*The Shoemaker and the Elves*

Kathy Pingel

CHARACTERS

\*Stage Direction Reader Annalise \*\*Customer

Narrator #1 Greta \*\*Wealthy Customer

Narrator #2 Bruno \*\*Mrs. Volkenant

Narrator #3 Schotzy \*\*Mrs. Englebrecht

Elf #1 Maria

Elf #2 Frieda

Elf #3 The Shoemaker

Elf #4 Sophia, his wife

\*There can be two Stage Direction readers

\*\*These are smaller roles that can be read by the narrators.

SCENE ONE: The Path, Afternoon

*This is a path through a field that leads from school to town. Four elves are sitting in a lump in the middle of the path. Their clothes need repair.*

*They are fast asleep, and some are snoring. The Narrators stroll on but are careful to side-skirt the sleeping elves.*

Narrator #1. At the edge of a small town is a well-worn path. By day, the path is used by children tromping to and from school.

Narrator #2. By night the path is used by fairies, pixies and elves returning from their

nightly escapades.

Narrator #3. Fairies, of course, do mischief, while pixies are only interested in dancing

until dawn. Elves, however, secretly work at night to assist the unfortunate.

Narrator #1. This band of messy elves worked into the early hours of the morning to harvest the crops of a widowed farm wife.

Narrator #2. She slept fitfully, worried about what to do about the wheat in the field.

Narrator #3. When she awoke, she found the wheat bundled up in the barn. She was very confused, but very relieved.

Narrator #1. And very thankful.

Narrator #2. The elves worked so long that they had to wait until the children were in school before using the path to travel home.

Narrator #3. They had worked so hard they stopped at the side of the path for a short nap which lasted well into the afternoon.

*A school bell rings several times off in the distance and then the sound of children just released from school can be heard.*

*Elf #1 and Elf #2 wake up to the sound of the bell and look in the direction from which the sound originated.*

*Then it occurs to them that it is late and soon children will be coming home down that very path.*

*Elf #3 and Elf #4 are still sleeping.*

Elf #1. Wake up, lazy elves!

Elf #2. It is well past three.

Elf #1. I heard a school bell!

Elf #3. Just, please, let me sleep!

Elf #4. I stayed up all night—

Elf. #3. Worked my hands to the bone.

Elf #3 & #4. So, get out of our sight

And leave us alone!

Elf #1. Fine. Stay out in the open.

Elf #2. So what if they find you?

Elf #3. (*Moaning.)* Silence is golden! Must I always remind you?

Elf #4. (*Sitting up and hearing the sound of approaching children.*) I hear it.

Elf #1. Beware all you elves!

Elf #3. Is this a bad dream?

Elf #2. So, quick hide yourselves.

Elf #1. We cannot be seen.

*All elves exit.*

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*Greta and Annalise have just gotten out of school. They carry their schoolbooks and lunch pails.*

*They are dressed in clean clothing, but their dresses are a little tight on them, and they are barefooted.*

*Greta walks at a brisk pace. Annalise drags behind when they enter the stage.*

Greta. Hurry along, now Annalise. Mama said to come home directly after school.

Annalise. I don’t remember hearing her say that we had to run all the way. Slow down!

Greta. I promised Papa I would sweep the shop.

Annalise. If there are no customers to track in dirt, there is no need to sweep. Sit just for five minutes.

Greta. You’ll get your dress dirty. Come on, I’ll carry your books.

Annalise. (*Sits defiantly.)* You just want to get home before the other children catch up to us.

Greta. So what if I do?

Annalise. Greta, you shouldn’t care so much about what others think. It’s not a sin to be poor.

Greta. Yes, but to be the shoemaker’s daughters and to walk about barefooted. It’s embarrassing and I don’t want to be teased. Let’s go.

Annalise. All right. (*Holds out her hands.)* Help me up.

*Greta holds out her hands to assist her, but Annalise pulls her to the ground and tickles her.*

*She does enjoy this despite her objections.*

Greta. (*laughs)* Let me go, silyl girl. Stop it. This isn’t fair.

Annalise. Oh, so now it’s a sin to be poor and a sin to laugh? (*Overdramatically.)* This is a cruel world.

*She renews her tickling efforts.*

Greta. No, no! Laughter is wonderful. (*Breaks away.)* And it’s free!

Annalise. Just like the smell of warm bread! Doesn’t cost a penny.

*They both lay down in the comfortable grass.*

Greta. And the feel of the grass underneath your feet . . .

Annalise. Or a brook as it ripples over your toes . . .

Both. Anyone can afford it!

*They are both relaxed and happy. The other children enter and put a stop to that.*

*Immediately upon their entrance, Annalise and Greta sit up.*

Maria. Oh, look. It’s some trash right here in the middle of the path.

