

Pink Swans Again: The Engagement

by Lorraine Bluestar

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: All characters and concepts of Harry Potter's universe belong to J.K. Rowling; I just borrowed them for a little while.

"Maybe you just can tell them I'm ill and that I have to stay in isolation the whole weekend. It could be very contagious, you know..."

"Severus, you said that you would go with me. Do I need to remind you that you gave your word to my parents, and they are expecting you for the weekend?"

He cursed under his breath, knowing that he was doomed. She was right. How *did that* happen? He was the one who was always right. "Maybe we can say that you're ill, as well, and then we can avoid going and stay here this weekend doing more productive things," he said, while closing the distance between them until he was whispering the last words in her ear.

Hermione trembled a little when she felt his warm breath in her ear, awakening all her senses. She thought to herself *Always the manipulative Slytherin, using every resource at hand.* But this time she needed to be the one who got the upper hand. Besides, two could play that game.

She turned to see him sliding her hands through his arms while pressing her body to his. Looking him straight in the eyes with her so-practised angelic look, she said, "I know you don't want to go, that this is really hard, but it's important to my parents and to me. Please come, and try to have a good time; I promise to make it up to you when the weekend's over." She rubbed her body a little against his.

Severus groaned, knowing that she had the upper hand now. "All right, all right, we'll go, and I will try to be civil to your relatives. But I'm warning you, if any of them crosses the line, I will not be responsible of my actions."

Hermione smiled and hugged him tightly. "Thank you. I promise I'll make it easy for you."

Severus held her tightly, knowing already that this was a very bad idea.

They Apparated outside her parents' house just after breakfast. They would have dinner with her family that evening to introduce him to everyone and to announce the engagement. Hermione had been reluctant to go along with this; she didn't want to expose Severus to her 'lovely' relatives, who surely had a list of questions ready for him. Why had she agreed to this nightmare? Her father, it was his fault entirely...

Hermione and Severus had visited them the week after Severus's proposal. He'd told her that he wanted to do things properly, to present himself to her parents and ask for her hand in marriage. She knew he thought it was the honourable thing to do, that he wanted this to be perfect from the beginning. She knew it since he'd told her one night, when they were resting in his bed holding each other close, that loving her was the best thing he had ever done in his life. Severus was just like that; he wanted to do things right, different from the things he'd done wrong when he was younger.

Her parents were sincerely happy for them, and, although it was a bit awkward to see their daughter with someone twenty years older than her, they were pleased with her choice. They knew that she needed someone like him to challenge her and, they just had to admit it, who could cope with her stubbornness and occasional bad moods. They toasted them and welcomed him to their family... unfortunately, that implied more than just Hermione's parents.

But, how had *this* nightmare occurred? Oh yes ... her father. He had already been declared responsible for this nightmare. Two weeks after their visit, Hermione's parents had attended a family party that Aunt Emily threw for Felicia to welcome her and her husband back from their 'lovely honeymoon.' Thankfully, Hermione had avoided that one, but now, she wished she had been there to stop her father.

Of course, the family members took advantage of her absence to express their concerns about Hermione. Aunt Emily cornered her cousin and started lecturing her on how to be a good mother. How could it be that a girl like Hermione was still single?

"Eleanor, darling, are you sure you've encouraged her enough? I'm not blaming you, but a mother must take care of these matters when raising a girl. I know that it's hard, especially if you weren't particularly skilled yourself. And letting her spend so much time at that boarding school, leaving her to grow up alone and spend her adolescence without a guide to teach her how to deal with boys. But you don't have to worry; I'm here to help you both. I offered to introduce her to some fine young men, and I'm sure we'll find a suitor for her very soon. Of course, she'll have my assistance in this endeavour, poor thing; I'll do everything in my power to repair any 'neglect' in her education."

