

# The time that is given us

## How love can change lives

Von Gepo

### Kapitel 21: Twenty-first chapter

It took exactly three days for Jonathan to come back. Or rather, it took him three days to tell Tom and for Tom to drag him into Harry's study and demand answers. The angry stomping in front of his door announced a disgruntled eight-year-old on a warpath.

"Dad!" Tom opened the door without knocking, dragging Jonathan in on one hand behind him. "I demand a explanation for this!"

"Tom, this is uncalled for, really," Jonathan tried to shush the boy, his gaze going from him to Harry. Regarding Harry, it was somewhere between apprehensive and fearful.

"It's not." Tom let go of his hand and stomped over to Harry's desk, slamming both hands onto it. "What kind of shitty answer is 'It will come in time'? Since when are you so mean, dad? Explain yourself."

Jonathan hovered near the door, clearly not wanting to be here but openly concerned for Tom. So Harry said: "Please close the door and sit down." - and to Tom - "This is not the tone in which we hold civilized conversation."

Tom took a deep breath and nodded. "Still, that's a very confusing statement and it makes Jonathan feel bad instead of better, so I don't think it's okay."

Harry stood and went over to the seating area. "And what is Jonathan's view on your planned intervention?"

Tom took a look at said man and answered: "He thinks you'll hurt me for demanding a better answer but he obviously still doesn't get you."

"So you think he is too afraid of me and that is why you need to intervene?"

"Well ... maybe?" Tom seemed less sure by the minute.

"Because there is also the possibility that it is the answer that scares him, so talking to me would be counterproductive. Have you checked that possibility before coming here?"

"No." Shame colored Tom's voice. "Why didn't you want to go ask dad?"

Jonathan just stayed silent, his gaze flitting between both of them. By now, you could actually see the tension in his body. He was slowly letting go of the masks he wore before, becoming more authentic with his own emotions. It made it easier to read him. Right now, Harry would guess that Tom's guess was actually true and he feared Harry punishing Tom for boldly demanding answers.

After not getting any reaction after more than ten seconds, he turned to his son and asked: "What has he told you?"

"That you told him that emotions and attachments are important and he balked at

that and he doesn't know why but you do and you did not want to tell him. That you basically told him to find it out for himself."

"So why do you think he needs an intervention here? Why not let him find it out for himself?"

"Because it pains him. He thinks he is not worthy of an answer and stupid for not getting this. He thinks it is most likely obvious and he is angry at himself for not understanding. So ... you always explain everything to me, even feelings, so I think it's harsh to leave him hanging like this. It hurts him. You shouldn't do that."

"Thank you for caring." Harry smiled proudly at Tom and petted his hair. "There is a difference between adults and children, you know? As you said once, adults have convoluted thoughts. They never take things at face value and try to integrate it into their view of the world. They hear something and they reject it, they deform it and in the end, very little of what was said ever gets to them. So the older someone is, the harder it is to change. You mostly treat Jonathan like someone your own age because in some aspects, he actually is around your age. But in a lot others, he is already over fifty and this is hard for him. You can't expect him to just accept the things that I say like you do. It would lead to a lot more frustration and I don't want him frustrated. Some things take time and in adults, the realization comes from within rather than outside."

Tom mulled over this for a moment and asked: "Can't you at least try it? Try telling him? Because maybe this is one of the things he can accept coming from outside. I mean, I told him about feelings and he could accept that, right?"

"Could he?" Harry turned to Jonathan that still sat there like a stone statue, just taking in their interaction. "Jonathan, could you try to explain what went on in your head the day Tom first met you?"

The other man swallowed visibly. "I don't want him to hate me."

"I assure you that he won't, though he may be disturbed for some time."

Jonathan's gaze flickered to Tom for a moment. "Well ... okay. It doesn't reflect well on me."

"As dad always says, it's a learning experience." Still, Tom took Harry's hand. "I can't be worse than what I think about people sometimes, right?"

