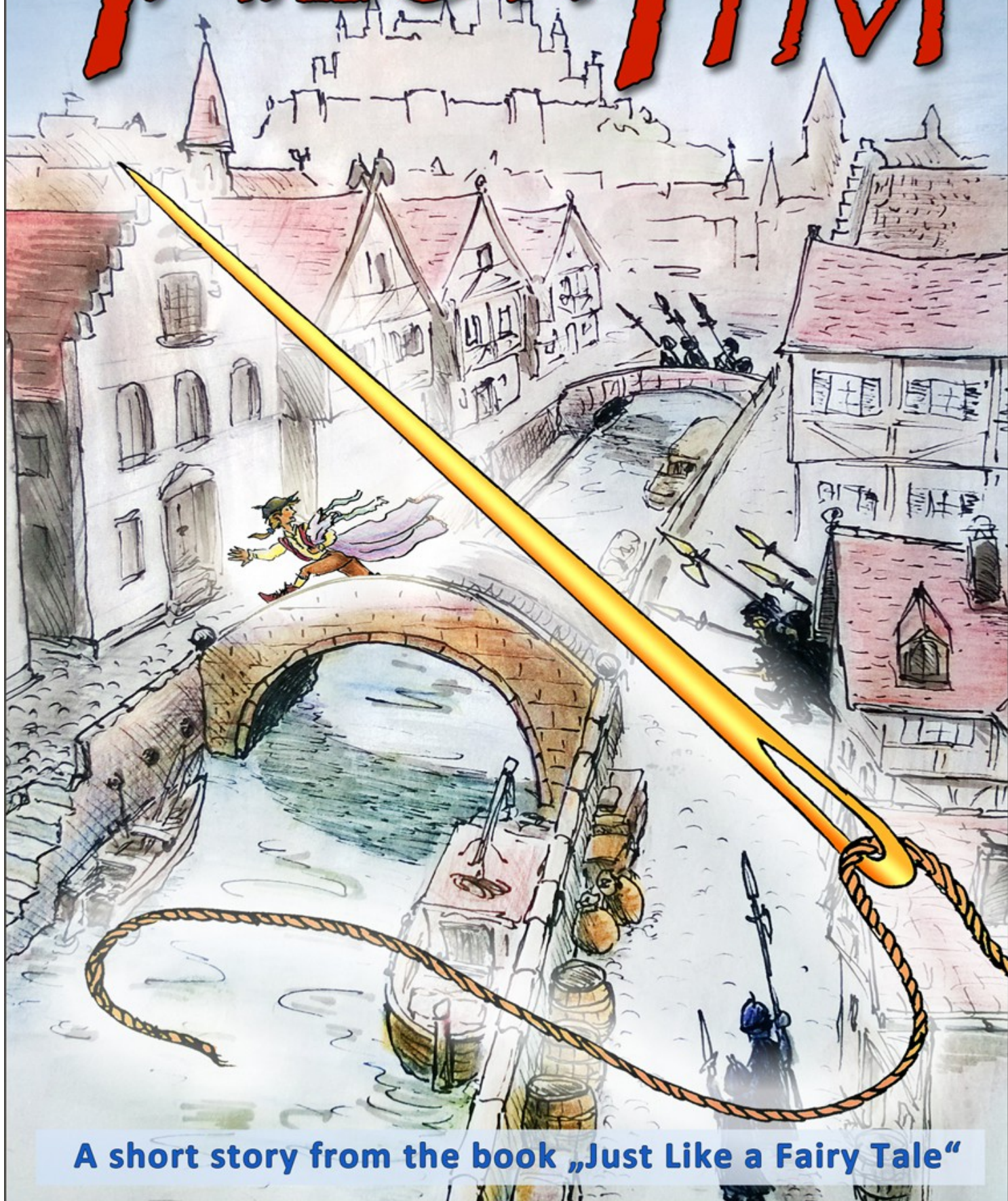


Andy Clapp / Christoph Buchfink

# TAILOR TIM



A short story from the book „Just Like a Fairy Tale“

# Tailor Tim

Dear readers,

this is one of 14 short stories

that are planned for

**„Just Like a Fairy Tale“**

a book by

Andy Clapp & Christoph Buchfink

which will appear in summer 2021

**We hope, you'll enjoy it**

# Give what you have and take what you are given

“Open up!” Someone was hammering on the door.

“Open up in the name of the King! Taxes are overdue! Open up this instant or you’ll regret it!”

In front of Tailor Tim’s door stood the Royal Tax Collector flanked by two soldiers, one of whom was battering Tim’s door with his lance. Tim knew this voice very well; if you didn’t respond straight away there would be a harsh punishment. Taxes had been increasing more and more and everyone was having difficulty paying. Tim jumped up from his sewing to open the door. The Tax Collector was a short, round man with thick lips and small penetrating eyes. A horn was hanging from his sash, which was in the King’s colours: light blue with golden borders.

I sewed that sash myself, thought Tim. It had been a personal commission from the king a few years back. He reached out to feel the quality of the material.

“Get those fingers off me!” shouted the little man, “or you’ll be locked up.”

Lately the soldiers had been getting stricter; the smallest misdemeanour could mean a trip to the dungeon.

“You are Tailor Tim?” demanded the Tax Collector as he glanced around the sparse hut. Fabric for clothes-making was hung and draped over everything. There was a window that let in a little light, an old oil lamp, otherwise not much.

