

With the youngest children utterly captivated, and the older three practically trembling with exhaustion, Fred had little trouble leading them through to the kitchen, where Sirius was sure Ceri would have food ready in an instant.

Sirius looked at Charlie, brows knitting together. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” he asked. Charlie sighed, stepping closer, forehead pressing to Sirius’ chin.

“Depends; are you thinking those kids need an inheritance test as soon as this damned war is over?” came his wry response. He tipped his head back, blue eyes knowing. “Fred and I thought we were imagining it, but we’re not, are we? Those *eyes*, Sirius. That smile. Those freckles. And *twins*.”

Sirius hummed in agreement, hands resting on Charlie’s hips. “Those are Prewett eyes if I’ve ever seen them,” he agreed quietly. It might not be obvious at first, with the tightly curled hair and tawny skin under the freckles that suggested one of their parents wasn’t white. But looking closer, something just felt so achingly familiar about those kids.

“They might be family, Sirius,” Charlie whispered, pressing in closer. “Long-lost squib descendants.” Thanks to Narcissa’s inheritance test push over the summer, they had discovered most muggleborns had connections to at least one magical bloodline, even if they were weak ones.

“We don’t want to jump the gun, sweetheart,” Sirius murmured, smoothing a hand up Charlie’s back. “Red hair and blue eyes aren’t exactly rare in Britain, y’know. Nor are twins.” They could be chasing ghosts — the kids could be nothing to do with the Prewett family. Other old pureblood lines carried the red hair gene; the Bones’, the Yaxleys, even some branches of the Goldsteins.

“I know,” Charlie agreed. “But, even if they’re not...” He swallowed tightly. Sirius knew what he was thinking.

“Their parents might be alive,” he reminded, talking more to himself, his traitorous heart that had picked up the moment Charlie had said the word *family*.

“*I know*.” Charlie’s voice was a heartbroken whisper. He rocked up on his toes for a kiss. “No getting ahead of ourselves. The important thing is they’re here, and they’re safe. Anything else... anything else can wait.”

When he pulled away, it was with a decisive set to his shoulders and jaw, and he squeezed Sirius’ hand before heading towards the kitchen.

Sirius stared after him, a vice tightening around his chest as the tiniest whispers began brewing in his mind, building a fragile possibility of *after*. He was only startled out of it by one of their healers coming down the stairs and squeezing past him, giving him an odd look on her way through.

Entering the kitchen, he saw soup and sandwiches had been shared around, the kids falling on the food like a pack of starving dogs. The girl immediately requested her siblings be seen to