

Chapter 5

As soon as Harry stepped out of the elevator, Penny met him with a pretty smile and a cup of coffee.

"You're the best," Harry smiled.

"Just trying to help," Penny said, her cheeks flushing lightly. "You've got a really busy day today. Madam Bones wants to see you as soon as possible. You have a Wizengamot meeting at two. Saul Croaker wants you to stop by the Department of Mysteries when you get a chance."

"Alright," Harry sighed. "Anything else."

"My mother wants another interview," Daphne said as she and Hermione followed him to his office. "This time, she wants to do more of a fluff piece, telling people about your life. There's really not a lot of information about you available to the public, and it should really help with your image."

"Great," Harry grumbled.

"You know, I wasn't sure working for you was a good idea at first," Daphne smirked. "Now, I'm really glad I took the job. I'll turn you into one of the most popular Ministers for Magic ever to hold office, and my career is going to be set before I even leave Hogwarts."

"Glad I could help," Harry said with a wry smile.

"Penny and I have been working on a new law," Hermione said eagerly. "It's called the Muggleborn Equality Act. I finished the first draft last night. It lowers taxes for Muggleborn and Halfblood businesses, makes it illegal for an employer to discriminate based on blood status, including at the Ministry, and establishes fines for doing so."

“What do you need me to do with it?” Harry asked, taking a massive pile of parchment from Hermione.

“We just need you to look it over and familiarize yourself with it,” Penny replied. “I plan to present it to the Wizengamot at next week’s meeting. We just need you to know what it says so you can support it. If you want to, of course.”

“Is there a... condensed version,” Harry asked, eyeing the foot-thick pile of parchment with distaste.

“I could go over it with you at lunch,” Penny offered.

“I’d appreciate that,” Harry smiled. “I’m sorry, but I just don’t have the time to read through all of this. Was that everything?”

“I think so,” Penny said, looking to Hermione and Daphne for confirmation.

When they shook their heads, she smiled and turned back to Harry.

“Okay, can you send a note to Amelia and tell her I’m available whenever she needs me?” Harry asked.

Getting a nod, he turned to Daphne as Penny left the office.

“Set up a time with your mum, and we’ll do that interview,” he told her.

“Will do,” Daphne nodded. “You know, it might help your public image if you did something for charity. Maybe you could make a donation or visit the children’s wing at St. Mungo’s.”

“Is that really necessary?” Harry asked.

“Only if you want public support for any changes you might make over the next three weeks,” Daphne smirked.

Harry sighed, “Fine. Set something up, and then let me know when I need to be there.”

“Gladly,” Daphne smiled.

As she turned to leave, Hermione smiled and gave him a cheery wave before following after her.

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Harry only had to wait a few minutes before Amelia came to his office.

“I hope you have some time free,” she said, closing the door behind her. “We have a lot to go through.”

“I don’t have anything pressing until the Wizengamot meeting at two,” Harry said.

Nodding, Amelia sat across from him at the desk and pulled a stack of folders out of her pocket.

“First of all, I have the results of McNair’s interrogation,” Amelia began.

“I forgot about that,” Harry frowned. “Wasn’t that almost a week ago?”

“It was,” Amelia nodded. “But it took time to corroborate everything he told us. I wanted to make sure I had all the bases covered before the Wizengamot meeting.”

Nodding, Harry leaned forward to look at the file as she laid it out on the desk.

“McNair confirmed everything you told us about You-Know-Who’s return and quite a bit more,” Amelia continued. “From what he told us, after you escaped, they fled to Malfoy Manor to regroup. He gave us the names of everyone who was there, and quite honestly, it was shocking. These witches and wizards are some of the most powerful people in our society.”

“Anyone unexpected or from the Wizengamot?” Harry asked, glancing over the names.

“Form the Wizengamot, no,” Amelia replied. “However, many members have direct relatives that are on this list. As for unexpected, yes. There are far more Ministry staff involved than I expected, including a handful of Aurors that I never thought would’ve joined You-Know-Who.”

“Shit,” Harry said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Do they know anything?”

“Fortunately, no,” Amelia said. “Nothing that isn’t public knowledge anyways. But it does leave us with a problem. I can’t make a move on any of the names McNair gave me until I’ve cleaned house.”

Picking up another folder, Amelia passed it across the desk.

“I’ve been talking with two of my most trusted Aurors, Kingsley Shacklebolt and Connie Hammer,” she told him. “The problem we have is that even if we manage to deal with the Aurors and other Ministry staff that follow You-Know-Who, word of the arrests is bound to get out, and the Death Eaters we really want to arrest will go into hiding.”

“What if you made a small team of people you trust and go after them before they can be warned?” Harry asked.

