



Gryla

Based on a traditional Icelandic tale

Gunnar blinked his eyes in the darkness and tried to work out where he was. A rough, scratchy surface rubbed against his skin and made his elbows and knees sore. He was bent almost double and seemed to be being carried in some sort of sack. He quickly thought back to the last thing that he could remember. He'd gone to bed as normal, making sure to wind up his sister on the way and settled down for a long, wintry sleep.

Starting to worry, Gunnar thought hard. He knew it was approaching Yuletide, and that the Yule Lads would start to make their rounds soon enough. That meant that it was almost time for... it couldn't be, surely? Surely that was just a tale told by parents to scare their children into behaving? It hadn't worked for Gunnar. He'd spent another year tormenting his sister and barely trying at school. If anybody was going to be snatched by Gryla, it was Gunnar, and he knew it.

There was a single pinprick of light in the side of the sack, so Gunnar probed at it with his finger until he had widened it enough to press his eye against and see out. The top of the sack was being held by the flexible tip of a long tail. There were at least another dozen tails flailing around next to this one, and each of those held hundreds of sacks. "That's over a thousand children!" Gunnar said to himself in alarm. He was careful to say it quietly: the stories of Gryla were horrifying.

Gryla was said to be the mother of the Yule Lads, and the reason for their mischief. Where the Lads would head down into the towns and villages and steal and ruin things, Gryla was much worse. She would steal away naughty children for her and her husband to eat in their cave in the mountains. Gunnar started to cry softly at the thought of ending up in a stew. It wasn't the way he'd imagined spending Jol, that's for sure.

Just as he was beginning to work himself up into a frenzy, a piece of skin on the back of the hideous troll's neck flicked open. It was an eyelid - she had eyes in the back of her head! Gunnar froze, but he knew that she had seen him looking at her. It was too late.

"I need a break", Gryla said in her screeching, gravelly voice. When she spoke, it sounded like two mountains rubbing together. The wind was knocked from Gunnar as she dropped her sacks to the floor and wandered off into the hills. Gunnar saw his chance to escape and pulled and tore at the hole until it was

wide enough for him to squeeze his skinny shoulders through. Keeping a constant lookout, he freed the rest of his body and turned to flee.

“Where do you think you’re going?” said the evil troll-witch behind him.

Gunnar turned and saw a roaring fire, with a bubbling pot resting over it.

“You can’t leave before dinner,” Gryla said with a twisted smile.

SUMMARY FOCUS

1. What had Gunnar done before he went to bed?
2. What did Gunnar do when he noticed the spot of light?
3. What would Gryla do with the children she stole?
4. Why didn’t Gunnar get time to work himself into a frenzy?
5. What happened after Gunnar worked his way out of the sack?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

How many children did Gunnar work out Gryla had?

I

Why did Gunnar know that he was likely to be snatched by Gryla?

R

What name does Gunnar use to refer to the Christmas or Yule period?

V

Which word described how Gunnar had behaved towards his sister?

V

Find and copy a word that describes why Gunnar could fit through the hole.