



Lotte Schweizer

Vampdog and the Tomatoe-Case

Original title: Das Vampirtier und die Sache mit den Tomaten

October 2023

128 pages

With illustrations by Alexandra Helm

Emma wants one thing and one thing only: a dog

‘Absolutely not!’ is all her single father has to say on the matter. But, with her dad trying to impress his new girlfriend, Emma notices a chink in his armour. With the help of her new stepbrothers, Lenny and Paul, she convinces the grown-ups that all they need to complete their family is a sweet, well-behaved, fluffy friend. But when Brutus arrives from Romania, they soon discover that he is neither sweet, well-behaved, nor fluffy. In fact, he both looks and acts weird, sleeping soundly during the day and prowling non-stop at night. Things begin to get even weirder when their ketchup repeatedly goes missing and they notice bitemarks in all of their tomatoes. Not to mention that Lenny swears he saw Brutus flying around the living room ... Until one night Count Dracula himself shows up on their doorstep, demanding his dog back. Let the chaos commence!

- Who needs a fluffy lapdog, when you can have a vampire pet called Brutus?
- For fans of the ‘Little Vampire’ and ‘Hui Buh’
- A book for reading aloud, with the perfect mix of wit, charm, and a tiny pinch of cosy horror



© Pauline Ruther

Lotte Schweizer, worked in a real office with a coffeemaker and file folders for many years. However, because she prefers having adventures, she closed her files and set off to travel the world. Since her return, she has devoted herself to writing children’s books, and every day she sets off on a new adventure at her desk.

Alexandra Helm was born in 1986 in Offenbach, the city she once again calls home. After successfully concluding her studies at the Academy of Design in Offenbach, she decided to make her way in the world as a freelance graphic designer and illustrator. Since 2016, she has preferred to illustrate children’s books, a task that inspires her to literally bounce out of bed every morning.

Sample Translation
By Sarah Rimmington

Chapter 1

This Chapter is about a Surprise involving Ketchup

It all started with Dad's new earring. Or rather with his new girlfriend Diana, who was the reason the earring was there in the first place. Of course it also kind of had to do with Emma's brothers, Lenny and Paul. They were – well – new, as well. A lot had changed in Emma's life over the last few months. But we had better start from the beginning, and the beginning was the night before Emma's eighth birthday.

“Now, about your birthday,” Dad said. “I've been meaning talk to you.”

“Is it about my present?” asked Emma.

She was sitting at the table in the little open-plan kitchen, watching Dad peel carrots. Outside, the wind was puffing dark clouds over the roofs in the neighbourhood and rattling the old window shutters. Leaves as red as the roof tiles danced through the air, then settled on the neatly-clipped lawn in the front garden.

Dad tilted his head to one side, then the other. “In a way, yes,” he hummed and hawed.

Emma wriggled her feet excitedly. “What is it? Can I guess? All right then, I'll guess! Does it glitter?”

“Emma, just listen for a minute, it's important. I've been wanting to talk to you about it for a long time. But somehow I could never find the right moment.”

“Just tell me, does it glitter?”

Dad sighed. “No, it doesn't glitter.”

“Is it green?” Emma asked.

“No, it's not green either. But Emma, wait, just listen...”

“You'll have to give me a clue, or I'll never guess,” Emma interrupted. Dad chopped the carrots into cubes, thinking. “All right, here you go: you're getting something your friend Natalie doesn't have,” he told her mysteriously. “And never will have,” he added, even more mysteriously.

He tossed the cubes of carrot into the saucepan with the onions. They sizzled and Emma took cover from the spitting fat.

They usually had pasta with ketchup, because that was all Dad knew how to make. He was so bad at cooking he even burned hard-boiled eggs. But today, the evening before Emma's big day, he was trying his hand at a Bolognese sauce. Home-made!

Emma pondered. Something Natalie would never have. What could that be? Natalie was actually allowed to drink cola in the evenings and she had so many toys they had a room all to themselves. She really did have everything.

Except ...

