

THE POLAR BEAR PRINCE

A CHILDREN'S PLAY

LOOSELY ADAPTED FROM A SWEDISH FAIRY TALE

By **Patrick Dorn**

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SYNOPSIS: Things are heating up just south of the North Pole, as a group of revelers spill out of their sleigh bus and into a snow drift. Keeping their spirits high and lower extremities warm, the intrepid partygoers await rescue by acting out a slap-happy, no-holds-barred fractured fairy tale about a beauty who goes to extreme lengths to win her beast, who just happens to be an enchanted prince. In her quest to live happily ever after, Christiana encounters a wild and crazy ensemble of characters, including not-quite-identical crone triplets, Four Windbags, the tyrannical Troll Queen, Princess Carrot Toes, and her hopping-mad suitor Benny O'Hare. The comedy is fast and physical, the dialogue snappy and sly. Ideal for touring or contests. Teen actors will feel like stars among the Northern Lights when they present the brightest and hottest show ever to come down from the Arctic Circle.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*WIDELY FLEXIBLE CAST, MINIMUM OF TWELVE,
APPROXIMATELY FOUR MEN, EIGHT WOMEN, PLUS FIFTEEN OR
MORE, FLEXIBLE, EXTRAS, DOUBLING POSSIBLE*

DRIVER (m or f)	Drives the sleigh bus (<i>30 lines</i>)
BRIDE (f).....	Happiest day of her life (<i>21 lines</i>)
GROOM (m).....	Not quite happiest day (<i>14 lines</i>)
PASSENGERS (m and f).....	Wedding guests with time on their hands - pretty much everyone
NARRATOR ONE (m or f).....	Knows the story (<i>24 lines</i>)
NARRATOR TWO (m or f)	Does too, more or less (<i>21 lines</i>)
OTHER NARRATORS (m and f)	As desired, simply distribute the narrator lines amongst the ensemble
WOODCUTTER (m).....	Poor and knows it (<i>21 lines</i>)
WIFE (f).....	Reminds him he's poor (<i>21 lines</i>)
CHRISTIANA (f).....	Kind, smart and beautiful, but a bit impulsive (<i>145 lines</i>)
CHILD ONE (m or f)	Poor but feisty (<i>6 lines</i>)
CHILD TWO (m or f)	Likewise (<i>6 lines</i>)

- OTHER CHILDREN** (m and f) As many as possible, not an unfeisty one in the bunch
- POLAR BEAR PRINCE** (m)..... Enchanted prince with noble bearing (75 lines)
- SERVANTS** (m and f) Likewise enchanted, as many as possible
- CRONE ONE** (f) Wizedened (13 lines)
- CRONE TWO** (f) Wrinkled (20 lines)
- POLAR BEAR** (m or f) The real deal (8 lines)
- CRONE THREE** (f) More than a little behind (22 lines)
- EAST WIND** (m or f) Airy windbag, maybe a Boston accent (22 lines)
- WEST WIND** (m or f) Breezy windbag with a “cowboy” or Texan accent (9 lines)
- SOUTH WIND** (m or f) Gusty windbag with a Southern accent (9 lines)
- NORTH WIND** (m or f) A blustery blow hard, maybe a Minnesotan accent. (9 lines)
- TROLL QUEEN** (f) Evil, wicked, hideous, etc. (49 lines)
- PRINCESS CARROT TOES** (f) Her daughter, needs either a good podiatrist or a gardener (51 lines)
- BENNY O’HARE** (m) Jumpy, nibbling troll (11 lines)
- COURTIERS** (m and f) As many as possible
- TROLLS** (m and f) As many as there are courtiers

ENSEMBLE of additional passengers, narrators, children, servants, courtiers, and trolls, as desired. See **PRODUCTION NOTES** for ideas on extremely flexible casting.

Time:

Once upon a time, perhaps even yesterday, but who can tell with these long Arctic winters?

Place:

Just south of the North Pole.

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Running time:

About 1 hour.

Setting:

An open space. ENTRANCES LEFT and RIGHT. Snowy landscape backdrop with Aurora Borealis. (The Aurora Borealis, of the Northern Hemisphere is often called the Northern Lights. The aurora is seen in a variety of forms, e.g., as patches of light, in the form of streamers, arcs, banks, rays, or resembling hanging draperies and appears in shades of red, yellow, green, blue, and violet.) For added variety and comfort, cover large pillows, cushions, etc. with white sheets, muslin or fabric, and sprinkle Styrofoam “snow” chips around, especially UP STAGE.

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

Preset onstage: Optional cushions, pillows, etc., draped with white sheets, muslin or fabric, liberal sprinkling of Styrofoam chips. NOTE: for ease of clean up, especially with a touring production, use masking tape to tape down sheets or muslin in the UP STAGE areas, and try to keep the chips UP STAGE as much as possible. Then after the show, simply pull up the sheets and trap the chips, sweeping up the “strays.”

Thrown On: buckets of Styrofoam chips or confetti, sleigh bells

Brought On: wrapped crash box, wedding gifts, blender, toaster, large plastic salad bowl, costume pieces, decorations, cut-out trays of food, empty box, quilt or blanket (ENSEMBLE); large and small bags of gold (POLAR BEAR PRINCE); cloak, robe or cape for CHRISTIANA (ENSEMBLE); candle (real or battery-powered) (CHRISTIANA); carrot, water bottle (CRONE ONE); life-like dummy, dressed to resemble CHRISTIANA (ENSEMBLE).

