

The time that is given us

How love can change lives

Von Gepo

Kapitel 9: Ninth chapter

Edgar came back crying with Tom held at his waist. He put the boy down in Harry's study before leaving without even looking at Harry once. So his questioning gaze found Tom.

"What is it?" Well, the boy seemed to grasp that it implied a question, but not which one.

"Why was Edgar crying?"

"Oh." Tom sat down in his usual spot on the couch. "He said that it was happy tears. He very much wants to be my godfather."

He hadn't looked happy though. He had looked conflicted. Harry's actions to bind him to life certainly weren't met with enthusiasm. On the other hand, he loved Tom dearly and having Harry's blessing to be a father to Tom officially must mean a lot to him.

"You don't think he's happy?" Tom scrutinized him.

"I think it is complicated." Harry came over and sat down in his chair. "As a child, a lot of things are easy. People are either good or bad. You are happy or angry or afraid or sad or disgusted. Growing older, you gain more complex emotions like pride or guilt or shame. You begin to see people in shades of grey, rather than thinking in black or white. Does that make sense?"

Tom scrunched his nose before asking: "Like how Oliver stole to survive but later stole to get rich before stopping to steal because he realized that stealing was bad? Because that means he was good and bad at the same time?"

"Well, it wasn't at the same time though. First he was good, then bad, then good again. But sometimes people are good and bad at the same time." Was that too complex for such a small boy? On the other hand, Tom was highly intelligent. Maybe he would grasp this.

"Like ... like how my mom loved me but still left me at that horrible orphanage?"

"That's a bit more like it, yes. Though I think she might not have known how bad they would treat you there. Or even if she did, she might not have had a choice."

"Huh ... then maybe like how I really wish I could have met her but are angry at her for leaving me?" Tom looked miserable saying that.

"That's exactly what I mean." Harry stood and went to over to sit down next to Tom and pull him into his lap. "It's completely normal to feel that way. There's no one to blame for her death, no one to pin your anger on. It's a miserable feeling." He knew. Gods he knew. He had been told that his parents had died in a drunken car accident for ten years after all.

"Or how I am so angry at my dad for not helping mom with me?" Tom squeezed Harry's jacket. "I don't want a dad like that!"

"I know." Harry stroked his back. "I wish I could tell you some more good things about your parents, I just don't know more about them." And somehow he doubted that he would hear any more good things. Maybe Tom's father was actually a nice bloke but he had basically been imprisoned, raped and mind-controlled. That wasn't something he ever wanted to tell Tom though.

"I want you and Edgar." The anger drained out of Tom's voice, leaving him sad and desolated.

"You have us." Harry kissed the soft black tresses. "Edgar will sort out his feelings. Give him a bit of time. He is conflicted too. Not about you, but about me. We'll sort it out, okay?"

"Promise?" Tom's voice was small.

"I wish I could. I can promise to do my very best, okay?" He wouldn't promise to be able to sort out Edgar's feelings. The man had too much on his plate for Harry to be sure it would work out.

The boy just squeezed his hug and remained half-lying on Harry with his face buried into one broad shoulder. Harry continued to stroke his back, wishing he could take some of that anger and confusion from those tiny shoulders.

"Can we play some ball outside?"

"Sure, Tom." Harry stood with the boy in his arms. "How hot is it outside? Do you think I need to change?"

The good thing about owning a sewing factory was that he could ask the kids for a short-sleeved shirt. It seemed like you could only dress in an undershirt and a long-sleeved formal shirt as a gentleman, even in the blazing sun of August. He didn't know how people could stand it. The townsfolk ran around shirtless but any kind of comfort was denied for the upper class. In this day and age, not only women had to suffer for fashion. He wished he had a way to find out when and where polo-shirts were invented. Maybe he should just invent them and make them popular. God knew he was invited to enough events already to show them off.

So his son advised him on what to wear and they were off to the gardens.

Edgar joined them half an hour later. It was the first interaction he had with Harry since yesterday evening and he still wouldn't look at him. Tom seemed to feel the tension but was also relieved that both men at least interacted in some way, even if it was silently tossing a ball around. Margret brought out some refreshments and a few other kids joined them after coming back from work. They went from playing ball to practicing boxing where Edgar's level of interaction upped to correcting Harry's pose and technique.

