

# I, Pale One

*by Fairfield*

A stranger in a strange tale.

## *Chapter 1 of 1*

A stranger in a strange tale.

"Is it really true you're descended from a vampire and a house-elf?"

"A base canard," I said. "It was a wood-elf."

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On a train tearing across a bleak landscape, a trolley appeared. It appeared to have nothing but sweets.

"What are the chances of a juicy, rare steak?" I asked.

Several girls ordering pumpkin pasties stepped back. I flashed them a big smile. They stepped further back. Perhaps my attempts to get acquainted weren't going as well as could be hoped: this train ride was the only opportunity to suss out my fellow students before being dropped into one of their close-knit groups.

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When the ugliest cat in the world wandered into the study area, Pansy and her cohorts belted out the song I had taught her.

Here pussy, pussy, pussy

Where can you be?

Here pussy, pussy, pussy

Come back to me.

Here pussy, pussy, pussy

Where do you roam?

Here pussy, pussy, pussy

Please come home.

The Gryffindor lady dashed in, scooped up the feline, and dashed out.

Pansy cackled out, "My pussy don't have no stripes, and it never smelled like that," before turning to me and saying, "You're a bad influence on us."

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We had hung a pendulum with a four-story cable. Students had been disturbing it until Pansy gleefully applied the electrostatic spell I had shown her. I had convinced her that the professors wouldn't let us keep the pendulum if the spell did more than tingle.

There was a ping as the pendulum swung a few millimeters off the center mark. Pansy nudged me, and we watched the stairs rearrange themselves. The pendulum swung back to the center mark. Flitwick was watching too. He had asked if vertical inside the castle was the same as vertical outside the castle. We didn't know. Comparison would have to be indirect, and besides, light rays might bend in this place.

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She had been telling me about everyone's opinion of me: an aloof character with no concerns. She obviously couldn't associate with a wizard with no moral fibre.

"I will give up bangers and mash for Lent," I announced.

The student body took bets on my chances of surviving.

"And marmite," I added.

The crowd went wild.

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"What are we doing out in this tippy boat?"

"I think the southwest corner, which is the lowest part of the castle and nearest the lake is the oldest part of the building," I said.

The rays of the setting sun reflected off the stones. There it was: a sharp vertical division between the medieval additions and the 1000AD structure.

Pansy didn't stare at the revelation for long. She was not the type to show awe "There are easier ways of getting me alone," she said.

I had to admire her insouciance.

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"Are you as smart as they say you are?"

Pansy, studying next to me, looked up from her Potions essay on twinkling toenail polish, eyed the inquisitive first-year, and said, "He has a proof by Algebra that Harry is Voldemort's ghost."

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"There better not be any snakes or spiders."

That was the condition on which Pansy would accompany me on an expedition to find the oldest part of the castle. We passed five different phases of construction before arriving at what seemed the end of a passage. A dark cavern stretched endlessly. There was a huge, basalt column next to us. We could see another in the far distance. After that, our light faded.

"We've found the elephants," said Pansy.

"What?"

"The world is held up by four elephants standing on the back of a dragon," she said. "It's a cosmological theory."

We felt a deep vibration under our feet and saw waves ripple through the dust.

"I wonder if the stairs are moving?" asked Pansy.

We saw flashes in the distance. They resembled Pansy's initial protective spells for the pendulum.

"An electrostatic dragon?" she asked.

We noticed the absence of vermin. We noticed the lightning flashes moving closer. We two vermin started back up the tunnel, going faster and faster until we were scrambling in terror. We reached a landing and tripped on the debris. There was a scream and a flash. I thought we were done for. No, Pansy had zapped a centipede. She looked at me accusingly.

"It's not a snake or spider," I said.

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We were in the morning history class, and Pansy was pondering the lack of information about the early structures. "Our history begins with a nod to the almost mythical four founders and their squabble. It doesn't mention any historical event until Glaum the Dour led an expedition against the giants in 1137."

"I'm not going to be so common as to suggest a conspiracy," I said.

"But it's fun to speculate," said Pansy. "The supposed defection of Salazar produced such bitter feelings that no one makes any inquiries."

"The antagonism has been carefully fostered for a thousand years," I said. "And what better repellant for a heap of rock than a bunch of rowdy adolescents."

"The instructors are strained to the limit keeping a lid on things," said Pansy, "and the students are only interested in one thing."

I gave her a quizzical look.

She looked around the classroom. Everyone was either busy taking notes or bored to somnolence, and we were in the back row. She gave me a knowing smile as she straightened her back. I tried not to stare at her jumper stretched across firm mounds. Her skirt rose above attractive knees and continued to rise. She leaned over. I admired the noble lines of her face as she whispered, "Want to see what I do late at night, thinking about you."

I reflected on the caverns, Pansy, and the school motto: Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus. Never tickle a sleeping dragon.

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Somewhere, there is a prompt about the shifting stairs.

Pansy's ditty is an old Western Swing tune.