“We thought about that, and it is an option,” Amelia nodded. “The problem with that plan is we’d only get three or four of them before the rest start to wise up.”

Harry set down the folder, took off his glasses, and rubbed his face.

“It’s a difficult situation, Minister,” Amelia said. “It’s a choice between cleaning up the Ministry and risking word getting out, or we go for the most dangerous, possibly sending our Aurors into an ambush. I don’t need to remind you that we’re severely low on personnel at the moment. Losing even a few Aurors could drastically hinder our ability to respond to a crisis.”

Putting his glasses back on, Harry sat back in his chair thoughtfully.

“The biggest problem is keeping information from leaving the Ministry once you start making arrests, right?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Amelia nodded, her brow furrowed.

“Then, what if we shut down the Ministry?” Harry asked, sitting forward again. “We close the Apparition points, the Floo, seal the wards, everything. Then you can make all the arrests you need.”

“That would buy us some time,” Amelia acknowledged with a slow nod. “We could hold people here for more than a few hours.”

“We’d just have to pick our targets carefully,” Harry said. “Like you said, we go after the most dangerous and influential people first.”

“I’d have to talk to Connie and Kingsley to see how many teams we can field,” Amelia said. “This is ambitious, but it could work. You know that this will look bad. The press could easily make it look like you’re trying to take over the Ministry. Certain members of the Wizengamot will certainly try to use this against you.”

“I’ll deal with that when it happens,” Harry said. “This is too important to ignore because of stupid politics.”

“I’ll talk with Connie and Kingsley – see what we can come up with,” Amelia nodded, her eyes hardening with determination.

“What about Voldemort?” Harry asked.

“According to McNair, he’s currently on the continent recruiting while his Death Eaters do the same here,” Amelia said. “He believes You-Know-Who is preparing for some sort of attack in the future, but we don’t have any conclusive evidence to support that.”

“Any idea where he would attack first?” Harry asked.

“My money would be on Azkaban,” Amelia said.

“Fucking Dementors,” Harry murmured.

“And again, guarding it all comes down to a bigger budget,” Amelia said.

“Can we use the information you got from McNair to help convince the Wizengamot?” Harry asked.

“We could, but it may cause some of the smart Death Eaters to go into hiding,” Amelia replied. “I’ll leave it up to you whether we should bring it up at today’s meeting or not.”

“Bloody hell,” Harry grumbled, then shook his head. “It’s not worth it. For now, just confirm what you can without giving too much away.”

“Very well,” Amelia nodded. “It’s probably for the best. Even if the budget is raised, it will take months to train the new recruits.”

“Can’t we try to bring back some retired Aurors like Moody or get help from other countries?” Harry asked.

Amelia smirked, “I’m starting to think you come up with these ideas just to piss off the Wizengamot.”

“It’s certainly not hard to do,” Harry smiled.

“I can try and contact some of the retired Aurors, but I don’t think it will do much good,” Amelia said. “Fudge released most of them before they could earn their full pension.”

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” Harry groaned. “What the hell was he thinking!?”

“Saving costs,” Amelia said. “He’d send Umbridge to find any excuse to have them relieved of duty. Sometimes just months or weeks before they earned full retirement.”

Harry dropped his head to the desk non too gently and tightened his hands in his hair. Taking a deep, calming breath, he sat back up.

“As for asking for foreign assistance, it’s possible, but you’ll need to offer concessions,” Amelia said.

“Like what?” Harry asked.

Amelia shrugged, "It depends. Some may want lower tariffs, debt forgiveness, or they may want you to commit to giving them aid in the future. You'd be better off asking Greg Goreman about this. He'd be able to give you a better idea about what to expect."

"Alright," Harry nodded.

"I should warn you, talks for that sort of thing can last for months," Amelia said. "You might be better off focusing on what we can do with what we have for now."

Harry sighed, "I suppose you're right. Let me know when you and your Aurors come up with a plan."

"Of course," Amelia nodded. "If there's anything you need in the meantime, you know how to reach me."

Smiling, Harry stood and walked her to the door. Nervously, Hermione bit her lip and walked over to them, a copy of her new law clutched to her chest.

"Excuse me, Madam Bones?" she said.

"Yes, Ms. Granger, wasn't it?" Amelia said.

"Yes, ma'am," Hermione said. "I was wondering – if you have the time, of course – if you could look over this law Penny and I drafted. It's called the Muggleborn Equality Act. It introduces new laws for fairer taxes and hiring practices."

"That's quite admirable," Amelia said, "If I can find the time, I'll take a look at it. I'm afraid I'm quite busy at the moment."

