

Once upon a time there was a prince who wanted to marry a princess. But, he decided she would have to be a real princess, and not just a beautiful girl who looked like a princess. He travelled all over the world to find one. But, nowhere could he get what he wanted.

Then, one fateful evening, a terrible storm blew into the city. There was thunder and lightning, and the rain seemed to fall down in buckets. Suddenly, however, a loud knocking was heard at the city gate, and the city guard went to see who was seeking to enter the city on such a terrible night. On opening the gate, the guard was surprised to find a young woman standing in the pouring rain!

The guard let the woman enter the city gate, and took her straight to see the old king. The king was shocked by the young woman's appearance. The rain and wind from the storm had made her look terrible! The water ran down from her hair and clothes. It ran down into the toes of her shoes and out again and the heels. And yet she said that she was a real princess.

The queen invited the young woman to spend the night. Then, the old queen took the mattress off the bed, and laid a pea on the bottom. Then, she took twenty soft mattresses and laid them on the pea.

The princess had to sleep on top of this pile of mattresses all night. In the morning, she was asked how she slept.

"Oh, very badly!" she said. "I scarcely closed my eyes all night. Heaven only knows what was in the bed, but I was lying on something hard, and couldn't get to sleep. It was terrible!"

Now they knew that she was a real princess, because she had felt the pea right through the twenty soft mattresses. Nobody but a real princess could be as sensitive as that. So the prince took her for his wife, for now he knew that he had a real princess. And the pea was put in the museum, where it may still be seen, if no one has stolen it.