

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Harry interrogates Pansy and then gets to the bottom of these deaths.

-x-X-x-

“H-Hey!”

Grabbing Pansy by the arm, Harry drags her back out of the dining room. Fortunately, the ghosts within don't follow, nor do they call out again. They don't seem capable of the former, and apparently leaving their line of sight is enough to make them lose track for the latter.

Once he and Pansy are firmly out of view, Harry lets go of the witch and arches an unimpressed brow at her. She rubs her arm as if to feign that he'd injured her, pouting for a moment before huffing and tossing her hands in the air.

“What?!”

“Explain, Pansy. What the hell is going on in there?”

“I already did explain that! They're ghosts and they refuse to move on. Because they're also my parents, if I leave the manor for any length of time, they might be able to kick me out permanently. I need them removed!”

In fairness to her, she had said that already... so Harry redirects.

“Alright then, *how* did this happen? How did they die in the first place?”

Pansy squirms, looking uncomfortable for a moment. Grimacing, she waves a hand through the air in a rather... airy manner.

“I mean... had to be the curse right? The same thing that killed all the other wizards. That's what did it.”

He can immediately tell that even Pansy herself doesn't actually believe that. Giving her a deadpan look, Harry sighs.

"Sure. The 'curse' killed your father. Here's the problem... why did it kill your mother too?"

Pansy freezes, clearly caught out by that question and looking distinctly like a deer in headlights as she fumbles for a response.

"I-I don't know! How would I? They just... died! Together! And then they came back as ghosts who don't even seem to know they're dead! Together! That's it!"

That rang closer to the truth to Harry's ears. Pansy's shrill desperation and panic was reading very genuine to him. Of course, he could have just read her mind with some Legilimency to really get everything she knew out of her... but where would the fun in that be?

"Why didn't you move their bodies?"

He's expecting her to say something like the ghosts wouldn't let her, that they got violent or something when she finally made an effort to get rid of their corpses. But instead...

"Ew! I'm not going to touch a couple of corpses, that's so icky!"

... Okay, maybe he should have expected as much. Still, he can't help wrinkling his nose a little in disgust.

"So you just left them where they were to... decompose over the years?"

Even with all of Harry's experience with Death... or rather, perhaps because of it, he knew full well how bad rotting corpses could stink up a place. Frankly, he's surprised the smell isn't still lingering in the manor, even with them having turned into skeletons. He's also surprised that the chairs they died in still look so good.

Then he sees the proud, smug look on Pansy's face.

"Actually, no. I found a spell in our family library that promotes rapid decomposition and I used that from out of their view. I was hoping it would disintegrate their skeletons too, but it didn't go that far... and they're still here, still hanging around, still being a pain in my ass."

... She'd thought to use a rapid decomposition spell on her parents' bodies to prevent the smell from permeating, but hadn't bothered using a simple levitation charm so she could bury the skeletons in the backyard or something? Harry just stares at Pansy for a long moment, trying to decide if he doesn't believe her... or if he's simply impressed by the dichotomy between her idiocy and her problem solving abilities.

Finally, he just sighs.

"You could have reported this to the Aurors you know..."

Here, Pansy blanches.

"What? No way! The Ministry doesn't know my dad's dead... and that means Gringotts doesn't know. And as long as they think he's alive, I'm still allowed to withdraw my allowance from the family vaults each month via mail owl! Else I would have *starved* at this point!"

Or she would have had to go out into the real world and get a job and actually work for a living. But Harry holds that back, even as he stares at the pureblood witch in front of him who has clearly never known a day of struggle in her life.

... Then again, maybe that's not fair. Sure, that was probably true for MOST of her life, but if she really had nothing to do with her parents' death, then that meant one day they'd just dropped dead on her and she'd been forced to survive on her own by any means she had available to her ever since.

Which explained why the manor looked like a fucking bachelorette pad, Harry supposed.

Unaware of his eternal musings, Pansy huffs again and crosses her arms over her ample chest.

