

Our Girl, Pansy

by MHaydn

The editor inspires the troops.

Warning: The motley crew of writers is back.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 4

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Chapter 1

"The romance of the age should be about someone who is unlovable," said Cho.

"You're right," said the editor.

When all is gone and life lies broken does not the heart embrace the narrow and straight road leading to emptiness for does not the knowledge that there is nothing produce a level of enlightenment that few dare to embrace and having accepted this insight of existence does not the possessor now regard both success and failure with aloof amusement and does not this detachment lead to experiences beyond the ordinary even as our alienated one hurtles toward oblivion.

"Omigod," said Biff. "The story's already in the trash heap. Well, we can console ourselves with the thought that we can't do it any more damage."

"We can try," said Theo.

"Go for it, old bean."

Pansy stuck one of her complimentary chips into the bowl of salsa and pushed it to the other side of the table, the signal that the meeting had been compromised. As she rose to make her way to the exit, three burly looking men also stood. Friend or foe? Who else was lurking in the crowd? No time for finesse. She flicked her wand around the room.

Numbnuts!

She made her way past the preoccupied patrons and out into the clear, starry night.

"Pansy?" exclaimed Cho. "We want someone difficult, not impossible. If the boys want impossible, I'll give them impossible."

"Impressive," she heard a voice say as she left the restaurant.

"What we've come to expect," said another voice.

Pansy turned to face Alastor and Remus. "You are too kind," she said.

"We know that you have whatever you're selling still on you," said Alastor.

"A mere roomful of thugs wouldn't cause you to abandon your merchandise," said Remus.

"Such gallant comments might turn a girl's head," said Pansy. "Are you going to detain me? You know what I have is not illegal, but you can harass me on the pretence that you're doing the world some good."

"We were thinking of seeing you safely home," said Remus. "At least, I was."

"Consider my head turned," said Pansy.

Continuing the charade, Remus offered his arm and the two set off to Pansy's flat.

This being his first encounter with the lady, Remus had to ask, "Have you ever considered going legit?"

"Have you ever considered hosting moon-viewing parties?" asked Pansy.

"I see that I hit a sore spot," said Remus. "I was only thinking that the compounds and solutions you distribute might be beneficial. Whoever is making them, possibly you, is an artisan of great skill."

For a few moments, Pansy felt lifted as she imagined a Pansy accepted, if not by society as a whole, at least by a select group of talented people. As her feet touched back upon the ground she realized he had first hit her sore spot and then he had hit her weak spot.

"You're a dangerous man, do you know that?" she asked.

"I'm aware of my affliction."

"I meant dangerous as a man, as a person," she said.

Remus was pondering that, wondering what she meant and how to respond when they arrived at her flat and they said their goodbyes.

"You inspired the boys," the editor told Cho, "and I thought Theo was impervious to elevated emotions."

"I think it's your fault," muttered Cho.

The editor looked up from correcting copy, polished her nails on her lapels, and smiled at Cho as the younger writer turned to a blank page determined to set things straight.

Once inside, Pansy scanned the rooms for any sign of intrusion, put up her protective wards, and carefully hid the consignment she had not been able to deliver. She would contact her customers tomorrow. They would understand. They were as cautious as she was.

Then she raged as the full impact of what had happened hit her. She had let Remus, that half a person, that foul changeling, step on her vulnerabilities. Worse, she had led him to her residence. What had possessed her to let that cursed low-life know where she lived? She was no longer safe. Her merchandise was not safe. Officialdom, maybe worse, could appear at any moment. With clenched fists and gnashing teeth, she destroyed her inventory, packed, and slipped away into the night. When she arrived at her previously prepared safe house, she lay awake. What had caused her to make so many mistakes?

The moon rose and she thought it had never looked so big.

"Want a piece of this?" Theo asked Biff.

"Aargh."

The bear sat in the corner and sipped his tea, waiting for the return of the wolf, the wolf on the hunt. The wolf appeared and ordered his own tea. How moderate are the predators.

"Why are we hunting her?" asked Remus.

"We're only watching."

Not all families escaped unscathed from the aftermath of the recent conflict, and Pansy's relatives had fled to the continent. Pansy's staying was the subject of speculation which appeared to be solved when she began selling elixirs advertised as pain killers. In a sting operation, two bureaucrats suffering from chronic pain bought several vials, but analysis revealed nothing prohibited. In an attempt to restrict the sale of the compounds, the government broadened their description of illegal substances, but it was soon pointed out that they had outlawed tea and chocolate. They repealed the ordinance. In a final irony, the agents involved in the sting discovered that the compounds released them from constant pain, and they complained loud and long when the operation was declared over. "We want more sting."