"Here you need to concentrate more on this point rather than this point. An uppercut is meant to aim for the chin or nose, not above the head." Edgar had even touched him for this part of the explanation. He murmured: "Now I finally know why you are suddenly so bad at this. One doesn't forget motor-skills."

"Sorry." Harry sent him an apologetic smile. "Thanks for teaching me. It helps to keep this body in shape."

"Then don't slack off." Edgar huffed and looked into his eyes for the first time this day. "Can we talk ... tonight?"

"Let's put Tom to bed together, yeah?"

The other man just nodded, a pained smile on his face. He moved to one of the girls to

correct her pose. Harry just continued his exercise and tried not to think too much. Had that been too much? Had he gone too far? Should he try not to include Tom as much? Maybe Edgar had wanted to tell him that he was leaving. Harry sighed. No crying over spilled beans.

Even after all these years, planning wasn't his forte. Following his guts was much more like him. He would just continue and try not to think too deeply.

After dinner, they read Tom a story about a rabbit and a hedgehog before kissing him good-night. Or at least Harry did, Edgar squeezed Tom's hand. They silently left for the study and closed the door.

"Think he'll try to listen in on us?" Harry asked with a smirk. Albus had sometimes done that until Ginny had finally caught him. They never knew why their son had done it but he had been highly sensitive whenever his parents had a spat.

"Might be." Edgar pulled out his handkerchief. "It's a bit nostalgic to block the key-hole." He did just that before coming over to the sitting area. "Not that you would remember."

"How are you right now?"

"Just ... don't." Edgar had closed his eyes and took some deep breaths. "I'm barely hanging on, don't ask about my feelings."

"Okay. No feelings, just facts. I guess you have questions?"

"Will you answer them?" A hard gaze was turned on Harry.

"Will you promise to listen with an open mind and not storm out of here to have me burned at a stake?" Or hospitalized or whatever people would do in this day and age.

"Are you human?" Edgar seemed about as mistrustful as Harry felt.

"Of course I am."

"Hm ... then I guess I'll hear you out."

"So you wouldn't hear me out if I were a magical creature?" Harry raised a brow.

Edgar just blinked before shaking his head. He was silent for a moment and finally said: "Magic, burning at the stake ... are we talking witchcraft?"

"And wizardry. This is the country of Merlin, so I hope you won't judge me as a lunatic."

"Your soul has taken control of my partner, it's pretty hard to discuss that away with science or religion. If you aren't God himself, being a wizard does not sound too unbelievable. Can you show me some magic?"

Harry had to look away for a moment, surprised how much the question hurt. "No ... Gren wasn't a wizard, I am stuck in his body, I won't ever be able to do magic again."

"This ... wasn't by choice, I gather?" Edgar suddenly looked a whole less passive-aggressive than before. No wonder that he had blamed Harry for taking Gren away.

"How did this happen?"

"Problem is, we have no clue. And by we, I mean all wizards and witches in this country. There is a ministry and a government and police and schools and hospitals and a jail and whatever else you have in a secret society. No one knows what happened. This is neither common nor planned. You don't just take over someone's body, especially not decades away from your own timeline."

"So ... are you from the future or the past?"

"Future." He could say that much, could he?

"So you know the future?"

"Again, I am not sure." This was heavy stuff to explain. "Wizards can travel through time but they stay in the same timeline. If a normal wizard went to the past, it would

not change the present because it already happened. This is not what happened to me though. I changed timelines. This is not my own past."

"How is it different?" Edgar furrowed his brow.

"I adopted Tom. That did not happen in my own timeline."

"But then ... you destroyed your future, I mean, your chance at returning to your present, yourself?"

"In my timeline, no one ever came for Tom. He became a horrible man, someone like Hitler."

"Hitler? That Austrian guy running for Germany right now?"

Oh, right, shit, Hitler hadn't done bad things yet. That was dumb. "He'll win ... we'll fight him in the next war."

"You know that man will start a war?" Edgar stared at him for a long moment.

"Shouldn't we kill him then?"

"No." Harry sighed. "This is so hard to explain ... when you know what's coming, you need to think on what to change and what not. The war will be horrible. Lots of people will be killed, buildings destroyed, Europe will be in ruins for years to come. But it will also greatly change people's thinking. Right now, a lot of people are hated and discriminated against and persecuted. Women, Jews, black people, homosexuals, a lot of people do not have the same rights. Hitler will not only kill, he will burn people alive, he will starve them and kill them with gas. It will be so horrible that afterwards, a lot of people won't even think about taking away someone's rights. Fifty years from now, homosexuals will openly march the streets for their rights. When I left my time, the first male couples married each other. One of the first was someone knighted by the Queen herself."