Yes! There was one thing Natalie didn't have. Because of her mother's allergies. It was something sweet and fluffy and cuddly, something Emma had been dreaming of for ages. She wanted one so badly, she would have given away every single one of her toys on the spot if she

could have had one.

“It is something I’ve always wanted?” asked Emma cautiously. Her tummy felt fluttery, as if bubbles were bursting inside it. Was her biggest wish, her only wish, about to come true at last? She had already tried everything to convince her father, she’d asked him at least a hundred gazillion times. But his answer was always the same: “No. Way.”

Were all her efforts going to be rewarded after all?

“It’s something you’ll be happy about,” replied Dad, sliding pieces of tomato into the saucepan.

“At least, I hope you will.” He stirred the sauce and his glasses steamed up.

“Does it have a wet nose?” asked Emma hopefully.

“Sometimes.” Dad winked at her and tipped a whole packet of pasta into bubbling water.

“Is it house trained?” Emma was getting jittery.

“I should certainly hope so!” Dad replied, laughing. It smelled a bit like something was burning. But Emma was too excited to tell Dad that.

“Can I play with it?” she asked instead.

“Of course!” Dad wiped the work surface. Smoke was rising from the home-made sauce.

“Does it like ball games?” Emma asked, fidgeting.

“Yep!” confirmed Dad. Then he paused and frowned, sniffing. “Something smells funny ... Oh crikey!” He took the pan off the stove and fanned the smoke away with a cloth. He looked sadly at the sauce, which was now more of a gooey blob.

“Does it have ears?” asked Emma, whooping.

“Oh yes. In fact it has four of them,” Dad announced, contemplating the sauce morosely. Four ears? Emma stopped short. “What kind of dog has four ears?”

“What do you mean, dog?” asked Dad, baffled. “Emma, we’ve talked about this. I will not have a dog in my house!”

“But ...,” stammered Emma. “What am I getting for my birthday then?” Dad poured the pasta water down the sink.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you. You’re getting something much better than a dog!” he assured her as he placed two plates of sauce-less pasta on the table. Adding a bottle of ketchup, he announced, “Emma, you’re getting two big brothers!”

Chapter 4

This Chapter is Well-Planned

A few days later, Emma and Paul, one of her new big brothers, were sitting on the bunk bed nibbling biscuits, while her other new brother, Lenny, performed horror circus tricks for them. “Be afraid, Ladies and Gentlemen,” he announced ominously. “You’re about to witness my most dangerous act of all!” He drew a matchbox out of his trouser pocket. “Presenting Hans and Franz, the miniature fire-breathing dragons!” He slid the box open and two houseflies buzzed out. Focusing intently, he held out Emma’s hula hoop. As if he’d rehearsed it with them, the two

flies flew right through the centre. Or at least they almost did. Hans turned right at the last minute and Franz landed on the biscuit plate. Lenny brought the hoop down despondently.

“Very creepy,” mocked Paul.

Emma was thinking about her plan. She’d written it in her diary in her best handwriting. It went like this:

Wuff-o-tastic Superplan

Step One: Convince new brothers they really want a dog, and get Diana on board.

Step Two: Join forces with Diana and new brothers, work on Dad and get a dog.

Step Three (because Step Two will perhaps probably almost certainly fail): Blackmail.

She hadn’t quite finalised Step Three, but there was no hurry. The first thing was to put Step One into action.

“Do you know what would be great at learning tricks?” asked Emma, shooing Franz away from the biscuits.

“Bumblebees maybe?” Paul wondered.

“A dog!” cried Emma. “Imagine if we had one. Then we could play with him, stroke him – and teach him tricks.”

“Mum and I could bake dog biscuits for him,” said Paul.

“He’d definitely be easier to teach than the miniature dragons,” said Lenny. “And if I dressed him up, he’d look really dangerous.”

Emma nodded. “I once saw a dog in a giant spider costume.”

Lenny’s eyes gleamed. “Why don’t we ask if we can get one?”

Emma grinned to herself. It was even easier than she’d thought. The boys were with her already. Now they just needed not to get ahead of themselves.

