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Opening extract from

Emil's Clever Pig

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There was never a boy in the whole of Lönneberga and in the whole of Småland and in the whole of Sweden and—who knows—perhaps in the whole world who got into more mischief than Emil. He lived at Katthult farm in Lönneberga in Småland in Sweden a long time ago. No one would have believed that when he grew up he would become the president of the local council and the finest man in the whole of Lönneberga, but he did.

Alma Svensson of Katthult, who was Emil's mother, wrote down all his tricks in blue exercise

books, which she kept in a drawer in her desk. Eventually, the drawer was so jammed with exercise books that it was almost impossible to open it, because one book always curled up and got stuck. But those exercise books are all there in the same old desk today, except for the three that Emil once tried to sell to his Sunday School teacher when he was in need of money. She didn't want to buy them; so he made paper boats out of them and sailed the boats in the stream at Katthult, and no one has ever seen those three books since.

The Sunday School teacher did not understand why she was expected to buy Emil's exercise books.

'What would I do with them?' she asked in surprise.

'Teach the children not to be as naughty as me,' said Emil.

Oh yes, Emil knew perfectly well what a naughty boy he was, and if he ever managed to forget it, there was always Lina, the maidservant at Katthult, to remind him.

'It's a waste of time for you to go to Sunday School,' she said. 'It doesn't do you any good, and you'll never go to heaven anyway—well, unless they need you up there to help make thunder and lightning.'

'I've never seen anyone like that boy,' Lina said, shaking her head as she went off with little Ida, Emil's sister, to the meadow where little Ida could pick wild strawberries while Lina milked the cows. Ida threaded strawberries on a straw and came home with five straws full, and Emil only persuaded her to give him two straws, which shows that he wasn't so bad after all.

You mustn't think that Emil had wanted to go to the cow pasture with Lina and Ida. Oh no, he felt like doing something more exciting. So he grabbed his cap and his gun, and ran straight to the field and jumped on to Lukas, who then galloped off among the hazel bushes, making the clods fly up behind him. Emil was playing 'Småland's hussars attack'. He had seen a picture of the soldiers in the newspaper, so he knew just what they did.



His cap, his gun, and Lukas were Emil's dearest treasures. Lukas was his horse, yes, his very own horse, won through his cleverness at Vimmerby Fair. The cap was an ugly little blue peaked one that his father had bought for him. The gun was a wooden one, and Alfred, the farmhand at Katthult, had made it for Emil because he was very fond of him. Emil could easily have carved his own gun, for if anyone was good at carving it was Emil, but then he had plenty of practice. You see, every time Emil got into mischief he was punished by being sent to the

tool shed, and there he would always carve a funny little wooden man. He had 369 wooden men, which are all there today, except for the one which his mother buried behind the red-currant bushes because it looked so like the parson.

'We can't let anyone see that,' Emil's mother had said.

Well, now you know something about Emil. You know that he played pranks all year round, summer and winter, and since I have read all of the blue exercise books, I'm going to tell you about some of the days in Emil's life. You will soon see that Emil did lots of nice things, too, so of course I shall tell you all about them as well as all about his terrible tricks. Some were worse than others and some were quite harmless. It was only on November 13 that he did something really outrageous. No, don't ask me to tell you about that. I'm never going to tell anyone because I promised Emil's mother. No, we'll take one of the days when Emil behaved fairly well on the whole, even though his father didn't think so.



Saturday, the twelfth of June, when Emil bought some useless junk at the auction at Backhorva which turned out useful in the end.

One Saturday in June there was an auction at Backhorva that everyone planned to attend, for auctions were what they enjoyed most in Lönneberga, and the whole of Småland. Emil's father, Anton Svensson, was going, of course. Alfred and Lina had pestered him so much that he had agreed to take them along too, and naturally Emil was going.

If you have ever been to an auction, you'll know what it is all about. You'll know that when people want to sell their belongings, they put them up for

auction so that other people can bid on them and buy them. The people from Backhorva farm wanted to sell everything they had, for they were emigrating to America, as so many people did in those days, and they couldn't take their kitchen beds and frying pans and cows and pigs and hens with them. So, on this early summer day, there was going to be an auction at Backhorva.

