

The Yule Lads

Kristin was excited. She had travelled on a plane for the first time ever to spend Christmas in Iceland with her grandparents.

“How will Santa know where to find me?” she asked her dad when they arrived.

“Santa doesn’t come to Iceland,” said Dad. Kristin frowned. “We have our own special visitors here. Grandma will tell you all about them.”

“Yes, you got here just in time,” said Grandma, hugging her tightly. “It’s December 12th, so our first visitor comes tonight. Do you have some spare shoes with you?”

Kristin looked confused, but nodded.



“The second Yule Lad travels down tomorrow and he likes cow’s milk – especially the creamy bit. His name is Gully Gawk, because he hides in the gullies of farmer’s fields, waiting to steal milk from the cows.

“Next comes the littlest Yule Lad. He is called Stubby, as he is so short. Stubby is very naughty and he’ll sneak into your kitchen and eat any crusts that are lying around.”

“Has he ever sneaked into your kitchen, Grandma?” asked Kristin.

“Of course,” said Grandma. “I had to chase him out with a broom! Now, where was I? Ah, the fourth Yule Lad is Spoon Licker. Whatever you do,

don’t leave any spoons lying around on that day – he never returns them.

“Then there is Pot Scraper. He scrapes your pots looking for leftover scraps. One year he woke us with his banging and scraping. Your grandpa wasn’t very happy, I can tell you.”

Kristin laughed, imagining it.

“The following night, greedy Bowl Licker comes. This cheeky Yule Lad hides under the dining table and, as soon as anyone puts down a bowl, he grabs it and licks it clean – just like a cat. Terrible manners!”

Grandma tutted, but Kristin liked the idea of meeting Bowl Licker.



“December 18th is the worst, as that’s when Door Slammer visits. Naughty gnome! You can hear him all across town slamming doors. We always lock our doors so he can’t get in.

“And then comes Skyr Gobbler. Do you like yogurt, Kristin?”

Kristin nodded. “Especially when it’s blueberry-flavoured.”

“Good, then you will like skyr. It’s like yogurt and we eat a lot of it here in Iceland. Skyr Gobbler loves it too and he sneaks into the dairy and gobbles skyr until he’s fit to burst!

“His brother Sausage Swiper is just as bad. He comes the following night and

you can probably tell from his name that he likes sausages. Why, even the butcher locks his sausages away on Sausage Swiper night!

“Now, on December 21st, you might spot Window Peeper peeking through the glass. Don’t be worried – he’s just looking for something shiny to steal. He loves shiny things. Now, before I tell you about the next Yule Lad, have you heard of leaf bread, Kristin?”

“No, Grandma.” Kristin thought it didn’t sound very appetising.

“Well, I used to make it with your father every Christmas and I made some just for you. It’s a tradition, though we don’t usually eat it before Christmas Eve.”





Right on cue, Grandpa walked in with a plate of thin golden flatbreads with lacy patterns cut into them – they looked like snowflakes. Kristin took a bite of one. It was crisp and delicious.

Grandma nibbled at one and said, “Even better with butter. We’ll make them again before Christmas, but not on the 22nd, as that’s when Door Sniffer comes. He has a huge nose and he sniffs at the door for leaf bread. It’s his favourite.”

“I don’t blame him,” said Kristin, picking at the crumbs on the plate.

Grandma looked pleased and she continued with her story. “After him, there is Meat Hook. In the olden days, he used to climb up on your roof, drop his hook down the chimney and steal any meat you had cooking over the fire. Most people don’t cook that way now, but he still lurks around, trying to pinch any meat he can find.

“And that brings us to the last of the Yule Lad brothers, Kristin. He isn’t so naughty really. He comes down on Christmas Eve and his name is Candle Stealer. If you go out at night and light your way with a candle, he will pop

out of his hiding place and try to take it from you. The impish little fellow just loves candles!”

“And what happens to them all after that?” asked Kristin.

“Then they return to the mountains to spend the rest of Christmas with their mother Gryla and their pet, the giant Christmas Cat.”

“Grandma, it sounds like they should get rotten potatoes in their shoes.”

Grandma laughed. “Maybe they do! Perhaps grumpy old Gryla gives them rotten potatoes instead of presents.”

That gave Kristin an idea. “Perhaps if we leave each Yule Lad a little gift as well as an empty shoe, they might not be so naughty. They might leave only nice presents for the children and no rotten potatoes at all.”

“That sounds like a good plan,” said Grandma. “What will you give them?”

“Their favourite things, of course! Let’s put a glass of sheep’s milk out for Peg Leg tonight. We’ll put it right next to my shoe on the windowsill.”

So that’s what they did and, when Kristin woke up the next morning, she was excited to find that Peg Leg had left a present in her shoe. It was her favourite chocolate bar.

As she peeled off its golden wrapper, she was sure she saw Peg Leg peep out from behind a snowy mound and wink at her. Kristin smiled and waved. Christmas in Iceland was going to be good after all. 🌀

