

But couldn't he see? Everything Sirius could do wasn't *enough*, not while he was trapped in this bloody house. "He needs someone who can protect him from all the crap he's getting. All the crap that's coming his way." If Harry were attacked, Sirius would be one of the last to know, and no one would let him fucking do anything about it for risk of his capture.

Blue eyes softened, a thumb stroking the line of Sirius' cheekbone. "I hate to say it, but if you tried to protect Harry he'd be the first one to shove you out of the way. Kid has even less self-worth than you do." Sirius wasn't sure whether to be more offended on his own behalf or his godson's. "We all feel useless. We're all playing a waiting game. Don't you think I wish I could take up the Weasley seat and put Dumbledore in his place? But it's not time for that. And I get the feeling that when it finally is, we'll be *longing* for the days where we sat around thinking how useless we all were."

He grinned, cheeks dimpling, and Sirius' heart thudded hard in his chest. "We're all doing what we can. Yourself included. This breakout... it's shit. There's no denying that. But the *second* those bastards show their faces, we'll get them. Until then, we just keep the lies going, so we don't put Harry in danger. That's the most important thing."

They could both agree on that; while Harry was stuck at school, they all had to fool the world into thinking he was just an average fifth year who happened to have a Dark Lord after his head.

A long sigh escaped Sirius' lips, and for a moment he let himself fall forward, forehead resting against Charlie's. "What would I do without you, Charlie?" he murmured. The hands on his face slid down his neck, resting on his shoulders.

"Don't know. But I can think of plenty of things you can do *with* me," the redhead replied flirtatiously. Sirius barked out a laugh, and it was harder than ever before to pull himself away.

"I keep telling you, you don't want to be saddled with me."

"And *I* keep telling *you*, that's my decision to make," Charlie retorted without missing a beat. His eyes, when they met Sirius', were sad and tired. "You deserve to be happy, Sirius. But I don't know how long I can keep trying to convince you of that."

The admission made Sirius' stomach clench, but before he could say anything Charlie was gone. Sirius was alone in the room, staring at the door, bereft.

He'd been telling himself for weeks now that he would be glad when Charlie gave up, when he could get on with his life in his solitude without gorgeous redheads trying to tempt him into breaking their hearts.

So why did he feel like his own heart was breaking?

.-.-.

Exhaustion tugged at the edge of Harry's senses as he headed down for his latest 'Occlumency lesson', and he pushed it away stubbornly. He had stayed out a little too late