

The Elves and the Shoemaker

by the Brothers Grimm

The Brothers Grimm, Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm (4 January, 1785 – 20 September, 1863) and Wilhelm Carl Grimm (24 February, 1786 – 16 December, 1859) were German academics, folklorists and linguists. They collected and published folklore during the 19th century. They were the first and best-known collectors of German and European folk tales and popularised traditional oral tales such as “Cinderella”, “The Frog Prince”, “Hansel and Gretel” and “Snow White”.

Rewritten story

Read the story and answer the following questions.



1. Once there was a shoemaker. He worked very hard but was still very poor. He was left with just enough leather to make a single pair of shoes. He cut the leather out before he went to bed. The next morning, he got up early and started working. To his amazement, the shoes were completely finished. They were made with excellent workmanship. “What happened?” he wondered.

2. The same day a customer entered the shop. When he saw the pair of new shoes, he was attracted to them. The shoes looked so well on him that he willingly paid a high price. The shoemaker could now buy enough leather for two pairs of shoes. He cut out the leather before going to bed. The next morning he was again greatly surprised to find the shoes finished. Soon buyers came and they bought the shoes. The money was enough for buying leather for four pairs of shoes. He again cut out the leather at night time. As before, at daybreak, the cut-out leather had been turned into shoes of excellent workmanship. This went on for some time, and the shoemaker became rich.

3. It was soon Christmas time. The shoemaker chatted with his wife. He said, “It’s really baffling what happened in the night that turned the leather into such fine shoes! I would like to sit up and watch tonight to find out who comes and does the work for me.” His wife thought it was a good idea because she was curious too. They left a candle burning and hid themselves behind a curtain in a corner of the room.

4. As soon as the clock struck twelve, in came two little naked dwarfs. They sat down at the shoemaker’s bench, took up all the leather that was cut out, and began to work diligently, stitching, sewing and hammering with their nimble fingers and flying hands. The shoemaker and his wife were fascinated and could not take their eyes off them. The little elves went on and on. Before daybreak, the shoes were all finished. The elves then left hurriedly.

5. The wife said to her husband, “These little elves have made us wealthy. We ought to show them our gratitude. It pains my heart to see them run about without any clothes on, especially in this freezing cold.” She suggested, “I’ll sew some shirts, undershirts, trousers and jackets for them, and knit a pair of stockings for each of them. You’ll make each of them a pair of shoes.” The good cobbler agreed with his wife. One evening, all these things

were ready. The couple laid them on the bench. They then hid themselves behind the curtains and waited. At midnight the elves appeared as usual. When they prepared to work, they found the presents. At first they were puzzled, but they were soon overjoyed. They dressed themselves in the twinkling of an eye and looked at each other. They hopped and danced and sang merrily. At last they danced out of the house, and were seen no more. The good couple missed them. From then on, everything went well with the couple.