

The Elves and the Shoemaker

Once upon a time, there was a shoemaker who had fallen on hard times. Every day, he worked until the early hours, yet he barely had enough money to buy food or fuel to heat his home.

It came to be that all he had left in the world was enough leather to make a single pair of shoes. That day, he worked hard making a pattern and cutting the leather. Despite all his troubles, he said to his wife, “If these are the last shoes I make, I want them to be the best ever.”

He went to bed that night feeling hungry but excited about the new shoes he was going to make.

When he woke the next morning, he was amazed to find that the shoes were finished.

“Mary!” he called to his wife.
“Did you do this?”

He picked up the shoes to inspect them. The stitches were so tiny he could barely see them –



and they had been polished so well they shone. They were perfect!

Mary admired the shoes too. “No, of course I didn’t. Perhaps you were sleepwalking last night.”

The shoemaker didn’t hesitate to put the shoes in his shop window. That morning, a rich gentleman came by and tried them on.

“What marvellous shoes!” he said, and he paid far more than the usual price.

In fact, he paid so much money that the shoemaker could now afford to buy leather to make two more pairs of shoes.

He cut out the leather ready and went to bed early. That night, he slept very soundly, cheered by his good luck. ➡



He got out of bed when the first cock crowed, but he needn't have rushed to his workbench. When he arrived, there were two perfect pairs of shoes waiting for him. They had the same almost-invisible stitches as before and the same fine craftsmanship.

The shoemaker didn't know what to make of it. His wife Mary still insisted that she hadn't made the shoes.

Confused but delighted by his good fortune, the shoemaker placed the elegant shoes in his shop window.

Soon both pairs of shoes had sold to customers who paid so much money that the shoemaker was able to buy leather to make four pairs of shoes.

As before, he cut out the leather and left it ready to make shoes in the morning – and, as before, when he got up the next day, four amazing pairs of shoes were waiting for him.



This is how it went for many weeks. He bought more and more leather and whatever the shoemaker cut out was always transformed into wonderful shoes by the morning. The shoes became so highly prized, people came from afar to buy them.

As Christmas approached, the shoemaker realised he was a wealthy man. For the first time, he and his wife would be able to enjoy a grand feast and buy each other gifts.

Though the shoemaker was happy, he couldn't stop thinking about how his shoes were made – and who was making them. Deep down, he knew he wasn't sleepwalking.

One night, after cutting out leather for many more pairs of shoes, he said to his wife, "I think we should stay up late. Let's find out who has been giving us this helping hand."

Mary agreed, so they lit a candle and hid themselves behind the curtain. They waited and waited.

At the stroke of midnight, seven little elves appeared, all chattering and laughing. They were dressed in rags. They sat down at the shoemaker's workbench, picked up the pieces of leather and set to work.

They sewed so nimbly and swiftly, the shoemaker and his wife could hardly believe their eyes.

On and on they stitched and polished until every piece of leather had been turned into a wonderful shoe. ➡



THE SHOEMAKER

When they had finished, the workbench



SPOT IT!

Can you spot these five items in the picture?



Answer: There are 15 shoes and boots.

was covered with smart new shoes.



**How many shoes
and boots can
you count?
Write it here.**





The wee elves checked their work one last time and disappeared.

Mary turned to her husband and said, “Those kind elves have made us rich. We should thank them for it. Did you see how ragged they looked? They must be so cold. I’ll sew them some shirts, trousers and jackets, and knit them some socks for their tiny feet. While I’m doing that you can make a pair of shoes for each of them.”

The shoemaker agreed and he and his wife worked hard all day long on

Christmas Eve to make cosy little outfits for the helpful elves.

That evening, when everything was ready, instead of leaving out pieces of leather, they put presents on the workbench. Then they hid behind the curtain to see what happened.

As soon as it turned midnight, the elves came skipping in. When they saw the brightly wrapped gifts, they were puzzled at first, but also delighted. They tore the parcels open, grinning from ear to ear.





When they saw smart new clothes
inside and their very own tiny shoes,
they tried them on and sang:

“Look at us, so fine and neat!
New clothes on our backs,
Smart shoes on our feet!
There’s a big wide world for us to see,
No longer cobbler we will be!”

Then the elves danced and jiggled
across the workbench, leapt onto a
chair, cartwheeled across the floor
and danced out of the shop.

They never came back to help, but
it didn’t matter – the shoemaker was
now so famous for his amazing shoes
that he and his wife were busy and
happy for the rest of their days. ★

