

# **The time that is given us**

## **How love can change lives**

Von Gepo

### **Kapitel 7: Seventh chapter**

Edgar was of course punctual. Harry had not expected anything else from a soldier. They shared an amicable breakfast and drove back into the city afterwards. One thing was for sure, Edgar was a smooth talker. He charmed a few office ladies and after two hours they actually found someone that felt competent enough to do the paperwork. By lunchtime, Harry was finally the official father of one Tom Vorlost Horten. They celebrated with a meal before hitting the road. Edgar had told him that his sister looked ready to kill him when he told her where he would go. Said elder sister did not seem to like Grenmore Horten much – no one did, Harry got that – but was happy to see her brother in better spirits. It seemed like that separation had done no good to either of them. They made one stop on the way to get fuel but otherwise drove in silence. Sometimes Edgar remarked on the scenery, told a story or simply laughed at something funny. He was easy to be around.

By now Harry had to redo his image of Grenmore Horten. He did not sound like a sane Voldemort – that one had been smooth as hell – he rather sounded like a less subservient version of Severus Snape. Not even once had Harry ever tried to imagine a partner for his most hated teacher in school but maybe someone like Edgar would have done the trick. He just didn't know what Edgar got out of it. He could have had anyone in Harry's opinion. Auburn hair, straight features, a lean and slightly muscular body from years of army services. Maybe Grenmore Horten had just been the lucky one to earn this man's loyalty first.

Harry and Ginny had both had partners before each other but never serious ones. Even her fling with Dean seemed to have been more hormonal than anything else. Their first serious partners had been each other and both stuck with it. So he could understand the mentality. Somehow Grenmore Horten had been able to stay in a relationship for fifteen years, even if he had been a horror at times. He pitied Edgar. It was not easy to be a homosexual in this era and his partner was gone for good. From his few comments about his sister's opinion of the situation, Harry understood that Edgar had been depressed for a few months now.

That seemed instantly cured since yesterday evening. Having hope again, it was only natural that Edgar clung to him. Harry had no idea how long it would take the man to understand that his partner did not exist anymore. On the other hand, he would give everything for a glimpse of Ginny, so he understood where the man was coming from. Losing your soulmate was like amputating a limb. You could live with it but the loss hurt like hell.

And really, Edgar wasn't hard to be around. He talked and laughed and told stories like a professional animator. Under all that, he was steel and blood and murder. In that regard, he even resembled Ginny. She was warm hugs and nice words until you crossed her. Harry would always remember her exchanging curses with death eaters at fourteen years old. Edgar had joined the army at 18 years old and stepped into a massacre.

They arrived in Bath late that evening. The kids came out and started whispering when they noticed Edgar. Margret looked pretty relieved – most likely because there weren't more kids in his car. Brea blushed when she greeted the handsome face. Still, Tom topped all of that. He ran to jump into Harry's arms, talking a mile a minute and asking questions even faster. He answered by cuddling the little imp and kissing the black tresses.

"Dad!"

"How else am I to shut you up?"

Tom just scowled at him.

"Now, first of all, we have a guest. Mind your manners and greet him." He let the boy down.

Tom trotted to Edgar sullenly but bowed perfectly and offered his hand. "Mister Edgar, welcome to Horten manor. My name is ... well, I don't know actually, my father won't tell me."

"Young master Horten, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance." Edgar bowed as well and shook the tiny hand.

"Really? You got my name changed?" Grinning like a loon, Tom turned back to him.

"You really did?"

"Edgar got your name changed, little rascal, so thank him."

"Thank you!" Tom called out but ran to Harry to hug him.

Harry just laughed and threw the boy in the air. Thank God he was small enough for that. He was gaining weight by the month. Maybe Harry should start exercising to keep this body in good shape.

"Was it hard?"

"Very hard! I couldn't have done it without Edgar. He charmed all the office ladies for me."

"Huh ... so he is not a lawyer?" Tom crooked his head. "Does charming mean he is a wizard?"

Edgar laughed at that, some of the older girls chuckling along.