“That’s me,” Tim replied.

“You are two weeks late with your payments. Ignoring the King’s Tax is a serious matter,” said the little man with a stern look.

“I can pay next week when I have this jacket finished.”

“You have until this evening. Either the money is there or it’s the dungeon for you, young man!” replied the Tax Collector. He turned on his heel and went out with the two soldiers sniggering behind him.

What a hopeless situation. He couldn’t possibly finish the jacket by this evening; there wasn’t enough time to finish the arms let alone the whole jacket. “If only they wouldn’t keep raising the taxes,” he mumbled to himself, “there’s hardly enough left over for bread and cheese. And I’ve got to buy new cloth.”

At that moment he heard a croaky voice outside his window. “Alms! Charity! Has anyone got a crust of bread for me? Have a heart for an old woman. I haven’t eaten for three days.”

Tailor Tim saw the old woman, dressed in rags, with wrinkled skin but with an intense light in her eyes that you don't usually see in people who live on the street.

"I have a little bread which I can share with you and a drop of milk. Come in." They shared what Tim had. When they were finished she looked slowly around the room as if to check something, then looked him straight in the eye for a moment and nodded.

"God will reward you, young man... but take this as a gift. It might be of some use to you." She rummaged around in her rags and gave Tim a tiny wooden box. He opened it and on the red velvet inside there was something that glittered brightly.

A needle? What should I do with another sewing needle? Tim was confused but couldn't take his eyes off it. It had a curious shine.

"You're a tailor aren't you? Use it wisely," she said.

"What is that supposed to mean? I..." He looked up and she was gone.

How strange, he thought. Where did she go? But then he noticed the needle shimmered golden.

"It's made of gold! Solid gold!! Old lady..." He called up the street, but she was nowhere to be seen.

And what did she mean with, use it wisely? He thought for a moment. I can take it to the pawnbroker and get some money to pay my tax.

Everyone knew the pawnbroker was a crook. He gave you much less than the worth of the things you took to him, and demanded much more when you wanted to buy them back. Even so this golden needle would fetch Tim enough money to pay his taxes. Next to the door of the pawn shop there was a brass plate which read: 'Give what you have and take what you are given.'

That doesn't sound very encouraging, Tim thought to himself and was just about to open the door when he heard a husky voice: "I wouldn't do that if I was you."

"Beg your pardon. Did somebody say something?" Tim looked around but could see no one.

So he went to open the door and again heard the same husky voice: "It would be better for you not to do it."

I heard it again, he thought. "Door - can you speak?"

"No."

"Ah. Of course you can, you just said No," he said.

"No it didn't," replied the voice.

“What?” Tim felt a bit silly talking to a door.

“Miaow.”

Tim looked down and saw a cat sitting in the next doorway, a beautiful creature with grey fur and orange eyes that he hadn’t noticed before.

“Did you just speak to me?”

“Miaow?”

Of course not, Tim said to himself. Cats can’t talk like humans.

He bent down and stroked its fur. “You’re a fine cat.”

“Miaow... mhhh... mmmmh.” The cat enjoyed being stroked particularly behind the right ear.

“Ohh, yes. And now behind the other one.”

“What?” Tim stared at the cat. “You’re the one who spoke! What did you say before?”

“Miaow.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Tim, lost in thought. He started stroking its back.

“Mmmh. That’s so good. And now my side,” said the cat in the same husky voice, rolling over on the ground.

“So you can speak!” said Tim.

“Miaow. Of course, you do too.”

“I can’t believe my ears.” Tim had never heard of an animal that could speak like a human.

“Miaow. Don’t sell it.”

“Sell what?”

“The needle of course, silly. It could be a great help to you some time,” purred the cat.

“How strange. That’s what the old lady said. But a great help for what?” He looked at the needle more carefully.

“Miaow. Have you tried sewing with it? It makes the most splendid clothes,” purred the cat.

“Grand enough for a princess.”

“That’s it!” exclaimed Tim. “I could sew dresses for the princess then I could pay my taxes. Thank you sweet cat.”

“Miaow. Again behind the other ear... Miaow... mmmh ... mmmh.”

Tim was hardly through the door of his hut when he had looked out his best material, satin and silk, and got to work. The needle sewed as if by magic and in the shortest time he had the most splendid dress he'd ever made.

Just then there was a banging on his door again.

"Open up in the name of the King. Open up this instant Tailor Tim!"

Tim rushed to the door. The same Royal Tax Collector and soldiers were there, weapons raised. Tim smiled. "I don't have any money I'm afraid, but a lovely dress for her majesty the princess and..." He didn't get any further.

"Arrest that man!" shouted the Tax Collector, giving the two soldiers a signal to seize Tim. "Into the dungeons with him!" Tim put the dress under his arm, grabbed the needle and some thread, jumped through the open window of his workshop into the street and ran for his life.

## The chase through the alleys

Now started the great chase through the city that the people talked about for years afterwards. Tim tried to avoid the market, and ran instead down the narrow alleys of the poor quarter, with the soldiers right on his heels. He knew every corner of this part of the city. He ran left, pretended to go right, darted left again and so confused the soldiers that he managed to slip into a backyard unseen while they ran on past. In the distance Tim heard the Tax Collector's horn which meant very soon there would be yet more soldiers out looking for him.

