

The time that is given us

How love can change lives

Von Gepo

Kapitel 14: Fourteenth chapter

Nurmengard was cozy for a prison. Dumbledore explained that it was an estate of the Stauffenberg family that had fallen to ruins over the course of time because no one had enough money to save it. Like most pureblood families, the Stauffenberg only had few members left. They had a Muggle equivalent who had been founded by Squib members of the family but had long lost contact to the wizarding main family. By now, the family had only five members left: Head of the family, Gellert's grandfather Oskar, his wife Käthe, his great-aunt Bathilda, his mother that lived in an asylum and Gellert himself. Another part of the puzzle, his mother was direly mentally ill. It also explained why they never crossed Gellert off the family tree. He was their only heir.

"Does his family know that he is alive?"

"Of course not." Dumbledore scoffed. "I asked for this castle as a historical side of the war because Gellert held a lot of councils here before deciding he would use it as a prison for political enemies. The family was happy to part with it and I used my own money to repair the place. It is a prison but it is a nice place with books, a good kitchen and other amenities. I never wanted Gellert to suffer."

"It's basically house arrest instead of prison." Edgar judged. "Castle arrest."

"It's enough of a punishment in my opinion."

"For killing how many people?" Edgar's question stopped Dumbledore in his tracks.

"I- ... I mean ..."

"Four thousand three hundred and twenty one witches and wizards, about three thousand of them muggle-born or half-blood. About twenty thousand Muggles," answered a voice from a room at the end of the corridor. The flickering lights of a fireplace could be seen from the open door. The man that stepped into the doorway was a strikingly handsome fellow of about fifty years, blond hair so fair it was close to white and piercing blue eyes. "I won't complain his leniency."

It was a less pouty version of Draco Malfoy last time Harry saw him. The resemblance faded after a moment. Grindelwald had higher cheekbones, fuller hair with curls and his eyes were colder than Lucius Malfoy's. Coldly calculating, those eyes froze your soul and instantly instilled fear.

Harry just nodded and went over. "Grenmore Horten." He held out his hand.

"Gellert Grindelwald." The other man shook it and studied Harry.

He broke their staring first by turning and laying a hand on Edgar's shoulder. "This is Edgar Garter."

Gellert's gaze flickered between them. "Your partner?"

"Co-parent, best friend, confidante, right-hand man, whatever fits the situation."

"Why not your partner?" What a damn snake, he really could not let this go, could he?

"Because I had a wife that I loved and I'll stay true to her." Harry took a deep breath. "I am not here as your enemy, so don't treat me like one and I won't behave like one."

Gellert looked away but did not seem intent on apologizing in any way. "May I offer you a drink?" He stepped into the room and turned his back to them.

"Tea would do nicely." It was a sitting room with couches in front of a hearth and a drink cabinet between two great windows overlooking a forest. It had a relaxing atmosphere. A good place for talking.

"Tea it is then. Accio tea set." Grindelwald did not use a wand for this, the china simply flew into the room by itself on his will alone. He arranged them on the table, cast an Aguamenti and another Accio for the tea leaves all wandlessly.

Edgar stared at it all in consternation. Except for a Dumbledore going up in flames in their fireplace, this was the first obvious magic he saw after all. He sat down next to Dumbledore on the sofa, so that Grindelwald and Harry could sit in opposite armchairs. It certainly made Harry the bad cop in the set-up but he was alright with that. In the end, Edgar's way of thinking was most likely closer to Grindelwald's and he would say what Harry could not.

"Milk? Sugar? Jam? Honey? Lemon? Anything?"

"Milk and sugar, please." Milk for him and sugar for Edgar. "Somehow I expected lemon drops at this table. Are they not your favorite?" He turned to Dumbledore.

"Apparently not yet." The man smiled uncertainly.

Harry called himself an idiot. He was a Muggle and should know nothing more than what Dumbledore told him. It's why he never did undercover operations, he sucked at them. He was too honest for his own good. He mixed his tea and pushed the sugar to Edgar. "Albus told me that he explained the theory we came up with."

