

Through it all, his mother didn't move.

"I would've thought you'd have other places to be today," she said tersely, once things had quieted down and Charlie had let himself be talked into a small slice of pudding. He winced.

"I wanted to see everyone. But I can leave, if you'd prefer."

"No one is leaving," Arthur cut in firmly, his hand on Charlie's arm. "We're delighted to have you here, as long as you're willing to stay."

Molly's lips thinned, but she didn't argue.

Charlie wasn't sure what he'd expected, honestly. For her to scream the house down? For her to pull out a jumper and say how sorry she was?

He forced his gaze away, smiling at his siblings instead. "Harry and everyone send their love," he told them. "And he loves the pranks you sent him," he added to the twins, who smirked. "I don't know if the rest of us are *quite* so grateful, mind."

"It's market research!" Fred insisted cheerfully.

"We can always give you something to get back at him with?" suggested George.

"I'll keep that in mind." Charlie wasn't sure *more* pranks was the solution to that particular problem.

"I suppose you're staying with the Malfoys, then?" his mum piped up. "We've all heard the news. If you're with *him*, you must be with them."

"You can say his name, you know, Mum," Charlie retorted. "But yes, *Sirius* and I are spending the holidays with the Malfoys. And Harry and Remus, of course." They didn't need to know that they weren't doing so at Malfoy Manor.

"Well *Sirius* ought to be careful about the kind of people he's letting influence poor Harry," Molly replied in the same tone.

"If you're about to start in on Slytherins, Mum," George warned, and she huffed.

"So it's silly of me to be suspicious of people who have spent the last few decades supporting You-Know-Who, is it?" she argued. "People who have made a point of tearing down our family at every chance they got!"

"That was only ever Lucius," Charlie defended.

"That's a lie; Malfoy had it out for us since we started school!" Ron said hotly. "I don't know what he's got over Harry but he's always been a git!"

"He was eleven, Ron," Ginny sniped. "He's grown up since then, which is more than I can say for *you*!"