

THE  
FORGOTTEN  
BOOK

MECHTHILD GLÄSER



FEIWEL AND FRIENDS

NEW YORK

A FEIWEL AND FRIENDS BOOK  
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*In the beginning was the Word*

*John 1:1*





## ONE NIGHT

SHE WAS CRYING AS SHE TURNED THE HANDLE AND TUGGED AT it. The window was stuck—it was old, antique, like everything else in this place. It was a place seemingly untouched by time, as if the decades simply blew past like leaves in the wind. A place where nothing ever changed, where seconds and years had no meaning. Even the night felt centuries old, as if this was the same night that had fallen for hundreds of years. Somber, blacker than black, it loomed over the treetops and cloaked the high walls the way it always had—and yet, things had changed. Things, people, and words.

And not necessarily in that order.

Her legs trembled as she climbed onto the window ledge, blinking back the tears and breathing in the ancient darkness. Not even the moon, it seemed, wanted any part in this—it was very high in the sky, very far away. But she'd known she was alone in this from

the start. She hesitated a moment longer, then closed her eyes, and everything happened in a flash. The night air flooded her lungs. The blood roared in her ears as she leaned forward, loosened her grip on the window frame, and slid her feet over the edge. Words flashed through her mind, trying to tempt her. But they couldn't reach her anymore—she was leaving them behind, just like everything else.

She jumped off the ledge and the voices in her head fell silent.

For the space of a heartbeat she was part of the never-ending night, and then the ground came up to meet her, fast. She was surprised in spite of herself.

The landing wasn't as hard as she'd feared. But it was hard enough to sprain her ankle. She gritted her teeth and ran. Her feet felt as though they were moving of their own accord.

Pain shot through her with every step, hot and sharp. But she kept running. She couldn't go back now, even if she'd wanted to. And it was too late, anyway—there was nothing she could do. No way of changing things. Not far to the Rhine.

He was waiting for her.

# 1



IT IS A TRUTH UNIVERSALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT RETURNING home after a long absence is one of the best feelings in the world. That's how I felt, anyway, when I arrived back at Stolzenburg one rainy Friday afternoon to find the keep swathed in fog and the castle courtyard gray in the hazy afternoon light. It was unusually cold for August.

Nevertheless I stood for a long moment outside the double entrance doors, closed my eyes, and breathed the smell of wet, age-old masonry deep into my lungs. Raindrops splashed down onto my face like a blustery welcoming committee, while the wind tugged at my ponytail as if trying to get it to dance.

At last! I was home at last!

This was the place I'd called home for the past four years, at any rate: the first place I'd ever known that felt like a real home.

I spread my arms wide and was about to spin on the spot for joy when I heard the noise of an approaching car and decided against it.

Through the gate came a gleaming black limousine, and out of it stepped Helena von Stein (the best student in my class, and currently head girl). She wafted toward me, opening an elegant umbrella.

I let my arms fall back to my sides.

“Emma.” Helena eyed my sodden suitcase and the mud stains on my red summer coat as the chauffeur lifted her luggage (suitcases, hatbox, and vanity case) out of the car. “Oh, dear. Did you *walk* here?” She raised one eyebrow.

“Hi, Helena.” I beamed at her. Not even Princess von Stein, as I liked to call her, could put me in a bad mood today. True, I’d had to walk some of the way to the castle because my dad had forgotten to pick me up at the airport again. In fact, I’d taken one train and two buses from Cologne Bonn Airport and then walked almost two miles from the village to the castle; all in all I’d been traveling for over eight hours. But I certainly wasn’t going to tell Helena that. “I like walking,” I said. “Anyway, how was your holiday? You didn’t get stalked by that boy at the pool again, did you?”

Helena’s lips twitched. “Of course not,” she said, pointing to her tanned face. “I’ve just got back from Mauritius, and it was amazing. And you? I’m guessing you went to see your mom in England again, right?” She made the word *England* sound not unlike a yawn. But Helena, whose parents were diplomats, had been to so many different countries that anything less than a trip to the moon probably wouldn’t have impressed her.

“This time we went on a road trip,” I offered nonetheless. “A, um, a cultural study tour, to be exact. It was fascinating.”

“Er, sure . . . how exciting. Anyway . . .” She flicked back her dark hair and followed her suitcases up the steps and into the castle before I could reply. Which was probably for the best, because I would honestly rather have dragged my suitcase another couple of miles uphill than give Helena any more details about my supposed “study tour.” And to think it had sounded like such a good idea when my mom had first suggested it. . . .

Initially, the fact that the summer holidays coincided with my mom’s new boyfriend’s lecture tour had seemed like a golden opportunity. “We’ve got invitations from all over the country,” Mom had gushed. “It means you’ll get to see a bit more of England this time, not just Cambridge.” Even though my mom had a habit of putting on a husky voice and obsessively touching up her makeup whenever John was around, I’d still been looking forward to spending the seven-week summer holiday with her. We’d made plans to explore London, Manchester, Brighton, and Newcastle together.

It soon transpired, however, that John (a distinguished professor of literature) didn’t approve of our proposed mother-daughter excursions. Instead he insisted we accompany him wherever he went, carrying his papers, pouring him glasses of water, and handing him pens with which to sign his books. By the end of the holiday, having sat through forty-two lectures in forty-two stuffy town halls the length and breadth of England, I felt that if I ever had to listen to John’s four-hour lecture on eighteenth-century women writers again, I would literally die of boredom. Some holiday this had been! But in spite of everything I’d decided to come out of it feeling positive—*re-energized*, even. True, I hadn’t spent weeks being “pestered” by a good-looking pool boy or the wealthy heir



to a Cornish country estate. But my holidays had been so dull that they might almost have been described as . . . *meditative*. Yes, that was definitely the right word. There were people who would have spent seven weeks on a bed of nails in a Tibetan mountain monastery to achieve the kind of inner enlightenment I'd achieved (in a less monastic fashion, admittedly) over the course of forty-two lectures in a series of British town halls.

Because, in between John's pompous speeches and my mom's breathless giggles at all his lame jokes, I'd gradually formulated a plan. I was sixteen years old now, and I felt it was time to take a few things in hand. Things that were long overdue. It was about time I challenged Princess von Stein for the role of head girl, for example. And tidied up the library. And started being more elegant and intelligent and independent in general. And then, of course, there was Frederick . . .

