

The time that is given us

How love can change lives

Von Gepo

Kapitel 20: Twentieth chapter

Jonathan Bagshot moved in with them in the month of May, 1935. His story was that his great-aunt had been thought to be barren after years of trying for a child. Thinking that true, she did not protect herself when she had a tryst with a Muggle. Despite being 49 at the time, she became pregnant with Jonathan and gave birth to him in secret, claiming that she needed seclusion for her current book. Apparently, she sometimes disappeared for months at a time to research and write a book. It reminded Harry of Hermione, just that Bathilda seemed to be an even less social version. Anyway, she hid Jonathan and had him raised by a house-elf (which will explain why he is supportive of magical creatures). His existence would have put shame upon Mister Bagshot, so he was schooled by his mother (which will explain why he is a genius without having records of formal schooling). For his mother's sake, he stayed hidden until Mister Bagshot's death but had been trying to convince his mother of applying for his papers ever since. Being rather adept at potions, he wanted to apprentice as a potion's master (Dumbledore found a potion's master that would take him on without asking questions). Bathilda finally relented and came out with the truth in front of the Ministry. She had to pay a fine for hiding a magical child, Dumbledore faked the entry in the school registry (writing down that the child was most likely under Fidelius as it couldn't be found). She even shamefully admitted that the house's secretkeeper had been none other than Gellert Grindelwald. Which meant that Jonathan Bagshot was six years younger than his cousin Gellert (no problem there, the man did not have a hair out of place, an impressive feat for being over fifty).

The story seemed completely believable apparently, no one questioned it. Dramas like that seemed to happen all the time. Harry shook his head in exasperation. So people simply accepted that things like that happened? Didn't the wizarding world have any kind of child services? Thinking back on his own childhood, apparently not. Had Hermione ever changed something about that? He couldn't remember. If by some miracle, he ever returned to his own time, he had to remind her to look into it. Anyway, Grindelwald got new papers without a hitch. His apprenticeship was supposed to start in September. Honestly, Harry pitied the poor potion's master that would soon find out that his apprentice not only knew all his techniques but a lot more than them and that there was nothing to teach him. Whoever believed that Dumbledore – who did not have a real interest in potions – had actually written the thesis on the twelve uses of dragon blood himself? It had been one of Grindelwald's

pet projects in captivity.

So Jonathan got the last spare room in the house that was now officially full. The children met the news with excited theories on Jonathan's circumstances for moving in with them. An aristocrat fallen from grace (because anyone could see that he must come from nobility with his looks)? Another homosexual friend of Gren (because apparently he was only friends with homosexuals)? A poor soul come down with the French disease (Harry looked horrified when he overheard that one)? Anyway, he found Jonathan in his room and asked for a more elaborate cover because the girls could be ruthless in their questioning.

"Hm." Jonathan pondered that for a moment. "I spoke about this with Albus. Due to my mother applying for my papers and him having to check the registries for me, he decided to pay me a visit and apologize in the name of the school that they had not looked harder. We madly fell in love upon that visit. So when he asked for my future plans and found out my interest in potions, he persuaded a friend of his to take me in. My English was good but I wanted more practice, so he asked another friend – that would be you – to allow me some time in his household to hone my language skills." He waited for Harry's nod. "So, for Muggles the story is rather similar, just that Albus works for the government – which is not a lie – and I am to become a chemist."

"The girls will be horribly disappointed that it is not more of a scandal." Harry smiled. "Illegitimate child of a noble woman, hidden from the world for years? Falling in love with the first handsome stranger that comes around?"

"Alright, I take everything back, it is scandalous enough. Especially the part about falling in love with a government official."

"Muggles are against homosexual love as well?" He rolled his eyes. "Isn't there any place in this world that will not hate Albus and me for who we are?"

"It might be best to censor that part of the story."

"No!" Jonathan's eyes narrowed. "I will not go back to hiding and being someone's dirty secret. People hate and shun me for it? That's okay. But I won't go back to lying about myself."

"Suit yourself." Harry held up his hands in surrender. "Just prepare to live with the consequences. This household is a safe place but even Edgar does not openly talk about being homosexual. So please don't implicate him."

"He lies to his children?"