“Oh, of course,” Hermione said. “I was just hoping you might have some feedback about the proposal. I’ve never written a law before, obviously. And I want to make sure I got it right.”

“Have you thought of asking Arthur Weasley?” Amelia asked. “He has some experience with writing laws.”

“Oh! How could I forget!” Hermione gasped. “I’ll make him a copy and stop by his office at lunch. Thank you so much, Madam Bones.”

“You’re welcome,” Amelia said as Hermione rushed back to her desk.

“Sorry,” Harry said quietly. “She gets like that.”

“Well, if I’m going by weight, I think she’s off to a good start,” Amelia smiled, hefting the heavy document. “Just remind her that most laws fail numerous times before passing. Everyone in the Wizengamot is going to want to give their input before they agree.”

“I’ll let her know,” Harry said.

Nodding, Amelia made her way to the elevator.

“Everything okay, Harry?” Penny asked, her hand sliding across his shoulders as she walked up behind him. “You look troubled.”

“Just...,” Harry sighed.

Thinking for a moment, he decided it wouldn’t hurt to tell her and Hermione about what he’d learned.

“Hermione! Can you come here for a second?” Harry called.

He debated with himself for a moment whether to invite Daphne as well, but in the end, he decided he didn’t quite know her well enough yet.

“What’s up, Harry?” Hermione asked.

“I need to see you two in my office for a few minutes,” Harry said.

The girls looked at him curiously but followed him back to his office, where he closed the door. Instead of sitting at his desk, he led them over to the couch and chairs near the fireplace. Over the next few minutes, he explained everything Amelia had told him.

“That is tricky,” Hermione frowned. “Have you thought about talking to Professor Dumbledore?”

Harry sighed, “I suppose I should. I’ll talk to him after the Wizengamot meeting.”

“He’ll know what to do,” Hermione said confidently.

Harry nodded, but he wasn’t as convinced. Dumbledore was only human, and it wasn’t like the Order could help.

“I think your idea sounds the best,” Penny said. “It’s risky, but if it works...”

“Thanks,” Harry smiled. “I just hope we can pull it off. I wish we could get some of those retired Aurors to come back.”

"Maybe if you explained the situation, they might be willing to give you a chance?" Penny asked hopefully.

"But what if one of them is a Death Eater or decides to go to Voldemort?" Hermione asked. "It's not like their fans of the Ministry."

"Maybe I don't have to give them all the details," Harry said thoughtfully, then sighed. "Still, I don't know if they'd be willing to come back just to help me for a couple of weeks."

"It's worth asking, though, isn't it?" Penny asked.

"I suppose you're right," Harry said, giving her a small smile. "I'll talk to Dumbledore about it. Maybe he'll have some advice."

Smiling, Penny ran her fingers lightly over his back. Harry closed his eyes and exhaled deeply, luxuriating in the pleasant feeling of her nails running lightly up and down his back. When he opened his eyes again, Hermione looked at him with a teasing smirk.

"Is everything ready for the Wizengamot meeting?" Harry asked.

"All set," Penny grinned.

"Well, if you don't need me for anything else, I should get back to work," Hermione said.

"Me too," Penny agreed.

Harry had to bite back a groan of disappointment when she removed her hand from his back.

"Actually, there's one other thing I wanted to talk to you about, Penny," Harry said.

Giving Hermione a pointed look, she gave him a knowing smile and left. Nervously Harry cleared his throat and wiped his sweaty palms on his trousers.

“What did you need, Harry?” Penny asked.

“Er, well, I – I was wondering...” swallowing thickly, Harry took a deep breath. “Would you like to have dinner with me, like as a date.”

Smiling softly, Penny tilted her head to the side in a way that looked like pity. Immediately, Harry felt his stomach drop.

“I’d love to,” Penny said.

“That’s alright, I underst – wait! You said yes?” Harry asked.

Penny giggled, “Yes.”

“Brilliant,” Harry grinned.

“Any particular day?” Penny asked.

“How about Friday night?” Harry asked.

“That sounds perfect,” Penny smiled.

Leaning forward, she kissed his cheek.

"I look forward to it," she whispered.

Harry watched in a daze as she walked out of the office, her hips swaying attractively.

"Yes!" Harry cheered, throwing his fist into the air.

Grinning, he walked back to his desk and sat down with a smile on his face.

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When lunch rolled around, Penny, Hermione, and Daphne joined him in his office to talk about their new law. Throughout their meal, Harry and Penny smiled every time they caught each other's eye.

"Alright, what's going on?" Daphne asked, glancing between them. "You two are way more flirty than usual."

"Harry asked me on a date," Penny grinned.

"That's great," Hermione smiled while Daphne rolled her eyes.

"Great," Daphne groused. "More lovey dovey bullshit."