It was more than Eleanor could bear. She had been tempted to tell her cousin a couple of things but restrained herself, knowing that it was not worth the argument Emily would surely have caused. Later, when she told her daughter this story, Hermione was tempted to practise a couple of hexes she knew on her 'lovely' Aunt Emily.

For her father, the experience had been as unpleasant as for his wife, but he hadn't managed to get out of it successfully. Her Uncle Robert confronted him, talking about his concerns for his niece and his fears about something being 'wrong' with her. Outraged, in an outburst of anger, he told Robert that there were no problems with Hermione, that she was a normal girl, and, for his information, she was engaged... That was the beginning of the end. By the conclusion of the evening, her Uncle Robert had told everyone that Hermione was engaged. Aunt Emily looked reproachfully at Eleanor but with a nasty smile on her face.

"Eleanor, darling, why didn't you tell me? I wouldn't want to think you were keeping it from us, from your family. We need to have a dinner party to meet her fiancé; it's not every day that a member of our family gets married. We need to celebrate. I'll call you to set the date and to make all the arrangements. You'll see what a beautiful evening we'll plan for our little Hermy..."

That nickname -- that dreadful name her Aunt Emily had called her since she was a little girl -- she had always loathed it. For a month, her aunt had tormented her mother, insisting on a dinner party to celebrate her engagement, until Eleanor couldn't stand it anymore and gave in.

"I'm sorry, Hermione, but I'll do the dinner, and you'll need to be there. Your *Auntie*' is driving me mad, and I just can't put her off any longer. She's the most insistent person in the world, and as time passes, she gets worse."

Her mother was right. Aunt Emily was insufferable and was making her mother's life a living hell. She appeared everywhere her mother was and relentlessly insisted on the dinner party. She'd even started inviting other members of the family to the nonexistent event. Hermione began to feel guilty and reluctantly agreed to attend the bloody dinner and confront her bloody aunt and let her know that her place was far away from them.

Severus was furious when she told him and yelled while pacing in frustration across his living room.

"How did you get us into this? Don't you have any common sense?"

There was simply no way he would attend that abomination of a dinner. Well, that was until Hermione convinced him to agree using a couple of manipulative strategies she had learnt from the Master of Manipulation. And she'd promised him that it would be the only time he had to see her entire family gathered together, other than the wedding, of course. He respected and liked her parents; so, he'd agreed instead of rudely refusing their invitation.

Hermione knocked at the front door of her parents' house and her mother opened the door.

"Sweetheart, it's great to see you here. You look radiant, so beautiful; the engagement suits you." She released her daughter from her hug and turned to greet her soon-to-be son-in-law. "Severus, it's great to see you again. Thank you for accepting the invitation and coming today; I know how you have er more pressing activities."

Severus bowed slightly and answered her. "It's my pleasure to be here, Mrs Granger. I thank you for your kind invitation."

"You're quite welcome. But come in, both of you, have something to drink and get comfortable."

Eleanor pulled Hermione inside, and Severus followed them. He sighed, closing the door behind him and knowing that he was entering into a version of hell.

At six o'clock, they had to be ready to receive the guests in the living room. Hermione was wearing a dark grey strapless dress that reached just to her knees, and Severus was wearing a black Muggle suit. He had got used to wearing only robes since he was a kid, spending many years denying his Muggle heritage, but since he had started seeing Hermione, he was learning the ways of Muggles again.

When the doorbell rang, he held Hermione's hand tightly and looked into her eyes as if to say *We can still go now; please, say we can go now* But it was too late when her Aunt Joanna entered her parents' living room. There was no problem with her; she was Hermione's grandmother's sister and a very fine and polite woman.

"Hermione, my girl, I'm so happy to see you again. You look so pretty; you've always been such a pretty girl. When your mother told me that you were getting married, I thanked God for letting me live to see this moment."

"Thanks, Aunt Jo. It's great to see you, too. May I introduce you to my fiancé?"

The old woman turned to meet him and inspected him with her green eyes, staring openly, as if she could see into his soul.

