

DÓRA GIMESI

# THE FAIRY'S BOOTS

ILLUSTRATED BY KATALIN SZEGEDI

© Orchard Literary Agency



© Orchard Literary Agency



DÓRA GIMESI

# THE FAIRY'S BOOTS



ILLUSTRATED BY KATALIN SZEGEDI

ISBN 978-963-410-410-0

Published by Pagony Kiadó, 2008  
www.pagony.hu

Text © Dóra Gimesi, 2014  
Illustrations © Katalin Szegedi, 2018  
© Pozsonyi Pagony Kft., 2018

© Orchard Literary Agency





Once upon a time there lived a fantastically famous cobbler. His workshop was to be found in a tiny little street in a tiny little town, and there he sat all they day long hammering, cutting, heeling and repairing shoe after shoe after shoe. There wasn't a broken heel or a scuffed toe that he couldn't mend in a minute, but the thing he liked to do the very best in the world was to make shoes to measure. Now that was a real art form! A customer could come along with feet as flat as pancakes, or bunions as big as onions, and the cobbler would stitch a pair of shoes to fit any foot. He'd received invitations from all over the world to make shoes of all sorts in cities as far and wide as Milan, Paris and Kuala Lumpur, too, but he never went anywhere. He preferred to stay in the tiny little town, with his workshop door always propped wide open and the sound of French chansons tinkling from an old gramophone as the fantastically famous cobbler hammered and smiled, smiled and hammered from morn to night.

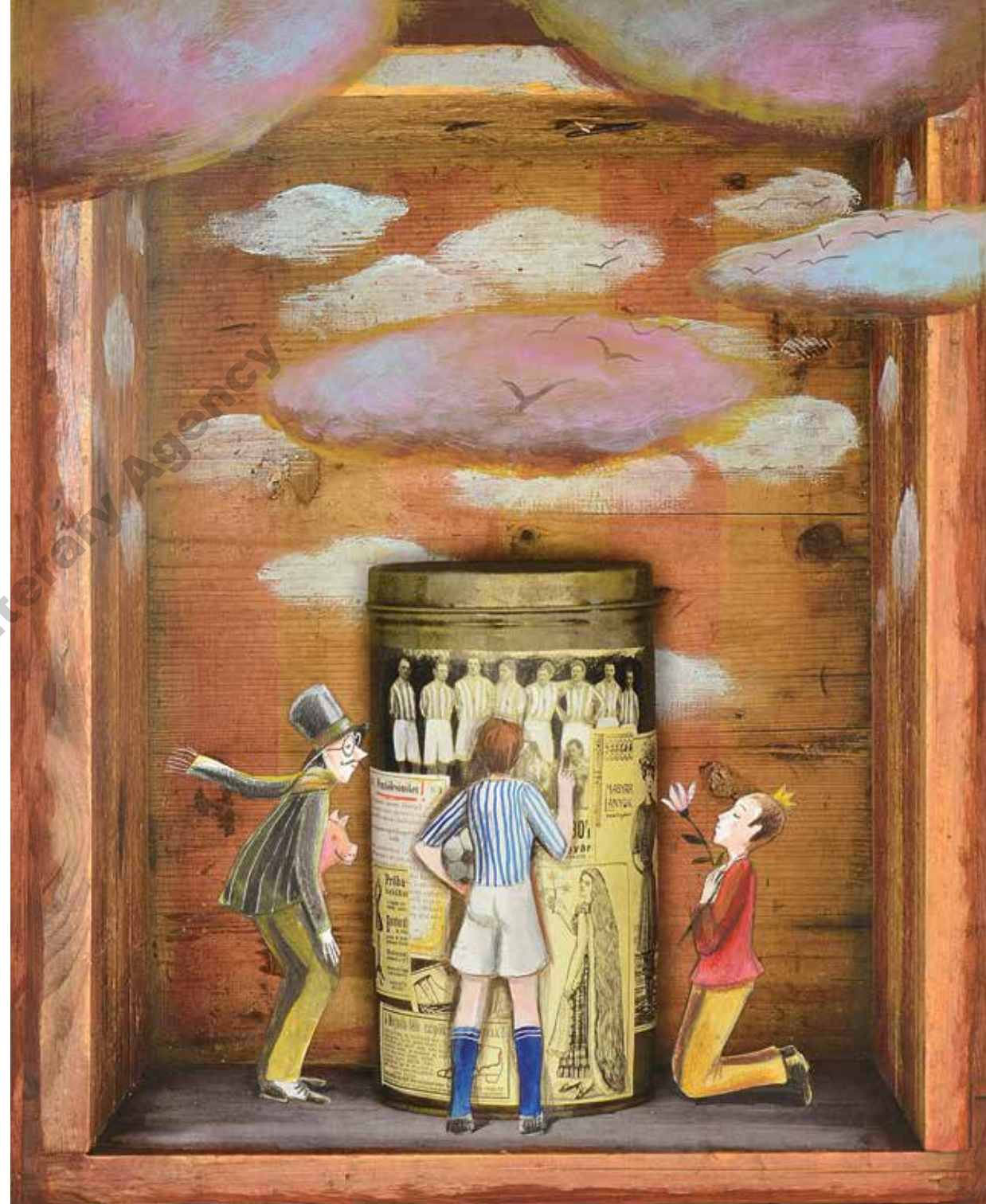
This fantastically famous cobbler had three fine sons. Each boy was his pride and joy, and he planned to teach each one to make fine footwear as he had been taught by his own father when he was just a boy himself. And his father had been taught by his grandfather, and his grandfather by his great-grandfather, and that had been the way of the world as long as anyone could recall. Faded photographs of grandfathers, great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers hung proudly on the walls of the cramped workshop along with a selection of antique and ancient tools of the cobbling trade. The cobbler took the very best care of all his old tools and would often tell his three fine sons: “Your great-great-grandfather used this very same needle to stitch a pair of flea-skin shoes for a fairy-tale princess. Your great-grandfather used this self same form to fashion a pair of glass slippers for the fair Cinderella. And your grandfather’s handiwork was danced to pieces by no less than twelve princesses at a royal ball! Because our family has always worked for fairies, princesses and giants... and that you must never forget! When you are all grown men, these tools will be yours and you will learn to use them well!”



