

PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

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One Snowy Night

By

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One Snowy Night was first presented by Minerva Theatre Chichester, UK, in 2004.

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Characters:

Nonni

Bjartur

Rosa

Titla

Gullbra

The Stag

The Ice Troll

The Fire Troll

The play was originally written for a cast of four, plus an on stage musician who also takes the part of Gullbra.

Note:

The play was inspired by a chapter in the famous Icelandic novel, 'Independent People' by Halldor Laxness, which describes a boy waking up in a lonely Icelandic croft, circa 1900. The setting for this play is the same but the story of One Snowy Night is my own. To acknowledge my debt to Mr. Laxness I have borrowed some of his character's names.

Cast

Imagine this
far across a northern sea
an island is being born.
imagine that.
Out of the deep it rises
like a troll
roaring its unknown name.
Volcanoes to the east
Glaciers to the west.
Ice and fire
Ice and fire.
Sometimes the fire
rolls down the mountainside
and on to the ice below- Oh
imagine that.
imagine this,
far across a northern sea
this island is growing up.
In summer it never gets dark
and in winter it never gets light.
imagine that.
imagine this.
In the very heart of this island
lies a valley covered all in snow.
And in the valley is a tiny croft
covered all in snow
right up over the roof.
imagine that.

Nonni

Imagine me
a boy living in the croft
covered all in snow
and I'm thinking
when will the day begin?
When will father wake up?
When will mother wake up?

Part 1: Black Pan and Pot Stick

Nonni's mother Rosa is heavily pregnant. She is sleeping in a chair. She snores a little. Nonni's father Bjartur is asleep on the floor. He snores a lot. A little way from him is Titla the dog, also asleep.

Nonni Mother? Wake up. Wake up. (*She turns away.*) Father? (*He snores grumpily and turns away.*) Titla. Titla wake up. (*Titla growls lowly. Nonni sees a heavy black saucepan with a wooden spoon in it.*) Hey you Black pan wake up. And you pot stick, wake up. Wake up. Black pan, wake up. (*He shakes them. Nonni puts on the voices of the black pan and the pot stick.*)

Black Pan What? What? What? What's going on?

Nonni It's time to wake up Black pan. And you too Pot stick.

Pot Stick No no. Let me sleep Let me sleep.

Nonni Wake up. Wake up. Its nearly morning.

Black Pan What do you want?

Nonni I want you Black pan and you Pot stick to do something for me.

Pot Stick Is it dangerous?

Nonni Yes very dangerous.

Nonni makes the pot stick shake with fear.

Black Pan Ha ha. Look at the got stick shaking with fear.

Pot Stick Aren't you scared Black pan?

Black Pan No. I'm not scared of anything

Nonni Good, because this is what you must do. You must wake up my mother---and my father. (*The Pan and stick look at each other then back*

to Nonni.) All you have to do Pot stick, is to hit Black pan very hard several times and they'll wake up.

Pot Stick I won't do it. I won't do it.

Nonni Why you, sniveling little pot stick, have you no courage? Stand up straight. There that's better. Are you ready?

Black Pan I'm ready.

Pot Stick I'm not.

Nonni approaches his parents, but the pot stick begins to shake with fear.

Pot Stick Wait, wait.

Nonni What now?

Pot Stick What if I break in two?

Nonni You won't- don't be stupid. Come. Come.

Nonni approaches again and is about to hit the stick against the pan.

Pot Stick Wait wait.

Nonni What now?

Pot Stick What if they get angry and throw me away?

Nonni You are a useless stupid stick- what are you?

Pot Stick A useless stupid stick. (*Nonni sits down angry with himself.*) But at least I'm not in trouble.

Nonni That's right- we're not in trouble.

Black Pan What's wrong with trouble- I like trouble

Nonni You? That's because you never think , you just rush in like an idiot.
Mother needs her sleep.

Black Pan Why?

Nonni I told you yesterday, she's going to have a baby. Can't you
remember anything?

Black Pan I'm a black pan, I don't have a memory.

Nonni No- you just have a big hole where your brain should be. [Pause]
She's going to have a baby and this morning she's going to the farm
at Rauthsmyri , 'just in case'.

Black Pan Are you going?

Nonni No, they're leaving me behind as usual.

Black Pan Why?

Nonni shrugs.

Pot Stick I know. I do-Your mother and father don't care about you anymore.
That's just obvious.

