The Elves and The Shoemaker

By Wilhelm and Carl Grimm.

Adapted for the stage by Tom Neill.

The Elves and the Shoemakers was first performed at Greenwich West Community and Arts Centre on 14th December 2019 by Natalie Wilcox and Tom Neill.

Marionettes supplied by Rici.

Wayang golek from an unknown maker.

'Perfect for younger children' THE LIST

'A wonder-filled new version' ALLEVENTS

'The perfect festive treat for young families' ENTS24

For pre-school children

Duration: 35 - 40 minutes

Performed by two actor / puppeteers

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The Elves and the Shoemakers.

The shop door bell sounds and music plays. The items for telling the story are brought forward.

Tom Once upon a time, there was a Shoemaker and his hard-working wife who, despite making the most elegant and comfortable shoes known, found that they could not earn enough to live on. About to give up, and with only enough leather left for one last pair, the kindly couple are visited by two mysterious and magical elves. This is the story of the Elves and the Shoemakers.

Music. The puppeteer puts on her shoes.

Natalie **These are my oldest, favourite shoes**
They nearly always come in twos
Red, orange, yellow, green and blues

Indigo, violet, black and brown
I bought them from the shop in town

I like the way they keep my feet
Feeling warm and looking neat
I wear them proudly on the street

These shoes are made by a master shoemaker. I'm pleased to have a pair because there's only one of him and he doesn't make very many. His name is Robards, and a lot of people say he's the best there is.

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He lives with Dorothy, his wife, by the river in a quiet row of houses, with a shop at the front. Although his name is respected the length and height of the land, you would not know he was there. It’s where they’ve always lived, with friends they cherish and surroundings they love.

If you ask them in the city,
If you ask them in the town,
Or even in the villages,
Who is the best around?

You can ask them in the cottages,
On the farms and in the yards
Who makes the most amazing shoes?
And they will say Robards.

Here he is.

Robards steps out of his shop and walks a little way.

He’s a happy portly soul
All day he works on shoes

Tom Hands like hammers
Hair unfurled

Natalie Swept back beneath his hat

Tom And just this much amused

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Natalie His tools, rolled up, are by his side
Kind, but tired and earnest eyes
Always wide from looking down
A tear in each

Tom A weary frown

Music.

One time, Robards was out at market and a trader he hadn't seen before offered him rolls of material that he said was perfect for shoes, and it came at a marvellous cheap price.

Natalie Robards stepped back, surprised.

Tom It was a price that makes you ask twice.

Natalie A price that leaves you wide-eyed.

Lots of different styles of shoe appear. They have happy faces on them.

Tom Robards was entranced by this possibility of making many more shoes much more easily. And the trader was very persuasive.

Natalie For every question he had, there came the answer, so quickly and certainly that the Shoemaker had no time to think whether or not it was true.

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Tom So, despite all his experience, Robards bought all the rolls of material the trader had to offer and with it made several pairs of shoes.

Natalie At first the customers were impressed. They ‘Ooo’d and ‘Ahh’d at the speed of delivery.

Tom They gasped and sighed at the colours and styles. But all too soon,

The shoes turn round to show sad faces on the other side.

Natalie They began to come back, with glum faces.

Tom These shoes had dents and lumps.

Natalie Creases and bumps.

Tom Wrinkles and folds.

Natalie Dampness and mould.

Tom The material he’d bought had turned out bad.

Music.

Natalie Now Robards was a good man and he was really upset by all the unhappiness he had accidentally caused, so he set about fixing the problems,

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Tom Which took him a long time and was very expensive. At the end of it, nobody would buy anything more from them, and they were left with nothing,

Natalie Save just enough leather to make one last pair of shoes. And although Robards had done no wrong, he said to himself,

Tom ‘What I fool I was to trust that unknown trader.’

Natalie And he went to bed.

Tom Luckily, Dorothy his wife, was very determined and while he was resting, she said to herself,

Natalie ‘I’ll cut out the leather to make these shoes’

She does.

Tom ‘I can’t make any more shoes’,

Natalie Robards cried

Tom ‘It’s time to sell my tools and I will be a Shoemaker no more.’

Natalie ‘Don’t be silly’,

Tom Said his wife

Natalie ‘What else are you going to do?’

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Tom **‘**I don’t know’

Natalie He said

Tom ‘Making shoes is all I know how to do.’

Natalie ‘It’s all we’ve ever done’,

Tom She said.

Music continues. The production box is brought forward.

