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Opening extract from

Pippi in the South Seas

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Pippi Still Lives at Villekulla Cottage

The tiny little town was looking very trim and cosy with its cobbled streets, its small, low houses surrounded by little gardens. Everyone who came there thought it must be a very quiet and restful town to live in. But there were not many places of special interest to a visitor—only one or two: and these were a folk museum and an ancient burial mound; that was all. Oh no!—there was just one other thing. The people in the little town had put up neat

notice-boards which clearly marked the way for those who wanted to see the sights. On one of them it said in large letters: 'To the Folk Museum', and underneath there was an arrow to show the way; on another it said: 'To the Long Barrow'.

But there was still one more notice-board. It said:

To Villekulla Cottage

It had been put there recently because people kept asking the way to Villekulla Cottage—as a matter of fact, far more often than they asked the way to the folk museum or the long barrow.

One beautiful summer's day, a gentleman came driving into the little town in his car. He lived in a much bigger town; that was why he had got it into his head that he was better and more important than the people in the tiny little town. Of course, there was this about it, too, that he had a big, shining car, and he himself looked very imposing with his highly polished shoes and with a fat gold ring on his finger. It was hardly surprising, then, that he thought himself exceedingly grand and superior.

He honked loudly as he drove through the streets of the little town to make sure that people would notice him.

When the fine gentleman caught sight of the notice-boards he laughed scornfully.

‘ “To the Folk Museum”—’pon my word!’ he said to himself. ‘ “To the Long Barrow”—I say, how *exciting*!’ he jeered. ‘But what nonsense is this?’ he said, when he caught sight of the third notice-board. ‘ “To Villekulla Cottage”. What a name!’

He thought for a moment. An ordinary cottage can hardly be a show-place like a folk museum or a long barrow. The board must have been put up for some other reason, he thought. Finally, he came to the conclusion, The house must be up for sale, and the board has been put there to show the way for prospective buyers. The fine gentleman had intended, for some time, to buy a house in a small town where life would be quieter than in the big city. Of course, he would not live there all the time, he would only visit it now and then when he wanted a rest. Besides, in a small town it would be more noticeable what a particularly fine and grand gentleman he really was. He decided to go and look at Villekulla Cottage at once.

He had only to follow the direction in which the arrow was pointing. The road took him to the very outskirts of the little town before he found what he was looking for. There, on a very

ramshackle garden gate, was printed in red crayon:

VILLEKULLA COTTAGE

Behind the gate he saw an overgrown garden and old trees covered with moss, uncut lawns, and masses of flowers growing exactly as they liked. At the far end of the garden there was a house—but, oh dear, what a house! It looked ready to fall down at any minute. The fine gentleman stared at it, and suddenly he gave a gasp. *There was a horse standing in the porch*. The fine gentleman was not used to seeing horses in porches. That was why he gasped.

On the steps of the porch, in the brilliant sunshine, sat three little children. The one in the middle was a girl with a lot of freckles on her face and two red plaits which stuck straight out. A very pretty little girl with fair curls, and dressed in a blue-checked cotton frock, sat on one side of her, and a little boy with neatly combed hair on the other. A monkey crouched on the red-haired girl's shoulder.

The fine gentleman thought he must have come to the wrong place. Surely no one would expect to sell such a ramshackle house.

'Look here, children,' he shouted, 'is this miserable hovel really Villekulla Cottage?'

The girl in the middle, the one with the red hair, rose and walked towards the gate. The other two followed slowly.

'Answer me, can't you?' said the fine gentleman irritably, while the red-haired girl was still approaching.

'Let me think,' said the red-haired girl, frowning thoughtfully. 'Is it the folk museum?—No! The long barrow?—No! I've got it!' she shouted. 'It's Villekulla Cottage!'

'Answer me properly,' said the fine gentleman, getting out of his car. He had decided to look at the place more closely in any case.

'Of course, I could pull it down and build a new house,' he muttered to himself.

'Oh, yes, let's start straight away,' cried the red-haired girl, quickly breaking off a couple of planks from the side of the house.

