who was helping them to make the shoes. They wanted to know so that they could say ‘Thank you’ to them.

Then one night, after he had cut out the pieces of leather and put them on his bench, the shoemaker said to his wife, ‘My dear, I have an idea. Let us hide behind this curtain and watch to see who it is that is making these beautiful shoes for us.’

The shoemaker’s wife lit some candles so that they could see what was happening and then they both hid behind the curtain and waited.

As the clock struck midnight, the door opened and in scampered two tiny elves with sharp pointy ears and long pointy toes. They clambered onto the bench and sat cross-legged in front of the leather pieces. Out came tiny needles, scissors, thread and hammers. In, out, in, out, stitch, stitch, stitch went their little needles. Tip, tap, tip, tap, bang, bang, went went their tiny hammers. The shoemaker and his wife stood really, really still and held their breath. They did not want their little visitors to hear them. When the elves had finished a whole row of beautiful shoes, they joined hands and danced around them, chitter-chattering and kicking their pointy toes in the air.

Suddenly, the clock chimed, ‘bong, bong’. Away they scampered, their work complete.

The shoemaker and his wife came out from behind the curtain.

‘How kind those tiny elves are,’ smiled the shoemaker, ‘I wonder how we can thank them for their hard work?’

‘I have a splendid idea,’ said his wife, ‘Did you see how little they were wearing? They have hardly any clothes to keep their bodies warm and their little pointy toes must be very cold in winter. I think we should make them some clothes and shoes.’

So the shoemaker set to work sewing the tiniest pair of shoes he had ever made. It was hard work with his stiff, old fingers but he managed. His wife took out her sewing box and found lots of different coloured threads and fabrics and sewed a splendid outfit for each elf.

When the clothes and shoes were finished, the shoemaker arranged them on the bench and his wife stood a mirror beside them. Then they hid behind the curtain once again. Just as the clock struck twelve, in scampered the elves. They clambered onto the bench and held up their little arms in surprise when they saw the tiny outfits and shoes. Then they began to dance, picking up the clothes and waving them in the air, gigging and chitter-chattering in their funny elfin language.

When they were quite out of breath, they sat down and began to try on the clothes. They strutted and posed in front of the mirror, looking very proud. Next they pulled on the tiny shoes. They fit perfectly. The elves linked arms and twirled round and round in excitement wearing their fine outfits.

Then the clock struck, ‘bong, bong’, and off they went, chitter-chattering and giggling on their way. The shoemaker and his wife smiled with joy. They never saw their little visitors again, but from that day onwards they lived happily ever after.

Adapted by Jean Evans, April 2007