

Summary: It wasn't that her secret was *bad* per se. It's just that she knows he'll look at her differently if he ever found out what it was, and that was something Pansy would not tolerate whatsoever, especially from her boyfriend. Unfortunately for her, Harry was insatiably curious and would not stop until he knew the truth, consequences be damned.

-

Tongue Between Teeth

-

Contrary to popular belief, Pansy Parkinson was not a very uptight person.

Sure, she was spoiled. More than a little selfish, perhaps. And occasionally she was even a bit of a bitch.

...Okay, maybe '*occasionally*' was putting things lightly.

Regardless, she wasn't a very high-strung girl. All the other facets of her personality came straight from her upbringing as the heiress of a pureblood house. She was raised to keep her head held high and her nose even higher above those deemed 'inferior' by the pureblood doctrine. Her contempt was practised, trained under veils of courtesies and crushing corsets that cinched her spine into something unyielding. Her wit became a blade polished by use. Words became tools to cut, shape, and dominate a room without her ever needing to lift a wand. Being a lady was not just knowing you were better. It was the art of proving it without appearing to try.

But as cut-throat as it sounded, being raised as a so-called 'pureblood princess' didn't exactly make for a hard life.

Sure, she had been taught to be seen but not heard, bred for a future of strategic marriage and tasteful childbearing for whichever puffed-up aristocrat tossed the most gold at her parents. A bleak fate on parchment, but one padded with sparkling balls, bespoke gowns, and the comfort of never wanting for anything. Even being objectified was tolerable with enough gold after all. That mattered little now.

Many of the old traditions died along with the Dark Lord and his followers after the war. Good riddance, in her humble opinion.

So no—now more than ever, Pansy Parkinson had remarkably little to stress over. Why would she?

A job? Please. Even without her family wealth, her fashion empire alone kept her vault overflowing with gold.

Social status? Pansy couldn't step foot in Diagon Alley without being mobbed by admirers and zealous fans. She must have signed more than a hundred autographs in the past week alone. Friends? Daphne practically kept half her wardrobe in Pansy's closet with how often the blonde slept over, and Blaise took her out clubbing at least twice a month just for the hell of it. The rest of her circle rotated in and out of her life with reliable frequency.

Love life? Well...

All right, perhaps there was one complication.

Not that there was anything wrong with her love life. She was quite the catch, thank you very much. Dozens of wizards (and even a few witches) constantly vied for her attention. Her mail redirect ward had collapsed three separate times due to the influx of love letters and gifts that her many admirers sent.

The issue was not a shortage of suitors. It was the particular one she had chosen.

Her boyfriend.

Look, Pansy was a vain witch. She wasn't afraid to admit it. She had certain standards when it came to those she dated—certain *requirements*, as it were. Anyone hoping to win her interest had to meet each and every one.

It just so happened that her current beau checked all of her boxes with infuriating ease.

Hot? *Morgana* yes. Some days, it took only one look from those annoyingly earnest green eyes to have her melting on the spot.

Rich? Even with her considerable income as Magical Britain's top fashion designer, her vault barely held a tenth of what his did.

Romantic? For their last date, he rented out her favourite art gallery in Nice for a private dinner, complete with live musicians and a chef who prepared all her favourite dishes.

She could go on, but what else mattered?

...

...

Okay *fine*. There were maybe one or two other qualities she supposed. The kind she pretended mattered less.

He was kind in a way that slipped past her defences before she noticed. He listened when she talked, really listened, even when she rambled about her earliest design ideas. When her fashion line went from dream to reality, he stood by her through all of it: late-night sketching marathons, the nerves before her first runway show, the quiet moments when she feared she'd fail. Every time, he was there. Whether with a cup of tea and a gentle kiss on her temple or a grounding hand upon her shoulder and a squeeze to remind her that he was there, he would always be there.

In short, he was perfect.

Which was deeply inconvenient.

Because her stupid, thoughtful, infuriatingly romantic boyfriend had managed to do the one thing Pansy Parkinson had sworn she would never allow.

He made her fall in love with him.

And that was a problem. A pretty fucking large one.

