

Our Life is Not a Movie or Maybe...

by pokeystar

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Warning: BYOMD (Bring Your Own Milk Duds)

Pansy Parkinson discovered Muggle cinema shortly after the War and had been escaping to it ever since. Her father in Azkaban, her family's reputation and fortune in ruins, her non-existent social life...the fact that she worked as a *shop girl* at Honeydukes in the Diagon Alley store...all of it melted away under the flickering lights that cast images of magic onto a blank expanse of screen.

The irony that a Muggle invention should bring her such comfort and relief had not evaded her awareness...she merely rationalized its import into practical non-existence by surmising that an encounter with a Pensieve probably inspired some unknown Muggle's ingenuity. Or more simply put, she didn't think about it.

Pansy spent a lot of time not thinking about things.

So, films were a prized entity in her life. The theatres in which they were shown were another thing altogether. Her search for the perfect playhouse had been long and fraught with many frustrations...sticky floors, rude staff, bad schedules full of preposterous action-filled shite, ruder audience members that insisted on talking to each other or on those ridiculous cell-thingies...consuming much of the six years that followed the end of the War. But then her harrowing search had paid off satisfyingly when she discovered the Electric, a small art house theatre on Portobello Road in Notting Hill.

Here was her refuge, her temple of calm, filled with cushy leather chairs, good actual food, and considerate movie-goers who didn't chew *otalk* with their mouths open. The schedule was filled with a plethora of titles that kept the undiscerning hordes away. No tractor-trailer flips or giant asteroids crashing into Earth were shown at the Electric. And that suited her just fine.

She was inclined to watch films on Sunday afternoons, mostly. Not that it mattered much what was playing, for she'd even watch *Rambo: First Blood* on repeat this particular day of the week, but on Sundays, the Electric ran older movies, often on a monthly theme; they tended to be solid fare, with plausible plots, dense themes, and decent acting. It was Nirvana.

Those cinematic nuggets of bliss never failed to soothe her raw nerves after the obligatory "family" luncheons her Mother insisted on, even though they were a painful reminder of everything missing from their post-War lives. Cheap stainless flatware and Melamine plates on two-hundred thread count acrylic blend tablecloths. The chair at the head of the table empty. A fatty roast and veg, followed by packaged biscuits for pudding. The Malfoys as guests, Astoria in *her* place. So many things lost.

~88~88~88~

When you look how you looked then to me, then I cease lying and fall into silence

Pansy paid for her ticket and stepped into the Electric's welcoming embrace, closing her eyes briefly to compensate for the change in light. She made her way to her favourite seat, only to be brought up short when she realized, with a dawning dread blooming in the pit of her stomach, that it was already occupied. By a disturbingly familiar unruly head of hair...the only part of Harry James Potter visible from her current position. She backed away from the interloper slowly and silently, cursing the Fates and the Chosen One to oblivion, eventually settling in a less comfortable chair near the exit.

Why was *he* here, of all people? And on a *Sunday*, of all days?

The room darkened further, and the movie started. The title music swelled around her, a pretty little tune she was tempted to hum along with. Until the lyrics penetrated the anxious fog clouding her brain. What crap. *Whatever will be, will be?* Pansy wrinkled her nose, suppressing the urge to snort. She didn't want to attract any attention to herself.

But someone else clearly didn't care...with a start, she realized the robust snort had emanated from Potter. How weird that they would have something in common, even if it was only a mutual disgust of senseless fatalism.

As far as she was concerned, Divination was for doormats, and Karma was a bitch. She had piled on the manure for every assignment Trelawney had set and it never failed to amaze her how eagerly that sherry-soaked bat had swallowed it down. Certainly not a Ravenclaw, that one. Too bad she couldn't say the same for Slytherin. Stupidity was an unfortunate side effect of inbreeding; she considered Crabbe and Goyle to be Exhibits A.

She shook her head in annoyance and tried to lose herself in the story, in the banter of the characters. It wasn't working. She blamed Potter, of course. His mere presence in *her* theatre had infected her thinking, gotten under her skin. Her mind dwelled in the past, viewing it through the prism of the movie she was supposedly watching, relating the characters' actions to her own school day misadventures.

She and Daphne had written a note to Hannah Abbott fourth year, dissolving into laughter when it was apparent the Hufflepuff believed Blaise Zabini had asked her to the Yule Ball. In sixth year, they had spiked Lisa Turpin's punch at the Slug Club Christmas party and watched in delight as she threw up all over Theo Nott's shoes.