"But it is." Jonathan licked his lips, his head held low but his eyes on Tom. "I have thousands of murders on you. I don't think about pranks with frogs or slime, I think about outright killing and torture first. It's always the first thing on my mind when I am angry. I thought about killing you a lot and ... I don't want you afraid of me. But I don't know how to assure you I would never do it."

"Oh, I think about killing people a lot too." Tom actually smiled at that. "Not like I actually do it."

"You do?"

"Yeah, Mister Smith died about a thousand horrible deaths in my head already. That substitute teacher as well. Sometimes I even think about killing dad when I am angry but I always remember I don't want that."

Harry just chuckled and kissed his son's head. Really, he had imagined Dudley and Vernon dead often enough. Children had a bloody fantasy, he had had one as well. It had went as far as blowing his aunt up after all.

"That ... doesn't disturb you?" Jonathan asked Harry.

"No, I think that is quite normal. Killing someone in fantasy calms you down in reality. It does tend to make you more prone to violence but it is still better than acting out your fantasies. When learning how to deal with anger, fantasized killing is a phase

everyone has. Normally, people aren't encouraged in it and therefore they learn other ways."

"Oh ... when my parents were angry, they hurt me a lot."

"Yes, you were quite encouraged in acting out your fantasies. Not only by your parents but also by your teachers. Or am I incorrect that you learned the Cruciatus in school?"

"I ... did." Jonathan seemed lost in thought. "So the way I was brought up encouraged me to become a mass-murderer?"

"It would have helped if your parents had been better role-models for dealing with emotions." Which was most likely the understatement of the century.

"Yeah, your parents were shit, Jonathan." Tom was – as always – a lot plainer in his statements than Harry. "Just like the nuns at my orphanage. At least they had the excuse of being completely overworked." He kicked off his shoes and put his feet up to sit in a cross-legged position. "So tell me about the day you met me."

"Okay ... that day." Jonathan still felt a bit overwhelmed by what he had just heard.

"So, I had met your parents once before. Albus had told me that they wanted my opinion on something political and they had been discussing the possibility of releasing me. I was elated at that. It's not like I hated the house arrest but I resented it. Killing and domineering people comes with a certain rush, power is a heady feeling and I didn't have that in captivity. My life felt dull, like a waste. I had no idea what I would do instead because I knew killing would be off the list but maybe becoming a potion's expert? Being admired for my knowledge? Maybe that would be a slight rush at least. I missed feeling good about myself. I only had options of forgetting about my feelings, of pushing them away for a bit by distracting myself. So I really wanted that freedom. At the same time, I thought only idiots or idealists would let me out of confinement. I thought that the people coming would want something from me, would want to exploit my weak position. So I wanted to appear in power. That ... was a bad idea. I horribly offended both of your dads."

"You broke into Edgar's mind."

"I judged him to be the weak link and exploited his being a Muggle to get dirt on Gren, yes." Jonathan actually looked ashamed about that. How far they had come. "On the day you three came to visit, I knew I had screwed up that first meeting but I didn't really know how. Okay, so you wanted me not to do anything illegal. Check, I could do that. You wanted an apology, check on that too. But that kind of apology ... that went over my head. Especially with your reaction, I realized that you wanted some kind of emotional development from me. You did not only want to to adhere to a set of rules, you wanted me to understand them and support them. In that moment, I knew I could never do that but I did not want it to be true. So instead I tried to disregard you with everything that was in me. A really large part of me wanted to beat you to the ground, to make you cry and fear me, to make you beg for mercy for asking such unthinkable shit of me." So Edgar's swearing had actually reached Jonathan as well. "A smaller part of me was horribly afraid. When I broke into Edgar's mind and Gren called me out on it, Albus was ashamed of me. My boyfriend had never been ashamed. He had been sad to see me drift away, he had been furious when our argument killed his sister, he had been resigned when he beat me and locked me away. He had been stoic for so many years I raged at him and in the end, he had forgiven me everything. But he had never been ashamed of me before. So I knew that if I hurt you, he would do what he had never done before. He would leave me."

