# *Swans at Regent's Park:*

# *A Winter Story*



The Regent's Park of London is the most elegant of parks, and no less so in the winter and at Christmastime. It befits the backdrop of the Georgian sash windows and white exteriors that overlook it. The park, if you did not know, is named after the Prince Regent and is owned by the king. The permanent inhabitants of the park, though, are quite the real regents of the place, as I've no doubt the king himself would agree.

They all know it is and make a point of marking Christmas, too.

Ernest and Elizabeth are a swan couple that live on the lake. They had been discussing among themselves what kind of wonderful thing they should do this year for Christmas, for themselves, for the other birds of the park, and for the park itself.

"I do wish the weather would make up its mind, though," Elizabeth complained one evening to her husband, in that gentle but articulate, elegant voice of hers, shaking her silky head lightly. "Rain one day, snow the next, then rain again!"

At this moment it was indeed raining, around 9 o'clock in the evening.

"Yes, yes, well, that is quite true my dear. The moment will find us though. The right weather, and the right idea."

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful, if we could make a microclimate, a winter wonderland, just here in the park, even just for a night and a day,” Elizabeth sighed.

“Yes, my dear, it would,” Ernest agreed. They whisked quietly away to their night rest, which was through the curtain of some delicate willows, near the blue bridge, and Ernest was soon in a steadfast sleep, his wing lovingly placed over Elizabeth.

Elizabeth, though, couldn’t sleep. She tried shutting her eyes but they wouldn’t stay shut, so after a little while she decided to move away from their sleeping spot and see if anything would ignite her soul from this soggy night. The rain had now just about come to a stop and air had cooled by a few degrees, giving a more wintry feel, which she welcomed. At the other side of their willowy enclosure was the opening to another one, or so it looked. To it she swam and lifted the branches with her beak to go inside.

The temperature seemed to drop again and it seemed to be something of a cave. She looked around, feeling a peculiar atmosphere but unsure why, but soon she saw little twinkles of light here and there, beginning to feel more and more enchanted. And then, suddenly, right in front of her appeared a fairy, who said, “Elizabeth, I heard you tonight when you said you wanted a winter wonderland, here in Regent’s Park!”

Seeing Elizabeth’s surprised and elated face, the fairy hesitated no further and thrust her sparkling wand towards the tip of the water from where she hovered above.

In an instant, the dark rocks of the cave became a shining ice lake that stretched all the way back to the eastern side of the park to the formal gardens, becoming a stage exposing the stone summer house and rectangular flower rows.

They were winter pansies now, appearing to come out of the beautiful frozen water. Poinsettia plants were dotted around the edges and small, slender Christmas trees with white lights, lining the scene all the way down to the roads.

The Christmas florals were not the only thing to look upon, though. Geese and heron, small birds, pigeons and even a rare falcon had arrived, gathered in ordered groups, ready for some kind of performance. How often does one see all the hundreds of birds of the Regent’s Park, assembled like this?

All the other swans were there, too. Earnest and Elizabeth were practically speechless.

The fairy spoke to them, “all you need to do is something beautiful for the crowd, when it comes to the turn of the swans. I think you can do that, can’t you? As swans, all you really have to do is move about the lake as yourselves.” They smiled in awe of the scene.

There was a human crowd that had now swelled into the thousands. The hedges had disappeared by the fairy’s wand so that it was an open scene onto the road and from the windows of the mansion flats.

The plan for the performance was whispered through each of the groups of birds and soon they all knew what to do. The small birds were to go first, with an air show above the glistening ice, then would be the pigeons and the ducks, and the herons, swans and falcon later for an exquisite finale.

The fairy pointed her wand towards the surface of the lake to command the start of the show, but just before the light hit the ice, there came a strange, and ominous feeling and, though it was night, the sky suddenly felt darker and as the people and the birds looked up, they saw flocks of crows gathering. Down they came towards the lake, headed to attack and destroy the show.

Not one creature nor person had any obvious means of stopping the menacing crows that seemed to be possessed with a devilish anger and hatred. The little birds due to perform first looked terrified, vibrating in horror in mid-air. Soon, though, the larger birds; the swans, geese and herons, decided to be brave and marched boldly to the front of the scene and with their great wings both shielded the smaller birds behind them and fiercely faced the crows.

Meanwhile, the fairy defiantly, with all her faith, cast her wand with greater force and light onto the lake. At the very moment she did this, a trumpet sounded from somewhere and the crows fled. The scene shone again, a glow coming up from the glacial water. The small birds, recovered from the fright were poised ready to perform.

On the show went; the small birds sprinkled the air above the water with circles of flight, fluttering their little wings and even going near the people, touching the hands of the children, and after a few minutes, fluttered away backstage. Then came forth the ducks and the pigeons, who entertained their audience with jovial lines of dancing on the ice, moving their feet right and left in a lively jaunt that brought a smile and laugh to every onlooking face. Finally, the swans, geese and herons, along with the singular falcon made something of a ballet simply by gliding across the ice, lifting their wings in stylish ways, gracefully interacting between each other.

The show concluded with Earnest and Elizabeth forming a heart with their heads, and all the birds positioned in their groups around and behind them, the small birds and herons behind, decorating the pavilion. All were still as the audience clapped and cheered. The fairy then made the park back to normal, and happily, the people went home.

When they had all gone, the fairy made the ice lake once again for the birds to enjoy an after-party and feast.

In the morning, though the park was once again in its usual state, the birds felt content for their wonderful night.