I've got to find a place where they won't look for me, he thought. He ran quickly out of the backyard, jumped over a low wall, crossed the canal bridge and ran round the corner into the street of the bakers. At the other end were two sentries who spotted him immediately. He quickly jumped back round the corner and dodged into Little Leather Lane, where he bumped into another soldier. He shot into the entrance to a cellar which luckily was unlocked, made his way through the washing rooms and laundries, pulled himself up over two walls and crossed the second bridge into the merchants' quarter. But soldiers appeared from everywhere. He heard shouts and horn signals from all directions. It seemed as if the entire king's army was after him. Just as he thought he was out of danger they came careering round the next corner.

He'd just dodged down a narrow alleyway when an old rusty door opened and he heard a familiar voice say: "Quick, young man come in here."

Tim slipped inside, still holding tightly onto the dress, and peered into the dark room as the old woman shut the door before the soldiers realised where he'd gone. He heard their confused shouts and echoing boots as they ran on past, down the alley.

"I see you've put the needle to good use," said the old lady as she fingered the dress material which seemed to shimmer even in the darkness.

"Yes," he replied, "but it doesn't help me pay my taxes. It seems half the king's army is after me."

"Yes, that greedy old King," sighed the old woman, looking very troubled for a long moment. Tim stared at the glittering dress. It seemed to change colour as he looked at it.

"I've got to find the princess so I can sell her this dress. That will solve my tax problems for the time being."

"Mmmm. That's a good idea," she nodded.

"But how?" mumbled Tim to himself. As he looked up, the old woman gave him a knowing smile.

"Make sure you get into the dungeon, cell number five. And take this little key," she whispered and gave him a tiny silver chain with an unremarkable key hanging from it.

"In the back corner of cell number five behind an old moss covered stone is a keyhole. Open it and it will lead you to the princess."

"That's very kind of you," Tim said and inspected the little key.

"And something else," she added. "Take this little bag of powder. It could come in useful."

"What's it for?" Tim asked.

"You'll know when the time comes. Use it wisely." She smiled again.

"Many thanks." Tim put the items in his pocket. "But how do I get into cell Number five? Hello? Hello?" He looked up and found himself alone in that dark room.

Tim wondered how he would get into the dungeon. He made a start for the door. Silly question, he said to himself. I just have to give myself up. The soldiers will be very happy to capture me.

When he left the house he expected the neighbourhood to be overrun by soldiers, but there wasn't a single one in the alley, or the next street, or the next. They were all gone.

After he had turned two more corners and found no soldiers he wondered where they all were.

"Miaow. They've all gone." The voice startled him. And there sitting on the ledge of a wall was the grey cat again staring him directly in the eye.

"Miaow. They've given up searching here and are trying in a different quarter... across town," purred the cat. "Mmmhh. Could you just stroke me behind the other ear?"

“And just when I need them,” mumbled the tailor. “Maybe I should shout for them.”

“Mmmhh,” murmured the cat quietly, “there are always sentries at the castle gates. Miaow.”

“Great idea,” said Tim, eyeing the dress which surprisingly didn’t seem to have a tear or mark on it despite the chase through the town. “Thanks for the tip. By the way do you have a name, my dear cat?” But when he looked up the cat had vanished.

## Locked up

When Tim arrived at the castle gate there was only one sentry, and he didn’t look particularly dangerous. That’s unusual, thought Tim. Ever since the king’s strange change of character there had been at least ten sentries guarding the gate.

“Sentry?” Tim put on a brave face.

“Yep,” answered the man in a good humoured, slow voice.

“Are you the sentry?” asked Tim.

The man looked left, then right and finally turned completely around and faced Tim again.

“Ain’t no one else ‘ere so Oi must be. Oi’m Bromm. Sentry Bromm.” He laughed happily at his own joke.

“So Mr. Bromm. Take me prisoner!” demanded Tim.

“Naaa.”

“Naaa?” repeated Tim. This sentry had a strange way of talking. “What does that mean?”

“Naaa. Oi can’t.”

“Look. I don’t have any time to lose. I must be put in prison.”

“Naaa. Ya ain’t allowed to be in prison.”

“I have to. Preferably in cell five.” Tim was getting very impatient.

“Naaa. Ya can’t. Ya ain’t been captured yet.”

“Well capture me then.”

“Oi ain’t running about capturin’ people. Oi’s got a gate to watch.”

“You don’t have to run around. I’m here.” Tim held out his arms for the sentry to tie him up and take him to the dungeons.



“Go away. Oi got a gate to watch,” he said and poked Tim in his belly with his lance.

“I’m a wanted man. I haven’t paid my taxes!”

The sentry laughed. “Oi ain’t paid mine neither! But Oi only get a soldier’s pay.”

This was getting nowhere so Tim decided to change tactics.

“Bromm. You have cauliflower ears!” said Tim cheekily.

“Oi know. Comes from playing rugby in the scrum when Oi was a lad.”

“Your nose looks like a bent cucumber!”

“Oi know. When Oi was a kid it just didn’t stop growin’,” he replied jovially and ran his fingers over his nose.

“And you have spots on your bum!”

“How did you know that? Ya cheeky bleeder!” The sentry was getting impatient and that was a good sign.

“And your breath stinks.”