"It was fascinating."

"We would like to bring at least one dark pure-blood wizard on board with this and then go public with it. As someone raised in a dark pure-blood family, how would try to discredit us and convince us of blood supremacy?"

Grindelwald froze at the question before continuing to raise his tea cup to his lips without taking an actual sip. He studied Harry over the rim of his cup before asking: "I as in myself right now or I as in who I was before I was imprisoned or I as an example of a typical dark pure-blood wizard?"

"The last one."

"Then I'd like it noted that what I'll say does not resemble my opinion on this."

"Noted."

"Right ... pure-blood culture actually does not discriminate between light and dark, so you might pose this question to Albus and he would most likely give you the exact same answer. Our belief is that magic is inherited by blood. Bad blood, like muggles or muggle-borns, dilutes our power which is why we call such people and their descendants mudbloods. They are a threat to our power, our blood, our culture. Some light wizards have voted for integration and inclusion and it ended in nearly exposing us in the early nineteenth century because muggle-borns wanted to include their muggle families in our culture, wanted to show them our world and they told just this one person who told it to just this other one person and so on. Magic is fascinating. I get that. But history shows time and time again that peacefully integrating muggle-borns ends in disaster. The better the muggle's mass communication, the harder it is to keep our secret. Being out in the open was deadly, every time it was tried. It

started with acceptance and interest and ended in fear and extermination. So you can either kill muggle-borns or have them cut contact from their families by taking them into our world early on. So if it were true that muggle-borns were the solution to saving magic, intelligent pure-bloods would accept that after seeing all the evidence you present. Then they would decide to kidnap every muggle-born there is, obliterate their families and give muggle-born children into pure-blood foster care. Seeing as intelligent pure-bloods are the ones in power, they would silence the not so intelligent ones with intimidation. Those would refuse to look at your evidence. Instead, they would mistreat the muggle-borns in their care." He turned to Dumbledore. "Does that resemble your own estimate?"

"Well ... I think they would argue a lot more, even a few of those in power would flat-out refuse the evidence, even coming from one of their own. It would be discussed for months, maybe even years. The trend of intermarriage between light pure-bloods and muggle-borns would continue, they would prosper. Dark families would try to cull this trend by discriminating against muggle-borns even more until some of the lower ones would try marrying off their squibs to muggle-borns or decide on half-bloods for their children. Seeing them prosper and losing power by progressing decimation, dark pure-bloods would relent and then they would discuss muggle-born foster-care. The muggle-borns already integrated into society would argue against that and I think they would decide on different safety measures. With the current knowledge of Muggle culture, they will most likely fail, we will be exposed and prosecuted again in about a hundred years."

"Except if we also raise the knowledge of Muggle culture at the same time," Harry argued.

"Knowing more about Muggles, wizards would actually rightfully begin fearing them. Your weapons far surpass ours, your radar technology beats every obfuscation. I watched a seer's vision of atomic bombs and satellites and there is no way we can hide from that." Grindelwald actually looked sour saying that.

"There is. The key is partial immersion. You register in the Muggle world, you visit their primary school, Hogwarts gets official state acknowledgment as a secondary school. If you want to continue to a Muggle university, your records are forged and otherwise, the Ministry and other magical businesses officially register as a company with sub-companies. You pay your taxes to the state of Great Britain which go back to the Ministry as financial subvention by the state. To every clerk and official in the country, you have your papers in order, taxes in order and work for an obscure company that only recruits from this one school in the country, certain schools abroad or home-schooled children from special teachers. Muggles in on the secret swear an oath of silence similar to an unbreakable vow. You don't need to have magic to be affected by magic after all. Even Muggles can swear unbreakable vows."

Both Grindelwald and Dumbledore looked at him with something akin to shock. Even after a few moments, both of them stayed silent.

"Other solutions are migrating to the moon, enslaving Muggles" - he pointed at Grindelwald - "or dying out" - he pointed at Dumbledore - "and all of them are worse if carefully thought through."