Harry and Penny shared a look before they both burst out laughing.

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Two hours later, Harry and Penny made their way down to the courtrooms for the Wizengamot meeting.

“Ah, Hello, Harry,” Dumbledore smiled as they sat.

“Hello, Professor,” Penny replied.

“Sir, could I talk to you in my office after the meeting?” Harry asked. “There’s something I could use your help with.”

“Certainly,” Dumbledore nodded. “Would I be correct in assuming this has something to do with the discussion you had with Amelia this morning?”

Harry blinked in surprise, then furrowed his brow curiously. Just as he opened his mouth to ask how he knew that, he remembered Kingsley was in the Order.

“Er, right,” Harry said.

“I’ll assist you all I can, but I’m afraid there may not be much I can do,” Dumbledore told him.

Harry had been hoping for better news, but it wasn’t unexpected. Seeing the troubled look on his face, Penny reached over and caressed his arm. Smiling, he sat back in his chair and waited for the room to fill.

Again, the first half of the meeting was mind-numbingly boring. It consisted mainly of members bickering back and forth about making small changes to old laws. A small hike in taxes here, a change in restrictions there, nothing anything major. It wasn’t until the second half of the meeting that they got into new business.

“Now, does anyone have anything they’d like to bring before the Wizengamot?” Dumbledore asked.

Before Amelia could get her wand in the air, Damien Greengrass beat her to it.

“Yes, Mr. Greengrass? The floor is yours,” Dumbledore said.

“Thank you, Chief Warlock,” Greengrass nodded. “Minister, just after you took office, you said you’d have a plan in place with regards to dealing with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. I was hoping you could provide the Wizengamot with an update.”

Nervously, Harry cleared his throat and stood while Penny reached out and gave his hand a comforting squeeze.

“Yes,” Harry said. “Right, well, Madam Bones and I have been working closely together for the last week. As I’m sure most of you are aware, we uncovered a substantial amount of corruption within the Minister’s office. Specifically, we discovered the former Senior Undersecretary, Delores Umbridge, committing several acts of blackmail and bribery. I believe her trial is scheduled for Wednesday?”

Looking back at Madam Bones, she nodded. There was a light murmuring amongst the members of the Wizengamot while Harry tried to think of what to say next.

“Perhaps it would be best if Madam Bones were to present her evidence before I continue,” Harry said.

Amelia stood gracefully and made her way to the podium while Harry stepped back to his seat.

“Thank you, Minister,” Amelia said. “As Minister Potter just stated, we have uncovered some quite disturbing corruption within the Ministry. Not only with Delores Umbridge but with former Minister Fudge as well. Upon Minister Potter’s discovery of the poor state of the

Ministry wards, our investigation has discovered that they haven't been maintained at all for the last fifteen years."

There was more murmuring from the Wizengamot, this time louder.

"We've also learned that payments were still being made every year," Amelia continued. "The DMLE is working with the Goblins to determine who owns the vault the payments were being made to. As it is, the repair of the wards has cost the Ministry greatly."

"While this is all certainly interesting," Greengrass interjected, "I was rather hoping to hear more about how you intend to deal with the threat of You-Know-Who and if you've discovered any more evidence of his return."

"Certainly," Amelia nodded. "As you may be aware, Walden McNair was recently arrested for the attempted murder of Auror John Wainwright. Due to an ongoing investigation, I cannot currently get into specifics. However, I can state that Mr. McNair confirmed, under Veritaserum, that You-Know-Who is, indeed, back."

Amelia paused as people began talking loudly. While they may have known before, having it confirmed by someone as trusted and respected as Amelia Bones made it that much more real.

"Now," Amelia said loudly, quieting the crowd. "Minister Potter and I have been working closely over the last week. For security reasons, I cannot reveal what has been discussed in detail, but I can tell you that I am very satisfied with the progress we have made."

"That being said, we could be doing more," Harry added, stepping up to stand next to Amelia. When she started to take a step back, Harry grabbed her arm lightly and pulled her back to stand next to him. "Right now, the DMLE is understaffed and underfunded for peacetime, let alone for a war. Honestly, it's incredible Madam Bones is able to do her job as well as she is. The DMLE needs more funding. If we don't start recruiting more Aurors now, then by the time Voldemort makes a move, we won't stand a chance."

That certainly got people's attention. Several people stood up and began shouting questions until Dumbledore let off a canon blast with his wand.

"Is that your assessment, Madam Bones," Greengrass asked loudly.

"Unfortunately, it is," Amelia said. "I have said for years that the Aurors are ill-equipped to do their job."

"And how much of an increase would you be requesting?" A bald, aged wizard with a large, curled mustache asked shrewdly.