"He omits the truth to spare them because he does not want them to have to lie." A heavy sigh wrenched itself from Harry's lips. "They would. They would defend him to their deaths. He wants to give them the opportunity of claiming they do not know."

The sharp blue eyes studied Harry for a moment. "What exactly is the law on homosexuality?"

"A prison sentence for any homosexual acts. A record open to every employer, once you are known for your so called depravity. Dishonorary exclusion from the military. Death if you are found out in an active war. Germany is talking about branding homosexual men for everyone to see. Later, it will be forced labor and death." Was there more? "Bravery and a coming-out can get you killed in this age."

Jonathan slowly nodded. "I'll ... think about it."

"Thank you." Harry made to leave the room.

"Gren?"

He turned back.

"I can't meet Albus here, right?"

"You can meet but not ... go to this room." Was that clear enough?

"You would have to report us?"

"It's obstruction of justice. Hiding and aiding criminals. They would take the children." Jonathan sighed. "I don't like this world."

"It's the one we have. It falls to us to make it better."

"I don't think people want a better world." The older man leaned against his bedpost. "They want to stay in their tiny little boxes, living their tiny little lives, never having to care about what that means to others."

Harry came back in and closed the door behind him.

"I wanted them to see the bigger picture. People care when their world gets threatened. When I talked about atomic bombs, they listened. They called for change." Jonathan sat down on his bed. "But nothing happened. Let's say they realized I was wrong. Killing everyone was a bad idea. Okay ... but why did nothing change? Did my words leave no impression at all?"

"People will remember. Once the first bomb falls, they will call for Muggle blood. They will call for the extinction of everything Muggle."

Jonathan shuddered. "I need to make up for that somehow. They need to have a better strategy before the first bomb falls."

"You will need to go into politics and propose a plan for better wizard-Muggle relationships before the first bomb falls, yes. They won't listen but by the time 1945 comes around, your current voice needs to be louder than your former one."

"So I have ten years?" Jonathan looked up at him. "How do you know that? How do you know when the first bomb will fall?"

Shit, horribly perceptive genius in front of him! "You aren't the only one that can contact a seer."

"Seers don't give you answers as concrete as that."

"No, 1945 is only an estimation based on her words. Might be more or less. But it's the most likely."

"Hm." Jonathan seemed to buy his words. "If I had known back then that it was still so far off, I would have taken another strategy."

"Well, the image of a grenade launcher might have done the trick as well. The Muggle World War I was a horrible affair." His cousin had had a picture book. He had also loved movies about explosions and people being torn into tiny, bloody bits.

"Any idea on how to do this?"

"You slowly warm people up to the idea. You don't force your opinion upon them with might, you let them see the wisdom in your words."

"Who would listen to a no-name half-blood if not for his potent magic? I am pretty good at making speeches but who will listen if I don't make them listen?"

"First of all, you get your degree as a potion's master. Then you make yourself invaluable to some important people with your genius potions. You introduce your idea there, butter them up, have them do some work for you. You present your theories in front of the Wizengamot after you already have half of them on your side. Waltzing in there and expecting everyone to listen is doomed to fail."

"I learned that lesson, yes."

"You present something to a group only after you are sure that most of them are in favor." Harry lowered his voice. "And only after you are aware of the consequences of what you are doing."

Jonathan grinned a bit sheepishly. "I was eighteen, okay?"

"I know how last time came about. Just don't repeat it."

"Right." He nodded. "So is there anything else about Muggle rules that I should

know?"

"You don't talk about magic, you don't do magic, you don't call them Muggles. Otherwise, it's very similar. No stealing, no killing, no attacking people."

"Am I on house arrest?"

"No, you can go where you want. Just tell someone when you plan to be back. You can feel like a guest here. You may use the library." Which was what he expected Jonathan to do for a few days or weeks, he was a bookworm. "Would you like a tour of the house?"

"I'd appreciate it."

For a former dark lord, Jonathan was actually a nice and well-mannered guy. What a change not being bent on mass destruction made to a human. He introduced the man to everyone in the house. Jonathan's friendly mask only slipped upon meeting Brea.

"Brea? This is our house guest, Jonathan Bagshot. Jonathan, this is my wife, Brea Horten."

"A pleasure." She curtsied in front of him.

