

*The Adventures of
Pipì the Pink Monkey*



ONCE UPON A TIME, in the famous land of Hullabaloo, there lived a small family of monkeys: mum, dad and five little ones, all boys, who were knee-high to a grasshopper. The family lived among the branches of a giant tree in the middle of a forest, paying fifteen plums a year in rent to an arrogant old gorilla who claimed to be the landlord.

Of the five little monkeys, four had dark, chocolate-coloured fur, while the youngest – from who knows what freak of nature – was covered with a fine pink down, similar to the petals of a rose in May. And this is why everyone, both at home and out in the forest, nicknamed him Pipì, which in monkey language means exactly that: “coloured like a rose”.

Pipì didn't look like his brothers or the other young monkeys living around their tree, and not just because he was pink. He had a lively, intelligent face, mischievous bright eyes that kept darting about, a smiling little mouth and a lean, wiry body, flexible as a riding crop. He was, if truth be told, a really handsome little chap.

Seeing him gambol around and hearing the racket he made, an observer might have mistaken Pipì for an eight- or nine-year-old boy: like a boy he chased butterflies and

went nest-hunting; like a boy he chomped all the time on anything he could find, greedy for unripe fruit; and like a boy – a boy with no manners – he'd wipe his mouth with the back of his hand after stuffing himself with food, before studiously licking his fingers one by one.

But Pipì's greatest passion was to copy humans and everything they did. One hot day in summer, as he wandered about the forest hunting for crickets, cicadas and other insects, he saw an old man sitting at the foot of a tree with a pipe sticking out of his mouth. Pipì was spellbound.

"Oh," he said to himself, "I wish I could have that smoking twig! My brothers would die of envy to see me puffing out clouds of smoke from my mouth like him!"

The afternoon sun was strong, and the heat was unbearable. After a while, the old man yawned, placed his smouldering pipe on the grass and dozed off. Moving gingerly, Pipì climbed down the trunk of the tree. Holding his breath, he stretched out his arm, little by little, then snatched the pipe and bolted away just as the man woke up and shouted at him to stop.

Back in his treetop home, he called out to his brothers and showed them how he could blow smoke out of his mouth. Pandemonium broke out all along the branches. Dodò, his older brother, wanted to try the pipe too and snatched it from Pipì, while the other siblings jumped and laughed and shrieked with excitement. Babà, one of the smaller monkeys, fell out of the tree and had to

limp back up, bawling his head off, more out of disappointment than pain.

Alarmed by the commotion, Pipì's mum and dad rushed to see what was happening. They found Gugù and Memè fighting over the pipe, and Dodò coughing and spluttering on the grey billows of smoke coming out of his mouth and nose.

Pipì's dad shook his head. "Whose idea was this?"

Four brown fingers pointed at the little pink monkey.

"It was Pipì's," said Babà, still tearful. "He stole the smoking wood from a man in the forest."

Their dad shook his head again. "You should not steal, Pipì," he said with a gentle voice, "and you should not smoke. You must remember that every action has its own consequences: if you steal today, you may come to a bad end tomorrow. And smoking may seem fun now, but it may harm you in the future. You should not copy what men do: one day you'll grow up and understand this, son. But if you are not careful now, it may be too late then."

"Sorry, Dad," Pipì said, stifling a naughty smile. Being daddy's favourite, he knew he could get away with all sort of mischief, risking at worst a few words of reproach. "I won't do it again," he added, looking up with eyes that said the exact opposite.

"Very well," said Pipì's dad, prising the pipe from Memè's grasp, who let go with a rueful whine. "Now let me tell you a story." Beckoning, he invited his wife to

sit next to him. The five little monkeys eagerly jumped onto a branch opposite him, arranged themselves from tallest to shortest, with Pipì right at the end of a leafy branch. “It’s about a human – a man who lived to regret one single action he did when he was younger.”

“Who is he? Who is he?” shouted the little monkeys, who always listened with delight to their dad’s stories.

“His name is Ticklythroat,” he said. “But he wasn’t always called that. When he was young, he used to be a very handsome boy, just like you lot are handsome little monkeys, but then...”