"No less than double the current budget," Harry replied.

Amelia looked at Harry with a surprised expression before schooling her reaction.

"What are you doing?" she whispered over the uproar his statement caused.

"Asking for more than we need," Harry answered softly. "Compared to that, fifty percent sounds like a bargain."

"Or they could give us nothing," Amelia countered.

"Not without looking like idiots in the press," Harry said.

As the discussion turned to the budget, Harry was surprised to find a staunch ally in Damien Greengrass. He fought almost as hard as Amos, Harry, and Amelia to get the DMLE a bigger budget. In the end, Harry was more than happy when they voted to give them a sixty percent increase. It was more than either Harry or Amelia had dared to hope for.

“Penny,” Harry said as the meeting moved on to another subject. “Can you find those retired Aurors and call them in for a meeting?”

“All of them?” Penny asked.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “Bring them all in at once, if you can.”

“What do you plan to do?” Amelia asked as she leaned forward in her seat.

“Beg,” Harry replied.

Smiling, Amelia snorted and patted him on the shoulder.

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Dumbledore was about as helpful as Harry expected him to be. The Order was useless for fighting outside of the Aurors he already had access to, and Dumbledore himself didn't have any better ideas. The only good thing that came from the conversation was that Harry was able to get a message to Moody, asking him to attend the meeting of retired Aurors he had Penny arrange.

Surprisingly, the vast majority of them agreed to show up the next night. Harry assumed he had Moody to thank for that. Even if someone didn't like the grizzled old Auror personally, he was still well-respected.

While having lunch in London with the girls, Harry invited Marcus and Kim to eat with them.

“I know you spend most of your time with me, but how do the Aurors feel about me being Minister?” he asked as they waited for their Indian food to be brought to the table.

“Most of them are really glad you took over,” Kim told him. “They especially like that you managed to get the whole department a raise.”

“Not everyone is happy, obviously,” Marcus added. “I’ve heard some Aurors trying to find a way to press charges for sedition.”

Harry blinked in surprise, and Hermione gasped while Kim snorted.

“The only ones that think that are the ones that got into the Aurors because of Fudge and Umbridge,” she said. “It was an open secret that anyone could get a job there for enough money or if they had the right connection. Fortunately, most of them left when they realized how difficult the job can be.”

“I’d say a good three-quarters of the Aurors are happy with what you’ve been doing,” Marcus said. “The rest are either undecided, or they have ties back to the previous administration.”

“And some of them are just tired of Tonks telling everyone how great you are,” Kim smirked.

Harry rolled his eyes, “What’s she been saying about me?”

“Is it true the girls from Beauxbatons all threw a sex party for you for saving their Champions hostage?” she asked with a grin.

Harry gaped at her before dropping his head to the table with a resounding *thud*.

“Please tell me you’re joking,” he said, his voice coming out muffled.

“Honestly, the things she comes up with are so outrageous they can’t be real,” Kim giggled. “I mean, there’s no way you singlehandedly killed a thousand-year-old Basilisk when you were eleven.”

“He was twelve, actually,” Daphne smirked.

Kim and Marcus’ laughter started strong and then slowly died.

“Wait, you’re not serious, are you?” Kim asked.

“It’s a long story,” Harry said, raising his head.

“This, I need to hear,” Marcus said just as their food arrived.

As Harry began to explain with the help of Hermione, Penny took his hand under the table.

“That’s incredible,” Kim breathed when he had finished. “Honestly, if anyone else had told me that story, I wouldn’t believe it, but...”

“We see a lot of liars in our line of work,” Marcus said. “And you are no liar.”

“You really need to make sure to tell my mother that story when she interviews you tomorrow,” Daphne said. “The public will go nuts for that story.”

“I hate talking about that kind of stuff,” Harry grumbled. “It wasn’t nearly as heroic as everyone seems to think, and it feels too much like bragging. There are so many times I would’ve been dead if it wasn’t for Fawkes of the Sorting Hat.”

“It’s not about bragging. It’s about accepting your accomplishments,” Daphne said. “Telling that story could be the difference between having the support you need to get things done or not.”

“I hate to admit it, but the lass is right,” Marcus acknowledged with a tilt of his head.

Sighing, Harry leaned back in his chair. With a reassuring smile, Penny rested her hand on his bicep and leaned against his side.

“I know you hate using your fame for anything, but I think Daphne is right, Harry,” Hermione said. “Besides, you should be proud of what you accomplished. Sure, you had some help, but none of that would’ve ever happened if it wasn’t for you.”

“And You-Know-Who would’ve been back two years sooner,” Penny added.

