

The Elves and the Shoemaker

Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm



Image from Wikipedia

There was once a shoemaker, who worked very hard and was very honest: but still, he could not earn enough to live on. He had become so poor that at last he had nothing left but leather for one pair of shoes. So, in the evening, he cut out the shoes which he wished to begin to make the next morning, then he lay down quietly in his bed, and fell asleep.

In the morning, when he was just going to sit down to work, the two shoes stood already made on his table. The good man did not know what to say or think. He took the shoes in his hands to watch them closer, and they were so well made that there was not one bad stitch in them.

Soon after, a buyer came in, and as the shoes pleased him so well, he paid more for them than was usual, and, with the money, the shoemaker was able to buy

leather for two pairs of shoes. He cut them out at night, and next morning was about to set to work again; but he had no need to do so, for, when he got up, they were already made, and buyers gave him enough money to buy leather for four pairs of shoes.

The following morning, too, he found the four pairs made; and so it went on constantly - what he cut out in the evening was finished by the morning, so that he soon became a rich man.

Now it happened that one evening not long before Christmas, when the man had been cutting out, he said to his wife, before going to bed, "What do you think if we were to stay up to-night to see who it is that lends us this helping hand?" The woman liked the idea, and lighted a candle, and then they hid in a corner of the room, behind some clothes and watched. When it was midnight, two little naked men came, sat down by the shoemaker's table, took all the work which was cut out before them and began to stitch, and sew, and hammer so skilfully and so quickly with their little fingers that the shoemaker could not turn away his eyes. They did not stop until all was done and stood finished on the table, and then they ran quickly away.

Next morning the woman said, "The little men have made us rich, and we really must show that we are thankful for it. They run about so, and have nothing on, and must be cold. I'll tell you what I'll do: I will make them little shirts, and coats, and pants, and knit both of them a pair of socks, and you, too, make them two little pairs of shoes." The man said, "I will be very glad to do it;" and one night, when everything was ready, they laid their presents all together on the table instead of the cut-out work, and then hid themselves to see what the little men would do.

At midnight, they came in and wanted to get to work, but as they did not find any leather cut out, but only the pretty little clothes, they were at first surprised, and then they laughed and laughed. They dressed quickly, putting the pretty clothes on, and singing,

"Now we are boys so fine to see,
Why should we longer shoemakers be?"

Then they danced and skipped and jumped over chairs and benches. At last, they danced out of doors. The good couple saw them no more; but everything went well with them from that time on, as long as they lived.

Adapted from the original by Outi Frisk