Because Pansy Parkinson did not fall in love.

Especially not with Harry bloody Potter.

-

It had started slow she supposed.

Falling in love, she discovered, wasn't some dramatic, swooning moment. There were no fireworks when their eyes first met, no breathless hitch when they shared their first kiss. It crept in quietly. Slow. Patient. Like the tide crawling up the sand, inch by inch, tugging at her ankles until one day she looked down and realised she was already knee-deep, surrounded before she'd even noticed the water rising.

It had started at a bar.

A dreadful little place, sticky floors and watered-down drinks, the sort of establishment Pansy would never have stepped into sober. Luckily, she'd already been well on her way to pleasantly tipsy when he walked in.

Harry Potter, saviour of the wizarding world and former pain in Pansy's arse, walking through the door of the same crappy bar as if he owned the place.

Pansy had been this close to hexing him on sight. Honestly, she still felt the urge on a near-daily basis, though now it was usually because he'd pulled some idiotic stunt on a raid that had nearly killed him for the umpteenth time.

Thankfully, she had controlled her urges that night.

Instead, at Blaise's oh-so-innocent nudging (the bastard), she had glided up to the bar with a perfected sneer and an outstretched drink.

"For trying to sell you out to Voldemort or whatever," she said coolly, dropping the glass of cheap whiskey in front of him with a sharp *clink*. "Take it or don't, I don't bloody care."

Potter, the insufferable git, had merely laughed and nudged the drink back toward her.

"Water under the bridge and all that, yeah? Don't worry about it, Parkinson."

And because Pansy was, well, *Pansy*, she had taken that as a personal challenge.

"I'm trying to apologise here, Potter. The least you could do is take the bloody drink," she hissed, slamming the amber-filled glass in front of him again.

People had started staring by then, though Pansy didn't give a single damn. Apparently, neither did he.

The bastard even had the audacity to smile.

Smile.

As if she'd delivered a punchline to a joke rather than an overdue apology for almost handing him over to the Dark Lord.

"Thought you said you didn't care?"

And *fuck*, she had said that, hadn't she? Ugh, bloody Potter. His smile sharpened into a smirk, obnoxious and unfairly charming, and he gestured to the empty seat beside him.

"You wanna apologise? Then let me buy you a drink, and you can tell me just how *sorry* you really are."

To this day, Pansy still couldn't explain why she sat down.

But she did.

One drink became three.

A half-arsed apology twisted into conversation, and somehow he made her laugh louder and longer than she had in ages. The kind of laugh that shook loose the tension she hadn't realised she'd been carrying.

Three drinks became five.

And by the time the night finally wound down, two pairs of lips met in a shadowed corner of that grimy pub.

Warm, unexpected, inevitable.

And in that moment, the first quiet wave curled around her ankles.

-

Months passed.

Their night at the bar had ended the way nights like that always threatened to: tangled beneath bedsheets, breathless and flushed, the air thick with moans and gasps that neither of them bothered to muffle.

Drunken sex had been a new experience for her back then, but then again, so was waking up next to the *fucking* Chosen One without so much as a pair of knickers on.

She doesn't remember much about the morning after. Only that, somehow, amidst her angry shouts and throbbing headache, she ended up with her lips pressed against his as her pussy was stretched open once more by his cock.

After that, their relationship was simple. Transactional.

Sex was their currency, offered freely whenever the mood took hold.

She'd show up at his doorstep without warning, a bottle of cheap wine dangling from one hand and a roll of condoms from the other, before pouncing on him right there in his entry hall. Potter, on the other hand, had a more subtle approach. Quiet, composed, he'd simply tug her into an empty changing room during her lunch break—back when she still apprenticed under Madame Malkin—and push her up against a wall before taking her with hard, relentless thrusts.

There was no emotional investment. No expectations. No complications.

Which suited Pansy perfectly.

In her mind, Potter was a good shag. Nothing more.

Yet the months continued to pass, and bit by bit, the waves crept higher.

It started small—tiny shifts in routine she didn't notice until it was too late.