FLEXIBLE CASTING

Casting for the show is extremely flexible. The play could be presented with a cast as small as 12, or as large as 30 or more, with any combination of males and females. With a smaller ensemble, double up the lines and roles. For a larger cast, distribute the lines and roles as evenly as possible. Except for the roles of WOODCUTTER, CHRISTIANA, POLAR BEAR PRINCE and PRINCESS CARROT TOES, feel free to cast across gender, since the ensemble is “acting out” a story. It would be very funny to have a male play WIFE, or a CRONE, or TROLL QUEEN.

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS should choose Scandinavian, Siberian or Lapp names for their characters, and list these names in the program. They can also decide what their various relationships are: parent, child, friend, cousin, neighbor, etc., and also their occupations, character type, etc. Once this “base” character is determined, those characteristics can be consistent throughout the various roles each ensemble member plays in the story.

COSTUMES

ENSEMBLE costumes should be festive, as they are supposedly on their way to a wedding. Colorful traditional Lapp, Siberian or northern Scandinavian dress would give the show a unique look, but bright sweaters, caps, scarves, etc. will suffice. Various “found” accessories are then added to the basic costumes to suggest specific characters.

- DRIVER: Could wear uniform or “official” cap.
- BRIDE: Bridal gown that allows ease of movement, or traditional bridal garment.
- GROOM: Suit, hat that is easily removed, used to hit him, and replaced.
- WOODCUTTER: Ragged coat.
- WIFE: Ragged apron.

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- CHRISTIANA: As the show's heroine, she should look distinct from the rest of the cast, perhaps in brighter colors, well dressed yet free to move.
- POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Fairy tale prince costume with removable puffy shirt. As Polar Bear, add a fur-trimmed coat, fuzzy gloves, polar bear mask (easily obtained at the gift shop in your local zoo and elsewhere), and a crown.
- CRONES ONE and TWO: Hideous wigs, blacked out teeth, long skirts.
- CRONE THREE: Enormous "bustle" or padded behind, or hide an actor back there, under a blanket.
- POLAR BEAR: Need not look realistic, since the role is played by an actor, but it would be great if he/she looked more like a bear than the PRINCE does.
- WIND CHARACTERS: Loose fitting, draped and flowing capes or accessories, perhaps with character-appropriate designs.
- TROLL QUEEN: Hideous and horrible. Perhaps branches and other foliage can be worked into the costume. Troll Queen wears a crown, perhaps woven from vines or brambles. A walking thorn-bush.
- PRINCESS CARROT TOES: Bunches of carrots tied to her feet or attached to her shoes. Otherwise, "weedy" garments, to connect her to her mother, but also able to relate to humans.

BENNY O'HARE: Also a “half-troll,” with bunny-type ears (a rabbit fur-trimmed hunting hat with flaps will do) and grossly oversized shoes, oversized front teeth.

TROLLS: Outlandish accessories. Most of their distinctiveness comes from body language, gestures, etc.

SOUND EFFECTS

- Sleigh bells: use actual sleigh bells, available at most stores around Christmas time, or found in the attic or garage of any number of cast members.
- Skid followed by crash: search the Internet for “sound effects skid crash” and you will be able to download this effect from a number of sources. Or, have a talented cast member “voice” the sound effect.
- Bell or chime.

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IDEAS FOR [OPTIONAL] AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT

Throw the “sit still and be silent” rule out the window with this whimsical fairy tale that offers unique opportunities for audience involvement. Below are a few ideas to loosen the line between audience and performer and get your audience involved:

1. Distribute small bells so that your audience can jingle their bells during the opening of the play.
2. Audience could help the crew make the “tapping” sound on the windowpane.
3. Audience could help make “wind” noises when the Windbags first enter and then help “blow” Christiana to “the castle that lies east of the sun and west of the moon.”
4. Encourage audience members to bring Arctic stuffed animals to the show to embark on their Arctic journey. In the classroom, study the habitat and survival strategies of animals that call the Arctic home.
5. In the classroom, discuss the complexities of conservation issues that affect animals and people and how the Arctic plays a vital role in the health of our planet. Engage students with study guides that are available online with great activities that integrate science, mathematics, geography, art, and language.

AT RISE:

SOUND of sleigh bells in the distance. They draw closer and closer. Suddenly, there is a skidding noise, followed by a CRASH! ENTIRE CAST tumbles ONSTAGE from LEFT, shouting and screaming. (Be sure to stage this safely, arranging the actors so that they do not actually fall on each other, but have their own designated landing zones.) Buckets of Styrofoam chips are tossed over them. Sleigh bells land in the lap of DRIVER.

DRIVER: *(Stands, holds sleigh bells, brushes off Styrofoam chips.)* Is everyone all right? *(ENSEMBLE MEMBERS help each other up, brush off chips, shake, stretch, etc.)*

PASSENGER ONE: I think so.

BRIDE: Me, too.

GROOM: I stubbed my toe. Waahhh!

BRIDE: *(Bops GROOM with his own hat.)* Knock it off. *(GROOM does. To DRIVER.)* It looks like we're all fine.

PASSENGER TWO: What happened?

PASSENGER THREE: Last thing I remember, we were singing.

DRIVER: We hit a patch of ice on that last turn.

PASSENGER FOUR: I think we spun around a couple of times.

GROOM: I got dizzy. Waah! *(BRIDE bops GROOM with his hat again.)*

BRIDE: Knock it off. *(GROOM does.)*

DRIVER: I'd better go check out the sleigh bus. *(EXITS LEFT.)*

PASSENGER FIVE: Good thing we landed in this snow drift.

PASSENGER SIX: It softened our landing.