"A ... pleasure as well, Miss Hor-, I mean, Misses Horten." He took her hand and kissed the back of it. "You are a beauty. You don't even look half your husband's age."

"That's because I am that young." Brea smirked. "Maybe you should have warned him, Gren."

"Apparently, I should have. Alas, I cannot hide my pervert tastes in women."

Jonathan just looked at him for a second and said, "Alright, you two are having a joke at my expense. Would you care to elaborate?"

"The law we talked about before." Harry made a hand gesture that could have meant anything. "We needed a cover up story. Brea had the great idea of marrying me."

"But I thought you aren't sleeping with Edgar?" The other man raised a blond eyebrow.

"That doesn't mean people don't think it. So I needed a cover-up depravity."

"Hah! A cover-up depravity." Jonathan shook his head. "I guess I understand. When you do some things, other things don't seem as important in comparison." Like being a mass-murderer? "So you are known to be lusting after young girls?"

"My former maid, turned sixteen just four months ago."

Brea lay a hand on her forehead and said, "It's so hard to satisfy my husband's urges."

"You are two peas from one pot." He rolled his blue eyes.

She smiled and reminded them, "It's nearly dinner time. I wanted to come get you. The girls want some fodder for their gossip."

"What's the reigning theory right now?," Harry asked her.

"Well, he can't be your boyfriend but word of the mouth is that he is Edgar's new boyfriend. They are making bets how we are to cover up this one."

"Edgar?" Jonathan made a face. "He's twenty, I mean, fifteen years younger than me."

"What?" Brea couldn't close her mouth for a moment. "You're nearly fifty? We thought you were thirty!"

"Well ... thank you? That is flattering."

"So you aren't his boyfriend?" She looked slightly disappointed. "Poor Edgar, he needs more love in his life. Especially now that Richard left."

"Richard?"

"Oh, he was a boy working here as a gardener. He followed his lover to London." She sighed as if it was a deeply romantic story. "It's good to have someone here that shares Edgar's troubles."

"You seem quite certain about my sexuality."

"Well." She stopped for a moment and looked him up and down. "After living with two homosexual men for a time, you notice when someone does not look at your cleavage at all."

Harry coughed to suppress his laughter.

Jonathan looked from her to him and said, "You really earned her. She's exactly the kind of women I would wish upon you."

"Some men think it an honor rather than chore."

The man just shook his head as if to dislodge the thought. Brea openly laughed about the comment and continued on to the dining room. Harry just grinned and followed her. The dining room was bustling with activity. Instead of a normal dinner, it looked like they had cooked at least two different dishes. They also put out the good china.

"Seems like we'll have a feast!"

Brea turned to him and said, "You didn't tell me what our guest was about, so we decided to go grand."

"I like it." He nodded in appreciation. "Does anyone need a hand?"

"No, we just waited for you two." Even though she said that, Loretta and Helen brought in some more side-dishes before sitting down. Brea herself asked for their drink choices and got a wine-glass for Jonathan.

"You don't drink?"

"No, this body has a bad history with alcohol, I'll stick to water." Actually, his body could most likely take it but Edgar could not. He didn't like anything more than butterbeer anyway, so he didn't impose privations upon himself.

Harry spoke a prayer for everyone which left Jonathan confused but playing along. Margret explained tonight's creation and everyone got a bit of everything. Even with the marriage making a dent in their income, they had done rather well, so meat made an appearance at their table more often. Jonathan simply kept silent about the fact that they were eating with their servants and everyone behaved more like family than master and maids. When Tom took the last dumpling without asking if anyone else really wanted it, it was Margret that scolded him.

Brea finally decided to actually play her role as mistress for a bit and said, "I hope you like it. Most of us take an interest in cooking."

"It's great," Jonathan assured them. "I lived by myself for a long time but never learned to cook. I always had a maid. I don't think I had any variety in my food for decades. This is very welcome."

"Oh, you are always welcome in the kitchen. It's good to be able to care for oneself. You never know what might happen in your life. Also, cooking is fun."

"Do you cook?" The other man turned to Harry.

"I am a decent cook but I don't enjoy it. So I like leaving it to others." His childhood had taken the joy out of it for all of his life. "Tom is great baker."