Now, sipping his tea, Remus said, "We've alerted her. She's probably destroyed all evidence in her present location and run for cover."

"Aye, that be true, lad," said Alastor with no trace of regret, "but it still be our job to watch her. It be too bad you were so successful in locating her current lair."

Remus should have been thinking about how to find her new lair instead of thinking about her eyes, how they would shine in the moonlight.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Attraction often works subtly, causing those under its influence to deviate from their normal routine for no reason that they can discern, for although the allure of another is initially gentle, it is constant, and like a breeze blowing a few grains of sand, the first effects are not noticeable, and it even appears that nothing has changed which causes those affected to blithely ignore the small events accumulating so gradually that they are caught by surprise when they discover the entire dunescape of their lives has changed.

Let's see those wannabe romance writers handle a little subtlety, thought Cho.

"We're not doing much these days," said Remus.

"We're observing," said Alastor, "observing quietly. Enjoy it. Trouble be finding us soon enough. And Pansy."

"Pansy?"

"Didn't you see the way she looked at you, lad?"

"No."

Biff and Theo faced a dilemma.

"Whose turn is it to be sensitive?"

"Flip a coin. Do you have one?"

"A tuppence."

"A tuppence. We can't decide something this important for a tuppence."

"Then sensitivity will have to wait."

"This is my fourth cup of tea," said Remus, "and I'm still falling asleep. It's barely dawn, too early for evil doers, and I don't want to hear about being eternally alert."

"Something will happen today. I can smell it in the air," said Alastor.

As the two sniffed the breeze, three secret members of the recent rebellion arrived at a table across the square. They ordered coffee and poppy seed muffins and waited. There was a rumor that the clan traitor Pansy Parkinson was in the area.

"Nothing exciting happens these days," said Remus.

"Aye, lad, not like the old days," said Alastor. "I could tell you stories."

"That might help," said Remus, yawning.

As Alastor gathered his thoughts, four undercover agents from the drug-enforcement branch arrived at a table a discreet distance from the other guests. They ordered coffee and butternut muffins and waited. There was a tip that the slippery Pansy Parkinson might be carrying something illegal today.

"One of the better cases was decades ago when Shacklebolt was just a constable," said Alastor. "It concerned a thief. His modus operandi was to sneak up on a witch, pinch her bottom hard enough that she screamed, and in the resulting confusion, snitch her wand."

"Should be easy enough to solve," said Remus.

"You would think so," said Alastor, "but he eluded all efforts to catch him. The constabulary was soon facing a horde of angry women, some of them threatening to show us their bruises."

"Desperate times call for desperate measures," said Remus.

As Alastor paused to let the suspense build, two members of the smugglers guild arrived and took a corner table. They ordered coffee and bran muffins and waited. They had heard that the renegade dealer Pansy Parkinson might try to ply her trade here.

"The only clue," continued Alastor, "was that at the scene of every crime, there were always chocolate-frog wrappers."

"Did that lead anywhere?" asked Remus.

"We set a trap," said Alastor. "Shacklebolt volunteered."

As Alastor took a deep breath to continue the tale, three vigilantes arrived and took the remaining table. They ordered coffee and pistachio nut muffins and waited. The grapevine had informed them that the uncatchable Pansy Parkinson was fond of this café's blueberry muffins.

"We filled Shacklebolt's pockets with chocolate frogs," said Alastor, "and he wandered through the streets munching down the candy and loudly proclaiming that he loved chocolate frogs, that he had lots of them, and he was going to eat all of them."

"You sent him out alone?" asked Remus.

"No, no," said Alastor. "He was followed by constables with wands at the ready. Senior officers were in reserve with flasks of incapacitating potion, and I commanded a squad of wizards who could ride fire-breathing dragons."

It was at this point that a lady joined them at their table and asked what they were doing up at this ungodly hour. The diligent waiter arrived and said, "Here's your coffee and blueberry muffin, Miss Parkinson."

The first round of hexes blew the café au lait out of the Trio's cups.

"My new blouse!" screamed Pansy as her return curse split some wigs.

Her second throw went awry as Alastor and Remus grabbed their little muffin and pulled her under the table.

"You made me muff it," she complained, grabbing her blueberry muffin on the way down.

The second round of curses shattered the ashtrays, including the one Pansy had spotted as worth taking home. The Trio crawled under a neighboring table, Pansy a bit clumsily since she was still clutching her muffin. Even though only a few combatants were still standing, the third round sliced through the awning poles, and the breeze carried the canvas away. As the morning sun revealed the scene to all, a few defensive spells were thrown as the four groups retreated, hauling away their wounded and deciding that Miss Parkinson was tougher than she looked.