Nonni That's right, that's right, that's right.

*In a sudden fit of temper he bangs the pot stick against the black pan. The others now wake up.
Bjartur sits up straight as if he's been shot. Rosa comes forward sharply and stops Nonni.*

Rosa Nonni? What are you doing making such a din?

Nonni I t wasn't me-it was them. They made me.

Rosa. Oh- I see. They made you.

Bjartur falls back asleep never really having woken up. Titla growls and relaxes.

Rosa What's the matter Nonni- can't you sleep? (*He shakes his head.*) Not like your father hey? He could sleep through the end of the world. Why can't you sleep? (*He shrugs. Rosa groans suddenly in pain.*)

Nonni What's the matter?

Rosa Don't be frightened-its only a little- ooh- uncomfortable. Now go back to sleep.

Nonni How can I sleep with Father snoring like that?

Rosa goes to Bjartur and gives him a kick. He stops snoring.

Rosa Don't you try that.

Nonni You were snoring just as loud.

Rosa That's right. Snoring for two. Oh what a scowl ? What is it Nonni? Tell me.

Nonni I don't want you to go to Rauthsmyri. I want you to stay here with me.

Rosa Nonni, when you were born I was very ill. There was no doctor for miles . This time I go to Rauthsmyri, there's a doctor there. Just in case.

Nonni Why doesn't the doctor come here?

Rosa Poor people travel to see the doctor, the doctor travels to see the rich people. That's how it works.

Nonni Its not fair, it's not fair.

Rosa Oh there's that scowl again. It makes you look like a troll, scowling and stamping his foot.

Nonni There's no such things as trolls.

Rosa [*With mock anger*] How dare you say such a thing.

Nonni Father says there are no trolls.

Rosa How would he know Hey? He sees only sheep. I have seen a troll with my own eyes.

Nonni Where?

Rosa Far from here- on the Glacier at Skaftellsjokul. Oh yes.

Nonni What kind of troll?

Rosa A strange creature- with white hands and cold eyes. He lives on the glacier, but he calls it , 'The Ice river'. Trolls have different names for everything.

Nonni Why?

Rosa Who knows- they're Trolls. Come -sit by me. Sit. I will tell you all about them. This Ice Troll, he has a brother.

Nonni A brother?

Rosa Who lives on the lip of the volcano at Helka. Never have two brothers been so different. One is made of ice and the other made of fire sometimes- they meet and fight. Oh you should see what happens then-ice and fire, ice and fire-

Nonni Mother! You think I can't tell your just changing the subject.

Rosa Oh ,was I? I thought a story might help you sleep. *[Pause]* Nonni- when I come back from Rauthsmyri- you'll have a little brother- or sister and if you wake up early -like today you can talk to them. Oh yes, you won't have to talk to pots and sticks ever again.

Nonni I don't talk to pots and sticks.

Rosa Oh no?

Nonni No!

Rosa Oh there's that troll again.

Nonni Stop talking about trolls.

Rosa Well I saw you chatting to the black pan and the pot stick -Oh what a conversation.

Nonni [*Angrily*] I don't talk to them---they talk to me.

Rosa Ah. And what do they say?

Nonni Its a secret.

Rosa Would you like to tell your mother what kind of secret?

Nonni A secret they overheard in the cow shed.

Rosa Yesterday?

Nonni [*Nods*] They overheard you talking to father. You said I was too young to stay in the croft all alone. What if something went wrong, you said and I was left here for weeks all alone and you were crying and called Father names and tried to hit him with a bucket.

Rosa You know what your Father is like. A big lump of rock. You can't change the mind of a rock. I've been trying for years. It's useless. But he is strong too-as a rock must be in a land as harsh as this.

Nonni If you leave me here, I'll never speak to you again-ever.

Rosa Don't say such things Nonni. Are you trying to upset me? What? Now you won't talk to me-ever? Look at you-like a little lump of ice. Well I know how you feel but all the same I must go to Rauthsmyri.

Nonni If it wasn't for the stupid baby you wouldn't have to go anywhere.

Rosa Ha, there's the Troll again, or is that his brother?

Nonni I told you, stop talking about Trolls -I don't like them. I don't like them.

Rosa Nonni- stop- stop. Everything will be alright, I know. I know. Truly I know.

Nonni How do you know?

Rosa Because I can see into the future.

