

The time that is given us

Von Gepo

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Prolog: Awakening

Harry rolled to his left, a smile gracing his lips. But instead of a warm body he found only cold sheets. He scrunched up his nose, sat up and looked around. Huh, okay ... where exactly was he? The room was done up in an inviting brown, all kinds of woods with no paint on them. Even the bedding was brown. The only color came from the striped yellow-and-red curtain which looked like it came right out of a movie from a time where movies weren't even invented yet.

„Ginny?“, he called into the room, even though he didn't really expect an answer. It was years since he had last smashed his brain with alcohol, so that couldn't be it. Also, as head auror he did not go on active missions anymore, so a stray curse was unlikely as well. He must have been struck with an obliviation charm. But by whom? And why had he been left here, seemingly in perfect condition except for his memory loss?

Harry sighed deeply. Well, he would not find out by lying in bed. Time to gather his belongings and leave. He went into the bathroom and found it stocked with a toothbrush, toothpaste and a shaver but nothing else. Oh, yeah, some shower gel and shampoo. Remarkably empty. Maybe it was a hotel room? He looked into the mirror and recoiled.

Okay, who the heck was that? This wasn't his body, he would never look this ... well ... actually, he looked pretty ordinary. Not fat, not thin, not muscled, not a beanpole. He had brown, slightly thinning hair, and morning stubble. He was in the body of a quite average-looking guy. A middle-aged white male with no distinguishing features. Maybe not even middle-aged, rather more a guy in his thirties. At least he had not liked being called middle-aged when he was this old.

„Well, well, who am I?“ Harry stepped out of the bathroom and looked for accessories like a wallet, a phone or a passport. „Bingo“ He found a wallet and some keys lying on a sideboard next to the door. The door of the bedroom, so it was most likely a hotel in which he was staying. The keyring only held three keys; one an antique looking car key and two normal door keys. He opened the wallet, which held twenty pounds and some small change as well as some papers. He stared at the papers for a second, dreading to open them.

That curtain, the car key, identification papers ... it couldn't be, could it? He opened the paper that said personal identification on top. Grenmore Horten, born April 23th 1894. Harry took a deep breath. 1894. And he was in his thirties. Coupled with those horrific curtains he must be somewhere in the 1920's or 1930's, trapped inside the body of a muggle. How did he get here?

More importantly, how would he get back? He had to find the Ministry. The Unspeakables would know what to do. Or maybe ... wait, thirties, that meant Dumbledore was alive and in his forties or fifties or something like that. He would be a teacher at Hogwarts or maybe he was already headmaster, and McGonagall would still be a student and-

Harry froze in place.

And right now, Tom Riddle was a small boy.

He sat back on the bed. Maybe that was it. Maybe they had found a way to time travel him here, so that he could stop Voldemort before he ever became a dark lord. He must have agreed to that, and the time travel must have cost him some of his memories.

So what was his mission? To kill Tom Riddle? Most likely not; he would never have consented to killing a child. He had three of his own, no one would ask such a thing of him. Bloody hell, couldn't they have sent some instructions through time as well? They had most likely told him how to get back too, but he had simply forgotten. Harry sighed again. No use crying over spilled milk. He would have to contact the Ministry anyway, and maybe the Unspeakables had a device for talking to people in the future. But first of all, he had to find out who and where and when he was. He opened his drawer and found some underwear, two pairs of trousers and a few shirts. On a clothes hanger there was exactly one jacket, but not a single coat. Either he had left England and was somewhere unusually warm or this wasn't his primary residence – hopefully. Seeing as there were no personal items anywhere, it was most likely the latter. His personal identification stated that he lived in Bath, an English city in the Southwest. He opened the door and found that none of his keys fit it. Well, where did people put their room keys? He looked on the bedside table and grabbed a pair of trousers hung over the back of a chair. He found the key in one of the pockets. He also found a notebook which revealed itself to be a calendar. The marking strap was on 21st of July. A day with two appointments, one with a barber, the one afterwards with an Officer Standen at an address in London. He looked at the days leading up to and following this day. He had had a few meetings with military officials these last few days if today was July 21. But he would have to find that out for certain by buying a newspaper.

So he was most likely in London. That made things easier. He put on the jacket – having to acknowledge that it was quite a fine suit jacket – and took the wallet, calendar, keys, and papers with him.

Taking the staircase, he counted three floors to ground level. He seemed to be in a nice hotel with carpeted floors and clerks in black suits. The lounge even had a newspaper rack, so he could read one without leaving the hotel.

July 21st 1932. Oh well, he had guessed correctly. Thirties then, just a few years before the Second World War. And he was somehow in contact with high ministry officials, even owned a car ... that did not bode well. At this point he was surprised not to have found a uniform in his room. Did he remember a Grenmore Horten from school? No, they hadn't exactly been taught about WWII in elementary school. He looked at the clock and checked the time while consulting his calendar. He had about an hour until his appointment with the barber. For now he should most likely stick to the schedule so kindly provided to him. He went up to the clerk who seemed pretty impressed with Harry – or rather Grenmore Horten – and asked for directions. The barber seemed to be just down the street while the officer on his list wasn't so near. The clerk showed him a map which he asked to take with him. When the clerk told him that it cost three shillings, Harry froze for a second. Of course, this was 1932. Everything had a completely different price. Wow, twenty pounds, that must be ... he must be quite rich. Well, he owned a car, so of course he was rich.

„Can you tell me where I parked my car? I seem not to remember.“

„But of course, Sir, your Ford is parked right in front of the hotel. It is the only car, you can't miss it.“

Oh well, easy. A Ford. Most certainly not an automatic. Hopefully he would not have to manually start it. He should have a look at his car before seeing the barber. He took the map after paying – which wasn't easy, the money looked completely different – and stepped out. For once it was not raining, for which he was instantly thankful. Finding his car was abnormally easy since it was the only car on the whole street. A

cobblestone street- at least it wasn't mud. Driving without any kind of suspension on these streets would be a horror. Well, at least he had a car. Even if it looked like the first one ever build. It had a roof at least. Ford Model A. Huh, that most likely meant it was the first Ford ever built.

What had he gotten himself into? Oh well, nothing to do about it. He should head to the barber first.

A shave, a haircut and a face massage was five shillings in total. The money in his wallet must have been more than an average labourer got in a whole month. He would have to be on his watch not to get robbed. Of course he had no credit card, so the cash was about the only means he had to survive, seeing as Mr. Horten had not written down which bank he frequented. While getting his hair trimmed Harry had read through the whole calendar. He seemed to have been in the military up to now, so he was most likely a World War One veteran. That did not exactly sit well with him; he had no inclination to fight in the second one. He would have to see what his meeting with Officer Standen would lead to. Maybe he could quit before the second war? Even though he hoped he would not have to stay that long anyway.

He took his car- which was surprisingly intuitive to drive- even though driving manually was a hassle after all these years. Reading the map was also easier than he expected. Central London was a lot smaller than in his time and no one had a problem with him stopping in the middle of a street. There weren't too many cars on the roads anyway and carriages took a wide circle around him. Damages to a car would be a life-changing cost in these times. He finally found the Office of Internal Military Affairs in which this Officer Standen was waiting for him. He went in and asked at the desk where to find the man. The friendly young women receptionist brought him to the right door. Harry was surprised how nice everyone was but, well, that might have to do with having all that money. Did they expect tips?

„Major-General Horten“ The young officer saluted. „It is an honor to meet you.“

„I am pleased to meet you too, young man. At ease.“ Hopefully all those military movies James liked to watch had something to do with reality.

„Thank you, Sir“ Standen moved back behind his working table. „We were all sad to hear about your leaving us.“

„Life always has more in store for us“ Harry replied blandly. And where would he be leaving to?

„I prepared all the papers for your retirement“ Standen looked up to him like some of his trainees would from time to time. „Are you sure you want to end your career? With all your honors, you could be Field-Marshal in the next war.“

„That is too high an honor“ Actually he had no clue about military ranks. „But one great war was enough for me. It is time for young souls like you to take up my work“ Thank God for all the speeches he had had to deliver as head auror. Such patronizing nonsense easily came forth from his lips by now.

„I am so glad I was able to meet you, Sir“ The hero worship glowed in Standen's eyes.

„Yes, so, about the papers ...“ Good thing this Mr. Horten had already initiated his retirement. The next war would most likely have killed him. Come to think of it, Bath wasn't the safest place either. Maybe he should move his host's body to thank him for lending it.

He read and signed some papers which released him from the military to begin a whole new life. Harry didn't know what Horten had planned for himself but following the schedule, he would most likely find out.

But first of all, he should find the Ministry and try to contact his future self.

Shit. Double shit. Triple shit.

In his present form he was without a doubt a muggle. A non-magical creature – and therefore unable to get access to the Ministry. So what were his options? He could go to the Leaky Cauldron, and risk obliviation again. But really, what else could he do? There were no other options. He could only write himself a note to remind his future self of what he knew and what he was planning to do before going there.

Nodding to himself, he did just that before setting off to the shady parts of London. He parked his car well short of his destination because it would create rumors in that part of town and walked the rest of the way. Horten must have taken a bullet to the hip in the war, since it began to ache after he had walked for a short while.

He entered the Leaky Cauldron and saw someone who looked a lot like Tom behind the counter. He went over and was roughly greeted before he could say a word: „Not exactly yer part of town, isn't it, Mister?“

„More like exactly my part of town“ He sat down and leaned a bit over the counter. „Are there muggles in earshot?“

The bartender nodded in the affirmative, then gestured towards the door leading to the kitchen while whispering: „Follow me.“

Wow, this was even shadier than in his own time. Right at this moment he direly missed his magic. But his inability to locate the Ministry only confirmed what he had suspected: In the body of a muggle he was a squib.

„Who are ya?“, asked the bartender as soon as they were out of sight.

„First, cast a silencio on the door.“

The man cocked an eyebrow but did as he was asked.

„Right now I am a squib, as you can see. I am a wizard who was transferred into the body of this muggle. I need to reverse this, but for that I need to get in touch with the Ministry. But as I am right now, I obviously can't.“

„Sucks to be ya, doesn't it?“ The bartender crossed his arms. „What's in it for me to get ya there?“

„A pound for your time“ Which was a lot more than it was worth but he did not exactly want to have to go around town repeating this story. „And also for your silence on the matter.“

„Done“ The bartender's eyes were as large as platters. „I'll get Daisy to tend the bar, just a sec.“

Nice. A fast-working man. Harry used the time to spare a thought for Ginny. Did she know where he was? Did she know there was a chance he might not come back? Had he properly said goodbye to her and the children? He sighed and rested his eyes for a moment. Lily was still so small. Not exactly a kid anymore but also not a teenager. Would he miss seeing her grow up? Would he not be there to be snarky to her future boyfriend? He had to get back. He had to discover his mission, complete it, and return to his own time.

„There is no device invented yet which can sent messages into the future.“

Harry groaned. Hours of explanations so he could finally meet an Unspeakable and then this? He argued: „Can't we simply write a message which will still be there in the future?“

„Mr. Auror“ He had not given them his name. „Everything you do, everything you say creates a time warp which changes the future. Every second you breath you create

another future. By now the future from which you were sent back in time might not even exist anymore."

Harry froze. James, Albus, Lily ... he might already have killed them all by going back in time. Had he already changed history? He said: „But ... when you use a time turner, whatever you do also already happened in the time you came from. There is only one timeline."

„Yes, time turners have a special magic on them which holds the timeline together. You cannot change history with a time turner. But you did not come here with a time turner. You came here specifically to change history. So whatever you do will change history. You must expect that your timeline does not exist anymore."

„That can't be what I wanted" Harry shook his head. „I never would have willingly consented to that."

„It might have been a magical accident" The Unspeakable laid a hand on Harry's shoulder. „From what you told me to prove your story, you were one of the highest ranking men outside of the Minister of Magic himself. You know more about our department than our current Minister of Magic. You might have been testing something which threw you into a magical time loop. As you know, most of the devices we use down here are unstable."

„In my time, we accidentally destroyed your time room. There were no time devices left" Harry mumbled.

„Which should convince you that your presence here among us was most likely not planned" The Unspeakable sighed. „I am sorry for your loss. It is hard to tell you this, but you will most likely never see your own time again."

He felt dizzy all of the sudden. He looked for something to grab onto to keep himself standing, and settled for the hand on his shoulder which had been there for the last bit of the conversation. He had never found Unspeakables particularly emotional but this one, at least, had a heart. He offered a handkerchief when Harry laid a hand over his eyes.

„Would you tell me about your future?", he asked after giving Harry a minute to compose himself.

„No" Harry gave back the handkerchief he hadn't even used. He would not cry. Not now at least. „If there is any chance of it still happening, I would ruin it by telling you. Maybe when I am sure it never will."

„As you wish" The Unspeakable nodded. „Wait a moment, I want to give you something."

Harry waited even though he knew the Unspeakable might throw a curse at him to make him talk any second. Some of them were like that. Curiosity over common sense. But what good would running away do? They would find him anyway. Right now, he was a threat to his own existence but he was unable to do anything about it.

The Unspeakable returned with some kind of pendant and said: „This won't give you back your magic but it will restore your status as a wizard. You will feel magical to other creatures and objects, so that you can enter magical areas like the Ministry."

„Thank you, that is most helpful" Harry replied in all honesty. It really was. How thoughtful of the other.

„I want you to remember me with kindness, so that you will tell me everything the next time you come here" Oh ... well, at least he was being honest.

„What is your name?"

„Henry Potter" Oh God ... then this man would be his great-grandfather or something along those lines. His great-grandfather had been an Unspeakable? „What is yours?"

„I might tell you next time. But if I tell you now I'll change history“ Harry sighed. „For now I will have to be Grenmore Horten.“
For now and forever.
„Farewell, Mr. Horten. Until then.“

Kapitel 1: First chapter

He had cried that night. In the dark of his room, he had remembered his wife and his children and his friends, now perfectly aware he would never see them again. He still remembered the day he died. He remembered going into that forest and being killed. He remembered how he had said goodbye to everyone in his head, knowing he left them for a reason. Knowing he would never see them again for a reason.

But this was just completely unreasonable. Being here served no purpose. Killing his future, himself, his children, just by existing ... maybe he should die. Let everything take its course. Maybe his grand-greatfather was wrong and his being here was only an unimportant event in history. If he was to die here and now, would everything happen how it was supposed to?

He did not know. He could not know.

But was it really important? If it came right down to it, could he kill himself? He shuddered at the thought. No, he was here now, he had to make the best out of it. Maybe he could change some things for the better. He nodded to himself and stood up to flip open his calendar.

22nd of July, he was supposed to drive back to Bath. Tomorrow he was to meet some carpenters for a refurbishment of his house. After that his calendar was blank. He had no plans past his retirement. It sounded like he inhabited the body of a life-wary man. Well, he might be, he had most likely seen a lot of death.

Harry decided to pay Diagon Alley a visit before following his host's plan. With the pendant, he should be able to go there, should even be able to acquire an owl. He had to contact Dumbledore. And to be honest, he needed company to stop himself from going crazy.

His Eastern Screech-Owl was certainly as pureblooded as an owl can be when it came to the noises he made. Hedwig had been such a nice owl, just being at his side through everything – most important of all: silently. This one going by the name of Phoebus was far from silent. But he was bound to Harry and that was the most important. And he was a cute bit of fluff, Harry had to admit. He even settled down after an hour of driving.

Which brought up another problem Harry had not exactly thought about: Where did one get fuel in this era? There weren't any petrol stations on the road. Harry was not even sure they were invented yet. He leaned out of the window and asked some people in the next town he passed. They sent him to the apothecary. He felt a bit silly asking for petrol in an apothecary but they actually had some in stock. Well ... after this he could write a whole new kind of road trip. It was as surprising as the fact that this car could go up to a 100 km/h. He had expected to be happy about reaching 30 km/h in a car from the thirties but far from it. He had to learn a lot about this time and to erase some prejudices.

It was nearly evening when he reached Bath and felt quite stupid for having to ask around for the location of his house. At least he had the address from his personal identification. What he found was a mansion with a live-in cook and maid called Margret. She immediately noticed he did not know her name but had no problem telling him again and freely giving the information that she had been employed for a few weeks now in which he seemed not to have been home a lot. He tried to get more

information out of her by subtly asking if there had been any changes lately and she gave information about neighbors, the head of town as well as some local projects. Her lack of mention regarding a wife and children left Harry relieved. She did not even comment on the presence of an owl, she only asked it's name and how he should be fed.

With a sudden stroke of genius Harry asked: „Were you instructed on financial affairs and how to get the money for maintenance and food?“

„As well as my salary, of course, Sir. I go to the bank twice a week before going to the market.“

„Splendid, why don't we go together next time? I have to reacquaint myself with the town. I feel like I have been away for years.“

„Of course, Sir“ She actually seemed happy about that. Maybe she was lonely, living here all by herself. „Normally I would go the day after tomorrow.“

„That goes well with my plans, I am meeting some carpenters tomorrow. Did you have some wishes about changes in the house?“

„Oh, um ... well, there are some things which need to be repaired.“

„Can you write me a list?“

She fidgeted and said: „I'd rather show them to you, Sir.“

Oh ... maybe she was unable to write. He had not thought about that. Different era, he should remember. He nodded and said they would do that in the morning. At the same time he remembered he did not even know what the house looked like in general and said: „I will only make a small inspection now.“

Good excuse for looking at everything. She seemed a bright girl, seeing as she asked immediately if she should bring something to write for him to make a list for tomorrow. Might even be a good idea, he did not know why his host had asked the carpenters over and he must run out of luck sometime soon. He was lucky his host had not already begun to set up some sort of business. Even though he might have, Harry would never know about it.

About an hour later he knew the general layout and what he should ask of the carpenters tomorrow. Except for some minor repairs here and there, he wanted an owlery for Phoebe and a fireplace made completely of stone. The one he had seemed unsafe to him and he needed a bigger one anyway if he planned on making Floo travels – unknowing if he even could.

He ended up making a full repair tour with Margret anyway, it would have served no purpose to do another one again tomorrow. After setting up a perch for Phoebe and giving him some meat, Harry fell into bed and slept nearly immediately.

The carpenters, some minor businesses, getting an overview over his bank account and buying some things he had been unable to find in his home concluded his next few days. He had not forgotten the importance of the letter to Dumbledore but he had to focus on setting up a basis first.

Finally settled a week after he had woken up in 1932, he finally composed his missive:

Dear Albus Dumbledore,

you do not know me – yet. Please spare some minutes for a story sounding like it was written by a raving lunatic.

I cannot give you my name nor where I know you from. I can tell you however that I come from the future, nearly a hundred years from now. I was thrown back in time by some

kind of magical accident and am unsure what to do now. I went to the Ministry but the head Unspeakable told me there was no way to get back and that the time I came from was most likely destroyed now just by my being here. In my time I knew you as a wise old man who might speak in riddles sometimes but always had good advice. So I am hoping that you can shed some more light on this, either by telling me I might have hope left or by confirming what I was already told. I trust in your expertise.

*Your future friend who will for now go by the name of
Grenmore Horten*

Harry sighed after sending the letter via Phoebe. He knew what the answer would be, he had already accepted he would never see Ginny or his kids again but it hurt so much that he clung to hope. Even though he rationally knew that his great-grandfather had told him the truth. Still it was best to confirm the information. A lot of lives depended on it and he would not give them up without second thought. It would be nice to have a photo to remember them by. Or his wedding band. Anything. He felt like a child again, clinging to a memory, no, an idea of people that loved him. Before he had any pictures of his parents, before he had his friends, before ... before he knew he had magic. The one feeling he remembered from that time was the feeling of isolation. Having no home, no roots, the feeling of being utterly alone, not only missing the living but also the dead. He remembered how it was to be having no one. He cried again that night.

Dear Grenmore Horten,

as you already expected, I can only offer you my condolences. I conferred with every book I could find on the topic but time travel except for the limited version by using a time turner is not invented yet. What you experienced might still happen, but as you were told, I also fear there is a high chance that it will not. I can see that you are trying your best to keep a low profile so that you will not change the future and I think it takes a courageous man to make that decision. Deciding to do nothing is sometimes harder than to take chances. I hope you could tell me more but I completely understand that that might ruin your chance to preserve the future you are trying to save.

*Your friend now and then,
Albus Dumbledore*

The note left Harry smiling sadly. He had been prepared to read the words but it changed nothing in their capacity to hurt him. He closed his eyes, savouring the pain for a moment before he sighed and imagined the pain leaving with his sigh. It was a technique he had learned as an Auror and it helped sometimes. This time it did.

He had to make a decision here and now. Would he keep his low profile or would he actively change the future? The first would not insure that his future would happen. And while he wanted Ginny and their children back, they would not be theirs anymore. His life as Harry Potter was over. He was Grenmore Horten and would be forever more. Right when he did not wish it anymore, his childhood dream came true: He was completely normal.

If he wanted to. He could lead a completely normal life.

Or he could decide to change the future. He could decide to tell it all, to save all the lives of the people who died under Voldemort, he could make them ... he could have them take this burden from him to kill the one that would terrorise them all.

He could take the way of the coward and have some Aurors kill a still innocent child. Harry gave a humorless laugh. No, he could not. He would never, ever tell them, exactly because they would kill an innocent child.

Only over his dead body.

Dear Albus,

thank you for your kind words. As you have deducted correctly I am a Gryffindor and thereby chronically unable to take the easy way out. I have decided I cannot stand by and let everything happen because there will be another war coming and it will take even more lives than the one with Grindelwald. I know about him and you, by the way. I also know you lied about killing him but as I understand your reasons, I cannot find fault in it. I am unable to kill the uprising menace as well. It leaves me with the same problem you faced back then: What shall I do? I know who he is, where he is, what he will become. Killing him now and thereby saving everyone is an option but not one I can take. I do not know how to solve this dilemma.

*Yours truly,
Grenmore*

Grenmore Horten. He was beginning to accept the name. Everyone in this city knew him, he seemed to be friends with the current head of town and he was a respected member of society. He had enough money to last him a while, so he could decide on what to do. He also seemed to have invested in some businesses, since he had a small income from different sources. Not enough to live this lifestyle and pay Margret on but enough to get him by if he absolutely had to. The question now was what kind of job he could and should do. He still wanted to blend in, so it had to be something a rich, successful and influential man would do. Politics? Maybe some job with the police like he did before? Or he could open a business himself. There was a war coming, maybe he could specialise in uniforms and later change to suits. He did not want to produce weapons, so uniforms were quite a good idea. He should make some inquiries about what he would have to do.

He was outlining his future business when Dumbledore's reply arrived:

Dear Grenmore,

I am unsettled and elated about what you know. We seem to have been quite good friends if I told you about all of that. Everything regarding Grindelwald is my best kept secret in this era. As you might know, I am and will most likely always be in love with him and I pray you do not have to face that as well. I was unable to save my lover from becoming a foe of mankind, I could only save him from death and until this day I am not sure he would not rather be dead than forever imprisoned. If I had the opportunity to go back in time, I would try to change his mind, to show him the error in his ways and save the life we had. Even if we fought, I was happy back then. I don't know if you ever saw a good side of the one you had to oppose. If not, then please believe that he has one. No

one is born evil, it is only what the world makes us into. And even if some are more prone to doing evil deeds than others, being born with a mind able to hurt others does not mean that one absolutely has to do it. If you find yourself in a position able to change him before he falls to darkness, I urge you to do so. Even if you fail, trying is the most noble thing you can do. And most likely the only thing your mind will allow you if you are the man I think you are.

*Yours truly,
Albus*

Change him before he falls into darkness. Well, but how? Right now, he was only a six-year-old- oh. Oh ... he was a six-year-old orphan. An orphan. Harry could have slapped himself. Of course the boy was an orphan. He detested the place he lived in, he had no friends there and somewhere in his later years he began using magic to terrorise other children. Really, Harry should know what that was like. Living somewhere where no one wanted you, where no one would befriend you, where to only good you could get was seeing someone else more miserable than you were yourself. The solution to that was easy.

He would give Tom a home.

Kapitel 2: Second chapter

Harry thanked his memory for his ability to memorise files. With all his training in recalling obscure information he had no problem recalling the name "Wool's Orphanage" in London. Being a rich man, he sent a courier to inquire about adopting a kid with instructions to wait for a written reply. It was much like sending an owl, just the Muggle way, and a lot more impressive. Especially since an owl could not tell tales about him while a human courier could.

Margret was ecstatic at the thought of a having a kid in the house. His impression that she might be lonely seemed not too far from the truth. He smiled as she rambled on about how to decorate a room for the child, the dresses she could sew for a girl, the toys she could buy for a boy. He interrupted by telling her it would most likely be a boy, explaining that he wanted an heir.

"A boy, of course, Sir." Her smile dimmed a bit. "If I may ask ... do you also plan on marrying?"

"Not especially, no." Which was strange, and Margret would not be the last to say so if he did not offer her an explanation. "I was in love once ... very much so. But she passed away and since then, I have had no interest in any other woman. By now I doubt I ever will."

"Oh, I am most sorry, Sir. I did not want to bring up painful memories." She lowered her head. "Though I have to admit that I did not ... no, let me rephrase that. I never saw much of a romantic side of you, Sir."

"That might be because I tend not to talk about the topic of romance." He nodded to her. "So let us bury the topic again and talk about the coming of my heir. Seeing as I lack a wife, do you feel up to the task of acting as his female role model?"

"Me, Sir?" Her eyes widened. "You mean ... as his mother?"

"As a motherly figure at least. You are still a servant in this household but I don't want the boy spoiled, so I don't think the boy should see you as such. I would like you in a caring but also parental position in regards to him" God, when had he begun to sound so formal? Having only Albus, the mayor and other gentleman of the highest social class as acquaintances certainly had done a number on him.

"Like a nanny?" Her smile indicated she liked the sound of that.

"Yes, a nanny." Harry nodded and smiled. "I want him to get all the love he can get but also to learn the rules of society. If one of us has to scold him, I want him to have another person he can go to." But not a mother. The mother of his children would always be Ginny, no matter the era or the children. And he did not want to fight with Margret when it came to parenting.

"So I am allowed to scold him if I think the situation merits it?" She asked.

"Of course. Even though I would prefer if you came to me in larger matters like stealing, fire setting or whatever else he might come up with."

"Mister Horton! Why would a beloved child do that?" She seemed horrified.

"Because he first needs to learn that he is loved and we need to learn to love him. Until he feels safe with us, he might do things we do not approve of." At least that was what he expected from Tom. Harry imagined what he would have done if he had suddenly been adopted at the age of six – he would have raided the kitchen and hidden food in his rooms.

"I see you have put quite some thought in this." Her cheeks coloured. "I hope I can live

up to your expectations.”

“As long as you open your heart to him, I am sure we will be fine.” He smiled at her and reminded himself that she was at least twenty years younger than him. He did not even know how old she was exactly. “Do you have younger siblings?”

“Two brothers, Sir” She looked up, pride shining in her eyes. “One is eleven, the other is eight. I helped with both.”

“Then I guess you know what to expect.” He smiled with one corner of the mouth. “I am expecting general mayhem.”

“The beginning will be hard, I guess?” She smiled while he nodded. “We will give the boy a home.”

“Yes, we will...” Harry said mostly to himself.

The orphanage was ecstatic to sell a kid to him. At least their reply sounded a lot like it; telling him about suitable kids and asking for “a kind donation to our most devoted institute” at the same time was audacious, but he expected it in these times. Orphanages were mostly poor and depended upon the pity (or piety in some cases) of wealthy women. Often there was no running water even though London's sewer systems were nearly a hundred years old by now, and the little ones were the first to die of the still raging infectious diseases. Food was scarce; whenever the country had a bad crop children stole to survive. Wool's Orphanage was a prime example of those badly kept homes from which no kid was ever adopted away. The building, the kids and even some of their caretakers were nothing short of filthy. Clothes and rooms were passed down from one kid to the next until they were unusable. The orphanage was located near the Thames and most of it's rooms were damp, even though kids must have lived in them for decades by now. Harry expected the roof to be broken and was not disappointed when the nun in charge showed him around. Mould could be found on most walls and a lot of the children seemed to be constantly coughing.

“Twenty-six boys and eight girls reside with us, ranging in age from four to thirteen. Brea, our oldest girl, would make a good maidservant if you would like to consider taking more than one. She is old enough to hold a job even if you do not adopt her. We are just glad to see our children settled into good homes, whatever their position might be.”

Harry sighed soundlessly. He could see why the nun – Sister Isolda – was set on foisting off as many orphans as possible on him. This building was as decrepit as could be and fewer mouths to feed would leave some money for renovations.

“You may introduce the boys ranging from four to eight to me as well as your oldest girls. My housekeeper Margret would not refuse more hands.” How many could he sensibly take with him? “I also plan to open a sewing factory, so I will speak with all girls and boys adept at that.”

It seemed cruel to actually consider child labor, but it was still thirty years before that would be forbidden in this country. Whenever given a chance, every orphan would take a job. If he were to school one boy, he could as well teach a bunch of children and have the others work in the afternoon. That was still better than living in this hellhole.

“That sounds lovely.” The nun actually smiled. “The last years have been hard. This country is still suffering from the Great War and these children seldom have something good happen to them. We cannot even provide them with a roof and food. There is increasing talk of closing this orphanage but where would the children go? Please take as many of them as you can manage.”

“Bring needle and thread, I will test them all for suitability.” He could not take

everyone but a few of them would most likely not be a burden. He spent the next hour judging the needle-work of all thirty-seven children – Tom included – and picked three girls and a boy as suitable. He also told the nun that he would take Tom as his adopted son, claiming the boy had impressed him with his sharp mind.

In truth they had not even spoken a word. Tom was an introverted kid, simply following the nun's orders without much resistance. He looked much like all the others – scrawny, broken down and hopeless. None of the five children seemed to have much opinion about coming with him. Being told that he had work for them and that they would be provided clothes, food and a bed seemed enough for all of them to pack up their belongings and follow him to his car. None seemed excited but they also did not seem to mind leaving this place much. The two oldest girls eyed him warily and exchanged a look, but followed him nonetheless. He seemed to have passed their test, whatever that might have been.

He instructed the oldest – Brea – to hold Tom on her lap on the drive. She made no complaint, so whatever personality Tom had, it was not completely repulsive. The other three he sat in the back of the car: Mary and Helen were both eleven years old while Richard was twelve. He thought about asking them some questions but decided against it, so that they spent the six hour ride in silence. Tom and Helen both dozed off after some hours. They arrived back in Bath two hours short of nightfall, so they would have plenty of time to settle in.

Margret seemed to have heard the car – or waited at a window, who knew? – and came out when he parked in front of the manor. He ushered all the children out, before he drove the car to the stable, where it would be safe from the weather, since garages hadn't been invented yet. When he came back, Margret seemed to have introduced herself to everyone and to have learned all their names.

"Welcome back, Sir" She greeted him again. "May I ask how the one child you wanted to adopt turned into five kids standing before me?" An amused smile graced her lips. "I'll explain in a minute. Let's show all of them the kitchen and offer them something to drink and eat first." That got him a thankful smile from two of the girls. Brea carried Tom who was still sleeping. He began explaining the general layout as he led them to the back of the house.

While the kids – including an awakened and grumpy Tom – filled their bellies with milk, bread and cheese, Harry began his explanation to Margret: "I adopted Tom as my son, that is the young boy over there. The others have followed me of their own free will. I plan to open a sewing factory. Until I have made all the arrangements, I would like you to give them work in the household."

"I certainly won't complain about helping hands. So you four will get your work from me come tomorrow. Four kids ... if the weather is fair, you can begin with the garden. Since we've gone without a gardener for quite a while now, there is a lot of work to do. Have any of you ever done gardening?" All of them, Tom included, shook their heads. "Oh well, you will learn a lot of useful skills then." She turned to him. "We have two rooms for maids and servants but each has only two beds. Tom will have his own room, of course, but what about the other boy? Where can we put him?"

"Is there another room we could use?" He recalled his tour but only came up with guestrooms far away from the servant's wing.

"There is the gardener's shack but it is not well maintained. The scrawny thing will catch his death out there." They both looked at Richard, who in turn watched them with a questioning gaze.

"I guess I should have the carpenters repair the old one then. Until then, he can have a guestroom."

"But what if there are actual guests? Are you sure?"

"I am not expecting anyone in the next month, so do not fret." He smiled gently at her. "It is a temporary solution. Certainly better than having him sleep on the floor somewhere."

"True enough." She shook her head in exasperation. "Well, boy, you just earned a real feather bed for a month just for being male."

"Do I hear jealousy in your voice?" Well, she was something like a head maid now and he had just given one of her underlings much better quarters than hers. But he could not have a boy and a girl together in a room. How else to solve that?

"Just for a moment." Her smile surfaced again. "Sorry, Sir, that was immature."

"You are still young yourself." He let his gaze wander over the multitude of kids in the room. "Brea, what education did you receive at the orphanage? Can you read and write?"

"Yes, Sir" She straightened up. "We four had three or four years of schooling. We can read, write and do sums."

"Very good" Harry nodded. "In that case, I will first only teach Tom. As soon as he has reached your level of schooling, I will teach all of you. Margret, I would like you to attend lessons with Tom, so you can help him with homework if needed." That way she could learn herself, without exposing her ignorance.

"Of course, Sir" She actually curtsied. She had never before curtsied. Was that a bad sign? No, she actually seemed thankful. Well, schooling meant you were able to get better jobs.

"I think instead of beginning with the gardening, we should all go into town tomorrow. You kids need some new clothes. I'll ask the seamstress to teach you a few basics. I wanted to speak to her anyway. After that, I guess we'll need to buy a lot more food, right?"

"Oh yes" Margret sighed. "These five growing kids will clean out our pantry in no time at all."

"Have all of them wash themselves in the morning. And please check them all for fleas and the like."

"Yes, Sir." She sighed deeply. Well, they knew what was coming, they had talked about it beforehand.

"Tom, I'll show you to your new room. Richard, come with me as well."

Both boys followed him without being asked twice. They might be dirty and thin as twigs, but the nuns had drilled obedience into them. He gave Richard the first of the guest rooms and took Tom to the one Margret had prepared with a six-year-old in mind. If Harry remembered correctly, the boy would turn six this winter.

"This will be your room from now on, Tom." He stepped aside so that the boy might enter.

"Mine?" The little one looked completely floored when he saw a feather bed, a dresser, a writing desk and an empty bookshelf.

"Yours alone." Harry knelt next to him and put a hand on his tiny shoulder. "I expect you to study hard to become worthy of living in such a room. Understood?"

"Yes, Sir" The boy looked at him with fearful eyes.

"Good" He smiled. "Since we were expecting you, we've already bought you some clothes. Let's wash you up and change you into your pyjamas."

"Pyjamas?" Tom spoke the word slowly and deliberately.

"Nightclothes. You have your own wardrobe now. You already own some trousers and shirts. We will add formal wear when you have grown a bit."

"Thank you, Sir" The little boy still looked stunned but he knew his manners. Harry was simply astonished, he had not expected such behaviour. He remembered James at that age ... oh well. He set to helping the boy but Tom seemed mostly self-sufficient. Harry checked him for parasites himself and found lice. At least it was only lice. No strange boils or wounds on the kid, that was good to know. He tucked him in and went to bed, absently scratching his own head.

Kapitel 3: Third chapter

Brea reminded him a lot of Ginny. Not so much in being like his wife but in being like the girl she once was. She was self-sufficient, caring and had an inner strength that would one day make her fearsome. She helped the younger girls like an older sister, guiding them, answering their questions and being their spokesperson. Even Tom seemed under her wing somehow, only Richard was left out. Even though he was a boy, that one was a lot more timid than her, keeping to himself and being mostly silent. It could still be the strangeness of beginning a whole new life but Harry doubted it. To him, that one seemed shy and insecure. Even though that one was not his son, Harry vowed to help him along. Richard reminded him of Albus, even if this one seemed a bit slow in comparison. But everyone seemed slow in comparison to Albus, his son was a genius. If he had not looked exactly like Harry, he would have guessed that Ginny and Hermione exchanged babies at a family dinner and never gave them back.

Mary and Helen were more of a mystery. Both only spoke with Brea, later with Margret but were much too shy to address him directly. But his housekeeper told him they were working hard, so he was content to let them be. It took only a few days for his temporary guest and employees to settle in, so they did not seem to be unhappy. When buying their clothes, he had made an appointment with the local seamstress and a tailor she worked with. Both were enthusiastic about his idea and wanted to be part of his business, so he contacted the London military office with his request. They invited him to speak with an Officer Brighton a week later and he took Brea and Richard with him who wanted to meet some friends. All in all, things seemed to go the right way.

And then there was Tom. He certainly had not taken the wrong kid, Tom was unusually intelligent and quickly learned how to charm any kind of treat out of Margret. It did not help that he learned reading and writing a lot faster than her and was soon tutoring her when they worked on "Tom's homework". But Harry saw no harm with stuffing the boy with some pastries. He only warned Margret that she should not let a nearly six-year-old exploit or extort anything from her and found her relieved that he knew about her difficulties and accepted them without judgment. At this point Tom seemed not to be troublesome, even though Harry was glad he was the youngest. He would have brought any kid of the same age to tears. He certainly was a know-it-all but in comparison to Hermione who had already learned to hate and isolate herself at the age of eleven, Tom still seemed to think himself better than everyone by being so smart. He sometimes looked down on Margret for not understanding something as fast as he did, so Harry sat him down one night and explained to him that every human had unique talents and intelligence was only one of them. Intelligence gave one a special talent but it did not make one better than others. Tom did not seem convinced, so Harry ordered him to follow Margret in her duties for a whole day and to ask himself if he could do what she did. At the end of the day, the boy stated that he might not be able to do it yet but he was able to learn it all. So Harry ordered him to learn cooking from Margret.

It seemed to do both a lot of good. Margret got back her respect – because she was a great cook and learning to cook was not exactly an easy task – and Tom seemed to gain at least a grain of humility. Furthermore he seemed to enjoy cooking, baking

especially. Making something with his hands that he enjoyed brought incomparable joy to his face. It also gave him a special place in their little group because all kids enjoyed his cakes and cookies. Sugar wasn't exactly cheap but with how much they all enjoyed the confections, Harry was loath to cut the expenses.

All the while the other four had worked half a day for either the seamstress or the tailor, so they had learned all kinds of skills from measuring to embroidery. They would be able to sew two standard uniforms a day, most likely more with time. He had drawn up a contract after meeting Officer Brighton two times and had both his co-investors check it. All money would come from him but both invested their time into teaching the kids about their craft and him about the business side of things. Where to get buttons, drawing chalk, thread, needles ... he had not exactly thought about resources, being used to getting everything from a supermarket or mail order. It took two months to get his new business running.

Of course it was too good to be true. Harry had expected Tom to be the first one to act out but it was Richard. It had just turned October when Margret shouted early in the morning for everyone to wake. Panic laced her voice, so it did not take them long to come running. When Harry saw her pointing towards a mangled door latch, he sent Brea with the other girls and Tom to her quarters to stay safe. Margret and him took up a pan and a rolling pin as weapons to inspect the house. They came upon Richard in the guestroom he had occupied before the shack was repaired – snoring from being drunk. He even had the wine bottle still with him.

"A Bourdeux! Of course he had to take the expensive stuff!" Margret took up the bottle, completely ignoring the sleeping boy. "Now what shall we do with this one?"

"What would you do if this was one of your brothers?" Harry asked.

"I would get a bucket of water and put his head in. After that he would have to work until he paid back what he destroyed." She sighed deeply and studied the bottle again. "This one will keep him occupied for weeks."

"Well, it sounds fitting. You have my complete authority. He will work half a day in the factory and the other half for you until he ... no, for a week. You are right, this is too expensive. Tell him I was lenient because it was the first time it happened but I won't be if it happens again." Actually he did not know what the wine cost, he served it to dinner guests but that was it. They accepted it as their due, so he did not think too hard about it.

"Yes, Sir." Margret left the room to get a bucket.

Harry simply followed her downstairs but went to the servants' quarters instead. Brea had a broom in her hands when he entered. She lowered it with pink cheeks as soon as she recognized him.

"It was only Richard. He decided to break into the wine cellar to get himself drunk." The girls' eyes went big. "Please refrain from doing something so stupid."

"Will you sent him back to the orphanage?", Helen whispered. It was the first time she ever spoke to him aside from Hello and Good night.

"No, I won't. He will have to do extra chores to pay for what he stole. He is not allowed free afternoons for a week."

The three girls shared a look, some kind of silent communication, before they smiled at him. Tom looked from one to another before he stepped before Harry and asked:

"May I go back to bed, please?"

"Yes, you may. I will accompany you, little one." The boy had copied his speech pattern from Margret, so Harry answered him in kind. It seemed distant but until now they

had not shared something more intimate than reading bedtime stories. First Harry had read them but by now Tom read along, so they shared the story book. It was the only time of the day where Harry felt like Tom actually was the son he wanted him to become.

They climbed to stairs together and Harry settled the boy back into bed. Before Tom closed his eyes, a shriek from the room next to them signaled Richard's uncomfortable awakening.

"What was that?" Tom sat up straight in bed.

"Margret woke Richard by dipping his head into a bucket of cold water."

Tom's eyes turned as big as saucers. They both could hear the curses the boy hurled at Margret and her sharp reprimands in return. The nearly six-year-old asked fearfully: "Was it that bad what he did?"

"He broke into the house, stole from us and drank alcohol. All is forbidden and he knew that. Breaking into a house and stealing are serious crimes for which adults have to go to prison. Right now Richard is still a child in my eyes, so I decide what happens to him. If he had been older, I would have given his punishment over to the police." Harry hoped it was the right mix of instilling a bit but not too much fear.

"So if I do wrong, you punish me? Like the nuns did?" Tom seemed very serious.

"What did they do?" He asked instead of answering.

"They caned us."

"I am no friend of the cane. I give chores or extra homework or restrict playtime. I hope none of you kids will ever do something that warrants worse punishment." He could see the question in the other's eyes. He still waited until the boy asked what he meant by worse. "Intentionally hurting people or animals is a very bad thing."

The little one was deep in thought for a moment before he asked: "Will you punish the nuns? They hurt us a lot."

"They are adults. The police judges their actions. I only judge yours and only until you are of age. After that sterner people will decide about your actions." Well, if Tom turned out well. If not, Harry would be his final judge – again. But it was a long time until then.

"Okay. I'll go to sleep now." With that the boy flopped back unto the bed and closed his eyes.

The older one just smiled and stood. He stopped in the motion when a small hand on his sleeve held him back. Innocent blue eyes were turned on him, accompanied by the question: "Can I have a bedtime story?"

Well ... oh hell, he had enough of being stern. So Harry took out the book and sat down next to the boy to begin where they left off. Something about a rat and a cat becoming friends with a bird in it somewhere.

It was a few weeks later when Harry found his way into the kitchen to ask Margret: "I haven't seen any pumpkins yet. Are they out? Or do you need help with the preparations?"

"Prep... what do you mean?" Margret's voice trembled slightly.

"Halloween?" As soon as he asked he wanted to hit himself. Halloween was an American tradition – it seemed it was still unknown in 1932. He should have thought of this beforehand! "Well, it is a custom I learned about in my military time. Have I never told you about it? I am deeply sorry, it is my mistake then."

"Oh, I see ... so what kind of custom is it? What do we do?" Her eyes lit up in excitement. "Is it a feast? Shall I prepare food? Something with pumpkins?"

Harry saw someone moving to his right and finally noticed that Mary and Brea were in the kitchen as well and had stepped nearer in interest. He straightened and answered: "Well, it is a ... a kind of ritual to scare off bad dreams and ghosts. The goal is to be more scary than they are. So you carve fearsome faces into pumpkins and dress as those that you fear."

Mary shrieked and hid behind Brea who laughed and said: "I don't think you have to dress as a spider."

"I have always been afraid of my grandmother", Margret mused, "It would not be hard to dress as her."

"Well, normally you dress as old hags, vampires or ghosts." Harry explained.

"Or Jack the Ripper." Brea had lowered her voice. "Remember the tales?"

Mary shrieked again and ran to Margret who said: "You are the scariest of us all, Brea."

"Well, anyway, I'll go buy some pumpkins. And you can think about your costumes."

Harry smiled benevolently.

"Oh, what will you wear?" Brea looked up to him, her voice full of excitement.

"Hm ... how about a dementor?" Her confused eyes reminded him of his own stupidity. When would he ever learn that he was a Muggle in 1932 now? "It is a mythical creature of fear. Something like a nightmare in physical form."

"Wow." She smiled widely. "I am afraid of forgetting. Is there a mythical creature that makes one forget?"

"Well ... dementors take your good memories, so I guess they would be a good choice. I need something else if you go as a dementor. How about going as a wizard?"

"That's not scary." Brea crossed her arms. Well, so much for an easy costume. He thought mermaids were quite fearsome but explaining that would be suspicious.

"How about a dark wizard? One who commands beasts like dementors?" Hopefully he could pull off an off-putting one. He did not want to be an example for Tom.

"Then I will be your first in command! Your chief dementor!" Brea stepped from foot to foot. "What do they look like?"

"Erm ... they are dressed in washed out rags that completely cover them, so that you can't see a face. They also glide instead of walking and can fly." And how should a human girl do that? "You can work on your gliding."

Brea straightened and moved forward like she was gliding. She wasn't bad at all, it would look like gliding in baggy clothes. She was enthusiastic about the whole thing, immediately discussing how to cover herself in rags. He left them to their chatter to go into town.

"Hey, Tom." He saw the boy on the stairs. "Come with me, we are getting pumpkins for a feast."

"What feast?" The boy came down the stairs, putting on his shoes and jacket without further requests.

"It is called Halloween and is a tradition from America. That is a country far across the ocean." He began to tell the boy more, like his favorite Halloween costume and what he had seen the other kids do when he was young. He itched to also explain the wizard stuff but he refrained from it. It was much too early, Tom had not yet shown any accidental magic.

Of course Tom wanted to know what a vampire was and where to read up on them but Harry decided that he was too young to read Bram Stoker and that was the only Muggle author that had ever written about them. So he just told him stories, one more scary than the next which the boy in turn told the other kids which led to ecstatic shouts from Brea to tears from Mary. Richard begged Margret to let him sleep in the

house that night and she turned a reproachful look on Harry who simply shrugged and grinned. He ordered a copy of "Dracula" the next day to give it to her.

They had a great feast, eating pumpkin soup and scaring each other until Helen and Mary refused to leave Margret's side and Richard slept in Tom's bed. The younger one teased him mercilessly for that and for once, Harry let him. But he did accompany him to chop some wood the next day which the boy was eternally grateful for.

They actually bonded a bit over that, Richard telling him he'd rather be a girl. Well, that was tricky. Harry had known about transsexuals but they lived in the wrong time for that.

"Why do you want to be a girl?" Better to understand him first.

"Well ... they always stick together. Be a girl and you have friends. Girls are like a bird flock."

"They do that to be safe." Especially in this time and age. "Men are fearsome and strong. Some men are really dangerous for women. So they stick together. It's their strength." It did sound nice in theory. "But they also scratch each other's eyes out. Even as a group, they always compete and try to be better than the others. So while they flock together, they are also extremely mean to each other sometimes."

"Really?" Richard looked up with big eyes.

"They harp about the other's weight and skin and clothes and make-up and whatnot, it's tiresome. I like male friends a lot more. They don't judge, they just let you be." He chopped up some more wood. "Like this here. Just working out together. Not squabbling or gossiping or harping about one's neighbors or all that other stuff girls constantly talk about."

"I wouldn't know." He looked sad. "They grow silent when I'm around. There's no one to talk to."

"They don't talk while they work?" Harry looked up in surprise.

"The head seamstress forbid them from talking while they work." He shrugged his shoulder. "They haven't started again. We always work in silence."

"Sounds oppressing." Harry shuddered. "Know what? I'll buy you guys a radio. Music makes everything better."

"Really?" Richard looked delighted. "Thank you, Mister Horten!"

"And you should go to town in the evenings and find some friends your age. Just don't hang out with the wrong crowd." That would set the boy straight. Hopefully. At least in staying a boy, even if he would become a gay boy or something. It was a horrible era for that. At least, this was Britain and not Germany.

"Wrong crowd?" Again with that timid look. He did give off the vibe of a young girl instead of a boy.

"You know, criminals, thieves, drunks. Boys who'll only be with you if you pay for their entertainment. Find some boys who spend their time with sports, books or adventures that don't cost limb and freedom. Maybe there'll be some boys playing soccer. You could ask Margret, she has some younger brothers, maybe they can tell you where the local boys meet."

"Do you think they'll accept me?" Oh, teenage angst. It was that age.

"Why shouldn't they? You can read and write, you have a job, you live in a good place, you have nice clothes. There's nothing wrong with you." He just sounded like a girl with all those insecurities. "Have some trust in yourself. You are already a man in your own right. You even earn your own money."

"They call us the rag-tag band. I heard some women talking in town. They called us no-goods. They say we live off your pity and would be out in the streets without you."

Richard's voice broke.

"That's why you don't want to be a woman. Mean beasts, I tell you." He put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Do you think they would dare to say that to my face?"

"Never." Richard looked up to him.

"See? When women say something to your face, you listen to them. Until then, you stay clear of their vicious tongue. Don't let it bother you. They are just jealous." That was a wisdom he learned over the years. Women were great, as long as they weren't too many in the same spot. Even Ginny tended to say mean things about him when the Weasley women flocked together. It was something women just did.

"Jealous? Of you?" Richard seemed to have completely given up on the wood, focusing on their conversation instead.

"Of you. All of you have a steady job, a nice house, food and clothes. You know that's not a given. But you have all earned it." How to make him feel more secure? "I haven't chosen you out of pity. You four impressed me with your skills. You were given a once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity and you seized it and made the best of it. That's nothing to be ashamed of."

"Hm." Richard took a new block of wood. "I still think we were just lucky."

"A bit of luck is always a part of being successful." Just thinking how often he had been lucky ... he had been close to death one time too many. "You know I survived a gun-shot to the hip? I could have been dead. That was nothing but luck. Sometimes good things just happen or you meet the right people at the right time. It happened to me frequently, so now I balance karma by helping others."

"Karma?" Richard's eyebrows scrunched up.

"Universal equilibrium. You do good, good will come back to you."

That got him one armful of angsty teenage power. He may be twenty-five years older but he remembered being that starved for acceptance. Hopefully Richard would not fall into the wrong arms.

"I'll always be here when you need me, Richard. You can come talk to me about anything. Just don't rob me again, alright?"

"I'm sorry, Mister Horten." The boy sounded close to tears.

"Don't sweat it. We all do dumb things as teenagers." Wouldn't he know?

Kapitel 4: Forth chapter

Halloween was a success even though they had to stay home. Going around scaring people would have given them a strange reputation in town. But the kids enjoyed the mystery, doing something nobody else did. Maybe Harry should introduce some other Pagan festivities, he had quite enjoyed them himself. The Weasleys had been horrified when they learned that he had never heard of traditional Yule festivities except for eating a big meal and that all he knew about Easter was that Dudley got tons of chocolate.

Kids needed traditions. Seeing how his own kids grew up with all four year-markers, dancing with fairies and ghosts and lighting the fire of the new year, he had felt the pain of missing all those reminders of the witches and wizards that came before him. It was humbling to know how tiny a light he was in the thousands of years magic had enriched the life of people. He had read the legends and myths of great sorcerers before him to his kids, learned of the gods his ancestors had worshiped. It was nothing he could openly teach to Tom now but maybe he could do it in secret, once the boy was a bit older. Once he knew about magic. In just five years, he would already get his Hogwarts letter. Just five more years to teach compassion to the haughty little bookworm. Gods, how that boy thrived with full access to the city library.

It was Albus all over. He wished Hermione were here with him. He had been happy to leave those two to their discussion of books. At least Hermione had read Dickens and Twain and all those other authors Harry did not even know. He had not owned any children's books and later in life, he had not developed an interest. Now he wished he had read them but alas, they were still unable to hold his interest. He wasn't made for books after so many years where reading meant school-work. It made him loath the thought in an unwholesome way. He could hear his inner Hermione despair.

"Mister Horten?", asked Tom one evening where they sat together in the study.

"Grenmore, please. Or Gren. Or Dad. Whatever you like, just drop the formal speech, please." It wasn't the first time they had this discussion. Most evenings, he just let Tom, but he had just been thinking about Albus and how much he missed his little genius.

"I was wondering about something." As always, Tom just ignored that part of his speech.

"What is it?" Harry put aside his ledger, only too happy to leave the numbers for now. With the new order, he should think about hiring more people. Maybe he should get more orphans? On the other hand, he thought it important they still had a personal connection to Margret and him and with too many kids, they would be spread too thin.

"This book I read ... it was about a boy that stole. A gentleman gave him a chance and he became a respectable young man. Then he was accused of stealing again, though he hadn't done it. He stayed good." Tom looked very serious about this.

Harry thought he could understand that well. The story was too close to home in his case.

"But what if he had done it? The gentleman believed in him. He would have gotten away with it. But what if he had done something bad?"

"Tom, have you done something bad and are afraid of the consequences?"

"No." That was a bit too quick. "It's just a question."

A disturbing question from the mouth of a nearly six-year-old. Very well. "It is not an easy question. There are two hearts beating in my chest. One is that of a father. As a father, you love your child and you believe in him as long as you can. Only when there is proof or your son has broken your trust again and again should one disbelieve him. So I think the gentleman in that story did the right thing, even if the boy was a criminal. A father always protects his son and stands by his side until proven wrong. I won't harbor a criminal but I'd want proof before I disbelieved my son. That is called trust and trust is an important part of love."

Tom nodded but it was obvious that some of that went over his head.

"On the other hand, I am a man of the law. I believe that punishing people for wrongdoing is the right thing. Sometimes people get punished who really haven't done wrong but were very suspicious. My godfather was such a man. He went to prison for twelve years for a crime he hadn't done. That was obviously wrong and he didn't deserve that, but I'd rather that happens sometimes than for bad people to go free. I had something like a school rival, a nasty boy with a bad attitude, and his father was a criminal. But he was very wealthy and he gave money to the judges to go free. I don't want such things to happen." He looked at Tom's scrunched up face. "I'm sorry, I think I made your problem a whole lot more complicated now."

"Huh ... well ... what do you think of the boy?"

"I think he did well by not going back to stealing. When you steal bread because you are starving, that's wrong but understandable. If you steal sweets because your dad won't buy them, that is just plain wrong. If he had continued stealing even though he had a good life now, I don't think he deserved that good life." He waited for Tom's reaction but did not really get one. The boy seemed to think fast. "Sometimes it's hard to stop with things you have done all your life. And sometimes you even have to learn things before you can stop bad behavior. For example, if you do not know how to make friends without bribing them, then you need to learn social skills first. So there is a time for adjustment in which people continue to do bad things and while that is bad, it is understandable. The right thing to do is to ask for help, to learn and to adjust, so one can stop the bad behavior."

"So ... if the boy had continued to steal, even though he had a good life now, his father might have been understanding and helped him?" Tom sounded like he couldn't really get his head around that.

"If the boy came to him and told him about his problem and asked for help, yes. Asking for help takes a lot of courage. But that courage is what you ask of someone when giving them your time, your possessions and your love."

"Being a parent sounds pretty hard." What a strange line from a nearly six-year-old boy.

"Being a good son isn't easy either. But we all try our most to become the best version of ourselves that we can."

Tom nodded and opened his book again. It did not seem like he was reading though. He seemed to continue to ponder his problem. Harry just smiled and went back to his ledgers. Thank Merlin he had brought up Albus before having this one on his hands. Without his experience of raising three completely different kids, he would have panicked over this conversation. Tom wasn't dissimilar to his middle son. He would ponder the problem and come back with more questions. In the mean time, Harry would investigate what brought this on.

He was vaguely sure it wasn't stealing.

Margret wasn't helpful in this because she had no idea what bad behavior Tom could have been up to. She said he was perfect. Too perfect actually. She was concerned that often he sounded like an adult. She found it cute how Tom tried his best to imitate Harry but was concerned that except for playing with Helen and Mary in the afternoon, there were few child-like things he did. She said he needed peers his age. Harry was concerned what public school would do to a boy that got by with stealing, biting and setting others against each other for years. Maybe he could get to know some boys and make friends before they would begin school with them. Who in this town had a kid of five or six years of age? The major, as far as he remembered. Maybe he should make a big party and invite all wealthy families of the town. That way he would know who had kids at what age. Maybe a lunch party. Yeah, that would work. Margret loved the idea and roped Brea, Helen and Mary into helping with the planning and preparations. Harry suggested to include Richard as well. It gave Margret big eyes and the comment "But he's a young man!".

"And?"

"I cannot order around a man now, can I?" The idea seemed to frighten her.

"You are head maid, Margret. Every one of these kids is under your supervision. It's not that the house is yours and the garden is his. He needs you to evaluate his work, to praise or criticize him. Just like you need feedback from me sometimes. We are all social creatures, we need one another. If you plan something, please include him. Even if he just arranges the tables or gets some flowers for decoration. He's lonely out there."

"Really?" Brea looked at the other girls for a moment. "He never talks to us. He doesn't even play with us."

"He's very shy." Harry smiled with a bit of nostalgia. He remembered how long Ron had felt like a third wheel, acting like a prick as a consequence. Richard seemed to tend to muteness instead, similar to Neville maybe. "Please give him a chance."

Brea looked to Margret and they seemed to have one of those silent communications where women exchanged whole epilogues without saying a word. Why they needed so many when they could just do something like that eye thing was beyond Harry. The only eye conversation that men exchanged was either "Look, she's hot" or "Man, she's a bitch". He finally got a nod from Margret and Brea both. Wonderful.

Tom played hide-and-seek, tag and some other games with the children. Just looking at that filled Harry with pride and relief. This would work out, he was sure of it. He would arrange more play-dates and get Tom ready to face school-life. One where he wasn't abused and shunned and where he had to become the meanest of them all.

Maybe he should adopt another small child, so that Tom could learn empathy by being a big brother. On the other hand, that might be too much for him or it might make him nervous about his position. Being Harry's sole heir did elevate him above others. Also, Harry wanted to focus his free time on bringing up Tom. A small child would take up a lot of that free time.

No, no other child. Teaching Tom and Margret first class stuff, sometimes playing with the children in the afternoon, talking books and sometimes politics with Tom after dinner and reading him bedtime stories, that was enough to fill his time and hopefully give the boy a sense of family and belonging. By now, Harry was even able to give hugs at night and when he left the house or came back. Sometimes when he sat on the sofa, both of them reading something, Tom would touch him with his feet or even

lean against him. Harry wished they had television, so that cuddling on a couch became normal. But they were just building the first cinemas in the country, none of them in Bath to his knowledge and sound had only been introduced for a few years now.

So he resorted to tickling Tom, hugging him and ruining his perfectly combed hair. Whenever he heard the boy squeak or laugh or saw him run around with a big smile, he knew this was working. Raising a child took love, dedication, empathy and a whole lot of nerves to burn through. Harry thought this wasn't too shabby. Tom looked happy and there weren't any complaints about him.

"Uhm ... Grenmore?", asked the boy after the story reading one night.

"Yes, Tom?" Grenmore! Harry felt like doing a little victory dance.

"Why did you invite all those people?"

"It was a party. You meet new people at parties. I wanted to know our neighbors better and I wanted you to make some friends your age."

"Friends?" Tom blinked owlishly. "Why?"

"You'll turn six next month. That means that you can go to school next summer. I want you to learn to make friends and nurture your friendships and even learn how to quarrel and make up again with friends before you go to school. That is because I want you able to have friends in school. People without friends are often bullied or they become bullies themselves. I want neither for you."

"What's a bully?"

For once, Harry understood his mother-in-law completely when she pinched small children's cheeks. They were just too cute sometimes, it was unbearable.

"A bully is someone that intimidates or hurts others to feel powerful. Often because they feel very insecure themselves. I want you to become someone that does not need to look down on others to feel good about himself. I want you to become someone that stands up to bullies." He stopped talking for a second to give Tom the possibility to think this through. "When we started the lessons with you and Margret, you taunted her for not learning as fast as you. That is bullying. It is enough that you know you are smart. You should not need to lord it over anyone."

"So ... I should not tell people they are bad at something?"

"You should help them. Or just leave them alone when you don't have time to help in that moment."

"But I like being better than others."

"Everyone likes being good at some things. But would you like to be accused of every thing you can't do well?"

Tom's face scrunched up.

"If you don't want that done to you, don't do it to others. Everyone has strengths, everyone has weaknesses. Be proud of the things you can do. You do not need to point out weaknesses to others. That is inner strength, inner greatness."

"But ... how do others see how good I am if I don't point it out?" What a smart question!

"By simply doing it or by helping others. Leading by example. Why would you tell others what you can do when you can just show them?"

"People refuse to see." Tom folded his arms and got a slight pout.

"Do they?" Harry leaned forwards to be on his eye-level. "Did I refuse to see the true you?"

The gray eyed gaze dropped to the floor before Tom slowly looked up again. Stubborn as they come he said: "You're different from other people."

"True." One day Tom would find out that he was a wizard and Harry would tell him that he had known. "But there are a lot of people like me."

"Never met them before." It was no more than a mumble. "The nuns didn't like us at all."

"I think some might have liked you." Harry ruffled the black hair. "But there were too many children for too few nuns, they were poor and overworked. When survival is your top priority, love takes a backseat sometimes."

There was silence for a while but Tom sat tight as a bow-string, so Harry was sure he wasn't done.

"Do you ... do you think ..."

"Do I think what?" Harry took Tom in a half-hug against his side.

"My mum ... maybe she left me because she was poor?"

"They haven't told you anything?" He couldn't help the appalled look. Did this boy really know nothing?

"Never asked." Tom looked up at him. "Do you know?"

"Your mum died in childbirth. She came to the orphanage because she was about to have you and needed help. She gave birth to you there but died because of blood loss." Harry put the blanket around the boy at his side. "Sadly that still happens to a lot of women. Having a child can be lethal, especially when you don't live in the best conditions." Should he say more? Tom's story wasn't exactly heartwarming. But maybe it was better than having no story at all.

"So she's dead." The boy snuggled into the blanket and seemed to be in thought for a moment. "Did they know where she came from?"

"Her name was Merope Gaunt. The Gaunts were an old family but very poor. The last in the line of Salazar Slytherin, a founder of a school called Hogwarts. It's a secret school for gifted students and I hope to send you there when you are eleven." He kissed Tom's hair. "But that is our secret, alright? It's a secret school after all."

"Really?" Big gray eyes looked up at him. "I can go to a school that one of my great-ancestors founded?"

"That's the plan. But first you have to finish elementary school and learn to make friends."

"Do you think they can tell me about my mom?"

"I hope so. Some professors might have taught when she visited the school."

"She went there too?" Tom's face showed a bright grin.

"Yes, she did." But Grenmore didn't. He should keep his stories straight. Grenmore was a Muggle that knew about the magical world.

"Do you know if my father went there too?"

"He didn't go there. I also didn't go there, I just know about the school. Guess we weren't gifted enough." He smiled to show that was alright. "I think your mom sounded pretty cool. She went to that secret school and she loved you so much that she had you even though her family didn't want her to. If she had lived, she would have loved you, I'm sure."

"Thank you." Tom threw his arms around him before completely disappearing under his blanket. "Good night, Grenmore."

"Good night, son." Harry stood with a smile and left.

Christmas was coming and with it came Tom's birthday. Margret and Harry planned for an opulent party on Christmas eve's lunch time. Harry had planned for a Christmas break for all the kids, wanting them inside on the cold days following the darkest

night of the year. They stocked up on food, planning for a filled goose, some ducks and finally some beef right around New Years. They would spend most days in the kitchen baking and cooking or in front of their fireplace roasting apples. They had bought about a ton of eggs for Tom to make cookies with. He would be their head baker, instructing all the other kids on the art of dough sculpting.

Harry also took Tom to the library to look for some books about Yule. He wished he could still apparate and get some from Diagon Alley about wizard traditions. They always had some at the Burrow but Harry wasn't sure what to do exactly. Maybe he could bring one of their deliveries in person and visit the Leaky Cauldron.

Maybe he should bring Tom. On the other hand, wasn't he too young to keep such a secret? He was only five. Six soon, sure, but still a small boy. Wasn't that too big a secret? If Tom told someone, Harry was unable to obliviate them. Maybe he should see how well Tom would do without the gloating. If he was able to be sure in himself without belittling others or holding knowledge over them he might be able to keep such a secret.

Said and done. He took his car with their order to the London headquarters – and what a good idea that was! They were happy to see him in person to discuss business. They had a rather large order and were still looking for contractors. Could he double his production? Well, yes, he could hire more workers but they needed to be taught, it would not be double right away. That seemed to be alright. In this way it was decided that he would take more children with him.

By now he had read up on their current law. A child labor act was in hot discussion and they proposed an age of 14 as the minimum age for employment. So he should look for some boys and girls of 13 or 14 years of age. Before he visited some of the orphanages, he should go to Diagon Alley though. The amulet that his great-grandfather had given him worked well. He was able to find the Leaky Cauldron and even entered the shopping district by tapping the stones with his hand. For some time he just wandered the streets in remembrance. He missed flying. He missed the little household charms, the simplicity of Lumos instead of candles, the squishy feeling of robes. He missed the afternoons eating ice-cream with Lily- no, not going there. He had a new life and purpose now. No sense in crying for things that were lost to him.

He entered the book shop and began browsing the shelves. He packed an edition of *The Bard and the Beetle* for Tom, some books about paganism and folklore, a book called *Rituals through the seasons*. He asked the bookshop owner for some recommendations for children's books and packed all that weren't too obviously magical. In the end, he came out with full bags and missed the shrinking charm most of all.

His gaze was drawn to Knockturn Alley. As an auror, he had visited the place more times than he could count. Over time it had even developed a bit more popularity, changing from a dank, dark alley to a hidden gem. Right now it looked even worse than the first time he had seen it – it was hidden in shadow, filthy and some eyes seemed to stare from the dark.

Was it suicidal to go there as a Muggle? Might be. On the other hand, some things looked worse than they were. Maybe he should just try. With a nod to himself, he entered the foul-smelling place. A man leaning against the wall and watching everyone entering was the first he encountered. Harry just nodded and smiled at him which made the man lower his head. The next was an older witch who had bought some semi-illegal potions ingredients which she tried to hide under her cloak. He already saw Borgin and Burkes when he was stopped by a young witch that seemed

fresh out of Hogwarts.

"Looking for company?", she drawled.

"No, thank you. I am here for some shopping." He tried to sidestep her.

"After you're done?"

"Not interested." He passed her but turned back again. "Except if you knew a woman by the name of Merope Gaunt."

"What's it to you?" She folded her arms.

So he had been right. Tom's mother had worked as a prostitute to earn food.

"I adopted her son. If she left anything, he would be glad to have it."

"Ah." The women lowered her gaze. "I thought you might be his real father. In that case, I'd have liked to chew you out."

"You liked Merope?"

"Not at all, she was a bitch." The women shrugged her shoulders. "But she was one of us and we stick together. Her dandiprat should bleed."

Harry just nodded, not wanting to aggravate the witch. She was mostly likely armed, he wasn't.

"She left nothing though." Another shrug. "Poor as dirt, she was."

"Were you there when she sold her locket to Burke?"

"How do you know that?" Her eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"I know things." He held up a bookbag. "That is my job. So I know what the locket was and that Burke screwed her over. I want it back for Tom."

"You know an awful lot." She nodded and stepped up to him. "I thought it was fishy when he said it was nothing much."

"He'll try to sell it to me for more money any sane person would give him. It would help tremendously if you chewed him out."

She just nodded, a small smile on her lips. Dirt poor still ... but if she knew Merope, she must be in her twenties. What was she doing working the streets? Was she a squib? They entered the shop together and the women shouted for Burke in an instant.

Burke looked like a sour man about to bin a dead mouse. In this case, he seemed to regard her in the same venue. For him she seemed to be trash to be disposed of. He was as unsympathetic as they got to Harry. "What is it, cunt?"

"I have a name, asshole! It's Babette. You remember me?"

"Are you drunk again?" Burke looked at Harry. "Is she with you?"

"He's with me!" Babette walked up to the man and put an accusing finger against him.

"You bought Merope's locket. We want it back."

"Merope?" The man sighed in annoyance but thankfully they were no other costumers around. "Which girl was she?"

"Oh come on, you remember all the girls you ripped off. You even slept with her!"

"I sleep with a lot of you scum."

Harry put down his bags and rolled a shoulder. He kept in shape – always. Right now he really wanted to throw a punch. He held back and said: "It's a hexagonal locket with a pale orange stone. I am sure to recognize it."

"How do you know such stuff?" Babette looked over her shoulder but seemed to decide to let it rest.

"I see you know the artifact." Burke smiled like a cat that got cream.

"I do. I also know you gave Merope ten galleons for it. I am here to get it back for her son."

The smile turned sour. Distaste, a frown, a sneer. "You don't expect me to give it to

you?"

"I do." He threw a handful of galleons on the floor. Working undercover had taught him some things about dealing around Knockturn Alley. "She sold it to you when she was unable to make more money due to her pregnancy. It was winter, she was starving. She died not a month later."

"Do you expect pity?" Burke snorted.

"I expect you to know when you have sinned." Harry widened his eyes. "Fate shall always haunt us for our wrongdoings."

"You are a seer ... no wonder he knows such stuff." Burke looked at Babette. "He came onto you?"

"He seemed to recognize me. He knew that I knew Merope. He knew I was with her when she sold the locket."

"Damn." Burke made a gesture to ward off evil. "You say you have her son?"

"He shall be great." Harry left it at that. He was sure he would not be able to pull off a fake prophecy. "And he will come for his birthright."

"Fuck you." Burke went to a closed cabinet and opened a drawer with a key. "Sometimes I hate magic. Should have been more Muggle, really. They're a lot easier to rip off." He took out a locket and trust it at Harry.

He studied it in the faint light shining in from outside and decreed: "The real one if you please."

"It's the real one."

"You should not lie to someone that knows the truth." Harry just looked at Burke steadily. He was not a 100% sure but doubtful enough to suspect Burke of trying to get him out of his hair without losing profit. "The initial is missing."

Burke rolled his eyes but grabbed another locket and forged it over.

Harry tried to reach for his lost magic and said "Open" to the locket. His gaze turned to Babette who simply looked curious, not revolted. So it had been English rather than Parseltongue. That way seemed closed to him. He studied the stone, the initial, the mechanism. The locket opened to reveal a lock of raven hair.

"This is the original", Harry decided. Burke might have faked some lockets but he would not have put a lock of Tom Riddle senior's hair inside of it.

The things Merope might have done with that. She really had been stupidly in love.

"Then go!" Burke snarled.

"Pleasure doing business with you." Harry pocketed the locket and took his bags.

"Have a good day."

Burke pushed Babette out right after him. She stumbled a few steps after him before she seemed to decide to talk to him again: "That was amazing."

"Burke and I speak the same language."

"So you are some kind of ... con artist?"

"Well, I made him think I was a seer, didn't I?" He smiled but continued to walk. He wanted out of this alley now his business was done.

"You aren't?" She blinked and stopped at the alley treshold.

"I am many things." He nodded at her. "All the best to you, Babette."

Somehow it was hard to leave her there. He felt like offering her a job but she was a liability. He could not save every being in this world. He could not take a witch to the Muggle world. It would not do to draw attention to himself. This had been a bit much for his reputation.

"Say hi to Tom for me?", she asked with a lost voice.

"I will." He wouldn't. It was a part of his mother's life the boy should never learn

about.

Kapitel 5: Fifth chapter

He came back home with two girls aged fourteen and thirteen. He had hoped for another boy but none had been any good with a needle. Harry had already ordered the rearrangement for one room to a servant's quarter so Richard would have a bed inside the house, but now it would be a room for the two girls. Hopefully he could also hire one or two locals to integrate all the London kids better. He should ask Margret for some recommendations, most potentials would be her age.

Margret just nodded the two new arrivals off, looking neither pleased nor displeased. So the kids were a strain on her. Maybe he should employ one or two older people, maybe older women. Yes, that was an even better idea. It would leave the poor woman with a bit more breathing space. After all, she wasn't even twenty herself.