Once Helena had disappeared I thought about having another go at dancing in the rain, but I was afraid the chauffeur might come back at any moment and that the other pupils might start arriving—and besides, I was starting to get cold—so I decided against it.

Instead, I made do with turning my face to the sky and taking one more deep breath. Pure, cool Stolzenburg air, fresh with rain. It really did feel good to be back: back in Germany and back at the castle. The gardeners had even planted out some of the pots around the entrance with pink fuchsias, which I loved. I smiled to myself.

The new school year was starting on Monday and I, Emma Magdalena Morgenroth, felt readier than I had ever been. Ready for Year 11. Ready to grow up. I heaved my suitcase up the flight of

steps, squared my shoulders, and stepped inside the imposing entrance hall of Stolzenburg School.



That was the day I found the book.

Later on, I sometimes wondered what would have happened if I hadn't stumbled across it. If we'd never gone into the library in the first place. Or if I had found it, but I'd cast it aside, just shoved it away on a bookshelf somewhere. What would have happened then?

The west wing library was located, unsurprisingly, in the west wing of the castle, which was hardly ever used for day-to-day school life anymore. The classrooms were all in the northern wing of the castle and the common rooms and bedrooms where the school's elite boarders lived and slept were situated in the east wing. Most of the west wing, however, had stood empty since the last time the castle had been renovated some eighty years earlier.

At that time, one of the school's former headmasters had decided that the teaching staff should no longer be housed in the castle itself but in apartments in the neighboring farm buildings. Ever since then the west wing, which was also the oldest part of Stolzenburg Castle, had been used mainly for storing tattered old maps, discarded furniture, and boxes full of yellowing exercise books. With its meter-thick walls and stone staircases, it was difficult to heat, and the water pipes often froze in winter. Only the ballroom on the first floor was in regular use. The rooms on the floors above remained for the most part in a state of cold, dusty hibernation.

I'd always thought it was a bit of a waste, especially considering how beautiful the west wing library was. I'd had an inkling that

the room was going to be perfect for our purposes, and now that I saw it with my own eyes I was delighted: Bookshelves covered the walls from floor to wood-paneled ceiling. Even around the windows, shelves had been put in, and all of them were full of old, expensively bound books. (These had long ago been superseded by the school's media center, of course, which gave every student access to library books online.)

There was also an open fireplace and a huge oak desk, several armchairs and sofas with carved wooden feet, a small intarsia table, and an impressive chandelier, which must have dated right back to the early days of electric lighting. There were a few things that were surplus to requirements—broken bits of furniture, antique lamps, piles of tattered papers, boxes full of old atlases bedecked with a thick layer of dirt and cobwebs—but it wouldn't take long to get them out of the way. I rolled up the sleeves of my sweater.

"Nice," said Charlotte, taking a photo on her phone of the clutter around us; no doubt she would post it online later. "But are you sure your dad's okay with it?"

Charlotte was English, a little shorter and slimmer than me, and had the look of a porcelain doll with honey-colored curls. She had a thing about cats (the top she was wearing today had two black cats on it, with their tails entwined to form a heart) and she was also my best friend in the world. For four years now, ever since my first day at Stolzenburg, we'd sat next to each other in classes and shared all our secrets.

"'Course he is," I said. "The room never gets used, anyway." During the most boring holiday in the history of holidays, I'd pictured exactly how it was going to be: We would commandeer the

library and turn it into our own private retreat, somewhere to get away from the stress of lessons and the hustle and bustle of the dormitories. I was sure my dad would agree—he let me do whatever I wanted most of the time, so asking his permission was really just a formality. I'd run it by him when I got the chance.

We clambered over cardboard boxes and other assorted clutter. “Just look at all these books. Isn't this amazing?” I said as we stood in the center of the room. “And the fireplace! In winter we'll have a fire, drink tea, and read the classics while the grandfather clock strikes the hour and ice crystals form on the windows. It'll be lovely and cozy.”

Charlotte eyed me skeptically. “The classics? You mean like *Nathan the Wise*? And other such thrilling reads?”

She had a point. Charlotte clearly remembered my scathing comments about Lessing's eighteenth-century play, which we'd read the year before.

I pushed a rickety floor lamp out of the way. “It's not necessarily all about the books. I was thinking more of a kind of secret society.” I'd read an article recently about famous student fraternities in the USA, and ever since then I'd been toying with the idea of starting my own elite little club at Stolzenburg. This was one of the oldest and best schools in Europe, after all, and secretly I was imagining a society like Skull and Bones at Yale University. But without any embarrassing rituals like lying around naked in coffins and stuff. “We could just meet here and chat, watch films, do our homework, whatever. It'll be awesome.”

“The idea of not having to fight for space on the common room sofas does have a certain appeal,” Charlotte conceded. She looked

around the room for a moment, then sighed. “But we’re going to have to do some dusting.”

“Thank you!” I brushed my bangs out of my face and launched into a detailed explanation of my idea: “So, I’ve got it all planned out. The first thing we need to do is get rid of all this junk. I thought we could shove it in the bedroom opposite; there’s plenty of room in there. Though I don’t know if we’ll be able to carry everything ourselves. But we’ll give it a try. Then we’ll sweep the floor and get rid of the spiderwebs and their delightful inhabitants. And this chest of drawers here—oh!” Charlotte had suddenly enveloped me in a bear hug.

“I missed you. I didn’t even realize how much till now,” said Charlotte, still with her arms around me. She smelled a little of sea and sunscreen; she’d only just got back from holiday, too. Her family had been to Lanzarote. “I’m guessing it didn’t go the way you wanted with your mom?” she asked.

“Nah, it was fine,” I mumbled. Charlotte knew me too well. She knew that the more enthusiastically I threw myself into school life, the worse it meant things were going with my family. Although Mom and I hadn’t actually argued the whole holiday. “It was bearable. It was just . . .” I thought for a moment, wondering why the disappointment of the holiday was bothering me so much. Being bored wasn’t the end of the world, after all, but . . . “I think the whole thing just made me realize that I can’t expect my parents to sort anything out for me anymore. That’s all,” I explained at last.

