

GRANNY REGURGITA

Visiting Granny always gives me a gloopy, nervous feeling in the bottom of my belly. Granny Regurgita is just plain terrifying; even Dad gets twitchy whenever she hobbles down from her tower once in a blue moon to see what's going on in the hotel.

When Granny's in a bad mood (and she always is), she can make a blood-crazed tiger look like a cute little kitten.

Three hundred and ninety-seven ...

Three hundred and ninety-eight ...

I finally got to the top and stopped to catch my breath. Outside, rain was lashing against the windows, and this high up in the tower everything creaked and groaned. I was half expecting the whole thing to topple over in the wind so I didn't

want to hang about.

'Just get it over with,' I whispered to myself, then gulped and knocked on Granny's bedroom door. There was a long silence, and for a minute I thought I was in luck and Granny was already asleep. Fat chance!

'Come in, boy,' she finally croaked from the other side.

I nudged the door open with my foot and her familiar stink of mould and rotten vegetables wafted out onto the landing. It's sour enough to sting your eyes and make you sick, I swear. No matter how many times I brought Granny Regurgita her food and bedtime mug of pondweed tea, I'd never get used to the disgusting pong of that wrinkly old husk.

Inside Granny's bedroom, everything was inky dark. I stood in the light of the landing and squinted my eyes, trying to spot her in the gloom.

'Hurry up, you useless carbuncle!'

I could hear the sound of her slug lips smacking together.

'Granny's hungry ... What have you brought me?'

Just then, lightning flashed outside and I caught sight of her copper-penny eyes glinting in the darkness.

'GET ON WITH IT, YOU LITTLE SNOT!'

I took a step inside her bedroom and shuffled towards the spot I'd seen her eyes flash seconds before.

One of the perks of being the great-great-great-grandson of a troll is that I can usually see in the dark, just like it's daytime – it's one of the cool things about being a human kid with troll blood in your veins – but this was magical darkness filling the room ... thicker, colder and blacker than the normal kind. Granny Regurgita loves to wrap herself in it like a blanket. Even when it's daytime and her windows are wide open, Granny's room is like the inside of a deep cave.

'I can't see, Granny,' I said. 'Can you put the lights on?'

'No!' she barked. 'I like it dooksome and

dungeonly.'

'Please, Gran—'

'NOOOO!' A bent spoon from last night's dinner sailed out of the gloom and bounced off the top of my head with a painful TUNK.

'Ow!' I yelled.

'OH, stop your griping,' Granny hissed, 'and **GIVE ME MY GRUB!**'

'I'm going to drop it!' I knew that would work. Magical creatures are SO greedy and the thought of missing out on food or drink terrifies them.

Granny Regurgita grunted in the dark. She snapped her crusty fingers, and hundreds of candles in jam-jar lanterns suddenly lit themselves. The room twinkled into view and there she was, my enormous, grizzly grandma, hunched in her bed like some slobbering, hairless buffalo.

She was a monster to look at. A grey-green hulk in a filthy nightdress, with fat scarlet toadstools sprouting across her shoulders and head. Her eyes glinted copper as another bolt of lightning flashed outside.

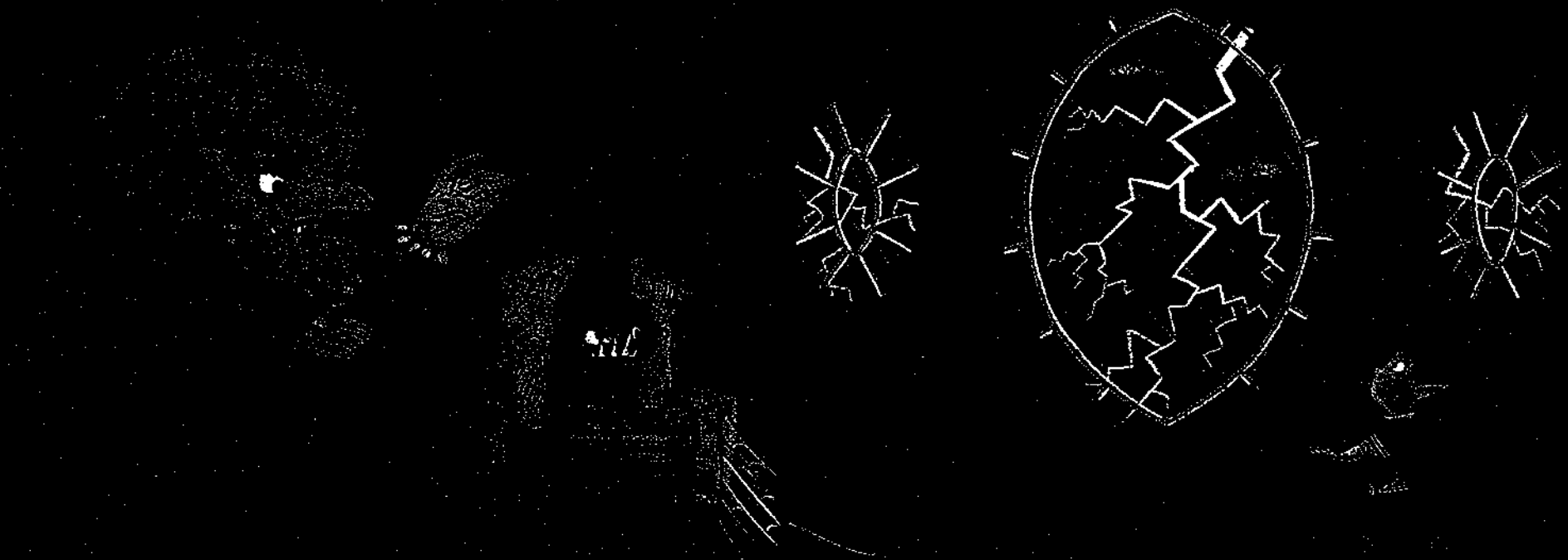
'Hello, Granny,' I said, trying not to look too scared. (Don't forget, she's the size of a bear and grumpier than a yeti with a headache.)