Emil's father was hoping to get a bargain on a cow and perhaps a sow and possibly a couple of hens. That was why he was going to Backhorva and that was why he let Alfred and Lina go with him, for he would need their help to bring the animals home.

'But what Emil thinks he's going to do there, I don't know,' said Emil's father.

'We don't need Emil to make trouble,' said Lina, 'there's sure to be plenty of that anyway.'

Lina knew there usually were a lot of quarrels and fights at auctions in Lönneberga and all of Småland, so she was right in a way. But Emil's mother looked at her sternly and said, 'If Emil wants to go, he shall

go. It's nothing to do with you. You just watch how you behave and don't go making eyes at the fellows like you usually do.'

That remark caused Lina to be quiet.

Emil put on his cap and was ready.

'Buy something for me,' said little Ida, as she tilted her head to one side.

She didn't say it to anyone in particular, but her father scowled.

'Buy, buy, buy, I never hear anything else. Didn't I buy you ten öre's worth of sugar-candy the other day—for your birthday in January, don't you remember?'

Emil was about to ask his father for some money, for you can't go to an auction with empty pockets, but then he thought he'd better not. It obviously wasn't the right moment to try to get money from his father, who was already sitting in the big milk cart, impatient to be off.

'What you can't get one way, you must get another,' Emil said to himself. He thought hard

for a moment, and then he said, 'You go on ahead. I'll come later on Lukas.'

Emil's father was suspicious when he heard this, but he was anxious to be off as quickly as possible, and so he only said, 'All right, but it would be better if you stayed at home altogether.'

Then he cracked his whip and away they went. Alfred waved to Emil and Lina waved to little Ida, and Emil's mother shouted to Emil's father, 'See that you come home without any bones broken.'

She said that, because she also knew what terrible fights there sometimes were at auctions.

The milk cart disappeared rapidly round a bend in the road. Emil stood in the cloud of dust and watched them go. Then he got busy. He had to get money somehow, and you'll never guess how he did it.

If you had been a child in Småland when Emil was little, you would know all about the gates that were everywhere in those days. They were there to keep the cows and sheep of Småland in their

pastures, and I think they were also there to help the Småland children earn a two öre piece each time they opened the gate for some farmer in his horse-drawn cart who was too lazy to open it himself.

Katthult had a gate too, but Emil had earned only a few precious two öre pieces from it, because Katthult was on the outskirts of the village and hardly anyone came that way. There was only one farm further away and that was Backhorva, the farm where the auction was to be held.

Which means that every man will have to come through our gate on his way to the auction, thought Emil, the clever boy.

Emil stood guard at the gate for a whole hour and he earned five kronor, seventy-four öre. Just imagine that! Horses and carts came in such a constant flow that he could barely shut the gate after one went through before he had to open it again for another. All the farmers passing through were in a good mood, because they were going to the auction, and cheerfully threw two and five öre pieces into Emil's

cap. Some of the old fellows were so full of the joys of spring that they gave him a whole ten öre piece, though they probably regretted it immediately afterwards.

But the farmer from Kråkstorp went into a tantrum when Emil shut the gate in his brown mare's face.

'Why have you shut the gate?' he yelled.

'I've got to shut it first, before I can open it,' Emil explained.

'Why don't you leave it open on a day like this?' demanded the farmer, crossly.

'I'm not dumb,' said Emil. 'This is the first time I'm getting something out of this silly old gate.'

But the farmer from Kråkstorp flicked Emil with his whip and didn't give him a coin.

When everyone who was going to the auction had passed through Emil's gate and there was no more money to earn, Emil mounted Lukas and rode off so fast that the coins in his trouser pocket bounced and jingled.

The auction at Backhorva was now in full swing. People crowded round the items which had been taken out into the farmyard, where they looked very out of place in the bright sunlight. The auctioneer stood on a barrel in the centre of the hubbub, and the bidding was brisk for frying pans and coffee cups and old Windsor chairs and I don't know what else.

