

Just

by JackieJLH

Childish toys and games are put away when one nears adulthood. Parvati always thought she was a bit more than that to Lavender.

one-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Note: This story is the collaborative work of **Vaughn** and **JackieJLH**.

They're kissing again. Not just kissing, even, but groping each other. In the common room. In front of everyone.

It's not that Parvati's jealous. Well, maybe she is, but she's pretty sure she shouldn't be, doesn't have a right to be. She should just ignore them... which would be so much easier if they would go somewhere, *anywhere* besides the common room. *Maybe I should go to the library*, she thinks to herself. *Or I could go see how Professor Trelawney is doing; she always seems so lonely....* In the end, she simply decides to go to bed, even though it's not yet dinner time; Hermione Granger gives her a curious look when she sees her closing the bed curtains before it's even dark outside.

"This can't happen anymore," she'd said softly, and Parvati had looked up at her, surprised by the finality of that statement. "It's... it just can't go on forever. School is starting next week, and I think maybe it would be a good idea to end this now. I mean, we're just playing around, right? Just experimenting. That's all...."

'*Experimenting*.' Parvati hates that word. It makes everything sound so meaningless. But Lavender used to say it all the time, and Parvati's begun to realise that maybe that's because to Lavender, it *was* meaningless. When she'd thought on it before, she had assured herself that she was wrong, that what they'd had over the summer meant something to both of them, that it didn't necessarily have to end. But now she has accepted the fact that Lavender never felt that way, and it hurts because Parvati knows that it meant something to *her*, and it still means something, even now.

She's never felt this way about another person, and there are days when she thinks she'll go crazy without her best friend, her confidante... *he* *lover*, though she only calls her that in her mind. Lavender would be furious if that word were ever spoken out loud because Lavender doesn't like girls; not, as she says, *like that*. And neither does Parvati. Really. They were just playing... just '*experimenting*'.

So Parvati tries not to notice the butterflies that form in her stomach at the sound of Lavender's voice, or the urge she has to kiss her when they're leaning over the same book or sitting beside each other in the common room during the rare times that Ron is off somewhere with Harry and Hermione. She tries to pretend she doesn't feel the small ache in her chest whenever she remembers the way Lavender insisted all of it meant nothing.

Parvati spends a lot of time in her dormitory. She'd started hanging out with her sister over in Ravenclaw tower, but Padma has her own friends, and most of them weren't too happy about a Gryffindor being in their common room, so Parvati passes most afternoons and weekends alone now.

It isn't fair. Ron doesn't even like her that much she writes in her diary, her anger spilling from her in the form of slanted, messy letters, so different from her usual curved words and I's dotted with hearts. *He's just trying to make Hermione jealous. Anyone can see that. And Lavender deserves better. She deserves someone who loves her and would do anything for her. She deserves to find the one, the perfect one.*

Parvati tells herself that she is only concerned about this because Lavender is her closest friend, and she really just wants the best for her. But when she thinks about it for a while, she comes to the conclusion that if she were male, she could be that *perfect one*. Sometimes, Parvati is pretty sure that life would have been a lot easier if she'd been born a boy.

The first Hogsmeade weekend of the year, three boys ask Parvati to spend the day with them. She declines. One of them bothers to ask why, after she's gone with him twice in the past, she's turning him down now. Parvati tells him she doesn't know, but she's lying. The truth is that the fantasies she and her sister had constructed as children, the ones filled with handsome men who would sweep them off of their feet, have been overshadowed by new fantasies made up of smooth legs, firm breasts and soft voices. When Parvati dreams about her future, she can't see herself with any of the boys that asked her to Hogsmeade. She can't see herself with any boy at all, and in a way, that terrifies her.

Occasionally, when she sees them in the common room, Parvati allows herself to watch them for just a minute. She watches the way Lavender's lips move over Ron's, sees the way her eyes close and her fingernails scrape gently across his back, and she wishes she didn't remember exactly what that felt like. She wishes she didn't know that Lavender's skin feels as soft as it looks, or that she has a birthmark on the back of her thigh, or that her most ticklish spot is just below her breast on her left side.