“Stop that! An’ get outta here.” It was working. The sentry was finally getting angry.

“Your breath stinks so badly that everyone in this part of the city has to wear a face mask to stop themselves passing out.” The sentry was getting furious.

“Your last chance. Get out of ’ere or Oi’ll have to arrest you fur insultin’ a royal servant.”

“A royal servant with such bad breath. The king would be unconscious before you entered the royal chamber.” Tim started dancing around and sticking his tongue out.

“Right! That’s it. Oi’ ain’t ‘avin’ no more o’ this. It’s the dungeons for you, my lad.” The sentry grabbed Tim by the arm and thrust him through the castle gates.

“Of course. And into cell five.”

“Naaa. It’s cell three fur you,” he said as he roughly pushed Tim along the path to the dungeons.

“You’re an idiot,” said Tim cheekily.

“Right. Cell Number four!” The sentry was insulted.

Now I know how this works thought Tim as they got to the door of the dungeon.

“You stink, your mother stinks, your whole family **sticks** like a herd of pigs. I’m surprised anyone lives within ten miles of you.”

“Cell ten for you. And another word and you’re in cell eleven. That’s the torture chamber!” said a very irate watchman.

Tim was shocked. “Very sorry. I didn’t mean it. I don’t know what came over me. You’re a very sweet, kind, thoughtful man, Mr. Bromm. With a great sense of humour.”

“Shut up an’ in’ ere.” The sentry shoved him into a cell before his eyes were accustomed to the darkness.

“Which cell is this?” asked Tim. Bromm looked nervously at the sign above the old oak door and scratched his chin.

“Um. Looks like a two but I thought it... never mind. Got you nice an’ locked up.” He turned to go and started down the dark passageway.

“Stop. Please. I’ve got to go into cell five. It’s really important,” pleaded Tim through the little barred window in the door.

“Quiet now. Oi gotta get back to the gate. Oi be the only watchman ‘ere. All the others are runnin’ round the town looking fur a stupid tailor.” Tim heard the sentry’s heavy boots on the flagstones echoing down the passage then he was gone.

“Bromm, I’m in the wrong cell...” His voice trailed away into the dark dampness. “I came into the dungeons so that I didn’t have to go into the dungeons... and now I’m in the wrong dungeon,” he muttered as he looked down at the wonderful dress he was holding. It shone in different colours depending how the light fell onto it. Here in the dungeon it sparkled a light green. It was meant to help him out of his trouble; now he was in more trouble. He couldn’t help it: he started to sob.

## Moss and muck

“That’s beautiful!” sighed a gravelly voice and there was a movement in the darkest corner of his cell. “I haven’t seen anything so beautiful in ages.” Tim saw in the twilight a grimy figure chained to the wall, covered in dirty old rags that were once clothes. But the strangest part was his face. He had a sort of lizard’s face, green with odd scars.

“Who are you?” Tim wasn’t usually frightened but this had given him a bit of a shock.

“Who am I? It seems I’m an ugly dragon, a dinosaur or a giant lizard,” snorted the fellow.

“But you can speak.”

“Can’t we all?” he replied sadly. He obviously didn’t want to talk about himself. “But what you’re holding is wonderful.” He said more gently. “It’s almost magical.”

“Yes. I made it for the princess... but now she won’t get it.”

“They say,” said the lizard man in his gravelly voice, “they keep the princess here in the dungeons in a secret room, with hardly a stitch on, unprotected from the cold.”

“What here in the dungeons?” Tim was outraged.

“Yes. Since the king has gone mad. He sent his wife out of the country, banned his son, the crown prince and now he’s locked up his own daughter in the deepest dungeon.”

“And he keeps putting the taxes up,” added Tim.

“What? The people are paying more taxes?”

“Everyone in the country pays so much tax there’s hardly enough left over to live.”

“Yes,” nodded the lizard man and Tim could see the despair in his wrinkled face. “He is out of his mind. It’s a desperate situation.” They both sat there on the damp mossy stones for a long moment lost in thought.

“I’ve got to find the princess, get her out of here and then there’s the dress... I suppose the taxes aren’t so important after all.” The dark cell reflected Tim’s dark mood as he realised he’d got himself into a bigger problem than he’d imagined.

“I tried to help her and look what’s happened to me,” said the lizard sadly.

“If only I was in cell five then I’d know what to do,” muttered Tim to himself.

“But you are in cell five. Look, over on the other side of the passage is cell three, next to it number four. Next to us is the six. So we must be in five,” explained the lizard man.

“What?” Tim was shocked. “The guard said we were in cell two.”

“He’s a fool who doesn’t know left from right. But didn’t you notice the old number on the door is broken and hangs just from one nail upside down... looks like a two.”

“Then I have to find a moss covered stone,” shouted Tim in his enthusiasm, and started scraping the moss and dirt off the old stones of the cell.

“You’ll find enough moss covered stones in here,” laughed the lizard.

“I was given a key by a strange old lady. The entrance I can use to get to the princess has to be here somewhere. I just have to find it,” explained Tim. He took a sharp stone from the floor and scratched away the dirt and lime from the joints in the wall. Eventually one stone larger than the rest moved. It was indeed covered in a lot of moss. He pushed it to one side and behind it was a small silver keyhole in the wall. His heart beat like the church bells on a Sunday as he put the key in the keyhole and turned it once, then twice in the lock. The door made a dull scratchy noise as it opened and he could dimly make out a narrow passageway disappearing into the darkness.

