

Sweet Dreams

‘That’s right, a nice big wave for Mum and Dad. No, Donald! Get back in the house. It’s far too cold to be out in your pyjamas. And now you’ve got mud all over the floor! Annie, will you please stop grinding it into the carpet?’

‘Right. Upstairs with the both of you. Hang on, Donald! My old bones can’t move that fast. Annie - all your thumping is scaring the cat.’

‘There now. All nice and cosy under the covers. Or you will be, once you stop kicking each other. I can’t stay long. I have to clean the toothpaste off the bathroom mirror...and the floor...and the wall.’

‘Now settle down and I’ll tell you all about the little man who comes down the chimney when children are tucked up in their beds. No, I don’t mean Father Christmas. The Bodach is nothing like Santa Claus. Nothing like that at all.’

‘He’s very small, with hair like straw and a long straggly beard. You can’t really see his face except for his big sharp teeth. His arms and legs are long and skinny. He looks a bit like a monkey.’

‘Donald! Now is not the time to be a monkey. Get back into bed. Budge *up*, Annie. You don’t need it all to yourself.’

Now, where was I? Oh yes. The Bodach. He only comes for naughty children. He pinches them with his long bony fingers, then he pulls them up the chimney and then...he *eats* them.

‘You probably don’t know this, but I had a sister once. One night, just like this one, with the wind howling outside, Kirstie unravelled my mother’s knitting and trailed it through the house. She pulled the head off my rag doll, then she sneaked into the kitchen and dumped the leftover stew on the floor for the dog to eat.’

‘No. The dog wasn’t happy. He was sick on the rug. Kirstie was sent to bed. She yelled and howled, until eventually she quietened down. It was lovely and peaceful. But then she started up again.

‘My Dad sent me to tell her to stop her noise. All the time I was climbing the stairs, I could hear Kirstie screaming, but when I pushed open the bedroom door - it was this bedroom, the one you’re sleeping in tonight - the room was empty, except for two bare feet disappearing up the chimney and a wispy beard like a rat’s tail whisking up along with them.

Kirstie’s yells grew fainter, and more muffled until they stopped altogether. I went downstairs and told Mum and Dad she was gone. I didn’t tell them what really happened. I knew they wouldn’t believe me.

‘I expect you’ve changed your minds about hopping out of bed as soon as Grannie’s back is turned. I told you Donald. I can’t stay. I’ve got things to do. Be quiet now, still as a mouse when the owl is hunting. You don’t want the Bodach to come, do you?’