“What do you think you’re doing here, anyways? I can’t call the Aurors, but you’re not with the Ministry, right? You’re a *Private* Investigator. That means you can solve my problem *privately* and nobody ever has to know.”

Harry snorts at that. From one angle, she’s not wrong. But from another...

“Technically, I am with the Ministry.”

Pansy blanches.

“... I’m a member of the Wizengamot, after all, where I hold two seats.”

Pansy immediately looks relieved.

“Oh! That doesn’t count, I mean I’m a member of the Wizengamot too, technically. I just... haven’t been able to claim my seat because nobody knows my father is dead. The money in the family vault is worth more than some stuffy Wizengamot Seat.”

She’s probably right about that, given that from what Harry knew, all of the women who did claim their male family members were dead found themselves locked out by Gringotts. And no amount of seats in the Wizengamot had allowed the all-female British Magical World to get the goblins to back down and let them access their family vaults.

In that regard, Pansy was smarter than most with how she’d gone about things. However... her actions still left a lot to be desired.

And yet... he’s too curious at this point not to see this through. After all, if Pansy’s father did die to whoever had killed all of the other wizards, why had her mother died with him? Was it connected to all the other deaths, or was it simple happenstance and completely unrelated?

He had to know... so fuck it.

“Fine, I’ll help you out. But you stay back and follow my orders, got it?”

Blinking, Pansy smiles and nods happily.

“Yeah sure, whatever! If you can get rid of them, I’ll do whatever you want!”

The way she says that last bit with a sultry lilt makes Harry even surer than before that the way she greeted him at her front door was in fact no ‘mistake’. Giving Pansy a dry look that does NOT stray below her neck, Harry just shakes his head.

“I accept payment in gold for my services, just so we’re clear. But regardless, let’s get to work.”

With that, Harry makes his way back to the Dining Room, with Pansy following in his heels. Her parents’ ghosts had vanished again, but they reappear as he and their daughter approach. Before they can speak, the Elder Wand flicks out and Harry wordlessly freezes them both in place, a bit of necromantic magic meant for putting specters such as these in stasis.

Pansy gasps at the sight of the two ghosts freezing up in place and becoming little more than unmoving 3D images of themselves.

“Wha- what was that? You handled them so fast!”

“They aren’t handled yet. I just don’t have much of a desire to listen to a pair of ghosts who don’t even realize they’re dead talking at me.”

Especially Pureblood Nobles. The ‘dearly’ departed Lord and Lady Parkinson were not the sort of people Harry would want to have a casual chat with even if they were alive. Them being dead would just make it all the more insufferable.

“O-Oh... yeah that’s fair, they’re really annoying.”

There's a note of something besides just agreement in Pansy's voice at that. Melancholy, maybe? Hm, Harry could easily imagine that Pansy is pretty split on losing her parents even now. On the one hand, freedom. On the other hand, they were her mother and father even if he highly doubted they were ever her 'mum' and 'dad'.

He wonders, briefly, when the last time Pansy sat down for a meal with the ghosts of her parents was. Somehow, he didn't think the answer would be 'never'.

Regardless... since Harry isn't going to bother interrogating the Lord and Lady Parkinson on how they died because of the aforementioned reasons, he's going to have to use another method instead.

"Give me their date of death, please."

Pansy blinks, thinks for a moment, and then rattles off a date. Harry simply nods and begins to swish and flick the Elder Wand through the air. Admittedly, this piece of magic is a LOT harder and more power intensive to cast than a number of other more efficient methods he could use to find out what happened here... but hey, he has the power in spades so why not use it? And besides... he likes how it looks.

Slowly, ephemeral shades of what once was begin to fill the air as Harry brings forth the events of the day and night in question. Behind him, the real Pansy gasps as the frozen ghosts of her parents, along with their skeletons, are overlaid a third time by images of her parents while they were still alive.