"Madam, it's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Severus Snape," he said, while holding the woman's hand and lightly kissing its back.

"My goodness, Hermione, your fiancé is a perfect gentleman." She turned to face Severus again. "I'm pleased to finally meet you, young man, and to discover you're so well-mannered."

Severus smiled to himself. *This is easy. I can do this and escape in one piece from this house if things keep going this way.* He didn't know how wrong he was, and unfortunately for him, he was about to discover his mistake when the bell rang again and Emily's voice could be heard at the front door.

"Eleanor, darling, it's wonderful to be here. You didn't have to go to so much trouble; it was so kind of you to invite us."

Insufferable woman. "You didn't have to go to so much trouble." *As if she left my mother alone for a single moment.* Hermione tried to compose herself and to calm down before facing her 'Auntie.'

Emily entered the room carrying a huge basket filled with exotic flowers that looked as if someone had gotten lost in a jungle. They were utterly distasteful compared to the single white tulip Severus would give her from time to time.

Her aunt left the basket on a nearby table and walked towards Hermione while removing her coat. "Hermione, darling, it's so good to see you again, knowing you followed my advice and found yourself a man." She dropped her coat unceremoniously in Severus's hands, turning her head to tell him, "Hang it carefully." She turned back to face an infuriated Hermione and asked her, "But where is your fiancé, darling?"

"He is my fiancé," Hermione answered in an angry voice, facing Severus.

"Oh, I'm so sorry; I thought that he was a valet."

Hermione turned towards Severus, and her anger became panic. He had that look on his face; the murderous glare she knew so well from her years as a student at Hogwarts; that look he reserved for Neville Longbottom when he had the misfortune of melting a cauldron. *Oh my God, he's going to hex her... Oh, who cares? She deserves it, and I'm sure he'll make it look like an accident.*

But Severus didn't hex Aunt Emily. Using every ounce of self-control he possessed, he schooled his features and faked a slight smile. "Don't worry, Madam. ~~W~~all make mistakes."

"Oh, it's nice of you to be so understanding about my confusion."

Nice? I'm not by any means a nice man, and I won't tolerate being called nice again.

"I'm Emily Subercaseaux, and you are Mr..."

"Snape, I'm Severus Snape."

"Oh, what an unusual name; where is your family from?"

"I'm from England," he answered, not wanting to give the woman more details.

"How lovely indeed..." The woman turned to Hermione. "Hermie, darling" Hermione cringed at the nickname - "will you accompany me to the kitchen? I want to see if anyone needs my help there."

"Of course, Aunt Emily."

The woman turned to face Severus with a saccharine-sweet smile. "It's such a pleasure to meet you. I'll see you around in a few minutes."

Severus nodded slightly at the woman who turned to head to the kitchen. Hermione took advantage of those seconds to turn to face him and give him a little apology. "I'm sorry, Love; I should have expected something like that."

He smirked at his fiancée. "Don't worry, *Hermie*, go and catch up with your *Auntie*."

She looked at him murderously and hit him in the stomach before leaving *How dare he use that stupid nickname with me?*

When she entered the kitchen, her aunt grabbed her hand quickly and pulled her to the back of the room. "Darling, are you sure about what you're doing?"

With a sudden intake of breath, Hermione faced her aunt, trying to calm herself before answering. "What do you mean, Aunt Emily?"

"Don't get me wrong darling, I'm sure he's a er good man in some way, but he looks... He's older than you by at least twenty years, and that skin! Does he ever take sunbaths? And have you looked at his hair? It looks greasy. And that nose; there are ways to fix that, you know."

"I see nothing wrong with the man I love. I see nothing wrong with his bright mind and his honourable character, with his braveness and his loyalty to his ideas. I see nothing wrong with the way he loves me and the way he would do anything for me, even giving his life if something threatened me."

"Come on, darling, don't get so melodramatic. I only want the best for you. You know that you're like a second daughter to me; you and Felicia were so close when you were little girls, just like sisters."