The only problem was that not one of his three fine sons had even the slightest ambition or wish to follow in their father's cobbling footsteps with all that tinkering and tailoring, stitching and fixing, buttons and buckles and bows! As soon as the first few whiskers appeared in their chins, they all ran as far away as fast as they could from their father's workshop in the tiny little street in the tiny little town. The eldest son became a bank manager, the middle son a footballer, and the youngest of the three married a princess and from that day on didn't do a single thing but lounge around on an over-stuffed couch. "Go out into the world as you will, you ungrateful boys!" the cobbler shouted after them. "And never darken my door again! You are no longer sons of mine!" And with that, he stormed back into his cobbler's shop and slammed the door shut with a resounding bang.



© Orchard Literary Agency





Days turned to months and months turned to years, and the world moved steadily on. The once tiny little town grew and grew around the still tiny little workshop. The first thing to go was the walnut tree outside the window that always kept the workshop cool in the hottest summers. It was chopped down to make way for blocks of flats so tall that one day the cobbler glanced out of his open door and could no longer see the sun. The old place was now surrounded by bank managers, princesses and footballers who rushed up and down in glass palaces all day long, trains rattled, trams turned, racing cars raced around, and fewer and fewer folk called on the cobbler to stitch shoes for their feet as flat as pancakes or to fit bunions the size of onions.



