

# East of the Sun and West of the Moon

## A Norwegian Fairytale



Once upon a time there was a very poor man who 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 richer than your wildest dreams." All eyes fell on Helga, for she was the youngest and prettiest daughter.

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

One night, Helga waited until long after the strange man had fallen asleep and quietly lit a 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 and leaned in for a closer look. As she did, her candle dripped onto his shirt, startling him awake.

“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 that makes me 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.”

When 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, asking directions from those along the way. On her journey, she acquired a golden apple, comb, and spinning wheel.

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

A troll-like princess with a three-foot-long nose was passing by when she noticed Helga’s golden apple. Greedy for gold, the troll princess asked if it was for sale. Helga agreed to give her the apple, but in return the princess would have to give Helga an entire night alone with the prince. The troll princess agreed, but secretly gave the prince a sleeping potion before bed so that Helga was unable to wake him. The next day, Helga sold her golden comb to the princess for the same price, but again the princess tricked the prince into drinking the sleeping potion. On the third day, Helga sold the golden spinning wheel. Luckily, that evening the suspicious prince only pretended to drink the potion and was awake when Helga arrived. Joyfully reunited, he and Helga formulated a plan.

The next day the prince announced to the whole kingdom that 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. The spell was broken. Helga and the prince were free to marry and live happily ever after.