Harry had to admire him for reflecting long and deeply on that, to be able to give a

name to all those emotions in his head. Jonathan had really come a long way. Gellert Grindelwald would never have been able to give his inner demons such elaborate words.

"So Gren said that ten percent of him believed I could do this. That was a lot more than the percentage of me believing in myself. So when you said that love means that someone believes in you more than you yourself do, I realized how many people actually believed in me while at the same time, I was very much in line with you. You openly stated that you hated me, that you would not forgive me and you did not believe me worth your time."

Tom actually colored in shame at hearing that.

"First, I was angry at you. Then I realized that was exactly what I thought about myself. I wasn't angry at you, I was angry at myself because I really believed, deep down, that I could never do what you asked of me. I hated myself for that. I hated myself for being so weak, of giving up before even trying and I decided in that moment that I would do it. I would learn this emotional stuff, no matter what I thought about it before, I would prove myself wrong. Because I was so damn angry that I needed other people to believe in me more than I myself did. I hated myself for that so much that I decided to change it."

Tom blinked more a moment. "That's like ... the exact opposite of what I tried to tell you."

"Well, it worked anyway." Jonathan shrugged his shoulders.

"I told you to accept love and friendship!"

"That sounded much too sappy. I went with hate at myself instead."

"Then why did you become so lovey-dovey with Dumbledore?" Tom's black eyebrows were crunched in confusion.

"Well, learning emotions did include letting Albus in after all. I never did that before. It was a damn scary thing."

"So ... in hating yourself you decided to accept love and reciprocate in loving someone?" The poor boy sounded out of sorts. "I see what you mean with adults being really strange, dad."

"What Jonathan illustrated perfectly is that in adults, the change has to come from within."

"I see." Tom shook his head. "Then what do I have to say to trigger said change this time?"

"You can start with stating your theories on why it might be hard for Jonathan to accept the value of emotions and bonds even after the learning experience he just described."

"Too complicated." Tom groaned and hid his face behind his hands.

Jonathan just smiled sadly. "If I accepted it, I would have to face the blame of ripping thousands of families apart, bringing about sadness and destroying their bonds."

"You already proved you can face your own blame."

"I ... I never knew what it meant though." He looked up, his blue eyes desperate and lost. "I never knew what a family looked like before. It's like I knew in the abstract ... now I feel it."

Tom looked up slowly, his gaze calculating.

"Still, the things you can put into words are always things you will learn to deal with. It's the things that have no words yet that plague us."

"How should I know something that has no words? How should I even think about something without words?"

Tom spoke into the ensuing silence: "There were a lot of things I had no words for before dad. I still remember. I was sad and angry all the time and I couldn't say why except for the gnawing hunger."

"Then how come you now have words for it?" Jonathan's trembling gaze focused on Tom. "Because this feels horrible."

"He explained feelings to me and he told me about my family. Family had always been a gaping void inside of me. I never knew about them and always said that they were not important anyway. It just showed how important they actually were to me. So when dad told me about my birth parents, those feelings gained words."

"You said family was not important and it showed how important they were ... that's like me with emotions and bonds. I rejected them when actually they were more important than anything else. I shunned bonds bec-" He suddenly fell silent.

"Because what?," Tom asked but Harry shushed him.

"Look at his face," he instructed his son, "Let him work it out. He needs time right now."

Jonathan's eyes had widened, staring into nothing. It slowly turned into a grimace as if he had bitten on something sour. Finally he continued: "Because I did not have them but wished for them."

Well, that's a start but still far from the core. Harry sighed internally. This would take time, a lot of time. He wished he could beam a psychologist from his own time over here. Just because he had to do it once himself, didn't mean he was well-equipped for helping someone with this.

"Ah." Tom's eyes widened suddenly. "Now I know!"

Jonathan looked up slowly, still a bit dazed.

