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East O' the Sun and West O' the Moon

Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen

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This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

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FOREWORD

In recent years there has been a wholesome revival of the ancient art of story-telling. The most thoughtful, progressive educators have come to recognize the culture value of folk and fairy stories, fables and legends, not only as means of fostering and directing the power of the child's imagination, but as a basis for literary interpretation and appreciation throughout life.

This condition has given rise to a demand for the best material in each of these several lines. Some editors have gleaned from one field; some from several. It is the aim of this little book to bring together only the very best from the rich stores of Norwegian folk-lore. All these stories have been told many times by the editor to varied audiences of children and to those who are "older grown." Each has proved its power to make the universal appeal.

In preparing the stories for publication, the aim has been to preserve, as much as possible, in vocabulary and idiom, the original folk-lore language, and to retain the conversational style of the teller of tales, in order that the sympathetic young reader may, in greater or less degree, be translated into the atmosphere of the old-time story-hour.

GUDRUN THORNE-THOMSEN.

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[Illustration: "Are you afraid?"]

EAST O' THE SUN AND WEST O' THE MOON

Once on a time there was a poor woodcutter who had so many children that he had not much of either food or clothing to give them. Pretty children they all were, but the prettiest was the youngest daughter, who was so lovely there was no end to her loveliness.

It was on a Thursday evening late in the fall of the year. The weather was wild and rough outside, and it was cruelly dark. The rain fell and the wind blew till the walls of the cottage shook. There they all sat round the fire busy with this thing and that. Just then, all at once, something gave three taps at the window pane. Then the father went out to see what was the matter, and, when he got out of doors, what should he see but a great White Bear.

"Good evening to you!" said the White Bear.

"The same to you," said the man.

"Will you give me your youngest daughter? If you will, I'll make you as rich as you are now poor," said the Bear.

Well, the man would not be at all sorry to be so rich;—but give him his prettiest lassie, no, that he couldn't do, so he said "No" outright and closed the door both tight and well. But the Bear called out, "I'll give you time to think; next Thursday night I'll come for your answer."

Now, the lassie had heard every word that the Bear had said, and before the next Thursday evening came, she had washed and mended her rags, made herself as neat as she could, and was ready to start. I can't say her packing gave her much trouble.

Next Thursday evening came the White Bear to fetch her, and she got upon his back with her bundle, and off they went. So when they had gone a bit of the way, the White Bear said, "Are you afraid?"

"No, not at all," said the lassie.

"Well! mind and hold tight by my shaggy coat, and then there's nothing to fear," added the Bear.

So she rode a long, long way, till they came to a great steep hill. There on the face of it the White Bear gave a knock, and a door opened, and they came into a castle, where there were many rooms all lit up, gleaming with silver and gold, and there too was a table ready laid, and it was all as grand as grand could be. Then the White Bear gave her a silver bell. When she wanted anything she had only to ring it, and she would get what she wanted at once.

Well, when she had had supper and evening wore on, she became sleepy because of her journey. She thought she would like to go to bed, so she rang the bell. She had scarce taken hold of it before she came into a chamber where there were two beds as fair and white as any one would wish to sleep in. But when she had put out the light and gone to bed some one came into the room and lay down in the other bed. Now this happened every night, but she never saw who it was, for he always came after she had put out the light; and, before the day dawned, he was up and off again.

So things went on for a while, the lassie having everything she wanted. But you must know, that no human being did she see from morning till night, only the White Bear could she talk to, and she did not know what man or monster it might be who came to sleep in her room by night. At last she began to be silent and sorrowful and would neither eat nor drink.

One day the White Bear came to her and said: "Lassie, why are you so sorrowful? This castle and all that is in it are yours, the silver bell will give you anything that you wish. I only beg one thing of you—ask no questions, trust me and nothing shall harm you. So now be happy again." But still the lassie had no peace of mind, for one thing she wished to know: Who it was who came in the night and slept in her room? All day long and all night long she wondered and longed to know, and she fretted and pined away.

So one night, when she could not stand it any longer and she heard that he slept, she got up, lit a bit of a candle, and let the light shine on him. Then she saw that he was the loveliest Prince one ever set eyes on, and she bent over and kissed him. But, as she kissed

him, she dropped three drops of hot tallow on his shirt, and he woke up.