"Oh?" Jonathan raised an eyebrow at the boy.

"Yes, he baked today's apple pie," Brea informed him.

"I look forward to it."

"What are your hobbies?" So, the interrogation finally began.

"I love to read and make ... tonics. I like dabbling in alchemy."

"Oh! Can you mix cologne?"

"Yes, I can." He smirked. "I come from Germany. I even know the formula for 4711." What the heck was that?

"So you can supply our gentleman with better aftershave?" Brea smiled at him. "Us girls are thankful for your services already."

"What's wrong with my aftershave?," Harry asked in confusion.

"It's horrible."

"It is?" Edgar used the same. "I think it's manly."

"It stinks."

"Okay, okay, we'll change it." Harry held up his hands.

"I am glad to be of service." Jonathan smirked at him. "What would you like? I can mix 4711 but I can also mix other odors. Would you like something flowery? Or something smelling of the sea?"

"Do you have examples?" Brea really got into it.

"It takes time and money to mix perfumes. I am not so sure about the money part right now." He looked at Harry. "I guess I need to ask Albus for a stipend?"

"I am sure he will pay me back. So ask for whatever you need."

"Albus?" Brea looked like a dog that had found a rabbit hole. "Isn't that the nice older gentleman that visited us a few times?"

"He's my age, young lady. Don't call me old." Jonathan actually looked affronted.

"So that's the boyfriend?"

The man just smiled and lowered his gaze, turning wistful.

"So I was right." She snapped her fingers. "I guess you are here on a favor?" Her gaze turned to Harry.

"As always, my dear, you are as sharp as a knife." How had he ever expected that he could keep secrets from the girls? "He is here for his English skills. As he said, he came from Germany and he will start his new job in September."

"Can you speak German?", Helen asked in fascination.

"Of course. This is only my second language. I speak German, English, French, Russian and a bit of Italian due to my Latin skills. I also tried to learn Spanish but I haven't gotten far without a native speaker."

"Can you say something in German?"

"Was möchtest du denn hören?" He smiled at her and seemed moved by her genuine interest in something that was natural to him. "I asked what you wanted to hear."

"That's so cool." Helen smiled.

"Can you teach us?" Brea looked fascinated as well. "They are trying to teach us German in school but the teacher is just awful."

Loretta groaned. "Don't tell me about it. I don't think he even knows that language he is talking in."

"Well, he is from Sweden ... his English is bad and his German is worse." Brea shook her head with a sigh. "Often, he explains something and when we look it up, it's all wrong."

"Who is taking German lessons right now?"

Brea, Loretta and Dorothea raised their hands. Jonathan began to ask them some easy questions in German and they stumbled through their answers. Even to Harry who spoke no other languages than English, it sounded bad. But he had to admire Jonathan for completely diverting the topic from himself. Dorothea wasn't exactly keen on extra lessons but she decided to join the other two that actually wanted to learn the language. Helen and Mary asked to join, so Tom wanted in of course. No way everyone but him would learn something. On the topic of learning, he would also like to join Jonathan in his alchemy work. The other man just looked at Harry in question.

"If you want to and as long as you don't work with poisonous stuff, I am open to the idea."

"Anything can be toxic, even daisies." The smirk accompanying that was downright

cruel.

"Do not let harm come to my son."

"As long as you can forgive me for his acts of complete stupidity?"

"Define that."

"Well, I don't think I need to tell anyone that you should not ingest ingredients in a lab except if you are specifically told to."

"As long as they don't look like candy, yes." Harry remembered his own potion's class.

"Look, kids can be idiots. You tell them to add a flobberworm and they take an earthworm instead. A pinch of aconite becomes half a spoon. Three strokes counter-clockwise become rigorous stirring in. As long as you two make candies or perfume, go ahead. But if it becomes more serious than that, I need you to be able to react to anything that could go wrong."

"So only when I get ... my work tools?" As in a wand.

"Yes, please."

"Can we make candies?" Tom's eyes were as wide as saucers.

"What was it I am to create? Lemon drops?" Jonathan smirked.

"And all other kinds of candy from lakritz to acid pops. Your lover is a candy enthusiast." Harry rolled his eyes remembering Dumbledore's horrible choice in passwords.

