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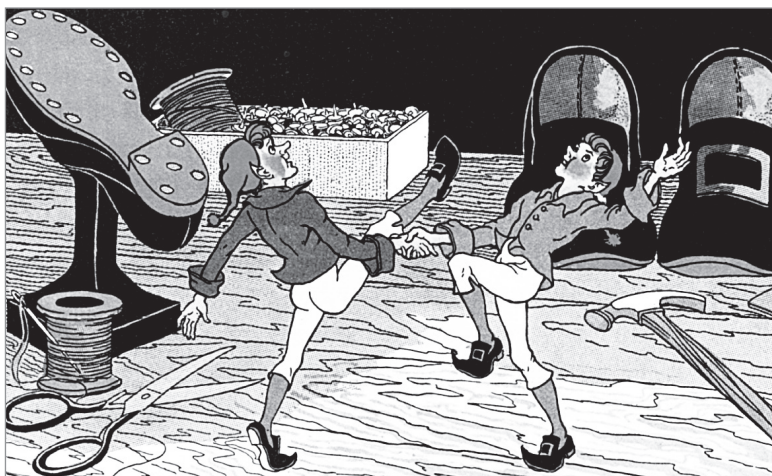
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Dramatic Publishing

The Elves and the Shoemaker



By Nora MacAlvay
and
Charlotte B. Chorpenning

Adapted from
the Brothers Grimm

The Elves and the Shoemaker

Fairy tale. Adapted by Nora MacAlvay and Charlotte B. Chorprenning. Based on the story by the Brothers Grimm.

Cast: 1m., 8w., 3 either gender. Suitable for an all-female cast. The Elves and the Shoemaker illustrates lovable, elfin versions of the old familiar fairy tale. A young elf, just beginning to learn elf duties, is accompanied by two experienced elves who take him to the shoemaker's shop for his first assignment. Here they find a scene of distress, as the shoemaker is gone to war, his wife and daughter are in danger of losing the shop for debt to the greedy Heckla if they cannot make her a pair of shoes for the morrow. Late that night, the elves make the shoes and return the next day to see their success. But Heckla has intercepted the money to pay off the debt and is about to take possession. Again the elves are obliged to come to the rescue to make it possible for everybody to live happily ever after. One set. Peasant costumes. Approximate running time: 65 minutes. Code: E64.

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The Elves and the Shoemaker

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Illinois.”

The Elves and the Shoemaker was given its premiere production at the Goodman Memorial Theatre of Chicago, under the direction of Charlotte B. Chorpenning.

The Elves and the Shoemaker

CHARACTERS

WIDGET: A young elf.

GREMLO: An older elf.

FINELLA: An older elf.

THE SHOEMAKER

HIS WIFE

KAREN: His daughter

HECKLA

DAME MARGERY

URSULA: Village girl

JOAN: Village girl

RHODA: Village girl

MEG: Village girl

TABITHA: Village girl

SETTING

The Shoemaker's Shop

ACT I

Scene 1: Midnight—Summer

Scene 2: The next morning

ACT II

Scene: Night of the same day

ACT III

Scene: Dawn, the following day

The Elves and the Shoemaker

ACT I

SCENE 1

SCENE: *The Shoemaker's Shop. Moonlight streaming into the bare, empty room. From beneath, comes faint elf music and the tapping of elf hammers. A distant town clock strikes 12. Before the last stroke, WIDGET's music is heard off, draws near, the door to outside flies open and WIDGET struts in to the music, followed by GREMLO and FINELLA, also dancing. The tapping has stopped.*

WIDGET. Here we are!

GREMLO. Then why do you keep on going?

WIDGET. Because I feel important (*Leaping up onto the bench and waving his cap.*) My first job!

GREMLO (*snatching the cap and putting it on again*). Widget! Widget! Do you want to leave your first job before you've begun it?

FINELLA. After all the times the oldest elf warned you about your cap?

GREMLO. When can a mortal see an elf?

WIDGET. When his cap is off.

GREMLO. And if an elf is seen by mortal eyes, what must he do?

WIDGET. He must leave the spot and never come back.

(The elf music and tapping begins. The elves, startled, listen with fingers uplifted. WIDGET is amazed.)

WIDGET (*cont'd*). Elf music!

FINELLA. Elf hammers!

(They fling themselves down, ears to the floor. GREMLO's up-flung leg keeps time to the music.)

WIDGET. Why are they tapping?

FINELLA. They must be trying to find the door to the golden hall. It's sealed up after the fifty year feast, you know, and never used till time for the next one comes around.