Pansy looked ruefully at her smashed muffin and said, "Do you two always cause such destruction?"

"What happened to Shackbolt?" asked Remus.

"He never ate another chocolate frog," said Alastor.

"What? Why?" asked Pansy. "I like chocolate."

Those prats, they lost their sensitivity coin. And they don't have any credit in that department either. thought Cho. *I've got them on the run. Let them try to develop this.*

As they departed from the wreckage of the outdoor café, it seemed natural to Pansy that she and Remus would leave together. She told herself that she was being wise: keep your friends close and your enemies closer.

"Have you had breakfast," she asked him.

When he said he hadn't and that they should look for someplace, she yielded to an impulse and took his hand. Part of her wondered what she was doing. Another part of her noticed that she was wandering through the streets of London, holding hands with Remus, and not really looking for a breakfast nook. When he stopped in front of a French pastry shop, she realized she wasn't hungry, but she wanted to have breakfast with him. They ordered coffee, croissants, and orange juice. They picked at their food.

"Do you have to get back to work?" she asked.

"My work is to observe you. My plan is to pretend to leave and surreptitiously follow you." He squeezed her hand. "I'll gladly watch you all day."

Oh, Wolfie, that's sweet, thought Pansy. *Wait, I mean I won't have to worry about what he's digging up about me.*

"Good plan," she said. "Where do you want to meet for lunch?"

He yawned.

"We should rest from the morning's excitement before undertaking a strenuous game of cat and mouse," she squeaked.

They retired to his flat since it was too early in the game for him to track her to her new lair. She stretched out on his hearth rug, and he obligingly lit a fire in the fireplace.

"Let's pretend," she said as he stretched out beside her. "You're not a law enforcement officer, and I'm not a fugitive prejudiced against those who are not pure in blood."

The fugitive traced his face with her fingers. He didn't protest. The prejudiced lady ran her fingers through his hair. He didn't mind. The snobbish aristocrat brushed him with her lips his forehead, his eyes, his nose. When her lips reached his, her restraint vanished, and she kissed him fervently. She pushed her tongue between his teeth. She had never done that before. She heard him moan.

Oh, wow, thought Pansy.

She snuggled against him feeling both calm and full of wild urges. She listened to him sigh as she cuddled him. She was in a place where reason and reality had no place. She laid her head on his shoulder and stroked his hair as the not-a-law-enforcement-officer fell asleep in her arms. As she relaxed and a comfortable feeling flowed through her, she reminded herself that she was playing a deep game, possibly a dangerous game which might have added some spice except she knew she was more than a match for a mere law officer.

When he woke, they had lunch and saw some of the sights of London. That evening, they waved goodbye, and she snuck away to her own flat. Any sense of sensibility did not return until she awoke the next morning and the proverbial light of dawn came crashing down.

Chapter 3

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The editor advances the plot

Chapter 3

Do not those who feel betrayed by their emotions experience a special kind of pain where there is first rage against the once-desired one for causing such anguish followed by rage against oneself for being foolish enough to hope that there was a chance, and is this not succeeded by the thought that there might be a fault in oneself but the fault comes from the capacity for great romance and, even though this may be a fault, it is a forgivable failing that will have to be accepted, whereupon, recognizing one's own weakness, the conclusion is that measures must be taken to protect one's vulnerable inner core and the first step is to distance oneself from the previously desired person who caused such turmoil and this distancing has such priority that rude, even hostile, behavior erupts, for is not all now subservient to the urgency of ending this ongoing agony.

"What's that?" asked Biff as he and Theo arrived at the office and noticed something shiny on Biff's desk.

"It's a sovereign, brand new," said Theo, "with a note from Cho. It says, 'Sensitivity coin. Flip it, you prats.'"

"That's not necessary," said Biff. "The senior writer accepts his responsibilities willingly."

Pansy woke and greeted the day like a wolf cub emerging from the den for the first time to observe a whole new world before her. Her elation dampened a bit on realizing Remus hadn't made any plans to meet her, but she braced up with the thought that theirs was a calm and mature relationship that didn't need constant reassurance. Besides, it was early days, and exploring a new world should not be rushed.

Taking her last thought about caution to heart, she disguised herself and proceeded to a breakfast diner known to be frequented by law enforcement types. She would sift through their gossip for possible revelations. To her surprise, the gossip was about her. Remus had been seen with her, and some officers were stating that they always knew Remus couldn't be trusted. Others were arguing that Remus was being clever, that he was playing the outlaw Pansy to learn her secrets. Those arguing for Remus reminded everyone of his heroic past, and all the officers finally agreed that Remus was acting honorably and he would be the one to finally capture that slippery witch.

