Opening extract from

Pippi Longstocking

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1
Pippi Comes to Villekulla Cottage

AT the end of a little Swedish town lay an old, overgrown orchard. In the orchard was a cottage, and in this cottage lived Pippi Longstocking. She was nine years old, and she lived all alone. She had neither mother nor father, which was really rather nice, for in this way there was no one to tell her to go to bed just when she was having most fun, and no one to make her take cod-liver-oil when she felt like eating peppermints.

There was a time when Pippi had had a father, and she had been very fond of him. Of course, she had had a mother too, but that was long ago.

Pippi's mother had died when Pippi was just a tiny baby lying in her cradle and howling so dreadfully that no one could come near. Pippi believed that her mother now lived somewhere up in Heaven and looked down on her little girl through a hole in it. Pippi often used to wave up to her and say, 'Don't worry, I can look after myself!'

Pippi hadn't forgotten her father. He had been a ship's captain, and sailed on the great ocean. Pippi had sailed with him on his boat, at least until the time he had blown into the sea during a storm and disappeared. But Pippi was quite sure that one day he would come back, for she never believed that he had drowned. She was certain that he had come ashore on a desert island, one with lots and lots of cannibals, and that her father had become king of them all and went about all day with a gold crown on his head.

'*My* father is a Cannibal King; there aren't ***many*** children with so fine a father!' said Pippi, really pleased with herself. 'And when my father has built himself a boat he'll come to fetch me, and then *I* shall become a Cannibal Princess. What a life it will be!'

Her father had bought the old cottage in the orchard many years ago. He had wanted to live there with Pippi when he grew old and sailed the seas no longer. But then he had unfortunately been blown into the sea, and as Pippi expected him to return she went straight home to Villekulla Cottage, as their house was called. It stood there furnished and ready and waiting for her. One fine summer's evening she had said goodbye to all the sailors on her father's boat. They liked Pippi very much, and Pippi liked them.

'Goodbye, boys!' said Pippi, kissing each in turn on the forehead. 'Don't worry about me. I can take care of myself!'

She took two things from the boat: a little monkey whose name was Mr Nelson (he had been a present from her father) and a big suitcase full of gold pieces. The sailors stood by the rail and watched Pippi until she was out of sight. She kept on walking without turning round once, with Mr Nelson on her shoulder and the suitcase firmly in her hand.

'A remarkable child,' said one of the sailors. wiping a tear from his eye when Pippi disappeared from view.

He was right. Pippi was a very remarkable child, and the most remarkable thing about her

was her strength. She was *so* strong that in all the world there was no policeman as strong as she. She could have lifted a whole horse if she had wanted to. And there were times when she *did* want to. Pippi had bought a horse of her very own with one of her gold pieces the day she came home to Villekulla Cottage. She had always longed to have her very own horse, and now there was one living on her front porch. When Pippi wanted to take afternoon tea there, she simply lifted him out into the orchard without further ado.

Next to Villekulla Cottage lay another orchard and another house. In that house lived a mother and a father with their two nice little children, a boy and a girl. The boy's name was Tommy and the girl's Annika. They were both very good and well-brought-up and obedient children. Tommy *never* bit his nails, and *always* did what his mother asked. Annika *never* fussed when she didn't get her own way, and she was always very properly dressed in freshly ironed cotton.

Tommy and Annika played nicely together in their orchard, but they had often wished for a playmate. At the time when Pippi always sailed the seas with her father, they would sometimes hang on the fence and say to each other, 'What a

pity no one moves into that house! Someone ought to live there; someone with children.'

The beautiful summer's day that Pippi first crossed the threshold of Villekulla Cottage, Tommy and Annika weren't at home. They were spending the week with their grandmother, and so had no idea that someone had moved into the house next to theirs. The first day after their arrival home they stood by the gate and looked out on the street, and they still didn't know that there was a playmate so near. Just as they stood and wondered what they should do, and if possibly anything *special* would happen that day or if it would be just one of those dull days when one couldn't think of anything in particular to do, why, just then the gate to Villekulla Cottage opened and a little girl appeared. She was the most curious child Tommy and Annika had ever seen. It was Pippi Longstocking going for a morning walk. This is what she looked like:

Her hair was the same colour as a carrot, and was braided in two stiff pigtails that stood straight out from her head. Her nose was the shape of a very small potato, and was dotted with freckles. Under the nose was a really very large mouth, with healthy white teeth. Her dress was curious indeed. Pippi had made it herself. It was supposed to have been blue, but as there hadn't been quite

enough blue cloth, Pippi had decided to add little red patches here and there. On her long thin legs she wore long stockings, one brown and the other black. And she had a pair of black shoes which were just twice as long as her feet. Her father had bought them in South America so she would have something to grow into, and Pippi never wanted any others.

The thing that made Tommy and Annika open their eyes widest was the monkey which sat on the strange girl's shoulder. It was little and long-tailed, and dressed in blue trousers, yellow jacket, and a white straw hat.

Pippi went on down the street, walking with one foot on the pavement and the other in the gutter. Tommy and Annika watched her until she was out of sight. In a moment she returned, walking backwards. This was so she shouldn't have to take the trouble to turn round when she went home. When she came level with Tommy and Annika's gate, she stopped. The children looked at each other in silence. At last Tommy said, 'Why are you walking backwards?'

