

East of the Sun and West of the Moon

A Norwegian Fairytale



There once lived a very poor man. This man had a very big family. But he did not have enough money to keep them. One stormy evening, they heard a knock at the door. The man opened it. Outside stood a huge white bear. The bear spoke. "Give me your youngest, prettiest daughter. I will make you a very rich man." All eyes fell on Helga. She was the youngest and prettiest.

Helga agreed to go. The bear carried her to his palace. It was high on a mountain. A royal dinner awaited them. After dinner, servants led Helga into a grand bedroom. They tucked her into one of the two grand beds. An hour later, a man came into the dark room. Without a word, he climbed into the other bed and went to sleep. In the morning, he was gone. This went on, night after night.

One night, Helga waited until the man fell asleep. Quietly, she lit a candle and tiptoed over to his bed. He was the most beautiful man she had ever seen. She immediately fell in love with him. She leaned in for a closer look. As she did, her candle dripped onto his shirt. It woke him up.

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“What have you done,” he cried. “If only you had waited one year. Then I would have been free! My wicked stepmother cast a spell on me. I am a bear by day and a prince by night. Now I will have to 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 awoke the next morning. Both the prince and his castle were gone. Helga set out to find him. She met many people along the way. On her journey, she was given a golden apple, a comb, and a spinning wheel.

Helga searched for the prince for many days. Finally, the North Wind took pity on her. It helped her. It took her to the stepmother’s palace. There, Helga learned that the prince was to be married to the troll princess. Helga sat down next to the palace. She took out her golden apple.

Along came the princess. She had a three-foot-long nose. She looked like a troll. The princess asked to buy Helga’s apple. Helga agreed. She would sell it for one night alone with the prince. The princess agreed. But then the troll tricked the prince. She gave him a sleeping potion just before Helga arrived. He slept through her first visit. He slept through her second visit, too. For the third visit, Helga sold her last golden item. It was the spinning wheel.

By then, the prince knew something was wrong. That night he only pretended to drink the troll’s potion. This time, he was awake for Helga’s visit. Together, they formed a plan.

The prince made an announcement the next day. He said he wanted to get married. But his bride must be able to clean the candle drippings from his favorite shirt. The troll princess tried. But she failed. His stepmother tried and failed. Then Helga tried. The prince’s shirt turned pure white. It became as clean as the day it was made.

And so Helga and the prince tricked his stepmother. The stepmother got so angry she exploded. Now the spell was broken. Helga and the prince were free to marry. They lived happily ever after.

