

# The time that is given us

## How love can change lives

Von Gepo

### Kapitel 19: Nineteenth chapter

Dumbledore looked more nervous than ever before. The easy smile, the twinkle of his eye, the infuriating calmness had all made room for nerves. At least he seemed to have finally understood that this would not be a walk in the park. He had tried his best and if his best wasn't enough, then there was most likely no one with enough wisdom and willpower to save his lover.

What was more surprising was that Grindelwald was quite the same. He met them in front of the fireplace and actually thanked them for coming. The tea was ready in the room, there were no unnecessary displays for magical or intellectual power. He politely asked after Tom's health and if the boy liked the present. He even excused himself for not having asked them as the boy's parents if sending something like that had been okay.

Harry explained their problems with the gift but that it had been okay and a learning experience in the end. He still complimented Grindelwald on thinking about it afterwards and remembering to ask in the future. It actually looked well so far.

"So, you might have noticed the seating order." Harry sat next to Dumbledore on the sofa with Edgar in the chair. "Edgar has been instructed to ask you a set of questions. It's not your answers on which I base my opinion but your thought process. So please state what comes to mind, no matter how bad it might sound in the beginning. It's how you rate your own thoughts on the matter and what you make out of it that counts. I will lean back and listen. Most of all, I will listen for indicators that show that you are lying or trying to omit certain facts. If I catch you lying, this is it. Not for one hearing but for the whole process. It's okay to not be there yet. It's not okay to try and mislead us. Understood?" He waited for Grindelwald's nod. "If you don't trust yourself to be able to keep yourself to the truth, it would be a good idea to tell us now. We can come back another time."

"No, I trust myself in this. I actually understand why it is better that I am locked up. If I am not there yet, that's how it is. Maybe that's how it will be for the rest of my time. Lying to get out here, only to slip up and endanger people, that's just bad for everyone, me included. I want to say the truth. I want to be judged for who I am and I trust you to do that. I'm ready." Grindelwald nodded at Edgar.

That one waited for Harry's nod as well before he began, "So I'll present some hypothetical situations. Let's say that you are released. Albus and you are living peacefully somewhere when Albus is hit by a curse. That curse is deadly. Not immediately but you only have one or two days at the most to save him. You find out

that there is a potion able to counter the curse. There is only one potioneer able to brew it, he is the only one that knows the formula. He knows that. He knows you are desperate. So he asks a price you won't be able to pay. It's a fortune. More than you have, more than Albus has. And you only have a day left at the most. What do you do?" Grindelwald took a deep breath. "Well, accepting it like a good little law-abiding citizen is a lie. I would not accept that." He nodded slowly. "So, my old self would most likely have broken into his mind and stolen the formula. I am quite adept at brewing and most people don't notice someone breaking into their mind. I am a good enough actor that the man would never know. At my height of power, I would not even have been gentle but rather raped his mind for the information. The last thing is something I would not do again. I learned my lesson on that. Stealing the information gently might be a plan of action but not my first option, even though it's the first my mind supplies."

So far, so good. He proved that he had reached level two, that was how he had been the last time. Slightly better, he had been going one on two, this was a clear two.

"That's because even if he would not notice it would still be wrong. Albus would know what I did. I would know what I did. Going around stealing from people, even if they never know, is wrong. Because one day, someone would notice. You can't be perfect all the time. It would fall back on me, it would fall back on Albus because he knew and most of all, everyone I ever met would be informed and everyone would ask themselves if I stole from them. Thousands of people feeling hurt, unsafe and afraid. Even if I just stole from one or two, who would believe me? No one but Albus. No one would ever have reason to trust me again because who would trust someone that can't keep boundaries? If I had no other option than to steal the formula from his head, I would admit to it afterwards and turn myself in."

Edgar blinked in surprise. It took a moment before he asked suspiciously, "That doesn't sound like a good plan, does it?"