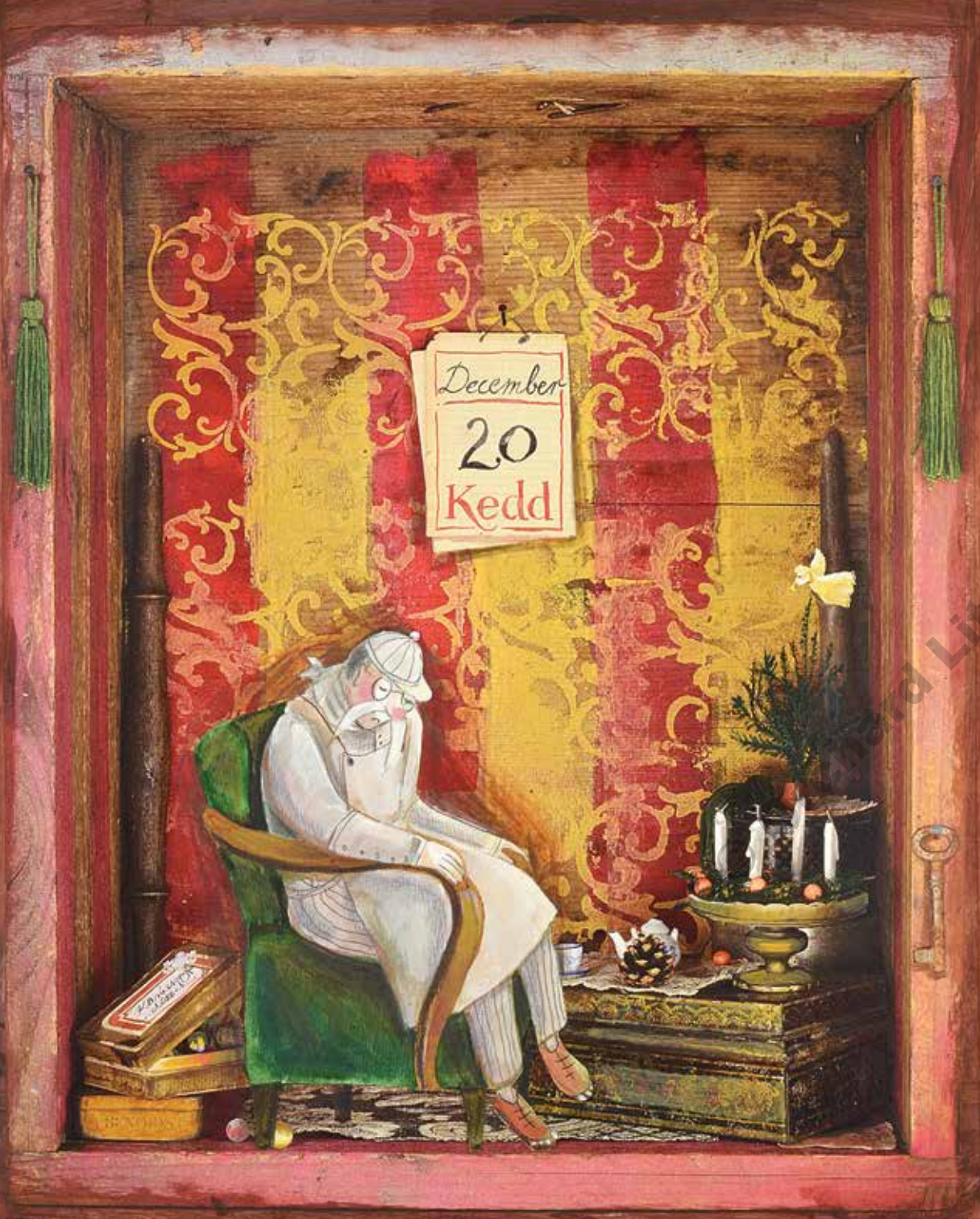


I don't know whether loneliness came first or perhaps grumpiness. Whatever the case, the door to the workshop stood open much less now than before, the old gramophone had long since ground to a halt, and the old cobbler no longer smiled but grumbled and hammered, hammered and grumbled. He grumbled and grouched and said all the kinds of things that grown-ups say like back when I was a boy, and young people today, and the world nowadays is all hustle and bustle! And the more he grumbled, the fewer people came into the cobbler's shop to have a heel repaired or a sole patched or simply just to pass the time of day. The cobbler was left all alone and lonely with his great-grandfathers' tools. He was as alone and lonely as anybody could be in the centre of a city.

"The devil take you all!" he thought one day. "He can stitch your shoes from now on!"

And with that, he closed his shop up, locked the door with a hefty green padlock, and never opened for business again. As days turned to months and months turned to years, the once shiny tools began to rust, the silken ribbons were chewed up by moths, and the colourful swatches of leather became hard and tough just like the old man's heart.





And then, one chilly Tuesday in December, only a handful of days before Christmas, there came a knock on the old workshop door.

“We’re closed!” the cobbler bellowed.

There was, after all, a sign hanging on the door that said, in bold red letters: CLOSED. But, instead of stopping, the knocking carried on and very soon became battering.

“I’m still not opening it!” the cobbler grouched, and turned his back to the door. “Please, just leave me in peace!”

The knocking suddenly stopped.

“I soon scared them off!” the cobbler said in a satisfied mutter, but not even he knew what had hardened his heart so. He sat back in his worn, green armchair and closed his old eyes.

Then he heard a very strange noise indeed. It sounded like someone tapping on the window pane. The rhythm sounded oddly familiar.

“That’s a French chanson!” the old man said, immediately recognising the tune, and he was so taken aback that he opened his eyes in an instant.

He turned towards the window and was surprised to see a red-faced and slightly breathless fairy staring right back at him. Her lace dress appeared almost iridescent in the dark blue of winter, and her wings fluttered faster than the busiest hummingbird’s.