"It's not friends, you had a friend after all. You also had a partner. You did not have loving parents though. So this is about family as well." The boy shared his insight excitedly.

"Family? Familial bonds?" Jonathan scoffed. "Why would I need ... oh, I see. Outright rejection might indicate a need for it." He leaned back. "But am I not too old by now to need a family?"

Tom blinked for a moment but turned to Harry.

"You answered that once already, Tom. Back when you first met Grindelwald. You told him that you could learn by being raised in a family but he could not. He is too old now. You were right in that. In his age, you don't look for family anymore, you fill that void with a partner and friends, sometimes even kids though that is dangerous. It's not like you need a family now, Jonathan. But you needed one once upon a time and that is the topic."

Jonathan's cheek twitched. "I want to reject that with everything that is in me."

"Then it's better that you go and think on it."

There was not a millisecond wasted before the man was out of the door.

"Should I go with him?," Tom asked in apprehension.

"No, you leave him alone." Harry patted his head. "You forced enough on him with this talk."

"Why is it so hard for adults to see what's right in front of them?" In annoyance, he crossed his arms.

"With few exceptions, adults have a clear concept of their self. Who they are, what they want, where they come from, where they are going. The more secure they are in it, the harder it is to change. Normally, kids don't self-reflect until puberty. They take what they hear and integrate it into their selves. It's why kids are malleable where

teenagers and especially adults are not. Most adults have to be taken for who they are because they won't change much. They might bend a bit, like washing their dishes regularly when living with someone else, but they do not change their character. Jonathan did and it is very admirable he was able to do that."

"Did you ever do that?"

Harry nodded. "Once, yes. In my mid-twenties. I had grown up with war and abuse, so I was emotionally detached and sometimes even mean. I had to change for the woman I loved because I did not want to lose her." And their children. It had been just James at the time but he had not been able to relate to his son. He had blamed his own childhood, never planning on overcoming his difficulties until Ginny told him that he either changed or she would leave. He had never expected that. He had cursed, even accursed her as an unfaithful wretch, not looking at his own mistakes, just seeing her as the bad one. Molly had saved them, had saved their marriage. She had made him see himself for who he was and how badly he was failing his own family. Not a year after, he had started therapy.

"I can't imagine you like that."

"Well, you met Jonathan before his change."

"True." Tom nodded and sighed. "He was a douchebag."

"Where did you learn that word?"

"Edgar." His son grinned.

"That man should give swearing courses instead of boxing."

"He misses you, dad."

Harry just blinked. "We see each other every day."

"I mean here." Tom pointed at his own heart. "At parties, it's you and Brea. With the Malfoys, it's Dumbledore, you and me. When it comes to me, I spend a lot of time with Jonathan. You don't really take an interest in the company he is leading for you. So he's lonely. He was special to you before and now he is like another guest here that works for you."

"He hasn't said anything."

"No, he's pining. He's looking at you with those eyes, you know, like I looked at all those shops in that wizard street. Another place where we went without him. You do not include him anymore."

"Not on purpose."

"Well, do something about it. Go on a date or something."

"He's a friend, friends don't date." Though they might as well go on a date, that was true. "I'll invite him to something."

"Great." Tom jumped from the couch. "I'll go annoy him at work. If Jonathan needs time, I can play with Edgar instead."

"Yeah, do that." Harry stood as well. How come he had missed Edgar being unhappy? They met twice a week for Occlumency lessons. Why had Edgar never said anything? On the other hand, he was a character that tended to suffer in silence. "Oh, Tom?"

"Yeah?"

"Thank you."

The boy just grinned and waived at him before leaving.

Edgar looked at him expectantly, waiting for their lesson to begin, but Harry just studied him. He was smiling – authentically – and looking expectant, no hesitation, no sadness, no underlying wariness. Maybe Tom had been wrong? But he was a good observer, Harry should at least ask Edgar. Now how to phrase such a question? If he

asked about happiness, the man would most likely give a standardized answer.

"Is something wrong?," Edgar finally asked.