"It's an adult thing again, right?" The boy pouted in reaction and crossed his arms.

"Smart boy." Harry kissed his cheek. "Now, do you have any food left? We are starving."

"Yes, yes, horribly." Edgar looked from Brea to Margret and smiled at that one. "May we trouble you for some dinner?"

"Of course, Mister ...?"

"Just Edgar. It's Edgar Lansborough, but the name is such a mouthful." His smile turned to a grin. "So how are you called, young ladies?"

"My name is Margret. These are Brea, Dorothea, Laurette, Mary and Helen. The young man over there is Richard, our gardener."

"Nice to meet you all. I heard you are running a factory? I hope to get to admire your work tomorrow."

"We'll show you.", Brea spoke shyly. Harry had never seen her shy before but Edgar seemed to be interesting to her. Maybe he should warn her off somehow? He could

tell Margret something, so she could tell the girl.

"I am delighted! A house full of beautiful young maidens. Gren, whatever shall I think of you?" Edgar smiled at him but there was a dangerous glint in his eyes.

"You could stop insinuating that I am a pedophile, thank you very much." It was something Harry was unable to joke about and these girls were much too young. Even if both of them knew that Harry had no interest in them, what impression would this leave on Margret? Or the girls for that matter?

"Woah, okay, no jokes about girls, I get it. Sorry." Edgar held up his hands and blinked in surprise.

"These ladies here are too nice to say anything, so I'll do it: You are scaring them with such jokes. This is the first place where they can feel safe and you are making them doubt their safety with your words. Think before you speak." It was a small slight and nothing men thought about in this age but Harry would not budge on this. Just because emancipation was still only at the beginning, it was an important topic.

"Okay, okay ... I get it." Edgar looked slightly bewildered.

"You still don't or you would think about your next move carefully."

Tom – still on Harry's arm – rolled his eyes and stage-whispered: "You have to apologize to Margret and the girls."

The man looked even more out of sorts to be scolded by a six-year-old. He looked from Tom to Harry and back but finally turned to the girls and said: "I seem to have to learn the rules of this household. Gren is an old friend of mine, we were in the army together. I will try my best to become less offensive. I am sorry if I scared any of you with my words."

"Soldiers aren't known for their respect for women." Margret put an arm around Brea.

"Please refrain from hurting or scaring my girls."

"I ... I wouldn't!" Edgar looked a bit shocked about her animosity.

"Don't worry, Margret." Harry stepped up and put a hand on Edgar's shoulder. "Just like me he has someone he lost and can't forget about. He is a charmer but he won't be interested in anyone here. I simply wanted to make it clear that I won't let harm come to any of you."

"Actually, about that ... well, we can tell you later. Come on in, we'll heat something about and tell you over dinner." Margret smiled shortly but it did not reach her eyes.

"Will you be staying with us, Edgar?"

"As long as Gren will have me."

"Will he take away your time?", Tom mumbled with a slightly vicious tone.

"He might play with you, you know? He's not an enemy."

Tom looked up guiltily and tried to explain: "More people is always more work for you."

"Edgar can help me with my work. He can teach Dorothea and Laurette, he can help with the factory. He has been my assistant for many years. He knows how to make me work less."

"Oh ... that's good." He looked like he wanted to say more but finally just lay his head on Harry's shoulder.

Harry smiled indulgently. It had been a good idea not to look for a baby. Tom wasn't keen on sharing and already felt like the world wanted to take Harry away. That was alright. The world might take him away soon enough, so he would enjoy those years with Tom.

Sometimes small actions could change the world.

Edgar stayed. Not a week, not a month, he simply stayed. He made himself useful by taking over the books, the talks with clients, the job interviews. What Margret had wanted to talk about was a man that had applied. He had come into the factory, looked at the work and told Brea and the others that they were bad at what they did. His rudeness had been so offensive that Mary had run to get Margret and she had told the man to leave. She had been afraid that Harry would not back her decision but of course he did so.