On days when she lets herself watch and remember, Parvati usually goes upstairs and hides behind her bed curtains. She closes her eyes and pretends that it's Lavender's hand touching her and caressing her, not her own. She casts a Silencing Charm so that no one can hear her soft moans and whimpers, or hear her whisper her best friend's name as her memories play out in her head.

One night, Lavender doesn't come back to their dormitory until well after dark. Parvati is lying in bed, pretending to be asleep, listening to Hermione's quill scratching away furiously as she works on her Potions essay on the other side of room. When Lavender finally does come in, she opens the door quietly, as though she's trying to get into the room without anyone realising she's only now going to bed, many hours after curfew. Parvati sits up and meets her friend's eyes, trying not to let more than mild concern show on her face.

"What were you doing out so late?" she asks softly.

Lavender blushes and looks away, and begins absentmindedly twirling a bit of her hair around one finger, something she only does when she is uncomfortable or nervous. "I was with Ron... in the empty classroom on the sixth floor," she finally answers, and she glances up hesitantly, as if she's afraid to meet Parvati's eyes.

The scratching quill stops suddenly, but Parvati either doesn't notice or doesn't care because she lets herself ask, "Did you... *wellyou know...*?" She says this softly, but quickly, because she knows that if she hesitates, she won't get it out of her mouth, and she'll never get the nerve to ask again. When Lavender avoids her eyes and begins staring at the floor, she has her answer.

"Oh," she whispers, and then realises she doesn't know what else to say. So she rests back against the bed and focuses her gaze on the ceiling, refusing to acknowledge the fact that she's fighting to hold back tears. "Oh," she says again quietly, and when she doesn't say anything else for a few minutes, Lavender quietly changes into her nightie and climbs into bed.

Only when Lavender's breathing evens out and Parvati is sure she's asleep does she let the tears fall, and she sobs softly into her pillow. She hears rustling on the other side of the room, and then the barely audible sound of someone trying not to cry, and Parvati is fairly certain that she's not the only one who's had her heart broken tonight.

Christmas comes and goes. For the first time in years, Parvati and Lavender don't see each other at all over the holidays. Parvati begins dozens of letters and reaches for the Floo powder more times than she's willing to admit, but in the end, she always decides that it's easier to just not see her for a little while.

Padma keeps asking her if she's all right, why she's so quiet lately and why she's not hanging out with Lavender every chance she gets, like she normally does when she's home for the holidays, and finally, Parvati tells her everything. Padma doesn't like it, really, and doesn't understand it at all, but she loves her twin and holds her while she cries. She promises that they'll spend more time together at school, and that everything is going to be all right. Parvati believes her.

When they get back to Hogwarts, Padma is much less friendly to Lavender than she's ever been before, and, at first, Parvati has her sister as a companion every afternoon. It's much easier to forget about things for a while when there's someone there to distract her and make her laugh. But within a few weeks, Padma goes back to spending most of her time with her Ravenclaw friends, and Parvati finds herself lonely more often than not.

When Ron breaks things off, Parvati isn't sure how she should feel. A mix of sympathy, delight, and a desire to not care at all rush through her, but eventually she settles for wrapping her arms around Lavender and listening to her cry.

"You still have me," she says into her best friend's hair, hating herself a bit for enjoying this moment of closeness, which she's been craving for so long.

"I know, but it's not the same," Lavender answers softly.

Parvati only nods and whispers, "I know," but to her it's the same, and she wishes for the thousandth time that Lavender would just give her the chance to prove it.

School ends in chaos that year, with the headmaster dead and the school damaged by a fight with Death Eaters. Parvati's mother refuses to let either of her daughters out of her sight for the entire summer, and even though they had turned seventeen during their sixth year, they obey her. While neither wants to admit it, they're scared, and they don't want to go far from home.

September comes, and Hogwarts doesn't reopen. Parvati is caught up in the war effort, getting a job at the Ministry, where she files paperwork and writes up reports so that the Aurors, who have better, more important things to do, aren't stuck doing them. Padma finds employment with the Ministry as well, but in another department, and once again, Parvati finds herself with no one to talk to.