Sisters? So close? The only people I consider siblings are Harry and Ron. And Felicia was always cruel to me. She mocked my hair and my teeth, and always teased me saying my dolls were awful and cheap.

"That's it, darling, no hard feelings about your fiancé. But rest assured that I'll do everything in my power to help you both."

Emily hugged the young witch, preventing Hermione from answering her last statement. "Come on, darling, we must go back to the living room; you don't want to leave your man there alone."

When they exited the kitchen, Eleanor was introducing Severus to her grandfather, Sebastian, Joseph Granger's father. The old man was truly pleased to meet him and stayed there talking with him while Hermione went to join her mother and help her with receiving the guests and offering them something to drink. In the other corner, her Uncle Robert was drinking enthusiastically while talking to her father about Hermione and her fiancé.

"I would never have imagined it, Joseph; the man is old enough to be her father. I think I may be younger."

Yes, Robert, you wish, Joseph Granger thought, rolling his eyes.

"He's not very good-looking, is he? Not that I pay attention to other men's looks, mind you, but in the case of this man, it's pretty obvious."

"Robert, he's the man my daughter loves and he's a good man. If I'm not questioning my daughter's choice, I don't see why you should."

"Don't get so touchy about it; it was just a comment," Robert said, before drinking the contents of his glass in a single gulp.

Minutes later, Hermione joined Severus and her grandfather's conversation, grabbing her lover's hand and pulling him close to her. "Hi, Grandpa, how are you?"

The old man hugged his granddaughter tightly; she had always been his favourite; they shared the same passion for knowledge and thirst for perfection. "Hermione, my

girl, I'm so glad to see you. I'm so happy being here to share your happiness and to wish you both a long, lasting life together."

"Thanks, Grandpa, you know it means a lot to me."

"I've been talking with this young man, and I must congratulate you on your choice. I'm sure that Angela would have liked him a lot, too." Angela was her father's mother. She'd passed away when Hermione was only seven years old. Despite it being almost twenty years ago, her grandfather still remembered her fondly.

"Thank you for your kind words, sir," Severus answered him. He liked the man; he was quite civil and still sharp, despite his age. He could see where Hermione's intelligence came from.

"You're welcome, son; now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go to join Joanna." He hugged his granddaughter again, nodded to Severus and left to join the older woman on a nearby sofa.

"Are you all right, Love?" Hermione asked him when they were left alone.

"I've managed to stay calm and not hex any of your relatives, so I guess I'm doing fine enough."

Hermione sighed. She knew it was hard for him, but they would have had to face her family eventually. "I'm sorry, but we had to face them some time."

"It's fine, Hermione; I would even face a pack of vengeful Death Eaters in order to please you." He kissed her lightly on the lips and she smiled back at him lovingly.

"Come on, I'll introduce you to my cousin Cecile. She's a snob, always showing off her rich husband, but she manages to be polite." They started moving toward Cecile when Eleanor called her daughter, needing her help in the kitchen.

"Do you mind introducing yourself to Cecile?"

"I would prefer to wait for you."

"Don't worry, she's polite enough. You only have to introduce yourself, make a couple of nice comments and excuse yourself with the pretext of needing to find me to ask me something important, or to tell me something you've just remembered."

"Fine, I'll do just that."

Hermione smiled and entered the kitchen. Severus reluctantly walked off to meet Cecile, who was standing beside the hearth mantel with her three-year-old son. He bowed a little and introduced himself. "Good evening, Madam, I'm Severus Snape, Hermione's fiancé."

But before she could answer him, the little boy started pulling his mother's dress while looking up at Severus with his wide eyes; then he turned to his mother to ask her, "Mummy, what is it?" pointing his finger at Severus.

Cecile flinched, trying not to laugh, and told her son in the sweet tone reserved for children who have done something bad, but terribly funny to the adults. "Come now, Paul, don't be so rude; *that* is your Aunt Hermione's fiancé. Come, let's congratulate him; they're getting married."