She glared at the back of Potter's head, interpreting every tilt or shift as disapproval, every cough or clearing of his throat as condemnation. *Mr. High and Mighty*. Who was he to judge, anyway? She was a kid. She was supposed to have fun and make mistakes. It's not like she was evil or tried to kill anyone, right?

~88~88~88~

It's just a life story, so there's no climax

Harry Potter paid for his ticket and entered the dim room, closing his eyes briefly to adjust to the change in light. He was tired of living a small existence, holding himself apart from the life he wanted and the people he loved, but he wasn't sure these Sundays were worth it.

He suspected Hermione was right when she called the Muggle therapist he'd been seeing a quack. The prescribed weekly visits with the Dursleys and the attempts to "reinvent his teenage years" through viewing coming of age films didn't seem to be working. For one thing, Uncle Vernon didn't want him there, would never want him there, and that was perfectly fine. He didn't want to be at Privet Drive, either. Dudley and Aunt Petunia came to lunch in London once a month...that was enough for him. It was an awkward truce, but a truce all the same.

This movie thing was borderline ridiculous though. How could he be expected to relate to this shite? None of these characters had ever had their families destroyed by a madman or been groomed for death to save an entire race of people. The night terrors hadn't gone away either. Still, the films were entertaining, at least. And the darkened room allowed him two hours of complete anonymity in which to shake off the weight of Uncle Vernon's disapproval before his work week began anew.

He purchased a bucket of chips and a pint, then walked back into the theatre proper to find his seat... occupied by a vaguely familiar head of silky black hair. From this angle, he also glimpsed impossibly long legs. What was her name? P... something. Park. Parker Posey! No. That was a Muggle actress from that movie about high school in Texas he saw two weeks ago... Dazed something or other. Pansy. Pansy Parkinson. Pug-face.

Her head jerked around while he was gaping and he winced, thinking he must have said it out loud. But her eyes widened when she spotted him and she whipped her gaze back to the blank screen, so she must've been checking for a date or something. Harry backed away, putting space between them, and quickly found an empty but much less comfortable seat.

During the movie, a dark comedy about a private school student obsessed with an older woman who did all sorts of absurd things to catch her attention, Harry found himself glancing over at Parkinson frequently. She was fidgeting quite a bit, which made him think she had been stood up. He wondered by whom. Not Malfoy, surely. He was engaged to another pure-blood witch, or so Harry had heard. That had to be a blow to Pansy's ego, at least. He remembered the devotion she'd paid the blond git in school. *Life happened while you made other plans*. The words fairly twinkled as they echoed in his mind. Harry could never figure out why the voice of wisdom inside him sounded like Dumbledore. It was an irony about which he tried to be amused.

Her nose wasn't as smushed anymore. Maybe she'd had it fixed. Or she had just grown into her face, like Luna had. She was quite nice to look at now, especially with those legs. But a nicer personality, well... that was probably too much to hope for. Not that he was interested. If Hermione and The Quack were right about anything, it was that he was not ready for a real relationship. He had a long string of exes to attest to that fact.

After a while, he was sucked into the plot of the movie and realized he felt a certain affinity for the lead character. He had thought of his school as his home, and had formulated grand unworkable plots that had misfired in a spectacular fashion. He, too, loved outrageously and jealously. With a jolt, Harry realized the film was nearly over, and crept quietly from his seat to avoid Parkinson, idly wondering what ever had happened to Cho Chang.

~88~88~88~

In the plot that you passed through your teeth there was no pity

Pansy slipped into the queue at the Electric immediately behind the most rebellious head of hair she'd ever laid eyes on, save Granger's, and groaned to herself. It just figured. She'd had a fantastically busy week and hadn't been able to come on Sunday. The silver lining thought had been that by coming on a different night, at least she would avoid *him*.

Don't turn around. Don't turn...bugger.

"It's Wednesday!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Avoiding me, Potter?" she drawled, lifting an eyebrow in challenge.

"No," he sputtered, confused. "I just saw you here the Sunday before last. I had no reason to think it's a habit with..." he trailed off and tilted his head to the side, observing the blush tinting her cheeks. "I suppose I could ask the same of you," he commented mildly. "You've seen me here before that, haven't you?"

"Just once," she replied evenly. "And I'm here tonight because I had a wedding to attend on my regular day," she added primly, unable to help herself.

"How odd." He smiled, bemused. "Me too. Though I suspect we did not attend the same wedding."

She snorted. "I'd heard they were finally getting married," she said. "Where did they go on their honeymoon?"

"Paris. The Hotel Cinq near Place de la Magie."

Pansy let out a sharp bark of laughter.