Edgar just looked at him like he had gone crazy.

"I know that it sounds unbelievable. But some things have to happen for that to be possible. A lot of people have to die for it to be possible."

"Like about 95% of our population or what?"

"No, not that many ... I think it was six million? Or seven million?" He saw Edgar's face before adding: "In total! Not in Britain."

"And you let that happen? Even though you know how to prevent it?" His eyes were wide with disbelief.

"Because I have an educated guess how many would die if it didn't happen. I have seen societies in which it didn't happen. Officially, slavery is abolished, but have you been to America? It will take another forty years for them to stop treating black people like slaves. Even though they will fight this war too and see what will happen."

"Okay, okay, I ... actually, I am not sure I get it but for now, I see your point." Edgar shook his head. "Blimey, the future sounds bleak. Think we'll die in this war?"

Well ... yes. They were soldiers. They would be drafted. They might be high-ranking but there was a pretty good chance of dying. "It is a possibility."

"Damn ... Gren would have stayed if he had known. Another world-war was his greatest wish."

"I don't think I understand my host." Harry sighed. "No offense but I'd be happy to never fight another war again."

"So there will be more afterwards? Will there ever be an end?" At least Edgar did not look so keen on killing more people.

"It will be the last in Britain for many years to come. The next two will be magical wars ... and those are what I'll try to stop."

"By adopting the guy who'll bring about two magical wars?" Edgar looked at him for a

long moment. "So ... you stop a future terrorist and dictator by giving him a good childhood? Did I understand that correctly?"

"In a nutshell." It sounded a bit crazy, right?

"But didn't his wars bring about change for the better too?" Damn, the man was sharp. How about he became the general and Harry tried to be his right-hand man? Edgar was obviously sharper and a lot better at keeping the whole situation in mind.

"In some cases, yes. But mostly it nearly wiped us out and revealed us." How much could he say? "The magical world went through a war some years ago about the very same matter. Magical folk that grew up without ever seeing something of non-magical life and then developed a superiority complex as well as a paralyzing fear of non-magical people. So the slogans were along the lines of "Wipe out most non-magical life". The two wars that Tom would have brought on us would have been even worse – all non-magicals, all magical folk from non-magicals, a lot of magical creatures dead."

"That's ... brutal." Edgar sharply drew in his breath. "I gather you fought against those people?"

"I personally killed Tom's body or host body four times and destroyed some more containers to which his soul was anchored. So ... let's just say I killed him a few times until he was permanently dead."

"But ... don't get me wrong but the person who led the last war and Tom – they must have found a lot of people supporting them. Those magical folk with a superiority complex, those are the problem, not Tom ... right?"

"Correct." Urgh, that was a bitter pill. He really needed Hermione for this. "Of those three wizarding wars, all were won by mostly pure-blooded wizards, so those that never saw non-magical life either. The last war though, I wasn't the only one that won it. With me were my two best friends and one of them was a witch from non-magical parents. A very bright person just like you. She went into politics and changed a lot of views. I need someone changing the system from the inside in this era. Because with our society, it wasn't the wars that brought the change, it was the shift in power to allow more people with a non-magical background into our government."

"So ... as you aren't magical anymore ... who is the lucky one now?"

"Tom." Harry blinked in surprise. He hadn't known this would come out as an answer until he said the name. "He is powerful, he is charismatic, he comes from a non-magical background. In my timeline, he tried taking the right path but he was too crooked from his childhood. He gave into hatred and madness. With the right upbringing ... well, he might be what the wizarding world direly needs."

"How?" Edgar just furrowed his eyebrows. "I thought only those pure-blooded people have power, how should he ... oh. You know who his parents are, right?"

"I do." Harry smiled. "He is the last heir of the man all those pure-bloods adore as their one true ancestor."

"Merlin?"

"Close."

"Then ... wasn't it a bad idea to change his name?"

"It's not the name in this case. He has an ability non one else in this world still has." Not even Harry. He lost it with killing the soul piece inside of him.

Edgar sat at the edge of the couch, obviously waiting for him to continue.

"He can talk to snakes."

His face fell. Disappointment and confusion warred in it.

