

The time that is given us

How love can change lives

Von Gepo

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. They 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.

The 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 women were allowed to sue their husbands for rape. Before, women 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. "Women 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 to 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 man, be very, very careful. Homosexuality is a death sentence in this day and 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 woman, 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.