"I only know he loves raspberry jam." Jonathan smiled to himself. "I should have known he would love candy."

"Especially made by you."

"I love candy too!," Tom interjected.

"Okay, little snake. I teach you how to make candy, you teach me how to bake."

"Done deal." The boy held out his hand for Jonathan to shake.

Harry just smiled. He liked this version of Grindelwald, the one that could enjoy learning and teaching, that did not think himself above a bunch of kids. Still, he vowed to listen in on these lessons sometimes. Jonathan should learn from the kids, not they from him. He could be a horrible influence if he wanted to.

"I like the men you bring to this house." Brea looked at Harry. "Where do you find these nice people?"

"Edgar found me." Harry smiled in remembrance.

"And I am not nice," Jonathan said with a grin.

Somehow, it was horrible how he was completely truthful but made his sound like a joke. Brea of course took it as one and admonished him for speaking badly of himself. Harry just hoped that he had not made a mistake. This could go wrong in so many ways ... he'd really love to have Ginny, Hermione and Ron here. Doing this all by himself was ... not too much but at least a lot. It didn't help that Jonathan was such a charming and handsome man. Harry was quite sure he would lose his objectivity sooner rather than later.

Hopefully, he would not regret this.

Dear Gren,

I hope you have a lovely time with your family. Summer has reached Hogwarts, so I am sure you already had some nice sunny days down there in Bath. Jonathan sent me a box of candies that he labeled as lemon drops, so I finally know what you meant when you

said I was crazy about them. Because I am! You introduce some great things into my life. He also invited me for cake this weekend. You said you will think about giving him a wand. Should I plan for a trip with him soon? I am not sure who to visit though. Gregorovich knows his magic, he might recognize him. Ollivanders might be a sensible choice but he might ask why Bathilda never brought Jonathan over, even in secret. Maybe we should go to Glendale in America? On the other hand, an American visa is a true hassle. What would be your recommendation?

I also wanted to tell you that I got a letter from Mister Malfoy. Apparently, he finally decided that there is wisdom in your words and he would like us to meet with a few other purebloods to gauge their reaction before he decides on supporting us. I would like to detest how pertinacious he is in protecting himself and his image but I guess that is what house Slytherin is about. Sometimes I look at Jonathan and remember how that is part of his personality too. He clung to his image stubbornly in our first meetings. Still, he was a lot more flexible in the end. How come I can find something endearing in my partner that I hate in other people? Anyway, Malfoy is asking us out for tea with a few purebloods. He named Crabbe, Goyle, Avery and Rosier in his letter. All of them try to cover up their recent family history but what they have in common is that their generation has a lot of miscarriages and a bunch of not exactly bright children. My guess is that he wants you to convince them to pair off a few of their family members with Muggleborns, wait for the result and then decide on supporting our cause. This might become a waiting game but I don't see other opportunities if you want Dark magic support. I see the sense in that but I still wish you wouldn't. Just thinking about how Malfoy spent his time looking through family trees, deciding which Sacred families could be sacrificed if needed, were desperate enough to consent to breeding experiments with their own children – honestly, if I did not believe in you like this, if I wasn't this sure that no harm would come to the children, I would hate myself for even thinking about talking to such a man. You were right to call me out on my treatment of Slytherin children but knowing they grow into these men, it is hard to remind myself of that every day. Right now, whenever I have to judge a Slytherin/non-Slytherin fight, I remember sixteen-year-old Gellert to raise my sympathy. I also remember your words that neither convictions nor speeches have a value against actions. Alas, it is hard to stay true to fair judgment in everyday life. Sometimes, I see a day coming where Jonathan calls me out on my actions and explains morality to me. He is obviously better at learning that than I am.

Yours truly, Albus

Dear Albus,

we are enjoying the sun a lot. Brea bought her first swimsuit which looks a lot like a full dress to me but I am told it is the height of fashion. I debated about writing back, as we will see each other tomorrow, but I am sure you will want to enjoy your time with Jonathan. You might want to make a trip to the beach, it is beautiful and I know for certain that Jonathan would immensely enjoy that. According to him, having people look at his nearly naked body will be a lot better when you are beside him and he never had the experience before. Basically, he wants enjoy going territorial on you and making you jealous.