"You are not a Muggle by the name of Grenmore Horten," Grindelwald stated with complete certainty.

"I am a Muggle by the name of Grenmore Horten."

"You are a wizard in the body of a Muggle by the name of Grenmore Horten, I give you that, but you definitely are more than just a Muggle."

"Because Muggles are inferior creatures unable to ever meet your intellect?" Harry cuttingly asked back.

"Because your Occlumens abilities are on par with my own and you need to Legilimens people to get that good at it. Also, because I already raided your right hand man's brain for information. He actually is a Muggle," Grindelwald admitted.

"Well, I applaud your honesty and am sorry to inform you that you just proved that you cannot be trusted to accept boundaries. I refuse freedom for someone that cannot take on the responsibility of actually conducting oneself as someone that learned that any kind of violence against another is a crime. Breaking into the mind of someone without their consent is a crime."

"Wha- wait, hold on." Grindelwald's gaze flickered to Dumbledore. "Albus?"

The oldest of them just sighed deeply and closed his eyes. After a moment, his resigned gaze met Harry's. "I don't want to defend him, because yes, that just now was a crime. I just honestly believe he didn't know that."

"I didn't know that killing was bad is not the argument that will get him out of his house arrest." He turned his eyes back to Grindelwald. "Listen ... I can imagine you had shitty childhood. Happy boys running free in the Swiss meadows don't grow up to be mass-murderers. But if you ever want to be part of society, you must first learn it's rules. Forget the twisted set of rules your parents taught you in words or actions. If you go out there and start committing crimes, even unknowingly, none of us will bale you out. Albus did it more than once. This is no trial and error game where you can start again after failure. Next time we'll meet, you can either hold yourself back from committing crimes while just talking over tea or it will be our last meeting. Are we clear on that?"

"I ... yes." Grindelwald's unsure gaze still changed from Albus to Harry and back.

Albus would not look at him. Harry recognized the expression of shame and he hoped that Grindelwald knew it too. Having your own partner ashamed of you should be a blow to yourself if you had any kind of empathy. From what Harry could see, Grindelwald had shreds of it. Not enough to feel shame by himself but enough to know he had fucked up badly.

"Albus, that's a job I give onto you. If you want him to have a chance, teach him right from wrong."

The older man nodded warily.

"Then that's it for today." Harry nodded and stood. "Thank you for the tea, Grindelwald. I expect an apology to Edgar before we meet again. Decide with Albus when you are ready for another meeting."

Edgar stood with him, somewhere between shaken and overwhelmed, and immediately stepped to Harry's side. Albus stood with them, only held back from leaving by Grindelwald's hand around his wrist.

"Albus?"

"Don't." Dumbledore wouldn't even look at him. "I can't describe how mad I am right now. Let me go."

"I ... okay." Grindelwald straightened with a sharp draw of breath. "I am sorry I didn't know. I ... am sorry I left a bad impression."

Dumbledore simply left him standing there, not even looking back once. For just a moment, Harry felt for Grindelwald. Of course he had made Ginny mad a few times. Sometimes they had rowed, sometimes they had left in a huff and taken days before speaking with each other again. Often, he had thought himself right, even knowing he would most likely realize later that he wasn't or that maybe he was but that he had

not been able to actually tell her what he meant. But every time it had hurt to see her leave, even if it was just to another room. Oftentimes, he had went to see Hermione, because really – talking with your best friend about rowing with his sister just didn't feel right.

But Grindelwald had no one.

He was completely alone.

From what Harry understood, he never had anyone but Dumbledore. What a damn sad life.

Back at their house, they went up to the study where Dumbledore broke into tears. It was something Harry never wanted to see, never expected to see, so he was happy to leave it to Edgar to calm the man down again, when Tom looked bewildered at seeing them in the study, one of them crying his eyes out.

Edgar just nodded and stayed with Dumbledore while Harry left and escorted Tom out of his study. The boy clung to his hand and Harry made a spur of the moment decision to take him out for a walk. Grindelwald was someone he could handle. A crying and guilty Dumbledore was too much for him. He felt a bit bad for Edgar but he really needed a moment after all of that.