PASSENGER SEVEN: *(Looks OFF LEFT.)* The sleigh bus wasn't so lucky. It's tipped over.

PASSENGER EIGHT: *(Looks out over audience.)* The reindeer have gotten out of their harnesses and are wandering all over the tundra.

PASSENGER ONE: Looks like we're going to miss the wedding.

BRIDE: *(To GROOM.)* They won't start without us.

PASSENGER TWO: All we have to do is turn the sleigh bus right side up . . .

PASSENGER THREE: And rein up the rounder - I mean, round up the reindeer.

PASSENGER FOUR: We'll be on our way in no time. (*DRIVER ENTERS LEFT.*)

DRIVER: I'm afraid it's not going to be that easy.

PASSENGER FIVE: What's wrong?

DRIVER: One of the runners is broken.

PASSENGER SIX: Do you have a spare?

DRIVER: Nope. Sorry.

PASSENGER SEVEN: We'd better phone ahead and let them know we'll be late.

DRIVER: I tried to call the station to send out a repair sleigh. Either we're out of cell phone range, or the Northern Lights are causing interference. (*Points to sky.*)

GROOM: We're all going to die in this frozen arctic wasteland! Waah! (*BRIDE bops GROOM with his hat.*)

BRIDE: Knock it off. (*GROOM does.*)

DRIVER: There's another sleigh bus coming through in less than an hour. All we need to do is keep busy and stay warm until then.

PASSENGER EIGHT: That's not so bad.

DRIVER: I need some volunteers to help me push the sleigh out of the road. (*Several ENSEMBLE MEMBERS volunteer.*) I'll be right there. (*They EXIT.*)

PASSENGER ONE: I'll help bring back the reindeer.

PASSENGER TWO: Me, too. (*They EXIT.*)

PASSENGER THREE: Let's collect the wedding gifts and our belongings and stack them here in the turnabout.

PASSENGER FOUR: Good idea. It will make it easier to pack up and leave when the next sleigh bus arrives. (*Remaining ENSEMBLE MEMBERS EXIT.*)

DRIVER: (*To BRIDE and GROOM.*) You stay here. No point in you two getting your hands dirty. (*DRIVER EXITS.*)

BRIDE: We'd better make it to the wedding in plenty of time. Otherwise, my mother will not be pleased.

GROOM: But what if it gets dark? I'm afraid of the dark!

BRIDE: And just when is the sun going to set?

GROOM: Uh . . . *(Looks at watch. Sheepishly.)* In about four months. *(BRIDE starts to bop GROOM with hat, but GROOM raises hand, stops her.)* I know, "knock it off." *(Bops self with his own hat. ENSEMBLE MEMBERS ENTER, carrying gifts, and miscellaneous props that could conceivably be on the sleigh, but are essential for acting out the play.)*

PASSENGER FIVE: So what should we do in the meantime?

PASSENGER SIX: We need to do something to help pass the time until the next sleigh bus arrives.

PASSENGER SEVEN: And help keep us warm.

PASSENGER EIGHT: How about if we tell a story?

PASSENGER ONE: All of us?

PASSENGER TWO: Sure. We can act it out.

PASSENGER THREE: That's a great idea. But it's got to have a lot of action.

PASSENGER FOUR: What should the story be about?

PASSENGER FIVE: *(Thinks.)* Well, since we're on our way to a wedding, maybe it should be about someone getting married.

DRIVER: Or, since we're stuck and the wedding might be delayed . . .

BRIDE: It better not!

PASSENGER SIX: Of course! A fairy tale about a wedding that is postponed. A story could be our very best gift to you.

GROOM: Will it have a happy ending?

PASSENGER SEVEN: We'll make sure the bride and groom get married at the end.

GROOM: I was afraid of that. *(BRIDE takes his hat, bops him with it.)*

PASSENGER EIGHT: So what story should we tell?

PASSENGER ONE: How about "Beauty and the Beast"?

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GROOM: (To BRIDE.) Dumpling, would you want to play Beauty?
(Aside to ENSEMBLE.) Or the Beast? (BRIDE overhears, bops him with his hat.)

PASSENGER TWO: How about something that takes place a little closer to home?

PASSENGER THREE: One of our traditional tales from the Arctic Circle?

PASSENGER FIVE: What will we use for props and costumes?

PASSENGER SIX: (Gestures to gifts and other items.) If we're resourceful, I'm sure we'll find what we need right here.

BRIDE: You mean open our gifts before the wedding?

GROOM: She's right. That's a bad idea. Very bad.

BRIDE: I'd LOVE to open my presents early!

GROOM: She'd LOVE to open them right now.

DRIVER: (Sits BRIDE and GROOM down amongst the presents.)
You two lovebirds sit here and watch the show. (Covers them with a blanket.) This will help keep you from getting a chill.

BRIDE: I want to help open the presents!

GROOM: And I don't want to be under a blanket with her!
(ENSEMBLE MEMBERS snicker, BRIDE turns on him.) Uh, until AFTER the ceremony. (BRIDE sits next to GROOM, pulls blanket over their laps. GROOM tries to crawl away, BRIDE jerks him back.)

BRIDE: Knock it off! (GROOM sighs, relents.)

PASSENGER SEVEN: So now all we need to decide is which story to tell.

PASSENGER EIGHT: I've got an idea! (Gestures for CAST to gather into a huddle. There is brief discussion, then ALL turn to the audience.)

ENTIRE CAST: The Polar Bear Prince! (Cheering, ENSEMBLE moves to positions, ad-libbing: "I want to be a troll," "I've got just the thing for the polar bear," etc. In moments, they are in place or OFF STAGE. BRIDE and GROOM watch, but eventually join in the action.)

