

The time that is given us

How love can change lives

Von Gepo

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 gentleman 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 adapt at 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