WIDGET. This is the shoemaker's shop. The golden hall isn't under here, is it?

FINELLA. It's somewhere under Elf Hill. I never knew what was above it. Elf Hill is miles long.

GREMLO. They're only looking for the door, you know. It isn't time for the feast yet.

WIDGET (*dancing with joy*). I'll be at the feast, this time!
And I'll get a new coat!

FINELLA. All the elves get new coats for the fifty year feast.

GREMLO. And you young elves, who have been sent out to try yourselves on your first jobs, will tell the old elves what you have done.

WIDGET. And I'll be honored at the feast, and given a stripe to wear on my new coat!

FINELLA. If you don't keep making mistakes and spoil your job.

GREMLO (*wagging his beard at him*). And what is the worst mistake of all the mistakes you make?

WIDGET. I lose my temper. (*Hanging his head.*)

FINELLA. It's a good thing they sent us along to keep an eye on you. I can see you're going to need our help.

WIDGET. I don't want help. I want to do it my own self.

GREMLO. You forget you mustn't be seen by a mortal.

WIDGET. There isn't any mortal here to see me.

GREMLO. There might have been.

FINELLA. You didn't look about to find out.

WIDGET. A happy feeling got hold of me because it's my first job.

FINELLA. That was your first mistake. You might have spoiled your job before you started, and the dear mortal you've come to help would lose the good luck you meant to bring him.

GREMLO. This is a bare place, (*Looks around.*) To bring good luck here looks like a pretty big job for a young elf.

FINELLA. It looks as if some dear body were in dire want.

WIDGET (*delighted*). He is.

GREMLO. Who is he?

WIDGET. The shoemaker. And he's away at the wars. And his wife and daughter haven't any money left.

FINELLA. Oh-h.

WIDGET. And there's a mean, mean woman. Her name is Heckla ...

GREMLO. I don't like the sound of it.

FINELLA. There's sorrow in it.

WIDGET. She's going to take away their shop, while the shoemaker is away.

GREMLO. That's no way for a body to act.

FINELLA. We mustn't let her do it.

WIDGET (*tossing his hat*). That's my first job. I've come to stop her. (*Snatches at it and puts it on, as if it hadn't happened, smiling at them seraphically.*)

FINELLA. You've chosen a very good job, Widget.

GREMLO. How are you going to do it?

WIDGET. I don't know. I've come to find out.

GREMLO. That's your second mistake, Widget. You should know what you're about, before you set about it.

WIDGET. I do. I've come to find a way for them to get some money.

FINELLA. This is a poor place for that. There's not a thing in the cupboard.

GREMLO. There's nothing to eat but a wee bit of porridge in the pot.

WIDGET. Here's a leather apron, Finella.

FINELLA. It's the shoemaker's apron. They can't sell that.

GREMLO. There's nothing on his bench but a few scraps of leather.

FINELLA. Not a penny in the money drawer.

GREMLO. That is bad.

FINELLA. It's time to think.

GREMLO. Widget should have done the thinking before he brought us here.

(GREMLO and FINELLA take off their caps, put them on the floor and sit on the bench and think. WIDGET steals to climb up and look out of the window.)

FINELLA. Here's a rule for you, Widget. The first thing to do when you want to help a mortal, is to listen and watch.

WIDGET. I know that rule.

GREMLO. Then why did you bring us here when they're all asleep?

FINELLA. That's your third mistake. Who is there to listen to, or watch?

(They fall into deep thought. WIDGET feels important, lifting his chest, weaving to the music as he uses his pipe, and watching something moving out of the window.)

FINELLA (*cont'd*). He's feeling important again.

GREMLO (*annoyed*). Widget, why do you feel important now?

WIDGET (*triumphant*). Put on your caps! (*A loud knock on the door.*)

HECKLA (*off*). Open up! It's Heckla! It's Heckla!

(The elves scramble for their caps.)

WIDGET. I knew she was coming! I brought you to listen and watch. (*In a sudden burst of temper.*) I hate her!

(The elves shake warning fingers at him. He hangs his head. The door opens stealthily and HECKLA tiptoes in. Part way to the inner door she stops at the sound of her shoes, goes to the window seat, and takes off the shoes, then tiptoes to listen at the inner door. WIDGET gets down and picks up her shoes, waving them over his head. As she turns back he hops up onto the window seat, holding the shoes behind him. HECKLA goes swiftly to the money drawer in the counter, holds it up chuckling.)

HECKLA. Empty!

