

The empty pot

A long time ago in China there was a boy called Ping who loved flowers. Everything he planted began to bloom. Flowers, shrubs and even big fruit trees grew as if by magic! Everyone in the kingdom loved flowers too. They planted them everywhere and the air smelled of perfume. The emperor loved birds and animals, but he loved flowers most of all, and every day he tended his own garden. But the emperor was already very old. He had to choose a successor to the throne. Who would be his successor? And how would the emperor choose him? Because the emperor loved flowers so much, he decided to let the flowers choose.

The next day an announcement was made: all the children of the land were to come to the palace. There they were to receive special flower seeds from the emperor. "The one who can show me the most beautiful flowers in one year," he said, "will be my successor on the throne." This news caused great excitement throughout the country! Children from all over the country flocked to the palace to get their flower seeds. All the parents wanted their children to be elected emperor, and all the children hoped that they too would be elected!

When Ping received his seed from the emperor, he was the happiest child of all. He was sure that he could grow the most beautiful flower. Ping filled a flower pot with fertile soil. He planted the seed very carefully. He watered it every day. He could hardly wait to see it sprout, grow and blossom into a beautiful flower! Day after day passed, but nothing grew in his pot. Ping was very worried. He put new soil in a bigger pot. Then he put the seed in the fertile black soil. He waited another two months. Still nothing happened.

Little by little, the whole year passed. Spring came and all the children put on their best clothes to greet the emperor. They hurried to the palace with their beautiful flowers, hoping to be chosen. Ping was ashamed of his empty pot. He thought the other children would laugh at him because, for once, he couldn't make a flower grow. Then his clever friend came along with a big plant in his hand. "Ping!" he said. "You are not really going to the emperor with an empty pot, are you? Couldn't you grow a flower as big as mine?" "I have grown many flowers better than yours," said Ping. "Only this seed will not grow." Ping's father heard this and said, "You have done your best, and your best is good enough to show the emperor." With the empty pot in his hand, Ping made his way to the palace.

The emperor looked at the flowers slowly, one by one. How beautiful all the flowers were! But the emperor frowned and did not say a word. Finally he came to Ping. Ping hung his head in shame, expecting to be punished. The emperor asked, "Why did you bring an empty pot?"

Ping began to cry and replied, "I planted the seed you gave me, and watered it every day, but it didn't sprout. I put it in a better pot with better soil, but it still didn't germinate! I have nurtured it all year but nothing has grown. So today I had to bring an empty pot without a flower. That was the best I could do." When the emperor heard these words, a smile slowly spread across his face, and he put his arm around Ping. Then he called out to everyone, "I have found him! I have found the one man worthy to be emperor!" "Where you got your seeds from, I do not know. For the seeds I gave you were all cooked. So it was impossible for any of them to grow."

"I admire Ping's great courage in appearing before me with the empty truth, and now I reward him with the whole kingdom and make him emperor of the whole land!"