"Malfoy too, eh? Well, that ought to be interesting." Harry said blandly.

Pansy just shook her head in amusement, conceding Harry's skill at understatement. If asked, she'd put her money on Granger. No, she was a Weasley now. Draco still whined about that hard slap she'd given him in third year.

Still imagining the outcome of an encounter between the blissful newlyweds...awkward didn't even begin to cover it...she dimly realized that Harry had paid for her ticket before she could protest. She tried to give him her money anyway, but he just waved her off.

She'd sat beside him because she felt obliged to, and now she heartily regretted her manner-bound upbringing. *The road to hell was paved with good intentions*, sneered her inner voice. It sounded remarkably like her former Head of House. Well, the only one she acknowledged with respect.

The movie they were watching hit home most uncomfortably, and she would have given anything to be able to escape. She knew it couldn't end well. Harry bore little resemblance to the tyrannical boy targeted for malicious vengeance, but it was clear to her that the boy couldn't see the bull's eye affixed to his back, same as she was sure Harry hadn't seen the one Slytherin had affixed to his, misled as they were by Snape's obvious condescension and the propaganda put out by the Ministry and the press.

She'd been as culpable as the rest...more so, really...eager to throw him to the wolves in her fear and blind devotion to a boy who never had believed her worthy of him. Pathetic. She wished to Merlin she had learned to think for herself sooner. That she had been born with the clear vision usually earned through the bitter pill of experience.

An epiphany occurred to her then, as the bully flailed in the water, dying for sins unintended and irrefutable. Her body went rigid as it washed over her, seeping into the marrow of her bones. She was a hypocrite. She'd never be able to move forward in her life or think for herself with any clarity unless she confronted her past and made peace with it. Let it go.

She followed Harry out of the theatre, feeling like a marionette with her strings cut, her steps jerky and hesitant. Her mind whirling, overfull with words, she opened her mouth a dozen times, but never uttered a sound. He seemed unaware of her dilemma, content to stroll quietly beside her to the Apparition point. Just as they reached it, Pansy summoned her voice back and croaked a clumsy "I'm sorry" before popping away abruptly.

~88~88~88~

And no cut to a costly parade that's for him only

For four long days, Harry dwelled on Pansy's overwrought apology. What precisely was she so remorseful about? Not buying him popcorn? He doubted it, since her demeanour had indicated a level of meaning deeper than that. He intended to find out and thank her for it, though, if he could. No matter what it had been for, the apology had kept the night terrors at bay while he had tried to figure it out.

Until the previous couple of weeks at the cinema, he hadn't seen her since the end of the War. And prior to that, he couldn't recall a single incident she should feel the need to apologize for. Malfoy, certainly, but not Pansy. It was definitely a puzzle, and one he had little hope of solving, since he doubted he would see her at the Electric, Sunday ritual or no.

He waited in line and purchased his ticket, then entered the dimly lit space, haphazardly looking for a head of silky black hair. And he found it, in his usual spot. When he sat in the empty chair beside her, she flinched. Harry cleared his throat. Pansy fidgeted in her seat a little, but kept her eyes on the blank screen.

"What were you apologizing for last week?" he blurted out.

Her jaw dropped and she turned to him in slow motion, her eyes wide. "What was I apologizing for?" she parroted.

Now he was tense. Obviously, he'd overlooked something she felt very bad about. Ginny had snidely commented once...just before she left him...that he needed prescription glasses for his myopic point of view. He hated that she might be right. "Um... yeah," he stuttered lamely.

"I. Tried. To. Turn. You. Over. To. The. Dark. Lord." She enunciated each word slowly as if explaining advanced Arithmancy theorems to the Giant Squid.

"Oh. That."

The film started just then, preventing Pansy's response, but Harry could feel her regarding him in horrified fascination. It was like the reoccurring dream he had about playing a World Cup Quidditch match against France. Naked. He sighed and turned his attention to the movie. Awkward was a state of being with which he was pretty familiar.

Pansy was completely floored. Utterly gob smacked. She'd finally worked up the courage to face the worst thing she'd ever done...an event so painful to her that she'd avoided thinking about it or anything associated with it for *six years*...and apologize for it, violating not only Slytherin Code, but her own personal ethics, as well, to do so. And Harry's response? 'Oh. That'

'Oh.'

'That.'

She just might be offended.

She let out an audible huff, which was thoroughly ignored by the oblivious twit sitting next to her, and turned her attention to the flickering images on the screen. An hour later the film faded to black and she was drained of resentment. Instead, she felt petty, mean, and awestruck. She was putting on her coat and debating a course of action...fleeing sounded awfully good...when Harry stepped in front of her, blocking her avenue of escape.

