

argue, not when he knew it would just end in another disappointed lecture from Albus about *doing his part for the cause*.

Because obviously letting Molly Weasley run roughshod over his silverware was absolutely vital to the war effort.

At least she couldn't throw out his family heirlooms in the name of *cleaning* anymore. Indeed, she didn't seem to know what to do with herself, now the house was in decent shape. It gave her less to needle him over in Order meetings, too; he was no longer the ragged escaped convict living in a disgusting, Dark hovel — a terrible role model for poor young Harry.

Sirius chuckled to himself. She didn't have much of a leg to stand on, anymore.

So lost in his thoughts, Sirius didn't notice the door creeping open.

"Is this a private party, or can anyone join in?" The smooth, lightly amused voice made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end, and Sirius looked up as Charlie Weasley snuck inside, shutting the door in his wake.

"Not just anyone, but I suppose you're alright," Sirius teased, winking. Charlie laughed, the sound tripping over Sirius' quickening pulse. "Thought you were with your dad."

"Just got back. They had to change his bandages again, and he hates us watching that." Charlie grimaced, and Sirius frowned; Arthur was having an awful lot of bandage changes, from the sounds of it. Was the venom still so potent?

Charlie sat down on the sofa beside Sirius, rather than in the armchair opposite. Sirius tried not to tense. "Harry's on the warpath again, by the way," the redhead remarked ruefully. "Heard him yelling at Ron and Hermione in the library on my way up. Sounds like they tried to tell him to get over himself and be friends with them again."

Sirius rolled his eyes. "Bet Harry loved that." He was surprised he hadn't heard the yelling from all the way up here. Harry had Lily's lungs on him when he truly got going.

"Gonna make for an interesting Christmas, that mix," Charlie mused. "Can't say I'm sad we're spending it here, though."

His blue eyes met Sirius' with a pointed kind of heat, and Sirius felt his breath catch, his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth.

He hadn't thought Charlie's flirting would go on this long. He'd fully expected the redhead to laugh him off after a while; get bored, switch targets. Instead, he only seemed to get bolder. More serious.

Sirius was beginning to wonder if the flirting had ever been a joke to begin with.

"You won't miss your dragons over Christmas, then?" he asked lightly. A syrup-smooth chuckle spilled from Charlie's lips.