"What have you done?" he cried; "now you have made us both unlucky, for had you held out only this one year, I had been freed. For I am the White Bear by day and a man by night. It is a wicked witch who has bewitched me; and now I must set off from you to her. She lives in a castle which stands East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon, and there are many trolls and witches there and one of those is the wife I must now have."

She wept, but there was no help for it; go he must.

Then she asked if she mightn't go with him?

No, she mightn't.

"Tell me the way then," she said, "and I'll search you out; that, surely, I may get leave to do."

"Yes, you may do that," he said, "but there is no way to that place. It lies East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon and thither you can never find your way." And at that very moment both Prince and castle were gone, and she lay on a little green patch in the midst of the gloomy thick wood, and by her side lay the same bundle of rags she had brought with her from home.

Then she wept and wept till she was tired, and all the while she thought of the lovely Prince and how she should find him.

So at last she set out on her way and walked many, many days and whomever she met she asked: "Can you tell me the way to the castle that lies East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon?" But no one could tell her.

And on she went a weary time. Both hungry and tired was she when she got to the East Wind's house one morning. There she asked the East Wind if he could tell her the way to the Prince who dwelt East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon. Yes, the East Wind had often heard tell of it, the Prince, and the castle, but he couldn't tell the way, for he had never blown so far.

"But, if you will, I'll go with you to my brother the West Wind. Maybe he knows, for he's much stronger. So, if you will just get on my back, I'll carry you thither."

Yes, she got on his back, and I can tell you they went briskly along.

So when they got there, they went into the West Wind's house, and the East Wind said that the lassie he had brought was the one who ought to marry the Prince who lived in the castle East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon; and that she had set out to seek him, and would be glad to know if the West Wind knew how to get to the castle.

"Nay," said the West Wind, "so far I've never blown; but if you will, I'll go with you to our brother the South Wind, for he is much stronger than either of us, and he has flapped his wings far and wide. Maybe he'll tell you. You can get on my back and I'll carry you to him."

Yes, she got on his back, and so they travelled to the South Wind, and were not long on the way, either.

When they got there, the West Wind asked him if he could tell her the way to the castle that lay East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon, for it was she who ought to marry the Prince who lived there.

"You don't say so. That's she, is it?" said the South Wind.

"Well, I have blustered about in most places in my time, but that far I have never blown; however, if you will, I'll take you to my brother the North Wind; he is the oldest and strongest of all of us, and if he doesn't know where it is, you'll never find anyone in the world to tell you. You can get on my back and I'll carry you thither."

Yes, she got on his back, and away he went from his house at a fine rate. And this time, too, she was not long on the way. When they got near the North Wind's house he was so wild and cross that cold puffs came from him.

"Heigh, there, what do you want?" he bawled out to them ever so far off, so that it struck them with an icy shiver.

"Well," said the South Wind, "you needn't be so put out, for here I am your brother, the South Wind, and here is the lassie who ought to marry the Prince who dwells in the castle that lies East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon. She wants to ask you, if you ever were there,

and can tell her the way, for she would be so glad to find him again."

"Yes, I know well enough where it is," said the North Wind. "Once in my life I blew an aspen leaf thither, but I was so tired I couldn't blow a puff for ever so many days after it. But if you really wish to go thither, and aren't afraid to come along with me, I'll take you on my back and see if I can blow you there."

"Yes! and thank you," she said, for she must and would get thither if it were possible in any way; and as for fear, however madly he went, she wouldn't be at all afraid.

"Very well then," said the North Wind, "but you must sleep here to-night, for we must have the whole day before us if we're to get thither at all."

Early next morning the North Wind woke her, and puffed himself up, and blew himself out, and made himself so stout and big, it was gruesome to look at him. And so off she went, high on the back of the North Wind up through the air, as if they would never stop till they got to the world's end.

Down here below there was a terrible storm; it threw down long tracts of woodland and many houses, and when it swept over the great sea ships foundered by hundreds.

So they tore on and on, — no one can believe how far they went, — and all the while they still went over the sea, and the North Wind got more and more weary, and so out of breath he could scarce bring out a puff, and his wings drooped and drooped, till at last he sunk so low that the crests of the waves lashed over her heels.