Harry felt rather old with all these young ones. After finally settling them in and having Tom following him like a little duckling the whole time, he finally had some time for his son. The small boy looked pleased with that, even though Harry worried how a child so small could be so unobtrusive. James would have chewed his ear off for ignoring him for hours. They went to the library where Tom asked about all the new books and was halfway between annoyed and pleased to hear that there were some books meant for his birthday and Christmas and he was not allowed to see them yet.

"There is one present though that is meant for now." Harry patted the couch beside him to have the boy hop over.

"What is it?" Tom sat down beside him and looked up with eyes very similar to an intrigued cat.

"I was appalled when I heard that the nuns told you nothing about your mother. So I went back to find out more. It led me to this." He pulled out the locket and placed it in Tom's open palm. "It is a family heirloom, it belonged to Salazar Slytherin. You can see his initial in the stone."

Tom held it up and studied it intently.

"When your mom left her house, she took it with her. But because she did not have enough money, she sold it to a pawn shop. I was able to retrieve it. I fear it is the only thing left of her, I was unable to find photos, but maybe they'll have some at Hogwarts."

Those gray eyes seemed cloudy when Tom looked up. At the age of five, his features were still full of emotion, not smooth like that marble stature Tom had later been in life. It was gratifying and certainly worth the trouble. This little boy would learn what love was.

"Does she have a grave?" He asked in a small voice.

Harry sadly shook his head. This was still a time where poor people were thrown into mass graves.

"Her name was Merope Gaunt, right?" Tom climbed into his lap which Harry thought huge progress. It turned into a hug. "Are the Gaunts bad people for throwing her out?"

"Well ... I don't know them in person but I would never throw out my daughter because she got pregnant, even if I don't like her boyfriend."

"Boyfriend?"

"Well, the father of the child." It seemed like time for some sexual education. "To make a baby, you need a man and a woman. They make love and sometimes the

woman gets pregnant, so a baby grows in her womb."

"So I have a father?" Tom blinked at him. "I mean, of course, I have you but- or are you my father?"

"I am your father by adoption. But yes, that means you have a biological father. I never knew your mother." Was it too early to tell Tom all this? "You were named after your father. His name was Tom as well."

"What happened to him?"

Hm ... tricky. He was alive, he may even have a family by now. Future Tom had killed him and his grandparents. Would it benefit Tom to know his father early? Or would it drive a wedge between them? Would Tom look down on his father for being Muggle? Would Tom senior be disgusted by his son for being a wizard?

"Sadly I don't know. I know that his name is Tom Riddle. But I don't know where he lives or why he left your mom. When you're a man and you make a girl pregnant, the honorable thing is to marry her. But your father did not do that which is why your mom had to fend for herself. I don't know what happened back then."

"So he is a bad man?" Tom looked sullen.

"Or maybe his parents forbid it. When you are eighteen, you can decide for yourself who you want to marry. But until then, your parents can veto your spouse. Maybe his parents were against the marriage. I don't know how old your parents were exactly. Or maybe something happened to him, I don't know. Sometimes sad things happen and we have no control over them. One should not pass judgment when one does not know the whole story."

The boy seemed to think about that for some time. "Say ... Margret is not your wife, right?"

"No, she is not. She is our maid and your nanny."

"If she got pregnant, would you throw her out?"

"Of course not. I'd congratulate her and find someone to help out for the months she would be unable to work. And if her boyfriend would try getting out of marrying her, I'd have a very stern talk with that man."

"If I got someone pregnant, you'd make me marry her?"

"Well ... I'd talk it through with you at least. If you didn't marry her, I would still give her and the child the possibility to live here. It would be my grandchild after all. If she didn't want to live here, I'd support her financially."

"So you would neither throw your daughter out nor make your son's pregnant girlfriend leave?"

"No, I wouldn't." Harry knew where this was going. He could not defend against the sadness welling up inside of him. Tom was sharp, he understood more than any other five-year-old.

Tom buried his face in Harry's coat. His shoulders shook and finally there was a sob. The boy understood completely. He had grandparents and a father somewhere out there and neither had wanted him or his mother. In a way it was worse than having no one at all.

Harry wrapped the boy into his arms and murmured: "I am here. I'll always be here. I like you lots, Tom. You are my son now."

The boy just continued crying.

Harry feared that was long overdue.

Tom was overwhelmed by his birthday and Christmas. One party at lunch, a family gathering in the evening, another party on the next day – he was running around

shouting, crashed into things and couldn't sit still for a minute. In the middle of Christmas day, Harry decided to excuse them both, took Tom to his room and told him they would nap now.

That was greeted with curses, shouts, tears, Tom tearing at the closed door, throwing his little fists against Harry's legs and finally screaming at the top of his lungs before dropping on the bed, sobbing uncontrollably before falling into a dead sleep. Harry weathered it stoically. James had had such episodes often until he was seven or eight, it wasn't unusual. Albus had only had one or two in his life, so Harry looked forward to only a few from Tom. Him and Albus were quite similar in character.

Harry had decided to put a rocking chair into his son's room, so he sat down on that one and decided that a nap really was a splendid idea, even for him. He woke to Margret knocking at the door. She told them it was dinner time and Harry decided that waking Tom was beneficial if he wanted any sleep in the night.

"Hey, son. Wakie-wakie." He saw Tom scrunch his nose. "It's dinner time. Everyone's waiting. Margret made a lovely roast. Isn't it a wonderful smell?"

"I'm tired", they boy mumbled.

"You can go back to sleep after dinner. Come on now."

Tom sat up, his eyes still half-shut. He slipped out of the bed and asked: "Can I go like this?"

"Of course you can." Harry held out his hand for the boy. "Did you notice the wonderful smell?"

"I'm hungry."

"That's good, there are lots and lots of food. I think there will be gravy and coal slaw. Margret's been cooking for hours."

"I wanted to help." Tom pouted.

"You had too much energy to be helpful."

The raven-haired boy suddenly stopped and looked up at Harry with big, fearful eyes.

"What is it?" Harry knelt down in front of him.

"Did ... did I scream at you? And hit you?" Tom's voice trembled.

"You were a bit out of it, yeah. I stopped you too late. With growing up, you'll have to learn to notice before you reach the stage where you lose control over your emotions. It's best to take a breather then."

"I'm sorry." He looked close to tears, completely horrified by what he had done.

"It happens to the best of us." Harry patted his head. "You'll learn."

"I've never done something like that."

"I'm sure you have." He picked up the boy and brought him into the dining room.

"Good evening, everyone."

"Good evening!" Everyone chorused with big smiles.

"I smell a wonderful roast. Who made what today?" He sat Tom in his seat and took his own.

"Oh, Richard made the coal slaw and helped with the gravy. The girls made the filling and I prepared the goose. It was a team effort."

"Dorothea folded the napkins and Laurette polished the silver", Brea added.

"You all worked hard today. Let's enjoy your efforts. Thank you for being such a great team." He smiled at them all. "Tom, you say today's grace."

"Bless us, o Lord, and these, thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty. Through Christ, our Lord ... and I am sorry I was a bad boy today. Amen."

„Amen.“ Everyone answered and more than one smiled.

"Thank you, Tom." Harry smiled at him.

"Now, let's have the man of the house cut the roast." Margret held out a two-pointed fork and a knife for him.

"Me? Oh, what honor." He stood up and began to carve the goose. "Please don't laugh at me, I'm not sure I ever did this before."

The youngsters grinned, especially when Margret had to come to his aid. They all laughed in the end and Harry was pretty sure he had ruined the table-cloth forever. But everyone got served a bit of goose with him and Margret getting one each of the legs and Tom and Brea getting the wings. Richard smiled like a loon to get a big piece of goose breast. Dorothea and Laurette who were still a bit new to being treated like family instead of dirt just stared at the big piece of meat they got each. Even though they had spent the whole day preparing a meal for everyone of them, they still looked as if they hadn't believed in actually getting to eat it.

But all in all, Harry had only heard good things about them. They had learned from Brea and were diligent workers. Harry only controlled their end product and seldom had to add changes. More and more, Brea seemed to become friends with both of them. It was only a matter of time before he expected them to head out to town and meet with the local boys. Richard had started going out which had done him a lot of good. Instead of a lanky, shy teenager, he was growing into his body. Margret also included him more which ensured his place in the family.

Life seemed well enough.

Dear Albus,

things are progressing well. I took charge of my little devil and it turns out he can be an angel. A cunning, rather ruthless angel sometimes, but it would not have expected otherwise. I write to you on his behalf. His mother was a witch by the name of Merope Gaunt. Did she visit Hogwarts? Are there any photos of her? Is there anything you can tell me about her?

Yours truly, Grenmore

Harry spent the next few days mostly indoors. The yule days were cold and harsh. Richard and him went out a few times to get more wood and Tom sometimes traveled along and ran back to the house with the wood they had hacked. The girls worked on their embroidery skills in the meantime. He asked them to think of an advertisement for getting new workers for their factory. Maybe an older woman and a man. The kids needed more role-models.

He also taught them a bit more about business as well as having some poem reading circles in the evening. As he had only visited normal school for five years as well, it wasn't much that he could teach them. By now all were able to read and write, do calculations and were able to speak posh English instead of the street accent some had before. He thought about hiring a real teacher but all of them had jobs and he did not expect any of them to want to study. Even if – by the time they would be able to visit a university, this country would be at war. He might be drafted back into the army. Darn, Richard might be drafted. At least Tom was safe.

Maybe he should spend a few days learning more about the army in case this happened. He had been a general before – what did a general even do? Okay, he ordered people around, sure, but with what? And how? Harry did not want to be the reason WWII was suddenly lost instead of won. He should really look into that next

year.

All in all, it was a quiet and peaceful time that they spent together. The years turned and they celebrated with a healthy soup. It did not sit well with Harry that some people were freezing and dying out there but what was he to do? He neither wanted to go into politics nor have people notice him by becoming a prominent figure in London. So no fundraising, no benefiz galas, simply laying low and giving Tom a nice home-life. So he was wholly unprepared for his son's request: "Can we go look for my father?"

He must have blinked owlishly because Tom averted his gaze and shrunk into himself in fear of rejection. "You mean Tom Riddle senior?"

"Yes ... is it bad that I want to meet him?"

"Everyone wants to meet and know their parents, that is quite normal." Harry remembered his own childhood in painstaking clarity. "I just fear you might be met with rejection."

"I am aware." Tom looked up, much too old eyes in a face too young to take on the world. "But, I mean ... I still have you, right? So if he does not like me, I can still stay with you?"

"Always, Tom." Harry picked up the boy and sat him on his lap. "When one is still young, the world seems so easy. Parents are loving people, the give you eternal happiness. Except if they are bad parents. But growing up means meeting a lot of parents and one learns that there are all kinds of parents. Loving their child is only one aspect. Some parents believe in punishment with beatings or starving."

"Like the nuns?" Tom's voice trembled.

"Yes, I think some of them believed that to be the right way. It does not mean they did not love you as well, just that they used different methods than me for example."

"I don't think any of them loved us. Except for Sister Henriette maybe. She sang songs with us and put us to bed."

"She believed in that way. People believe in all kinds of things. God or fate or magic. Some might exist, some may not. Believes shape feelings but some things may exist at the same time and that might not make sense to one so young as you."

"Like what?" Tom looked up curiously.

"Your father might not want to have anything to do with you. He might also want you as an heir but not care for you. He might want you to live with him and beat you because he thinks that it is the right way. He might want to get to know you and then grow tired of it because not everyone likes to interact with kids. All kind of things might happen."

"You don't want me hurt, right?" Tom upped his chin. "I can take it, I'm strong."

"I don't doubt it. As long as you can return to me, I am sure you can look after yourself. You are a big boy after all." He tapped Tom's nose with his finger which made the boy giggle and scrunch up his face. "But that's the thing. I am your father by adoption. He is your father by blood. He has more rights than me if he decides to press his case. As long as you are this young, you would have no say in any of it. So if we went to find him now and he turns out to be someone that does not want the best for you, I might not be able to stop him. He could apply for custody of you, my adoption would be annulled and he would have every right. He could beat you or starve you and I would not be allowed to do anything about that."

"Oh." Tom looked at him with big eyes. "That's bad."

"Yes, it is ... so I am afraid of what would happen if we were to look for him now."

"I see." The boy hung his head. "I don't want to be away from you."

"I also want you here." Harry pet his head. "You are my precious son after all."

"When can we look for him? When am I old enough?"

"I'd have to ask a layer. Maybe twelve or fourteen, I don't know."

"But that's ages away!" Tom's pouty face was just too cute, Harry had to hug him for a minute. "Stop that, Dad!"

"Nope." Harry smiled into the black tresses. "I'll hug you until you remember how young you are."

"I am six years old already!"

"Yes, you are." Harry leaned back and looked Tom in the eyes. "This will be an exciting year. You'll start school and it will make you smarter and more knowledgeable than even me."

Tom just grinned like the tomboy that often hid behind the well-mannered facade.

Harry held his cheeks with both of his hands. "You are important to me, Tom. I don't want to lose you."

His face became serious and his eyes glistened with unshed tears.

"Ask me again when you are older. I don't want to keep your father from you. I just don't want to lose you or see you get hurt." He kissed the boy's forehead. "I hope you understand."

"Sure do, Dad." Still Tom's voice choked up. He looked away, so that Harry would not see his tears but the hands on the boy's cheeks got wet.

He gently pulled him back into a hug.

He direly hoped he had done the right thing.

Dear Grenmore,

I was happy to hear from you again. I had feared that you had met another accident. Thank you for trying your best for a better future. Now, back to your question. I started as a teacher at Hogwarts in 1921 at 30 years of age. I wanted to teach Care for Magical Creatures but alas, they made me a teachers for Charms and Transfiguration. Right now it's Transfiguration. I'd rather teach Ancient Runes by now, it's a fascinating subject really. Anyway, when I came to Hogwarts, Merope Gaunt was in her fifth year. She was a rather unremarkable Slytherin. Most of her peers mocked her for her run-down wardrobe and her unfortunate looks. She had one bad eye that squinted and crooked teeth. She did not speak much. I talked with her Head of House because she sometimes walked strangely when she came back after the holidays. I thought it might be domestical abuse but the teacher waved me off. She came from an old and noble lineage linked to Salazar Slytherin. She wore his locket proudly. I think her parents wanted her to be courted but being a sullen and plain girl, she was unable to draw attention to herself. She seems to have been rather good at Potions but Charms wasn't her strength. I was her Charms professor at the time. I think I would have taught her some spells to make herself a bit prettier if I had taught Transfiguration at the time. I don't believe in beautifying oneself but she seemed to anguish a lot over her looks and thought herself a hopeless case. She could have done better with a slight boost in self-confidence. I am happy to hear she has found an husband and born a son. Though your words "taking charge" imply that you might have adopted the boy? Does this mean that Merope died already? What happened to the father?

Yours truly, Albus

P.S.: I looked for a graduation photograph and attached a copy. It's the only one I could find. She did not win any awards or otherwise made a name of herself.

Well, Merope was one ugly witch. Harry looked at the photograph and completely understood what Dumbledore meant about beauty charms. Hermione had had those ugly front teeth and corrected them somewhere during their school career. He could not remember when but one day they were simply gone. She had also had frizzy hair with unruly curls that changed into a beautiful mane somewhere along the line. He had seen the same happen to other girls and even some boys. Merope had teeth so crooked she did not seem able to close her lips over them. A long lower jaw, an underdeveloped middle face with a pudgy nose and her cross-eyed gaze would not win her any beauty contests. It reminded him of some pictures of old Lords and Ladys and he asked himself for a moment if there might have been incest in her family. It seemed likely with those pure-blooded fanatics. He poked his brain for information about Merope's mother but could not find any. From the memories he had gotten from Dumbledore, he knew Merope's brother and father weren't exactly smart people. There was hardly a thing to say in her favor. How should he tell Tom about that?

The little imp was having a snow-ball fight with the others. He observed them for a minute before deciding that tonight was soon enough. First he had to thank Dumbledore for his help. He hoped it had not been a bad idea to tell the man which boy to watch out for. On the other hand, the man would most likely have been the one to tell Tom that he was a wizard at the age of eleven and he would have recognized Grenmore Horton's name. Certainly, he would have drawn a connection. This way Tom might gain some support instead of suspicion thrown his way. For all his strengths, Albus Dumbledore was obviously discriminating against Slytherins.

And Tom would be one without doubt. The little charmer still got everything he wanted out of Margret. Sometimes just by smiling, asking nicely, coyly, sometimes demanding in an imitation of a haughty voice. Sometimes Harry thought that must have been what Draco Malfoy sounded like as a child. Tom loved the fact that he was a rich man's son while all others were people working for his father. Harry still did his best to temper his arrogance into acknowledging the responsibility that came with it. Teaching him business seemed to do the trick for now. He let Tom help with when he did the books, receiving orders, organizing their shipment and writing diplomatic correspondence. He tried teaching his son that being a boss just meant doing another job – not a better one, just a different one and one that required overview and good decision-making skills. He often asked the boy for his opinion to see how much of the concept he had already grasped.

Still, most days he just wanted to look at a laughing, playing child. A few times a day, it was a whiny, sulky or angry version of said child but even the most stubborn mind could learn. James had been a lot harder to teach compassion to. Just like his namesake he had been a bully at heart and it had taken rather a lot to curb those tendencies. Hateful loudmouths only lasted in people's grace for a small amount of time. People grew bored with it rather fast once they grew up.

He missed Ginny. Good, how much he missed her. She was the fierce presence by his side, the one to scold and order everyone around and grow so incredibly shy when he looked at her with adoring eyes once she went into fury-mode. She was a completely different mother than her own. She cooked and stuffed them all with food left and right but she wasn't all hugs and smiles. Having a smile from her was a high praise and

they all tried to make her proud, Harry included. She was fierceness and fire, only seldom mellowing down to smoldering embers. Harry was the one who hugged and cuddled, who read stories and sang. He did not like the role as disciplinarian but sometimes she had him make the decision on tricky matters.

He missed her flaming soul, her witty input, her loyalty and love. He missed her presence at his side. He missed the joy she had brought into his life, he missed their children most of all. Would he really never see her again? With his eyes closed, he let out a wary sigh. One day he would see her again, he was sure. Somewhere on the other side.

Kapitel 6: Sixth chapter

"Tom, would you come with me to the study after dinner?"

"Sure." His son looked up with eyes sparking with curiosity. At dinner, he threw him glances every once in a while, puzzling over his surprise.

What warmed Harry's heart was that never once did Tom look fearful. Since they talked about different methods of raising children and Harry told him that he did not believe in corporal punishment, Tom had lost his last bit of apprehension. Sometimes he was cheeky, sometimes angry, sometimes he stomped his foot in frustration or ran into his room in disappointment. What had been a quietly calculating mind before was now a slightly impulsive youngster with a bit of a superiority complex.

They went up to the study after dinner and Tom seemed to become impatient on the way. "What are we gonna do? Did we get a new order? Did someone apply?"

"Today it's not about the company." Harry opened the study and let Tom in. He had taken to locking it since a guest had wandered in here at the birthday party. "I have another surprise."

"Good or bad?" Even though he asked that, Tom grinned.

"It depends on you, I guess." Harry pointed him at the settee on which Tom normally sat reading a book or counting things. "I got a letter this morning from the school I told you about."

"The one I'll go to now? Or the one my mom went to?"

"The one your mom went to. One of the teachers is friend of mine and I asked him about your mother. He sent this back." He gave the letter to Tom.

That one read it aloud: "I wanted to teach Care for Magical Creatures but alas, they made me a teachers for Charms and Transfiguration. Is it a magic school, Dad?"

Oh damn. He should have thought about that before. The cat was out of the bag, it seemed. He whispered: "Yes, it is. That is why it is secret. Never tell anyone."

"Okay." He continued reading. The great thing about young kids: They believed in magic. "She was a rather unremarkable Slytherin. What is a Slytherin?"

"They have a house system because it's a boarding school. They have four houses. Slytherin is the house for cunning and ambitious people."

"So you would have been a Slytherin." Tom nodded. "Me too."

Did he give off the vibe of being cunning and ambitious? Really? He always thought that the hat had wanted to put him in Slytherin because of Voldemort's soul ... uh, it was a bit strange to think about the fact that he had carried a part of this boy's soul for all of his youth.

Tom had continued reading: "Most of her peers mocked her for her run-down wardrobe and her unfortunate looks. She had one bad eye that squinted and crooked teeth. She did not speak much. Dad, my mom sounds like one of the beggars in downtown London."

"She was no beauty, it happens. She gave birth to a very handsome son though. It's not important how she looked." Well, it was a bit but ... he should not be so superficial.

"I thought it might be domestic abuse – what is that?"

Maybe he should not have given him the letter. This was a bit much to explain. How to go about it? "Do you remember how I told you that some parents believe in corporal punishment?"

"Yeah ... that's not abuse, is it?"

"No. But sometimes such parents hit their children even if they did nothing. Then it is not punishment, it's abuse."

"Oh ... so my grandparents on both side weren't good people."

"Again, it is just speculation. We do not know the truth. It might be something different." Most likely not, so Harry knew that he wasn't very convincing.

"I think her parents wanted her to be courted but being a sullen and plain girl, she was unable to draw attention to herself. What is courting?"

"They wanted her to find a husband at school."

"But my father wasn't at that school, right?"

"Right. She met him in her hometown."

"Did her parents want her to have a magic husband?" Damn, the boy was fast. How did such a plain woman bore such a handsome and quick-witted child? If the boy's father was the same, no wonder his parents did not make him marry her.

"I believe so. The Gaunts are the last heirs of Slytherin, it's a noble bloodline full of highly skilled wizards and witches. They most likely wanted her to marry a wizard from another old bloodline."

"But she was very ugly." It sounded like Tom was just stating a fact. "So she took someone without magic instead ... do you think she bewitched him?"

"That is possible." He knew for a fact that she did but he would not tell Tom that about his mother. "It would have been a despicable act though. Forcing yourself on someone like that, it's ..." Rape? Yes, it was. Rape and enslavement. No wonder Tom's father walked out on her. "It's the same as being a boss. Having power means having responsibility. One should not use their powers to hurt or domineer or intimidate."

"Hm ... I have to think about that." Tom stared into space for a moment before taking up the letter again. "What happened to the father? Who knows?" He huffed in annoyance. "One day I'll ask him and find out what my mother did and why he left her. But if she really bewitched him to be with her against his will, I think I understand why he did not want to marry her." That were a lot of long sentences for a boy this small. Every time Harry heard him speak, he was amazed how well he had adapted to this high-born way of speaking. Tom did not stutter, did not mispronounce, he did not even speak short sentences. He had a classy way of talking and most sentences felt thought through. He would be a great conversationalist once he was older. He was already reading enough books to have a few topics he could speak about.

After reading the post scriptum, Tom looked up at him inquisitively and Harry gave him the photography. It was a black and white one printed on yellowish paper with Merope barely moving. Except for the robes it could have been a photo for prison entrance. She neither smiled nor winked nor blinked in it. She was ugly and did nothing to make herself more inviting in any way.

Tom stared at the picture and finally lay it upside down onto the small end table. "She is ... ugly."

Should he deny that? There really was no denying that. She was. Were there any good points about her? "Professor Dumbledore said that she was good at potions. She must have been intelligent."

"And cunning and ambitious. Did she become a potioneer? Is that a job?"

"A potions master. I think she might have done that but she fell in love with your father and had you right after school."

"So she died a few months after this was taken." Tom put a finger on the back of the photography. "That's a sad and short life. It sounds neither cunning nor ambitious."

Harry secretly feared that viciousness and haughtiness had put her in Slytherin rather than the other attributes. Every house had their dark side. Gryffindor had arrogance and stupidity as well as a high tendency to breaking rules.

"Again, one should not judge before one does not know the whole truth."

"I don't think I'll ever know the whole truth." There were tears glistening in Tom's eyes. "The more I know, the more I despise my blood family. I don't think I want to know more. I don't want to meet my father, I don't want to meet any grandparents."

He looked up at Harry. "Can't I be Tom Horten? I don't want to be Tom Riddle."

There was a pang of feelings in Harry's breast, some good, some bad. Sadness was hovering over all of them. What a sad life. Tom only wanted to belong. Not to anyone, but to Harry. To someone he liked, he loved. Harry understood that perfectly. All those nights he had dreamed that someday someone would show up that wanted him. Some long-forgotten uncle, a fairy godmother, a grandmother with a house full of cats. He would have moved in with Mrs. Figg if she had wanted him. A wealthy dad with hugs and playmates would have been his ultimate dream and could only be topped by a loving mother.

But Riddle was his family name. He had a father out there, another wealthy aristocrat, and this time he hopefully would not seek him out to kill him. He might have a chance to meet his family one day and be a part of them. But not if he changed his name.

"You don't want me?" Tom asked aghast.

"What? Heavens, no, you are my son. I was just thinking." Harry finally pulled the boy onto his lap and hugged him. "Of course you can have my name. I just thought that it might be good to keep the Riddle name if you want to be part of their family one day. I don't want to keep you from them forever, just until you are able to protect yourself. They might not like the fact that you changed your name. It might even be the reason they turn you out."

"If they don't like me because of my name, I don't think I need them." Tom upped his nose, a haughty expression on this chubby boy's face.

"You are awfully young to make such a decision."

"Oliver Twist was as young as I when he decided to live on the streets." The boy crossed his arms. "I can decide on my name."

"Alright, young man." It would also prevent a lot of abuse from classmates finding out that Tom was adopted, had a history of poverty and famish and only got to be a young lord by happenstance. "Then I will inquire how to change your name to mine."

Tom just grinned his Cheshire cat smile and hugged him hard. Hopefully it was the right decision. It was so easy to go wrong somewhere on the way. Harry tried to have faith.

Changing one's name was a hard process. As a British citizen, it was not hard at all. But in 1916 there was a law that forbid foreigners from changing their names in Britain. Tom was no foreigner but Harry had no proof of that. He needed the birth records for a formal adoption with a name change. What was even more curious in his opinion was that adoption only became legal in 1926. It also meant that even the major had no idea how to do it and had asked him to go to the London authorities.

So when he went to London with their wares and drove by the orphanage after concluding his business. The old building looked as decrepit as before, a part of the roof carved in even more after the rains and snow of winter. The nuns kindly asked for money, sorry about the fact that the rains and the Thames and whatnot else regularly destroyed their records. An older nun wrote a note that she had been there when

Merope Gaunt gave birth to Tom Vorlost Riddle on December 24th in 1926 and that said child had been adopted by him. She sent him to the birth record office to try and get a copy of the record they had filled back then.

Said office did not seem to be in high demand, maybe because the clerk was a jerk. It took over two hours to find the record and quite a bit of money to get a copy. Harry finally decided to look for a hotel and continue tomorrow because the ride and the bureaucracy had tired him out. He was just exiting the records building when a fine looking gentleman exclaimed: "Grenmore, is that you? I haven't seen you in months!" "Ah, I have been busy. It's good to see you." They shook hands but no spark of recognition ignited. "How are you doing?"

"As well as can be expected. How long are you in town?"

"Just until tomorrow. I was thinking about retiring for the day, it was long and exhausting."

"Oh bugger, it's only four p.m., that is no time to go home like an old man. How about a drink? We can speak about our old days!" Judging by his looks, the man was a bit older than Grenmore. Maybe an old friend from the army?

"Ah, I fear I have to decline. I have to rise early tomorrow."

"How come? You did not take back that resignation now, did you?" The man actually seemed concerned, maybe he had been a good friend.

"No, not at all. I started a business, it's going well. I also adopted a young boy as my son. I have to finish the paperwork with the authorities tomorrow."

"Oho, a son." His look was somewhere between impressed and spooked. "Who would have thought, the great general Grenmore Horten decides to become a parent ... I hope your wife is a lovely, cheerful thing. You'll ruin a boy with your somber moods and the humor of a dead cat." He must have been a really good friend to insult him to his face like that. "Oh, don't look at me like that, you know it's true. People fear you, Grenmore. They have reason to."

"I changed those last few months." Authoritative and intimidating? Harry was not enough of an actor for that. "I can play on a carpet, make cooing noises and weather a temper tantrum."

The other man laughed wholeheartedly and said: "You even found your humor!"

"It's important to laugh about things, even oneself, when raising a child."

"Sounds like you studied a book on parenting. That's so you, Grenmore." The man lay a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Come on, one drink? I'll even drive you to your hotel if you don't feel like it."

"In my car?"

"Of course in your car. I am no high and mighty general that can buy a car. But I could feel great for a moment by driving yours!"

"Do you have a license?"

"I was your driver once, you know? You think the army would let me drive you without a license?"

"Maybe." Harry shrugged his shoulders. "That's the thing though ... my memory is kind of hazy. I keep forgetting things. I know that we are good friends but I don't even remember your name."

"Really?" The man stopped in his tracks, the laughter falling from his lips into a dead silence. "Oh, that's ... that ... have you seen a doctor?"

"Yes. They think it's permanent but it should not get any worse. I can remember new memories."

"That must suck." What a sentence for a gentleman in upper London. "So ... anyway,

my name is Edgar."

"Nice to meet you again, Edgar."

"I was your second in command, your trustee, your driver, your friend ... well, a lot of things really." Sadness had come over him and made Edgar lower his gaze. "Do you remember any of that?"

"No, I am sorry."

"Do you think ... no, forget it." The man shook his head. "I guess that's a theme. You forget. I am not even sure if I should believe you." He snorted. "Really, you forgot my birthday, you forgot our anniversary, you forgot about every important thing we ever had and now you conveniently forgot about me completely."

Oh ... that sounded more like an ex-lover. Had Grenmore Horten been a homosexual? As a general? He was pretty sure the army would flay him alive for that.

"Were you the reason I quit?" Maybe he should use this opportunity.

"Are you serious?" Edgar's gaze was pained. "You really forgot?"

"I am sorry I did not write all these months. I did not remember you. It's not only you, it's most of my time with the army."

"You just forgot all the blood and the gore and the friends we lost and went to play house. Great." Edgar sighed deeply. "I am sorry. You made it clear you did not want further contact with me. I just thought ... well, one can try. I miss you, Gren."

"I miss having a confidante. I don't even remember my friends, Edgar." Harry felt slightly nauseous about using this man's feelings but this was hitting gold. "I don't remember my family. I am too afraid to ask because I don't want people to know and treat me like a nutcase. Do I even have family?"

"Shit, Gren." Edgar took a step near, raised his hand but stopped the motion. There weren't many people around but this was still out in the open. "You have amnesia."

"Yes, I do."

"Damn it." He seemed to think for a moment. "How about this: I'll drive you to a nice hotel a bit out of town and we do have that talk about old times? I'll tell you about your life."

"I do get why the me before had feelings for you."

"Really?" Edgar looked rather shell-shocked at hearing this? "You ... mean that?" His breath was shaky. "The old you would never have said that."

"The old me seemed to have been an asshole." Harry smiled encouragingly. "Just ... I don't remember you, okay? Don't expect to rekindle an old flame."

"No, that's ... don't worry, I understand. I am basically a stranger for you." Even though he said that, Edgar's eyes glistened with tears. "Where did you park your car?"

"Over there. Come on." Harry surrendered his keys to the man and went to sit in the passenger seat. This was taking a jump but Edgar seemed trustworthy. His intuition had not failed him most of the time. He had lived through a war, just not the one Edgar knew.

The other man started the car and pulled onto the road. He was silent until the traffic grew lighter. "It was the peace. I mean, why you quit. You could not stand the peace."

"Why that? Peace is a happy time."

"It is ... the old Gren just wasn't suited to live happily ever after."

Harry snorted. "There is no happily ever after. War always looms on the horizon."

"You used to say that, yes." Edgar seemed highly-strung. "But you were disappointed it never broke out."

"There will be another war soon and I plan on enjoying the time I have until then."

"Before, the things you enjoyed were war and maybe sex. You weren't the emotional

type."

"That is what you liked?" Harry raised an eyebrow.

"I liked your intellect, your ruthlessness and your single-minded focus. Especially on me." Edgar grinned a wolf-like smile full of teeth. It sounded like they had had great sex but nothing else.

"I guess I am different now."

"I gathered. You seem mellow. More blunted blade than sharp steel."

"I learned to enjoy peace, I guess." Did he? Had he lost his edge? Ginny and the kids had been good for him but some nights, he remembered the constant fear, the highs of adrenaline, sparkly curses flying against his shields. Always running for his life, a desperate and wild fight for survival. Would he have to live through the same again?

They fell silent again. Edgar pulled up in front of a homely inn, a tavern with four to six rooms maximum. He even took Harry's suitcase without much ado and held the door open for him. Edgar seemed to have been something like a personal assistant, a dedicated and hard-working man. For someone like him to look up to Grenmore Horten, the body he owned now must have been a formidable man. Harry felt a pang of guilt. What had happened to the soul that had inhabited this body? Where was he gone? Had he been world-weary enough that it had fled this body?

The owner greeted them with a smile and a hearty: "Good to see you two lads back. It's been a couple years, ain't it?"

"Sure was, Arnie. Same old?"

"I've got a good one, wait a moment." The man, that had been manning the tavern bar, rummaged behind it and pulled out a bottle of amber liquid. "Ain't this a beauty?"

"You're the best!"

"Want it all?"

"Definitely. Glasses and keys and we'll be on our way."

"There you go." He put everything on the counter.

Edgar gave him some money before taking the whiskey but Harry stopped him and carried the whiskey and glasses himself.

"Ah, sweet on him for once? It's about time." It wasn't a glare but the owner seemed a bit hostile when it came to Harry.

"Arnie", Edgar snarled in a warning.

"Not my business, I know, lad. Not at all." The owner held up both hands.

"Thank you, Arnie", Harry said, nodded to him and looked at Edgar to bring them to their room. They went up some stairs before he dared to ask. "Was this a place you went with me to ... well?"

"Arnie is a good soul. We're friends. Please excuse him, he never approved of ... Gren." Edgar did not look at him, he just continued to a door and opened it with the key. "The important thing is that he knows to stay quiet. We sometimes met people here for secret meetings."

"It is not advisable to put so much trust in one man. Knowing secret contacts and ruinous information regarding our work relationship, it would be a disaster if he fell into enemy hands or decided to denounce us."

Edgar who had already proceeded into the room shuddered. His gaze was pained when he turned around and said: "That is exactly what you said before."

"It is common sense." Harry put down the whiskey and glasses. "You screen out and going by the rumors you know who squealed."

In a flash, Edgar had one arm around Harry, kissed him and closed the door behind them with one hand. That for not rekindling an old flame. Harry sighed in annoyance

into the kiss and put a hand on Edgar's upper body to disengage.

"I'm sorry." That one slumped into himself. "I am so sorry. I know you said ... it was just too much of a reminder. I love you so much, Gren."

"For what it is worth, I am sorry to disappoint you. Maybe it was a bad idea to choose a place full of memories."

"I'd hoped you would remember something." Edgar sighed and sat down by the table to pour whiskey. "This was the only place we had where you did not have to gag me. This was where I saw you most relaxed."

"Sounds like the old Gren liked you." Harry sat down as well. "Listen, Edgar ... I know that it hurts but your Gren is gone. I haven't been able to remember anything for six months. My lips don't remember, my body does not remember. The sooner you can accept it, the less it will hurt."

"Right now it hurts like hell." Edgar certainly looked like it. He downed a glass of whiskey.

"Easy there." Harry pulled the bottle out of reach. "Alcohol should be savored."

"I don't know how often I told you that. You listened less and less."

"Well, I am sober. So don't fall prey to it yourself." Harry tried a sip. It really was good whiskey. "Tell me about us. When did we meet?"

"1917." Edgar closed his eyes for a moment. "You had been with the army since 1913. You climbed the ranks, mostly because our men were dying like flies. You weren't liked by your soldiers but you were feared. You shot down every man that ran from the enemy. When my group was sent to join yours, your men thought about mutiny."

"Lovely." Grenmore Horten sounded like a sane Voldemort. Oh the joy.

"I was placed as your second in command, so I told the men I would speak with you. I thought you would murder me when I told you the situation. First me, then one man after another, asking if anyone had anything to say." Edgar smiled like that was a good memory. "I had never met a man this intense and fierce. I fell in love with you that night."

"So Gren ... I did not kill you?"

"You fucked me against a wall and told me to talk down our men for a week because they would not live longer than that anyway. You were right. Five days later, most of them died in a bombardment. You saved my life twice that night. I stuck like glue to you ever since."

"It was fourteen years between the war and my retirement. You said I grew disappointed?"

"You were promoted again and again. It was meetings, planning, espionage. Stocking up again after the war, installing defense mechanisms, training new recruits. We were busy at first. Then there were no new projects, just the same old. Some exciting rumors sometimes but never anything concrete. The markets crashed, famine raged, they tore down what we had build. We argued again and again but they sent the troops home, stopped maintaining the defenses. You were too fierce for politics, they called you a bloodthirsty animal. You grew more and more resentful and started drinking too much. You became rough with me, so ... when you decided to quit and leave me, I didn't stop you. I hurt all over."

"I am sorry about that."

"It feels like you weren't the one doing it. Maybe this amnesia is a blessing. It's like you have a second chance. I had hoped you would write me after calming down and finding something to do with your life."

"You'd really take back a man that hurt you like that in self-destruction?"

"Maybe." Edgar shrugged with a shoulder. "Probably." He grabbed the whiskey and Harry let him. "Gren was all I knew. I went to the army to run from my sexuality. He was my first, I wanted him to be my last. It's been fifteen years, you know?"

"How old are you now?"

"34. You are 38 by the way. Your birthday is April 23th."

"I found my passport. I also found a house at my address in Bath."

"Oh, the mansion? Is your mother still alive?" Edgar looked up with a smile. He savored the alcohol this time.

"If she lived there, then the answer is no. There was a maid that only knew me."

"You fired all your servants? Poor Henry. Your butler had been a good man. But true, you never liked them much. You would never say why but you were full of resentment. I always thought your father might have been abusive and you resented them for not helping."

"We'll never know now, so your guess is as good as any." Grenmore's life sounded far from happy. Maybe he really had been world-weary when Harry took his body. He should have appreciated this young man more. Maybe you had to die once to really enjoy life.

"So your mother is dead. Your father was a soldier too, he died in World War I. You have a sister that became a nun. She lives in a cloister up in Scotland and has cut ties with the family."

"Sounds like a happy family." Harry sighed. "So there is no one I have to think of."

"You said that you have your own family now? That was fast." Edgar watched him, his eyes heavy with anguish.

"I did not marry. I don't think I'll ever be able to." Even though it was for different reasons than Edgar thought. This way at least, no woman would ever show up claiming to be a fiancée, having born a child by him or anything else. "I adopted a five-year-old boy from an orphanage when I came looking for workers for a factory."

Edgar blinked in surprise which lowered the anguish by miles. "I don't even know where to start asking. You opened a factory?"

"Sewing uniforms for the army. I employ a lot of youths whose parents died in the famine." Or through other means, he never asked. "Right now it's one boy and five girls. I plan on hiring one or two adults as well. They need a few more role-models than just Margret and me. Margret is my maid, she is seventeen. The boy, Richard, doubles as the gardener. The girls help around the house when they are off work. I started with half a day of work and half a day of school and housework. Now that all can read and write, they work half a day, do their chores in the house and have the rest off."

"Wow ... from demon general to a goody-two-shoes boss. Those are splendid working conditions for a bunch of orphans. You even schooled them."

"They are humans, same as we are. They should have the same opportunities in life than we have. Being a seamstress is good work but it's not for everyone. I want them to have choices. I could be drafted back in every day, I want them cared for."

"True enough." Edgar sighed deeply. "They might hate you but in wartime they would order you back within a blink of an eye. You are one of the best."

"Where would they place me? I have a home to come back to now."

Edgar saddened, his gaze turning down. "There's no place for you but the front. You did not make friends in the higher offices, Gren. Even your title of general ... I don't think they would keep you here. They would send you back out, claiming they needed someone with the troops."

"I feared that." Harry closed his eyes. So World War II was waiting for him here. "Will you be with me again?"

"Nothing would keep me from your side, Gren." Edgar lay a hand on his.

"Even if I don't sleep with you?" Harry felt a bit uncomfortable with the gesture but he never had a problem with Charlie's hugs, so why would he flinch from Edgar's touches? It wasn't like the man would try to force himself on him.

"Yeah. Even without sex, we are a great team. Fifteen years of working together, you know? I miss your snarky comments."

"Maybe you won't like them once you have nothing to take the edge off afterwards?"

"Gren, I tried to leave you so often, it never worked. This time as well, I could not forget about you. I tried to sleep with others, it just doesn't work. It's you or no one."

"Edgar, really, we won't go back to the way we were before. I mean it. Please don't hurt yourself like this." Because Harry could not do that. He loved Ginny. Even if he never saw her again, she was the only one for him. Maybe it was the same with Edgar and Gren. Why would he disregard Edgar like this when he felt the same? For Harry, it was Ginny or no one. For Edgar, this person was Grenmore Horten.

Edgar just smiled at him and Harry sighed.

"Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Just if you can think of something I still need to know. Old enemies, other ex-lovers, a slighted ex-fiancee. Money I owe or lend, businesses or houses I need to maintain."

"If there were other ex-lovers, I'd kill you." Edgar grinned like a wolf again. He had a nice exterior but his core was steel. Unbending and unyielding, Grenmore Horten had been fortunate to find such a partner. "The enemies are more than I can even tell you about. You have slighted and offended about anyone you ever worked with. They wanted to expel you often enough but in the end, they never dared." The smile mellowed a bit. "I have no idea about your money, we never talked about that. Mine went to my sister, yours to your mother. We only lived with the barest minimum mostly. We had a flat in London but canceled that when you decided to end it. So there is only your mansion and my sister's house. You gifted everything in our flat to me. I have a few things that belong to you, some honor medals you scoffed at, stuff like that. I also own your uniforms."

"My factory can sew new uniforms for me if they were needed. Just like my old self, I don't value medals. So keep my stuff or throw it out, that's your prerogative."

"You really are the same at heart." Edgar supported his head with one arm. "This new you isn't too bad either. Not as fascinating but a lot more approachable."

"Still not interested, Edgar." Harry sighed. He really felt for this man. He would do anything to have Ginny back with him. "I think I'll go to sleep soon. It's late now and I have to do the paperwork tomorrow."

"May I accompany you? I was always the one to do the talking. Diplomacy is not your forte."

"Don't you have work?"

"I quit the army with you. It's a theme, you know?"

Harry just shook his head with a fond smile. "Are you planning on following me home?"

"I just may." Edgar grinned. "I still haven't asked about that son of yours. He must be a mini-wolf to meet your criteria for a good son."

"He's a snake. Charming until he strikes. My pride and joy."

"I can't wait to meet him." Edgar stared at the bottle of whiskey. "You won't let me sleep here, will you?"

"You may book another room."

"Pity." He got up and walked a few steps. "Okay, I am steady enough for driving. I'll take your car and join you for breakfast again tomorrow? Let's say eight o'clock?"

"Please don't have an accident. You had two glasses of whiskey. You are not fit for driving."

"You could always fuck me to burn through the alcohol."

Harry just shook his head.

"Oh well. Then I'll have to take the road." Edgar blew him a kiss and took his coat. He turned to the door but froze for a second. "Gren?"

"Edgar?"

"You'll be here tomorrow, right?"

"Where would I be without my car? It's a sensible move to assure my compliance." His tone was light though. Edgar was very likable. Even if they would not be lovers, Harry was sure they could be good friends.

"Just ... don't leave me again, okay?" Edgar hunched in on himself. "I'll go before I'll get even more pathetic." Without waiting for a reply, he left the room and closed the door after him.

Harry just closed his eyes in pain.

He missed Ginny. So much.

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. Margret, 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.

Kapitel 8: Eighth chapter

Tom apologized earnestly. He not only gave back the drawing, he gifted Howard with his own drawing to show how sorry he was. Howard – who had looked like going into a fight – not only hugged Tom but also showed his cleft now that he was minus his first baby tooth. He told Tom about the tooth fairy and that she had given him money for the tooth. The could share that money and buy sweets and ask Victoria for an even cooler drawing.

Tom was over the moon and they did just that. The parents just smiled at them and waved them off to go about their business of becoming the two foremost drawing collectors. Harry just smiled at Tom's excitement that seemed genuine for once. Maybe he was on the right path, even if he was stern as hell and stricter than he had been with any of his own kids.

"Mister Horten? My name is Derrick Smith." The boy's father held out his hand.

"A pleasure to meet you, Mister Smith." Harry took it.

"You opened a sewing factory, didn't you? The one where only orphans work."

"Mostly, yes. My ex-colleague works there too and I want to hire a skilled older worker. Maybe a seamstress whose kids are out of the house. You don't happen to know someone like that, do you?"

"Oh, I am a seamstress", Mrs Smith answered.

"You still have to look after the kids, dear." Her husband didn't even look at her.

Harry noticed the hidden pout and a hint of bitterness though. "Splendid! Maybe you'd like a bit of work while the kids are in school? Do you have younger ones or is Howard your youngest?"

"He is but she may still get pregnant."

"It doesn't stop her from working now, does it?" Harry noticed how he liked the man less and less. His habit of ignoring his wife's wishes and not even asking for her opinion wasn't uncommon but still not appreciated.

"I don't want her to." The dislike seemed mutual. "We do not need your scraps."

"I am sure she does not need to work but maybe she wants to? I'd be indebted to her. A mother as good as her would have a great influence on my orphans, even if she just worked two hours a day. It is an offer and she may decide on it."

"She may not." Mr Smith snorted. "That's my decision to make."

Was it? Was there a law that women could only work with their husband's permission? Harry did not know but if that were true, it would be a disaster. Poor women! He would have to ask Edgar about it. He knew that this was the beginning of the women's movement but damn! He really did not like how men treated women. He wished for Ginny, breathing fire down their sorry necks.

"If that is how your relationship works, who am I to comment? Just note that women are treated differently in my household and if Tom ever stands up for your wife, please don't be surprised."

"Stand up for- are you-", the man spluttered. "No wonder that your son is such a pussy!"

"Excuse me?" Harry raised an eyebrow. "Men that stand up for women's rights as equals are pussies? Boys that know when they have done wrong and apologize are pussies?"

"Mathilda, I do not want you to speak to this man. I'll also forbid my son from playing

with yours."

"A pity after they just made up and obviously like each other. Don't you think you should reconsider if your vanity or your son's happiness is more important?"

"Don't you dare speak to me that way!"

Harry just sighed. "In that case, I apologize for my words. For me, my son's happiness is the most important thing and I do not want him to lose a friend due to my actions. I won't criticize how you handle your family again."

Mr. Smith just snorted and walked off. He shouted after his wife who had remained and stared at Harry like she had never seen someone like him. Maybe she never had. It saddened him.

He explained the situation at the dinner table to everyone, openly apologizing to Tom in case this cost him a friend and Mr. Smith would still forbid Howard from seeing Tom.

They boy looked thoughtful for a minute and said: "We went to his place after school and Mrs. Smith was really nice to me. She told me to become a man like my father and sent me off in the afternoon before Mr. Smith came back. I wondered about that."

"A lot of women are afraid of their husbands because they are abusive. Might be that he'll punish her if she keeps letting you see Howard."

"Is that allowed?" Tom looked up with something like disgust on his face.

"Sadly, yes, it still is. I hope they'll change those laws soon." Harry remembered how he had heard his aunt talking with her friends at teatime about the new law where woman were allowed to sue their husbands for rape. Before, woman agreed to all kinds of sex at all times just by marrying and sexual violence mostly stayed free of punishment. That was still about 60 years into the future!

"So what do we do? Does this mean I can't meet Howard anymore even though we made up?" Tom's hurt gaze cut into Harry's soul.

"You'll just continue being his friend. But if Mrs. Smith ever asks you to go somewhere else or meet Howard only at our place, you'll heed her wishes, okay?"

"Okay..." Tom looked to Edgar sitting beside him and whispered with him.

The other man just smiled and shook his head which had Tom pouting.

"Girls, are you all alright?" Harry looked at them one after another.

Most interestingly, it was the normally very shy Mary that squirmed for a moment before opening and closing her mouth for a bit. Harry looked at her patiently. Margret lay a hand on her shoulder and encouraged her to speak.

"Mister Horten ... you and Mister Edgar ... you are good men, right? You would treat your wives correctly?"

"I hope so." Harry looked at Edgar sideways for second, knowing that Grenmore Horten hadn't been a good boyfriend most of the time.

But Edgar was able to nod his head, so all in all he seemed to agree with Mary.

"They why aren't you married? Am I allowed to ask that?" Mary trembled at her own question.

Margret and Brea both bit their lips, Richard sent Edgar and Harry a panicked gaze. So they had all drawn their own conclusions.

"Of course you are. I won't ever punish anyone for asking a question. I might just tell that someone if a question is rude. This one isn't, Margret asked me the same last year. There is a woman that I loved once. She died and I can't even imagine having another. So that is why I am not married and why I never will."

Mary's lips formed an O before she stuttered: "I- I am sorry- sorry for bringing up ..."

Harry just nodded and closed his eyes for a moment. He asked back: "What brought up this question, Mary?"

"Oh! Oh ... well ..." She bit her lip and looked to Helen for support. "I wanted to know ... I mean ... there seem to be a lot of bad men and very few good ones. How do I spot a good one? What makes a man a good man?"

"Wow, okay ... that's a hard question." Devotion? Love? Respect? Trust? There were so many things. "Edgar, help me out."

"Talking about emotions isn't his forte sometimes." Edgar winked at Mary. "I think honesty and reliability are important. Sooner or later your partner will always find out who you are, it's the one person you can't and should not hide from. Your partner knows you best. He knows all your strengths and weaknesses. Someone that shows his character from the very beginning is trustworthy in my opinion. Someone that wears a public face and another one at home ... that hurts in the long run. If a boy behaves differently towards you in front of his friends, that's a no-go in my opinion."

"Acknowledgment and respect." Harry continued. "Oftentimes men go to work and woman care for children, the household and sometimes even the finances. That's a full-time job too. When men go to war, the women have the country running all on their own. To believe that women are less, work less, aren't as intelligent or as worthy is simply rude. A good man acknowledges that there would be no family and no home without his wife."

Edgar spoke up again: "A good man never hits his wife in anger, he does not belittle or demean his wife in earnestness. Sometimes when you have a fight, people are idiots in the heat of the moment. A good man is able to apologize and takes responsibility for his mistakes."

"And love of course." Harry smiled in remembrance. "Woman always have a lot on their minds and can multitask but men are pretty straightforward. They look at their woman and no matter how angry or hurt or annoyed you are, for a moment you only see how beautiful she is and it gives you a warm and fuzzy feeling in your chest. Then you have this goofy smile on your face" - most likely the exact same he was sprouting right now - "and your wife fondly calls you an idiot and sometimes she even forgives you."

"Goofy?" Edgar snorted at that. "I never heard that word before but it sure suits your expression."

"You see a man looking at you like that, like he would travel the sky for you, give you the stars and hang the moon at your request, you know you are loved."

There was a moment of silence before Margret said: "I don't think I ever saw a man looking like that."

"I saw Richard looking like that once." Brea poked that one in the ribs. "Who were you thinking about?"

"I ain't saying."

"Come on!"

"No." He blushed a very visible red. "I am not telling you."

"Have you confessed?" She seemed to fish for gossip.

"No." His gaze was trained on his plate. "That person is a lot older than me. They'll think me a mere child."

"Oh." Her gaze flickered to Edgar for a moment. "I see. Sorry for needling you like that."

Harry turned to Edgar: "I guess that's the most important. Have we forgotten something?"

"I don't think so." He smiled but it was strained and he would not look at Harry. Something seemed off about him. "I think I forgot something at the factory. I'll go for a walk, alright?"

Everyone nodded and told him to look after himself in the dark. Margret even offered to accompany him but he waved her off. So all the others started to clean up as usual. Harry and Tom often ended up either drying or putting away the dishes. By now, Margret had given up on trying to stop Harry from doing servant's work. She always thanked him though and this evening she even looked genuinely pleased. After most was done, she waved Tom and him off, so he could put his son to bed.

They continued to speak a bit more about Mr. Smith in private but finally, Tom went to sleep. Harry returned to his study and took up a book. Edgar would need a bit longer to return, so he had time to pass. It was unusually late when his friend finally showed up.

"Took the long way?" Harry smiled at him.

"I needed a moment to myself." Edgar closed the study and sat down on the couch. "I needed to sort my thoughts."

"What about?" Harry put down the book. This sounded like a serious conversation.

"You know how I said that your partner knows you best?" There was pain and sadness in Edgar's gaze. "Maybe I am wrong but ... I don't know you. I know Grenmore Horten inside and out, at least I thought so, but you are just too different. No memory loss or trauma or anything can explain that away."

"What do you mean?" Oh, didn't he know. He was another soul in this body. It just wasn't the same and the close proximity was not helping in fooling Edgar.

"I mean ... you know ... if I were a woman and could have had Grenmore's child, that would be Tom. He is intelligent, he is cautious, he is far more wise than his age. He is also slightly impulsive and not very emphatic and in some way, he's an arsehole in the making."

That was a pretty apt description of Tom's character, yes.

"If presented with a problem, he solves it with cold calculation, sometimes overlooking how emotions play into decisions. Or he plans emotions into those calculations, weighing loss and gain, thinking about the risks to himself he takes. He doesn't exactly care for others except for those very few he sees as his. Sometimes he is overcome by his impulses but those get fewer every month. He has emotions but he often does not value them, he sees them as a weakness. He reminds me a lot of myself." Edgar seemed lost in his thoughts. "I admired Grenmore for how scrupulous and vicious he could be. He was a lot colder than me, had a lot less emotions and perfect control over his impulses. It was why I fell in love with him." He looked at Harry for a long moment. "It was also why I left him. You can't live with someone that is unable to even be fond of you. I was useful. I was good in bed. I could take his few losses of self-control. In his own way, he liked me. But I would never dare say that he loved me. I don't think that he was capable of that."

So that was what exposed him. His ability to love. He had a sudden flashback to Dumbledore talking about the importance of being able to love. How Harry had it and Voldemort did not. How Dumbledore had it and Grindelwald did not. Was it really this black and white?

"But you loved him, didn't you? You still do. If you are able to, shouldn't he be as well?"

"Maybe." Edgar's eyes teared up. "After the war, I changed. More and more, I felt hollow without my feelings. I allowed them to come back. I allowed myself to feel."

Year after year, my ability to feel grew but it also meant that Gren and I grew apart. He stayed the cold officer while I began to dream of a future where we might have a family."

"And you don't think I could have changed as well?"

"No." Edgar looked him straight in the eye. "No, you are completely different from him. That impression grew the last few months but this evening, I was finally sure. The way you talk about that woman you loved, that is you. No one can fake that. You weren't talking about me and I know Gren's history. I have no idea who you are and why you look exactly like Gren but you aren't him."

"I see." Harry hesitated for a moment. "What will you do with that knowledge?"

"Is that the part where I am killed for stumbling over some huge conspiracy?"

"Not killed. Normally, your memory would be wiped. It's just pretty hard because everything that went over Grenmore being your boss would have to be wiped. That is practically your whole life."

Edgar turned his serious from one second to the next, his muscles bulging, ready for flight.

"So how about I don't tell anyone and you don't tell anyone?"

"Where is my Gren?" The other man looked ready to kill.

"I am him alright. It is his body. But his soul fled the body. I have no idea where it is and if it can be retained." Harry sighed. "Even to my own kind, this is mysterious. Souls either go to the afterlife or stay as ghosts but the body needs to be dead for that. Gren's soul is not in here and he has not become a ghost. I can only conclude that he went to the next world."

"So he is as good as dead." The anger died down and sadness returned with a vengeance. "Gren is dead."

"I am sorry, Edgar. You are a good man. I wish this didn't have to happen to you."

Harry wanted to go over and put a hand on Edgar's shoulder but he didn't know how that would be received from Grenmore's body.

Edgar simply breathed for some moments. "So ... when did this happen?"

"The day before I got Gren's release papers."

"I guess he wanted to die in that moment. The army was everything to him."

"I gathered." Harry sighed deeply. "I cannot tell you who and what I am. But if I had any more information about Gren, I would tell you."

"Strange thing is ... I believe you." Edgar shook his head and laughed humorlessly.

"It's all so bloody confusing and unbelievable but I do believe you. It makes a lot more sense than trying to think of you as Gren."

"I am truly sorry, Edgar."

"Yeah ... me too." He closed his eyes. "Was that how you lost her? Waking up in Gren's body?"

"Yes." Harry had to give himself a moment, swallowing and licking his dry lips. "She is not alive in this day and age."

"Maybe she'll also show up in another body." Edgar smiled in desperation. "You can still have hope. I ... it's over for me."

"It's not over, Edgar, look-"

"But it is." The finality sounded ominous. "It is over, whatever your name is. Gren is dead."

"But you aren't."

"As good as, without him." Edgar's eyes began to search the room as if looking for something to kill himself with. Harry had seen it before, this feeling of despair leading

to stupid actions.

Think.

Quickly.

"What about Tom?"

Edgar stopped and blinked. "What about him?"

"Weren't you the one who just said that he is exactly like a child you would have had with Gren?" It was the first thing that had come to mind. Hopefully it would work until the despair left enough for him to stop his suicidal thoughts. Harry had had one deescalation course in his life and only had to use it on someone suicidal twice.

Edgar just stared at him, his visage flitting between two different sorts of despair. It ended up some kind of anxiety with Edgar breathing as if he had just run a mile. He shook his head, blinked his eyes and gazed at something only he could see. "I ... I can't ..."

"Tom can't lose you, Edgar. I am nice. Margret is nice. But you are the one that gets him, you are the one he turns to to explain the world to him. He would be lost without you. You are needed here, Edgar."

"But ... but Gren ... what if he ..."

"What? What, Edgar?" Harry balled his fists. "You already decided that you are better off without him. Why does his death change anything about that?"

Edgar just shook his head, his gaze turning inward, his eyes unfocusing.

Shit. That seemed to have been the wrong thing to say. How to remedy this? It seemed like he had nearly been at the right point before he blew it. He tried talking but Edgar did not seem to hear him anymore. The last time he saw something like that had been after the last battle. People lost in themselves, too shocked for any other feelings. Death Eaters looking at their dead Lord, families looking at their dead relatives, some people just too stunned to realize that it was over and they had survived.

Finally he just sighed and went to sit beside Edgar. Was it okay to hug a gay man? Or would Edgar ... no, he just found out his lover was dead. He would not read something into anything. So he put one arm around the man and leaned back on the couch. Edgar melted into his side like he belonged there.

They must have been a glorious pair. Two strong, handsome men, high-ranking army officials, smart and cunning. Ruthless, effective, loyal to no one but each other. To think that one would lose the other ... no wonder Edgar wanted to follow Gren into death immediately.

Should Harry have lied? Should he have tried to diffuse Edgar's doubts? It would have come out anyway but maybe then ... no, even then it would have been the same. What life was there when all your life had been about one man? Gren's love had been war but Edgar seemed to have loved Gren with all his heart. Not even Harry felt as much. He had been able to immediately look for a new goal in this time and age. Sure, he missed Ginny, he missed his kids, it actually hurt like hell sometimes but he never even thought of killing himself.

Should he? Was it wrong not to love so deeply that you would kill yourself upon losing it? Was it a less passionate love? A lesser love? He looked at Edgar whose head lay on his shoulder. Edgar's devotion was astounding but scary at the same time. Would Ginny have wanted something like that? He was pretty sure she wouldn't. They were both fiercely independent people, loving and trusting another but not depending on each other. Had Gren loved Edgar with the same intensity? It was unthinkable. So it was only Edgar ... Gren really was not worth this man.

In Harry's opinion, Edgar had wasted fifteen years on Gren already. It was time to live his life, to look for someone treating him like the treasure he seemed to be. Harry wasn't attracted to him at all but he liked Edgar's character. He did not want to lose the man, especially not over someone like Grenmore Horten, asshole of the decade. Shouldn't he be more thankful to the man whose body he inhabited? He had basically killed him. Somehow. He hadn't meant to but ... hadn't Gren decided on dying anyway? Harry only knew that this fact made him incredibly angry. Gren had had everything – a great job, a loyal partner, money and success. Still, he had not appreciated any of that. He had thrown it all away, drowning himself in alcohol. Harry couldn't understand what had driven the man. How could someone be so much in love with war? How could someone give up a love like Edgar because he missed killing people?

Most likely there was only one man that would be able to explain it to him.

Edgar was currently out of order though. A man that did not want to live through the pain and fear of surviving without the one he loved above all else – Harry had taken his choice from him. Again. Had that been the right decision? Was living always the best way? Would Edgar be able to learn to live without Gren?

In one swift motion, Edgar stood and pushed Harry to the side. Nostrils flaring, his upper lip curled in disgust, he sneered at the sitting man and growled: "Why are you even here? Why did you have to steal his body?"

Harry paused for a moment.

A moment too long – Edgar began to rant: "I don't know who you are, I don't even know what you are. You just came along and took my lover's body for whatever purpose. Whatever chance his soul had to return, you destroyed it. Then you even have the audacity to lie to me for months and keep my lover's death to yourself? Did you have a good laugh? Edgar, the love-sick fool, still clinging to hope after you already told him he was nothing to you? Still I looked and hoped and waited and cried for hours on end. Was it fun to watch? Did it give you some sick pleasure to see me like that? Even Gren never stooped so low!"

Okay ... what now? What was he supposed to say to that? He had no idea at all.

Edgar just scoffed at him and fled the room. Or maybe he decisively left. Harry wasn't sure. What just happened? Why was Edgar so angry? Was the hug a bad idea? Hm ... well, what was past had passed. Being angry was a good thing. Angry people normally didn't kill themselves. Should Harry follow him anyway? But he was the source of his hurt.

He looked out of study but couldn't see Edgar anywhere. He should have grabbed him, should have held him back. As always, one only knew afterwards what would have been best. No use crying over spilled milk. Edgar hadn't killed himself right that moment. For now, this had to be enough.

At least Harry hoped so.

Edgar couldn't be found until the next morning. It was in the last place Harry would have looked anyway, even though it made sense. Harry found him wrapped around Tom in the child's bed. Edgar seemed to leech onto his new "one and only in life" awfully fast. On the other hand, Harry was happy for both of them. Tom needed love and devotion, Edgar needed a purpose to go on. For now, this would have to be enough.

He let both of them sleep and went down to help Margret with breakfast. Would Edgar still be angry? He certainly had a right to be. Even though Harry never intended

... but did Edgar actually know that? What should he tell him? He deserved the truth but there was also the Statute of Secrecy. He could not tell Edgar about magic, witches and wizards ... on the other hand, Edgar was Tom's confidante and sooner or later, he would show magic. It would be good if Tom had two people to go to. So yes, he would tell Edgar.

That one stumbled down the stairs looking like hell warmed over. It was clear that Tom had got him up as he was now leading him by one hand. Edgar sat with a groan and was immediately given a cup of strong black tea by Margret.

"Do you have something stronger? Coffee maybe?"

"Of course, just a minute." Margret went back to the kitchen. The girls came in one after another, only missing Richard who seemed to be at an age where you often overslept.

"I'll go wake Richard, alright?" Harry said to no one specific. It hurt that Edgar wouldn't even look at him. So he fled the room and went outside to the small pavilion Richard had for himself. "Richard? Time for breakfast!"

Some unidentifiable mumble sounded from within.

"Do I need to come in and wake you up?"

"No ... no, I'm up."

"It's what you often say before you go back to sleep. Get up, please."

There was some shuffling and the door opened to show Richard's head with tussled hair and bleary eyes. "I'll be over in ten, okay?"

"Sure thing. Maybe you should invest in an alarm clock, Richard."

"I have one ... I just don't wake. I'm so tired all the time."

"Maybe it's puberty. You are growing up and getting more manly."

"Yeah ..." Edgar's face scrunched up, something between embarrassment and disgust.

"About that ... can I ask a question? I don't know who else to ask."

"Sounds like something about sex or genitals." Harry leaned against the door. After two sons, there wasn't much that could shock him anymore.

"Yeah ... so ... shit, this is hard." Richard shuffled back a bit and opened the door fully. He was wearing only shorts which obviously did not hide the hard-on he had beneath them. "This happens like ... every morning. It's really sensitive. Is that normal?"

"Yeah, it is." Thank god this was an easy one. "It's called an erection and you get one whenever you are sexually aroused or very relaxed. So right after sleep is normal. In puberty, it often happens at some really inconvenient times, so try to wear trousers that can hide one." Robes had been pretty good for that. "Do you know what jerking off is?"

Richard looked at him with wide eyes and shook his head.

"You take it firmly in hand, maybe lubricate a bit with spit or so, then you move your hand. It imitates sexual intercourse. You'll reach an orgasm which feels bloody amazing and it will make the erection go away. Just try not to be seen or heard, it grosses people out. And if you ever get to the point where someone agrees to sexual intercourse, the white fluid that comes out is able to make someone pregnant. Oral or anal sex is safe in terms of pregnancy but vaginal sex will make you a father sooner rather than later. If you make a girl pregnant and not take responsibility for that, we'll have words, young man."

"Oh." Richard was red as a beet by that point. "Won't be a problem."

"Does that have to do with why you are asking me and not Edgar?" Harry saw the boy duck his head and congratulated himself for actually getting something for once. "You might have a chance with him in a year or two but right now, you're a kid to him."

Don't try it. If you ever try to woo another men, be very, very careful. Homosexuality is a death sentence in this day a age." Well, at least he thought so. He wasn't sure about the law's wording but it was very dangerous.

"I might have a chance?" Richard's eyes were as wide as a doe's.

"Well, you seem to have figured it out that Edgar once had feelings for me."

"Yeah ... it's obvious ... I thought you must have them too."

"No, Richard, I'm heterosexual." At least he had never questioned it. Maybe he was bisexual, now that he thought about it. Cedric and Victor hadn't been bad-looking. He could also appreciate Edgar. Not in the way he looked at women but they were special in a way. Victor had certainly done more for him than Fleur, even though Cho had been his favorite at the time.

"Oh ... that's ... sorry. I thought ..."

"It's okay. I don't have a problem with it. But I know the rest of the world does and one word to the wrong person can cost a life. Edgar is a good friend of mine. Don't ever do anything to expose you or him, alright?"

Richard slowly nodded, his face pale by now. The erection had gone away as well.

"Did homosexuality make you feel better in your body or do you still want to be a girl?"

He drew in a sharp breath, looking off to the side. After a long moment of silence, he mumbled: "I have no idea."

Harry just nodded. "I'm sorry I can't help you more with that. I hope you'll meet some other homosexuals in your life which you can ask questions. Even if you do like Edgar, you might think about asking him a few questions."

"Hm." It was one of those non-comments that could mean yes or no. "I wouldn't know how to start."

"Tell him that you are homosexual. Otherwise, he'll fear having been found out and become prosecuted. He knows the drill. Hiding your whole life is tedious."

"Yeah ... Mr. Horten? There's some talk in town. You are raising a bunch of kids with a man, you don't have a women, so people ... wonder. I'll tell them about your lost love, that will help when it gets around. Did anyone here know her?"

"They didn't. I have been away for more than fifteen years. Everyone knew my mother and I don't know what she told people. She knew Edgar, he has been my best friend for those fifteen years."

"Has he loved you all those years?" Richard looked aghast.

Harry didn't know if he should answer that. It was private after all. If he hadn't known that Richard already suspected Edgar, he wouldn't even have told that one about Edgar's sexuality. He should inform Edgar as soon as they were on speaking terms again.

"Has he ever been happy?" The young man looked close to tears. "That's so sad."

"It is." Harry lay a hand on Richard's shoulder. "Listen ... you can't help who you fall in love with. It just happens. For me, it is wrong to blame someone for who they love. My mother would not have accepted my girlfriend, so I never introduced them. Edgar couldn't help loving me and I am sorry that I can't love him back, but I would never think him a lesser man for loving me. I feel humbled by his feelings. What I want to say is ... don't beat yourself up over who you are and who you love. I'll accept you as you are. Edgar will as well. The rest of the world might not but one day, I hope even the last idiot will get that homosexuality is neither contagious nor dangerous."

"Thanks, Mister Horten." Richard's smile was strained by uncertainty but also honest thankfulness.

"Think nothing of it. Now can we grab some breakfast?"

"Just a moment, I'll put some clothes on."

"Don't forget to wash them. Puberty means you'll stink. You need to be careful about hygiene or the girls won't like you." And they didn't have house-elves here that simply stole your clothes when they smelled. Hogwarts had been a marvel.

Richard came out and immediately asked: "Do I smell?"

Harry sniffed him and said: "A bit. It's okay but wash those things after today. Do you have enough clothes to change daily?"

"I'll use my wages on cloth and make a few things for myself."

"Do that." Harry nodded. "It's good that you are skilled at sewing. That saves a lot of money."

"Brea is using her free time to sew a dress for another girl. She'll get paid for that. That's alright, isn't it? Can we use our free time to work some more?"

"I'd rather you use it to play and have fun. But Brea is old enough to make her own choices. If she wants more money, she can work in her spare time."

"I don't even know what she wants it for. We have beds, we have food, we have school with you, two jobs, steady wages ... it's pretty nice here. I even began to like gardening."

"Some women like jewelry. Maybe it's something like that."

They reached the house and went into the dining room. Most of the others were still sitting together, only Edgar had already left. Harry sat down next to Tom.

"You were gone pretty long."

"Richard and I talked a bit. Where's Edgar?"

"He went for a walk. He told me he would pick me up from school today." Tom's gaze seemed to pierce him. "Did you two have a fight?"

"Something like that. I had to tell Edgar something that made him very sad and he needs you to get over it."

"Why me?" Tom looked confused about that.

"Because he likes you. You are like a son to him. He likes being there for you."

"But I can't have another dad ... can I? I mean, I have a biological dad and I have you as my dad. You're my adoptive dad. What would Edgar be?"

"Have you ever heard of a godfather?"

"Like a fairy godmother?"

Margret and Brea burst into laughter at hearing that.

"Without the fairy part, yes." Harry smiled in amusement. "A godparent is someone that pledges to be a parent to you in case something happens to your real parents. So when your parents die or are unable to care for you, you normally go to your godparents first."

Tom looked around the table before asking smartly: "So why are so many kids going to the orphanage?"

"Because a lot of people don't have godparents or because they are dead too or because they already took so many kids in that they do not have enough money for more." Harry saw Helen smiling sadly. There was most likely a story there. "Or some other circumstances which make it impossible."

"Do you know if I have godparents?" Tom looked hopeful for a moment. "No, wait, I can answer it myself." He sighed and lowered his gaze.

"You could ask Edgar if he wanted to be your godfather. I'm sure he'd say yes." Changing the topic seemed the best way to go about this in Harry's opinion.

"That would be awesome." A smile formed on Tom's lips. "But I don't want anything

to ever happen to you, okay?"

"We can all hope and pray for the best. Just in case something does happen, I would want you to be cared for. I know Edgar would be a good father to you."

"Even if he teaches me boxing and secretly tells me to be a bit meaner than you tell me to?" Tom's grin looked like that of a true Slytherin.

"We'll need to have words about that." Harry shook his head in exasperation. "Now get ready for school and don't come back with complaints about your behavior."

"Yes, dad."

Harry just nodded and was finally able to eat some breakfast.

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 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 an 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.

Kapitel 10: Tenth chapter

Tom really was a devil. A cute one, able to make hearts melt with his smile, but still a devil. He read more books than any kid his age should know and began correcting his teacher. He solved his math problems faster than any other kid and called them out on their jealousy. While he had learned not to lord his intelligence over them, he defended himself viciously if they attacked him for it. Some kids tried beating him up and he gave back as much as he got. Edgar's teachings changed to self-defense tactics and non-lethal combat. But while Tom could hold his own against kids his age, their older brothers had no qualms about beating Tom up for being "an uppity little shit". Edgar and Harry taught the boy to talk to them and complained to the kids' parents and teachers. All in all, it worked, but Tom still earned some beatings and animosity for smart-mouthing other people sometimes. Edgar saw it as a necessary evil for learning to differentiate between people you could correct and people that easily flew off their handle but Harry fretted. He and Edgar finally worked out that their parenting worked best if Edgar focused on the everyday stuff and Harry focused on long-term development.