"No, just thinking ... Tom told me that you looked unhappy but I don't see that. I am trying to piece this together."

"Unhappy?" Edgar shrugged it off. "Not at all."

"Are you sure about that? Tom is seldom wrong. Are you playing something off here?"

"It's nothing as serious as that."

"But there is something?"

"When isn't there something?" Again, the same smile, just a bit dimmer. It looked so real but right now, there was nothing to smile about, was there? "Let's begin the lesson."

"Would you tell me anyway? Even if it is not important? It bothers you after all."

"It's silly." Was there a blush on Edgar's cheeks?

"I'm intrigued by this silliness."

"You won't leave me alone about this, will you?" A sigh, then a nod. "Okay, I'll tell. So remember that weekend Dumbledore visited and he spent a day at the beach with Jonathan? And the weekend before where we all went to the beach?"

"Sure. The weather was really nice."

"I just ... I wished I could spend a day with you like that. Just longing around."

"Didn't we do that on the family weekend?"

"Kind of but ... not really. I know, Brea spent most of her time with the girls, but she is your wife, she sits next to you, not me. I just wanted to be close to you too. Not being allowed is ... in the end, I wished I hadn't come. I want to spend time with you, just us, or maybe with Tom, but there is Jonathan and Brea and Dumbledore and Malfoy and ... there is just so much you have to do. I am happy we have these lessons but I wish we did something more leisure as well. I don't know, maybe go see a sport game or test a car or ... anything really. I am not picky. I see you everyday but you feel so far away."

"And why is that silly?" It wasn't exactly what Tom had said but the boy had been close. Definitely a good observer. "Those are things I'd like to know."

"It's a burden though. I don't want you to compromise your time even more for me."

"That's my decision, don't you think? You're important to me, Edgar. I want you to be happy."

"Oh, in that case ..." The man wriggled his eyebrows.

Harry just laughed. Of course this would elicit a dirty joke. The other man just smiled back and shook his head at his own antics.

"What would you like most? Except for the unspoken," Harry asked him.

"No mud-wrestling at the beach? No visit to the local baths for a steam-filled sauna?"

Edgar inclined his head in thought. "Jonathan will stay until September. It's an important time and I don't want to detract from it. Maybe afterwards, we could spend some evenings together again? Just reading or playing a game with Tom. We could go for a drive on the weekends. Who knows how long we will stay together like this?"

"Tom will change schools in September 1938. He'll go to a boarding school. We will go back to war exactly one year later."

"Oh." Edgar's face fell. "I forgot. You actually know."

"So we still have three years of peace together."

"That's the upside." He stayed thoughtful. "I've been here for two years now."

Had it been that long already? Time was passing them by. It always felt like this, children grew up too fast, seasons changed more rapidly every year. "Do you regret

anything?"

"Not at all." Edgar smiled faintly. "It may have hurt at first but after I got over Gren, this has been paradise. It were the best two years of my life and I still have more of them in front of me."

"So tell me if something bothers you, okay?"

"Sure, Gren. I will." The other man grinned. "I also need to thank Tom for ratting me out to you."

"He is a great kid."

"The best."

Harry just remembered his other three kids and knew that his smile was most likely tinted with sadness. Maybe he would see them in the afterlife. Hopefully it was for Muggles as well as magical folk. Or if not, he hoped he would still count as magical.

"Gren?"

"Sorry, my thoughts drifted off. Let's start the lesson." He smiled at Edgar. This life held a lot for him too, he should never forget that. This was more than duty and misery. He was giving all of his friends a world of peace.

At least he hoped so.

Jonathan spent a lot of their evening meals more or less subtly trying to have everyone talk about family. There was a certain irony to it, seeing as most of the people at this table were orphans. Nearly all of them stated that this – being in Harry's house – felt like family. Often more than what they could remember of their former lives.