The cobbler knew from the start that she had to be a fairy because what other manner of woman would float outside his window in a dress of lace on a winter’s night. He could still remember the many fairies he’d met as a much younger man, but the passing years and troubling times had made him forget all about them.

He took a step towards the window and said:

“We’re closed to fairies, too!”

And SLUP!, he pulled the blinds down.



Luckily this fairy was made of tougher stuff and wasn't about to be shaken off so easily. She wasn't as young as she had once been, and she'd come across her fair share of hard-hearted old men in the course of her long career.

"What do you mean, closed?!" she shouted, and began to beat so hard that she was in danger of waking the sleeping city.

Not knowing what else to do, the cobbler was forced to roll the blinds back up and open the window.

"It's no use you wasting your time here, miss! I don't need rescuing!" he said in a fiercely unfriendly tone.

The flying fairy made an elegant landing right in the middle of the room.

"Save you?!" she sighed, and shook her head in disapproval. "Who on earth would want to save you? I only came here because I need a pair of seven-mile boots!"

"I've retired," the cobbler informed her, and he could feel his blood pressure rising fast. "And what do you mean, you don't want to save me? Isn't that what fairies do? Aren't they supposed to visit hard-hearted old men on Christmas Eve and save them?"

The fairy pulled a funny face and started to count on her spindly fingers.



"One: it's not Christmas for a couple of days yet. Two: I've saved so many hard-hearted old men in my time that I've had quite enough for this life. I've retired, too. You can grouch and grumble as much as you like for all I care, I'm not going to move as much as my little finger for you!"

"So if you've retired, what on earth do you want with a pair of seven-mile boots?" the cobbler asked, because he was increasingly intrigued by the oddly unfriendly fairy.

"What for? What for?! Why, to see the world, of course! You don't think I'm just going to sit at home and knit spider silk all

day now, do you, just because I've retired? I've still got so much I want to do, like travel to Milan and Paris and Kuala Lumpur! And I want to climb the Himalayas... or at least Mont Blanc!"

This so surprised the the cobbler that he even forgot to grumble. His hands went automatically to a drawer that needed a good tug to reveal its contents of leather swatches, paper patterns and his great-grandfathers' tools. The two of them did not speak again that night. The cobbler carefully measured the fairy's feet (she

wore 38s) and quickly started to cut and stitch away while the fairy sat herself down in the armchair and whistled a selection of French chansons. And so the night passed, and the day that followed.

And as the second day moved into the afternoon, the cobbler found himself whistling along, too. He was surprised at first and then simply shrugged his shoulders. The fairy didn't say a word. The two of them whistled their way through the afternoon in perfect harmony.

By the time the third day arrived, the boots were very nearly complete. The cobbler had skilfully sewn them from nine types of leather, used seven kinds of nails to strengthen their soles, put a zip on one side, on the other side buttons, and they were laced up the middle with unbreakable laces woven from the finest thread of gold. The cobbler hammered the very last tiny nail into a boot heel and gave a wry smile. Then he glanced out of the window, and saw the snowy city as beautiful once more. He even liked the look of the trams, racing cars and the towering glass palaces.

"I've been called before now to work in Milan, Paris and Kuala Lumpur, but I never went," he whispered to himself. "But it's quite possible that there's a beautiful world out there."





The fairy at last tried on her seven-mile boots. They were the perfect fit and so comfortable!

“I’ll send you a postcard!” she trilled, and fluttered out of the front door.

The cobbler watched through the window as she walked away in the snow leaving a trail of tiny black footprints across endless carpet of white.

The old man let out a loud sigh and closed the window. He sat back down in the armchair and tried to grumble and grouch, but he somehow couldn’t manage to muster as much as a mutter. The lilting tune of the French chanson kept creeping back into his mind.

By the time morning came around, the cobbler knew what it was he wanted to do. He leapt out of the armchair, gathered up all of his great-grandfathers’ tools and set hard to work. The first pair of shoes he made were of the finest suede and all the owner had to do was click their heels together and they would receive as much gold as they could carry. Then he hammered thunder into a pair of running shoes, and whoever put them on would run faster than flash lightning. The last pair he made were slippers in the shape of rabbits from the softest and richest velvet he could find. When all three pairs were complete, he carefully placed them in boxes and parcelled them up before sitting down to stitch his final creations: a pair of seven-mile boots exactly the same as those he had crafted for the fairy. These boots, however, were in his size: 46!