Harry got himself books on legilimency and occlumency. He practiced meditation and impulse-control with Tom, explaining that once he went to Hogwarts, all of his actions would be what would define him later on. Most teenagers did idiot things during their puberty and did not have to worry about that. But those with high aims could be brought down by youthful stupidity, so every action should be well-thought through and seen from the eyes of an adult looking back. A few hours of that, telling stories about youthful exploitation and bad choices made a whole lot of difference and at seven years old, Tom resembled a perfect young lord instead of an unruly child. He had the grace and decency that Draco Malfoy hadn't reached even after school.

Which didn't mean that he couldn't be a child. He build snow-men and had mud-fights and spitting competitions with the other children. It just meant that sometimes, he asked if this or that behavior might be seen as strange or shameful. He did not have a grasp on shame yet – not that Harry would have expected that from a seven-year-old – but he understood on an intellectual level. They often recapped the day and went through situations Tom had questions about. Where he had been boisterous and overbearing before, he now stayed back and observed and analyzed. Sometimes they even reached points where Tom knew he should have intervened but didn't – wanting to see how something worked out. Teaching Tom about group dynamics took all out of Harry. He wished he could get some of Hermione's books on mass psychology but mournfully, most weren't written yet.

Sadly, one of the best books on the topic was actually the one written by Hitler himself.

In it, he described how you could bend the masses to your will, how you could manipulate and redirect their focus, how you could sow distrust and use prejudice and hatred to further your gain. Harry described to both Tom and Edgar in detail how those techniques were used. They read the paper together, discussing the articles about what went on in Germany, comparing it to other rulers in the past. Harry also taught them the opposite – how to use those techniques to make a society more open-minded, how to fight prejudice, how to make people reflect on themselves.

He knew that he gave Tom the tools to bring about devastation as well as salvation.

He taught him Grindelwald's and Dumbledore's techniques. After all, they were the same, just used for different aims.

He described society as he knew it – a world where women were equal to men in terms of intelligence and decision-making and men equal to women in terms of child-care and household skills. Tom was pretty confused about that one because why wouldn't men be good at child-raising? Harry sent him off for a sleep-over with the Smith family. The father had calmed down after not having to meet Harry again and not getting bad-mouthed by Tom. Harry had sworn him to observing only with that man, seeing as Howard's mother would most likely be the one to suffer if Tom talked back to Mr. Smith. Tom came back deeply confused with a million question about why the kids feared their father, why he hit his kids instead of talking with them, why he never played with them and most importantly: Why that man thought himself so great when he was shit at being a decent human being.

Edgar had to explain that part because Harry just wanted to rip Mr. Smith a new one after hearing what Tom had observed. The next barrage of questions was why Mrs. Smith didn't leave her husband, sued him, sent the police after him, why she tried to make everything look fine and most of all: Why she didn't hit him back. Tom had not been able to hold himself back, he had offered her to visit boxing training with Edgar. He told them that she had only smiled sadly and hugged him, never giving an answer. This time, Harry had to answer because for Edgar, a lot of prejudice and rules were branded into his skull so deeply that he didn't even recognize them as discrimination. He explained stigma, ingrained societal rules, how well-thought ideas had turned into grotesque standards over time. He had never expected to be happy about having to sit through all of those Hermione monologues on womens' rights but no he used them to explain change of deeply ingrained standards. He wasn't exactly happy about what he had to explain but with a sigh, he shouldered on and said: "Well, for it to make sense, I need to explain rape to you."

"Gren!" Edgar put his arms around Tom. "He is too young for that."

"Edgar, he has heard it happen."

"What?" The other man looked down at the seven-year-old that just seemed curious and a bit excited at the prospect of hearing about something he was deemed "too young" for.

"He just told us that in the night, Mr. Smith woke the kids and threw them out of the bedroom. They were only allowed back in later and Harold told him that such a thing happens all the time."

"That's not rape-"

"It is." They shared a look, Harry resolute, Edgar confused and a bit distraught. "Don't worry, I won't get too graphic."

"Well ... okay." Edgar still pulled Tom onto his lap. "But we stop if this is too much for him, yeah?"

"Of course." Harry focused on Tom. "So, first of all, what I am teaching you now is something that people normally don't talk about. It is seen as a taboo. If people talk about it, it is with friends and it's normally only adults. Kids aren't supposed to know about this, so don't talk with other kids about this. If anyone hears you talking about this, they'll see you as extremely strange and might even think of us as mistreating you."

"So it's like violence? Like how Mr. Smith beats his wife and I am supposed to ignore it because I am not supposed to know about it, even though I can see it happening?"

"Very much so. Rape is the worst form of violence. Just like beatings, it also happens

to kids and as before, it is not supposed to happen, so people don't speak about it. If someone speaks about it, they are often told that they lie or have imagined it."

"And like with violence, the not talking about it makes it happen more often because people don't get help?"

"Exactly. I am glad you understand the pattern."

"Which means that someone in power should begin talking about it, so that people become aware of the problem and start believing in kids and other mistreated people that talk about their mistreatment."

"You are entirely correct, Tom. Well done." They had encountered the same pattern again and again in previous arguments.

The boy just smiled proudly.

"So, first of all: sex. That is short for sexual intercourse. It is an action where two adults use their genitalia to pleasure each other."

Edgar closed his eyes and groaned in exasperation while Tom scrunched his eyebrows and asked: "How does that work?"

"Do you remember when you asked Brea why her breasts were growing?"

"She nearly hit me and you explained the differences between males and females in class the next day. It was fun, all of the others looked really embarrassed. Why were they embarrassed?"

"Because once you hit puberty, normally around twelve to fourteen years old, you become embarrassed about your genitalia. That is normal because you begin to be able to feel pleasure by your genitalia then and the embarrassment saves you from experimenting with it too early. You are supposed to begin sexual intercourse once you are older than sixteen, best older than eighteen. But your body needs a few years to adjust, so the embarrassment helps to keep back from acting on your sexual urges while your body is not mature enough for it."

"Hm ... makes sense." Tom looked over his shoulder. "Why is Edgar embarrassed still?"

"Because I am telling this to you and you are very young. Most people have this inborn embarrassment when it comes to anything sexual around children. It is a mechanism to protect the children. He wouldn't feel embarrassed if you weren't in the room."

"So why aren't you embarrassed?"

"I am." Harry felt his cheeks flush for a moment. "But I know how important this is and where to draw the line on what I can tell you and what not. It keeps the embarrassment in check."

"Hm ... yeah, I get that. So once I'll hit puberty, I'll become ashamed of my own penis?"

"A lot of things will happen then and I'll tell you about them once you reach that age. The important thing now is that after puberty, your penis will be very sensitive and you'll be able to feel pleasure when it is touched. If someone touches it, that is a sexual act. It should only happen between consenting adults."

"So sex is when someone else touches my penis?" Tom seemed to think about that for a moment. "And that is not allowed until I am an adult?"

"It might not make a lot of sense now but it will after puberty. Your genitals are a private area. Touching you there is a violation. With girls and women, that is also between their legs and their breasts. It is why Brea nearly hit you for asking about her breasts. That is something very private."

"So even asking about my penis is not okay? Because a girl in my class asked me if I would show her my penis."

"No, that is not okay and no, you shouldn't do that."

"But she offered to show me her ... what is it called? What girls have?"

"Just say genitals. Male and female genitals."

"So she showed me her genitals and I showed her mine. I wanted to see hers."

"You are not supposed to until you are an adult." Harry sighed. "If anyone else asks you again, you say no and you explain to them that genitals are private and shouldn't be shown to other people. If an adult ever touches you there or asks you to show them your genitals or they show you theirs, you tell me immediately. All of that is very, very wrong."

"Huh ... the nuns touched our genitals."

Edgar nearly flew off the couch, only stopped by Tom still sitting on him, spitting out an unbelieving, "What?"

Tom just looked unsure, most likely not knowing if the anger was directed at him or not.

Harry prompted him, "Tell me about that. Maybe I need to intervene, so they don't hurt other children."

Edgar's anger puffed out to hurt and sadness at seeing Tom's fear. He whispered, "Tell us, please."

"Well, they bathed the smaller children and they touched their genitals to wash them. They lined us up nakedly. They also touched our genitals if we couldn't sleep. They sometimes rubbed my penis, so that I would calm down."

Edgar just hugged Tom close, breathing in his scent for a moment or two.

Harry also focused on his breathing until he could speak again: "So ... the washing was okay. Small children need help with washing. They should not have paraded you nakedly but I have seen your living conditions. They did not have enough people to care for you like they should have. The rubbing to calm you down, that is very wrong."

"Oh, I remember! My penis was sensitive then. It isn't anymore."

"It shouldn't be. Your body is not mature enough for sexual intercourse, so nature protects you by keeping your genitals non-sensitive after the age of five or six. That rubbing that the nuns did, it screwed with your natural development. It might have meant that you wouldn't have lost your sensitivity and therefore would have had to battle sexual urges while not having the embarrassment to keep those urges at bay. It would have been a constant battle with sexual urges until you were old enough. Therefore, what the nuns did was a violation and thank God that it did not damage you."

"I want to shoot them dead." Edgar muttered.

"I will have a word with them, next time I visit London." Harry promised.

"I don't really understand why this sex thing is bad." Tom tried to wriggle out of Edgar's embrace. "You say that my body isn't mature enough for sex and that it can damage me. But how can touching my penis damage me?"

"That is a question that I will answer once you have your first sexual urges. You can ask me then and at that time, I will explain in detail. Right now, you are too young to even hear about it."

Edgar looked relieved at that while Tom just looked put out and sulking. He ruminated about what he had been told and finally asked: "But you say that I saw it ... rape. I guess that rape is the word for sexual intercourse with violence? So if someone forcefully touches your genitals?"

"Hm ... you are right. I need to explain a bit at least for this to make sense."

Tom immediately sported his victory face while Edgar groaned in dismay.

"Do you remember what girls have instead of a penis?"

"They have a vagina and an uterus. So a hole in their body and an organ in which children can grow." It had been a year since Harry had explained that in class but as always, Tom had a great memory.

"Exactly right. So one form of sexual intercourse is entering the vagina with the penis."

"Ewww!" Tom scrunched his face.

"Yes, exactly that is the reaction you should have. You are too young to even think about that. It changes with puberty and adults do that for fun because it feels good to them."

"I don't wanna know." Tom shook his head.

"Yeah, that's what I meant when I said that I'll explain the details later in life. You now get why?"

Tom just nodded, his face a picture of disgust. Edgar just smiled at that reaction and cuddled the boy.

"And imagining something like that, does it make sense that sexual intercourse can damage a child?"

The boy just put his hands on his ears and closed his eyes.

Edgar said bemusedly: "I think he got the point, Gren."

"Anyway – doing that to a child is wrong and doing that against someone's will is wrong and it is called rape. I guess that is enough to understand the words sex and rape."

"I do understand." Tom looked deeply unhappy but unplugged his ears. "Can we stop talking about those disgusting things?"

"Now that you understand the words, yes. We go back to women and their position in society?"

"Yes, please", said Edgar while Tom just nodded.

"So in ancient times, the taboo on sex was a lot smaller because people had sex in front of each other. They were so poor, they didn't have houses, so there wasn't a lot of privacy. Consequently, children were aware of sex from an early age and the embarrassment trick from nature didn't really work. The bad thing about that was that adults' embarrassment also did not really work and some adults not only had sex in front of children but with children."

"Which is rape," Tom stated and had Harry nodding.

"And damaged the children. So people tried to come up with rules to spare the children, especially the girls. One of the first rules that when you had sex with a girl younger than three years old, you had to pay money to her father for the damage done. Another was that if she was older than three years old, you had to marry her and protect her from other men."

"Dear God." Edgar shuttered. "That's much too young."

"Yeah, they realized that. So once this system actually worked, they raised the age limit to seven years old."

Tom pressed his legs together and looked mildly disgusted again. It seemed Harry had been too graphic after all. His son saw a lot of seven years old girls on a daily basis.

"Yes, that is still too young but better than before. Next, they raised it to twelve years old."

Edgar slightly relaxed at hearing that. Tom leaned back against him.

"They encountered a problem when they wanted to raise it further – some girls look pretty mature at twelve years old. So they couldn't raise it further on account of the girls being too underdeveloped. They needed a new idea. It was also a problem that

while the rules stopped strangers from raping children on account of the money to pay, it did not save children from their fathers agreeing to the rape. So they came up with an idea that made fathers even more responsible – they used God.”

Edgar and Tom both hung on his lips, both looking fascinated.

“The Bible stated that Marie had been a young girl when she birthed Jesus. They changed the Bible, so it now stated that she had been a virgin when she birthed Jesus.”

“What is a virgin?” Tom immediately asked.

“It’s someone that never had sex in their life. Rape included. The church invented a belief that being a virgin was really important at marriage because of God. They even celebrated that extensively by allowing virgin brides to wear white clothes when they marry, while the non-virgin ones still married in color. They made propaganda that a good father was someone that protected their daughter from both sex and rape, so that she could marry as a virgin. Then they raised the age-block for marriage to fourteen.”

“That’s really clever.” Edgar blinked in amazement. “When was that?”

“Twelfth and thirteenth century mostly. The initial idea was really good.”

“But?”

“But once virgin brides were established, the non-virgin ones had extensive problems. You can’t help being raped. It’s violence done to you. But it was the girls that suffered for it. It was an age where unmarried women mostly didn’t survive long. So those that had such violence done to them were doubly cursed. They were expelled from their families, unable to marry, often pregnant without anyone’s support.”

“Like my mom?”

“Yes, like your mom, Tom. With the difference that your parents were married and her husband’s family expelled her. But it is mostly the same: Young girls, unable to support themselves, unable to find work, pregnant, slowly starving.”

“That shouldn’t happen.”

“My thoughts exactly. Now what would be the next best step to protect those girls?” Harry looked at Tom for the answer.

“Making people realize that being raped is not their fault and caring for those poor girls and the consequences.”

“That is possible if people are rich enough for it. Paying doctors, feeding a girl and a newborn, giving her child support and help with parenting. Once everyone has a good living standard, that will become possible. Right now, people are too poor for it. Next idea?”

“Another thing from God? Family is sacred?” Tom began to look pensively.

“Already tried that, wasn’t enough. When you don’t have enough food, you cut the weakest off. A pregnant teenager is the weakest in a family. Still the same non-solution as the one you tried before.”

“How about a mom’s home? Like the orphanages? A place where pregnant women can go?”

“A very good idea, that one. You could invent shelters for pregnant women and young moms. You would need some people that can look after children, give parenting advice and help with women’s ailments. So midwives, nurses, older mothers. You also need the space and enough money for food.”

“So either become a politician or do charity work.” That had often been a conclusion from their talks, so Tom already knew that. “If someone had done that before, I’d still have my mom and would not have lived in a crappy orphanage.”

"Another good reason to become either a politician or a charity worker – our current orphanages are crap. They don't have good locations, they don't have enough workers, they don't have enough food."

"Dad, why aren't you a politician?"

Harry just sighed. Well, how to explain that one? "You know ... when we are talking like this, it makes sense. You do stuff because you know it makes sense. But once you discuss this with politicians, the question is not if it makes sense. The question is how to pay for it. It's like the family deciding to throw out their daughter because she is pregnant and they don't have the money for that. Governments work the same way. They only have a limited amount of money and as a politician, you need to argue why spending money on this makes sense. There is war brewing on the horizon. War kills people, a lot more than crappy orphanages do, so they spend money on soldiers and weapons. In a world where conflict is still solved with war, the old and the young and the helpless get left behind and die."

"So for better orphanages and shelters, war has to stop?"

"Exactly. The less money you need to spend on soldiers, policemen, judges, lawyers, jails, weapons, espionage and what else you need because countries fight one another, the more money you have to care for your people, educate them, build infrastructure and social support systems."

"I see." Tom looked from Harry to Edgar and back. "Still, why are you two soldiers and not politicians?"

"Because when someone tells me they rather invest in a new tank or a nuclear bomb instead of using the money to raise thousands of kids decently, I just want to punch their faces. I am a man of action, not talk." Harry harrumphed. "I tried that politician thing, I am really not made for it. I don't have the patience to talk to such short-sighted people. I just want to shoot them. I make a pretty good soldier but a very bad politician. I am only good at shooting them in the head."

"He tries to raise you to become a better man than him." Edgar smiled down at Tom. "I think I'd like to try that politician thing myself. If we survive the next war, I'll retire from the military to become a politician. I have a bit more patience than you, Gren."

"If?" Tom asked into the silence that followed. "What do you mean ... if?"

Oh. Damn. Edgar sent Harry a helpless look.

"Well ... soldiers die in war. Even some as high-ranking as us. There will be a war in the future. It might take us." Harry tried to explain calmly.

Tom just shook his head, his eyes filling with tears.

"Don't you fret, little one ... it hasn't started yet. We still have some years." Edgar pulled Tom closer and pecked his head with kisses.

"Dad?" His voice shook.

Harry came over and knelt down next to them. "We still have some years, I promise."

A hand stretched in his direction, so he sat down next to Edgar and pulled both of them into an embrace. Tom sniffed and winced, not exactly crying but not exactly far from it either.

"Gren? Why don't we become politicians now?" Edgar asked in a whisper.

"Let us talk about that later."

"Okay."

So they just sat, letting Tom cry on them until he fell asleep.

"So ... why not become politicians?" Edgar sat down again, the exact same spot he was in before they brought Tom to bed.

"Same reason as stated before: I am really bad at it. You could decide on it, of course. I wouldn't stop you. But it's not for me. I need something to do, I can't just talk all day long. I'll lose first my patience, then my reason, then my grip on social morals. I am neither sly nor cunning nor underhanded enough to be a politician. I fly off the handle much too quickly." As he had explained to Hermione over and over and over again. "There is something else I am good at."

"What is that?"

"Being a soldier, especially someone that organizes them. You see ... once you change a system from within, there are three things you have to fear. The first is easy: No one being on your side, no one listening to you, never getting anywhere because you can't convince people of your view. The second is a bit more tricky: The population turning on you. The more change you bring, the faster you change systems, the more people will be against you. You need to be patient, do it step by step, convince everyone again and again, hold your endgame close and always talk yourself out of everything, distributing the responsibility to a lot of other people. But then there is still the third: A military coup. Soldiers should work for you. But if they see the population suffer, they will turn on you and then you have nothing to protect you. So, to be a good politician, you need to be persuasive, patient and you need good friends in a lot of positions, especially the military."

"So ... you'll stay in the military to support Tom? But how does the non-magical ... wait. Have you speculated that I might decide to become a politician?"

"You are extremely capable, Edgar. I had hoped you would decide on that course of action. Now that you have taught me about the military, I think I can make it work, even if you decide not to stay by my side. If you want to become a politician now, I'll root for you. Or you decide to become one after the war. I think you would have more impact that way. But on the other hand, you are right that we might die, so maybe it's best you become a politician and only I join the war."

Edgar scoffed and shook his head. "And here he says he is not sly enough to become a politician. You do get how persuasive you are?"

"I am perfect behind the scenes. But I am bad in the spotlight. I need people like you and Tom. Both of you can smile prettily while you would like to strangle the person in front of you." Was it a sly thing that he was manipulating both in that direction? After Hermione made him into a political player, it was hard not to further her agenda. All of her ideas were spot-on. At least those that did not have to do with magical creatures.

"So you want us both on the non-magical front while Tom takes on the magical government? That plan is missing a player in the magical military ... oh, wait. You said you had some contacts in the magical world. This man you look up to, the homosexual one that battled his own lover – that one is a higher up in the military?"

"There is no magical military, they only have law enforcement. Dumbledore is not part of it though. He is head of the only magical school and is on his way to becoming a political player. He may be able to support Tom to get a foot in the system." Harry leaned back with a sigh. "Tom will have to make his own allies in the law enforcement or use Dumbledore's contacts."

They sat in silence for a moment.

"I can see the gears turning in your head." Edgar smiled a truly Slytherin smile.

"We could secure his position by introducing him to magical society. Making friends with some people, becoming part of their community ... I'll talk to Dumbledore about this. We need him on our side."

"I really like this cunning side of you."

Harry snorted. Cunning and ambitious. The hat had told him that he would do well in Slytherin. He always thought that had come from the Horcrux but that soul piece was long gone. Maybe Harry Potter was actually a lot more Slytherin than everyone had believed. Would believe in the future. Maybe not, he had most likely already erased that future. Or had he absorbed Gren's soul? Because from what Edgar told him, Gren would have been a Slytherin.

"I don't want you fighting alone though. It might make more sense to change to politics now, especially in light of one of us having to survive for Tom. But honestly ... I can't let you go off to war alone. I can't sit back and wait for the news of your slaughter every day. We either live or die together. My heart won't allow anything else."

"Are you sure?" Harry's gaze found Edgar's. "I want you to live."

"I want the same for you." The smile on the other man's lips was shaky. "So I will make sure you make it out alive. You have a son and a mission."

"I had a few of those in my life. Missions as well as sons." Harry closed his eyes in pain.

"If I learned one thing it is that even the best of plans often fail."

"Oh." Edgar fidgeted on the couch. "So you think we'll die?"

"High chance of that."

"Hm." He stared into space for a moment. "I'll crumble without you. I had a few months without Gren and it was pure hell. I don't want to sit back in an office, knowing that somewhere a grenade bomb has ripped you to pieces."

"There will be bombs falling from the sky, ripping London to pieces and making the rest go down in flames."

"All the more reason to be by your side." Edgar took a deep breath and straightened his spine. "We either die or live together. I don't want it to be any other way."

Harry wished his friends weren't as stubborn as this. But this was his fate: Gaining the most loyal friends, people that would even die for him. He wished it wasn't this way. Edgar should stay safe. But Harry knew that nothing he could say would sway Edgar.

"As you wish." He nodded to himself. "I'll write to Dumbledore to come up with a plan on the magical front. Can you gather some intel on how best to change into politics after the next war?"

"Yes, sir." Edgar saluted. "First of all, I'll go to sleep though."

"Is that insubordination? We need to have a strict word about that," Harry joked.

"Uh." The other man closed his eyes and shuddered. "That was some innuendo Gren sometimes used before sex."

"Oh. Uhm ... sorry." Harry scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "The soldier jokes come rather easy with you."

"You need to break that habit before we rejoin the military." With an indulgent smile, Edgar shook his head. "What will happen to the factory once we are gone?"

"We will need a manager. It is a few years in the future though, so I thought we first expand a bit. Politics always take a lot of money, so getting rich on the war is sadly the only way to ease you into politics and secure Tom's future."

"What will happen to the factory after the war?"

"We'll just change the production to fashion."

"Fashion?" Edgar blinked. "What a gay thing to do, my dear non-Gren."

"Oh shut up."

"Just saying." The grin was infectious. "You certainly have all our futures laid out for us."

"I have a rough idea is more like it. Now go to bed. I'll write a letter to Dumbledore first thing tomorrow morning."

"Just one question before I go ..."

"Yeah?"

"If we introduce Tom to wizarding society early, does that mean I'll see real magic?" Edgar's eyes sparkled.

"Uh ... I guess so. If not, you'll see it once he turns eleven. We will need to shop before he goes to school."

"Awesome!" Edgar grinned like an excited child. "I'll cross my fingers and hope this Dumbledore will be helpful. I want to see magic."

Harry just smiled a bit tiredly. He remembered being this excited. Magic was something grand. Right until it turned political and magical terrorists threw around killing curses. He bid the other man good night and started putting together a letter in his head.

Kapitel 11: Eleventh chapter

Dear Albus,

thank you very much for your help so far. I found out what I could about Tom's history and by explaining it to him, he gained some perspective that will hopefully keep him from ever starting a war in the future. I am actually hoping he might do the opposite and go into politics. He is an extremely bright boy, talented and magically powerful. Now that he is learning morally upright behavior, I see a lot of potential. As you have a rather intimate view on slightly psychopathic youngsters planning to change the world, would you indulge me a bit by telling me what Grindelwald and you came up with in your youth and where you diverged? Also, what are your current thoughts on the ideas and solutions you came up with in your youth? What goals do you still seek and how do you go about it now? As I only know the you sixty years from now, I'd really like to gain some perspective. As war-comrades, I know a lot about you in terms of warfare, but not in terms of political machinations apart from war. I hope I am not overstepping boundaries with my question, seeing as you never even met me in this timeline.

Yours truly, Grenmore

Dear Grenmore,

it is always a pleasure to hear from you and I have to admit that I feel rather trusting whenever I am writing to you. But you are asking for sensitive information and I am uncomfortable sending it to you in writing. On the other hand, a lot of it is emotionally taxing and I cannot say that I am over everything that happened, so talking about it is even harder. The last few days, I argued with myself over how I should respond to your letter and decided that I will write down some bits and see how it goes from there. So I am honest in telling you that I am withholding information while writing this.

Gellert and I met in the summer of 1910 in Godric's Hollow. He had come to live with his aunt after being thrown out of Durmstrang for practicing magic too dark even for them. I did not know that at that time, I just saw an immensely attractive young man walking around in town, charming everyone he met – me included. We started talking which turned into youthful transgressions in a matter of days. Please imagine that state of mind before judging me. I was rather taken with him and not exactly thinking straight as a hormonal teenager.

He told me that he wanted to change the world because he had ventured into the Muggle world and learned about their progress with technology. He feared that Muggles would be able to overpower wizards soon enough. As you are now living in a Muggle body, I am sure you can relate to that fear. So he wanted a world where wizards did not have to hide, he wanted us to rule humanity before Muggles would one day rule us after finding out about us. He showed me books about the witchhunt and historical documents about how often we had come close to extinction. Also, we studied family trees and found out that the progress of Muggle technology seemed to be in direct correlation to loss of magical power. Whenever Muggles invented a lot, the birth rate of magical children decreased. Whenever Muggles were thrown back, technology destroyed or wisdom forgotten, the birthrate of magical children would increase. Actual magical

power seemed to have something to do with the belief of people in magic rather than technology. So I understood why Gellert was in favor of destroying technology before Muggles could rise. For a hundred years, Muggles had made leaps in science and the magical population was dwindling. He wanted to save magic.

I disagreed with him. While I do not like the thought of magical extinction, killing about 98% of the world's population, just so magic would survive, seemed too excessive for me. I tried to dissuade him from his course and he promised me that he would simply publish his theory, bring it before the Wizengamot and have it discussed. He wanted me to oppose him and have this decided by the whole magical population rather than just us. I relented but soon found out that it had been the worst idea I ever had. Most people are rather shortsighted, so our findings were used to fan the hatred and persecution of Muggles and Muggleborns even more, separated the population and lay the groundwork for the following war.

I was devastated that my actions had led to this. I could not stand myself, I was angry and hurt. We fought and in that fight, the unthinkable happened. After that fight, I was ready to end my life to atone for my sins but something held me back. I knew that killing myself was paramount to running away from my problems. My pride would not let me. My actions had led to this, so I swore to myself that I would solve this. I told Gellert that I wanted to break up with him and that I did not want to see him ever again. He told me that he was sorry and that he would respect my wishes. He proposed that we could do a blood-pact not to fight one another again, so that we would never hurt innocents again. I relented again – my second mistake. I thought I was doing good but I never expected him to start a war. I was still too much in love to see him clearly for who he was.

Years later, I had to confront him on the battlefield and the rest is something you know. I swore to myself to abstain from politics because obviously, I could not be trusted with them. So I stayed on as a teacher, now a headmaster, to see that children do not learn a biased view on history and society. I do not think that I can teach anyone that dying to save others is something noble but I also do not want kids to grow up thinking only of themselves. I still do not know what the right course of action might be. I hope that in our time together, I had a better grasp on how to realize the greater good. For now, I can just say that teaching children to think of others, to think of the planet and all its lives instead of personal gain, is my political goal. I am making headway with Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws, but Slytherins are a mystery to me. I fear that their focus on personal gain is a rather inborn trait, otherwise they would not be Slytherins. I hope your Tom can teach me better.

Yours truly, Albus

Harry had to drink a glass of cognac after reading that letter. Dumbledore's behavior in his time made a lot more sense now. Thinking that destruction of Muggles or magical extinction were the only possible outcomes, no wonder he had been dodgy about "the greater good". Just like he had not told Harry that he had to die until the last possible moment. Dumbledore knew that he himself would have to die for the greater good eventually. He had known for most of his life. He also had not thought that anyone else would ever be as accepting of that fate as him. No wonder that he saw love and sacrifice as the ultimate form of goodness and never trusted in the government again. Simply releasing information like that to the general public would of course result in people screaming for the death of Muggles. With "Save our children" as the leading motto, killing Muggles would have become a necessity rather

than a crime.

In their time, Hermione had found those early publications written by Grindelwald. She had cross-referenced all of them and found out that – while a valid theory at the time – he had been wrong. She had republished not only him but other authors in favor of “Muggles are a thread” and countered every argument they had. She had then written her own publications on magical theory which completely changed people’s views. Not only were Muggles no thread as long as wizards kept up with technology, partly integrating into Muggle society, they were also indispensable for magical survival. With her Muggle background and understanding of both Muggle and magical science, she had been paramount to the development of magical theory and had used it as a starting point for her political career. Harry had read all those articles, even argued some with her. He needed to get that knowledge to Dumbledore. He may not be magical anymore but maybe the man could extract those memories from him. It wasn’t like he could actually remember all she had written.

Still, he waited a night before writing back. He even showed the letter to Edgar and discussed it on an emotional as well as rational level. Dumbledore must have gone through some horrible feelings. He had been eighteen or nineteen when Grindelwald published his theories and brought them before the Wizengamot. It seemed like he had taken on the guilt for the consequences of those publications, just for not dissuading his boyfriend further. It actually seemed a bit over the top, so Harry theorized that there might have been more to it. Maybe Dumbledore helped with the publication. Maybe he actually supported Grindelwald for some time. His guilt seemed rather excessive but maybe further information would make it more understandable. It also explained Dumbledore’s obvious disfavor of Slytherins. He seemed to have given up somewhere along the way, simply condemning them all as a necessary evil, learning to play by their rules. Using Slytherins for his gain by playing their self-servicing nature, simply bribing them with what they wanted to get some of them in line. It seemed like his guilt and hurt had translated into a hatred of people similar to Grindelwald. He made enemies of influential and determined people, dividing the wizarding world even further. On the other hand, that was no surprise with the misinformation that he had.

Dear Albus,

thank you for being so honest about your history. While I already knew a lot of it, I never heard it put together like that. It must have been hard to write about something that makes you feel as ashamed and guilty as that. I do not judge you for what happened, though I have to admit that in our shared past and future, I judged you on how you handled it later on. To me, it seems like you are about to or already gave up on Slytherins. That led to massive hatred. A lot of the pupils you are teaching now or are about to teach later rose to fight a war, tired of your constant humiliation and degradation of them. I don’t know if you already started but I know it will happen in thirty years at the latest. As far as I know, you already started though. Thinking that some people are unworthy of any effort on their behalf, that they will turn out bad anyway, it’s something I have seen you do again and again. I get the feeling you may have already reached that point here as well. With what you wrote, I understand where you are coming from. Gellert Grindelwald was beyond saving for you. Others are not and I would like to work together on bringing about change.

For that to happen, I would like to give you an update on your findings. Technology is not

the link to magical fluctuation, it is genetics. It is a concept that has not been found yet but I would still like to explain it to you. For that, I need the papers that are stored in my head right now. As I can't write them from memory, I would like to give you the memories. Seeing as I am not a wizard anymore, I would love to meet with you, so that you can extract them. What I am offering here is giving you the information to prove Grindelwald wrong and therefore right the damage you have wrought with publishing the thesis you two have worked on. I hope I can trust you to not simply keep the memories because of the change they might bring about. Just because something did not work out well once does not mean it will be a mistake again. But they will be life-changing, have no doubt.

I also think we should meet on the topic of Slytherins and politics at a later date. I would like you to meet my good friend Edgar and my son Tom. Edgar is a Muggle but if he weren't he would have been a Slytherin. I think he is a good example to explain why self-serving, cunning and ambitious people are very important, even if they come with a higher danger of becoming evil. Seeing as with your current definition of goodness, you might find your older self evil as well, I think this might be an enlightening talk about morality.

Yours sincerely, Grenmore

Dear Grenmore,

I am disturbed by a lot of what I read in your last letter. I kept myself from asking how I turned out and I may have been happier not knowing. Now that I have some tidbits, I am hooked on wanting more. I would also like to right my mistake. As you seem to have correctly gleaned from my letter, it was not Gellert who wrote the thesis but me. He started a war on things I dug up for him and my protest in front of the Wizengamot was more of a show-act to give his words more power. I seem to have continued to collect mistakes and it sounds like my desperate attempts to right them have not worked out well. So yes, I would very much like to meet with you. Please send me an address I can apparate to, maybe something in London? Weekends work best for me.

Yours truly, Albus

Harry planned a weekend in London and asked everyone who would like to come. Edgar wanted to visit his sister, Brea wanted to visit friends she had not seen for a year, Loretta wanted to visit a sister that had been adopted before her departure. Tom just wanted to see the city but Harry told him he would not have enough time to tour it with him. So the little imp asked Edgar if he could stay with him instead and the man relented.

On Friday, they took the car to bring all of their current stock of uniforms to London, booked a hotel and then everyone went their own way. Harry had been able to secure a meeting with Dumbledore on Saturday, so he used the Friday evening to tour Diagon Alley. He looked for some of the prominent books from Hermione's papers at Flourish&Blotts. He also got some treats for Phoebus and a magical prank to show to Edgar and Tom. One day we would walk these streets with them, looking at their faces full of wonder. Maybe that day would come sooner than he thought.

He met Dumbledore at the Leaky Cauldron the next morning. They wandered into Diagon Alley and stopped at a tea shop that did not exist anymore in Harry's time.

Dumbledore asked them for a private room and ordered some tea before heavily warding the whole room. He continued with pulling out a pensieve and setting it on the table.

It was strange to have a man barely fifty in front of him. Short grey hair, a short beard, a winning smile. They exchanged some pleasantries about the weather, Hogwarts, Harry's family, Harry's trip before Dumbledore asked openly: "How come I can't read your thoughts at all? I thought you were a Muggle."

"This is the body of a Muggle, yes. I myself am magical. I don't know exactly how that works. I can't perform magic, I am not recognized as magical. If you can't read my thoughts, my Occlumency still works. As it is a mind magic, mayhaps I can still use that. I am no Legilimens though, so I don't have a way of proving it."

"At least that gives me hope that we can actually extract your memories. That does not work with Muggles. You can only Legilimence them and extract the memory from your own head."

"I know. I will consent to that if the other way does not work."

"You are aware then that that would make me aware of the whole future?"
Dumbledore's eyes widened.

"It is a future that will never come to pass anyway. But you are right that in some cases this may not be for the best, so I hope extraction will work."

"Before we begin with that ... would you indulge my curiosity about myself? You said I would turn out evil."

"In your eyes, from what I understood from your letters, yes. I do not see you as evil. You were a friend and mentor to me. A human with flaws, sure, but all in all a good guy. I am not sure you would see yourself as that though."

"What is the worst that I will have done in your future?"

Oh. Oh well. Harry sighed and looked at the ceiling for a moment. He chose his words carefully: "I think it may have been what you did to me."

"I did something to you that is worse than bringing about a war and enabling my boyfriend to become a mass murderer that I later imprisoned for life?" Dumbledore pressed his lips together and sighed. "The more you tell me, the less I understand why you like me."

"Do you really want to know?"

The other man nodded.

"There was a Dark Lord in my time and it was prophecised that I would be his downfall. So he tried killing me when I was one year old. He succeeded in killing my parents but my mother's sacrifice saved me. It made me into a Horcrux though."

Dumbledore looked pained as well as very serious. So he already knew what Horcruxes were.

"You suspected it but you also suspected that I wasn't the only one. So you decided that you needed me easily controllable. You let my godfather be wrongfully imprisoned in Askaban and placed me with some relatives of which you knew would abuse me."

"I can't believe I would do that."

"It was war, Albus. You did what you had to do. You could not have a loose cannon, not for the sake of one boy's happiness. You asked me for forgiveness later on, so I am not mad. The world hailed me as their savior but I never knew. I was starved, I was beaten, I came to Hogwarts as a confused nobody and you were there for me. You were the father I never had. I knew that you manipulated me and I later found out why, but still, you were the most important person to me."

"I was basically your abuser."

"I am aware." Harry nodded. "You tasked me with destroying the Horcruxes and my last task was dying for the greater good. I did."

"I ... I don't know what to say. I am sorry for that. I can't believe I would turn evil."

"You didn't. I know you enough that I know you think you turned evil. But I know you did it for the greater good and what you believed in. I find no fault in that, as long as you regularly question this belief and do not become a fanatic. You are a bit fanatic in some aspects. As long as you use the opportunity to look at those again, I find no fault in you."

"Not even after abusing you and using you as a scapegoat?"

"Not even then, no." Harry sighed. "Though I wished that you had trusted in my integrity. My parents, my godfather, my friends, they all died for me. I would never have walked away from dying for them."

"You are a very exceptional man, Grenmore. I don't think I ever met anyone quite like you."

"I like to think you might see such a man in the mirror, Albus."

"Not at all." Dumbledore shook his head with an exasperated smile. "I don't ... I worry, I scheme, I regret. I sent others to fight my fights for me. I am a coward."

"Phoenixes don't sing for cowards."

The older man looked up, his eyes shining with tears. "You really know me well."

"Fawkes has been my comfort. After your death, he stayed with your successor, a Slytherin by the way. The man died for the cause, then I died shortly after and after my death, Fawkes stayed with me."

"After your death?" Dumbledore's eyes narrowed.

"I was given the choice to go back to war or stay dead. I decided on more fighting. In the end, I killed the Dark Lord. Only the Horcrux died by his Avada."

"So there is an afterlife ... fascinating." Dumbledore leaned back in his seat. "I am not surprised that Fawkes stayed with you."

"Only for a time though. He flew off some years later, once I felt comfortable in my own life. I got a job, I married, I was happy. I guess Fawkes thought I did not need him anymore."

"No wonder he stayed with me for my whole life." The man scoffed.

"It does not have to be that way, Albus. You may start with thinking that people can redeem themselves." Like Severus. Harry was sure that even Dumbledore believed him redeemed in the end. The only one that never thought so was Severus Snape himself. Both men were similar in that regard.

"I really am unsure if you are my salvation or just a great manipulator."

"How about both?" Harry smiled. "You saved me once. You gave me a purpose, you gave me hope in the darkest of nights. I saw you die for a cause you believed in, a cause I believed in. To me, you were a great man that fought evil at a high cost to himself, sacrificing himself, sacrificing me, so that others could live. I was angry at you and I raged and I cried, but I never gave up, I never strayed and I have you to thank for that. I even named my son after you."

"Really?" Dumbledore's voice wavered.

"Albus Severus. You and your successor."

"A Slytherin?"

"The first one that made you believe in redemption and the honor of being a Slytherin. He was a betrayer, a liar, a manipulator. He was the best at it, so he worked as a spy. He tortured and killed and watched his friends die, some by his own hand,

just to bring information back to you and save us all."

Dumbledore just blinked in silent astonishment.

"I believe he was your best friend in the end. He was your most trusted. You asked him to kill you."

"He did what I could not do?" Dumbledore had to breath through his mouth twice to keep his tears from falling.

"Yeah ... he killed his only friend for the greater good, continued his job and finally died a completely senseless death, just to buy me some time to defeat the Dark Lord." Harry took a sip of his tea. "He felt guilty because his mistake got the women he loved killed. You could relate to that."

"So Slytherins can love ... you are right, I started shunning them, thinking them irredeemable. I never thought I would befriend one."

"That divided the world even further. Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff on your side, Slytherin as the house of evil. It made most Slytherins of three generations stand with the Dark Lord. The worst magical war the world had ever seen. Annihilation of more than a third of Britain's magical population. The overthrown Ministry registering Muggleborns like werewolves, branding them and killing them."

"No wonder you decided on changing history."

"But it's not only that one person that became the Dark Lord. If it's not him, there are countless others that could take his place. We need to change society, to stop discrimination before it is too late. The Muggles will have their cleansing war in a few years. Grindelwald was meant to be our cleansing war but it wasn't. People still fear Muggles, shun Muggleborns, think of blood purity as superior. My memories will demolish those patterns. Blood purity is a weakness, cause of magical decline and marriage with Muggleborns is the reason for inclines."

"Blood purity is the cause for squibs?" Dumbledore leaned forwards. "Are you serious?"

"The more intermarriage there is, the more squibs and the more madness. Think of the Black family, purest of them all."

"Mad as hatters."

"Exactly." Harry averted his gaze. "The reason that their family is not overrun by squibs is that they kill their squib children early on."

"No ..."

Harry just looked at Dumbledore for a long moment. This man was still pure in a lot of ways. He hadn't gone through the Black library, had not looked at those many, many burned out faces in the tapestry.

"There is a lot of intermarriage even in my family. Ariana ... I always ..."

"If she had married a Muggleborn, there would have been a high chance of her having immensely powerful children." It was most likely easier to start off with an explanation instead of the memories. "Had she married another pure-blooded squib, they would most likely have had more squib children. Let's take Tom for an example. You taught Merope Gaunt. You know she was nearly a squib, only excelling in potions."

Dumbledore nodded gravely.

"She fell in love with a Muggle. Tom is therefore a half-blood. Once he is an accomplished wizard, he will be slightly more powerful than you. And at least in my time you were hailed as the most powerful wizard alive."

"He'll be on Gellert's and my level? Even though he is not a pure-blood?"

"Same level as Severus, same level as me. Severus and me were both half-bloods as

well." Harry leaned forward as well. "Muggleborn means new blood. They are the most potent carriers for magic in future generations, even if they aren't powerful by themselves. Even marrying a Muggle is better than someone once-removed from you in terms of having powerful children. You will not find a squib or low-level wizard in any old blood-new blood pair. Muggles and muggleborns are our salvation, not a threat."

"And you have the whole evidence for that in your head?"

Harry just nodded and waited for Dumbledore to process the new information.

"This will completely overthrow generations of magical research."

"Do you fear facing the truth?" Harry smirked.

"You know that I don't."

"Do you fear the consequences of bringing the news before the Wizengamot?"

Dumbledore slowly shook his head. "Just ... you know, I sent Gellert to the Wizengamot with what I believed to be true. That ended in bloody mayhem. Now you sent me with what you believe to be true. There is a high chance for bloody mayhem, you know? I'll be your scapegoat."

"If anyone would believe this coming from a Muggle, I would do it myself. But if I tell them, they'll think I just want to save my skin, dismiss the information and obliviate me." Harry shrugged his shoulders. "I need you to do this. But I won't stand idly by. You want me as your co-author, I'll be on those papers with you. I won't hide because this is unsavory information. I just can't protect myself or my family, so I'd rather not. But I won't throw you to the wolves."

"Do you think I might have been able to save Gellert if I presented it with him? If I stood by him instead of playing an enemy I never was?" Dumbledore looked down onto his hands that he had folded on the table.

"I don't know. I only met him once and those were his dying moments. The Dark Lord confronted him about the Elder Wand" - Dumbledore flinched and looked up in shock - "and Grindelwald laughed in his face before telling him it's yours, knowing that you had already died. Then he was killed. He seemed to have lost his will to live with your death. So the only thing I can say for sure is that you are important to him."

"Oh." The man seemed horribly strung-tight. "You know about the wand?"

"It went to me due to various circumstances. I broke it and threw it into the lake."

"Oh." Dumbledore looked at his wand for a long moment. "Do you think I should do that?"

"Who knows?" Harry shrugged again. "It felt right to me. Do whatever you think is best." A rather crooked smile found his way onto his face. "You know, I'm only a guy from the future, not even your own future. I am not almighty."

"You're the most interesting person I met since Gellert though."

"Please don't fall in love with me." He had enough of gay guys falling for him.

Dumbledore just chuckled. "Do a lot of guys fall in love with you?"

"More than I ever wanted." He scoffed. "Now, let's try extracting the memories?"

"Let's." The other man grinned in anticipation.

It went well. Dumbledore went into them while Harry prepared more tea, drank a cup, two, prepared more tea ... it took a while. It had already turned dark when Dumbledore finally emerged and drank a cold cup of tea immediately.

"How long was I gone?"

"Ten hours maybe? I didn't think I gave you that much."

"No, I just read it again and again. Do you have the references?"

"I picked some up today. Some others are in Hogwarts, some are deeply hidden in pure-blood libraries and some aren't written yet. I somehow became heir to Black manor, so a lot is from their library. You will need to charm a Black."

"You trust in my single-minded stubbornness?"

"Always, Albus. Always." Harry had to smile at remembering Severus saying those exact words to him. It was bittersweet in a way.

"I'll get those books. Thank you so much. This was an enlightening day."

"Is there a way to copy those memories and give them back to me?"

"Sadly, no. But if you agree to meet me here again tomorrow noon, I'll have written copies of what you showed me."

"Sure. I need to leave after that though, we have to drive back to Bath. It's a long trip."

"Oh! Should we meet at another location next time?"

"You could connect our fireplace to the floo, that would save a lot of time."

"I need to go to your place for that."

"Then we can meet here again next time and you can come back with us. I'll save you a spot in the car. It's full right now, I brought Edgar and the squirt as well as two of my employees who wanted to meet friends and family."

"I am looking forward to meeting your family."

"The new one anyway." Harry sighed sadly. "I wish I could have introduced you to Albus Severus. You would have liked my little genius. He went to Slytherin, by the way."

"You were a Gryffindor, right?"

"Definitely. But I can see a lot of Slytherin traits in me, even though Edgar tells me I am a goody-two-shoes." He grinned. "He says I'm too nice."

"So Edgar ... is he ...?" Dumbledore made a vague hand movement.

"Co-parenting with me, he is Tom's godfather. I have one wife and I am faithful to her, even if I never see her again."

"Admirable." Dumbledore nodded. "It's crazy how your mind gets stuck on one person."

"Well ... we were married for nearly twenty years. I saved her life when I was twelve and she was eleven. She had become possessed by a Horcrux. I battled a basilisk over her nearly dead body. By the way, you have a basilisk living in your school basement."

"That's ... unsavory news."

"Thankfully, it does not kill children if it isn't commanded to do so. The only living parselmouth is Tom, so it should not prove dangerous. Salazar Slytherin kept it as a pet."

"I think I'd still like for it to be removed."

"I can relate to that."

"Any other things I should know about my school?"

"It's a great idea to be more inclusive. You could let in some werewolves ... without telling the Ministry. Safe travel to a nice far-off forest on the full-moon nights. Werewolves don't hurt animagi, did you know? So the animagi on staff can chaperone the baby wolves."

"Fascinating." Dumbledore's eyes actually seemed to sparkle with mirth.

"Also, you'll soon get a young half-giant called Hagrid as a pupil. He loves magical creatures as much as Newt Scamander does, he just does not exactly grasp the danger some of them pose. He needs a guiding hand in learning that acromantulas make bad pets."

"I shall look out for him."

"We'll meet again on the topic of Slytherins. Please observe your behavior towards them as objectively as possible until then."

"I shall endeavor to do so."

"Well, see you tomorrow."

That went rather well, he guessed. Hopefully, Dumbledore would be there tomorrow, give him back his memories and start digging. If "War Hero Dumbledore" would come out with this information, it would hopefully work as well as with "War Hero Potter" and "War Hero Granger-Weasley". He was unsure about his own part in this but he would make a stand with Dumbledore if he so desired. It would give him a reputation in the wizarding world and Tom would have to live with that but on the other hand, he would not be a nobody by name. It could be positive as well as negative. It would certainly give him an even bumpier start in Slytherin but Harry could tell him his option of persuading the hat to sort him into Ravenclaw. A lot of good politicians came from Ravenclaw. Though Tom Riddle in Ravenclaw sounded as believable as him being a Hufflepuff. No, his son would be a Slytherin. Just like Albus had become one, Harry had seen that one coming for years.

He slept fitfully that night. Dumbledore was his best bet, but what if he decided that the information was false or improvable because some ground work for it hadn't been discovered yet?

What if he decided to develop another fanatic idea? What if people decided to follow and kill for that idea? Harry did not see a possibility how to make hate out of these findings but in his time, most purebloods had been dead. Somehow, he was able to imagine a counter-movement on the lines of discrimination against genetically tainted wizarding blood – which would hit the purebloods this time. It sounded far-fetched to him but killing all Muggles and reigning supreme over them had seemed far-fetched as well. At this point, there were more muggle-borns than purebloods. Discrimination was a possibility.

It was no use crying over spilt milk. He had given his knowledge to Dumbledore, so it was mostly out of his hands. Grounded in that conclusion, he waited at the cafe the next day. He still let out a relieved sigh when he saw the old man entering and heading towards him with a smile.

"Were you able to copy everything?"

"It was a lot but thankfully, I have a sharp memory." The older man sat and ordered tea for himself. Harry was just happy to have a place with fine coffee. He always took a pack back home but it wasn't the same as having freshly ground beans. "So would you place back my memories?"

"Of course." Dumbledore got out the bottles filled with memories and started putting them back one by one. "I am happy this worked."

"It is a new situation, having a trained wizard in a Muggle body. I just don't want to end up as a test subject to the Department of Mysteries."

"Your secret is safe with me. Actually, how did you enter this part of town?"

"I met with the Department of Mysteries, explained my situation and asked for help. I have an amulet that gives me a magical aura."

"They let you go again?" Dumbledore raised an eyebrow.

"There are some decent people working there. I spoke to someone whose name was familiar. There are certain people that have a sense of honor I can trust."

"Am I someone that you trust?"

"You are the one I gave these memories too. You also know a lot about the future now and I trust you with the knowledge of my son. Right now, you are the wizard I trust most."

"Were you trained in political talk or is that your natural speak?"

"I think that when it comes to making ambiguous sentences with double meanings, I still haven't reached your level." In thought, he added that he also never wanted to reach that level.

"Would you tell me where you find me untrustworthy?"

Harry leaned back and crossed his arms. Of course Dumbledore would pick up on the things he left out. So he was cautious when he answered: "You care for the greater good. You sacrificed for the greater good. I am okay with informed choices, even if they mean death. Grindelwald knew what he was getting himself into. I knew from the time I was fifteen that fighting with you would mean death somewhere along the way. Not only for myself but for everyone I loved as well. I am alright with all of that. But honestly, I don't trust you around my son. In the life I came from, he tried to do the right thing again and again and you rejected him at every turn because you feared the darkness in him. You basically left him no choice but to go bad. Instead of support, you gave him disdain. Would it have turned out different if you had acted differently? I do not know that. But I know that you certainly didn't help. So I have some reservations about you meeting my son."

The older man nodded sagely and finally averted his gaze. I took him a moment to gather his thoughts before he said: "I see."

"Just so you know, I like this version of you much better than the one I met in my time." Harry smiled at him. "You carry guilt but it hasn't hardened you. Your older self would have said something like 'Oh, don't you worry, my boy, don't you worry'. You were very set in your ways. Some of them good, some not so much. You never showed your doubt, you never questioned yourself or sought counsel. It was quite impossible to discuss something with you. Even your mistakes were something you took as a given, something one had to forgive you for because there was no other way, no other choice."

"I seem to have thought myself infallible."

"I fear it was more along the lines of being unable to change guilt into remorse. So you made a world where you never had to carry guilt."

"Are there mistakes in your life that you just cannot forgive yourself for?"

"Plenty. People needlessly dying, people I could have saved. One brother losing an ear for me, one dying. My own wife, it took me nearly a year to figure out that she was possessed and dying. But worst of all, I regret how I treated my son. My youngest, the Slytherin. The older he got, the more he scared me. I had tried to deny my Slytherin nature, fearing those parts of me. So when my son reflected my own self back at me, at first I shunned him. I thought there was something wrong with him when actually, it was just something I did not like about myself. My wife confronted me about that, so I had to confront myself. I finally came around and returned to loving my son, but it had been two or three years in which I had been cold to him. It is the thing I regret most in life."

"You made it right."

Harry just nodded. "It is what gave me the ability to forgive myself. I made it right, I made it better. People make mistakes. I was able to right mine."

"I am not sure I can ever make up this mistake."

"You saved the world from your crazed ex-lover. You are now releasing counter-

information to make up for the misinformation before. You help to bring up children with love and acceptance instead of hate and discrimination. Or at least you work on that one."

"One after the other. I will need to work myself into the graces of some purebloods for some of those references anyway. I will reflect on my behavior towards them and Slytherins in general. Next time we'll meet, let us work on that."

"I will let you meet my son then. You have my full trust that you are able to overcome those last hurdles."

"Thank you, Grenmore."

"All the best, Albus."

Kapitel 12: Twelfth chapter

Dear Grenmore,

Ursus Black proved to be too hard to even have tea with but I had a nice chat with Arcturus Malfoy. Mayhaps I can make use of his library once I know him better. I explained Mendelson and other Muggle authors to him and he showed remarkable interest in their findings. As you know, most Malfoys have blond hair and have a tendency to marry blond partners. Finding out about recessive and dominant genes therefore fascinated him. The concept of genetic penetration made us look at his ancestry gallery. He invited his son Abraxas along, so I have hopes that he wasn't repulsed and will continue to meet with me on the topic. I insinuated that I planned on taking another look at the theory of magical inheritance in light of these genetic findings. If I was able to have Arcturus Malfoy join me at the presentation, that would shake the political landscape. Light and Dark wizarding families have had no joint projects since Gellert shook us up.

I had a realization though and decided to share it with you, even though I fear your reaction. Light families are known for marrying Muggleborns and half-bloods while Dark families intermarry. If that continued, wouldn't Dark magic die out eventually? Should we really share our findings? It would strengthen Dark magic families in the long run, wouldn't it? I already know you'll call me a fool but my doubts cannot be quieted.

Yours sincerely, Albus

Dear Albus,

a Malfoy is a great support and I congratulate you on your diplomatic skills. I will read up on current biological findings on genetics, so if Mr. Malfoy would ever like to meet a Muggle on the topic, I am at your service.

You are right that Dark magical families would eventually dwindle if nothing happened. You think of that as good while I think of it as a disaster. Dark magic is powerful and heady. It can work miracles but it can also be addictive. What we both think of as bad is when people grow addicted to pain and power by using too dark a magic. But that does not make Dark magic bad, just the misuse of Dark magic. Dark magic was needed for a lot of great inventions. Dark magical families, those with an affinity for Dark magic, can wield it without succumbing to its addictive components far longer than wizards with a Light affinity. If Dark magical families died out, we would need to have Light wizards performing Dark magic for research and rituals – those would have a much higher chance of growing addicted and performing misdeeds as a consequence. Dark pureblood culture is meant to cultivate balance, to teach skills that make you able to withstand the addictive components. It's why I would actually like for Tom to learn pureblood culture. Not the supremacy and not the arrogance but the inner mindset needed to withstand the Dark pull. So if Arcturus Malfoy would be open to meeting, I really would like to meet.

In my time, most purebloods had died. Their progeny often hadn't learned the ways of training the mind. Draco Malfoy (he would have been the great-grandson of Arcturus Malfoy) was one of the last purebloods alive that had learned those techniques. He

taught them to his son Scorpius who became friends with my Albus. I have not been able to learn much before I left that time, so I would love to meet the source of those teachings. I am ill-equipped for training Tom in that regard. I'd love to learn.

Though I want you to meet Tom before I ever meet with any Malfoys. They were my enemies in the war, the fiercest I fought against. So I need to be sure that you are on Tom's and my side whatever happens.

Yours truly, Gren

Dear Gren,

I apologize for my rather judgmental character, I never thought to differentiate between Dark Magic and its misuse because both are so often linked. It makes perfect sense now. I will further look into our endeavor.

I think that Abraxas will ask about the source of my new found interest soon and I would like to tell him about you. Not that you are from the future, just that you are a Muggle that adopted a half-blood child from a pure-blood line and used his scientific background to study magic. I would spin it that upon finding out about magic, you registered at the Ministry as a trusted Muggle and have been in contact with the Department of Mystery and me about your findings. We could say that the amulet that gives you a magical aura also gives your soul slight traces of magic, so if anyone ever questions your ability to occlude, we link it to your exposition with magic through the amulet. No other Muggle ever wore one, so it should tide us over. Do you think of that as a good idea or should I try to keep you as a mysterious source?

I would also love to discuss all this with Gellert. I know you most likely don't have a good opinion of him but he has a sharp mind. He has been my only real friend for years and while that most likely alarms you, please keep in mind that even in your time, he never convinced me to use Dark magic or kill Muggles (as far as I know from what you told me). I love talking to him and keeping all this from him is hard.

When would you like for us to meet next? I am at your service.

Yours sincerely, Albus

Harry clicked his tongue and sighed a lot while reading the letter. Great. So Dumbledore was in constant contact with none other than Gellert Grindelwald, the guy known for charming every captor into bending to his will sooner or later. It was true that Dumbledore never released him but that was as long as he felt horribly guilty about letting him loose onto the world. If Dumbledore worked on his guilt, would he stay as immune to Gellert's charms as he was now? What an abominable situation. Was there no one else that could act as Gellert's jailer? Did it have to be his lover, his best friend? Poor Dumbledore.

Harry couldn't imagine having to lock Ginny in, cutting all contact from the world, being her only confidant but having to keep her under lock and key, all the while checking if talking to her changed his thoughts and actions over the years. What kind of love was that? What kind of twisted situation was Dumbledore in? He really pitied the man. There was no going back from Dark addiction, no cure. It was like locking your heroine-addicted partner up forever, just to keep him or her alive and clean, all the while having to live with their half-crazed ravings intercepting normal

communication. No one should be in that situation – but there was no one as powerful enough as Dumbledore to do it. Both magically and mentally, the man was a bastion. Edgar had a lot to say about that. He had lived with Gren for years, watching him deteriorate, watching him succumb to alcohol, not able to stop him from destroying himself. He had often thought about locking him up to save him from himself. He had tried it once, trying to keep Gren from going to a pub. He had suffered a beating, verbal and emotional abuse and humiliation. He had weathered it all stoically. But Gren's tears had brought him down. He had been unable to suffer the crying, the screaming, the begging. He held Dumbledore in high respect for not succumbing to any of that.

Harry could not even imagine the pain of going through all of that. In some ways, he was still innocent. Even with the war, with his own death, with losing so many people close to him, he still retained some innocence. Love had never been tainted for him. Dumbledore and Edgar though, they knew that even love wasn't the epitome of goodness. Even love could be trumped.

What would Edgar have done if he had found out that war wasn't about protecting and saving but only about killing off innocents to have some men keep power and money while Gren had still been alive? Would he have talked with Gren about that, knowing it could destroy the man's equilibrium? Even knowing that Gren might have told him that all he ever cared about had been the power? Or would he have kept the knowledge? Dumbledore wanted to tell Gellert but what would be the consequences? What if Gellert twisted their findings? What if Gellert wholeheartedly accepted them and repented for his actions? All of those options were scary. Gellert was an unknown factor but a very powerful one. Because Gellert Grindelwald was without doubt Dumbledore's heart and soul.

Edgar looked lost thinking about that. Too many emotions ravaged his soul. He commiserated with Dumbledore, feeling a certain kind of kinship. He could only conclude that Dumbledore most likely would not last long in his silence. Hiding from your partner for long was unimaginable. A good partner found out sooner or later. Allowing a controlled setting was always better than Dumbledore hiding from them in the long run.

Dear Albus,

I am alright with telling Arcturus Malfoy that story. It adds up. If anyone questions why I adopted Tom, I will simply say that he was a bright boy, the best I could find in an orphanage. Small children often show accidental magic. Looking into his history, I finally found my way into the Ministry. We should stay obscure about the details of that. Just say that you do not know. You found the boy on the school list and maybe you sometimes check in on Muggleborn magical children? Do you do that? I would make sense that we met that way.

The topic of Gellert Grindelwald is a rather hard one. I know who he is to you. I'd love to trust in your integrity but you are in a horrible situation. Both Edgar and I agree that – if it were in any way possible – you should be relieved of being captor, jailer, confidante, lover and best friend all at once. As a friend and confidante, of course you should be allowed to talk to him about all this. As a lover, he may cloud your judgment but I trust you to keep it separate. It's the part where you are his jailer that worries me. He will want books to read up on it. He will want to be updated. He might even regret his own choices and propose things he could do from his cell to help. If he were given an

opportunity to redeem himself, who will be his judge to decide that there can never be redemption? You'd be in the situation of having to keep him locked up against your heart's judgment that everyone deserves a second chance. What I fear the most is that Grindelwald will support us and redeem himself. He is the one person that can bring you down, not only magically and emotionally but socially as well. If anyone ever found out that he is alive, they'll have your hide for that. Giving him world-changing knowledge could prove fatal in unexpected ways. I'd like to discuss it further before we decide on anything.

How about Saturday next week? Same place at one pm?

Yours truly, Gren

The hard and horrible thing about having power was making decisions. You could talk to others, inform yourself as good as possible and even ask specialists but in the end, you never knew exactly what your decisions would lead to. Oftentimes, success was expected. Oftentimes, there was some negative feedback involved. Oftentimes, you never knew all factors beforehand and had to adjust over time. Being a politician always meant being hailed, glorified, hated, made fun of and blamed for all kinds of failures and mistakes at the same time. It took a certain personality to withstand that and Harry had never felt like being able to take on such a responsibility.

Hermione had. From a young age, she had informed herself as good as possible, made decisions and also lived with the consequences of those decisions. She had a way of looking forward and working on current problems without being crushed by guilt by her past mistakes. She still learned from them though. Harry wasn't sure he was as good as that. He had the "not looking back too much" part down but did he learn enough? Did he inform himself enough? He wasn't sure.

He certainly did not know enough about Grindelwald to make any decisions. Over all, the question was if he even had to make a decision. It was Dumbledore's decision and he could only reflect with him. If Harry was certain of something, it was that he did not want to be another leader that made decisions for everyone. It wasn't his style. Everyone was able to make their own decisions. The goal was never that everyone listened to him. It was what had annoyed him about Voldemort and Dumbledore both – they were two sides of the same coin.

He wanted the political key players to learn to discuss problems instead of pushing their opinions by military might. Diplomacy was the key, not war. War only meant death and destruction and if a politician needed it, it showed weakness rather than strength. Grindelwald, Voldemort, Dumbledore – they had all chosen war. In their own way, they had all become terrorists. But all of them had tried talking first. If talking had been an option, if discussions would have been taken seriously and change made possible, none of them would have needed war. No one would have had to die if there could have been open discussion.

So yes, silencing Grindelwald and putting him away forever – just because his opinion was unwanted by current power holders – was wrong. As long as he abstained from killing and terrorizing, his voice was as important as any other. The question was: Could he abstain from violence? Could he be brought to see that toppling over a government that was hard to talk to for one of open terror and even less opportunity for voicing opinions was just more of the same?

And over all of that: Was gaining Grindelwald worth losing Dumbledore? Because if people found out that Grindelwald was alive, they would crucify Dumbledore.

Harry groaned in annoyance. He hated unsolvable puzzles. He needed more perspectives.

"Dad?" Tom patted over after shutting his book. "What's going on?"

"I have a problem I don't know how to solve."

"Can I help?"

"I don't think so." Why not actually? Tom might be seven by now but he was as bright as a star. "Okay, let's try. Sometimes things can be solved simply by telling someone else. Edgar couldn't help but maybe you can. So in this problem, we have a bad man and a hero that saved the world from the bad man."

Tom sat down on the other side of the desk and nodded.

"Everyone thinks that the hero killed the bad man but he didn't. The hero thinks that killing is wrong, so he locked the bad man away to keep him from doing bad things. But the world thinks that the bad man is dead. If they knew that he were alive, they would fear his escape. Makes sense?"

"Sure." Tom went into his thinking pose, one leg thrown over the other, his fingers lightly touching another.

"Now the hero began to like the bad man. He thinks the bad man might be redeemed. But if that happened, what would he do then? He can't release the bad man. The world would turn on him and think he went bad as well." Harry sighed. "That's the point I don't know a solution to."

"Is that man easily recognizable or could he change so much that people would not know it was him?"

Harry looked up and tried to follow his son's thinking. What was he on about? "What do you mean?"

"Well, the bad man is officially dead. Could he take another identity and live as someone else?"

"You are a genius, Tom." Harry blinked. "What an easy solution, how did I overlook that?"

"You need a child for easy solutions." Tom grinned. "You tend to think too much, Dad."

"I don't think any child ever accused me of that." The man shook his head in amusement. "Thank you, Tom. It was a good idea to talk to you."

"Sure. Ask me when you need help again." He jumped down the chair and went back to his book on the couch, a proud smile on his face.

So ... the solution was to bring Grindelwald around and then offer him a complete second chance – new look, new identity, a clean slate. Just like he had offered Tom a different life. Dumbledore knew his lover best, so he would have to be the one to decide when Grindelwald reached the point of having earned a second chance. Just like he would have to be the one to imprison or even kill him if it went wrong again.

Yes, it should be Dumbledore's choice. Harry would only support him in this. It wasn't his call to make. After all, he wasn't the one who would have to live with the consequences.

Dumbledore showed no reaction at all when Harry voiced his thoughts, his doubts, the possible endings he could see in involving Grindelwald in all of this. The older man stayed silent through all of it, having learned that listening and asking questions often brought about more than voicing opinions too early.

"May I formulate an answer while we drive to your house?"

"You have enough time for that?"

"I cleared my weekend. I'd like to make these meetings easier for both of us. I see

more of them coming. Also, I'd like to meet Edgar and Tom. I'd really like to know more about where you are coming from and meeting those extraordinary people."

"The drive will take a few hours."

"That will suffice for thinking about everything you told me regarding Gellert. Maybe we can continue this talk tomorrow?" Dumbledore's eyes seemed to shimmer, filled with not enough and too much emotion all at once. "I don't think I can talk about this today. Just the thought of seeing Gellert free again, being able to have him in my arms again ... it cancels out all rationality right now. I never expected our acquaintance to fill me with hope ... right now, it hurts more than I can say. My mind rebels the thought, too afraid to be let down and hurt again."

"I don't even want to think about you somehow finding a way where I could go back to my own time-line, so I know where you are coming from. Take your time, Albus."

"I just ... no matter what happens from here on out, I want to thank you, Grenmore. I can honestly say you turned my life around. I don't know where I will end up, maybe I'll curse you and hate you forever in the end but ... right now, I am just happy. I don't think I ever really realized how tired, bitter and jaded I had become over the years."

"Acceptance helps to settle into life, but not every thing in this world going wrong needs to be accepted just because change is hard. Your situation with Grindelwald is ... it shouldn't be like this. I don't know if I can help. Maybe it will mean actually killing him in the end. But a lot of things are better than the life both of you lead right now." Dumbledore looked close to tears by now. It was a confusing look on the man in his forties.

"Tomorrow." Harry nodded to himself. "I'll pay and we'll go."

The other man just stared into space.

They arrived in Bath in the evening, having driven most of the way in rain. Dumbledore conjured an umbrella but they both got quite wet anyway. Margret opened the door to let them in before closing it right after them.

"What a lousy weather!" She curtsied to Dumbledore. "Nice to meet you, sir."

"Well met, dear one. I am Albus Dumbledore."

"I am Margret, the maid. May I take your coat, sir?"

Loretta had come over as well and taken Harry's coat. She was still a quiet girl but she seemed to like helping out Margret. Competent at needlework, cooking and dusting, she would certainly find good employment if she decided not to stay. She also had beautiful penmanship, often exchanging letters with her sister.

"I made stew and left it to simmer. Would you like to eat now or later, Mister Horten?"

"Give us a quarter of an hour. Which guestroom can we give my dear friend, Margret?"

"Oh, I can ready the yellow one. Maybe it convinces the weather to brighten up."

"Splendid idea." He nodded to her. "Albus, let's warm ourselves in front of the fire, shall we?"

"Dad!" Tom took the stairs three at a time.

"Don't fall or I'll laugh, Tom." He went down to one knee though and braced for impact. His son had become more earnest and more lively at the same time – sometimes wise beyond his age, sometimes more silly than someone half his size.

Dumbledore chuckled. "So, this must be young master Tom."

"Nice to meet you, sir." Tom actually turned to him, nodded and held out his hand. A perfect little gentleman in the span of milliseconds.

They shook hands while Dumbledore grinned.

"May I inquire about your name, sir?"

"Dumbledore. Albus Dumbledore. Your father and I are old friends."

Tom suddenly froze and looked up at him with huge eyes. "You're ... you ... you signed the letter about my mom. The one about the school." He nearly hissed the last two words.

"Let's talk about that in my study, away from prying ears, later," Harry suggested.

"So he knows?"

"So he does." Harry led them into the living room. "I had this fireplace installed when I moved back here."

"What a great idea. Perfect for even a grown man."

Well, the workers had looked at him strangely when he asked for a fireplace as big as a man. They had outdone themselves though. It was perfect for flooding.

"Could you connect it later?"

"Certainly." Dumbledore sat in a seat next to it. "A real mansion you have here. Multiple guestrooms, maids ... all of that for you two?"

"Not at all. You'll met everyone for supper. I don't see any sense in dividing between employer and employees when we are living like a family."

"We are seven kids and three adults," Tom informed the older man. "Dad has taught everyone how to read and write. The other six kids are older, they work in the factory and around the house. Margret is our full-time maid and Edgar keeps the factory's books. Dad and him teach me business."

"It sounds like you have pureblood etiquette down to a T." Dumbledore raised an eyebrow.

"I try to imitate the good stuff." Harry grinned and sat Tom on his lap. "I am not much into having slaves, keeping apart from the less fortunate and arranging marriages." He saw Tom's questioning gaze. "All the kids here come from orphanages. They came here on their own free will and are given food, board and wages for their work. They aren't allowed more than eight hours of work and have half of Saturday and Sundays off. Most Saturday evenings are spent reading stories. I would guess most of the kids are in the library right now."

"Yeah, it's where I came from. We heard the door," Tom informs them.

"Then why were you coming from upstairs?"

"I was on the balcony. We replayed that scene from Romeo and Juliet. Helen played Juliet and I read her lines to her when she forgot them."

"So you and Helen went through my study even though I was away?" Harry lowered his voice.

"No! We took the ladder!" Tom bit his lip. "Okay, I went through it when we heard you." He lowered his head. "Sorry, Dad, I forgot."

"And you are sure that you simply forgot and did not do it to show the others how privileged you are by being allowed in my study when I am there? Because I am sure the other kids wouldn't dare."

"But you're my dad!"

"And does that exempt you from the rules?"

Tom looked sour.

"You don't go into my study without me there." Harry tipped his son's chin to remind him to look at him when they were talking. "I want to trust you on this. Otherwise I will need to lock my study. Do I need to do that?"

"No, Dad."

Harry waited for a moment. His son's eyes searched his face.

"I am sorry I went through your study without your permission."

"Good. Did you close the doors behind you at least?"

"Maybe ... I should take a look?"

"Maybe that is a good idea." The boy hopped from his leg. "Tell the others it's supper time in five minutes."

"Will do, Dad." He ran off.

Dumbledore looked deeply amused by their interaction.

"Raising a Gryffindor: You simply stare at the mess they made after disobeying your rules. Raising a Slytherin: They drop hints of their mischief wanting you to catch them and call them out on it."

"It doesn't tire you out?"

"It keeps the mind sharp. But I am happy to have Margret and Edgar. It's not something you do on your own."

"I guess it's easier when you don't have their parents breathing down your neck."

"It's worse. You have teachers, friends' parents and even your co-parents breathing down your neck how you can so hard on so sweet and nice and well-behaved a young boy. They really don't know how once you look away for a second, your son organized a crime ring to rake in candy."

"So Slytherins need a firm hand?"

"Someone strict as well as emphatic. Someone in their corner that does not let them get away with any shit. Someone unafraid of calling their bullshit without becoming their enemy. One of their own."

"In essence, a honored Slytherin they can aspire to that makes it his goal to bring out the best in them."

"Or her goal." Harry smiled. "Women, especially traditional ones, may be docile next to their husbands. They become fierce lionesses when they don't need to stay in their husbands' shadow. Maybe a widow that was famous before marriage?"

"Women don't tend to-"

"Lyadrett Selwyn? Catherine Parkinson? Meredith Ashura? Victoria Lestranger?"

Dumbledore closes his mouth in surprise and seems thoughtful.

"I just want to broaden your perspective. There has never been a female Slytherin head of house though a lot of head girls have come from Slytherin."

"How are you so- oh, Margret. Is it time already?" Dumbledore smiles at her. "Let's meet your family then."