When a co-worker invites her out for a drink after work, Parvati accepts. Jocelyn is funny and smart, and her personality is not at all like Lavender's, really, but Parvati decides that it's better that they're so different. If she can't have her, why be reminded of her every day? It's much better that Jocelyn is Jocelyn, and not some pale reminder of what would never have been. Parvati knows this now, has stopped thinking of it as accepting defeat because she can see the truth: what she and Lavender never were, and what she and Jocelyn could be.

The war drags on, and sometimes Parvati thinks it will never end. So many people die that it's hardly a surprise anymore, though the grief caused by each new loss is just as strong as it was from the start; co-workers, friends, old classmates and professors and childhood enemies.... Some battles are won, some are lost, and some hit a bit closer to home than others.

Jocelyn suggests the two of them get a flat in London to be closer to work, and Parvati thinks that this just might be a good idea. Explaining things to her parents is easier than she'd expected it to be; Padma all but argues her right to be happy for her, and Parvati is thankful for the millionth time to have her as a twin. Her mother and father seem okay with everything, once they understand it all, and for once, things seem to be going perfectly.

They're in the middle of a war, and life is chaos and terror and fear most of the time, but despite the happenings around her, Parvati finds herself, in the rare quiet moments, happier than she had ever been at Hogwarts.

The fall of Voldemort is so anticlimactic that, for a moment, Parvati is almost angry. Surely they hadn't fought for so long, so many of their friends hadn't died, in a war that ended five minutes into a skirmish in Diagon Alley? Surely Voldemort couldn't be defeated by something as Muggle as a sword, by someone as young as Harry Potter? The fact that it was Godric Gryffindor's sword he'd wielded hardly makes it seem any less... *simple*. But that sense of outrage is quickly replaced by relief, and Parvati finds herself celebrating along with everyone else, and then thrown headfirst into rebuilding efforts.

Padma falls in love with an Auror named Adam, and before long, the task of planning a wedding is thrust upon them all as well. Life is still busy and chaotic, but not nearly as heart-wrenching, and Parvati and Jocelyn find themselves in a comfortable routine.

As luck would have it, or, heralding back to her third year with Trelawney, fate, Jocelyn blends in seamlessly with Parvati's life. She had expected her sister to make the attempt to reach out to Jocelyn, regardless of her personal feelings towards her, because that's what sisters do; they accept the partners who make their siblings happy. But, to Parvati's surprise, Padma does much more than that. She becomes good friends with Jocelyn, and what's more, soon their parents see the value in the young woman Parvati has chosen as well.

Padma's wedding draws near, and Jocelyn is knee-deep in the preparations, right alongside Parvati. Jocelyn never grumbles or complains; in fact, she seems thrilled to be so included, her own family having been victims of the first war. Soon, everyone is asking when the next wedding will be. For a while, Parvati blushes and gives evasive answers, while Jocelyn just smiles and changes the topic, sensing Parvati's uneasiness. For the life of her, she's not sure why the idea of marriage terrifies her, so much so that she is sometimes kept up at night by the mere thought.

Sometimes, during the nights when she does not sleep at all, she thinks it's the death of an age-old dream that makes her feel the way she does. When she was little, she'd indulged in the standard little girl fantasy: getting married in a fancy, white satin ball gown, complete with a devastatingly handsome groom at her side. She can actually remember once having a conversation about it with the other Gryffindors in her year, in the girls' dormitory. They had laughed and laughed about the foolish whims of their youth, but most admitted that, upon meeting the boy, the fantasy was still there. Of course, it was now a grown-up dream, with impractical aspects like flying unicorns at the reception being replaced by Transfigured replicas, but it was forever the same basic concepts: bride, blushing and beautiful; groom, handsome and kind; and bells and whistles.

Parvati remembers the sinking feeling, the realisation that although her dream was alive, it had been irrevocably altered. For her, the smiling groom had long since disappeared.

She looks in the mirror, checking her reflection from all angles. She wants to be perfect for this *day/her* day. Well, her and Jocelyn's, she amends silently.