Brea and Helen's parents had both died due to the great famine – or in Brea's case, her father had died shortly after World War I while her mother was pregnant. He was tasked with retrieving mines and one had blown him up. Dorothee's parents had been dead the longest, they had died due to the Spanish fever. She had grown up with her grandmother who died of old age later. Loretta said that her mother had died of disease and she never knew her father. Later, she shamefully admitted that her mother had been a whore and died due to the French disease. Her sister and her had gone to the orphanage and her sister had found work with an uprising family. Loretta had wanted to join her but Harry's offer had come and now, she was happy she had taken it.

Jonathan openly asked them what family meant to them. That turned everyone silent at once, all of the teenagers lost in thought.

"Warmth. Safety. Knowing that you belong somewhere. Having someone tell you what to do, where to go, giving you a set of rules to live by," answered Margret. "Before coming here, I lived with my mom and dad, my two brothers and my aunt. My grandmother also lived with us until her death. I had a cousin once but he died as a child. My aunt never said who the father was or even if it had been something she wanted. She cared for Matthew and when he died, she ... she became a shadow. She wasn't herself anymore. She wasn't any fun to be around, somedays she just sat somewhere and wept. But we stayed with her and she with us. It's what families does. They are there for each other."

"But oftentimes, they expel you for not following their rules. They choose your job for you, sometimes your spouse and you have no agency of your own. How is that good?"

"Not everyone is a homosexual, Jonathan." Margret actually looked sorry about being so blunt. "I mean ... most of us actually fit the expectations of our parents. Or at least they accept our choices. Mine wanted me to become a seamstress or marry young or



work in a factory. But becoming a maid was okay. Now they only ask me if I met a nice men yet. But they accept it when I tell them no. My older brother is married. My younger one still goes to school. They want him to become a shoe maker. They already wanted that for my older brother too but he wanted to be a fisherman instead. That was okay for my parents. As long as we have jobs and are happy and marry somewhere along the way, it's okay."

"It is?" Jonathan blinked slowly. "So you had choices?"

"Yes, I had." Her eyes teared up. "God, I can't imagine being locked up for more than forty years. I am so sorry, I haven't thought about your situation. What your mother did was horrible."

Jonathan just blinked at her, his face completely filled with confusion. "It ... is?"

"She took away your choices."

"But ... she wanted to protect me."

Margret looked at Harry for help but it was Brea that cut in: "Locking someone away is wrong. It's what you do with criminals."

"Oh ... I never really cared that freedom of movement was a choice taken from me."

Jonathan contemplated what he had heard. "When I think of parents, I think of someone that rules your life with an iron fist, making every decision for you and asking things some people might be able to do but you most certainly not."

"Like what?," Margret asked carefully.

"Well ... who and how to love, yes. Also how to be as a human, how to treat others. If I listened to my ... mother, then I would not be allowed to talk to any of you. Servants. No better than slaves in the eyes of my family. Creatures that should be neither seen nor heard. Actually, most of you would meet their criteria for being burned alive. I know that they are wrong. You are all lovely people and I like you. But there the only example of parents that I have."

"Well, you are living with a very good parent." Margret looked at Harry for a moment.

"Take him as an example?"

Jonathan looked at Harry for a moment. "He also meets their criteria for being burned alive."

"But you aren't your family, right?" Margret smiled with a rather shaky curl of her lips.

"You can look past their prejudice."

Jonathan looked at Harry for a moment and slowly nodded before shaking his head.

"Yes, he is a good father. But I only have one example what a mom is like. Can I meet your mother? I'd just like to know what one could be like."

"My mother?" Margret looked at him with wide eyes. "You do know that they will think I am introducing a prospective husband, that I have somehow captured the heart of a noble prince and they will ply you with all the alcohol in the house until you say that you'll marry me?"

Jonathan looked perplexed for a moment before he grinned and said: "Sounds fun."

"Oh dear Lord." The poor maid shook her head. "Just stay vague and make them think you are thinking about it. Also prepare for my older brother to give you the shovel talk of not breaking my heart and making me pregnant before the wedding."

"What is a shovel talk?"

