

## Erik and the Enchantress of the Fjord

The next day they set to work to repair Golden Dragon. But Erik took three of his best hunters and said: "We shall kill some wild boar and tonight we shall feast." Erik and Ragnar Forkbeard and Sven the Strong and Thorkhild set off into the wild forest.

They had not gone more than a mile before they cam to a cave. At the entrance to the cave was a strange creature, half bird and half wolf.

"Erik!" said the creature, and its voice sounded like a thousand voices speaking together, "my mistress is waiting for you," and it pointed into the gloomy cave.

"Who is your mistress?" asked Erik.

"She who will tell you what you want to know," replied the creature.

But Ragnar Forkbeard gripped Erik by the arm. "Do not go into that dark cave. For I fear you will never come out again."

"I must," said Erik.

But Sven the Strong gripped Erik by the other arm. "If you are killed we are all lost," he said.

"I must find out what I want to know," said Erik.

And then Thorkhild stood in front of him and said: "Perhaps she is the Enchantress of the Fjord who never lets any man return?"

"If she can tell me what I want to know," replied Erik, "I must meet her".

Then her strode into the cave, and the other three would have followed him but the strange creature, half bird, half wolf barred their way with its great talons, and bared its wolf teeth. Whereupon Ragnar Forkbeard and Thorkhild and Sven the Strong drew their swords and advanced towards it as one.

Meanwhile Erik walked boldly through the cave, and the light from the entrance got dimmer and dimmer until there was no light at all, and Erik was feeling his way along the rocky walls of the cave.

Suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks. Above his head he could hear a sound like someone breathing. He looked up, but he could see nothing. "who's there?" he cried.

"Go deeper into the cave," said a voice... and it sounded like his mother, although she was many many miles away in a distant land.

Erik put his hand on his sword and went deeper into the cave. Suddenly he stopped, for he could hear another sound above him. It sounded like a heart beating.

"Who's there?" he cried.

"You must go deeper into the cave," said a voice... and it sounded like his father, although he had been dead for many years.

But Erik pulled his helmet more firmly onto his head and went deeper into the cave.

And as soon as he got deeper, the cave grew warmer and he saw a red glow ahead of him. And as he got nearer and nearer he let go of his sword and took off his helmet and he found himself in a small room. It was warm and soft and on the floor had been laid out food and drink and a straw bed. Erik was overcome by a desire to lie down and go to sleep, but something inside him told him to beware.

"Rest yourself," said his father's voice.

"I cannot," said Erik, "for my men are waiting for me to return."

"Sleep my child," said his mother's voice.

"I should like to..." said Erik, and he lay down on the straw bed, but still something inside him told him to beware.

"I seek she who will tell me what I want to know..." he said, and his eyes were half closing with sleep. "This is all you need to know, said a soft voice at his ear, and he turned and saw a young girl beside him whose skin was green as jade. She held up a golden charm on a golden chain, and said: "Here, wear this around your neck and you will know everything you need to know," and she lifted up and Erik looked at her eyes, and still something inside him told him to beware. But he bent his head, and the beautiful green girl placed the chain over his head, and a voice inside him said, "Stop! Before it's too late," but the chain was already around his neck and resting on his shoulders.

The green girl gave a cruel laugh, and Erik's mind went suddenly clear like the water in a stream, and he suddenly knew that this was the Enchantress of the Fjord, and that no man ever returns from her embrace and that now he knew all he needed to know. But the chain was around his neck, and he realized that although his mind was clear he could not move a single muscle.

"You fool!" cried the green Enchantress, who now looked a million years old. "How could anyone tell you what you wanted to know when you yourself didn't even know what it was you wanted to ask!"

And she took a great iron stake and was just about to drive it through the golden chain to fix it to the wall when there was a shout and a blaze of light and there stood Ragnar Forkbeard and Sven the Strong and Thorkhild, torn and stained with the bright green blood of the wolf-bird, but safe and holding flaming torches in their hands.

For a moment Erik was blinded by the light and the Enchantress of the Fjord was too, but in that time, Ragnar Forkbeard saw the chain around Erik's neck and knew what it was. So he snatched it off and before the green Enchantress could do anything, he had thrown it over her neck and she froze as solid and as still as Erik had been and by the look in her eyes they could see that she knew everything she needed to know.

Erik and Ragnar Forkbeard and Sven the Strong and Thorkhild ran from that place as fast as they could, but as they reached the mouth of the cave, they saw to their horror the carcass of the wolf-bird, lying where it had fallen in a pool of green blood, suddenly rear up and block their way. Before they had time to draw their swords again it spoke and its thousand voices were like distant echoes calling from another world.

"Erik!" they said. "We are the spirits of others like you did not know the question to which we sought the answer, and so were ensnared by the Green Enchantress. But now you and your comrades have set us free."

And with that the creatures seemed to collapse upon itself and split up into a thousand different shapes that fluttered up into the sky and were gone, like moths to the sun.

Then Sven the Strong sealed up the mouth of the cave with great boulders and rocks, and they all went back to their ship.