(She replaces it, and goes to put on her shoes, missing them, searches for them, as WIDGET waves them over her head, and makes faces at her back, even lifts a foot to kick her until GREMLO catches his eye, when he hangs his head.)

HECKLA (*cont'd*). Where in the world did I put those shoes?

(She flounces quickly down onto the shoemaker's bench, hiding her unshod feet by spreading her skirts, as the inner door opens and KAREN enters, followed by her mother.)

KAREN. Heckla! Why do you waken my mother at this hour?

HECKLA. I just got home from Blackpool Fair. Where is the money you were to leave at my house?

WIFE. We couldn't lay hands on a penny, Heckla.

KAREN. But we have good news for you.

WIFE. We'll have the money by the end of the week.

HECKLA (*startled*). What? ... The end of the week, is it?
Where will you get it?

KAREN. From Father!

HECKLA. The shoemaker? Is he home from the wars?

WIFE. He's on his way.

KAREN. If he isn't here by the middle of the morning, we're
to meet him at Blackpool Fair for a holiday.

HECKLA. When?

KAREN. We'll start tomorrow.

HECKLA. Very good. Tell the shoemaker he needn't come
back to this shop.

WIFE. What do you mean?

HECKLA. I mean, it isn't his, It's mine.

WIFE. Our shop ...

HECKLA. When you borrowed money from me, you agreed
the shop should be mine if you couldn't pay it back.

WIFE. But we can pay, at last.

HECKLA. At last is too late. The time is long up.

KAREN. Only a few days and ...

HECKLA. I've given you a few days, again and again.

KAREN. But we didn't know where we could get the mon-
ey before. We only hoped, if we worked hard enough. But
now we know. We had word this evening. We stopped by to
tell you, but you weren't there. Father has money.

HECKLA. That won't put it in my hands tomorrow.

KAREN. You've waited so long, you can surely wait three
days more.

HECKLA. No. Not one.

WIFE. That isn't reason, Heckla.

HECKLA. It's business.

KAREN. It isn't even fair.

HECKLA. It's business.

KAREN. Why are you so sharp all of a sudden? You talk like a miser. You sound as if you didn't want us to find the money. Are you trying to put us out on purpose? I believe you are. You were glad enough to lend us the money. You made us feel that we weren't beggars, and that it was for the love of our shoemaker that you did it. It was when the men began to come home you changed. Did you have this scheme under your bonnet all that time?

WIFE. Hush, Karen. What could Heckla want of a poor shoemaker's shop? We love it, because it's home ...

KAREN. And because father loved it so.

WIFE. Yes. Heckla, I'm not one to eat humble pie. But I'm begging you. I'm all but on my knees to you. Hold off these three days We can't let our shoemaker come home and find we've lost his shop for him. What a bitter homecoming! His shop gone ... through no fault of his own!

KAREN. If you'd seen him when he left ... standing there in the open door ... the fond look of him and the faith he had in us.

WIFE (*nodding*). "This war is putting a heavy load on my womenfolk." he said. "But whatever comes, you'll find a way."

KAREN. And we will, father! ... You shan't turn us out of this shop, Heckla! Father always pays what he owes. You know that.

WIFE. Everyone knows it.

KAREN. I don't know why you want our shop, but something tells me that you're just making our debt an excuse to get it. If the village folk knew what you're up to, they'd run you out of town!

HECKLA. Well ... If you had anything at all that could be turned into money ... You haven't even an extra chair ... the place is bare.

WIFE. We've had to trade everything for food.

HECKLA. A shoemaker's shop, and not even a pair of shoes to bind a bargain ... unless ... that looks like leather for one!

KAREN (*snatches it and goes to her mother, who puts an arm around her—both looking at the leather*). Father had just cut it out when they sent for him.

WIFE. We've never moved it. It seemed to keep him with us.

HECKLA (*scheming*). Has either of you ever made a shoe?

WIFE. Surely not. That's the shoemaker's place. Everyone knows how his heart is in his work. He's always making some new pattern. There's not his like in the whole country-side. My place is by the hearth and at the loom, for his sake.

HECKLA. If I give you one more chance, will you tell the neighbors how patient and fair I've been?

(WIDGET has to be controlled by the others at this.)

KAREN. Oh, yes! You always have been until just lately.

WIFE. You'll let us stay until the shoemaker comes home?

HECKLA. If you give me something to bind the bargain.

WIFE. What can we give? The shoemaker's apron is the only good thing left in the shop.

KAREN. We can't let that go. It's almost like giving you Father, himself.

HECKLA. Make that leather into a pair of shoes for me as fine as the shoemaker's own by noon tomorrow, and I'll wait three days.

