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Family Plays

EAST OF THE SUN, WEST OF THE MOON

A PLAY FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

by BRIAN KRAL



East of the Sun, West of the Moon

AATE Unpublished Play Reading Project Award Winner

Folktale. Adapted by Brian Kral. From the Norwegian folktale. Cast: 4m., 5w., with doubling, or up to 15 (7m., 8w.) East of the Sun, West of the Moon features a young girl battling supernatural forces to free a young man from a terrible spell. Karen is on a quest into the dark Scandinavian wilderness, populated by magical trolls, mysterious hags and talking gargoyles. Without hesitation she struggles to save a young man from the curse that makes him “a bear by day and a man by night.” Humor and heroic adventure accentuate this adaptation of the epic of a girl achieving adulthood. Set: five flexible settings, suitable for either proscenium or arena. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: E63.

*Cover art by Ted Wolter.
Courtesy of Mesa Youththeatre*

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By

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Thank You:
TO FRITZ LEIBER
for odd folk, other worlds,
and a lasting love of Fantasy;
AND TO GAYLE CORNELISON,
another brooding Scandinavian
with a quiet propensity to dream.

EAST OF THE SUN was written as partial fulfillment of the MFA degree at Arizona State, with residency made possible through special arrangement between California Young People's Theatre and the Rainbow Company Children's Theatre.

EAST OF THE SUN was first performed by California Young People's Theatre, May 11, 1983, at the Sunnyvale Community Center. It was produced by executive director Gayle Cornelison, and directed by Scott Williams, with the following actors:

Karin Mary Gibboney
Mother, and Troll
Princess Shannon Edwards
Peder, and
Karin's Father Chuck Rounds
Troll Queen, and
South Wind Rachel LePell
1st Hag, North Wind,
and Stone Figure Richard Plombon
2nd Hag, East Wind,
and Horick Chuck Abernathy
3rd Hag, West Wind,
and Stone Figure Dorien Wilson

Costumes were by Pam Cornelison, Sets and lights by Ralph J. Ryan, with Technical Direction by Anders Bolang. The production Stage Manager was Duncan Graham.

The play was selected for the Children's Theatre Association's "Unpublished Play Listing" and was able to evolve into the present draft after subsequent productions with the following producers and directors: Jane Campbell and John Kauffman at Honolulu Theater for Youth; Johnny Saldana and Rick Atkins at Arizona State University; and Brian Strom (of all people) with the Rainbow Company in Las Vegas. Each production, through the care and support of talented production staff, was instrumental in polishing the play. They deserve the author's thanks and recognition.

Characters (in order of appearance):

Karin, a young girl
Her Mother
Peder, the White Bear
An Older Woman, the Troll Queen
A Younger Woman, the Troll Princess
The First Hag
The Second Hag
The Third Hag
Karin's Father, a spectral figure
The East Wind
The West Wind
The South Wind
The North Wind
Horick, a Troll attendant
First Stone Figure
Second Stone Figure

Time and Place:

Castles, cottages, and the frozen wilderness of Old Norway after the advent of Christianity.

By doubling actors in multiple roles, a great economy in cast size can be achieved. The only character that cannot be doubled is Karin.

The play is divided into three acts. The first act represents the visible world, in which magic and religion co-exist, mysteriously, in the shadows. At the conclusion of the act, the familiar world is stripped away, showing the Trolls as they are. The second act shows a desolate wilderness, where characters and incidents are influenced by Karin's psychological and emotional struggle. The troll kingdom is made up of mismatched parts of the real world. The Trolls exaggerate the worst of human nature and mock Christian behavior, with more sympathetic human values as counterpoint. These three acts vary in tone and style; a compelling dramatic throughline must be established and maintained for the audience to accompany Karin on her journey through these changing states. The play can be performed without intermission.

EAST OF THE SUN, WEST OF THE MOON

Scene One

A room in a Norwegian home. Furnishings are of wood, but there are not many and those that are there are simple. Karin, a young woman, stands on a stool, while her mother kneels below her, pinning the hem of a lovely wedding gown.

MOTHER: Hold still. I'm almost finished.

(Karin shifts on the stool, trying to look at the gown.)

KARIN: Ow! You stuck me.

MOTHER: Yes, and I'll do it again if you don't stop squirming.

(She stands, steps around to see the back.)

KARIN: *(to herself)*

You did it on purpose.