The fine gentleman did not listen to her. Small children were of no interest to him, and besides, now he had something to consider. The garden, in spite of its neglected state, really looked very pleasant and inviting in the sunshine. If a new house were built, the grass cut, the paths raked and beautiful flowers planted, then even a very fine gentleman could live there. The fine gentleman decided to buy Villekulla Cottage.

He looked round to see what further

improvements might be made. The old mossy trees would, of course, have to go. He scowled at the gnarled oak tree with a thick trunk. Its branches stretched right over the roof of Villekulla Cottage.

'I'll have that cut down,' he said firmly.

The pretty little girl in the blue check dress cried out.

'Pippi, did you hear?' she called in a terrified voice.

The red-haired girl took no notice and practised hop-scotch on the garden path.

'That's it—I'll have that rotten old oak tree cut down,' said the fine gentleman to himself.

The little girl in blue looked at him imploringly.

'Oh, please don't,' she said. 'It's—it's such a good tree for climbing. And it's hollow. You can sit inside it.'

'Nonsense,' said the fine gentleman. 'I don't climb trees. You should know better than that.'

The little boy with the tidy hair also came forward. He was looking worried.

'But,' he pleaded, 'ginger-beer grows in it. And chocolate, too—on Thursdays.'

'Look here, children, I think you've been sitting out here too long and have got a touch of the sun,' said the fine gentleman. 'But that's no concern of mine. I'm going to buy this property. Will you tell me where I can find the owner?'

The little girl in the blue check started to cry, and the boy ran to the red-haired girl who was still practising hops.

'Pippi,' he said, 'can't you hear what he's saying? Why don't you do something?'

'Do something?' said the red-haired girl. 'I keep hopping as if my life depended on it, and then you come and tell me to do something. Try it yourself and see how *you* get on.'

She went over to the fine gentleman.

'I'm Pippi Longstocking,' she said, 'and this is Tommy and Annika.' She pointed at her friends. 'Can we help you in any way? If there's a house to be pulled down, or a tree to be pulled up, or anything else to be altered, you have only to say so!'

'Your name does not interest me,' said the fine gentleman. 'All I want to know is where I can find the owner of this house. I'm going to buy it.'

The red-haired girl, the one whose name was Pippi Longstocking, had gone back to her exercise.

'The owner is otherwise engaged at the moment,' she said. She hopped with great concentration while she spoke. 'Extremely engaged,' she said, hopping round the fine gentleman. 'But won't you sit down a moment, and I'm sure she'll come?'

'She?' said the fine gentleman, pleased. 'So it's a she who owns this miserable dwelling? All the better. Women don't know anything about business matters, so I may get the whole lot for a song.'

'Let's hope so,' said Pippi Longstocking.

Since there did not appear to be anywhere else to sit, the fine gentleman placed himself cautiously on the porch steps. The little monkey jumped nervously to and fro on the veranda railing. Tommy and Annika, the two charming and well cared for children, stood some distance away, looking at him anxiously.

'Do you live here?' asked the fine gentleman.

'No,' said Tommy, 'we live next door.'—

'But we come here every day to play,' said Annika shyly.

'I'll soon put a stop to that,' said the fine gentleman. 'I won't have any children running round my garden: there's nothing worse.'

'I quite agree,' said Pippi, who stopped hopping for a moment. 'Children ought to be shot.'

'How can you say such a thing?' said Tommy in an injured voice.

'What I mean is that all children *ought* to be shot,' said Pippi. 'But it wouldn't do, because then there would never be any kind old gentlemen. And we couldn't do without them, could we?'

The fine gentleman looked at Pippi's red hair and decided to pass the time by teasing her.

'Do you know what you have in common with a newly struck match?' he asked.

'No, I don't,' said Pippi, 'but I've always wanted to know.'

The fine gentleman tugged quite hard at one of Pippi's plaits.

'They're both flaming at the top,' he said, roaring with laughter.

'I wonder I didn't think of that before,' said Pippi. 'We have to hear a lot before our ears drop off.'

The fine gentleman stared at her.

'I do believe you're the ugliest child I've ever seen,' he said.