It wasn’t exactly a groundbreaking realization, to be fair. I’d had to learn to rely on myself since my parents split up four years ago. My dad had been wrapped up in himself and his job as a

headmaster, and my mom was preoccupied with her own chaotic life in England. Since the age of twelve I'd been washing my own clothes, checking my own homework, and deciding what to have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

No, my realization was really more of an admission to myself that what I'd always thought of as a sort of temporary state of affairs was never going to change. My dad was always going to be a workaholic, and my mom was always going to be busy "finding herself." And I was sixteen now, and officially not a kid anymore. Only *I* could decide what to do with my life, and from now on that was exactly what I was going to do. It was that simple. From now on, I was going to be in charge of my own destiny.

Charlotte pulled at my ponytail. "All right then," she said. "Let's make this year our best one yet. And let's make this library our headquarters."

We grinned at each other and set to work. Together we lugged boxes and stacks of paper, three-legged chairs and crinkled lampshades into one of the rooms across the corridor. On top of those we piled globes with out-of-date borders, moth-eaten cushions, and moldy tennis rackets. It took nearly two hours to empty the library of all the things we didn't need. Eventually, however, all that remained was an old chest of drawers in the middle of the room, which absolutely refused to budge. The thing weighed a ton! We leaned our whole weight against it, dug in our heels, and pushed and pulled with all our strength. But the beast didn't move an inch.

After a while Hannah (my new roommate—today was her first day at Stolzenburg) came to give us a hand. But not even our combined strength was enough to shift the chest of drawers. "Do you

reckon it's screwed to the floor?" Hannah panted as she and Charlotte pushed and I pulled as hard as I could.

"It feels like it's put down roots," I grunted through gritted teeth. "Anchored itself in the bowels of the earth. They probably built the whole castle around this chest of drawers."

Hannah giggled.

The two of us had immediately clicked. I'd taken to Hannah the moment I'd seen her empty the contents of her suitcase unceremoniously into her closet, saying it didn't matter because she was going to be rummaging through her clothes like a raccoon every morning, anyway.

Of course, I would have loved to share a room with Charlotte now that Francesca, my old roommate, had left Stolzenburg. But Charlotte had been sharing with Princess von Stein for years, and Mrs. Bröder-Strauchhaus—who taught biology and math, and was also in charge of bedroom allocations—was less than accommodating when it came to changing people's sleeping arrangements. (She had some inane reason for this—something to do with us developing good social skills.)

Luckily, Charlotte was the most tolerant and good-natured person I knew and had managed to put up with Helena von Stein's moods without complaint since Year 6. We were also lucky in that Hannah (unlike Charlotte and me) was not afraid of spiders, and she released several of them in quick succession into the ivy outside the library window.

Meanwhile, Charlotte swept the wooden floor and I confronted the chest of drawers again. I'd decided to empty it out. That would make it lighter—hopefully light enough to lift. I started rifling

through the drawers. First I unearthed a collection of hideous dried flower arrangements, then a stack of even uglier painted porcelain plates. These were followed by an assortment of candlesticks, broken bits of soap, and yellowed handkerchiefs.

And then I found the book.

It was inside a sort of secret compartment, hidden under a wooden slat in the bottom drawer that I'd almost overlooked. The grooves in the wood around the edges of the slat were practically invisible, and it was only when I happened to graze my left wrist on one of them and thought I'd gotten a splinter that I noticed them at all. But then I ran my fingertips over the bottom of the drawer again, and sure enough I felt the furrows in the wood around the edges of the slat. I dug my fingernails in underneath it, jiggled it about a bit, and finally managed to lift it out. In a compartment below, one that looked specially designed for the purpose, lay the book.

It was old. You could see that from the worn, dark cloth binding. The corners were frayed, and the fabric was so stained that I couldn't even tell what color it must once have been. Gray? Brown? Blue? I lifted the book carefully out of its hiding place. It was heavier than I'd expected, and warmer. *Alive*, I thought, and the thought startled me.

I rubbed the cover with my sleeve, raising a little cloud of dust. As I wiped the dust away, delicate lines became visible on the cloth binding: not letters, not a title, but the vague outline of a figure imprinted on the fabric. I could only guess what it was supposed to be. Was it a man? Or . . . no, the figure didn't really look human. It had what looked like curling horns on its head, and its legs were strangely crooked.



I ran my fingers over the rough fabric. What was inside this book? Why had someone hidden it? And from whom?

Suddenly there was a whispering in the air, a sigh, so quiet that I felt rather than heard it. A rustling murmur, a hum that made the hairs on the backs of my arms stand on end. It sounded almost like a name.

My name.

Er—okay . . .

*Emma*, whispered the book. *Emmaa*.

I shivered, then shook my head firmly. This was ridiculous! My ears were obviously playing tricks on me.

It had been a long day, after all. Too long. The flight back from England, the journey from the airport to the castle, and the hours spent clearing out the library. I'd been on my feet for so long, it was no wonder I was in a bit of a daze. I was completely worn out: Obviously the book was *not* calling my name, or anything else for that matter. It certainly wasn't alive. I needed to get a grip. Or some sleep. I yawned.

"Let's sort out the rest another time. I reckon that's enough for today," I announced after a moment. But I found it hard to tear my gaze away from the shadowy figure on the front of the book.

When I did, I saw that Charlotte and Hannah had already called a halt to the cleanup operation. The broom stood propped against the wall in one corner, and my friends were leaning out of the window, peering down into the courtyard below.

"Are they students here?" Hannah was asking. She stood up on tiptoe, leaning out of the open window as far as she could go without falling.

“I don’t think so,” Charlotte replied. “They look a bit too old—though it’s hard to tell from up here.”

“Well, they’re not bad-looking—I can tell *that* from here!”

“Hmm,” said Charlotte, looking over her shoulder at me. “Do you know these guys?”

I joined them at the window in time to see two tall young men climbing the steps to the entrance. They disappeared into the castle before I could catch a glimpse of their faces. “I don’t think so,” I said, looking at the Mini Cooper with the British license plate that was parked on the gravel right at the foot of the steps. “But whoever they are, they clearly think they’re too important to use a parking space like the rest of us mere mortals.”