"Are you afraid?" said the North Wind.

She wasn't.

But they were not very far from land; and the North Wind had still so much strength left in him that he managed to throw her up on shore close by the castle which lay East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon; but then he was so weak and worn out, that he had to stay there and rest many days before he could get home again.

And now the lassie began to look about her and to think of how she might free the Prince, but nowhere did she see a sign of life.

Then she sat herself down right under the castle windows, and as soon as the sun went down, out they came, trolls and witches, red-eyed, long-nosed, hunch-backed hags, tumbling over each other, scolding, hurrying and scurrying hither and thither.

At first they almost frightened the life out of her, but when she had watched them awhile and they had not noticed her, she took courage and walked up to one of them and said: "Pray tell me what goes on here to-night that you are all so busy, and could I perhaps get something to do for a night's lodging and a bit of food?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the horrid witch, "and where do you come from that you do not know that it is to-night that the Prince chooses his bride. When the moon stands high over the tree tops yonder we meet in the clearing by the old oak. There the caldrons are ready with boiling lye, for don't you know?—he's going to choose for his bride the one who can wash three spots of tallow from his shirt, Ha, ha, ha!"

And the wicked witch hurried off again, laughing such a horrible laugh that it made the lassie's blood run cold.

But now the trolls and witches came trooping out of the very earth, it seemed, and all turned their steps toward the clearing in the woods.

So the lassie went too, and found a place among the rest. Now the moon stood high above the tree tops, and there was the caldron in the middle and round about sat the trolls and witches;—such gruesome company I'm sure you were never in. Then came the Prince; he looked about from one to the other, and he saw the lassie, and his face grew white, but he said nothing.

"Now, let's begin," said a witch with a nose three ells long. She was sure she was going to have the Prince, and she began to wash away as hard as she could, but the more she rubbed and scrubbed, the bigger the spots grew.

"Ah!" said an old hag, "you can't wash, let me try."

But she hadn't long taken the shirt in hand, before it was far worse than ever, and with all her rubbing and scrubbing and wring-

ing, the spots grew bigger and blacker, and the darker and uglier was the shirt.

Then all the other trolls began to wash, but the longer it lasted, the blacker and uglier the shirt grew, till at last it was as black all over as if it had been up the chimney.

"Ah!" said the Prince, "you're none of you worth a straw, you can't wash. Why there sits a beggar lassie, I'll be bound she knows how to wash better than the whole lot of you. Come here, lassie," he shouted.

"Can you wash the shirt clean, lassie?" said he.

"I don't know," she said, "but I think I can."

And almost before she had taken it and dipped it in the water, it was as white as snow, and whiter still.

"Yes; you are the lassie for me," said the Prince.

At that moment the sun rose and the whole pack of trolls turned to stone.

There you may see them to this very day sitting around in a circle, big ones and little ones, all hard, cold stone.

But the Prince took the lassie by the hand and they flitted away as far as they could from the castle that lay East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon.

THE THREE BILLY GOATS GRUFF

Once on a time there were three Billy Goats, who were to go up to the hillside to make themselves fat, and the family name of the goats was "Gruff."

On the way up was a bridge, over a river which they had to cross, and under the bridge lived a great ugly Troll with eyes as big as saucers, and a nose as long as a poker.

First of all came the youngest Billy Goat Gruff to cross the bridge. "Trip, trap; trip, trap!" went the bridge.

"*Who's that tripping over my bridge?*" roared the Troll.

"Oh, it is only I, the tiniest Billy Goat Gruff, and I'm going up to the hillside to make myself fat," said the Billy Goat, with such a small voice.

"Now, I'm coming to gobble you up," said the Troll.

"Oh, no! pray do not take me, I'm too little, that I am," said the Billy Goat; "wait a bit till the second Billy Goat Gruff comes, he's much bigger."

"Well! be off with you," said the Troll.

A little while after came the second Billy Goat Gruff across the bridge.

"Trip, trap! trip, trap! trip, trap!" went the bridge.

"*Who is that tripping over my bridge?*" roared the Troll.

"Oh, it's the second Billy Goat Gruff, and I'm going up to the hillside to make myself fat," said the Billy Goat. Nor had he such a small voice, either.