"No. First of all, I would try to haggle. Get the price down. Explain my situation. Try pity, guilt, maybe even greed. Promise to pay in installments, even more than what he originally wanted. Promise him rare ingredients, rare recipes, whatever might interest him. I'd try to get some dirt on him, find his deepest desires, give or promise him those. If all of that did not work, I'd rather pressure him with some shameful secret than steal from him. After all, he is exploiting me. I know that an eye for an eye is not the best philosophy but it's Albus, so ... in this one case, I guess I would try to bend the rules a bit. Not until the point it wasn't lawful anymore but it's Albus' life after all. Only if every legal option was exhausted, I would turn illegal. A legal option would also be to find a way to elongate Albus's life and file a formal petition against him for exploiting others. There is such a clause in our law for potioners that overprice. If I had any friends, I would ask for advice, help, money, whatever possible. I'd try to sell off everything we own and get the rest of the money from somewhere if it were possible in time. Only if all of that was not working, would I decide on illegal methods."

"Then you would steal the formula?" Edgar's eyes narrowed.

"No, I think I would first list all illegal options at my disposal. After checking off all legal ones, I would try to find the least horrible illegal one. Not in terms of my sentence served but in terms of how it would affect people. If Albus were conscious, I would ask his help on deciding."

"And you would turn yourself in no matter what you two decided on?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it's the right thing to do. Neither Albus nor I can decide about right and wrong in the end. It's what judges are for. Admittedly, I don't think our law system is very trustworthy. If I get out, I would like one of my goals to be to make our adjudicative system fairer. Still, our faulty system is what we have and it's still better than deciding on self-justice."

"Why?" Edgar was like a dog that had sniffed out a bone. This was exactly what Harry had meant. A level three person was the best to find out if a level four was actually true or just well-played.

"Because no one should think themselves above the system. I did so once. It's no use. You either change it from within or you don't change it at all. Being the next dictator is not making anything better, it only gets worse. Albus and I studied the history of conquerors, dark lords, even people later hailed as heroes. You can only change something from the outside when the people are truly behind you. You first need to look or change everyone's opinion. Politics will nearly automatically change with it. Everything else is madness."

"You say all that but you would still steal from the potioneer? It's against the law, you know."

"Yes." Grindelwald did not hesitate. "Albus's life is more important than someone's greed. If it is greed. Maybe the man has good reasons, maybe he needs to save someone himself. I don't know. I'd like to know his reasons, maybe I would reevaluate. With what I know right now and with the time limit, it's my course of action."

"So you present Albus with your list of illegal actions and he says it's not worth it. He does not want to risk you. He'd rather die than have you harmed."

Grindelwald drew a sharp breath and nearly jumped from his chair. In a matter of seconds, he's in front of the window looking at beautiful mountains, lush fields and a slow-going river. He actually puts his hands on the glass panes, feeling the cold under his fingers. Harry takes in how much that question seems to hurt him. So he actually became attached. He actually learned love. It certainly gives hope for Tom.

"Do you have to ask such a realistic question?"

"You know it's a realistic answer. I am not sure you would really ask him." Edgar can be a beast when he interrogates someone.

"I would." Grindelwald takes a deep breath. "Honestly, I am not exactly sure if I would listen to him. But I would like to hear his answer and his reasoning to make my decision."

Edgar checks with Harry who nods that off. It sounded honest.

"You mentioned friends. Is there anyone but Albus that you would ask?"

Grindelwald turns from the window and slowly comes back, not seating himself but standing next to his chair. "You two. You aren't exactly friends but I hope you would help for Albus's sake. You could at least give me some objective opinion."

Edgar evaluates him for a moment. "So, let's say that you decide on gently extracting the formula as the best course of action. You do so and thereby find out that the potion is actually not working as it should. Sometimes it does work, sometimes it kills or maims. The potioneer did not want that known. What do you do?"

"Merlin." Grindelwald runs a hand through his hair. "That's what I get for being a self-serving shit most of my life. Damn." He exchanges a smile with Albus. "I would try to eradicate the faulty parts, maybe even confer with a trusted potioneer but in end, I have to give Albus the faulty version. Everything is better than certain death."