Natalie Carefully, so it would not crease or snag, Dorothy laid the cut out leather in a storage box, closed and locked the lid, and hid it safely away under his workbench, just in case. No-one would think to look in such a dusty old box, even though that's often where important things are.

‘You should sleep early’,

Tom She said. They knew that they would have to start work as the sun rose.

Natalie As he sat down on the edge of the bed, Robards thought about how they had come to be in such a mess. He would not sleep well with worry, so he put together his hands and wished to heaven, providence and good fortune, ‘For a happy future’.

Amidst all their troubles, with a clear conscience and a light heart, he drifted peaceably off to sleep.

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Music. Dorothy appears.

Tom The night was quiet, not a fox howl, or a cat call, no hooting owl or squawking bird. Just the bedroom door softly opening and closing in a draft. In the morning the Shoemaker's wife, whose name was Dorothy, was awake and up. It was such an important day, that the Shoemakers couldn’t wait for it to begin.

Dorothy narrates the story.

As the sun peeked its bright eyes over the window sill, the Shoemakers peeked back, wide-awake and excited. Robards swung his short legs out of bed, popped his feet into an expertly made pair of slippers, and launched himself in to the room. It was warm already and a basin of warm water waited for him. He washed his face and settled his hair; drew on his clothes and kissed a thank you to his wife. He opened a window, and with a great yawn, breathed in the air and energy he needed to make their good dreams come true that day.

Natalie With nervous determination, he pulled aside the curtain that led to their workshop. He lifted the locked box on to the table, jumped to the top of his cushioned stool and unlocked the box, ready to begin the best shoes he would ever make. But as he unfastened the catches, he heard, instead of the usual clunk, a twinkling of musical lights. And as he opened the lid, instead of a long and tired creak, he heard a waterfall of harps. And when he looked inside, there, to his great wonder, stood the shoes all ready made.

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The shoes have magically appeared inside the box.

Tom The good man knew not what to think at such an odd thing happening, so he looked at the shoes, bemused, and took a long sip of his tea.

Dorothy rushed in to the workshop – she thought the roof was leaking again – but all she saw was her husband, stunned and confused, looking at a pair of brand new, and very shiny shoes. It was impossible that he could have made them in the five minutes he had been there.

The puppeteer presents a shoe and describes its parts.

Natalie He extolled the sole
The magnificent whole
The linings were fine
The puffs were divine
The heels, genteel
The feathers were sealed
The welt was heartfelt
The vamps were so svelte
The top piece was sweet
The quarters, a treat
He saw with one view
That this was a new
And truly miraculous shoe!

Tom There was not one false stitch in the whole job. All was so neat and true, that it was quite the masterpiece.

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Natalie The Shoemaker and his wife could not believe how they had been blessed. Perhaps some passing gypsy or hobo had taken shelter for the night and as payment made these indescribable shoes. Dorothy wanted to take a stroll in them herself, but she knew they had to sell them.

Music. The shop bell sounds. A wealthy lady appears.

Tom That same day a wealthy lady came in to the shop, to buy a pair of shoes. Dorothy showed her the new pair, and when she tried them on, they fitted her perfectly. She was so pleased that she paid twice the usual price, and they all breathed a sigh of relief. With the money, they bought the material they needed to make two pairs more.

The lady exits.

Natalie In the evening, Robards cut out the work, and went to bed early, that he might begin with fresh courage at daybreak; but he was saved the trouble, for when he got up in the morning,

A pink and silver boot appears.

the work was done ready to his hand.

Music. The boot unfolds in to a washing line of boots.

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The whisper soon abounded about Robards and Dorothy Shoemaker's exemplary new-styled footwear, and the bright welcome of the shop bell was heard once more, as buyers came from all around, willing to pay handsomely for their exquisite goods.

The boots on the line walk themselves in to the shop.

Tom And so it went on: what was got ready in the evening was always done by daybreak.

Natalie The good couple thrived, and by their own work and mysterious assistance, regained their honest independence and became once again in comfortable circumstances.

Seasonal music.

Tom Now it happened, one evening, around their celebration of Christmas-time, as he and his wife were sitting by the fire together, that she said to him,

Natalie 'How would it be if we were to sit up tonight to see who it is that lends us such a helping hand.' The Shoemaker liked the thought; so they left a light burning, and hid themselves behind the kitchen curtain, and watched to see what would happen.

Time passes.

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Tom The stove in the kitchen had long gone out, yet the homely smell of its ash still hugged the room. Dorothy and the Shoemaker sat near the curtain to the workshop, warming their hands.

Natalie It had been so quiet for hours that they could almost hear the snow falling from the trees outside and gently brushing against the window. The clock showed five minutes to midnight.