This will surely lead up to the princess's chambers, he thought. Taking a deep breath he bent low and went through the doorway. Feeling his way along, he was surprised that a stairway led him downwards. After rounding a number of corners and tripping on the uneven flagstones he suddenly saw light. It came from a huge candle in a holder on the wall lighting up a hole in the floor. Peering inside he saw, sitting on a wooden bench and wrapped in an old blanket, a dirty but very beautiful girl. She wore a thin blouse that was ripped in many places and she was trying to rub her legs warm under the blanket.

She looked up, startled, and Tim lost his balance and fell the two metres, landing directly at her feet. Before he could think straight, he shut his eyes and offered her the beautiful shimmering dress. The sight of her had completely confused him and he couldn't form any clear thought. After a long silence that seemed to him like hours, he heard a gentle "Thank you." He looked up and saw that she had put on the dress. He was amazed: it fitted perfectly, not a centimetre too big or too small, as if it had been created for her by magic. He looked up into two shining eyes that smiled at him kindly. Is it any wonder that his heart started to pound and he felt himself falling deeply in love with her?

"My name is Tim. I'm... I'm a tailor," he stuttered. She looked at him with an amused smile.

"Elizabeth, Princess of..."

"Yes. I know you, your majesty," interrupted Tim.

"You don't need to be so formal," she said. "Tell me rather where you came from and how I can get out of here?"

The question brought him back to reality.

"We have to go back up the stairs, and then... Ummm. It ends in a dungeon cell... number five." Just then Tim heard a clinking of chains and keys, and noticed a moss covered door in the wall of her cell. He threw himself into the shadow behind it.

"Here you are, my deary. It's me, Bromm. Someert to eat," said the guard as he entered with a steaming bowl in his hand. "It's lovely porridge again." Tim sprang onto his back. The bowl fell from his hand and smashed on the ground, sending hot porridge scooting across the floor. Tim had hoped to overpower the guard but hadn't reckoned on his massive strength. He shook violently but Tim held on tight. So Bromm threw himself against the stone wall, knocking the wind out of Tim who started to see stars. Holding on for dear life Tim remembered the needle. Pulling it out, he poked the guard in the bum.

"Ooow. Stop that! That hurts..." But just at that moment Bromm saw the princess in her shimmering dress which had turned to a beautiful violet colour in the candlelight. He stood there with his mouth open.

"Your Majesty..." he said and fell onto one knee.

The princess pulled back her shoulders, stood very straight and gave her most royal look.

"Indeed, I am your princess. Guard Bromm. You have to lead us out of here."

"Naaa. Impossible, your Graciousness. The king said Oi shouldn't let you out. Orders is orders!"

"Guard Bromm. Look at me. Am I the princess?" She looked him directly in the eye. "And should a princess be kept in a dungeon?"

"Yer... Oi mean naaa... um... Oi..."

"When did the king last pay your wages?"

"Well, about a year ago." Bromm was embarrassed. "Oi have to steal bread from the kitchens to feed me kids. But don't give me away."

"Don't worry, we won't," replied the princess.

"Bromm, what are you doing here? You're supposed to be guarding the gates," said Tim catching his breath as he thankfully slid off the guard's back.

"Double duty. Lot of runnin' about," replied Bromm, rubbing his bum.

Tim turned to the princess. "How long has the king been like this?"

"It all began when the king and my mother started arguing," she said. "It got worse and worse until they were just shouting at each other. Then he started drinking this strange brew that made him forget everything. Soon after that he chased my mother out of the palace." The princess looked sadly at the floor.

"And no one's seen her since," added Bromm.

"As we children got bigger my brother the crown prince tried to stop father drinking the brew. So the king banished him. In the end the king had me thrown into this dungeon."

"He said you are too beautiful, your Ladyship," added Bromm.

"Too beautiful!" Tim was shocked.

"Yes," she sighed. "As I grew up he was afraid that other princes or noblemen would come to woo and marry me."

"So he would rather lock you up in this filthy hole?" Tim was speechless.

"He's gone completely bonkers," said the guard.

All three stood for an awkward moment lost in their own thoughts. What could they do? Capture the king together and put him in prison? No chance; there were too many guards bristling with weapons. Take his drink away? Far too risky. They'd only land back here in the dungeons together... or worse.

At length Tim asked “Where does he keep this drink? Who gives it to him?”

“His chief adviser,” answered the princess. “It all started when she came to the palace. She’s an old witch ... and evil.”

“A witch!” Tim shook his head. “I didn’t think there were still any witches in the kingdom. Weren’t they banned years ago?”

“I just call her that, because she behaves like one. She brings him his drink each day in person. No one else is allowed near.”

“Then she mixes something in,” said the guard. Tim and the princess stared at him, astonished.

“Well. That’s what you normally do, don’t you? You mix some sort of potion in and give it to him. Or did Oi said something stupid?” asked the guard sheepishly.

“Bromm. You’re a brilliant fellow,” said Tim. “Bring me white cloth: a big piece. Scissors and thread. I’ve got an idea.”