I’d promised my dad I’d eat dinner with him that evening. So when Charlotte and Hannah eventually set off for the dining hall, I made my way across the courtyard to my dad’s apartment.

My dad lived in the old coach house, in an apartment with light parquet floors and windows that looked out over the gardens. On the walls hung a collection of African masks and drums. Dad himself had never left Europe (partly due to his fear of flying) but he often got presents from parents or ex-pupils or people who were both at the same time. It was well known that he had a penchant for the exotic.

So, when we sat down to dinner I was relieved to see that none of his students had brought him back honey-roasted locusts or other such insectile delicacies from their travels this year. The last time we’d eaten together before I left for England there’d been insects

on the menu, and it had put a bit of a damper on things. However nutritious Dad claimed they were, I was never—I repeat, *never*—going to let an exoskeleton pass my lips. And any creature with more than four legs was also out of the question.

Luckily, however, he'd ordered tonight's dinner from my favorite Chinese restaurant, and the polished mahogany table was littered with boxes, chopsticks, and paper napkins.

"My poor little Emma," Dad said now for the third time, picking at his sweet and sour chicken (and probably inwardly lamenting the fact that it wasn't as crisp and crunchy as a giant grasshopper). "I'm so sorry I wasn't there to pick you up. I hope you didn't catch cold. And in the pouring rain, too! Why didn't you call me?"

"I did. Your phone was off." As usual. My dad and modern technology really did not mix. The fact that he'd finally started communicating by email at work was nothing short of a miracle. If he'd had his way, he would still have been writing letters on a typewriter and only ever using the Internet to observe other countries from a safe distance on Google Earth. If at all. The Internet, according to my dad, was a force for evil, and a source of "uncontrolled overstimulation." (At least that was how he'd described it eighteen years ago in his famous parenting guide *The Modern Child*, a seminal reference work that appeared on many a parental bookshelf to this day, and which was essentially responsible for landing Dad this job and for the fact that I—perhaps the ultimate "modern child"—had been permitted to have a smartphone last year only after a series of tense negotiations.)

"What about the landline in my office?" my dad continued. "You could have reached me there."

“It was busy.”

“Really? All that time?”

I raised my eyebrows. “I tried seven times. At one, at quarter past, and half past, at quarter to two, at . . .”

My dad put his head in his hands and sighed. “Ah, yes—that blasted sheikh. Exasperating! He seems to want to know the shoe size of every member of staff at the school before he will even consider sending his son here,” he muttered. “I was on the phone with him for three hours. I feel a migraine coming on just thinking about it.”

If you’d had to hazard a guess at my dad’s age—given his aversion to technology and the myriad ailments and illnesses he suffered from (or thought he suffered from) on a daily basis—you could have been forgiven for thinking he was about 120 years old. In actual fact he would be celebrating his fifty-sixth birthday in two months’ time. But his eccentric manner belied his age (and as an eminent authority on pedagogical matters and a holder of two PhDs, he got away with it without anybody questioning his ability to manage an elite institution like Stolzenburg).

“How did it go with your mother?” he inquired between two mouthfuls of rice.

“Fine. She says hi,” I said, taking a bite out of a spring roll. I usually tried to avoid talking to Dad about Mom whenever possible. This was because of the look that came into his eyes at the slightest mention of her—a look that gave him the air of a mournful old dog that has just been kicked. Now, as ever, he looked as if he were simply awaiting the next blow.

“Thanks. Is she . . . is everything all right?” he went on gamely.

“Oh, yes—she’s still living in Cambridge. She only cooks ayurvedic meals now. *When* she cooks, that is. We mostly ended up having pizza. . . . Well, you know what she’s like.” I cleared my throat. “But how was your summer, anyway?”

“Hmm . . .” He swallowed a mouthful of rice and then, visibly relieved at the change of topic, launched into a detailed account of his recurring sore throats; problems with the caretaker, Mr. Schade; bouts of fever; applications from new students and meetings with prospective parents; and, of course, the attack of flu that had left him a shadow of his former self. Not to mention the migraines he’d been having the past few days. “And now these two young men turn up here unannounced, demanding to be housed here for several weeks. As if we had anywhere to put them, with three hundred students on the waiting list! But what am I supposed to do—I can’t exactly have them camping out in the courtyard, can I?” he concluded, and he began massaging the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger, presumably to fend off another migraine.

“Why not?”

He sniffed. “Well, I’d have no qualms about sending one of them packing—a certain Toby Bell—I don’t know him from Adam. But the other one, you see, is Darcy de Winter, which means, of course . . . But all I could offer them at such short notice was a couple of rooms in the west wing.”

“I see,” I mumbled with my mouth full, though I didn’t see at all. No, hang on . . . the name de Winter *did* ring a bell. It was the name of the English lord whose family had once lived at Stolzenburg and had set up the school. It was well documented that a son of the

Stolzenburg family had married into a branch of the British de Winter family several hundred years ago, and that when the Stolzenburg line had died out the castle had passed to the de Winters. I'd never heard of a boy called Darcy de Winter, though. "Did they say what they're doing here?"

"Not exactly. Apparently they're on a road trip around Europe and thought they'd make a stop here."

"For several weeks? It's not like there's a lot to see round here."

Dad sighed.

"Strange," I murmured, but my mind had already started to wander, from the boys who were to stay in the west wing to my beautiful library and from the library to the book I'd found. Especially the book.

Somehow I just hadn't been able to bring myself to put it back in its secret compartment, so I'd taken it away with me for a closer look. I wasn't quite sure why. There was just something about that book—something that made me curious. Intrigued, even.

"Anyway, I've said they could have two of the old guest rooms on the second floor. I was planning to make them available for the sheikh's entourage, in case he should decide to grace us with his presence, but it'll be all right for a few nights, I suppose, and after that we'll see," Dad went on. I was still thinking about the book, lying in my shoulder bag a few inches from my chair, waiting to be read. It looked like a perfectly ordinary book, the same as hundreds or possibly thousands of others in this castle. It was probably just an old textbook. Or a deathly dull treatise on garden herbs, or a corny old-fashioned love story. Nothing that could possibly be of any interest to me. And yet . . .



Wanting, if nothing else, to silence the nagging voice in my head that kept telling me there was something special about the book, I took it out again later that evening when I got back to my room.

