

East o' the Sun West o' the Moon

a synopsis

It's cold in the cottage. The snow is piled up against the door. Suddenly there's a knocking and Mother and Father are confronted by a big white bear. He wants their daughter to join him in his ice palace. And he gives them till Thursday to make up their minds. Mother and Father decide it will be in everyone's best interest if their daughter goes with him – after all he has promised that they will be rich. So Father breaks the news to his daughter.

Next Thursday the bear returns and whisks the girl away. He installs her in his Palace of Ice. She is comfortable but lonely – there's no-one to talk to and the bear is always away about his business. The bear sleeps in her room to protect her but she hears a different pattern of breathing and is sure that someone else is there.

She persuades the bear to let her visit her parents. He agrees as long as she doesn't talk to her mother alone. She does speak to her mother alone and her mother gives her a candle-end to light so that she can see who is in her room.

Back at the Palace of Ice the girl lights the candle-end and discovers a beautiful Prince asleep in her room. She is so taken with him that she leans over to kiss him. But three drops of burning candle-wax spill onto his shirt, which wakes him. He is distraught. Now they will never see each other again. He has been under a spell – a bear by day, a prince by night – and because she has seen him as a prince the Trolls will carry him away to marry the hideous Troll-Princess. The girl instantly falls into a deep sleep.

When the girl awakes she finds that not only has the prince disappeared: so too has the Palace of Ice. She sets off to find the prince, knowing only that the Castle of the Trolls lies somewhere east of the sun and west of the moon. A young girl gives her a golden flask that will never run dry and a horse. The young girl's mother gives her a golden pot that will never empty. And the young girl's grandmother gives her a golden shawl to protect her against the extremes of temperature. The grandmother also summons the Wind of the East to help her on her journey.

The Wind of the East runs out of puff and hands her over to his brother, the Wind of the West. The Wind of the West hands her on to the Wind of the South. And the Wind of the South finally hands her on to the Wind of the North. The Wind of the North delivers her to the crack in the cliff that leads to the Castle of the Trolls – which is buried deep beneath the earth.

In the Castle the girl meets the Troll Princess – who speaks a very strange language. She uses the golden gifts to persuade the Troll Princess to let her see the prince. The Troll Princess takes the gifts but then drugs the prince so that he is always asleep. Finally the girl barges into his room and they hatch a plot.

The prince interrupts his own wedding with the Troll Princess to announce that he will only marry the girl who can wash the three drops of wax out of his shirt. The Troll Princess tries but fails. The girl tries and succeeds. And the Trolls are so angry that they explode – propelling the girl and her Prince back to the little cottage where father and mother are delighted to see them. And where, we hope, they will all live happily ever after.