

“Kingsley,” Harry called, before Kingsley could get to work. The boy’s face was solemn, an expression Kingsley was far too familiar with by this point. The face of someone expecting the worst. “Be safe.”

He nodded, and turned on his heel, striding for the doors.

He couldn’t make any promises.

The Dark Mark in the sky sent an instinctive shiver down his spine as he walked quickly across the Hogwarts grounds. He’d seen far too many of those in his time, and none of them meant anything good.

Kingsley pushed away the unease in his gut, and kept going.

Tonks was fast, Kingsley would give him that. Soon the younger auror was practically jogging towards him, Kingsley’s requested team at his heel. At the gates, the edge of the wardline, Kingsley surveyed them all. “I’ll be honest with you, I have no idea what we’re walking into. Be on your guard.”

Five determined faces nodded back again, and they set off.

There was definitely smoke coming from the village, Kingsley realised as they grew closer to Hogsmeade. Not much, not enough to have him truly fearing for his life, but definitely some.

It was either a good sign or a very, very bad one that no one from the village had come to the castle for aid.

As soon as they reached the main village itself, Kingsley saw the problem — down at the end of the road, far away from the more student-friendly side of the village, the Hog’s Head was a smouldering pile of lumber.

“Auror Shacklebolt!” It was Rosmerta, hurrying over to him with a grim expression. “We weren’t sure if you’d come. We didn’t know if it was worth the risk.”

Kingsley hated how bad things had gotten, that the people of Hogsmeade weren’t even willing to ask for help from the castle barely a hundred feet away, just in case it was a trap.

“Of course we came, Ros,” Tonks insisted, always the earnest foil to Kingsley’s stony countenance. “What happened?”

“There were four of them,” Rosmerta said, wringing her hands anxiously. “Didn’t seem like they wanted to pick a fight. They threw some flaming potion into the Head and next thing we know it’s up like a pile of matches.” A sad smile twisted her lips. “Amount of booze old Ab had in there, can’t say I’m surprised. They watched it burn for a bit, threatened anyone who came close, then shot that monstrosity in the sky and turned tail.”

“Good Merlin,” Arthur murmured. “Was anyone inside?”

Rosmerta’s face said it all. “As far as we know, only Aberforth. He doesn’t open ’til at least five most days, says there’s no good business in the hours before dinner.” She cast her eyes at