

Emma toddled into the bedroom from the darkness of the corridor. The light of the full moon, which towered over Berlin like a midnight sun on this spring night, shimmered into the room like mercury through the drawn curtains.

Screwing up her eyes, over which her fringe hung like a chestnut-brown curtain, Emma could make out her surroundings: the rattan chest at the foot of the bed, the glass tables that flanked the wide bed, the wardrobe with sliding doors where she used to hide.

Until Arthur entered her life and spoiled the game of hide and seek.

‘Papa?’ Emma whispered, feeling for her father’s bare foot that was sticking out from under the duvet.

Emma herself was only wearing one sock, and even that was barely attached to her foot. She’d lost the other while asleep, somewhere along the way from the sparkling unicorn

palace to the valley of the silver-grey flying spider, who sometimes frightened Emma in her dreams.

*But not as much as Arthur frightens me.*

Even though he kept assuring her he wasn't wicked. Could she trust him?

Emma pressed the elephant more tightly to her chest. Her tongue felt like a dry lump of chewing gum stuck to the roof of her mouth. She'd barely heard her thin voice, so she tried again:

'Papa, wake up.' Emma tugged at his toe.

As her father retracted his foot he turned to the side with a whine, briefly lifting the duvet and filling Emma's nostrils with his sleepy odour. She was certain that if she were blindfolded she could pick her father out of a dozen men by his smell alone. The earthy mixture of tobacco and eau de cologne, which was so familiar. A smell she loved.

Emma briefly wondered whether she'd be better off trying her mother. Mama was always there for her. Papa often grumbled. Mostly Emma had no idea what she'd done when doors were slammed with such force that the entire house shook. Later Mama would say that her father didn't really know himself. She explained that he was 'earasable', or something like that, and that he felt sorry afterwards. Just sometimes, albeit rarely, he even apologised. He'd come to her room, caress her tear-stained cheek, stroke her hair and say that being a grown-up wasn't so easy, because of the responsibility, because of the problems you had to deal with, and so on. For Emma these select moments were the happiest of her life, and just what she was in need of right now.

Today, especially, it would mean so much to her.

*Seeing as how frightened I am.*

'Papa, please, I...'

She was moving to the other end of the bed to touch his head when she tripped over a glass bottle.

*Oh no...*

In her excitement she'd forgotten that Mama and Papa always had a bottle of water by the bed in case one of them got thirsty in the night. When it toppled over and rolled across the parquet floor, to Emma's ears it sounded as if a freight train were ploughing through the bedroom. The noise was deafening, as if the darkness amplified sound.

The light went on.

On her mother's side.

Emma let out a high-pitched cry when she suddenly found herself in brightness.

'Sweetheart?' said her mother, who looked like a saint in the beam of her reading light. Like a saint with dishevelled hair and pillow creases on her face.

Startled, now Emma's father opened his eyes too.

'What the hell...?' His voice was loud, his eyes were scanning the room, trying to get their bearings. He'd obviously woken from a bad dream, maybe it was still in his head. He sat up.

'What's wrong, sweetie?' her mother said. Before Emma could reply, her father shouted again, this time even louder.

'Fucking hell!'

'Thomas,' her mother chided him.

Maintaining his strident tone, he waved his hand towards Emma.

'For Christ's sake, how often have I told you...'

'Thomas!'

'... to leave us alone at night!'

'But my... my... my... cupboard...'

Emma stuttered, her eyes welling with tears.