NARRATOR ONE: *(Steps forward, narrates.)* This is the story of the Polar Bear Prince.

NARRATOR TWO: *(Steps forward.)* Once upon a time . . .

BRIDE: Boring.

NARRATOR ONE: At the far edge of the Arctic Circle's dense and mysterious forests . . .

BRIDE: Oooh, better.

WOODCUTTER: *(ENTERS.)* There lived a poor woodcutter.

BRIDE: Poor woodcutter.

NARRATOR ONE: Eh-hem.

WIFE: *(ENTERS.)* And his wife.

CHILDREN: *(ENTER. Together.)* They had a whole bunch of kind, intelligent and beautiful children . . . *(CHILDREN, including CHRISTIANA, march up to WOODCUTTER and WIFE in a line.)*

CHILD ONE: Hello, Papa. Hello, Mama.

CHILD TWO: Hello, Papa. Hello, Mama. *(OTHER CHILDREN follow, repeat same business, then they all begin pulling on each other's hair and clothing, wrestling, squabbling, etc.)*

WIFE: The woodcutter and his wife had so many children, they didn't know what to do.

WOODCUTTER: I don't know what to do. *(To WIFE.)* Do you?

WIFE: I'm too tired and busy raising all these children to have an opinion.

WOODCUTTER: *(To NARRATORS.)* We don't know what to do.

NARRATOR TWO: How about stop having children?

WIFE: Now there's an idea.

WOODCUTTER: But what shall we do with the ones we already have?

WIFE: We've very little food.

CHILD ONE: I'm hungry.

CHILD TWO: Me, too. *(OTHER CHILDREN agree.)*

CHILDREN: We're hungry!

CHILD ONE: I want pizza.

CHILD TWO: Tacos and burritos.

CHILD THREE: How about a Caesar salad?

CHILD FOUR: Or a big, juicy, reindeer steak!

NARRATOR ONE: Late one fall, the weather turned especially cruel.

(SOUND: ENSEMBLE makes sounds of wind, thunder, rain.)

There was nothing they could do but stay inside, snuggled together for warmth.

CHILDREN throw themselves into a pile, begin wrestling. WOODCUTTER and WIFE look at each other, shrug, face off and begin wrestling each other. WIFE picks WOODCUTTER UP, preparing to body-slam him to the floor.

NARRATOR TWO: Suddenly, their cozy family togetherness was interrupted by the sound of someone tapping on the windowpane.

SOUND: *ENSEMBLE MEMBER taps on a wrapped wedding gift.*

NOTE: *the carefully sealed box is actually a “crash box,” filled with nuts and bolts, pieces of plate or glass.*

WIFE: *(Holding WOODCUTTER off the ground.)* Did you hear that?

WOODCUTTER: Hear what?

WIFE: A rapping sound on the windowpane.

CHILD ONE: I didn't hear anything.

CHILD TWO: Me neither.

CHILD THREE: All I can hear is the sound of my stomach growling.

NARRATOR ONE: *(WIFE sets WOODCUTTER down. They square off to wrestle as before.)* They were just about to pass it off as merely the sound of a windblown branch from a nearby tree, when they heard the mysterious tapping again. **(SOUND: Tapping as before. They freeze.)**

WIFE: There it is again.

CHILD ONE: I definitely heard it this time.

CHILD TWO: Me too! *(Other CHILDREN agree.)*

WOODCUTTER: I'd better check to see what's going on out there in that exceptionally cruel storm. (*WOODCUTTER crosses to side of STAGE, mimes opening door. From OFFSTAGE, WOODCUTTER is pelted by Styrofoam chips or confetti "snow."*) **POLAR BEAR PRINCE ENTERS**, standing on his hind legs. He wears a crown on his polar bear head, furry gloves and a large, fur-trimmed white coat or robe over princely garments. **WOODCUTTER** rubs his eyes, sizes **POLAR BEAR PRINCE** up, holds up one finger.) Excuse me. (*Dashes back into the "house," mimes closing and barring the "door."*)

WIFE: Who was it, dear?

WOODCUTTER: (*In shock.*) No one.

CHILD ONE: No one?

WOODCUTTER: Nothing at all.

CHILD TWO: Not even a branch?

WOODCUTTER: It's nothing, I tell you. And whatever it isn't, it is definitely, positively NOT a polar bear.

WIFE: A polar bear!

CHILDREN: (*Scream.*) A polar bear!

WOODCUTTER: Don't worry. Polar bears are never seen in this neck of the woods. (*Considers.*) Maybe he'll just go away.

NARRATOR TWO: This time, the polar bear tapped just a teensy weensy bit harder. (*POLAR BEAR PRINCE mimes tapping on window. ENSEMBLE member with the decorated crash box drops it, making a shattering SOUND of breaking glass. BRIDE gasps. CHILDREN, WIFE and WOODCUTTER huddle together.*)

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Oops. (*Mimes leaning in through "window."*) Sorry about that. (*FAMILY looks at POLAR BEAR PRINCE, takes a deep breath and lets out a long, drawn out scream.*)

WOODCUTTER, WIFE, CHILDREN: Aaaahhhh! (*They take another deep breath, look at each other, scream again.*)
Aaaahhhh!

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Good evening, Woodcutter . . . and family.

