On the outskirts of a tiny little town was a neglected garden. In the garden stood an old house, and in that house lived Pippi Longstocking. She was nine years old, and she lived there all alone. She had no mother or father, which was actually quite nice, because it meant that no one could tell her that she had to go to bed just when she was having most fun. And no one could make her take cod liver oil when she would rather eat sweets.
Once upon a time Pippi did have a father whom she loved very much. And of course she once had a mother too, but that was so long ago that she couldn’t remember her at all. Her mother died when Pippi was a tiny little baby, lying in her cot and crying so terribly that no one could stand to come near. Pippi thought that her mother was now up in heaven, peering down at her daughter through a hole.

Pippi would often wave to her and say, ‘Don’t worry! I can always look after myself!’

But Pippi had not forgotten her father. He was a sea captain who sailed the great seas, and Pippi had sailed with him on his ship until one day a big storm blew him overboard and he disappeared. But Pippi was sure that one day he would come back. She didn’t believe that he had drowned. She believed that he had washed ashore on an island that was inhabited by natives and that her father had become king of them all. He walked around wearing a gold crown on his head all day long.

‘My mamma is an angel, and my pappa is king of the natives. Not all children have such fine parents, let me tell you,’ Pippi used to say with delight. ‘And as soon as my pappa builds himself a ship, he’ll come back to get me, and then I’ll be a native princess. Yippee, what fun that will be!’

Many years ago her father had bought the old house that stood in the garden. He had planned to live there with Pippi when he grew old and was no longer able to sail the seas. Then, unfortunately, he was blown overboard. While Pippi was waiting for him to come back, she headed straight home to Villa Villekulla. That was what the house was called. It stood there, all furnished and ready—just waiting for her to arrive.

One beautiful summer evening she said goodbye to all the sailors on her father’s ship. They were very fond of Pippi, and Pippi was very fond of them.

‘Goodbye, boys,’ said Pippi, kissing each of them on the forehead, one after the other. ‘Don’t worry about me. I can always look after myself!’

Two things she took from the ship. A little monkey whose name was Mr Nilsson—he was a present from her father—and a big suitcase full of gold coins. The sailors stood at the railing with their eyes fixed on Pippi for
name was Annika. They were two very nice, well-mannered, and obedient children. Tommy never bit his fingernails, and he always did whatever his mother asked him to do. Annika never made a fuss if she wasn't allowed to have her own way, and she always looked so dainty in her crisply ironed little cotton dresses, which she was careful not to get dirty. Tommy and Annika played very nicely together in their garden, but they had often wished for a playmate. While Pippi was still sailing the seas with her father, they would sometimes lean over the fence and say to each other, 'It's so sad that no one has ever moved into that house! Someone should live there, someone with children.'

On that beautiful summer evening when Pippi stepped through the front door of Villa Villekulla for the very first time, Tommy and Annika were not at home. They had gone to visit their grandmother for a week. That's why they had no idea that someone had moved into the house next door. On the first day after they came home, when they were standing at their front gate and looking out at the street, they still

as long as they could see her. She walked firmly away without looking back. Mr Nilsson sat on her shoulder, and she carried the suitcase in one hand.

'What an amazing child,' said one of the sailors, and he wiped a tear from his eye as Pippi disappeared in the distance.

He was right. Pippi was a quite amazing child. The most amazing thing about her was that she was so strong. She was so incredibly strong that there wasn't a policeman in the whole wide world who was as strong as she was. She could lift a whole horse if she wanted to. And she did. She had her own horse that she had bought with one of her many gold coins on the very same day that she arrived home at Villa Villekulla. She had always longed to have her own horse. He now lived on the porch. Whenever Pippi wanted to have her afternoon coffee there, she would simply lift him down into the garden.

Next to Villa Villekulla was another garden with another house. In that house lived a father and a mother with their two sweet children, a boy and a girl. The boy's name was Tommy, and the girl's
didn’t know that a playmate was actually so close. As they stood there, wondering what to do and whether anything fun was going to happen that day, or whether it was going to be one of those boring days when they couldn’t think of anything to do—just at that moment the gate to Villa Villekulla opened and a little girl came out. She was the strangest girl that Tommy and Annika had ever seen. It was Pippi Longstocking, going out for her morning walk.

This is what she looked like:

Her hair was the colour of a carrot and it was plaited in two tight plaits that stuck straight out. Her nose was the shape of a very small potato, and it was completely covered with freckles. Under her nose was an exceptionally wide mouth with nice white teeth. Her dress was quite odd. Pippi had made it herself. It was supposed to have been blue, but there hadn’t been enough blue material, so Pippi had decided to sew on little red patches here and there. On her long, thin legs she wore long stockings, one of them brown and the other black. And she wore black shoes that were exactly twice the length of her feet.
Her father had bought those shoes for her in South America, big enough so she would have room to grow into them, and Pippi never wanted any others.

What made Tommy and Annika really open their eyes wide was the monkey who was sitting on the strange girl’s shoulder. It was a little African monkey, and he was dressed in blue trousers, a yellow jacket, and a white straw hat.

Pippi set off up the street. She walked with one foot on the pavement and the other in the gutter. Tommy and Annika fixed their eyes on her for as long as they could see her. After a while she came back.

That was so she didn’t have to turn around when she came home.
As she reached the gate to Tommy and Annika’s house, she stopped. The children looked at each other in silence.

Finally Tommy said, ‘Why were you walking backwards?’

‘Why was I walking backwards?’ said Pippi. ‘Don’t we live in a free country? Can’t a person walk any way she likes? Besides, I can tell you that in Egypt everyone walks like that, and nobody thinks there’s anything odd about it.’

‘How do you know that?’ asked Tommy.

‘You’ve never been to Egypt, have you?’

‘Have I been to Egypt! Oh yes, you can bet that I have. I’ve been everywhere on the whole planet, and I’ve seen things that are much odder than people walking backwards. I wonder what you would have said if I’d walked on my hands, like people do in Farthest India.’

‘Now you’re lying,’ said Tommy.

Pippi thought for a moment.

‘Yes, you’re right. I was lying,’ she said sadly.

‘It’s bad to lie,’ said Annika, who finally opened her mouth.

‘Yes, it’s very bad to lie,’ said Pippi, sounding even sadder. ‘But sometimes I forget, you see. And how can you really expect a little girl whose mamma is an angel and whose pappa is king of the natives—a girl who has sailed the seas all her life—how can you expect her always to tell the truth? And besides,’ she said, her whole freckled face beaming, ‘let me tell you that in the Congo there isn’t a single person who tells the truth. They tell lies all day long. They start at seven o’clock in the morning and keep on going until sunset. So if I happen to lie once in a while, you’ll have to try to forgive me and remember that it’s just because I’ve spent a little too much time in the Congo. But we can still be friends, can’t we?’

‘Of course,’ said Tommy, and he suddenly thought that this was probably not going to be one of those boring kind of days.
‘So is there anything stopping you coming to have breakfast at my house?’ said Pippi.

‘No, of course not,’ said Tommy. ‘What would stop us? Come on, let’s go!’

‘Yes,’ said Annika. ‘Let’s go!’

‘But first I have to introduce you to Mr Nilsson,’ said Pippi. And the little monkey took off his hat to greet them politely.

Then they walked through Villa Villekulla’s ramshackle front gate and along the gravel path that was lined with old moss-covered trees—they looked like truly splendid climbing trees—and up onto the porch. There stood the horse, munching oats from a soup tureen.

‘Why on earth do you have a horse on the porch?’ asked Tommy. All the horses he knew about lived in stables.

‘Hmm . . . ’ said Pippi, giving it some thought. ‘Well, in the kitchen he would just get in the way. And he doesn’t feel comfortable in the living room.’

Tommy and Annika patted the horse and then went into the house. There was a kitchen and a living room and a bedroom. But it looked as if Pippi had forgotten to do her Friday cleaning. Tommy and Annika peered around cautiously, just in case the king of the natives happened to be sitting in a corner. They had never in their lives met a king of the natives. But there was no father in sight, or any mother either.

Annika asked anxiously, ‘Do you live here all alone?’

‘Of course not,’ said Pippi. ‘Mr Nilsson and the horse live here too.’

‘Yes, but, I mean, isn’t there any mother or father here?’

‘No, not one,’ said Pippi cheerfully.

‘But who tells you to go to bed at night and things like that?’ asked Annika.

‘I do,’ said Pippi. ‘First I tell myself once, very nicely, and if I don’t obey, then I tell myself again, very sternly, and if I still don’t obey, then it’s time for a spanking, of course.’

Tommy and Annika didn’t really understand all
this, but they thought it might not be such a bad way of doing things.

By now they were out in the kitchen, and Pippi hollered:

‘Now it’s time to make **pancakes**,

now it’s time to flip **panclips**,

now it’s time to shape **panchettes!**’

And then she got out three eggs and tossed them high in the air. One of the eggs landed on her head and cracked open, making the yolk run into her eyes. But the other two she easily caught with a saucepan. They smashed into bits in the pan.

‘I've always heard that egg yolks are good for your hair,’ said Pippi, wiping her eyes. ‘Just wait and see, my hair is going to start growing like mad.'
‘By the way, in Brazil everyone walks around with egg in their hair. And nobody is bald there, either. Except once there was an old man who was so foolish that he ate up all his eggs instead of smearing them on his hair. And of course he went bald. Whenever he went out on the street, he caused such a commotion that the police cars had to be called out.’

While she was talking Pippi nimbly picked the eggshells out of the saucepan with her fingers. Then she took down a bath-brush that was hanging on the wall and started stirring the pancake batter so hard that it splattered all over the walls. Finally she poured what was left onto a griddle that stood on the stove. When the pancake was done on one side, she tossed it halfway to the ceiling to flip it in the air and then caught it on the griddle. And when the pancake was done, she flung it across the kitchen right onto a plate that was sitting on the table.

‘Eat,’ she cried. ‘Eat, before it gets cold!’

So Tommy and Annika ate, and they thought it was a very good pancake. Afterwards Pippi invited them into the living room. There was only one piece of furniture in the room. It was a very big cabinet with lots of little drawers. Pippi opened the drawers and showed Tommy and Annika all the treasures she kept inside. There were strange birds’ eggs, peculiar seashells and stones, elegant little boxes, beautiful silver mirrors, pearl necklaces, and many other things that Pippi and her father had bought on their travels around the world. Pippi gave each of her new playmates a present as a souvenir. She gave Tommy a dagger with a gleaming mother-of-pearl handle, and she gave Annika a little box whose lid was covered with pink seashells. Inside the box was a ring with a green stone.

‘Now you’d better go home,’ said Pippi, ‘so that you can come back tomorrow. Because if you don’t go home, then you won’t be able to come back tomorrow. And that would really be a shame.’

Tommy and Annika thought so too. And so they went home. They walked past the horse who had eaten up all the oats and out through the front gate of Villa Villekulla. Mr Nilsson waved his hat as they left.