Pansy was as devastated as a wolf cub that has crawled into a brand new world to discover she had lost her mother.

Biff, his sensitivity completely spent, leaned back and groaned. Theo took him to the Caffeine Palace for restoratives.

After they left, Cho scanned the story to date. *The boys left themselves wide open. Now, we can reveal the true Pansy.*

She had to tell him how she felt, what he had done to her. But wait, did not girls have their pride, and did not a Parkinson have it in abundance? Hence, he had to know without her telling him. It should be obvious to him. But wait, it would have been obvious to anyone with an ounce of sensitivity, but she doubted that that changeling berk fell into that category. In fact, it was obvious he did not. Just look at what he had done to her: played with her, led her on, toyed with her feelings. He was a man if man he was, not some creature found under a damp rock who possessed cruelty beyond comprehension, cruelty that no decent person could possess, cruelty she vowed to pay back many fold. Pansy brightened. He had hurt her as no one professing to be human would do. She would hurt him worse.

She sent an invitation to a smuggling gang whose operations had been damaged by the vigorous actions of Remus and Alastor. When they met, she told them that she could set up Remus Lupin in a spot convenient for an ambush.

After Biff and Theo returned from their break, Theo flipped the sensitivity coin, declared it 'heads,' and took up the gauntlet.

It is true all those jealous thoughts swirled through Pansy's head, but it was only as an amusement because she had heard other girls utter such things. She was reminding herself that she was a Parkinson and above such petty nonsense. In an elevated moment, she recognized that a fully mature Pansy wouldn't have needed any reminder, but she also recognized that she was still young and this was her first broken romance. Meeting disappointment with aplomb took time and experience.

But, as young and inexperienced as she was, as hurt and wounded as she was, she would show her true mettle. She had lured the smugglers into revealing themselves. She only had to inform Remus and Alastor, and at last, they could round up that gang. It would be a feather in Remus's cap, a feather put there by her. Her inner self glowed at the coming triumph of the most marvelous man she had ever met even though she never wanted to see the despicable fiend again.

Theo paused to take a deep breath.

"Time for a break," said Biff. "This sensitivity stuff is best done in easy stages."

Cho had read the latest entry. Cho was pounding her desk. "Pansy is the essence of mean girl. The boys are writing her as noble because they're fantasizing that she has a set of impressive knockers. But she doesn't. No where in canon does it say, 'Pansy Parkinson had a great rack.'"

How deluded are those who underestimate the fury of a girl set aside. Having managed to trick both Remus and Alastor into an ambush, for was not Alastor a co-conspirator in her humiliation, Pansy realized the ambushers needed more firepower, and she contacted the remnants of the recent, failed rebellion. They were more than happy to eliminate two major agents of the opposition.

Biff rubbed the sensitivity coin for good luck and began pounding the keys.

Our poor reader, like someone seeing a Shakespeare play for the first time, might have trouble following the schemes that Pansy was bringing onto the stage of the unfolding drama, but these plots were well within range of our dedicated heroine. Assuming an air of dignity in the face of crushing betrayal and affecting an indifference which she did not feel, our Slytherin Princess relayed the information to the law-enforcement division that the smugglers and rebels had formed a temporary alliance and her Remus, a brave soul willing to be the bait in a sting operation, needed more than Alastor for backup. There would be a grand roundup of miscreants at the chosen place, an abandoned building that once served refreshments during a wilder time in our history.

Thus was set in motion the Wand Fight at the OK Coffee and Tea Emporium which has reached legendary status among generations of story tellers.

Some claim that Pansy observed the battle because she wanted to witness the downfall of Remus and Alastor, and these people even claim that she entered the fray at the last minute to save them because she would not yield the privilege of finishing them off to another, but the more sensitive souls among us realize her motives were different. She wasn't confident in the prowess of the law officers and she was there out of fear for the safety of Remus. It was well that she was present since Remus and Alastor were about to be overwhelmed. She sprang into action, and there is no fury like a girl beside her besieged one. Howling with rage, her wand cut a swath through the attackers.

Too well was done the deed. The band of assailants turned their attention to the banshee in their midst. She was deflecting the incoming curses, and her defenses were collapsing when Alastor and Remus appeared by her side and, once again, dragged their little muffin to safety, dragged her kicking and screaming that she didn't need any help.

By the time they had shifted her to the periphery, she had regained her moxie and was ready, willing, and eager to whale on anybody in her way, but the field was empty, and the three of them were the ones left standing.