They stood and went to the dining room. Dumbledore froze in the doorway before smiling broadly.

"Reminds you of something?," Harry teased.

The big table full of dining ware and food with teenagers and young adults sitting at it looked a lot like a miniature Hogwarts table.

"You need a crystal chandelier," Dumbledore decided while pointedly looking at the ceiling.

"You may outfit this house with one." How easy that would be for someone of his caliber. A minor transfiguration. "Now, let's take a seat. Everyone, this is my dear friend Albus Dumbledore. He's visiting for the weekend."

They sat down and Tom spoke their blessing before everyone began to fill their plates.

"So, this is Edgar. Edgar, this is Albus."

They nodded at each other. Edgar said: "It's a pleasure to finally meet you. Gren has told me so much about you."

"Same here. He is always full of praise in regards to you."

Edgar actually blushed and Harry had to ask himself if those two were flirting right under his nose. Richard's panicked gaze across the table seemed to say the same. How was it that he attracted gay men and boys like flies? Did Voldemort have a sexuality? Maybe that had ended with splitting his soul, so who knew? At least Tom would have a lot of support if he ever turned out to have a different sexuality or gender identity.

"Well, we can get a drink later." Where he reminded both of them that they already had someone they loved. "Let me introduce the children." That took a while, so Harry finished his meal long after everyone else.

Tom got some cookies for everyone that he had baked that day.

"They're exquisite!" Dumbledore smiled at the boy. "I have a sweet tooth, did you know?"

"I'll be sure to remember, sir." Tom's rather sinister smile said exactly that, yes. Harry was sure that his son just booked that under bribing material.

"Did your father teach you to bake?"

"No, Dad's not allowed in the kitchen." Tom grinned. "I learned from Margret. She's a great cook."

"Yours seems to be quite a skilled household."

"Edgar teaches everyone boxing, even Dad. Most of the girls stopped though. Brea and Mary are still with us and Richard never misses a session."

"Might be because of the shirt," Harry mumbles under his breath.

"Do I distract you too?" Edgar smirks at him.

"Sometimes I think that's the only reason why you always remove it."

"Maybe it is." Okay, so Edgar was back to his normal self, flirting with Harry instead of with strangers. When had he gotten so possessive?

"So, can we go to your study?," Tom asked impatiently.

"You want some whiskey too?" Harry huffed. "Bring the biscuits."

They got up and went to the first floor. As master of the house, Harry gave a tour on the way. He pointed out Dumbledore's room next to Edgar's. They settled into Harry's study with Edgar pouring them each a glass of whiskey and one with water for Tom. Harry checked the door to the library before making the warding motion with his hand.

Dumbledore muffled and warded both doors.

Edgar and Tom both looked awed at seeing the grey-haired man flicking around a little twig. Harry just reminded himself that even at this age, Dumbledore was openly carrying the Elder Wand with him.

"And both of them are safe?"

"I trust both of them, yes."

"Even your boy? He's only seven. Kids brag."

"He also knows that bragging means being made to forget. Someone messing with your memories is not a pleasant experience."

"Fascinating." Dumbledore looked at the boy. "Even more fascinating that I can see the beginnings of occlusional walls in his mind."

"I teach him some basic mind control techniques. If possible, I'd like to hire a professional teacher before he goes to Hogwarts."

"You are quite ambitious for a Gryffindor."

"Houses don't define us forever. Some of us never fit their house perfectly. I was loud and boisterous as a child but I liked to sneak around and solve riddles just as much." Harry gazed at Tom proudly for a moment. "Children are all unique and all of them

need a different approach. This one has high expectations of himself, so I want to support him in that."

"Gren told me that you are of a similar mind as Tom." Dumbledore turned to Edgar. "Sharp, cunning, ambitious."

Edgar laughed and smiled at Harry. "I really don't think I am. Gren has been too kind."

"Modesty?," Dumbledore wondered.

"Everything pales next to him, that is not modesty." The man turned serious in the blink of an eye. "My ambition is to stand by his side, to follow him wherever he goes, to be his support in his every endeavor."

"Loyalty?," Dumbledore wondered even more.

"Faith." Edgar pierced him with his gaze. "It's more than loyalty when one lays his life down for another."

Dumbledore closed his eyes for a moment, his visage pained. He had got Grindelwald to trust him, had edged him on and then pulled back when the other stepped too far. Lost faith. But there was still loyalty. Somehow, Harry was sure that Grindelwald chose to stay incarcerated. Point being that in his original timeline, the man hadn't even left after Dumbledore's death. He had stayed in that tower even without a jailer. He had let himself be killed. He had laughed in Voldemort's face.

What had he laughed about? Voldemort's lack of knowledge? His failure? His brokenness?

In a way, Dumbledore had not only captured Grindelwald, he had captured his heart again. He just did not know that.

"I think the most Slytherin attribute is single-minded drive. It might be towards a person or towards an idea. It might be a thirst for knowledge or development but it always has a scary intensity." Harry looked at Edgar. "It can be overwhelming but also deeply admirable."

"I think I know exactly what you talk about." Dumbledore looked wistful and took a sip of his whiskey. "Why a person and not an idea, Edgar? Why him?"

"Sometimes a person and an idea equal one another. Gren has a vision and this vision is something that surpasses simple personal bonds. It's the man that inspires me and the vision that has me hooked."

Dumbledore nodded but his mind seemed to be elsewhere. Harry was sure he immediately drew a parallel to Grindelwald. His lover had followed his vision and taken over when Dumbledore drew back. Just like Edgar would take over if Harry faltered. Just like he hoped that Tom would carry on the legacy. It really was something beyond loyalty. One could call it ambition but it was a lot more than that. Faith might not be too far from it. It was a fight as fiercely as a Gryffindor would fight – just more sneaky, more underhanded, less open and a lot more complex.

"When it comes to fighting and possibly dying for a vision, Gryffindors and Slytherins aren't dissimilar." Harry smiled, seeing that Dumbledore shared that conclusion.

"Their methods are different and they look down on each other's way of reaching their goal. With combined forces though, they are unstoppable."

"It just ... imagine I hadn't pulled back. Imagine Gellert had ...," the older man seemed at a loss for words.

"You and him against a government? They wouldn't have stood a chance." Harry looked at Edgar who had Tom on his lap. "I guess it's good we are polar opposites. We hardly agree on anything but when we do, it's worth fighting for."

"A fight against discrimination is worth fighting for." Edgar smiled at him.

"Not when you are the leading class and the discrimination keeps others from

threatening your position. People have to see their own benefit to decrease discrimination." Harry looked at Dumbledore again. "It's why we need a popular pureblood on our side if we want to do this right."

"Well, Gellert is obviously out."

"I hear you are becoming fast friends with a certain Malfoy." Harry had to smile, remembering those words aimed at him when Albus started bringing home Scorpius. It really seemed like a lifetime ago now.

"You really want to bring Arcturus Malfoy around?"

"A Light pureblood wizard, a Dark pureblood wizard and a Muggle. Certainly a combination not seen before." Harry grinned.

"Us three proposing an idea that will pave a future for your son?"

"I don't want him ostracized for things he cannot control. I want him to have the best chances in life he can have."

"You do realize that sometimes all your work is thrown in your face?" Dumbledore sounded resigned.

"That would be his choice. It doesn't change that I can tell myself that I did the best I could. Trying my best to change the world that it will be more accepting of him ... right now that's the best I can think of."

Tom pouted while Edgar looked at him with something like adoration. Harry just felt like a fraud. Who was he even? What gave him the right to hold such lofty speeches when he hadn't reached anything yet?

"Sometimes I wish I had children." Dumbledore sighed longingly. "Parents' love and devotion is something I can only envy."

"Why don't you adopt?" Edgar looked at the older man.

"Because there is only one person I wish to have children with. I fear it's not someone I trust around a child right now."

"Is it a violent person?" Tom asked with the blunt curiosity of a child.

"Planning on massacring most of the Muggles and enslaving the rest is a very violent act."

"Why would anyone want to do that?" Tom looked at Harry.

"What is the reason for discrimination?"

"Fear of the unknown, hatred of something foreign, possible loss of power," the boy reiterated.

"Killing and enslaving is the ultimate form of discrimination. Dumbledore's loved one is someone that discriminates against Muggles."

"So he's a bad man?" Tom thought for a moment. "Is it the same bad man as in the story with the hero? Is Mister Dumbledore the hero?"

"Sharp as always." Harry smiled at him.

"So you think Mister Dumbledore's loved one could see reason and stop discriminating Muggles?" Ah, the naivety of a child ... even one as sharp as Tom. Dumbledore drew in a sharp breath.

"It's not important what I think. It's important what he thinks." Harry gazed over to the man that had gone remarkably pale. "Sometimes speaking about such assumptions can hurt, so I think we should change the topic."

"No." Dumbledore looked at Tom. "Tell me what your father told you."

"Uhm..." The boy looked at Harry uncertainly. "Well, he told me that there was a hero and a villain. The hero incarcerated the villain and the world thought that the hero had killed the villain. It's what made him a hero. But now the hero thought that the villain might be redeemed. But if the hero let the villain go free, the world would brand him

a villain too."

Dumbledore averted his gaze, the pain clear in his eyes.

"He asked me for a solution and I told him that you could give the villain a different identity. Then no one would know that the villain was still alive, he would go free and the hero would stay a hero." Tom had gotten more quiet, obviously unsure if he should keep talking. "Dad thought that was rather brilliant."

Dumbledore just nodded dumbly, his eyes still on the carpet.

Harry continued softly: "Albus ... I am not sure if Grindelwald can be redeemed. But if it happens, I'd like to have a solution that doesn't sacrifice you."

The older man stayed silent. His gaze seemed lost to them, maybe even lost to himself. Lost to a time that he wanted to change, an episode filled with regrets gnawing at his soul. Dumbledore took a long sip of his whiskey.

"Thank you for your honesty," Harry whispered to Edgar.

"It's nothing to be ashamed about. I am proud to be able to say all this aloud."

Tom just looked at them as if they were a puzzle that needed solving. It was so cute, Harry just had to ruffle his hair.

"I need to go," Dumbledore said with a sudden clarity. "Gren, I'll connect your floo and then I need to use it."

Harry blinked his eyes for a moment. Go? Go where? Why sud- oh ... of course. That was a rash decision. "Are you certain?"

"I don't think I have ever been more certain. I need to apologize to him. I let him down. It's my fault he ran rampant like that ... I should never have been such a coward. If I hadn't let him down ... I need to go."

"Albus." With two steps, Harry stood in front of him. "Grindelwald is no child. He will not be molded into shape. He may use and twist your guilt. That man is a league of his own ... what will your apology mean to him?"

"Everything." The older man's spine straightened, giving him a few imposing inches.

"Do not stop me, Grenmore."

"I just don't want you to add to your guilt with a rash decision."

"This is not rash. It has been long in coming. It's something I should have done long ago." With a wave of his hand, the wards on the door fell. "Thank you for enlightening me in so many ways, Grenmore. This is one journey I need to do on my own, though."

God, Harry wished he had any power over this. But he hadn't. Albus Dumbledore was also a league on his own. He watched the man stride downstairs, cast a Notice-me-not around him – which Harry saw by how Edgar suddenly wandered off, the only one that Anti-Muggle-magic could be used against of their group – and enchant the fireplace. They would hereby go by the name of Horten manor.

"Can the floo actually get you all the way to Germany?"

"The floo?" Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "It's the magic. It can do anything." He conjured a box of floo powder, took a bit and stepped into the flames to be whisked away. The name of the place was immediately muffled, so Harry was sure it was under Fidelius.

He stared into the flames for a long moment. Tom was silent, changing his gaze between the fireplace and his father.

"Is that a good or a bad thing?" he finally asked.

"That remains to be known." Harry drew breath and sighed deeply. So much for not mucking up time ... he may have just released a monster.

Kapitel 13: Thirteenth chapter

"Do you think he'll come back today?" Harry leisurely drank his morning tea. Going to church every Sunday was a given in this era and he hated every minute of it, but the tea afterwards was very nice. Finally, it was time to relax.

"If everything went well, he's heels over head right now."

"The saying is ..." He saw Edgar's smirk and discontinued the sentence. For a moment, he imagined the position and hoped he didn't blush. Damn it. Sometimes, that man reminded him of Ginny and her dirty humor. God, he missed their banter.

"So I should not expect him back today?"

"Definitely not. He's either happy or licking his wounds." Edgar leaned closer. "How about a tumble in the sheets for us as well?"

"Take Richard. He's been making puppy eyes at you for weeks now."

"Uh ... I am not a pedophile." Edgar shook himself. "He'll grow out of his infatuation. Sometimes, I am not sure if it is hero-worship or desire."

"I think he'll turn out homosexual. I actually hope he only turns out homosexual."

"How is it that this household is filled with homosexuals?"

"I am heterosexual." Harry scoffed.

"You are a honorary homosexual." Edgar winked.

"Tom will be heterosexual."

"You won't know until puberty."

"The women are heterosexual as far as I know."

"Sometimes I am not sure about Mary. She likes to stick to Brea rather obviously," Edgar mused.

"Well, Brea obviously likes you, so Mary will not have a chance there." With a frown, Harry looked at the other. "Hey, why are they all in love with you? Richard and Brea, both like you. Nobody likes me."

"You are their dad and their boss. It would be weird to like-like you."

"Like-like? Very mature. Maybe you are simply on their emotional wave-length."

"Pining for a man that I can't have like some teenage girl?" Edgar grinned.

Harry just rolled his eyes.

"Hey, Gren, what are we doing today?"

The man smirked. This brought up a sudden memory of a show he had seen Dudley watch as a child. "We are taking over the world today."

"Okay ... how?"

"With a lunch at the major's house to get you into politics and discuss women's rights."

"Sounds great." The younger man just sighed. "With or without Tom?"

"Kid-free party. Margret is on child-watch for today."

"Thank God!" Edgar bit into his biscuit. "When do we have to leave?"

"In about half an hour, I think."

"Time to get pretty."

Harry just rolled his eyes.

Dear Gren,

I cannot thank you enough for what you have done for me. Gellert and I were able to

reconcile. He actually forgave me for betraying and abandoning him. I told him about your theories and in return, he told me a secret he allowed me to share with you. I am still baffled by it. So I knew that Bathilda Bagshot – a witch who lived in my town – was his great aunt. Her birthname was Stauffenberg, an old German wizarding bloodline. His mother went to Durmstrang and met his father there, one Jörg Grindelwald. Grindelwald is a Swiss wizarding bloodline. What I did not know before was that this man was a claimed bastard of Gerhard Grindelwald, Gellert's grandfather. The man had an affair with a muggleborn witch. It seems that Gellert had always been ashamed of his father's heritage. With your findings, he finally accepted his history and actually cherishes his grandmother's addition to his legacy. We tried finding some foreign blood in my ancestry but alas, my family believed in purity. It does not surprise that my sister was a squib and my brother barely gets by magically. Sadly, Gellert has no siblings. It would have been most interesting how they would have turned out.

We were able to talk about what we did wrong in our research and how we should have tested our theories back then. The folly of youth, you find something that works and then you wholeheartedly believe in it without actually looking for proof. Gellert laughed at the irony of going from planning to wipe off Muggles to defending them to purebloods. He regrets his actions deeply right now because if he had been able to reenter the world as himself, it would certainly have made a hell of an impact. He would like to aid our cause and I believe his integrity. As for a new identity, he says that no change of his body will ever hide his Slytherin nature, his dark magic and his pureblood bearing. He asked me to find a family that would support his claim of being a distant relative. No one would believe a lost pureblood child suddenly turned up but he was fine playing a half-blood bastard of some family. I am at a loss who to ask though. Which dark pureblood family might I ask? Right now, I am only friends with Arcturus Malfoy and I am certain he would never accept a half-blood stain in his family tree, not even after entertaining the concept of genetics.

Yours truly, Albus

Dear Albus,

please take a moment to examine your feelings. I am very happy for you that Grindelwald and you are closer again. But you are describing a complete turn-around in Grindelwald's opinions. Are you sure it is that simple? Hearing that he was wrong, that he killed hundreds of Muggles and magical folk for a misguided idea – is it that easy to turn away from his beliefs? If yes, does this mean he regrets his actions? What has he planned for the future?

Because if he radicalizes again and starts supporting breeding programs, genetic match-making, forced partnership of muggle-born and pure-blood couples or any other restraining and controlling action, I am not sure I want him on our side. Please think this through thoroughly. I have never met Grindelwald, not even in my time. But I am not sure if you can turn back from being a mass murderer.

Yours sincerely, Gren

Dear Gren,

my heart tells me to convince you but I am aware that you are right. I might not be the best to judge Gellert's state of mind. I'd like to invite both you and Edgar to meet him. Though I have to caution you – he is devastatingly handsome and charming, he knows how to pull people to his side. Please discuss my offer and send word about your decision.

Yours truly, Albus

"What do you think?" Edgar looked up at him from reading the letter over his shoulder.

"I think ... I wish one of my old friends were here. She could never be talked into anything. She saw through every kind of bullshit, exposing the truth beneath. When I had criminals like this one in for questioning, I called on her. She was a lawyer and a politician but she would have made a terrific cop as well."

"Did you ever ask her how she did it?"

"Yes." Harry tried his best to recall her explanation. "I'll try my best to remember. So everyone has a morale development. With the right upbringing, you can reach further stages of morality. A lot of criminals are driven to their wrong-doing not only because they are in need of something or have a feeling of being repressed but because they do not have the moral to keep them from their wrong-doing. So when you want a criminal to stop his actions, you need to address the causes for their actions as well as the moral principles driving them. Hermione told me that when she talks to criminals, she evaluates the underlying causes for their wrong-doings as well as their morale principles as well as their guilt and how they minimize it. Because how you cope with your negative feelings of doing wrong is also important. Does that make sense?"

"I am not sure that I understand the difference between causes of actions and how people justify their actions. Isn't the cause for an action also what you use to justify it?" Edgar sat down on the sofa.

"No. Let's say that you steal bread. The cause for that is hunger. But you may justify it by saying that the baker has enough money anyway, he won't miss one loaf of bread and for you it is the difference between surviving and starving. Hermione told me that there were six different categories of how you could make your actions sound better and the more of them and the more intensively you used them, the harder it was to amend your ways."

"Do you remember those six categories?"

"I'll try ... so first one was flat out denying you did something. That's the easiest one. Next is giving reason why you are not guilty. You were hungry, you were delirious, you could not control your actions, you saw that bread and stopped thinking because of hunger. Then there was one blaming the other person. It's the baker's fault because they left the bread out in the open, easy to snatch, an invitation to a thief."

"That's simply rubbish." Edgar snorted.

"Yes, it is. But how often have you heard soldiers tell each other that they just had to rape that women because she was wearing a short skirt or had flirted with them or that she was a whore anyway, so what is one more man?"

"Okay, point taken. I have heard that a lot."

"Yeah, so ... denying, disclaiming guilt, disclaiming responsibility. Then there was one where you claimed some higher principle. You hit that man but it was to teach him a

lesson, so he would do better in the future. You killed those people but it was to save your loved ones back at home."

Edgar closed his eyes in pain. Harry just winced, suddenly remembering that the man in front of him had killed hundreds of people in the name of their country. Both of them were murderers, defending their own actions by claiming a higher authority.

"It hurt me too to listen to her, don't worry." Harry sighed. "So the next one is discrediting the ones in front of you, the ones judging you. Have they not done wrong as well? Are they without blame? Who are they to judge you?"

"I remember using most of this. I am still using a lot of it. What have we done, Gren?" Edgar shook his head in despair.

"Yeah ... talking about guilt makes you face your own. I had to do it again and again and I hope it made me a better man." He sat down next to Edgar. "I wish we could decide to never kill again because killing is wrong. Who am I to decide that we need the oncoming war, just because I have no idea how to bring about change in any other way? I have the power to prevent millions of people from dying and I choose not to do it ... what does that make me?" He felt tears well up in his eyes. "I wish I were a wiser man, Edgar. I wish I had some other solution to this. I wish that ... that someone else had to make all of these tough decisions. I wish that Dumbledore didn't lean on me like this because most of my original time, I could lean on him to make these decisions for me."

Edgar just lay his head on Harry's shoulder and they shared a minute of silence. "What is the last one?"

"Last one?"

"You said there were six. You named five of them."

"I ... don't remember. There is speaking in euphemisms but that is a part of disclaiming guilt. There is dehumanization of the other person but that is part of disclaiming responsibility. There is comparing you with others, like saying they also did nothing, but that is disclaiming guilt. There is minimizing the consequences, like saying that it didn't really hurt, it wasn't that bad what you did. Oh, I think that was the last one. Damn, I wish I had a better memory."

"It was a pretty good summary anyway." Edgar snuggled up to him. "I wish I could have met your friend. She sounds awesome."

"She was. Is. Will be. Whatever." A deep sigh left his lips. "Anyway, that are the techniques people use to diffuse their guilt. When it comes to wrong-doing, it's better to use as few as possible and actually face your guilt."

"I see." Edgar had closed his eyes. "I shall do so. You gave me a lot to think about."

"I don't think we should face Grindelwald as long as we still ponder our own decisions."

The other man nodded into his shoulder.

God, he wished life wasn't as hard as this.

They spend a few evenings with Edgar talking about his decisions in war-time. Most of the time, he followed Gren, happy to have his commander make decisions, even if he sometimes questioned them. Most of those decisions were logical and calculated, minimizing losses but devoid of any empathy. Was it better to lie to a group of soldiers, so they happily walked to their death, instead of telling them the truth and having more of them die? Was it better to kill civilians to ensure a more swift peace or to let them survive, even if it meant a prolonged war? Gren had been all about saving resources – people's lives – and completely dominating their foe. Edgar had admired

that, but with what he saw afterwards, he now questioned the why of that. Had Gren fought for peace? Or had he been all about keeping the war going? Had it been about the lives of his soldiers or had it been about his own glory? It was hard to say, even for Edgar who had been his partner.

They had reached a point where he could only go in circles, so he asked: "Tell me about this morale development, please. Right now, I can't decide if Gren was a genius or a madman."

"Even morality won't tell you that. It will only tell you how far he was in thinking about his actions. I am not sure that someone who thinks deeply about his actions equals someone good. I am not even sure that someone who does the so-called right things is someone good."

"I'd like to understand though, please." There was a lost look to his eyes, a man questioning his whole life and what he had believed in.

"As you wish. So again, we have six categories. Actually, it is seven but most people never reach number seven. Actually, most people never reach number six. Most stop somewhere around three or four. Seven is a category for people who never do anything else than think about morality all of their lives, people like the Dalai Lama."

"Okay, wait ... I think I'll note it down this time." Edgar got a piece of paper and a pen. "I am ready."

"So the first staging is thinking in terms of obedience and punishment. If I do this, will I be punished? It's an easy yes or no. It's how small kids think." He waited for Edgar's nod before continuing. "The second stage is weighing that punishment against personal gain. Even if you do wrong, you aren't always punished. So is the risk of punishment worth not doing the action or not? You begin calculating."

"Tom can definitely do that."

"Yes, very much, he has reached the second stage early on." Harry smiled remembering their little rascal. "The third stage focuses on what the action does in terms of your social standing. If your friends, if your family knew what you had done, what would they think of you? How would it change their perspective? What would onlookers think of you if they saw you doing this action?"

"It's what you tried to teach Tom with that picture incident, right?"

"No, I only talked about personal gain there. I talked about his teacher's and my opinion of him in terms of how he would benefit from our continued good impression of him. That's different from talking about how disappointed I would be if he didn't apologize. He has not reached the third stage yet. That stage requires bonds and that is something Tom is still developing."

"I see the difference ... is it normal that he has not reached that stage yet or should he have reached it by now?"

"No, most reach it in their teens. Puberty is the age where you begin to care a lot about how people see you, surpassing just thinking about your own gain. Kids are selfish by nature. This morale stage comes later in life. I will still try to instill as much as I can in Tom early on. In my time, he never surpassed the stage that he is in now. He never developed bonds in my original timeline, never cared about anyone."

"I see ... that's why you gave him a family. I am pretty sure that I care about what people think of me. Not everyone, but my sister and you and Tom and the other little ones."

Harry smiled indulgently. That's what he hoped Tom would learn someday. Right now, he was pretty confident that he would. Edgar was a great role-model for their son.

"Next stage?"

"That is social order. You begin to understand that rules are there for a reason. It keeps the social order, it keeps a society running. Rules should be adhered to at all times, not because you are punished if you don't but because they make sense. You do not kill people, not only because you are punished, not only because your loved ones would think badly of you, but because a society that turns an eye to killing people will suffer as a whole. It will give rise to questions about the worth of life, the worth of people, the worth of those still living as part of them. Once you allow discrimination against one of your own, you allow discrimination against any of them, even yourself. When you discriminate against homosexuals for example, it also gives rise to discrimination to people of color, people of other religions, women, disabled people, any kind of person actually. Even if you discriminate against people that openly discriminate others, you are no better than them. You begin to understand that society is a living system with a backlash on what you pour into it. There more love and acceptance you give, the more you may receive. The more hate and abuse you give out, the more you will be met with."

"That ... is something I am still trying to grasp. I hear your words and I know that's where I want to be at but I still catch myself doing actions that disagree with what you tell me."

"Don't worry, you aren't the only one struggling. In my time, people were focused on teaching morale and this point, stage three to four, was what most saw as the turning point to becoming an adult."

"I can't believe there are still three more stages ... God, I have a lot of work to do." Edgar sighed deeply. "Okay, continue to tell me what I'll struggle with for the next years."

"Stage five is where you understood every societal rule, why you should not kill, why you should not lie, why you should take responsibility for your own actions – and then you begin to question those rules. Yes, you should not kill. But what if you killed someone that would bring about thousands of deaths? You should not steal but what if you stole to save someone's life? What is the worth of someone's life? Is a stranger's life less worthy than that of someone dear to you? What is the worth of your own life? If your death can save more than one other life, would you die for them? If a life you held in your hands could save someone else, would you sacrifice them? You learn that rules are only the easy way out. Adhering to a rule is easy. But what if not adhering to it might bring about a bigger gain for society?"

"Like how you decided that letting this war happen might save more lives in the future because people will start to focus on learning morality in school?"

"Exactly that. At least I hope that is where I am at and am not deluding myself about my reasons for this decision."

Edgar just looked at him for a long moment before slowly closing his eyes in pain. Some of those were questions he struggled with. War seemed easy at first. You go where you are told to go. You shoot who you are told to shoot. You are a weapon, not the one making decisions. Sometimes you question those decisions afterwards but never before obeying. But what happens then? What happens when you begin to question if you should have disobeyed? What happens when your memories begin to pain you? How do you live with the guilt of obeying those orders? And what happens after you begin questioning the whole concept of war? What happens when you realize that it never was about defending oneself but about some people's greed?

"So ... you learned and understood society's rules, then questioned them again and noticed that some situations call for adjustments of rules and then what? What could

possibly be number six or seven?" Edgar's sigh sounded deep and wary, his head held in his hands and his posture that of exhaustion.

"Number six is a person with an ingrained set of moral rules. You have societal rules, situational amendments and can make decisions based on those ingrained rules even in short amounts of time. Your code of ethics is driven by empathy, you are able to take on everyone's view of the situation and you actually feel their perspective. So you make decisions based on what's best of everyone involved and it actually is what is best for everyone because you understand others so well. You also understand yourself well, so you know what a decision will do to yourself."

"That ... sounds understandable, but can you give an example?"

"Let's say that you are a leader and sacrificing someone is the right decision to save a lot of people. You understand that this one person does not want to die but all the others want to live. Sacrificing him would be right for this society as a whole, even if killing is wrong. Level six would make you question what this decision would do to yourself and how the saved ones would feel about being saved by someone's sacrifice. Some would be happy and thankful, some would feel guilty. Would you feel right in your decision? Or would you question yourself for years if you could have made a better decision? Would your insecurity about your own actions prevent you from hard decisions in the future, thereby affecting society as a whole negatively?"

"God, I am definitely not anywhere near that point." Another sigh left Edgar's lips.

"The last stage, number seven, takes this even further. Not only would you ask how yourself and society would be affected by your actions, you would be able to calculate how this action would shape not only yourself but society in the future and how future generations would look upon those actions. You would actually have an idea how you yourself would develop and if someday you might regret the action you did today and therefore should not do it. You even count into it that if there were an afterlife, how would you look upon your own actions in years to come. It's a kind of transcendent morality."

"I just can't believe that there are people who can do that."

"There are. Those people need a lot of time to make decisions, weighing pros and cons excessively. You ask them a question, they need hours to answer you because they have so many perspectives to think through. I'd love to have someone like that to pose the question to if I should let the war happen or not. Should I kill Hitler now or not? I really feel ill-equipped to make that decision by myself. I am actually sure that I will regret it but I have no idea what else to do."

"So ... seeing as you can evaluate your own stance on this, even how it will change, have thought through societal consequences and the impact on society, you would be level six?"

"Maybe somewhere at five going on six. I spend a lot of time on the concept of morality after the war. I was destined to kill someone and then I found out that I had to die for this person to lose his immortality. So I died, it's what everyone would have expected of me, I was on level three at that time. I thought about everyone's disappointment if I baled out. I thought of how many people would die if I did not sacrifice myself, that were the first inklings of level four. So I died and then I was asked if I wanted to come back to actually kill the guy myself." Harry shook his head. "Of course I didn't want to. Death is peaceful. It's nice. It's where my family and most of my friends were. But people expected me to come back, to fulfill my destiny, to do as I was prophesized to do. Still level three at that time. I came back, I killed the guy. Seeing as he had taken over the government, I had to do a lot of crimes to finally

vanquish him. So after he was dead and peace was restored, I faced criminal charges of breaking and entering of many accounts, theft, harming others physically and mentally and – of course – killing someone. Our government decided that all my actions were for the war-effort and therefore immediately annulled any charges brought against me. First, that was nice. Then I grew up and understood what I had done, how much damage I had wrought on some people. I felt immensely guilty and I had no idea how people ever decided to drop all charges against me without even hearing them. I reached level four and understood how damn wrong I had been in doing a lot of things just because I didn't know better. Really, a lot of people would not have needed to die if I had only thought about my actions some more."

"That's exactly how I feel right now." Edgar slowly raised his head. "For more than fifteen years, I blindly followed Gren, thinking him correct, stopping myself from thinking my own actions through. I simply listened. His alcoholism made me question first my faith, then him, then my own actions. Meeting you ... I got out my depression and started facing my failures. But now that I feel alright with who I am, I start thinking about who I was and what I did. That's just ... overwhelmingly hard."

"Learning from past mistakes without condemning yourself for it, without bringing them up time and time again, it's hard but it makes you a better person. We can't change what we did but we can learn not to make the same mistake again. Not only that, we can learn to anticipate consequences not only for small actions but for large ones, even for societal ones. The better we understand ourselves as well as others, the better our decision-making skills."

Edgar leaned back on the sofa and closed his eyes. With a sigh, he sunk into the cushions.

"I need you, Edgar. I am too far from Tom's mindset. You are perfect in your imperfection. Please don't feel bad about who and how you are."

"Yes, sir." His eyes stayed closed.

They were silent for a minute, both lost in their thoughts. Had Harry overdone it? It was a big topic. Hermione's answer had not been short and he had needed the explanations more than once. He had asked about endless examples, discussed morale decisions again and again. Edgar seemed a lot more overwhelmed. Was it because of his age? Harry hadn't been that much older. Had he been farther along the moral stages? He had been mostly at level four, only slipping up sometimes. Maybe it was because Edgar carried a lot more guilt with him than Harry.

"What do you think Grindelwald will be like? Will he be level two or six? Will he talk about the great reasons he had for killing people or will he have learned that it's only a technique to diffuse guilt?"

"I have no idea, I never met the man. But from what I read about his childhood and youth, I got some clues about possible causes. He was raised by two dark magic parents, so he had a traditional upbringing. Everything is done for the image of the family. In a hundred and fifty years, no one ever found out that Grindelwald's father was a bastard. So there must have been one hell of a cover job and young Grindelwald must have been instilled from early childhood that his father's ancestry is a forbidden topic. Then he went to Durmstrang, a school that celebrates dark magic. He was thrown out of that school at sixteen for practicing a magic too dark for even this school. So he must have practiced black magic which means ritualistic sacrifices, blood magic, necromancy and the like. That magic has a heavy pull towards a focus on power and domination. It practically kills your empathy. Still, Dumbledore said that both were in love with each other as boys. Love normally requires a form of empathy."

Dumbledore is wise enough to differentiate love from being in love, so a one-sided love from a love that builds on the feedback of the other. From what he told me, they have a love where both participate and care for the other, so Grindelwald did not kill off every shred of empathy with his actions. It means he must have one hell of a focus to escape the black magic pull. You could say that Dumbledore was his salvation to steer away from the path of self-destruction because that is what black magic leads to. But homosexuality is something unthinkable in a traditional pureblood upbringing. It was a scandal in my time when that tidbit of information came out after Dumbledore's death. As far as I know, Grindelwald's great-aunt was the only one who ever knew about them because she walked in on them once. Grindelwald lived at her house after being thrown out of school. As far as I know, he never had contact with his family again. Might be because he could never tell them about Dumbledore, might be because they were what made him turn to black magic in the first place. Anyway, he went bad, yes, but he never practiced black magic again."

"So ... a dire lack of empathy, possible childhood trauma, carrying a damn lot of secrets and being afraid of someone finding out any of them for multiple reasons. Early childhood criminal record, no friends except for a lover no one can know about. Neat." It must be the day of sighs because Edgar let out another. "I am deeply impressed by all this. This analyzing and working out how to help an individual mend his ways ... if we had a deserter, we shot him in the head, end of story. In front of everyone, so no one would come up with the idea of running."

"If it weren't for Dumbledore show-killing Grindelwald and hiding his body, they would have made a spectacle of his corpse, inviting everyone to look at him before publicly burning him and scattering his ashes because mass-murderers don't deserve burials. It's what they did to Tom after his death in my time."

"After what you told me about this moral levels, how can a society as a whole be this ... this low-level? At level four, they would have at least decided that dead is dead and a dead body is not open for public humiliation, right? They would have cremated him and scattered the ashes because a grave would only mean a place for strange people to gather, sure, but openly displaying a corpse? That's not even level three, is it? That's nothing but schadenfreude."

"Yes, that decision does not reflect well on wizarding society." Harry – who had sat his armchair for most of the discussion – looked away in shame for the first time. Even at eighteen, he had thought that it wasn't okay what happened but he hadn't said anything. No one had said anything. He had no idea who made the decision of displaying Voldemort, if anyone actually made the decision. "Hitler will decree that his body should be burned, so exactly that kind of display would not happen to it. They had two hours after his death before Sowjet soldiers stormed the place. The bodies had been burned to be unrecognizable and shallowly buried. In the end, they were buried and exhumed ten times before their ashes were scattered."

"The bodies?" Edgar looked exhausted again.

"Hitler, his wife, his right hand man with his wife and their six children. They killed the children before killing themselves, knowing death would be a kinder fate than living with what their parents had done, in the hands of their enemies."

The other man just shook his head. "How are people cruel enough to blame the parents' actions on children?"

"They just are. Whatever we do, Tom will be blamed for it. I was reborn as a general of the British army, you as my right hand man. If we absent from the war, he will be seen as a coward for all of his life. His name tarnished, his reputation immutable."

"How ... how do you do that? Always thinking of him first, even to the point of your own death?" Tears rolled over Edgar's cheeks. "Don't you realize that this war will kill you?"

"Even your own death has a worth and sometimes it's a price worth paying, Edgar. I have died two, maybe three times by now. I saw what lies on the other side. Death does not scare me."

"Is there really another side?" His hands shook and he tried clasping them together to stop their shaking.

"Magic is a curious thing. You can talk to the dead, you can summon their spirits. There are inferi, there are ghouls, there are ghosts. Might be I can't ever die, maybe someone will chain me to earth as a ghost. There are magical portraits that save your essence. Death is relative when you are a wizard. But yes, there is a great beyond, a veil to lead you to the other side. Your ancestors are watching you, they see your actions and decisions."

"Okay ... can I have a hug?"

"Sure." Harry stood but nearly fell back into his seat with the might of Edgar crashing into him. Damn ... how much was he placing on these shoulders? On the other hand, people only grew with the challenges they had to master. Was he expecting too much from Edgar? "What do you need right now?"

"This." Edgar pressed against him. "And afterwards I'll go and hug Tom."

"Sounds like a plan. You have been a bit out of it these last few days and Tom asked me twice if he did something wrong."

"He's such a good kid."

"That he is." Harry patted Edgar's back. "He'll love the reassurance."

"When should we schedule a meeting with Grindelwald?"

"It's up to you." It was the least Harry could do. All this was hard on Edgar. Hell, it was hard on Harry too. He made the decision about the war but he sure as hell doubted himself about that one. Maybe he should talk it through with Dumbledore at a later date. It might also restore the power balance between them.

"Let's go next Saturday."

"Alright. I'll write to Dumbledore then."

Dear Gren,

thank you for your confirmation and also the time you took to answer my request. It made me question myself and I realized how right you are in doubting all of this. No one makes such a turn. Gellert was impressed by your findings but even he acknowledged the irony of going from a man intent on enslaving Muggles to someone fighting blood supremacy and advocating equal rights for muggle-borns. Though he seemed empowered by the thought that once you break with all tradition, you could actually also promote homosexual rights. He says he is sick of hiding who he is to me and I to him. He asked me that if we were to decide to set him free, would I openly come out as his partner? Not Gellert Grindelwald's partner of course, but whoever he would impersonate. That scared me a lot but the answer is yes. I'd give up my power and reputation to be with him. I am sorry if that will thwart your plans in any way but I love him and that will always be my most important truth. He will be my downfall in every way and still, I'll never regret loving him. Be it that he is found out one day, be it my homosexuality – we are both so sick of living lies. Nothing is worth that much pain. This became clear to me these last two weeks.

Thank you so much, Albus

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 leafs 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, obliviate 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.

Kapitel 15: Fifteenth chapter

Dear Gren,

even a week later, words still elude me. I was also unable to meet Gellert, I fear I would only scream at him. I decided to send him a letter instead. I also talked about my own criminal habits with Minerva McGonagall, a good friend of mine. Are you acquainted? Her feedback was, well, let us call it vicious. Most likely my due but she never holds back when asked her opinion. She gave me quite the list of things to learn. I really do not see how I ever got to be a wise man in your time. Maybe I had some epiphanies over the years. Maybe not, seeing as you know about my habit of breaking into people's minds. Now that I identified this as a problem, I am amazed that you reacted as calmly when I tried it with you. How often have people broken into your mind that you simply shrugged at my feeble attempt? On this note, I fear Gellert's answer to the question why breaking into someone's mind feels so normal to him. I dearly hope his parents did not do what I thought they did.

I am sorry that this letter mostly consists of me rambling. Even now, I have no idea what to think about any of this. Most of all, I ask myself how I was able to converse with Gellert for more than fifteen years without ever noticing how far he strays from cultural norms and social rules. I wish I could go back and start teaching him fifteen years ago. What have I done all this time? I simply left him to his norms and ideals. It's like having him frozen in time for fifteen years. I feel like a failure right now.

Yours truly, Albus

"Well ... how does it feel knowing that you make everyone around you feel inadequate?"

"Not so good." Harry laid the letter onto his desk and looked up to Edgar who stood next to his chair.

"Were a lot of your friends like you?"

"Ginny was a lot like me." Harry stood and went to the window. "She was my fire, my passion but also my soulmate. She was the only one who came close to understanding what I went through. My whole childhood and most of my teenage years, a part of the dark Lords soul was in my head. It whispered to me, it gave me nightmares, it gave me visions of torture and death. The same dark Lord had possessed her for close to a year. It made her free a deadly creature that paralyzed other kids and nearly killed them. It made her cut a cat open and paint a wall with it's blood. Finally it leached off her soul, nearly killing her in the process. I don't think anyone can understand dying not only once but twice. Growing up with people that hate you, believing your parents to be drunks that got themselves killed. But she understood the horror of having another person living in your head. An evil, bloodthirsty monster that speaks with you night and day. We worked through our guilt and horror together. She had been tortured, just like I. She had been beaten and starved by our enemies. She had been made an example of. She was nearly raped and killed more than once and only got away by sheer luck. I can't even explain how much she meant to me ... not only as a partner and the mother of our children. She was there in my darkest moments and I was there for hers. Most of our childhood was complete shit and we knew we had a

lot of work to do if we ever wanted to be good parents."

"She sounds awesome."

"She was." Harry smiled sadly. "Then there was Hermione, the one who explained all those concepts to me. What I am to all of you now, she was that person to us. She was fighting against discrimination, enslavement and all that at twelve years old and we all thought her barmy. But she was just that far ahead of all of us. When you wanted to know right from wrong, Hermione was the one to ask."

"It's sad that we live in a time where women can't be brave enough to get that awesome."

"We will bring about such a time." Harry smiled grimly. "But yes, my life was full of great women. The one that Dumbledore mentioned, Minerva McGonagall. She is awesome already. That's one of the great women of this age." Harry grinned. "My best friend was called Ron. He was immature as hell and I have no idea what went on in Hermione's head when she decided to marry him. He was very down to earth and a good guy but it took him over ten years to stop nursing a grudge against Hermione and me for simply existing. Hermione was smarter than both of us put together and I was famous for dying as a baby. He needed a long time to get over that as a teenager. For years, he felt inadequate."

"I get why making people feel inadequate does not fill you with pride."

Harry just snorted and shook his head. "Everyone around me had so many things I was envious about. Hermione was smart, Ron had a loving family, Ginny was the girl everyone wanted to date. Even Draco, the damn git, had it better than me as a kid. I got a bloodthirsty murderer after my hide that made me a killer at eleven years old. The worst part was being famous for having said murderer blast up my parents and somehow surviving that shit as a baby. No, I don't like people looking up to me."

"You can lean on me too, okay?" Edgar sent him a shy smile. "I like being your confidante. I like being the one you turn too. Even if you'll never love me – which I understand completely after what you just told me about your wife – I want to be your support in this life-time."

"I really don't know how I am worthy of such great friends." Harry put a hand on Edgar's shoulder. "If I did not come with my history, I am sure I could have loved you."

"Your history made you the man you are today. There is nothing wrong with that." Edgar placed a hand on Harry's. "On another note ... Tom told something curious. We are meeting some people this Sunday?"

"Yes, I invited the Delbert family. They are neighbors to the Smith family. Mr. Smith is getting worse, he started hitting his two-year-old and Tom."

"He's hitting Tom?" Edgar clenched his free hand to a fist.

"You may have noticed that he isn't hiding the bruises anymore. He has also told his teacher and the school principle about being hit by Mr. Smith. Next time this happens, I'll report him to the police. He may hit his own children, I can't do anything about that, but I won't condone him hitting Tom."

"I want to beat him up right now."

"But you also want to reach the fourth level of moral progression, so tell me why you shouldn't do that?" Harry smiled.

"Because he would only hit his wife and kids harder. He could also report me to the police. It would make you angry because it would fall back on this house and our reputation. Also, self-justice is not allowed because we aren't judges and most people don't have enough moral progression to make rational decisions which is why no one should support self-justice."

"Level one through four in perfect order. You really are a fast learner."

"Just for the record, I still want to beat him up."

Harry just smiled and squeezed his shoulder before drawing back his hand.

"You know ... I think we'll mix up today's boxing training with self-defense techniques. It will be good for the girls anyway. Everyone should know how to fend off an attacker."

"Let's do that."

They met the Delberts after church and had a really nice lunch with the whole family. Their two girls befriended Harry's girls in record time and they went out to play and chatter directly after dessert. Their boy was two years older than Tom, so Harry asked Margret to have both boys help in the kitchen for their chat with the parents. Misses Delbert looked really excited to be asked to join the men in Harry's study, clearly ecstatic about not being sent to the kitchen.

When Harry asked what they wanted to drink, her sparkling eyes practically drilled a hole into her husband. The poor man said no word when Harry give his wife a cognac too.

"Well, err ... thank you again for the invitation. You have a really nice place." Mister Delbert worked in a factory, a job with a lot of work and not a lot of pay.

"Thank you very much. I wanted to use this invitation to thank you for all you have done for my son. Especially you, Misses Delbert." He toasted the women who blushed and giggled.

"Oh, no, it's nothing. He is such a sweet boy."

"He is." Harry nodded and smiled proudly. "He also told me that the reason he often comes over lies in your neighbor hitting his kids, often unprovoked. I wanted to hear your opinion on this."

Both quieted and stilled instantly, sending each other a concerned gaze.

"Well, err ... yes. When Tom comes over, it often has to do with Mister Smith hitting his kids," Mister Delbert answered. "He mostly stated some kind of reason but it seems ... excessive. But, sir, we want no trouble. It's Mister Smith's decision how he raises his kids."

"Normally, I would completely agree. But then I find hand-prints and bruises on my own son and he tells me that Mister Smith hits him too."

Misses Delbert was fidgeting on the sofa, looking at her husband intently.

"Well, that ... might have happened once or twice." He looked at his wife. "He said the boys had talked back to him. Tom never complained to us ... did he?"

"He damn well did, Roger." It seemed his question had finally allowed her to speak her mind. "At first, Tom came over just asking for water and cleaned up Howard. The boy is always full of bruises. Then he brought the little one, Daisy. I couldn't believe my eyes when he came over and the girl had a big, fat bruise right on her face! The nerve of that man! Now all three come over, bruises all over them. And Sara, the poor woman, she is black and blue as well. I said 'Roger, we have to do something', didn't I? Roger, this is wrong. Tom never complained to us but he's always telling the kids that it's not their fault and that hitting a kid is wrong and he is so right! That Mister Smith takes it too far." She took a deep breath. "Mister Horten, your son is such a good boy. He hasn't lied to you. It's true, all true, so God help me."

Harry just nodded while Edgar gripped his armrest.

"I'd like to do something but the law is on his side. I'll report him if he ever touches Tom again but his kids are out of my reach. But I would like to give him a fair warning

that he is being watched. For that, I'd like you to accompany me to the major to tell him. I'd also like you to accompany me to talk with Mr. Smith himself. Would you do that?"

Misses Delbert's eyes bore into her husband again. It was clear that she wanted to do something but could not without her husband's consent. This one sweated and looked really uncomfortable in the spot he was put in.

"Minnie, I- can we talk about this?" His voice was high-pitched.

"No, Roger. Mister Horten is a gentleman. He gives work to orphans, he pays for the local soup kitchen and he cares for mistreated families. You will lend him your support. It's the right thing to do." If Ginny had looked as furious as Mrs. Delbert did in this moment, Harry would have been on his knees.

"A- aye ... oh well." The man let out a shaky breath. "I am sorry, so sorry, Mister Horten. It is the right thing, I know, I just want no trouble. Mister Smith is a damn scary man. Always shouting, always breaking things ..."

"We have to think of the children, Mister Delbert. They need adults to defend them. Little Daisy is only two years old."

"I just wish the police would do this. It's no work for people like us. I mean, like Minnie and me, not you, you are obviously ... well, you. You know. You are a good man."

"It's why we need to involve the major. I fear this is a common problem and Mister Smith is not the only one mistreating his family. There might be other kids that need our help."

"You are so right, Mister Horten. Thank you so much." Misses Delbert looked star-struck. "It's our duty as Christians."

"But the major is an important man, Minnie, he does much more important things--"

"Kids are very important, Mister Delbert. They are our future. They'll be the ones running this country when we are old, they'll decide about peace and war, they'll raise our grandchildren." Harry took a swig of his whiskey. "Also, I am friends with the major, so I know that there is some free time in between his important work."

"See, they're friends. Nothing to fear. You saw those bruises on all of those kids, you just tell the truth. God is with those who are true." Misses Delbert held her husband's hand.

"Can't you come too?" There was panic in his gaze.

"Yes, why don't you come as well? Your word is just as good as his." Also, it would keep Mister Delbert from running with his tail between his legs.

Her eyes wide as plates, she looked at Harry before breaking into a smile. "Of course I'll do that! Thank you!"

"The war showed that women are just as important as men, their word counts exactly the same. As a man of war, I know that the women of this country are our back-bone." He practically felt Edgar's amused grin beside him. Well, it was true, wasn't it? Maybe a bit fast for this time but someone had to start.

"You are too nice, Mister Horten, just so nice." She fanned herself with a hand. "There, Roger, you can learn a thing or two." A grin was thrown into her husband's direction.

"Now when shall we meet the major?"

"How about next Sunday? We could repeat this nice lunch. Provided that there aren't any new bruises on my son which would make me expedite that meeting."

Misses Delbert looked at her husband who nodded under her drilling gaze. That women could move mountains with those eyes.

"Thank you for your courage," Edgar spoke for the first time. "You are invaluable to helping the kids."

"We love to help." She threw back the rest of her drink with a satisfied look. "Let's leave these gentlemen to their day off, Roger."

"Err, yes, sure." He also took the rest of his drink, a far larger sip than hers.

"Your kids are always welcome at our home, Misses Delbert."

"Perfect. Do you think that perhaps my girls could work at your factory once they turn fourteen? I heard you have great working conditions for kids."

"Four hours of work after school. Every girl should have as much education as possible. They just need to be adapted to needlework."

"Gracious me, that's perfect. May I ask how much you pay your girls?"

"Well, they get food and board and the current minimum wage. As your girls would not need food and board, I guess one-and-a-half the minimum wage would be the right amount. At least as long as they still are in school."

Mister Delbert's jaw dropped significantly.

"See?" Misses Delbert poked her husband into his belly. "I told you a man as good as that would pay well. You never believe me." She looked up again. "Please excuse me. I wanted to reply to your offer of an older seamstress but my husband was sure that you only employed orphans because it's cheaper."

"A gifted seamstress will be paid double the minimum wage. You may decide if you want to work half or full days. A half day would be four hours in the afternoon, a full day four hours in the morning with a lunch break from twelve to one o'clock."

"Only eight hours and time to make lunch for my kids for a double wage?" She blinked before drilling her eyes back into her husband.

"Yes, yes, sure, do it! I'm sorry! I thought it sounded fishy, I'm sorry." He immediately quelled under her gaze. "I just thought there must be something wrong with the offer, it was just too good."

"It's military uniforms. A lot of people are sick of war." Harry pointed at Edgar. "He is running the factory right now, so he is the one to talk to about employment. How about you visit the factory tomorrow, he shows you around and you decide on it then?"

"What a great day this turned out to be." Misses Delbert smiled, her back a lot straighter than it was before. "God bless you, Mister Horten."

"You as well, Misses Delbert." He stood and all of them followed. "Let's see what the kids have been up to in our absence."

Dear Gren,

three weeks have passed. I think I heard more lectures from Minerva than in my whole life put together. I never knew she was that dissatisfied with my conduct. Apparently, I am an arrogant, sly old fool, too full of myself. I do not get why she is friends with me. Anyway, she wrote down something like a current conduct of honor and I intend to share it with Gellert. I was able to explain my feelings about the situation to him in detail by letter. Afterwards, we met and made up. I think he understood now what he did wrong. He formulated an apology to Edgar. We still need to work through that code of conduct though. I asked Minerva to include all wrong-doings of students in the past twenty years. Hopefully that will cover most misdeeds Gellert could come up with. Regarding the nature of his lack of social etiquette, he swore me to silence, so I am unable to tell you more. Please believe me when I say that he had ample reason to behave like he did.

Yours truly, Albus

"Dad?" Tom took his hand after lunch. "Could we talk?"

"Sure." Harry smiled at him. "Shall we go to my study?"

"Yes, please." It was rare that his son held his hand, so Harry savored the moment. It was sweaty though, a clear sign of nervousness.

"Should we include Edgar?"

"Err ... sure, why not?" Tom looked at the man talking to Margret. "Edgar? Would you come with us?"

"Hm? Sure!" The man nodded to Margret and ended his sentence before coming over.

"What are we doing?"

"Going to the study on Tom's wish."

"Okay." Edgar took his other hand which Tom allowed. "Is it about you, squirt, or someone else?"

"It's ... someone else." Noticing their hands, he held them up and said with a grin:

"Carry me upstairs?"

Both men grinned back and lifted him up on the stairs. Tom was actually growing, so it was harder than Harry had expected. Still a squirt though, Edgar was right about that. They were still laughing when they reached the study. They sat down on the couch, Tom in their middle.

"Spill, what is it?" Edgar's fingers carded through Tom's hair.

"It's ... Howard's mum." Tom leaned into Edgar's side. "After dad and Mister Delbert talked to his dad, his mum was looking better. But yesterday she was crying. There weren't any new bruises on her, so I asked her if this was about rape. She was a bit startled that I knew what that was and I explained that you had taught me that word after I asked why her husband was waking us up in the middle of the night and throwing us out. She started crying again, really hard actually, and she asked if you could come talk to her. I think she needs help." He was looking at Harry imploringly.

"Of course I will talk to her." He couldn't help the sigh though. "But you weren't supposed to talk about rape, do you remember? It shocked Howard's mum."

"But it's also true and it is what is happening and not talking about it will not make it better, kid or no kid." Tom crossed his arms.

"That is true ... but let me do it. I know you meant well but that could have gone wrong. You can offer that I talk with someone. Don't talk about rape yourself."

"Why are some things forbidden for kids? If adults aren't the better humans on average, why are there things you can't do just because you are still a kid?"

"Because most kids are simply that: Kids. They often don't understand the whole situation, they often do not have all information. Most kids have problems taking on the view of someone else. They understand other people's motivation with their intellect but not with their emotions. Some things are simply not yet understandable to them. For example, there is sexual desire, the need for a partner, taking on financial responsibility as well as nearly crippling self-doubt. You are very sure in yourself and in your actions. And I hope I raised you in a way that you will stay that way while at the same time develop empathy towards others. But most people aren't like that. They are unhappy, ashamed of themselves, have doubts and fears that control them."

"They are weak."

"They are human." Harry slid to the floor, so that he would be on Tom's eye-level. "I have doubts. I fear things. I fear to lose you or Edgar or the others. I am afraid of not raising you in the right way, of not spending my time on what is needed, of making bad decisions for this family. I don't let those doubts and fears cripple me but I can

understand that some people aren't that lucky. Mister Delbert, I think he is a good father. But he fears for his family because he does not make a lot of money. There have been times where he could not provide for them, where they had to go hungry. As a father, you fear failure because it's not only you, it's a whole family that will suffer." He saw a sliver of a bad conscience in Tom's eyes. "Adults share those experiences. They know that you often make mistakes and they judge you on how you deal with them. You think yourself above them, but let's face it, Tom, you haven't been in their shoes. Do you remember how you made fun of Margret until you understood how hard she was working?"

"Yeah." His voice was smaller than before.

"It's normal that you don't understand the hardships of being an adult. I don't even want you to, yet. You will learn empathy, you will learn to think yourself into others and see the world from their eyes. And once you do, you can have those talks with adults. But until then, you are a kid and some topics are only for adults. Rape is one of them. If you ever meet a kid that suffers from rape or from having seen something like that, you bring them to talk to me. You don't try to solve it on your own. Are we clear on that?"

"Yes, dad."

"Good." He closed his hand around Tom's. "In all other things, I am very proud of you. Thank you for looking after Howard's mum like that. You did well by offering her to talk to me."

"Yeah?" There were tears shimmering in Tom's eyes.

"Yes, Tom. I am very proud how you handle Howard's family situation." He was met with an armful of seven-year-old boy clinging to his neck. "Hopefully I can resolve whatever situation has occurred now."

"Your dad is very good at talking with people. I am sure he can help." Edgar patted Tom's back.

"Okay ... can I go read a book?" Tom had reached an age where he did not want to cry in front of his parents.

"Sure. Come back if you want to talk about this again, yes?"

He was gone without an answer, practically running from the room.

Edgar sighed and turned his gaze on Harry.

"What?" He sat back down on the sofa.

"I still think that explaining rape to him was too early."

"Maybe I was a bit too detailed, yes ... in my time, you learned about that at eight years old."

"Still a bit early in my opinion."

"Yeah, maybe ... on the other hand, some kids are raped from very early on. One in ten girls is sexually harassed before reaching puberty and that was in my time where people were on the watch for it. For most, it happens at nine or ten years old. So I think eight is a good age to learn about it."

"Then you should have waited another year." Edgar crossed his arms and sighed deeply. "Just look at him, he's not even half our size but dealing with domestic abuse and rape and ... why can't he be a normal kid? Is that too much to ask?"

"Not talking about it will not make it go away."

"I know but ... I just wish it were different."

He wished that a lot of things were different but they weren't. Not yet anyway. They would get there. Slowly but surely.

He met Howard and Tom after school and accompanied them to Howard's house. Misses Delbert was home and greeted him enthusiastically while the kids continued onward. Either Misses Smith had seen them or Tom had sent her out but a minute later, she joined them outside. They talked about common things, even gossiped a bit about some neighbors Harry didn't know. It took a bit for Misses Delbert to ask what he was doing here before he smoothly lied that Misses Smith and him had planned on taking the kids out today. Oh, where did they want to go?

Well ... the only place that came to mind was the museum. Better than nothing. He offered Misses Delbert to tag along but she said that her kids had no interest in museums. She winked before she went back to her house, so Harry was sure that her mind was already inventing a heated love story where rich Grenmore Horten was wooing the poor beaten Mrs. Smith. Hopefully, that story would not garner much attention.

He wasn't surprised that Mrs. Smith seemed frightened at the prospect of going out in public. On the other hand, just talking to someone of a different sex could be seen as flirting and meeting the women at her house was even worse. There was no good way to go about this, so taking three kids to a museum sounded not too bad.

She seemed to think differently but did not voice it. She invited Harry in, offered him some soup she had made for lunch and helped Daisy not to make a mess of her clothes. After lunch, they went out to visit the local museum. Harry held his son back for a moment, asking him to tell Howard to please look after themselves in there and stick to the rules, so that he could have an uninterrupted talk with Mrs. Smith. Tom swore to look after his friend and Daisy which was more than Harry could have asked for. So he reminded his son to please interrupt him if it was getting too much. A two-year-old was trouble on legs after all. But seriously, he was really impressed how much responsibility Tom could handle.

Mrs. Smith and Harry strolled from old horse-drawn carriages to owl skeletons when he thought that it had been long enough for her to speak. "So ... you asked for me?"

"I am most sorry, sir, I was having a moment, I should not have-"

"Not at all, I am at your service. Tom told me that you were very upset, he was worried."

"I ... well, I was ... distraught, yes." She averted her gaze.

"May I ask why?"

"Oh, it's not important, just some female business-"

"You were crying." He stopped and turned to her. "You have had enough pain in your life that small things do not upset you as much. So it can't have been unimportant."

She paled but flushed again after a moment, looking more energetic after a moment.

"What disturbed you that much?"

"Well ... I haven't told anyone yet. It's not proper to tell ... right now." Her eyes were sad but she straightened and looked better by that alone.

"Mayhaps you are pregnant?"

She immediately teared up, her eyes anguished, her face drawn. "I ... yes." The tears let her eyes reflect the dim light but it wasn't in any way beautiful. She drew into herself and put her arms around herself. "I don't ... it's just ..."

"Do you want out?" Maybe that was too straightforward but he really had no idea about how to be tactful. Domestic violence and unwanted pregnancies weren't exactly his most known topics.

"Out?" she barely whispered.

"You could leave him." Could she? There was divorce but the terms were hard. She

would be a social outcast. Until then, she would not be able to hold a job. She would not be allowed to rent a place, to own property and she still had two kids to think about. Did he even know what he was proposing here?

"No." She wrapped her arms around herself. "I could never."

"He won't stop hitting you. He won't stop hitting the kids. You might lose this child due to him. You might even lose your living children due to him." Sometimes, just stating the facts was helpful. He didn't know if that worked with abused women. Or with this one. Actually, he was very much out of his depth.

She bit her lip, her gaze averted. After a moment, she just stopped moving. He checked on the kids for a moment but found them occupied reading tags and explaining them to little Daisy. Such good behavior for two seven-year-olds, he was seriously astounded. Now, back to Mrs. Smith ... what to do about that one?

She had wandered a bit, looked at things but not really looking at the same time. Her gaze seemed drawn inward, her expression stony. Harry wished he was able to know what she was thinking. He simply fell into step with her, waiting for her to speak again.

She didn't.

They left the museum half an hour later, Harry feeling worse every minute ticking by. So he had been too direct. He should have let her talk. Pushing her had been the wrong move. He might have destroyed whatever motivation or idea she had had.

The kids came back, both Tom and Howard looking at Mrs. Smith expectantly before looking at him. Well, what could he say? He had tried? It certainly hadn't been his best. Hermione was more emphatic than him and she was an emotional bulldozer on the best of days.

"So, are we leaving papa?," Howard asked his mother.

She actually flinched, looked at him with wide eyes and moved her gaze onto Harry.

"That was an idea?" Stupid, that was too direct!

"No!" Her mouth opened and closed like a fish. "I mean ... Howard, that is not possible."

"Why not?" Her son simply looked at her like she had posed him a riddle.

"It's just ... you don't do that. Marriage is for life." She sighed and shook her head.

"You pledge a vow to each other."

"To have and to hold from this day forward, for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part." Harry remembered his vows perfectly.

"Yes, exactly. Women obey their husbands."

"Men swear the same vow, at least I did. Even if men don't swear to obey, they swear to love and to cherish. Not honoring your marriage vows is the worst kind of felony."

Mrs. Smith closed her eyes in pain, deep lines marring her face.

"Mr. Horten is right, mama. Papa is not allowed to do all those bad things," Howard argued.

"But he is!" She turned on her son. "Stop saying such blasphemous things! He has every right!"

"He has not." Harry kept his cool. "He is allowed to punish you if you step out of line. All three of you, yes. But the punishment has to fit the crime. He is simply using excessive violence against you and that is wrong. Nothing can warrant the bruises on your body."

"How would you even know?," she turned onto him instead.

"Because I saw what he did to Tom. I counted the bruises on my own boy."

She paled, her eyes widening in fear. "Oh ... oh god ... no. He didn't ... did he?"

"He trashed my own child more than once, yes. Next time he does, I won't stop at warning him and informing the major and the school. I know that this will escalate the violence on you but I can't protect you as long as you stay on his side."

"You informed ..." She shook her head slowly.

"All officials and your husband. He is watched. You are not alone in this if you decide to speak up. But if you decide to stay on his side, you won't be able to protect him from himself. He is digging his own grave right now. Beating up my son was a bad idea on his part. Beating up Daisy was just a step too far."

She grabbed her daughter and picked her up to hold her close. Her hands slightly trembled but steadied with holding the little one. Her gaze lost herself on the horizon before she continued to speak. "Will he go to prison?"

"I honestly have no idea. You do not have much money, so I would guess on prison."

"What a disgrace." It was barely audible but unmistakably spoken. There was a long moment of silence. "Is that job in your factory still on offer?"

"As a seamstress? Yes, sure. We have one but it's always good to have more."

"Good." Her smile held a dangerous edge. "I'll get his signature."

Howard and Tom clapped their hands in clear victory.

Dear Gren,

for the first time in years I have actual hope that my life won't consist of building lies upon the ruins of my failures. Talking to Gellert about morality is a challenge though. It is simply exhausting and oftentimes, I don't have an answer to his questions. I wish I could include someone else in this. I wish you weren't his judge, so that he was able to talk freely with you. I fear that some areas are a mystery even to me. Some of it, I asked Minerva. Those were some awkward conversations. Why shouldn't you kill someone when no one will ever know and it doesn't change you at all? Why shouldn't you rob the dead when it doesn't last on your conscience? Why is love important to a human? Minerva and I both cannot answer with more than that some things are wrong and some things are important – but why? I have no clue. A lot of things become questionable when you don't have an inherent feeling of right and wrong. How do you cope without an inner compass? Why should it interest Gellert what I think is right or wrong, except that it may lead to me leaving him? (which – let's face it – is very unlikely) He was very open about the fact that it is of interest to him because people judge him based on it – but it still feels alien to him. That life and staying alive should be more important than saving magic or the planet or why we humans feel superior to other animals, all of that is foreign to him. He questioned so many of my beliefs. Even that love is in any way important to happiness or that having friends is a good thing, none of that is a shared view between us. Sometimes, I have no idea who or what I am to him. While I feel hopeful, I also feel confused and hurt. I don't think I ever knew Gellert at all.

Yours truly, Albus

Kapitel 16: Sixteenth chapter

"How much worth has a single life?" Edgar pondered Albus' letter. "Is every life equal? Are there more and less important lives?"

"Important questions." Harry felt the other's gaze upon him. "Are you asking me?"

"Yes, I am."

"I don't think that I have answers. In war, many people died to keep me alive. I was destined to kill someone, they needed me to be that killer. Everyone of them would have answered you that there are more and less important lives. They died because they believed in that truth." Harry smiled mirthlessly. "It later turned out that I wouldn't have been able to die anyway and that if the one I was destined to kill would have succeeded in killing me, it would have made him mortal and therefore able to be killed by all others. So if people hadn't insisted on dying for me, maybe a lot of people could have been saved. It turned out that I was actually the least important to keep alive." He turned to Edgar who had sat down on the study's sofa. "It also begs the question if being kept alive for a cause equals being of more worth. Being useful and being worthy are two different things after all."

"I wanted answer, not more question."

"Believe me, presenting a question to a philosopher does not end in answers, only in more questions." Harry smiled and offered Edgar a glass of cognac. "You have to find answers on your own."

"How?"

"By living. Being alive means making new experiences and learning. As long as you learn, you look for answers. It's never good to be too stuck on something. You might find answers along the way, then discard them again and look for new ones."

Edgar sighed deeply and leaned back against the cushions: "Your life sounds exhausting."

"Having children was nice. Changing nappies is a pretty mindless task. You smile and wave and make annoying noises. There are no big questions when you have a baby. You know that your whole life has only one focus: Caring for that little one."

"And making the world a place to be worth living it."

"Yeah, that's the harder part." Harry closed his eyes for a moment. "Do you think Grindelwald is ready for another visit?"

"No." Edgar threw the letter onto the table. "I think he needs more than Dumbledore. That man's morality might be better than Grindelwald's but it is far from developed. He needs someone like you."

"I am not sure about that. Love is important, I think so as well. I am not sure I could explain ... I could give examples but would they mean something to someone that the feeling is unknown to?"

"Right ... we need another rehabilitated dark Lord."

Harry just laughed outright. "Ha ... sure. I'll use Twitter to find one."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Insider joke." Harry made a shooing motion with his hand. "Sadly, I don't have someone like that on hand."

"Don't you?" Edgar raised his eyebrows.

"Don't I?" A moment of silence commenced. "You don't mean ... Tom?"

"Yes, exactly."

"You want us to sit a seven-year-old in front of a mass murderer to explain love and friendship to?" Harry snorted. "So rape is too much for him but genocide is an okay topic?"

"I don't know ... it's the best idea I have."

"It could go spectacularly wrong."

"Or it could help." Edgar shrugged. "It's worth a try, don't you think?"

"I think it's a stupid and dangerous idea ... which is why I am in favor of it."

Edgar grinned like a loon.

"Are you sure?," Dumbledore asked for the third time, right as they entered the corridor leading to Grindelwald's sitting room.

"Is this man likely to kill me on sight?" Tom sounded rather exasperated.

"Wha- no!" The old man blinked.

"Then what is the problem?"

Dumbledore just looked at him, annoyance and confusion crossing his face.

"Do you fear he could morally corrupt a child?" Harry couldn't ban the smirk from his face.

"He can corrupt judges, so yes, I fear for a child this small."

"We're leaving if he does." He looked to Edgar. "I am not even sure who corrupts whom in this setting."

Grindelwald stepped out of the room, clearly having listened in again, his gaze trained on Tom. They walked the rest of the way until they were only a few feet apart.

"You brought a child?"

"Yes, we did." Harry simply stopped. "I'll wait with the introduction."

Grindelwald looked up, his arms crossed and his shoulders not exactly relaxed. His gaze went to Edgar. The inkling of a smile of Grindelwald's face drew no reaction from the other man, so he took a deep breath and said: "I am sorry about breaking into your mind."

"Why?"

"Why?" Grindelwald blinked in confusion. "I ... overstepped a boundary."

"Why should you care about that?"

"Because I hurt you with it."

"Really? I didn't feel anything. I didn't even understand what you did until later. Why would it hurt me?"

"So ... you don't need me to apologize?" Grindelwald frowned.

"Oh, don't worry, it did hurt in a way. The question is if you actually know what you are apologizing for. Otherwise you'll do it or something similar again."

"So it's a quiz. Hm ... it made you feel weak and powerless and instilled fear in you?"

"That's one part, yes, go on." Edgar crossed his arms as well.

"You are unsure what I saw and if that might influence my actions to have me act according to what you want to hear instead of actually getting what you want me to believe in?"

"You don't seem to have seen much if you do not know that I fully trust Gren to pick out your lies anyway." Edgar's hand made a swirling motion. "Go on."

"You are embarrassed about what I might have seen?"

"Powerless, fearful, embarrassed. Any other emotions that come to mind?"

"Are you jealous of my powers?"

"A bit," Edgar admitted. "That's a rather small part though."

"I would be very angry if someone broke into my mind." Grindelwald seemed to try to

imagine the situation right now. "Actually, I would be furious. I would doubt myself and my skills."

"Self-doubt, anger, yes. A very personalized rage even."

"I see." Grindelwald's nails bit into his flesh.

"Above all, I feel repulsed. Someone without manners, someone without common sense and empathy, that is someone I would normally shun on principle. It's a character I would try to use as cannon fodder because he is nothing but a risk in an army. Soldiers need detachment but not to the point of becoming incalculable."

The blue eyes were trained on Edgar like they were trying to solve a puzzle. "Are we talking about mistrust?"

"Mistrust is too small a word, it's revulsion."

Grindelwald actually paled a bit. His gaze flittered to Harry but really, he wasn't the one to look out for.

"What did you do to Edgar?," Tom barked at the man.

Grindelwald just opened and closed his mouth like a fish, obviously thrown by an angered seven-year-old. "You ... you don't even know what happened."

"I don't care! Edgar is family and you hurt him."

Harry placed a hand on Tom's head to calm him down again. "I brought my son because he has the best understanding of you out of all of us. I don't think that any of us could explain love to you. Tom might be able to."

"Right now, I don't understand at all," Grindelwald admitted.

"What's not to understand? You hurt Edgar! It makes you a bad man and I hate you for it."

Grindelwald just looked at Harry for a moment before nodding and turned to Tom: "Don't you think that is too simple a view? You don't know the situation, you don't know my motivations, you simply act out your feelings."

"I also don't care." Tom snorted. "I don't know you, I don't even know your name. But Edgar is family and you hurt him. So I don't care to listen to your reasons, I want you to make it better. Your apology was worth shit."

Harry didn't correct him on that, he didn't even feel the need to call him out on his language.

Grindelwald seemed to check every word Tom said on Harry's face. "Why?"

"You apologized because you had to, not because you meant it. That's no apology." A lesson long learned by now. Painfully learned in Tom's case.

"I meant it. I understood that I hurt him and I won't do it again."

"You don't sound like you understand it, so you cannot be trusted."

"But I did mean it!" Grindelwald looked about ready to snap. "Wasn't I able to answer his questions?"

"Barely." Harry stepped in, tipping Tom on his shoulder. "May I?" After Tom's nod, he turned to Grindelwald. "Let me rephrase your apology for you." He waited a moment for his calm voice to have the other uncoil again. "Edgar, I am sorry for breaking into your mind. I didn't understand at that time how it would make you feel. Since then, I reflected on my actions and I understood that I made you feel unsafe in my presence. I made you feel powerless and afraid by using powers you have no defence against. The worst of it was that you were not even able to know that you had been wronged. I understand that that made you feel helpless and enraged. You now know that there are people and powers that can hurt you and you won't even know about it. I humiliated and shamed you with that. Knowing that someone can draw your most embarrassing secrets from your head and use them against you, is terrifying. You have

no idea what I know about you now and you will have to fear that I use your secrets against you when talking to you or when I talk about you with others. I understand how that fills you with mistrust and even repulsion. So I swear ...?" Harry pointed a hand at Edgar while still looking at Grindelwald.

Grindelwald swallowed and turned to Edgar. "I swear to never read your thoughts or memories without asking again. I swear to try my best not to use my knowledge of your past against you in any way. I'll ... try to make it up to you by being honest about what I know."

