



The Noel Stories

The Elves and the Shoemaker



This story is one of a large number of German folktales collected by the Brothers Grimm in the early 1800s. As in Old Pierre's Christmas Visitors, the hero of this famous folktale is a shoemaker. Only this time it's the shoemaker himself who had fallen on hard times.



Luckily, some elves turn up and help save the shoemaker's business, but when he and his wife try to repay the secretive little creatures, the elves abandon them. Thanks to the couple's continued hard work, however their business thrives. I like the idea that it's their human determination and decency that has saved their business, not just magical elf stitching, don't you?



Once Upon a Time

There was a shoemaker who worked hard and made very good shoes. All day he toiled in his shop, but times were hard, and he grew poorer and poorer.



Finally, the evening came when he cut out a pair of shoes from his last but of leather. He put the pieces on his bench to sew in the morning when the light was better and laid everything out ready, including the needles and thread.



“I may never make another pair of shoes,” he sighed as he put the shutters over the shop window. “When I sell these, I must use all the money to buy food for my family, and there will be nothing left over for more leather. Oh dear, what shall I do?”



The next morning, he awoke with a heavy heart and went sadly to his bench. To his amazement, instead of the pile of leather pieces, he found the most beautiful pair of shoes, exquisitely sewn with the tiniest, neatest stitches he had ever seen. The shoemaker was quite bewildered, but he took down his shutters and put the shoes in the shop window.



He was still puzzling over who could have made them when the door opened and in came a rich old gentleman. He wanted to buy the shoes and offered the shoemaker four times as much as he had ever been paid for a pair of shoes in his life.



The shoemaker was overjoyed. He rushed straight out and bought more leather and enough food to feed his family for several days.



That evening he sat in his bench and cut out two pairs of shoes from the new leather. He left the pieces laid out as before, ready to sew the next day.



In the morning he was even more amazed to find two beautiful pairs of shoes sitting on the bench. “Whoever can it be,” he wondered, “who works so fast and sews such tiny stitches?”



Again, he put the shoes in the shop window, and rich people who had never visited his shop before came in and paid a lot of money for them.



The shoemaker went off again and bought more leather and cut out more shoes. Every night for weeks the same thing happened.



Two pairs, sometimes four pairs, were made in a night,
and the shoemaker was soon known all over the town for
his excellent shoes.



But he still had no idea who was making the shoes, and he grew more curious day by day.



One evening he could bear it no longer, and he and his wife stayed awake and peeped from behind the door to see who their helpful night visitors were.



As the clock struck midnight, they heard a scuffling and a scurrying from the window and saw two little men squeezing through the shutters.



They hurried over to the bench, took a set of tiny tools from their workbag, and began stitching and hammering.



The shoemaker and his wife rubbed their eyes to make sure they weren't dreaming, for the little men were no bigger than the shoemaker's needles!



The elves – for that is what they were – worked hard until just before dawn, when three beautiful pairs of shoes stood ready on the bench.



Then they packed their tools away, cleaned up the mess, and vanished the way they had come.



When the shoemaker and his wife had recovered from their amazement, they wondered how they could show their gratitude to the elves.



As it was just before Christmas, the shoemaker's wife suggested that they should make some tiny clothes as presents for the raggedy little fellows.



So, all the next day she busied herself making two little jackets and two pairs of trousers, while the shoemaker stitched two tiny pairs of shoes.



On Christmas Eve they laid the presents out the shoemaker's bench together with two tiny glasses of wine and a plate of little cakes and biscuits.



That night they kept watch again.



he elves scrambled into the shop and climbed onto the bench as they had done before.



When they saw the little green jackets and trousers and the tiny shoes, they shouted and jumped for joy.



They put the cloths on; they drank the wine and ate the food; then they disappeared in a flash.



After Christmas the shoemaker still cut out shoes and left the pieces on his bench, but the elves never came back.



They knew the shoemaker and his wife had seen them because the clothes were exactly the right size – and elves do not like to be seen by humans.



The shoemaker did not really mind, for his shop was now so famous that he had plenty of customers.



His stitches were not as neat as the elves' stitches, but no one seemed to notice.



He and his family were never poor again, and every year after that on Christmas Eve they would gather around the fire and drink a toast to the little elves who had helped them when times were hard.

The End





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