

“Wide open space, full of dragons?” Sirius retorted. “Sounds perfect.” He was starting to forget what actual nature looked like.

“It’s a date, then,” Charlie murmured. He let his head fall forward, nose brushing Sirius’ ear. “Please say it’s a date.”

Sirius’ chest ached at the earnest hope straining his voice. It had been weeks, months even, and Charlie Weasley wasn’t giving up on him. “I don’t know what you see in me,” he confessed quietly. “I don’t... I don’t know how to do this anymore.”

“There’s lots of things I see in you,” Charlie said. “You’re funny, you’re clever, you’ve got a fantastic arse,” he added, dimples returning for a moment. “But I think the thing that really hooked me was seeing how much you care about Harry. Us Weasleys, we’re all about family, y’know. People thought I was the odd duck because I buggered off to Romania, but... it’s just a different kind of family, out there. You’re the kind of man that would do anything to make that kid’s shitty life better, even if it made you miserable. That kind of devotion... it’s an attractive trait, that.”

And oh, that hurt, because if Charlie had just talked about his arse more, or even his sense of humour, Sirius might have been able to brush him off as a young man looking for a challenge, a boyfriend more interesting than the last. But to talk that way about him, about Harry... Charlie had seen him, in ways most others didn’t.

“I’m older than you,” he reminded, and Charlie scoffed.

“Only twelve years.”

“Twelve years I spent in Azkaban,” Sirius pointed out, voice getting sharp again.

“So mentally we’re the same age, then,” Charlie reasoned, grinning ever so slightly. Sirius shot him a look.

“I was shit at relationships even before I spent time in that hellhole,” he said flatly. “Ask Remus. I... I don’t know if I can be what you want me to be.”

“Won’t know until you try, will you?” Charlie said, unfazed. “I reckon you’ll be a lot better at it than you think you will.”

“I don’t know how to love anymore, since the dementors.”

“Bullshit,” Charlie retorted, not even hesitating. “You love Harry. You love Remus. You love Tonks. You love blackberry crumble in a way that’s more than a little bit obscene, quite frankly.” He grinned, eyes glowing in the moonlight, and Sirius could hardly breathe, “You know how to love, Sirius Black, and we both know it. You’re just scared of it. And of all the things I’ve learned about you in the last year, I never took you for a coward.”

There was a challenge, bright in his blue gaze; the kind of challenge that set Sirius’ blood afire.