As Hannah slept soundly in the bed opposite mine, dressed in a mismatched pair of pajamas (the top was pink and the bottoms were red with little Santa Clauses on them), I leafed carefully through the book by the light of my bedside lamp. I was struggling to stay awake, but I wanted to do this before settling down for the night. A sneaking suspicion that you might not be of sound mind is not exactly conducive to a good night's sleep.

As it turned out, of course, the book was just a book—just as I'd expected—though not a novel or a gardener's handbook. It seemed to be some kind of chronicle. I thought at first that it was a diary, because it was full of dates followed by separate paragraphs. All the entries were written by hand, and by lots of different people. The paragraphs at the beginning of the book were in an archaic script full of flourishes—more painted than written—but there were passages in the middle written with fountain pen in an old-fashioned hand, and sections toward the end with more recent dates that someone had written in ballpoint, and in some places even in felt tip.

Most of the entries, as far as I could make out, talked about Stolzenburg. Chroniclers from different eras had recorded all sorts of events, both major and minor, throughout the castle's history. I found accounts of a kitchen fire in the summer of 1734, the

founding of the school in 1825, and an unusually large snowfall in 1918. One diarist had written about the night-time bombing raids during the Second World War, and someone else had described the opening of the new chemistry lab five years ago. And the paper was so gossamer-thin that the book must have a lot more pages than I'd thought at first glance.

Okay, so the book was a bit special after all. Just not in a freaky, name-whispering way.

I flicked back and forth through the pages for a while. Right at the beginning was a very old text that seemed to date back to the time when the castle had first been built. It even mentioned the former monastery (which now lay in ruins in the woods near the castle) and the monks who had once lived there and produced a special type of paper from which to make their books.

A few chapters on, I found an ink drawing of the figure on the cover. Somebody had captured the creature on paper in sharp pen strokes, and it was much clearer here than in the embossed image on the cloth binding. Its upper body was human, but it had the legs of a goat and cloven hooves. From its misshapen head sprouted two huge, curling horns encircled by a crown of leaves and insects. It reminded me of those creatures you find in ancient myths and legends—a faun, perhaps. Yes, a faun, with a mournful look in its eyes.

I flicked through to the entries written after Stolzenburg had become a school. This was the most interesting part of the book. There were descriptions of balls, new headmasters and headmistresses, and visits from peers and politicians and famous actors. Information that might be worth its weight in gold next spring, when the school would vote to pick the next head girl.



Information that meant—I felt sure of it—I had been destined to find this book.

Yawning, I put it down on my bedside table. I'd have a proper read through it tomorrow, when I felt a bit more awake.



I soon drifted into an uneasy sleep, full of disorienting dreams. In one of them, the west wing library had turned into a classroom. John was the teacher, and he was giving one of his interminable literary lectures. To my surprise, my classmates were hanging on his every word as if they found the whole thing incredibly exciting. Charlotte in particular was absolutely spellbound. Helena, meanwhile, who was sitting in the row in front of me, turned round and asked me why I'd walked all that way in the rain—my hair was a mess. Frederick, in the seat next to mine, said it didn't matter: Even with wet hair I was gorgeous. And behind the screen where John's Power-Point presentation was displayed, oblivious to everything around them, my parents were dancing the tango.

Then, all of a sudden, something landed on my hand.

An animal.

For a moment I was afraid it was one of the spiders Hannah had released into the ivy. I often had nightmares about spiders. But even as I wondered how it was that I was able to think so clearly in a dream, I realized the creature was not a spider at all but a kind of dragonfly. It was a strange color for a dragonfly, though: Instead of a shimmering bluish-green body, it had a snow-white back and pearly round eyes. There were gray flecks on its body that, upon closer inspection, turned out to be tiny

little letters. This was probably because the thing on my hand was not a real live dragonfly but an elaborately folded piece of paper made to look like an insect. A piece of origami fashioned from the page of a book, perhaps.

But then, just as I was thinking this, the paper dragonfly started to flutter its shimmering wings and rose into the air. It buzzed away over the heads of my classmates and flew in a circle around John and then my parents. Then it came back to me, flew away again, came back again.

Nobody in the dream seemed to be aware of the creature. But it looked as if it wanted me to follow it. I got up from my seat and clambered over the legs and schoolbags of my fellow students.

The paper dragonfly was flying more quickly now. It led me through the school corridors and out of the castle, through the castle gardens and deep into the woods. The moonlight gleamed on its blanched paper body and its wings rustled quietly like pages turning.

Not until we reached the bank of the river did the creature come to a halt. It landed on a rock (or was it the remnants of an old stone wall?) and stretched out its antennae toward me. I crouched down in front of it in the grass and watched it crawl on its delicate little paper legs until it was only inches away from my face. It blinked its pearly eyes as I tried to decipher the letters and words on its body.

*Emma*, whispered the dragonfly suddenly, making me jump.  
*Emmmaaa!*

“This is ridiculous,” I scoffed. My breath sent the dragonfly tumbling backward, almost into the water. But it managed to cling

on to the rock and immediately came crawling back toward me. *Emma*, it whispered again. *Emmmaaa!*

“Stop it,” I said. “You’re made of paper. You can’t fly and you can’t talk.”

But the dragonfly said my name again, and this time I’d had enough. I took a deep breath and blew the dragonfly off the rock.

It rustled angrily as it whirled away from me, far, far away across the moonlit Rhine.

A moment later I woke up in my own bed, bewildered. A talking dragonfly? I’d had some bizarre dreams in my time, but this one was definitely the weirdest!

13<sup>th</sup> August, in the year of our Lord  
sixteen hundred and three

On this day the brothers from the Abbey of Saint George did deliver to my master, His Grace the Earl of Stolzenburg, the three reams of paper that they had promised him from their new paper mill, whereupon His Grace requested that they make and bind six books and decorate them with beautiful illustrations, like to this volume that His Grace hath kindly given me for my records. The Earl doth wish to give the six illuminated books as a gift to his most excellent lady wife upon the birth of his second child.

Unhappily one of the brothers was crushed between the mill wheels as he worked, and the monks have asked that they might be given a week’s grace to bury their

brother and mourn his death. The Earl hath most graciously granted their request.

