

In the Children's Room

Hans Christian Andersen

Father and mother and all the brothers and sisters had gone to the theater; only little Anna and her grandfather were left at home.

"We'll put on a play, too," he said, "and it can start right away."

"But we don't have any theater!" said little Anna. "And we haven't anybody to do the acting. My old doll can't, because she looks dreadful, and my new one mustn't, because she'd rumple her new dress."

"You can always find actors if you use what you have," said Grandfather. "Now let's build the theater. We'll set up a book here, and another there, and one more over there, in a slanting row. Now three on the other side; so, now we have the side wings. The old box lying over there can be the backdrop, and we'll turn the bottom out. The stage represents a room; everyone can see that. Now we need the actors. Let's see what we can find in your toy drawer. First the characters, and then we'll prepare the play; one holds the other together. This is going to be splendid! Here's a pipe head, and there an odd glove; they'll do very well for father and daughter."

"But that's only two characters," said little Anna. "Here's my brother's old waistcoat - couldn't that play a part, too?"

"It's certainly big enough," said Grandfather. "We'll make it the lover. There's nothing in its pockets, and that's very interesting, for that's why the course of true love doesn't run smoothly! And here we have the nutcracker's boot, with spurs on it. Potz, blitz, mazurka! Look how he can dance and strut! He'll be the unwelcome suitor, whom the lady doesn't care for. Now what kind of play do you want? A tragedy? Or a domestic drama?"

"A domestic drama," said little Anna. "The others like that sort of play. Do you know one?"

"I know a hundred!" said Grandfather. "The most popular ones are from the French, but they're not good for little girls. Instead, we'll take one of the prettiest; they're all about the same inside. Now I'll shake my bag! Kukkelrum! Brand-new! And now here's the play, all brand-new! Now listen to the program."

Then Grandpapa took up a newspaper, and pretended to be reading from it:

THE PIPE HEAD AND THE GOOD HEAD

A Family Drama in One Act

CHARACTERS

MR. PIPE HEAD, *a father* MR. WAISTCOAT, *a lover*

MISS GLOVE, *a daughter* MR. BOOT, *a suitor*

"Now we're ready to start. The curtain rises! But we don't have any curtain, so it's up already. All the characters are on the stage, so we see them immediately. Now I speak as Father Pipe Head; he's angry today. You can see that he's a colored meerschaum.

"Chitchat! Muttering! Poppycock! I'm master of this house! I'm my daughter's father! Listen to what I have to say! Mr. Boot is a person in whom you can see your face; his upper part is made of morocco, and he has spurs at the bottom. Prattle! Chitchat! He shall have my daughter!"

"Now listen to what the Waistcoat says, little Anna," said Grandfather. "He's speaking now. The Waistcoat has a laydown collar, is very modest, but knows his own value and has a right to speak his mind. 'I haven't a spot on me!' he says. 'Good material ought to be taken into consideration; I'm made of real silk, and have strings on me.'

" 'On the wedding day, but not after that. You don't keep your color in the wash!' This is Mr. Pipe Head speaking. 'But Mr. Boot is watertight, made of strong leather, and yet very delicate. He can creak and clank his spurs, and looks Italian!' "

"But they ought to speak in poetry," said little Anna. "I've heard that's the nicest way."

"Oh, they can do that, too," said Grandfather. "And if the public wants it, they'll do it. Just look at little Miss Glove, pointing her fingers!

*A glove without a mate;
That's forever my fate!
Ah!
I can't get over it!
I think my skin will split!
Bah!*

"It was Father Pipe Head who said, 'Bah!' And now Mr. Waistcoat speaks:

*Oh, beautiful Glove,
You must be my love,
Though you're from Spain
And I'm Holger the Dane!*

"When Mr. Boot hears this he kicks up his heels, jingles his spurs, and knocks down three of our side wings."

"This is such wonderful fun!" said little Anna.

"Quiet, quiet!" said Grandfather. "Silent approval will show that you belong to the educated public in the front rows. Now Miss Glove sings her great aria with a break in her voice:

*I have no voice;
I can crow, but that's all;
Caw, caw-in the lofty hall!*

"Now comes the really exciting part, little Anna. This is the most important scene in the whole play. Mr. Waistcoat unbuttons himself and addresses his speech to you out front, so that you will applaud. But don't do it; it's more refined not to. Hear how his silk cloth rustles.

" 'I am driven to extremities! Take care of yourself! Here's my plot! You are the pipe head, and I am the good head. Zip! and away you go!'

"Did you see that, little Anna!" said Grandfather. "That's a most delightful comic scene; Mr. Waistcoat seized the old Pipe Head and put him into his pocket! There he lies, and Mr. Waistcoat speaks:

" 'Aha, you are in my pocket now, in my deepest pocket! You will never come out unless you promise to unite me to your daughter, Miss Left-hand Glove. I hold out my right hand!'

"My, that's awfully pretty!" said little Anna.

"And now old Pipe Head replies:

I'm getting so awfully dizzy!

*Unlike before, I'm not busy.
Gone is my humor, I fear.
Never have I felt so queer.
Without my stem here I feel so frail.
Take me from your pocket without fail,
And you shall have my daughter here,
To marry and to hold dear.*

"Is the play over already?" said little Anna.

"Certainly not," said Grandfather. "It's just all over with Mr. Boot. Now the lovers kneel and one of them sings:

Father!

and the other:

*Mr. Pipe Head, do as you oughter,
Bless your son and daughter!*

"They receive his blessing and celebrate their wedding, and all the furniture sings in chorus:

*Clinks and clanks,
A thousand thanks,
And now our play is over!*

"And now we can applaud," said Grandfather. "We'll bring them all out for a curtain call, and the pieces of furniture, too, for they're made of mahogany."

"And isn't our play just as good as the ones you see in a real theater?"

"Our play is much better!" said Grandfather. "It's shorter; the admission was free; and it has passed away the time before our tea!"