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Opening extract from

# Emil and the Great Escape

Written by

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***Tuesday the twenty-second of May***
***when Emil got his head stuck in the soup tureen***

That day they were having meat broth for dinner in Katthult. Lina had served it up in the flowered soup tureen and they were all sitting round the kitchen table eating soup—especially Emil. He liked soup; you could hear that when he ate it.

'Must you make that noise?' asked his mother.

'Well, you can't tell you're having soup, otherwise,' said Emil.

Everyone had as much as they wanted, and the tureen was empty except for a tiny little drop left at the bottom. But Emil wanted that little drop, and the only way he could get it was by pushing his head into the tureen and sucking it up. And that is just

what he did. But just fancy! When he tried to get his head out again he *couldn't*! He was stuck fast. It frightened him and he jumped up from the table and stood there with the tureen like a tub on his head. It came right down over his eyes and ears. He hit at it and screamed. Lina was very upset.

'Our lovely soup tureen,' she said. 'Our lovely bowl with the flowers on it. Whatever shall we put the soup in now?'

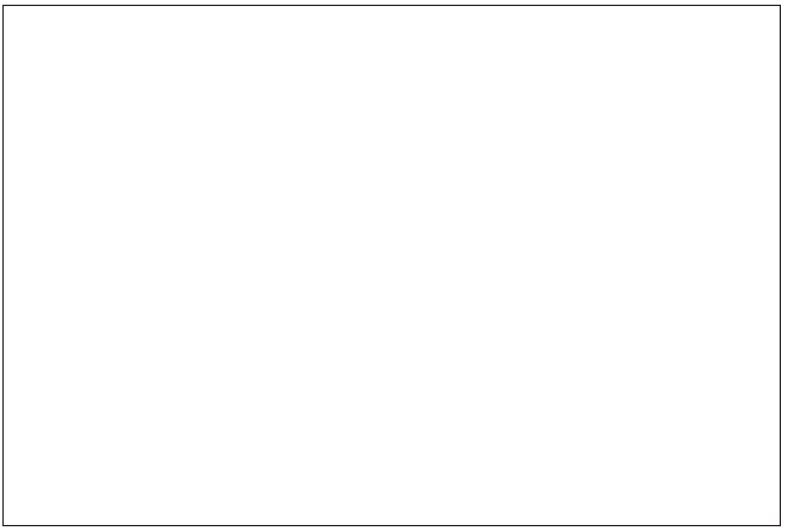
Because although she wasn't very bright, she did realize that while Emil was in the tureen it would be impossible to serve soup in it.

Emil's mother, however, was more worried about Emil.

'Dear sake's alive, how shall we get the child out? We'll have to get the poker and break the bowl.'

'Have you taken leave of your senses?' asked Emil's father. 'That bowl cost four kronor!'

'Let me have a try,' said Alfred, who was a strong, hefty farm hand. He took hold of both handles and lifted the tureen high up in the air—but what good was that? Emil went with it. Because he was stuck



really tight. And there he hung, kicking, trying to get back on the ground again.

'Let go! Let me get down! Let go, I tell you!' he yelled. So Alfred did let go.

Now everybody was very upset. They stood in the kitchen in a ring round Emil, wondering what to do, father Anton, mother Alma, little Ida, Alfred and Lina. Nobody could think of a good way of getting Emil out of the soup tureen.

'Look, Emil's crying!' said little Ida, pointing at two big tears sliding down Emil's cheeks from under the edge of the tureen.

'No I'm not,' said Emil. 'It's soup.'

He sounded as cocky as ever, but it isn't much fun being stuck inside a soup tureen—and supposing he never managed to get out! Poor Emil, when would he be able to wear his cap then?

Emil's mother was in great distress about her little boy. She wanted to take the poker and break the tureen, but his father said, 'Not on any account! That bowl cost four kronor. We had better go to the doctor in Mariannelund. He'll be able to get it off. He'll only charge three kronor, and we'll save a krona that way.'

Emil's mother thought that a good idea. It isn't every day that one can save a whole krona. Think of all the nice things you could buy with that, perhaps something for little Ida, who would have to stay at home while Emil was out enjoying the trip.

Now all was hurry and bustle in Katthult. Emil must be made tidy, he must be washed and dressed in his best clothes. He couldn't have his hair combed, of course, and nobody could wash his ears, although they certainly needed washing. His mother did try to get her finger under the rim of the soup

tureen so as to get at one of Emil's ears, but that wasn't much use for she, too, got stuck in the bowl.

'There now!' said little Ida, and father Anton got really angry, though as a rule he was very good-tempered.

'Does anyone else want to get stuck in the tureen?' he shouted. 'Well, get on with it for goodness' sake, and I'll bring out the big hay wagon and take everyone in the house over to the doctor in Mariannelund.'

But Emil's mother wriggled her finger and managed to get it out. 'You'll have to go without washing your ears, Emil,' she said, blowing her finger. A pleased smile could be seen under the rim of the tureen, and Emil said, 'That's the first bit of luck I've had from this tureen.'