I shall make a jump to your musings on Slytherin nature here. Every action can be seen in

a lot of different ways. You could see a man of over fifty years gearing up for a trip with his lover to the beach, agonizing about it like a love-sick teenager, and find it quite cute. You could also see a man fit and handsome beyond his years that is vain enough to enjoy his lover's jealousy over other people openly fantasizing about laying their hands on him and be annoyed about such youthful antics. So you could say that Malfoy is a scumbag for saving himself and his son derision and a loss of reputation by manipulating others into becoming experiments. You could also say that Malfoy carefully selected afflicted families in order to maximize the impact of introducing our theories to people while helping friends and acquaintances at the same time with offering an effective and free solution they would otherwise sell their soul for. It's not Slytherin actions that are a problem, it's your reasoning. You tend to see Jonathan in a good light while other Dark wizards are assigned the worst of motivations. Being a Slytherin only means that most actions have a self-serving aspect instead of being done on principle or because it is noble or right. You could say that Malfoy is doing a noble deed for his fellow Dark wizards by introducing an unpopular theory and thereby taking the blame if it goes wrong, just for helping them. I would also say that is going to far because I am sure that is not how Malfoy reasons his own actions – it is a possible motivation though. You might even think that if Malfoy were a Gryffindor.

Back to our dear Jonathan: That one is doing well. I see how attaching himself to you and reconnecting with his own feelings made him receptive to opening up to the kids. I don't think he likes me and Edgar's animosity is not helping to make Jonathan warm up to him but Mary, Tom and him are as thick as thieves now. I overheard a conversation last week where Tom and Jonathan were discussing how to prank one of Tom's schoolmates when Mary admonished them for petty revenge instead of trying to get behind the other boy's reasoning and helping him instead. Tom pouted but relented while Jonathan just looked struck. It's like he forgot he was trying to be a sensible adult and had to be reminded by a teenage girl. So you might not be the only one that finds it hard to actually live what he preaches. But all in all, there are no dead people, no intimidation attempts (except for kids trying to wriggle candy out of him) and violence is kept to a frog in the bed (Brea was not happy about that one). I guess he is doing as well as can be expected. So yes, a wand is on order. I would advise on visiting Ollivander's shop with both Jonathan and Tom. Most wizards that cannot get their own wand use hand-me-downs. Let's say that Jonathan did that up to now and wants his own now. At the same time, we can get Tom a wand. Those two will start actual brewing soon and I don't think that Tom will stop afterwards. So we need someone able to cast healing spells. I will also need an emergency portkey for St. Mungos. Can you arrange that for me? Tell me a time that would be convenient for our outing, I'll make room in my schedule.

Yours truly, Gren

Tom and Jonathan had certainly bonded, not that Harry had expected any less. They were two peas from one pot. He had not expected the addition of Mary to that troupe, seeing as she had been a rather shy girl before and never gave any dark lord vibes but his only reference had been Bellatrix after all. Thankfully, she was something like an Hermione to Ron's and his own general stupidity. Both boys – and yes, by now Jonathan felt more like an additional child in an adult's body – tended to be geniuses when it came to discussing crystallization theories while growing

beautiful salt crystals but could be idiots when it came to human interactions. Both knew how to be charming, how to use pretty smiles and bashful blinking of their eyes but connecting on an emotional level seemed difficult. Jonathan first learned from Tom, not that Harry had expected any less. He met Howard and his adorable little sister and finally their heavily pregnant mother. A few weeks later, Harry met her to congratulate her on the birth of her daughter Patricia, where instead she thanked him for introducing her to that charming young man (as always, people did not think that Jonathan was a day older than thirty) that had finally brought her husband to reason. Apparently, after him meeting Mister Smith, her husband had backed off whenever he got angry. Harry later found out from Jonathan that he had cast a layered stinging hex that triggered whenever the man was about to do damage to his wife or kids. He placed it on the back of Mister Smith's head, so that it would feel like a stab of his consciousness.