"I don't want to, Mummy, he's scary." With that, he hid behind his mother, glaring back at Severus.

I definitely don't like the way that child is looking at me, and I definitely don't like his mother. That is your Aunt Hermione's fiancé. What was the bloody woman about?

"Don't worry, Madam, children can be outspoken." *And I want to kill him like the rest of them.*

"Oh, you're so kind. He didn't mean to be rude, but, you know children; they just speak their minds without being polite." She smiled sweetly at him, but he knew it was a completely false smile.

"If you'll excuse me, I need to find Hermione. It was a pleasure." And with those last words, he turned quickly to leave before his self-control slipped from his grip and he ended up hexing the woman and her brat. He should have waited for Hermione.

At that moment, Eleanor exited the kitchen, announcing that dinner was ready and inviting everyone to move into the dining room. Joseph joined Severus to escort him in. "Come with me. You're sitting next to me, and the place beside you is for Hermione." Severus nodded and followed his future father-in-law.

The dinner that Eleanor cooked was delicious; she was as gifted in the kitchen as Hermione was untalented. It would have been a more pleasant affair *Dear Aunt Emily* hadn't monopolised the conversation.

"Felicia and Anthony spent a wonderful honeymoon. They went to a lovely beach in the Caribbean; I think it's called *Kan-Kun*, or something like that. They wished so much to be here, but they had a function to attend. I know that even the Duke of York was going to be there. Dear Anthony is such an important member of English society."

"Have I told you all about the gift Anthony's parents gave them? I was so astonished. They gave them a yacht! Yes, you heard right -- a yacht. There's no doubt that my Felicia managed to make a splendid match."

Both Severus and Hermione closed their minds to the woman's babbling without knowing that the other was doing exactly the same thing. Eleanor's face was red with anger. There was no doubt that Hermione had inherited her temper from her mother; she was just as passionate.

When everybody had finished their dinner, they all moved to the living room for coffee. There, a group of women surrounded Hermione asking her about her engagement ring. Severus had given her a beautiful platinum ring with a square-cut emerald. She thought it was exquisite. One of her cousins thought otherwise. "Honestly, Hermione, where's tradition? Engagement rings should have diamonds, not emeralds. What was your fiancé thinking?"

Aunt Emily took advantage of the group surrounding Hermione, keeping her apart from her fiancé, and approached him, smirking. "Severus, darling, I just heard little Paul's reaction to you: *What-is-it!* Just *precious!* I think we've just found a funny nickname for you."

Severus's eyes widened as he looked at the woman in disbelief, but before he could get past the shock, she spoke again. "I was thinking about you and little Hermie, and I had a marvellous idea. I'll make an appointment for you with Thomas, my stylist. I'm sure he'll manage to give you a complete makeover in his salon. He also has a sun-bed there, so you can get a tan to complement your new style."

Severus just stood there glaring at her, his mouth gaping open like some dunderhead from his Potions class. *This is not happening. This is an alternate universe, a hallucination, an after-effect of the many times I was tortured with the Cruciatus Curse.*

"So, what do you think, Sevvie, darling?"

That caught his attention. "What did you call me?"

"Sevvie, short for Severus. I just love to give everyone in the family a short name. Although, I'm afraid that most of the family will just call you *What-is-it* in honour of little Paul."

That was enough. The woman had more than crossed the line and he wouldn't stand for it any longer. *Self-control, my arse! I'll hex her on the spot.*

But before he could even attempt to answer, she spoke again. "You don't have to thank me, darling. I'll talk to Anthony, my son-in-law, and ask him to go with you. He's an adorable man; I think he'll be more than capable of giving you some tips on how to groom yourself. Hermy will be so pleased, she won't be able to find a way to thank me enough. Oh, I must leave you; I must catch up with Robert about some gossip I heard."