“Alright,” Harry said, raising his free hand in surrender. Sighing, he ran a hand through his hair. “Do you have any advice for when I meet with the retired Aurors?”

“Don’t beat around the bush,” Marcus said. “Be as upfront and as honest as you can.”

“And bring pastries,” Kim said. “Aurors love pastries.”

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Harry watched nervously as the retired Aurors milled around the snack table he’d set up in the conference room, eating pastries and drinking coffee. Greeting each other like old friends, they talked and laughed while Harry waited for Moody and Amelia to show up. The Aurors had glanced his way several times, but none of them had tried to talk with him.

Fortunately, it was long before he heard the repeated *clunk* of Moody’s wooden leg on the hard stone floor. A few moments later, he limped into the room with Amelia right behind him.

“Potter,” Moody grunted, holding out a gnarled hand.

“Moody,” Harry replied. “Good to see you again.”

“How’s Ministry life treatin’ yeh?” he asked with a raspy laugh.

“Is it too early to retire?” Harry asked.

Moody laughed and clapped him on the shoulder.

“Moody!” one of the Aurors yelled. “Haven’t lost anything else since I last saw you, have you?”

“Nothin’ important,” Moody said,

Hobbling over to the group of Aurors, Moody started shaking hands while Amelia stopped next to Harry.

“You ready to get started?” she asked quietly.

“As I’ll ever be,” Harry said nervously.

Smiling, she patted him on the shoulder.

“Everyone,” Amelia called out. “If you’re finished with the reunion, perhaps we could get started?”

“Always straight to business, ey Amy?” A grey-haired witch asked with a smile.

“Some of us still have work to do, Matilda,” Amelia replied with a smile of her own.

“So, what’s got you pulling decrepit old witches and wizards like us out of retirement?” a wizard asked as they took a seat.

In a conference room designed to hold twenty, some people still had to conjure chairs to sit on.

“Minister Potter has an offer he would like to make you,” Amelia said.

Clearing his throat, Harry stood at the head of the table.

“As I’m sure most of you have heard, today, the DMLE got a much needed raise in its budget,” Harry said. “First of all, each of you will be getting your full retirement from this point onwards. I wish I could backdate it so you got everything you deserve, but that just wasn’t possible.”

A rumble of excitement ran through the room.

“And this is contingent on us agreeing to whatever you need us for?” a greying wizard asked with a scowl.

“No,” Harry said. “That goes for everyone, even the Aurors that refused to come.”

Furrowing his brow, the wizard levered himself out of his chair.

“Then I’ll take my leave,” he said.

“Oh, come on, Shaw,” A heavily scarred wizard with said in a deep voice. “At least hear the lad out.”

“I don’t give a damn what the Ministry’s got to say,” Shaw growled. “No matter who’s runnin’ it.”

Harry waited with bated breath to see if anyone else would follow Shaw as he left the room. Thankfully, everyone else stayed in their seats.

“So, what’s this really about, Potter?” Moody asked.

“We need help,” Harry said. “With Voldemort back, the Ministry just doesn’t have the Aurors to protect everyone. It’s going to take us months or years to get the new recruits trained.”

“Not all of us are still up for chasing after Dark Wizards, lad,” A witch said.

“We don’t need you to be,” Harry said. “We need teachers. We need leaders. You fought in the last war. You know what to expect and how to get the new Aurors through what’s coming.”

“And what’s to guarantee we’ll still have a job after you leave?” a wizard asked.

Harry shared a look with Amelia.

“I can’t,” he admitted. “Unfortunately, there’s nothing I can do to stop a new Minister from getting rid of all of you as soon as they take office.”

“What do you think about all of this, Amelia?” Matilda asked.

“Minister Potter is the best Minister I’ve had the pleasure of working with,” Amelia said. “Everything he’s told you is true. The Aurors really do need your help, and I’ll do my best to keep you on once we have a new Minister.”

“Why do I get the feeling there’s more to this?” a wizard in the back asked.

Amelia looked over at Harry and quirked an eyebrow. After a moment of thought, he nodded.

“We’re currently working on an operation,” Amelia said. “Perhaps the largest single operation ever conducted on home soil. I’m sorry, but I can’t tell you more than that right now.”

“Well, that sounds exciting,” a wizard grinned. “Doesn’t sound like we have much to lose. I’m in.”

“What say you, Moody?” Matilda asked.

“I never did like retirement,” he replied gruffly.

Pulling out his flask, he drew deeply from it.

“Did anyone check that for Polyjuice?” Harry whispered to Amelia.

“I’ll let you be the one to ask,” Amelia smirked.

“I’ll take my chance,” Harry grinned.

“Can we have some time to think about this?” a wizard in the back asked.

