

XX/XX/21XX

10:21 AM, Monday.

[AUTHORISED ENTRY: WELCOME, JUNIPER-38]

I clock into work for the day. I didn't have any morning classes so I was able to sleep in a bit, which I needed, the past few days have been tense for everyone, but especially for one person...

The news broke out last Wednesday, it was shocking, sudden, something none of us could even predict. Yale instructed us all to be more gentle with Ron for the time being, today's his first day of work after the incident. It's so unfair, why must an honorable man suffer like this? What sort of karmic debt would a man like him have that'd have to be paid back like this?

The atmosphere in the ministry was off, you could tell something was wrong but as is protocol, the Ministry try to remain calm.

I know I'm not the best at comforting, especially with something like this, but it would pain me seeing Ron like that without at least trying. I feel my heart hammering as I approach the door to his office, I was trying to mentally prepare myself for anything he may say to me, I was preparing to fail.

[Knock, knock]

"Come in."

His voice called out, having lost the power and strength it once had. I push the door slightly open and poke my head in. He sat there, shuffling his papers, he looked composed, as he usually did, and he shot towards me a smile, a thin veil covering the sorrow and grief underneath.

"Oh, Juniper-38, do you need anything?"

"No, no, um..."

I enter the room, closing the door behind me. I can feel my hands shaking and going cold. You've gotta concentrate, Juni! You can't just mumble and mutter as you always do, you have to at least try and help your friend.

"No, um... Do *you* need anything?"

I timidly inquire, fidgeting with my fingers as I am met with a rather perplexed Ron. Dammit, Juni.

“Uh, what do you mean?”

Completely understandable reaction. Come on, you can pull yourself through this..

“I mean like.. D-Do you, uhm.. Just– do you need anything? I know uhm, what happened and uh... I want to help.. Do you maybe need someone to talk to? “

I tried hard to tip toe around saying it outright, but I've never been the best at subtlety.

“ Ah. “

Ron raised his eyebrows, stared down at his papers, then back up at me, before once again, smiling. God, I hate that smile, I hate it because it's being used to hide how he's feeling, I don't want him to feel the need to hide.

“Juniper-38, I appreciate you asking me that, but I assure you, I'm going to be okay. You probably already have a lot of work to do, I don't want to burden y-”

“You're not a burden.” I instinctively cut him off, seeing him describe himself like that just set me off. He's not a burden, he'll never be a burden.

“It's– I don't have a class until 11, and besides I can excuse myself for being 5 or 10 minutes late... You're what's most important to me right now, I do really want to help you... “

I continue, turning my head downwards towards the ground. I feel guilty about cutting him off, but hearing those words leave his lips angered me, I had to put the record straight.

Ron just stares at me for a moment, then his eyes glance to the side, processing my words.

“ Juniper-38.. “

He calls, then rubs his face with his hand.

“It's just that– I'm not sure how you can help, nothing you say or do can bring her back.”

“I know that, Ron-29, but I feel like right now, you at least need someone to keep you company, no?”

He heavily debates my words for a second, he goes to say one thing, then immediately stops. After a moment, he sighs and points to the chair across from him.

“That would... Actually be quite nice, thank you.”

I'm honored that he feels safe talking to me, perhaps I am doing something right. I pull out the chair and sit down.

"Talk to me, let it all out if you need to."

He stops for a second, I understand, he has a lot he wants to say. He then holds his head in his hands.

"It's just— it happened so suddenly... One moment she was there the next— the next she wasn't! I don't get it.. I-I vowed to always protect her! Why did I break my promise?!"

His voice grows more intensified, a mixture of grief, guilt, and anger. It's horrible to see him like that. If I could carry his pain, I would. Out of all the people, he deserves it the least.

"It's not even me I'm most worried about, I'll cope with it, I don't know how, but I will. It's— it's my girls.." Tears were welling up in his eyes, his voice weaker and more hiccupy.

"They're— they're gonna grow up without a mother. I haven't even yet t-told them what happened, I can't find the strength to look them in the eyes and— and tell them their mother is gone.. I've been stalling ever since, I just told them she went on a trip!"

He hides his face in shame, I can hear sniffing and hiccups, he's trying to hold back his tears.

I stare at him for a moment, before leaning my elbows on the table, looking at him.

"Ron, Ron..."

I softly call out. He slowly moves his hands from his face, which had a few tears streaming down, his lip quivering. He then blushes out of embarrassment, staring down.

"Ah— uh, a-apologies, Juniper-38, I didn't mean for you t— for you to see me like this, ah—"

"Don't apologise, Ron. It's human to cry, you're not 'embarrassing yourself' or anything, you're having a human reaction to a tragedy."

Ron stares at me for a moment, sniffing and wiping his tears with his sleeve.

"There are things in life we cannot change, even though we really, really want to. Thing is, Ron, you didn't do anything wrong. She left the house as she did every day, how were you supposed to know that would happen to her? I hate seeing you beat yourself up over something you had no control over..."

I've never been under more pressure in my life, Ron is attentively listening to me, I must word everything perfectly.

“And, I get it, it's gonna be hard for your girls to process that information, it'll be a big change for them but— they will be okay, I know that. They do have the best dad in the world, after all.”

I gesture to the ‘#1 Dad’ mug on his table, hoping to maybe lift the spirits, at least a bit. It worked, he let out a soft laugh.

“And.. Just know that whatever happens, The Ministry will always be there for you... *I* will always be there for you. This isn't a battle you have to fight alone.”

Ron, with dried tear streaks on his cheeks, silently sat there for a minute, before cracking a soft smile.

“That's... That's really reassuring, Juniper. I— once again, thank you for coming in, I feel like getting all of that off my chest really helped me.”

“Anytime, Ron. You know I'll always make time for you, so if you need me again.. Don't be scared to call me.”

Ron nods, then looks at the clock on the wall, 10:58, it reads.

“Oh, it seems like it's almost time for class. You should probably get going.”

I look up at the clock and raise my eyebrows, then glance back at him.

“Hey, if you still need me to be here, I will. My students can do without me for a bit.” I offer.

Ron shakes his head.

“You've already helped so much, Juniper.. I'll be okay.”

I hesitate for a bit, but then nod and stand up.

“Goodbye, Ron, have a great day.”