I'll just use the door. (*Walks around to the "door," bursts in. ENSEMBLE member has picked up the crash box, drops it again. BRIDE picks it up, shakes it and listens, shrugs.*) Oops. Sorry about that, Woodcutter. (*POLAR BEAR PRINCE bows. FAMILY huddles together. WOODCUTTER cautiously approaches POLAR BEAR PRINCE.*)

WOODCUTTER: Do you know me?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Aren't you the woodcutter who has so many children he doesn't know what to do?

WIFE: (*Joins WOODCUTTER.*) That's him.

WOODCUTTER: That's me. Is there anything I can do for you?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: As a matter of fact there is. Will you give me your kindest, smartest and most beautiful daughter? If you do, I'll make you just as rich as you are currently poor.

WIFE: That's pretty rich.

CHILDREN: Because we're pretty poor.

WOODCUTTER: My kindest, smartest and most beautiful daughter, eh?

WIFE: All our children are kind, intelligent and good-looking. (*CHILDREN pose, proudly showing how kind, intelligent and good looking they are.*) So you could pretty much take your pick. (*Horrified, CHILDREN pose in such a way as to look uncaring, stupid and ugly.*)

WOODCUTTER: One more or less won't make much difference.

WIFE: Except that we'd be rich, and able to care for the survivors . . . I mean others.

WOODCUTTER: You're not going to eat the child, are you?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Certainly not! If I were hungry, I wouldn't be so choosy. I'd probably start with your wife, plump as she is.

WIFE: Hey! You're not making any points with me, you oversized door mat.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: (*Tips crown.*) I do beg your pardon. I'll double my offer. You will be twice as rich as you currently are poor. But it must be your kindest, smartest, and most beautiful daughter.

WOODCUTTER: How are we supposed to choose?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: She knows who she is, and will step forward, now. (*CHILDREN, except CHRISTIANA, take a step backward. CHRISTIANA realizes she is now exposed, faces POLAR BEAR PRINCE and curtsies.*)

CHRISTIANA: For the sake of my family, I am yours.

WIFE: Christiana!

WOODCUTTER: Daughter, no. (*To POLAR BEAR PRINCE.*) She is the light of our lives. Please, take any of the others.

WIFE: Take ALL of the others! (*CHILDREN object.*)

POLAR BEAR: The decision has already been made. (*Holds out a paw. CHRISTIANA takes it, steps to him.*) Here is her dowry. (*Gives WOODCUTTER a bag of gold.*)

WOODCUTTER: (*Weighs it.*) Gold!

WIFE: We're rich!

CHILDREN: Yippee!

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: (*Gives WOODCUTTER a smaller bag of gold.*) For the door and the window. I don't know my own strength sometimes.

CHRISTIANA: Did you say "dowry"?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Yes, Christiana. I am not purchasing you as a slave. You are to be my betrothed. In one year's time, if you decide not to marry me and wish to return home to crowded living conditions, poverty and squalor, I will release you from your pledge to me. (*To WOODCUTTER.*) And I promise you, Woodcutter, that no harm shall come to your daughter. On my honor. (*Places hand to heart, bows.*)

WIFE: The honor of a polar bear means little to us.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Upon my life then.

WOODCUTTER: Well, that's something. (*Shakes POLAR BEAR PRINCE'S paw.*) She's yours.

WIFE: With our blessing.

CHILDREN: Bye!

NARRATOR ONE: And with no further negotiation, the Polar Bear Prince took Christiana away. (*NARRATORS, WOODCUTTER, WIFE and CHILDREN wave, scuffle backwards, EXITING OFF RIGHT, while POLAR BEAR PRINCE and CHRISTIANA walk in place. The effect is as if POLAR BEAR PRINCE and CHRISTIANA are moving away from the "hut." CHRISTIANA shivers violently.*)

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Are you cold, Christiana?

CHRISTIANA: (*Teeth chattering.*) M-m-me? N-n-no. I'm f-f-fine.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: (*Offers paw.*) Take my paw.

CHRISTIANA: N-n-no thanks.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: You'd rather freeze than hold my hand?

CHRISTIANA: (*Considers.*) O-k-k-kay. (*Takes his paw. Stops shivering.*) Well, isn't that curious? (*Lets go of paw, instantly feels cold.*) Brrr! (*Takes paw, feels warmth.*) Wow! You're a walking cure for hypothermia, did you know that?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: No harm may come to you if you stay close to me.

CHRISTIANA: Where are we going? To your polar bear cave?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: You can call it that, if you'd like. (*They stop walking in place.*) In fact, we're here. What do you think?

CHRISTIANA: (*Looks DOWN STAGE.*) Yep. Looks like the entrance to an ice cave, all right. Pretty much what I expected.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Go on in.

CHRISTIANA: Might as well. (*Gets down on hands and knees, crawls forward.*)

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: (*Follows.*) Watch your head. (*They crawl a short distance. Stands.*) You can stand up now, Christiana.

CHRISTIANA: (*Stands.*) It sure is dark in here.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Not for long. (*Claps hands. ENSEMBLE rushes in from every direction, some carrying shiny wedding decorations and fancy gifts.*) What do you think?

CHRISTIANA: (*Awed by the display.*) Wow. (*ENSEMBLE MEMBER puts an elegant cape or robe on CHRISTIANA.*) Wow. (*Two ENSEMBLE MEMBERS step forward with trays of [fake] food and desserts typical of a wedding feast.*) Wow.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: You are welcome to everything I have, but I must insist on one rule, and it's a biggie.

CHRISTIANA: Sure, anything. (*Mimes taking food off tray, eating it.*) Oh, that's good. (*Mimes taking something off other tray, eating it.*) Mmmm.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Under no circumstances must you ever come into my room when I am sleeping.