Nonni Can you really?

Rosa Oh yes, most women can. For instance, in one moment your father will wake up. There. And I shall tell you what he'll do next. Next he will yawn, like so. Then he will scratch. There we are. Now he will clear his throat, spit, pull up his trousers. You see, the future is easy to read.

Nonni But he always does that.

Rosa Which just goes to prove that the past and the future are exactly the same thing, you understand?

Nonni No.

Bjartur Has winter gone?

Rosa Not yet.

Bjartur By the time we get back from Rauthsmyri winter will be gone.

Rosa Oh I see, now you control the weather as well.

Bjartur Come we must get ready to leave while there is still ice for the sledge to run on. Titla.

Titla Yes master.

Bjartur Ha- get ready for a nice long walk hey.

Titla. Yes yes yes yes yes yes.

Rosa Anyone would think you loved that dog more than me and Nonni.

Bjartur I'm in a hurry and have no time to squabble. Come, Nonni. Help us with the sledge.

Part two: Rosa and Bjartur leave

Light change as They move outside. Rosa follows. Bjartur looks up.

Bjartur It could snow yet

They pull out the sledge on which Rosa will lie wrapped in rugs and Bjartur will pull.

Nonni Father?

Bjartur Well, what is it? *(Silence)* What do you want, can't you see I'm busy?

Nonni Can I come with you and Mother to Rauthsmyri?

Bjartur We talked about this already.

Rosa Bjartur.

Bjartur The answer is no.

Rosa But Bjartur dearest, *[she pulls him to one side]* is it really safe to leave a boy alone in such a wilderness.

Bjartur Rosa, dearest, what can happen in a place famous for nothing happening? We haven't seen another soul for five months. This is the safest place in all of Iceland.

Rosa You don't understand do you? You can't ever imagine what it's like to be someone else, a child here, all alone.

Bjartur Ah Titla. It looks like I have to argue it all through again.

Nonni I just want to go with you and mother.

Bjartur Oh now the boy is tugging on my heart strings.

Nonni Please.

Bjartur Listen to me Nonni. Don't turn your head away. You're old enough to spend some time alone. When we come home you will be a stronger person, because you will know yourself better than before. We shepherds must learn about ourselves- because in the wilderness we spend more time alone than with other people. You have food- oatcakes dried fish. Light the fire, make some coffee. You are the master here and are in charge. What do you think of that hey? And you know your job.

Nonni Gullbra?

Bjartur Gullbra is no ordinary sheep, she is one of a famous breed and has given birth more times than any sheep in history. You look after Gullbra. Good boy-I depend on you. I trust you. [*He goes to the sledge*]

Rosa Sometimes I think you have no heart at all.

Bjartur No heart? I have a heart as big as all Iceland.

Rosa No Bjartur- your pride is as big as all Iceland, and one day you will learn that you are not always right. But when does anything I say have any effect.

Bjartur Hah! I will show you how big my heart is. Titla.

Titla Master?

Bjartur Stay.

Titla Stay?

Bjartur You will stay- stay with Nonni . Stay.

Titla Stay? I thought I was going for a walk.

Bjartur Don't argue with me stay. Stay. Stay with Nonni.

Titla Nonni - Stay ?-- Nonni-[*She realizes*] No no-

Bjartur Stop- stop- don't argue with me. [*He speaks in her ear*] Your job is to look after my son.

Titla Why do you keep talking to me as if I understand every word you say. I don't, I'm a dog.

Bjartur Look after my son, never leave him alone, never.

Titla Stay- I understand. Sit I understand-the rest is all bla bla bla.

Bjartur Stop growling- and don't sulk. [*He rises*] You know, sometimes I think that dog understands every word I say.

Titla What?

Bjartur You see. Rosa come.

Rosa Like I say- a rock never changes its mind. [*She groans*]. Time to go.

Nonni How many nights will you be gone?

Rosa No more than three. This baby wants to be born- I can tell.

Nonni What if I can't sleep?

Rosa Tell yourself a long story, just like I taught you. Be brave Nonni. When I come back you will have a new friend and you can teach them everything you know, and you know so much. (*She lies on the sledge.*)

Bjartur When I come back, it will be spring time and the snow will have fallen for the roof and Gullbra will be grazing in the homefield. You look after Gullbra. (*To Titla, aside*) You look after Nonni.

Bjartur ties Titla up.

