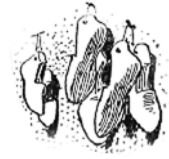


The Elves and The Shoemaker



A Story for Christmas

2024



Once upon a time, very long ago and far away, there was a shoemaker who, through no fault of his own, became so poor that at last he had only enough leather for one pair of shoes. In the evening he cut out the shoes which he intended to begin the next morning, and since he had a good conscience he lay down quietly, said his prayers, and fell asleep.

In the morning he prepared to sit down to work, but when he looked, there stood a pair of shoes all finished on his table. He was so astonished that he did not know what to say. He picked up the shoes to examine them inside and out; and they were so neatly made that not a stitch was out of place, showing that they were done by a master hand.

Very soon a customer came in and, because the shoes pleased him so much, he paid more than the ordinary price for them. With this money the shoemaker was able to purchase leather for two pairs of shoes. He cut them out in the evening, and next day was about to go to work with fresh courage; but there was no need for him to work, for the two pairs of shoes stood beautifully finished on his table.

Presently two customers came in, who paid him so well that he was able to buy leather for four pairs of shoes. The next morning he found the four pairs finished, and so it went; what he cut out in the evening was finished in the morning, so that he was soon in comfortable circumstances again, and at last was becoming really prosperous.

One evening, not long before Christmas, the shoemaker said to his wife, "What do you think of staying up to-night to see who it is that lends us this helping hand?"

The wife liked the idea; so they lighted a candle and hid themselves in a corner of the room behind some clothes which were hanging there. At midnight came two little

naked men, who sat down at the shoemaker's table and took up the work which was cut out. They set to work with their little fingers, so nimbly stitching, sewing, and hammering, that the shoemaker could not take his eyes off them. They did not stop till everything was finished and the shoes stood ready on the table; then they ran quickly away.

The next day the wife said to her husband: "The little men have made us rich, and we must show them how grateful we are. They must be almost frozen, running about with nothing on. I'll tell you what we'll do; I will make them little shirts, and coats, vests, and trousers, and knit them stockings, and you shall make each of them a little pair of shoes."

The shoemaker was pleased with this plan, and on Christmas Eve, when everything was ready, they laid out the presents on the table instead of the usual work, and hid themselves to see how the little men would behave.

At midnight the little men came bounding in, and were about to set to work as usual; but there was no leather to be seen, only charming little clothes.

At first they were astonished, and then perfectly delighted. With the greatest speed they put on and smoothed down the pretty clothes, singing,

*Now we are boys so fine to see,
Why should we longer cobblers be?*

Then they danced, and skipped, and leaped over chairs and benches. At last they danced out at the door. From this time on they never returned; but the shoemaker prospered as long as he lived.



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