(Her mother spansks her once with the back of her hand.)

MOTHER: Stand up straight so I can see how it looks.

(She studies it, nods.)

It's good. Ten maidens' hands couldn't have done as well. Take it off, and I'll finish the stitching.

(She goes to a table, lays out her materials. Karin steps down, admiring the gown.)

KARIN: It isn't fair.

MOTHER: What's that?

KARIN: That you make such clothes for other people,—

MOTHER: *(threading her needle)*

They pay for them.

KARIN: *(still admiring the gown)*

—while I wear the same things year in and year out.

(Her mother again spansks her.)

MOTHER: Hurry up, or I'll be at this all evening.

(Karin removes the gown. Beneath it she wears a simple cloth shift. Her mother takes the gown, and begins sewing the hem.)

KARIN: Why are you so mean to me?

MOTHER: *(sewing)*

I'm not. I have work to get done.

KARIN: You treat me like I wasn't yours.

MOTHER: Don't talk nonsense.

KARIN: Like I was some monster baby the trolls left in your cradle.

MOTHER: Stop that! It's bad luck to mention the trolls. Especially at night.

KARIN: Our luck couldn't be any worse.

MOTHER: *(resuming her sewing)*

Hush, now. You'll wake your father. And you know he needs his rest.

KARIN: I have needs too. But who cares about those? Who cares for the needs of an orphan?

MOTHER: You're not an orphan, it's just your age. I don't know why but sooner or later all girls feel unloved by their mothers.

KARIN: Not all get sent away.

(Pause.)

MOTHER: You don't have to go.

KARIN: No, I could stay and starve and the family would suffer. Unless I worked. I could bring in enough money to help you with father!

MOTHER: What could you do?

KARIN: I do housework, don't I?

MOTHER: *(gently chiding)*

Sometimes. But who'd pay for that?

KARIN: *(dejected again, she touches the gown)*

You're right, I clean like a troll—everything I touch gets dirtier. I'll go. And maybe I'll have beautiful dresses like this, all for myself.

MOTHER: *(finishing her work)*

Pack it away. They'll come for it tomorrow.

(Karin takes the gown, to wrap it in cloth.)

I hope you will have many dresses, Karin. And that you'll be. . .happy.

KARIN: That's a hard word to say, huh? I know you haven't had much to be happy about. But I will, you'll see. You won't find me making dresses for other people's weddings!

(She carelessly drops the bundle on the table, but her mother ignores her. Pause.)

What is it made Papa so sick?

MOTHER: Only God knows. And He has his reasons.

KARIN: You still have faith? After everything?

MOTHER: He's brought you salvation, hasn't He? Why are you smirking?

KARIN: Nowhere in my catechism did the Pastor have a White Bear as salvation.

MOTHER: "Tender mercies, God's good grace, Smile in any form He takes." Besides, it wasn't a bear.

KARIN: That's what the neighbors said.

MOTHER: They only spy so they'll have something to whisper; they didn't speak to him.

KARIN: Him!

MOTHER: Yes, him. He looks like a bear, but he talks like a man.

KARIN: I'd go with him anyway, Mother, even if he was a dragon! First, because you promised. . .but also because he claims a great fortune! I am relieved he talks, though. Oh! Maybe he's a handsome landowner, hexed by the trolls!

MOTHER: Stop it! And at this hour.

(She makes a superstitious gesture, to protect against the trolls—spitting in her palm, kissing an amulet, etc. Karin laughs.)

You shouldn't make fun of such things.

KARIN: Why? Surely with "God's good graces"—

MOTHER: *(seriously)*

Even in a good world there's evil enough to get underfoot. And it may be waiting for you!

(Pause. Karin repeats the protective gesture her mother had used, suddenly frightened. There is a heavy knock on the door. Karin jumps, startled. She looks to her mother.)

MOTHER: Yes, it's him. You'd better get your things.

(Karin exits, as her mother goes to let the visitor in. Outside, in the dim light, stands the tall White Bear. She stands aside to admit him, but he remains on the threshold, wrapped in shadow. Wind whistles behind him.)

WHITE BEAR: Good evening to you. Is your daughter willing to go?

MOTHER: *(uneasy)*

Yes. She's just. . . putting on her cloak.

WHITE BEAR: *(handing her a leather pouch)*

Here is your payment. With each cycle of the moon I'll deliver another, for every month of the year she is to stay with me.

