

The Princess and the Pea

Once upon a time there was a prince who wanted to marry a princess, but only a real princess. So he traveled all over the world looking for one, yet everywhere something was amiss; there were plenty of princesses, but whether they were real ones he could never quite determine; there was always something not quite right about them. So he returned home and was very sorrowful, for he so longed for a real princess.

One evening a terrible storm arose; lightning flashed, thunder rolled, rain poured down in torrents—it was dreadful indeed! Suddenly someone knocked at the city gates, and the old king went to open them.

Standing at the gates was a princess. Good heavens, what a sight she was from the rain and the weather! Water streamed from her hair and her dress, ran straight into the toes of her shoes and flowed out from their heels, yet she said that she was a real princess.

"Well, we shall soon find that out!" thought the old queen, but she said nothing and went to the bedchamber, took all the mattresses and pillows off the bed, placed a single pea on the wooden boards, then took twenty mattresses and laid them on top of the pea, and upon those mattresses another twenty featherbeds filled with eiderdown.

On this bed the princess was put to sleep for the night.

In the morning they asked her how she had slept.

"Oh, terribly badly!" answered the princess. "I did not close my eyes all night long. Heaven knows what was in my bed! I lay on something hard, and now my whole body is black and blue! It is simply dreadful!"

Then everyone understood that she was a real princess before them. Why, she had felt the pea through twenty mattresses and twenty featherbeds filled with eiderdown! Only a real princess could be so delicate.

The prince took her for his wife, for now he knew that he was marrying a real princess, and the pea was placed in the cabinet of curiosities, where it can still be seen today, provided no one has stolen it.

Know that this is a true story!