

# **Emma's Stormy Summer**

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**Tannbourne**

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**For PGM**

# Homework

It was not a great way to get out of History.

And it hurt. A lot.

One minute Emma was sitting at her desk half-listening to Miss Houghton explaining why the Romans had such a big influence on how we live our lives today when she suddenly felt a sharp stab of pain in her left leg.

“Ow, ow ow!!!” she jumped up from her seat.

“What on earth is the matter, Emma?”

“Ow!”

Emma lifted up the hem of her school skirt and found a big sting puffing up, red and angry.

“I think I’ve been stung by a wasp, Miss”

Just at that moment the wasp flew past the desk behind Emma and three girls leapt to their feet and started flapping their arms and screeching with fright.

“Don’t flap at it, it’ll only get angry and sting someone else!” said Miss Houghton.

“Emma, you’d better get yourself down to the school office and have it looked at.”

Emma left the classroom to a mixture of sniggers and snorts of laughter, panicky giggles and gasps of fright. Miss Houghton was chasing the wasp out of the window and trying to get Beth Harris to sit down and stop screaming every time she thought she saw the wasp fly past her.

In the school office they made a big fuss of Emma and sprayed on a special spray to help the sting go away. The sting on Emma's leg was big and hot.

"Are you allergic to wasp stings, Emma?"

"No, at least I don't think so. I don't think I've ever been stung by a wasp before."

"Well, you'd better stay here with us just in case until the end of class. Do you want us to tell your Mother?"

"No, I'm fine, really. Please don't bother Mum."

Emma sat down on the scratchy office chair and got her book out of her bag to try and take her mind off the big sting on her leg. It was a good story about a girl who had a funny little creature called a Bog Woppit who lived behind the compost heap in her garden. Emma hardly noticed it when the school bell rang and it was time to go home.

Emma slowed down as she approached the entrance to the churchyard. She was hot and sticky and she pulled irritably at her tie to loosen it. The day had started out cold and grey and so her mother had made her wear her winter shirt and her jumper, even though it was officially the start of the summer term. She sighed and looked at the gates, unsure whether to cut through the churchyard. It was much quicker that way, and the long grass looked cool and inviting to her hot feet. Her mother did not like her coming this way as the path took her a long way from the main village high street, with all its shops and friendly faces. If Emma was honest with herself, she did not really like coming this way either. It only ever crossed her mind to come this way on very hot, sunny days when the churchyard looked inviting – never on cold, rainy days when it looked gloomy and a little bit frightening. On those days she always avoided it and went home along the high street, even if it did take much longer and she was in a hurry to get home to watch her favourite TV programme.

The only other time she would go into the churchyard was to visit Granny. Granny, her lovely Granny, who had died two years ago. Emma panicked

slightly at the thought of Granny. She loved her so much, and missed her so much, but it was becoming harder and harder to remember her properly. She remembered doing lots of things with her, like picking daisies in the fields and making cakes after school in the winter. But over the last few months Emma had found it harder and harder to remember what Granny looked like. If she closed her eyes and concentrated, she could still hear her laugh and call Emma's name, but she could not see her face any more. Recently Emma had found herself looking at pictures of Granny and wondering whether she really had looked like that, or a little bit different, more Granny-like in a way. Emma was worried that if this carried on then Granny would eventually just melt away in her memory until there was nothing left at all. She kept asking her mother questions about Granny, questions like "Yellow was her favourite colour, wasn't it?" and "Granny always much preferred cats to dogs, didn't she?" just to make sure that she wasn't forgetting important details. Her mother never minded. She missed Granny just as much as Emma did and liked talking about her and telling Emma what she had been like when she herself was a little girl. Emma loved these stories, they made sense

to her and made her feel safe and secure, as if she was part of a chain made up of Granny, her mother and herself.

Emma decided that she would walk through the churchyard after all. The sun was streaming through the trees, making all the new leaves glow a bright, acid green and the shade underneath was so dark she could hardly make out what was underneath. It looked so inviting as she bent down to take off her shoes and socks and set off for home, swishing her toes through the long, cool grass next to the path.

Her rucksack felt very heavy and uncomfortable, and she kept shifting it from one side to the other. She could hear her empty lunchbox rattling inside, knocking against her general science file and her pencil case. She had been set a geography project for her homework tonight. She had to trace a map of the world and then mark in where the main deserts, mountains and rivers were. She quite enjoyed geography but was dreading doing the project. However hard she tried to make her tracing accurate she always managed to follow the wrong line or to let her bit of paper slip and then not be able to line it up properly again.