CHRISTIANA: (*Mimes taking something from first tray.*) Oh, yes. (*Takes another.*)

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Are you paying attention?

CHRISTIANA: What? Oh, sure. Don't go into your room when you're sleeping. Got it.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: It's very important, Christiana. A lot depends on you respecting my privacy.

CHRISTIANA: (*Drops something on her cloak/robe.*) Oops. I've made a mess. (*ENSEMBLE MEMBERS remove robe, put another on her. They toss robe UP STAGE. BRIDE crawls over to it, tries to work stain out with "snow." GROOM uses this opportunity to crawl OFFSTAGE, and will join the ENSEMBLE in acting out the story, perhaps as BENNY O'HARE.*) I get TWO sets of clothes? Wow. Who does the laundry around here? (*ENSEMBLE MEMBER raises hand.*) At home, that used to be my job. And the cooking? (*TWO ENSEMBLE MEMBERS raise their hands.*) And the cleaning? (*ENSEMBLE MEMBER raises hand.*) Wow.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Christiana!

CHRISTIANA: Sorry. You were saying?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Never mind. It's been a long day, and I'm tired. I'll see you in the morning. Just promise me that you'll stay here or in your room all night.

CHRISTIANA: Sure thing. (*POLAR BEAR PRINCE starts to EXIT.*) Hey! (*Kisses his polar bear cheek.*) You're a real prince of a guy . . . for a polar bear.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: (*Bows.*) Thank you, Christiana. (*EXITS.*)

CHRISTIANA: (*To ENSEMBLE.*) Okay, let's get this party started! (*ENSEMBLE cheers, freezes. NARRATOR TWO steps forward.*)

NARRATOR TWO: And so Christiana might have lived happily ever after, but you know as well as I do that real happiness doesn't ever come that easily. (*ENSEMBLE unfreezes. CHRISTIANA moves from MEMBER to MEMBER.*)

CHRISTIANA: So tell me about this polar bear guy. Have you worked for him a long time? (*ENSEMBLE MEMBER smiles, shakes head as if to say "It's a secret." To another.*) What's the scoop? Where does he come from? (*MEMBER smiles, shakes head. To ANOTHER.*) What's the big deal? You can tell me. (*MEMBER smiles, shakes head.*) Oh, for crying out loud. Now I REALLY need to know. (*ENSEMBLE MEMBERS look alarmed.*) One little peek. What can it hurt? (*ENSEMBLE MEMBERS shake their heads "no."*) What? I'm supposed to share an ice cave with a hibernating polar bear for a year and never see him sleeping? (*ENSEMBLE shrugs.*) Yeah, like THAT'S going to happen. Where's his room? (*ENSEMBLE points in various directions.*) Fine. Be that way. I'll just find him myself. (*EXITS.*)

BRIDE: *(Notices GROOM is missing.)* Hey! Where'd you go? Well I'm not going to sit by myself and miss out on all the fun. *(EXITS, joins ENSEMBLE in acting out the story, perhaps as PRINCESS CARROT TOES. ENSEMBLE takes away decorations, food and props and forms POLAR BEAR PRINCE'S bedchamber. Several ENSEMBLE MEMBERS, on hands and knees, become a "bed." Another ENSEMBLE MEMBER ENTERS, drapes a blanket or quilt over them, then stands at the "head" of the bed, pretending to be a coat rack.)*

NARRATOR ONE: Trusting that Christiana was kind, smart and beautiful enough to stay out of mischief, the polar bear, who was actually an enchanted prince, assumed his true form. *(POLAR BEAR PRINCE takes off crown, hands it to "coat rack." Takes off furry gloves, puts them in pocket, takes off robe, drapes it over "coat rack's" arm. Finally, takes off polar bear mask, hands it to "coat rack.")*

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Oh, curse this cursed curse! How wearisome it is to be a polar bear during the day, and only revert to my true form at night! I pray that Christiana will respect my privacy for the next year, for if she sees me like this before the year is up, all is lost! *(Yawns.)* Guess I'll get some shut eye. *(Climbs onto "bed," falls asleep. Snores.)* Zzzzz. Snork.

NARRATOR TWO: Meanwhile, Christiana searched the cave until she came upon the Polar Bear Prince's secret bedchamber. *(CHRISTIANA ENTERS with lit [battery-powered] candle.)*

CHRISTIANA: It's got to be around here somewhere. *(Sees POLAR BEAR PRINCE.)* Aha! Gotcha. *(Approaches.)* Now, let's see what the big deal is. *(To audience.)* When you come from a big family like mine, there's no such thing as "personal space." *(Tiptoes to bed, leans forward with candle.)* Hmm. Looks pretty normal to me.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: *(Snores.)* Zzz. Snork. *(Turns over, away from CHRISTIANA.)*

CHRISTIANA: Oh, no you don't. (*Moves around "bed," leans forward with candle.*) It can't be. Wow! You're no polar bear at all. You're gorgeous! (*Accidentally drips "wax" from candle onto POLAR BEAR PRINCE'S shirt.*) Oops. Spilled some wax on you.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: (*Wakes.*) Ow! (*Sits up.*) Who's there?

CHRISTIANA: Uh . . . just me. Christiana. Your betrothed.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: (*Stands. ENSEMBLE MEMBERS abandon their positions, step back.*) Oh, no! You couldn't wait? Oh, all is lost. And not only that, you got three drops of candle wax on my best shirt! Oh, woe is me!

