

East of the Sun and West of the Moon

A Norwegian Fairytale



Once upon a time there was a very poor man. He had a very big family and not enough money to feed and clothe them. One stormy evening, the man opened the door to find a huge white bear standing outside. The bear said to the man, "Give me your youngest, prettiest daughter and I will make you rich beyond your wildest dreams." All eyes fell on Helga. She was the youngest and prettiest daughter.

Helga agreed to go. The bear carried her far away, to his palace on a steep cliff high on a mountain. A royal dinner awaited them. After dinner, servants lead Helga into a grand bedroom. They tucked her into the smooth silk sheets in one of the two grand feather beds. An hour later, a man entered the dark room. Without a word, he climbed into the other bed and went to sleep. In the morning, he was gone. This continued night after night.

One night, Helga waited until long after the man fell asleep. Quietly, she lit the candle and tiptoed over to his bed. In the light

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of the candle slept the most beautiful man she had ever seen. She immediately fell in love with him. As she leaned in for a closer look, her candle dripped onto his shirt and woke him up.

“What have you done,” cried the man. “If only you had waited one year, I would be free! I am a prince. My wicked stepmother cast a spell on me. I am a bear by day and a man by night. Now that you know my secret, I will have to leave. I must return to her castle that is east of the sun and west of the moon. She will make me marry that troll princess with the nose that is three feet long.”

Helga woke the next morning to find both the prince and his castle gone. She knew what she had to do. Helga set out to find him. She asked directions from those along the way. On her journey, she acquired a golden apple, comb, and spinning wheel.

After many days, the North Wind took pity on Helga. It carried her all the way to the stepmother’s palace, where she learned that the prince was engaged. Helga sat down outside the palace and took out her golden apple.

Along came a troll-like princess with a nose that was three feet long. She wanted to buy the apple. Helga agreed to sell it for a night alone with the prince. The troll princess agreed but had a trick in mind. She secretly gave the prince a sleeping potion and Helga was unable to wake him. The next day, Helga sold her golden comb to the princess. But again the princess tricked her. Again, Helga could not wake the prince. On the third day, Helga sold her golden spinning wheel. Luckily, that evening the suspicious prince only pretended to drink the potion. And that night he and Helga met and formed a plan.

The next day the prince made an announcement. He would only marry the woman who could clean the candle drippings from his favorite shirt. The troll princess tried, but failed. Even the stepmother tried and failed. But when Helga touched it, the prince’s shirt turned pure white, as clean as the day it was made.

And so Helga and the prince were able to trick the evil stepmother, who got so angry she exploded. With the spell broken, Helga and the prince were free to marry and live happily ever after.