Harry did explain the ethical aspect of using magic on unsuspecting Muggles, the illegality of it, the danger of being caught and what would happen after reversal, the possibility of Mister Smith ignoring that pain and getting more violent instead, etcetera, etcetera – all in all, he could not bring up any anger though, so good riddance to Mister Smith's Muggle rights in this case. So when Jonathan asked if he should reverse it, Harry simply shrugged his shoulders and answered that he should do what he thought best, being realistic in the dangers of his actions. Jonathan just grinned and told him he should have been a Slytherin. Sometimes, Harry thought so as well, but on the other hand, Ron had been a paragon of a Gryffindor and Harry was pretty sure he would have had no problem with cursing Mister Smith. The interesting part came after, because Harry asked why he had chosen this kind of curse. So Jonathan told him how Tom and him had discussed this – certainly a much more bloody version of what they wanted to do to Mister Smith – when Mary came by and realistically argued their points with “And what happens then?”, explaining the implications and consequences of their actions. A point that both did not get was how people could love their abusers. In this, Mary was a fountain of wisdom, having opened up about her mother's affair with her master. Yes, she had been forced. But she had also received gifts, had been taken on special trips, had sometimes even enjoyed luxuries. Mary herself had always thought that she had been her master's favorite, being doted upon and cherished until her mother ran away. Trying to explain to both Tom and Jonathan how you could deeply hate someone because you starved and were sometimes beaten and love him at the same time because he bought you silk garments for doing your hair and pastries to keep you occupied while your mother went to him, she made them aware of the intricacies of being dependent on someone. Her master had been like a father to her, both fearsome and kind, until she saw the real him when she became useless to him.

So Jonathan asked Harry why you would attach yourself to someone like that. He explained that he had always thought this a weakness in his youth, had even thought so most of his adult life. Yes, he knew he now had an emotional attachment to Albus and it was both scary and exhilarating but why attach yourself to someone that clearly meant you harm?

“Often, it is not a choice. Kids need emotional attachment because our genetics program us into that. If parents weren't attached to their kids, they would simply abandon them for being too much work. But attachment goes both ways. Parents can only bond successfully if their children can bond back. The better the bond, the less abuse there is normally, because parents that have an emphatic bond are less likely to

abuse their children. In conclusion, abuse is preferable to indifference because it is less likely to cause neglect. Loving your abuser makes sense in a context where you are dependent on your abuser to survive. The scary thing is not the abuse but the abandonment. That is what Mary tried to tell you."

"But her mother could have found another job. Mary could have survived in an orphanage. There were choices. It's not like they had to suffer this man."

"But did they know that? As a child, deciding to change parents never comes up as an idea. Or at least not when you are already in a survival mode. More securely bonded children actually come up with that idea sometimes, normally around the age of six and then again in their teenage years. Though her mother could have made a choice. Maybe she actually made a choice by running away. I still fear that it's only Mary's version that her mother got away. Please never contradict her on that."

"So you also think her master simply killed her one day?" Jonathan raised an eyebrow. "Starving the women you supposedly love is pretty extreme, so yes, I think he killed her."

"I guessed so too." Jonathan crossed his arms, obviously bothered by that thought.

"When I remember how I was before ... I believed in might above all. One should only have the rights they can fight for. Being intelligent, being magically potent, those people should lead and others should follow. Living with clear hierarchies based on your own skills, that was what I strove for. I saw Muggles in the same line one might see cattle."

"It's the view of someone that surpasses others even though he or she had bad starting conditions. It's the naive view that you are simply born with a set of talents and the way that you grow up does not decimate from that."

"For most people it does, huh?"

"It did for you too." Harry smiled sadly. "Have you ever thought about who you could have been if your parents had done a bit better?"

Jonathan just blinked owlshly at him.

"Normally, I am not a friend of what-ifs in the past but just for a moment, try to imagine a world where you weren't completely emotionally stunted. A world where you met Albus, fell madly in love and did not break it off. Where you stayed together, researching magical theories, reworking your original ones again and again. A power couple of magical geniuses bend on bettering this world instead of splitting into destruction and defense of that."

Jonathan mulled over that for a moment.

"Your abuse did not detract from your intelligence, rather it honed it. That's admirable. But all other aspects of your personality got left behind. Your emotions, your ability to bond, your moral development. There is more to a human than their ability to write three-piece layered runic circles."

After a long moment of silence, Jonathan said: "I always thought Albus was simply an overemotional fool, his compassion his only weakness."

"His compassion saved your life. His compassion even gave you another chance."