Schotzy. Should we go around?

Freida. Just ignore them. Poor little mud puppies; they have no manners.

Maria. They have no money.

Bruno. And they have no shoes!

Schotzy. How odd. I thought their father was a shoemaker.

Bruno. Yes, but he is such a soft-hearted soul, he gives shoes away to any beggar who comes in off the street.

Schotzy. Soft-hearted or soft-headed?

Frieda. Stop it. Our mama says we should be kind to the poor, right Maria?

Maria. Yes. (*Quoting her mama*:) “The least we can do is offer a sympathetic word.”

Bruno. Oh, I can do that. I have a sympathetic word. Annalise, Greta—you’re not *too*

shabby.

Frieda. That’s four words.

Maria. And besides, they *are* shabby. It’s impolite to lie, Bruno.

Annalise. Stop it right now.

Schotzy. Or you’ll do what? Throw your shoe at him?

Frieda. Oh, wait, you don’t have a shoe.

Greta. No, we won’t throw anything. (to Frieda:) But she will tell your mama that you steal cookies when the baker isn’t looking. (To Bruno:) And she’ll tell your papa that you kissed Helga in the cloakroom. (To Schotzy:) And she’ll tell your mama that you have to sit with the first graders for math lessons. (To Maria:) And—

Maria. You won’t tell my mama anything because your kind doesn’t come to our door.

Annalise. But I’m sure you’ll want to know why you got a black eye.

Maria. But I don’t have a black eye.

Annalise. Not yet.

Maria. Just stay away from me. You don’t scare me, Miss Annalise Dirty Feet!

*All four surround the sisters and begin to chant:*

All. Barefoot, barefoot

Walking down the lane.

No shoes, no boots

Now, isn’t it a shame?

*The children exit in a cloud of malicious laughter. The two sisters watch for a moment before speaking.*

Greta. She’s right. Our kind doesn’t come to her door.

Annalise. She’s safe because she’s rich, not because she’s right. I’d rather be right.

*She exits. Greta sighs.*

Greta. I’d rather be rich.

*She exits.*

*The four elves re-enter and watch the very last moment of Greta’s exit.*

Elf #1. I like Annalise.

She’s clever and spunky!

Elf #2. Though her troubles increase,

And she’s clearly unlucky.

Elf #3. Let’s follow them back.

See what we can do.

Elf #4. Find out what they lack,

And then give them two!

*They all gather around and put their hands to the center to make a pact.*

All. Just three nights

To make it right!

SCENE TWO: The Shoemaker’s Shop, Evening

*In this scene we see the Shoemaker’s shop. This is where he sells his shoes. There is a workroom over to the side where he cuts, sews and soles the shoes. And the family lives in rooms at the back of the shop.*

*Mr. Shoemaker is sweeping up. Unbeknownst to him there are elves are hidden in various parts of the shop.*

Narrator #1. The Shoemaker used to be a successful shop owner. However, for the past year he cannot seem to sell a thing.

Narrator #2. Rather than let his shoes sit and gather dust, he gives them away to those in need.

Narrator #3. As he finishes his nightly clean-up, Sophia, his wife comes in from their house at the back of the shop.

Shoemaker. Are they all tucked in?

Sophia. Yes. They’ve had their baths and stories. Oh, and Greta finally told me what was wrong.

Shoemaker. I knew something was bothering her. What was it?

Sophia. They were teased on the way home from school again.

Shoemaker. Was it that Bruno? I have a good mind to go over to his house and—

Sophia. She didn’t say who it was. Said it didn’t matter. It’s almost like she’s given up.

Shoemaker. I know how she feels. How did we get to this point? I’ve worked hard all my life

—five years as an apprentice.

Sophia. Three years as a traveling cobbler with a cart. Remember that broken down old horse you had?

Both. (*With fond laughter*.) Charlemagne!

Sophia. People said you were the best shoemaker in town.

Shoemaker. And then I opened my own shop. What a fine day that was. (*Sadly*.) I make the same

shoes I always have. How come no one is buying? Do you know I only have enough leather in the back to make one pair of shoes.

Sophia. Just one pair?

Shoemaker. If we don’t sell this pair, Sophia, we will have to move out of this place, and—

Sophia. Don’t invite trouble. Of course, we’ll sell them. Cut them out tonight and sew them in the morning when you are fresh from a good night’s sleep. (*She sees that he is still very*

*discouraged*.) After all, you are the best.

Shoemaker. Oh, is that what everyone still says?

Sophia. I don’t know about everyone, but that’s what I hear from your two most loyal admirers.

Shoemaker. Oh, and who might they be?

Sophia. Why Greta and Annalise, of course.