She began pouring them both a glass of the cheap wine, lingering long enough to listen to him ramble about whatever case he'd worked that day. She'd smile into her drink when he embellished details for her amusement, pretending she wasn't charmed. And yes, she still climbed him the second her glass was empty, pushing her tongue past his lips while his hands worked the clasp of her dress, but the frantic urgency had eased. There was no rush to take what she wanted and bolt.

He started bringing her food with a pointed look, fully aware she'd forgotten her lunch again.

He'd sit beside her as she picked at the fish and chips, listening patiently while she ranted about insufferable customers and Madame Malkin's maddening critiques. And afterwards, when he

pulled her into a changing room and fucked her against the wall, his touch had changed.

Gentler. Surer. Less like she was a convenient tool for his pleasure and more like she was something precious he didn't quite trust himself to hold too tightly.

A year passed.

By then, the water was already halfway to her knees. She pretended not to notice.

He was the one who asked first.

It was sometime after midnight, when they lay wrapped in each other's arms, the sweat of sex cooling on their skin and the sheets twisted around their legs.

"Where is this going, Pansy?"

As always, she ignored the faint stutter in her heartbeat whenever he said her name like that.

Like it meant something to him. Like *she* meant something to him.

"I've no idea what you mean, Potter," she murmured, her voice smooth against his chest, the picture of indifference.

They both knew she was lying. She only ever called him Potter when she was hiding something.

Harry didn't call her out on it. He just chuckled softly and pulled her closer, his heartbeat steadying the chaos she refused to acknowledge inside her ribcage.

"You could always move in with me, you know?"

Pansy remembered the little huff she'd made, disguising the sharp catch of her breath.

"Careful, Potter. You're starting to make things sound almost domestic between us."

He hummed, fingers brushing through her hair with an ease that felt far too natural.

"Would that be so terrible?"

In another world, her instincts would have won.

In another world, she would have bolted—heart pounding, pride brittle, running like the coward she had always believed herself to be. Pansy Parkinson, pureblood princess, terrified of anything real. Terrified of anything *vulnerable*.

But in this world, she swallowed her pride.

In this world, she took a quiet breath and burrowed her face into the warm crook of her boyfriend's neck.

"No," she admitted softly. "I guess it wouldn't."

Another huff, this one hiding the thunderous mess of thoughts in her head. "But don't go expecting me to start playing housewife or anything."

"Housewife, huh? Now who's talking all domestic?"

A beat. A light slap against his chest.

"Shut up, Potter."

-

Things hadn't been perfect. Not when Pansy Parkinson was involved.

There'd been fights.

Some little—like the time she scolded him for spilling a bit of quill ink on one of her sketches, her words bit too harsh from a combination of stress and lack of sleep. Or like the times when he'd grumble after he tripped over her shoes again, which she left scattered like territorial markers across the house, no matter how often he begged her to put them away.

And then there were the bigger ones. Like last Christmas when they broke up.

It seemed ridiculous now, almost funny in the way scars sometimes are when they've stopped hurting. But at the time it had felt like a splinter driven beneath the nail.

He'd been invited to a party—just a little get-together with his old friends from that absurd secret club he ran back in sixth year. Naturally, he asked Pansy to come along.

"Absolutely not," she'd said, clipped and immediate.

"C'mon Pans—"

"I said no, Harry." Her voice cracked like a whip, a clean line of refusal. "In case it's slipped your mind, nearly everyone on that guest list hates my guts. And the ones who don't hate me still wish I'd fall off a broom and die quietly."

“So I’ll talk to them! We both will! They’re not bad people, Pansy. Stubborn? Sure, but they’ll listen to reason.”

Pansy let out a short, sharp laugh—the sort that sounded like it had been honed to a point.

“Right. Brilliant plan. Oh, hello everyone!” She pitched her voice into a mocking parody of his—too bright, too cheerful. “Remember Parkinson? That girl who was an insufferable bitch to you all for years and tried to hand me over to Voldemort to save her own skin?” Her eyes narrowed to slits. “Well, guess what? We’re shagging now, and I’ve brought her along!”

