

THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA

by Hans Christian Andersen



There was once a prince, a lonely prince. He traveled around the world to find someone like himself, a proper princess to share his life. But this he knew: She must be a *real* princess.

In his travels, he found many princesses. Each claimed to be a real princess. Each had the proper pedigree and credentials, but there always seemed to be something not quite right about each one. People started to say that he was looking for something that he did not want to find. Behind closed doors, they even snickered. At last, the prince returned home in despair; he wanted a princess so badly. The Old King and Queen welcomed him home.

Another summer passed and the leaves were falling from the trees when, one evening, a terrible storm blew in from the sea. As the prince sat by the fire reading, lightning drew closer and closer and thunder rattled the windows until it seemed sure they'd break.

Hours into the night, the storm raged. At midnight, a calm fell as suddenly as the storm itself had arrived. An eerie knock was heard at the town gate. It was a gentle but

insistent knock. The townspeople and courtiers rubbed their eyes and wondered who could have been out in such a storm. The Old King himself sent his advisor to the town gate.

There stood a princess, but she was in a terrible state. Rain poured from her hair and her clothes. It overflowed her shoes and ran out the heels. She claimed she was a princess, and the advisor all but laughed aloud. Still, she swore she was a real princess.

"We'll see soon enough if that is true," whispered the Old Queen softly to herself.

The princess was given a warm dinner and some dry clothes while the Old Queen set off to prepare a sleeping chamber for the princess.

First, she stripped all the bed blankets. Then, she placed a single pea in the center of the bedstead. Next, she called for twenty mattresses and piled them, one on top of the other, on the pea. Finally, twenty feather beds were added on top of the mattresses. The princess's sleeping arrangements were made.

In the morning, the Old King and Queen met the princess when she arose. If possible, she looked worse than when she had arrived! They asked how she had slept.

"Oh, terribly bad!" exclaimed the princess. "I scarcely closed my eyes all night. Heaven knows what was in that bed. It seemed as if I were lying upon some hard pebble; my whole

body is black and blue this morning. It is truly terrible!"
And the princess started crying.

The Old Queen saw at once that she must be a real princess. Only a real princess could have felt the pea through twenty mattresses and twenty feather beds.

So the prince asked her to be his wife, sure that he had found a real princess. The prince once again traveled the world, this time with the princess, and they were happy.

And the pea? It was put into a museum and visited by people from many countries. It may be there yet, if no one has stolen it.