Shoemaker. (*Her total faith in him restore his energy.)* All right, Sophia, I’ll make a pair worthy of nobility.

Sophia. Come, I’ll help trim the edges.

*The elves enter as Sophia and her husband exit.*

Elf #1. I’m glad that we’re here.

Elf #2. We’re in just the right place.

Elf #3. Our job is quite clear—

We’ll cut, sew and lace.

Elf #4. Two shoes—each fit for a king

Ones they just can’t resist.

Elf #1. Which elf should begin?

Elf #4. You go first, I insist.

*They exit towards the workroom.*

SCENE THREE: The Shoemaker’s Shop, Early Morning

Narrator #1. The next morning, the Shoemaker awoke early.

Narrator #2. He was determined to do his best.

Narrator #3. Before he entered the shop, he called out to his family:

Shoemaker. *(Offstage.)* You get the girls ready.

*He walks through the shop to the backroom, saying:*

Shoemaker. I have some shoes to make and I’m feeling lucky!

Sophia. (*Entering*.) Girls, you’re late. (*Cheerfully*.) Get up, lazy bones!

*The Shoemaker re-enters carrying a stunning pair of shoes.*

Shoemaker. Sophia, look! (*With urgency.)* Greta, Annalise, come here!

Sophia. You were up early this morning. These are incredible.

Shoemaker. I agree, but--

*The girls enter. They are sleepyheads.*

Annalise. We’re sorry, Papa. We didn’t mean to sleep in.

Shoemaker. No, it’s not that. Look!

Greta. Papa, those are the most beautiful shoes I’ve ever seen.

Annalise. Oh, what tiny stitches. How did you do it?

Shoemaker. I didn’t.

Sophia. These truly are fit for a king!

Shoemaker. I just wonder—

*A wealthy-looking customer enters the shop.*

Sophia. Good morning. Welcome! My husband will take care of you. *Girls*.

*That is their signal to leave, but they are too much in awe of the wealthy customer to move.*

Sophia. Girls! Time for breakfast.

*She guides them out.*

Customer. Hello. I don’t believe we’ve met.

Shoemaker. No, I’m pleased to serve you.

*As he bows, the customer has a clear view of the shoes.*

Shoemaker. My name is—

Customer. Hold on a moment. (*Crosses over to the shoes.)* These are, well, these are truly magnificent. Such intricate workmanship. These must have taken weeks to create.

Shoemaker. Actually—

Customer. Well, nothing else will do. I must have them.

Shoemaker. But don’t you want to try them on?

Customer. No time. Let’s just agree on a price. How does 50 florins sound?

Shoemaker. But—

Customer. You’re right, of course. These are one of a kind, a work of art really. How about 100 florins?

Shoemaker. Sold!

Customer. Excellent. (*Gathers up shoes and begins to exit.)* Oh, I will recommend you to all my friends, naturally.

Shoemaker. Thank you. Thank you kindly!

*The customer exits, and the Shoemaker stands rather dumbfounded for a moment. Sophia and the girls re-enter.*

Sophia. Did (s)he?

Shoemaker. Yes! Sophia, look!

*He shows her the money.*

Sophia. One hundred florins?!

Annalise. Hurray!

Greta. We’re rich!

Sophia. I told you you’re the best.

Shoemaker. I wish I could take the credit, but I did not create those shoes.

Greta. Papa?

Annalise. How can that be?

Sophia. Girls, enough questions. You go off to school and your Papa and I will solve

this mystery.

Greta. All right. Goodbye.

Annalise. You’re still the best, Papa.

*They exit.*

Shoemaker. I swear to you, I left the leather I cut out on the workbench, and when I came downstairs this morning, the shoes were there. All finished. It must be magic.

Sophia. Humph. Magic and hard work, I’ll bet. Take the money you made today and buy the finest leather you can afford, cut it the same as before and leave it out on the bench. Only this time, we’ll stay up and watch what happens when the rest of the world sleeps.

*They exit.*

SCENE FOUR: The Workshop, later that night.

Narrator. #1: On the second evening, the elves found the leather that the Shoemaker had bought and cut.

Narrator #2. They set to work without wasting a moment. Their tiny hands fairly flew as they made the shoes.

Narrator #3. Only this time they were observed by the Shoemaker and his wife who were hidden away.

Elf #1. Nail this, nail that.

Tiny nails:

Tap, tap, tap.

Elf #2. This pair needs a fancy bow.

Thread a needle.

Sew, sew, sew.

Elf #3. These will go to a fancy, dress ball,

Dance all night in a royal hall.

Elf #4. These will march in a military band,

Stand at attention, shiny and grand.

Elf #2. Quick there’s daylight,

Time to take flight.