“You’re blowing things out of proportion! If you’d just come with me—”

“And do what?” The words were a hiss, her shoulders wound tight enough to snap. “Stand there and pretend I don’t hear every snide comment they mutter when your back’s turned? Ignore the looks? The way their hands twitch toward their wands like they’re deciding if I’m worth the trouble? No, Harry. I’m not blowing anything out of proportion.” She stepped forward and jabbed a finger into his chest. Harder than she needed to. Hard enough that she hoped he couldn’t see the tiny tremor in her hand.

Harry said nothing, just folded his arms and set his jaw. The dusting of stubble along it only made his scowl look sharper, older. She hated that it still made something in her stomach swoop.

Prat, she thought, anger slicing through something softer she refused to name. *He knows I like it when he doesn’t shave.*

Huffing sharply, she went on. “They might play nice around you, but your friends would sooner curse me in the back than suffer through one evening with me.”

That had done it then. She remembered the way his face had hardened, anger twisting into a scowl as he swatted her hand away.

“Yeah? Well, you’d know all about that, *wouldn’t you?*”

For a second, she didn’t understand.

Confusion. Shock. Hurt.

Fury.

A million more emotions passed over her like ice water down her spine. The world went quiet in a way that felt violent.

“And what,” she said slowly, voice thin as ice, “is that supposed to mean?”

He crossed his arms again, a barricade she couldn’t breach.

“Just that it wasn’t my friends who went around cursing people in the back a few years ago, was it?”

Silence. The type that made your ears ring because the emptiness was just too loud to bear.

“Fuck. You.”

Two words, angry and cold, every syllable like a knife dropped point-down.

Harry flinched—barely. Just a tightening around the eyes. But she saw it.

He scrubbed a hand through his hair, fingers trembling with a frustration she’d seen a hundred times but couldn’t read now. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“You never do, do you? *Please.*” Her laugh was brittle enough to fracture in her throat. “Don’t try to act all noble now. You wanted to hurt me, yeah? Well congratu-fucking-lations Potter, you *hurt me*. At least try to bloody own it.”

“You’re being ridiculous!”

“No, what’s ridiculous is you trying to drag me in front of your sainted little fan club like I’m some charity case you’re trying to rehabilitate!”

His head snapped up. “That’s not what this is.”

“No?” She took a step closer, chin lifted, every nerve in her body sparking like she was inches from a duel. “Then why are you trying to force me into a room full of people who would hex me before saying hello?”

“Because it’s been years, Pansy!” He threw his arms out, useless, exhausted. “People change. You’ve changed. They’d see that if you gave them the chance.”

"I don't owe them a chance," she snapped, too quickly. Too loudly. "I don't owe them anything."

Harry's jaw worked as if he were holding back words that might burn them both.

"You owe *us* something," he finally said. Soft. Dangerous. "Or does that not matter?"

Her breath hitched—not visibly, she hoped.

"Don't you dare turn this around on me."

"I'm not. I'm trying to talk to you."

"No," she corrected, her voice thinning into something sharp enough to cut. "You're trying to fix me."

"That's not—"

"Yes, it is." Her hands curled into fists at her sides, nails biting into skin. "You want me to be the version of myself you can parade around. The one who smiles politely and doesn't mind being glared at. The one who pretends she isn't waiting for people to remember every mistake she's ever made."

He stared at her for a long moment. Too long. The kind of silence that meant he wasn't sure if stepping forward would bring them closer or cause something to snap.

When he finally spoke, his voice cracked on the edges. "I just want us to stop fighting."

She swallowed—hard. Because something twisted deep in her, something she didn't want him to see, something she couldn't let him name.

She wanted that too, but not even Pansy Parkinson gets everything she wants.

"Well," she breathed, steadying her voice like she was casting a spell, "maybe we shouldn't keep trying to make something work that clearly doesn't."

Harry's face fell—not dramatically, just a subtle collapse, like a structure losing its last support beam.

"You don't mean that."

"Don't I?" It came out colder than she intended. Or maybe exactly as cold.

"Pansy—"

“No.” She stepped back. Then another step, as if movement alone could save her from the look on his face. “I’m done arguing. I’m not going to your bloody party. And I’m not going to stand here while you—while you throw my past in my face like it’s leverage and forgive when it’s *convenient*.”