“Sure,” Harry nodded. “Just keep in mind that this offer is only good so long as I’m in office.”

The wizard nodded, and Harry sat back in his chair as the Aurors started to talk.

“What do you think?” Harry asked Amelia softly.

“We’ll know in a few days,” she said. “You earned a lot of respect by letting Shaw leave the way you did.”

“It was the right thing to do,” Harry said. “What Fudge and Umbridge did was bullshit. I don’t blame him one bit for not staying.”

“And that’s why I like having you as Minister,” Amelia smiled. “Are you sure I can’t convince you to run for office when your term is up?”

“Come on, Amelia,” Harry said, his cheeks flush. “I don’t have the first clue what I’m actually doing.”

“You could’ve fooled me,” Amelia said.

Patting his knee, she stood and walked over to talk with the other Aurors.

“Potter!” Moody barked. “Get over here. There’s some people I’d like you to meet.”

~

Eight Aurors had agreed to return by the time Harry left the conference room. Frankly, it was more than he had expected with how the Ministry had treated them.

Sitting in his office near the fire, Harry took a sip of his Firewhiskey just as someone knocked on the door.

“Come in,” he called.

Opening the door, Hermione slipped inside with a smile.

"How'd it go?" she asked.

"It went alright," Harry said. "A handful agreed to come back, but the rest wanted some time to think about it."

"I'm sure more will come back over the next few days," Hermione said reassuringly.

Harry smiled, "That's what Amelia said."

"See," Hermione smiled. "Well, I'm going to head home for the night. Are you coming?"

"I'll be along in a little bit," Harry told her. "I've got some paperwork I still need to finish."

"Do you want some help?" Hermione asked.

"No," Harry said, shaking his head with a smile. "You go home and get some rest. It's really not that much."

"If you're sure," Hermione said. "And don't drink too much of that stuff."

"Yes, mum," Harry smirked.

Slapping his shoulder lightly on the way to the Floo, Hermione smiled before disappearing in a burst of emerald flames. After she left, Harry stared into the crackling flames, lost in thought.

"Still at it?"

Harry jerked in his seat and turned towards the door. Seeing Penny in the doorway, he smiled and waved her in.

“Just thinking,” he said.

“Oh?” Penny asked, walking around the couch to sit next to him. “About what?”

“The Aurors, the Death Eaters, Voldemort, the Wizengamot...” Harry said, trailing off. “Take your pick.”

“But things really went well today, didn’t they?” Penny asked, taking his hand in hers. “You got more than the budget you were hoping for; at least some of those Aurors agreed to come back, and you have a plan to deal with the Death Eaters.”

“Yeah,” Harry said softly.

“So, what’s bothering you?” Penny asked.

“It’s all just – going too well,” Harry sighed. “I’m waiting for something to go wrong.”

“And if it doesn’t?” Penny asked, smiling and leaning into his side.

“Then, I’ll be really worried,” Harry said, his lips twitching. “It means something *really* bad is going to happen.”

“Well, aren’t you just a little ray of sunshine,” Penny chuckled.

Harry shrugged with the shoulder she wasn’t leaning on.

“That’s just the way my luck goes,” Harry said. “The longer it takes for something bad to happen, the worse it’ll be when it does.”

“Have you ever thought that maybe bad things happen because you expect them to?” Penny asked.

“Not really,” Harry smiled. “But, you did forget one other really good thing that happened today.”

“What’s that?” Penny asked, her brow furrowed cutely.

Turning to her, Harry grinned. “I got a date with a really pretty girl.”

Penny smiled and blushed cutely while shaking her head.

“Smooth, Potter,” she said.

Slowly, their faces drifted closer together. Harry paused and swallowed nervously when their lips were just a hair’s breadth apart. Staring at him with her bright blue eyes, Penny’s twitched into a smile right before she closed her eyes and closed the distance.

Harry marveled at just how full and soft her lips were. The smell of her perfume filled his nose as he nervously wrapped his arm around her.

Far too soon, Penny pulled back. Giggling prettily, she settled against his side and rested her hand on his chest. With a smile, Harry relaxed back against the couch and caressed her arm.

“You know, you should try thinking that if good things keep happening, something really good might happen next,” Penny told him.

"It already did," Harry grinned.

Giggling, Penny tilted her head up and kissed his cheek.

"Good answer," she said.

~

The next morning, Harry stepped off the elevator and froze as he looked around the DMLE office. The place was buzzing with activity. Most, if not all, of the retired Aurors he had spoken to the night before were now getting situated around the office.

Moody and Matilda were barking orders, forcing the younger Aurors to move around several desks. Meanwhile, others were looking at the filing system, unimpressed.