"And after that?" An unimpressed eyebrow gets raised.

"I turn myself in. I expose my own deeds and I expose the potioneer."

"Even with Albus alive but in constant need of care?"

"I don't think it needs to be my care especially."

"But what if? Say the potion ties your life forces together. You can't be away from him."

"Albus would follow me into prison." Grindelwald brings his chair closer to the sofa, sits down and takes Dumbledore's hand. "We'll talk it through but I am sure that would be our decision." With the way the other man smiles, Grindelwald is probably right.

"Let's change the first situation. It's not Albus hit by a curse, it's Gren."

Grindelwald just nods and answers, "Same course of action. Albus and I decide together what is best."

"Let's not talk about me," Harry proposes, "Let's say we are talking about Aberforth." Dumbledore flinches, Grindelwald contorts by curling his lips outwards. Both men exchange a long gaze, conferring silently. Most likely even telepathically, both seem capable of that.

"I hate that man," Grindelwald says very honestly, "I'd love him dead but that would pain Albus. Even though he does not like his brother much, it's still his brother. Knowing that we could have saved him and decided against it ... no matter how much I hate Aberforth, I would not want to do that to Albus. If he even suggested it, I'd argue against it. Between the both of us, I'd do the illegal deed because Albus can function without me but I fear I am not so good without him. I would hate to have him make that decision. Maybe I would even decide all by myself on doing the deed without Albus having to tell me to do it. I would just want to spare him. I can live with prison."

"I would never want you to-" Dumbledore gets shushed with a finger on his lips.

"This is about me and what decisions I would make. I might overrule you in this. Grenmore is right to ask. There are few situations and people where you get hung up in your own thoughts." Grindelwald takes a deep breath and looks at Harry. "If possible, I'd like to consult with you first. It's scary how well you know Albus."

Harry nods at Edgar to continue his line of questioning.

"So in another scenario you learn of someone that got cursed. Someone writes to Albus asking for help, someone neither of you know."

"Well, I won't go to prison for a stranger but I'd do everything legal. If I have the time and resources, why not? Albus tells me that it is a good feeling to help people in need. I would try." Grindelwald shrugs his shoulders.

"Let's say it's not exactly a stranger. It's one of the kids in the school Albus is headmaster of."

"Hm." Grindelwald thinks for a moment. "Again, nothing illegal. But that part about bending the rules, getting some dirt on the potioneer, maybe threatening him ... I'd walk the sharp line of legality. You don't let kids die for greed, that's just wrong."

Edgar looks at Harry, clearly out of questions by now. Actually, he looks rather miserable. He most likely noticed that Grindelwald actually surpassed him in terms of morality.

"First situation again." Harry turns to the man. "Albus got cursed, you weren't in time, he died. What would be your course of action?"

Grindelwald's face darkens in a blink, his eyes narrowing in unadulterated hatred, and says, "I'd find whoever cursed him and bring them to justice."

"What does that mean exactly?"

"Well." He lets an annoyed sigh go. "My old self would have decided on the most torturous self-justice and I'd certainly enjoy the fantasy but Albus wouldn't want that. He would want me to turn the man in. So I would collect evidence, make sure that the man was convicted rightfully and turn him in. You can count on our adjudicative system to punish people harshly."

"And afterwards?"

Grindelwald looked at him, still tensed up from the last question and slowly let that tension go. It took nearly a minute of silence in which he slowly sunk back into his chair and cradled Albus's hand in his. Finally he answered, "I would hope that Albus would have left some kind of plan for me to follow. If not, I would consult you. If you advised me on coming back here and spending the rest of my life in house confinement ... I would." His gaze sank to the floor. "I fear that would be a rather short life in that case."

Dumbledore squeezed his hand in support.

"I am on borrowed time anyway. By all accounts, I should be dead."