His mouth opened. Closed. He looked suddenly, terrifyingly young.

“So that’s it?” he whispered.

She grabbed her cloak—her fingers fumbling once, just once—and yanked it around her shoulders. “Yes,” she said, because she needed the word to be an anchor. “That’s it.”

She didn’t slam the door when she left.

She shut it quietly.

The softness of it hurt more than any slam ever could.

The water turned icy cold against her skin.

The next week had been one of the worst of Pansy’s life. Somehow she had ended up at Daphne’s flat, though she still had no real memory of how she got there. Daphne had not asked a single question. She simply pulled Pansy into her arms and held her close, murmuring something steady while Pansy trembled as if every nerve had been stripped bare.

The night dragged on with no sense of time. Pansy cried until her head throbbed and her voice sounded like someone else’s. Then came the anger, hot and frantic, sending her pacing the length of the room while she raged, slinging curses and shouts into the air as if they would soothe her aching heart. After that came the quiet. The horrible, suffocating quiet where she curled on Daphne’s guest bed with her knees to her chest and her fingers twisted tight in the blankets. Daphne stayed beside her through all of it, patient and steady and unmovable.

Sleep never really came. Every time Pansy drifted, her hand would slide across the mattress toward the space where Harry should have been. The cold sheets made her flinch awake each time, sharp and humiliating. She despised how her body noticed the emptiness before her mind

did, how her chest tightened at the thought of the steady breathing she had grown used to. Now there was nothing but silence. She hated that silence. She hated herself for hating it.

By morning, she felt fragile in a way she would never admit out loud. One wrong word might have made her break entirely. Pansy Parkinson did not break. Not in front of anyone. Not even Daphne. So she kept her chin lifted and announced that she was “fine” in a voice that fooled no one. But the moment she was alone, the ache settled over her again, deep and bruising, and it refused to let go.

Daphne had offered to take her out to some new bar and drink until they could hardly stand. Pansy hadn’t bothered to argue. Her mind felt swollen with too many emotions to name, each one pressing against the next until she could barely breathe. Getting drunk sounded like the cleanest solution, a temporary drowning of everything she could not sort through.

It was fun at first. The bar pulsed with loud, thrumming music that she could feel in her teeth, and neon lights strobed in colours sharp enough to make her forget where the night began. The air was thick with the smell of sweat and sweet liquor and the acrid tang of cheap plastic cups; it burned her throat, but the sting only added to her sense of reckless freedom. The first few drinks slid down easily, softening her edges. The ones after slipped down even quicker, until her thoughts blurred pleasantly and her limbs felt loose and warm. Her body buzzed with a restless energy that begged for an escape, for something to pour itself into.

She dragged Daphne onto the dance floor, laughing too loudly, letting her movements dissolve into the rhythm. The music pulsed through her like a second heartbeat. Bodies pressed in on all sides, glowing under the neon lights. Pansy let herself sway with the rhythm, arms loose, mind soft around the edges. She could almost forget the week that had chewed her down to bone.

She spun once, hair whipping around her shoulders, and when she steadied herself she saw him.

A man. Tall. Dark hair. Glasses that glinted under the lights.

Her stomach twisted in something like recognition and something like hope, blurred together until she could not tell them apart. She let him step closer. He placed a hand on her waist and guided her back into the beat. She let him. The room swayed in a pleasant way, and she leaned in, chasing the illusion of familiarity. He smelled like cologne and liquor, nothing like the warm scent she missed, but her mind was too scrambled to care.

For a moment she convinced herself she could pretend.

But as the music swelled, the illusion cracked. His grip grew firmer, too deliberate, too practised. He pulled her closer in a way Harry never had, fingers sliding lower with a confidence that made her skin crawl. His hand brushed the curve of her hip, then lower still.

Her chest went cold.

Everything that had felt blurred and soft sharpened all at once, stabbing through the haze. The neon lights became harsh. The music turned hollow. His face, so briefly comforting, now looked nothing like Harry. Not even close. It was wrong. All of it was wrong. *Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.*

His hand slipped down to her arse and Pansy went cold.