She was about to complain that she could have taken out more opponents if they hadn't interfered, but they were telling her that she was a brave girl for coming to their aid. The unfamiliar experience of being accepted stayed her tongue.

Cho was glaring at Biff and Theo. "You're ruining everything."

"That's not possible," said Biff.

"Right, not possible," said Theo, "we used the sensitivity coin."

"It was wasted on you," declared Cho.

The editor realized she needed to save the group and the story, and she realized how she could do it.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 4

The editor saves the day.

Chapter 4

How often our modest exterior hides a passion that those of the stouter frame would scarce believe rages inside us of the frail breast, and it rages not only in our breast but in parts that those of the ruder temperament imagine would bring a blush to our cheeks if any of our thoughts wandered there, but our thoughts not only stray there but dwell there incessantly, and thus nourished, they wait for opportunities to spring into being, for it is only by action that they can truly flourish, but alas, we of the weaker faculties often discover that those to whom nature gave the bold disposition lack perception of our nature, and hence, circumstances rarely arise to express our inner desire to ravish our special one among those of the heroic stance, ravish wholeheartedly with such vigor that the doughty one is left speechless by the unspeakable acts of his delicate flower.

Biff and Theo read the editor's spiel.

"What do we do with this?"

"Flip the coin."

"I got heads."

"I got tails."

"Both ends are covered."

"We're good to go."

Let them gawk, thought Pansy.

She moved through the lunch crowd to where Remus and Alastor were waiting for her, not certain this was a good idea.

"It's good you showed, lass," said Alastor after she had sat down. "Take advantage of your earned goodwill."

"You're saying that this is my chance to act like an upright member of society and be accepted as one."

Alastor nodded and invited her to return to the office with them to help them write their report on the recent hex out. Pansy looked at Remus and nodded yes.

Those jokers will never understand that girl, thought Cho.

Pansy looked around at the diners. "So, the wizards here were sizing me up for legitimacy, and I had hoped they were undressing me with their eyes."

She watched Alastor chuckle and Remus maintain a dignified silence.

So much for a suggestive comment, thought Pansy. *Doesn't Remus know I'm a girl? Doesn't he know what girls are made of, want they want?*

On their way to their office, she let her hips sway anyway on the off chance that Remus wasn't as dense as he was acting. Once they were in the building, she assumed a restrained and dignified demeanor for the law officers and administrators she greeted. She was an innocent girl who had been misunderstood.

She hovered over Remus and Alastor as they wrote their version of the recent fracas, correcting their punctuation and grammar. She was wondering if they had learned anything at school besides how to hex each other. *A spelling bee*, she thought. There was no reason to mention that she had acquired her vocabulary and eye for composition from reading romance novels. Speaking of which, she had always resented the amount of sentimental garbage she had to wade through before getting to the few good passages. She had always thought those novels were secretly written by men, men as clueless as these two klutzy report writers about the raging, seldom satisfied, needs of healthy females. She had her hands on Remus's shoulders, complimenting him every time he managed a correct sentence.

"Keep your quill erect," she encouraged him. "Open the story line. Insert yourself into the narrative. Admire the shape of the tale under your hands. Take advantage of its soft pliability. Use hard, pounding phrases. Let it flow for you. Make it yours."

As Cho paused to catch her breath, the editor popped her head in the door and announced it was past time for a coffee break, and maybe they could share a small pastry. Cho agreed. They could offer each other a little solace two warm-hearted women trapped in a world of neglect.

Theo perused the recent script. "Do you think Cho is trying to tell us something?"

"Naw," said Biff, "she's only making a literary effort to introduce some tension."

"Aye, lad, we be in trouble now."

"I thought the chief liked our statement."

"It were coherent. We raised his expectations. But never you mind, that's in the future. Take our erudite Miss Parkinson to lunch. Sufficient unto the day are the reports thereof."

Later, Pansy was pushing her mushroom omelet around on her plate. They had been talking about her operating legitimately. She was thinking about the

indignities: standing in line to fill out forms to be approved or disapproved by some snotty, mentally deficient, government clerk. Her fate would be in the hands of people who had a grudge against the Parkinsons. Now, she was facing a Remus who was puzzled by her lack of enthusiasm for the new life ahead of her.

He took her hand. "Tell me what's wrong."

She had always kept such things bottled up, but this time, to her astonishment, she found herself telling him what she was thinking. To her astonishment, he was agreeing with her. But, he informed her, she had friends. A petty clerk might be able to hassle her, but not for long. She felt some of her anxiety about the future, some of the tension she had been carrying with her, ebb away.

