

Ceri; the eldest Black sister was their only trustworthy connection to the outside world, these days.

Shouting echoed in from the Entrance Hall, and Kingsley mentally prepared himself to break up another fight. But there were no frozen forms when he arrived; instead just Emmeline Vance, her hair mussed and her eyes frantic. “The Dark Mark is over Hogsmeade,” she told him urgently, just loud enough for eavesdroppers to hear and start spreading word around the hall. Great.

“Just now?” Kingsley asked, wondering if this was the beginning of the end. Emmeline shook her head.

“Don’t think so. It’s fuzzy round the edges, like it’s been up a while,” she reported. “I was just taking the little kids out for some fresh air when I saw it. We got them all back inside, but I think they saw it too.”

Kingsley grimaced faintly, and he wasn’t surprised to turn around and see Harry at his back. That boy seemed to be in five places at once, these days.

“Any sign of danger?” he questioned, vivid green gaze fixed on Vance.

“Hard to tell. I think there was smoke, but not much. Surely if there was a fight they would have sent word? Rosmerta can do a Patronus messenger, I know she can.”

Kingsley wasn’t reassured. “Only if she’s well and able to cast it,” he pointed out. “We need to go down there.”

Harry nodded, though he didn’t look any happier about it. “How many are you taking?”

Kingsley thought for a moment. “Myself and five others. If we need more, I’ll send an elf.” The Hogwarts house elves were taking quite happily to being messengers for the war effort, particularly the odd one that seemed to have attached itself to Harry.

“What do you need, Boss?”

He didn’t let himself smile, even as he looked at Tonks, reporting with a serious face but twinkling violet eyes. He — for he was definitely a man today, even though he didn’t show it, even though his body was feminine — stood at attention, ready for instruction, as if they were still aurors at the Ministry. As if Kingsley was still his superior.

One day, that wouldn’t be the case anymore. But until then, Kingsley had to keep it professional.

“Auror Tonks, you’re coming with me. I want Bill Weasley, Arthur Weasley, Remus Lupin and Apolline Delacour, at the gates as soon as possible.” Four combatants he trusted and a healer, just in case.

Tonks nodded, and hurried out of the hall.