The rucksack was particularly heavy today as it contained her wet swimming towel and costume from her swimming lesson at lunchtime. She loved going swimming. They had done diving today, which was her favourite. They were still only diving off the side of the pool but the teacher said she thought that they might be able to start learning how to use the springboard by the end of the term. Emma couldn't wait. The thought of running, jumping and sailing through the air, to land gracefully, sliding into the blue water below made her toes wiggle with excitement.

She reached the other side of the churchyard and stopped to put her shoes and socks back on again. She went through the small, rickety gate and set off down the dusty lane towards her house. Her house was at the end of the cul-de-sac, just before the lane turned sharply to the left and went down the hill, towards the stream. Emma liked the fact that their house was at the end of the short road. They had only moved there the year before and she did not know her neighbours very well as there were no other children her own age. So, in Emma's eyes, living at the end meant that if a person or a car came all the way to the end it meant that someone was coming to visit them, and not anyone else

in the road. Of course, most of the time this was not true as most of the cars that came as far as the end were simply looking for a turning space. This made her father absolutely furious, for some reason. Emma could never work out why he got so cross about it. Surely it did not matter that much if someone used the wide part of the road at the end of the cul-de-sac to turn around easily? She had decided that it was one of those 'grown-up' things, and not worth bothering about.

Going through the gate and on to the drive she glanced to the left and saw that her mother's car was already in the garage. She opened the front door and went in, pausing to take her swimming stuff out of her rucksack and to drop the rucksack at the bottom of the stairs, ready to take up later. She wandered into the kitchen where her mother was chopping vegetables for dinner.

“What are we having?”

“Spaghetti-by-the-nose” her mother answered, not looking up from her chopping board. Emma smiled. Spaghetti Bolognese had been called Spaghetti-by-the-nose ever since her Granny had misheard when she had asked Emma what she had had to eat during a day out to London and said, “Goodness, how odd, did it hurt?”

“You’re home early, how was swimming?” her mother asked.

“Not bad. We did diving. Miss Porter says we should be able to have a go on the springboard by the end of the term. I can’t wait.”

“Oh, and I got stung by a wasp”

“What? Oh, Emma, where did it sting you?”

“In History”

“No, you noodle, I mean where on your body?”

“Just here, on my leg” Emma lifted up her skirt a few inches and showed her mother the sting.

“Wow, that looks painful.”

“It was, but I can hardly feel it now. I was going to walk home with Ruth but I had to go to the office after I got stung so I just came home on my own. ”

“Never mind, you’ll see Ruth tomorrow and I’m glad you came home a bit earlier than usual. If I’d known you’d been stung I’d have given you a lift.”

“I told them not to bother you when it happened, it’s only a sting after all.”

“Well I think you have been very brave.”

“Thanks” Emma smiled. “You should have seen the fuss Beth Harris was making; anyone would have thought it was her that got stung, not me.”

With that Emma threw her swimming stuff into the washing machine, opened the fridge and got out a drink and a yoghurt and then crossed over to the cupboard where she found a packet of chocolate biscuits. Clutching her hoard of food she drifted out of the kitchen and went through to the sitting room, across the hall. Sitting herself in her favourite chair she settled down to watch TV. It was her favourite programme and she was really looking forward to it. She knew she was delaying doing her homework but she reckoned she could spin it out at least until her father got home. Then, to be honest, it might be a bit of a relief to go upstairs and get on with it until suppertime. She never knew whether her father would be in a good mood or not. Lately he had always been in a bad mood when he got in from work. He would come in, drop his briefcase onto the chair in the hall, take off his jacket and tie, make himself a drink and go and sit in the sitting room. He was not cross exactly, more tired than cross, and a bit miserable. Emma preferred to go up to her room, listen to her music and do her homework when he was like this.

She heard the key turn in the lock and looked up. She heard him calling to her mum, "Kathryn, are

you there?" as he went into the kitchen and Emma took the opportunity to slip out of the sitting room and up the stairs to her room. She grabbed her rucksack as she didn't want to be told off for leaving her rucksack on the stairs, even if it was unfair as Dad's briefcase was always left in the hall.