“Then what? Then what? Tell us, Dad.”

“Then, as I said, he did something wrong. He didn’t deliver on a promise he had made – and so he was punished for it.”

“What happened, Dad?” shouted Babà.



“He was in love with a beautiful girl called Bella. They were soon to be married, and he had promised to bring her some turquoise flowers for her wedding dress. He was picking them in the forest when he saw an old man sitting at the foot of a tree, smoking on a *glup-glup* – yes, just like this one.” Dad waved the pipe around and stared at Pipì, who looked away. “Ticklythroat had never seen a *glup-glup* before, and wanted to try it out, so he stole it from the man and ran away. The thing is, he didn’t know the man was a wizard... and that the *glup-glup* was a magic one.”

“Oh,” said Gugù.

“As soon as he started puffing away as he went on his way, he realized something was wrong. The smoke grew to envelop him like a thick fog, and he no longer knew where he was going. So he got lost in the forest and wandered around, unable to find a way out. The only thing he could see was his own shadow, which kept stretching and shrinking as days – yes, days – passed. At least, he *thought* they were days: in fact they were *years*. After a terrible passage of time, after endless meanderings, he met the old man again. ‘Here’s your smoking wood,’ he said, sobbing. ‘Now break your spell and let me go, I beg you!’ The old man looked him in the eyes. He saw that the boy had no malice and was good at heart. He also saw that he was sorry and had learnt his lesson. So the old man lifted the spell and set him free.”

“And then?” said Memè.

“Then Ticklythroat ran home as fast as lightning, desperate to see Bella. But as soon as he was out of the forest, he noticed that something had changed. Where there used to be a cornfield, now there was a cottage with a garden; where the ferry used to take him across the river, now there was a large stone bridge. The people he met were wearing strange clothes and hats he had never seen before, and when he asked for directions, they didn’t understand him and answered in a language he didn’t know. Eventually he reached the place where Bella’s house used to be, and he gasped – it was a ruin. He pulled at his hair and shuddered – centuries had passed since he’d left to pick turquoise flowers for her wedding dress, and the fairies had long taken her away.”

“So they didn’t marry in the end?” gulped Gugù.

Pipì’s dad shook his head.

“What a sad story,” said Memè. “All for a stupid stolen piece of wood.”

“And a broken promise,” added Dodò.

“What happened to Ticklythroat?” asked Pipì in a squeaky voice.

His dad fixed his stare on him. “He continues to live his miserable life outside the forest. He’s a very angry man now, and he’s turned into a brigand. He and his gang of thieves – the Swooping Magpies, people call them – are the terror of the land.”

“Do they rob people?” said Babà.

CHAPTER I

“Yes, they do, dear,” Mum suddenly piped in. “They rob, beat, kidnap – and even kill strangers.”

“This is why you should never set foot outside the forest,” said Pipì’s dad. “It’s very dangerous. Understood, boys?”

The five little monkeys nodded.

“Now, will you take this back to its owner, Pipì?”

“Sure, Dad,” the little pink monkey said, earnestly, but curling his mouth into a smile when he looked away. “I’ll do it – I’ll do it straight away.”

He grabbed the pipe and with a few agile jumps disappeared from view, to find a place where he could hide it and smoke some more another day without being disturbed.



THE NEXT MORNING, at the break of dawn, Pipì was already scampering around the edges of the forest, looking for the best way to leave the trees behind. His head was still foggy and his throat burned from the previous day's smoking, but he was a very curious little monkey, and no blankets of smoke, no ticklish throats or swooping magpie-robbers could stop him from exploring the dangerous world beyond his homely trees.