(WIDGET can hardly contain his delight.)

KAREN (*throwing her arms around her*). Oh, thank you, Heckla. That's like your old self.

HECKLA. It's settled, then. I know your word is good. The shoes or the shop by noon tomorrow. They must stand complete on the bench, here. Good night.

(She looks shyly around for her shoes, gives them up and goes out. KAREN opens the door for her as she starts out, and breaks into a little dance of joy as she closes it. The WIFE stands staring at the leather, sober.)

KAREN *(singing as she dances)*. Dance for your daddy,

My little maid,

Dance for your daddy,

Our debt is paid . . .

Won't it be wonderful to be altogether again, in our own, own shop! Here's where Father and I made up our very own dance.

WIFE. Yes, Karen, I remember how you danced for Father.

KAREN *(illustrating as she goes)*. These steps are his hammer, tap, tap, tapping. And this is the needle and thread, flashing in and out. And this is father holding up the best pair of shoes he's ever made yet. I do it over and over because Father says, "There'll be more and more of them and each pair better than the last." *(Stops dancing, lost in memory.)*

WIFE *(musing)*. What happy times we three had in this dear old shop.

(WIDGET is nearly in tears, as he watches. His music changes to plaintiveness, as he circles them, in his desire to be near.)

KAREN *(rousing herself)*. I'm making up a new dance to show Father when he comes home. Sometimes when you are asleep, I come into the shop alone, when the stars look in at the window, and have a little time with father, just as if he were here. I touch his counter and his bench and his apron, and take his awl and hammer into my hands and dance for him. And, last night, I made up this, to ask him to forgive us for losing the shop he loves so much.

WIFE *(interrupting the dance)*. No, no, Karen, our man will never hold it against us.

KAREN. Anyway, we haven't lost it after all! As soon as Heckla's shoes are finished, I'll make up the gladdest dance he ever saw! I feel so happy I don't know where I am!

WIFE. I'd be happier if I knew what to do with this leather.

KAREN. It looks easy, when father does it. He's often made a pair by noon, all by himself, by working late and starting early.

WIFE. Ah, but father is a master-hand. I don't even know where to begin.

(The elves are nearer, listening intently.)

KAREN. He makes holes with his awl. He pounds with his hammer. He draws the needle in and out. The thread is waxed.

WIFE. I don't even know how the pieces go together. It was a new pattern, he said.

KAREN. I think he made holes here.

WIFE. Don't touch the leather with the awl till you're sure. We might spoil it. It's all there is.

KAREN. It's not the same shape as our shoes.

WIFE. It's hard to say what our shape might have been when they were new. They're almost worn through.

KAREN. No one in the village has good shoes left. Business will be brisk if only we can hold the shop till father gets here.

WIFE. He was making these to show to Dame Margery. It always pricked his pride in his shop a little that she went to the city for her shoes. His heart was set on winning her trade. He was so pleased with the pattern he'd thought up for her that he sang at the top of his voice while he was cutting this.

KAREN. Dame Margery's shoes would be too small for Heckla, even if we knew how to make these up.

WIFE. If we only had one of Heckla's shoes to go by.

KAREN (*beginning to look around*). Isn't there one of Heckla's old shoes about the shop somewhere? Everyone brought in old shoes to be patched when they knew he was going away.

WIFE. No. He mended and patched early and late so he could leave everyone well shod. He had them under the counter, and even in the window box, when the work piled up.

KAREN. Not a sign of a shoe under the counter.

WIFE (*opening the window box*). Nor here.

(WIDGET is having jun waving HECKLA's shoes behind their backs, to the consternation of the other elves who fear he'll fail to get them out of sight when they turn.)

KAREN. What difference does it make? We could never make a pair of shoes in these few hours. It was a foolish bargain we made.

WIFE. I knew it when we made it. But it was that, or lose the shop. I thought something might come into my head, for father's sake. It's wonderful what you can do when you have love to push you. We'll sleep on it, and see what comes to us.

KAREN. I can't sleep, with the thought of losing the shop to Heckla on my pillow.

WIFE (*playful*). You know what Father would say to that.

KAREN (*laughing and quoting*). "If your conscience is clear, say your prayers and lie down quietly and go to sleep."

WIFE (*amused at the memory*). How many times have you heard that from Father's lips?

KAREN. Yes, that's his way.

WIFE. Come then.

KAREN. I'll try. But something *must* turn up.

WIFE. Who knows but what it will? You know how father says, "If ill befalls, there's always good to be got out of it."