

# Pink Swans

*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.

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"Maybe I just can tell them I'm sick and that I have to stay in bed the whole weekend."

"Hermione... although the prospect of having you in bed the whole weekend is very appealing, I must remind you that you gave your word to your parents and they are expecting you for the weekend."

She sighed with resignation. He was right; why did he always have to be right? "Maybe I can take you with me to my parents' home so they can meet you."

Severus stiffened at the thought of meeting her parents and telling them he had been seeing their daughter for almost two years and that they were serious with their relationship. "That is not an option, as I'm sure you know. This is not the time to tell them. You'll be engaged in other social activities, and you won't be able to deal with the trauma that the news will cause your parents. You'd better start getting ready."

"I don't want to go; we share so little time together to waste a whole weekend away from you."

"You should have thought of that before accepting the invitation."

"I hate it when you're right."

He smirked at her remark and held her tightly before watching her leave for the weekend.

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Hermione Apparated outside her parents' house that evening. They would be going to her cousin's wedding tomorrow morning, and she had agreed they would leave early.

Her mother opened the door and embraced Hermione tightly. "Sweetheart, you're back. It's so good to have you back for the summer."

"It's only a weekend, Mum."

"I know, sweetheart, but it's still wonderful to have you here for a change." She grabbed Hermione's luggage and let her into the house.

Going back to the home where she spent her childhood and her adolescent summers was awkward. After finishing Hogwarts, Hermione had moved to a flat in London with Harry and Ron while they trained as Aurors. Ginny joined them a year later when she had started her Mediwitch apprenticeship at St. Mungo's. Of course, she visited her parents regularly, but she avoided staying with them for long periods knowing that, although they loved her, they didn't quite understand the wizarding world - her world. They had tried for years to lure her back to the Muggle world.

Hermione shared dinner with her parents. Her mother was giving her an update of family gossip, so she wouldn't make a faux pas in front of the family. Her father was quietly watching her; he knew her very well and knew that something wasn't at all right.

"What is it, my girl? You're completely lost in your thoughts. Is something bothering you?"

She stiffened uncomfortably in her chair - why did he have to know her so well? "It's nothing, Dad. I was just thinking about my job and a couple of things I have to work out on Monday."

"It seems to me that there's something you haven't told us."

Damn it, she wished that her father wasn't able to read her like an open book. "What are you talking about? I'm not hiding anything."

He took her hand and squeezed it gently. "I'm sure that if you have something to tell us, you'll do it without shilly-shallying; we are your parents and you can trust us."

"I know it, Dad, thank you."

After dinner, she helped her mother with the dishes before retreating to her old bedroom. She was feeling really tired, so she changed into her nightdress and lay in bed, staring at the light-yellow wall and thinking about Severus. After two years of seeing each other, she wondered where their relationship was going. It had never been an issue for them until now, but eventually they'd have to decide, and for the last couple of weeks it had been preying on her mind. She didn't have in mind a fairy tale romance with promises of undying love and a lovely manor in the country with a dozen of children; she just wanted it the way it was, practical and deep, because although he wasn't a romantic partner, his sporadic tenderness and solid love for her were enough. Very few knew about her relationship with him, her friends amongst them, and although it was hard for them to accept it in the beginning, they had made peace with her choice.

She just wanted to know if they would remain together and what adjustments she'd have to make. If they moved in together at some point... that could be a problem, considering their jobs. They saw each other on weekends (or when one of them managed to get in or out of Hogwarts) and spent the summers together living in the house he owned just outside London. Would that arrangement become permanent one day? She knew they loved each other but didn't know if they were ready for a more serious commitment. It was certainly a scary thought. They had been happy enough with the arrangement, but she now knew that it wasn't enough.

She turned off the light, determined to stop thinking about it; it would have to wait at least for this weekend.

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They left her parents' house early on Saturday. It was a nice day for a wedding in the country. Knowing her cousin Felicia, she'd make a show of her *special day* with flowers and romantic reminders of their love. Fortunately, Hermione hadn't been asked to be one of her bridesmaids, so she didn't have to wear one of the pink dresses full of lace and ribbons. Instead, she was wearing a short black dress. When her mother saw Hermione, her eyes had widened and she had frowned in disapproval, while her father asked her, "Don't you think it's too funereal?"

As she had expected, Felicia's wedding was a display of flowers and ribbons at every turn. There were even hearts with the names *Felicia and Anthony* on them. She was grateful that Severus didn't have to endure the nauseating orgy of pink, but the last straw was when she saw a pond with five swans, which had had their feathers painted pale pink. 'Poor animals, that's so cruel,' she thought.