She reached her room and sat down on her bed to take her homework out of her rucksack. She loved her room. It had two big windows looking out over the garden, one to the back and one to the side of the house. Her bed was against the wall, in between the two windows and on windy nights she liked to open both the windows and lie in bed and watch as the curtains danced in the breeze above her head. Next to her bed she had a small bedside table and a light. Underneath the main window overlooking the back of the house was her desk, and it was here that she sat down to do her homework. On sunny days she found the view over the garden a bit distracting but her mother said she should see it as an incentive to make her do her homework as quickly as possible and then she would be able to go outside and enjoy the rest of the afternoon. Behind her, next to the door was her chest of drawers. It was the only thing she did not like

in her room. It was old and tatty and had a shiny white top that she covered with as much stuff as she possibly could. Behind the door, along the back wall, was a row of fitted cupboards that were very useful to hide as much of her stuff in as possible when she was made to tidy her room.

She put her iPod on and opened her file. The hardest part about homework was starting, once she got involved the time seemed to fly by but that first few minutes always seemed to drag on forever. She started with America, as it looked like the easiest country to trace but soon got stuck around the Gulf of Mexico. By the time she had got all the way around to Argentina her paper had already slipped twice and she hadn't lined it up very well. She moved on to Africa, which went surprisingly well, as did Australia. Encouraged by this, she had a go at Europe, which was a disaster! She finished off Asia as quickly as she could and started to trace in the rivers. Her blue pen was beginning to run out so the Amazon was a very different colour and thickness to the Mississippi and the Ganges looked like a stream in comparison to the Thames, but at least she got it done. She moved onto the mountains and deserts with relief, how hard could it be to colour in yellow

areas and draw grey ^^^^ across the Alps and the Himalayas? Although the end result did not look exactly like she had hoped it would when she started, she decided that it was as good as it was ever going to be. It should at least win her a plain, coloured star, if not one of the sparkly gold and silver ones that she would love to get. She finished, switched off her music, and headed off down the stairs to have supper.

Her mother was just finishing cooking the spaghetti as she came into the kitchen. She had a tired, worried look on her face although she turned and smiled at Emma as she came in, temporarily lighting up her pale face. Emma laid the table and put out glasses for water. Her mother always insisted that she did this, even though both her parents always had a separate drink and never used them. Another 'grown-up' thing.

“Is supper ready?”

Her father came into the kitchen rubbing his face in a sleepy manner. Obviously he had dropped off in the sitting room in front of the news.

“It will be in just a minute, why don't both of you sit down and I'll dish up?”

Emma and her father sat down and looked at each other across the table. Neither of them said anything.

“Why don’t you tell your Dad about swimming?” her mum suggested.

Emma felt tongue-tied. A few months ago she would have been chattering away, happily describing her day at school and her first few attempts at racing dives. But recently she found it so hard to speak to her father. He always used to smile and ask her about her day, mentioning her friends by name and remembering details about what had happened in class the week before. The questions, and the smiles, had got shorter and shorter until Emma felt that he was not listening to her at all and so she started feeling embarrassed about just sitting there, talking out loud. Eventually the questions had stopped altogether, which was both sad and a bit of a relief. Now, she looked up and wriggled awkwardly in her chair, and mumbled that it had been fine.

Her mother placed a plate of food in front of each of them and then sat down herself and they all started to eat. Emma loved spaghetti, even if it was a bit tricky to twist properly around her fork and she



always made a mess, however careful she tried to be. None of them spoke much during the meal, although she noticed that both her parents were spending more time pushing their food around their plates rather than eating it. Emma decided not to comment on it. As soon as they had finished, Emma helped clear away the dishes and asked if she could go and watch MTV and practice some dance routines.

She left the room, and went and switched on the TV in the sitting room. However, she did not stay and watch it, but crept back into the hall where she sat on the stairs and tried to hear what her parents were talking about. Usually it was boring stuff about the bank, where her father worked, or her school, where her mother was a form teacher. Some of the school stuff was sometimes interesting but normally Emma did not listen for long. She did not see it as eavesdropping exactly, more that she wanted to check that everything was OK and, once she was reassured, she would return to the sitting room. Recently she had been staying longer and listening more. Today was one of those days. She could not hear exactly what they were saying but she could tell from her mother's voice that she was worried.

“So, what do you think is going to happen?” her mother asked, but Emma could not catch her father’s muffled reply.

“Is there anything you can do about it?” she continued.

“Not really, it is part of a national programme” her father replied.

“But you are a senior manager; surely they will be able to find you something?”

“Maybe, maybe not. To be honest, Kath, I’m too tired to talk about it or think about it.”

“I just can’t believe you, doesn’t it matter to you anymore, don’t we matter to you anymore?”

Emma decided she did not want to listen to the answer to that question and returned to the sitting room, hoping that the TV would cheer her up.