

## East of the Sun, West of the Moon

There was once a poor man who had seven beautiful daughters but no money at all. He did not know how he would provide for them all. Late one night there came a knock at his door, and when he opened it there stood a large white bear. The bear asked the man for his youngest daughter. If she would go with him, the bear in return would grant the rest of the family riches the like of which they had never seen. Now, the girl did not want to leave her family but she loved them and she knew that if she could do this one thing then the family she loved would want for nothing. So she agreed to go with the bear.

Climbing onto his back she waved goodbye to her mother and father and her sisters. The bear carried her a long, weary way until at last they came to a steep mountain with a door in the rock. Inside was a huge palace with rooms that gleamed with gold and silver. On the table was more food than the girl had ever seen.

Well, the bear took good care of her. He was courteous and gentle and she had everything that she could want. Only one thing bothered her. Sometimes at night she had the strangest sense that someone was watching her sleep.

As time went on however, she missed her family more and more. The bear could see that she was sad and asked what would make her happy. If he could grant it, he said, he would. To visit her family, she said. That was all she wanted. Now, the bear did not want to let her go but neither did he want her to pine and fade, so he agreed that she could go home to visit her family as long as she would return with him when he came back for her. She must though promise him one thing, and she must keep the promise. She must not talk to her mother alone. Longing to see her family again, the girl promised, and she meant to keep her promise. So the bear carried her home.

Her family were delighted to see her and there was so much to do that it was easy for the girl to avoid her mother. Her mother though was determined to speak to her, and as time passed the girl found it easy enough to forget the promise- and on her last night she found herself alone with her mother. Eagerly she told of how kind the bear was and how gentle, and how rich the castle was. 'Is there nothing to trouble you?' her mother asked, and the girl hesitated. Her mother saw her hesitation and pressed her until finally she admitted. 'Just one thing,' she said, and she told her mother that sometimes at night she felt someone watching her. Her mother was bothered by the thought of it and so she gave the girl a candle and flint and told her to light the candle whenever she thought someone was there.

Well, all too soon the bear returned for the girl, and she climbed willingly onto his back as she had said she would and waved goodbye once again to her mother and father and sisters as he carried her away. As they travelled he asked her if she had kept her promise but she, not wanting to anger him, hid the candle from him and told him that she had.

The very next night she woke in the dark and felt immediately certain that there was someone there. She reached for the candle. By its light she saw the most handsome prince dozing in the chair in the corner of her room. She crept closer but as she held the light up to see him better three drops of wax dripped onto his shirt, and he awoke.

'You stupid girl!' he cried. 'Could you not have waited? If you had only lived with me willingly for just a year the enchantment would have been broken, and I would have been free again!' Shocked by his anger, the girl begged him to explain. 'A wicked troll,' he told her, 'enchanted me to be a bear by day and a prince by night. I told you not to speak to your mother. Because of her you have failed, and I must go back to the troll's castle which lies east of the sun and west of the moon, and marry her daughter.' The girl wept bitterly, but there was nothing to be done. The castle and the prince disappeared and there she lay, once again in her rags, on the floor of the forest.

The girl was determined to find the prince again. After all, it was because of her that he must marry the troll princess. And so she set off to find the troll's castle which lay east of the sun, west of the moon.

She travelled for many days until she met an old woman. 'Can you tell me,' she asked, 'how to get to the troll's castle which lies east of the sun, west of the moon?' The old woman shook her head. 'But ask my neighbour,' she said. 'Perhaps she will know.'

The girl travelled on until she came to the house of another old woman. 'Can you tell me,' she asked, 'how to get to the troll's castle which lies east of the sun, west of the moon?' The second old woman shook her head. 'But ask my neighbour,' she said. 'She lives a little way further on. Perhaps she will know.'

The third old woman, when the girl reached her, knew no more than her neighbours. 'Perhaps,' she said, 'you should ask the East Wind when he passes. After all, the winds blow all around the world. Surely he would know how to find the castle east of the sun, west of the moon.'

On and on the girl travelled, until at last she found the East Wind. 'Can you tell me,' she asked, 'how to get to the troll's castle which lies east of the sun, west of the moon?' Well, the East Wind had heard of it but he had never been there. 'But perhaps,' he said, 'we could ask my brother, the West Wind. Maybe he has blown further.' So saying, the East Wind swept the girl up and carried her to find his brother the West Wind. The West Wind when they found him had never blown so far, but he knew that his brother the South Wind was stronger. Perhaps he then had blown further and could tell her where the castle lay. So the West Wind swept up the girl and carried her to find the South Wind. Sadly, the South Wind too had never blown so far, but he knew that his brother the North Wind was more powerful and more ancient than any of them. Surely he would know. And the South Wind swept up the girl and carried her to find the North Wind.

Now, the North Wind was wild and fierce and reluctant to help anybody with anything. But he had, so he said, been to the castle east of the sun, west of the moon and in spite of himself he was impressed that the girl had travelled so far and endured so much. He agreed to carry her there. 'If you are not afraid,' he said. 'It will be a wild and dangerous journey. You may not survive it.' But the girl was determined and would not change her mind. 'So be it!' the North Wind said, and he lifted her up. She clung on as he carried her over land and sea, through storm and tempest, bitter ice and raw cold and rain that soaked her to the skin until at last he dropped her on the shore below the troll's castle east of the sun, west of the moon.

As the girl arrived the castle bells were ringing and a great crowd of trolls were gathering. Pushing cautiously through the crowd she saw the troll princess in her wedding dress and the prince, her prince. This was his wedding day. She had come too late! But as the prince reached the altar he caught sight of her in the crowd. He turned to the troll queen and said, 'Before I marry your daughter, I have one request of my bride. There are three spots of candle wax on my shirt and I have vowed to marry only the woman who can wash them out.' The troll queen was angry, but the troll princess shrugged. How hard could it be? She called for water and began to wash but, no matter how much she scrubbed, the marks remained. She grew angrier and angrier. All the other trolls joined in but no one could get the stains out. The girl crept closer. It took all of her courage to approach the furious trolls but she saw one last chance. She stepped forward. 'Let me try!' she said. The trolls screeched with laughter, but as soon as the girl dipped the shirt into the water it was spotless. At that the troll princess flew into such a rage that she burst on the spot, and so did the queen and all the other trolls.

And the girl and the prince left the castle that lay east of the sun, west of the moon, and travelled home together.