So Edgar made himself an office in the factory. He vowed to protect the children and be of service and did exactly that. It left Harry with time to focus on teaching the children in the morning before they went to work and playing with Tom until they came back. Knowing that he could have his father to himself made Tom crave the exact opposite – he spent more and more time helping Margret or even doing the books with Edgar.

It was exactly what Harry had wished for. So the trick to make Tom care about people had not been to present him with people to care about but with more care to himself. It was so stupidly easy that Harry wanted to hit himself for not seeing that right away. Tom needed security to go explore and Harry was that security. One part of it at least. Margret and Edgar became important to Tom as well.

Which was exactly why Harry would not send Edgar away, no matter how sad he sometimes looked when he thought no one was seeing him. It pained Harry that he could not alleviate the anguish. No one would bring the old Grenmore Horten back. It also meant that Harry needed to learn a lot about this body's old life. Edgar taught him every detail. It would be months to learn it all and Harry wasn't sure he would be able to remember. Especially war strategy went way over his head. He wished he had Ron for that. Planning was something Hermione and Ron had done for him. He really didn't know what he was doing – hopefully Edgar would stay with him if they were drafted.

Winter turned to spring and spring to summer. Tom's first day of school was approaching and though it wasn't Hogwarts, Harry still felt like letting his son go into a world unknown and full of danger.

As was tradition, the teacher went to meet Harry and Tom a few weeks before school started. He was a nice man about as old as Harry himself and seemed the right mix of kind and stern. They talked with and about Tom, especially about his tendency to be a bit of a bully. Harry praised his son for how much he had learned in this regard and how he expected him to continue on this way. He also boasted a bit about Tom's charm and his wit, warning the teacher not be fooled by the doe eyes. As children went to school at four or five years of age, the teacher asked why Tom had not gone to school last year. Harry explained that he had adopted Tom, so he wanted the boy to adapt to his new surroundings first. Yes, he had gone to school before and he had been home-schooled and he could read and write already. He was reading Dickens? Admirable! How about letting him start in second year? He would still be one of the best. He might even think about starting third year. Tom preened like a peacock with all the praise.

The teacher promised to come back with some tests for Tom to see which year might be best for him. He would also talk to the other teachers that taught higher years. It would be a shame to let Tom start in first year, he would outshine everyone. If humility was to be taught and Harry did not want his son bored to death, he would let him face a challenge. Tom was all for it obviously. A six-year-old with ambitions, thirsting for glory – what a strange sight. All Harry had wanted to do at that age was

to roam around outside as long as possible, either forgotten or neglected by his minders. Tom was different, he wanted people to acknowledge him.

Edgar was all for it and cheering the boy on. Margret was worried that he would be too smart for his own good, land himself with kids older than him and beaten up for being small and intelligent at the same time. Tom just grinned and said that he would outsmart the bullies. Edgar proposed some physical training to build up muscle and Harry joined them with a sigh. He needed to stay in shape and sitting behind desks was not helping that. When push-ups turned into boxing lessons, he stopped him though. Fistfights were for brutes, real men used words. Edgar just grinned and challenged Harry to a bout of wrestling.

"You are not helping my case here."

"Oh come on, Gren, we started out as ruffians too."

"You may have, I was an officer when we met."

"You didn't get there by being a goody-two-shoes."

"I got there by being smart. I don't need a son that picks drunken fights in bars."

"Still, a man should be able to hold his own. You're just afraid I'll win."

"I am not afraid. I know that you'll win. It's why I won't pick a fight with you." Harry might not like it but Edgar was fitter and younger.

"Great! Then I'll get to teach boxing to the short stuff."

"Edgar! I said no!"

"And that you'll lose the fight anyway." The man grinned in triumph.

Should he make an example out of this or let it slide? He might have to threaten Edgar with throwing him out. It wasn't what he wanted to do but he also did not want Tom ... oh well, knowing boxing and being a bully were two different shoes. Edgar was right. Teaching him did not mean he would use it as a mean to harass people.

"Tom, if I ever see you using boxing techniques to hurt people for your own gain, you won't like the punishment. Learn it as a way to protect others. It's how power is meant to be used."

Edgar and Tom grinned at each other. It was a bit like watching James and Teddy planning a "project". It felt like disaster in the making.