Tom changed into shoes and a warm jacket wordlessly and didn't take his hand again. Out of hearing range of the house, he began his rapid-fire questioning: "What is going on? Why is Dumbledore crying in your study?"

"Because he realized that redeeming his friend will be hard and might be impossible."

It was so hard to say that, even after just knowing Grindelwald for maybe half an hour. He was intelligent, highly intelligent actually, he was handsome and could carry himself with dignity. He was also an immensely powerful wizard. Harry wasn't so sure about the charming part but one thing he could attest to: Grindelwald was deeply damaged from early childhood. What parents broke into the mind of their own child? How should a child ever feel safe when they were even punished for the thoughts in their head? He did not need to know more than that fleeting moment of Grindelwald's total confusion of being told that breaking into someone's mind was wrong to know how he had learned that lesson.

He knelt down and opened his arms for Tom. "May I have a hug?"

"You?" Tom's eyes went wide as saucers, the boy stunned for a moment. "Okay." They hugged for a moment. "Even you need a hug sometimes?"

"Everyone, Tom. Everyone has bad moments. I am no exception. Thank you for indulging me."

"Sure ... so was Edgar sad about the same thing?"

"Not exactly." They started walking again. "We met with Dumbledore's friend today and to prepare Edgar for that meeting, I taught him about morality and ethics. That always leads to questioning yourself and as long as there are things you feel guilty about, that is always hard."

"Hm ... there is something I feel guilty about," Tom admitted.

"Oh?" Harry shoved his own emotions to the back of his head to focus on Tom. "Tell me about it."

"You told me not to talk back to Mr. Smith even though he is a human scumbag. He would only hit his wife or kids if I criticized him. I get that. I don't talk back to him, even when he hits or screams at Howard or his mother in front of me. When it gets bad, I get a neighbor that calms him down. I get cream from the doctor, I help bandage their wounds. All of that feels wrong but I get that there is no one that can

stop Mr. Smith because we don't have laws that will stop him yet. But he started hitting little Daisy, she's only two years old. Mostly Howard or I take the beating for her because hitting a child that small is just wrong, no matter what the law says. It just makes me so damn angry." The little boy balled his fists. "I really want to do some bad things to Mr. Smith."

"That's not guilt, that's anger." Harry sighed and lay a hand on Tom's shoulder. "Completely understandable anger. Just hearing about it makes me angry too. It's noble to sacrifice yourself for Daisy, but so horribly wrong of Mr. Smith to do something as despicable as that. Hitting someone else, especially a child is worse enough, but a toddler? That's just plain wrong."

"Is there nothing we can do?" He looked up at Harry, then around them before continuing in a whisper. "Can't I magic him or something?"

"No, Tom." Harry sighed. "I mean, yes, you could. If you wish enough for it, you could most likely do something very bad to him. But that's not the solution for the problem. If he survives, he would be worse than before. If you killed him, that would be on your conscience forever. I never want you to solve anything with violence. You might not regret it right now but you would later in life." Just imagine having the boy start killing at seven years old. Complete failure. "But you are right that this can't go on. Even if there aren't any laws, this family needs an intervention. I want you to introduce me to their neighbors, alright? The ones you run to when it gets bad."

"Can you make it better?" Tom's voice sounded anguished.

"I'll try." He stroked the boy's hair. "I am proud of you, Tom. You stay with Howard even though it is hard. You protect his sister even though it hurts. You hold yourself back from lashing out in anger because it would only make it worse. All of that is very admirable."

And so much more than could be expected from any seven-year-old kid. No kid this young should be burdened with abuse. Yes, it was admirable that he protected little Daisy but he should not have to. Who did this Mr. Smith think he was to beat up Harry's son? It felt like a punch to his own guts. What kind of father was he himself that he had overlooked the bruises on his son?

"Do you have any bruises from him right now?"

Tom just nodded.

"Could you show me, please?"