“I’ve begged Dad more times than I can count,” she said. “So we have to wait for the right moment.”

“How will we know when the right moment comes?” asked Paul.

At that moment the door opened and Diana and Dad came in, giggling.

“So, what d’you think?” asked Dad, doing a twirl. Emma stared at him, her mouth open. He was wearing leather trousers and – she had to look twice before she could believe it – a gold hoop in one ear.

“You’ve got an earring,” she said incredulously.

“Snazzy, isn’t it?” said Dad. “Diana thinks it makes me look like a rock star.”

“When I asked if I could get earrings, you said they were grievous bodily harm!” exclaimed Emma indignantly. “Yes, yes! But that was the old me,” explained Dad. He gave Diana a kiss on the cheek. “Things change.”

Emma scarcely recognized her dad. He normally wore liver pâté-coloured chinos and sandals with Velcro fastenings. She looked sideways at Lenny and Paul. They winked at her conspiratorially. Emma’s feet prickled with excitement. She could hardly believe it – the right moment for Step Two had suddenly arrived.

“Speaking of change,” she said, trying to stay very calm “might you also have changed your mind about getting a dog?” Before Dad could reply, Lenny said, “Dogs are great for keeping

families together. And our family has only just been formed.” Paul added, “Lenny and I are soooo sad that we’ve lost our home.” Respect! Emma was impressed. Her new brothers had simply bypassed Step Two and gone straight to emotional blackmail. Dad turned as white as a sheet. But Diana’s eyes were shining.

“It’s too much work,” said Dad. “You have to keep taking a dog outside, even in bad weather.”

“But there are three of us. We can share the work,” said Emma.

“And then there’s the hair, all over the apartment!” Dad’s voice suddenly sounded quite shrill.

“And they have ticks, and fleas, and bugs, and they slobber all over the place.”

“Martin, surely you’re not a dog-hater?” asked Diana.

Dad crossed his arms. “I wouldn’t say a hater ...” he said.

“I think a dog’s a great idea,” said Diana. “It’ll teach these three some responsibility.”

“Oh, please, Dad!” cried Emma.

“Please, please,” Lenny and Paul cried. Diana joined in until Dad sighed, held up his hands in defeat and said, “All right. But I don’t want to have anything to do with it. You’ll have to take care of everything.” And the others threw their arms around his neck, cheering.

Chapter 8

This Chapter is All Wrong

Emma screwed up her eyes. “Can you see anything?”

“Nothing,” said Paul.

“We could shine the torch into it,” Lenny suggested.

Diana shook her head. “That’ll just frighten him.” The four of them were lying on the floor in front of Brutus’ crate, armed with dog biscuits and sausages. They had tried a tin opener, a fork and a fish slice, but they could only get the lid of the crate to open a tiny crack.

“How are we going to get the dog out, then?” Dad sat at the kitchen table, leafing through his dog handbook.

“Should I throw in another liver pâté biscuit?” asked Paul.

“Give it a try. Maybe he’ll like that,” said Diana. Paul had scarcely put the biscuit into the crate than it sailed out again in a high arc. The same thing happened to the sausage that Lenny pushed through the crack. “I’ll eat it myself, then!” Lenny fetched the ketchup bottle from the fridge and squeezed some onto the sausage. He was just about to take a bite when the crate gave a shake. It rumbled and clattered and – whoosh – a bolt of black lightning shot out. Before Lenny knew what was happening, the sausage had been snatched from under his nose. Then the sausage and the lightning bolt disappeared back into the crate. A second later, the sausage flew out and hit Lenny on the head. Minus the ketchup!

Lenny sat there, his mouth open. “Did you see that?”

Emma took the ketchup bottle and squeezed another blob onto the sausage plate. This time

she was ready for him. When the lightning bolt shot out of the crate, she pushed the lid shut and sat on it. You could have heard a pin drop in the kitchen. Everyone held their breath anxiously – except for the creature sitting on the kitchen floor, who had his tongue out and was panting, looking around timidly.

“He’s awesome,” Lenny whispered.

