The Princess And The Pea

By Hans Christina Anderson

Chapter 1

In a land far far away there was a glorious kingdom. In the kingdom stood a great castle. And inside the castle lived a handsome Prince. The Prince was sad. He longed for a true Princess to share his castle and kingdom, but he couldn’t find one.

This was not because there was a lack of Princesses. In fact, the kingdom was full of fair maidens all claiming to be Princesses.

The Prince scoured the kingdom, meeting every one of these so-called Princesses. But he returned sad and empty handed.

‘It is impossible to tell whether these are *true* Princesses!’ he said to his Father, the King.

‘You must be patient my son. You will know when you know.’ said the King, with a knowing smile.

The Prince smiled back, then went to his chamber.

Chapter 2

That evening a huge storm came.

Thunder clapped. Lightning flashed. And the rain clattered down on the castle roof like the sound of a thousand horses charging into battle.

Suddenly, came a loud knock at the castle door. The King put on his robe and opened the door to find a cold, soggy young lady standing in front of him.

‘I am a true Princess,’ she said, ‘Please can I have some dry clothes and a bed for the night?’

The King let her in.

‘She says she is a true Princess,’ said the King to the old Queen-mother.

The Queen-mother didn’t say a word.

Instead, she thought to herself, ‘we’ll soon see about that’. She then handed the Princess a nightgown and said, ‘put this on while I prepare your chamber’.

Chapter 3

The Queen-mother began preparing the chamber—but in a very peculiar way.

First, she took the covers, sheets and mattress off the bed.

Then she placed a single garden pea on the bedstead.

And then she laid twenty mattresses on top of the pea taking care to separate each layer with a soft eiderdown quilt.

After this she replaced the bedclothes on the top mattress and said to the Princess, ‘your chamber is ready!’

The bed was now so high off the ground that the Princess needed to climb a ladder to get into the bed. The Princess climbed up the ladder, got under the covers and blew out her candle.

Chapter 4

At breakfast the next morning the Queen-mother turned to the Princess and asked, ‘My dear Princess, how did you sleep?’

‘Oh, not at all well,’ said the Princess. ‘I mean to say, I am extremely grateful for your kindness in putting me up for the night, but there seemed to be something ever so hard and uncomfortable under my mattress. I didn’t sleep a wink.’

‘My my!’ replied the Queen-mother, ‘is that so?’

The Queen-mother turned to the Prince and said, ‘I believe we have found your *true* Princess, for none but a *true* Princess possesses such a delicate sense to feel a single pea through twenty mattresses and twenty of my finest quilts. You must wed immediately!’

The Prince was overjoyed.

He turned to the Princess and said, ‘Dear Princess, would you do me the great honour of becoming my wife?’

She blushed, then taking a moment to finish a mouthful of cereal, said, ‘On one condition.’

‘Anything!’ replied the Prince.

She looked back at the Prince with a cheeky grin and said, ‘that you promise, dear Prince, that from this day forward that any pea that should enter this castle is simply for eating. And *not* for sleeping upon.’

The Prince looked back at her, chuckled and said, ‘I promise!’