

The Princess and the Pea

There was once a prince and he wanted a princess, but then she must be a real princess. He traveled all over the world to find one but there was always something wrong. There were plenty of princesses, but whether they were real princesses he had great difficulty in discovering. There was always something that was not quite right about them. So at last he had to come home again, and he was very sad because he wanted a real princess so badly.

One evening there was a terrible storm. It thundered and lightened and the rain poured down in torrents, indeed it was a fearful night. In the middle of the storm somebody knocked at the town gate, and the old king himself went to open it.

It was a princess who stood outside, but she was in a terrible state from the rain and the storm. The water streamed out of her hair and her clothes. It ran in at the top of her shoes and out at the heel, but she said that she was a real princess.

"Well we shall soon see if that is true," thought the old queen, but she said nothing. She went into the bedroom, took all the bedclothes off and laid a single pea on the bedstead. Then she took twenty mattresses and piled them on the top of the pea, and then piled twenty feather beds on the top of the mattresses. Up on top of all these was where the princess was to sleep that night.

In the morning they asked her, "Did you sleep well?"

"Oh, terribly badly!" said the princess. "I hardly closed my eyes the whole night. Heaven knows what was in the bed. I seemed to be lying on something very hard, and my whole body is black blue this morning. It was terrible!"

They saw at once that she must be a real princess when she had felt the pea through twenty mattresses and twenty feather beds. Nobody but a real princess could have skin so delicate. So the prince took her to be his wife, for now he was sure that he had found a real princess. And the pea was put into a museum, where it may still be seen if no one has stolen it.

Now this is a true story.

(The Princess and the Pea is in the Public Domain)

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