Alfred had brought the horse and trap to the front steps and Emil now came out to climb into the trap. He was very smart in his striped Sunday suit and black button boots and the soup tureen—of course it did look a trifle unusual, but it was gay and flowery, something like a new fashioned summer hat. The only criticism that might have been made was that it came down rather too far over Emil's eyes.

Then they set off for Mariannelund.

'Be sure to look after little Ida properly while we're away,' called Emil's mother. She sat in front with Emil's father. Emil and the tureen sat at the back, and Emil had his cap beside him on the seat. Because of course he would need something to put on his head for the journey back home. A good job he remembered that!

'What shall I get ready for supper?' shouted Lina, just as the trap was moving off.

'Anything you like,' called back Emil's mother. 'I've other things to think about just now.'

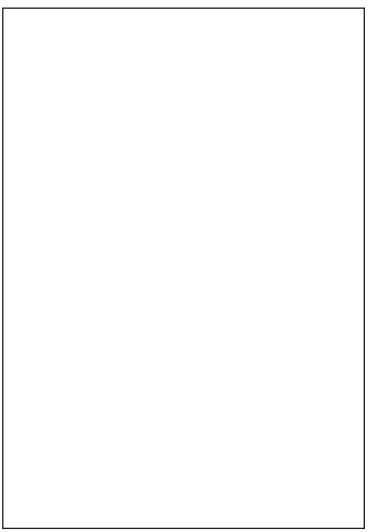
'Well, I'll make meat broth then,' said Lina. But at that moment she saw something flowery disappearing round the corner of the road and remembered what had happened. She turned sadly back to Alfred and little Ida.

'It'll have to be black pudding and pork, instead,' she said.

Emil had been several times to Mariannelund. He used to like sitting high up in the trap, watching the winding road and looking at the farms they passed on the way, and the children who lived in them,

and the dogs that barked at the gates, and the horses and cows grazing in the meadows. But now it was hardly any fun at all. He sat with a soup tureen over his eyes and could only see a little bit of his own button boots from under the tightly fitting rim of the tureen. He had to keep on asking his father, 'Where are we now? Have we got to the pancake place yet? Are we nearly at the pig place?'

Emil had got his own names for all the farms along the road. The pancake place was so-called because of two small, fat children who had once stood by the gate eating pancakes as Emil went past. And the pig place owed its name to a jolly little pig whose back Emil would scratch sometimes.



But now he sat gloomily looking down at his own button boots, unable to see either pancakes or jolly little pigs. Small wonder that he kept

whining, 'Where are we now? Are we nearly at Mariannelund?'

The doctor's waiting-room was full of people when Emil and the tureen went striding in. Everybody there was very sorry for him. They realized that an accident had happened. All except one horrid old man who laughed like anything, just as though there was something funny about being stuck in a soup tureen.

'Haha! Haha!' said the old man. 'Are your ears cold, my boy?'

'No,' said Emil.

'Well, why are you wearing that contraption, then?' asked the old man.

'Because otherwise my ears *would* be cold,' said Emil. He too could be funny if he liked, although he was so young.

Then it was his turn to go in and see the doctor, and the doctor didn't laugh at him.

He just said, 'Good morning! What are you doing in there?'

Emil couldn't see the doctor, but in spite of that of course he had to greet him, so he bowed as low as

he could, tureen and all. Crash! went the tureen, and there it lay, broken in two. For Emil's head had banged against the doctor's desk.

'There goes four kronor up in smoke,' said Emil's father to his mother, in a low voice. But the doctor heard him.

'Yes, it's saved you a krona,' he said. 'Because I generally charge five kronor for getting small boys out of soup tureens, and he's managed to do it all by himself.'

Emil's father was pleased and grateful to Emil for having saved a krona. He hurriedly picked up the broken bowl and off he went with Emil and Emil's mother.

When they came out into the street, Emil's mother said, 'Fancy! We've saved a krona *again*! What shall we buy with it?'

'Nothing. We'll save it,' said Emil's father. 'But it is only fair that Emil should have five öre to put in his money-box when we get home.'

And he took a five-öre piece out of his purse straight away and gave it to Emil. You can imagine how pleased Emil was.

So they set off for home. Emil sat in the back seat, delighted with the five-öre piece in his hand and the cap on his head, as he looked at the children and dogs and horses and pigs as they went past. Had Emil been an ordinary youngster nothing more would have happened that day. But he wasn't! So guess what he did? He put the five-öre bit in his mouth, and just as they passed the pig place, a little 'plop' was heard from the back seat. Emil had swallowed the five öre.

'Oh!' said Emil. 'It *did* go down quick!'

Now there were renewed wails from Emil's mother.

'Dear sake's alive, how are we to get the five öre out of the child? We'll have to go back to the doctor.'

'How well you work things out,' said Emil's father. 'Shall we pay the doctor five kronor so as to get back five öre? Where were you in arithmetic class when you were at school?'

Emil took the matter calmly. He patted his stomach and said, 'I can be my own money-box and have a five-öre piece in my tummy just as well as in my money-box. Because it's no good trying to get

anything out of that. I tried with a kitchen knife, so I know.'

But Emil's mother wouldn't give way. She wanted to go back to the doctor with Emil.

