

Erik at the Enchanter's Court

While Erik and his men were staying at the court of the old Enchanter and his daughter, Freya, a strange adventure happened.

One day the Enchanter said he must go away for several days, and that he must leave his daughter, Freya, in their care.

'Have no fear,' said Erik. 'I shall look after her as if she were my own dear child.' And so the Enchanter left, riding on a huge black pig, and Erik and his men continued to repair their ship, Golden Dragon.

That night, when the wind was howling outside round the palace and they were all gathered in the great hall around a blazing fire, the Enchanter's daughter, Freya, stood up and said: 'Which one of you has taken my shoes?'

Erik and his men looked one to the other, and they all shook their heads and said not one of them would have ever dreamt of taking Freya's shoes.

'But they were on my feet but a moment ago,' said the Enchanter's daughter, 'and now they are gone, and she showed her bare feet to everyone. And Erik's men all agreed that they were elegant white feet, but no one had any idea of what had happened to her shoes.'

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So they ate some more and passed the mead jug round, and by and by Freya rose to her feet once more, and her face was clouded.

'What is the trouble, Freya?' asked Erik. And Freya said: 'It grieves me to ask . . . but which of you has taken my ring?'

Well, Erik's men looked one to the other, and then they shook their heads, and Erik replied: 'Freya, we are not thieves and robbers . . . not one of us would ever take your ring.'

'But it was here on my finger but a moment ago,' said the Enchanter's daughter, 'and now it is gone,' and she showed them her hand. Erik's men all agreed it was a delicate white hand, but none of them had any idea of what had happened to her ring.

So they ate some more and passed the mead jug round, and the fire burned brighter and redder. Then all of a sudden they heard a cry, and Erik and his men turned, and there was Freya, the Enchanter's daughter, standing as naked as the day that she was born.

'Who has taken my clothes?' she cried, and she burst into tears.

And Erik and his men looked from one to the other in amazement, for only the moment before she had been sitting there in her slender white robe. Erik took off his cloak and put it over her shoulders, and put his arm around her and said: 'Who could have done this?'

And Ragnar Forkbeard stood up and replied: 'There is no one here who would do such a thing. We are all sworn to protect this girl.'

But Freya frowned and said: 'If the thief is not found before my father returns, he will banish you from this

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island, whether your ship is finished or no.' And with that she ran to her room.

Then Erik said to his men: 'No one has been in nor out of this Great Hall in this time. The thief must still be here.' So they began to search the Great Hall. They searched under every seat and every table and every bed in the Great Hall. But they could not find the thief. Erik said to his men: 'We must not sleep until this thief is found.'

So they started to search the whole palace. They searched the corridors, the bedrooms, the rooms of state, the kitchens, the cellars, the turret rooms, and the closets, the cupboards and the chimneys, under the floor boards and behind the tapestries. They even looked for secret passages and hidden rooms and found plenty. They even searched the old Enchanter's private study but they could find neither hide nor hair of any thief, nor any shred of Freya's clothes.

Dawn was breaking, and Erik and his men were very tired for they had been searching hard all night, when Freya appeared before them and said: 'Well, have you found this thief?'

They all shook their heads, and Freya looked at them and said: 'The shoes and the robe were presents my father gave me before he left. If the thief is not found I fear my father will turn you back to stones in his anger!'

So Erik and his men redoubled their efforts. All day they searched the palace grounds. They looked in every conceivable place: in the stables and the out-houses, in the barns and chicken houses and the wash house and the cattle sheds, under hedges and in ditches, in the

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grass and amongst the flowers, up trees and in the bushes. They looked everywhere.

And that evening they all assembled together and Freya asked them: 'Well? Have you found the thief?' They all shook their heads, and Freya frowned and gave it to me before he left. If the thief is not found before he returns, I fear he will go mad with anger and shut me away again in that dark cave.'

Then Erik stood up and said: 'That we will never allow him to do! We shall find this thief before your father returns.' And with that they started to search the whole island. They searched the valleys and the mountains, the beaches and fields, the caves and woods and even the rivers and rocky ravines and the dark, deep forests. And all the while their ship, Golden Dragon, lay on her side on the beach, and not a nail was nailed in her nor a plank was sawn, and the hole in her stern was as big as ever.

On the day when the old Enchanter was to return, Erik and his men gathered in the Great Hall, and they each looked anxiously at the others. Then Freya appeared before them and said: 'Surely you have found the thief now?'

But Erik shook his head. 'We have searched every stone and every leaf of this island, but we have found neither hair nor hide of this thief.'

Just then the door burst open and in strode the old Enchanter himself.

Erik and his men threw themselves on their knees before him, and Erik explained what had happened.

'But please don't turn these men to stone,' cried

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Freya, 'for they have searched night and day for the thief.'

'And please don't shut your daughter back in the cave,' said Erik, 'for we shall carry on searching until we find the thief!' And they all looked at the old Enchanter.

And to their surprise he did not go mad with anger. He did not banish his daughter to the cave, nor turn Erik and his men to stone, nor even banish them from the island whether their boat was finished or no. Instead he smiled.

'You need look no further for the thief,' he said, 'for he is here in this room.'

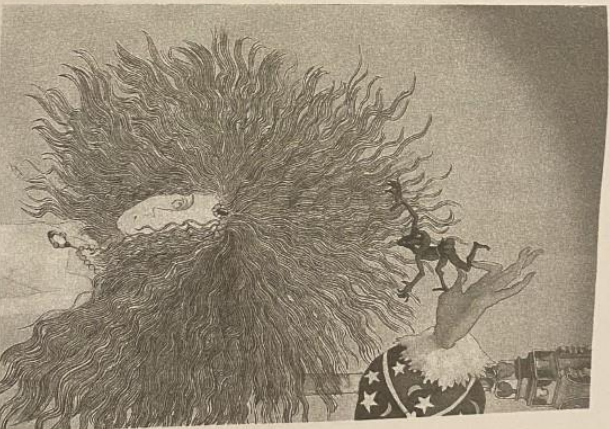
Erik's men looked at each other, and Freya looked from her father to Erik to Thorhild and Sven the Strong and from Sven the Strong to Ragnar Forkebeard and then back to her father.

'But we have searched every nook and cranny of this Great Hall,' said Erik. 'The thief could not possibly be here.'

'There is one place you have not looked,' said the old Enchanter, and he called his daughter over to him and sat her on his knee. 'You never looked here!' With that he quickly put his hand into Freya's hair and pulled out a little goblin as black as soot, that kicked and screamed in a little high voice, 'Let me go!' But the old Enchanter held it firm between his fingers.

'This is the mischief-maker,' said the old Enchanter. 'This flibbertigibbet! This snatch-troll! I thought it was harmless, but as soon as my back was turned it got up to its old tricks eh? Very well . . .'

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And he put a spell on the little creature and it turned into a little black puppy, which he gave to his daughter, saying: 'There, now it may get into

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mischief, but it won't stop these men doing their work in future.'

Then the old Enchanter declared a feast that night, and the next day, Erik and his men got back to repairing their ship.



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