

The time that is given us

How love can change lives

Von Gepo

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. They 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.