

# The Cobbler and the Fairies

by Katharine Pyle *from Mother's Nursery Tales*

There was once a cobbler who worked hard at his trade, and yet never seemed to get on in the world.

One evening he took his last piece of leather and cut out a pair of shoes and laid the pieces neatly on his bench, expecting to finish them in the morning.

“There,” said he to his wife; “that is my last piece of leather, and I will have no money to buy more until those shoes are made and sold.”

The next morning he went to his shop early to begin work. What was his surprise to find that in the night the pieces had been made up into a fine pair of shoes. He took them up and examined them, and there was not a fault to be found with them. It was indeed much better work than the cobbler could have done. Not even the king's shoemaker could have done better.

The cobbler set the shoes out where they could be seen, and he soon had a customer for them. This customer was a very rich man. “This is a very fine pair of shoes,” said the rich man after he had examined them. “I will take them, and you may make me two more pairs.” He then paid the cobbler well, and went away, carrying the shoes with him.

The cobbler was ready to dance with joy. He hurried out and bought more leather, and by evening he had cut out two more pairs of shoes. He left the pieces lying on the bench as before.

When he came to the shop the next morning, he found both pairs finished and standing side by side on the bench, and they were just as well made as the other pair had been. The rich man was delighted with them, and he brought a friend to the shop with him, who also ordered two pairs of shoes.

So it went on. Soon the cobbler had all the customers he could attend to, and they paid high prices for his shoes, for they were better than could be bought anywhere else.

But the cobbler puzzled and puzzled about who was helping him. No matter how late he sat up, nor how early he rose in the morning, he never saw anyone, and he never heard a sound.

At last he determined he would watch all night and find out who was doing the work. So when his wife went off to bed he hid himself behind some clothes that were hanging in the corner, and stayed there as still as a mouse. No one would have known there was anybody in the room. The moon shone in at the window and all the house was still.

Suddenly he saw two little brown fairy-men there in the room, but where they came from he could not tell. It was cold winter weather, but neither of them had on coats or shoes or trousers. They

picked up the pieces of leather and looked at them, and then they sat down cross-legged and began to work. They fitted and sewed and hammered, so fast that in a short time all the shoes were done. The two little men set them in a row on the bench, and nodded to each other as though they were well pleased, and then they went as they came, without a sound, and the cobbler could not tell what had become of them.

The next day the cobbler told his wife all that he had seen the night before. The two talked it over for a long time.

“We ought to do something to show our gratitude to the little men,” said his wife. “How would it be if I made a little shirt and a suit for each of them, and you can make them each a pair of shoes.”

To this the cobbler agreed. He went out and bought some fine cloth and cambric, and buttons and also some soft thin leather.

Then his wife set to work and made two little shirts and two little suits all complete, even to the pockets and buttonholes, and the cobbler made two tiny pairs of shoes. When all was finished, they laid the clothes out on the bench, and that night they left a light burning and hid themselves in the corner behind the clothes, to see what would happen. The clock ticked on, and suddenly they saw the two little brown men there in the room, moving quietly about, though how they had come there neither the cobbler nor his wife knew.

The little men went to the bench where the leather was generally laid out, and there, instead of leather pieces were the two little suits of clothes and the two little pairs of shoes. The brownies took up the clothes piece by piece and examined them; they held them up and turned them this way and that. Last of all they put the clothes on, and they fitted exactly. Then they began to dance with glee, and to sing:

“How fine we be, how fine we be!  
Now we never will work again!”

So singing they danced about over tables and chairs and benches and so on out the door into the night, and they never were seen again.

But the cobbler prospered, and in time became a very rich man.

**Questions**

1. What is a cobbler?
2. What did the cobbler and his wife give the fairies?
3. What does "as still as a mouse" mean?
4. Do you think it was a good idea for the cobbler and his wife to give the fairies the gifts? Why or why not?