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opening extract from

Tales of Hans Christian Andersen

written by

Hans Christian Andersen

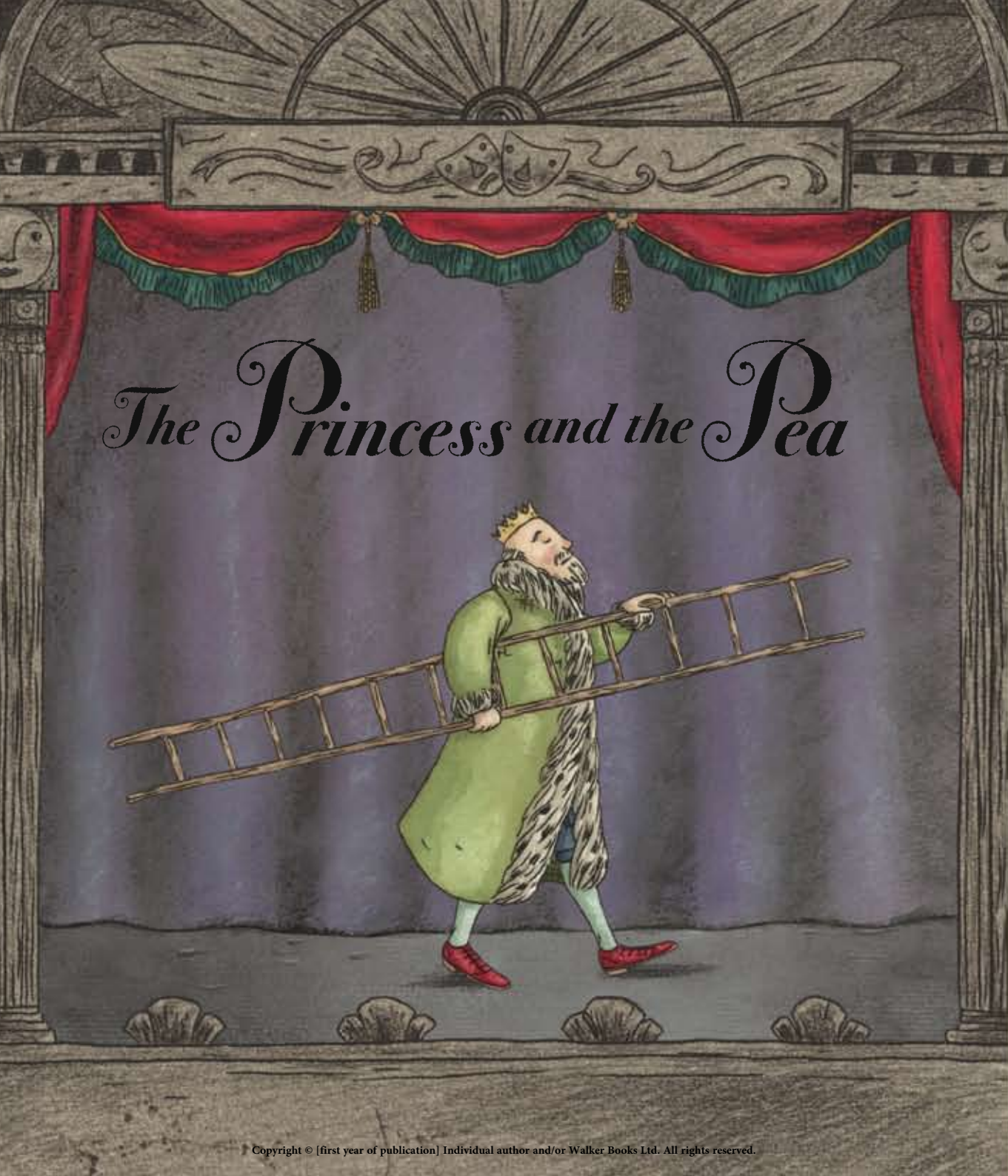
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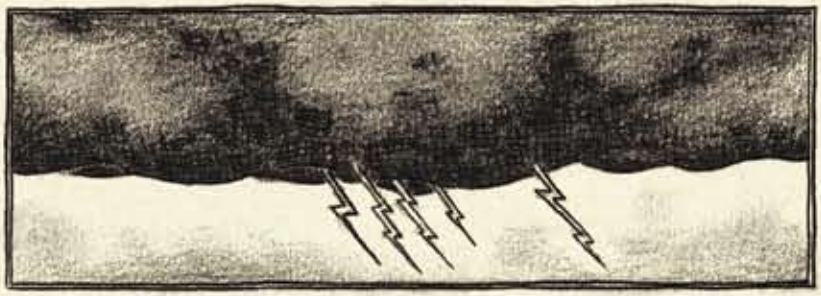
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This has the distinction of being one of the first four "fairy tales" tried out in May 1835. Would they bring fame, shame, or silence? Well, they brought very strange reviews, for Andersen was known only as an adult writer. Yet fame soon came – and stayed. Though he explained that the idea for this tale may have come from the women telling folk tales and fables to each other in the spinning room or the hop fields, the listening boy had now become the skilful artist. Indeed, as our story shows he was a master from the start. This pioneer tale is a small perfection. Andersen's artful simplicity keeps the tale alive: one pea; a huge load of bedcoverings; a royal household where the king answers the door and the queen arranges the bed, yet we have no doubt of their royalty; oh, and that single pea is later sent to a museum.

The first English translators could not understand Andersen's humour or his subtlety. One pea? That was absurd. Three might be more credible. The museum is ignored. Sadly, some of these early versions are still in use. Look out for those rogue peas.



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THERE WAS ONCE A PRINCE WHO WISHED to marry a princess – but a real princess she had to be. So he travelled all the world over to find one; yet in every case something was wrong. Princesses there were in plenty, yet he could never be sure that they were the genuine article; there was always something, this or that, that just didn't seem as it should be. At last he came back home, quite downhearted for he did so want to have a real princess.

One evening there was a fearful storm; thunder raged, lightning flashed, rain poured down in torrents – it was horrifying. In the midst of it all someone knocked at the palace door, and the old king went to open it.



Standing there was a princess. But, goodness! What a state she was in! The water ran down her hair and her clothes, through the tips of her shoes and out at the heels. Still, she *said* she was a real princess.

Well, we'll find out soon enough, the old queen thought. She didn't say a word, though, but went into the spare bedroom, took off all the bedclothes and laid a small pea on the mattress. Then she piled twenty more mattresses on top of it, and twenty eiderdowns over that. There the princess was to sleep that night.

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When morning came, they asked her how she had slept.

"Oh, shockingly! Not a wink of sleep the whole night long! Heaven knows what was in the bed, but I lay on something hard that has made me black and blue all over. It was unspeakable."

Now they were sure that here was a real princess, since she had felt the pea through twenty eiderdowns and twenty mattresses. Only a real princess could be so sensitive.

So the prince married her: no need to search any further. The pea was put in a museum; you can go and see it for yourself if no one has taken it.

There's a fine story for you!



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