"Let's go have a drink," he said, looking fairly uncomfortable himself. She shrugged in agreement and followed him out of the theatre

Once again, the walk to the Apparition point was silent, awkward, and over all too soon. They Side-Alonged to Diagon Alley and entered the Leaky Cauldron through the back, quickly finding a quiet booth to sit in. Pansy picked through the nut bowl idly as she waited for Harry to come back with their drinks. She felt like she had rather a lot to say to him, but didn't know where or how to begin.

"Gillywater, right?" he asked, setting it down in front of her and placing his butterbeer on the pockmarked table next.

She nodded as he slid into the booth across from her, and they both took a long sip from their glasses with their eyes averted.

Harry finally put down his drink and sighed. "Look, I'm sorry I was so offhanded about your apology. It's just..."

"That my little transgression didn't register in the face of evil wizards trying to kill you, your friends dying, and fulfilling a prophecy you didn't fully understand?" Pansy inquired, rushing in.

He looked up and their eyes met. "Um. Yeah."

"I realized that, watching the movie. This girl never caught a break, right? It just piled all on top of her, day after day. Probably, it blended all together into one long nightmare, but she never broke under it. That is amazing," Pansy stopped to sip her drink.

"Yeah... well," Harry cleared his throat. "The thing is, what you did actually ended up being good for me."

She frowned in confusion. "How?"

"Don't you remember, Pansy? Everyone rose up to protect me. I'd lost track of Ron and Hermione. I was trying to search for something that had been missing a very long time. That show of support gave me the strength to do what needed to be done."

She fiddled with her soggy drink napkin. "So, I shouldn't feel bad about it anymore?"

"Not for my sake," he replied.

They smiled at each other, finished their drinks, and then went their separate ways.

~88~88~88~

It's just a house burning, but it's not haunted. It was your heart hurting, but not for long, kid.

Sunday brunch had run late at the Burrow that morning, so he made it into the theatre just as the room went dark. He closed his eyes to adjust to the difference in light, and then moved quickly to join Pansy, who was sitting in their usual seats. When he spotted the pint and bucket of chips waiting for him, he gave her hand a quick squeeze, which she returned without looking away from the screen.

Two hours later, they were back out on the street, blinking against the unusually sunny London day. They stood quietly for a little while and just as Harry was oriented to the bustle of the city again...

"Harold." Pansy nudged his side with her elbow. "You were late."

"Sorry, Maude." He grinned down at her. "The honeymooners got back from Paris yesterday."

"Yes, I know," she replied with a wicked gleam in her eyes. "I've seen the bruises."

"The pictures were pretty spectacular too," he commented.

He had given up going to the Dursleys' entirely, which made both him and Uncle Vernon very happy. The Quack would just have to lump it. Or he would lump The Quack. Maybe he should do that. The night terrors had devolved to nightmares, and he was finding that the more time he spent around people he actually liked, the less disconnected he felt. The movie thing had worked out okay too, even though he didn't "reinvent his teenage years." What a pile of Thestral crap. The point of living was to keep moving forward and enjoy the journey as much as you could. To have no regrets.

"So," Pansy said as she turned toward the Apparition point. "You want to do something together next Saturday?"

"What did you have in mind?" he asked curiously.

"We could rescue a dying tree," Pansy suggested.

"You could pose nude for Dean Thomas while I watch." Harry offered. She punched him in the arm. "Ow. Watch it, I mark easy."

Pansy eyed his forehead and snickered.

He rolled his eyes. "How about we go to the sea and watch the sun set?"

"Sounds like a plan."

~88~88~88~

A/N:

Thank you very much, Kazfeist, for the excellent beta & advice. Any remaining errors are strictly my own.

Lines in bold italics from *Our Life is Not a Movie or Maybe...* by Okkervil River

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROICPlnCIf0>

The Electric is an actual theatre in London on Portobello Rd.

<http://www.electriccinema.co.uk/index.php>

though my version is lot less spiffy and doesn't play first run studio fare.

Movies Harry & Pansy viewed:

Heathers

Rushmore

Mean Creek

Welcome to the Dollhouse

Harold & Maude

Most Excellent Original Prompt: Pansy has a love for independent/foreign/mind-boggling cinema. Imagine her surprise when she discovers Harry Potter to be the only other patron during a Monday afternoon screening of *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin*. Conversations, film festivals and milk duds ensue. ~ Obviously, I twisted this just a little. Hope you liked it, Laiksmarei!