A path on the west side of the forest led him around the shores of a vast lake. According to stories he had heard from his parents, this was the haunt of Snapper, a ridiculously old crocodile who had become blind with age. Two thousand years old, that's how old Snapper was said to be, and since he could no longer hunt for food, he squatted near the shore with his head above water and his jaws open wide, hoping that something juicy would fall into his mouth, or that a passer-by would give him some food, something chewable that would enable him to get by for another thousand years or so. But rather than throwing him a fish, some fruit or even a rotten vegetable, people taunted him: a handful of stones were thrown into his mouth, a bunch of

nettles or brambles, a rusty nail or harpoon, or any old junk found on the road. Snapper would never get angry at these pranks, but just spat out the stones, the nettles, the brambles and the nails, and give a slight shake of his big, craggy head, as if to say: “One day...”

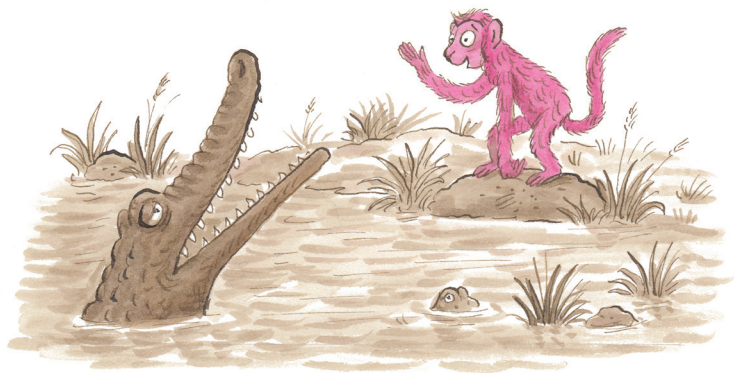
As he turned a bend in the path, Pipì saw a massive, jagged “V” sticking out from the lake’s surface.

“There he is!” he said to himself, jumping with excitement. “Let’s see if it’s true that Snapper never snaps!”

He went over to the old crocodile and, standing at a safe distance on the shore, called to him.

“Good day, Mr Croc.”

“Good day to you,” Snapper said.



“Can you hear a rumbling noise? There must be rain on the way.”

“It’s my stomach.”

“Are you hungry, Mr Croc?”

“I’m very hungry.”

“Oh, I see. And what would you like to eat? Meat? Fruit?”

“Anything you want to give me.”

“But would you rather have meat or fruit?”

“It’s not for an old, blind, starving crocodile to choose. Whatever you give me, I’ll take it.”

“All I have around me is sand, cobwebs and hot air. How does that take your fancy, Mr Croc?”

Snapper gave a slight shake of his head and remained silent.

Soon Pipì was conjuring up imaginary meals in delicious detail, describing the irresistible aromas of roasted meat, the juiciness of ripe melons and the succulence of fresh fish, but the ancient crocodile showed no sign of annoyance other than the growing grumbling of his belly. The only thing that seemed to bother him was when a fly or a wasp came to rest on the tip of his nose: he would then jerk his head and shake it until the insect buzzed away.

“You’ll need to be patient, Mr Croc,” said Pipì, “and wait for someone with tastier food than mine.”

“Old creatures are always patient,” said Snapper, “especially with the young ones.”

“Oh well. I must be on my way now, Mr Croc. Good luck with your peckishness!”

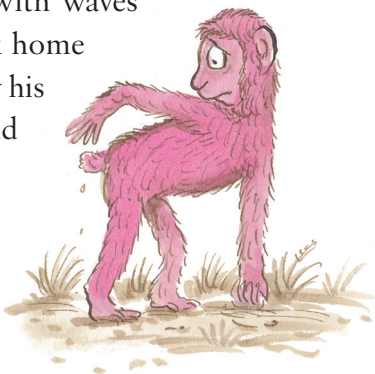
But before leaving, Pipì couldn’t resist playing one last piece of mischief. He stole onto a bough that was hanging over the lake and crept from branch to branch until

he was right above Snapper's jaws. Then he lowered his tail and started tickling the tip of the crocodile's nose, imitating a fly landing just above Snapper's left nostril. It was true that Snapper was blind, but he had not lost his hearing or his sharp sense of smell, so as soon as he felt the brush of Pipì's tail on his nostrils – whoosh! – he sprang up like a youthful croc and – snap! – bit it clean off.