## Invisible

In no time at all Tim had used the golden needle to sew a cook’s hat and apron. With the guard’s help, he dressed as a cook and slipped into the kitchen. There was a great bustle of activity, with banging pots and vegetables being chopped, and the smell of fresh onion soup. Tim tried to work out where he was, turned and came face to face with a tall, angular woman who had a voice like fingernails scraping across a blackboard. This, thought Tim, must be the old witch, the king’s chief adviser.

“What’s this?” she screeched. “A new cook? I don’t remember hiring you.” She flashed him an evil glance, but at that moment she had more important things to occupy her than interrogating a new cook.

“Where’s the King’s wine?” she yelled across the kitchen. Tim rushed in the direction she was looking, straight into the pantry where a young cook had just filled two glasses with best red wine.

Tim said quickly, “I’ll take those. Orders from the top!” and snatched the tray out of the hands of the astonished young man, taking it straight to the scowling chief adviser.

“Good. Now go about your work,” she snapped, took the tray and turned away from Tim. He looked over her shoulder and saw her pull a little bag out of her sleeve, open it and pour green powder into one of the glasses. The wine fizzled and for a moment frothed up before settling down again. He ducked back, not to be seen by her and crashed into an oven, knocking over a saucepan.

“How dare you?” The king’s advisor spun around spilling some of the wine from the glass with the green powder onto her sleeve which left ugly green marks. Tim had to act quickly so he sprang forward and dabbed her dress with a white tea towel.

“I’m terribly sorry, Your Majesty. Your Highness... er... I’ll put things right,” he stammered.

“Disappear!” she whispered in a deadly tone. “You are not needed here. Get back to your work before I dream up a punishment for you.” Tim dodged back into the pantry but turned just in time to see her going up the stairs with the wine glasses.

I have to move quickly, he thought. I have to follow her and stop the king from drinking.

If only he had sewn a servant’s costume instead of a cook’s, it would have been much easier to get into the throne room. The other servants kept sending him back to the kitchen.

He had an idea. Everywhere there were wall hangings, heavy material that hung from every window, corner and alcove with the king’s emblem on them. He darted into a small alcove took a piece of cloth off the wall, took the golden needle and sewed himself a cloak that covered him completely. What a useful needle! Now he could hop from one wall hanging to the next. When a servant came past Tim only had to stand perfectly still to become invisible.

At last he got to the top of the stairs and hoped he wasn’t too late. His thinking and sewing had already cost too much time. At the end of the passage he saw the king’s advisor who had just given the royal guards a right royal telling off. With mumbled apologies and red faces they opened the great doors to let her into the royal chambers. At the last moment Tim managed to slip in, his new cloak just pulling clear of great doors as they closed. With trembling hands and knees the royal guards stood in front of the door.

“Did you see that?” whispered one to the other, who shook his head.

“Something followed her in. It swished past me. I felt the air. Do you think we should tell them inside?”

“Are you mad?” whispered the other, “and get another scolding? My ears are ringing from the last one.” The royal guards took a deep breath and hoped that nothing else was going to go wrong today.

Inside the hall Tim slipped behind a suit of armour to get a better view of what was going on. The royal chamber was huge with a stone platform in the middle topped with the throne. All along the walls were high windows, suits of armour and the same wall hangings with the king’s emblem, so Tim could use his cloak trick to full advantage. The advisor was just giving the king a glass of wine: the one with the powder.

“Here, Your Majesty. Take your fortifying wine before we get down to the affairs of state. We have some tricky decisions to make. We have to put up the taxes again. The people are so stubborn and unwilling to pay them. Only yesterday I had to send out a hundred soldiers into the city to search for a tax evader.”

"I don't know, Ignatia," replied the king, "I think it would be better to leave the taxes..."

"Don't worry, your Majesty." Her voice had suddenly become soft and smooth. Tim was amazed at the difference: she sounded sympathetic and sensitive. The king obviously had great trust in her.

"You will manage everything easily once you've had your strengthening potion. Your Health, Majesty!"

"Your Health, Ignatia!" replied the king raising his glass. Tim had to think quickly. As the king lifted the glass to his lips there was a huge crash as one of the suits of armour hit the floor and burst into its different parts. The helmet rolled across the floor of the great hall and came to a stop in front of the throne. The king jumped in his seat and dropped his glass which shattered on the floor sending a trail of hissing bubbles and green marks onto the wooden boards.

"What is that?" The king stared perplexed at the foaming spots on the floor. Although angered at such a distraction, Ignatia quickly had herself under control.

"Oh. Nothing special. The boy who cleans the floor hasn't done his work properly. I'll see he gets a good thrashing for this. I'll get a fresh glass, your Majesty." She moved quickly back to the great doors, looking round nervously and muttering, "Who was that?" She couldn't spot Tim. He was nestled in a curtain that hung between two windows and was completely invisible to the naked eye.

Now I've a minute or two, Tim thought as he heard the king's advisor disappearing down the stairs. But she mustn't catch me. He scurried from wall hanging to wall hanging while the king was staring, puzzled, at the green marks on the floor.

"Majesty!" A high pitched ghostly voice echoed through the room. The king looked up startled. "Where is your daughter?" The king had a bemused expression as he looked around the room but he saw no one. Tim darted a few windows further. He was getting nearer to the throne.

"Where is your son?" Again the strange high pitched voice rang out.

"My son?" The king tried to clear his head. Did he have a son? Did he have a daughter?