"The boys will never get this story into the higher realms," complained Cho.

"You're right, my dear," said the editor. "Show them what girls are really made of."

She took his hand and asked, "What makes your eyes shine?"

I mean something besides a chunk of rare meat, Wolfie, she thought, Or maybe I do mean that.

She saw the look of confusion on his face and realized they were in unfamiliar territory. He had never given any thought to what he might enjoy. This was going to be difficult. She backtracked to more familiar ground and asked about his next assignment. When he indicated he didn't know, she suggested some proactive work on smuggling. They could disguise themselves and visit some dodgy shops for illicit goods and teleportation devices. When he said they should do something less risky because he didn't want to expose her to that much danger, her heart skipped a beat as she realized he wanted to include her. She suggested dressing appropriately and touring the exclusive jewelry shops in London. He initially looked puzzled, but he brightened up and said that, of course, wizard goldsmiths could craft exquisite items. He thought some more and declared there had to be violations. The small wizard society by itself could not provide the Malfoys and others with the wealth they had. Pansy felt a warm glow. Her Wolfie was a smart man. They first visited her flat to make the necessary adjustments before touring the exclusive stores selling high end jewelry.

"You can examine my potion lab later," she told him as he scrutinized a strange-looking assortment of glass tubes and small burners that looked nothing like what he had seen in school.

She positioned him in front of a mirror and made multiple passes with her wand until a representative of the ruling class stood before her. She straightened his lapels, adjusted his tie, and brushed imaginary dust off his coat. She enjoyed a moment picturing herself doing this for him every morning before dismissing the image as sentimental twaddle. A single pass of her wand transformed a Slytherin Princess into an executive complete with skirt suit which she assumed appropriate since she had been told repeatedly that she was a hard faced bitch with no redeeming curves. She glanced at Remus, hoping he didn't disapprove too strongly, but she saw admiration. Out of the blue, it struck her that he liked it that she was an accomplished person, not some dandy's plaything. Something stirred in her knickers.

They toured leisurely. After all, they were members of the class that could spend time on itself. She played the dignified, but still besotted, companion: discreetly holding his arm, pressing her hip against him, brushing him with her breast. An act that came more naturally to her than she thought it would.

At the third and last shop for the day, a pass of the wand caused several filigree brooches to glow. They had located an outlet for illicit wizard goods. Breaching the shop's security brought a glow of success to Pansy, and she forgot the filigree as images of ivory rods danced through her head. She looked around. Did the shop have any? Did Wolfie have one? Would he breach her breach? How could one breach the subject?

Cho slammed her recent effort down. Bloody 'ell, the boys had written a Pansy completely out of character, and it had taken all her skill to preserve continuity and get the story back where it belonged. And now she was too exhausted to get to those illusive higher realms. But before she could stomp down the hall and rip some lungs out, the editor intercepted her and offered sherry, biscuits, and sympathy.

"I don't think the girls are happy with us," said Theo.

"We'll lock the sensitivity coin in the desk," said Biff, "get tanked on triple espressos, and see what happens."

Pansy, keeping in mind her companion's reaction to her executive attire, decided to stay in character and play to her strong suit. "Care to celebrate with some fruit and wine?" she asked

Thinking Pansy had uncovered a whole new area of investigation, he suggested champagne.

Thinking she really wanted to go for the hard stuff and then have her way with his hard stuff, she took his arm and said, "Usually, I'm a simple girl, but okay," her managerial instincts telling her that his inner bad boy was best aroused by a formal façade concealing restrained ardor.

As they left the jewelry store, she mentioned that a break from civilization would be welcome.

Later, on a sea cliff with several bottles of bubbly, she said, "Look at those waves pound the shore. Have you ever dreamed about being the sea and pounding away at a stony edifice until it yielded and lay at your feet? Lay before you as you entered all its crevices and covered it with your foam?"

My, my, I'm just full of suggestive comments.

But her effort might have been wasted since Remus was staring into space with his mind a million miles away. She took his hand. "Tell me what you're thinking."

"A number of things," he said. "What possessed you to lead me to the jewels? Rich and powerful people are probably involved. It could become dangerous for you if they find out who discovered their secret."

She gave it some thought. "It seemed like a game at the time, like a puzzle, like thinking about the world and figuring it out."

"I imagine you're having trouble finding someone suitable for you," he said.

"What are you saying?" she asked.

"You probably haven't met anyone of your caliber," he said, "and wizards tend to avoid witches that outclass them."