Edgar smiled and nodded. "That's a start."

"You are much too nice, Edgar." Tom still scowled. "You go harder on me than on him and he claims to be an adult."

"The difference is that you are allowed to go free and he is imprisoned here for exactly that reason." Harry shoved Tom back to the front. "Now be the bigger man, let go of your anger and introduce yourself."

Tom scoffed but unwrapped his arms, straightened and held out his right hand. "My name is Tom Horten. Formerly Tom Vorlost Riddle, formerly Tom Vorlost Gaunt."

"Gaunt ... the last of the Slytherin line. I met your grandfather once. A truly unpleasant man, even as we shared the same beliefs. Are you Morfin's or Merope's offspring?" He still shook the hand. "Gellert Grindelwald."

"My mother was Merope Gaunt. She died in childbirth."

"I am sorry to hear that." He looked up for a moment. "Should we continue to the sitting room?"

Harry turned to Edgar who nodded. Both of them looked at Dumbledore for confirmation. He seemed pretty out of it though. So Edgar took Tom's hand and Harry grabbed Dumbledore's arm to have him follow into the sitting room. He steered Dumbledore to the sofa which made Edgar sit down in the armchair across from Grindelwald with Tom on his lap. They were all served tea and Tom stared at the dancing cups in awe.

By now, Grindelwald seemed resigned to the fact that they expected him to converse with a little boy. "So why do they think you are best suited to understanding me? Because we share the same magic? Have you killed before? Or do they judge me as mentally developed as a child?"

"You shouldn't underestimate children when it comes to stating the truth. Adults have rather convoluted thoughts and tend to start overlooking the painfully obvious." Well, Tom had a knack for psychology.

"And what is the truth to my question, oh wise little sage?," Grindelwald mocked him.

"That you believe in neither love nor friendship nor even understand it. All of them grew up with at least a sliver of it. I didn't. I had to learn the meaning of family just like you have to do it now. And while they could simply adopt and show me, you are too old to learn it by any other means than having it explained. You won't be able to experience it."

There was a moment of stunned pain openly visible on Grindelwald's face before he closed off again and rearranged his features.

"At least, that is what my father told me. Personally, I don't think you are even worth the explanation."

"Tom-," Edgar began to admonish him but stopped at Harry's hand gesture.

"Why are you still so angry with me? I apologized and your ... Edgar forgave me."

"That does not automatically include my forgiveness. He forgave you because you are still learning and for now, he thinks it is enough. I don't. I expect better from you. If I

was able to learn it, you should be able to do it too. Papa tells me that I shouldn't hold others to the same standards I set for myself. Other people aren't as intelligent, don't have the same emotional and financial support, they often have to care about their survival more than their personal development. Okay, I get that. But you are intelligent, surrounded by great people and basically sit in a castle the whole day. No one can tell me you don't have the necessary resources to be a bit faster than this."

Grindelwald just blinked. "Your ... father told you that?"

"No, that's my personal opinion. I don't like you."

Grindelwald just looked at Harry, his eyes communicating disbelief and a hint of desperation.

"Edgar proposed having you two meet." Harry explained with a smile. "I thought it a splendid idea. Tom is right that we are nice because we care about Albus and offending you will hurt him. I am not sure if coming here won't turn out to be a monumental waste of time. I do it because I care for Albus. I also believe in giving people a second chance. Tom is more judgmental than me and he doesn't care as much for Albus as I."

"So he basically states your own opinion in plainer words?"

"I never told him what I think about you. I am not as opinionated and I trust Edgar to fight his own battles, so I like you slightly more than Tom does. It still comes down to a lot of mistrust."

"You still trust me around your child though."

"That's because I trust my son." Harry smirked and he knew it wasn't pretty. "I trust Albus from keeping you from casting on him. I trust myself from recognizing harmful conversation. I trust Tom to know right from wrong enough that he won't take you as a role-model."

"Basically ... you hate me for how I am, how I think, but you indulge Albus by coming here. You don't think I can do this." Grindelwald balled his fists.

"About ten percent of me believe you might be able to do this. A bit more are unsure, most don't believe in you. I don't know if that is enough for you. It is enough for me to come here and think about ways to up that chance."

There was a long moment of silence. Dumbledore looked from Grindelwald to Harry and seemed unsure if he should go over to his boyfriend. Finally, he stood and placed a hand on the other man's shoulder. "I believe in you."

Grindelwald closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His eyes shimmered when he opened them again. His gaze slowly turned onto his boyfriend, a mixture of confusion and anguish. "Why?"

Dumbledore parted his lips but no sound left them. His eyes simply reflected the same pain back at Grindelwald.

"Because he loves you," Tom interrupted them.

Grindelwald blinked and looked back to the boy. "What does that even mean?"

"That he believes in you more than you yourself do." Tom crossed his arms again. "I was a little shit. I lied, I stole, I picked on others. I looked at a man and only thought about how to get his wallet. Dad adopted me and I saw myself living like a king, ordering around servants and lording over anyone else. I thought myself invincible and our castle-like house my due. Dad always believed I could be better than that. He taught me everything I know and he always believed I could learn it. He never gave up on me, no matter how shitty I behaved. He patiently explained why my behavior was wrong and what I could do instead. He never belittled me, never once said that with my past, my ancestry, my blood, my magic, my completely missing morals, I would

never amount to more than a street rat only worth dying."

Edgar gasped and hugged Tom back to chest. "Who said that?"

"The ones that came before dad."

Edgar just turned the boy in his arms and drew him close. "They obviously knew shit."

Ah ... so that was where Tom learned such language. Harry smiled indulgently. He watched Grindelwald stand and end up his Dumbledore's arms as well. Hopefully, Tom's words had been enough to reach him. He closed his eyes and allowed himself to remember Ginny for a moment.

She had been faithful in her unwavering belief in him.

Merlin, let her be safe and happy.

Dear Gren,

thank you. I don't even know how to convey these words, to make them sound less paltry. Thank you. The package includes a beginner potion's kit and a toy wand. It is a gift from Gellert to Tom. He said to convey the message that Tom could accept the gift and continue hating him. He is not trying to buy affection. He wants to thank Tom for teaching him about love. He never believed in it before but now, he does.

Thank you, Albus

Tom was ecstatic. Both the wand and the potion's kit had to be confiscated four times before he started being responsible. For once, Harry nearly lost his patience and it took both Edgar and him to keep each other from strangling the little devil.

He actually had to call Dumbledore once to obliviate Margret, who had walked in on Tom having smuggled potions ingredients from the study and mixing them in his room. Finally, the rascal learned to follow the rules. It actually took the first stock of ingredient to run out and having to ask Harry to buy more that he remembered that pissing off his parents wouldn't help.

It was astounding how someone so adept at words, so good at self-reflection, could throw it all to the wind as soon as his self-interest was large enough. Well, he would learn to temper that excitement. He was only seven after all.

Seven going on eight. It was autumn when Dumbledore wrote a letter, asking his family to meet with the Malfoys on the topic of genetic heredity. Arcturus had taken his sweet time reading the books that Dumbledore had given him, most likely discussed it with a lot of other pure-bloods before deciding he would let a Muggle and a Mudblood into his home. Harry couldn't exactly blame him, looking at the era they were living in. Discrimination was an identifying factor of the well-bred in this time.

Now the important question: Should he take Tom or not? They might be met with undiluted hatred. The boy would be linked to him, his behavior, his opinions. It could make his start at Hogwarts a disaster. It could also give him his first allies. Abraxas Malfoy would become an influential man and he was only slightly older than Tom now. Already going to school, he would be a prefect when Tom started. It could be his downfall as well as his salvation.

Harry wouldn't be a Gryffindor if he didn't take risks, so he accepted the invitation on their behalf. Later, he invited both Edgar and Tom into his study and explained his decision and what it would entail.

Tom just sighed really put upon.

Harry smiled indulgently and raised an eyebrow in question.

"Just ... why are we even meeting with such people? This villain guy, okay, you are friends with Dumbledore and he is headmaster at my future school, I get that. Grindelwald is his lover. If he is better, Dumbledore is better, that's better for the school and my education. I also get that being friends with those Malfoy people would be helpful ... it just seems such a hassle. Can't we meet with people we like and that like us?"

"It actually reminds me – everyone thinks Grindelwald is dead. Keep that in mind. Never breath a word of his existence."

"Yes, dad." Tom rolled his eyes.

"The Malfoys will be hard to bring around, but if we can bring them around, they'll bring others around. You'll be met with acceptance in school. If we don't, they will hate you on the basis of your blood and ancestry."

"I am quite used to that."

"But isn't elementary school a lot nicer than the orphanage? Do you want to go back to a place that hates you for things you can't control?"

Tom mumbled something but Harry refrained from asking about it. He was pretty sure that Tom wasn't keen on making the same experience again.

"So I play your model son, the most virtuous and well-behaved half-blood those purebloods will ever see?" Tom's voice dripped with sarcasm. It looked strange on a seven-year-old but it had been even stranger on a five-year-old and Harry had been able to weather that as well.

"Just don't play villain turned anti-hero as with Grindelwald."

"What's an anti-hero?" Tom instantly turned curious.

"Someone who does good in evil ways. Someone evil that secretly supports the good guys."

"Huh ... if this rehabilitation thing would work, Grindelwald would become an anti-hero, right?"

"Pretty much, yes."

Tom wrinkled his nose and finally pouted. "I don't want to be in the same category as him. I'll try my best at being a good guy."

"Sounds like a plan." Harry smiled proudly. "So you'll be my model son on Sunday?"

"What do I get for it?" Tom turned up his nose.

"Maybe less tickles for being a total shit?" Edgar grabbed the boy and started tickling him.

The next minutes were full of shrieks and tumbling.

Before Sunday came around though, another crisis tumbled into their household in form of the local police. One would expect them to come knocking at a reasonable time but no – it was just before midnight when Margret came to wake him. Thankfully, he was still up, working on his biology books to get authors and references right. Studying had never been his strong point but it would take a few years for people to listen to Tom. So he had to be the Hermione of their team this time.

None of that mattered in the slightest when Margret informed him that two officers had been seated in the parlor and seemed pretty cross. Harry bade her to make some tea for all of them and exchanged his evening gown for his normal clothes again. When he came down, it was Brea that waited upon the officers.

"Brea dearest, you should be in bed," he admonished her slightly before even greeting the gentlemen.

"I am sorry, sir, the knocking woke me."

"Thank you for your help, but please go back to bed. It is much too late for a girl as yourself to be awake." He lay a hand on her shoulder.

"Yes, sir." She held up her serving tray in front of her upper body. "I am sorry, I did not want to leave a bad impression. I was just anxious what these officers are here about."

"I am sure it does not concern your friends. I shall tell you all in the morning. Surely, it is only a misunderstanding. The others may be young and foolish, but certainly no one of us warrants the attention of nightly controls. Now quell your fears and go back to sleep."

She finally let out a small sigh and nodded. One day, she would be a lioness in her own right, but as of now, she was a scared mother-hen. Margret brought in the teapot and scolded Brea as well: "You should be in bed, young miss. Now back to your quarters."

"Yes, head maid." Brea rolled her eyes but finally retreated.

"What a foolish young girl." Margret shook her head.

"She means well." Harry finally turned to the two men that had stood upon his entry.

"Good evening, sirs. Please take a seat. To what do I owe this late visit?"

"Pardon us, sir Horten, this matter could not be delayed." They shook hands and exchanged names before everyone sat.

Margret served the tea, offering sugar, milk and even lemon juice before leaving upon Harry's nod.

"So which of my charges does this concern?"

"This is about a certain Richard, no last name given."

"Ah, of course. Richard works in my factory and as our gardener. A quiet boy who does not like fighting. Some of my girls are less peaceful than him. Except for a foray into alcohol, I never had problems with him."

"He was reported by a young men claiming that Richard had tried to kiss him."

"Kiss him? Forcefully and against his will?" Harry snorted. "It's hard to imagine." The forceful part certainly was, but not the kissing part. Richard was very much into men and Harry was aware of that. "Who was the boy that reported this?"

"It was one of the Conner's boys, the seventeen-year-old."

"Conner? I can't seem to recall the boy, but isn't Mister Conner friends with Mister Smith?"

Both police officers looked at one another before the slightly older one nodded. "Aye, what does that have to do with this?"

"Just that Mister Smith and I have a tryst right now. He is hitting his wife and kids overly much and some neighbors already complained about him. I added my own complaint because he hit my son as well. Implicating one of my charges through a friend of his seems like some form of payback. There have been rumors in town about my assistant Edgar and me having an affair. Trying to fuel those rumors by having a charge of mine convicted of homosexual acts seems in line with trying to discredit me to save his own neck."

Both officers blinked in surprise, again sharing a look. It was the younger one that asked: "So you do not have an ounce of doubt this has to be untrue?"

"It would certainly be foolish and uncharacteristic. Richard is a gentle soul, he is never forceful. He also knows that I am a retired army general. The army has only one way of dealing with homosexuals, they shoot them in the head."

The younger officer swallowed visibly, going a bit pale at that. The older one drew a deep breath.

"Personally, I don't think we need to be as strict with the public. If no one comes to

harm, I don't care what people do behind closed doors. But if Richard were to force himself upon someone, male or female, you can be sure my punishment will not be light."

"Mister Horten, he is of an age where such things are handled by the police--"

"Of course, my apologies." He held up his hands. "It's just that Richard knows my stand exactly. It seems hard to believe he did something criminal like that. He might have done something though that could be misconstrued. I will have to talk to him about it."

"That is also police work." They were really stubborn, it seemed.

"I just thought that an attempted kiss – if it even happened at all – is beneath the attention of the police. You really don't need to concern yourself with such trivial matters when a lot more ghastly criminal acts are committed out there. I see it as my responsibility to punish my charges on minor infractions."

"This is no minor infraction, Mister Horten-," the younger officer exclaimed but was stopped by a hand on his arm by his partner.

"It rather is." The other officer nodded. "Still, now that it has come to police attention, we need to investigate this."

"Of course, I understand. At which time tomorrow should I bring Richard down to the station?" Because he certainly would not drag him out of bed now like a criminal.

"We would like to see him now," the younger officer stubbornly insisted.

Harry turned to the older officer, knowing that this young one only dared to speak like this because the other secretly supported him. He had done enough good cop/bad cop scenarios himself. Obviously, it made no sense to argue with a wand instead of the wizard. "So you want me to drag a fourteen-year-old, built like a stick, doing needlework for a living, boy out of bed because you sincerely believe he assaulted a sixteen-year-old, muscled, athletic boy with a forceful kiss?" He let that question linger for a moment. "And you want me to believe that by barging into my home in the middle of the night, you will treat him fairly?" The unease he caused was a balm on his soul. "Believe me when I say that I will get to the bottom of this. If he did assault someone, he will confess to it tomorrow and accept your judgment. He will even do so gladly because I am sure that our law will be less harsh than I would be. But if I believe him to be used as a pawn against me and can find no blame with him, I will fight tooth and nail against these wrong accusations. For that boy is my charge and therefore his actions reflect upon me. All of these children are dear to me and I don't want harm to come to them, no matter what form it takes." There was a pause but he spoke before any tone left the officer's mouth that had slowly opened. "Now I wish you a pleasant night. I shall see you in the morning, first thing after breakfast."

The younger officer drew in breath to shout but his partner stopped him. "Thank you for your hospitality, Mister Horten."

"Thank you for your hard work, Officer Derbrow, Officer Kanderly." He nodded at them and stood, accompanying them to the door. With a smile, he shut it behind them.

Deep breath.

Well ... that had been bad. Had he really just threatened two police officers? Not his smartest move. At least, he hadn't been openly hostile. Thankfully, the older one had not been as hot-blooded as his eager younger partner. That could have gotten ugly fast.

Both Margret and Brea stood in front of him in a flash, Margret's eyes wide like a deer in head-lights, Brea's hard as steel.

"I was so scared," Margret whispered.

"Did he do it?," Brea asked instead.

"I have no clue." Harry sighed. "But in these matters, word against word does not count for anything. People will show up that will have supposedly seen something, convicting someone on rumor and hearsay. They first target Richard, then Edgar and me. It would basically mean the end to all of us."

"You should marry," Brea immediately counseled.

"I will not tarnish my late wife's me-"

"Would she want you in this danger?" The fifteen-year-old girl stood her ground against him. "I know that you are a honorable, loyal man. You have ideals that far surpass our times. But people believe what they want to see and this threatens us. All of us. We all know that Edgar won't marry, not even as an alibi. But you could. Everyone expects you to. Every unmarried women in this town is set on you and it drives the men crazy. Marry someone. It would protect both Richard and Edgar. I know it's unfair to ask of you, but this world just isn't fair!"

Harry just blinked. Okay. Not what he had expected. On the other hand, she was right. He was vulnerable right now. Or not exactly, Richard and Edgar were. He could help. He really could ... but ... "But what about the poor woman I am to marry?"

"Every women in the world would be happy to be married to you! Just because you won't ever love her does not detract from the respect you have for women." She blinked, suddenly calming. With a deep breath, she straightened her spine. "Actually ... Mister Grenmore Horten, I hereby ask for your hand in marriage."

Err ... what? Harry just blinked.

Margret still looked like a deer caught in headlights, just not in fear but in shock.

"Was that a serious proposal?"

"Well, I don't have a ring, but I am sure you have some family heirlooms somewhere. The official age for marriage is sixteen, that's still four months off. Otherwise, I mean it."

"But ... why? Is this just about protecting everyone?"

"Not really." Suddenly, she lowered her gaze. "I'd really like to study. Also, I am so annoyed by all those boys chasing after me. Unmarried women aren't taken seriously. So I'd like to marry and go on to study and I really don't want a man breathing down my neck about domestic duties, children and why I am throwing away my time with going to university."

"So ... money, security and freedom?"

"I know that you respect women enough to not bat an eyelash at that." Even though she said that, her voice trembled. Obviously, she wasn't sure he would stay true to his word.

"You are right about that." Was he seriously considering this? "What would you like to study?"

"Economy. I heard you talking with Edgar about the upcoming war. You'll go back to the army, right? Someone needs to take over the business." She folded her arms behind her back. "Please let me do this. This is my home too." Her eyes filled with tears, my throat closing up.

"Brea ... you know that you don't need to marry me for this, right? You can study, I'll support you."

"Will it give me the right to rent a place? Will it secure me a spot in university? Will it protect me from rape and abuse in a city all by myself? Will it keep the other students from disregarding me because women only study to marry an academic husband?" Her

rage poured freely. "You respect women but no one else does. Only a married women has rights in this world. So yes, I really mean it. You would do me a great favor and I promise to never ask anything of you that would dishonor your late wife."

"You won't have kids that way." Dear heavens, she was only fifteen. Why did a fifteen-year-old have to think about any of this?

"I am old enough to know you don't exactly need a husband to have those. Maybe I'll madly fall in love and reconsider but even then, I am sure we can talk and find a solution. I trust you, Mister Horten."

"Gren." He heaved a deep sigh. "My fiancée should not call me by title. She also shouldn't wait upon me." His finger pointed at her uniform. "Most of all, my fiancée needs her beauty sleep, so back to bed with you. Tomorrow, buy some expensive cloth and sew yourself some dresses. A Misses Horten needs to look the part."

With a big smile, her face basically lit up. "How expensive? How many?"

"Well, you need at least three expensive dresses for dinners, operas, galas and such, two for balls and five dresses for daily use as well as a marriage dress. I'll see that the factory's workload is lowered after the next shipment, so the others can help you. You'll need all of that as soon as possible. After you look the part, we can announce this."

"Can I at least tell the others?" Brea looked more excited than at Christmas.

"Let's tell them in the morning. But I will not keep the real reason from them. I promised I would never take advantage of any of you. Right now, I feel like a lecherous geezer preying on a helpless maiden."

"I train boxing with you, Mis-, I mean, Gren. I can defend myself."

"Also, this is the second time I was proposed to. I seem to attract strong women. At this rate, I'll never ask someone to marry me."

"Well, you can officially propose to me somewhere for the public eye. A romantic setting, a great gesture, family heirloom rings, you know ... every girl's dream."

"Even yours?" Harry raised an eyebrow.

"No." Her tone was flat. "But who cares about what any of us really think? One day, people might. Right now, they don't." She gave him a nod. "Goodnight, Gren."

"Goodnight, Brea." Harry sighed deeply.

So, fate gave him a child bride once again, aged far beyond her years. It was Ginny all over again.

Kapitel 17: Seventeenth chapter

Everyone was quiet. Most of the kids seemed to have picked up Margret's mood of tense queasiness. Those that didn't notice it immediately went quiet after a few questions and comments. Breakfast had never been this strained.

"So ... the police were here last night," Harry began after sipping his coffee. He wasn't sure he could stomach food yet, even though the eggs with mayonnaise looked inviting. He knew he was stalling. "I will talk to Richard about their accusations later. We'll go down to the police station after breakfast." Which was why he had waited for the boy to eat a bit before beginning to talk. "Personally, I don't think it is about him. I think someone is trying to attack us as a family by picking the easiest targets before moving on to the harder ones."

The kids exchanged looks.

"In the next few weeks, I think that every weakness that can be exploited will be. So, if any of you have some dark secrets or wrongdoings they need to confess, please find me later and do so. We'll look for a solution together. I promise not to get angry. Even past criminal acts that can be dragged up, social blunders that people will remember, please tell me all of them."

A few of the kids began to fidget and Harry took notice of them. If they didn't come to him, he would go to them.

"The same goes for Margret, Edgar and me. There is one glaring fact that can be exploited and it is that Edgar and me are both men and everyone knows I am not having an affair with my maid. No one here knew my wife. It is too easy to make up stories about us." He looked at Edgar at that point, seeing the hurt in his eyes.

"Do I need to go?" It was no more than a whisper from the other man.

"I would never do that to everyone. By now, this is your home too. You are part of this family. I will never leave any one of you to fend for themselves. I won't ever throw someone out against their will, except for intentionally causing harm to this family."

"But I harm you by being here." Edgar averted his gaze. "I know what I am. If it hurts anyone—"

"Stop your thoughts right there." Had he really overlooked how bad his friend felt about himself? "You are not intentionally harming this family."

"But my existence is a threat to you!"

Well, that was hard to argue with. "I don't plan on giving anyone the opportunity to threaten us."

"How?" Edgar's voice was laced with desperation. "I know only one way and that is not advisable in times of peace."

Shooting every threat or sending them to their deaths as their commanding officer. Harry did not need more than a moment to know what Edgar remembered. He had listened to the other man's stories about a person Harry couldn't help but resent. Grenmore Horten had been a despicable human being.

"Brea came up with a plan." He had asked her again before breakfast. She seemed even more determined than yesterday, totally at peace with herself except for the excitement about becoming a wealthy lady. "The only way to finally lay rest to the rumor that you are secretly my lover is to create a rumor that is even more scandalous."

Edgar blinked.

"Before Edgar came here, the going rumor was that I was a pedophile that adopted all of you for some kind of girly harem." Two of the girls began to whisper, Loretta shook her head as if to dislodge that thought. "But when you all started working and went to school, that rumor dissolved. Which harem master sends out his concubines for most of the day? Also, people could see you weren't scared of me. Especially when you started making friends, meeting boys and growing confident, people found something new to theorize on. But Brea is right that when I want people to stop thinking about Edgar and me, I need to resurrect that first rumor about my love life. People need to have evidence that they were right after all, I was into young girls all this time."

"No one that knows you would believe that." Edgar looked around the table and most of the kids nodded.

"The general public doesn't know me though. This is about appearances. Rumors and false accusations, this is what we will be faced with. I need a perfect image with one obvious flaw. One imperfection why I do my best at everything else. No one should be too perfect, that always invites envy. Your weakness needs to be something people can look down on you for. When everyone knows that you are despicable on one account, they stop looking for other things to exploit. At the same time, it needs to be something most people don't actually find revolting. So people gossip but don't shun you."

"Being a pedophile is something people shun you for."

"But what if I never act on it until it was legal? Enjoying to look at young girls is accepted in this era, even if I find it completely revolting. Lusting after girls is ... disgusting in my opinion but alright in the eyes of a lot of men."

"So what evidence do you want to present that makes everyone think that?" Edgar looked doubtful.

"I proposed to him", Brea suddenly interrupted.

Edgar just blinked stupidly and Margret sighed deeply.

"It is my plan." She looked around, especially at the other girls. "Let's say he basically adopted us to have his free pick. We all know he would never do that but people love to think bad of others and almost everyone will believe it when he marries me."

"People do that?" Mary looked at Harry with big eyes.

"Sadly, yes, they do. It is the connection most people will draw. Everyone will talk about this marriage. Take the fact that a lone bachelor adopted five girls and later married one of them without knowing more than that. You'll stop thinking he might have an affair with a man. If I marry a normal woman of standing, people will believe I did it as a cover-up. But marry some impoverished orphan that basically has no choice when you make moves on her, it does not make sense as a cover story anymore. Too scandalous. Why would anyone ruin his image like that?"

"Why would you?" Dorothea asked. Normally, she was a quiet one, even though she was older than Brea. "Are rumors really that dangerous?"

"Homosexual men go to jail." How he wished that were different. "Rumors become beliefs, beliefs become truth. Suddenly people see things they take as evidence. The way people look at each other, a touch of a hand, all of that suddenly becomes wild public kisses and unclothed encounters at other people's homes. Suddenly, people swear they have definitely seen this or that. How do you prove that you never did something? It is easier to prove that you did something."

"What prove?" Edgar sounded disbelieving. "I know you, you won't touch her, you won't impregnate her. So what's your prove?"

"I think a ruinous marriage is enough prove. Who in their right mind would marry someone without money or connections if not for legally doing what was forbidden before? People love to believe the worst of others. They will want to believe in this truth."

"Then why not me?" Dorothea sounded petulant. "I already turned sixteen."

"Because I would never make one of you do this. I tried to talk Brea out of this but she had great arguments. She really thought this through. A loveless marriage is not for everyone."

"Well, I'd do it." The older girl sulked openly. "Who wouldn't want to be lady of this house? Lots of money, never having to work again, I'd jump at the chance."

"I don't plan on being a trophy wife." Brea actually sounded insulted. "This is for protecting this family. So I'll go study in London and come back to manage the factory. You are aware that we are sewing uniforms for the next war? Those two are military officers. Come war, they'll be gone. The only one allowed to administer an estate and it's belongings – which the factory is – is a wife. So I'll get some education to do a good job. Most of us lost their parents due to the war and it's consequences. Bad working conditions, hunger, sickness, that is what war means for everyone. Men not coming back, women finding no jobs, young girls going into prostitution. We don't need to repeat what happened to our parents. Sewing uniforms is a good job, even in wartime. We'll make it but we'll need someone that can do what Gren and Edgar do right now."

Everyone was quiet for a moment. Even Dorothea looked queasy.

"Thank you, Brea." Mary took one of her hands. "You're my hero."

"Yes, thank you." Helen smiled at her. "That's a good plan."

"It's why I finally acquiesced in her proposal. We both want to protect this family. She's not quietly suffering, we both know why we are agreeing to this. I can continue to be faithful to my late wife."

"So what do we need to do?," Loretta asked. "Should we make up stories about how you always liked to watch us and how scary that was?"

"No, better not. Let's stay with the gentleman with dark desires he is ashamed about. I didn't pant after you, I didn't stalk you or stared at you scarily. Actually, Brea wants me to do the routine of romantic gestures, flowers and admiration. You all have access to the library. Think of those cliché stories of rich, perfectly well-behaved young masters falling in love with their maid."

"Everyone knows that those are fiction." Dorothea snorted.

"Well, pretend that it is happening right before your eyes. A flower in bloom, rose color painting her cheeks, an innocent maiden ... well, I have never read those stories, I am no good at trying to quote them." He shook his head. "Also, I need all of you to help Brea with her wardrobe. Cinderella-style, she needs to look the part where I spoil my young love interest rotten."

"Oh!" Helen clapped her hands. "Will she get jewelry?"

"I will have to go through my late mother's stuff."

"It will be like in our plays. You'll be the heroine." The young girl grinned at Brea.

"I'll turn into a princess."

Some girls cooed and cheered. Even Margret smiled. Richard and Edgar though looked not so well, both in their own way. Richard was pale, most likely fearing what awaited him. Edgar ... he looked like he was trying his best to keep from crying. Swallowing his pain, keeping a straight face, waiting until one could allow oneself to fall apart.

"Right now, this is all still a secret," Harry told the girls. "You'll finish the current

uniforms while Brea buys the stuff for her dresses. You can plan them together. You'll start on them after our next shipment. Then you can start telling people how I am courting Brea. I will actually do that, you don't need to come up with stories. Just do and say what you would if it were really happening."

"Wouldn't it be safer if you hadn't told us?," asked Loretta, always the voice of reason.

"Most likely. But I wanted you to know. I didn't want you to think I was breaking a promise I made to you."

"What promise?" Dorothea looked first at Harry, then at the other girls.

The one to answer was Helen: "That he would never desire any of us. He promised that on our first evening here. When Brea, Mary and me came here, we thought he was ... well. We had all seen it before. We thought his plan was a harem with girls, just like he said."

"He would never," Loretta deadpanned.

"Did the thought not occur to you when he got you two from the orphanage?"

Dorothea and Loretta looked at each other but both shook their heads.

"They came from a better orphanage than yours." Harry sighed remembering the orphanage's conditions. "It had a roof for example."

The girls began to talk about their respective orphanages. For a moment, Harry watched with a smile, but Richard's uneasiness permeated the room. The older man lay a hand on Edgar's shoulder and announced: "We'll need to have some manly talks now. See you later, everyone. Richard, are you coming?"

The boy may have looked pale before but he became chalky when he stood. Should he offer him a hand? The boy did not look steady on his feet. Edgar looked slightly better but ... only a bit. Still, they followed Harry without complaint. Tom slipped from his seat as well, so Harry turned to him for a moment and said: "You, young man, will go to school. Protect the girls on your way."

His son scrunched his face and not in a cute way.

For once, Harry didn't care, he could sort that one out later. He knew that Richard had to be top priority but he suddenly felt like he should have talked to Edgar beforehand. Had the other man harbored hope? Was it even possible not to? He looked crushed by the revelation. Harry tried a hand on his shoulder which wasn't shrugged off. That had to be positive, right?

Edgar's eyes were lost and desolate though. Crushed, devoid of all hope, not even able to cry. Harry remembered seeing those eyes on Ron once. Day by day, they had filled with anger until his best friend left them in the forest. Would he lose Edgar the same way now? Or would the hopelessness turn him suicidal again?

"Richard, please go sit in my study, alright? We'll be there in a moment."

The boy hesitated only for a moment before nodding and closing the door of the room behind him.

"Talk to me, Edgar."

The man slowly opened his mouth but nothing came out. His eyes lost focus before he shook his head and lowered his gaze.

"I am still the same. We are still the same. This doesn't change anything. It is a front, an image. It's a bitter pill to swallow. Even more the fact that we need it at all, I know. Just ... I don't want you in danger. Neither you nor him." Harry nodded in the direction of his study.

"What has he done?" It was no more than a whisper.

"Kissed a boy ... maybe. Maybe not. The other boy is one of the sons of Mister Smith's

friend."

Edgar sighed in annoyance. "I'll sort out my feelings later." He turned to the study. Harry stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. At least he planned to grab the shoulder. In his haste, it was more more chest than shoulder. Edgar shuddered as if he had been electrified. As if burned, Harry pulled back his hand. In the time it took to blink, Edgar's arms were around his shoulders, the other man's lips right beside his ear: "I just hate the fact that it can't be me."

"Marrying me? I am not marrying her because I want to. I don't love her, I don't desire her."

"I know." Edgar leaned back to look in his eyes. "You won't love or desire me as well. I am the same. Still, she gets to marry you and I don't."

"2014." Harry sighed and hugged Edgar as well. "We'll both be dead when they legalize it."

"Hm ... if we get to live that long, will you marry me? Just for the heck of it."

"You think I'll make 118?" Harry smiled crookedly. "Alright. If we live in 2014, I'll marry you."

"Good." Edgar grinned and finally took a step back. "I'll hold you to your word."

"Can we save our foal from prison now?"

The other man sighed deeply. "Can we skip about fifty years or so?"

"Where would be the fun in that?"

Edgar just rose an eye-brow before entering the study. This time, Harry let him go. Had that been enough? Had he assured Edgar that nothing had to change? Because things would change ... Brea would sit in his seat on Harry's right side. She would be on his arm at parties. Later, only Harry and her would be invited and Edgar would have to stay home. Harry wasn't blind to all of that. He would not be able to promise that everything would be the same.

Edgar knew that.

He also knew how much every reminder would hurt.

Harry took a fortifying breath and entered the study.

"Do you know if Ian is alright?" Richard had a bit more color on his cheeks.

"Ian as in the Conner's boy?" Harry brought the boy back to the sofa. "So it is true that you were caught kissing?"

"By his father." Richard lowered his head in shame and pain. "He screamed and used swear-words. He got so angry, he hit Ian. I ... I ran away." He hiccuped and his eyes teared up. "I am so sorry."

Great. Well, it was more in line with what he had expected but it complicated things a lot.

"Ian will be okay but he is most likely hurt. Men like Conner, they ... they are very impulsive. They can do a lot of damage in their rage."

"I didn't know what to do!" Richard hid his face behind his hands.

"You come and talk to me, Richard. We could have gone to the police and made this go away before it became in issue. You don't have to do things by yourself. Come to talk to me or Edgar."

The boy just cried. God, he was only fifteen. He was still half a child.

"I need you to explain in detail what happened."

Edgar went over to Richard and put an arm around the boy's shoulders. Harry gave them a handkerchief. It took a few moments before the boy calmed enough to talk.

"Ian and I ... I knew he was like me. Like us. We met sometimes. Out in the woods or in

the garden shed. No one knew. He's learning to be a carpenter. His family owns a workshop, he just wanted to show me what he was working on. It was a Christmas present, a little table for the shed. I made a joke or maybe said something flirty, I don't know, I don't remember, just that we were kissing. His father should have been with a client, it should have been safe-

"Well, it happened. Go on." Young innocent love, spoiled viciously.

"His father screamed bloody murder. He beat Ian, really beat him, with fists and all. I screamed and when his father turned to me, I ran." He hung his head in shame. "I am so sorry."

"I hope you'll be able to tell Ian some day." Harry sighed deeply. Most likely Richard wouldn't be able to. "Either Ian told his father that you initiated that to save himself or the man is forcing Ian to implicate you. They went to the police and reported you. Two against one and the public against you is not a good position."

Richard went pale again and whispered: "I'll go to prison?"

"We'll try not to let that happen. But for the best outcome, we need Ian on our side."

"Ian is very, very afraid of his father."

"I feared so." What to do? "We won't be able to talk to him before we go to the police. We need a story."

"The truth will bring both of you into prison." Edgar squeezed Richards shoulders.

"Then it's better if I take the blame?" Richard's nose was clogged again.

"No, we need something where both of you are innocent and Conner had an overreaction. How exactly were you standing when Mister Conner walked in on you?"

"Ah." The boy cleaned his nose. "Err, the door was two meters away and we were a bit sideways-

"Show me." Harry stood and went to the door. "Let's say that I am Mister Conner. Place Edgar as Ian and then yourself."

They reenacted the scene with both Edgar and Harry asking for clarifications.

"We'll say that you roughed around." Edgar finally decided. "This hand position, it can also be used in a rough tumble. The youthful sort, not the tumble in the hay sort. Ian stood with his back to the door and with how tall you described him, it's easy to misunderstand the situation. Let's say that there was no kiss, you were just fooling around and Mister Conner misunderstood. The rest of the situation will be the exact same. Screaming, hitting, you running away and being afraid."

"You can even say how you were not only afraid of Mister Conner but also of my reaction. Recount the story of the stolen wine and my severe punishment. Recount how Edgar and I sometimes talk about our time in the military and how we had to shoot homosexuals as disciplinary measures."

"What?" Richard looked up with big eyes full of shock.

"War is a horrible thing." With a sad face, Edgar patted the boy's head. "In the trenches, you need to make fast decisions. Sending people to their deaths, keeping them from rebelling and running away in the face of bloody destruction ... yes, we had to shoot them. If they were caught, there was no other way."

"But ... but aren't you-

Edgar placed a finger on Richard's lips. "What I am is not as important as who I have to be."

God, why? Why did people have to discriminate like this? You couldn't help what you were born with. This whole situation, it was such a ... Harry couldn't believe people ever thought like this. Making homosexuals into criminals, giving no rights to women or children, waging war instead of finding compromises for their differences. Why was

this so hard for so many people? Even in his own time, people had been like this. Just a bit less hostile with not as much support behind them. In this age, the state supported them. What a horrible thing.

"Richard? Do you think you can tell the story like that?"

The boy cried again. Edgar held him, dried his tears, whispered words of comfort. Finally, Richard quieted again and nodded.

"We should go down to the station now. Edgar will go about his day as usual. Later, we'll make a plan how to get Ian to say the same as you."

For a moment, it looked like Edgar would argue but his words never left his lips. He nodded, knowing the wisdom in this course of action. They couldn't go as a team this time. It would only implicate them. If Edgar had learned one thing in all his years with Gren, it was that your image was everything. Sometimes you had to make sacrifices for it. Sometimes you had to kill for it. They would try to save Richard but not to the point of self-destruction.

It hurt to think what might be needed.

"Mister Horten." Officer Derbrow nodded at him.

"Officers Derbrow and Kanderly." He removed his hat. "Let me introduce Richard Burstone, a worker at my factory and our gardener."

"Good morning, son." The older officer nodded, not exactly inviting but also not hostile. "Seems there's no hole in his head."

"It turned out to be a misunderstanding, just like I expected. One with a lot of negative consequences but let Richard tell you himself. Hopefully, I didn't frighten him too much with my interrogation."

"Leave police matters to the police-" Officer Kanderly was interrupted by his partner with a pinch to his arm.

"Of course, officers. Officially, Richard may only be an employee but he has been with me for years, I watched him grow up. He is something like a honorary son. Finding out that I have been harboring a criminal for years would have been ghastly."

Richard paled and trembled slightly. Harry hoped that he didn't overdo it.

"Well, boy, let's take your statement. Follow us." Officer Derbrow made a hand gesture to follow and took the lead.

Harry didn't leave Richard's side. Of course that became a problem at the door of the interrogation room.

"You may wait outside, Mister Horten." Officer Kanderly seemed to be losing his tact.

"Outrageous! He is a minor, you cannot take his statement without adult supervision. If you don't want me, I can call our family lawyer but that would take a few days. He resides in London."

"That won't be needed." It seemed like Derbrow had already made his peace with the fact that he would not stop Harry. Kanderly bristled – without his partner though, he was more like a barking chihuahua.

They went inside with Harry taking a seat slightly behind Richard. So far, so good. He had worn down at least one of them. Maybe that would spare the boy. They took his personal information, asked about his youth, his family. Finally, they asked about yesterday. Richard told the same story with the same emotions, the same fear and shame, the tears. He remembered their little story quirk well enough. Harry offered him handkerchiefs that he had packed in advance. All in all, it was perfect.

Of course, it would not be that easy. They tried to wear him down, to break him. They let him recount the story again and again, do a placement themselves, asked invasive

questions. Harry let out all of his annoyance unfiltered, so that his looming presence would give him the opportunity to cut the interrogation short. He did so after the third retelling, playing the businessman who had better things to do to listen to some youthful idiocies more than four times in a morning. Kanderly argued that he could go and the interrogation could continue which made Harry grumble and fidget, so the officers got another retelling but Richard didn't stumble on the details. The best lie was always the one that had as much truth as possible. The officers finally gave up.

"This will go to court."

"Court?" Harry used all of the anger that he normally kept behind massive walls of deescalation training. "Whatever for?"

"Mister Conner and his boy said something different."

"That boy will say what his father tells him to. Did he actually tell you that Richard forced him? Or was that all his father?"

Derbrow and Kanderly exchanged a look. The younger spoke: "Well, anyway, a judge needs to make the decision. These are delicate matters after all."

"Well, if you insist on it." Arguing more would have only made matters worse. Time to change tactics. "So I will need to call our lawyer?" He did his best to look like he had an epiphany. "Wait ... if you already knew this would go to court anyway, why did you tell me that no lawyer was needed? If you knew this already, Richard should never have been interrogated without legal representation." That would have led to dropped charges in his day and age. Sadly, that was in the future as well. "So you tried to get some hurried confession out of him not only once but twice? First turning up in the middle of the night, then ... no, thrice! You even tried to keep me out of the interrogation room. I will need to have a stern word with your superior. Those tactics are despicable for people who uphold the law."

Too many purebloods that had tried to take him apart in his years as an auror. It was something that had been used against him and it had flustered him again and again in the beginning. Now, he was thankful for the experience – he knew how to turn tables. Kanderly flustered, even Derbrow fidgeted.

"I expect better from you in the future, gentleman. Now be so kind as to tell me where I can find the superintendent."

He had a sudden flashback to Lucius Malfoy stalking the Ministry floors with an upturned nose and a haughty gaze. Really, what was his life coming to?

Malfoy Manor looked exactly the same as the last time he had been in it. Which was at seventeen years old, bound and bloody, losing a friend that had been mistreated by pureblood culture all his life, still hearing Hermione's tortured screams filling the halls. Not a good memory.

"Dad?" Tom seemed to have noticed his faraway look.

"I'm ... not all here right now. It sometimes happens when bad memories haunt you. This place reminds me of something in my youth that wasn't pleasant."

Tom, who had his hand in his, watched him for a moment and asked, "Do you need a hug?"

"Yes, please. May I carry you?" He picked the boy up. Tom was actually getting heavy now but the weight helped to ground him. Harry had to put him down halfway to the door.

"You need to train more, dad."

"Sure ... well, okay, you might have a point there." It had been the same when he changed from active missions to desk work. Now, how to get a magically fired broom

that a Muggle could ride? Wait, didn't the Malfoys have a breeding empire for flying horses? It should still exist in this age. There! He was sure he had heard a horse nigh. Maybe he would get to fly one?

"Would you like a calming draught?," Dumbledore offered.

"No, thank you. It's alright. There's horses instead of peacocks and stuffy purebloods instead of murderous madmen. Also, having you with me is a good reminder where I am."

"So it was after ..."

"Yes, after." They arrived at the door which was opened by a house-elf that was thankfully not Dobby. "Let's not talk about the past." Future. Whatever.

Tom let his gaze wander, eyes sparkling while taking everything in. It was actually a nice mansion when your life wasn't threatened. Still a bit cold and rather dark with the big halls only lightened by candles and magical illumination. It had a cosy atmosphere though. There were flying candles that parted when you passed them and an enchanted ceiling just like in the great hall. This one did not show the sky but rather a ball, as if dancers were using the ceiling as their floor. It was a bit disconcerting but also pretty. Harry wasn't surprised that Voldemort had banished the enchantment in his time.

"Welcome to Wiltshire manor." Of course, Arcturus Malfoy stood near the top of the grand staircase. Like every good manor owner, he needed to make an entrance from a higher place.

"Thank you for having us, Mister Malfoy." He would not continue though. It would place him like a beggar, so he waited for the other to come down to his level. "It is a pleasure to finally meet you. My name is Grenmore Horten. This is my son, Tom Marvolo Horten."

"Marvolo? A peculiar name." The regal blond man eyed the boy.

"After my grandfather, sir. Marvolo Gaunt." Tom bowed like the purest pureblood one could imagine.

"A Gaunt?" As expected, Malfoy ignored Harry in favor of someone more in his league. "How does the offspring of one of our oldest and purest lines end in the hands of a Muggle?"

"You would have to ask my mother, sir. She died in childbirth and decided to leave me in a Muggle orphanage."

"A bastard, then?"

"I am unsure if my parents married or not." A lie but certainly a well-placed one. "I carried my father's name, so maybe they married. I do not know him though. She did not place me with him, so I will have to draw my own conclusions. Those aren't favorable."

"Surely you would like to know him at least? Or know of him? Merope Gaunt would not have married a fool, her grandfather would never have allowed it. He was a proud man."

"So I have been told." Tom left a pause that clearly unsettled Mister Malfoy in its insolence but continued before his patience ran out. "My mother also decided not to place me with him. For her to choose a Muggle orphanage, it does not reflect well on either my grandfather nor my father."

Malfoy seemed thoughtful for a moment. "It must have been a scandal ... curious that I never knew of it."

"No one knew. No one came to get me. My mother must have gone to some lengths to keep me secret. For the heir of a line as old as the Gaunts, that must have been

quite some work."

"To hide you with Muggles is certainly unexpected." His gaze flickered to Harry. "Curious indeed. So your entrance back into this world is at the side of a man trying to prove that blood is the most important ... but not it's purity but it's diversity?"

"My adopted father acts in my interest. As a half-blood, you would not deign to talk to me otherwise."

"A half-blood?" Malfoy recoiled in disgust. "Merope! How could she?"

"She owned a mirror." Tom kept his composure, continuing to speak like a politician rather than a small child. "She knew what inbreeding let to, she only had to look at her own face."

"Well ... she was as ugly as a thestral's behind, I give you that. So breeding with a Mudblood led to this?" Malfoy seemed to study Tom's face. "The looks have certainly improved, the intellect as well. But how is your magic?"

Suddenly, the hundreds of candles flouting in the room slowly turned upside-down. It was creepy as hell and one by one, they extinguished. Of all things to happen, Harry had not expected this – it was a perfect statement. It was powerful to overrule an adult's magic and the light drowning from the room was screaming the nature of Tom's magic without offending Dumbledore as the only light wizard in the room. Even though extinguishing lights in front of a light wizard known to fight dark lords may be a bit over the top after all.

"Lumos," the older man mumbled after a moment. The dark made him uncomfortable. Malfoy's face seemed ashen in the harsh light. That might also have to do with being as pale as a vampire but maybe he was impressed as well. He held his countenance unwaveringly. "A remarkable performance of magical mastery. Also one of which I am sure that our dear headmaster had no hand in."

"He seems rather partial to light." Tom! That was a joke far beyond your years!

"I am very proud of my son's development," Harry decided to intervene.

"Of course." Malfoy couldn't help a snicker. "How do you foster his talent?"

"He got a beginner's potions kit and started brewing this year. He also has access to an extensive library that I stocked with some elementary books. I started teaching him the mind arts as an extracurricular."

Malfoy hesitated for a moment, gathering his thoughts. "I thought you were a Muggle?"

"So?" Harry raised an eyebrow. "Are you one of those purebloods that think Muggles are unable to read?"

The other man actually seemed unsure how to answer that, so he stayed silent.

"Magical theory is just that – a theory. You do not need magic to read about it. The same applies to the mind arts. Imagining and mentalizing do not need magic to work."

"Fascinating." It actually sounded honest. As Malfoy was staring into Harry's eyes, he was most likely trying to break in right now. "Utterly fascinating."

"It is also rather rude to try to break into someone's mind."

"Indeed." Dumbledore coughed. "No attacks, you remember?"

"Oh, it was basically an invitation." Malfoy made a grand hand gesture. "You are right none the less, where are my manners? Please follow me to the drawing room. Let us discuss your scientific evidence."

Thank God, they were getting somewhere. So the man deigned to listen to them after all these impressive displays of power. Harry patted his son's head and nodded at him when Malfoy had his back turned. Tom grinned for a moment, falling out of character, before the haughty expression was back.

The drawing room was exactly as Harry remembered it. High ceiling, portraits of Malfoys lining the walls, a marble fireplace and a long table. On the other hand, it wasn't as bleak and dark as in Voldemort's time. There was a fire and the curtains were open. It had a bit of a morbid feeling to walk in here hand in hand with Tom. He had a sudden flashback of Burbage being eaten by Nagini on this table. His son most likely noticed his shudder. Hopefully, it would never come to pass now.

"Our ancestors watch our every move. This room reminds us of those that have come before us and whose ideals we have to uphold." What a clever move and what an obvious try at intimidation.

"Magic above all," Harry quoted Merlin's credo.

"All hail those who stay superior," Tom continued with a quote from Salazar Slytherin.

"Exactly." For a moment, Malfoy grinned as if they were men of worth. After a short moment, he turned, most likely remembering he was talking with filth. "The worth of a man has changed over time but might always held the same value. Those with power should hold the power."

"As well as the responsibility for future generations to come," Dumbledore added.

"To keep and to hold magic, to further research and to protect all wizardkind from extinction," Malfoy continued as if he had not heard the man.

"The first and third will be a challenge in the years to come," Harry interjected.

The blond man turned to him, not a hair out of place but his micro-expressions spoke of unease.

"You see the signs. The Sacred lines are declining, their offspring weaker and less sharp every generation, their madness and bloodlust increasing. Dark wizards turning to black magic, fanatical dark lords on the rise. Gellert Grindelwald was actually someone most purebloods placed their hopes on. More powerful, more stable and with a better plan than all the ones that came before him for decades." Harry continued, ignoring Dumbledore's fidgeting, "He was right about some things. Muggles are a threat. Their technology is advancing, their weapons far surpass a wizard's capability of mass destruction."

Malfoy turned to him, a man with a body full of strain. His gaze flickered to Dumbledore.

"Know your enemy." Harry placed a hand on the older man's shoulder. "To defeat someone, you have to know where they are coming from. Albus knows this better than anyone. What he projects to the outside world and what he thinks are different things, just as with you. At least I guess that no Malfoy would ever admit to having invited a Muggle to their home? I am aware of the honor you have bestowed upon me ... in your view."

"I guess I did not expect a Muggle to quote Merlin nor Grindelwald, especially not in his presence." Malfoy's gaze remained on Dumbledore. "Most people would not dare."

"He was a horribly misguided man, but only because he was ill-informed. With the right kind of knowledge, who could have stopped him? Imagine a dark lord not opposing those in power but rising within their ranks."

Dumbledore averted his gaze.

"You would not call them a dark lord." Malfoy seemed to get the hint. "But a visionary."

"A dark lord is a feared individual but ultimately, a failing one. Light shall always triumph over dark ... unless they agree with the other side's view. Then you only need a few skilled individuals to realize something people have never thought possible."

Hogwarts is a prime example of different people following the same ideal, ending with something grander than ever imagined."

"I see." The other man sharpened his gaze. "So you imagine me as part of your plan?"

"I am a Gryffindor at heart, it makes me unable to be subtle," Harry deadpanned. "As much as I love my son, he does not have the skills of an expert on politics like you do."

"That could be ruinous."

"It could also be the greatest honor, a showing of leadership in hard times, going down in history as one of the men that saved magic when hope dwindled and the old blood died." Which sounded like a rather Gryffindorish thing to say. "A path to save your family. How much have you fought for that one boy?"

One corner of Malfoy's mouth actually twitched. That seemed to be a rather sore topic. Time for a diversion.

"The Gaunts have exactly this one boy that refuses to carry their name. He is the last true heir of Slytherin. I don't see Morphin Gaunt saving the family line anytime soon. Tom has the looks, the magic, the skills not found in other families. He is living proof of what we are trying to show people. Offer me all your doubts and let me disperse them. You need not make a decision now. I only wanted you to know my motives."

Malfoy regarded him for a moment, his gaze suddenly filled with suspicion. "It is a lot of work for one boy."

"Would you not do the same for yours?" Harry smiled with a sad undertone. "Merlin may have taught us magic above all – but did he have a family?"

"No ... he didn't." The other man took a deep breath. "There is nothing I wouldn't do for my son. Including challenging centuries of history, centuries of values passed from my forefathers onto me."

"A brave man indeed." Harry nodded. Certainly braver than some Malfoys before and after him. So the ferret had actually taken after his great-grandfather. Cautious but not too set on something. Not as set as Lucius, not set to the point of facing madness rather than change.

Malfoy seemed to wage an inner war, no matter his words. His values needed to reject them and their words but his logical mind knew that they were right. How much truth would he allow? How many actions would he let his convictions follow? Keeping oneself ignorant was a choice that kept someone from making further choices. On the other hand, he was too far gone to back out and he knew it. Letting Dumbledore in had been a wrong move if his ways were comfortable enough, if he did not have enough to worry about.

"All this brooding makes me think of tea." Dumbledore smiled in a way that sharply reminded Harry of the cunning old man playing the fool too often. "A few cookies would also not go amiss, don't you think?"

"My feet hurt," Tom grumbled under his breath but loud enough to be heard.

"Of course." Malfoy clapped his hands. "Milfy, set out some tea in the sun room. Delby, fetch my son and have him join us there."

Two plops sounded through the room, informing Harry that the elves must have been invisible or very well-hidden. His inner Mione screamed at him to say something but his few Slytherin tendencies warned him not to offend Malfoy over this matter. But after all this talking, his inner Slytherin was losing some steam. Hopefully they could finally lower the tension and the need for grand speeches and hyperboles. Diplomacy was not his strong suit and he really wanted to go back to simply stating opinions and annoying people long enough until they gave up.

They went out into a hallway, past some doors and finally took one near the end. It

opened into a light and airy room with high windows that offered a beautiful view into the garden. Tom sat down on a chaiselongue with Albus next to him, leaving a wicker chair to Harry. Malfoy took another one of those which left a second chaiselongue to the still missing son. In between offers of tea, sugar and lemon, a probably ten-year-old boy arrived. To Harry's surprise, he had light brown hair instead of blond. With Lucius extremely fair blond hair, he had expected a blond child.

"Abraxas, please join us." His father made a hand gesture that bid him to approach.

"This is my son and heir, Abraxas Malfoy."

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance, young Mister Malfoy." Harry stood to shake his hand, proudly noticing that Tom copied him. "This is my son and heir, Tom Marvolo Horten."

"I fear I never heard your name." God, the boy was as snotty as they come. No wonder that a man like Lucius had sprung from his loins.

"Young Tom is the Gaunt heir, Abraxas," his father explained patiently.

"Then why would you consort with a Muggle?" It seemed that Abraxas deigned Tom important enough to talk to.

"Figure it out for yourself." Tom's gaze was icy, clearly annoyed enough to leave behind his charming persona.

"Tom, that was rude," Harry admonished him.

"Well, he was rude first."

"I don't care about that. I care about your conduct and it was shameful."

"Yes, dad." Tom nearly rolled his eyes but held himself back. "Please excuse my rudeness, Mister Malfoy, I hold my father in high regard. Therefore I shall not let a slight to him go unchallenged."

Abraxas looked taken aback for a moment and checked with his father which reaction was expected of him before saying: "I did not want to sound disrespectful and I offer my sincerest apology if I did. I was merely baffled, not trying to imply any disregard."

"Sure." Tom said down again, still glaring at Abraxas.

"Mister Horten and his son are our guests today, Abraxas. They may be unusual company but I deign them worthy enough to talk to. Disregarding them is disregarding my estimation in this matter."

"I am sorry, father, I never wanted to imply that I was doubting you." The boy was actually bowing to his father! What a strange sight. Not even Malfoy – Draco, that is – had been as formal with his father.

"Mister Horten and his son are here to further our knowledge on what Mister Dumbledore already explained the last few times he was here. Do you remember about dominant and recessive traits and how our unique hair color came about?"

Abraxas lowered his gaze, one of his hands slightly clenching. It was a hair color he did not share, so Harry had an inkling how that question hurt. Everyone of us but you – even though it was something Abraxas was born with.

"We also learned about genetic penetration. I am curious what you have for me this time." Malfoy turned to Dumbledore.

"Well, yes ... I think I skimmed the topic of hereditary flaws. I mentioned that inbreeding was bad but never elaborated on it. I hoped that Mister Horten could give us some insight."

"Of course. What is your current knowledge on the origin of hereditary diseases?"

Harry looked at Arcturus Malfoy.

The man kept quiet for a moment before answering carefully, "It is common knowledge that the more squibs occur in a family, the more likely they are to have

more. It is why a lot of families hide their squib children, some even kill them. It is the only hereditary disease that does not have a cure yet. There were others but potions were invented to cure those."

"So your magical prowess also kept you from finding a solution to squibs earlier, I see." Harry nodded as if that was a new thing. "Muggles have a bit more knowledge on this due to the fact that they are unable to cure most hereditary diseases. So they occur more often and are easier to identify, therefore easier to study. If you had not found cures for most diseases, you would most likely already have found out how squibs come about."

"Is that a theory or do you have proof to base it on?" Malfoy's eyes narrowed.

"I shall present the theory first and if you have the real Black family tree at hand – not the one where they blasted off all their killed infants – I can show you the proof as well."

"How would such knowledge come into your hands?" The grey eyes of the Malfoy lord were cold as steel.

"You may know that Hogwarts registers every child born to magical parents as well as any magical child born to Muggle parents. So the headmaster is basically the keeper of records for the true history of magical families. Some families' exploits are ... hard to face. I asked Dumbledore to approach you because the Malfoy family actually seems rather reasonable and well-managed over the centuries. Neither madness nor mental retardation have occurred often. Due to your ancestor's wisdom, you have been spared a lot of risks regarding your health."

"So madness and mental retardation are also hereditary?" Both Malfoys exchanged a quick look. "Marrying wives from families with those seems undesirable."

"Which is why your ancestors declined such offers time and time again. Your family's penchant for marrying foreign aristocrats has proved fortunate." Did he need to puff up Malfoy's chest even more or was that enough flattery that they could get to the point?

"So being a squib, madness and mental retardation are recessive genes?" Finally, they could tackle the point.

"No, it's not as easy as that. As a wizard, you know that there are people with darker and with fairer skin." He waited for both Malfoys to nod. "Those with dark skin originally come from a place where the sun was very intense. So their skin color protected them from being hurt by sunlight. Most people living in England have fair skin, because our sunny days are very numbered. That is a development over thousands of generations. Those with fairer skin than others lived healthier in our cloudy land, so they had more children and therefore the skin color got lighter and lighter over thousands of generations. You could say that genes specialized. Does that make sense?" Again, he waited. "This process is continually happening. Genes have freak mutations and some are good, most are bad though. Most mutations are not an improvement. Thankfully, we always have two copies, so if one doesn't work, we have another to fall back on. It's because we always get one gene per parent."

Still, both Malfoys seemed to listen. Arcturus looked a lot more reserved than his son who could not keep his haughty exterior but looked rather intrigued.

"Now, when there is a lot of inbreeding, which occurs when people that are closely linked genetically marry one another, it happens more often that their children get two mutated copies. In that case, you have a hereditary disease. It doesn't happen fast but it happens. Most Muggle countries had monarchies, so they were ruled by one royal family. Royals were only allowed to marry other royals, so royal families

intermarried for centuries. Last century, that had led to a lot of specific hereditary diseases. The Romanovs, royal family of Russia, could only have daughters in the end. Their sons had a hereditary blood disease which killed them. The Habsburger, royal family of Austria, all had a specific nose and chin. The nose was very long, the chin as well, so sometimes it was more prominent than even their nose."

"They must have looked very strange," Abraxas muttered.

"Indeed they did. The Wittelsbacher, royal family of Bavaria, were known for their madness. The list goes on and on, the reason for it was intermarriage for centuries. Now, you may have already guessed where I am going: The Sacred twenty-eight have been intermarrying since the time of Merlin."

"So hereditary diseases have increased but we did not notice because we have cures for most of them." Malfoy nodded slowly. "The cure for squibs, madness and mental retardation is therefore to stop intermarrying?"

"That has an immediate effect in most cases, yes." Harry pointed at Tom. "As you can perfectly see in my son's example."

"It makes a lot of sense, yes ... Merope Gaunt had a hunch, her facial features were unproportioned, she was not the smartest and barely able to follow the school curricula. Her magic was close to a squib's. It was a shame because the Gaunts were the purest of them all. But madness had slowly taken a hold of them for a few generations. It was why I was so fascinated to see a boy not only handsome but smart and well-mannered. Not even to speak of your magic, young man, which is amazing. So you want to tell me that the reason for that is Merope's decision to defy her father and elope with a mudblood?"

Tom smirked and answered, "Even worse, she eloped with a Muggle."

"A Muggle?" Malfoy nearly spat the word. He even shuddered in revulsion. "She lay with a Muggle like a sodomit?"

"It would be a lot less scandalous if you did not put Muggles on the same level as goats or dogs." It did not faze Harry at all, he had done all this before. "Muggles are humans and some of them have genes that code for magic. When two such people come together, you have a Muggle-born. A Muggle-born is the most potent genetically, because they have all genes with complete penetration. Marrying a muggle-born secures that there won't be a squib for many generations to come. You can see that frequently in less well known light families. The Bones for example, the Diggorys, the Weasleys. I know that your family has a feud with the Weasleys going back decades but look at it objectively – have you never been envious of the number of potent magical children they produce?"

"They are blood traitors!"

"They are able to see that marrying Muggle-borns every few generations is a sensible course of action. They have practiced it for three centuries by now. How many of their children are squibs, insane or retarded?"

Malfoy glared at him as if he were a personal enemy. It made for a nice change to see some emotion on his features.

"Feel free to bring every family tree you own and we can check if my words hold true." The reply was nearly a hiss: "You want me to go explain to my fellow purebloods that they need to marry their kids off to mudbloods? Have you lost your mind?"

"You could start by calling them Muggleborn instead of Mudblood. That might make the idea easier to swallow." Harry lazily shrugged his shoulders. "I asked you what you would do for your son. You said that you would defy convictions and your ancestors if it meant a better future for him. Now I challenge you to prove your words."

"Insolent!" Malfoy stood and began to pace. "It is not possible for so many people to go so wrong. We began to shun Muggleborns to preserve magic. The answer cannot lie with them."

"The catholic church launched the so called inquisition. Wizards and witches were hunted down, tortured and burned alive. Magical folk began to gather and hide, to keep to themselves. In the 17th century, the Statute of Secrecy went into practice to protect magical folk from Muggles. Muggleborns were shunned because of their close ties to Muggles, because purebloods feared for their lives. For most families that are now called the Sacred twentyeight, it's been six- to seven-hundred years of intermarrying which are only now showing their ugly faces. That's how long it takes for several mutations to take root."

"There must be another way!" Malfoy's eyes burned with fury.

Well, he hadn't expected this to be easy. Harry took a deep breath and sighed. "There is."

"There is?" the other man echoed in surprise.

"Your own family already practices it. Marrying from abroad. It will widen the gene pool and stave off the hereditary degradation for another few hundred years. But you also know it's side-effects."

"We do?" With a searching hand he grabbed for his chair while standing behind it.

"The more divergent the genes, the less specialized they are to their environment. Some children aren't suited to the weather, the climate, the diseases, some children never come about. When was the last generation that had more than three children in the Malfoy line?"

Abraxas seemed to think about this as if it was a serious question. Due to Hermione's research, Harry knew the answer.

"In the 16th century, Lucius Malfoy the first tried to marry Queen Elisabeth the first but was rejected. He married a half-blood by the name of Catherine Abercromby instead, they had seven children. He was the last in line to marry a half-blood spouse, so it was also the last time your line had an abundance of children."

"We tried to marry into the Muggle royal line?" Abraxas asked his father in surprise.

Arcturus Malfoy clicked his tongue as if he had bitten into a lemon.

"It's a family secret for many generations now which you will be told upon marriage, young Mister Malfoy. The wealth of your family comes from hundreds of years of secretly working for the Muggle crown and investing in both magical and Muggle businesses. Your ancestors were smart people. The Gaunts, the Blacks and the Lestranges kept to themselves, never intermingling with anything remotely Muggle and look where it got them. Poor, frail and mad."

"Is it true?" Abraxas turned to his father.

"I wish I knew your sources, Mister Horten." The older Malfoy took a deep breath. "I'd like to strangle them."

"It's books, Mister Malfoy. Most of the Sacred twenty-eight own them, not only Hogwarts. I bet you still own your investment books from the 14th and 15th century." Again, he knew because Hermione had gotten them from the Malfoy library with Draco Malfoy's permission after finding some in the Black library that hinted at it. "Some other old families will have copies of them. Tergus Malfoy even wrote a widely-known book about investing in the 15th century. Not all copies are lost."

Arcturus Malfoy slowly shook his head and sat down again. "Of all people to unearth our family secrets, it has to be a Muggle."

Muggleborn actually but Harry knew he could not give credit to Hermione. In his head,

he thanked her profusely. At the time, she had annoyed him with her tales of what she had read where and what it meant while now, he was infinitely grateful that he knew. "The Lestranges are nearly extinguished. If Tom does not accept the Gaunt name, they will die with Morphin. The Blacks may have a few more generation but they get madder every century. One day, they will simply kill one another and that will be that," Malfoy concluded. "The Crabbe and Goyle family barely have any functional members left. They are either squibs or mentally retarded. Greengrass, Nott and Parkinson, they are still holding on but we have married their family members for four generations now. I already knew from my family tree that I would have to find a French, German or Scandinavian wife for my son. I had my eyes on the d' Eon, Grindelwald or Stauffenberg family. But all eligible members perished in the last war. I will most likely have to settle for Letizia Lundberg. Even with our European focus, it is not easy to find suitable spouses. I even debated looking at Russian or American wizarding families."

"Far be it from me to make suggestions but if you allowed half-bloods again, you would have a variety of choices. Hermione Lovegood is a lovely girl with the exact hair tone you like." A person he only knew about because Hermione had been fascinated by women with her name and looked up all of them to tell Ron and Harry about.

"They have inbred for generations."

"But the current head decided to break with the tradition and married a Muggleborn." Marrying Hermione would keep her brother from marrying her which would keep Luna's father from being born. The man had been mad as a hatter, so Harry did not feel bad about suggesting it. With the way things were going, Lucius Malfoy wasn't about to happen as well.

"Hm." Malfoy slowly nodded. "I will have to think about this and consult the books. There are some family trees I need to study."

"Of course." Harry smiled. "Thank you for the lovely tea. I look forward to our next meeting."

"Is there more?" The other man looked up sharply.

"There is the question of how to make this public without overturning the world as you know it. As well as the question as how to keep the wizarding world safe once they welcome Muggleborns into their society. Muggles are a threat. Grindelwald was right in fearing what is about to happen, of how powerful Muggles are getting. Eradicating them is not an answer though. You need them for the Muggleborns they produce. So other answers need to be found."

"Which is a topic you are looking into? As a Muggle?" A blond eyebrow was raised.

"Who better than a Muggle? I know what we are capable of."

"How does Albus Dumbledore feature into this?" What a surprisingly open approach for a Slytherin!

"I guess it is an open secret that Gellert was my lover before he became an enemy of the state," Dumbledore stated with surprising calmness. "I opposed his opinion on killing Muggles. I shared his other thoughts and concerns though. I am a light wizard but not a blind fool."

"Allow my surprise after doing your best to distance yourself from him for the last twenty years."

"I feared that people would implicate me with him. I did not want to lie about our affair but I also feared the conclusions drawn from it. I decided to stop running away from my past. I was a great part in what Gellert became and I need to face that and its consequences. We worked together on most of what he presented before the

Wizengamot."

"But you opposed him there," Malfoy's voice lowered.

"You know best how beneficial it is to play the pro and contra side at the same time, to have an influence on both. You want something done, you need an in on all sides."

"So this time I am to be your scapegoat?" His eyes narrowed. "This falls through as well and I am your fool?"

"It's why I decided to face this. I lost my lover due to my fear of the public opinion, Malfoy. Never again. This way of using others as pawns to save myself, it has to stop. It only ends in loneliness." Dumbledore slowly shook his head. "I discredited my own lover and left him to die just to save myself. I persecuted Slytherins for their self-sufficient backstabbing for twenty years when in reality, I hated my own cowardice most."

"So for you, this is some noble quest to make it up to your dead lover?" Malfoy could not hide his disdain. "You are such a Gryffindor at heart, it sickens me."

"You wanted to know my motivation, now you do." Dumbledore smiled but without humor. It rather looked like a threat. "Love is the most important of all and I betrayed it. Remorse is a strong motivator."

"I see." The blond man nodded. "I shall think this through and owl you about my decision."

"Great." Tom jumped from his seat. "Can you go and look at the flying horses before we leave? They look really cool." He pointed at the white pegasi that could be seen in the distance.

"Abraxas, please present our flock to our guests before they go."

"Yes, father." His son stood and bowed before the man. "Please follow me, sirs."

God, yes. Definitely. Flying horses were a lot better than parleying with Slytherins. It was exhausting. How had his life become like this? He really wished for Tom to grow up to take this duty off him. The boy would most likely even have fun with this.

Harry stood, nodded at Malfoy and followed the younger one. As long as it got him out of here, he was fine with anything.

Kapitel 18: Eighteenth chapter

"How did it go?," Edgar welcomed them back.

"We survived." With a plopping sound, Harry relaxed his joints. "Albus, what did you think?"

"Your explanation was in depth and to the point. Malfoy would be a fool to ignore it. It is amazing how many family secrets you know."

Tim piped in too, "That part about the queen, it looked like you just killed their pet cat."

Harry shuddered slightly, knowing that for his son, this wasn't a figure of speech.

"They had flying horses!" The boy had already turned to Edgar, the topic of Malfoy apparently finished. "Pure white flying horses, they were really beautiful."

"Pegasi?"

"No, those are Greek, they had the French equivalent. Abraxas or something, just like their son's name. Dad, do you think they named the horses after him or him after the horses?"

"I don't have a clue." Harry looked at Dumbledore. "Do you?"

"They had the boy first. People made jokes about his name, so his father bought up every available Abraxan horse. He is only selling them to people he likes, so everyone stopped their jokes."

Edgar snorted. "That sounds like one spoiled brat."

Dumbledore just coughed while Harry nodded and said, "He is an arrogant little shit."

"He treated us like dirt at first," grumbled Tom. "But the older Malfoy did that as well. He was only interested in me when he heard my bloodline and he totally ignored dad at first!"

"Dear Tom, he let you into his home. Some purebloods would never do that."

Dumbledore went down to own knee to be at his level. "They would kill you on sight or feed you to their pet. They would have their slaves scrub the floor to erase every trace of you. Malfoy was actually very nice and inviting for someone with his upbringing."

"I need to do that eloping thing with one of their daughters." The little devil smirked.

"You'll do no such thing, young man." Harry's voice was stern and he held up a finger in warning. "Never play with a maiden's heart unless you are serious."

"It is still nasty how full they are of themselves. As if being born to someone is more special than being born to someone else."

"Well, it changes what genes you have. What talent you might develop."

"You could still turn out a lazy ass." The boy rolled his eyes. "People need to be judged on what they do with what they have, not on how they are born."

"That's a progressive attitude." Harry patted his son's head. "Most people don't think like that though. They see in what ways they are born to better circumstances and pick on others that aren't as fortunate."

"About that," Tom began and looked very serious, "What's up with those," his gaze flickered to Mary that had just come in. Their hallway was big but not so big that you wouldn't be overheard, "those special servants they had?"

"Elves. They call themselves house elves," Dumbledore answered, apparently unconcerned about the maid.

"Are they ... do they hold them as slaves?" His brows crunched.

"Yes, they do." Dumbledore looked him dead in the eye. "Horrible thing, isn't it? They were enslaved a few hundred years back. They have forgotten what freedom is."

"How do you forget that when you can see free people?"

Mary, who had begun to dust something on the other side of the room, looked up.

"Well ... most house elves aren't treated well. They learn early on that they have no rights. Being envious and being caught at it means to be punished." Dumbledore looked at Harry. "Do you have a better explanation?"

"Imagine being hungry and standing in front of a bakery. You don't have money. Stealing will bring about a heavy punishment. Even looking at the bread means a punishment. You learn not to look at food, no matter your hunger." He knew. Gods, did he know. Just looking at the table full of food had gotten him sent to the cupboard.

Mary came over and looked at Harry silently, so he smiled invitingly.

"My mom was a maid," she explained. "She worked in a house just like this. We were allowed the scraps from the table and sometimes, there weren't any. But she cooked their food as well, so I asked why we couldn't just cook more or eat a bit before the others. She slapped me really hard for that question." Her gaze turned to Tom. "You learn not to question. In the end, you learn to not even think about the possibility that you should be allowed the same as them, that they are humans just like you."

"Oh." Tom seemed to think for a moment. "Well, that's wrong. Why wouldn't you feed your maid well?" He turned to his father.

"Because when people are hungry and scared, they are easier to manage, they ask for less. They are thankful for your scraps. They do things for you that they would not do otherwise."

Mary's hands clenched into fists. "The master raped my mother and she was silent for years. Someday, she ran away but she left me there. It's how I ended up in the orphanage."