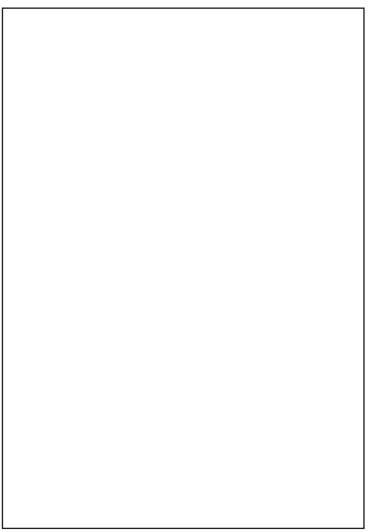
'I didn't say anything that time he swallowed those trouser buttons,' she reminded Emil's father. 'But a five-öre piece is much harder metal, believe me; it might be very dangerous.'

And she managed to scare Emil's father so much that he turned the horse and drove back to Mariannelund. Because he, too, was anxious about his boy.

They went rushing breathlessly into the doctor's surgery.

'Have you forgotten something?' asked the doctor.

'No, it's that Emil has swallowed a five-öre bit,' said Emil's father. 'So if you would perform a small operation on him for four



kronor, say, . . . the five öre could go towards the cost.'

But Emil tugged at his father's coat and whispered, 'None of that—it's mine!'

And the doctor had no intention of taking Emil's five öre away from him. There was no need for an operation, he said. The coin would turn up all right in a couple of days.

'But you should eat five buns,' said the doctor to Emil. 'So that the five öre can have a bit of company and not scratch your stomach.'

He was a delightful doctor, and he didn't charge anything, either. Emil's father was so pleased that he beamed when they went out again.

Emil's mother wanted to go straight away to buy buns for Emil at the Miss Anderssons' Home Bakery.

'No need for that,' said Emil's father. 'We've got buns at home.'

Emil thought for a moment. He was clever at working things out and he was hungry, too, so he said, 'I've got five öre inside me and if I could get at it I would buy my own buns.'

He reflected for a little longer, then he said, 'Can't you lend me five öre for a couple of days, Father? You'll get it back, sure as eggs!'

Emil's father agreed, and off they went to the Miss Anderssons' Home Bakery and bought five buns for Emil, splendid buns, round and golden brown, with sugar on them. Emil gobbled them up at a great rate.

'That's the best medicine I've ever had in my life,' said he.

Emil's father had become so pleased and excited all of a sudden that he didn't know what he was doing.

'We've saved lots of money today,' he said, and he bought five öre's worth of peppermint rock for little Ida at home.

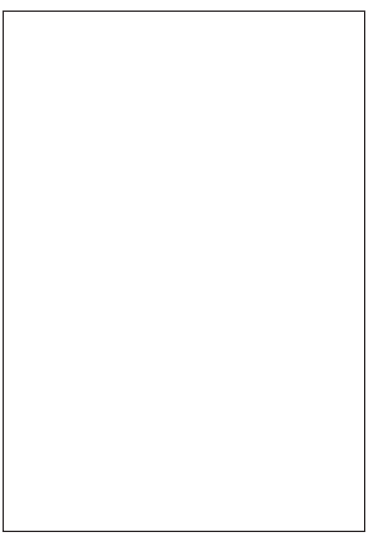
Then Emil and his parents went back to Katthult. As soon as Emil's father got inside the door, and before he had even taken off his hat and coat, he stuck the tureen together again. It wasn't difficult, it had only been broken in two pieces.

Lina was so pleased that she jumped for joy and shouted to Alfred, who was unharnessing the horse, 'Now there'll be meat broth again in Katthult!'

That's what she thought; she had forgotten Emil!

That evening Emil played longer than usual with little Ida. He built a cottage for her among the stones and boulders in the meadow. She thought it great fun. And he only pinched her a little bit each time he wanted some peppermint rock.

Then it began to get dark, and Emil and little Ida thought about going to bed. They went into the kitchen to see if their mother was there, but she wasn't. Nobody was. Only the soup tureen. It stood on the table, all mended and fine. Emil and little Ida stood looking at the wonderful tureen which had been travelling about all day.



'Fancy, all the way to Mariannelund,' said little Ida. And then, 'How did you get your head into the tureen, Emil?'

'It was quite easy,' said Emil. 'I just did this.'

At that moment Emil's mother came into the

kitchen. And the first thing she saw was Emil, standing with the tureen on his head. Emil struck at the tureen, little Ida screamed, Emil screamed as well. For now he was stuck fast again, as he had been before.

Then his mother took the poker and whacked the tureen so that it smashed with a noise that could be heard all over Lönneberga. Crash! it went, and flew into a thousand pieces. Bits of it showered all over Emil. Emil's father heard the noise and came rushing indoors.

He stood silent in the kitchen doorway, and saw Emil and the bits of the tureen and the poker Emil's mother was holding. Not a word did Emil's father say. He just turned and went back to the sheepfold.

But two days later he got five öre from Emil, which was some comfort.

Well, that shows you something of the sort of boy Emil was. It was on Tuesday the twenty-second of May that this soup tureen business happened. But perhaps you would like to hear something about: