

Emma's Bliss

Emmas Glück

15tbc Germany 2006 99 m sub-titles

Crew

Director Sven Taddicken
 Screenplay Claudia Schreiber, Ruth Thoma
 Cinematography Daniela Knapp
 Editor Andreas Wodraschke
 Production Designer Peter Menne
 Music Christoph Blaser, Steffen Kahles

Cast

Emma Jördis Triebel
 Max Jürgen Vogel
 Artz Maik Solbach
 Hans Martin Feifel
 Dagmar Nina Petri

Synopsis

After getting the bad news that he is soon to die of cancer, Max wants to escape to the most beautiful place in the world – Mexico. When he accidentally lands at Emma's pig farm, he realises that true happiness waits just around the corner...

Emma is a pig-breeder at a shabby and indebted farm. She slaughters the pigs in her own way: she treats them lovingly till the last day; the lethal cut shows something like tenderness and in Emma's strong arms the dying animals cease bleeding, calmly and sub-missively. But Emma is lonely. The missing man in her life is replaced by her motor-bike. But the loneliness stays. Until one night when a Jaguar crashes on her farm. Inside the wrecked car lies an unconscious man and a bag full of money. Emma's luck seems to be perfect: fate has thrown money – and a man, Max – into her lap. Suspecting that he has stolen the money, Emma hides the man in her home and the money under her bed. But soon Hans, Max's best friend and employer, turns up and wants his money back...



Review

Justly earning a number of awards for her portrayal of Emma, Jördis Triebel leads in this thoughtful and moving adaptation of Claudia Schreiber's popular novel. Sven Taddicken (*Mein Bruder, der Vampir/Getting My Brother Laid*) presents us with the story's protagonists brilliantly. Emma is the brash and self-dependent farmer, introduced to the viewer slaughtering a pig by means of her own compassionate technique, greeting unwelcome visitors with a double-barrelled shotgun and relieving her frustrations on her rusty motorcycle. Max is the quiet and unassuming car salesman, wondering how best to come to terms with the discovery of his pancreatic cancer. Max's most immediate solution is to (efficiently) pack-up and leave town under cover of darkness with his boss' illicit earnings and a Jaguar, when fate juxtapositions him into Emma's rural enclave.

However, *Emma's Bliss* adeptly sidesteps the cliché of the chalk-and-cheese romance. Rather than obtusely highlighting the pair's differences for laughs, which for some directors would have emerged the easy option, the film focuses instead on the difficult circumstances surrounding our characters as they fall in love. Taddicken delivers moments of humour judiciously and subtly, not detracting from the emotion of the film, and delicately preventing what could otherwise become too sombre or too sweet an experience. This is handled at times with surprising flair, best demonstrated by the scene in which Max, confronted with the spilled insides of a pig, is given the animal's heart to hold and asks Emma where one would find the pancreas. This is not funny in the conventional sense, but is an example of the tender lightness offered to the tragic situation.

Surrounding their unfolding relationship are excellent supporting performances from Hinnerk Schönemann and Martin Feifel. Henner (Schönemann) is an awkward village policeman, pitifully in love with Emma and reluctantly assigned to overseeing the farm's potential auction. Hans (Feifel) is Max's friend and boss, and initially more concerned with what became of his cash. Both characters depict their own acceptance of loss in affecting scenes that complement the main plot excellently.

Unwittingly or not, the distributors' choice of "bliss" as an alternative to "luck" (the latter has been adopted for several international releases) for the film's UK title is testament to Triebel's performance and the residing mood of the picture. Referring, perhaps, to both the harmony she provides her animals as she cradles them during their final seconds and her own found happiness during the time spent with her new companion, the sense of bliss is accompanied perfectly by Daniela Knapp's wonderful cinematography and the organic colour of the photography.

While it could be argued the feature lacks a defining boldness, *Emma's Bliss* transcends the standard of the often-stale romcom format. It is instead a charming and accomplished work about life and death, the confusing passage between the two, and how we deal with choices arising out of situations over which we have little control.

Robin McHugh, Bath Film Festival 2008