Her body reacted before her mind did. She shoved him away, the force sending her stumbling back a step. He shouted something behind her, angry and slurred, but the noise was swallowed by the pounding bass. She didn't look back.

She pushed past a cluster of laughing girls, vision blurring again, this time with tears she couldn't stop. The hallway to the bathroom felt miles long, the floor tilting under her feet. She slipped inside and braced herself against the sink, breath heaving. Tears spilled freely, dripping onto her fists. She hated herself for crying, hated the man for touching her, hated that she had spent the whole night trying to forget the emptiness Harry left behind.

The door creaked open. Daphne hurried in, face pale with worry. She took one look at Pansy and moved to her side, hands gentle but steady.

"What do you need?" Daphne asked quietly.

Pansy swallowed, shaking her head as if denying her own answer. But there was no escape from it. It clawed up her throat and ripped free.

"I need Harry."

Her tears dripped down, splashing against the tide that had never truly left.

Between the alcohol and the tears, Pansy did not remember the journey back to Daphne's flat. It was becoming an unfortunate theme for her, losing stretches of time to emotion she could not control. One blink, she was in the bar's bathroom, shaking and furious and small, and the next she was being guided gently through Daphne's doorway, the blonde's coat draped over her shoulders like a shield.

She didn't resist. Couldn't. The couch greeted her with a soft thud as she sank into it, hands limp at her sides. Her tears had dried hours ago, leaving her face tight and her lashes sticky, but the emptiness inside her chest still gnawed with relentless precision. Daphne was saying something, her voice low and warm, but the ringing in Pansy's ears swallowed every word. All she could hear was the faint thump of her own heartbeat, too fast, too hollow.

Time bled strangely after that. A few minutes. Maybe an hour. She stared at nothing, wrapped in the numbness that felt safer than feeling anything at all.

Then a hand pressed lightly against her shoulder.

"Pans..."

Harry's voice. Not imagined. Not dreamed. Real.

Tears pricked the corners of her eyes, sharp and immediate, as if her body recognised him faster than her mind could. She turned toward the sound, and there he was.

He still hadn't shaved. That was her first thought, ridiculous and small but all-consuming. Before she could second-guess herself, her hand lifted to his cheek. The rough stubble scraped against her palm, warm and familiar, and the soft gasp that escaped her felt like something breaking open.

He was real. He was here.

He looked awful. Dark smudges under his eyes, cheeks hollower than she remembered, skin washed-out and tired. A wreck, really. But she wasn't much better, and some part of her almost welcomed how ruined he looked. It meant she hadn't been the only one falling apart.

"Take me home," she whispered. The words were quiet, frayed at the edges, but laced with a hope so fragile she barely dared breathe.

Harry didn't speak. He only leaned down, slid an arm beneath her knees, another around her back, and lifted her gently against his chest.

She let herself fold into him, eyes closing as he held her tight.

She could no longer ignore it after that. That night had been the moment everything inside her shifted, the moment she realised just how deep the water was. The tide had surged, climbing past her knees, her hips, her ribs, swallowing her whole until she could hardly breathe.

She'd always been a terrible swimmer.

It took months. Months of pretending she didn't notice how her chest tightened every time he brushed a hand against hers, or how her throat warmed when he smiled at her in that quiet, stupidly gentle way. Months of telling herself it was something else, something simpler, something safer. But the truth rose with every tide, until it finally reached her mouth and she could not deny it without drowning.

She loved him.

She loved Harry Potter.

She kept the secret tucked against her heart like a bruise that never healed, tender and aching. Every night after that, for nearly two weeks, she held it a little tighter, terrified that speaking it aloud would shatter everything she'd managed to build.

Because Pansy Parkinson was not an easy girl to love. She had teeth and thorns and a history carved into her like old runes. Her parents had never managed it properly. Her father hadn't bothered trying, and her mother... well, her mother cared, but in the distant, aching way of

someone who saw too much of herself reflected in her daughter. Too much self-loathing. Too many sharp edges. Never enough softness to hold.