"That's a horrible thing." Harry put a hand on her shoulder. "Maybe there were some circumstances that forced her to leave you and she couldn't tell you. Most mothers would never willingly leave their child in an unsafe place." He did not voice his thoughts on those circumstances though. Poor Mary. Maybe it was best if she believed her mother had gotten away.

"I would like to have a word with that so called master. Or maybe he could have a word with my fist." Edgar hugged the girl, as always being a lot less afraid of the implications of touching girls in puberty age. By now, everyone kind of knew about his homosexuality, so he was most likely a safe haven for the girls.

"Well, people, who can't treat their servants well, don't earn the right to be called people. In my opinion, you can call them pigs," Tom stated and took Mary's hand. "Such people should be stripped of their wealth."

Mary smiled and squeezed his hands. "That's a bad comparison. Poor pigs."

"Yeah, right. They are the dirt." Tom snorted. "I can't believe that they tried to treat us like that. Dad! Why were we talking to such people?"

"Because they have a lot of influence and can bring others around. First is the issue of blood purity. Then national security. After that, you can teach them how to treat other people."

There was clear disgust on his son's face. "So we just ignore that they treat other beings as slaves?"

"Right now, yes. In politics, you have to go slow. People are able to change but only one step at a time. If you want too much too soon, you become an enemy of the state

and in the end, someone will overthrow you and all changes revert back. So you better go the diplomatic way. It means swallowing a lot of your anger and let it out later."

"Politics sound very tiring." Tom looked very put upon.

Edgar laughed, let go of Mary and grabbed for Tom. The boy was thrown into the air for a second before Edgar caught him and hugged him to his chest. "That's my boy!" Mary giggled and Dumbledore smiled benevolently. Harry just shook his head. Really, he wanted those two to become politicians? Right. At least Tom had a few more years to grow up.

"Let's learn patience, hm?" Edgar grinned.

Tom rolled his eyes.

"Well, I shall take my leave." Dumbledore nodded at them. "Thank you for today. I'll owl you when they are new developments."

Tom waved him and Harry shook his hand. Edgar turned to Mary – who really shouldn't see a man go up in flames in their hall – and asked, "Do you think someone has a snack ready? Let's see what we can find in the kitchen."

"I still need to dust."

"It's Sunday, you don't need to work today."

"But Mister Horten worked today!"

"That's only because some business can only be done on Sundays." They left the room together, Tom still perched on Edgar's hip. Apparently, he was still stronger than Harry.

"You have a lovely family," Dumbledore said in a wistful tone.

"All of them are dear to me."

"Thank you."

"What for?"

"All of this. Doing this for the wizarding world." Dumbledore curled his lips inward.

"You know ... you could just retire. Live as a Muggle, away from all these problems."

"I would still live in a world full of discrimination, strife and death. One is only a mirror of the other. The wizarding one is easier to change than the Muggle one."

Dumbledore just smiled. "I am glad to have met you."

"I thought the same once." Harry smirked. "It's like returning the favor."

"I wish that my other self had treated you better."

"I think you did the best you could." He took a deep breath. "Like Tom said – that's the most important. Doing the best you can with what you are given."

Dumbledore nodded and stepped into the fireplace with a bit of floo powder.

"Nurmengard castle."

Autumn turned to winter and with it, Harry began his quest of courting his still fifteen-year-old employee. Every Sunday, he took her on walks around town, having her wear one more expensive thing every time. Her maid outfit turned to a dress, her wool mantle to a fur own. Her hair style got more elaborate and the girls had fun experimenting with curlers and make-up (it led to evenings full of giggles and even Richard was roped into it sometimes). Harry began to search his mother's old room, separating usable and unusable items and preparing the room for Brea to move in after the wedding. He proposed to her on New Year's eve in the center of town in front of everyone. They were the talk of the town for weeks. The wedding followed in February with about every guest looking at Brea's stomach. They most likely wondered if the whole marriage thing happened because he had impregnated her. Brea and Tom decided to stay with the name Brea. He did not want to call her his

mother and she thought it strange as well. In fact, not much actually changed. She still went to school, worked in the factory (mostly on her own dresses) and helped with the cooking. Her clothing was more expensive but that was it really. When there was a party, she attended it with Harry and became a pro at deflecting questions about her husband's pervert nature and if she was pregnant yet.

Harry was happy that all the wedding fuss gave them a reason to stall Richard's court date. It offered the boy time to inform Ian of their plan and bring him on board. It was hard because for a few weeks, Mister Conner watched his son like a hawk. It let up due to the wedding though as if seeing a heterosexual couple magically cured Richard from having an interest in boys. Prejudice worked in their favor, so Richard was able to sneak Ian in the morning after the wedding. Harry had sponsored alcohol for the whole town on the occasions and both Mister Smith and Mister Conner apparently had drunk themselves silly.

Ian Conner was a broad, simple young man. Neither especially handsome nor ugly, he was your average townsman. He had stopped school at fourteen years old and learned to be a carpenter just like his father and grandfather. His smile missed a tooth, two others did not look well. There were some small scars from his akne which was mostly subsiding by now. There was a tint of red on his cheeks, a certain shyness that hinted at embarrassment.

"Good morning, Mister Horten," he said well-mannered, "Congratulations on your marriage."

"Thank you, Ian. It is nice to finally meet you. Richard told me about you."

"I guess he had to." The young man averted his gaze.

"Apart from the charges, I mean. It seems he really likes you."

Both boys blushed prettily and it was a sight to behold.

"To the public, I need to look very disapproving but in private, I have no problem with that, Ian." Hopefully that made sense to the boy. "As long as Richard does his work, he can spend his free time with whoever he likes."

Richard shyly grabbed Ian's hand who smiled back as if he couldn't help it. Young love.

"If you never need a place to run and hide, my house is always open." Harry sighed. "I cannot help the law though and I am not above it."

"Richard said that you had a plan?" The young man finally looked up again.

"Yes, we have. Come sit." He showed them to the couch in his study. "You father's accusation is dangerous to both of you. Even if the court were to prove that Richard somehow attacked you and it is all his fault, people would know it's fishy. You are obviously stronger than him and even being close friends with a known homosexual implicates you. It wouldn't be long until new suspicions arose. Every young man you interact with would be scrutinized until anyone found evidence to convict you."

Ian paled visibly. "Bu- but ... dad said ..."

Harry waited for him to finish but he never did. "Once the suspicion is out there, there is no taking it back. The only way to get you both out of this is if people believe that your father overreacted. He is known for his homophobia. It is not a stretch to think he would be suspicious of you and reacting to every small sign."

The other option would be to turn it back on Ian, make him into a homosexual preying on Richard and making Mister Conner into a father trying to save his son by denouncing Richard. It was an option Harry did not want to take.

"But he made his accusations and I said nothing."

"Yes, that is the important thing: You said nothing. It wasn't you accusing Richard."

Your father caught you, beat you into an inch of your sanity, so you stayed silent when he made his accusations. I would guess that is pretty close to the truth anyway."

Ian shuddered and nodded.

"The important thing about a believable lie is that it is as close to the truth as possible. Have you ever told any official that Richard kissed you?"

He shook his head.

"Thank God for that." Harry stood again. "Let's go through the situation, this time with both of your memories and adjust one or two details slightly. Whatever happened, you two never kissed. You were roughing around and your father misinterpreted. A honest mistake, can happen to anyone."

"It will not implicate my father? The police officer said that you can go to prison for lying."

"It's only a lie if you know it to be false. Your father saw something that looked like a kiss. He did the right thing by separating you and going to the police. It's what any good father would have done ... in the eyes of society."

Ian squeezed Richard's hand. "Sir, may I ... can I ..."

"Yes?" Harry sat down again.

"What would you have done?"

"Well, congratulated you. It's not easy to find love." Especially not this kind of love.

"Then I'd have gotten Edgar, so he could explain to you exactly how to keep your secret. It's sad that it is necessary but it is. You'll be in danger for the rest of your lives."

Both boys held on to each other.

"I am sure Edgar will do that someday but right now, we need to save you from prison. Both of you optimally."

This time, they nodded and stood. Hopefully, this would work out. Hopefully, Ian would not break under the pressure.

The court date was in March. Thankfully, Brea's plan was a masterpiece. Three weeks after the wedding, everyone was still talking about it, so seeing the maid turned lady, most everyone rather gossiped about her than about Richard. Next point of gossip was the obviously London-born lawyer next to him. How had such a man come to the province? Was Mister Horten really paying an uptown lawyer for an employee? And did you hear his polished manner of speech? The London dialect amazed the people. What posh choice of words!

The spectacle drew most of the town. The police finally had to bar the courtroom because it couldn't hold so many spectators. The judge called the room to order and read the charges to the excited whispers of the townspeople. Mister Conner looked decidedly unwell next to his son, no lawyer on their side. His righteous anger did not seem to hold well against a united front. Misses Conner, a boy of maybe twelve years and a small girl as well as Mister Smith were sitting right behind them. Misses Smith seemed to have decided to stay home. Harry thought this a wise choice, she would be the target of her husband's anger later anyway. Better he found something to vent his frustration on the way.

Harry scanned Ian for obvious bruises and found one behind his ear, running down the side of his throat. That had come from a swinger against his temple. Another one was on his jaw. A few could be seen on his left arm. His father had obviously tried to pummel him into compliance yesterday or the day before.

The judge asked Mister Conner to state his accusation, then the lawyer to state his

defense. Being a small town affair, there was no state lawyer, the judge asked his questions himself. First of all to Mister Conner, then to Ian. Ian spluttered and tripped over his words, even stuttered in fear. He stuck to the story they had given him though. Mister Conner exploded and threatened his son, even hitting him once before the judge ordered him at a distance to his son with the threat of removing him from the courtroom if he couldn't behave.

Richard was rather fluent in his story, a lot less afraid than Ian. After having been grilled by the policemen, the judge was actually nice. The display of Mister Conner exploding at his son seemed to have already cemented his opinion. Asking Richard's version seemed rather a formality. An hour later, the charges were dismissed, much to Mister Conner's displeasure. He cursed at the judge, Harry, the lawyer, the whole town actually and finally had to spend the night in a police cell and face a fine for disrespect in court.

Mister Smith was smart enough to confront Harry outside the court. He did so while most of the townspeople were still around and talking about what happened. Of course he talked so loud that every had to listen, "So you think yourself all high and mighty? You think money can buy everything?"

"Dearest, why don't you return home first?" Harry kissed his young wife's hand. "Richard, please escort her home safely." He gestured for a coach to take them.

"I don't want you to talk to this vile man!" Brea stated in affront like a good trophy wife.

"Hey, I am talking to you! Are you going to ignore me?" Mister Smith spit at them.

Harry leaped in front of his wife but the other man missed anyway. "Keep your vulgarities away from my beloved. Your grudge has nothing to do with her."

Richard tapped on Brea's shoulder and nodded at the coach. Reluctantly, she let go of Harry's arm and followed him.

"Yeah, run, you little fag boy! Your sugar daddy will not save your ass next time."

"Keep your tongue in check, there are children present!," Harry admonished the man. He felt Edgar to his right readying for a fight.

"What do you know of children? You are fucking one, no word of mine will dirty her further."

"You are insulting my wife, Smith. Watch your mouth."

"Or what? You'll suck you lawyer on me? You'll summon your army? You are just one pathetic little man lusting after little girls, a safe haven for sodomites and failed existences."

Edgar snorted and countered, "I didn't know you suddenly lived in our home."

Some of the listening people snickered.

"Mister Horten?" Said lawyer stepped up to them. "Do you have further need of me?"

"No, thank you, Mister Gommersby. I am not prone to fistfights."

"Public defamation is a crime, Mister Horten. It would be an easy case with all these witnesses."

"It's just one sad and bitter man, Mister Gommersby. That's not worth your time."

Harry nodded at him. "Thank you for today."

"Of course, Mister Horten. Send a telegram if you have need of me."

Mister Smith had balled his fists, clearly fuming with anger. "Apparently, you are still talking to this waste a human. It seems you are concerned for your image after all."

"Actually, Smith, I am concerned for your wife and your children. You'll just go home and beat them silly. I'd rather you leave your frustrations with me, I can hit you back."

"That does it! You think you can act all high and mighty? You are a damn pedophile

and you think you can lecture me?" Still, Mister Smith kept his distance. It might have to do with Edgar cracking his knuckles one by one.

"Well, yes, I can. I don't hit my wife. Neither do I hit the kids."

"You just fuck them."

"My lawfully wedded wife, yes. I actually guess you do the same sometimes. With your own, hopefully."

"You don't feel an ounce of shame, do you?"

"I find this public spectacle pretty shameful." Harry made a broad gesture at all the people watching. "Don't you get that you are simply digging your own grave? Everyone's amusement is at your expense."

Mister Smith looked at the crowd for a moment and seemed to decide there was some truth to his word, "Don't think you have seen the last of me!"

"If only I could be so lucky." Harry sighed exasperatedly. "Let's go, Edgar."

Thankfully, Mister Smith did not find another insult. Harry noted that he needed to get Brea another gift. All of this could have gone so much worse without her plan.

The following day, Ian Conner was nowhere to be found. Two weeks of Richard nearly going up the walls followed before they got a letter that Ian had ran away to London. He promised to continue writing and invited Richard to live with him. So three weeks later, they lost their gardener. Harry wished him the best of luck.

Dear Gren,

Gellert has read a lot of books about morals and ethics, we spoke about a lot of situations I got from Minerva and we discussed politics. I would say that he is as ready as I can make him. By now, I do not have any idea what to do to further his knowledge. Would you talk to him again? If not to set him free, at least to tell me what to do next?

Yours truly, Albus

"Well, how do we play it this time?" Edgar put down the letter.

"I'd say it's your turn. You talk to him, I listen. In that way, I can concentrate on the nuances and you can look for the obvious flaws."

"Do we take Tom?"

Harry just shook his head. "I don't want him to start liking Grindelwald and taking after him."

"Is that a risk?"

"Might be. We did what was needed but I don't want further risks."

"Right ... what do I talk about with him?"

"The same problem posed to everyone who works with morals – the wizarding version. Let's say that Albus, Grindelwald's beloved, is dying of a nasty curse. There is one potion able to save him. There is one potion master in the world able to brew it. But that man knows he has the monopol, so he asks an unreasonable price that is ten times the cost of the ingredients. Grindelwald does not have that money. He tries to explain his situation, the potioneer won't listen. He offers to pay in installments, the potioneer won't listen. No matter what he does, the potioneer will only hand over the potion if he sees all of the money. What will Grindelwald do?"

"Huh ... that's hard."

"What would you do?" Harry settled into his chair. This could take a while.

"No idea ... go to a lot of people and ask for money."

"They don't have enough."

"Go to the bank?"

"You have no credentials."

"If this were you and me, I'd ask Brea for all her jewelry to sell and then I'd sell the factory."

"You don't have enough time, I'm dying over here."

"Well, I won't tell Tom because Tom would just go and steal it. Keeping the details from him would be important."

"Good idea." Harry grinned, thinking of their little whirlwind.

"I guess I'd explain it all to Brea and ask her to bail me out later. Then I'd go and steal it myself."

"Right ... let's say you know that the medicine could possibly cure me. How much of a chance does this medicine need to have for you to steal it?"

Edgar closed his eyes for a moment. "You know I don't care for my life. Even one percent would be enough to give my life up for you."

"Right. Let's say this wasn't about me. It's Brea that's dying. What would you do?"

The other man's visage twisted in something like pain. He averted his gaze, trying to find something to focus on. A row of books seemed to give him some stability. "Right ... I wouldn't give my life for her. I also wouldn't give my hand for her. I'd go to prison alright but only for a specific amount of time. So I guess I'd confer with a lawyer before stealing the thing. Maybe I'd hire someone to steal it. Depends on the laws and the consequences."

"Hiring someone to steal something is a worse crime than stealing something yourself."

"Then I'd do it myself. It's also better not to tempt anyone else with such a situation."

"Let's say it's neither me nor Brea. There is an old man at our door, he is dying and there is only this medicine. What would you do?"

This time, it wasn't as hard for Edgar. "I won't go to prison for someone I don't know. If neither he nor I can pay for it, that's sad and I will help the man to have some good last days. But I won't steal for him."

"It's not the old man that's dying. He is carrying a child, his grandchild. The grandchild is dying. Also a stranger?"

Edgar's face contorted again. "Gods, I hate you. Those are horrible situations."

"What's the difference between an old man and his grandchild? What's the difference from Brea or me?"

"I would have failed the test horribly, right?" The other man shook his head.

"There is no failing. You are still on level three, that is okay."

"What answer would have been level four?"

"It's not the answer, it's the thought process. You are completely on how important someone is to you, not on society as a whole and definitely far from it's individual impact on you or others."

Edgar nodded slowly, even though Harry was not sure he really understood. Maybe Grindelwald's answer would shed some light on what it meant. It wasn't something that was explained easily.

"What level does Grindelwald need to be at for you to release him?"

"Four."

Edgar spluttered. "Errr ... what? He needs to be better than me to be let out of prison?" His eyelids fluttered in shock and disbelief.

"Edgar, you shot innocent people to save Gren. That's bad. But you were in a rather

desperate situation where his and your lives were on the line and right now, we don't need to expect you'll ever go as far again. Grindelwald killed thousands of innocent people over different opinions. Not even their different opinions. He had a scientific and political argument with some people and killed humans to prove his point. That's a whole other level of bad."

"Well ... I guess ... that makes sense." Edgar fidgeted on the couch. "I know how much trouble I have to reach level four. Is it really possible for Grindelwald?"

"As I said, there is a slim chance." Harry smiled with one corner of the mouth. "Maybe we would have advanced more if we talked morals instead of me teaching you the mind arts."

"But that is a lot more important. I am a liability as long as people can read my mind."

"True." That statement was supported by a nod.

"Will you take over the questioning if I am bad at it?"

"Don't worry, you'll do perfectly. If he is trying to pretend to be better than level three, you will be able to root it out. That's your special power by not having reached further."

"Oh." Edgar straightened. "So it's actually good I haven't advanced? At least for the questioning?"

"Yes." This way, it would be immediately obvious if Grindelwald actually had a chance to pass the test. The more problematic question was what to tell Dumbledore if his lover didn't pass. That had never been Harry's field of work. He knew that rehabilitating criminals was possible – he just didn't know how.

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 potionneers that overprize. 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 ..."

"Yo 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 he 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 it's 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.

Kapitel 20: Twentieth chapter

Jonathan Bagshot moved in with them in the month of May, 1935. His story was that his great-aunt had been thought to be barren after years of trying for a child. Thinking that true, she did not protect herself when she had a tryst with a Muggle. Despite being 49 at the time, she became pregnant with Jonathan and gave birth to him in secret, claiming that she needed seclusion for her current book. Apparently, she sometimes disappeared for months at a time to research and write a book. It reminded Harry of Hermione, just that Bathilda seemed to be an even less social version. Anyway, she hid Jonathan and had him raised by a house-elf (which will explain why he is supportive of magical creatures). His existence would have put shame upon Mister Bagshot, so he was schooled by his mother (which will explain why he is a genius without having records of formal schooling). For his mother's sake, he stayed hidden until Mister Bagshot's death but had been trying to convince his mother of applying for his papers ever since. Being rather adept at potions, he wanted to apprentice as a potion's master (Dumbledore found a potion's master that would take him on without asking questions). Bathilda finally relented and came out with the truth in front of the Ministry. She had to pay a fine for hiding a magical child, Dumbledore faked the entry in the school registry (writing down that the child was most likely under Fidelius as it couldn't be found). She even shamefully admitted that the house's secretkeeper had been none other than Gellert Grindelwald. Which meant that Jonathan Bagshot was six years younger than his cousin Gellert (no problem there, the man did not have a hair out of place, an impressive feat for being over fifty).

The story seemed completely believable apparently, no one questioned it. Dramas like that seemed to happen all the time. Harry shook his head in exasperation. So people simply accepted that things like that happened? Didn't the wizarding world have any kind of child services? Thinking back on his own childhood, apparently not. Had Hermione ever changed something about that? He couldn't remember. If by some miracle, he ever returned to his own time, he had to remind her to look into it. Anyway, Grindelwald got new papers without a hitch. His apprenticeship was supposed to start in September. Honestly, Harry pitied the poor potion's master that would soon find out that his apprentice not only knew all his techniques but a lot more than them and that there was nothing to teach him. Whoever believed that Dumbledore – who did not have a real interest in potions – had actually written the thesis on the twelve uses of dragon blood himself? It had been one of Grindelwald's pet projects in captivity.

So Jonathan got the last spare room in the house that was now officially full. The children met the news with excited theories on Jonathan's circumstances for moving in with them. An aristocrat fallen from grace (because anyone could see that he must come from nobility with his looks)? Another homosexual friend of Gren (because apparently he was only friends with homosexuals)? A poor soul come down with the French disease (Harry looked horrified when he overheard that one)? Anyway, he found Jonathan in his room and asked for a more elaborate cover because the girls could be ruthless in their questioning.

"Hm." Jonathan pondered that for a moment. "I spoke about this with Albus. Due to my mother applying for my papers and him having to check the registries for me, he

decided to pay me a visit and apologize in the name of the school that they had not looked harder. We madly fell in love upon that visit. So when he asked for my future plans and found out my interest in potions, he persuaded a friend of his to take me in. My English was good but I wanted more practice, so he asked another friend – that would be you – to allow me some time in his household to hone my language skills.” He waited for Harry’s nod. “So, for Muggles the story is rather similar, just that Albus works for the government – which is not a lie – and I am to become a chemist.”

“The girls will be horribly disappointed that it is not more of a scandal.” Harry smiled. “Illegitimate child of a noble woman, hidden from the world for years? Falling in love with the first handsome stranger that comes around?”

“Alright, I take everything back, it is scandalous enough. Especially the part about falling in love with a government official.”

“Muggles are against homosexual love as well?” He rolled his eyes. “Isn’t there any place in this world that will not hate Albus and me for who we are?”

“It might be best to censor that part of the story.”

“No!” Jonathan’s eyes narrowed. “I will not go back to hiding and being someone’s dirty secret. People hate and shun me for it? That’s okay. But I won’t go back to lying about myself.”

“Suit yourself.” Harry held up his hands in surrender. “Just prepare to live with the consequences. This household is a safe place but even Edgar does not openly talk about being homosexual. So please don’t implicate him.”

“He lies to his children?”

“He omits the truth to spare them because he does not want them to have to lie.” A heavy sigh wrenched itself from Harry’s lips. “They would. They would defend him to their deaths. He wants to give them the opportunity of claiming they do not know.”

The sharp blue eyes studied Harry for a moment. “What exactly is the law on homosexuality?”

“A prison sentence for any homosexual acts. A record open to every employer, once you are known for your so called depravity. Dishonorary exclusion from the military. Death if you are found out in an active war. Germany is talking about branding homosexual men for everyone to see. Later, it will be forced labor and death.” Was there more? “Bravery and a coming-out can get you killed in this age.”

Jonathan slowly nodded. “I’ll ... think about it.”

“Thank you.” Harry made to leave the room.

“Gren?”

He turned back.

“I can’t meet Albus here, right?”

“You can meet but not ... go to this room.” Was that clear enough?

“You would have to report us?”

“It’s obstruction of justice. Hiding and aiding criminals. They would take the children.” Jonathan sighed. “I don’t like this world.”

“It’s the one we have. It falls to us to make it better.”

“I don’t think people want a better world.” The older man leaned against his bedpost.

“They want to stay in their tiny little boxes, living their tiny little lives, never having to care about what that means to others.”

Harry came back in and closed the door behind him.

“I wanted them to see the bigger picture. People care when their world gets threatened. When I talked about atomic bombs, they listened. They called for change.” Jonathan sat down on his bed. “But nothing happened. Let’s say they

realized I was wrong. Killing everyone was a bad idea. Okay ... but why did nothing change? Did my words leave no impression at all?"

"People will remember. Once the first bomb falls, they will call for Muggle blood. They will call for the extinction of everything Muggle."

Jonathan shuddered. "I need to make up for that somehow. They need to have a better strategy before the first bomb falls."

"You will need to go into politics and propose a plan for better wizard-Muggle relationships before the first bomb falls, yes. They won't listen but by the time 1945 comes around, your current voice needs to be louder than your former one."

"So I have ten years?" Jonathan looked up at him. "How do you know that? How do you know when the first bomb will fall?"

Shit, horribly perceptive genius in front of him! "You aren't the only one that can contact a seer."

"Seers don't give you answers as concrete as that."

"No, 1945 is only an estimation based on her words. Might be more or less. But it's the most likely."

"Hm." Jonathan seemed to buy his words. "If I had known back then that it was still so far off, I would have taken another strategy."

"Well, the image of a grenade launcher might have done the trick as well. The Muggle World War I was a horrible affair." His cousin had had a picture book. He had also loved movies about explosions and people being torn into tiny, bloody bits.

"Any idea on how to do this?"

"You slowly warm people up to the idea. You don't force your opinion upon them with might, you let them see the wisdom in your words."

"Who would listen to a no-name half-blood if not for his potent magic? I am pretty good at making speeches but who will listen if I don't make them listen?"

"First of all, you get your degree as a potion's master. Then you make yourself invaluable to some important people with your genius potions. You introduce your idea there, butter them up, have them do some work for you. You present your theories in front of the Wizengamot after you already have half of them on your side. Waltzing in there and expecting everyone to listen is doomed to fail."

"I learned that lesson, yes."

"You present something to a group only after you are sure that most of them are in favor." Harry lowered his voice. "And only after you are aware of the consequences of what you are doing."

Jonathan grinned a bit sheepishly. "I was eighteen, okay?"

"I know how last time came about. Just don't repeat it."

"Right." He nodded. "So is there anything else about Muggle rules that I should know?"

"You don't talk about magic, you don't do magic, you don't call them Muggles. Otherwise, it's very similar. No stealing, no killing, no attacking people."

"Am I on house arrest?"

"No, you can go where you want. Just tell someone when you plan to be back. You can feel like a guest here. You may use the library." Which was what he expected Jonathan to do for a few days or weeks, he was a bookworm. "Would you like a tour of the house?"

"I'd appreciate it."

For a former dark lord, Jonathan was actually a nice and well-mannered guy. What a change not being bent on mass destruction made to a human. He introduced the man

to everyone in the house. Jonathan's friendly mask only slipped upon meeting Brea. "Brea? This is our house guest, Jonathan Bagshot. Jonathan, this is my wife, Brea Horten."

"A pleasure." She curtsied in front of him.

"A ... pleasure as well, Miss Hor-, I mean, Misses Horten." He took her hand and kissed the back of it. "You are a beauty. You don't even look half your husband's age."

"That's because I am that young." Brea smirked. "Maybe you should have warned him, Gren."

"Apparently, I should have. Alas, I cannot hide my pervert tastes in women."

Jonathan just looked at him for a second and said, "Alright, you two are having a joke at my expense. Would you care to elaborate?"

"The law we talked about before." Harry made a hand gesture that could have meant anything. "We needed a cover up story. Brea had the great idea of marrying me."

"But I thought you aren't sleeping with Edgar?" The other man raised a blond eyebrow.

"That doesn't mean people don't think it. So I needed a cover-up depravity."

"Hah! A cover-up depravity." Jonathan shook his head. "I guess I understand. When you do some things, other things don't seem as important in comparison." Like being a mass-murderer? "So you are known to be lusting after young girls?"

"My former maid, turned sixteen just four months ago."

Brea lay a hand on her forehead and said, "It's so hard to satisfy my husband's urges."

"You are two peas from one pot." He rolled his blue eyes.

She smiled and reminded them, "It's nearly dinner time. I wanted to come get you. The girls want some fodder for their gossip."

"What's the reigning theory right now?," Harry asked her.

"Well, he can't be your boyfriend but word of the mouth is that he is Edgar's new boyfriend. They are making bets how we are to cover up this one."

"Edgar?" Jonathan made a face. "He's twenty, I mean, fifteen years younger than me."

"What?" Brea couldn't close her mouth for a moment. "You're nearly fifty? We thought you were thirty!"

"Well ... thank you? That is flattering."

"So you aren't his boyfriend?" She looked slightly disappointed. "Poor Edgar, he needs more love in his life. Especially now that Richard left."

"Richard?"

"Oh, he was a boy working here as a gardener. He followed his lover to London." She sighed as if it was a deeply romantic story. "It's good to have someone here that shares Edgar's troubles."

"You seem quite certain about my sexuality."

"Well." She stopped for a moment and looked him up and down. "After living with two homosexual men for a time, you notice when someone does not look at your cleavage at all."

Harry coughed to suppress his laughter.

Jonathan looked from her to him and said, "You really earned her. She's exactly the kind of women I would wish upon you."

"Some men think it an honor rather than chore."

The man just shook his head as if to dislodge the thought. Brea openly laughed about the comment and continued on to the dining room. Harry just grinned and followed her. The dining room was bustling with activity. Instead of a normal dinner, it looked like they had cooked at least two different dishes. They also put out the good china.

"Seems like we'll have a feast!"

Brea turned to him and said, "You didn't tell me what our guest was about, so we decided to go grand."

"I like it." He nodded in appreciation. "Does anyone need a hand?"

"No, we just waited for you two." Even though she said that, Loretta and Helen brought in some more side-dishes before sitting down. Brea herself asked for their drink choices and got a wine-glass for Jonathan.

"You don't drink?"

"No, this body has a bad history with alcohol, I'll stick to water." Actually, his body could most likely take it but Edgar could not. He didn't like anything more than butterbeer anyway, so he didn't impose privations upon himself.

Harry spoke a prayer for everyone which left Jonathan confused but playing along. Margret explained tonight's creation and everyone got a bit of everything. Even with the marriage making a dent in their income, they had done rather well, so meat made an appearance at their table more often. Jonathan simply kept silent about the fact that they were eating with their servants and everyone behaved more like family than master and maids. When Tom took the last dumpling without asking if anyone else really wanted it, it was Margret that scolded him.

Brea finally decided to actually play her role as mistress for a bit and said, "I hope you like it. Most of us take an interest in cooking."

"It's great," Jonathan assured them. "I lived by myself for a long time but never learned to cook. I always had a maid. I don't think I had any variety in my food for decades. This is very welcome."

"Oh, you are always welcome in the kitchen. It's good to be able to care for oneself. You never know what might happen in your life. Also, cooking is fun."

"Do you cook?" The other man turned to Harry.

"I am a decent cook but I don't enjoy it. So I like leaving it to others." His childhood had taken the joy out of it for all of his life. "Tom is great baker."

"Oh?" Jonathan raised an eyebrow at the boy.

"Yes, he baked today's apple pie," Brea informed him.

"I look forward to it."

"What are your hobbies?" So, the interrogation finally began.

"I love to read and make ... tonics. I like dabbling in alchemy."

"Oh! Can you mix cologne?"

"Yes, I can." He smirked. "I come from Germany. I even know the formula for 4711." What the heck was that?

"So you can supply our gentleman with better aftershave?" Brea smiled at him. "Us girls are thankful for your services already."

"What's wrong with my aftershave?," Harry asked in confusion.

"It's horrible."

"It is?" Edgar used the same. "I think it's manly."

"It stinks."

"Okay, okay, we'll change it." Harry held up his hands.

"I am glad to be of service." Jonathan smirked at him. "What would you like? I can mix 4711 but I can also mix other odors. Would you like something flowery? Or something smelling of the sea?"

"Do you have examples?" Brea really got into it.

"It takes time and money to mix perfumes. I am not so sure about the money part right now." He looked at Harry. "I guess I need to ask Albus for a stipend?"

"I am sure he will pay me back. So ask for whatever you need."

"Albus?" Brea looked like a dog that had found a rabbit hole. "Isn't that the nice older gentleman that visited us a few times?"

"He's my age, young lady. Don't call me old." Jonathan actually looked affronted.

"So that's the boyfriend?"

The man just smiled and lowered his gaze, turning wistful.

"So I was right." She snapped her fingers. "I guess you are here on a favor?" Her gaze turned to Harry.

"As always, my dear, you are as sharp as a knife." How had he ever expected that he could keep secrets from the girls? "He is here for his English skills. As he said, he came from Germany and he will start his new job in September."

"Can you speak German?", Helen asked in fascination.

"Of course. This is only my second language. I speak German, English, French, Russian and a bit of Italian due to my Latin skills. I also tried to learn Spanish but I haven't gotten far without a native speaker."

"Can you say something in German?"

"Was möchtest du denn hören?" He smiled at her and seemed moved by her genuine interest in something that was natural to him. "I asked what you wanted to hear."

"That's so cool." Helen smiled.

"Can you teach us?" Brea looked fascinated as well. "They are trying to teach us German in school but the teacher is just awful."

Loretta groaned. "Don't tell me about it. I don't think he even knows that language he is talking in."

"Well, he is from Sweden ... his English is bad and his German is worse." Brea shook her head with a sigh. "Often, he explains something and when we look it up, it's all wrong."

"Who is taking German lessons right now?"

Brea, Loretta and Dorothea raised their hands. Jonathan began to ask them some easy questions in German and they stumbled through their answers. Even to Harry who spoke no other languages than English, it sounded bad. But he had to admire Jonathan for completely diverting the topic from himself. Dorothea wasn't exactly keen on extra lessons but she decided to join the other two that actually wanted to learn the language. Helen and Mary asked to join, so Tom wanted in of course. No way everyone but him would learn something. On the topic of learning, he would also like to join Jonathan in his alchemy work. The other man just looked at Harry in question. "If you want to and as long as you don't work with poisonous stuff, I am open to the idea."

"Anything can be toxic, even daisies." The smirk accompanying that was downright cruel.

"Do not let harm come to my son."

"As long as you can forgive me for his acts of complete stupidity?"

"Define that."

"Well, I don't think I need to tell anyone that you should not ingest ingredients in a lab except if you are specifically told to."

"As long as they don't look like candy, yes." Harry remembered his own potion's class.

"Look, kids can be idiots. You tell them to add a flobberworm and they take an earthworm instead. A pinch of aconite becomes half a spoon. Three strokes counter-clockwise become rigorous stirring in. As long as you two make candies or perfume, go ahead. But if it becomes more serious than that, I need you to be able to react to

anything that could go wrong."

"So only when I get ... my work tools?" As in a wand.

"Yes, please."

"Can we make candies?" Tom's eyes were as wide as saucers.

"What was it I am to create? Lemon drops?" Jonathan smirked.

"And all other kinds of candy from lakritz to acid pops. Your lover is a candy enthusiast." Harry rolled his eyes remembering Dumbledore's horrible choice in passwords.

"I only know he loves raspberry jam." Jonathan smiled to himself. "I should have known he would love candy."

"Especially made by you."

"I love candy too!," Tom interjected.

"Okay, little snake. I teach you how to make candy, you teach me how to bake."

"Done deal." The boy held out his hand for Jonathan to shake.

Harry just smiled. He liked this version of Grindelwald, the one that could enjoy learning and teaching, that did not think himself above a bunch of kids. Still, he vowed to listen in on these lessons sometimes. Jonathan should learn from the kids, not they from him. He could be a horrible influence if he wanted to.

"I like the men you bring to this house." Brea looked at Harry. "Where do you find these nice people?"

"Edgar found me." Harry smiled in remembrance.

"And I am not nice," Jonathan said with a grin.

Somehow, it was horrible how he was completely truthful but made is sound like a joke. Brea of course took it as one and admonished him for speaking badly of himself. Harry just hoped that he had not made a mistake. This could go wrong in so many ways ... he'd really love to have Ginny, Hermione and Ron here. Doing this all by himself was ... not too much but at least a lot. It didn't help that Jonathan was such a charming and handsome man. Harry was quite sure he would lose his objectivity sooner rather than later.

Hopefully, he would not regret this.

Dear Gren,

I hope you have a lovely time with your family. Summer has reached Hogwarts, so I am sure you already had some nice sunny days down there in Bath. Jonathan sent me a box of candies that he labeled as lemon drops, so I finally know what you meant when you said I was crazy about them. Because I am! You introduce some great things into my life. He also invited me for cake this weekend. You said you will think about giving him a wand. Should I plan for a trip with him soon? I am not sure who to visit though. Gregorovich knows his magic, he might recognize him. Ollivanders might be a sensible choice but he might ask why Bathilda never brought Jonathan over, even in secret. Maybe we should go to Glendale in America? On the other hand, an American visa is a true hassle. What would be your recommendation?

I also wanted to tell you that I got a letter from Mister Malfoy. Apparently, he finally decided that there is wisdom in your words and he would like us to meet with a few other purebloods to gauge their reaction before he decides on supporting us. I would like to detest how pertinacious he is in protecting himself and his image but I guess that is what

house Slytherin is about. Sometimes I look at Jonathan and remember how that is part of his personality too. He clung to his image stubbornly in our first meetings. Still, he was a lot more flexible in the end. How come I can find something endearing in my partner that I hate in other people? Anyway, Malfoy is asking us out for tea with a few purebloods. He named Crabbe, Goyle, Avery and Rosier in his letter. All of them try to cover up their recent family history but what they have in common is that their generation has a lot of miscarriages and a bunch of not exactly bright children. My guess is that he wants you to convince them to pair off a few of their family members with Muggleborns, wait for the result and then decide on supporting our cause. This might become a waiting game but I don't see other opportunities if you want Dark magic support. I see the sense in that but I still wish you wouldn't. Just thinking about how Malfoy spent his time looking through family trees, deciding which Sacred families could be sacrificed if needed, were desperate enough to consent to breeding experiments with their own children – honestly, if I did not believe in you like this, if I wasn't this sure that no harm would come to the children, I would hate myself for even thinking about talking to such a man. You were right to call me out on my treatment of Slytherin children but knowing they grow into these men, it is hard to remind myself of that every day. Right now, whenever I have to judge a Slytherin/non-Slytherin fight, I remember sixteen-year-old Gellert to raise my sympathy. I also remember your words that neither convictions nor speeches have a value against actions. Alas, it is hard to stay true to fair judgment in everyday life. Sometimes, I see a day coming where Jonathan calls me out on my actions and explains morality to me. He is obviously better at learning that than I am.

Yours truly, Albus

Dear Albus,

we are enjoying the sun a lot. Brea bought her first swimsuit which looks a lot like a full dress to me but I am told it is the height of fashion. I debated about writing back, as we will see each other tomorrow, but I am sure you will want to enjoy your time with Jonathan. You might want to make a trip to the beach, it is beautiful and I know for certain that Jonathan would immensely enjoy that. According to him, having people look at his nearly naked body will be a lot better when you are beside him and he never had the experience before. Basically, he wants enjoy going territorial on you and making you jealous.

I shall make a jump to your musings on Slytherin nature here. Every action can be seen in a lot of different ways. You could see a man of over fifty years gearing up for a trip with his lover to the beach, agonizing about it like a love-sick teenager, and find it quite cute. You could also see a man fit and handsome beyond his years that is vain enough to enjoy his lover's jealousy over other people openly fantasizing about laying their hands on him and be annoyed about such youthful antics. So you could say that Malfoy is a scumbag for saving himself and his son derision and a loss of reputation by manipulating others into becoming experiments. You could also say that Malfoy carefully selected afflicted families in order to maximize the impact of introducing our theories to people while helping friends and acquaintances at the same time with offering an effective and free solution they would otherwise sell their soul for. It's not Slytherin actions that are a problem, it's your reasoning. You tend to see Jonathan in a good light while other Dark

wizards are assigned the worst of motivations. Being a Slytherin only means that most actions have a self-serving aspect instead of being done on principle or because it is noble or right. You could say that Malfoy is doing a noble deed for his fellow Dark wizards by introducing an unpopular theory and thereby taking the blame if it goes wrong, just for helping them. I would also say that is going to far because I am sure that is not how Malfoy reasons his own actions – it is a possible motivation though. You might even think that if Malfoy were a Gryffindor.

Back to our dear Jonathan: That one is doing well. I see how attaching himself to you and reconnecting with his own feelings made him receptive to opening up to the kids. I don't think he likes me and Edgar's animosity is not helping to make Jonathan warm up to him but Mary, Tom and him are as thick as thieves now. I overheard a conversation last week where Tom and Jonathan were discussing how to prank one of Tom's schoolmates when Mary admonished them for petty revenge instead of trying to get behind the other boy's reasoning and helping him instead. Tom pouted but relented while Jonathan just looked struck. It's like he forgot he was trying to be a sensible adult and had to be reminded by a teenage girl. So you might not be the only one that finds it hard to actually live what he preaches. But all in all, there are no dead people, no intimidation attempts (except for kids trying to wriggle candy out of him) and violence is kept to a frog in the bed (Brea was not happy about that one). I guess he is doing as well as can be expected. So yes, a wand is on order. I would advise on visiting Ollivander's shop with both Jonathan and Tom. Most wizards that cannot get their own wand use hand-me-downs. Let's say that Jonathan did that up to now and wants his own now. At the same time, we can get Tom a wand. Those two will start actual brewing soon and I don't think that Tom will stop afterwards. So we need someone able to cast healing spells. I will also need an emergency portkey for St. Mungos. Can you arrange that for me? Tell me a time that would be convenient for our outing, I'll make room in my schedule.

Yours truly, Gren

Tom and Jonathan had certainly bonded, not that Harry had expected any less. They were two peas from one pot. He had not expected the addition of Mary to that troupe, seeing as she had been a rather shy girl before and never gave any dark lord vibes but his only reference had been Bellatrix after all. Thankfully, she was something like an Hermione to Ron's and his own general stupidity. Both boys – and yes, by now Jonathan felt more like an additional child in an adult's body – tended to be geniuses when it came to discussing crystallization theories while growing beautiful salt crystals but could be idiots when it came to human interactions. Both knew how to be charming, how to use pretty smiles and bashful blinking of their eyes but connecting on an emotional level seemed difficult. Jonathan first learned from Tom, not that Harry had expected any less. He met Howard and his adorable little sister and finally their heavily pregnant mother. A few weeks later, Harry met her to congratulate her on the birth of her daughter Patricia, where instead she thanked him for introducing her to that charming young man (as always, people did not think that Jonathan was a day older than thirty) that had finally brought her husband to reason. Apparently, after him meeting Mister Smith, her husband had backed off whenever he got angry. Harry later found out from Jonathan that he had cast a layered stinging hex that triggered whenever the man was about to do damage to his wife or kids. He

placed it on the back of Mister Smith's head, so that it would feel like a stab of his consciousness.

Harry did explain the ethical aspect of using magic on unsuspecting Muggles, the illegality of it, the danger of being caught and what would happen after reversal, the possibility of Mister Smith ignoring that pain and getting more violent instead, etcetera, etcetera – all in all, he could not bring up any anger though, so good riddance to Mister Smith's Muggle rights in this case. So when Jonathan asked if he should reverse it, Harry simply shrugged his shoulders and answered that he should do what he thought best, being realistic in the dangers of his actions. Jonathan just grinned and told him he should have been a Slytherin. Sometimes, Harry thought so as well, but on the other hand, Ron had been a paragon of a Gryffindor and Harry was pretty sure he would have had no problem with cursing Mister Smith. The interesting part came after, because Harry asked why he had chosen this kind of curse. So Jonathan told him how Tom and him had discussed this – certainly a much more bloody version of what they wanted to do to Mister Smith – when Mary came by and realistically argued their points with "And what happens then?", explaining the implications and consequences of their actions. A point that both did not get was how people could love their abusers. In this, Mary was a fountain of wisdom, having opened up about her mother's affair with her master. Yes, she had been forced. But she had also received gifts, had been taken on special trips, had sometimes even enjoyed luxuries. Mary herself had always thought that she had been her master's favorite, being doted upon and cherished until her mother ran away. Trying to explain to both Tom and Jonathan how you could deeply hate someone because you starved and were sometimes beaten and love him at the same time because he bought you silk garments for doing your hair and pastries to keep you occupied while your mother went to him, she made them aware of the intricacies of being dependent on someone. Her master had been like a father to her, both fearsome and kind, until she saw the real him when she became useless to him.

So Jonathan asked Harry why you would attach yourself to someone like that. He explained that he had always thought this a weakness in his youth, had even thought so most of his adult life. Yes, he knew he now had an emotional attachment to Albus and it was both scary and exhilarating but why attach yourself to someone that clearly meant you harm?

"Often, it is not a choice. Kids need emotional attachment because our genetics program us into that. If parents weren't attached to their kids, they would simply abandon them for being too much work. But attachment goes both ways. Parents can only bond successfully if their children can bond back. The better the bond, the less abuse there is normally, because parents that have an emphatic bond are less likely to abuse their children. In conclusion, abuse is preferable to indifference because it is less likely to cause neglect. Loving your abuser makes sense in a context where you are dependent on your abuser to survive. The scary thing is not the abuse but the abandonment. That is what Mary tried to tell you."

"But her mother could have found another job. Mary could have survived in an orphanage. There were choices. It's not like they had to suffer this man."

"But did they know that? As a child, deciding to change parents never comes up as an idea. Or at least not when you are already in a survival mode. More securely bonded children actually come up with that idea sometimes, normally around the age of six and then again in their teenage years. Though her mother could have made a choice. Maybe she actually made a choice by running away. I still fear that it's only Mary's

version that her mother got away. Please never contradict her on that."

"So you also think her master simply killed her one day?" Jonathan raised an eyebrow. "Starving the women you supposedly love is pretty extreme, so yes, I think he killed her."

"I guessed so too." Jonathan crossed his arms, obviously bothered by that thought. "When I remember how I was before ... I believed in might above all. One should only have the rights they can fight for. Being intelligent, being magically potent, those people should lead and others should follow. Living with clear hierarchies based on your own skills, that was what I strove for. I saw Muggles in the same line one might see cattle."

"It's the view of someone that surpasses others even though he or she had bad starting conditions. It's the naive view that you are simply born with a set of talents and the way that you grow up does not decimate from that."

"For most people it does, huh?"

"It did for you too." Harry smiled sadly. "Have you ever thought about who you could have been if your parents had done a bit better?"

Jonathan just blinked owlishly at him.

"Normally, I am not a friend of what-ifs in the past but just for a moment, try to imagine a world where you weren't completely emotionally stunted. A world where you met Albus, fell madly in love and did not break it off. Where you stayed together, researching magical theories, reworking your original ones again and again. A power couple of magical geniuses bend on bettering this world instead of splitting into destruction and defense of that."

Jonathan mulled over that for a moment.

"Your abuse did not detract from your intelligence, rather it honed it. That's admirable. But all other aspects of your personality got left behind. Your emotions, your ability to bond, your moral development. There is more to a human than their ability to write three-piece layered runic circles."

After a long moment of silence, Jonathan said: "I always thought Albus was simply an overemotional fool, his compassion his only weakness."

"His compassion saved your life. His compassion even gave you another chance."

"I know." Jonathan sighed. "For years, I hated him for it. Even before he overpowered me, I think I wished he would have just killed me. Living is so hard and so unfulfilling."

"Is it still?" Harry raised his brows. "Now that you bonded to him, is that still true?"

"No." The lids around his blue eyes widened. "No?" He sounded rather shocked by his own admission. He looked like he wanted to say more but words eluded him.

"It's not, right? Emotions are hard but they are what makes us happy. They make life worth living."

For a moment, Jonathan looked like a rabbit with no way to escape. Eyes like a deer caught in headlights, nose twitching and his mouth opening and closing like a fish. Harry decided to wait it out. Questioning and rewriting your own history after all those years, after all he had done, it was admirable. It was also pretty damn hard.

"I ... that ... you ... wait a moment." Jonathan stood and began to pace. "I want to argue. I want to say this is wrong. But I know you are right. I know that having emotions and bonding made me happier. Why does it make me feel like throwing up when I say that?" He raked a hand through his hair. "It sounds to wrong. So wrong to say it. Emotions do make me happy, I know that. The past year was the happiest I've ever been, even counting the time I reveled in making others fear me. Might and power was a rush but I always needed more, it was never enough. It's the same with

being loved but there is more, there is always more. I am not even close to reaching the end of Albus's feelings for me and I know that and it makes me happy and it makes me feel secure for the first time in ... I don't know, forever. I never had that, feeling secure. Knowing that there are people I can trust, it scares me but it frees me. I know that. I still don't want it to be true. Why do I deny the truth?"

Harry knew he could answer that. He had been in therapy for exactly that once. He also trusted Jonathan to get it for himself. If not, it's not like his own words could reach much. It was a conclusion that the other man had to make for himself.

"Gren?" Jonathan sounded lost.

"What would it mean if you were to accept that having feelings and attachment is the key to being happy?"

"That I was dumb for thinking that intelligence and magical prowess are the important things and that emotions are a weakness?"

"What else?" Because while the first part was hard, the second part of that was a lot harder.

"Else?" Scared again. Good thing he was still able to hold on.

"You are able to put into words that your world-view was ... off. That's not the part that's scaring you right now. It's the part that you can't put into words yet. It has to do with what gave you this world-view."

"Can't you tell me?" Jonathan actually trembled.

"Not with how much it scares you. This process takes time. When it does not scare you as much, you will know the answer."

"When will that be?"

"Someday." At least he was sure of that. "You are doing well, Jonathan. Facing this is hard and most men would simply stay in their own ways and refuse to change."

"I want to." He paced again. "This hurts like hell, all this regret and anger at myself, the guilt and the shame ... still, I never laughed like I do now. I've never been silly, I never enjoyed company, I never loved like I do now. I want to get this. And I want it before I move out of here. This ... this being here. I thought it a nuisance, I could do so much better with my time but I realize how talking to everyone shapes me and heals me and ... I am also learning to love Albus like he should be loved. He is worthy of so much love."

"You are as well."

Jonathan shuddered. "Why does hearing that scare me?"

"For the same reason that accepting emotions and bonds as important scares you."

The blue eyes nearly pierce Harry. "What made me think that they were unimportant? What would be different if I thought them important? What would be different if I thought myself worthy of love?"

"Deserving of love," Harry adds.

"My head draws a complete blank." Jonathan grit his teeth. "I feel like an idiot."

"The answer will come in time."

"I don't have time! I want it now!"

"You have all the time in your life." Still, for someone as intelligent as Jonathan, this must be frustrating as hell. It had not been the same for Harry. School had been a constant experience of not getting something right at the first time. That had been different for Hermione and most likely for Jonathan as well. Patience came from learning to deal with frustration.

"Talking to you is exasperating."

"It's a learning experience." Harry smiled, remembering his own therapist. He really

hated the man at the time of their therapy. It had been highly effective though.

"I am going to give this some thought and come back another time."

"Sure, do that." He would most likely discuss it with Albus. That was fine. Albus knew how to be sensitive. After that, he would discuss it with Tom and Mary. Both would not be as sensitive but most likely not know the answer themselves. Maybe Tom would. It would be most interesting if he did. Harry was looking forward to it.

Kapitel 21: Twenty-first chapter

It took exactly three days for Jonathan to come back. Or rather, it took him three days to tell Tom and for Tom to drag him into Harry's study and demand answers. The angry stomping in front of his door announced a disgruntled eight-year-old on a warpath.

"Dad!" Tom opened the door without knocking, dragging Jonathan in on one hand behind him. "I demand a explanation for this!"

"Tom, this is uncalled for, really," Jonathan tried to shush the boy, his gaze going from him to Harry. Regarding Harry, it was somewhere between apprehensive and fearful.

"It's not." Tom let go of his hand and stomped over to Harry's desk, slamming both hands onto it. "What kind of shitty answer is 'It will come in time'? Since when are you so mean, dad? Explain yourself."

Jonathan hovered near the door, clearly not wanting to be here but openly concerned for Tom. So Harry said: "Please close the door and sit down." - and to Tom - "This is not the tone in which we hold civilized conversation."

Tom took a deep breath and nodded. "Still, that's a very confusing statement and it makes Jonathan feel bad instead of better, so I don't think it's okay."

Harry stood and went over to the seating area. "And what is Jonathan's view on your planned intervention?"

Tom took a look at said man and answered: "He thinks you'll hurt me for demanding a better answer but he obviously still doesn't get you."

"So you think he is too afraid of me and that is why you need to intervene?"

"Well ... maybe?" Tom seemed less sure by the minute.

"Because there is also the possibility that it is the answer that scares him, so talking to me would be counterproductive. Have you checked that possibility before coming here?"

"No." Shame colored Tom's voice. "Why didn't you want to go ask dad?"

Jonathan just stayed silent, his gaze flitting between both of them. By now, you could actually see the tension in his body. He was slowly letting go of the masks he wore before, becoming more authentic with his own emotions. It made it easier to read him. Right now, Harry would guess that Tom's guess was actually true and he feared Harry punishing Tom for boldly demanding answers.

After not getting any reaction after more than ten seconds, he turned to his son and asked: "What has he told you?"

"That you told him that emotions and attachments are important and he balked at that and he doesn't know why but you do and you did not want to tell him. That you basically told him to find it out for himself."

"So why do you think he needs an intervention here? Why not let him find it out for himself?"

"Because it pains him. He thinks he is not worthy of an answer and stupid for not getting this. He thinks it is most likely obvious and he is angry at himself for not understanding. So ... you always explain everything to me, even feelings, so I think it's harsh to leave him hanging like this. It hurts him. You shouldn't do that."

"Thank you for caring." Harry smiled proudly at Tom and petted his hair. "There is a difference between adults and children, you know? As you said once, adults have convoluted thoughts. They never take things at face value and try to integrate it into

their view of the world. They hear something and they reject it, they deform it and in the end, very little of what was said ever gets to them. So the older someone is, the harder it is to change. You mostly treat Jonathan like someone your own age because in some aspects, he actually is around your age. But in a lot others, he is already over fifty and this is hard for him. You can't expect him to just accept the things that I say like you do. It would lead to a lot more frustration and I don't want him frustrated. Some things take time and in adults, the realization comes from within rather than outside."

Tom mulled over this for a moment and asked: "Can't you at least try it? Try telling him? Because maybe this is one of the things he can accept coming from outside. I mean, I told him about feelings and he could accept that, right?"

"Could he?" Harry turned to Jonathan that still sat there like a stone statue, just taking in their interaction. "Jonathan, could you try to explain what went on in your head the day Tom first met you?"

The other man swallowed visibly. "I don't want him to hate me."

"I assure you that he won't, though he may be disturbed for some time."

Jonathan's gaze flickered to Tom for a moment. "Well ... okay. It doesn't reflect well on me."

"As dad always says, it's a learning experience." Still, Tom took Harry's hand. "I can't be worse than what I think about people sometimes, right?"

"But it is." Jonathan licked his lips, his head held low but his eyes on Tom. "I have thousands of murders on you. I don't think about pranks with frogs or slime, I think about outright killing and torture first. It's always the first thing on my mind when I am angry. I thought about killing you a lot and ... I don't want you afraid of me. But I don't know how to assure you I would never do it."

"Oh, I think about killing people a lot too." Tom actually smiled at that. "Not like I actually do it."

"You do?"

"Yeah, Mister Smith died about a thousand horrible deaths in my head already. That substitute teacher as well. Sometimes I even think about killing dad when I am angry but I always remember I don't want that."

Harry just chuckled and kissed his son's head. Really, he had imagined Dudley and Vernon dead often enough. Children had a bloody fantasy, he had had one as well. It had went as far as blowing his aunt up after all.

"That ... doesn't disturb you?" Jonathan asked Harry.

"No, I think that is quite normal. Killing someone in fantasy calms you down in reality. It does tend to make you more prone to violence but it is still better than acting out your fantasies. When learning how to deal with anger, fantasized killing is a phase everyone has. Normally, people aren't encouraged in it and therefore they learn other ways."

"Oh ... when my parents were angry, they hurt me a lot."

"Yes, you were quite encouraged in acting out your fantasies. Not only by your parents but also by your teachers. Or am I incorrect that you learned the Cruciatus in school?"

"I ... did." Jonathan seemed lost in thought. "So the way I was brought up encouraged me to become a mass-murderer?"

"It would have helped if your parents had been better role-models for dealing with emotions." Which was most likely the understatement of the century.

"Yeah, your parents were shit, Jonathan." Tom was – as always – a lot plainer in his

statements than Harry. "Just like the nuns at my orphanage. At least they had the excuse of being completely overworked." He kicked off his shoes and put his feet up to sit in a cross-legged position. "So tell me about the day you met me."

"Okay ... that day." Jonathan still felt a bit overwhelmed by what he had just heard. "So, I had met your parents once before. Albus had told me that they wanted my opinion on something political and they had been discussing the possibility of releasing me. I was elated at that. It's not like I hated the house arrest but I resented it. Killing and domineering people comes with a certain rush, power is a heady feeling and I didn't have that in captivity. My life felt dull, like a waste. I had no idea what I would do instead because I knew killing would be off the list but maybe becoming a potion's expert? Being admired for my knowledge? Maybe that would be a slight rush at least. I missed feeling good about myself. I only had options of forgetting about my feelings, of pushing them away for a bit by distracting myself. So I really wanted that freedom. At the same time, I thought only idiots or idealists would let me out of confinement. I thought that the people coming would want something from me, would want to exploit my weak position. So I wanted to appear in power. That ... was a bad idea. I horribly offended both of your dads."

"You broke into Edgar's mind."

"I judged him to be the weak link and exploited his being a Muggle to get dirt on Gren, yes." Jonathan actually looked ashamed about that. How far they had come. "On the day you three came to visit, I knew I had screwed up that first meeting but I didn't really know how. Okay, so you wanted me not to do anything illegal. Check, I could do that. You wanted an apology, check on that too. But that kind of apology ... that went over my head. Especially with your reaction, I realized that you wanted some kind of emotional development from me. You did not only want to to adhere to a set of rules, you wanted me to understand them and support them. In that moment, I knew I could never do that but I did not want it to be true. So instead I tried to disregard you with everything that was in me. A really large part of me wanted to beat you to the ground, to make you cry and fear me, to make you beg for mercy for asking such unthinkable shit of me." So Edgar's swearing had actually reached Jonathan as well. "A smaller part of me was horribly afraid. When I broke into Edgar's mind and Gren called me out on it, Albus was ashamed of me. My boyfriend had never been ashamed. He had been sad to see me drift away, he had been furious when our argument killed his sister, he had been resigned when he beat me and locked me away. He had been stoic for so many years I raged at him and in the end, he had forgiven me everything. But he had never been ashamed of me before. So I knew that if I hurt you, he would do what he had never done before. He would leave me."

Harry had to admire him for reflecting long and deeply on that, to be able to give a name to all those emotions in his head. Jonathan had really come a long way. Gellert Grindelwald would never have been able to give his inner demons such elaborate words.

"So Gren said that ten percent of him believed I could do this. That was a lot more than the percentage of me believing in myself. So when you said that love means that someone believes in you more than you yourself do, I realized how many people actually believed in me while at the same time, I was very much in line with you. You openly stated that you hated me, that you would not forgive me and you did not believe me worth your time."

Tom actually colored in shame at hearing that.

"First, I was angry at you. Then I realized that was exactly what I thought about

myself. I wasn't angry at you, I was angry at myself because I really believed, deep down, that I could never do what you asked of me. I hated myself for that. I hated myself for being so weak, of giving up before even trying and I decided in that moment that I would do it. I would learn this emotional stuff, no matter what I thought about it before, I would prove myself wrong. Because I was so damn angry that I needed other people to believe in me more than I myself did. I hated myself for that so much that I decided to change it."

Tom blinked more a moment. "That's like ... the exact opposite of what I tried to tell you."

"Well, it worked anyway." Jonathan shrugged his shoulders.

"I told you to accept love and friendship!"

"That sounded much too sappy. I went with hate at myself instead."

"Then why did you become so lovey-dovey with Dumbledore?" Tom's black eyebrows were crunched in confusion.

"Well, learning emotions did include letting Albus in after all. I never did that before. It was a damn scary thing."

"So ... in hating yourself you decided to accept love and reciprocate in loving someone?" The poor boy sounded out of sorts. "I see what you mean with adults being really strange, dad."

"What Jonathan illustrated perfectly is that in adults, the change has to come from within."

"I see." Tom shook his head. "Then what do I have to say to trigger said change this time?"

"You can start with stating your theories on why it might be hard for Jonathan to accept the value of emotions and bonds even after the learning experience he just described."

"Too complicated." Tom groaned and hid his face behind his hands.

Jonathan just smiled sadly. "If I accepted it, I would have to face the blame of ripping thousands of families apart, bringing about sadness and destroying their bonds."

"You already proved you can face your own blame."

"I ... I never knew what it meant though." He looked up, his blue eyes desperate and lost. "I never knew what a family looked like before. It's like I knew in the abstract ... now I feel it."

Tom looked up slowly, his gaze calculating.

"Still, the things you can put into words are always things you will learn to deal with. It's the things that have no words yet that plague us."

"How should I know something that has no words? How should I even think about something without words?"

Tom spoke into the ensuing silence: "There were a lot of things I had no words for before dad. I still remember. I was sad and angry all the time and I couldn't say why except for the gnawing hunger."

"Then how come you now have words for it?" Jonathan's trembling gaze focused on Tom. "Because this feels horrible."

"He explained feelings to me and he told me about my family. Family had always been a gaping void inside of me. I never knew about them and always said that they were not important anyway. It just showed how important they actually were to me. So when dad told me about my birth parents, those feelings gained words."

"You said family was not important and it showed how important they were ... that's like me with emotions and bonds. I rejected them when actually they were more

important than anything else. I shunned bonds bec-" He suddenly fell silent.

"Because what?," Tom asked but Harry shushed him.

"Look at his face," he instructed his son, "Let him work it out. He needs time right now."

Jonathan's eyes had widened, staring into nothing. It slowly turned into a grimace as if he had bitten on something sour. Finally he continued: "Because I did not have them but wished for them."

Well, that's a start but still far from the core. Harry sighed internally. This would take time, a lot of time. He wished he could beam a psychologist from his own time over here. Just because he had to do it once himself, didn't mean he was well-equipped for helping someone with this.

"Ah." Tom's eyes widened suddenly. "Now I know!"

Jonathan looked up slowly, still a bit dazed.

"It's not friends, you had a friend after all. You also had a partner. You did not have loving parents though. So this is about family as well." The boy shared his insight excitedly.

"Family? Familial bonds?" Jonathan scoffed. "Why would I need ... oh, I see. Outright rejection might indicate a need for it." He leaned back. "But am I not too old by now to need a family?"

Tom blinked for a moment but turned to Harry.

"You answered that once already, Tom. Back when you first met Grindelwald. You told him that you could learn by being raised in a family but he could not. He is too old now. You were right in that. In his age, you don't look for family anymore, you fill that void with a partner and friends, sometimes even kids though that is dangerous. It's not like you need a family now, Jonathan. But you needed one once upon a time and that is the topic."

Jonathan's cheek twitched. "I want to reject that with everything that is in me."

"Then it's better that you go and think on it."

There was not a millisecond wasted before the man was out of the door.

"Should I go with him?," Tom asked in apprehension.

"No, you leave him alone." Harry patted his head. "You forced enough on him with this talk."

"Why is it so hard for adults to see what's right in front of them?" In annoyance, he crossed his arms.

"With few exceptions, adults have a clear concept of their self. Who they are, what they want, where they come from, where they are going. The more secure they are in it, the harder it is to change. Normally, kids don't self-reflect until puberty. They take what they hear and integrate it into their selves. It's why kids are malleable where teenagers and especially adults are not. Most adults have to be taken for who they are because they won't change much. They might bend a bit, like washing their dishes regularly when living with someone else, but they do not change their character. Jonathan did and it is very admirable he was able to do that."

"Did you ever do that?"

Harry nodded. "Once, yes. In my mid-twenties. I had grown up with war and abuse, so I was emotionally detached and sometimes even mean. I had to change for the woman I loved because I did not want to lose her." And their children. It had been just James at the time but he had not been able to relate to his son. He had blamed his own childhood, never planning on overcoming his difficulties until Ginny told him that he either changed or she would leave. He had never expected that. He had cursed, even

accursed her as an unfaithful wretch, not looking at his own mistakes, just seeing her as the bad one. Molly had saved them, had saved their marriage. She had made him see himself for who he was and how badly he was failing his own family. Not a year after, he had started therapy.

"I can't imagine you like that."

"Well, you met Jonathan before his change."

"True." Tom nodded and sighed. "He was a douchebag."

"Where did you learn that word?"

"Edgar." His son grinned.

"That man should give swearing courses instead of boxing."

"He misses you, dad."

Harry just blinked. "We see each other every day."

"I mean here." Tom pointed at his own heart. "At parties, it's you and Brea. With the Malfoys, it's Dumbledore, you and me. When it comes to me, I spend a lot of time with Jonathan. You don't really take an interest in the company he is leading for you. So he's lonely. He was special to you before and now he is like another guest here that works for you."

"He hasn't said anything."

"No, he's pining. He's looking at you with those eyes, you know, like I looked at all those shops in that wizard street. Another place where we went without him. You do not include him anymore."

"Not on purpose."

"Well, do something about it. Go on a date or something."

"He's a friend, friends don't date." Though they might as well go on a date, that was true. "I'll invite him to something."

"Great." Tom jumped from the couch. "I'll go annoy him at work. If Jonathan needs time, I can play with Edgar instead."

"Yeah, do that." Harry stood as well. How come he had missed Edgar being unhappy? They met twice a week for Occlumency lessons. Why had Edgar never said anything? On the other hand, he was a character that tended to suffer in silence. "Oh, Tom?"

"Yeah?"

"Thank you."

The boy just grinned and waived at him before leaving.

Edgar looked at him expectantly, waiting for their lesson to begin, but Harry just studied him. He was smiling – authentically – and looking expectant, no hesitation, no sadness, no underlying wariness. Maybe Tom had been wrong? But he was a good observer, Harry should at least ask Edgar. Now how to phrase such a question? If he asked about happiness, the man would most likely give a standardized answer.

"Is something wrong?" Edgar finally asked.

"No, just thinking ... Tom told me that you looked unhappy but I don't see that. I am trying to piece this together."

"Unhappy?" Edgar shrugged it off. "Not at all."

"Are you sure about that? Tom is seldom wrong. Are you playing something off here?"

"It's nothing as serious as that."

"But there is something?"

"When isn't there something?" Again, the same smile, just a bit dimmer. It looked so real but right now, there was nothing to smile about, was there? "Let's begin the lesson."

"Would you tell me anyway? Even if it is not important? It bothers you after all."

"It's silly." Was there a blush on Edgar's cheeks?

"I'm intrigued by this silliness."

"You won't leave me alone about this, will you?" A sigh, then a nod. "Okay, I'll tell. So remember that weekend Dumbledore visited and he spent a day at the beach with Jonathan? And the weekend before where we all went to the beach?"

"Sure. The weather was really nice."

"I just ... I wished I could spend a day with you like that. Just longing around."

"Didn't we do that on the family weekend?"

"Kind of but ... not really. I know, Brea spent most of her time with the girls, but she is your wife, she sits next to you, not me. I just wanted to be close to you too. Not being allowed is ... in the end, I wished I hadn't come. I want to spend time with you, just us, or maybe with Tom, but there is Jonathan and Brea and Dumbledore and Malfoy and ... there is just so much you have to do. I am happy we have these lessons but I wish we did something more leisure as well. I don't know, maybe go see a sport game or test a car or ... anything really. I am not picky. I see you everyday but you feel so far away."

"And why is that silly?" It wasn't exactly what Tom had said but the boy had been close. Definitely a good observer. "Those are things I'd like to know."

"It's a burden though. I don't want you to compromise your time even more for me."

"That's my decision, don't you think? You're important to me, Edgar. I want you to be happy."

"Oh, in that case ..." The man wriggled his eyebrows.

Harry just laughed. Of course this would elicit a dirty joke. The other man just smiled back and shook his head at his own antics.

"What would you like most? Except for the unspoken," Harry asked him.

"No mud-wrestling at the beach? No visit to the local baths for a steam-filled sauna?"

Edgar inclined his head in thought. "Jonathan will stay until September. It's an important time and I don't want to detract from it. Maybe afterwards, we could spend some evenings together again? Just reading or playing a game with Tom. We could go for a drive on the weekends. Who knows how long we will stay together like this?"

"Tom will change schools in September 1938. He'll go to a boarding school. We will go back to war exactly one year later."

"Oh." Edgar's face fell. "I forgot. You actually know."

"So we still have three years of peace together."

"That's the upside." He stayed thoughtful. "I've been here for two years now."

Had it been that long already? Time was passing them by. It always felt like this, children grew up too fast, seasons changed more rapidly every year. "Do you regret anything?"

"Not at all." Edgar smiled faintly. "It may have hurt at first but after I got over Gren, this has been paradise. It were the best two years of my life and I still have more of them in front of me."

"So tell me if something bothers you, okay?"

"Sure, Gren. I will." The other man grinned. "I also need to thank Tom for ratting me out to you."

"He is a great kid."

"The best."

Harry just remembered his other three kids and knew that his smile was most likely tinted with sadness. Maybe he would see them in the afterlife. Hopefully it was for

Muggles as well as magical folk. Or if not, he hoped he would still count as magical.
"Gren?"

"Sorry, my thoughts drifted off. Let's start the lesson." He smiled at Edgar. This life held a lot for him too, he should never forget that. This was more than duty and misery. He was giving all of his friends a world of peace.

At least he hoped so.

Jonathan spent a lot of their evening meals more or less subtly trying to have everyone talk about family. There was a certain irony to it, seeing as most of the people at this table were orphans. Nearly all of them stated that this – being in Harry's house – felt like family. Often more than what they could remember of their former lives.

Brea and Helen's parents had both died due to the great famine – or in Brea's case, her father had died shortly after World War I while her mother was pregnant. He was tasked with retrieving mines and one had blown him up. Dorothee's parents had been dead the longest, they had died due to the Spanish fever. She had grown up with her grandmother who died of old age later. Loretta said that her mother had died of disease and she never knew her father. Later, she shamefully admitted that her mother had been a whore and died due to the French disease. Her sister and her had gone to the orphanage and her sister had found work with an uprising family. Loretta had wanted to join her but Harry's offer had come and now, she was happy she had taken it.

Jonathan openly asked them what family meant to them. That turned everyone silent at once, all of the teenagers lost in thought.

"Warmth. Safety. Knowing that you belong somewhere. Having someone tell you what to do, where to go, giving you a set of rules to live by," answered Margret. "Before coming here, I lived with my mom and dad, my two brothers and my aunt. My grandmother also lived with us until her death. I had a cousin once but he died as a child. My aunt never said who the father was or even if it had been something she wanted. She cared for Matthew and when he died, she ... she became a shadow. She wasn't herself anymore. She wasn't any fun to be around, somedays she just sat somewhere and wept. But we stayed with her and she with us. It's what families does. They are there for each other."

"But oftentimes, they expel you for not following their rules. They choose your job for you, sometimes your spouse and you have no agency of your own. How is that good?"

"Not everyone is a homosexual, Jonathan." Margret actually looked sorry about being so blunt. "I mean ... most of us actually fit the expectations of our parents. Or at least they accept our choices. Mine wanted me to become a seamstress or marry young or work in a factory. But becoming a maid was okay. Now they only ask me if I met a nice men yet. But they accept it when I tell them no. My older brother is married. My younger one still goes to school. They want him to become a shoe maker. They already wanted that for my older brother too but he wanted to be a fisherman instead. That was okay for my parents. As long as we have jobs and are happy and marry somewhere along the way, it's okay."

"It is?" Jonathan blinked slowly. "So you had choices?"

"Yes, I had." Her eyes teared up. "God, I can't imagine being locked up for more than forty years. I am so sorry, I haven't thought about your situation. What your mother did was horrible."

Jonathan just blinked at her, his face completely filled with confusion. "It ... is?"

"She took away your choices."

"But ... she wanted to protect me."

Margret looked at Harry for help but it was Brea that cut in: "Locking someone away is wrong. It's what you do with criminals."

"Oh ... I never really cared that freedom of movement was a choice taken from me."

Jonathan contemplated what he had heard. "When I think of parents, I think of someone that rules your life with an iron fist, making every decision for you and asking things some people might be able to do but you most certainly not."

"Like what?," Margret asked carefully.

"Well ... who and how to love, yes. Also how to be as a human, how to treat others. If I listened to my ... mother, then I would not be allowed to talk to any of you. Servants. No better than slaves in the eyes of my family. Creatures that should be neither seen nor heard. Actually, most of you would meet their criteria for being burned alive. I know that they are wrong. You are all lovely people and I like you. But there the only example of parents that I have."