“Wha... What is it?” Dad was leafing through the dog handbook.

“There’s nothing like that in here!”

“Probably a crossbreed,” Diana said knowledgeably.

The creature was dark brown. He had a small face with big saucer eyes and was covered from nose to tail in fluffy fur.

“Is it a poodle?” asked Lenny. No, thought Emma, he couldn’t be a poodle. His ears were far too big. They sat on his head like two bat ears. One pointed straight up while the other flopped downward. But perhaps the ears only looked so huge because the rest of him was so small. Emma felt a bit disappointed. He was scarcely the size of a paperback book. She’d wanted a dog, not a guinea pig!

“Maaaah!” the creature now said. Better and better. This strange dog didn’t even bark, he baaed like a sheep. His soft tail wagged back and forth. Should she stroke him?, Emma wondered. Carefully, she stretched out her hand towards him. The little fellow pushed his nose forward timidly and snuffled. Only then did she notice his canine teeth. And what teeth they were! Long and pointed, they stuck out from his mouth, glistening. Alarmed, she drew her hand back again. Even though he was no bigger than a miniature pinscher, he was a bit frightening. Lenny laughed. “Look at his ears. That’s probably what the advert meant by is ideally equipped to hear well.”

“Maaaah!” Brutus said again. He shook his gigantic furry ears as if he’d understood what Lenny was saying. He looked curiously around the kitchen, sniffing here and there until suddenly – ‘choo! – he sneezed.

“I should probably dust again,” said Dad.

Brutus came to a halt in front of the shelves and barked at the dish holding the garlic.

Diana stretched. “That’s enough excitement for today,” she said. “Let’s all have another wink or two of sleep. There’ll be plenty of time to get to know Brutus properly tomorrow. Now then, little one. Come on.” Brutus followed her into the children’s room.

“This is where you sleep.” Diana tapped the dog basket. Brutus, however, trotted straight over to the triple bunk bed and placed his front paws on Emma’s mattress. “No, that’s my bed,” Emma said quickly. “I sleep there. You sleep over here.” Far away from me, she wanted to add. But Brutus waited by her bed, wagging his tail.

“Out of the question! Dogs don’t belong on beds,” said Dad sternly. Emma felt a little bit relieved.

“Maaaah!” Brutus plodded over to his basket and pushed his nose into the soft cushion.

“It’s comfy, isn’t it?” asked Emma. The basket was far too big for him and Brutus looked completely lost in it. He curled himself into a fluffy croissant and folded his ears over his face.

“All right then...sleep tight,” murmured Emma. Brutus whined quietly. He sounded terribly sad. Diana and Dad waited until Emma, Lenny and Paul had climbed into their beds, then switched out the light and closed the door.

Before long, Paul and Lenny were asleep. Emma listened to their regular breathing and stared into the darkness. A guilty conscience gnawed at her. Why hadn't she dared to stroke Brutus? That had been mean. He must be feeling lonely. Should she go and check on him again? A rustling sound came from under the radiator. Pitter patter, pitter patter. She heard little claws tapping over the floorboards. The next minute something landed on her covers. She switched on the nightlight. Brutus was sitting on her stomach, his head cocked, looking at her. He was as light as a feather.

"You're actually supposed to stay in your basket," Emma whispered. Brutus licked her hand. It tickled wonderfully. Emma giggled. Then he batted his big saucer eyes at her.

"Are you lonely?" asked Emma. In answer he pricked up both his ears. "I understand. You're a long way from home. I'd be lonely too." Brutus made a hollow in the covers with his paw and nestled down into it. Carefully, Emma stretched out a finger towards him. As she touched him, he lifted his head. Her heart pounded. But when she scratched his ears, he laid his head back down again and closed his eyes. His ears were softer than velvet.

In actual fact, they were softer than anything Emma had ever felt. She ran her fingers over his back and buried them in his cuddly, fluffy fur. The little body was cool. Emma covered him with a corner of her covers. He looked peaceful, lying there. It was almost as if a smile flitted across his muzzle behind his sharp canine teeth. All of a sudden everything felt completely right.