

“Gendered clothing is bullshit and I look *fantastic* in a mini-skirt,” Sirius informed the trio. “So no, I don’t give a fuck about Tonks’ gender identity, except to make sure he’s happy and feels welcome to present however the hell he wants in this house.” He shook his head, bewildered. “Merlin, how old and stuffy do you two think I am?” He knew Azkaban had aged him prematurely, but *really*?

“Our apologies,” Bill replied. He was smirking pointedly at his brother. “We won’t doubt you again. Now, I’ve got some good news for you. I’m pretty sure I’ve figured out how to get your charming mother off the wall for good.”

Sirius lit up excitedly. “Really?” Ever since the kids had left for school, he’d been slowly gutting and re-decorating the whole house — with Molly no longer trying to steamroll his every opinion, it was going much easier. He’d mainly stuck to the upstairs rooms so the rest of the Order wouldn’t notice, but now he was working on the more widely used parts of the house, and his mother’s portrait had been proving a very difficult sticking point.

“My supervisor promised me that if this spell doesn’t work, nothing will,” Bill assured. “So I brought a sledgehammer too, just in case. But first, neither of us have eaten lunch yet.”

“Oh, I see how it is,” Sirius drawled, keeping his voice low as they passed the portrait and headed to the kitchen. “Using me for my free food.”

“Absolutely,” Charlie confirmed, with a wink that sent Sirius’ nerves aflutter. Merlin, he was off his game, after twelve years in Azkaban. One handsome young redhead smiling at him and he was turning into a fifth-year Hufflepuff!

Bill made himself perfectly at home in the kitchen, pulling out salad and cold cuts for sandwiches. “Tonks, Sirius, you eating?”

“Please,” Tonks requested, sprawling gracelessly into a chair.

“Go on, then. Charlie, would you check his concussion, please?” Sirius requested, resolutely trying not to blush as he looked at the redhead. “He says he’s fine, but he also said he was too scrambled to pretend to be female this morning, so I don’t trust him.”

Charlie was immediately turning concerned eyes on his friend, who glared accusingly at Sirius. “Don’t give me that look; you promised you’d let Charlie look you over,” Sirius reminded.

With a sigh, Tonks relented, and Charlie soon had his wand out. From his work as a dragon tamer, he’d learned to deal with all sorts of medical maladies — you couldn’t always access a healer, if there was an angry dragon blocking your way.

“How long can the three of you stay?” Sirius asked, perching on the kitchen table with his feet on one of the chairs. “Getting the portrait down would be great, but I wanted to strip the wallpaper in all the hallways today, and a couple extra hands would be fab.” It looked much better now he’d taken down all the house elf heads, but there was definite room for improvement.