Edgar moved his chair as well and held out a hand. He received one of Harry's in reassurance. It also gave Harry a moment to think. Had he missed anything? He was quite sure that Grindelwald had been truthful and that placed him on level four of morality. He even showed first inklings of five. That must have been some hard work for half a year. Actually, it was amazing for only half a year.

"All in all, I believe you. I don't think that you told a lie or tried to mislead us. You also made amazing progress since we last met."

"But it's not enough?" Grindelwald smiled in acceptance.

"Actually, it is exactly enough."

Both Dumbledore's and Grindelwald's eyes widened in surprise.

"Theoretically, you are on an okay level now. It's moral progression level four. The question now is if you can stay true to your word in the outside world."

"So ... I get out but you keep an eye on me?" The man smiled hesitatingly.

"That's the idea, yes."

With a blinding smile, Grindelwald turned to his lover and whispered, "I did it!"

"You really did!" Dumbledore grinned back at him. "I love you."

The other man leaned forward and kissed him. Without breaking that kiss, he stood and moved to sit on Albus's thighs. For a moment, they grinned at each other and maybe held a whole conversation in their heads, who knew.

"So, what do we do?," Dumbledore asked for both of them.

"First of all, you need a new identity and look."

"Jonathan Bagshot." Grindelwald smirked. "We'll ask my great-aunt. I am sure that she'll help. I can be her half-blood son born out of wedlock, hidden from the world. Maybe even Jonathan Stauffenberg, depending on what she would have named me. I'd like Stauffenberg more."

Dumbledore nodded slowly. "You gave this some thought."

"It would explain why – no matter how much we change my appearance – I have a certain similarity to the Grindelwald family. It also means that somewhere along the line, I might get my inheritance back." His grin dimmed. "I don't care for the money but I'd hate to see my childhood home waste away."

"And why would you come out of hiding after fifty years?"

"My great-uncle died two years ago. So maybe my mother – which would be Bathilda Bagshot – said it was okay. We need to ask her."

"I will talk to her. I think that your plan is sound." Dumbledore nodded at his lover.

"It also seems that you now have a type." The man on his lap grinned. "Blond, blue-eyed German fellows with dark magic. Albus, Albus. I will be jealous of your past lover, even if I think him a madman."

Harry interrupted their flirting, "I would like to invite you to come live with us for a time. See a Muggle town with your new world view, interact with nosy children, just somewhere without wizarding folk."

"Won't your son hate that?"

"He is eight years old, it's not his call to make."

"You're the boss, I guess. Starting small sounds fine." Grindelwald turned to the man he was sitting on. "Are you alright with that?"

"I am just happy that you have a chance now. Also, I know I cannot simply take you to Hogwarts. That would lead to too many questions."

They gazed at each other, smiles slowly turning wider in happiness.

"Okay, lovebirds, could you please return us home before you start your party for two?" Harry asked slightly annoyed by their antics.

Grindelwald actually seemed to pout for a moment – in a subtle Slytherin fashion – but stood to give Dumbledore the chance to get up.

"I'll get them home and return immediately, alright?"

"Sure." Still pouting. "When shall I move into your place, Grenmore Horten?"

"Whenever you have a name and papers. Also, Gren is fine."

"Thank you. Whatever my name shall be will be fine as well." Another slow smile spread on Grindelwald's face while he looked at Dumbledore.

They kissed again. Harry just rolled his eyes and left the room with Edgar by his side. Yes, sure, they were happy, they were celebrating ... it still was a bit like watching your grandfather kiss someone. In this age, Dumbledore was only slightly older than fifty but still ... just eww.

"Is that still the same man?" Edgar whispered just out of earshot.

"Morality changes people profoundly. It changes their skill to relate to others, their empathy, the depth of their bonds. He is still the same, just with a lot more emotion, trust and an ability to take another's perspective."

"Half a year? How do you change like that in half a year?"

"Maybe it was long in the making and only needed a push." Harry put an arm around Edgar's shoulders. "Maybe he gained the skills but did not apply them and now, he has a reason to."

"It's like a fairytale. The healing power of love."