"Err ... now?" He looked up in confusion.

"No, back inside." Harry tried his best to smile. "If anyone ever hits you again, I want you to tell me, Tom. I didn't know it got that bad with Mr. Smith."

"Would you have done something beforehand?"

"Of course, Tom." He stroked his son's cheek and was happy the boy didn't flinch. He was perfectly able to discriminate between the nuns, Mr. Smith and Harry. "You are my son. I never want you hurt."

"It was my own choice, dad." Determined brown eyes met his. "Daisy is just too small for any kind of beating."

"No one should ever be beaten, no matter how big or small." Harry snorted. "Next time this happens, one of you boys take Daisy and run with her. As soon as they are far enough, the other runs too. Don't let yourself be beaten. You run to a safe place, either the neighbors or our house. This will always be a safe place for you. I can't promise that for kids not belonging to this house-hold, but I will always protect you."

Tom thought that over for a moment and finally nodded.

They headed back to the house and talked of lighter things.

Dumbledore had stopped crying but he hadn't left. He was nursing a drink of something yellow-orange Edgar must have given him. He sat beside the dejected man and looked up in clear relief at seeing Harry.

"Tom needed a moment, sorry." Harry closed the door after him and went over to sit next to Edgar.

"Kids always come first," Dumbledore just mumbled.

"To be honest, I also needed a moment." He lay a hand on Edgar's shoulder. "Thank you."

"Sure." Edgar moved closer and leaned against him.

"I ... just wanted to say sorry." Dumbledore sighed deeply. "I don't even know where to begin."

"It's not your fault and I don't blame you." Harry decided to slip an arm around Edgar's shoulders. "You didn't know and in this case, that is enough of an excuse. Teach him. Teach him everything that comes naturally to you. Everything that feels self-evident for you, you need to teach him. Begin with our laws, then muggle law, then social rules. I like to think that everyone can be redeemed as long as you have time, a safe environment and at least a slight bond. You have a lot more than that and he is highly intelligent. It's not the worst place to start off." He scoffed. "You might also need to reflect on your own actions because you also like to break into people's minds without asking."

Dumbledore slowly looked up, a visage of misery.

"You like to excuse yourself with the fact that people don't notice and that it is for the greater good but do you know where those words come from?"

Dumbledore's eyes widened.

"I am not sure who of you came up with them, but those are the words your dear boyfriend engraved into the door of his prison. Are they yours or are they his? Does it even matter who made those excuses first?"

The man looked away.

"Which greater good are we even talking about? The one where most people are enslaved? The one where most of us are dead? Which greater good were you thinking about?" Harry took a deep breath. "Please take this as a learning experience for both of you."

"I feel like an utter fool."

"Well, do something about it. Don't wallow in misery, change first yourself and then him. Sitting here pitying yourself won't save him and it won't make anything better for you."

"Do you ...?" Dumbledore was looking at his glass again. "Do you really think he can be saved?"

"I don't know," Harry answered truthfully. "Damn tough job you have in front of you." The man scoffed and threw back his drink. He placed the glass on a coaster, sighed and finally said: "Thank you for today. Most importantly, thank you for giving him a second chance."

"I will. I am not so sure that Edgar will. We will talk about it."

Dumbledore stood without looking at them. "It may take a while until I sent another owl."

"Use the time wisely."

"I will." His gaze flickered to Harry for a moment but fell away the next instance. "I shall take my leave."

"I wish you all the best, Albus."

"That ... thank you." He nodded to himself and left the room, carefully closing the door after him.

Edgar let his breath go.

"I am so sorry I left you alone with him." Harry pulled the man into a short hug. "Really, I am sorry. I needed to compose myself, so I wouldn't say something I would regret later. Still, I shouldn't have left you. That was shitty of me."

"No, I get it." Edgar changed his position, so he would sit sideways on the sofa. "It wasn't so bad. He mostly cried and I gave him alcohol. But honestly, I have no idea what this was all about. So Grindelwald broke into my head? What does that even mean?"