Elf #1. We worked one night,

We’ll work one other.

Elf #3. Then our work

Elf #4. Is done and over.

*They exit.*

*The Shoemaker and Sophia come out of hiding and nod at each other because they understand the gift that has been given to them.*

SCENE FIVE: The Shop

Narrator #1. The Shoemaker and his wife eagerly put the shoes on display.

Narrator #2. News of the fashionable shoes spread very quickly.

Narrator #3. The next morning the shop was buzzing with activity. (As the Wealthy Customer:) Do you have this in a smaller size?

Sophia. Be with you in a moment, sir/ma’am.

Wealthy Customer. I’d like to order a dozen of these!

Shoemaker. I’m sure we can accommodate you!

*Frieda and Maria pull their parents into the shop. Annalise enters from the back and stays away, just far enough to hear their interchange.*

Frieda. These are the shoes. Everyone wants them.

Mrs. Englebrecht. Oh, but they look so expensive.

Maria. Don’t you want us to have the best, Mama?

Mrs. Englebrecht. Why certainly, but we simply can’t afford these.

*Annalise approaches them.*

Annalise. Hello, Frieda, Maria, Mrs. Englebrecht. May I help you?

Mrs. Englebrecht. We were just admiring your fine shoes, but I was trying to explain to the girls

how money is a bit tight this month--

Frieda. Quiet, Mama!

*They pull her over to the side as Mrs. Volkenant (Bruno and Schotzy’s mother) enters the shop.*

Mrs. Volkenant. Bruno! Schotzy! Come in here. Surely this fine establishment is not the one that you told me belongs to the two barefooted girls.

*Bruno and Schotzy enter sheepishly. They wish they were anywhere else.*

Bruno. Yes, Mother. It belongs to them.

Schotzy. I don’t understand. They’re the two worst dressed, and ill-cared for children in town.

*Greta enters and heads in their direction.*

Mrs. Volkenant. That is a most ridiculous story. I should punish you for telling tales.

Greta. Hello, Bruno, Schotzy, Mrs. Volkenant. May I help you?

Mrs. Volkenant. I should apologize for my children. No manners at all. They had some outrageous story about barefooted shoe store owners.

*She laughs a little too loudly. Her children are mortified.*

Wealthy Customer. I want to buy them all! Name your price.

*The Shoemaker and Wealthy customer shake hands. As the Shoemaker gathers up the shoes for the*

*customer, Sophia approaches the Englebrechts and Volkenants.*

Sophia. I’m sorry, but as you’ve undoubtedly heard, we’ve sold out. May I see you to the door?

*She ushers them out the door as the Shoemaker escorts the shoe-laden customer to the door in a much more courteous way. After waving goodbye and shutting the shop door, he turns to his family.*

Shoemaker. Now that I know what people want to buy, I’m certain I can make shoes to suit them all!

*Sophia, Greta, and Annalise all hug him and surround him with congratulations and dancing.*

Annalise. Wait! Didn’t you say the elves would be back for one last night of work?

Sophia. We don’t need their help now. Your papa knows just what to do.

Annalise. However, we should thank them, don’t you think?

Sophia. She’s right, you know. I did notice they were in need of new clothes.

Shoemaker. New shoes!

Girls. And something good to eat!

*The shoemaker’s family exits as the rest of the characters enter the stage to help the narrators finish the story.*

Mrs. Volkenant. So the shoemaker and his wife devised a plan to surprise the elves.

Mrs. Englebrecht. Sophia sewed all afternoon, and when she was finished, she had four fine jackets and four fine pairs of trousers for the elves.

*Sophia enters with folded clothing and lays out four separate piles on the workbench.*

Wealthy customer. The shoemaker crafted four fine pairs of shoes.

*The shoemaker enters with the shoes and divides them up as well.*

Maria. Greta and Annalise baked sweet cakes-

Frieda. -and set them out with glasses of lemonade.

*Greta and Annalise enter with a tray of miniature cakes and lemonade that they set on the workbench.*

Bruno. The family put out their gifts-

Schotzy. -and waited for the elves to appear.

Narrator #1. But hid themselves so they would not frighten the little creatures.

Narrator #2. The elves entered the room, prepared to work—

Narrator #3. `--but instead of giving to others, others had given to them.

Elf #1. Is this a surprise?

Elf #2. Could this be for us?

Elf #3. Can I believe my own eyes?

Elf #4. You can. Sure Enough!

*The elves enthusiastically gather up their presents and start to leave.*

Elf #1. So, farewell everyone but,

Before we head out-

-

Elf #2. Some words of advice. There can be no doubt-

Elf #3. Good luck is for those who work hard and declare it.

Elf #4. So listen to us:

All: “If the shoe fits, wear it!”