When everybody was in their places, the music began and a parade of girls in pink walked along the red carpet leading to the vicar. They were followed by four couples: women in pink dresses walking by the sides of men in grey tuxedos with pink bows. They were followed by a handsome young man, and then it was her cousin's turn to enter. She was a blonde young woman wearing a huge white dress with her hair held back by a tiara.

The ceremony was nice, although Felicia couldn't speak coherently because she couldn't stop crying.

The reception was a boring affair for Hermione. She wasn't used to attending this kind of social event, where everybody seemed to know each other except for her, nor were there any relatives here that were near her age. Not that that would really have made any difference, considering that her life was completely separated from this world.

Her Aunt Emily, Felicia's mother, approached her, smiling like a satisfied cat that had just caught a mouse before hugging her tightly. "Hermione, darling, it's so good to see you. You look well, despite your dress. Honestly, darling, who wears black for a wedding?"

Hermione smiled, trying to forget that she was a witch capable of hexing her aunt. "Hi, Aunt Emily, it's nice to see you, too."

"So tell me, darling, how's everything going on? How's your job?"

"Fine, Aunt Emily, I'm "

"Did you enjoy little Felicia's wedding? She looks adorable - just like an angel - everything is going so nicely. Every detail was perfectly planned so we could have the perfect wedding, but you just had to see the trouble the swans gave us - they kept on trying to get out of the pond and into the party. Well, who can blame them?"

"Of course, Aunt Emily. I "

"And tell me, darling, when will it be your turn? Your mother tells me you don't even have a boyfriend. How can that be possible? You have to go out more. Tell me, darling, how old are you?"

"I'll be twenty-six next month."

"You'd better start hurrying up; at your age it will start to get difficult to find a man. Look at Felicia, she managed to find her perfect match at twenty-three."

"Aunt Emily, I think "

"But don't worry, darling, I'm sure that you'll meet someone before you get too old. A nice man, if not the Prince Charming you seem to be waiting for. Tell you what, I'm going to introduce you to some nice men, all of them sons of my friends; I'm sure that we'll find someone suitable for you and your... tastes. But I must admit that the better ones are already taken, just like young Anthony."

"You don't really have to, Aunt Emily; I'm not really interested in "

"Don't say silly things, darling. It's obvious that you're not making the best job of finding a good match. There's nothing wrong with accepting our own deficiencies and letting the people who know what they are doing give us some help. I'll start talking with my friends about you, but we'll have to do something with your looks; if you don't take better care of yourself, you won't succeed. You have to use more make up, more jewellery and more cheerful colours, believe me you'll thank me someday... I have to go, darling, it seems that they need me over there. Enjoy yourself," her aunt said, kissing her on both cheeks before leaving her standing there, furious, but so dizzy with

the woman's chattering that she couldn't move for some seconds.

That insufferable woman! Ever since Hermione had been a girl, Aunt Emily had been lecturing her cousin about Hermione's education: how Hermione shouldn't be allowed to spend so much time reading and that she should be encouraged to go and play more with other children. Of course, years later, when Aunt Emily had her beautiful and perfect Felicia, it had gotten worse. 'Eleanor, darling, you should pay more attention to Hermione - she's such a shy girl - not like my Felicia. She has lots of friends although she's so young.'

The rest of the reception wasn't any better. Every single member of her family asked her why she was single - such an intelligent girl - surely that was one of the reasons. Even perfect Felicia had asked her about it. "Hermione, you should try harder to find someone. It's such a blessing to have someone who loves you, and believe me, getting married is the best thing in the world. Maybe someday, I'll give you some advice about it."

Her uncle Robert was just as bad. Every time he saw her, he started telling her stories about her childhood and how he had held her when she was a baby. After all the memories, he asked in a low voice, "Tell me, little doll, why don't you have a boyfriend? Is it that you don't want to?"

"It's not that, Uncle Robert, it's just that I haven't met the ideal person."

"Don't tell me, I know it's because there are no longer men like your uncle Robert; this new generation is clueless." He crushed her in an embrace, and all she wanted to do was to hex her entire family and run away from the nightmare.

The young witch was counting the minutes until she could leave; she couldn't stand another moment there. Her parents must have noticed it because they excused themselves and left the party. On their way out, Hermione smiled when she heard her aunt's scream as she saw a group of black swans in the pond; pity she couldn't see her face.

Later that evening, Hermione was seated with a cup of coffee by her bedroom window. A knock at the door startled her and she let her mother in.

"Is everything all right, Hermione? You looked very uncomfortable at the party."

"I'm fine, Mum. I just had a headache."

Her mother sat in a chair near her. "I know you, sweetheart, and your dad was right yesterday, you're not telling us something. What is it?"

