



## DUDA DUDA

It happened in the week between Christmas and New Year. The retired parson, Lennart Eriksson, thought it was a really dotty idea to go and sit on a church bench in the middle of the night, but he wanted to prove he dared to do it. The old fool had toyed with his plan the whole of November and December.

Lennart lived in the parsonage together with his son Urban, who was working as a parson in the village. No doubt, if his son saw him going to the church in the middle of the night, he would probably think that his father had gone crazy.

“But it makes no difference,” thought Lennart.

-An old parson like me is a subject of ridicule anyway, so people can just as well think I am bonkers.

Lennart really wanted to find out whether there was any truth in the old women’s tales about elves who held their own services, or whether they were just founded on superstition. He found the key to the church, put on his black coat and went out into the snowy winter night.

The light from the porch guided him halfway to the church and he managed most of the rest in the darkness. For the last bit, the full moon came out from behind the snow-covered hills causing the snow to glimmer, but the walls of the old wooden church remained black.

At the church door Lennart noticed strange tracks in the snow, which didn’t seem to be from animals but were more like those from tiny human feet, the small people.

Perhaps somebody wants to play a trick on me, he thought.

He unlocked the creaking iron door and went inside. But there he got an unpleasant feeling of damnation, which seemed to hover in the air like an evil spirit. It didn’t disappear even when he turned on the lamps.

He walked up the aisle, filled with deep uneasiness, and sat down in the middle of one of the rows. Even the red colour of the psalm-books had a strange appearance and he regretted he had got out of bed in order to come there. But as he was certainly no funk he decided to stay.

The angels and devils in the murals watched the trembling old man and their piercing looks seemed to follow him. Suddenly, Lennart heard faint singing, which came from the darkest corners of the church and he began to wonder whether, despite everything, there was some truth in all the tales about the small people, the elves.

He saw them walk up the aisle in procession and he tried to calm his nerves by laughing but he soon stopped. They came nearer and nearer. It was obvious that this was no optical illusion. They were dressed in clothes from biblical times and none of them was taller than a decimetre. He tried his best to find out what they were singing but all he could hear was: "Duda duda, duda duda" over and over again.

The procession appeared to be endless and Lennart began to dislike their monotonous song intensely. It had a frightful ritual tone, a mysterious reminder that all was not well in the church. The peace of God seemed to have been removed by force and the devils in the murals had been given shining blood-red eyes.

Lennart felt awful. He wondered whether the small people really sang: "Duda duda". He wasn’t certain any more. For a moment he almost froze with horror. Perhaps the words were: Deada deada, deada deada"! He pinched himself. But, this was not a nightmare it was reality.

It took a long time for the procession to reach the altar, but when the last of them had passed the row where he sat their song changed into sneering laughter.

“What on earth are you all laughing about?” he shouted.

After this they came in enormous numbers like raindrops from the vault of the roof and like ants through the chinks in the old wooden floor.

Soon Lennart had them all over him. Like bats, they bit deeply into his skin and sucked out so much blood that he collapsed. Then they moved him to the altar where they carried out a grotesque ritual in honor of the full moon. The small people, who lived in this isolated and forgotten district, had always wanted to crucify one of the bog people.

At dawn the next day, Urban found his father’s corpse nailed to the cross on the altar and that was all he found. Not a trace of the small people could be seen.