"Now, I'm coming to gobble you up!" said the Troll.

"Oh, no! don't take me, wait a little till the big Billy Goat comes, he's much bigger."

"Very well! be off with you," said the Troll.

But just then up came the big Billy Goat Gruff.

"Trip, trap! trip, trap! trip, trap!" went the bridge, for the Billy Goat was so heavy that the bridge creaked and groaned under him.

"*Who's that tramping on my bridge?*" roared the Troll.

"It's I! the big Billy Goat Gruff," said the Billy Goat, and he had a big hoarse voice.

"Now, I'm coming to gobble you up!" roared the troll.

*Well come! I have two spears so stout,
With them I'll thrust your eyeballs out;
I have besides two great big stones,
With them I'll crush you body and bones!"*

That was what the big Billy Goat said; so he flew at the Troll, and thrust him with his horns, and crushed him to bits, body and bones, and tossed him out into the river, and after that he went up to the hillside.

There the Billy Goats got so fat that they were scarcely able to walk home again, and if they haven't grown thinner, why they're still fat; and so,—

"Snip, snap, stout.
This tale's told out."

TAPER TOM

Once on a time there was a King who had a daughter, and she was so lovely that her good looks were well known far and near. But she was so sad and serious she could never be got to laugh, and besides, she was so high and mighty that she said "No" to all who came to woo her. She would have none of them, were they ever so grand — lords or princes, — it was all the same.

The King had long ago become tired of this, for he thought she might just as well marry; she, too, like all other people. There was no use in waiting; she was quite old enough, nor would she be any richer, for she was to have half the kingdom, — that came to her as her mother's heir.

So he had word sent throughout the kingdom, that anyone who could get his daughter to laugh should have her for his wife and half the kingdom besides. But, if there was anyone who tried and could not, he was to have a sound thrashing. And sure it was that there were many sore backs in that kingdom, for lovers and wooers came from north and south, and east and west, thinking it nothing at all to make a King's daughter laugh. And gay fellows they were, some of them too, but for all their tricks and capers there sat the Princess, just as sad and serious as she had been before.

Now, not far from the palace lived a man who had three sons, and they, too, had heard how the King had given it out that the man who could make the Princess laugh was to have her to wife and half the kingdom.

The eldest was for setting off first. So he strode off, and when he came to the King's grange, he told the King he would be glad to try to make the Princess laugh.

"All very well, my man," said the King, "but it's sure to be of no use, for so many have been here and tried. My daughter is so sorrowful it's no use trying, and it's not my wish that anyone should come to grief."

But the lad thought he would like to try. It couldn't be such a very hard thing for him to get the Princess to laugh, for so many had laughed at him, both gentle and simple, when he enlisted for a soldier and was drilled by Corporal Jack.

So he went off to the courtyard, under the Princess's window, and began to go through his drill as Corporal Jack had taught him. But it was no good, the Princess was just as sad and serious and did not so much as smile at him once. So they took him and thrashed him well, and sent him home again.

Well, he had hardly got home before his second brother wanted to set off. He was a schoolmaster, and the funniest figure one ever laid eyes upon; he was lopsided, for he had one leg shorter than the other, and one moment he was as little as a boy, and in another, when he stood on his long leg, he was as tall and long as a Troll. Besides this he was a powerful preacher.

So when he came to the king's palace, and said he wished to make the Princess laugh, the King thought it might not be so unlikely after all. "But mercy on you," he said, "if you don't make her laugh. We are for laying it on harder and harder for every one that fails."

Then the schoolmaster strode off to the courtyard, and put himself before the Princess's window, and read and preached like seven parsons, and sang and chanted like seven clerks, as loud as all the parsons and clerks in the country round.

The King laughed loud at him, and the Princess almost smiled a little, but then became as sad and serious as ever, and so it fared no better with Paul, the schoolmaster, than with Peter the soldier—for you must know one was called Peter and the other Paul. So they took him and flogged him well, and then they sent him home again.

Then the youngest, whose name was Taper Tom, was all for setting out. But his brothers laughed and jeered at him, and showed him their sore backs, and his father said it was no use for him to go for he had no sense. Was it not true that he neither knew anything nor could do anything? There he sat in the hearth, like a cat, and