

“Harry. Mr Malfoy.” He had to pretend he hadn’t seen Draco dozens of times over the summer; people weren’t to know just how involved he was with Harry’s true family. “Enjoying the weather?” he asked wryly. Harry snorted.

“Hardly. How long have you been out here?” The man had to be absolutely freezing.

“Since eight,” the auror — or was it ex-auror, technically, since he couldn’t go to the Ministry without being killed? — replied, shrugging. “I’ll switch with Vance in an hour or so. Can’t see the students staying long today.”

“You’re only here for the Hogsmeade weekend, then?” Draco asked, but Kingsley shook his head.

“Oh, no; Albus has a constant guard in the village, just to keep an eye on things. But we’ve doubled up protection while the students are about. Tonks is around here somewhere. Fletcher’s supposed to be on guard, too, but I’m pretty sure he buggered off a while ago. He was bitching about frostbite.” Kingsley rolled his eyes, and Harry scowled. He still had not met Mundungus Fletcher in person, and hoped it stayed that way.

“Typical,” he muttered derisively.

“What are you boys up to, then?” Kingsley’s dark eyes travelled pointedly between them, and both boys flushed beneath their scarves.

“Just out and about. Getting a break from the castle. Not that this is much better,” Harry added, turning to glare at a pair of fourth years whispering a bit too loudly about him on their way past. Kingsley frowned.

“Yes, Sirius mentioned you’d been having some trouble,” he murmured.

“It’s nothing I can’t handle,” Harry assured. “Just gossip. The usual.”

“But the headmaster isn’t helping,” Draco cut in with a dark look. “Watching you like you’re about to start throwing Unforgivables around the Great Hall.”

“I can handle it,” Harry insisted stubbornly.

“Wish you didn’t have to, kid,” Kingsley sighed, shaking his head slightly. “But you’re doing alright, otherwise? All things considered?” His gaze was pointed — there were so many things Harry didn’t dare write in letters, and he wasn’t sure how much Sirius shared.

But those same things were far too sensitive to be talked about in the middle of Hogsmeade, and they both knew it.

“Doing fine,” he assured. “Keeping my head down, my grades up, all that jazz.” He flashed a cheeky grin, and Kingsley chuckled.

“Glad to hear it. Look after yourselves, both of you. Now get out of this bloody cold — just because I have to stand here freezing to death doesn’t mean you need to join me.” His voice