'FOOD!' she yelled, reaching for the plate in my hand. 'NOW!!'

I took another step closer and Granny's pet thistlewump, Gulp, uncurled at the end of the bed and growled at me. I hate thistlewumps, and

I especially hate Gulp. It's a football-sized ball of thistles and thorns, with twiggy feet sticking out at the bottom and very sharp teeth. I'd lost count of how many times the horrible little shrub had bitten me. Now, it just blinked its yellow eyes at me, then scampered across the blanket and snuggled under Granny's arm.

'Gulp, my twigling,' Granny said, chuckling and cooing.



Before Gulp had come along, Mum and Dad tried out a few pet cats to keep Granny company, but they kept disappearing. For ages we thought she'd scared them off and they'd made a quick getaway across the rooftops of the hotel, until she belched up a huge ginger furball one morning. How were we supposed to know that Granny had a taste for tabbies on toast? That's why Mum and Dad settled on a thistlewump. It's the only thing too prickly to chew.

'Here you are, Granny,' I said. I held out the plate of cockroach quiche and she snatched it wildly from my hands. I barely had time to blink before she threw back her head and emptied the whole thing down her gullet, plate and all.

'DRINK!' she barked as soon as she was done chewing.

I handed her the pondweed tea and she did the same thing, pouring it straight into her huge mouth, followed by the mug.

'Delunktious!' she sighed.

Once she'd finished licking her lips and picking

her teeth, she lowered her eyes back towards me and stared. For a minute I wasn't sure if she was going to say anything, so I waited. You never know ... maybe today would be the day she'd actually say thank you.

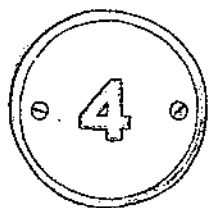
'Don't just stand there oogling, you little pimple,' she finally said. **'Bog off!'**

I didn't need telling twice. I spun round and ran for it.

But ... I told you that things got really interesting when I was visiting my Granny Regurgita in her tower bedroom and, as you must surely know by now, I don't tell lies.

Just as I reached the door, Granny gasped.

PREDICT
Why do you think Granny gasps?



A FLASH IN THE DARK

'Boy!' Granny practically spat the word at the back of my head.

I turned and saw her sitting bolt upright, copper eyes wide, and ears twitching backwards and forwards like she was straining to hear something. She snatched her rusty ear trumpet from beside the bed and jammed it into one of her ears.

'What's wrong?' I asked, watching her face crease up with concentration.

'Shhhhhh!' she hissed. 'I thought I just heard—' She gasped again, then hurled herself out of bed, dropped the ear trumpet on the floor and clomped to the window. Granny could move pretty fast when she wanted to, but it was normally only when she was scrambling for leftovers.

'What?' I ran and joined her at the window. With the jam-jar lanterns all burning brightly, it was hard to see anything except our own mismatched reflections staring back at us. 'What did you hear?'

Granny ignored me. She clicked her crusty fingers for a second time and every candle in the room instantly extinguished itself. Suddenly the outside world rushed into view far below. There, in the light of the street lamps, were the other hotels and restaurants that lined the seafront. Peering out of the window, I could see the waves thundering up the beach, and every flash of lightning cracked the sky in two, lighting up the raindrops like stars.

'What did you hear?' I asked again, but she was still ignoring me. Her eyes were fixed on the night sky above the ocean.

'There!' she suddenly yelled and pointed into the storm.

I squinted and tried to see what she'd spotted.

'There, boy! **LOOK!**'

Another flash of lightning lit up the sky and I

finally saw what Granny was pointing at. High above the sea was a huge black raven frantically beating its wings against the wind and rain. It whirled upwards, then vanished back into the night.

Another bolt of lightning flashed and I saw the raven was closer this time and ... and ... there was something riding on its back. A small figure, hunched forward and holding on for its life.

'What is it, Granny?' I asked. 'A fairy? A pook?'

'A goblin,' Granny said. 'It's a messenger.'

All the hairs on the back of my neck tingled with excitement. Who was sending us a message by Goblin Post?

'QUICK, BOY!' Granny barked at me. 'It won't last long out there. Run and let it in!'



PREDICT!
What do
you think
the message
will be?

EXPLAIN

1. Why do you think the author uses big bold letters sometimes when Granny is speaking? What effect does this have on the reader?
2. How do the pictures contribute to these chapters?