"I know." Jonathan sighed. "For years, I hated him for it. Even before he overpowered me, I think I wished he would have just killed me. Living is so hard and so unfulfilling."

"Is it still?" Harry raised his brows. "Now that you bonded to him, is that still true?"

"No." The lids around his blue eyes widened. "No?" He sounded rather shocked by his own admission. He looked like he wanted to say more but words eluded him.

"It's not, right? Emotions are hard but they are what makes us happy. They make life worth living."

For a moment, Jonathan looked like a rabbit with no way to escape. Eyes like a deer caught in headlights, nose twitching and his mouth opening and closing like a fish. Harry decided to wait it out. Questioning and rewriting your own history after all those years, after all he had done, it was admirable. It was also pretty damn hard.

"I ... that ... you ... wait a moment." Jonathan stood and began to pace. "I want to argue. I want to say this is wrong. But I know you are right. I know that having emotions and bonding made me happier. Why does it make me feel like throwing up when I say that?" He raked a hand through his hair. "It sounds so wrong. So wrong to say it. Emotions do make me happy, I know that. The past year was the happiest I've ever been, even counting the time I reveled in making others fear me. Might and power was a rush but I always needed more, it was never enough. It's the same with being loved but there is more, there is always more. I am not even close to reaching the end of Albus's feelings for me and I know that and it makes me happy and it makes me feel secure for the first time in ... I don't know, forever. I never had that, feeling secure. Knowing that there are people I can trust, it scares me but it frees me. I know that. I still don't want it to be true. Why do I deny the truth?"

Harry knew he could answer that. He had been in therapy for exactly that once. He also trusted Jonathan to get it for himself. If not, it's not like his own words could reach much. It was a conclusion that the other man had to make for himself.

"Gren?" Jonathan sounded lost.

"What would it mean if you were to accept that having feelings and attachment is the key to being happy?"

"That I was dumb for thinking that intelligence and magical prowess are the important things and that emotions are a weakness?"

"What else?" Because while the first part was hard, the second part of that was a lot harder.

"Else?" Scared again. Good thing he was still able to hold on.

"You are able to put into words that your world-view was ... off. That's not the part that's scaring you right now. It's the part that you can't put into words yet. It has to do with what gave you this world-view."

"Can't you tell me?" Jonathan actually trembled.

"Not with how much it scares you. This process takes time. When it does not scare you as much, you will know the answer."

"When will that be?"

"Someday." At least he was sure of that. "You are doing well, Jonathan. Facing this is hard and most men would simply stay in their own ways and refuse to change."

"I want to." He paced again. "This hurts like hell, all this regret and anger at myself, the guilt and the shame ... still, I never laughed like I do now. I've never been silly, I never enjoyed company, I never loved like I do now. I want to get this. And I want it before I move out of here. This ... this being here. I thought it a nuisance, I could do so much better with my time but I realize how talking to everyone shapes me and heals me and ... I am also learning to love Albus like he should be loved. He is worthy of so much love."

"You are as well."

Jonathan shuddered. "Why does hearing that scare me?"

"For the same reason that accepting emotions and bonds as important scares you."

The blue eyes nearly pierce Harry. "What made me think that they were unimportant? What would be different if I thought them important? What would be different if I thought myself worthy of love?"

"Deserving of love," Harry adds.

"My head draws a complete blank." Jonathan grit his teeth. "I feel like an idiot."

"The answer will come in time."

"I don't have time! I want it now!"

"You have all the time in your life." Still, for someone as intelligent as Jonathan, this must be frustrating as hell. It had not been the same for Harry. School had been a constant experience of not getting something right at the first time. That had been different for Hermione and most likely for Jonathan as well. Patience came from learning to deal with frustration.

"Talking to you is exasperating."

"It's a learning experience." Harry smiled, remembering his own therapist. He really hated the man at the time of their therapy. It had been highly effective though.

"I am going to give this some thought and come back another time."

"Sure, do that." He would most likely discuss it with Albus. That was fine. Albus knew how to be sensitive. After that, he would discuss it with Tom and Mary. Both would not be as sensitive but most likely not know the answer themselves. Maybe Tom would. It would be most interesting if he did. Harry was looking forward to it.