

Ella's Retelling

This is a story you have probably heard before; my story. But I can assure you that you have never heard the proper version. It has been twisted so that now everything is the wrong way 'round: the villain is a victim, and the victim has become a hated villain, accused of an atrocious crime. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Excuse my discourteousness. My name is Ella, and this is my story.

The story really starts the day I met Anita. We went to University together, both pursuing a career in fashion design. Anita preferred simple, vintage styles while I wanted to make a statement with my creations. I had something to say to the world and I chose to do so through the clothing I wore and created. We were different in every way, Anita and I: she was loud and abrupt, I was quiet and dainty in all but my choice of fashion; she adored attention while I preferred to stay in the background; her skin was tanned and her facial structure soft, complemented by her long, blonde hair as opposed to my pale complexion and harsh, distinct features shrouded by my chin length hair if it was not partially pulled back. Yet we immediately became fast friends, nearly inseparable. Where one was, the other could generally be found. We wandered the streets of London together, discovering its secrets. We would travel to the coast on weekends and traverse rocky cliffs riddled with coves and treasures. There we were like children, happy to roam all day, letting our imaginations draw us away from reality. Then, on Monday, we would drive back to our apartment, lightheartedly cursing the responsibilities of "real" life.

On one of our days journeying through London, we met Gerry. It was a rather strange meeting; Anita and I were weary from walking all morning and had stopped at a cafe for lunch. Gerry was taking pictures of the river outside the cafe and spotted Anita and I at our outdoor table. He claimed the contrast of our persons was what intrigued him—Anita having a sunhat adorning her head to shade her freckled face, the hat matching the impression her attractive skirt

and blouse gave; then me with my white shirt and pants paired with a black leather jacket, the stark contrast causing me to stand out.

Gerry asked if he could take our picture to which we agreed. He tried a few different angles before deciding upon one that placed him at the edge of the stone patio, directly over the river. As a cloud passed over half of the sun, Gerry took a step back to get better lighting, but, misjudging how close the edge of the patio was, toppled into the icy river. Anita and I immediately hopped up from our seats and rushed to help him back onto solid ground. Amazingly, despite the suddenness of his fall and the chill of the water, Gerry had managed to keep his wits about him enough to save his camera from a watery death. We had a good laugh, then Anita and I invited Gerry to join us for lunch.

Fortunately, our table was situated in the sun and Gerry was able to dry off and be warmed by the noontime rays. We squandered the afternoon talking and laughing together, and it was nearly dusk as Gerry accompanied Anita and I to our apartment. Anita bid him a curt ‘goodnight’ at the door then disappeared inside. Gerry and I stood shocked for a moment then laughed at her gruffness before wishing each other goodnight and parting ways.

Gerry became a big part of our lives over the weeks and months to come. The three of us would roam the evening streets of London or see a show together on a quiet Saturday. I even convinced Anita to allow Gerry to accompany us to the coast one weekend.

It was during that weekend that Gerry and I became fairly close. The two of us spent one night talking by the fire into the early hours of the morning. One topic of conversation was my love of black and white: a generous portion of my closet consisted only of those two colors, but perhaps the most striking thing was my hair, split down the middle--black and white. The contrast was not so stark as to be distracting or terribly unusual. The white was soft, dusty--about as natural-looking as possible. Naturally, Gerry was curious as to what the reason for this color

choice was. I told him honestly that my dogs - Wiggles and Dottie - were the inspiration. Their black and white spotted coats fascinated me. I was not sure what it was about them - perhaps it was the contrast; the clean, crisp look the dogs had - but to me they were the most beautiful creatures I'd ever seen. I explained that I had owned Dalmatians all my life and could not imagine owning any other type of dog.

Several more weeks passed, during which time Gerry and I grew closer and closer to the point where our friends insisted we must be dating. This had not occurred to either of us, but we realized they were right. Everyone was glad when we started dating; everyone except Anita. She distanced herself from us, which I could not understand. Was she jealous? Not once had she expressed any interest in Gerry. If anything, she had always been rather cold toward him. I tried talking to her to sort out what had gone wrong between us, apologize for any wrong I had done toward her, but she would hear none of it. She closed both Gerry and I out...for a time. As I would later discover, she was meeting with Gerry discreetly. Twas nothing devious on Gerry's part. He believed she was trying to mend her friendship with me and was merely looking for advice from him on how to best do so. But as the story unfolds, you shall find that her intentions were not as innocent as they appeared.

Christmas was truly a joyful season that year. Gerry and I put together a celebration at his apartment as Anita was reluctant to host one alongside me. We invited everyone we knew, spent days beforehand baking goodies, hours decorating, and many a pretty penny shopping for favors and gifts.