"Where is your wife? The Queen?" The king was confused. He was dizzy. Old memories came to him but they were unfocused, unclear, floating around at the back of his mind.

"Majesty!" called out a familiar voice as Ignatia came hurrying through the doors towards him with the two glasses on a tray. Even from his hide out Tim could see that one of them was foaming slightly.

"Majesty, it's a disgrace. We've just hired a new cook and now he's nowhere to be seen. I've had to do everything myself. Heads will roll!"



"Where is my daughter?"

"What?" The advisor thought she hadn't heard properly. How had he remembered her? High time that he took the potion. "Drink, my king. Drink!"

"Where is my daughter?"

"Ah... she's gone off riding on her favourite pony, Majesty."

"There have been no ponies for years in the palace," called out the disembodied voice.

Where did that voice come from? Ignatia looked carefully around the room.

"No ponies?" repeated the king, confused.

"Ah. Yes. You banned them yourself years ago, Majesty." replied Ignatia.

"Where is my daughter?" asked the king.

"Ah... she's gone for a walk in the Palace gardens. Now quickly drink up, Majesty," said Ignatia. "It will do you good," she whispered in the king's ear.

"And where is my son?"

Ignatia was shocked. Where on earth had he suddenly got these ideas?

"You don't have a son, Majesty," she insisted, trying to compose herself. She even tried to laugh.

"I do..." murmured the king. "I remember... he's ... um... called Edward. Yes. Edward. My crown Prince." The king was starting to unearth long buried memories.

"No, no. You're getting confused, Majesty. Here's your fortifying wine. Very good for the memory."

"He was very good with the sword, my Edward," remembered the king. Ignatia paused to think for a minute. She had to change tactics.

"Ah. You mean Edward. Of course. He's practising with his sword in the..."

"In the dungeons!" The ghostly voice echoed though the room.

"In the dungeons? What's he doing there?" said the king, shocked.

Ignatia was mumbling to herself. "Where is that voice coming from?" She took a few steps in the direction of the voice but could see nothing. Turning back to the king she said more forcefully this time "Drink up, Majesty. It WILL do you good."

"And my wife? Where is the queen?"

"Your Health, Majesty!" Ignatia raised her glass.

“Banished and chased out of the country!” echoed the ghostly voice again.

“Banished?” The king was appalled.

“Drink up, my king. You are hearing voices. You need this medicine to clear your mind. You are starting to hallucinate,” urged the advisor.

“No! Don’t drink! There’s poison in the wine!” The eerie voice was insistent.

“Now I’ve got you!” snapped Ignatia. She had spotted Tim as he tried to dodge from one curtain to the next. In the blink of an eye she knocked him to the ground and called out triumphantly to the king.

“Look at that! An intruder, my Lord! I shall have him put in the dungeons and soundly whipped.” In those few seconds while Ignatia stood triumphantly over him, Tim whipped out the golden needle and sewed the hem of her skirt so tightly around her ankles that she couldn’t take a step. Ignatia just laughed arrogantly and pulled a long hatpin from her headdress. It sparkled brightly as she stared at him with hate-filled eyes. She took a step and toppled over on top of him.

“Your time is up, my cocky false cook!” she said as she raised the hatpin dangerously close to his left eye. At that moment the doors at the end of the great hall crashed open and there stood the guard and... Princess Elizabeth!

## Time for truth

“Tim!” called out the princess, “Father!” She didn’t know who to go to first.

“Who... what?” The king was only more confused. Ignatia was the first to realise what was going on. She pushed herself up to attack the young princess but immediately tripped over the hem of her skirt again, falling flat on her face. The hairpin skidded across the floor where Bromm stamped his heavy left boot onto it.

The princess rushed to her father and stood before him with tears in her eyes. He seemed completely muddled and could only stammer “Who are you?”

“I am your daughter. Elizabeth Maria Annabella Therese.” She fell silent as the king shook his head as if to quieten a swarm of bees in his head.

“It’s all so muddled...” he said sadly. Tim pulled himself up and came over to the throne. He had remembered the little bag the old lady had given him, pulled it out of his pocket and showed it to the king.

“This powder will give you clarity and power, your majesty.” He poured the contents into the glass with pure wine where it started to fizz. But before he could take the glass, Ignatia had pushed herself between him and the king. She took the glass and downed it in one go.

“That power is for me alone!” she screeched and gave an enormous burp.

For what seemed like hours no one dared to move. Then suddenly Ignatia started to writhe. She held her throat, then her head and started to shake. Suddenly her arrogant, haughty posture was gone and she slumped. The other three watched as all the fight went out of her. She stood for a moment with hanging arms and sagging shoulders, then sank to her knees.

Elizabeth and Tim exchanged an astonished glance. What was happening? They heard a pathetic sob. Ignatia looked up slowly and they saw tears running down her cheeks.

“It should have worked out so differently,” she sobbed. Her voice had changed just like her body. “I wanted revenge. They always laughed at me.”

“Who?” asked Tim and the princess simultaneously.

“The witches.”

“Witches?”

“I was never as clever as the others. They said I had no magic powers. I just couldn’t remember the healing recipes and the magic rituals. All I could do was make magic potions... that was my speciality.” She looked at the others with just a bit of pride before she slumped back down.