"One shall have the power the other does not know."

"What?" Edgar blinked in confusion.

"Oh, nothing. Just a line from my youth." Harry closed his eyes for a moment.

"Amazing how some things stay the same through every age."

They went to stand in front of fireplace, hoping that Dumbledore would show up soon. For a moment, Harry recalled Ginny's first win as a professional Quidditch player. They had had the same silly looks and fucked like rabbits. Having to floo people somewhere would have been very far from his mind. Thankfully, Dumbledore had a bit more self-control than him, so he showed up half a minute later, grinning like a fool.

"I still can't believe he passed."

"You must have done a lot of work these last six months."

Dumbledore nodded. "I have been here every night. I bought books from and about

Muggle philosophers and I even visited some to discuss questions Gellert had that went over my head. I found one that was really good and arranged for him to meet Gellert here and discuss with him. Those months really broadened my perspective too. Morality is such an interesting topic!"

Well, that certainly was a lot of work. No one could ever doubt Dumbledore's commitment to his lover. He really went beyond every expectation.

"Will it hold?" Doubt flashed over his face.

"I have no idea," Harry answered truthfully. "Words are easily spoken, even convictions easily made but in the end, the actions count."

"So he has to prove his word?" The older man nodded. "Yes, that makes a lot of sense."

"I would like him to start without a wand. I know he is capable of wandless magic but he can do a lot less destruction without one."

"Certainly."

Harry's gaze was drawn to the wand in Dumbledore's hand. "At this point, I would also advice on destroying this. It is a great temptation."

"The Elder Wand?" His blue eyes gazed at the wand calculatingly. "I thought about it ..."

"You do not have to. But it would be one less thing pulling him back to the dark side."

"Right." He nodded slowly. "I'll confer with Gellert. If there is no pressing argument, I'll follow your advice."

"Thank you, Albus."

"No, thank you." Dumbledore placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Both of you. You made this possible."

"For once, I fear you are underestimating your influence on him."

Edgar just nodded in support. "That was nearly a different person in there."

"Really?" Dumbledore smiled uncertainly. "He opened up to me, I opened up to him. I just think we became a bit more similar."

"It's a lot more than that."

"Good to know." The smile turned positive. "At least I think it's a good thing, right?"

"It is." Edgar looked close to tears. "It's ... something to envy."

Harry put a hand on his shoulder in support. God, was there anything he could say? Anything he could do? He wished he could bring Gren back somehow. Maybe he shouldn't have invited Grindelwald to live with them for a time? He really should have asked Edgar first.

"Let's go home," was the only thing he uttered though.

"Home," Edgar echoed hollowly.

The other man did not want to talk. He asked Tom if he would sleep in his bed and the boy agreed with a careless shrug. It was three days later that Edgar came into Harry's study and asked for some time. Of course, Harry agreed immediately. As always, there was the concern that Edgar might turn suicidal again.

"I think I got over my envy," Edgar began after sitting down. "I am happy for them. I also cried a lot about Gren. I keep asking myself if I could have kept him from drinking if we had talked more. Talked about the war, about what we did, what we had to do."

"The what-if thoughts only hurt when they are about the past."

"I know, I ... okay, yes, you are right. They don't help. I am talking myself into guilt. Still, I'd like to ask you this. Could a moral development have helped Gren? What do you think?"

"From what I understood, Gren had a morality on level one or two. Most likely two with you long you were able to have a secret relationship. People on level one don't get very far."

Edgar just nodded. His eyes and mimic were disconcertingly without emotion.

"Developing level three would have meant deepening his bonds, leaning on you, trusting you, actually loving you in the sense of having a reciprocal emotional attachment where the other's joys and hurts become your own."

The other man closed his eyes for a moment. Only after a deep breath did he open them again.