The party was not the only excitement, however; I was eagerly awaiting Wiggles' and Dottie's litter of puppies. Only heaven knew what I would do with the likely near-dozen puppies I would be blessed with, but I was as excited for their arrival as I would have been for my own children. Gerry chuckled at my flustered state. 'Relax. They'll arrive when it's time,' he would say. I tried to convince him that I was indeed calm and it was Wiggles he had to pacify, but that

was a foolish tale that we both knew was not the least bit true. But oh, watching how Wiggles cared for Dottie as the long-awaited day neared made my heart melt everyday. He made sure she was fed, and on the cooler nights he would drag the doggie blanket from the living room to the kitchen where Dottie spent most of her nights snuggled under the corner table. More laughable were the times Wiggles was reprimanded by his love for his playful spirit when she clearly would much rather sleep. Gerry and I would double over with laughter at times while poor Wiggles trotted to the next room, head down in shame.

Alas, the fated day arrived. Gerry called my aunt to assist with the delivery of the pups as I was far too much of a frantic mess to think straight and deliver them on my own. In truth, Gerry assisted my aunt far more than I was able to. Eventually, my aunt kicked me out of the kitchen as I was more of a nuisance than a help, and I spent the remainder of the time pacing outside the door, Wiggles at my heels. After what seemed like an eternity, Gerry stepped from the kitchen. Wiggles rushed past him to Dottie's side. I followed calmly, though I nearly squealed with delight when I saw the puppies— fifteen of them wriggling and squeaking. I looked again. Not fifteen; fourteen. One of the sweet things was unmoving. We tried everything we could think of to revive the dear, but it was all for naught. The poor, unlucky pup was beyond saving. An uncanny still settled over the three of us and my two dogs. It was incredible that in the midst of such new life, a single death could dampen our spirits so.

The puppies grew quickly. Within just a couple weeks they were starting to get their spots. The dogs made such a handsome family that I was reluctant to split them up, but as the puppies became more active, it became increasingly clear that I could not care for sixteen dogs: they required more time, energy, and money than I could afford to spare.

This simple fact set Anita's plan in motion. She began whispering lies about what my plans were for the puppies. She used my love of black and white against me, hid items in my room to cast suspicion upon me, and used my computer to document my "plan" and make it look

like it had been a long time in the making. Of course, all of this was false; but her cleverness exceeded the reason of those I loved and who I thought had loved me.

Anita waited until she had compiled much false evidence against me before confiding in Gerry. She claimed she was worried for my sanity and for the pups, of course. In truth, she was jealous. She had convinced herself she loved Gerry and deserved him more than did I; and with all the horrific evidence she had created, I looked like a monster— a monster who planned to kill the puppies to use their fur for a single coat.

I was not aware of what was going on for some time as she and Gerry kept this all in confidence between the two of them. It was not until I arrived home one evening to find two policemen waiting for me in our apartment that I knew anything of what had been happening behind my back. Gerry and Anita were both there. Gerry shook his head and expressed how disappointing this all was to learn, but he assured me what was happening was for my own safety. I barely heard his words, my attention focused on Anita. She had the nerve to sit on our couch, head held high, the pride of her success sparking in her eyes. I pled my innocence, begged Gerry to believe me, but I was too late. The evidence was too much for me to fight at this point, and I had no money for a good lawyer. Knowing my plight was useless anyway, I resigned myself to my unjust fate. In true English fashion, I kept my chin up as I was led to a squad car, then to court, and finally to prison. Though the rest of London now saw me as a malicious monster, I had the truth of my innocence in my heart. My prison sentence was short enough, and when it was over, perhaps I could start anew. That was my only hope.

I am writing this all from my cell today. I can hear rain on the roof— a typical London day. My only link to the outside world is the daily paper that the warden is kind enough to share a glimpse of with me. Today's front page headline is what has prompted my story. It reads:

**“Newlyweds Roger and Anita Radcliffe Adopt Sixteen Dalmatians Formerly
Belonging to the Crook, Ella DeVille”**

The nerve. My sweet darlings in the hands of Anita *Radcliffe*. She stole my reputation, my dogs, and finally my love. She does not deserve the dears, but alas, there is nothing I can do from in here. Even when I am again a free woman, I have no malicious plan as she did. The most I would want would be to get my lovely Wiggles and Dottie back, but I shall save that idea for another day. For now I shall be content with getting my story out to the world. I imagine that is all the justice I shall see in this matter, but if I can convince even one person reading this of my innocence, that will be enough for me.