Pansy's inner self wailed. *You can't do this to me. I saved your ass in a shoot out, I put together the best report you and that bug-eyed pervert ever wrote, I uncovered a criminal activity that you and those dense, mother-humping constables couldn't even imagine, and now, you're leaving me because I show some signs of intelligence instead of being a simpering bimbo. I'm going to crack your nuts, you changeling freak, I'm going to puree your private parts, and I'm going to serve them on a tray to whatever low-class slag mistakenly thinks you're worth her attention.*

Remus sighed. "I've never met anyone like you, and I don't know why you're bothering with me, but I'm glad you are."

Oh, thought Pansy, reconsidering.

"The wheel of fortune rides high, and it rides low," said Pansy. "When it rides low for me, will you remember my better days?"

"I don't think better days or worse days count for much compared to what you are," said Remus.

Cho was thinking the two on the cliff were full of bubbly desires and the sentimental mush the boys were having them spout was completely out of place. With the insight provided by several glasses of sherry, she was ready to do the story justice.

Oh, grrrr, thought Pansy. *That was an invitation.*

Her hand was moving from his hand up his arm. Even through his blazer she could feel his compact muscles. His other hand was on her upper arm. Surely that was permission to move closer. He was stroking her hair. It had to be okay for her forehead to touch his. She was breathing the same air. He didn't protest when her lips caressed his face. She had her hands on his chest. Omigod, he was hard bodied. He was kissing her, as he should. She felt otherworldly, and she was hardly aware she was pressing against his chest until she was very aware she was against that firm chest and not able to stop.

Her hand traveled down until it reached his trousers whereupon the emptiness in her lacy garment shot to her brain and emptied the world except for her Wolfe. If the rest of the world were not empty, it might have been shocked to see Pansy grab his hand and guide it to her breast. She was tearing at her blouse. Strange, buttons had never given her any trouble before. She was almost grateful that Remus was unfastening the garment, except he was being too calm about it. He was supposed to be a youngster at Christmas, ripping open his presents. She was going to complain, but he was nuzzling her and it was too lovely for her to form any coherent thoughts except she managed to unfasten her top garment and press him into her and it didn't matter anymore that she wasn't abundantly endowed, she just wanted him to continue what he was doing. She lay back on his spread cloak. Did he like what he saw?

His fingers traced her face, his eyes gleamed, and he said, "Beautiful."

She pulled his lips to hers. She didn't know how to go about it, but she wanted to kiss that lovely man. It was clumsy, but she thought it was great. And he was participating, awkwardly, but lovingly. As her novice lover fondled her, Pansy was sighing with pleasure.

She saw Remus raise himself up his look appreciative. She took his hand and placed it between her knees, hoping he would move it to where she ached. She tried opening her legs for him, but the executive skirt was getting in the way. No problem. Her darling was sliding it up, nibbling as he went.

When her legs were far enough apart, he began again back at her knees, but this time his nibbles were for her inner thigh. He began at her knee and made it part way up her leg before starting at the other knee. This time making it further up her leg. Over and over again. Further up her leg each time. Unskillful caresses driving Pansy into a frenzy. She was squirming. She thought her undies were getting damp. Would he kiss her there? Would he dare? He was getting closer and closer. He did. Pansy's back arched and her legs opened wider. But he moved up, across her stomach where it tickled. He was holding her.

Remus was holding Pansy. One hand was stroking her hair, petting her, and the other was resting on the smooth swath of fabric between her legs when he asked, "Where does it feel good, sweetheart?"

His finger traveled over the cloth covered groove until she said, "There."

It was gentle. He tended his hard-faced, not-curvaceous lady as her features became soft and her body curved into him. Pansy had not known anyone would want to do this for her. She had not known she would want anyone to do this. It was Remus, someone special. Warm feelings were spreading through her. Her hand was on his, pressing it harder against her. Urgent feelings were driving her. She was trying to find the right moves to make it better. There was mounting frustration as nothing seemed to work until nothing seemed to matter and there was a moment of writhing before everything dissolved.

"Ha," cried Cho, banging her fist on her desk, "Action-adventure that."

Two doors down, two warriors of the ink were psyching up.

"Time for essence of Pansy," said Theo, ready to attack the blank page.

"Bring her out, lad," said Biff.

After the bolt from the heavens had shot through her, Pansy lay flushed and panting, but not for long. When the world returned, she knew she could not let this pass. Pansy Parkinson might have suffered a moment of weakness, but she was not anyone's toy. She tore open his trousers and engulfed him with her lips. When he responded, she cast aside her knickers and straddled him.

"I'm going to take you, Remus," she announced. "I'm going to ride you, and I'm going to enjoy the look on your face when you pop like that last bottle of champagne."