Pipì let out a dreadful monkeyish cry of agony and, jumping off the tree, screeching, scarpered at full speed back towards the forest.

“Thank you, kind traveller,” Snapper called after him, chewing on Pipì's tail. “There'll be no more rumbling for today.”

Pipì ran and ran until he reached the edge of the forest, where he stopped and found enough courage to turn and look down his back. His tail – his lovely, fluffy, pink tail – was no more. That nasty old scoundrel of a crocodile had bitten it off, chewed it into bits and swallowed it down into his horrible stomach. The ugly red stump throbbed with waves of pain. Should he go back home and get the wound treated by his mum? But what would his dad say? This time Pipì wouldn't get away with a few gentle words of reproach. And what about his brothers and friends? They'd mock



him for the rest of his life! Who wouldn't laugh at a monkey with no tail?

Ashamed, disconsolate and smarting, Pipì wandered aimlessly around the forest for hours and hours, until the shadows of the night descended from the top of the trees, wrapping him in gloom. Not able to bring himself to return to his family, he found a quiet spot where he could rest for the night. He lay on a heap of twigs covered with leaves and closed his eyes to sleep, but just as he was about to drift off, he heard an angry voice crying out:

“Ah, so who have we here!”

Pipì opened his eyes and saw a lantern lighting up an angry face – it was the old man he'd met in the forest the day before.

“Where is my pipe, little pink monkey?” the man demanded. “Give it back!”

Pipì tried to say that he had left the *glug-glug* in the secret cavity of an old tree trunk near his home, but what came out was only a frightened mumbling noise. He leapt up and made to escape, but the man grabbed him and shoved him in a large sack, tying it shut with a knot.

“Let me out! Let me out!” Pipì cried. “I'll go and fetch your smoking twig, I promise!”

But the man didn't hear him and, throwing the sack over his shoulder, he stomped off across the forest, muttering.

“This’ll teach you a lesson, you horrible little monkey.”

After a long walk, the old man stopped and tied the sack astride the rump of some large four-legged animal. There was a slap and a whistle, and the beast sped off into the night, carrying away the unfortunate Pipì on its back.



C ONFINED IN THE DARKNESS of the sack, constantly jolted here and there, Pipì lost all sense of time – did his journey last for hours or entire days? Every now and then he shouted for help, but there was never a reply. Was there a rider, he wondered, or was the beast that was taking him farther and farther away unmounted? What kind of animal would run for hours or days at a stretch without stopping? A horse? Or something more dangerous – a tiger, a leopard? If it was a big cat, surely he'd end up eaten. In such confused thoughts he spent most of his time, with pangs of fear and guilt troubling his little heart.

In the end, Pipì's exhaustion was such that he could no longer hear any clomping or feel any jostling, and the darkness gave way to a colourful vision. No longer in a sack, he was travelling on the back of a winged animal – half horse, half eagle – that was flying in wide circles towards the moon. They landed among sky-high trees loaded down with the juiciest peaches and shiniest plums ever seen, indescribably better than the ones that grow on earth. Wherever he looked, he could see mountains of sugar, lakes of honey and rivers of milk, with copses of chestnut trees and cherry trees scattered

around. He advanced through a field of *dop-dops* – the name monkeys give to candy canes. Some of them were white, some striped with red, others entirely pink, just like his tail. That’s when it came to him – if he searched hard enough, perhaps he could find his tail here! Then he could go back to his family without shame.

And as Pipì made his way through the sugary sticks... look, there it is! – his beloved tail, which Snapper had cruelly bitten off – over there, only a short distance away. Burning with joy, he sprang forward and reached out to grab it, but a fluffy rabbit with turquoise fur popped up from nowhere to stop him.



“What do you think you’re doing, little monkey?”

“It’s mine!” Pipì shouted, angry and disappointed. “It’s my tail!”

“I’m afraid you lost it,” the rabbit said.

“Can’t I get it back now that I’ve found it?”

The rabbit gave him a thoughtful look. “Maybe,” she said. “But not now.”

“When, then?”

“After you stop telling lies – and after you fulfil your promise.”