"It might not sound like much but it is a hereditary ability that only heirs of this

important person have. I am not sure Tom even knows that he can do it and I have not told him his whole history. He doesn't even know that I am more than a non-magical, even though I have told him about magic and sworn him to secrecy."

"A six-year-old?"

"I know he can keep a secret."

Edgar sighed and sank back into the couch. "That ... is a lot of weight on tiny shoulders."

"I told him his mother's name, got him a memento and a photography. I tried to give him a child-appropriate version of how he ended up in an orphanage. The rest can come later. Right now, his character and his ethics are the important thing."

"I am beginning to see why you are so strict with him. It's like raising the future prime minister."

"That is exactly what I am planning on. Just not the non-magical one." He had never really thought about this but yes – Edgar made him see clearly what path he had to take.

"This ... is so much more than I expected." Edgar had leaned back, so he looked at the ceiling. "You are literally changing world history right now. You fought in wars, wake up in a new timeline, losing everything you held dear and just say "Hey, let's make it better over here"? What kind of superhero are you?"

"I am not prone to give into depression." Hopefully, Edgar would not take that as an insult. He had lost his partner to depression, as far as they could put history together. "It's like meeting Gren Deluxe version." The other man just groaned. "I am hopeless. I have lost Gren, I get that. He won't be coming back. Instead I get a man with the same looks and a personality a hundred times better. Ten minutes of conversation, I am falling for you as hard as I did for Gren. Bloody hell. Why am I into powerful men with unshakable determination?"

Oh.

Oh!

Oh ... how should he react to that?

"I ... really am heterosexual. I am sorry. My wife is the only one for me." Was that okay?

"Don't worry, I won't try to rape you in your sleep." Edgar scoffed. "I guess you know that. Are you friends with homosexual men? It was possible in your time, right?"

"One of them is someone I admire as much as you seem to worship Gren. He was the most powerful wizard alive." Harry contemplated that for a moment, deciding on elaborating. "The man who let the last war in this timeline ... was his lover. They fought and Dumbledore took everything from him, even though he loved him more than anything. It's the saddest and also most heroic tale I know."

Edgar studied him for a moment, both of them lost in thought. He asked after a moment: "So ... why doesn't this Dumbledore change society?"

"Because Dumbledore shares his lover's view in a lot of things except for killing millions of people. Just like you don't want another war while Gren would have relished in it ... but still are very similar to him in most other ways."

"That makes a lot of sense." Edgar tentatively smiled at him. "I wish I could have met your wife. She must have been amazing."

"She was." Harry grinned, love and unbearable sorrow battling in his chest. "She is ... the best. She and the kids were my life." His eyes closed for a moment. "I learned my whole life to look ahead and never look back. I left a path of loss and devastation. Too many wars, too many deaths. I try to remember her and at the same time,

remembering hurts so much.”

“I look at you and it fills me with joy and love and bitterness and hatred at the same time,” Edgar admitted.

“It’s not as strong for me but it is not dissimilar.” Harry met Edgar’s eyes. “She was my rock. She had been possessed and exploited, same as me. She fought and got tortured and she killed, same as me. She knew me inside out, my best and my worst. Without question, she was one of the most amazing people I ever met.”

“Do ... I remind you of her?”

“You are intelligent, resourceful, supportive. I wouldn’t even do half as well without you. You know darkness as well as light. You can see the bad without losing sight of the good.” Harry took a trembling breath. “I told you all of this because I trust you. Anyone finds out, we are both dead men. I have a mission here ... and I want you to help me.”

Edgar just stood, saluting to him and proclaiming: “You lead, I follow.”

Harry smiled shakily.

“That’s my life. Always been, always will be.”

“Even if I am not Gren?” Because a body wasn’t enough. Ginny’s body would never be enough. It was her fiery spirit that he loved.

“I-” Edgar shook, his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. “I wish I could kiss you to undermine my words. The only hard thing is that you don’t want me that way.”

“I am sorry ... I wish I could. I don’t like disappointing people. But my wife is ... I would never do that to her, even if I never see her again.”

“You know I’ll just keep hoping that will change over the years?” Edgar smiled at him ruefully.

Harry just sighed but still put a hand on Edgar’s shoulder and said: “Thank you. Not for that but ... everything else. I’m no good on my own.”

“Successful people need strong support. Let’s raise a great son.”

“Let’s.” Harry just nodded.