

King Pipo's fairy tale

"Oh my," sighed King Pipo as he dried the coffee pot with his embroidered handkerchief. "Oh my," he sighed – and he really did have every reason to sigh. What a poor king he was, having to stand in the royal kitchen with the sleeves of his ermine coat rolled up, washing the dishes. He didn't even have a tea towel to dry his only cup, plate, and coffee pot (whose handle had long since broken off, by the way).

"Oh my," he sighed when he had finished that job, then took a broom and went into the throne room to sweep the floor. Can you imagine what it's like sweeping the floor of such a huge throne room? A room that's so long, you need a telescope to see the other end? Our poor King Pipo could tell you a thing or two about it! Every time he got to about the middle of the room and had already gathered a big pile of dirt in front of him, the dust tickled his nose so much that he had to sneeze: "Achoo!" – all the dirt was gone, and poor Pipo had to start all over again.

"Oh my," there were so many things to do today! The weathervane on the turret of his castle had to be oiled (it was already squeaking so loudly that Pipo couldn't get a wink of sleep at night), he had to mend the canopy over his bed because the moon had started peeping down at him through the hole, and in between he had to remember to stir the rice pudding so that it didn't burn. "Oh my", there really was a lot to do!

Why did poor King Pipo have to do everything himself? And why didn't he have a court, you ask? Yes, I still have to tell you that: A few years ago, Pipo was a rich, powerful king, with chests full of sparkling gold, sumptuously furnished halls and rooms, valuable carpets, and a large staff of the best servants. He had a special cook for plum dumplings, another for apple strudel, and he even had a cook from the neighbouring kingdom come specially to make him pasta with ham, because he was the best. To make the evenings more fun, he had a musician who played the most beautiful songs for him by blowing a comb (not everyone can do this, because the tissue paper tickles most people's lips!). King Pipo was so rich, he even had someone to clean his nose!

But the chubby little king also had a soft heart. He didn't like to see other people worse off than he was and so he gradually gave away all his possessions: his magnificent furniture, his glittering jewellery, his servants ... In the end, only his nose cleaner was left. And when King Pipo saw a little boy sitting on the drawbridge with a suspiciously dripping nose, he gave his nose cleaner away, too.

Since then, he has lived all alone in his empty castle, with nothing but his bed, a few household items, the ermine on his shoulders, the crown on his head, and the sceptre in his hand.

While Pipo was once again stirring the rice pudding, he heard someone whistling a merry tune down below. He rushed joyfully to the window and saw a painter sitting happily in a sun-drenched meadow of flowers, a drawing board between his knees, sketching Pipo's castle. Pipo asked the painter inside and invited him to share the sweet rice pudding with him. Soon, the two of them were sitting there, smacking their lips, and enjoying rice pudding and raspberry juice. Of course, it wasn't long before Pipo told his story and complained to the tall, skinny Pinseltopf (that was the painter's name) about how lonely he was and that he would never find a queen now that he was so poor.

"Isn't there anyone you might love?" asked the painter, rubbing his nose. "Ooh, yes, there is!" Pipo exclaimed enthusiastically. "King Pipi, who lives to the right of my kingdom, has a beautiful, sweet daughter: Princess Pipinella! But I can't invite the two of them to my yawningly empty castle!" "Yes, that's true," said Pinseltopf, plucking at his left ear with his right hand. But that was a sign that he was thinking, and after a little while, he had a marvellous idea!

First, there were plenty of things to do: The little king had to clean his crown with sandpaper, shake out the big bedspread in the castle courtyard (carefully, as it was already very rotten!), get the long ladder and brush the cobwebs out of the corners – and I don't know what else! Pinseltopf painted the empty walls with splendid furniture, polished mirrors, and silk curtains. The whole castle was sumptuously "furnished" – and King Pipo was beside himself with delight. Then the painter wrote a beautifully decorated invitation to King Pipi and Princess Pipinella, and one sunny afternoon the two came to visit, accompanied by a few ministers.

Pinseltopf stood high up on the battlements of the castle, disguised as a herald, and blew the fanfare three times. Then he ran down the 384 steps of the spiral staircase as fast as his long legs would carry him (he had to change his clothes as he ran) and, after lowering the drawbridge with a clatter, opened the castle gates for the guests with a deep bow. Then it was time for him to run ahead again to stand next to King Pipo (dressed as the chief steward). Luckily, nobody saw that Pinseltopf's steward's baton was just an upside-down wooden spoon.

Oh, it wasn't easy! The poor painter couldn't keep up with all the changing: First, he had to serve drinks in Pipo's only two glasses as a servant (of course there was no wine, so Pinseltopf brought the coloured water that he had washed his paintbrushes in – but nobody noticed!), then he had to give his opinion on the royal millstream flotilla as a minister, in between flipping the pancakes in the kitchen – it was hard work! But don't think that Pipo had an easier time. As he walked up and down the throne room, happily chatting with his guests (or so it seemed), he had to be careful that none of them tried sitting on one of the painted chairs. Pipo loudly shouted, "Oh!" (making the minister jump in shock). "Oh. Have you heard the latest joke?" And then he told a joke that made Pipo laugh so hard that some of the painted curtains crumbled down.

Everything went perfectly. Pipi was delighted with Pipo – not least because of the splendour of his castle – and was more than willing to give him his daughter's hand in marriage. And Pipinella herself? Well, the dear princess was the only one to realise (when she tried to stroke a painted kitten) that all the wealth was just a ruse, but she liked King Pipo so much that she didn't say a word about her discovery and just nodded joyfully when Pipo shyly asked her if she wanted to be his dear wife.

What a wedding they had! There was schnitzel with salad, doughnuts, Swiss rolls, raspberry fritters, vanilla ice cream – too many delicious things to name! The pretty bride's dowry was very, very large. Pipo gave most of it away again, but there was still enough for the sweet royal couple and their first minister Pinseltopf, along with a modest court, to lead a happy life.

And if they hadn't all been invented by our Uncle ABC, they'd still be living happily ever after today!

And that, dear children, is why we named our children's world after King Pipo.

The Brunner family