Richard wanted to join in too – finally something "manly" going on – but even Harry was surprised when Edgar asked the girls if one of them wanted to join as well. The older ones spent their time on sewing and embroidering clothes, the younger ones playing games outside, so Harry did not expect any of them to be willing. Brea stepped forwards though and said that all of them would learn the basics. None of the girls ever spoke back to Brea, so it was a deal. Edgar had gained quite a big boxing club.

Harry joined in, seeing as he should know it but actually had no clue at all. Edgar had told him that they had boxed often. His body certainly seemed used to it, even if Harry did not know what to do. It left Margret some time to herself which seemed to do her a world of good. A week later and she was singing while sweeping and had a lot more patience with the brood.

Tom passed the tests with flying colors. The teacher advised on him joining the third years but Harry doubted that it was a good idea. Wouldn't they all be older and stronger? Tom was not a scrawny kid anymore but he was small for his age. Wouldn't he be bullied? The teacher promised to send the third-year teacher over, so that he could convince Harry. In the end, bullying had a lot to do with the teacher supervising. No one would try anything in McGonagall's or Snape's class. Hagrid's class had been filled with pranks and barbs. With a good teacher, Harry might accept the proposal.

Tom badgered him to no end of course, even calling him cruel and demonic. When "tyrant Dad" mutterings started, the other kids scolded Tom for his thanklessness and he became sullen for a day.

The third year teacher was an intimidating man, laying down his strict rules and his penchant for physical punishments. Thankfully that cured Tom from wishing to start with the third class. So they met the second year teacher, a charming woman with lots of enthusiasm, charmed immediately by Tom's smile. Harry wished it was possible to have him start with the first years but this teacher was at least better than the last one. The woman – one Ms Miller – praised Tom's beauty and said that his mother must have been a sight to see.

Tom had the audacity to answer: "She sure was."

Harry could not help breaking out in laughter. Wasn't the boy too young for sarcasm? Had he just taken her words at face value? Goods, this was hilarious. Tom had such a dry wit sometimes. It would bring him in trouble someday but Harry couldn't help but appreciate it from time to time.

Ms Miller just smiled proudly and praised Tom for being a well-mannered and finely brought up kid. Tom smiled back at her, also obvious pride in his visage.

Somehow Harry knew it wasn't because he took the praise at face value. He was proud of fooling the naive woman. He knew that smile from the face of a sixteen-year-old Tom, proud of making his teacher squirm and still crave for him with nothing but his words.

Harry shuddered. How was he meant to stop that? He really didn't know. But falling into the trap of looking for those signs again and again and condemning Tom for being who he was was not the way to go about it. He would not be another Dumbledore, even if he sometimes understood what had driven the man. It was hard when you realized that a six-year-old's scrupulousness filled you with fear.

The first schoolday came and went without any complaints. No crying children, no offended teacher, no indignant parent asking him what a devil he was bringing up. Harry began to relax a bit and after a month, he started meeting Tom a bit further from school every time so that after two months, he went there and came back all by himself. Marget, Edgar and Harry only picked him up when they were in town anyway. So the first complaint about Tom reached him via Margret.

He knew that Tom had a few boys in the class he normally played with. Their names were James, Howard, Theodore and Harold. Howard was the one that sometimes accompanied Tom after school to play in their garden. From what Margret told Harry, Tom and Howard seemed to have had their first big fight. Ms Miller wasn't able to tell her what it was about but she was able to tell Margret that after a heated argument, Howard had attacked Tom. Tom had deflected the punches, never hitting back and Ms Miller hadn't been fast enough. When Howard had pushed Tom down, that one finally hit back and took Howard out for a moment. His mouth and lip had been bleeding afterward, one teeth knocked out.

Margret told Harry that she had apologized to Howard's parents immediately and vowed to get to the bottom of this. The parents seemed to have been gracious and told her that from what Ms Miller said, Howard had been in the wrong just as much as Tom. They would see to it that he was properly disciplined. Margret just told them that she would bring the matter before her master to decide about Tom's punishment. The other parents had seemed pleased with that.