Yet since the unfortunate event took place, some of the holy brothers do seem to fear the mill and the paper that doth issue from it. 'Tis likely owing to the shock they suffered, for many of the men did witness the accident with their own eyes.



## 2



DARCY DE WINTER AND TOBY BELL—GOOD-LOOKING AND expensively dressed—entered the castle vaults around quarter past nine the next evening. Since arriving at Stolzenburg they had been *the* primary topic of conversation among the students, particularly the girls. But until now only a few people had been able to catch a glimpse of them—they’d been holed up somewhere in the west wing. I still hadn’t met them, either, and I observed them with curiosity as they entered the main vault where the dance floor was.

Hannah’s long-distance assessment had been accurate: They were an attractive pair. One was tall and blond and covered in freckles, and looked as though he’d spent the summer surfing on the west coast of America. He grinned at the partying students as he squeezed through the crowd to the bar.

His friend, on the other hand, was of a much less sunny disposition; his mouth was set in a sullen scowl. He, too, was tall, half

a head taller than his friend, with neatly parted dark hair that was exactly the same color as his eyes. Unlike the surfer, he hovered by the door as if wondering whether he should stay or go.

His doubts were not unfounded, as far as I was concerned. No one had invited him, after all. The “First Lesson” (the name of the party that had been held on the last Saturday before the start of term for as long as anybody could remember) was organized entirely by Stolzenburg students. Once upon a time, when education had been more of a luxury than it was now, the students really had attended their first lessons on the Saturday before term started. Pipe-smoking professors with whiskers and stern faces had taken it in turns to give inaugural lectures, and the assembled students had sat through these lectures on hard, uncomfortable chairs until late into the night (preoccupied mainly, I imagined, with trying not to fall asleep).

But the First Lesson had long since been declared a teacher-free zone. Not even Frederick had come, which I was a bit annoyed about. I’d taken extra care with my appearance and Charlotte had put my hair up in an elaborate bun. But Frederick was no longer a student here—he just worked on the estate during the summer holidays. Of course I understood why he hadn’t come, but I’d been hoping until the last moment that he would.

So what were the two unexpected visitors doing at the party? Nobody but me seemed to mind very much that they’d showed up: On the contrary, the uninvited guests had soon found themselves surrounded by a large gaggle of female students.

I sighed and turned my mind back to more important matters. The decorations, for example. This year it had been my class’s turn to organize the party, and before the holidays Charlotte and I had

spent several weeks' worth of art lessons making decorations out of papier-mâché and tinfoil. This was another school tradition: The outgoing students picked a theme for the next academic year, and the students in the years below had to organize the First Lesson around that theme. This year it was *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and relatively speaking I felt we'd got off pretty lightly.

I still shuddered to think of the spider-themed party we'd had the year before last. There'd been hairy legs and fake cobwebs strung up everywhere, and unfortunately it had been impossible to tell them apart from the real thing (of which there are a fair few in the castle vaults). I was much happier with our papier-mâché planets. At least they didn't have legs.

It had taken Charlotte, Hannah, and me almost all day to arrange the decorations the way we wanted them. The lower years in particular seemed impressed with our efforts (and I hoped they would remember that fact when the head girl elections came around next spring). The pièce de résistance was a huge satellite made from shoe boxes and mirror shards, with a built-in motor that made it rotate like a disco ball. In theory, anyway.

I was just wondering whether it would be a really bad idea to go and stand on a chair in the middle of the dance floor and try to fix the stationary satellite while everyone around me danced to an \*NSYNC song (the playlist was also from 2001), when I spotted Hannah standing by the wall gazing at Sinan, a boy in our class, as he sipped on a lemonade. She was absentmindedly tugging at the bow on her dress, which already looked pretty ruffled. Uh-oh.

"Everything okay?" I asked once I'd worked my way over to her.



Hannah nodded. She was still gazing at Sinan, who was leaning against the wall a few feet away from us.

“You’re . . . um . . . you’re being a little obvious,” I ventured cautiously. “Shall we go over there?”

“Over where?”

I nodded in Sinan’s direction.

Hannah blushed. “What d’you mean? What makes you say . . . ?” She looked down at the crumpled bow.

“Come on. I’ll introduce you.”

“What? No! I don’t know. No, let’s not.” Hannah’s face had gone as red as a cooked crab. A Madonna song was playing now, and the surfer dude was dancing—to the great annoyance of all the Year 7s—with . . . Charlotte! The two of them seemed to be getting on swimmingly. The surfer’s friend, however, was still leaning against the door with his arms folded, surveying the room with a bad-tempered expression. Why was he even still here, since he so clearly thought the party was rubbish?

No, Charlotte had the right idea—we were here to have fun. Determinedly linking arms with Hannah, I pulled her onto the dance floor. “Come on then. Let’s dance,” I said, and we lost ourselves in the music, spinning each other round and round as we celebrated the beginning of the new school year.

We were in Year 11! My fifth year, and Hannah’s first, at the best school in the country—maybe even the world! “You’re going to be so glad you came here,” I told her. “Stolzenburg is amazing.”

“I know!” Hannah called happily, as Megan Stevens danced past us with Karl Alexander von Stittlich-Rüppin (he came from an

old aristocratic Swedish family, hence the ridiculous name) yelling, “Damn right, baby!”

Charlotte danced to a few more songs with the surfer, and after a while the two of them came over to join us.

“This is Toby,” said Charlotte. She was slightly out of breath, and her eyes were shining.

“Hi. I’m Emma, and this is Hannah.”

“Nice to meet you. Do you girls want a drink?”

We nodded.

“I’ll be right back.” He disappeared into the crowd.

“He seems nice,” I said as soon as he’d gone, studying Charlotte attentively.

She grinned. “He is. Super *super* nice, actually.” Her cheeks were a bit flushed, too. “Isn’t his accent the cutest thing ever?”

I couldn’t help laughing. “It’s exactly the same as yours, Charlotte. Probably something to do with the fact that you’re both English.” Stolzenburg had always taken lots of British students; it was a very international school. Foreign accents were nothing unusual here.

“But *still*,” sighed Charlotte.

“Did he tell you what’s wrong with his friend?” I gestured toward the party pooper in the corner. “He seems to be hating every minute of this.”

