

“You’re going to be free, sweetheart.”

Sirius surged up, dropping the paper in order to get a hand in Charlie’s fiery hair, his other bracing himself on the man’s shoulder. Charlie kissed him furiously, both of them pouring their relief and delight wholeheartedly into the embrace.

They were so engrossed in each other that they didn’t notice the fire in the grate flare green. But they did hear the scream.

Molly Weasley stood in front of the hearth, staring at the pair of them in utter shock. “You... but... Charlie.” She snapped out of the daze, face rapidly turning red. “Sirius Black, what in *Merlin’s name* do you think you’re doing to my son? Charlie, get away from him,” she urged in a high-pitched, alarmed voice.

“He wasn’t doing anything I didn’t want, Mum,” Charlie insisted, making Molly’s eyes bulge.

“But— he’s so much older! And a criminal!”

“Wrongly convicted, as you well know,” Sirius said, getting to his feet, glaring at the woman. Whether it was the news of his impending freedom or the surety of Charlie’s hand on his shoulder, Sirius felt suddenly like he could do absolutely anything — including tell Molly Weasley where she could shove her judgement. “Charlie is a grown man, Molly. He doesn’t need you making his decisions for him.”

“He is my son!” Molly argued. “I won’t have you *manipulating* him into some kind of relationship he thinks he wants! He’s barely older than Harry!”

“He’s eight years older than Harry, and how *dare* you accuse me of manipulating him!” Something in Sirius snapped, and an entire year’s worth of anger came spilling out. “I don’t care that you don’t think I’m good enough for him — hell, I agree with you! — But you will not do him the disservice of thinking he isn’t capable of making his own bloody choices about who he wants to be with! And more than that, you will not accuse me of *forcing* him into anything, *in my own house*! Or have you forgotten that, Molly?” he pressed, and over on the counter the plates began to rattle. “This is *my* house, where I have allowed you and your family to live for weeks, completely for free, eating food that *I* paid for, enjoying the safety of wards that *I* hold, and not once have I heard a single word of gratitude! All you’ve done is act like you own the place, talk down to me, belittle me in front of my godson and the Order and your own children, treat me like I’m some filthy criminal when we all know I never deserved to be in Azkaban! You’ve treated my house like it’s some den of Dark magic and iniquity, too good for your *precious* babies, trying to throw out my family heirlooms without so much as *asking* if I might want to keep them! And now you come in here — entirely uninvited, might I add — and try and convince the man I love that he shouldn’t be with me? Well *I have had enough*!”

Abruptly, Molly turned chalk-white, and Sirius snarled at her. “I am barring you from the house wards, Molly. You’re no longer welcome here.”

“But— but the Order!”