"I think Tom's words got through to Grindelwald. In my opinion, that was the turning point where he began to open up to Dumbledore." How did you deliver bad messages? You give people enough time to sort through their emotions. "Dumbledore and Grindelwald started their affair thirty-seven years ago. In all those years, not even saving his lover from certain death, staying with him and loving him through his anger at being imprisoned and forgiving him the death of thousands of people got through to Grindelwald in any way. The concept of love still eluded him after all of that."

"You want to tell me that I would have been unable to get through to Gren?"

"I fear so, yes." It was eerie how calm Edgar took this. Harry watched him like a hawk.

"Honestly, I did not expect Tom to get through to him like this. Your idea was ingenious."

"So all of what Dumbledore did ... the books, the talks, the philosopher, everything ... that only got Grindelwald from level three to four after he actually bonded to Dumbledore?"

"Yes." Harry waited for a long moment, seeing how Edgar mulled over his words internally. "Morality links to emotions and emotional depth. For level three, you need the ability to emotionally bond to a handful of people. For level four, you need the ability to care about a society as a whole, even care about strangers. Not for your immediate benefit but for the benefit of all. You need to understand that collective health and prosperity also furthers your own, even if something might mean a disadvantage to you at first. Knowing that it strengthens your community, your society, you and your loved ones will profit in the long run."

Again, Edgar seemed to mull over those words for quite some time. Nearly a minute of silence later he said, "What shocked me most was that he seemed to accept being confined. He actually seemed to understand that for society as a whole, Gellert Grindelwald needs to be dead. He even seemed to understand that someone like him, I mean his old self, should not even exist. If Dumbledore died, do you really think he would go back into house arrest?"

"As he said, he would take revenge in a way Dumbledore would accept, then kill himself."

"I understand that part." For a moment, Edgar closed his eyes again. "Gren never cared enough to tell me that he would want me to live without him, to find happiness without him. Dumbledore would. I am sure that right after going back, Dumbledore told Grindelwald in very plain words that he does not want his lover to follow him into death. He would want Grindelwald to live life to its fullest. Yes, have regular check-ins with you. Even go back into confinement if needed. But die? Never."

Harry just nodded.

"Watching Dumbledore, seeing how much he cares and what lengths he goes to ... I see what I missed out on." Tears ran down Edgar's cheeks silently. "Having someone



that can connect to you, that cares for more than if you can warm his bed at night and won't take too much work to have around," he stopped himself and closed his mouth. Harry stood, moved over to Edgar and took him into his arms.

His voice nearly choked from the tears, "I wanted that with Gren. I thought I ... I thought I had that. I believed that Gren loved me ... secretly, somewhere ... I thought that he loved me like I loved him."

"I'm sorry, Edgar." Harry held on tight. It hurt. Seeing Edgar hurt, it pained him deep in his soul. Ginny and him ... it hadn't always been smiles and roses. They had had their rough patches. After the war, Harry certainly hadn't been very emphatic. Ginny had been the same, they had been alright. But Ginny had gotten her empathy back sooner than him. There had been a lot of angry shouting about him not loving her like she loved him. It had taken an intervention by Molly, sitting them down and talking about their feelings, to keep them from separating. That had been his defining moment. Sure, he had cared about others before, he had been able to bond but somehow, the war had taken that part of him and closed it off from the rest of him. His own death, ripping out the Horcrux, it had messed with his emphatic skills. What he felt later had been a lot more meaningful than what he had felt as a teenager.

Edgar dried his tears with a handkerchief and blew his nose.

"Better?"

He only nodded. Somehow, it looked like it had not been all. That proved true after a moment as he talked again, "Caring about someone hurts a lot. Just because you care, it doesn't mean that the other person cares. I try to imagine level four where you care about a whole community or society ... surrounded by people that don't care. I mean, take our city. There's Mister Smith and Mister Conner and that horrible teacher at Tom's school and our major that does not like to make unpopular decisions, even if they make sense ... I am annoyed with so many people. How should I learn to care for them? They won't thank me. They might even hate me. Still, as a level four, I would need to take actions that benefit them, right?"