"Yeah, uh ... I need a drink too. Do you want one?"

"I'd rather you don't drink when you aren't feeling well." Edgar's voice sounded clipped.

"I'm sorry." Harry, who had already risen, sat again. "I don't think I am prone to alcoholism but you are right, I shouldn't."

"I ... sorry, I have rather thin skin right now."

"No, you are right." He put his arm back around Edgar and leaned back, giving the other the opportunity to lie down on his shoulder or chest. It was how he had held the very difficult talks with Ginny. The ones where you really did not want to look at the other.

Edgar cuddled up to him and took the opportunity immediately. "Gren ... am I a liability?"

"Well ... it's my own fault really. I shouldn't have told you about me. But you were suffering so much, thinking that I was Gren, it ... yes, it may stab me in the back someday and it may have been today. I don't regret it though."

"Is there anything I can do?" Edgar looked at him from the shoulder he had lain his head on.

"I can try teaching you Occlumency. It's the art of closing off one's mind. I don't know if non-magical people can do it but I learned it as a wizard and it still works."

"I want to try. I don't want to be your weak point."

"Never." He smiled at Edgar. "With you, it was easy to call out Grindelwald on his bullshit. You fell for nearly all of his techniques and it was great feedback actually. By your reactions, I could gauge what he tried with me. He's damn good in the criminal skills department."

"Techniques?" Edgar scrunched his eye-brows. "You know, it's great you come with a new skill set, on the other hand it's very frustrating."

"We can teach each other, just like we have been doing for the last year." Harry let his head fall back and looked at the ceiling. "So first of all his appearance. Revealing himself to have listened in from an unknown point, showing up with the light effects of a fire-place and the setting sun, confident in his body with his looks and the reputation following him, that was meant as intimidation."

"Yeah ... and you simply walked up to him as if it was nothing."

"When you met your share of dark Lords and pure-bloods in general, it gets kind of old." Harry scoffed. "So next he tried to unsettle me by driving a wedge between us. He used his observation skills to notice the imbalance and pounced on it."

"Imbalance?"

"You are in love with me, I am not in love with you. It may have been that I didn't know that and he could unsettle us both with it. He tried the game of striking first again."

"You openly called him out on it, so he would not try it again."

"Yeah ... he tried again immediately but more subtle. He let himself sound meek with asking for our drink orders but used wandless magic to summon it. You were awed by the simple display – typical Muggle – and he wanted me to be unsettled by his power. You have to know that wandless magic is extremely hard, especially when your wand is not even around. His first one was snapped by his school, his second one was taken by Dumbledore."

"Again, you were completely unfazed."

"So he was sure I wasn't a normal human and started ransacking your head for information while talking to me. You can be sure that by now, he knows every dirty secret you have and all information I ever gave you."

"Wizards can just do that?" Edgar actually flinched back, finally taking in the information.

"Ones as powerful as him and Dumbledore. They are both master Legilimens, so they can break into your head as a by-the-way without you noticing. They only need eye-contact once. Like this, you are a liability to all of us. Grindelwald, the evil version, will think about getting free and staging some accident-looking death for you. He cares about Dumbledore. I am still not sure if it is love or simply the knowledge that Dumbledore is the only one strong enough to stop him."

"He would ... no, right?"

"Of course he would sleep with his captor to get free. Dumbledore's weakness are his feelings for Grindelwald. They make him susceptible to guilt-trips and seduction."

"But at the end, he-"

"Showed us that he noticed Dumbledore's negative feelings but neither yours nor mine and he only apologized to Dumbledore, even after I already called him out on the fact that he needs to apologize to you. He cares for us only for the effect we have on Dumbledore. He also inadvertently showed that he didn't really get why he had made Dumbledore angry. He is smart enough to understand that Dumbledore's anger linked to him doing a crime, but he has not enough empathy to actually get any emotion apart from anger. He apologized for doing a crime and leaving a bad impression. If he actually got the situation, he would have apologized for disappointing and shaming his partner."

