



The Princess on the Pea

By Hans Christian Andersen (1835)

Once upon a time there was a prince who wanted to marry a princess—but she had to be a real princess.

He travelled all over the world to find one, but everywhere he went, something was not quite right. There were plenty of princesses, of course, but whether they were real princesses was impossible to determine. There was always something a little off. So he returned home, disappointed and disheartened, for he longed so deeply to find a true princess.

One evening, a terrible storm blew in. Lightning flashed, thunder roared, and the rain poured down in torrents—it was dreadful! Then came a knock at the city gate, and the old king went to open it. Standing outside was a young woman. But good heavens—what a sight she was! Rain streamed from her hair and clothes, running down into her shoes and out the heels. She claimed to be a real princess.

“We’ll soon find that out,” thought the old queen, though she said nothing. She went to the guest chamber, removed all the bedding, and placed a single pea at the bottom of the bed. Then she laid twenty mattresses on top of the pea, and on those, twenty more feather duvets made from the finest down.

That night, the young woman was invited to sleep there.

In the morning, they asked her how she had slept.

“Oh, terribly badly!” she said. “I hardly closed my eyes all night! Heaven only knows what was in that bed. I felt something hard beneath me, and now I’m black and blue all over. It was simply awful!”

That was all the proof they needed.

Only a real princess could have such delicate sensitivity as to feel a pea through twenty mattresses and twenty featherbeds. No one but a true princess could be so exquisitely sensitive.

So the prince married her, for now he knew she was a real princess.

And the pea was placed in the royal museum, where it can still be seen—if no one has taken it, of course.

And that’s a true story.

The End

