



# *The Pea Emperor*

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Romanian

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*Easy*  
*10 min read*

Once upon a time something wonderful happened. If it hadn't happened, it wouldn't be told.

There was once a good for nothing fellow, who was so poor and needy that he had not even enough to eat to be able to drink water after it. When he had wandered through all the countries in the world, he returned home somewhat more sensible. He had passed through many perils abroad, knocked his head against the top of the door, been sifted through the coarse and the fine sieve. He would now gladly have pursued some trade, but he had no money. One day he found three peas. After picking them up from the ground he took them on the palm of his hand, looked at them, pondered a long time, and then said laughing: "If I plant these seeds in the ground, I shall have a hundred in a year; if I afterward plant the hundred, I shall have thousands, and if I put these thousands in the earth I shall reap who knows how many! Then, if I go on in this way, I shall finally become a rich man. But if I could help wealth to come quicker—let me see!"

He went to the emperor and begged him to order through the whole empire barrels in which to keep his peas.

When the emperor heard that he needed such a quantity of barrels, he thought he must be stifling in money, and was more and more convinced of it when he entered into conversation with him. What is true must remain true; he didn't keep his mouth shut, but opened it and bragged till it would have been supposed that real pearls fell from his lips.

He told the emperor what he had seen in foreign lands, related how things were here and there, spoke of this and that, till the emperor stood before him with his mouth wide open. When he saw that the emperor marveled at his statements, he bragged more and more, saying that he had palaces, herds, and other riches.

The sovereign believed the boaster's stories, and said to him:

"I see that you have traveled, know a great deal, and are cunning and experienced; if you wish, I will gladly give you my daughter in marriage."

The braggart now regretted having told so many lies, for he did not know how to escape the monarch's proposal. After reflecting a short time, he plucked up courage and said "I will gladly accept the position of son-in-law you offer, and will try to show you that I am worthy of it."

The necessary preparations were made, and after some time an imperial wedding was celebrated in the palace. Then the man remained there.

One, two, several weeks elapsed, and no trace of peas and wealth appeared. Finally the emperor began to repent what he had done, but there was no help for it and the emperor's son-in-law perceived, from the manner of the courtiers and nobles, that they had very little respect for him.

His cheeks burned with shame. He made useless plans, tortured himself to find some means of getting out of the scrape, and could not even sleep at night. One morning without any one's knowledge he left the palace at dawn, walked on till he came to a meadow, and wandered along absorbed in thought, without knowing where he was going. Suddenly a rosy-cheeked man stood before him, and asked: "Where are you going, gossip, you look as sad and thoughtful as if all your ships had sunk in the sea."

The emperor's son-in-law related his dilemma and what he was seeking, and the man replied:

“If I deliver you from your difficulty, what will you give me?”

“Whatever you ask,” he answered.

“There are nine of us brothers,” said the man, “and each knows a riddle. If you guess them our whole property shall be yours, but if not, your first child must be ours.”

The emperor’s son-in-law, utterly crushed with shame, agreed, hard as it was for him, hoping that before the child was born he might find somebody who could tell him what to do.

So they set out together, that the stranger might show him the herds of cattle he owned and his palaces, which were not far off. They also instructed the herdsmen, swineherds, shepherds, and laborers what they were to say, if any body asked to whom the flocks and herds belonged.

The emperor’s son-in-law returned to the palace and said that he would take his wife home the next day. On his way back he met an old man in the fields, and, seeing how aged and feeble he was, he pitied him and offered him alms. The old man would accept nothing, but asked permission to enter his service, telling him that he would be none the worse for it, and the other received him. When the emperor heard that his son-in-law wanted to go to his own palace, he was so delighted that he commanded every thing to be arranged on a grand scale in order to accompany him with imperial honors.

Therefore, on the following day, the whole court was filled with nobles, soldiers, and attendants of all kinds. All the directions for the journey had been given by the old man who had taken service with the emperor’s son-in-law; he said that he was the Pea Emperor’s steward, and all praised his energy, dignity, and industry.

The emperor was in high spirits and set out with the empress, the Pea Emperor, and his bride, for his son-in-law’s possessions. The old servant went before and had every thing in good order. But the poor Pea Emperor was as pale and dejected as if somebody had showered him with boiling water. He was thinking of the riddles and how he could guess them.

They drove and drove till they reached the fields. Here was a beautiful meadow, beyond it a grove like the Garden of Paradise. When the overseer of the fields saw them, he came up cap in hand.

“To whom do these estates belong, my friend?” asked the emperor.

“To the Pea Emperor,” replied the man.

The emperor grew fat with joy, for he now believed that his son-in-law really was no beggar. They drove on some distance further and met numerous flocks and herds of all sorts of animals; the emperor asked one keeper after another to whom they belonged, and all replied: “To the Pea Emperor.”

But when they reached the palace of the nine dragons the emperor marveled at its magnificence. Every thing was in order. They were received at the gate by a band of musicians, who played the most beautiful tunes ever heard. The interior of the palace was adorned with real gems. A magnificent banquet was hastily prepared, and they drank the finest wine.

After the emperor had wished his son-in-law every happiness, he returned to his own home greatly delighted with the riches he had seen. But the Pea Emperor was almost dead with anxiety.

Evening came. The old servant said to his master:

“Master, what you have seen of me since I entered your service must have convinced you of my fidelity. Now I assure you that I can help you still more.”

“Are you telling the truth?” asked the Pea Emperor.

“Do not doubt me for an instant, master! And I ask one thing besides: let me spend the night in some corner of the chamber where you are sleeping, even if it is behind the door. Moreover, I advise you not to answer a single word, no matter who calls you by name or how great a noise is made.”

“Be it so!” said the Pea Emperor. And so it was.

After they had lain down and put out the light, they heard a dull, rumbling noise like an approaching thunder storm. Then a hoarse, rough voice said:

“Pea Emperor, Pea Emperor!”

“What do you want?” replied the old man.

“I’m not calling you,” it replied, “I’m calling the Pea Emperor.”

“That’s just the same thing,” replied the old man, “my master is asleep, he’s tired.”

Then the noise of many voices was heard, as if people were quarreling! Again the first one repeated: “Pea Emperor, Pea Emperor!”

“What is it?” the old man answered.

“What is one?”

“The moon is one.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

Then a terrible wailing arose, as if all the spirits of evil were abroad, and another voice said:

“What is two?”

“Two eyes in the head see well.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

“What is three?”

“Where there are three grown daughters in a house, *beware* of putting your head in.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

“What is four?”

“The cart with four wheels runs well.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

“What is five?”

“Five fingers on the hand hold well.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

Again there was a noise like a thunder storm, and the palace shook as if the earth was quaking. And again there was a shout for the Pea Emperor. But the latter became more and more quiet, and scarcely ventured to breathe, but remained perfectly still. This time, too, the old servant answered. Another voice asked:

“What is six?”

“The flute with six holes blows well.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

“What is seven?”

“Where there are seven brothers, don't meddle with their affairs.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

“What is eight?”

“The plow with eight oxen furrows the earth well.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

“What is nine?”

“Where there are nine grown daughters in a house, it is not swept.”

“Is it you, master?”

“Burst, dragon!”

The Pea Emperor, who heard all this, could not sleep all night long, even when it grew so still that one might have heard a fly buzz; he waited for daylight with the utmost impatience.

When he rose the next morning the old servant had vanished. He went out of the palace, and what did he behold? The scattered corpses of nine dragons, which he gave to the ravens. While thanking God for having preserved his life and delivered him from disgrace, he heard a sweet voice say:

“Your compassion for the poor man saved you. Always be charitable.”

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