“I didn’t ask,” said Charlotte. “But I remembered something—the de Winters used to be students here. Till about four years ago. Darcy and his twin sister, they must have been about sixteen then—I was twelve. I only saw them a couple of times. And then

after—you know—what happened to Gina, Darcy left and went to Eton.”

“Was that *her*?” I asked.

Charlotte nodded, and Hannah asked, “Who?”

“Gina de Winter,” I murmured. Yes, now that Charlotte mentioned it . . .

Just then, Toby returned holding four Cokes.

“Thanks.” Charlotte beamed at him as if he’d just saved the world, and sipped at her Coke.

I took a sip of mine, too. “So,” I began, looking the surfer dude square in his blue eyes. “Who are you guys, and what are you doing in our castle?”

He smiled. “Darcy and I are at Oxford together,” he explained. “But we don’t have any lectures till next month so we decided to take a road trip around Europe. We’ve just come through France and we thought we’d stop off here. Darcy reckons he owns the place.” He grinned and made a sweeping gesture that I took to indicate not only the vault where we were standing but all the floors above our heads.

I sniffed. “Well, I very much doubt that he *personally* owns this whole castle.” Unbelievable! Toby must have misunderstood. The school was a charitable foundation, and . . . I definitely shouldn’t have drunk so much Coke. I was on my third glass of the evening. “Back in a minute,” I said.

When I returned from the toilet a few minutes later, Darcy had at least stopped glowering silently in the corner. Unfortunately he was now talking to Princess von Stein, of all people.

“. . . kids’ disco with all these stupid decorations . . . looks like

a primary school, doesn't it? And that shoe-box satellite! It's hilarious!" Helena was exclaiming as I walked past. She pointed at the papier-mâché planets above our heads.

I came to an abrupt halt.

Darcy nodded. "Ridiculous. But what do you expect—Stolzenburg is basically the whole world to these kids, and this party is the highlight of their year."

"Not mine," said Helena.

"I know." He heaved a sigh. Why? I wondered. Because he'd turned up here uninvited? Because the decorations were not to his taste? Seriously?

"Hello," I said loudly, before I could change my mind.

Darcy de Winter turned and fixed me with the same look that had already caused so many of the younger girls to beat a hasty retreat. It was a cold, haughty look, and there was an inscrutable expression in his dark eyes.

Nevertheless, I smiled my most endearing smile and pretended not to have heard what he'd said about our lack of sophistication. "I'm Emma. I heard you used to be a student here. Welcome back! Are you not enjoying the party?" I asked with studied friendliness.

"No, not particularly," he replied. He was about to turn away again, but quick as a flash I inserted myself between him and Helena, who was forced to take a step backward. "It's, um . . . it's a shame you've found it boring," I went on. What was I even doing here? I should have just left him to it—if he wanted to stand here sulking all night, that was up to him. It was no skin off my nose. I decided to go straight back to my friends.

But my feet felt rooted to the spot.

He frowned, suddenly seeming to properly see me for the first time. “Er—excuse me, do we know each other?”

“No. I’m Emma.”

“Yes, you said.”

“Yes.”

“Mhm.”

We stared at each other. His nose really was very aristocratic. As if it was accustomed to being wrinkled in disdain at every opportunity. And indeed, it was starting to wrinkle a bit now. In amusement, or in contempt? Or a mixture of the two? And why on earth was I still standing here talking to this thoroughly unpleasant person? Oh God! The giant bun on the top of my head must have been interfering with the proper working of my brain. I took a deep breath. The moment dragged on.

“What do you want, Emma?” Helena asked eventually.

“Can we help you?” added Darcy.

“Er—no. It’s just that I . . . *we* happen to like our ‘kids’ disco,’” I informed him without looking at Helena. My thoughts were gradually becoming clearer. “Perhaps you’ve forgotten, but the First Lesson is supposed to be for everyone—including the younger students. It’s about doing something together, something that everyone at Stolzenburg can get involved in. *We* happen to think that’s important.”

Darcy’s lips twitched. “So I see. I didn’t mean to offend you—I’m just not really in the party mood.”

“No worries.” I made a sound that vaguely resembled a laugh. “It takes more than that to offend me.”

“Really?” He raised one eyebrow. “You look a little annoyed, if I’m honest.”

“No, no. I just noticed you’ve been standing here for about twelve songs looking as if you were being subjected to a particularly cruel form of torture. And since I’m the school council representative, I thought I’d come and ask why?”

“Well, Emma the school council representative: If you really want to know, Toby persuaded me to come. But forgive me if I’m not fantastically excited about hanging out with a load of thirteen-year-olds in a cellar decorated with balloons and tinfoil, dancing to the songs that were in the charts twenty years ago. Community spirit or no community spirit,” he replied, as I finally started to regain control of my feet.

“That’s a shame,” I said. “You know, sometimes you can have a much better night if you just forget about the big wide world and all its hipster clubs for a while. Even if that involves cardboard satellites.” I turned to go.

“Oh, Emma,” sighed Helena. “Ignore her, Darcy. She’s been gluing mirror shards to shoe boxes for weeks: She’s probably still high from the fumes. Shall we go and get a drink?”

I turned away and headed off across the dance floor.

“Thanks, I was actually just leaving, anyway,” I heard Darcy say before a new song came on and the DJ turned the volume up full blast.



It took me a long time to get to sleep that night. The First Lesson had finished, as always, at midnight on the dot, and on the way back

to our room Hannah and I had been treated to a detailed account of Toby Bell's freckles, his sense of humor, the dimples in his cheeks, and, of course, his accent, which was apparently the cutest thing in the world *ever*. Charlotte was walking on air—but I was still fuming about Darcy de Winter.

“The party wasn't stupid,” I muttered at last, when Hannah and I were both tucked up in bed. “That's just how we do things at Stolzenburg.”

Hannah sighed. “I thought it was awesome and you did a brilliant job of organizing everything. Why are you letting that guy get to you so much? I hardly even noticed him. And the two of them will probably be off on their travels again soon, anyway.”

“Don't let Charlotte hear you say that.”

“Well, it's true. What's he doing here, anyway? Has he just come back to reminisce?”

“Hmm.”