“Which promise?”

“You’ll find out.”

He wanted to ask the rabbit more questions, but a great stomping noise behind him had him turning

round to see the towering figure of a giant, billowing smoke from a pipe in his mouth.

“He’s still furious with you,” said the rabbit. “Quick, run!”

Pipì fled, but it was difficult to run among the candy canes, and he kept bumping into them and knocking them to the ground or breaking them. Behind him the giant’s steps were getting nearer, and the obnoxious smell of smoke was spreading all around, making it hard for him to see where he was putting his feet. As he was looking for his flying steed, his eagle-horse, he tumbled headfirst into one of the honey lakes. He tried to swim, but the honey was so sticky that he couldn’t make any progress. With great effort he dragged himself out of the lake and made it towards a tree, looking for shelter. As he started clambering up, he realized that his hands and body were still sticky and he could not move – and now the huge great hairy mitt of the giant was sweeping in to catch him.

His scream, as he awoke from this nightmare, was drowned by an even louder cry, perhaps the bray of a donkey or the neigh of a horse. The sack in which

he was tied fell to the ground, and Pipì heard the retreating clop of the beast that had carried him. He lay there a moment, panting, listening, then tried to claw and gnash his way out, but all his efforts were in



vain: the cloth of the sack was too tough and densely woven. Frightened, exhausted, starving, Pipì started crying – a soft, whiny cry mingled with broken words: “My tail... I’ll never... oh, Daddy... oh, Mummy... I...”

Just then he heard a little squeaky voice.

“Are you OK in there?”

Pipì stopped weeping and crouched inside the sack, half in fear, half in hope. “Who are you?” he asked.

“I’m a mouse, and my name’s Nibbler. I was crossing the road when that stupid horse reared in fright and knocked you off its back.”

“Oh, Nibbler, I’m all right – only a few scratches, perhaps. My name’s Pipì, and I’m a young monkey. An evil man chucked me in this sack and tied the top with a knot. Would you mind helping me out?”

“Let me see,” Nibbler squeaked. He tried gnawing at the sack with all his strength, but the cloth didn’t yield. He sighed and said: “Mmm, this won’t be easy.”

“Why?”

“The fabric seems tougher than leather. It would take me three months to nibble a hole.”

“Three months?” cried Pipì. “I’ll be dead by then, Nibbler! You’ll only find a small heap of fur and a bundle of bones inside! Is there anything else you can do?”

“What can a little mouse do, Pipì? I am sorry, but I can’t see how I can get you out.”

“Where are we? Is there anyone else around?”

“We are at the top of a hill, in the open countryside. Hang on, I can see a billy goat over there. Give me a moment: I’ll go and talk to him. He’s much stronger than me. Perhaps he can help.”

Nibbler returned a few minutes later with the goat, who was called Basher.

“So you can’t get out?” Basher said.

“The cloth’s so tough,” said Pipì, “I can’t rip it open.”

“Leave it with me: let me have a go,” said the goat. “I’ll give it one of my almighty head-butts and crack it like a dry leaf, you’ll see.”

Basher lowered his head, took a long run-up and knocked the sack – with Pipì inside it – for all he was worth, sending it flying into the air yard or two, before it started rolling down the hill.



Pipì shrieked in agony at the blow, letting out a new cry at each tumble: “Oh, poor me!” – “Oh, help!” – “Oh, I’m dying!”

Basher and Nibbler ran after the sack at top speed, unable to catch up with it. In the end, it rolled to a halt

on the lawn of an elegant country house whose façade was almost entirely covered with ivy. The goat and the mouse stepped cautiously towards the sack to check if Pipì was alive or dead, but just as they reached it they saw a huge Newfoundland dog bounding in their direction, barking.

“Run, Basher, run!” cried the mouse. “You jump a fence, I’ll find a hole to scurry down. Pipì,” he yelled, darting away, “I’m sorry we couldn’t help you. I hope you can get out of there. Good luck!”

And before the dog could snap at him, Nibbler dashed behind a bush and disappeared.