

## Ella and the Prince

Ella was like a normal seventeen-year old teenage girl, or boy for that matter. In other words, by turns gentle and aggressive, friendly and antagonistic, loving and hating, helpful and obstructive, kind and spiteful. The hormonal storms of puberty had mostly died down, but still flared up now and then.

It hadn't helped that her mother had died when she was seven, and that her father had married a divorced woman with two sons when Ella was in the middle of changing from a child to a woman. In general Ella and her step-Mum got on well, as Ella could see that her Dad was happy again, and her new step brothers, one of whom was usually at University, weren't too unbearable, she thought.

When Ella was in a good mood, she called her step-mother 'Mum'. When she wasn't, what she called her would best be left untold. Her step-mother tried to ignore the worst of the storms.

From the description above, you might think that she was a brat, but that is far from the case. Mostly her home life was tranquil and contented, with only a few blow ups to disturb the family calm. Ella was well aware of what was going on in her body, and when she did have a flare up, she would let it die down, and then apologize and be especially nice to her step-mother for a while. Then her step-mother would talk about the problems that she'd had when her sons were going through similar hormonal storms. They would usually end up laughing hysterically.

Her step-mother on her part, loved Ella to bits. She had not been lucky enough to have a girl baby in her previous marriage, but she came from a family of girls and understood what Ella was going through and made allowances. Ella did love her step-mother, but with a bit of reserve. She sometimes felt that she was betraying her mother by loving her step-mother so much. Over time though, it seemed more and more right.

One thing, though, was almost guaranteed to cause a big fight and that was housework. Ella had a blind-spot and if she was asked to vacuum the house or dust around, or iron clothes, the chances were that she would spin up into a rage. She considered that she did more of the housework than both of the boys combined. Well, she might have had a point, if it was true that the boys didn't ever do those jobs, but in fact, they did. But they also did the washing up or put the dishes into the machine, cleaned the shower and the toilet, cut the grass, took out the garbage and even washed the car now and then, none of which Ella was asked to do. Somehow this didn't help.

But if Ella was asked to do housework, she would explode, then she would sulk, and then she would apologize to her step-mother, then she would do it. It worried her a little that such a tiny thing could cause her such grief.

"Don't worry, dear. You'll grow out of these moods," said her step-mother, hoping that she was right.

Ella would give her a hug and do the chore, whatever it was.

It so happened that Ella and her family lived not far from the Royal Summer Palace. The Royal family spent a month or so at the Summer Palace most years and the locals eagerly awaited the visits, because the local economy was boosted by the spending of the Royals and the media and others who followed them around.

There were also the parties! The Royals tended to hold gala balls and banquets but the Crown Prince held parties! Famous classical musicians were hired for the balls and banquets, but famous pop groups were hired for the Prince's parties.

Of course, you couldn't just turn up for one of the Prince's parties. There was a ballot held and on the occasion that we are interested in, all three step-siblings won a ticket. Great rejoicing! It happened that Ella's father and step-mother were going to visit some friends on the same evening and would be out too.

On the day, all the family were preparing to leave for the evening. Ella wore her favourite LBD and paired it with heeled shoes. She had her hair trimmed and swept to one side. As it was a masque party, she had a black domino mask with sequinned edges. She looked amazing.

Unfortunately she had forgotten to do one of the chores that her step-mother had asked her to do.

"Right, please get changed and sweep the floors in here and in the kitchen and vacuum the lounge. I've asked you several times, and I told you that you weren't going out until you had done it," said her step-mother.

Ella immediately had a meltdown. She screamed and shrieked and begged, but to no avail. Even her father wouldn't help her.

"Go and get changed. You are not going out tonight until it is done, and that's final," said her step-mother firmly.

Ella flew up to her bedroom and fell on her bed crying. She was going to miss the party! After a bit she calmed down and changed to her ordinary clothes, and started to do the chores. Stupid temper! She resolved to never to have a meltdown again. She conveniently ignored the fact that she'd promised herself the same thing several times before.

It didn't take her long to finish the chores and the repetitive motions were soothing. She finished and sat down. What now?

"I can still go!" she told herself. It wasn't too late! She looked at herself in the mirror. OK, she looked like a panda, but she could fix that! She quickly washed off her make-up, and reapplied it. OK, it wasn't as good as it was before, but it would do. She slipped on her LBD and her shoes. Mmm, the hair was a mess. She did her best, and the end result was still amazing. She donned the mask, and picked up her black clutch and was ready to go.

As a last touch she put on a necklace that she had been given by her mother, which had a gold chain and a green polished stone teardrop pendant. She carefully locked up the house and headed for the Summer Palace. From some distance she could make out the thumping sound of the music and as she got closer she could even make out the song that was playing. Looking forward to the party, she mounted the steps to the door.

"Excuse me, miss, can I please see your ticket?" asked one of the large men at the door.

She dipped in her clutch and then realised. Oh no, she'd left it on the table!

"I can't let you in without a ticket," stated the large man.

"I've got a ticket, but I left it at home."

The large man just shook his head. She refused to cry. She walked away from the door with her head down. She WASN'T going to CRY.

"Think she was genuine, Smith?" asked the other large man.

"Probably, Jones," said the other. "But you know the rules."

Ella walked down the road to the corner, then turned right. This was not the way home, of course. She circled the building. Ah, an open window! She considered. A bin! Right. She pushed the bin under the window. Somehow she scrambled up on to the bin. After a bit of thought she slipped off her shoes and held them in her mouth by the straps. Yuk! Awful taste.