With that, she left a completely outraged Severus standing in a corner of the living room.

Thankfully, around ten o'clock, the guests started leaving the Grangers' house, calling it a night. They wished the couple happiness and let them know they would be expecting an invitation to the wedding.

"Hermy, darling, it was so nice to see you. Finally, you're getting married. Thank God! I thought you were doomed to be a spinster. It's like I've always said *happy woman is a married woman*." She hugged her and kissed her on both cheeks before releasing her and turning to Severus. "Sevvie, darling, it was such a pleasure to meet you. I'll make sure that Anthony calls you for doing you-know-what." She then hugged his stiff frame and kissed his cheeks. "I'm looking forward to your wedding." She turned to face Hermione again. "I'll call you so we can meet and discuss the arrangements. Felicia is so excited about it; she wants to be involved in every aspect of her almost-sister's wedding. I'll be seeing you soon."

They stood there praying that Merlin, and every deity who was listening, prevented that from happening.

Next day after having breakfast with Hermione's parents, they Apparated to his house, their house since Hermione had moved in after his proposal. They felt exhausted after their nightmare dinner with her relatives and fell limply onto the couch. Hermione snuggled against his chest, feeling relieved at being home with the man she loved and back to their normal lives after spending a day in the twilight zone.

"Thank you for doing that, Love. I know it was terribly awful. I must say, you behaved admirably considering how horrible they were."

"Are you kidding me?" he answered her, while stroking her hair lovingly. "I drank a calming draught before everyone arrived, so I could have my mind numbed the entire evening."

She sat up straight so she could face him. "You sneaky man; that was such a Slytherin thing to do!"

"Really, *Hermy*, I was under the impression that you wanted me to behave and refrain from hexing your bloody lot."

"Oh, and I'm sure you want me to thank you for that, *Sevvie, darling*, or should I better call you *What-is-it, dear?*"

He stared at her seriously. "Don't ever call me that again." Then he again pulled her against his chest, holding her tightly. "You know how much I love you and that I would face a thousand deaths for you or, I should say, a thousand Aunt Emilys. Your laughter is my salvation from myself, looking at my own image in your eyes is redemption from my sins, and loving you is my resurrection to the man I am now."

A tear escaped from Hermione's eyes. "I love you so much, Severus. I never knew I could feel so much in my heart, and it grows even more with each day."

He kissed the top of her head and held her more tightly, enjoying the silence interrupted only by their hearts beating.

Some minutes later, Hermione raised her head and, looking into his eyes, she inquired, "Severus? The next time we have to see one of my relatives, can you please save some calming draught for me?"

Severus nodded to her and smiled when she again snuggled against his chest. Amazed, once again, by how right she felt in his arms. He closed his eyes, knowing that that moment was the meaning of happiness.

A/N: *Once again I've used some elements of my own life in this story. Hermione's grandmother's name was borrowed from my own grandmother who passed away when I was sixteen. I also have an Aunt Joanna, who is a lovely woman and whom I love very much.*

The 'What-is-it' part is a true story. It happened to the fiancé (now husband) of my brother-in-law's cousin. Her nephew indeed asked his mother that question when the guy went to meet his fiancée's family for the first time, and they still call him 'What-is-it;' even his wife.

I also did a little advertising for Can-Cun, which is, in my opinion, the most beautiful beach we have in Mexico and proudly one of the most beautiful in the world. If you have a chance, try to visit it, it's worth the trip, and we Mexicans just love tourists.

I borrowed the line in which Severus calls Hermione his salvation, redemption and resurrection from my fanfic 'We Don't Say Goodbye.' I just love that one.

I want to thank everyone who left a review for the first 'Pink Swans' story and who asked me for a next part. Thanks for the nice comments and for being an inspiration. I also want to tell you that I'm also working on the third part in which we'll have the wedding.

I also want to thank Nakhash Mekashefah for beta'ing this story. Thanks Nak.