

“Don’t even start,” Charlie interrupted stubbornly. “The only thing you ever did was love me, and don’t you *dare* apologise for that. This is on *her*. She’s had it out for you long before we got together — whatever she thinks she is to Harry, you threatened that, and she hates you for it. And part of me hates her for that, a bit. For stealing from him, for lying to that poor kid who just wanted to be loved. For treating you like shit. When I was younger, I always thought my mum was perfect.” He gave a bitter snort. “I know better, now. I... I love you, Sirius, and I love being here with you. I’m honoured to be involved in your Yule celebrations — you’ve made me part of your family, and that’s amazing. I’m not saying I don’t want to be here, but I —“

“You miss your family,” Sirius finished for him. “Fuck, Charlie, of course you do! Your relationship with your mother might be difficult, but you’ve still got your dad, and the rest of your siblings. Even if Ron is a little berk.” Charlie snickered tearfully. “I wish I knew how to make it all better, love,” Sirius murmured, running a hand through Charlie’s hair, tucking the man’s head under his chin. Sometimes he felt ancient compared to his boyfriend — but this wasn’t even about age. This was just Sirius’ own years of experience having his parents hate him. He’d pretended it didn’t bother him, as a kid, but James had always seen through that bullshit in a heartbeat.

He couldn’t imagine what it was like to be Charlie, to have grown up in a loving family and only now have it fall apart as an adult.

“Things will get better,” he promised. “Once the war’s over.” Once they stopped having to live in Seren Du for their own safety. Once Dumbledore was gone and Molly could be forced to confront the consequences of her own actions. “I can’t promise your mother will come around. But when it’s all over, at least you’ll have the rest of your family with you.” He kissed Charlie’s fiery hair. “We’ll have Yule at the Pottery next year. Invite all your siblings over for dinner.” It would be chaos, and they would love every second of it.

“That would be nice,” Charlie agreed softly. “I... I know things will be different. We’re all getting older. Bill will be married next year, and even the kids are pairing off like nobody’s business. Soon we’ll all be alternating family holidays and starting our own traditions and we might not even bother doing the big family thing at the Burrow anymore. But this year...” He sighed, and Sirius held him tighter.

This year he was missing it not because he was busy, or there were other plans, but because Molly didn’t want to see him as long as he was still with Sirius. Sirius couldn’t help the guilt that pooled within him, but he ignored it; he’d done his time convincing Charlie not to get involved with him. It was too late to try again. He was in far too deep, now.

“Think of this year as a fresh start,” he offered, nudging the younger man up to look him in the eye. “Starting our own traditions, like you said. It’s the first Christmas me and Harry are having here. First Yule I’ve had since Jamie died. First one Moony and Severus have actually been able to spend together in I don’t even know how long. And the less said about the Malfoys’ Yule traditions, the better.” He kissed Charlie’s cheek, then his lips, soft and tender. “I’m not trying to replace your family. Next year we’ll have a home where all your siblings will be welcome, and your dad too.” He’d make no promises about Molly. “And if you want