Tom ‘They will not come tonight’,

Natalie Said Robards,

Tom ‘We’ve stayed quiet and still, but whoever it is, has seen us and stayed away. I hope we haven’t scared them.’

Natalie ‘Let’s wait a little longer’,

Tom Said his wife,

Natalie ‘They may yet come.’ The Shoemaker shook his head.

Tom ‘I want to know who is helping us, but I am so tired, if I don’t sleep now, I won’t do my best work tomorrow.’

Natalie ‘You go to bed’,

Tom She said,

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Natalie ‘I’ll wait a little longer and hope to see who it is that is being so kind to us.’ The Shoemaker, thinking this unfair, closed his eyes.

Tom ‘I’ll rest here’,

Natalie He murmered,

Tom ‘Won’t you wake me if anything happens?’

Natalie So, they settled down for a long night.

Tom As the two hands of the clock came to rest together at midnight, from behind the curtain to the workshop, came the soft and clear light of a candle. These generous strangers they had been waiting for had at last arrived. Waking her husband, Dorothy stood and, feeling excited, they peeked through the curtain. They were amazed by what they saw.

Balinese music. The Elves appear and perform a dance.

Natalie Robards and Dorothy had seen nothing like them before. Not human, nor animal, nor much from nature could compare. They shimmered with a wealth of kindness, with warmth, with golden sincerity, with a light that couldn’t be captured and wrought and worn round your neck or on your wrist. They were a new kind of royalty, crowned with generosity and thoughtfulness, and rich with spirit.

The Elves are shown to the audience.

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Tom There were two of them. The first, an Elf Queen, very refined, with beautiful flowers in her hair, and golden leaves, and rainbows.

The Elf Queen is called Kulit. She took the needle and thread in her long and dexterous fingers, and slowly, carefully, stitched together the pieces of the shoe; closing all the gaps. She bowed her head towards this most complicated work, and sang a low and melodious tune.

We see and hear her doing this.

Natalie The second was the Elf King, semi-refined shall we say, with a magnificent moustache, and a bird flying on the wind through his hair.

The Elf King is called Golek. He held the sewn shoe in the air and, with quick and direct actions, hammered the seams flat with his hand. He sang a high pitched and energetic tune as he worked.

We see and hear it.

Tom The Queen and King of the Elves stitched and rapped and tapped away so beautifully, that the Shoemakers were all wonder, and could not look away for astonishment.

Natalie And on they went, until each shoe was finished as if by a master-hand, and stood ready for use upon the table. This was long before daybreak; and then they vanished away as quick as lightning.

The Elves exit. Music.

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Tom The next day, Dorothy said to her husband,

Natalie ‘These magical sprites have made us rich, and we ought to be thankful to them, and do them a good turn if we can. I am quite sorry to see them run about as they do, for they have nothing upon their backs to keep off the cold, and they deserve so much more. I will tell you what I’ll do,

I’ll make them little shirts and coats,
Two vests and robes, I’ll sew them both
Two pairs of stockings, and why don’t you
Design them little pairs of shoes?’

Both **We’ll make them little shirts and coats,**
Two vests and robes, we’ll sew them both
Two pairs of stockings, and why don’t we
Design them pairs of shoes for free?’

Tom **‘I’m glad to do it’,**

Natalie **Robards said,**

Tom **‘And listening every night from bed**
To the hammer tapping out so clear
Has given me a new idea’

Both **We’re glad to do it, both they said**
And listening every night from bed
To the hammer tapping out so clear
Has given us a new idea

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Natalie So they did what they said, and when everything was ready, they laid their presents all together on the table instead of the cut-out work, and then hid themselves away to watch what Kulit and Golek would do.

Enter the Elf Queen and King.

Tom About midnight in they came, and went to sit down to their work as usual; but when they saw the clothes lying there for them, they smiled and laughed, and seemed mightily delighted.

Natalie The clever Shoemakers had sewn them beautiful robes and designed them special shoes that made an amazing sound whenever they moved.

The Elves put on their new clothes.

Tom In the twinkling of an eye, they dressed themselves, and then they danced and capered and sprang about, as merry as could be; until at last they danced out of the door, and away across the river.

Natalie The Shoemakers never saw the Elf Queen and King again, but they remembered always how they had helped each other.

Tom And they remembered how happy they were with their new and amazing shoes, that made an incredible sound whenever they moved. And they remembered the dance that they did.

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Natalie And this is the dance that the Elves did.

Music. The puppeteers perform a tap dance. Bows.

The End.

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