As far as I knew, Darcy had left the school not long before I'd started, because of the girl who'd gone missing—Gina de Winter, his twin sister. I'd heard about what had happened, of course. Gina had disappeared a few months before my dad had taken the job as headmaster. In fact, it was rumored that her disappearance was the real reason the previous headmaster, Mr. Bäuerle, had finally decided to retire. Gina had been a quiet student, people said, unassuming but friendly. She'd joined the drama club to help her get over her shyness.

And then, one night, she'd suddenly vanished without a trace. Nobody knew where she'd gone. She hadn't taken any of her belongings with her and she hadn't triggered the castle's alarm

system. The police had mounted a search for her but had found nothing, and eventually closed their investigation. Gina had never been seen again. Naturally, rumors abounded at Stolzenburg as to why she had disappeared, from abduction to a romantic elopement with a mysterious stranger. Some people even said Gina had gone to America to pursue a singing career and was earning a living by appearing in TV commercials.

Either way, her disappearance had attracted a lot of attention, and her brother had returned to England shortly afterward. And he probably wasn't going to stay long at Stolzenburg this time, either. Hannah was right: I shouldn't let him get to me. With any luck he would leave as quickly as he'd arrived. Although I hoped his friend might stick around a little while longer, for Charlotte's sake. I'd hardly ever seen her look so happy.

The last time Charlotte had been this excited was in the run-up to her visit with the Queen last autumn. Her family had been invited to tea at Buckingham Palace along with a select handful of other guests, and Charlotte had spent weeks planning what she was going to wear. Unfortunately, however, the visit had ended in disaster, and Charlotte and her younger sister, June, had been splashed across the front page of the British tabloid the *Sun*. Charlotte was still so embarrassed by the "incident" that we'd never spoken of it since. She even feared she might never be able to show her face again in her native England. I was sure people would forget about the story in time (and anyway, it wasn't Charlotte's fault that she and June had eaten some bacon of questionable quality that morning and that they'd both started to feel queasy right in the middle of their audience with the Queen). Toby hadn't mentioned the



incident at all yet. Perhaps he hadn't heard about it—after all, not everybody in England read the *Sun*, thank goodness.

The *Sun*, I thought . . . what a strange name for a newspaper. Had they called it that because it came out in the morning? Or did it have something to do with the day of the week?

At some point during these ruminations I must have fallen asleep, because I suddenly became aware that the illuminated numbers on my alarm clock read 03:47 and that I was freezing cold.

And no wonder, because the bedroom window was wide open. I switched on my bedside lamp and glanced over at Hannah. But she was fast asleep with the duvet pulled up over her head, a muffled snoring noise issuing from beneath it. Why had she opened the window? Did she want us to freeze to death? Or had the window not been properly closed in the first place, and blown open in the wind?

The curtains were billowing in a rather ghostly way, and it took a certain amount of willpower to leave my warm bed. I scurried quickly over to the window and closed it, turned up the dial on the little radiator, and finally fished a pair of thick socks and a woolen blanket out of the wardrobe before crawling back into bed. It was a very cold night for the end of August. It was odd how the temperature had plummeted over the last few days.

I carried on shivering for a little while, but eventually I started to warm up under my multiple blankets. My eyelids began to droop. I felt around for the switch to turn off my bedside lamp. My fingertips brushed paper and frayed cloth and . . . hang on. Had the wind really been that strong? I turned my head and blinked.

Suddenly I was wide awake again.

The book was open.

It was still lying where I'd left it, on top of the little bedside table by my pillow. But now it was open, to a page fairly near the end. I picked the book up and looked at it more closely.

The diary entry that filled these pages was one of the more recent ones, written in modern handwriting in what looked like felt-tip pen. It was dated to an evening in August four years earlier. In fact, it seemed to be talking about that year's First Lesson. I skimmed a few lines and sighed. The text gave a detailed description of people, dresses, drinks, and music, none of which I had a burning desire to read about at four o'clock in the morning. I let the pages slip through my fingers, and as I did so I caught a glimpse of something about smoked salmon canapés, mmm . . .

Now I came to think of it, I realized I was quite peckish. There hadn't been any snacks at the party this year, and it was several hours since we'd had dinner. And I really liked smoked salmon. And canapés. And my stomach had now started to rumble. Damn it!

With a great deal of effort I managed to haul myself out of bed once more, this time with the intention of creeping downstairs to the kitchens and making myself a cheese sandwich. I pulled on a sweatshirt over my pajamas, picked up the book and my flashlight, and set off down the dark hallway. The thick carpets swallowed up my footsteps and made me feel as if I was gliding soundlessly along the castle corridors. The building itself, however, was far from silent—it was never that. There was always a creaking from somewhere in the woodwork, a rustling in some dark corner. Shadows danced across the paintings and suits of armor. I was used to it by now, after four years at the school, and it didn't scare me at all. Stolzenburg wasn't reputed to be a haunted castle, and even if it had

been, it wouldn't have bothered me: I didn't believe in all that crap. Stolzenburg was my home.

I carried on flicking through the diary as I walked, the beam of my flashlight revealing entry after entry penned in felt-tip. Whoever had last written in this book had certainly been prolific.

Downstairs, in the main kitchen, there was a fridge that had been the target of nighttime raids by Stolzenburg students for generations. It was not my first foray to the fridge, and I soon found what I was looking for and more. Ten minutes later, armed with a cheese sandwich, a carton of chocolate milk, and a banana, I headed back to my bedroom. But when I got there and pushed open the door, a chill ran down my spine.

Hannah was lying in the same position as when I'd left. She was still snoring lightly, wrapped up in her duvet, sound asleep. And everything else in the room looked exactly the same as before.

Except the window.

The window was open again.

~~In the year of our Lord, blah blah~~

August 2013

The venerable students of Stolzenburg celebrated the beginning of the school year again as usual this summer. The smoked salmon canapés donated by Mr. Bäuerle were delicious, but unfortunately they ran out very quickly. I should have grabbed myself a handful right at the start.

Frederick Larch was the hero of the hour: He managed

to repair the speakers after they got knocked off their stand by Darcy de Winter and Helena von Stein, who were getting a little too energetic on the dance floor.

Yes, it was great fun.

For most people.