"Did he tell you what it was about?" Harry looked at Tom who had been standing still

as a stone-statue and looking at the floor for the whole time of her speech.

"No, he hasn't." There was still anger in her voice. "I reminded him that you told him that he was never to use his boxing skills for something like this."

Tom just stayed quiet but the tension in his shoulders told Harry that his son would argue with Margret if he thought he might have a chance that his case would be believed. It painfully reminded Harry of himself, every time his cousin had bullied him and blamed it on Harry afterwards.

"Thank you, Margret. I'll take this to my study. Please return to your work."

Tom followed him without any resistance. He even sat down on his usual place on the couch when Harry pointed at it. It was a painful reminder, seeing that small body on a couch so big.

"Explain to me what happened."

Tom just looked at him for a whole minute, studying his expression, the tension of his body, calculating the risk of saying what he was thinking against saying something that might lessen a punishment. Harry had never been this smart. Wary, yes, but never calm enough to plan like this. Maybe if he had gone to Slytherin, he would have learned it. Gryffindor only taught him to blurt out the truth, hope for the best and think of adults as wholly incapable beings.

"Howard and I had a fight about something childish. He got angry and attacked me. I really didn't want to hit him and I am sorry. I know I have to be punished. Ms Miller was almost there, I could have taken another hit or two."

Well played. Harry wanted to tell him that self-defense was alright, he hadn't done anything wrong, taking hits was not needed. Punishing the boy now would make him feel guilty. So he asked instead: "What was the fight about?"

"I don't even remember anymore."

"That's a blatant lie, Tom. I don't like being lied to."

The boy looked like he had just bitten into a lemon. There was finally the defiance he had already seen earlier in Tom when he said: "Okay, then I won't lie. I remember. I just don't want to tell you."

"That's okay." Harry nodded and surprised Tom with that. "Can you tell me why you do not want to talk about it?" It earned him a bout of silence. "Is it embarrassing or is it something where you know you are actually in the wrong?" More stony silence. "So I guess you know that you are in the wrong and while attacking someone is wrong, he had his reasons?"

Tom fidgeted uncomfortably. At least he wasn't an accomplished liar already.

"Do you think that Howard will tell his parents the truth?" After a moment, Tom nodded. "Will they believe him?" Another nod, this time more hesitant. "So tomorrow, you'll be confronted by his parents. He might have attacked first but they'll believe in his reasons. They know that you did wrong and when Howard got annoyed at that, you knocked his tooth out."

There was a long moment of silence, Tom's fist shaking in either fear or anger.

"If you want me to help you, Tom, you'll have to tell me the truth."

His son just shook his head.

"Think about it for the rest of the day. Maybe tell Edgar. If you haven't told me until dinner, I'll punish you for undue violence and won't help you with Howard's parents. If you tell me, you'll get punished but I'll help you talk to Howard and his parents tomorrow."

Tom took that as his cue to leave.

Harry waited and hoped but when dinner came around, he knew that stubbornness and pride had won out. On the other hand, he was happy that Tom hadn't tried lying again. It was a small victory at least. It tasted shallow though. Had he done the right thing? Should he have been more kind, more understanding? James had usually been in this position and he had bubbled out his troubles in a matter of minutes, even though he was the most stubborn creature next to Dobby that Harry had ever met. Tom was different, he relied on himself. But he had opened himself up to Harry a bit, they had talked about his parents, his pasts, his loneliness and his wish for connection. "Gren?" Edgar knocked on his door.

Startled out of his thoughts, Harry's head snapped up.

"I have someone here that wants to talk to you." He shoved Tom in front of him.

Thank Merlin. Thank god, thank anyone listening. Harry couldn't help the smile that spread on his face.

"You'll be disappointed", Tom mumbled with his gaze on his shoes.

"I'll also be extremely proud that you were able to overcome your fear of that and that you were able to admit you did wrong."

Edgar just smiled at Harry, sat down on the couch and pulled Tom onto his lap. "Come on, little one. Gren is a just man. I had to endure a lot of his scoldings for my mistakes. He'll love you anyway." It also earned him a wink.