CHRISTIANA: Hey, it's not so bad. With a face like yours, the real crime is keeping it a secret.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: You don't understand! (*ENSEMBLE begins swirling and twirling, moaning and groaning.*)

CHRISTIANA: What? What's the big deal?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: I am undone! Don't you see? I wasn't really a polar bear at all. I'm a prince, under an enchantment. I had one shot at getting free of this, and you blew it!

CHRISTIANA: Well, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. What did I do?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: The horrible, hideous Troll Queen . . . (*ENSEMBLE shudders.*) cast a spell on me because I refused to marry her daughter, Princess Carrot Toes. If you could have lived with me without seeing my true nature for just one year, the spell would have been broken and we could have married. But nooooo.

CHRISTIANA: But you haven't changed back into a polar bear, so maybe the spell is broken after all. (*To audience.*) I'll bet that little kiss on his cheek did it.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: I wish it were that easy. If only you had been as kind and smart as you are beautiful, we could have lived happily ever after.

CHRISTIANA: So why can't we?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: Because now I've got to go back home and marry Princess Carrot Toes, daughter of the Troll Queen! (*ENSEMBLE shudders. In fact, they shudder every time the TROLL QUEEN is mentioned.*)

CHRISTIANA: Maybe if I go talk to the Troll Queen, she'll have mercy on you out of the goodness of her heart? (*Realizes what she said.*) Oh, right. Probably not. (*ENSEMBLE shakes their heads.*) Still, it's worth a try. Where do you live?

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: In a castle east of the sun and west of the moon. There's absolutely no way you can get there from here.

CHRISTIANA: Now hold on a second. I'm not going to give up that easily. I really like you, whether you're a polar bear, or a handsome prince, or all or none of the above. In fact . . . I think I could learn to love you.

POLAR BEAR PRINCE: (*Screams.*) Ahhh! You're breaking my heart! For I feel that I could learn to love you too, Christiana. (*ENSEMBLE sighs.*) But it is not to be. (*ENSEMBLE sighs again.*) Even now I feel the enchantment pulling me back to my castle east of the sun and west of the moon. Farewell, forever! (*EXITS, spinning. ENSEMBLE members wave feebly to CHRISTIANA, then are "pulled," OFFSTAGE, spinning and carrying everything with them, except CHRISTIANA'S robe. She is left standing alone.*)

NARRATOR ONE: And so Christiana found herself alone, standing on a small green mound in the middle of the forest, as poor as the day she had left her father's home.

CHRISTIANA: (*Pause.*) Well, this stinks.

NARRATOR TWO: Filled with remorse, Christiana threw herself to the muddy ground, crying her eyes out. (*CHRISTIANA hesitates.*) Realizing that she had squandered her one chance at happiness, she screamed and threw herself to the ground, weeping and wailing and crying her eyes out. (*CHRISTIANA hesitates. ENSEMBLE MEMBERS ENTER, pose as trees. Some coax her.*)

CHRISTIANA: Well I can't just cry on cue! (*ENSEMBLE begs, pleads, threatens.*) Oh, all right. Alas and alack! (*Melodramatically swoons, collapses to the ground, weeps and wails unconvincingly, then suddenly throws a tantrum, kicking, screaming, pounding the ground, etc.*) Ahh! Waah! (*Looks up. ENSEMBLE applauds.*) Thank you. (*Gets back into "character," climbs to her feet. ENSEMBLE returns to posing as trees.*) What do I do now? I mean, if a girl can't marry a wealthy prince and live happily ever after, what's the point? I think I'll just sit down and waste away to nothingness. (*Sits. Pause.*) I'm hungry. (*Stands.*) I'll find a bite to eat, and THEN I'll just sit down and waste away to nothingness.

NARATOR ONE: Christiana wandered through the dark and mysterious forest, looking for something a little tastier than pinecones, when she came upon an old crone. (*CHRISTIANA wanders among the "trees." CRONE ONE ENTERS, a withered, toothless hag if there ever was one. She wears one shoe, on her left foot.*)

CRONE ONE: Hello, dearie. Out for a stroll?

CHRISTIANA: Not exactly. More of a quest, if you must know.

CRONE ONE: How's it going so far?

CHRISTIANA: Not so great. I guess it's easier to TELL the story of a quest than to actually go on one.

CRONE ONE: Well, you simply can't have a proper adventure on an empty stomach. (*Pulls a carrot from somewhere on her person.*) Why don't you tell me all about it while you eat this?

NARRATOR TWO: *(Narrates as CHRISTIANA seizes carrot, bites off a hunk and mimes telling the story. Bits and chunks of carrot fly out of her mouth and all over CRONE ONE, who listens intently, nodding and reacting to the story, but not the carrot. If done properly, CHRISTIANA need not actually swallow any of the carrot.)* And so, as she devoured the remarkably crisp and flavorful carrot, Christiana explained to the old crone about the polar bear prince, and the enchantment, and how he had been pulled back to the castle east of the sun and west of the moon to marry Princess Carrot Toes, daughter of the horrible, wicked Troll Queen. *(ENSEMBLE, posing as trees, shudder.)*

CRONE ONE: Gee, that's too bad. Anything I can do to help? *(Hands her a water bottle.)* Here. Have some water.

CHRISTIANA: *(Takes water bottle.)* Thanks. I don't think so. *(Drinks, returns water bottle to CRONE ONE. Optional belch.)*

CRONE ONE: So, do you still want to just sit here and waste away into nothingness?

CHRISTIANA: *(Thinks.)* No, I don't! I want to marry the polar bear prince, and I want to live happily ever after.

CRONE ONE: That's the spirit!