"Because it was clear he felt disappointment, frustration and also pity for Grindelwald and shame towards us?"

"See, that's empathy. You got that immediately." Harry sighed. "Grindelwald didn't even get the obvious expression of shame on Dumbledore's face. He apologized but it was clear he didn't get what he was apologizing for."

"It made Dumbledore even madder, right?"

"And that anger turned to sorrow once we arrived here." Harry sighed deeply.

"Dumbledore and I both got in that moment how deeply Grindelwald is hurt. I am not sure that can be mended."

"I ... suddenly pity the man. Even after just learning he broke into my head."

"So ... level of morality progress?" Harry smiled shrewdly.

"Is it even level one when you have no clue about societal rules?"

"Yes, of course. It just means level four will be really hard for him."

"He is level two."

"Exactly." Harry sighed. "Going on three or he wouldn't have tried apologizing to Dumbledore."

"But definitely not there or he would have tried apologizing to us."

"See? Not so hard a concept. You are also really smart, Edgar." He earned a slow smile for that. "Question is how he will phrase his apology. That will tell us how he deals with his guilt." Harry slowly stroked Edgar's hair. "At least if you want to come again."

"Well, he already raided my head. What more can he do?"

"He can start using it against you. Every dirty secret, every hidden desire, every past hurt that still pains you. Your mother always had a smirk that told you punishment would be hard? Then he doesn't need to hit you. He can simply flip your trigger with that exact same smirk. He can make you afraid, aroused, insecure without doing much because he knows what your childhood bully did, he knows what Gren did in bed."

Edgar paled at that.

"It's hard to put into words how something that does not hurt at all can do so much damage. He basically raped your mind."

"Can he ... change anything in there?"

"He needs a spell for it but yes – he can erase memories, he can facilitate memories, he can basically run rampant in your mind and make you forget about it afterwards."

"That's ... horrible."

"For someone genuinely surprised that something like that is forbidden, I would wager it happened to him again and again. Being made to forget pets because parents couldn't stand the crying after their deaths. Earning memories of major beatings for infraction without ever being touched in reality. It gets worse until we are talking being raped for real and made to forget about it. I have no clue what happened to him and it might be the same for him himself. Feeling some inexplicable emptiness and pain without any clue of why."

"I ... see." Edgar put his arms around Harry's waist. "I pity him." He shuddered. "You knew all that while talking to him?"

"You learn to draw fast conclusions the more often you do this."

"I just remember you saying that happy boys running the Swiss meadows don't grow up to be mass-murderers. You sounded resigned but also slightly angry. That he should forget what his parents taught him in words or deeds ... all the while you already knew this must be what happened to him."

"In a way, you have to stuff your own empathy to work with criminals. My pity won't help him."

"I don't know if that is cruel or a form of respect and support." Edgar slung his legs over Harry's lap. "It reminds me of Gren's decision to lie to soldiers, so that they happily went to their death. When you know that another will die anyway ... why not leave them with the impression that they will soon be home? They'll think happy thoughts before they die. But if there is life after death, if Gren is now standing in front of all these soldiers ... I wish he had been honest."

"Such decisions are never easy."

"How often do you question yourself?"

"Every day." Harry sighed. "I don't think it's good to ever stop that."

"Doesn't that depress you?"

"The key is to make decisions anyway, even when you aren't sure. Even when you know you might regret them in the future. As long as you think in that moment that it is the best you can do right now, also including asking others ... well, then it is the best you can do."

"Maybe you destroy the future and your decisions lead to mass destruction and death."

"They might."

"I can't even imagine that burden."

"You know what? Just because I have seen one version of the future doesn't mean that the same does not apply to everyone else. Every human in the world is shaping our future right now."

"That's ... a terrifying thought."

"Still true."

Edgar just hummed in acknowledgment. He tightened his hug for a moment. "You want to read Tom's bedtime story tonight?"

"You sound like you want to."

"Yeah ... a prince saving a princess sounds mightily fine right now."

"Then go save a princess." Harry just smiled and watched Edgar go.