True enough, Grenmore Horten had kept Edgar as his lover for 15 years while working side by side with him 24/7. They must have had one hell of a failure management.

"I ... I stole something", Tom admitted.

"Go on", Harry encouraged him.

"See, the other kids are always collecting something. Sometimes it's just rocks or clover, the last time it's been glass pearls. The more or the prettier they are, the more others coo over them. I never really understood but I wanted them to notice me too. So I earned some glass pearls in games and they were really cool and pretty but the others weren't interested because they already moved on to something else. It's drawings now. We have this girl in our class, her name is Victoria. She draws really well. She'll draw for you when you give her sweets. Sometimes it's not really good but some of her drawings are great. So Howard wanted her to draw something and he saved up three days worth of sweets and she drew for him. I really, really liked that drawing, so I wanted to have it. Mine wasn't as good as his. So I said we should trade. But Howard didn't want to, so I challenged him for the drawing in a game."

"Did he say yes?", Harry asked after Tom seemed to look for words.

"Not really ... I think I bullied him into playing. I knew that I would win. Edgar told me that it's bullying when you bring someone to play a game against you that you know you'll win."

"That's true."

"So ... basically I just stole his drawing. Edgar explained that to me."

"It was better than simply taking it but yes, it is basically stealing. I agree with Edgar. Where is the drawing now?"

"It's in my schoolbag."

"And your own drawing?"

"It's also in my schoolbag."

"Have you and Edgar already talked about what to do tomorrow?"

Tom looked extremely unhappy but answered dutifully: "I should apologize and give him back his drawing."

"You should or you will?" Harry had noticed the difference.



"I'll ... I don't want to! It's pretty."

"Tom, it's just a drawing." Edgar admonished him.

"I really like it! I want to keep it!" Tom looked at Harry with desperation in his eyes.

"Isn't there any way to keep it?"

"You could have continued to lie to me. You would have lost your friend, your teacher would have been disappointed, I would have been disappointed. Harold's parents would have accused you of stealing and I would have searched your belongings but you would have hidden the drawing really well."

"Grenmore!" Edgar exclaimed in shock.

"I would start to distrust you, looking at you whenever something was missing, maybe even wrongly accusing you. I would start to disbelieve you after knowing you lied to me. You would have the drawing but lost a friend and the trust of your other friends, your teacher and me. Would that have been worth it?"

Tom looked at him in disbelief and despair.

"Bullying, stealing, lying. Using your power to ridicule someone in a game, using your boxing training to seriously hurt someone, thinking you would get away with calling it self-defense. Is that enough or do you want to add to it by keeping the drawing?"

When Tom began to cry, he knew he had gotten his point across. Harry picked him up and hugged him close to his chest, carrying him while walking through the room as if he was trying to sooth a toddler. In the end, kids all wanted love, a safe environment and their parents' acceptance. Even someone as calculating and mistrustful as Tom. Even someone who did not readily imagine how someone else would feel about his actions. Given enough time, he would have realized but until then, he also would have talked himself into not caring about their reactions. A father not believing in him would have not been worth the title. A friend not heeding his wishes while he gave so much would have been unthankful. A teacher not stopping a fight soon enough and being angry at him afterwards would have been someone too guilty to admit their own mistakes, projecting them onto him.

He would only have concluded that he needed to get better at not being caught.

Harry knew because some of that had been his own thoughts once and as an adult, he had recognized them in others that had shaped him. Tom might not have called it "the greater good" or Voldemort's version "a way to save our world from corruption" yet but the pattern was the same. Having talked to criminals for years, Harry knew how they ticked. The problem was always the rationalizing. He wanted to stop this in the bud because Tom would not have a Gellert Grindelwald for self-reflection. He would become a master of doing what he thought was right and disregarding others. Sometimes it helped the world. Oftentimes it only meant pain and suffering. He wanted Tom to become a man able to better the world without having to disregard others for it.

This boy was meant for greatness and this time, it would not be as the nemesis of most living creatures.