'Why am I walking backwards?' said Pippi. 'This is a free country, isn't it? Can't I walk as I please? Why, let me tell you that in Egypt *everyone* walks that way, and no one thinks it the least bit odd.'

'How do you know that?' asked Tommy. 'You haven't been in Egypt, have you?'

'Have I been to Egypt! You can bet your boots I have. I've been all over the world and seen odder things than people who walk backwards. I wonder what you would have said if I'd walked on my hands like the people do in Indo-China?'

'That can't be true,' protested Tommy.

Pippi considered this for a moment. 'Yes, you're right,' she said sadly, 'I wasn't telling the truth.'

'It's wicked to lie,' said Annika, who at last had found her tongue.

'Yes, it's *very* wicked,' said Pippi, even more sadly. 'But I forget once in a while, you see. How can you expect a little child whose mother is an angel and whose father is a Cannibal King and who has spent her life sailing the seas to tell the truth always? And for that matter,' she said, a smile spreading over her whole freckled face, 'I can tell you that in the Belgian Congo there isn't a single person who tells the truth. They tell fibs all day and every day, begin at seven in the morning and keep it up until sunset. So if I should happen to tell a fib sometimes you must try to forgive me and remember that it's only because I've been a little too long in the Belgian Congo. We can still be friends, can't we?'

'Of course,' said Tommy, realizing suddenly that this *wouldn't* be one of those dull days.

'Why not have breakfast at my house, for that matter?' Pippi wondered.

'Well, yes,' said Tommy, 'why not? Come on, let's!'

'Yes,' said Annika. 'Right away!'

'But first let me introduce you to Mr Nelson,' said Pippi. The monkey raised his hat to them politely.

And so they went through Villekulla Cottage's tumble-down orchard gate and up the path between rows of mossy trees (trees lovely for climbing, they noticed) to the house and on to the porch. There stood the horse, munching oats from a soup tureen.

'Why on earth have you a horse on the front porch?' asked Tommy. All the horses he knew lived in stables.

'Well,' said Pippi after thinking it over, 'he'd be in the way in the kitchen, and he doesn't thrive in the parlour.'

Tommy and Annika patted the horse, and then went on into the house. There was a kitchen and a parlour and a bedroom. But it looked as if Pippi had forgotten to turn out the rooms that week. Tommy and Annika looked carefully about in case that Cannibal King should be in a corner.

They'd never seen a Cannibal King in all their lives. But no father was to be seen, nor any mother, and Annika asked anxiously, 'Do you live here all alone?'

'Of course not,' said Pippi, 'Mr Nelson lives here too.'

'Yes, but haven't you a mother and father here?'

'No, none at all,' said Pippi cheerfully.

'But who tells you when to go to bed at night, and that sort of thing?' asked Annika.

'I do,' said Pippi. 'The first time I say it, I say it in a friendly sort of way, and if I don't listen I say it again more sharply, and if I *still* don't listen, then there's a thrashing to be had, believe me!'

Tommy and Annika didn't quite understand all this, but they thought that perhaps it was a good arrangement. Meanwhile, they had come into the kitchen, and Pippi whooped:

'Here pancakes will be baked now,
Here pancakes will be served now,
Here pancakes will be fried now!'

At which she took out three eggs and flung them into the air. One of the eggs fell on her head and broke, and the yolk ran down into her eye. But the others she caught properly in a bowl, where they broke.

'I've always heard that egg-yolk is good for the hair,' said Pippi, wiping her eye. 'You'll see that it will grow now so fast it creaks! In Brazil, for that matter, *everyone* goes about with egg in his hair. There's not a bald head to be seen. Once there was an old man who was so odd that he *ate* his eggs instead of spreading them on his hair. He turned quite bald, too, and when he as much as showed himself on the streets the traffic stopped and they had to call out the police.'

While she was talking, Pippi carefully picked out all the broken eggshell from the bowl with her fingers. Then she took a bath-brush which hung on the wall and began beating the batter so that it splattered on the walls. At last she threw what was left on a griddle that stood on the stove. When the pancake was browned on one side she threw it halfway to the ceiling so that it turned in the air and was caught in the pan again. And when it was done, she threw it across the kitchen so that it landed on a plate standing on the table.

'Eat it!' she cried. 'Eat it before it gets cold!'

Tommy and Annika ate, and thought it a very good pancake. Afterwards, Pippi invited them into the parlour. There was only one piece of furniture in it. It was an enormous cupboard with many, many little drawers. Pippi opened them one by one and showed Tommy and Annika all

the treasures she kept there. There were strange birds' eggs, and unusual shells and stones, lovely little boxes, beautiful silver mirrors, a pearl necklace, and much more, all bought by Pippi and her father during their travels round the world. Pippi gave her new playmates each a little present as a keepsake. Tommy's was a knife with a gleaming mother-of-pearl handle, and Annika's a little box decorated on the lid with pieces of shell. In the box lay a ring set with a green stone.

'If you should happen to go home now,' said Pippi, 'you'll be able to come again tomorrow. Because if you don't go home, you can't very well come back, and that *would* be a shame.'

Tommy and Annika thought so too, so they went home. They went past the horse, who had eaten up all his oats, and out through the gate of Villekulla Cottage. Mr Nelson waved his hat to them as they left.