"Well, you are living with a very good parent." Margret looked at Harry for a moment.

"Take him as an example?"

Jonathan looked at Harry for a moment. "He also meets their criteria for being burned alive."

"But you aren't your family, right?" Margret smiled with a rather shaky curl of her lips.

"You can look past their prejudice."

Jonathan looked at Harry for a moment and slowly nodded before shaking his head.

"Yes, he is a good father. But I only have one example what a mom is like. Can I meet your mother? I'd just like to know what one could be like."

"My mother?" Margret looked at him with wide eyes. "You do know that they will think I am introducing a prospective husband, that I have somehow captured the heart of a noble prince and they will ply you with all the alcohol in the house until you say that you'll marry me?"

Jonathan looked perplexed for a moment before he grinned and said: "Sounds fun."

"Oh dear Lord." The poor maid shook her head. "Just stay vague and make them think you are thinking about it. Also prepare for my older brother to give you the shovel talk of not breaking my heart and making me pregnant before the wedding."

"What is a shovel talk?"

"Boy, he's so innocent." Brea shook her head in amazement.

Harry answered: "It's a father or older brother threatening you with all kinds of harm, so you are good to their female relative. Women lack a lot of rights, so their family protects them."

"So if I had a father, would he have given Albus a shovel talk? Or would that not happen with ... you know?"

"Men are meant to look after themselves."

Edgar snorted and looked at Harry in amusement. "Well, my sister gave my ex-boyfriend a shovel talk. So I don't think that gender matters here."

"Will you give our boyfriends a shovel talk, Mister Horten?," Helen asked.

"If you introduce one to me, I sure will."

The girls giggled and Brea asked: "Did you give one to Ian?"

"No, the poor boy was scared out of his wits already. You don't need to give one to the kind of boy that means well."

"Oh." Jonathan nodded. "Then Albus wouldn't have gotten one."

"Well ... he does have some strange ideas sometimes. Maybe someone should have

warned him off at some point." Like publishing world-changing theses before the Wizengamot and throwing someone under the bus for it.

"Hm ... so parents protect you and are on your side ... that sounds too good to be true." Jonathan sighed.

"The theory is nice, the reality is harsh. My original father simply did not want me. It happens." Tom shrugged his shoulders. "Some parents love their children, some don't."

"But why?" The older man looked honestly puzzled. "Why do some parents love and some don't?"

"It's not as black and white as that." Everyone looked at Harry when he spoke up. "Every parent loves and hates their child at the same time. You love a child because it is a part of you, it carries your hopes and dreams, oftentimes your ideals. It is a part of you in some way but also it's own person, someone you are proud to watch grow and develop. On the other hand, children take a lot of time, money, nerves ... I can't even tell you how annoying children can be sometimes. So when you are a patient, not easily stressed person, you love your child a lot more than you hate it. But when you have a lot of problems yourself, your anger and resentment may overshadow your love and make you abusive."

"My parents weren't stressed. They had money, they had servants, they actually owned slaves, they got their money by inheritance, they didn't even work. How stressed can one be? They had the best prerequisites for being good parents."

"There are two other requirements for being a good parent." Because of course Hermione had read up everything there was to know about parenting when she became pregnant. It had actually been Ginny that helped the most, telling her to stop stressing and to begin enjoying parenthood. "One is something Margret just said. As a good parent, you are interested in your child. You know that your child is not you, it has it's own character, it's own interest and it will carve it's own road in life. So instead of fussing about what to do to make your child more like you or the ideal you have, you become interested in the human you are raising. Your child will do things that you label as wrong. You will punish them when they are wrong in the eyes of not only you but everyone. But if it is just wrong for you, you will only explain your view and leave the decision to your child. So respect and interest are keys."

"That's the other two?"

"No, that's just one. It's hard enough because a lot of parents have a very clear image of how their child has to be."

"Yes, I know what you mean." Jonathan's face slacked.

Oh boy if he thought that this was his problem. "The second one is harder though. It's when parents simply don't get their child. When you have a baby, you learn to differentiate their screams. Some are for hunger, some for pain, some are simple boredom and some are for things like "Why are you stinky human here? I want my mom, not you, dumbhead". The more children you have, the better you are in getting their signals. It's normal you're not perfect with the first baby but somewhere around the third or forth one, you get them. Most parents do that. But there are people that simply can't relate to their children. I knew a French women, she was lovely but could be ... shallow sometimes. She married a good man from a good family, he knew how to treat babies, he had six younger siblings. So when they had a baby, she was surrounded by people that were good with babies and she was ... not. It's no fault of her own, she just never learned it. When you have children, you treat them like you were treated, that's normal. At least if you did not have other role-models and

learned from them in the meantime. She treated the baby like she had been treated and everyone was disturbed by that. Because Victoire often wanted attention, her father gave her that all the time and Fleur, the French woman, tried to feed her or changed her nappies or oftentimes, she didn't react until Victoire screamed at the top of her lungs. She simply did not get the signals her daughter was sending. It's like she had no radar for them." It had not been as bad for him but he had needed to learn too. His mother had been a loving woman, no doubt, but she came from the same household as Petunia did. Their parenting had been lacking in some areas, resulting in the monstrosity of one Dudley Dursley. So Ginny had had to teach him about getting subtle hints. Again, not as bad as Fleur but ... well, after recognizing his lack of sensitivity, it had been a hard road. He had been better with Lily. Maybe that's why James had resembled Dudley sometimes.

Jonathan simply looked aghast.

Tom summed up that feeling on his own: "I'm never having children then."

"Well ..." Harry looked at him but really, he couldn't disagree. "Maybe with a wife from a loving family with great parenting skills?"

Tom just raised an eyebrow.

"I am so glad right now that I never had a child." Jonathan ran a hand through his hair. "I would have messed the poor thing up completely."

"Well ..." Again, he couldn't disagree. "Yes. You would have. Albus as well. He is a great man but ... not so good at taking a child's perspective." What could you expect from a man that burned an orphan's whole wardrobe when he already owned next to nothing, sent him back to that place every year and threw him out when he basically asked for asylum later. Dumbledore had played a large part in Tom's negative development.

Jonathan stared into his soup, not really responding anymore.

"Are you alright?" Harry narrowed his eyes.

Edgar tugged the other man's sleeve when he didn't react.

"Oh?" He looked up with a smile that was purely fake. "What was the question?"

"Nothing, man. It was scary how you zoomed out." Edgar nodded after a moment.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

"Uhm ... it's complicated." Jonathan turned back to Margret. "So when can we visit your mother?"

Edgar just sent Harry a look to which he nodded. This sounded like something he should get behind. Jonathan had a right to his privacy but having him hung up in his thoughts seemed like a bad idea. Still, Jonathan was an adult and what worried him more was the look on Tom's face. He looked sour, also staring at his food and picking at his potatoes. Harry snapped his finger against Tom's arm to get his attention.

"What?" That did not exactly sound friendly.

"You also did not look as if you were thinking happy thoughts."

"Just ... how my grandparents did not want my mom and my grandfather wanted my father dead? I don't think my parents would have been any good, even if I had them. I don't like the thought. You say my mom loved me. But what good is that when she would have been a horrible mom?"

"We don't know that, Tom, and we shouldn't assume. Maybe she would have sought help. Maybe she had a loving mother and only her father was a bad man. It's not like your abilities are set in stone. People can learn, people can change. If you want to learn to care for babies, you can."

"No thanks. They are messy. I don't want one."

"No grandchildren for me?"

"Jonathan is the one with the learning curve. He can have your grandchild."

"That's not how it works, Tom. You are my only son."

"I resent the expectation. If you want babies, have your own."

Harry spluttered and couldn't hold back his laughter. Really, how was that boy only eight years old? At least he was grinning again.

"But wait until I am in school, okay? I can deal with a baby sister but she needs to be at least eleven years younger than me."

"And who should I have that child with? Brea? Babies need biological mothers."

"You adopted all of us, surely you can adopt one more. There's enough starving kids in London."

"In that case, your baby sister might be one or two or any number of years old." Not that he would actually adopt one when there was a war coming. But if he survived it, maybe he should take in some kids. It was an idea what to do with his life. Not that he really expected to survive this all. It would be nice though.

"But only a sister, okay? I don't want a brother."

"Sure thing." He ruffled his son's hair. "Good thing you can choose at adoptions."

"Yeah. Don't make Brea pregnant."

"Not planning on that."

"Good. That would be disturbing." Tom shuddered. "She's like ... my sister or something. That would be wrong."

"I think so too."

"Good." The boy tucked in again.

So his appetite had returned. Harry sighed in relief. Tom was right though. His parents would not have been the best and even with them, he might have turned out ... not as well as he was right now. Hopefully, this would work out. Right now, he had quite a good feeling. He liked who the boy had become.

Kapitel 22: Twenty-second chapter

"Jonathan?" He stopped the other man after dinner. "Would you like a night-cap?"

"That's sounds like a very nice invitation to telling me what I did wrong." The blond man sighed. "Lead the way."

"There's actually nothing wrong." Going up the stairs, Harry put a hand on Jonathan's shoulder. "You don't need to expect the worst. I just wanted a drink and some adult conversation."

"So I'm not getting scolded?" Like the last ... three, four ... actually, he had a point.

"Only if there is something I should know about."

"Not at all." Jonathan grinned impishly.

Harry just raised an eyebrow. "I'll find out sooner or later, you know?"

"Oh, I hope not." He actually blushed. "Albus cast a lot of anti-Muggle spells, you know?"

"In that case, I don't want to know."

"Right." He grinned in delight. "I never thought sneaking around could be fun."

"Please tell me it was outside the house at least."

"Well, there is this nice bathhouse in town--"

"Right, know what? I really don't want to know."

Jonathan pouted. Harry held the door open for him, shaking his head about the other man's antics. "So, aside from your adventurous sexual escapades, is there something I should know?"

"I don't think so. I may have written a letter to that horrible teacher Brea, Loretta and Dorothea have, correcting some of what he taught but I stated that I were a private supplementary teacher you hired for your wife."

"That ... is a great cover. I'd still like for you to talk to me before you do that." Did Jonathan expect him to say no? Why did he only get to know about such things afterwards?

"The man is useless. I can't stand useless teachers." Jonathan used the opportunity to summon the bottle and glasses by magic, serving Harry a perfectly made drink. "Why do you send them to school? I am sure you could teach them yourself."

"I did. I want them to socialize with kids their age."

"What for?"

"Social and emotional development."

"With how backwards the kids here are? Isn't that dangerous? It's like they are living in two different worlds. One with your ideals and ... the one out there."

"It's the world out there they will have to navigate in. You only learn courage from having to stand up against other people's opinions. It's easy to be an idealist in this house. The challenge is to go out there and stay true to yourself."

"It's easy to like and accept everyone here." There was a long pause. "Standing in front a pureblood society and defending Muggles ... that's something else. Especially after how I was before. With this cover, everyone will believe Albus found this abandoned Dark wizard and forced him to live with Muggles to give him Light magic ideals. They'll pity me for saying that Muggles are nice. Poor waylaid child. You don't know better. You don't know how bad they really are. Some may be nice but in mass, they are a threat. If they knew what you were, they would call for your blood. Albus only showed you the nice ones. You were blended. I can't even argue with that ... if

you were to proclaim me a wizard in the middle of town, they would call for my blood."

"It's mass psychology. Wizards on their own are nice as well but in a crowd, they will call for Muggle life. Masses fear differences, anything foreign is a threat. They need single voices to sway them from becoming bloodthirsty. They need leaders that won't give into their baser urges. It's a problem when leaders offer opinions that should be restricted to extremists of a group. You can shun fanatics. You can't shun your leaders."

"So I'll be a poor misguided little lamb. Albus's new pet project, his first openly acknowledged lover. Some dark wizard seduced from the right way. Dumbledore's not so secret dirty secret."

"I can't imagine you filling that role." Gellert Grindelwald would never accept being a sheep.

"In some of my darker days, I imagined myself in that role. I behaved as if that were truth." A painful expression crossed his features. "It's not who I want to be."

"Who do you want to be?"

"Someone unafraid and unashamed. I am a dark wizard, yes. I don't have to be bad but neither do I have to pretend to be good. I brought the most powerful wizard since Merlin to heel. I own the pieces of my cousin's empire, one of the worst mass murderers ever seen. I don't care if one is Muggle or not, Muggle-born, half-blood or pureblood, the blood status does not define one's worth. I respect integrity and strength of character. Like every pureblood, I believe in magical might. But raw power is not the same as knowledge, so I shall not disregard Muggle-borns. Though knowledge is important too, wisdom is what I respect. It's why a Muggle scholar can be worth just as much as a wizard one. Effort, talent, the integrity to question oneself and one's ideals – those will be what I shall value. I shall fall in line with only one of Albus's ideals: love. I will not be his dirty secret. I will stand proudly at his side."

"Even though you were hidden all this time? Your story states that you were a shameful secret all of your life."

"I won't stand to be that for one more day."

"So you won't flinch from being called murderer scum for being Gellert's cousin? You won't flinch from being called a whore for securing your place in society by sleeping with one of its leaders? You will stoically face their accusations about being a blood traitor?"

"No matter what I do, I won't be able to change their opinions anyway. I can only decide to weather them by covering in on myself. I don't think I can allow myself that."

"Seeing you with him, they will begin to speculate about Albus's history with Gellert Grindelwald. Albus never denied his feelings. It will be public that your late cousin was your lover's ex-boyfriend."

"Good riddance then. I don't like sharing."

"That will hurt Albus. He may know you say that for your cover but in his heart, it's Gellert that he loves. With you disregarding him ... you'll make him sad."

Jonathan looked at him for a long moment. "Then what could be my stance?"

"You did not know your cousin. There must have been a good side to him for Albus to love him. On the other hand, Albus killed him. Mass murderers don't get second chances, so you won't mourn him."

"No good word for the wicked?" Something in Jonathan's countenance shattered.

"Not from you. Never from you. Gellert died by Albus's hand and you will always

admire him for his strength in character to let someone go for the best of all."

Jonathan looked shattered. Disbelieving. His hands trembled, so he put down his drink.

"You are Jonathan Bagshot. You may have been a shameful secret but you had a loving mother. Gellert Grindelwald wasn't as fortunate. He died for his mistakes. There is no need to hero-worship or villainize him. He was simply a misguided soul that was laid to rest."

A tear ran down Jonathan's cheek.

"There is no legacy, no empire. Just like most other Dark Lords of history, he rose, he was defeated and forgotten over time."

"Not all of them ... some weren't forgotten."

"But Gellert Grindelwald will be. Because between you and Albus, he will not have a place. He will not be a ghost accompanying you forever. He is gone."

Jonathan held back a sob by pressing a hand to his lips. "I can't believe I ... why am I even crying?"

"He was your identity for a long time." Just like Harry Potter. By now, he was a ghost that would never come about. He was Grenmore Horten, Muggle general of the British troops. "Your memories that say otherwise are that of another life. One that will be locked far away. It's okay to mourn a life that is ... gone."

"How do you deal with it?" Jonathan looked lost, his cheeks wet with tears, his eyes widened in a mixture of disbelief and sadness.

"I look at the life that I have, the people in it ... there will always be new dreams, new goals. It's good to remember where you came from but you should never linger. We don't live for our past. Our future is ever changing. We have nothing but the present and that is what we live for."

"But there is nothing to miss about my old life ... is there?" Jonathan angrily wiped the tears from his face. "There is nothing to cry about. Gellert Grindelwald was a failed existence."

"He was proud. He was dark. He was mighty and feared."

"He lost himself in love, in dreams of might and finally in blood. He succumbed to the black magic pull and afterwards, there was nothing left to him. Those years in seclusion ... I was no one. I had no identity. I was a lost soul, that much was true." Fresh tears marred his expression.

Harry decided to give him time to put his thoughts in order.

"I dabbled in potions. It was fun at first. But it's only fun when you can share your theories, get new input. Albus could only do so much. When you give yourself your own challenges ..."

"It's not candy you made, I guess." Enough prodding.

There was a long pause, Jonathan's face drawn in pain. "Can you keep a secret from Albus?"

"As long as you aren't planning death and annihilation."

The man shook his head and closed his eyes. "I did not want to be left and forgotten about."

There was a theme in there, yes. Gellert Grindelwald strove for recognition and Jonathan would not be different.

"I tried to ... if I couldn't leave, I wanted a part of me to leave there. I wanted a child. Someone that could change the world in my stead. A typical case of having a child for purely selfish reasons."

"How?" How indeed without a woman. Did he try to summon a specter?

"I tried to find a potion that would give me the possibility to become pregnant."

"I guess that failed." Number two of the five principal exceptions to Gamp's law of elemental transfiguration – you could not summon what wasn't there. You could regrow a womb, could refertilize a women after procedures similar to chemotherapy but magic would never make a man pregnant.

"I wrecked my body with those experiments ... after I gave up, I spent years mending the damage. I poisoned myself over and over again."

"And you did not think that Albus should have a say in that? You planned for him to be the father, right?"

"I ... hm." Jonathan looked pensive. "I don't think I ever really thought it through. Emotionally."

"You simply wanted a child? Never thinking about what it would mean for Albus to unknowingly become a father, for yourself to become a mother and having to care for a baby?"

"It's what house-elves are for, I guess. Purebloods don't really raise their children. They have them and then someone else has to care for them. First an elf or a wet nurse, then a nanny, later tutors. Parents don't actually care for their children. They just ... produce them."

"What a sad kind of parenthood."

"It's the only one I knew. It's not hard to see life in as much worth as cattle when that is how you are brought up. You don't form attachments. There are these strange adults that sometimes come by and evaluate you. You try to meet their expectations because they are the only constant in your life. If you do bad, they kill whoever you might call your mother at the time. House-elves are just slaves after all."

Harry just shook his head in sadness.

"Familial bonds ... it is such a strange concept."

"Just stick close to Margret's side and ask her your questions. It's okay to come off as shy. Just don't embarrass her. She is the one most whole in this household."

"More than you?"

"Certainly more than me." Harry scoffed. "That's not hard. I learned later. It's hard work learning empathy for a baby. Much harder than for your fellow adult humans. Children take a lot more patience and only few people can be guides in this."

"So you had someone like that? Someone that guided you?"

"My mother in law. She was a wonderful women, very loving, very warm. Children were her world. She was one of the poorest people I ever saw but she was happy. She had a family that she loved and that loved her. She taught me that you do not need much to be happy."

"My family had a lot and they were far from happy. No money in the world is worth the unhappiness those people gave me."

"Does that make you angry? Does it make you sad?"

"It leaves me ... hollow."

"There will probably be resentment at some point. You may ask yourself why you were the unfortunate one to be born into that family. It will bring about a deep sadness and hopefully the adult Jonathan will be there for that lost boy that still lives in you."

"I want to roll my eyes at you for sprouting such mushy nonsense." Jonathan sighed.

"Which most likely means that you hit a sore spot in me."

"It sounds like you have the tools for recognizing and working with your emotions." Harry smiled proudly. "Don't forget to rely on Albus. He may not exactly be good with

emotions but he tries his best. Above all, he loves you. If there is one thing he is very good at, it's being devoted and giving his all."

"It seems I got myself a good man." The other man scoffed into his drink. "At least one thing I did right."

"Sometimes, a reliable partner makes all the difference in the world." Like Ginny. Who would he have become without Ginny? A failure most likely. A washed up human, unable to continue on after his great quest was done. Like Frodo in the Lord of the Rings. He would not even have written his memoirs, only faded away into nothingness. "Still, he is no help if you don't see a problem."

"So my denial keeps me from advancing. Great." Jonathan sighed and pushed back his blond locks with one hand. "All this time you wanted to tell me that there is a hurt child inside that needs my attention. While at the same time, you tell me that I am basically unable to care for children due to my history."

"It's a learning process." How he had hated his own therapist for that damn sentence.

"You need to learn self-care."

"Learning all of this, will I be some kind of child-expert at the end of it all?"

"At least for those similar to yourself." James and Lily had been easy. Albus on the other hand ... god, his youngest son had taken the cake. He had nearly gone back to therapy. At least it had prepared him for Tom and the likes of Gellert Grindelwald.

"Like Slytherins?"

"Like severely abused children with projected hatred." So basically most Slytherins.

"Can I go back to murdering people? That was a lot easier."

Harry just scoffed and took a sip of his drink.

Jonathan smiled bashfully. "Is it okay to joke about that? That was most likely very insensitive."

"You might want to keep those jokes to Albus and me. I don't want those around Tom. Edgar would definitely not appreciate them."

"You are right." The other man looked into space. "I really don't know how to ever make this right."

"Honestly, there is no way to ever make it right. You killed people. You can't bring them back. They will forever be on your conscience. But you can keep others from making the same mistake and that can be your redemption."

He slowly nodded his head. "To help others, I first need to be able to help myself. I need to learn to care for that hurt child inside me." He focused again. "How do I do that?"

"You learn to relax. You learn to forgive, not only others but yourself. You learn to accept praise and to be proud of yourself. You learn to accept love and give it. You learn to care for others, help them and accept help. You reflect on your prejudices against others and stop unjust discrimination in yourself as well as others. You learn to stand up for yourself and others."

Jonathan blinked. "That's what I've been doing all this time!"

"Surprise. That's why you are here."

"I thought I was here so that you could gain trust in me and see that I really changed."

"That's a part of it too. But if that were the only goal, I would not have risked my family. I wanted to give you a chance, Jonathan. Living in a family is the best way to learn about family."

"Oh." The man smiled cautiously. "All of that for Albus?"

"My main reason for being here is Tom and I need Albus strong and emphatic for this to work. Him hating Slytherins because of you is a problem for me."

"That makes a lot of sense ... will he bring about the end of wizardkind or something like that?"

"Just imagine a world with Gellert Grindelwald followed by World War II followed by Dark Lord Tom Riddle."

"Mass destruction and unfiltered killings of all things Muggle, followed by breaking the Statute of Secrecy and all-out-war between magical and non-magical beings."

"And between magical beings. Trolls, werewolves and vampires make great additions in an all-out-war."

"Merlin." Jonathan shook his head. "Involving them in anything is madness."

"Not when the goal is mass destruction." Harry unclenched his fingers, noting that the memories still weren't easy after all these years. "He ripped his soul into pieces and went mad."

"A Horcrux?" Of course Jonathan would have read about it.

"Seven Horcruxes."

"That's madness."

"That's Tom without any help, mistreated by Albus for years."

Jonathan blinked for a moment before understanding filled his gaze. "My redemption is freeing Albus of his discrimination against dark wizards, working against anti-Muggle prejudice and helping Slytherin children."

"If you ever try to work against hatred, you'll only sow hatred. It's exactly where Albus went wrong. If you want to teach acceptance, you work with hatred, not against hatred. You don't tell people that discrimination is wrong, you teach them to work with their discrimination. Albus is right that a lot of Slytherins are self-serving assholes that feel mighty because they discriminate others. Shunning them is not the way to teach them acceptance and love."

"So I need to get Albus to understand where most Slytherins are coming from and how to teach them ... to feel good about themselves without discrimination?"

"And that Muggles and Muggle-borns are actually damn useful and knowledgeable and acceptance is the key to further development."

"Sure, easy thing." Jonathan raised an eyebrow. "I'll do that in my sleep."

"Well, you got an impressive number of wizards and witches to start killing Muggles. Use your powers of seduction and conviction."

"I worked with their prejudices for that!"

"Exactly." Harry put down his glass. "That's exactly it: You work with them, not against them."

"How?" It wasn't exactly a whimper but it certainly wasn't Jonathan's normal pattern of speech.

"Find your way." He leaned back against the coach and rested both arms on it. "I teach them about genetics. All purebloods want smart, magical powerful children. They will need Muggle-borns for that."

Jonathan blinked owlshly. "I remember you telling me about political ways to work with the Muggle technological progress. Partial integration into Muggle society to uphold the Statute of Secrecy."

"For that, you need their fear of Muggles."

"Use their fear to force integration?"

"The right amount of cultural knowledge not to make it daunting while keeping their fear of extinction to keep them from balking at integration."

"School trips to the Muggle world?"

"Actual Muggle-borns as teachers for Muggle studies and making it a mandatory

course."

"A political taskforce that work with Muggle technology, discussing the risks as well as the possibilities."

"Taking a plane instead of an international portkey."

"A plane?" Jonathan looked confused. "You mean those small things that will throw the bombs?"

"Those can be build for mass transportation and get you from London to Germany in two hours without any discomfort."

His lips formed a surprised O.

"You took a ship to America, right? Imagine a plane getting you there in nine hours time."

"Are you kidding?"

"I saw Muggles on the moon."

"Now you are kidding me."

"I'm not." Harry smiled. "Let's take a ride in my car tomorrow. I'll show you what Muggles can do right now. In a few decades, cars will go thrice the speed. Eventually, they will learn to drive by themselves."

"By now, I got that you came from the future, but how far?"

Harry just put an index finger to his lips.

"Well, a time where you learned time jumps, apparently." Jonathan shook his head.

"Damn, I'm envious."

"You're only fifty. That's nothing for a wizard."

"Will I see that?" There was fascination sparkling in his eyes.

"If you stay on the right side of the law, you'll see a time where you can legally marry your boyfriend."

With a shimmer washing away the fascination in his eyes, Jonathan took a deep breath. It was barely more than a whisper: "I really want to do that."

"Without war and other catastrophes, humans can learn amazing life values. Love and acceptance are something we strive towards, once we don't have to fear for our lives all the time."

"So wizards need integration to develop as a society? Because without integration, the fear of Muggles keeps wizards from developing further?"

"You are starting to get it, yes." Harry smiled proudly. "A society that fears is a society that discriminates. It's what you used as a Dark Lord to rally people up against Muggles. You fanned their fear. That's mass psychology."

"So I need to address fears ... not fanning them but working with them."

"It's what Albus is unable to do because of his irrational hatred against those that are similar to you."

"I did a lot of damage, did I not?"

Harry just nodded. In the end, he was sure that Jonathan still did not fully get the impact of Gellert Grindelwald's crimes but it was better than before.

"Somehow, I am amazed that there aren't more of me. I mean, more people like Gellert Grindelwald."

"There are a lot. Most just don't break the law. Without it, there would be a lot more crime."

"I never feared the law. I got punished and people never cared if I was the one that did wrong or if I was just the victim. So I learned not to care about rules – they never protected me anyway. I got dirt on my teachers, so they left me alone. I made my own laws."

"As I said, your environment did not provide a learning curve for becoming a law-abiding citizen."

"What about Howard?", Jonathan asked suddenly.

"What about him?"

"The law does not protect him from his dad. It's really unfair. Will he become a criminal?"

"It ups his chance of becoming one, yes. Criminals often have a history of abuse. Happy people normally don't commit crimes."

"Then why doesn't the law stop the abuse?"

"People change gradually. They just made a law that you can't hit your wife or child with a cane thicker than your thumb. Stopping violence against your family entirely is still in the future."

"But why?" Jonathan shook his head. "It makes so much sense, why shouldn't abuse be punished?"

"What do you do instead?" This went a bit further than the discussions he had with Tom or Edgar. "How do you raise a child if you can't use violence as punishment? In your case, no Cruciatu, no curses, no hexes, no jinxes?"

Jonathan just blinked.

"Some people came up with the idea of not punishing children at all or just reinforcing good behavior and ignoring bad things. Neither of those are good parenting techniques. Only a small percentage of children come out of that with the skills needed to be happy and successful, they need to be highly sensitive and not prone to anxiety at the same time. It's not a common combination."

"Well ... then how do you punish children, if not with violence?"

"Most parents in this age choose screaming, insulting and crying. It makes children feel guilty, sometimes even ashamed of themselves. Another method is leaving, ignoring their child and rebuffing their need for physical contact. Both ways are worse than violence in my opinion. So if you change the laws too fast, the children are worse off, even though their parents aren't violent anymore."

"I see. What are healthy ways of punishing your child?"

"Securely bonded children react to your moods. Displeasing you is punishment enough. So the better your connection with your child, the less punishments you need. If you have to use punishments, the first thing to do is to take privileges away. Things like candy, their favorite plaything, time with friends, time with you that is reserved only for them. You never take away the basics – they keep their room, they aren't locked away, they get food and water, they have free use of the bathroom and a baseline of time with their parents, siblings and friends. But everything that goes further than that is a privilege. Like visiting special places, the beach or a candy store or wherever your child loves to go."

Jonathan just looked at him for nearly a minute without saying anything. Harry let him. He most likely had to work through something very emotional. Sometimes, that needed time. "You bring candy for everyone when you go to London. We make trips to the beach. The children read your books and perform plays. Everyone has free time in the evenings. Tom goes through a sugar loaf a week. I knew that you were nice and very patient but somehow, I never made the connection that all of that are privileges that can be taken away if you are angered."

"Normally, I don't need to take any of that away. The kids seldom anger me. We have a system where small infractions are handled by Margret. She gives the others extra chores. Even Tom has to do chores if he behaves badly. I only handle the big stuff and

... to be honest, that's only Tom. The others wouldn't dare."

Jonathan shook his head in something like amazement. "I haven't seen a punishment yet, I just imagine you taking away the sugar for baking his cookies. Kid Gellert would have laughed at that."

"When you are used to the Cruciatus or something similar, small punishments don't mean much. For someone that is used to luxury and privileges, someone that feels secure in his way of life, taking away cookies is a big thing. Especially when you have a bond to the one taking the cookies. In that case, it's not about cookies anymore. It's about knowing that you angered the one that loves you and believes in you. Parenting shouldn't be about fear, it should be about love and respect. In that case, disappointment becomes a leading factor. It's more than cookies."

"I ... guess. Disappointing Albus was scary. I am used to him loving me. So children should be used to their parents loving them ... I see how that is a big step for a lot of parents."

"They never learned that themselves. Or they may have learned love, but neither acceptance of, interest in and respect for their children. You can't just decide to be such a parent, you need role models. So simply forbidding violence per law doesn't cut it."

"I see. You need to offer alternatives."

"That's the crux."

Jonathan nodded in silence. It took another minute for him to continue speaking:

"That was an example for my current problem, right? I want people to deal with their fear of Muggles differently but they simply have no alternative to killing them."

Harry blinked. Well, yes, that made total sense. It hadn't been his conscious idea behind talking about parenting but yes, that was actually a pretty good drift. It was nice talking to a genius for once. It reminded him of Hermione, she often made connections he hadn't even thought about. "That's exactly it, they need alternatives. While most wizards look down on Muggles, most also don't want to kill but they will scream for blood if they have no idea that there are other good solutions."

"I suggested enslaving them, not killing them."

"You killed a lot of them, so those plans sounded like the nice wrapping for people with a conscience."

"Well ... it was. Mostly." Jonathan sighed. "Okay, I need to make other solutions popular and feasible."

Harry just nodded.

"Gah!" The blond man threw his arms into the air and sank against his backrest.

"Talking to you is really great as well as damn exasperating. I always feel like I got something, understood more about something and when I try to answer what that is, I only end up with more questions."

"Philosophy and politics, the great mysteries of life." Harry smirked.

"Are you making fun of me?"

"I would never."

Jonathan just threw him a dirty look.

"Come on, you were the one who loved the topic at only sixteen years old. Your whole life since then has been about politics in one way or another. It's not my fault you liked to discuss things at wand-point and only now have to learn to use words for it."

The angry glare with a pout turned into slow blinking. "Did you just make a joke about killing thousands of people because I was a stubborn idiot?"

"It's not a joke but it's done. By now, it's what happened. No one can change it."

"What, no time-jump to save poor little Gellert?" Jonathan tried to make it sound like a joke but his voice cracked.

"It already happened." Harry tried his best to speak slow and not hurt the other man further. "Even magic has limits. I am sorry, Jonathan."

The other man just stood and fled the room. It seemed like sorrow had finally reached him.

Kapitel 23: Twenty-third chapter

Dear Gren,

this summer was filled with a slew of surprising weddings for the pureblood community. After we met with Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, Avery and Rosier, there were three secret weddings that have now become known. Ernest Crabbe, the second son, married Leticia Delbert, a half-blood witch. Henrietta Goyle married a Muggle-born by the name of Philipp Nettels, a marriage in which he took her name. To my outmost surprise, Malcolm Avery, heir to the Avery name, married none other than Cynthia Bones, half-blood light witch from the old Bones line. The Rosier family seems to be the only one still hesitating. That does not surprise me, their son is not only young but a shy, nerdy man. I would have pecked him for someone that will marry late and only produce one son out of duty, shunning the company of his wife because of lack of interest. Not due to my own reasons but rather because his interest fully lies in his studies.

As you may guess, the Avery/Bones-marriage was the one that could not be kept secret for long. It has been the talk of the community for days now. Everyone thinks that they secretly eloped and that Malcolm's parents will disinherit him. I read every new Daily Prophet with delight right now. The Bones family offered a statement that their children are free to chose their partners and they found Malcolm Avery to be an upright and well-raised young man. Seeing as the children's upbringing and education are in the hands of their mother, they don't see any reason to object to a husband with a dark magic background.

So dark magic males are okay because children get their magical inclination from their mother due to their upbringing. That is an interesting hypothesis, don't you think? If that were true, it would give females a very strong role in the way society develops. How much of your magical inclination is genetics and how much is learned? There have been some cases of dark wizards in light families, though I never heard of a light wizard coming from a dark family. Do you know one? I excitedly await your answer.

Yours truly, Albus

Dear Albus,

of course there have been as many light wizards in dark families as the other way round. Usually, the children are taught to look like dark wizards because their tradition is not one of acceptance and pride. It is easier for dark wizards born into light families though some are mistreated as well. When a light and a dark magical couple have children, these are a 50/50 mix. I was a light wizard, made dark by a curse, married a light witch and had two light and one dark child. The difference is not that big anyway.

You were right to question the Bones' hypothesis, the magical inclination is genetical and has nothing to do with upbringing. So the Avery/Bones-couple will have a 50/50 mix most likely, except if she wasn't pure-light, then it's likely they will have more dark than light children. But that is statistics and it may be that they have ten children and all of them are light.

Women do have a very important role in society though, even if this one thing is not linked to their parenting. Culture, that means norms and values, are given to our children by the ones telling them stories, singing songs and upholding traditions. Those are often their mothers. So if and what parts of themselves children feel free to express, that links to their mothers (when they are the main care-takers).

I am more interested in the general reaction to a dark/light wedding. Is it seen as a scandal or are people accepting? Has the Avery family given a reaction? Is any of the three women pregnant already?

Yours truly, Gren

Dear Gren,

the general reaction was one of amusement at the apparent scandal. It has now come out that there is no scandal and the Avery family is not disinheriting their son. They released a statement that their culture is one of purity of blood - but that it is also a fact that too close relations do not bode well for children. If intermarriage with light wizards is a possibility to protect their line, they would rather choose it than to intermingle with Mudbloods. They actually believed us and still made an anti-Muggle agenda out of it. I have to admit that I am boiling with anger. How can one be so blind?

That is what I expect from dark wizards. They take your support and stab you in the back for it. Jonathan is telling me that the Bones family basically did the same – rather marry a dark wizard than more Muggle-borns – still ... they did not throw it in everyone's face. What makes me mad is the blatant hatred that they spew. Everyone has prejudices and irrational grudges but decent people – what I see as decent people at least – don't force their opinion on you. So Jonathan tells me I am doing the same. That I blatantly favor Muggle-borns and Gryffindors. He is right and I am trying to judge fairly. Both of you are right that children are not responsible for the actions of their parents. If they spew racist and bigot opinions, it's their parents that are to blame. I will only teach them by being an example, not by suppressing them. I learned that now, I am trying my best to live it. But inside of me, I am boiling with anger sometimes. Jonathan is really good at expelling those resentments but I am not yet enough of a sage to simply let all of it go.

On a positive note, both Mrs. Crabbe and Mrs. Goyle announced their pregnancies. I wish both them and us the best of luck with those pregnancies. If those children prove to be more intelligent, less clumsy and more magically potent than their late ancestors – which really shouldn't be hard – it will be a huge step towards introducing our theories. I don't think I ever thought about heterosexual people having sex and actively cheering them on this much.

Did you notice that I sound a lot more sarcastic than before? Minerva pointed it out to me. I think Jonathan might have an influence on me, now that we spend so much time together. I noticed that before – before you, before his change of heart, before this second spring of my life – I always held myself back. I feared what he could do with my emotions. It's different now. Jonathan is trustworthy, not only in his own actions but with my heart. Again, I cannot thank you enough. I never thought something like this could be possible between two men. My own prejudice held me back from trusting my partner with my feelings.

My thoughts are running away from me, I apologize. So after the Avery statement, the

reaction was drastic. Some purebloods were highly offended and called the Averys traitors, others were supportive. A lot of light families have pressured the Bones family, most of them thinking that they were blinded by evil people. It's the topic everyone is talking about. Even the students are discussing the ethics of this marriage. Most light families are openly against it. They are offended by the Avery family's statement. The dark families are rather ambivalent. The more traditional ones snub the Averys, some more open ones haven't issued any opinions. It seems like a few people are simply waiting to see where this goes, treating them like guinea pigs. It is a mix of many different reactions and I pity the young couple that are under a lot of scrutiny now. Apparently, their marriage was actually one of love. Let's hope it can withstand the pressure society places them under.

I hope I have answered sufficiently, I feel like my mind is all over the place right now.

Yours truly, Albus

"Do you really have to leave?" Tom sounded like a small child asking for candy, knowing exactly how to trick an adult into giving into their whims. It was dinner and still a few days from Jonathan's last but somehow, it ended up as the topic.

"I need a formal education." Jonathan sighed, sounded exactly as reluctant. "Just like you have to go to school again next week, I have to do my degree."

"Can't you do it from here? You could go to work every morning, just like we go to school. Then we'd have the evenings and weekends."

"My job isn't exactly one that you can just leave from and come back the next day." Both looked exactly as miserable as the other. "There are ... concoctions that need tending to even at night. It's a live-in position."

"Can you at least visit?" Tom was pouting by now.

"I'll definitely come for your birthday, okay?"

"That's half a year away!"

"I know." Jonathan sighed, not even pretending to eat anymore. "It's not like I want to leave, okay? But I need that degree. It's three years, maybe two and a half if the master isn't into arrogance and can live with the fact that I am actually good at what I do."

"By that time, I'll go to a boarding school and I won't be able to be visited. In three years time, I'll change schools to that special school dad found for me."

"I know, Tom." Jonathan's shoulders slumped. "I really enjoyed my time here. I don't want to leave. But to progress, I need to get my formal degree. In this world, people only respect you when you have papers to prove your skills. I know I would pass the exam if I had to do it now with a blindfold and one arm tied behind my back but no one cares if I don't have the papers."

"That's unfair!"

"Life is unfair." He raked a hand through his hair. "I can't believe I am saying that. It's nothing one should just accept, isn't it? But it's true. I don't have a school degree, I don't have an apprenticeship certificate, I am basically on the level of a school dropout."

Well, he was a dropout. A very intelligent dropout but without any degree all the same.

"It doesn't matter that you are a better chemist than most others out there?"

"No. It's why you go to school and do your best to finish it. Papers open doors, not your skills. That's seldom what people ask for."

Brea supported the poor Jonathan: "It's true, Tom. All of us are blessed that Gren supports all of us in going to school. It's a gift. Our degrees will open doors for us, everyone will be able to choose their jobs. With Howard's mom working in our factory, all of us will be able to get degrees as seamstresses as well. We will not only have school degrees but will also be certified workers. You get a lot more money with such degrees."

Harry turned to her: "I want you to be able to choose if you like your work or want to do something else. I also want you able to choose your husbands carefully, not having to rely on men. Jonathan is blessed to be born into money, otherwise he would be dependent on his boyfriend. That is never a good basis for a healthy relationship."

Tom sighed, his arms crossed in front of his chest, and said: "I still don't like the fact that he has to leave for his degree."

"I'll miss you too." Jonathan put a hand on the raven hair.

The boy just scoffed, though he did not object to the statement. "Who will make soap and candles and perfume now? Who will make candy with me? And the special stuff we did?"

"You'll learn it in school. I'll also sent all of those other things, okay? When I visit, we can make something."

"You promise?"

"Of course." They shook pinkies. "And you can write. I'll answer your letters. You can sent me the Mug-, err, the books from here that you like and I'll sent you my favorites. I can even sent some schoolbooks in advance and we can discuss them via letter."

"It's a promise."

Harry just smiled, proudly watching his son having his first real crisis since discussing his family. The first time actually losing someone, letting go of someone that he held dear. It was great to see how attached he had become. The boy that had been unable to form connections actually stated openly that he would miss another human. It boded well for them.

That was without focusing on Jonathan, the man that had come an even longer way. Mary wanted to keep him as well and they also promised letters to one another. Harry had no doubt that this was a good thing. He trusted Tom enough to come to him if there was something strange in the letters. Even if not, he would discuss it with Mary and Mary would go to Brea and Brea would come to him.

It was time to let Jonathan go. Only two and a half days to go. Everything was arranged, his trunk packed up. Of course, that did not better Tom's temper. It was something he would have to do by himself. Harry would be there for the tears that would follow without question. Still, it was an experience he was glad for his son to have.

"How would you like to spend your last days here?," Harry asked Jonathan.

"Depends ... if Tom is up to it, he is right that we should stock up on perfumes and candles and all the other stuff we did."

"Can I help?," Mary asked them.

Jonathan looked at Tom questioningly. The boy just mumbled something into his non-existent beard that sounded vaguely positive. Harry told them to go all out and buy ingredients to their heart's content. Soap and candles did not go bad anyway. He could do without the perfume the girls liked on him, but as long as they were happy, he could relent.

He knew that Brea and Margret already planned a farewell feast because they had asked him to invite Dumbledore as a surprise. He wished everyone was magical, so

they could conjure up some instruments – they would have to make do with the radio. Jonathan could ask his boyfriend to a dance, Harry could ask Edgar, everyone would be happy. Except for birthdays, they never had feasts just for themselves. Even then, they never danced. They just sung sometimes.

Harry missed the exuberant feasts they had with the Weasleys. Singing, dancing, often pranking one another. There was always someone looking after the children, so they could get drunk and laugh so loudly that the ghoul began to howl. Sighing at the memories, he knew that he missed having peers. Just people to drink with. Go to a pub and have fun for a while.

Would Edgar be able to overlook his history with Gren? Because he was the only one Harry would go out with. Neither Dumbledore nor Jonathan were people he wanted to see drunk – or to be drunk in front of. Edgar was alright. The worst that could happen was some drunken kissing back home. Maybe he should ask that sometime after Jonathan was gone.

Certainly after the part where Tom would not sleep well and end up in either one of their beds.

"So? How many nights were you awoken by Tom?," Harry asked when the two men were sitting in his study together.

Edgar just smiled and shook his head. "The sneaky kid doesn't wake me anymore. I simply awaken with a cuddly boy in my arms."

"Not the worst way to wake."

The other man just smiled.

"How does he cope with Jonathan's leave? He does not talk to me about it."

"He still cries at night. Mostly, he thinks he is not waking me, so I do not react."

Harry just sighed. "You think he'll be alright?"

"He's a tough kid. He'll be fine."

"I worry about the tough part. He does not have to cry at night all by himself. It's okay to miss someone. I don't want him to feel like he has to hide."

Edgar nodded slowly. "Do you think I should react?"

"He does not want to be alone but he is also ashamed ... just make clear that there is no shame in crying."

"Sure." Edgar snorted and changed his tone. "You cry so much, it's easy to learn that you can express weaknesses in this house."

Harry just blinked in surprise. "I ... don't think you ever used sarcasm on me before."

The other man just rolled his eyes.

"Sorry ... you are right. I don't like my role as the infallible role-model either."

Edgar blinked in surprise.

"I wanted to ask you about that, just ... after. I mean, once Tom is better. I know you have bad memories with Gren getting drunk, I just miss being buzzed and stupid sometimes ... I would really like to go drinking with you. Just a few beers. Have fun in a pub, sing songs, just the stuff men do with their free evenings sometimes."

"You ... want to get drunk and stupid with me?" Edgar blinked before grinning. "You are actually tired of being a responsible adult?"

"Just for a night. An evening. Being an adult is really hard sometimes. With Jonathan around, I always had to be on my toes. With you, I can ... relax for once."

"Sounds lovely." The grin wouldn't fade. "Don't worry, it does not remind me of Gren. You definitely aren't a drunkard. Don't worry."

"Thank Merlin, I was really worried. I did not want to remind you of bad things." Harry

let go of the breath he had been holding in. "So, I need to show more insecurities in everyday life?"

"Well, I don't know ... you are like this perfect marble bust. Admirable but not affable. Approachable in a way but only for advise, not to share feelings with. You are too perfect sometimes. I am not sure if that is a good or a bad thing. Tom does seem to do well with it but when he is sad or lonely, he comes to me."

"I always thought that this was how it should be. You are his other parent after all."

Edgar blinked for a moment before he blushed. Not even slightly but profusely. Even his ears turned red, just like Ron's when he was asked about Hermione after the final battle. It had stuck because it had been the first good feeling he had after a long while. Watching Ron blush had been ... a feeling like everything could be right again. Some kind of hope.

Edgar's blush was different. It held no hope, it held happiness. An unexpected happiness, an unexpected kindness. His voice was only a whisper: "You meant that?"

"Of course. You are much more in tune with him. You are not someone he wants to impress. I don't think he would come to me even if I showed more weaknesses. It's not how we work. He wants my respect, my acknowledgment. Now that I think about it, I am a lot like one of those pureblood parents I normally despise."

Edgar snorted.

"You should call me Arcturus Malfoy." Harry lifted his glass for a toast, not to Edgar but to some imaginary person in the room. "God, you are right, now I feel like a jerk."

"Sorry, that wasn't the intention."

"It's how children like Tom are often brought up and I know that it works ... still, it's not something to copy. Why did I fall into that trap?"

"Maybe you spend too much time at those stuffy places." Edgar smiled indulgently.

"Definitely. I need that drink soon." He sipped his whisky. "I'll try to be more human and you start acknowledging Tom's tears. As soon as he is feeling well enough to sleep in his own bed, we'll go out for drinks, alright?"

"Sounds like a plan." They grinned at one another. "I like to see you relax again."

"We did a good thing with Jonathan but it was a strain."

"You never let that on either."

"Oh, he would have pounced on it at first."

Edgar laughed.

Harry raised one hand and made some clawing motions.

"I like you when you are silly."

"It's my natural state." Not when he looked after dangerous criminals and tried to save the wizarding world single-handedly. "I really need to cut back on the serious stuff."

"Obviously." The other man shook his head. "It's only some years until the next war. Let's enjoy them. No more politics. That can wait until after."

"I'll continue on the wizarding front but you are right that non-wizarding politics can be left until later." Could it? Jonathan had the right idea. When confronted with something new, something unbelievable, it was helpful if people had an idea how to deal with unexpected stuff. Something other than accusing, blaming and condemning others. Something different than hate. Maybe this was exactly the time they shouldn't miss.

Was living through World War II the right idea or was this actually the time he should be politically active? Could he stop the war? Would it be a good idea to stop the war or even parts of it? He had been so sure before. Could he be sure? He had changed the

fate of the wizarding world without second thought but decided to not change the Muggle one. Why? On what basis did he make such a decision? Or was the basis simply that it seemed too much work?

The wizarding world was actually a small community, at least the British one. He knew it well. He knew how to work it, that was the most important part. He had lived through it, saw it. Hermione had single-handedly changed so much, he had always admired her for that. But he had also made fun of her, told her to relax, to give herself time. Would she have been able to change as much if she had been as laid-back as he was now? No. Even now, he was reaping the fruits of her work. If she had been here instead of him, she would have already found a way to prevent the war, make the necessary changes in people's opinions without death and destruction. So much pain, so much fear and suffering was about to happen because he felt overwhelmed with finding a better way to bring about the same burning desire for peace and quiet.

"Why do people so often chose violence first, what do you think?", Harry asked into the silence.

"Because talking with your fists is easier than actual talking." Edgar shrugged his shoulders. "People don't know better ... no, it's what people are used to." He suddenly sat up, his eyes alight with joy. "You know what was the first thing that made me really doubt that you were Gren?"

It wasn't the totally unbelievable amnesia story?

"When I came here, you were still teaching the kids yourself. Remember how I sometimes sat in on class? One day, Tom was really grumpy. Bad sleep, I don't remember, anyway, he was talking back at you. He called the lesson stupid and unnecessary and dumb and whatnot, he really was a little shit. Every teacher I know would have hit him and sent him to do manual labor or something. You asked him what he wanted to be, to which he answered that he wanted to be a lord and command around his servants. Everyone was annoyed at that point, I think Brea was very close to screaming at him. You simply asked why he thought that anyone would follow his commands. You were really nice about it, you weren't even annoyed while all the others were seething. Tom answered that he would have money to pay his servants with. So you asked where he would get the money and that seemed to be the point where he actually noticed the looks everyone was giving him. You just told him that you would not give him money if he behaved that disrespectfully towards other humans." Edgar smiled while remembering. "You know, now that I know you, that seems completely normal. But back then, I was blown away by the fact that you actually talked it out – in class! – except for just punishing him. I realized that how we treat our kids has a huge impact on what adults they'll be. And I don't mean the big things but the everyday things. Not hitting your child, okay, I knew some people did it like that. But talking sensibly, discussing things, sometimes asking their input, even humoring their silly, unrealistic ideas. You never had to preach how a human should behave, you simply did it and everyone copied you. Violence is unnecessary. One learns that simply by interacting with you."

Harry just blinked in astonishment.

"When I finally noticed, I knew you were definitely not Gren. He was your polar opposite. When tactics did not work, he maimed or killed people."

"I do as well." Though sad, it was the truth. "When a madman killed my friends and went after me, I killed him. I did not try to talk it out with him."

"For revenge or for protection? If others would have been safe without him being dead, would you have killed him?"

"Of course not!" It's not like he wanted to be a killer.

"Yeah ... that's what makes you a good human while Gren and me weren't. We would have killed him regardless. You have a quality that we both lacked: Forgiveness."

"Don't be so melodramatic, Edgar. You forgave me for taking Gren from you. That's not exactly an eating-one-of-your-favorite-pastries-level of guilt and forgiveness."

"It's not like you did it intentionally."

"Yeah? How do you know? Only because we talked it out. Only because you understood my involvement, how your suffering came about and heard my feelings on the matter. That's how forgiveness works."

Edgar scoffed. "You think I would have been able to do that without watching you for half a year?"

"Well ... maybe?"

"Most definitely not. I would have debated shooting you, strangling you to death or simply beating the brain out of your skull, even knowing that it was Gren's body. If he wasn't coming back, I would never have allowed you a hair on his head. I would have killed and buried that body because it was mine."

Was he for real? Harry had expected anger and desperation – but killing intent?

"Then I would have shot myself on his grave." Edgar shrugged as if he was telling a folly of his youth. "So ... thanks for teaching me emotional and communicative skills. I think humanity is still lacking that and that's why we rather bash each other's heads in."

"Huh ... emotional and communicative skills ... do we really have to go to war and kill millions of humans for people to realize how important that is?"

"Most likely not but you are asking the wrong person for a better idea."

"Globalization helped. Books, films and stories about other people. Trying to think yourself into others, trying to understand their motivation. Learning about different cultures. Not thinking of people as enemies or unimportant but as neighbors. People that you want to learn about. Curiosity. I think curiosity is the key to becoming a better person."

Edgar just looked at him in interest.

"The biggest thread to curiosity is fear. So how is a war going to change anything? War brings about fear."

"When I asked you, you told me that the war would be horrible on an unimaginable scale. So people might ask themselves how it came to it. How it happened. How it could get so out of control."

"But why didn't that happen in the wizarding world? Gellert Grindelwald killed so many people. Still, people look up to him and mourn his loss. He was more destructive than what came after him. But the bad guy afterwards, that made people change. He killed a lot less but he had more impact. So why? How could Grindelwald not change a single thing and the other remade so many laws?"

Edgar stayed quiet for a moment, then asked: "You know what I hated most about Jonathan?"

"That he got his fairytale ending?"

"Well, that too." Edgar rolled his eyes. "No, actually, it was the fact that he was pretty likable for a mass-murderer. I think that all of them act because they believe in something. They all state some kind of pretty reason to justify their murders. Protect their home, their country, their people, their way of life, their monarchy, their democracy, get more resources, more space, something, something. Afterwards, you can say that the idea was nice but the methods were wrong. Gellert didn't fight

because he had a cooked up solution and wanted everyone to support it. He pointed out flaws and risks, he wanted people to come up with solutions. People didn't like to hear what he had to say and they attacked him for it. Sure, he didn't only defend himself. He proposed killing Muggles until another solution was found. He just never denied that he could be wrong. He wasn't a fanatic. He wanted people to stop living in the past and think that their old methods would protect them forever. He's not exactly someone you can hate as an atrocious monster or a misguided soul afterwards."

"Here you're telling me you have problems with forgiveness..."

"Well, killing people, threatening governments and annihilating everyone sent after you, he was still wrong in his methods. In the end, he killed wizards and Muggles alike, trying to change people, and failed miserably." Edgar sighed deeply. "With most fanatics, the people following are the ones that profit or at least believe to profit from the proposed solution. Gellert didn't really have a solution. Collect strong wizards, kill Muggles. It's not a very thought-out plan. So I like the fact that he never stated this would be the plan everyone had to follow."

"It seems you talked to him."

"Well, at some point I got the whole "Get interested in your enemies and broaden your worldview"-thing."

"Sadly, a lot of people believe that was the plan. So masses of people still support him even today and call for the annihilation of Muggles." They shared a moment of silence. "The guy after him went farther. Annihilation of Muggles and Muggle-borns. He made people register, planning to kill them off systematically. But he was suddenly a villain and everyone changed. I don't get it."

"Who stayed in power? Who told the story? What did the press write?"

So the narrative was the important thing? Not what actually happened? Could it be that the press was actually the one in power of changing everyone? Harry remembered Rita Skeeter for a moment and suddenly had a clear vision why the wizarding world was doomed for a long time.

Hermione had never stopped having that woman dance to her tune. She had used her again and again. Others had been recruited through other means, oftentimes bribery. Harry had sometimes wondered how an idealist like her could be so unscrupulous at times. He had asked her once and her answer had only been "I learned from SPEW."

She had known that her visions were unpopular. So she had made them popular by getting the press on her side. In some desperate cases, she had used Harry, making him hold a speech or posing for some photos. It wasn't something he could plan and execute. Maybe after the war ... maybe he could become a voice for peace, a bid to end bloodshed. Writing wasn't his forte but maybe he could inspire others.

"You taught me not to go with the first feeling that came up. Journalists can channel those feelings. I guess they play a huge role in what people think in the end."

There were ripped from their musings by a faint knocking on the study door. Harry called in whoever it was and wasn't surprised seeing his son in pajamas. Edgar extended his hand and Tom went to him.

"You weren't in your bed", said an accusatory voice.

"Sorry, we were up and talking."

"What about?" The anger drained from his voice and made way for sleepiness.

"How we miss Jonathan."

Tom scoffed and snuggled up on Edgar's lap. "You're glad he's gone."

"True. I found him annoying. But he wasn't all bad. I'm glad you made a friend."

"You're lying."

Edgar poked the little one's cheek. "Why would I?"

"You don't want me to get angry."

"Sure." Edgar smiled. "You're an intimidating little warrior and I quake in fear before your might." A kiss to the head was added. "I wasn't lying. I just disliked him more than I liked him. It doesn't mean there weren't good things about him."

"Like what?"

"Like how happy he made you."

"Hmpf." Tom closed his eyes, his voice a mere whisper. "I miss him."

"I know, kid." Edgar tightened his grip. "There's a lot of people in my life that I miss as well. At least you'll see him again."

"Will I?"

"Why wouldn't you?"

"He's an adult. Maybe he'll just forget about me."

"I doubt it, he really likes you. He'll be here for Christmas, I'm sure. If not, we can go crash his workplace and tell his boss that he's a slave-driver to keep someone away from his friends on Christmas."

Tom chuckled. "Really?"

"Well, we'll need the help of Mister Dumbledore, do you think he'd help?"

"He does what's best for Jonathan."

"Then he'll let us meet. Friends are a good thing. You are at least, me maybe not so much."

"Hm ... Edgar, why do you dislike Jonathan?" It was such a sad voice, it spurred Harry into motion.

He went over to the couch and took both of them into his arms.

The other man just sighed but seemed to decide to be honest. "I am jealous of him. He did so many bad things and still got a second chance and a wonderful boyfriend. So instead of looking for a boyfriend, I am childishly angry at him."

Tom looked up in fright. "Would you leave if you found a boyfriend?"

"What? No!" Edgar had leaned back against Harry, his head resting next to his. "I am not leaving. I am not even looking for a boyfriend. Don't worry."

Tom's gaze flitted to Harry who nodded. His tiny hands took Harry's arm and laid it over Edgar's chest. This time, his question was directed at Harry. "Promise?"

"No one is leaving until you'll go to school." He secured his arm around Edgar and could feel that one's cheek heating against his own.

Tom observed them and nodded after a moment. "Okay, I believe you."

"Right. Bed?" Harry raised his eyebrows in a rather suggestive way.

Edgar just squeaked.

Tom grinned and nodded.

"Up we go then."

Kapitel 24: Twenty-fourth chapter

Dear Gren,

my dear old friend Rasmus tells me that Jonathan is the worst pupil he ever had. A genius at brewing, a horror at following rules. With every order, every rule put before him, Jonathan seems to want an explanation as to why he should follow it. Rasmus says that they have screaming matches at least four times a day. Jonathan himself tells me that it's mostly Rasmus screaming at him and Jonathan ignoring him. I fear Rasmus is reaching the end of his rope, so I advised Jonathan to lay low but he seems incapable of doing so. The only thing I hear is how incompetent Rasmus is. I don't want Jonathan to lose his apprenticeship, I know he would hate himself for it. Also, what would he do then? I can't have him live with me, can I? Gren, I really have no idea how to continue. Could you talk to him before the situation gets unsalvageable?

On the front of our project, Mrs. Avery has announced a pregnancy as well. All three women pregnant in less than half a year, that is an amazing result in itself. So I wasn't surprised to get a letter from Malfoy asking to meet another pureblood circle. It seems that other families began to ask questions, everyone sent them to the Malfoys and now we have a new audience. Less desperate, more prone to critical thinking as well as outright discrimination against you. I am sure you will want to see this through, I just want you to know that it could turn out to be a much more difficult meeting than the last one. I have to give it to Malfoy, at least he behaved himself. I do not expect the same from people like Cruella Black and Edward Westwood. Anyway, I'll try arrange a meeting somewhere in February, does that suit you?

Yours sincerely, Albus

Jonathan got his Christmas leave without problem. Actually, he got the whole December off and was told to come back with another attitude. So Harry agreed to take him in again. At least Tom was ecstatic about it and claimed Jonathan for himself upon arrival. The older man didn't seem to mind at all. He actually told everyone at dinner that he was happy to be home again.

Home. Harry realized this was the first time Jonathan ever had something like that. His so called parents sent him to Russia at eleven years old, the school threw him out, his aunt took him in for half a year and then he became a public enemy at seventeen years old. The poor man was over fifty and had a home and friends for the first time in his life. Emphasis on the fact that his only real friend was a nearly nine-year-old boy. Harry was not a friend at this point, more like a probation officer.

So if Jonathan actually lost his apprenticeship ... he would want to come back, wouldn't he? Albus could not let him live in the school. Buying him a house somewhere might also be dangerous, Jonathan needed company, not a new kind of imprisonment. Also, the man could not be kept to producing soap and perfume. Giving him a free pass to brew everything he wanted sounded dangerous as well though. Albus was right that Harry should do his best in convincing Jonathan to change his behavior.

His first idea was to ask Jonathan to practice necromancy – a dark art Harry was definitely incapable of – and summon the ghost of Severus Snape to ask how he

managed to get his own potion's degree without killing off his master. Could one summon ghosts from the future? Now that the timeline was already altered, could Severus Snape's ghost actually be summoned? Most likely not, even if Harry had been serious about the necromancy stuff.

So, he needed another solution. Sadly, his next thought was resurrecting Salazar Slytherin. Seemed like all of this would not exactly be a walk in the park. Hm ... if Albus – his son, not the headmaster – had been old enough to finish school and then showed the same behavior in his apprenticeship ... well, Harry would have sent him to Hermione. Merlin, why was his answer to everything Hermione? Alright, what would Hermione have done? She would have tried to understand the problem first – obviously, it was the fact that Jonathan knew a lot more about potions than this Rasmus guy, so they got into a power struggle. The easiest way would be to explain to this Rasmus guy how to live authority instead of enforcing it. Most teachers had some kind of curriculum and their pupils either followed it or had to leave. It was actually hard for most teachers to adapt to individual needs. But once you could, there was no need to assert authority by rules and punishments.

Sadly, it did not seem like the guy wanted to change, he wanted Jonathan gone at this point and Dumbledore was the only thing stopping Rasmus from kicking his pupil out. So how to get Jonathan to follow a curriculum that was boring him to death? Telling him to suck it up wasn't going to cut it. It might have worked with Lily but James and Albus would have been too headstrong to stand three years of enduring a hellish apprenticeship.

How about summoning Remus's ghost and asking him how James Potter and Sirius Black kept themselves from being thrown out? On the other hand, that might have had to do with having filthy rich parents. Oh well, nothing for it. Summoning ghosts to one's help wasn't going to happen. How could he make this apprenticeship interesting in any way?

Hm ... there was one person alive that he could ask: "Tom?"

"Yes, dad?"

"Has Jonathan told you about his apprenticeship?"

"Yeah, he says it's boring as hell and his master is an incompetent idiot with an inflated ego."

"Lovely." How to save this? "See ... the problem is that he makes no secret of his opinion. He is antagonizing his master every which way. If he continues like that, he'll lose the apprenticeship and won't get another. He'll stay unemployed and will have to live off Dumbledore's money which ... is most likely not the best of solutions. He'll basically be homeless and poor."

"But he can live with us, can't he?"

"For a time, sure. Not forever." How much time would he give the guy? Another six months? Honestly, Harry didn't want to. Edgar and him had just reached equilibrium again.

"Oh ... can't he live with Albus?"

"If Albus gives up his job as headmaster, yes. Honestly, you're the only kid I trust him to be around."

"Why?" Tom's eyes widened. "He's not doing anything bad, isn't he?"

How to explain that one? "How many times was Mary your voice of reason? How many times were you unsure if you could tell Mary about your plans because you knew she would disapprove? Now imagine it wasn't Mary but me discussing those things with you." Was that enough of an explanation? Tom looked so unhappy. "Listen, I am not

saying he is evil. He is trying his best. But changing is a slow process and even though he does his best, it takes time and opportunity. What he is doing with his master right now, that's not his old self, true. It's still far from optimal."

"Well, should he just smile and happily accept that he has to listen to someone has no clue what he is doing half of the time?"

Well, should he? Certainly not. Hermione might say yes but Harry was definitely no Hermione. "No, not at all. But correcting someone by being mean and condescending will only lead to anger and frustration. One can be smart about it."

Tom cocked his head. "So ... what can one do instead?"

"Well, what would you do if you wanted to correct me in front of a lot of important adults and would not want me to lose face?" Because Harry had an inkling but actually, Tom most likely had an answer.

"I ask questions, so you come up with the answer yourself."

Thank god for this boy. "Exactly right. Same with an adult that would never listen to you if you just presented him with the answer. If someone would never accept your opinion, you ask them questions and manipulate them into taking your position. That's how you get smart in dealing with difficult adults."

"Huh ... that makes sense. It's what I do with our French teacher."

"You're learning French?" When had that happened?

"Oui. I asked Jonathan to teach me German as well and I took French in school. Jonathan also got me a book on Latin. Once I master those languages, I want to learn Russian next. Languages are pretty cool."

Harry groaned. "I am so happy I sent you to school. You're not even nine and already too smart for me to handle."

"You have those people-smart skills I still have to learn."

Harry just picked the boy up and hugged him. Somehow, he was sure Tom already had most of those people-skills, he just did not use them consciously.

"Do you want me to talk to Jonathan about his apprenticeship?"

"That's an adult's job, Tom."

"Yeah, but it will be easier to accept for him if it comes from me."

Somehow, the boy was getting too heavy to carry for long, so Harry put him down again. "Still, it should not be on your shoulders. Let me be the bad guy and you can calm him down if my scolding goes sideways."

"Alright." Tom continued the hug anyway, just in a standing position. "Can you talk to him tomorrow though? We wanted to ... actually, I can't tell you, we'll be in the kitchen tonight for a surprise."

"Good surprise?"

"I would not tell you if it wasn't." Tom grinned impishly.

Harry scoffed, pat his son's head and said: "Love you, son. Don't do too many things I wouldn't do."

"Don't worry!" With that, Tom dashed off.

The older man just smiled and remembered how James had said the exact same ... before crashing a broom into the neighbor's living room. Oh well. At least his kids didn't kill off people at eleven years old. Seems like he did something right here.

They got pralines, the finest chocolate, for Christmas. They as in Edgar and Harry, both of them quite speechless over the treat. After all kinds of sweets, maybe they shouldn't have been as surprised but chocolate was not exactly a common ingredient for normal folks. Rich ones, sure – Jonathan must have paid for it.

With his own money. First paycheck and he used it to buy chocolate to make gifts for Harry and Edgar together with Tom. It might have been a while but Harry remembered how it was to earn money for the first time. He had also bought chocolate – though those had been ready-made – and gifted them to Ginny. Still, this was unexpected and due to his various talks with Tom, he knew that they had made them before Jonathan learned how to keep his apprenticeship. Including Edgar was even more thoughtful.

All in all, Harry decided that a hug was in order. So he got one stiff, emotionally overwhelmed human in his arms and an extra one wriggling in and grinning at them from the height slightly beneath their armpits. Kids really grew too fast.

Harry had gifted both of them a new potion's inventory with masses of ingredients. He still wanted Tom to use ready-made stuff instead of going out and catching frogs to slice them up on his own. Gellert didn't understand but at least he accepted the explanation that hurting animals diminished your emphatic response and made it harder to react to humans with kindness and understanding. Another rather secret gift was the toy-broom. Buying that one had been a bit nerve-wracking. Harry had crossed his fingers, hoping that the inherent magic would allow Muggles to ride a broom but no – he would have to teach Tom the theory and leave practice to Jonathan. He would try if he could command a broom if Tom sat on it too, but high chance was that flying was out for him. To have something under the Christmas tree, he had bought more books. French and German story books for children. Jonathan had helped him with that and spend the next hours reading fairy-tales. One of his caretakers had read stories to him as a child but for some kind of mishap, his parents had blasted her head off. He just remembered that he liked her and the stories, so Tom's gift had actually first went to him. Harry had asked him to translate a story for him and seriously debated not giving Tom the books afterwards. Who came up with such gruesome stories for children? They were all about death, blood and vengeance. No wonder that people turned to violence.

Anyway, Christmas was great. Dumbledore visited on Tom's birthday for lunch – the other meals were taken with all those kids in school that had no home or family. It was something new that he had established. Kids could stay even in the holiday time if they so wished. The staff had been overwhelmed though because a quarter of the kids decided to stay. Harry just pointed out that if a child would rather spend a festivity at school than at home, it might be a good idea to ask them why. Some might just be poor, some might not have a family, but high chance was that some of these kids were mistreated at home.

Not even a week later, Dumbledore dragged Jonathan and Edgar into Harry's study with a grim expression and announced: "I need help."

Oh well. Maybe today was the day where he would run out of answers. They all took a seat of the couch and the lounge chairs.

"Now, how do I say this? So ... I took your advice. I started with Minerva. You know Professor McGonagall?" Dumbledore waited for a short nod. "Yes, so ... I told her that some of the kids might be staying because of unfortunate home situations and bade her to ask them about it. Some of those kids were quite forthcoming about it. They talked about violence due to bad grades, having to work around the house and being forbidden from meeting friends. None of it sounded too bad but still, I am not sure how to proceed."

"Well, first of all, be aware that only those talk that think that their parent's behavior

is normal and allowed. Those that are heavily mistreated will lie about their home situations. They were drilled not to speak badly of their parents."

Dumbledore looked at Jonathan who shrugged his shoulders and said: "I am not a good example here, my parents behaved normally for kids going to Durmstrang. The teachers acted upon the principle action and reaction. If someone broke the rules, they were heavily punished."

Harry explained: "The better your relationship to your child is, the less severe punishment has to be. Durmstrang is known for housing a lot of unbonded, traumatized children. So what is normal in Durmstrang would most likely be frowned upon at Hogwarts. So the children coming from similar backgrounds as Jonathan will not talk about their home-situations at your school while they would feel free to do so at Durmstrang." Like Harry had done. Like Neville had done. Like Luna ... even today, Harry was still amazed how teachers were able to overlook how strange she had been and never wondered if it might have to do with trauma. Same with Neville. Harry's behavior might not have raised a red flag but his state of starvation every summer? But as Dumbledore had just stated, Minerva had been a teacher from this era. Violence, hunger and neglect had been normal in her day and age. She had never learned better.

"So those accounts that made me frown ... those are the ones that actually have still good home situations?"

Harry just nodded. "Not as good as those going back home – partly – but yes. Those with really bad home situations will only tell you about it if they trust you can help them without endangering them, their parents or their siblings. If being taken out of your family is the only option, most children will not talk about their home situation."

"What's that part about those going back home?," Jonathan asked when Dumbledore stayed silent.

"Kids are aware that staying in school is a tell-tale sign that something might be wrong at home. So especially kids like some of your Slytherins will go home to abusive situations to keep up the facade. Those are kids that neither trust you nor will they ever tell you how horrifyingly they are mistreated."

"But ... that would mean ... I mean ... it cannot be that many, can it?" Dumbledore's eyes seemed pained.

"Depends on your definition of mistreatment. Look at this house, look at my kids. How many of your students grow up without physical or sexual violence, without being called names, without being accused of things that aren't actually their fault? In my time, mistreatment often consisted of overworked parents that used emotional violence. They told their children that due to their actions, due to their not being obedient enough or good enough or smart enough, the parents suffered and the family couldn't function. In reality, the parents were overwhelmed and the kids were just being kids, trying to fit their own desires into a place that could not cater to their emotional demands. In this day and age, people would scoff at such a problem because that's what happens to like ninety percent of the children at least. So my and your definition of mistreatment have to be vastly different. You can start with trying to stop sexual violence and diminishing physical violence. For me though, that's a given."

Edgar nodded, Jonathan seemed deep in thought and Dumbledore looked shattered. It took nearly a minute until he found his voice and asked: "How?"

"Well ... first of all, people need to be aware that it is actually a problem. I have no idea what the wizarding law on sexual violence is ... I know a bit about the Muggle

one, let me see if I remember it correctly." He tried to recall some of Hermione's impassioned speeches on the subject. "So the Jewish community was – as far as we know – the first to pass laws against sexual violence. About two thousand years before Christ, they passed a law which made sleeping with a girl under two years of age illegal. That's because most girls were damaged by the act, so the perpetrator had to pay money to the girl's father. If she was above two years of age, the perpetrator had to marry her."

All three men listening looked at him with various expressions of horror.

"Somewhere around the time of Christ, it was upped to five years of age. Later, it became twelve. That's around the time of Merlin."

"Are people crazy?" Edgar stared at him in horror. "I knew that girls are married off against their will but only after they had their period. Who marries off girls as children?"

"If a girl is married, her husband has to pay for her living expenses. Marrying a girl off at a young age meant less costs. Also, the law was meant to instill the idea that sleeping with a young girl was wrong. Problem was that mostly it wasn't strangers raping a girl, it was their father or brother. So the marrying-off-law did not exactly help most of the time. If a father raped his daughter, he had to pay for her anyway. So in the twelfth century, they came up with an idea how to protect young girls."

"Good Lord." Edgar shook his head.

"Yes, that one. The bible stated that Mary was a young girl when she gave birth to Jesus Christ. So they changed the bible in the twelfth century to now state that Mary had been a virgin when she gave birth. It does not make sense, seeing as she was married, but it worked anyway. They used religion to tell families that girls needed to be virgins at the age of marriage which was twelve and later became fourteen. It was meant to protect girls. It backfired though because instead of instilling fear in men of godly retribution, it lead to blaming the girls that they had been unable to protect their purity. Similar things happened in African and some Arabic cultures where girl's genitals were sewn up in childhood and cut open by their husbands on the night of their marriage. If a girl with ruptured sutures was found, she was blamed, not her rapist."

