



*Emil and the Sneaky Rat*



Have you ever heard of Emil from Lönneberga, the little boy who lived on Katthult Farm in Lönneberga, in a place called Småland in Sweden? You haven't? Well, I can tell you, in Lönneberga there wasn't a single person who hadn't heard all about Katthult Farm's dreadful little boy, that Emil, who got up to more mischief than there were days in the year and who scared the people of Lönneberga so much that they wanted to pack him off to America. Yes, they really did. The people of Lönneberga collected money, tied it up in a bundle and took it to Emil's mother and said:

‘There might be enough here for you to send Emil to America.’

They thought it would be much more peaceful in Lönneberga if Emil wasn’t around, and they were right, of course, but it made Emil’s mother so furious she threw the money back at them and it flew all over Lönneberga.

‘Emil is a lovely little boy,’ she said. ‘We love him just as he is.’



And Lina, the girl who was the maid at Katthult, she said:

‘We ought to think about those Americans, too. They haven’t done us any harm so why should we dump Emil on them?’

That’s when Emil’s mother looked at Lina long and hard, so that Lina understood she had said something stupid. She started to stutter, wanting to make it better:

‘Yes but,’ she said, ‘it says in the *Vimmerby Times* all about that terrible earthquake over there in Amayrica . . . and, I mean, well, it would be too much if, on top of all that, Emil . . . ’

‘Quiet, Lina,’ said Emil’s mother. ‘Get off to the barn and do the milking, that’s the only thing you understand.’

So Lina picked up her milking stool and strode off to the barn. She sat down and started milking so fast that the milk splashed in all directions. She always worked best when she was a bit angry, which is why this time she did the milking faster than usual, all the time muttering quietly to herself:

‘There’s no justice! Why have those Americans got to have all the problems, anyway? Oh, I’d like to change places with them. I think I might just write them a letter saying, here you are, here’s Emil. Now send us that earthquake!’

What a show-off she was, that Lina, thinking she could write a letter to America when she couldn’t even write so that the people in Småland could

understand! No, if anyone was going to write to America it ought to be Emil's mother. She was very good at writing. She wrote down all Emil's mischief in a notebook with a blue cover, which she kept in the bureau drawer.



‘What’s the point of doing that?’ said Emil’s father. ‘With all the pranks that child gets up to you’ll be using up all our ink, have you thought of that?’

That didn’t bother Emil’s mother. She wrote down all Emil’s mischief so that when Emil grew up he would know exactly what he had got up to when he was little. Because then, she thought, he would understand why his mother’s hair had turned grey and then perhaps he would love her even though she had a headful of grey hair, which she had got because of him.

Now you mustn’t think that Emil was nasty—oh no, his mother was absolutely right when she said that he was a lovely little boy. Just like an angel he

looked, with his fluffy blond hair and his innocent blue eyes. Of course Emil was a kind boy, and his mother wasn't unfair, so she wrote exactly that in the blue notebook.

*'Yesterday Emil was well behaved,'* she wrote in her book on the twenty-seventh of July. *'He did not get up too a single bad thing all day which was becoss he had a high tempreture and could not qwite manage too.'*

But the very next day, the twenty-eighth of July, Emil's temperature was down far enough for his mischief to fill several pages in the notebook, because he was as strong as a little ox, that boy, and as long as he was well he could get into all sorts of trouble.

*'I've never known a child like him,'* said Lina.

You might have understood by now that Lina didn't really like Emil. She preferred Ida, Emil's little sister, who was a good, obedient child. But Alfred, the farmhand at Katthult, he liked Emil, nobody really knows why, and Emil liked Alfred. They had fun together when Alfred wasn't working and Alfred

taught Emil all sorts of useful things, such as how you harness a horse and how to catch pike when you go fishing and how you chew tobacco—well, that isn't exactly useful, as I'm sure you know, which is why Emil only tried it once. But try it he did, because he wanted to know everything Alfred knew and be able to do everything that Alfred did.

Alfred had carved a wooden rifle for Emil—wasn't that kind of him? That wooden rifle was Emil's most treasured possession. His second most treasured possession was a scruffy little cap that his father had bought for him once when he was in town and can't have been thinking straight.

'I like me gun and me hat,' Emil used to say, and every single night when he went to bed he had his gun and his hat in bed beside him.

Now, do you remember who lived at Katthult Farm? There was Emil's father who was called Anton, Emil's mother who was called Alma, Emil's sister who was called Ida, the farmhand who was called Alfred, the maid who was called Lina, and



then there was Emil, who was called Emil. Oh, and Krösa-Maja, of course, we mustn't forget her. She was a scrawny little old woman who lived in a farm worker's cottage up in the forest, but she was always running backwards and forwards to Katthult to help with the laundry and sausage-stuffing and things like that, and to scare Emil and Ida half to death with her terrible stories about ghosts and murderers and robbers and other nice things which Krösa-Maja knew all about.

But perhaps now you would like to hear about

some of the trouble Emil got into? He got into trouble every single day, except when he had a temperature, so we could easily pick any old day and he would have got up to something. Well then, why not take the very day we were talking about, the twenty-eighth of July?