

The Real Princess

Hans Christian Andersen was a Danish author. He is best known for his fairy tales such as *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Little Mermaid* and *The Snow Queen*. *The Real Princess* tells the story of a prince who wants to marry a real princess, but isn't having much luck finding one...

5 There was once a prince who wanted to marry a princess. But she must be a real princess, mind you. So he travelled all round the world, seeking such a one, but everywhere something was in the way. Not that there was any lack of princesses, but he could not seem to make out whether they were real princesses; there was always something not quite satisfactory. Therefore, home he came again, quite out of spirits, for he wished so much to marry a real princess.

One evening a terrible storm came on. It thundered and lightened, and the rain poured down; indeed, it was quite fearful. In the midst of it there came a knock at the town gate, and the old king went out to open it.

10 It was a princess who stood outside. But O dear, what a state she was in from the rain and bad weather! The water dropped from her hair and clothes, it ran in at the tips of her shoes and out at the heels; yet she insisted she was a real princess.

15 "Very well," thought the old queen; "that we shall presently see." She said nothing, but went into the bedchamber and took off all the bedding, then laid a pea on the sacking of the bedstead*. Having done this, she took twenty mattresses and laid them upon the pea and placed twenty eider-down* beds on top of the mattresses.

The princess lay upon this bed all the night. In the morning she was asked how she had slept.

20 "Oh, most miserably!" she said. "I scarcely closed my eyes the whole night through. I cannot think what there could have been in the bed. I lay upon something so hard that I am quite black and blue all over. It is dreadful!"

It was now quite evident that she was a real princess, since through twenty mattresses and twenty eider-down beds she had felt the pea. None but a real princess could have such delicate feeling.

25 So the prince took her for his wife, for he knew that in her he had found a true princess. And the pea was preserved in the cabinet of curiosities, where it is still to be seen unless someone has stolen it.

And this, mind you, is a real story.

An extract from *The Real Princess* by Hans Christian Andersen.

Glossary

bedstead — the frame of a bed

eider-down — duck feathers used to stuff bedding