'Maybe,' said Pippi, 'but it seems to me you're no oil painting yourself.'

The fine gentleman looked offended, but made no reply. Pippi watched him in silence for a time, her head on one side.

'Do you know what we two have in common?' she said at last.

'No. Nothing, I should hope,' said the fine gentleman.

'Oh, yes,' said Pippi. 'We're both swollen headed . . . except me.'

A faint giggle was heard from the direction of

Tommy and Annika. The fine gentleman went red in the face.

'So you're impudent,' he shouted. 'We'll soon put a stop to that.'

He stretched out a fat arm to take hold of Pippi, but she instantly jumped to one side, and a second later she was sitting high up in the hollow oak tree. The fine gentleman's mouth dropped open with astonishment.

'And when are we going to start to put a stop to my impudence?' asked Pippi, making herself comfortable on a branch.

'I can wait,' said the fine gentleman.

'Good,' said Pippi, 'because I'm thinking of staying up here until the middle of November.'

Tommy and Annika laughed and clapped their hands. But that was not a very wise thing to do as it made the fine gentleman furiously angry, and since he could not get hold of Pippi, he seized Annika by the scruff of her neck and said:

'Then I'll give you a spanking instead. It seems you can do with it, too.'

Annika had never in all her life been smacked, and she cried out in her fright. There was a thud as Pippi jumped down from the tree. With one leap she reached the fine gentleman.

'Oh no, you don't,' she said. 'I won't waste

time fighting you, but I'm going to put a stop to your meddling once and for all.'

Without delay, she seized the fine gentleman about his fat waist and threw him up in the air, twice. Then she carried him at arm's length to his car and threw him into the back seat.

'I don't think we'll pull the house down till another day,' she said. 'You see, once a week I pull down houses, but never on Fridays, because then I've got the weekly turning-out to think of. So I generally vacuum the house clean on Fridays and pull it down on Saturdays. It's always best to have a routine.'

The fine gentleman struggled with great difficulty into the driving seat and drove off at high speed. He was both frightened and angry, and he was annoyed that he had not been able to speak to the owner of Villekulla Cottage, because he was very eager to buy the place and turn the horrid children out of it.

It was not long before he met one of the little town's policemen. Stopping the car, he called to the policeman:

'Could you help me find the lady who owns Villekulla Cottage?'

'With pleasure,' said the policeman. He jumped into the car and said:

'Will you drive to Villekulla Cottage?'

'She isn't there,' said the fine gentleman.

'Oh yes, she's sure to be,' said the policeman.

The fine gentleman felt safe with a policeman beside him, and he drove back to Villekulla Cottage, as the policeman had told him to do, because he wanted so very much to speak to the owner of the house.

'That's the lady who owns Villekulla Cottage,' said the policeman, pointing towards it.

The fine gentleman looked, put his hand to his forehead, and groaned. For, on the porch steps, stood the red-haired girl, that dreadful Pippi Longstocking, and in her arms she carried the horse. The monkey was sitting on her shoulder.

'Come along, Tommy and Annika,' shouted Pippi. 'Let's have a ride before the next perspective buyer comes.'

'It's *prospective* buyer,' said Annika.

'Is *that* . . . the owner of the house?' said the fine gentleman in a weak voice. 'But it's only a little girl!'

'Yes,' said the policeman. 'It's only a little girl—the strongest girl in the world. She lives there all alone.'

The horse, now carrying the three children on his back, came galloping up to the gate. Pippi looked down at the fine gentleman and said:

'It was good fun guessing riddles just now, wasn't it? I know another one, too. Can you tell me the difference between my horse and my monkey?'

The fine gentleman did not really feel like guessing any more riddles, but by then he was so afraid of Pippi that he dared not refuse to reply.

'The difference between your horse and your monkey?—I don't know, I'm sure.'

'No, it *is* rather a tricky one,' said Pippi. 'But I'll give you a clue. If you see them both under a tree and then one of them starts to climb it, it's *not* the horse.'

The fine gentleman trod on the accelerator and disappeared at top speed. He was never, never, seen again in the little town.