

A Reconstructed Fairy Tale

by Penny Humphrey

Hans lay beside Anna gently purring in his sleep, Anna turned to look at him. Moonlight was flooding through the inadequate curtains and she thought for the hundredth time that she must do something about them.

Anna leaned up on one elbow and studied Hans critically as he continued to purr, mouth slightly open. In no way did he resemble the striking young man she married forty years ago; now with receding hair, wrinkled face and weighty. Still, she mused that was probably her fault for cooking such big meals for him over the years. Life had been a struggle for them in the little German village of Spreewald and she knew only too well that she was getting tired and old as well. Their looks may have changed but their love remained steadfast.

She sighed and turned onto her back, it was going to be a long night, no food for tomorrow and no money for the rent. She also worried that Hans looked tired and was not himself these days.

If Hans had a fault it was that he was too kind. He was a shoemaker and yesterday he gave away his last pair of shoes to a needy lady in the village.

He had just enough leather left to make one last pair of small shoes. He cut out the pieces before he retired for the night.

As she lay in the creaky old bed staring up at the ceiling, Anna heard noise coming from downstairs. Mice maybe but a little loud for that. Not wanting to wake Hans and too frightened to go and investigate, she stayed rigid in the bed until morning.

The next day Hans went into his workshop and found to his utter surprise, a beautifully made pair of shoes lying on the bench. Within an hour they were sold and he had enough money to pay half of the rent, buy some potatoes and a larger piece of leather from which he could make two pairs of shoes.

As before he cut out the leather for two pairs of shoes and laid them carefully on the bench and as before the next morning there was not one but two pairs of beautifully made shoes waiting for him. He sold the shoes and bought enough leather for four pairs.

That night after he had cut out the leather, he crept out of bed when Anna was asleep and to his amazement, there in the workshop were three very small winged men sitting on the bench, legs crossed, working away at the shoes and humming softly to themselves. He made them all cups of cocoa which he made in egg cups before they flew out of the window.

The next morning Hans told Anna about the three men who had told him they were in fact elves. Anna boxed his ears and took him straight to the doctor who referred him to a consultant under the mental health act.