(The mother has opened the pouch and holds a handful of gold coins. She drops them back.)

MOTHER: Bless you!

WHITE BEAR: As promised, you'll be as rich as you are now poor.

MOTHER: And her?

WHITE BEAR: She'll be taken care of.

MOTHER: You'll be. . . kind to her?

WHITE BEAR: She's to be my companion—my friend. She'll have every consideration.

MOTHER: Thank you.

(Karin enters, sees the White Bear in the doorway, and tenses visibly. Her mother crosses to her, trying to appear calm.)

You have your hood up?

(Adjusting it around Karin's face.)

Good.

WHITE BEAR: Pull it close. The wind is cruel tonight.

(Karin stands still, staring at the large bear. Her mother runs to the table, grabbing up the bundle.)

MOTHER: Here. I want you to take this with you.

(She places the bundle in Karin's hands.)

KARIN: But, mother, I—

MOTHER: I'll make another. I'll tell them I had the wrong material, they'll understand.

KARIN: *(forcefully)*

What do I need with a wedding dress?

(Pause. Her mother looks at her, then again adjusts her hood, sweeping the hair from Karin's face.)

MOTHER: Someday you will. Someday.

(Karin walks past her mother, to the door. Her mother runs to a small cache of food.)

And, here. This bread and cheese will be welcome.

(She hands it to Karin, steps back into the room, clutching her shawl around her throat.)

WHITE BEAR: *(offering her a hand up)*

Climb onto my back. And hold tight to my shaggy coat.

(She tucks the food and her bundle under her arm, climbing onto his back.)

There's nothing to fear.

(He carries her slowly out of the light of the doorway into the darkness.)

MOTHER: *(as Karin disappears from view)*

Don't be bitter, Karin, towards God or me.

(She runs to the open doorway.)

Turn your heart to Christian thoughts and be thankful you're being delivered from this.

(Calling out into the night.)

Be thankful!

(The wind grows louder.)

Scene Two

The mountains at night. Karin and the White Bear move in and out of view as he carries her through the shadows. Wind whistles around them.

KARIN: *(holding on to his coat)*

I can't see a thing. Where are we headed?

WHITE BEAR: To my castle.

(Pause. He runs with a predictable rhythm. The long journey through the mountains is made by mixing the dialogue in with the constant motion of running. Even when they speak, the bear continues running evenly.)

KARIN: Aren't you tired? Perhaps we could rest?

WHITE BEAR: I'm colder than I am tired. We'll go on.

(Pause. Each piece of conversation finds them in a new location, but the rhythm of the running continues unchanged.)

KARIN: Couldn't we slow down? . . . My legs are stiff and my fingers are freezing—how must you feel?

WHITE BEAR: Impatient to be home. Hold tighter.

(Pause. The wind quiets, and Karin sags wearily against the bear's back but she maintains her hold on his coat as he continues running.)

KARIN: Can't you tell me something about yourself?

(She yawns.)

Are you really a bear?

WHITE BEAR: You ask too many questions.

(He slows down, then stops.)

And besides, . . . we're here.

(Revealed within the forested mountains is the palatial bed chamber of the White Bear's castle.)

We've arrived.

(Karin has fallen asleep; she slowly slides off his back onto the ground, and into a curled up, sleeping position. The White Bear lifts her gently, and carries her into the castle. The chamber glows hazily from candlelight. Within the chamber, he lowers her slowly onto a large, luxurious bed, with flowing quilt and billowing canopy. Karin's bundle slips from her arms, and two shadowy women appear—one young, the other older—to whisk the bundle from the floor and to arrange Karin on the bed. The White Bear pulls a heavy dividing curtain forward, separating the two sides of the bed. He crosses to the far side of the bed, away from Karin.)

YOUNG WOMAN: *(whispering)*

She came, after all. What will we do?

OLDER WOMAN: *(whispering)*

Nothing to do. Wait and see.

(The two women hurry quietly to the White Bear. They ceremoniously remove the heavy coat and head that give him the appearance of a bear, showing him to be a handsome, well-dressed young man, in elegant breeches and a loose-fitting white nightshirt. On the other side of the curtain, Karin awakens and sits up, running her hand over the soft quilt. The two women carry the bear's coat out of view. The young man—Peder—sits on his side of the curtain, and speaks quietly to Karin.)