"Boy, he's so innocent." Brea shook her head in amazement.

Harry answered: "It's a father or older brother threatening you with all kinds of harm, so you are good to their female relative. Women lack a lot of rights, so their family protects them."

"So if I had a father, would he have given Albus a shovel talk? Or would that not

happen with ... you know?"

"Men are meant to look after themselves."

Edgar snorted and looked at Harry in amusement. "Well, my sister gave my ex-boyfriend a shovel talk. So I don't think that gender matters here."

"Will you give our boyfriends a shovel talk, Mister Horten?," Helen asked.

"If you introduce one to me, I sure will."

The girls giggled and Brea asked: "Did you give one to Ian?"

"No, the poor boy was scared out of his wits already. You don't need to give one to the kind of boy that means well."

"Oh." Jonathan nodded. "Then Albus wouldn't have gotten one."

"Well ... he does have some strange ideas sometimes. Maybe someone should have warned him off at some point." Like publishing world-changing theses before the Wizengamot and throwing someone under the bus for it.

"Hm ... so parents protect you and are on your side ... that sounds too good to be true." Jonathan sighed.

"The theory is nice, the reality is harsh. My original father simply did not want me. It happens." Tom shrugged his shoulders. "Some parents love their children, some don't."

"But why?" The older man looked honestly puzzled. "Why do some parents love and some don't?"

"It's not as black and white as that." Everyone looked at Harry when he spoke up.

"Every parent loves and hates their child at the same time. You love a child because it is a part of you, it carries your hopes and dreams, oftentimes your ideals. It is a part of you in some way but also it's own person, someone you are proud to watch grow and develop. On the other hand, children take a lot of time, money, nerves ... I can't even tell you how annoying children can be sometimes. So when you are a patient, not easily stressed person, you love your child a lot more than you hate it. But when you have a lot of problems yourself, your anger and resentment may overshadow your love and make you abusive."

"My parents weren't stressed. They had money, they had servants, they actually owned slaves, they got their money by inheritance, they didn't even work. How stressed can one be? They had the best prerequisites for being good parents."

"There are two other requirements for being a good parent." Because of course Hermione had read up everything there was to know about parenting when she became pregnant. It had actually been Ginny that helped the most, telling her to stop stressing and to begin enjoying parenthood. "One is something Margret just said. As a good parent, you are interested in your child. You know that your child is not you, it has it's own character, it's own interest and it will carve it's own road in life. So instead of fussing about what to do to make your child more like you or the ideal you have, you become interested in the human you are raising. Your child will do things that you label as wrong. You will punish them when they are wrong in the eyes of not only you but everyone. But if it is just wrong for you, you will only explain your view and leave the decision to your child. So respect and interest are keys."

"That's the other two?"

"No, that's just one. It's hard enough because a lot of parents have a very clear image of how their child has to be."

"Yes, I know what you mean." Jonathan's face slacked.

Oh boy if he thought that this was his problem. "The second one is harder though. It's when parents simply don't get their child. When you have a baby, you learn to

differentiate their screams. Some are for hunger, some for pain, some are simple boredom and some are for things like "Why are you stinky human here? I want my mom, not you, dumbhead". The more children you have, the better you are in getting their signals. It's normal you're not perfect with the first baby but somewhere around the third or fourth one, you get them. Most parents do that. But there are people that simply can't relate to their children. I knew a French woman, she was lovely but could be ... shallow sometimes. She married a good man from a good family, he knew how to treat babies, he had six younger siblings. So when they had a baby, she was surrounded by people that were good with babies and she was ... not. It's no fault of her own, she just never learned it. When you have children, you treat them like you were treated, that's normal. At least if you did not have other role-models and learned from them in the meantime. She treated the baby like she had been treated and everyone was disturbed by that. Because Victoire often wanted attention, her father gave her that all the time and Fleur, the French woman, tried to feed her or changed her nappies or oftentimes, she didn't react until Victoire screamed at the top of her lungs. She simply did not get the signals her daughter was sending. It's like she had no radar for them." It had not been as bad for him but he had needed to learn too. His mother had been a loving woman, no doubt, but she came from the same household as Petunia did. Their parenting had been lacking in some areas, resulting in the monstrosity of one Dudley Dursley. So Ginny had had to teach him about getting subtle hints. Again, not as bad as Fleur but ... well, after recognizing his lack of sensitivity, it had been a hard road. He had been better with Lily. Maybe that's why James had resembled Dudley sometimes.

