

Sample Chapter - A Dance Upon the Ringing Rocks

From: Erin Greengloves and her Big Fight with Gunnar Lokka the Giant

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A Dance Upon The Ringing Rocks

It was a bright morning when Erin met with a large group of drummers out on the pasture behind Greengloves Inn. They led the way towards the Ringing Rocks, taking turns to beat an ever-changing rhythm, and were soon joined by an equal number of pipers, whistlers, fiddlers and other assorted players of musical things. It was a big band, and it could turn a tune on a sixpence around in a carnival of head-spinning, dance-me-dizzy tunes.

Soon, the procession arrived at The Ringing Rocks just a little ways upstream from Burnhollow. Gunnar Lokka was waiting impatiently, and limbering up for another easy win. There were four flat rocks that spanned the shortest width of water, with enough room to spare for two dancers, two-dozen players, and one dancing master.

Rock Dancing is as easy as falling down a flight of stairs and just as liable to cause pain and distress. All you have to do is dance, dance, dance on a big, flat rock, until you can dance no more. The thing is, you cannot stop until either you drop, or you are the only one left standing.

You have to dance without fear of soreness in your feet, cramp in your legs, or a cracked head from fainting or falling over. Most people never consider these things before agreeing to a rock dancing contest, any more than you or I would fear the potential hazards of skipping along the path outside your own back door.

Gunnar Lokka was vain. He thought himself the finest dancer on ten toes, and he was full of himself after winning the first game so readily. Two days of rest was sufficient for a big-headed giant and a big-hearted girl, but it only took the giant half a day to start boasting that he was sure to win.

So, it was that the Rock dancing began. A very large crowd gathered, and grew even greater in size as the contest went on. People crowded the riverbanks and climbed trees for a better view of the show. The players set-to with a 'one-and-a-two' and made a sensible start with balanced beats and an easy tempo.

The first hour of bopping passed easily enough with a bit of Morrising and a bit of gentle clog dancing. The audience came and went, as did the changing guard of players. Some folk joined in with a little dancing and prancing of their own, while others tapped a toe or clapped along for a while. Mostly they sat munching on bread rolls and biscuits, and simply gawped.

The second and third hours came and went. The pace quickened as each contestant executed a mid-tempo *pas-de-bas*, some easy jigs and a bit of hop-step-and-jump. Hands clapped harder and ankles were freely slapped. There was also quite a bit of bowing low and passing slow, which Gunnar Lokka just about managed despite his obvious lack of flexibility.

They danced on the spot, which energetic Erin found quite difficult, but lumpy Gunnar managed with ease. They performed quick-steps, old steps, fox-trots and flamenco. There were high kicks and splits, marches and twists, turns, reels and much rolling around and clenching of fists. By the fifth hour things were becoming seriously competitive.

'Oi!' yelled Erin Greengloves, quite indignant. 'You very near trod on my foot then, you big balloon.'

'Huh!' puffed the giant, equally offended. 'You stuck your elbow in my gut. Watch where yer goin'!

'Save your breath', shouted the dancing master, who came from a big town and had seen everything. 'There's at least another hour to go, if we're sticking to the strict rules of Rock Dancing.'

Erin was very pleased to see a flicker of disappointment on Gunnar Lokka's big, red face. They moved from rock to rock and back again, almost at walking pace, all the better to stretch their leg muscles. It was a means of catching a rest of sorts, and Gunnar Lokka was the one who was more grateful for it.

The giant had begun on his toes but, by the end of the sixth hour, he was flat-footed and in some pain. His breathing became harder and his thick arms felt as heavy as sea-faring ships. Erin had Gunnar Lokka on the ropes.

At the bottom of the seventh hour, she clapped harder and quicker than ever before, and got the players going again, only this time, twice as fast.

'Quick, quick, quick!' called Erin, and she grinned in cruel delight at the tiring giant's distress. It was his turn to be exhausted. Gunnar Lokka's proud shapes

had dissolved into staggering, uncertain steps. He would fall soon, and it was anyone's guess where on earth he would land.

The keen-eyed players noticed Erin fold her arms and wink a sly wink in their direction. They played fast and furious for Erin who, saving her best for last, lifted up her knees and danced like a pirate, pulling hard on imaginary ropes in a flying, fleet-footed 'Sailor's Hornpipe'.

Gunnar Lokka groaned. He wobbled. He jumped a little jump. His heavy stepping and lumpy lepping was enough to wake the dead that slept peacefully deep under The Ringing Rocks beneath his thick feet. It would not be long before Gunnar's reckless blundering set in motion a chain of events that would eventually lead to his own undoing.

The giant's big legs buckled. He felt ill. He fell forwards. He fell backwards. Finally, Gunnar Lokka fell over. His arms flailed like broken windmill sails and his fingers grasped at thin air. It was all to no avail. The big fellow landed with a terrible hard thud and a fierce crack to his stony skull. There was no soft landing for Gunnar Lokka, and no hearing of the loud cheer that went up for Erin Greengloves, the dancing quean of Green Glen.

Only Tom Moss, on releasing his second white dove for the benefit of Erin's Ma and Pa, noticed that the unconscious giant had buckled the stone that broke his fall. Only Tom Moss heard the faint, almost inaudible singing that rose out of the gap between the stone and the earth. Gunnar Lokka had fallen so hard that his great weight had dislodged one of the famous Ringing Rocks.

It was all very concerning for these rocks are not ordinary slabs, but doors to a world below. Down there dwelt all manner of things better left alone, including the much-dreaded Spirits of the Glen.