"You call this organized?" an older witch asked derisively. "It's a wonder you get anything accomplished. It needs to be sorted by case number, *then* by date. Not the other way around."

"Wow," Kim said softly from behind him. "I can't believe you got this many to come back."

"Me neither," Harry blinked.

"That's a hell of a thing you've done," Marcus said. "Getting them to trust the Ministry again."

"They don't," Amelia said as she joined them in watching over the office. "They trust the current Minister."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, his brow furrowed.

“Letting Shaw leave and still giving the ones that didn’t show up their full pension had a bigger impact than I thought,” Amelia said. “All but one of the retired Aurors we talked to last night was here waiting for me this morning.”

“Bloody hell,” Harry said.

“Amelia!” Matilda yelled before walking over. “Who in Merlin’s name did you have teaching these kids?”

“Since Moody left, Dawlish and Scrimgeour,” Amelia said.

Matilda snorted, “Figures. This place is a mess. The filing system is all wrong, and there’s no discipline. The only one here with their head on straight so far is that Tonks girl. Don’t worry, though. We’ll have this place running ship shape in no time.”

“It’s good to have you back,” Amelia smiled.

“I did miss the old place,” Matilda said, gazing around the office. “It’s hard to go from hunting Dark Wizards to sewing quilts.”

“Quilts?” Amelia asked with a twitch of her lips.

“Eh, my daughter put me up to it,” Matilda said. “Said it’d help me relax. Load of bollocks. Anyways, Moody and Wellington want to get everyone under Master Auror in the training room this week so they can put them through their paces.”

“I’ll set up a schedule,” Amelia nodded.

“Any chance I could join?” Harry asked. “I know you’re going to be busy, and I’m not as good as the Aurors, but I’d appreciate some advice on my dueling. Besides, I hate being stuck in an office all day.”

“A Minister that’s willing to get his robes dirty?” Matilda asked with a smirk. “I never thought I’d see the day. What year are you in, lad? Sixth?”

“Er, I’m going into fifth,” Harry said.

“Fifth, eh? Well, I’m sure we can squeeze you in,” Matilda said.

“If it’s not any trouble,” Harry said.

“Oh, it’s no trouble at all,” Matilda grinned. “Trust me, most of this lot have been waiting for years to get their hands on a Minister.”

Harry paled as the older witch gave him a predatory smile. A moment later, she and Amelia laughed while Marcus patted him on the shoulder. Letting out a breath, Harry smiled when he realized she was joking.

“Don’t worry, lad,” Matilda said. “Moody seems pretty fond of you for pulling him out of his trunk. I’m sure he’ll be happy to make time to teach you a thing or two.”

“Thanks,” Harry smiled.

The elevator opened, and the group stepped out of the way. Surprisingly, Shaw stepped out with an older witch and wizard behind him.

“Well, look what the Kneazle dragging in,” Matilda said.

“Bennet,” Shaw said, nodding to Matilda before turning to Harry and Amelia. “I just want to make it clear, I’m only staying as long as I feel it’s worth my time. The second this department gets political, I’m out. I’m not risking my neck from some snot-nosed bureaucrat.”

“Fair enough,” Harry said, holding out his hand. “Welcome back.”

Shaw stared at him intently for a long moment before nodding and shaking his hand.

“Where do you need me?” he asked, looking at Amelia.

“I think Moody could use some help getting the training room organized,” Amelia told him.

Nodding, Shaw walked off without another word.

“Sorry David and I missed the meeting,” the witch that had come with Shaw said with a kind smile. “It was our grandson’s birthday.”

“Not a problem,” Harry smiled, shaking her hand. “We’re glad to have you.”

“Minister, this is Agatha Greene and her husband, David,” Amelia said.

“Pleasure,” Harry said, shaking David’s hand.

David was a thin wizard with white hair and a round, youthful face. Agatha was quite short, with grey hair and a cane in her right hand.

“Likewise,” David said. “What can we do to help?”

“Can you two help Melissa with the organization for now?” Amelia asked. “We’ve got a lot of rearranging to do to fit everyone in.”

“Of course,” Agatha smiled.

“I can ask Magical Maintenance to enlarge the room,” Harry offered.

“Probably not a bad idea. A few new offices wouldn’t hurt either,” Amelia said, checking her watch.

“I’ll see to it,” Harry told her.

“Thank you,” Amelia said. “I’m sorry, but I have a meeting with Kingsley and Connie in a few minutes. Once we have a handle on our numbers, I’ll bring you in so we can go over our options.”

“Sounds good,” Harry said.

Shaking Amelia’s hand, he got back into the elevator with Marcus and Kim. For the first time since he’d taken office, Harry felt like he was really accomplishing something.