Rosa You, look after yourself. (*Bjartur tries to pull the sledge.*) I told you not to sell the horse. (*He pulls, the sledge.*)

Bjartur [*Wheezing*] Who needs a horse when you have a man who is as strong as a rock.

She waves goodbye. Nonni waves. Music- they pull the sledge round the stage once- as if getting farther away-then exit. Music stops. Wind. Nonni is alone.

Part three: One Snowy Night

Titla Unfair. Unfair.

Nonni Be quiet. (*Titla strains at his leash.*) Stop. I will untie you, if you promise not to run after Mother and Father. You will stay with me. Stay. (*He unties Titla who rushes straight off after Bjartur.*) Titla, Titla come back. Titla-Titla.

Silence. He goes inside picks up the Black pan and the pot and speaks to them.

Nonni Now what am I going to do? It's so quiet here. The loneliest place in the world.

His head droops, he is tearful. Then he hears a change in the weather. A wind is blowing. The light changes. He goes outside.

Nonni Mother! Father! (*Enter Titla, nursing a clipped ear.*) Titla. You came back?

Titla He's gone. My master has gone and left me.

Nonni At least we have each other.

Titla Unfair, unfair.

Nonni We'll be alright. Come, sit by me. Come-sit, sit. I said-Sit. [*Titla refuses. The boy in sudden temper hits the pot stick against the pan. Titla is shocked.*] You will do as I say. I'm the master now.

Titla Master- now that's word I understand, but you are not my master.

Nonni Sit. Sit.

Titla No. no.

Titla grabs the got stick and runs away with it. Nonni chases.

Nonni You are a bad bad dog. [*They both stop and look up*]

Titla Oh no.

Nonni (*Worried*) It's snowing.

Titla All we ever get is this white stuff.

Nonni But father said winter was over.

Titla And if I ever meet the person who makes it I'm going to chew him up into a thousand chewy bits.

Nonni Titla! What are you whining about?

Titla I can't even remember the last time I saw the sun. I like the sun.
[*Sound of wind rises slightly*] The wind is getting stronger, we'd best go inside.

Nonni The wind is getting stronger, we'd best go inside.

Titla [*To Titla*] What's that?

Nonni If only you and I could speak the same language Titla. Then we could be friends.

Titla Bla Bla Bla.

Lights change as they go inside the croft.

Nonni What if there's a blizzard? What if mother and father are caught in it? What if they can't get back? Titla? Titla?

Titla That's my name- don't wear it out.

Nonni Titla come here. Alright- I don't need you. I have Gullbra for company. *[Exit]*

Titla Gullbra. I know that word.

Enter Nonni with Gullbra the sheep.

Gullbra What's going on? What's going on?

Nonni Everything's going to be--

Gullbra Why am I here? Why am I here?

Titla Calm yourself Gullbra.

Gullbra Why is the dog here? Why is the dog here?

Nonni Calm yourself.

Gullbra Why is the dog here? Why is the dog here?

Titla Be quiet

Nonni How dare you bark at Gullbra. What has she done to you, nothing?

Titla Oh shout at me- what have I done?

Gullbra I don't like it here I want to be with the other sheep.

Nonni You stay here with me Gullbra, because there's going to be a storm, oh yes. I can hear it coming. Listen. Listen. *(Nonni listens and they copy him.)*

Titla & Gullbra A storm?

Nonni But don't you worry. My father has given me a very important job.
I am to look after you-

Gullbra What?

Titla Oh- marvelous, now we have three creatures who can't understand
each other. I understand your father very well- oh yes, even if I
sometimes pretended not to. When a man and a dog spend a lot of
time together- they get to understand what the other wants. But
Bjartur is my master- not you. You I don't understand-- at all.

Nonni Stop whining. *(To Gullbra)* Sit here- here, here.

He tries to pull or push Gullbra into place.

Gullbra I don't want to sleep in the same room as that silly dog who
follows me around all day foaming at the mouth.

Titla Stop bleating.

Gullbra Stop growling.

Nonni Be quiet Titla- both of you be quiet. Be quiet.

Silence.

Gullbra Stupid dog.

Titla Stupid sheep.

Nonni Be quiet or you can both go outside.

The wind level suddenly increases.

Titla I don't like that sound.

Gullbra I don't like that sound.

They both draw close to Nonni.