PEDER: Are you awake?

KARIN: *(leaning into the curtain)*

Do you truly have a castle?

PEDER: Just as you see.

KARIN: *(sitting back, to look again)*

Then I guess I'm awake.

PEDER: Are you impressed?

(Karin nods her head, looking around—then realizes he cannot see her.)

KARIN: I mean, Yes. Yes, I am. It's wonderful.

PEDER: There's much more than this room. But you can see that tomorrow. Beside the bed is a silver bell. Ring it, and anything you wish will be yours—

(Her hand immediately reaches for it.)

Tomorrow! For now, we'll both get some rest.

KARIN: *(leaning into the curtain)*

Not yet! Who are you? Why did you bring me here?

PEDER: I'll tell you my name: Peder. But that's all. Except for this warning: you must never try to see what I look like asleep.

KARIN: Asleep? What do you mean?

PEDER: Nothing. Be satisfied that, tomorrow, when you see me, I'll be just as you remember: a large white bear, with shaggy, matted coat.
(Pause.)

KARIN: And now? . . . Peder?

(Pause. The two women have reappeared.)

PEDER: *(suddenly frightened)*

You mustn't ask! Go to sleep!

(He turns away from the curtain, covering himself with the quilt. Karin waits, then slowly lies down on her side of the curtain. The two women remain in the shadows, dimly lit.)

OLDER WOMAN: *(whispering)*

Wait and see.

Scene Three

The bedchamber of Peder's castle, the following morning. Peder has gone, and sunlight filters into the room through drapes, but Karin is still asleep. The younger woman of the previous night is slowly sweeping with an old broom. She can be seen now to be dressed in dreary clothes, to appear to be a servant, with a dark shawl to cover her head. Karin awakens, sits up, and stretches luxuriously, until a sudden twinge of pain makes her curl up.

KARIN: Oh! I have a charly-horse.

(The woman ignores Karin, continues sweeping.)

Can you get those from riding a bear?

(The woman ignores her. Karin watches her, then surreptitiously lifts the dividing curtain to peek underneath. When she sees he isn't there, she draws it back altogether.)

Where is he?

YOUNGER WOMAN: *(sweeping)*

Gone.

(She uses a deep voice to sound more gruff.)

KARIN: Where to?

YOUNGER WOMAN: Don't know.

(Pause. She continues sweeping slowly. Karin swings her legs off the bed, cringes again and rubs her leg. She reaches out to ring the silver bell.)

Don't bother.

(Younger woman drops her broom, strides off. She returns with a breakfast tray, sets it on the bed with a clatter, returns to her sweeping.)

KARIN: *(staring at the tray)*

He was right.

(She takes a piece of toast, nibbles on it.)

What do you do here?

(Younger woman looks at Karin, continues sweeping. Karin finishes her toast.)

When will he be back?

(Woman continues to ignore her. Cheerily:)

You have an interesting nose. But it's so long.

(Woman stops, looks at Karin, who smiles.)

YOUNGER WOMAN: You'll see him at dinner.

KARIN: *(picking up a delicate cup)*

Thank you.

(Karin reaches down, but her bundle is missing.)

Did you see my dress?

(Younger woman walks to a curtained area, draws them back to reveal several hanging dresses, returns to her sweeping. Karin goes to them, holding up several.)

They're wonderful! But I had a wedding dress I brought with me.

YOUNGER WOMAN: *(eyeing her)*

A wedding dress? Where'd you get it?

KARIN: *(looking through the dresses)*

My mother made it. She'd do practically anything for me.

(Pause. The woman resumes sweeping.)

Which do you think I should wear for—

(Suddenly realizing.)

Dinner? What do bears eat?

YOUNGER WOMAN: *(maliciously)*

People, mostly. Sometimes little girls. With tiny noses.

(Karin drops the dress she's holding.)

KARIN: Aren't they. . . more partial. . . to fish?

YOUNGER WOMAN: Sure they are. Raw fish. Bones and all. So they're. . . crunchy.

KARIN: *(slowly overcoming her distaste)*

I suppose that's better than people.

YOUNGER WOMAN: If you wanted to go home, though,—

KARIN: No, I'll be fine.

YOUNGER WOMAN: *(disappointed)*

Suit yourself.

KARIN: *(picking up the fallen dress)*

Anyway, I couldn't go home if I wanted to. I've got to stay.

(Brightening up.)