Harry smiled a rather resigned smile. "Let me tell you a story." He waited for Edgar's nod. "As you know from your history classes, slavery was abolished step by step from the middle age on. First, enslaving your countrymen was outlawed, but foreigners could still be slaves. Later it was prisoners from war. Later people from conquered countries. Whenever slavery was abolished, people continued to live exactly the same for some time. In a matter of years, sometimes generations, the general situation got better. Taking or owning a slave became something strange. A lot of people still behave as if some other people were slaves and some people let themselves be treated like that but all in all, the situation gets better. With me so far?"

Edgar nodded in consent.

"Most of us central Europeans don't learn a lot about Russian history but in Russia, slavery was the societal norm until the middle of the 19th century."

"That's long."

"Yes ... it was actually the tsars, many of them, that thought that this was bad and they had to change it."

"The tsar is something like their monarch? Divine king chosen by God and all that?"

"Exactly." This was something Hermione had taught him as well. "So the tsars, one after one, thought about how to abolish slavery. They knew they had to go slow. From the first one that started the process to the one that finally did it, seventy years went by."

"Admirable." Edgar lay his head down on Harry's shoulder, not looking at him as he

listened. "Especially that they stayed true to this."

"It was Alexander II that finally abolished first private slavery, then slavery by the state. People not only got freedom, they got some land, rich people had to give their money away, it caused an uproar but he stayed true. There was a famine, political unrest – still, he kept his course. He changed the adjudicative system, abolished corporal punishment, even took privileges from nobility."

"Those sound like some awesome kings."

"They really were, especially Alexander II. He was nearly assassinated by former slaves in the year he decided to abolish slavery by the state. That was 1866."

Edgar just groaned in dismay.

"Slavery had meant security. Some masters let their slaves starve but not all of them. Suddenly having to care for themselves, making their own decision ... people found this harder than having to suffer their masters. So they tried to kill Alexander II to go back to slavery."

"Did he survive?"

"He ruled until 1881 where he was killed by young intellectuals that thought that the old system had been the ultimate form of socialism and caring for the common folk."

"Slavery?," Edgar asked in disbelief.

"They used some euphemisms."

"I really pity this Alexander guy."

"Visionaries aren't well liked." Harry took Edgar's hand. "If we ever publish the evidence on genetics in the wizarding society, people will hate us. Even those we are doing it for will hate us. Change always means that something gets worse before it gets better. You have to weather those phases. Sadly, sometimes they have harsh consequences for you."

"You really want me to go into politics?" Edgar sounded slightly lost.

"You do what you think is best." Harry sighed. "I cannot tell you if it is the best. Even in seventy years, the tsars were too fast, especially Alexander II. The people that assassinated him, a lot of their members later formed the Socialist party. The Romanovs, that is the family of the tsars, were killed in 1918. After that, the socialists ruled and they brought terror to the people of Russia. The Russians might not starve anymore but for decades, they will have to fear people listening in on them, denouncing them, being killed for stray thoughts. Even in my original time, there were still topics in Russia you weren't allowed to talk about. Homosexuality was one of them. Homosexuals were openly killed and people didn't really care. In my time, the situation there was worse than what we have here right now."

"Here as in this era?" Edgar took a bit of distance and stared at Harry in disbelief.

"That sounds horrible."

"It is." Harry felt a sudden tiredness in his limbs. "Was Alexander II Russia's salvation? Or was he the final drop in what later ended a caring monarchy and led to a terror regime? Hero or villain?" He closed his eyes. "With some people, you can't really say. Do good intentions make someone good, even if the end result might not be the best? He did abolish slavery, that's good. But at what price?"

Edgar took Harry's hand and kissed the back of it. "I really would not want to be you." Harry scoffed.

"I love you." There was no hesitation in him. "Not because you are in Gren's body, not because you remind me of him – because you don't – but because you are just amazing. I love you, whatever your name may be."

Harry just looked at him for a moment.

Edgar smiled back sadly. "I just wanted you to know."

"Thank you."

The other man nodded and left the room without another word.