"It's nothing, Mum. It's just that... Why do meddlesome people care if I'm single or not? It's my choice after all, and I don't need to get married and have a display like that to let everybody know that I have a *perfect life*. My job matters to me, and it's not a crime wanting to be settled in my professional life before I start thinking about a family."

Her mother sighed. "I know, and I won't deny that I would love to see you married and happy as part of a couple. But I respect your choices; I always have since you were a little girl, despite the fact that I didn't understand some of them. I'm sure that you won't rush in and that you won't do anything in order to please someone else."

Hermione squeezed her mother's hand. "Thank you, Mum. I know I can always count on you. I'll always be grateful to you and Dad because you let me be myself and make my own decisions."

"It had to be that way; you had to learn how to make your choices and to know yourself so you could be the mature and centred woman you are now. I'll go to sleep, sweetheart, but I'll see you tomorrow for breakfast." She kissed her daughter on the forehead and walked to the door.

"Mum, there's something I want to tell you."

"Really, what is it?"

"Well it's about all this stuff about being yourself, making your choices and finding a match."

"I see... so tell me, Hermione, what's his name?"

"Sorry?"

"I'm asking you the name of your boyfriend. I assume he's a wizard, but I would love to know more about him."

"How did you know?"

"A woman in love always shows her happiness in her face. In your case it's more subtle, but not to your mother, young lady."

Hermione smiled and told her mother about Severus...

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The next morning was more pleasant. Now that her parents knew about Severus, she felt more relaxed around them. Spending time with them didn't seem tedious at all; she even started wondering why she hadn't talked with her mother about him before. The long conversation they had had about him the night before had made her realise what she wanted. She didn't want the pink wedding, but she did want to be a proper couple, and she had decided to tell him just that.

She arrived at his house hoping that Severus had stayed there for the weekend waiting for her return. Hermione was rewarded when she found him sitting in a chair near the window, reading a book. She couldn't help but smile at the sight. Clearing her throat, she let him know she was there.

"I was considering leaving to Hogwarts; you said you would be back in the morning and it's past five."

"I know, but believe it or not, I was having a nice time with my parents, so I stayed longer."

"That's good."

She kissed him lightly on the lips and moved to the kitchen.

"I'll make some tea. Do you want a cup?"

"That sounds acceptable, but I need to talk to you first."

His tone was grave and Hermione was a little worried. She sat in the chair next to him. "What is it?"

"Since this is an important matter I want to get straight to the point. I spent these last couple of days thinking about us, and about that wedding you attended."

The knot in her throat was tightening; what did this mean? He wasn't a man who talked about his feelings and the tone of his voice was scaring her. Obviously, what he was trying to say was difficult for him. What if he was planning to end their relationship? That would be great, great indeed, considering that she'd just made the decision of talking to him that same morning.

"Hermione, you must know I can't give you that. The great social event with a display of love for the amusement of everyone present..."

"I understand..." she interrupted him. "I guess that it's time to move on to different things."

He moved to take her hand. "You're right; it's time to move on to other things."

How dare he hold her hand in that way while breaking up with her? Didn't he see the pain that this was causing her? She wanted to scream, to tell him that he was a bastard and that she would be better without him, but the effort that she was making to stop her tears kept her from doing so. She wouldn't let him see her cry, and she tried to hide her expression by lowering her head.

He moved to kneel on the floor in front of her and raised her face with his fingers under her chin. "Hermione, it's time for us to move on and tell the world that we love each other and that we're together. I thought that I would never do this; I don't even know how to tell you..."

Hermione's heart stopped for a second when realisation hit her. "Severus, are you trying to tell me what I think?"

"If you are referring to marriage, you're right. I want to marry you."

She threw herself into his arms, knocking him to the floor, making no effort now to keep the tears under control.

"You evil, sneaky git, you scared me so much."

"I suppose that this is your idea of an affirmative answer?"

"Of course it is."

They stood up, and when she looked into his eyes, something came to her mind.

"Severus, I want you to promise me something."

"I hope I don't regret it in the future, but anything you want."

She smiled and pulled him closer, saying, "Promise me we won't have pink swans at our wedding."

He looked at her utterly confused. She smiled before kissing him deeply and feeling like the happiest woman in the world...

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**A/N:** This is a story that came to my mind after a wedding I attended in April at which I was questioned about being single. So, I guess I spoke through Hermione this time. Aunt Emily is an exaggeration of the annoying relatives, but I do have an Uncle Robert and he treats me like that.

I want to thank Rachel Watkins whose commentaries prompted me to write this story. Thanks Rachel, both for the favour you did for me when I had to go to this wedding and for the idea.

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