Jonathan simply looked aghast.

Tom summed up that feeling on his own: "I'm never having children then."

"Well ..." Harry looked at him but really, he couldn't disagree. "Maybe with a wife from a loving family with great parenting skills?"

Tom just raised an eyebrow.

"I am so glad right now that I never had a child." Jonathan ran a hand through his hair. "I would have messed the poor thing up completely."

"Well ..." Again, he couldn't disagree. "Yes. You would have. Albus as well. He is a great man but ... not so good at taking a child's perspective." What could you expect from a man that burned an orphan's whole wardrobe when he already owned next to nothing, sent him back to that place every year and threw him out when he basically asked for asylum later. Dumbledore had played a large part in Tom's negative development.

Jonathan stared into his soup, not really responding anymore.

"Are you alright?" Harry narrowed his eyes.

Edgar tugged the other man's sleeve when he didn't react.

"Oh?" He looked up with a smile that was purely fake. "What was the question?"

"Nothing, man. It was scary how you zoomed out." Edgar nodded after a moment.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

"Uhm ... it's complicated." Jonathan turned back to Margret. "So when can we visit your mother?"

Edgar just sent Harry a look to which he nodded. This sounded like something he should get behind. Jonathan had a right to his privacy but having him hung up in his thoughts seemed like a bad idea. Still, Jonathan was an adult and what worried him more was the look on Tom's face. He looked sour, also staring at his food and picking at his potatoes. Harry snapped his finger against Tom's arm to get his attention.

"What?" That did not exactly sound friendly.

"You also did not look as if you were thinking happy thoughts."

"Just ... how my grandparents did not want my mom and my grandfather wanted my father dead? I don't think my parents would have been any good, even if I had them. I don't like the thought. You say my mom loved me. But what good is that when she would have been a horrible mom?"

"We don't know that, Tom, and we shouldn't assume. Maybe she would have sought help. Maybe she had a loving mother and only her father was a bad man. It's not like your abilities are set in stone. People can learn, people can change. If you want to learn to care for babies, you can."

"No thanks. They are messy. I don't want one."

"No grandchildren for me?"

"Jonathan is the one with the learning curve. He can have your grandchild."

"That's not how it works, Tom. You are my only son."

"I resent the expectation. If you want babies, have your own."

Harry spluttered and couldn't hold back his laughter. Really, how was that boy only eight years old? At least he was grinning again.

"But wait until I am in school, okay? I can deal with a baby sister but she needs to be at least eleven years younger than me."

"And who should I have that child with? Brea? Babies need biological mothers."

"You adopted all of us, surely you can adopt one more. There's enough starving kids in London."

"In that case, your baby sister might be one or two or any number of years old." Not that he would actually adopt one when there was a war coming. But if he survived it, maybe he should take in some kids. It was an idea what to do with his life. Not that he really expected to survive this all. It would be nice though.

"But only a sister, okay? I don't want a brother."

"Sure thing." He ruffled his son's hair. "Good thing you can choose at adoptions."

"Yeah. Don't make Brea pregnant."

"Not planning on that."

"Good. That would be disturbing." Tom shuddered. "She's like ... my sister or something. That would be wrong."

"I think so too."

"Good." The boy tucked in again.

So his appetite had returned. Harry sighed in relief. Tom was right though. His parents would not have been the best and even with them, he might have turned out ... not as well as he was right now. Hopefully, this would work out. Right now, he had quite a good feeling. He liked who the boy had become.