Even the lighting in the room changes, with the view outside of the window turning to early evening instead of mid-morning. Harry tilts his head to the side as another copy of Pansy also appears in a third, empty chair next to her father and across from her mother.

"Wha- what are you doing? Why am I there?"

“Recreating the night in question so we can get to the bottom of this once and for all.”

He says it casually, but Harry is very much ready in case Pansy tries to kill him. He’s especially ready when they watch the events of that fateful dinner play out together... and both Lord and Lady Parkinson expire shortly after having a few bites of the food put in front of them by the kitchen staff.

There’s a pause from the copy of Pansy as they die, the younger-looking version of the witch blinking stupidly for a long moment before wordlessly calling out to her mother and father. When they don’t respond, she checks them both... and still doesn’t get anything.

Finally, the copy of Pansy pauses... seeming to consider something for a long moment. Rather than scream for help, she pulls out her wand and strides towards the doors of the dining room, magically securing them behind her. And then she goes on to fire the manor staff one by one, kicking them all out without much explanation.

Harry looks to the real Pansy as this is happening and she looks back at him, pale.

“I-I told you already... I had to cover it up. Nobody could know they were dead o-or they would tell the Ministry and the M-Ministry would tell the goblins. I’d already heard from some of my friends that it had happened with them when THEIR fathers died so... so I had to act fast.”

Harry makes a noncommittal sound... and rewinds things back to the start of the fateful meal. Then, he rewinds things further and begins striding towards the kitchens. Pansy follows after him, much more timid than before... but Harry is still very aware of her and still expecting to potentially be stabbed in the back at any second.

Especially when they reach the kitchens, because here is where Harry assumes the deed was done. Watching that night play out in this room as opposed to the dining room, Harry observes as the Parkinson’s kitchen staff sets about cooking

dinner for the family. He watches them make up the very same meals that Pansy and her parents would be eating an hour later and that her parents would die from but she would not.

... Then he watches as those meals, placed under magical preservation charms and each labeled clearly with Lord, Lady, and Heiress to signify who they're meant for, are left out unattended.

The last person that Harry expects to see approaching said meals... is Lady Parkinson. He watches the older witch's past copy walk right up, glancing around to make sure nobody is paying her much mind as she pretends to inspect their upcoming dinner. Then, he watches her slip a vial out of her bosom... and pour half of the contents into her husband's dish and half of the contents into Pansy's.

The real Pansy chokes on her own spit as the past Lady Parkinson quickly tucks the vial away, glancing around one last time before swiftly departing the kitchens. Harry doesn't follow her though... he stays and watches, curious to see what will happen next.

And there she is. The past Pansy Parkinson comes into the kitchen about fifteen minutes after her mother has left. She stops in front of the plates of food that have been prepared for dinner, each of them relatively identical in their contents. She wrinkles her nose... and switches the plate labeled Heiress with the plate labeled Lady.

Then, she walks away with a skip in her step and a pleased smile on her face.

Harry speeds things up and about forty minutes later, the plates are retrieved by the serving staff and brought into the dining room to be served to the Parkinson Family. The servants make no mistakes here... and as a result, one of the two poisoned plates winds up directly in front of the poisoner, all because Pansy had switched them beforehand.

Turning to the real Pansy, Harry tilts his head to the side.

"What made you switch the plates like that?"

Mouth opening and closing, face pale white and drained of blood, Pansy shakes her head after a long moment.

"I... I just t-thought that mother's plate looked b-better. So... I m-made sure it was mine instead."

The funny (and sad) thing is, Harry believes her. On a whim, Pansy had saved herself from sharing her father's fate... and unwittingly committed matricide in the same moment.

The news looks to have broken the poor witch a little bit. Though she still rallies impressively quickly and manages to ask a relevant question while looking very, very lost.

"What... what now?"

Harry hums... before dispelling the magic that's allowed them both to peer into the past.

"Now? Now we ask your mother why she did it."

-x-X-x-

A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!