“I... they... they threw me out... the witches. Those haughty hags! I wanted to pay them back. I wanted to make sure the king would ban them. No more witches in the kingdom.” She sat on the cold stone platform in front of the throne, and the story just poured out of her.

“It took me two years and a lot of trial and error to mix the perfect potion. Anyone who drinks it does whatever I tell them. The next step was to get access to the palace. Of course that was easy. The guards had a sip, the cook a large glass full and they did what I wanted. Then it was the king’s turn.” All three looked at the king but he just sat there, confused.

“As soon as he had my potion in his favourite wine, he became addicted to it. A useful side effect!” Ignatia smiled as she remembered it. “The first thing I demanded was that witches should be banned and sent out of the country. Ha... I had my revenge. Then it was so easy... I wanted more. Why not? The king did everything I wanted. Why should I stop?”

“Perhaps out of decency?” said the princess, “or compassion?”

“Yes... probably but I just couldn’t. For the first time in my life I could call all the shots. In this day and age an old, poor woman is worth nothing at all. Who gives you anything? I’ll tell you... no one! The power is with the king, and I had power over him.”

Oh, dear, thought Tim. Once you start you can’t stop.

“But then there was the queen and his children,” continued Ignatia. “They wouldn’t drink the potion and treated me with suspicion. I had to get rid of them.”

“That’s the most offensive thing I’ve ever heard!” The princess could hardly contain herself.

“I know, I know,” Ignatia started to sob bitterly, “I’ll make up for it... somehow.”

In the meantime the doorway to the throne chamber was filling up with guards and servants curious to know what was going on. It took until evening for the former king’s advisor to confess all her misdeeds. How she had arranged for the queen to be exiled. How the prince had tried to stop her and she had thrown her potion in his face, disfiguring him, making him look more like a lizard than a human. Then of course it was easy to get him thrown into the dungeons as no one recognised him. How she wanted more and more gold and money and so raised the taxes again and again. Then she saw how Princess Elizabeth grew into a beautiful young lady and feared a nobleman would come to woo her, meaning Ignatia could lose her power and influence over the king. So she had the princess put into a cellar hole deep under the dungeons where no one would find her.

At last the tale was told and Princess Elizabeth stepped forward. “Get my brother out of the dungeons, search in all the neighbouring countries for my mother, and reduce the taxes to a sensible amount. Ahhh! Pay back what has been paid in excess! And you, hag, will be punished!”

“I suppose I deserve it,” Ignatia sighed. She felt awful. Everyone was staring at her, full of anger and repulsion. It hurt but it was good to have confessed.

“I’ve an idea, your Majesty,” said Tim. “Couldn’t she use her skills to heal the king and the prince?” The princess looked at him approvingly. The tailor was full of surprises.

“Why not? She can try,” she said. “It would be a start to making up for her misdeeds.” She looked at Tim quizzically. “Why did she suddenly confess all of this without lying?”

“The powder that the old lady gave me had something written on the bag,” He pulled it out of his pocket and read ‘Time for truth’.

## Nearly happy end

Countless servants had heard everything and quickly spread the news throughout the city. The citizens were relieved that the king was restored to something like his old self and overjoyed when they heard that taxes would be repaid. Spontaneous songs were sung in praise of the princess and tailor Tim and at long last the people started partying in the streets.

Ignatia tried very hard to make the right potions to make up for her misdeeds. Even so it took weeks before the old king was fully recovered. The prince recovered his strength more quickly but it took many months for the scars to disappear, despite the best creams and ointments. But the best part was that they were all together again as a family. Nearly all of

them that is: the queen still hadn't been found. The rumour was that she had fled the country with the witches and was learning their skills.

Bromm was promoted to General In Command. The prince and princess shared the affairs of state. She did the accounting and he talked to the people. The prince wasn't very good at maths but he could be very charming talking to his councillors. Tim was made Royal Tailor and Advisor to Princess Elizabeth and she made sure he visited her often.

"What happened to the old woman who gave me the golden needle?" Tim asked the cat, when he saw it a few evenings later. But the only sound it made was a loud "Miaow."

"That's a shame," he said, "I had hoped to thank her."

A week later Tim heard the clippety-clop of approaching hooves echoing down the alley. Princess Elizabeth was riding towards his hut over the cobblestones on a beautiful bay horse with a white horse on a leading rein.

"I'm going to look for her. Would you like to join me?"

"Who and where?" he asked although he already knew the answer. "Your mother and the witches?" She nodded, gave him the rein for the white horse and rode on.

"I don't even have time to take any bread and milk with me," he sighed. He just quickly packed the golden needle and rode after her.

The old lady sat on a low wall with a mischievous smile on her face and watched them ride away. She stroked the cat's back and the only sound to be heard was "Miaow."

## The End

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## The Idea catchers

Whenever we start our theatre show “Die Ideenfänger”, the Idea catchers, we ask the children for ideas, objects, places or themes that they’d like to see in the story. Then we improvise using acting, storytelling and puppetry to develop a one hour adventure; it’s emotional, funny, exciting and sometimes just plain strange!

We hope you have as much fun reading them as we did developing them.

Best Wishes, Andy and Christoph

PS.: If you can read German and want to find out more about our theatre work, take a look at [www.clapp-buchfink.de](http://www.clapp-buchfink.de) or [www.wie-im-maerchen.de](http://www.wie-im-maerchen.de)

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