So Pansy feared the worst. She feared Harry wouldn't love her back, not really, not the way she loved him. That he would wake one morning and see the whole of her and decide it was too much trouble. That she wasn't worth the effort. She feared, too, that she wouldn't know how to love him the way he deserved. That she'd get it wrong. That she'd break something precious without meaning to.

But beneath all the fear, something warmer stirred.

Something hopeful.

Something unbearably soft.

Because she wanted to love him. Gods, she wanted that more than anything she'd ever let herself want. She wanted to tell him in quiet ways, in the spaces between morning and night. She wanted to count the scars that dotted his flesh, kissing each one with a gentleness as if she could wash away the pain they must have brought. She wanted to soak in the early morning light, snuggled against him when she woke, the sound of his heartbeat setting the rhythm of her day. She wanted to learn all his different smiles and frowns, and be able to pick apart his thoughts based on whichever one he used.

She wanted to learn the map of his small joys and memorise them until she could navigate them in her sleep. She wanted to share a life with him—simple, ordinary, and warm.

She wanted to be good at loving him.

She wanted to show him the kind of tenderness she'd never known, yet somehow believed could exist for them.

She wanted the chance to choose him, over and over, in a hundred quiet moments.

But wanting it and believing she deserved it were two very different things.

And Pansy Parkinson had never been taught to believe she deserved anything soft.

So she held her secret close. She held it tight, let it bruise her from the inside, let it pound and thrash against her ribcage for two long, agonising weeks until the pressure became something she could no longer swallow. Every night she tried to smother it, bury it beneath routine or snide comments or the way she rolled her eyes at him when he fussed. But it kept clawing back up, relentless and bright, refusing to be quiet.

And Harry...

Harry was always too bloody nosy for his own good.

He noticed everything. The way she lingered in doorways when she meant to leave. The way her sharp retorts came half a second too late. The way she looked at him sometimes and then immediately looked away, as if she'd been caught stealing. He watched her unravel with an expression that said he already understood far too much.

It all came to a head on a quiet evening after dinner. The house was still, warm, soft around the edges in a way that made Pansy feel even more exposed. Harry was putting dishes away, humming under his breath, while she pretended to be fascinated with the contents of her tea. He didn't let it go on long.

"Pansy," he said, voice gentle but annoyingly firm.

She stiffened but didn't look at him. "What?"

"You're doing that thing again."

"What thing?"

"The thing where you pretend everything's fine even though you look like you're about to run for the door."

Her jaw clenched. "I'm not doing anything."

He wiped his hands on a tea towel and stepped closer. Not touching her. Just close enough to make her heart slam against her ribs.

"You've been quiet for days."

"People are allowed to be quiet."

“You’re not.”

She spun around at that, bristling. “Excuse me?”

“I mean—when something’s actually wrong.” His voice softened. “You go quiet when you’re too deep inside your own head.”

His words hit her like a blow. Something in her chest stuttered, and despite her best effort, her breath caught. Harry saw — of course he did — and the worry in his expression melted into something unbearably gentle.

“Pans,” he murmured, stepping closer, “you can tell me.”

“I don’t want to tell you anything.”

“That’s alright,” he said, all warm patience. “You don’t have to want to. Just... let me in.”

Her throat tightened painfully. The secret clawed upward, furious and desperate, begging to be let out. She turned away, nails digging into her palms hard enough to sting.

Harry’s voice followed her, soft but relentless. “You’ve been fighting yourself for weeks.”

“Drop it.”

He didn’t. “Pansy.”

“Harry, I said—”

“It’s okay.”

Two simple words. Quiet. Soft. But they hit like a spell, clean and unavoidable. The world seemed to still around them, the air too heavy to breathe. Pansy’s fight-or-flight instincts roared to life, slamming through her body with familiar, vicious precision.

Run, they hissed. Run before he sees you. Run before he sees all of you. Run before you lose something you were never meant to have.

She squeezed her eyes shut, trying, failing, to silence the voice.

Then Harry spoke again.

“I love you.”

Her eyes flew open, shock cracking her wide open. Her chest tightened painfully, impossibly.