Nonni There's no need to worry. My father built this croft with his own hands. We're safe here. Even if the storm lasts all day and all night- we are safe. I know- to keep your fears at bay I will tell you a story.

Gullbra The wind is getting stronger.

Titla The snow will cover my master's tracks.

Nonni Shh, listen. This is the story.
One snowy night. One snowy night, like this one when the wind blew all about the croft and it felt like the roof might come off, there was a boy- me, and a ewe called Gullbra, who had given birth more times than any sheep in history.

Gullbra What?

Nonni Shh now, try to sleep.

He strokes Gullbra's back.

Gullbra That's nice- very nice.

Titla Huh- that's it- stroke her back- see if I care.

Nonni And there was also a bad tempered dog called Titla.

Titla Hey?

Nonni Who's pelt was full of lice. *(He picks one out and throws it away.)*

Titla Thank you. *(Titla Yawns.)*

Nonni Now these three friends huddled together as a great wind strode around outside trying to blow off the roof. But the friends just laughed, Ha ha ha. Because they knew they were safe in the house, because- because, they -they were. And then... *(He sees Gullbra close her eyes)* Gullbra fell asleep, and then... *(Titla covers her ears)* Titla covered her ears and fell asleep too. Soon the boy's parents would return and they--- they would bring a baby with them. *(He scowls.)* A stupid baby who made him say some bad things to mother.

Things he didn't mean. (*He picks up the Pot stick and the pan.*) What are you looking at? Soon I will have a brother or a sister and I won't not have to talk to pots and sticks anymore.

He falls asleep. The storm rises to a climax then fades.

Part four: Gullbra has Gone.

Morning. The storm is over. Nonni is snoring. Gullbra has gone.

Nonni Titla. Titla wake up The storm is over. Titla?

Titla [*Sleepily*] Go away.

Nonni Gullbra? Gullbra? Gullbra where are you? Wake up Titla. Wake up.

Nonni picks up the Black pan and Pot stick and bangs them against each other.

Titla What what what what what?

Nonni She's gone. Gullbra's gone.

Titla Oh good.

Nonni What do you mean good? Go and find her.

Titla You go and find her, what do you think I am a slave?

Nonni No-I think you're a sheep dog. She sheep- you dog.

Titla I know what I am.

Nonni Then go and find her .

They turn and look at each other in surprise.

Titia That's odd.

Nonni I understood everything you just said.

Titla And I understood everything you said- as if—

Nonni You were speaking my language.

Titla No no- you are speaking my language.

Nonni But how?

Titla I don't know-I was asleep when it happened.

Nonni What happened?

Titla I don't know I was asleep.

Nonni Perhaps its because I'm the master now, do you think so Titla?

Titla Just because your the only human being here, doesn't make you the master.

Nonni But Father told me I was the master.

Titla nd he told me to look after you.

Nonni How can a dog look after me? I don't need looking after.

Titla You're always losing your temper- you know that?

Nonni He told me that I was the master, and that I must look after Gullbra. Gullbra? *(He pulls on his coat and goes outside. Light change.)* Gullbra. Gullbra.

Titla There's no need to worry.Gullbra has roamed this country all her life--

Nonni *[Calls]* Gullbra.

Titla She'll come back. What are you doing?

Nonni I'm going to look for her.

Titla Don't be silly. Which way would you go? East north west?

Nonni You don't understand, If I don't find Gullbra, Father will never trust me again.

Titla And if he comes home to find you gone- he'll never trust me again. You will not go!

Nonni And how are you going to stop me? (*Titla stands in front of Nonni and growls, just like a dog.*) That doesn't frighten me.

Titla It doesn't?

Nonni Not anymore. Not now you can talk.

Titla Then listen to what I say. Gullbra is a sheep, a sturdy breed, she can survive the mountain, you can't.

Nonni The mountain? So that's where she's gone. You knew all the time.

Titla Of course, I spend half my life running round after sheep who wander off like fools, just as you are about to do. Nonni stop. The mountain is a dangerous place, sometimes there is nothing to walk on but ice-

Nonni I know.

Titla And sometimes the ground is so hot, it burns your feet. Everywhere is dangerous.

Nonni Father gave me a job.

Titla No no- he gave ME a job, to look after you.

Nonni Then you'll just have to follow me. Now, I need food. Oatcakes, dried fish.

Titla Oh, this is bad, this is very bad.

Nonni

I'm ready.