

“You have training sessions disguised as detentions,” Snape cut in, setting fire to the mistletoe with a wave of his wand. “I can always change them to *actual* detentions, since you clearly miss them so much. There are plenty of cauldrons that need scrubbing, even though I no longer teach the subject.”

Harry grimaced, hurriedly setting his hands in his lap. Across the room, Remus snickered.

When the Tonks family started making noises about leaving, Charlie sidled over to Sirius, kissing his partner’s cheek. “I’m going out for a bit,” he warned. Sirius’ grey eyes turned knowing.

“Want someone to come with you?”

Charlie knew that if he asked, Sirius would join him. Even if that would be a total disaster. Hell, *any* of them would join him; Tonks, Remus, even Narcissa would happily stand at his shoulder while he went to face his mother. But he couldn’t ask that of them.

“Nah, think it’s best if I go alone. I won’t be long.”

The dog animagus frowned slightly, but nodded, kissing him chastely. “Send a Patronus if you need me. Give the family my love.”

“Will do.”

He stayed long enough to see off their guests, then slipped away while the kids were cajoling Narcissa into a game of Bluff. It was brisk outside compared to the warmth within, and his shoulders hunched as he walked to the wardline, his heart beating a staccato in his chest.

He never thought he’d feel this anxious about going to his own family home.

Charlie apparated away, arriving at the gate of the Burrow. He paused to stare up at it; the same lopsided structure he’d grown up in, as always looking like a strong wind might knock it all down.

Home.

Was it home, now?

Even when he’d lived in Romania, the Burrow had been home. But this last year... When he thought of home, he thought of family, yes. But he thought mostly of grey eyes and a bark-like laugh, of the welcome he got whenever he stepped through the doors of Seren Du.

His stomach churned. But he wasn’t a Gryffindor for nothing. He’d faced *dragons*, he could handle his mother.

He started walking towards the house, and knocked on the front door.

Charlie could hear the bustle of the whole family on the other side of the door — his mother calling for someone to answer it, then yelling at the twins to stop whatever it was they were doing. Ginny laughing.