Well, all three men listening looked ready to puke at this point. Harry remembered his own horror, hearing it all for the first time.

"So ... any idea what the wizarding community tried to do to protect their girls?" Most likely not, another thanks to his best friend for uncovering cryptic legislation. "No? Thought not. There was a ruling in 1478 when a girl killed her father with accidental magic when he tried to rape her. She was branded as a black witch and given to the inquisition who burned her at the stake. Again, her magic reacted to save her which ended in a fire taking hundreds of lives, hers included. It led to a law that said that abused children had volatile magic and should be sent out as living missiles against enemies. After the Statute of Secrecy, that law was remade and said that they should be eliminated. That law was abolished in 1821 when a pureblood girl from the Abbott family was raped by a Muggle. No other cases of sexual abuse have ever been reported in wizarding history."

"Oh Lord," Edgar reiterated. "Please tell me that there are current laws against sexual abuse."

"Our great country invented that in 1828, yes." Only six years after they invented laws against mistreatment of animals – as Hermione liked to remind them. "Though you have to know that it is a general law against rape. The first law specifically targeting

the rape and sexual exploit of children is forty years into the future."

"That's ... I don't even have words for that. How is that possible?"

"Have any of you ever heard about Siegmund Freud?" Hopefully, he hadn't mangled that name too much. "Austrian guy, a psychiatrist. One of the best psychotherapists in the world ... right now actually. I am not sure if he is dead or still dying. Anyway, he tried to tell other doctors and therapists that a lot of rape is happening in families and that they need to start seeing it. He himself had been raped by his mother, a fact he tried to keep hidden. He failed miserably to have people listen to him for years. So he changed the narrative and began to explain that patients had been thinking about sex with their parents as children and that was why they developed mental illnesses. Instant hit, he became a renowned man."

"What's so hard to believe? Men's base urges sometimes lead to rape. It happens in war, it happens in marriages, it happens in families." Edgar crossed his arms. "What's so hard to see?"

Harry's gaze rested on Jonathan though who had gone pale. Dumbledore had turned to him, his own gaze concerned.

"Have I triggered something?" Harry asked a bit sheepishly. Had Jonathan been raped as well? His boyfriend looked just as clueless. "Jonathan?"

"Gellert?" Dumbledore tried and shook his shoulder.

"Don't." Edgar knelled down next to the who stared into nothingness. "Jonathan, listen to my voice. This is Edgar. You are sitting next to your partner Albus. It's 1936, a day before New Years. You are safe here. Listen to my voice and follow it to come back to us. You are a grown man, a very powerful wizard. You are an adult. You are safe. Come back into this room and focus. Albus, move into his line of vision. Jonathan, your boyfriend is right in front of you. Focus on his face."

Jonathan's gaze shot down, his body still motionless but at least focusing.

"Very good, you're doing great. Now get back some feeling for your body. See if you can move your fingers or your toes. Great, that's good, very good. Now the arms. Excellent. Albus, help him up to stand and prepare to catch him, he might be wobbly. Yes, just like that, Jonathan. Make a few steps. Wonderful. Keep going until you can use your voice again. Gren, get him a glass of water."

Sure thing. Harry jumped up immediately and left for the kitchen. He remembered that George had had these ... dissociative states? Had that been the name? Angelina had got him out of one once, the only time Harry had ever seen one. Angelina had used a lot more yelling and shaking though. Edgar seemed like a professional right now.

Had the original Gren had PTSD? It seemed likely with how Edgar had immediately got what was going on and acted accordingly. When he returned with the water, Jonathan was still standing and shaking out his muscles. He took the glass from Harry with a barely audible "Thanks" as if he was hoarse.

"Right ... so I did trigger him?" Harry asked Edgar.

"I only know triggers as in using a weapon but if the question is about evoking bad memories, then yes. Soldiers had those states all the time. I've seen those episodes happen after loud noises like popping a cork but it seems that words can be just as bad."

"Let's try not to talk about our last topic again." Rape. Which part about rape had been the trigger? Harry couldn't exactly remember when he had said what.

"Shouldn't we ask him about this?" Dumbledore looked from Edgar to Jonathan.

"No. If he wants to talk about it, okay, and even then, only once he is in a safe place."

"This is a safe place, isn't it?"

Harry looked at his study for a moment. "No ... I don't think so. Not this room at least. Let's change our location to the cellar." Where the brewing room was. A place he definitely felt safe in.

"Outside," Jonathan wheezed out.

"Yes, right, let's take a walk." Edgar seemed in his element. Well, he had been a commanding officer in the military during World War I, so ... this was what he knew. Harry was just amazed how gentle he had been with Jonathan. They walked in silence for half an hour, Jonathan getting steadily more sure of his feet. He also found his voice again at some point and said: "Thank you, Edgar."

"No problem, man." He punched Jonathan's shoulder. "I would advise on some good workout next."

"I am not sure I could get it up right now."

Edgar's mouth hang open for a second, disbelief clearly written on his face. "Sometimes you should get your mind out of the gutter. I was speaking about boxing."

"Oh, that ... actually, yes. Can we spar?" It had been seldom that Jonathan joined the boxing classes but he had the basics down.

"I'll give you a handicap." Most likely an arm tied behind his back or something. "Let's grab some mittens."

Harry offered: "I'll see that dinner is ready once you are finished."

"Good thinking." Edgar grinned at him.

Sometimes at least. Maybe he should have did a bit of that before talking about rape. How had using Cruciatus on your child and killing of their parental figures never translated to the idea that sexual abuse could be part of it as well? If it was. Maybe it had been something else. Maybe it had been a name or a word.

Maybe he would know one day.

Kapitel 25: Twenty-fifth chapter

Dear Gren and Edgar,

thank you for all of your help this last month. Master Rasmus is beside himself with joy because I am behaving like a model student. I am not sure I can keep this up but for now, it's good. Hopefully, the potions will get more interesting with time. I am bored out of my mind and I have learned that is not a good state for me.

Thank you again for explaining about flashbacks and PTSD. In this case, it was not my own memory I was catapulted into. I snooped through a lot of minds, sometimes very crazy ones. I encountered memories I never wanted to see. Sometimes, that made me flashback to my own memories, sometimes I flashbacked to other people's traumatic events and that scared me. Thank you for showing me how to get out of that state.

I am not exactly good at writing letters but I fear I am even worse at saying this: Thank you.

Jonathan

They met again only two months later to plan for their next pureblood meeting. For the first time, Jonathan would join them, introducing himself as Dumbledore's boyfriend. Harry wasn't sure if a hostile pureblood meeting was actually a good place for that but Dumbledore talked him into it. They had to start somewhere and this small gathering was as good a start as any.

Harry asked Malfoy for a list of attendants. Thankfully, the Black family wasn't on it. The Bones family was, as well as the Longbottoms. This would be quite the gathering. Still, he was a bit proud of Malfoy to allow this instead of keeping a policy of dark-families-only. On the other hand, this could also lead to a lot of animosity.

In the end, he trusted the combined forces of Dumbledore and Jonathan to keep them safe if the meeting would get out of hand. After all, Jonathan was extremely powerful, even if all that power had been used before to kill rather than protect. Before apparation, he asked Jonathan if he actually knew good defensive spells.

"Well, I know some but I am not good at them. Albus is a master though. So he can protect while I immobilize and chain down people."

"And do you know how to do that without hurting others? Taking their wand instead of snapping or burning it? Freezing them without having them hit the floor and break their noses?" Or gutting them, having them go up in flames or similar stuff.

"Hm... I'll throw a spell list together, alright? I know a good cancellation screen at least, so you can hide behind it. Oh, wait, I know an imprisonment spell that cancels out magic. I cast that, no spells can go in or out. As you don't need the out possibility, it's perfect."

"So you protect them, I protect us and then we disarm whoever shoots at us?," Dumbledore asked his boyfriend.

"No creative dark spells? There is a really cool one that makes someone into a ghost for a moment, so they lose both their wand and their clothes."

"Is it a necromancy spell?"

"Well ... don't know. It's not forbidden. Asian wizards used it to infiltrate places by surpassing walls with it."

"So you also sink into the floor?" Dumbledore raised his eyebrows disapprovingly.

"Well ... except if you stand on earth. It's a shortcut to Malfoy's cellar?"

"Don't cast it."

Jonathan shook his head in exasperation. "I can't believe you bested me in a duel."

"Get into your role, we never dueled." Dumbledore looked at Harry and Tom. "Are you ready?"

"Yeah." Tom looked bored, not exactly keen on hearing the same thing again.

Harry just nodded, so they were off to Malfoy Manor.

The setting was less illicit meeting, more pureblood party this time. People were standing, talking and mingling. Jonathan stayed with Dumbledore while Malfoy introduced Harry while Tom stayed on his other side. People wore dress robes and ate snacks that were brought to them by house-elves with trays. Tom openly thanked an elf for bringing him a glass of juice which startled everyone around them. Jonathan smirked and did the same when he got a flute of champagne. Only with Dumbledore, no one seemed startled. Everyone tried to not blatantly stare at them, but it was obvious that their every move was observed.

"Desmelda, a pleasure to see you." Dumbledore kissed a witch's hand.

"How could I not when I heard you would be here? It is just beyond me why you let a Malfoy host such an important event. Though admittedly, it is true that they are immaculate hosts."

"Darling, may I introduce Desmelda Longbottom?" Well, so this was one way to break the news of their relationship. "Desmelda, this is my partner Jonathan Bagshot."

"A partner? Who would have guessed? How delightful." Her smile was completely forced and she did not offer her hand. "Are you related to Bathilda Bagshot?"

"Yes, that's my mother." Jonathan's face actually held fondness.

"I didn't know she had a son." Desmelda's gaze flickered to Dumbledore for a second but she could not keep the viciousness from her tongue. "Did she keep you secret for a reason?"

"Yes, I was conceived in an affair, she only recently decided that her husband had been dead long enough for me to enter polite society."

"Oh." The woman fanned herself. "How kind of her. Being our dear headmaster's protege must have helped her decision along."

"Oh no, we only met after she had me registered. Due to it, actually. I am very happy how things turned out." The two men shared a fond smile. It seemed that both had decided to simply overhear her judgmental tone of voice.

"Well, I guess this shall be an enlightening meeting, learning about all kinds of ... pairings that are frowned upon in this day and age." What a forked tongue that woman had.

Harry tried to keep up with his own conversation but it was hard. Should he intervene? Could he intervene? It was done now but had this really been a good idea? Maybe they should have waited until Jonathan had made a name for himself?

"Aren't light wizards all about embracing liberal views?" Another woman joined them, this one looking like a sixty year old version of Bellatrix, even though no Black had been on the list of attendants. What was startling was the alarm on Dumbledore's face. "Misses Longbottom, you disappoint me. Aren't you normally criticizing me for judging too harshly?" She smiled at Jonathan. "Ruby Sinclair, a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

"The pleasure is all mine. Enlighten me, is the Sinclair family French?" He kissed her

hand.

"One might guess so, but no, we migrated long ago."

"I am sorry not to recognize your name then. My mother taught me about German, Swiss and English families, the name must have slipped my mind. They are so many to remember."

"We are just a small family, it happens." So most likely not a pureblood but an upstart.

"So I guessed correctly that the formal acknowledgment makes you heir to the Bagshot, Stauffenberg and Grindelwald family at the same time?"

Well, that certainly killed most fake conversations in the room. People seemed to lose their interest in pretending not to listen to every word said in that moment.

Jonathan looked at his boyfriend, fidgeting slightly. "Well ... the first two, I think? I would have guessed that my cousin's inheritance was seized after his death?"

Dumbledore answered gravely as if he actually had to battle his emotions instead of talking through a script they had agreed on beforehand: "No, he was disowned."

"Oh! That's ... actually not what I expected. So the state seized their lands?"

"Gellert's mother is still alive. So it will pass into the Stauffenberg family."

"Auntie is alive? Mom does not talk about her." Jonathan looked at Dumbledore's stoic face for a moment. "That's also something about my cousin, I see. I am sorry you have to be the one to tell me about him. I really shouldn't bother you with this."

"It's a hard topic for everyone." That was most likely planned to be a way to shut people up about Gellert Grindelwald.

Not Ruby Sinclair though which might explain Dumbledore's shock at seeing her. "Oh, I can tell you about him. I wouldn't claim to have been a friend but we were close. You look very similar."

"I am often told that. I only met him when I was ten." He looked her up and down.

"Wasn't everyone close to him arrested?"

"Talking to him and supporting him are two different things, otherwise everyone would be in prison now, most of all your partner." She made that sound like a joke, something very funny.

Neither Jonathan nor Dumbledore laughed and Desmolda Longbottom took two steps away from her.

"I wrote a book about him. He was fascinating when you leave out all the murders."

Jonathan's face twitched, unsure on which expression to settle. "How do you leave out more than twenty thousand murders?"

"Well, it's the motivation that counts, not what people made of him."

"He still killed thousands of people."

"Yes, but you see, he had to."

"No, he didn't." Anger laced Jonathan's voice. "Killing someone in any other situation than self-defence is a choice."

"It was self-defense in the end. In the beginning, it was only Muggles after all."

"Murder is murder. Adult, child, wizard, Muggle, house-elf, unicorn, any sentient creature you kill is a murder."

"Oh dear, aren't you a nice young man?" She smiled condescendingly. "No wonder our dear headmaster likes you."

"It's called manners." By now, his voice was heated with anger. "You are standing next to a child, in case you haven't noticed." Jonathan held out a hand in Tom's direction which made the boy step next to him. "This is Tom Horten, last in the line of Salazar Slytherin himself. Circumstances led him to being raised by a Muggle right now. You think this boy likes hearing you spout your opinion that Muggles are basically cattle

that can be killed as necessary?" He scoffed at her. "Not to mention that this whole meeting is about a Muggle telling us why our population and magical potency is dwindling through Muggle science?"

Dumbledore put a hand on Jonathan's shoulder and exchanged a gaze with Arcturus Malfoy before turning to the women: "May I kindly request that you leave this meeting, Miss Sinclair?"

She looked sour for a second before laughing and stating: "Oh, silly me, don't take this so seriously. No one calls for Muggles to be killed, not even Gellert did. You know that best, don't you? I am sorry I ruffled your feathers. Politics are always such a delicate topic. I shouldn't have poked where the wounds are still fresh. I am really interested in what this Muggle has to say."

"My father's name is Grenmore Horten. Would you like me to introduce you?" Tom was all smiles, his tone friendly, his eyes cold as glaziers. "Then you might be able to remember and use it from now on."

If looks could kill, Tom would have dropped dead. Harry really had no idea where his son got those skills from but he even offered her a hand to guide her. How could a nine-year-old boy be this cunning? His tongue was sharper than hers, using his age to blatantly disrespect her without giving her the possibility to retaliate. After all, calling out a child on his manners would directly fault the parent, the one person she should not affront if she wanted to save her reputation.

Also, she had taken a position that no one else wanted, so even the most traditional purebloods would hesitate to take up the same argument now. It was practically a genius occurrence that she had ... actually, no, Jonathan had manipulated her into this position. Had he done that consciously? Dumbledore had looked so spooked when she had showed up. Had she really been a close acquaintance of Gellert Grindelwald?

Had Jonathan used his own manipulation before to his benefit now?

Harry had told him to use people's prejudices instead of arguing against them but he had not expected for Jonathan to master that without any practice at all. If this had been a conscious move, this had been one hell of a genius one.

"Misses Sinclair, this is my father, Grenmore Horten. Since adopting me, he has become very knowledgeable about magical theory."

"A fascinating topic, just like Muggle science." He held out his hand, knowing she would have to take it to redeem herself. It would automatically force most others here to acknowledge him by shaking hands with him as well if they did not want to be singled out.

"I am very interested in your speech." She shook his hand, the disgust at doing so obvious on her face. "My, how the world is changing ... twenty years ago, we had such a different opinion on Muggles."

Harry decided that it was better to not react to that and answered instead: "Acknowledging that your slaves might have worthwhile things to say is not easy to accept. Even today, most people have no idea what house-elves are capable of. They are continually underestimated because most historical documents from before their enslavement are lost today."

"Well, how would you know if they are lost?"

"My specialty is research." At least Hermione's had been but with Jonathan and Tom, he could at least bluff convincingly. "Most of your families' libraries are full of treasures, long lost and forgotten. Some bear account of a time where elves were a superior magical race that kept wizards as life-stock for handy slaves. What a

surprisingly similar situation to what we face today, just the other way round."

Jonathan snapped his fingers and said: "Or how Gellert wanted to enslave Muggles because he was actually afraid of them."

"He wasn't!," Ruby screamed in anger.

Harry ignored her. "Looking at history, we can conclude that slavery works for a time until the masters get too complacent. Then the slaves overthrow them. Masters could only stay in power if they freed their slaves themselves. So the plan to enslave Muggles would have backfired anyway."

Malfoy chuckled. "It certainly explains why you are nice to house-elves. You see them overpowering us anytime soon? Because their slavery has held for ... well, aren't you the historian?"

"A bit under 1600 years, it's actually the longest slavery in history. So yes, it worries me a bit. It's why I don't have house-elves nor would I ever take one in."

"Or one could just kill everyone of them." Sinclair's words sparked a murmur. "It was one of Gellert's alternative plans regarding Muggles."

Jonathan answered her: "Yes, that's how you spark a rebellion that ends in a lot of bloodshed. You might have noticed how Grindelwald never openly declared war on humans. Even he knew that would have been utter madness. I am not sure how much my cousin knew about Muggle weaponry but we are vastly underpowered. Do you know what a grenade launcher is? Trying to kill all Muggles is utter madness."

Sinclair looked at him as if he was a naive child. "You admitted to not knowing your cousin, so don't speak like you know him. Right now, you are simply reiterating Dumbledore's arguments. No wonder he is taken with you, it's like he finally tamed his late lover."

Harry saw Jonathan clench his teeth, knowing it was mostly Grindelwald's injured pride right now. So he interjected: "History has taught us that justice always triumphs in the end. It's why Grindelwald is dead and people know better than to use him as an example on how to solve problems."

"Or maybe he died a martyr for a great cause." Sinclair did not disguise her hatred in how she looked at him.

"Only time will tell." Harry smiled at her. "Personally, I don't want a bloody showdown between wizards and Muggles. Even today, there nearly aren't enough magical people left to run your society efficiently. It's why we came together today, after all. To discuss how to further the magical population instead of how to diminish it. War will come soon enough anyway."

"Oh, are you a seer now as well?" The woman seemed to have given up on not antagonizing him.

"I did not expect to actually quote Grindelwald against you in this discussion." Harry shook his head slowly. "I don't have his talent for holding speeches, most likely Jonathan could give you a much better impersonation of his late cousin. Do you remember his legendary proclamation in New York after escaping prison?"

"I was there."

"Then maybe you are able to quote him when he showed you what an atomic bomb can do to humans, no matter if they are magical or not."

She stayed silent.

"Atomic bombs are still in their invention phase. They shall be used in the next war. Worse than that are hydrogen bombs, also still in their invention phase. No redirecting magic will help wizardkind when Muggles can drop a bomb than can level the area of London. Grindelwald showed you what that looks like."

"So why not kill off Muggles before they invent those bombs?"

Jonathan answered her: "Because the weapons they already have are enough to end us. It's been like that for hundreds of years now, it's why we invented the Statute of Secrecy. Believing that we can simply cultivate powerful wizards and become stronger again, that's ... my cousin was delusional. We gathered here today because right now, we can't even save the Sacred Twenty-eight. How exactly is his army of super powerful pureblood wizards supposed to come about?"

"His theory was that Muggle technology is causing the decimation of magical fluctuation which directly results in less magical children born, the more Muggle technology advances."

"Yes, that was my theory."

Everyone turned to Dumbledore who had kept silent until now.

"That ... excuse me?" Sinclair blinked in surprise.

"It's the theory Gellert and I came up with in the summer of 1899. We collected our research and introduced the theory in 1902 in front of the Wizengamot. To give a broad view over the whole topic, he argued in favor of the theory, I argued against it. Later, people thought that I had opposed him from the start. In truth, we presented our joint theory. People made him into a villain, me into a hero. It is true that we parted ways at some point, because I could not condone the killing of Muggles. Until that point, we were a team though."

"You came up with that together?" Sinclair looked disgusted. "Aren't you making that up to discredit Gellert even more?"

"No, the truth is not exactly favorable to my image of being the savior of wizardkind, the one who saw Gellert's wickedness long before anyone else did. I was in love with Gellert, we were research partners and for a long time, I did not oppose him because I silently supported him. He was fighting for our ideals after all. I did not want to kill Muggles but at the same time, I was very interested if his actions would change the rate of magically born children. In essence, he was conducting an illegal human experiment that I had orchestrated two decades earlier."

That ... was a bit too truthful, wasn't it?

"Albus, is that true?" Desmelda Longbottom looked aghast.

"It does not help anyone if I keep blaming all my shortcomings on my ex-lover. I would not have killed all those Muggles myself but at the same time, I could have stopped him a lot earlier if I had wanted to. But I wanted to know if our theory was right, so I let him kill all those people and killed him as a scapegoat afterwards. It's laughable how people hail me as a hero for that."

Malfoy clapped slowly and stepped into their midst. "I did not expect you to ever earn my respect, Albus. You hid behind half-truths like a true Slytherin for years. How come you finally decided on Gryffindor honesty?"

"Because the truth is more important than my vanity. Gellert and me were wrong. Right now, the most important thing is that everyone knows this Muggle technology theory was a dead end. Horten approached me first because so many people still think that it may be true. I am the only one that can finally discount our original theory."

Malfoy's grey eyes blazed with fury: "So you decided to use me to recruit purebloods to prove your new theory with another human experiment?"

Dumbledore smiled bashfully: "Would you like more of my Gryffindor honesty?"

"It wasn't his idea," Harry stepped in. "Albus is too morally upright for that. He would have simply introduced the theory and it would have been discounted as well. He needs other people to push the human experimentation part. With this theory, I told

him we would need dark wizarding families on our side."

Malfoy turned to him. "So a Muggle decided that an experiment with dark wizarding purebloods was a good idea?"

"I decided that introducing the theory to you first was our best bet because you are the correct mix of intelligent, calculating and opportunistic. If you thought that the theory had merit, you would be the one to decide if an experiment with dark pureblood wizards was a good idea or not. Which you did, if I may remind you."

Malfoy stared at him for a moment.

Before he could decide on a course of action, Tom spoke into the silence: "Is everyone done with airing out their sinister intentions? Isn't this about having more happy and healthy babies?"

"Yeah, thank you." Jonathan stood next to him. "How about we sit down, listen to the theory and everyone can decide for themselves what they think about it? I get a headache from all the posturing."

Sinclair observed him like a hawk and asked: "You are Gellert's cousin and Dumbledore's lover. Do you personally believe in this theory?"

"Well, it explains more than the technology theory ever did. No pureblood likes the fact but a lot of half-bloods are insanely magically powerful. No half-blood is ever born a squib. Do we have any explanation for that?" He left a pause. "No, we try to obscure the fact that those children are half-bloods. Gellert wasn't a pureblood. I am not a pureblood. Our own prejudice keeps us from learning more about magic."

Sinclair's gaze turned to Dumbledore. "He's not?"

"No." The blue eyes looked questioningly at Jonathan who nodded back. "His father came from an affair with a Muggleborn witch. The Grindelwald family kept that a secret by adopting him and claiming that he was Lady Grindelwald's son."

Jonathan said: "As for myself, my mother had an affair with a Muggle. Her husband was unable to father children."

Tom also claimed: "I am a half-blood as well. Merope Gaunt had me with a Muggle."

Desmolda Longbottom put a hand on Dumbledore's arm and asked: "You are a pureblood, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am." He nodded and smiled benignly. "I had two siblings. My brother is a mediocre wizard that runs the Hog's Head and my sister was a squib that already died. So I was open to the suggestion that blood superiority might not be the solution to saving wizards. If it were, the Sacred Twenty-eight would not be this close to extinction."

Silence reigned again until Robert Bones said: "Well, I gave away my daughter for this theory, so I'd like to hear it in full now. Mister Malfoy, where should we all sit?"

Lord Malfoy glared at Harry for a moment before directing everyone to a door: "I prepared the sun room for Mister Horten's speech."

Harry nodded at him. Hopefully, Malfoy would come around. He was a powerful ally, they should not have ruffled his feathers like that. On the other hand, it pressured Malfoy into taking a side. He could either stand behind the theory or step away from it.

Albus took spear. Tom took Harry's hand. Just behind him, he heard Miss Sinclair whisper to Jonathan: "Do you want everyone to go along with this?"

"Go along with what?"

"I knew you weren't dead."

"Oh. You think that I am Gellert?" He chuckled. "I hope I am smarter than him. He seems to have been quite stubborn."

"We all hoped you would come back."

"Let's assume that I actually were Gellert." Jonathan grinned at her. "Could you live with a Gellert that likes Muggles and works together with them?"

Miss Sinclair startled as if he had slapped her.

He lay a hand on her shoulder, winked at her and said: "Decide for yourself if you want me to be your Gellert."

Harry kept himself from rolling his eyes. The gall of that guy ... what a perfect manipulator. He actually used his own followers for a pro-Muggle agenda. Exactly like Harry had told him. What a scary guy. It had been worth all the work to get him on their side.

Now he only had to present Hermione's theory again. How had this become his life?

Dumbledore admits complicity with Gellert Grindelwald by Elena Hollybrook

In a private gathering yesterday, Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and honored with the Order of Merlin First Class for his help in defeating the Dark Lord Gellert Grindelwald, admitted to having worked with said Dark Lord for years. While people thought him a stern defender of Muggles' and Muggleborns' rights, he stayed neutral for years and did not openly oppose the man except for some public speeches in which he protested against Grindelwald's methods. Confronted with Ruby Sinclair, a long-time friend of Gellert Grindelwald, he confessed that in reality, he was a lot less opposed to Grindelwald's methods. He stated: "I did not oppose him because I silently supported him. He was fighting for our ideals after all. I did not want to kill Muggles but at the same time, I was very interested if his actions would change the rate of magically born children. In essence, he was conducting an illegal human experiment that I had orchestrated two decades earlier". Before that, he had admitted to having been Grindelwald's research partner and that the Technology Theory, still one of the current research theories on magical fluctuation, had been both of their work.

The theory states that the advancement in Muggle technology – which is known to disturb magical spells – also influences birth rates, squib rates and is cause for the regression of magically potent children. Dumbledore and Grindelwald first presented the theory in front of the Wizengamot in 1902. In that presentation, Grindelwald argued in favor of the theory, Dumbledore against it. To this day, common belief was that this meant that Dumbledore discounted the theory. His recent confession shows that this was not the case. He continued in saying: "I could have stopped him a lot earlier if I had wanted to. But I wanted to know if our theory was right, so I let him kill all those people and killed him as a scapegoat afterwards."

As morally questionable as that is already, he now presented a new theory which we shall call the Genetic Theory for now. Together with a Muggle by the name of Grenmore Horten and the newly introduced Jonathan Bagshot (please turn to page 5 for further information), cousin of the late Gellert Grindelwald, he spoke with members of the Sacred Twenty-eight. His theory was met with great skepticism. He basically told the gathered witches and wizards that the declining rate of magically competent children was due to inbreeding. He proposed marriages with half-bloods and even Muggle-borns as a solution to this. The scandal regarding the Bones/Avery marriage recently brought up the discussion of intermarriage between Light and Dark wizards but Dumbledore

seems to want to take this a step further. He was met with clear opposition from the gathered families.

We asked Desmelda Longbottom, a former friend of Dumbledore, for her opinion: "I think his goal is clear. He wants to bring unnatural pairings and morally questionable affairs into discussion to gain support for his own perversions. He not only admitted to sodomite acts with Gellert Grindelwald but also with his cousin Jonathan Bagshot. I am deeply disgusted and call for the removal of his Order of Merlin as well as his placement as headmaster. An ingrate like that should not be allowed around our children."

Other members of the gathering could not be reached for questioning. Ruby Sinclair was asked about the possibility of Dumbledore and Grindelwald having a sodomite relationship: "I can see Dumbledore lusting after Gellert, he was a handsome and charming man after all. Of course, Gellert would never have fallen for him. He was a ladies' man, not an animal. The same does not seem to be true for his cousin. Men like Jonathan Bagshot and Albus Dumbledore should be kept away, they are an embarrassment and a danger to society."

This has certainly shown a side to the former hero that was unknown to the public until now. We thank the brave women that were courageous enough to make those atrocities public. Longbottom stated: "We do this for our children. My dear Augusta is a Hogwarts student. Other parents need to know what their children have to endure for their education. A man with such convictions must be stopped for their protection."

Kapitel 26: Twenty-sixth chapter

Harry slapped the Daily Prophet onto the table and let out a deep sigh.

"Bad news?," Edgar suspected.

"We are done for. Dumbledore and Jonathan outed themselves, now they are social pariahs and the knowledge about genetics will die before it even hatched." He put his head in his hands. "The only good thing is that they kept Tom's name out of this. They only mentioned mine. We can change his before he goes to school."

"It's beyond me how they ever thought that this was a good idea."

"I guess they knew." Harry smiled sadly. "Both of them will lose their jobs. On the other hand, they'll be able to move in with each other and live a quiet life somewhere out of the spotlight. I just wish they would not have dragged us down with them."

Edgar read the article while Harry fixed himself a drink. It was only morning but he felt like erasing this day from his mind.

"At least they aren't connected with our government and our press. If your name were to be associated with homosexuality again, this could have turned really ugly."

Edgar sat down next to him. "Is this dangerous to them? Will there be people going after them? Are there laws against ... unnatural copulation?"

"It's only the social discrimination. It's also possible that Dumbledore will lose his ... it's like a badge of honor. It's given to war heroes. He got it for killing Grindelwald."

"I am sure he will not be sad about losing an award for supposedly killing his lover."

"But he will be sad about losing his position as headmaster." Harry clenched his hands.

"Worse than that ... I changed history in a way that I never foresaw, in a dangerous way. Dumbledore being in a position of power kept the magical world from turning against Muggles for years. What if I made the worst come true? What if the wizarding world will declare war on Muggles?"

Edgar hugged him from the side. "Don't take everything onto your own shoulders."

"But I did this, Edgar ... I am responsible. What if I ruined the future?"

"What will you answer Jonathan when he asks you the very same question?"

Harry looked up and blinked in confusion.

"What will Jonathan do when he reads this article?"

"Murder Ruby Sinclair? What should I know?" Harry scoffed but still sank into Edgar's embrace. "I don't know, mate. Why did he have to bait her like that?"

"Did he really?"

"No, he expertly manipulated her, so that the consequences would be as slim as possible. He was a genius in that meeting." A deep sigh left his lips. "Dumbledore dropped too many bombs at the same time. He alienated too many people. I understand why he wanted to be done with the lies but this was about more than him."

"So just like you, Jonathan tried to protect him but Dumbledore was too forward and now, both of you will suffer for it." Edgar smiled at Harry's suffering groan. "He'll feel responsible too, you know? He supported Dumbledore in coming out and it completely backfired. You know how I would have felt if I'd outed Gren and he would have lost his position as general?"

"I need to get to him before he does something stupid."

"Trust in him, would you?" Edgar chuckled. "I can't believe I'm saying this. But I know Jonathan. He won't endanger Dumbledore further."

Edgar was right, of course. Three hours later, Tom came back from school, Jonathan's hand securely in his own tiny one. God, the man looked so down. Down enough that Edgar hugged him without even a greeting. Tom went up to Harry.

"Dad? Jonathan says that he lost his job. Can he stay here?"

"Of course." Harry ruffled the ink black hair. He went over where Jonathan was passed into his arms. "Welcome back."

"You're not angry?"

"Well ... I told you both my opinion beforehand. You decided not to listen and I understand that decision. Now, you have to live with the consequences."

"We destroyed your work."

Harry just sighed. "Most likely. But maybe not. We'll see."

"I am sorry, Gren."

"I am sorry too." He stepped away from the other man. "Maybe I should have been sterner telling you the possible consequences of your plan."

"Have you seen Albus? Has he written?"

Harry shook his head.

"I want to see him."

"I ... would not advise on that right now. He will be busy trying to save his reputation. You would not help by showing up. Why don't you write him a letter?" He smiled sadly. "Then Albus can decide when it is possible for him to show up. This is a safe place and will always be."

Jonathan simply looked lost and his eyes shimmered with unshed tears. What would be good for him? A divergence, right? He looked at Tom who got the hint.

"Hey, Jonathan. We're low on candles. Should we make some to pass the time?" Such a good boy!

The older man just nodded slowly and took a deep breath. "I'll ... just write that letter, okay? Then we can make some candles. We could use some winter flavors like pine."

"Let's do that." Tom took Harry's hand while Edgar brought Jonathan to the study.

"What went wrong, dad?"

"Their coming out as a couple, that ... seemed to have been a bit much. Longbottom and Sinclair started a personal vendetta. For them, that was worse than him supporting Grindelwald in the beginning."

"So being gay is worse than mass-murder?" Tom rolled his eyes. "I don't understand these people."

"Well ... I'd wager that Sinclair was in love with Grindelwald and hearing that he was completely uninterested in her, that was just ..."

"What will it mean for them?"

"Both will lose their jobs." Harry sighed. "They won't get new ones. Society will discount our whole theory as insane ramblings of perverted man and both of their names will be tarnished. History books will be changed, Dumbledore will go from hero to public enemy."

"For being gay?" Tom squinted his eyes. "A women being jealous?"

Harry nodded gravely.

"That's so dumb."

"I know."

"Why is the world this way?" The little boy balled his fists. "I mean ... why destroy someone out of jealousy? If she loved him, shouldn't she want the best for him? What

kind of love is that? Why does being gay ostracize someone? Why is having mixed blood a bad thing? How come that Howard's father can hit his children and wife and that is somehow okay, but Edgar, Jonathan and Albus should be locked away for loving someone? All of that makes no sense!"

"Those are good questions, Tom. Change is needed. But change is a slow thing, it's like a snail wandering a labyrinth, sometimes taking the right, sometimes the wrong turn. Oftentimes, you don't know if the turn will be right or wrong. Albus and Jonathan wanted to come out and I warned them but I did not protest. Now ... they lost everything. Maybe someday in the future, we'll look back and decide it was a great thing that this happened. Maybe we'll regret it for years. No one can really say." "I hate this."

He drew the boy into a hug and admitted: "Me too."

"I don't understand what those people think."

"Try to. Then help them to see your point of view. Share what you know. Just remember to protect yourself, don't maneuver yourself into the position of a pariah."

"Like Albus did?"

With a sigh, Harry closed his eyes. Had he been too hard on Dumbledore? Had he asked too much of him? Had he steered him into this position? He had worked with Jonathan on his guilt, should he have worked with Dumbledore instead?

My relationship with Gellert had always been an open secret

by Edward Macintosh

In yesterday's interview, Ruby Sinclair and Desmelda Longbottom revealed Albus Dumbledore's former relationship with Gellert Grindelwald, a Dark Lord killed by none other than Albus Dumbledore himself in 1918. It sparked an outcry of rage in the magical community, many witches and wizards wrote letters to the Daily Prophet where they described their feelings of being betrayed by one of their supposed leaders. Albus Dumbledore was awarded an Order of Merlin First Class for helping end the war with Gellert Grindelwald in 1918. He was also chosen as Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in 1931.

"I have never lied about myself", stated Dumbledore in an interview with us. "The Daily Prophet published an interview with Gellert and myself in 1903 in which we openly talked about our relationship. This has always been an open secret. I was approached by our government since 1908 with requests to contain my – at that time – former lover. I refused them, not wanting to take sides, until 1917. At that time, it was clear to me that Gellert had lost himself to the Black Pull. I knew that containing him was only an euphemism for killing him. It is why I hesitated for so long, hoping that he would stop in his madness."

We also asked about him co-authoring the Technology Theory. He answered: "That is true, Gellert Grindelwald and I developed that theory. We presented it to the Wizengamot in 1902 together. Later, people thought I had opposed the theory because I had opposed Gellert but it was the other way round. Gellert's actions convinced me that our theory had to be wrong but in the beginning, I thought it to be true. By now, I know better." He continued to specify that he had indeed presented the Genetic Theory to various members of the Sacred Twenty-eight, asking for input before he presented another theory to the Wizengamot, seeing as the last one brought about horrible consequences. "In part, I feel responsible for Gellert's actions. Would he have started killing, would he have lost himself to the Black pull if not for me? I shall never know. It is

too late for me to ask."

As for the last of the accusations leveled against him, we asked Albus Dumbledore about his current relationship. "Miss Sinclair and Misses Longbottom seem to think that courting a cousin of your late lover is a scandal. I guess it may be when your late lover was a mass-murderer. Thankfully, Jonathan and Gellert are different people. If we were to accuse every family member of someone lost to the Black Pull, our society would not function as well as it does today."

Some parents of Hogwarts students aired their concern about an openly homosexual headmaster. Regarding those, Dumbledore answered: "I have been openly homosexual since before I ever became a teacher. I joined Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in 1904 when I was still in a relationship with Gellert Grindelwald. I taught for nearly thirty years before becoming headmaster. If parents are concerned, most of them can think back on their own school career with me as their Transfiguration teacher. I never had any complaints about untoward behavior. I had to kill my own lover – if there has been one thing I was completely uninterested in for the last decades, it was romance." Now, that had apparently changed. For more information on Jonathan Bagshot, please go to page 7 for an interview with his mother, the renowned Bathilda Bagshot.

Dear Albus,

how much did you bribe that reporter with?

Dear Gren,

some sacrifices are worth it.

Yours truly, Albus

"Mister Horten! Mister Horten!," Helen cried in fright.

Harry stormed down the stairs, expecting to see blood or a fire. Instead, he was confronted with a face in the flames of his fireplace that was unknown to him.

"Whoever you are: Begone and sent an obliviator."

"Mister Horten, my name is—"

"I don't care! Send an obliviator right away!" He took a bit of floo powder to throw into the flames, a sure-fire way to disconnect a floo call.

Helen shook like a rabbit. He went to her and hugged her carefully.

"Don't worry, it's gone now."

Her voice shook: "What was that?"

"Some ghost, I guess. Salt is good against ghosts."

"Salt, okay, salt." She shook her head, seeming to come back to herself. "What did you tell him? He should sent something?"

"A priest is also good for exorcising ghosts. The rift between us and the netherworld

should always be closed. I told him to have someone close the rift from his side." Textbook procedure for talking to Muggles after experiencing magic.

"You really know a lot of things, Mister Horten."

"It comes with age, Helen. During your lifetime, a lot of strange things will occur and you will learn to deal with them one by one."

"Alright." She smiled shakily. "I see a ghost, I throw salt at it."

"It's why I keep that special purifying salt over the fireplace and tell everyone not to touch it."

Her gaze turned to the floo powder. "That makes sense."

She was interrupted by a popping sound that made her scream. Or most likely, it wasn't the sound but the wizard emerging from thin air. It was followed by more popping sounds, three men suddenly appearing in his sitting room. Helen and Harry were hit by a Petrificus Totalus.

Harry concentrated on his mental barriers. Hopefully, these Aurors knew what they were doing. One of them appeared in his field of vision, pointing a wand at him and cast an Oblivius. Great, so they barged in first, asked questions later. Hopefully, his shields would hold.

"No, no, not that one! That's Mister Horten, don't obliviate him!" One of the men – the one that had been in the flames – screamed.

"Already done," the Auror answered, apparently not noticing that Harry did not react at all to his cast.

"No ... no. What did you do?" The man stepped next to them, also looking down at Harry.

"Erased all knowledge of magic, standard procedure."

"But that man is the father of a magical child!"

"Oh." The Auror looked a bit sheepish. "Well, that's bad. Why didn't you say so?"

"When should I have said so?"

"Dad?" Tom's voice quivered, a voice coming from above. "Who are you?"

"Petrifi-"

"Stop it!" The unknown man grabbed the Auror's arm. "He'll fall down those stairs if you petrify him! Are you out of your mind?"

"Yeah, Rob, chill." The other Auror came over. "I secured the girl, she only witnessed a floo call. That's erased. Didn't you use Legilimency on this man?"

"Forgot about that." Well, Harry would have had his ass for that if that had been his own man. "Hey, kid, this your dad?"

"Yes?" Tom approached with hesitancy.

"That is Tom Horten, heir to the Gaunt line. Right, boy?" The man was most likely a reporter.

"What do you want with me and my father? What did you do to him?" His gaze changed between Harry and the Auror, unsure if he should approach.

"Ah, well ... err, Charles, what does the protocol say?"

The second Auror – Charles, apparently – shook his head and looked at Harry. "First of all, let me see how much you mucked this up. Legilimens!" Good luck with that. It was a tiny probe against Harry's shields, immediately bouncing back. Charles groaned in pain and held a hand to his head.

"What? What is it?" Rob turned to his partner.

"My father is an Occlumens. Stop trying to break into his mind, that's against the law."

Tom tried to sound brave. "Leave or I will call the Aurors."

"We are the Aurors, kid!" Rob barked at him while giving Charles a potion. "Why is a

Muggle an Occlumens? Is he even a Muggle?"

The reporter interrupted: "Mister Horten is a very important community member—"

"Why don't you tell us this stuff?," Auror Rob screamed at him.

"Why don't you stop and listen for a second?"

Auror Charles just groaned in pain.

"Dad?" Tom had knelt down next to him. "Can you hear me?"

Even his gaze was frozen, so he couldn't react.

"Why isn't he moving?" The boy looked up at the three adults. "What did you do to him?"

"Why do I always have to deal with this shit?" Auror Rob shook his head. "I petrified your dad, kid. I also obliviated him because I was told that he had witnessed magic which is forbidden for a Muggle—"

The reporter interrupted: "I told you to obliviate the girl, not him."

"You never specified!" The man screamed again, clearly a choleric guy.

His partner groaned in pain, even more miserable than before.

"Is Helen okay?" Tom spared her a glance. She was most likely sitting somewhere, just looking into space.

"Yeah, she'll come to in a moment." Auror Rob looked down at Harry. "We should get your father out of the way. Are there other Muggles living here?"

"A few maids. They are out." They weren't but Tom clearly wanted them out of danger. Smart boy.

"Lead us to your father's room." Auror Rob levitated Harry.

Tom seemed reluctant but finally led them up the stairs. Instead of the bedroom, he knocked on the door leading to the study. "Edgar, are you in?"

Sadly, there was no answer. Most likely, Tom hoped for some support. They put Harry down on the couch but still did not release the spell.

"Charles, are you better now?"

"Yeah, sorry ... just a minute." The other Auror sat down in one of the chairs. "That's one hell of an Occlumens."

"Oh. Do you think my spell even took?"

"Most likely not. Release him."

"Finite incantatem."

First of all, Harry took a deep gulp of air. One of the main rules of petrification: Never keep it up for more than thirty seconds. It was possible but it was hell on the body. So Harry simply breathed for a moment while Tom squeezed his hand.

"Thanks ... Tom." He slowly stood with his son helping him. "Now ... may I know your names, first and all?"

"Auror Robard Leeves, fourteenth division. This is my partner Charles Burlap."

The supposed reporter also introduced himself: "Larrey Barren from Witch's Weekly."

"Excuse me for not expressing my pleasure in meeting you all. I am General Grenmore Horten, one of the leaders of the British troops. In lieu of my position, I have been aware of the magical population for quite a few years now. Auror Leeves, Auror Burlap!"

Both sprang to attention as if he were their boss.

He was using his Head Auror voice after all when he continued: "On the conduct of dealing with No-Mags, chapter seven, line thirty-six!"

Auror Charles answered: "Before casting at a Muggle, one needs to be in a situation of immediate danger or mass panic."

"So how did an adult male standing with his back to you and a screaming fifteen-year-

old look like a situation of immediate danger or mass panic?"

Auror Rob looked at his partner who stoically looked at Harry.

"Right. You attacked me unprovoked, you tried to obliviate me without using Legilimency first and worst of all, you kept me petrified for over two minutes. Auror Leeves, do you have any idea what that means for your career?"

"Uh ... sorry?" The man looked to his partner. "Charles?"

"You'll be suspended."

"At the minimum." Harry glared at him. "If I was Head Auror, you would be fired. Your conduct makes you a liability to the force. I will put in a formal request for your demotion."

"Wait a minute, calm down for a sec ... Charles, tell him. That wasn't so bad, right?"

The other Auror looked conflicted, clearly wanting to help his partner.

"Auror Leeves." Harry lowered his voice. "If I weren't an Occlumens as good as I am, your little spell would have erased at least five years from my life. That would have shredded my mental integrity and might have left me a living vegetable. You also nearly suffocated me because Muggles have no magical power that can let petrification spells run out before they die. In essence, you nearly killed me twice in the span of the last five minutes."

Auror Charles just closed his eyes while Auror Rob stared at Harry in shock.

"And I hope you won't try to wriggle out of this while standing next to a reporter, Leeves."

"Oh! Right." Barren pulled a notepad and a quick-quotes quill from his jacket. "Mister Horten, I have some questions for you."

"If you want an article, you can write about this." Harry glared at him. "Now kindly leave my estate, none of you are welcome here."

"Just a few regarding the theory you presented-"

"Out!" He pointed at the door. "Or do I need to employ these gentlemen for a case of breaking and entering? You hijacked a Muggle fireplace and apparated into someone's house without permission."

"Now, Mister Horten, don't be like that-" He could not finish the sentence because Auror Charles grabbed his arm and side-along apparated him out of the house.

Harry just groaned due to his massive headache after being without oxygen and having his mental barriers repeatedly attacked. This was not what he had expected from this day.

"Dad?" Tom's voice shook.

"Just a moment." Harry leaned back. "I just need to breath for a bit." Which he did – deeply and slowly. "Can you get me a glass of water, please?"

A minute of simple breathing and a full glass of water later, he turned his gaze onto Tom. "You did well. That was a horrible situation, huh?"

"What did they want with us?" Tom stood right in front of him, too excited still to sit down.

"That reporter showed up in the floo. Helen saw and it spooked her. I calmed her down while I sent the man to get obliviators. Apparently, they had a lot of miscommunication."

"They nearly killed you."

Well ... yes. Instead of answering, Harry offered his son a hug. Thankfully, he himself had been in enough life-threatening situations to not even tremble when the adrenaline left. For Tom though, this was ... it was true, Harry had nearly died. Tom would have lost his home and his main parent. He wasn't surprised when the boy

started to cry.

He needed to get a letter to Dumbledore. Jonathan was at the school, both of them discussing their options. Edgar was still at the factory, going over the books with Brea. Were they safe? They needed to secure the fireplace. He had never expected anyone other than Dumbledore to contact it. How had he not expected paparazzi to show up? "I want to be stronger," Tom mumbled into his shoulder. "I want to be able to protect you."

"Strength always lies in numbers, Tom. We need our allies." Harry reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a handkerchief. "Make yourself presentable. We'll bar the sitting room and contact Dumbledore about this."

The boy nodded and clumsily wiped his cheeks. They went down and found Helen cleaning the sitting room again. She smiled at seeing them, clearly not remembering what had happened.

"Helen, dear, we need the room for a bit. Could you continue somewhere else?"

"Oh, sure, Mister Horten. Do you need anything?"

"Just a bit of quiet. I'll lock the room. Please tell the others not to disturb us."

"Of course, sir." She curtsied, send the clearly disheveled Tom a smile of sympathy and took her cleaning supplies with her.

Tom followed to lock the door behind her. Harry locked the other doors. "There was no one upstairs, right?"

"Edgar is still out."

"Right." He threw a bit of floo powder into the hearth. "Dumbledore's office, Hogwarts." He pushed Tom in front of him. "Please put your head in the flames. I promise that it won't hurt."

"You sure?" There was anxiety in his eyes but he still complied. "You're right, it doesn't hurt."

"Your magic protects you. Just like with floo travel." Harry sat down beside him. "Is Dumbledore in? Please call for him."

"Albus? Mister Dumbledore?" He moved his head. "There is only a strange bird."

"His name is Fawkes. Please ask him to get Dumbledore immediately."

"Okay ... birdie? Fawkes? Could you please help us? My father was attacked by Aurors. I need help from Albu- woah! Dad, the bird burst into flames!"

"It's a phoenix. It's an immortal, very intelligent creature."

"That's so cool. So he travels through flames? That's neat." He looked around some more. "Hello there. Are you a ghost? Oh, she went away. Maybe she'll help us too?"

"There is one nasty male ghost in the castle, the others are mostly nice. Some are very shy though."

"Right, okay. Oh, Albus! Down here!" He was silent for a moment. "Dad is okay, I think. But we're scared. Can you come here?" A moment later, he pulled his head from the flames and took a step back. "That was weird."

A moment later, the flames went higher and Dumbledore stepped out of them. "Gren? How are you?"

"A bit out of breath." He stood and shook the other man's hand. "I was petrified for about two minutes."

"Heavens! What happened?" Dumbledore ran a few diagnostic spells.

"A reporter was in the floo, Helen saw, so I sent him to get obliviators. They petrified us and the one with me obliterated without using Legilimency first. The second one then tried Legilimency but failed. That led to a lot of confusion, so it took quite a bit for them to decide to let me go."

"Dad gave them a scolding!" Tom grinned with pride, obviously over the fact that this had been really dangerous.

"Thankfully, I got the auror code of conduct memorised." He grinned.

"Your head is a gold-mine, Gren." Dumbledore shook his head fondly. "On the downside, they nearly destroyed that. I'll sent Jonathan back here to protect you until this had died down."

"Please ward the fireplace as well."

"I shall." He sighed deeply. "Gren, I am sorry-"

He stopped him with a hand gesture. "What's done is done. I only care about the fact that you stay on as headmaster. We can reintroduce that theory on a later date."

The lines on Dumbledore's face deepened. "Or we could use the current press."

"And divert from your love-life?"

"That would be appreciated."

"It would also paint an even bigger target on my back." Harry looked at Tom.

"Whatever happens, Tom comes first, is that clear?"

"Of course." It was not reassuring that Dumbledore looked away while saying so.

"Who was the reporter?"

"Someone called Barren from Witches Weekly."

"Never heard of him. We should get you an interview with the Daily Prophet."

"I also need to write a formal complaint against the Aurors just now."

"Jonathan will take you to the Ministry. I'll arrange the interview, alright?" The man had already turned to the fireplace and begun to cast wards.

Tom took Harry's hand and asked: "Can I come?"

"I ..." Harry knelled down. "I don't want to part from you either. I want you, Edgar and the others safe. But I can only keep you safe when the focus shifts from you. People should not see you with me right now. If this backfires, it could get you in danger."

"But I can help! I don't want you to- Dad, what if you are attacked again?"

"Trust Jonathan, Tom." He hugged the boy. "He'll keep me safe. I am a lot more worried about you here. Albus, is there anyone that can look after my family?"

"I, err ... there is a friend I could ask."

"As long as it is not Mundungus Fletcher."

"How do you ... right, yes ... err, Elias Dodge?"

"Yeah, that's alright."

"I forgot that you know me better than I know myself." The man smiled crookedly.

"Elias is a good fellow, he'll keep you safe, Tom."

"And ... you'll come back? Both Jonathan and you?"

"Yes, Tom, don't worry."

"Should you take Brea?", the boy suggested.

"Brea? Why would I do that?"

"Well ... coming out as gay seems to be dangerous, so having only Jonathan as your bodyguard could ... well, you have her as security in that regard, right?"

"That is actually a great idea, Tom." He pondered the thought. "I just never told her about magic."

"But she is supposedly the one raising me, Dad. No one knows that Edgar and you are caring for me." What a smart boy!

"You have a point there." Harry exchanged a gaze with Dumbledore. "What do you think?"

"It wouldn't hurt to have a beautiful young woman with you. She also knows how to keep secrets, as far as I know."

"Right." Harry nodded to himself. "Tom, would you please run to the factory and fetch her and Edgar?"

"Sure, Dad!" Off he went.

"Right ... please let this turn out well." Harry stood and turned to Dumbledore. "Don't antagonize more people, please."

"I am sorry." The man hung his head.

"As I said, it's done now. Would you get Elias and Jonathan, please?"

"Of course." He grabbed a handful of floo powder. "Just ... I really mean it. Gren, I am sorry."

He nodded. What else was there to do? If time took a completely different path now, the error lay with Harry and would forever do so. It was just another cross to bear.

Kapitel 27: Twenty-seventh chapter

Tom explained the current situation to Edgar and Jonathan while Harry drew Brea aside. The others took the study, so that both of them sat in the library. Her pinched face showed clearly that she knew that something serious was going on.

"How can I help?"

Merlin, he wished he could actually appreciate her for the great woman she had become. He regarded her for a moment before answering: "I need to tell you a few secrets that will most likely shock you."

"You are a high-ranking military man and we secretly hide homosexuals, what exactly should shock me at this point?"

"Magic."

She simply raised her eye-brows. "Magic?"

"Yes, magic is real."

"Alright." She wore her corset, so it was impossible to lean back into the chair. Instead, she leaned sideways to make herself more comfortable. "So you can use magic?"

"No, I can't. Albus, Jonathan and Tom can."

"That makes a lot of sense."

"It does?" Harry blinked.

"Well, Albus never arrives with a car but he let it slip that he came down from Scotland."

"He ... could have taken a bus?"

"For a day trip without luggage?"

"Well, I see your point. His means of travel were suspicious." Why had he never thought about that? "So, there is this whole magical community that hides from non-magical people which are called Muggles."

"Are we the Muggles or are they called Muggles?"

"We are the Muggles, they call themselves witches and wizards. Well ... how to tell you about a whole society? So, basically they work very similar to us. They have reporters and policemen and schools and so on. Albus is the headmaster of their main school. Jonathan is not a chemist but a potioneer."

"So they are important?"

"Albus is, Jonathan not so much. But they also have something like aristocracy and both are members of that. So, in a way, both are important. A reporter came to this house today and surprised Helen. It's why the magical police – they are called Aurors – came and magicked her memory about it away."

"She does not remember?"

"No." He saw how that finally shocked Brea. Magic was all fun until you realized how dangerous it could be. "In the course of that, they attacked me and nearly killed me twice."

"Why?" She balled her fists.

"Basically because they were lax in their procedures. I am about to go to their ministry and log a formal complaint."

"Oh." She let go of her breath. "That's possible?"

"Yes. Jonathan will come with me for security reasons."

"Good." A smile rose to her lips. "I hate thinking that we aren't safe."

"Mister Dodge, the older man just now, will stay here and look after everyone."

Her smile turned sad. "We ... aren't safe, are we?"

"For the foreseeable future, I'd like Jonathan to live with us again. He is very capable."

"Am I to manage this household in your stead?" She drew in her shoulders. "What about Edgar?"

"Edgar will stay here. I'd like you to come with me."

"To the magical world?"

"Yes." After just telling her how dangerous that could be? Smart move, Harry. He was an idiot sometimes. "I don't think that it will be dangerous. But Albus and Jonathan just got outed, so I need a female divergence."

"Oh, I see. Same old problem?"

"Same old, yes. Tom is my son by adoption and every wizard could take him away, claiming that wizards should not be raised by Muggles. I'd be powerless. So we need to present a united front, a strong, intelligent father and a beautiful, loving mother."

"You need me to claim that we raise Tom together?"

"It's more like smiling, nodding along and being pretty."

"So the usual ruse." She nodded and sighed. "Only a different audience this time. Do they know about Edgar?"

"No. If his name comes up, he is a friend in charge of our factory. Just like Albus and me are old friends, you don't know where from."

"I do not need to know my husband's business, I am only a woman after all. The world of politics is for men to enjoy."

"Women can vote, you know?"

"A good woman never would, she stays with the tasks she is entrusted with. A good home and happy children." She would also have to wait another five years to even be allowed to vote. One could marry at sixteen but decide about their government only at twenty-one and above.

"You sound like I mail-ordered a wife."

"For the sake of your reputation, it's easier if I am dumb. A good lay with a pretty face."

"I am both proud and appalled how perfect you play that role."

She simply shrugged her shoulders in a very unladylike manner. "It's easier to cover up inconsistencies that way."

"You also need to be a bit shy this time."

"Shy?" She scrutinized him.

"Some wizards are able to read your mind. When they do, they stare into your eyes deeply. So when someone stares, lower your gaze and act coy."

"Ah!" Brea nodded. "That makes sense. Other than staring at me, is there any way to indicate that someone is using magic?"

"Some people need words or their wand – a wooden stick – to do it, but those aren't the ones I fear. It's those that charm you with a smile and their magic at the same time."

"Sounds like Jonathan."

"He is a master at reading minds and manipulating them. Albus as well. I know none better than them. Looking at me like you adore me to bits is the best way to get through this."

"Oh dear ... can we ask Jonathan to perform some magic first? I don't want to gawk at people and things just because they fly or talk or whatever they do."

That ... was a pretty good idea, yes. Being eleven sounded so far away but he could still remember how strange everything had been. "We'll do that."

"Great." She looked down. "Is this dress okay or should I wear something more pompous?"

"The dark green one that goes well with my eyes. Also, I'll wear a coat over my suit. Wizards normally wear robes."

"Huh ... can we go shopping for clothes afterwards?" Her eyes twinkled with mischief. "It depends on how that complaint goes. But we should take some money just in case."

"Yes!" She stood with a smile. "I'll be back in a quarter."

"I'll be in the study with the others."

Brea had some serious doubts about stepping into a lit fire-place. He could not exactly fault her for that but they had to hurry – so he picked her up and carried her in. Jonathan just grinned in amusement. At the Ministry, Harry carried her away from the fire-places first. Even with a few magic spells to acquaint Brea with the sight, the Ministry lobby was something else. There were people of all colors, all kinds of fashion styles, flying memos, a few house-elves levitating desks and some boy running after a Niffler. It was a daily sight for years of his life and it still overwhelmed him.

"This is amazing," she whispered.

"We should take her to a quidditch match."

"A definite no, Jonathan." Poor girl. At least she grew up in London and was used to human masses. "My lady, may I have the honor?" Harry offered his arm to her.

"Give me a moment." She let her gaze wander. "This is just ... I have no words." Her eyes sparkled with joy. "Can I become a witch?"

"No, you need to be born that way."

"Darn ... can I marry a wizard?"

"You already married." He knew the expression on her face without even looking.

"And no, the cat is already out of the bag, Jonathan does not need a wife."

Said man only raised a brow.

"Right now, you have a magical son. Enjoy that one after he comes back from school."

"He already goes to a magical school?"

"Nope, eleven to seventeen years of age. It's a secondary school."

"I need to work on my motherly charm." She grinned. "Tom will care for his elderly honorary mom when I am old and grey, right?"

Harry just turned to Jonathan who looked as doubtful as Harry felt.

"You are no fun, you know that?" She rolled her eyes. "Okay, I'll enjoy it now and dream about it later." Her hand was put on his arm. "Lead the way, husband of mine." Jonathan fell into step beside them while Harry went over to the information desk. All of them got badges with their name and purpose before they took an elevator to the Auror department. Brea told them that she had once seen a pater noster as a child and used it until she had been thrown out. So elevators were not completely foreign but still amazing. She also poked a few of the memos with her finger.

"As soon as we step of, you need to be in control of yourself."

"Yes, sir." She smiled at him. "Do I call you Gren or sir?"

"Gren, please. We are a devoted, loving couple of an older research specialist and his warm-hearted, loving, beautiful, young wife."

"Who is slightly shy due to her age. All of these important people running around her."

"They aren't important to you right now, you are enraged that your husband was attacked."

"A shy, enraged wife?" Her gaze turned pointed. "You are not making this easy."

"You simply stay silent until you can't take it anymore. Whenever something is not in our favor, your emotions gush out."

"I should become an actress." She nodded. "Let's do this."

They reached their floor and stepped of the elevator to a long floor with a lot of doors. For a moment, homesickness grabbed Harry's heart before he noticed how he knew none of the people navigating the corridor. He stopped a young girl with an Auror apprentice batch and asked to be led to the head Auror.

"What do you want with him, sir?" So not completely blue-eyed it seemed.

"I need to log a complaint against Auror Leeves."

"Oh, that one." She rolled her eyes. "I'll take you to his team leader."

"I fear that another slap on his wrist is not enough this time. Please take me to the head Auror."

She scrutinizes me for a moment, not so subtly studying the badge I wear. "You're that Muggle from the news, right?"

Should he react? Harry knew the way. He could simply go there by himself and leave standing her. He had thought that talking to a recruit would get him in faster but this one was like a terrier. "Yes, madam, I am. My name is Grenmore Horten."

"So this is the infamous Jonathan Bagshot?" She eyes him up and down. It's not exactly clear if it is favorably or not. "I'd understand if you wanted to sue a reporter but why Auror Leeves?"

"Because he tried to kill me twice today."

Her eyes widened comically, a muttered curse leaving her lips before she said lowly: "What was he thinking?"

"That's for your superior to divine. Now would you take us there or shall I have to find the way by myself, telling this to everyone I meet when I ask for directions?"

"No, no, I'll take you there." She held up her hands, a wand in one of them. "Sorry, he's known for behaving rashly but mostly he just pisses people off."

"Speaking of that, I do have to sue some reporters, so maybe we could take some statements after my business with the head Auror is done?"

"Sure thing." She led them down the corridor. "Can I stay for that complaint against Leeves?"

Harry smiled devilishly. "You want to be first for the gossip?"

"Hell yeah." She grinned. "I live for the gossip."

"I did not think that many people would remember my name from that article."

"There was another article explaining the theory further that had your name in it. It was published in Rogue, a pureblood witches' magazine that normally covers fashion or new baby trends. Seeing as it pertained magical births, the magazine deemed it worthwhile. It had an interview with Leticia Bones who was asked why she let her daughter marry a dark wizard. She explained your theory and quoted you."

"Is there a way for me to get that publication?"

"It's a limited edition, not publically available." There was calculation in her eyes, definitely a Slytherin.

"You get all the details on Leeves and get to squeeze Larrey Barren for a bit."

"Would you be cross with me if your statement never made it to the records?" So she wanted leverage against the reporter.

"Depends on what you use it for? I need a bit of good press on Jonathan and Albus right now. What are your goals?"

"I am not sure about the good press but I could raise a shitstorm against Ruby

Sinclair."

Jonathan interrupted for a moment: "That's appreciated."

Harry also acquiesced: "As long as it doesn't hurt Jonathan or Albus, I'm in."

"Perfect." She stopped in front of the head Auror's office. "Right this way, sirs, I'll announce you and see to it that you are seen immediately."

"A pleasure doing business with you." Not exactly what he expected from a rookie though.

Her returning smile screamed the truth about her conniving mind.

The rest went as smooth as warm butter. Brea did not have to intercept once. She only asked afterwards if that move with the Auror rookie wasn't a bit far from his character. Honestly, it was. Bringing down and attacking your enemies was low. Not even the argument that she did it first was enough here, he wasn't a four-year-old fighting over a toy. Her naive question made Harry aware that he had just caused Ruby Sinclair's social death as a means to protect Albus and Jonathan as well as his own interests. Brea was right that this wasn't his style at all.

"I am getting sucked into a world of intrigues." Harry sighed. "All I want is for Dumbledore to keep his position and change history for the better by being a role model for young kids."

"A man in the light needs another to manage his shadow." Jonathan looked at him, no remorse in his face. "That has always been my job. If you had not made that deal, I would have. I know Ruby. She's dangerous. I know that she is already planning her revenge and discrediting her is the only way to remove the threat."

"But to stoop down to her level?" Harry looked at his wife. "Your right, Brea, I am not okay with what I did. I do not like doing things this way. It was a kind of violence and the problem should be solved without it."

Jonathan spoke before she could: "You cannot solve every problem without violence, Gren. How exactly should one have stopped Gellert Grindelwald without violence? Told him that his theory was wrong when not even his own lover turning from him and people out to kill him made him realize that?"

Harry faced him and asked back: "Did the punishment help? Did the imprisonment help?"

"Well ... no."

"Then how did violence help? It only took his means of hurting others but it did not solve the problem. How many people come out of prison and can honestly say that they learned something?"

"Some people cannot be helped", argued Jonathan.

"Don't you think that nearly everyone has said that about Gellert Grindelwald?"

"Well ... violence gives you time to help."

"My move on Ruby Sinclair will not help her, it will only hurt."

"But there was no alternative at this point. Her goal was to hurt and maim and she nearly crippled us. We had no legal way to stop her. What do you do when the law does not protect you?"

"You change it." Harry sighed. "There is no honor in self-justice and that's what I just did." It was followed by an even bigger sigh. "I'll write her a letter of apology. It was a spur of the moment decision and not a good one."

"You are too nice." Jonathan rubbed his head. "People take our power, our jobs and maybe even our lives for how we are born and I should simply accept that?"

"No, you should find a place that accepts you."

"What if there is none?" Pain laced his voice. "Gren, there just is none. Not even here, as nice as you are. You have seen the same things I did. Millions of people are going to be killed for nothing other than prejudice."

"I know." He hung his head. "I wish I knew how to stop that."

"Just how I wish I knew how to stop Muggle killings." Jonathan placed his hands on Harry's shoulders. "Violence is needed to gain time. You don't have to like or support it but sometimes it serves a greater purpose."

"Your rhetoric of a greater purpose or the greater good is exactly what the populists will use to kill people like us, Jonathan. Did you see those words engraved on the plate above the concentration camp entryway in your visions? Don't use the same logic your enemies use, no matter how tempting."

To everyone his own. It were the words on the entryway of the concentration camp Buchenwald. What was once meant as words of acceptance, coming from ancient Rome to gain approval of a social support system, was then used as a way to tell Jews, homosexuals, gypsies and political enemies that they were unwanted elements and only deserved death. It was nearly as bad as telling people that their death and suffering served a greater purpose. Lives lost seldom served any purpose. Some people sacrificed themselves for others, yes, some even heroically. Harry had done that after all. Albus had done it. But it was rare cases where a death was actually a sensible sacrifice.

More often, people decided that others had to be killed for some kind of gain. There was no honor in that. There was no greater purpose. There was only greed, fear and desperation making people prepared to kill. This one time, he had allowed himself to be guided by those emotions and caused harm to someone else when he could have talked to her first. His fear and frustration had gotten the better of him.

Brea said: "I have no idea what you are talking about but if Gren wants to apologize to the woman that harmed you for harming her in return, I can't see a bad outcome. As long as everything still runs as planned, why not?"

"It's a paltry excuse to say you regret doing something but not carry any consequences, Brea. I could warn her of what is coming but that would mean it would not be as effective. Is it worth the risk? I wish I knew. I don't want her to lose face but I also need her to lose face if she does not change her ways."

Jonathan offered: "I could always reveal my other persona, she would immediately be on our side."

"That is never the right way, Jonathan. Scratch that thought from your mind forever. Nothing is worth the consequences of that."

Brea looked at them both for a long moment but seemed to decide to let this slip.

"How about a letter explaining the reasons for doing what you did? It would be an apology with the possibility of her seeing your way."

"Sounds a lot like justification."

Brea groaned and asked: "Why does explaining yourself always mean that you aren't sorry as well? It's not like misunderstandings are caused by one person alone. You can apologize and explain. Oftentimes the other person needs to apologize as well anyway."

"Angry people think that you aren't sincere when you explain yourself, Brea." Even though she was right that mostly, all people involved were hurt. Only taking an apology and not giving one in return was not exactly nice. "You are right though. In essence, my message is "Please refrain from hurting my friends and family, otherwise I will hurt you further". I will basically just threaten her. I might feel sorry that is has

come to this but I can't apologize. I would not be sincere if I said I regretted this. I would like to regret it, but Jonathan is right, I know no other way. I wish I knew another but in our current legal system, there is no other way."

"I am all in for a threatening letter." Jonathan smirked.

"It will be a non-confrontative though." Harry smiled sadly. "I fear her and I shall tell her so. It is most likely not the way you would ever write a letter."

The other man just sighed and asked: "Can I read it at least?"

"Of course." He headed to the study. "For now, let's tell the others that we should be safe again. The only thing that could happen are wizards apparating in but that would be most unusual. Except for the reporter that won't come here again and both Aurors of which one will not come here again, no one knows this place."

"I'll stay and protect you," Jonathan vowed.

Harry just nodded and thanked him. Time to release Elias from his duties.

Dear Ruby Sinclair,

I write in hopes for this not to become a bigger and bigger mess. I do not know if you intended for your words and actions to have the consequences they could have had. They cost Jonathan his job, they might have cost Albus his job. More importantly, it could have ruined both their social standings.

Both of them are important to make the wizarding world more open, more accepting for change that is needed to keep it alive. You know of the genetic theory, you also know of the danger of Muggle technology. Keeping the old ways of intermarrying and shunning Muggles is a threat to survival, even though a lot of people cannot see that right now. I fear you are one of them, still believing that enslaving Muggles and killing most of them would somehow save us. It will not. Some people already had that epiphany, maybe Jonathan could explain it to you a bit better than I can. He is aware of and more knowledgeable in your own rhetoric after all.

Right now, with the way you are, you are a threat. I hope that this will change in the future, but due to current circumstances, I need to see you in this light. Therefore I made some moves to reign in the threat you pose. I am not proud of them, it is not the way I like work with intelligent creatures. Normally, I talk to them, try to understand them and maybe have them understand me as well. This time, based on the information I have and the pressures of time, I denounced you to the press. I am sorry it came to this, I wish there had been another way. Please let us communicate instead of destroying each other further.

*Yours sincerely,
Grenmore Horten*

"Do you think she will write to me?," Jonathan asked.

"You know her better than I do. She seems fascinated with the thought that Grindelwald could still be alive and come back in your body. So I guess she will invite you and then press you for information until she is sure you are really him."

"She was a fervent fan of him."

"I guess that is why Albus feared her so." Harry pointed at the letter. "Is there anything you wish to add or would change?"

"I would take a different tone but I see why you do this. You don't want her to become a cornered rat, you want her to cooperate. By mentioning me, you want to lure her to our side with the possibility of secretly working with Grindelwald again. It's a genius move, seeing as you don't reveal anything. It's subtle. I guess that is how you would want me to play her. Always leaving the question open without ever giving something concrete away."

"Albus would disapprove. He would say that it's too risky."

Jonathan fell silent for a moment before hesitatingly speaking: "I want to say that he underestimates me ... maybe he is right though. She is sharp. One can play her but only at a certain distance. Once she has too much information, she becomes dangerous."

"So we need to keep her at an arm's length."

"Never trust her with anything."

"I know the type." Like Gryphook. Knowing that an ally is only there for their self-interest, nor for the cause itself. One that could always stab you in the back.

"Sometimes I wonder what you have seen." Jonathan looked at him in something like wonder. "Have you been good or evil? Do you have regrets that eat you up? Who have you lost to stand here today?"

"I lost my parents, I lost my mentor, I lost all of my friends, my wife and my three children. I lost my own life twice now and countless people died for me. As far I know, I even lost my whole time-line. Nothing I know will ever come to pass and most likely, I won't ever see my loved ones again, not even in death." Harry scoffed. "It puts misery into perspective."

"And I am telling you about societies that aren't accepting." The other man hung his head. "You are most likely older than me and have seen a lot more."

"I have seen more but I am actually not older than you. You have a few years on me." Harry took the letter and sealed it. "All of us are shaped by our experiences and some prepare us for things others aren't as well prepared for. We lack in other areas for it." "What do you lack?"

"Consistency." He had gotten an inkling in his last life. "Trust in the world around me." "You trust even me by now."

"That's because you talk stuff through before you do it. No more bewitching violent Muggles in secret without telling anyone about it."

"Has Howard's father stopped with the violence?"

"Mostly, yes. His wife works in our factory, she looks after their youngest and Tom looks after Howard and his sister. The man still has work but he is about to lose it because he drinks his anger away. I hope that one day, his wife will see him for the pathetic waste of space that he is. Or he comes around and changes something about himself, who knows. One of them would be appreciated."

Jonathan nodded slowly. "Do you have any wishes, now that I live here?"

"Apply for a new apprenticeship. Some people love scandal, one might take you in. It can't be worse than your last one."

"Don't you want me here for protection?"

"That's important but the long-time goal is still to have you join politics. I don't want to stand in your way. There are others that can protect us, but there aren't many with your rhetoric skills."

"Thank you." The other man smiled and nodded. "You are right, I'll do that."