She pulled his erection to the vertical, but when she released it, it flopped back to its original position.

Well, it would be erect if he were standing up, she reasoned, but she still thought it misnamed.

No matter, she would cope. This time, she held him authentically erect. It took some fumbling to get it in the right place, but she finally succeeded.

Ah, ha, she thought.

"Ohh," she sighed as she began her descent. Taking him was going to be more fun than she thought.

But halfway down, she discovered everything was at the wrong angle.

Oh, bother.

She rose up to let him out, and as he flopped back to the horizontal, she scooped forward to try again. This time, it took fewer tries to position him, and this time, she got to enjoy the look on his face as she eased him all the way in.

I'm getting the hang of this sex stuff.

As she rode him, her enthusiasm grew. She was rising higher and higher before slamming back onto him.

"I'm going to shag your brains out, Wolf Boy."

She rose too high. He fell out.

Bugger.

Pansy felt devastation coming, but before it arrived, Remus was coaxing her down to where he could run his fingers through her hair and whisper that she was lovely. With one hand he held her hips, and with the other he guided himself. She heard him moan as he threaded her needle. *Oh, Wolfe.*

He was telling her that she was a sweet and loving lady. The critical part of her that had denied such sentiments was not functioning, and she let herself be swayed by words she had only heard in her dreams. She was returning his dreamy kisses.

She heard him say, "Make love to me, sweetheart," and a part of Pansy previously untouched was set in motion. Novice, unskilled motion, but Remus was making appreciative noises and he was accepting all her affection. Almost imperceptibly, her affection grew and grew and grew. Between her clumsy kisses and uncoordinated wiggles, Pansy was making small, animal sounds as Remus went about the business of screwing her.

She thought it was just getting good, and she was reveling in the feral gleam in his eyes when Remus went, "Pansy ... Oh, Pansy."

He stopped. A bit later she stopped, having concluded that he had finished.

Maybe it takes some practice, she thought, but she was happy that he was holding her, and she loved that he had cried out her name.

"I'm spent," said Theo.

"Aye, lad, let me try," said Biff.

Like a transatlantic clipper after a storm, Pansy was enjoying the calmness as she retrieved her knickers and straightened her clothes. She was under full sail and ready for the heavy seas ahead.

Pansy was thoughtful. *He stole my virginity. How do I get out of this without his kissing and telling.*

Pansy was realistic. *He's only another man. He wants someone with more curves, someone more pliable and less intelligent, someone who knows a lot about sex.*

Pansy was practical. *His job is to track me down and throw me in jail. Even more important, he's a poor man not able to provide me with a decent life, and given his affliction, only the gods know how long he'll be able to keep this job.*

Pansy was stoical. *It was fun while it lasted. It was more than fun. For a while, I got to pretend someone liked me and wanted my company, but I've got to brace up and admit that he was leading me on and it was only a fling. Well, I've got news for you, buster, I'm the best thing that could possibly happen to you. You're going to end up with a shallow shrew who'll never understand you and who'll make your life a misery and don't come running to me when that happens because I'll have long forgotten about you and I'll know that you're getting what you deserve and I'm not going to spend a single night crying over you after you leave me like a callous cad.*

Pansy said, "We can go back to my place. We can clean up and rest."

He nodded okay.

"Do you want to stay?" she asked.

"Of course," he said.

He squeezed her hand. "I've got to see your marvelous potions lab."

He's not interested in me, only in those quasi-legal compounds, thought Pansy.

"I was once good at potions," he said. "I'd be glad to help. That is, if you can tolerate me. Perhaps you prefer to work alone."

"You want to work with me?" asked Pansy. "Do you know what kind of temper I have?"

"I can guess," he said.

Pansy looked into the distance. "Do you know how many days I've spent alone: no one to complain to if I failed; no one to celebrate with if I succeeded?"

Pansy remembered what she had heard about Remus and his prowess at everything magical. She reminded herself of what she had seen of his bravery. She recalled he was known as a true friend.

There was no hurry. She stretched out beside him, still confused. *Am I really going to let another person into my life? Can I really care for another?* When he put his arm around her, she sighed and snuggled closer. Yes, the answer was apparently yes.

The editor was treating Cho to tea and a cherry tart to celebrate finishing the story, but Cho was not fully into the occasion. She was complaining that the boys had ruined the story to the point that she couldn't give it a biting ending worthy of the conniving, heartless, twofaced Pansy.

She glared at Theo and Biff when they arrived. "I want my sensitivity coin back."

Apparently, we are going to suffer like true artists, thought the editor, *although there are times I'd be willing to put out a mediocre story in exchange for a little peace in the office.*

END