I'd better explain that at an auction you shout out to the auctioneer how much you want to pay for the item he is selling, but if there is anyone who is willing to pay more or bid higher, then he gets the kitchen bed or whatever it is.

A sort of sigh went through the crowd when Emil and Lukas came clattering into the farmyard, and you could hear some of them muttering, 'Here comes the Katthult boy; we might as well go home!'

Emil was anxious to start bargaining; since he had so much money in his pocket, he was quite dizzy with excitement. Even before he dismounted, he had bid three kronor for an old iron bedstead which he wouldn't ordinarily have wanted even if it had

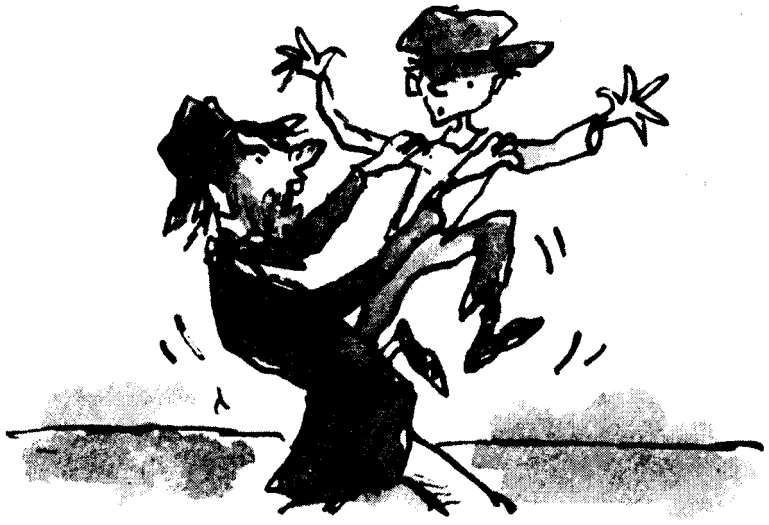
been given to him. Fortunately, a farmer's wife bid four kronor for it, so Emil was saved. But he went on bidding enthusiastically for just about everything and in a flash he became the owner of three items. The first was a faded velvet-covered box with tiny blue shells on the lid which he planned to give to little Ida; the second was a bread shovel, one of those with a long handle for shoving the loaves into the bread oven; the third was a rusty old fire pump which no one in the whole of Lönneberga would have given even ten öre for. But Emil bid twenty-five and got it.

Oh help, I didn't want that, thought Emil. But it was too late now, he had a fire pump and that was that.

Alfred came and looked at Emil's pump and laughed.

'Fire pump owner Emil Svensson,' he said. 'What do you want that contraption for?'

'In case lightning strikes and starts a fire,' said Emil. And the next second lightning did strike, at



least that's what Emil thought, but it was only his father grabbing him by the collar and shaking him until his curly hair swayed.

'Wretched child. What do you think you're doing?' shouted Emil's father.

He had quietly been walking about through the cow pasture, picking out a cow for himself, when Lina had come running up quite out of breath, 'Master, Master, Emil's here and he's buying fire pumps for all he's worth. Is that all right?'

Emil's father did not know that Emil had any money of his own. He was sure that he would have to pay for anything which had been auctioned off to Emil, so you see it wasn't surprising that he went pale and quivered with fear when he heard about the fire pump.

'Let me go. I'm going to pay,' yelped Emil. Gradually he got a chance to explain how he had become so rich simply by opening the gate at Katthult. Emil's father admitted that it was rather smart of him, but said it wasn't at all smart to throw his money away again on an old fire pump.

'Don't let me hear that you've bid for any more idiotic bargains,' he said sternly.

He wanted to see everything that had been auctioned off to Emil and it was an awful shock when he did see them. The old velvet-covered box and the bread shovel were two absolutely useless bargains, but worst of all was the fire pump.

'Now remember what I've told you. You only buy things that are really necessary,' said Emil's father.