Her dream has come to life, and as overly sentimental as that sounds, she can't find any other way to describe it. It's liberating, exciting, and a trifle scary, but it's the good kind of fear; she is now able to recognise the difference. Never, even in a million years, had she thought this possible, but here she is, dressed in the satin ball gown she had dreamed of...mind you, she's also old enough to know ivory is far more flattering to her skin tone than alabaster...awaiting her declaration to the world and to herself that she loves her *princess*. Not everyone needs a prince, and it's Jocelyn who has made her accept it. Not by force, Parvati doesn't think she would have been able to adapt if she'd felt like she had to, but by being there, unyielding in her support and patience.

When Jocelyn finally had approached the taboo subject, albeit tentatively and in passing, it was enough to make Parvati think of what she could gain and what she could lose by marrying. Ever the logical one...Padma used to wonder why she wasn't in Ravenclaw with her...she listed all of the pros and cons, and even showed them to her sister. It was the most stunning moment of clarity she'd ever experienced in her life; Padma had studied the list and silently handed it back, shaking her head. When Parvati pressed her for an answer, for anything, Padma gently told her she didn't need a list or anyone's approval to be with the person she wanted to, but she needed to get past her 'negatives' first. Confused, Parvati had asked what she meant, only to be told that her 'cons' were not cons at all; they were her own fears.

Immediately thereafter, Parvati had rushed home to find Jocelyn and asked her to be her wife.

Months of preparation later, and here they were. Friends and family were abound; the guest list had ballooned to over one hundred people before she'd realised what was happening, as is rote for such events. Of course, there were the normal cancellations, and some that were absent by Parvati's own admission. When they had worked on the guest list together, Padma had been surprised that Lavender was not included. Sure, she had known her sister had not talked to her much since graduation, but they had been *such* good friends....

Luckily, she had dropped the idea rather quickly, sensing Parvati's disquiet. To be honest with herself now, Parvati had grown past Lavender; it was the lingering pain of being tossed aside that still popped up now and again. She did not want to rekindle her friendship with Lavender because she now believed that it had never existed. She had been there for Lavender's convenience, and to Parvati, that wasn't a friend. That was a master and her servant, and Parvati doesn't wait on anyone anymore.

Three wonderful years have passed since her wedding day, and Parvati is still amazed at her luck. She is an aunt now, Padma having had a little boy, and is due to be a mother herself. Although there are magical means for same sex couples to conceive in the wizarding world, she couldn't see bringing another child into the world when there are perfectly good ones awaiting new homes in various orphanages, families and siblings lost to the war. Jocelyn agrees, and while they have a laugh over not having to change nappies, as the child they have bonded with during their weekly visits to St Albus' Home For The Lost is nearly three, they can't help but wish they could take them all. Parvati couldn't imagine not having a home, and she is confident she and Jocelyn can provide a good one.

So, Parvati finds herself rushing to Diagon Alley, one day before their little Aidan is finally to come home, to pick up the last minute items he needs. As she loads up on extra playthings, mindful that she came for more blankets yet unable to resist spoiling him a bit, she hears her name being called in a somewhat surprised tone.

She slowly turns around and comes face to face with Lavender, who is clutching a bag full of baby items herself. She doesn't appear pregnant, but Parvati knows there are charms to cover such things; after all, Lavender is married to some Gryffindor now. According to *The Prophet*, he was a few years ahead of them at school.

Lavender seems the same, and appears to be thrilled at the chance meeting. As she babbles on her congratulations about Parvati's marriage and adoption...*Oh, I read all about it in the papers! What a wonderful thing to do!*...Parvati finds herself wondering what she had ever seen in Lavender. She just jumps from one topic to the next, giving homeless children the same treatment as her new hairdo in terms of attention; she's just so... shallow.

Parvati gives all the polite responses in the right spots, not an easy feat, considering she has to do so in the few moments Lavender takes a breath, and finally manages to steer the conversation to a close. As she makes her goodbyes and turns to leave, she is momentarily stunned when Lavender grabs her arm.

"You know, things are good," Lavender says with a bit of sadness in her eyes, "but they could be better."

Parvati pulls away and nods, but doesn't really respond. After all, that door shut for a reason, and she now knows it allowed her to open a better one. As she makes her way to the exit, she does decide to give Lavender an answer over her shoulder, even though she knows it's not the one she's looking for.

"You've almost got it right. They could *have been* better."

Many thanks to LariLee for the contribution of a title and a summary. ;)