CHRISTIANA: Do you know the way to the castle east of the sun and west of the moon?

CRONE ONE: Uh, no. Sorry. But maybe my sister does. She lives a long way away, through this dark and mysterious forest. The journey will be dangerous, but if you are determined, fate may be kind to you.

CHRISTIANA: Do I have to? My feet are tired.

CRONE ONE: Most quests involve a lot of walking.

CHRISTIANA: Well, anything worth having, is worth working for.

CRONE ONE: You got that right, dearie. But let me give you this gift. *(Goes to pile of gifts.)*

CHRISTIANA: But you've already given me so much.

CRONE ONE: Oh, this is just a little something for later. It's a . . . it's a . . . *(Lifts blender out of gift box.)* . . . blender. Might come in handy. You never know.

CHRISTIANA: *(Receives it gratefully.)* Oh, thank you, old crone.

CRONE ONE: Don't mention it. Just consider this a wedding gift. Now be off with you. Go find that prince of yours.

CHRISTIANA: You betcha!

NARRATOR ONE: And with that, Christiana continued her quest to find the castle east of the sun and west of the moon, and marry her prince. *(CRONE ONE EXITS. CHRISTIANA walks in a circle, carrying the blender.)*

NARRATOR TWO: On and on she walked, through the dark and mysterious forest, where she heard strange sounds . . . *(ENSEMBLE, posing as trees, makes strange sounds, and may encourage the audience to do so as well.)* and saw even stranger sights. *(GROOM ENTERS, followed by BRIDE. She takes his hat off, bops him with it and drags him OFFSTAGE.)* Until, just when she had about given up hope, she came across another old crone. *(CRONE TWO ENTERS.)*

CRONE TWO: Hello, dearie. Out for a stroll?

CHRISTIANA: Oh, great. It's you again. Don't tell me, I've been walking in circles! *(ENSEMBLE, posing as trees, nods.)*

CRONE TWO: I beg your pardon?

CHRISTIANA: Didn't I just meet you?

CRONE TWO: Must've been my sister. My OLDER sister.

CHRISTIANA: They make crones even older than you?

CRONE TWO: Watch it.

CHRISTIANA: Sorry. It's been a long day.

CRONE TWO: So, how is she?

CHRISTIANA: Who?

CRONE TWO: My sister. My OLDER sister.

CHRISTIANA: To be honest, she looks terrible.

CRONE TWO: *(Delighted.)* Really?

CHRISTIANA: Oh, yeah. Her hair is all matted, her clothes are in rags, she's wearing just one shoe on her left foot, and she's only got one tooth.

CRONE TWO: Hah! I've got TWO teeth! See? (*Smiles a hideous smile.*) And a shoe on my RIGHT foot. (*Lifts up right foot, wiggles the shoe.*)

CHRISTIANA: Oh, right. You look a lot better than she does.

CRONE TWO: So my OLDER sister sent you to ME, did she?

CHRISTIANA: Yes. You see, she wanted to help ME, but couldn't manage. She thought that maybe YOU, being so much younger and more beautiful, could give me some information.

CRONE TWO: She did, did she? (*CHRISTIANA nods.*) Well, then dearie, what can I do you for?

CHRISTIANA: I really, really need to get to the castle that lies east of the sun and west of the moon as soon as possible. (*Pause.*) So, how about it?

CRONE TWO: (*Scratches head, plays with her two remaining teeth, and makes a big deal out of thinking.*) I'm thinking, I'm thinking.

CHRISTIANA: It's really urgent. My living happily ever after depends on it.

CRONE TWO: (*Sighs, defeated.*) Rats! Sorry, kid, can't help you with that one.

CHRISTIANA: Not even a clue?

CRONE TWO: Truth is, being younger and more beautiful than my sister doesn't necessarily mean I know everything.

CHRISTIANA: Oh, dear. (*Looks around.*) And I can't even tell which direction I came from. (*Sits and sighs.*)

CRONE TWO: You're not going to give up, are you?

CHRISTIANA: I don't know what else to do. I'm lost in this forest, and my prince is doomed to marry Princess Carrot Toes instead of me. I don't know whether I should blame myself, or the one who started it all in the first place . . . the Troll Queen. (*ENSEMBLE, posing as trees, shudders.*)

CRONE TWO: Might I make a suggestion?

CHRISTIANA: Does it involve more walking?

CRONE TWO: Sorry, kid, that's the way it goes. (*Helps CHRISTIANA stand.*) A long, long way from here, deeper in this dark and mysterious forest, you'll find my OTHER sister.

CHRISTIANA: There are three of you?

CRONE TWO: Yep. We're triplets.

CHRISTIANA: I thought your other sister was a lot older than you.

CRONE TWO: She is. By sixteen minutes. But I've got another sister. She's the baby of the family.

CHRISTIANA: By another sixteen minutes?

CRONE TWO: Actually, fourteen. She didn't get my looks, poor thing, but she does have a sizeable brain between those hairy ears of hers. Maybe she'll know how to find this castle you're looking for.

CHRISTIANA: I'd be so very grateful.

CRONE TWO: (*Reaches into pile of gifts.*) And here, take this . . . this . . . (*Lifts it up.*) . . . toaster. Consider it a wedding gift.

CHRISTIANA: (*Takes it.*) Gosh, thanks.

CRONE ONE: Don't forget your blender. (*CHRISTIANA picks it up from where she'd set it.*)

CHRISTIANA: So which way do I go?

CRONE ONE: Deeper in. Bye now. Tell my sister hello for me, and be sure to mention how good I look! (*EXITS.*)

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