She stared at him, refusing to believe what she'd heard.

Harry only smiled, gentle and steady, his hands settling at her hips with comforting warmth.

"You—what? No. You don't. Y—You can't." Her voice trembled against her will. "You can't just say things like that!"

"Of course I can," he laughed softly, those bright green eyes warm and ridiculously happy. "I love you, Pansy."

She shook her head violently. "Shut up. Stop saying that. You don't know anything."

"I love you."

"Stop!"

He pulled her closer, but tenderly, like she might shatter. "I love you, Pansy. And that means whatever you're holding inside—whatever you're afraid of—I'll face it with you. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I promise."

"You can't promise me that," she snarled, though her voice had gone fragile, thin. A sound made of fear.

Harry smiled gently. "I can. Because I love you, Pansy Parkinson."

That was it. The final push. The secret burst free before she could choke it down.

"You insufferable man!" She shoved at him, pacing in a frantic half-step, hands thrown up as the last walls collapsed. "Fine! You want it? You want to hear it?"

He waited. Still. Calm. Heartbreakingly patient.

"I love you too!" she cried, voice cracking open. The words tore out of her as though they'd been burning holes in her lungs for months. Her hands trembled. Her eyes shone. "I love you, you stupid, impossible man, and I hate it, and I hate you for making me—"

The rest dissolved into a strangled sound.

Harry stepped in and cupped her face, thumbs brushing her cheeks with a tenderness that undid her.

“I know,” he whispered, a soft laugh in his breath. “You’re not very good at hiding it, you know?”

Her hands fell slowly from his chest, trembling against her sides. For the first time in weeks, maybe months, she allowed herself to inhale without the weight of the secret pressing on her lungs. The fight inside her chest ebbed, leaving only a jittering, fragile sort of hope.

A shaky laugh escaped her lips, small and uneven, but it carried the release of everything she had been holding in. “You’re an idiot,” she murmured, the words breaking into another laugh, soft and raw. “A massive bloody idiot, Harry Potter.”

He grinned, that mischievous, warm grin that always made her chest loosen, and he stepped closer. “Only for you,” he said quietly, and the earnestness in his voice made her stomach twist in the best possible way.

Her hands finally reached up to rest on his shoulders, shaky but deliberate, as if anchoring herself to the reality of him. He leaned down, just a fraction, giving her every opportunity to pull away. She didn’t.

When their lips met, it was tentative at first—soft, testing, an exploration of trust and relief and longing. Pansy’s eyes fluttered closed, the last of her defences crumbling as warmth spread from her chest outward. She pressed closer instinctively, letting herself be seen, letting herself be vulnerable.

The kiss deepened, slow and careful, a shared promise rather than a rush of heat. She tasted him and, for the first time, let the quiet certainty of love fill the spaces that fear had hollowed out. When they finally parted, even slightly, Pansy rested her forehead against his, breath mingling, laughter still trembling on her lips.

“I—” she started, then shook her head, laughing again, a soft, liberated sound. “I really do love you, you infuriating man.”

Harry chuckled, pressing a gentle kiss to her temple. “I know,” he said simply. And this time, she believed him.

The room was quiet, warm, and safe. And for the first time in a long time, Pansy let herself stay exactly where she was. Right here, with him.

-

Author's Note

This one-shot was an experiment of sorts. I wanted to sort of make a small ficlet that lulled in between snippets of a complete story, showing a progression that felt natural. It was kind of like a personal test of my own writing abilities and something I felt like I should try, especially with how much I've been changing up my writing style over the past couple of months. Of course, I just had to do it with my favourite pairing. Hansy is a hill I will forever die on, and it's a shame that there are so few real fics about the pairing that aren't just a background to Hermione/Draco. I hope you all enjoyed! I know the absence of smut might be a bit disappointing, but if you all enjoy this one, I may do a one-off or two focused on more of their steamier moments ;). Probably won't be a full series though, mainly because reading back this one-shot is a bit too similar to Denial of A Dalliance to justify a full multi-chapter fic. Anyway, enough yapping from me!

Thanks for reading!