She pulled the window open and pushed herself through head first, into what looked like a storeroom. At first, she was able to control her descent but suddenly she was shooting through the air. Crash! She hit the floor with a bang.

"Ooof!" she said. She slipped her shoes on just as two pages rushed in to see what was happening.

"Come on, dear, you're out."

They pulled her through the door into the room where the party was happening. They hurried her towards the exit, but suddenly a voice called out, "Wait! What's happening here?"

"We have caught someone who was trying to get in without a ticket, sire," said one of the pages.

"I've got a ticket! I just left it at home."

Everyone laughed. Ella realised that the party had come to a stop.

"Come here, my dear," said the Prince.

The pages brought her before the Prince.

"Pretty little thing," said the Prince. "Well, am I worth it?"

He threw his arms up, and a few people sniggered.

"\*\*\*\*\*!" she said quietly, so that only he could hear.

The Prince laughed, and she ran for the exit, in her heels, bumping into people on the way. She burst out of the door and flew down the steps.

The two large men watched her go.

"You left the window open, Smith."

"So it appears, Jones."

"She didn't make proper use of the opportunity."

"Poor girl. I'd better go and shut it. One's enough for a night."

Ella headed home, crying, expressing her opinion of the Prince and her life as she went. She stepped off the kerb and one of her heels broke off.

"Should've gone back and got the dratted ticket! Should've gone back and got the dratted ticket!"

She stopped and removed both shoes and carried them in her hand. A truck went past and the driver leant on his horn. She made a gesture at him.

She arrived home and went to her room and removed all her make-up, then changed into her pyjamas and went down and watched television.

After a while her Dad and step-Mum arrived home from their friends' house.

"Quiet evening?" said her Dad.

"You might say that," she answered, not exactly truthfully. "I think I'll wait up for the boys."

"OK, dear," said her step-mother. "We're going to bed."

She leapt up and hugged her step-mother. "I l-l-love you," she said.

Her step-mother patted her on the back. She looked over Ella's head at Ella's Dad questioningly. Ella's Dad indicated that he had no idea.

Ella settled down to watch the television, although she didn't see much of what appeared on the screen. Shortly after Council Noise Control shut down the party at one in the morning her step-brothers came home.

They walked in chatting and saw her waiting for them.

"Oh, the star turn," said Matt, the older brother.

She wailed. "Really?"

"Sorry, Ella. Yes, everyone was talking, but don't worry. Your mask was in place and no one, except us, guessed. Everyone was wondering who you were. We were the only ones to guess because we know you so well, and we weren't telling."

"Oh, thanks guys! I love you both!"

"Someone might work it out, though. There were a lot of people there that know you. Let's hope that they don't."

"Who would have thought that the Prince was such a ....."

"\*\*\*\*?" offered Robin. "Yes, it was pretty nasty."

"Oh no!" she said. "I've lost my mother's necklace."

"Go to bed, kid, it will be better in the morning. Maybe someone will hand it in. We'll ask."

Nevertheless, she spent a restless night. In the morning, another blow. The news was full of a story about a mystery interloper who had crashed the Prince's party. The interloper had been ejected, according to the inaccurate story, before she managed to approach the Prince. A fuzzy picture was shown. Ella cringed.

Then a shock. Her necklace was shown, together with a number to call. Robin and Matt looked at her. Ella realised that there was no way out.

"Er, Dad? Can I tell you something?"

The whole sorry story came out. Her Dad and her step-mother looked at each other.

“You can call, or not,” her Dad said.

“I’ll call,” she said.

She called the number and was given an appointment.

“Can you come with me, Mum? Please?” she asked her step-mother.

They turned up at the Summer Palace and were directed to a waiting room. It was partly panelled with walnut, and the doors and furniture were walnut. The top part of the walls was painted in an eggshell blue, and the ceiling ornaments were white. The lights and the fans were brass. There were portraits on the walls, and a very big painting of a large house. They had a long time to notice the details. Someone brought them some tea and biscuits.

Eventually the Crown Prince arrived, accompanied by a young Army officer, his brother. He sat down at the table with them.

“Hullo, sorry for the wait. It’s nice to meet you again. I’m very sorry for the way I behaved last night. I should not have made fun of you in front of everyone. You were correct when you called me that name. What’s your name, by the way?”

Ella swallowed. “Erm, I’m Ella. Do you have my necklace, sire? It was my Mum’s.”

The Crown Prince glanced at Ella’s step-mother.

“Step-mother,” Ella’s step-mother explained.

“Well, Ella, when you made your escape, you bumped into my brother, and your necklace caught on his uniform. Yes, he has your necklace.”

The young officer said “Hullo, Ella, I’m Mark. Unfortunately the chain snapped when your necklace caught on my uniform.”

He placed it on the table.

“If you permit me, I’ll get it mended before I return it to you. I want to.”

“Thank you. I’d like that.”

The Crown Prince said “You might like to know that I was severely told off by our parents for the way I treated you. And by Mark. And by pretty much everyone else who knows me. I realised pretty much right away that I had been a... what you called me. I sincerely apologise to you.”

“Thank you, sire,” said Ella. “I’m sorry I caused such a commotion. If only I’d remembered my ticket.”

They chatted for a short time, until the Princes had to leave. Ella found the Crown Prince to be charming, in spite of their unfortunate first meeting, but she liked the younger Prince better. She wondered without any real expectation if he would ask her out when he returned the necklace, and she couldn’t know that Prince Mark was planning to do exactly that. The future is unknown, but in at least one possible future, she was going to attend the Crown Prince’s wedding by the side of her husband, Prince Mark. Let’s hope that future came to pass.

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