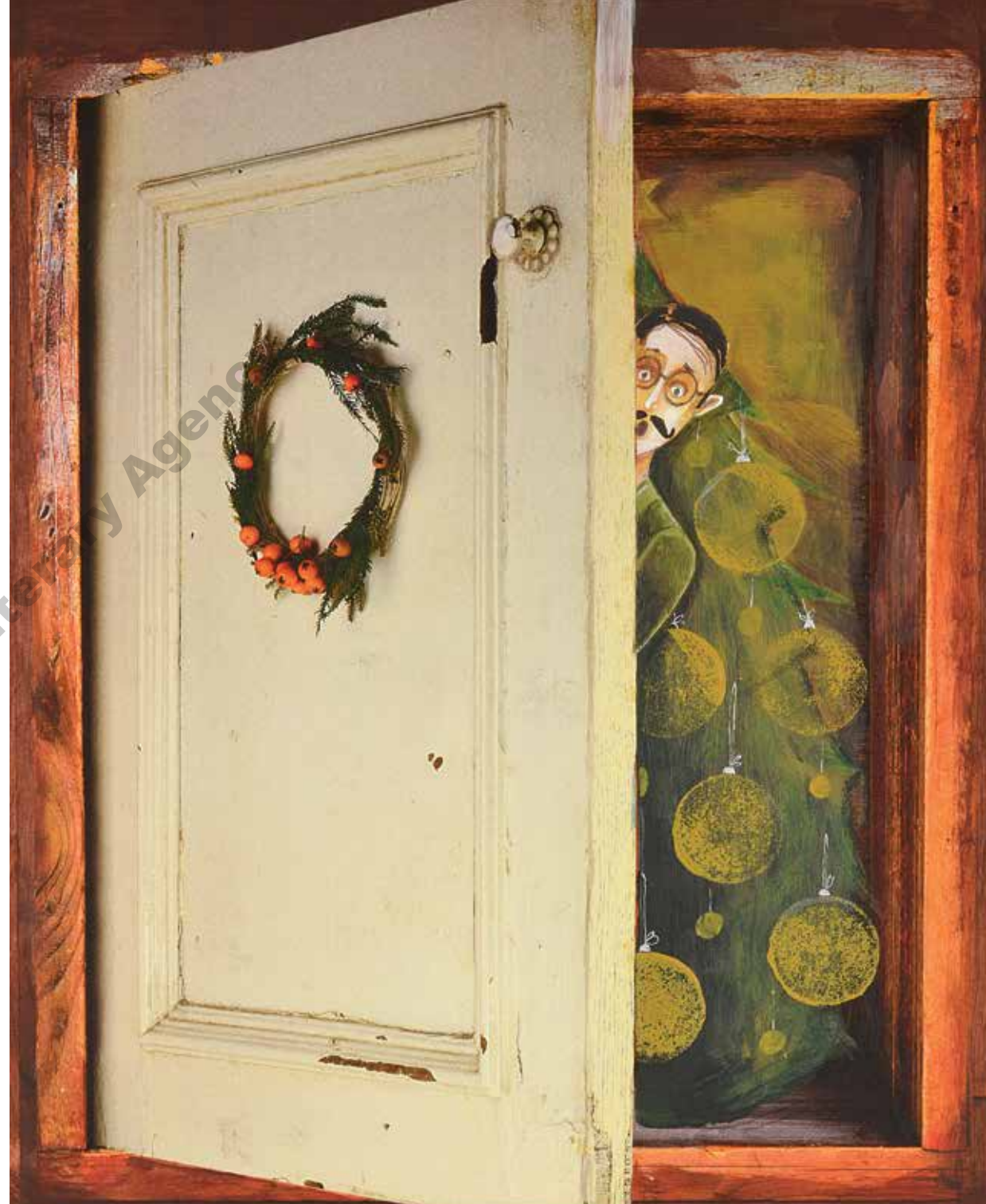
The very second he put down his tools, he pulled his new boots on, pulled the blinds down, and stepped out into the crispy snow. It was Christmas morning.

His first trip was to see his eldest son, the bank manager, who lived at the other end of the world. He was about to leave the parcel on his son's doorstep, when the door swung unexpectedly open.

“How wonderful to see you, Father!” the bank manager exclaimed, and he invited the old man into his home. “The others will be so pleased to see you here when they arrive!”

The three sons, you see, always gathered at Christmas time to celebrate together, but their festivities were always tinged with sadness. Their father had sent them all away with such anger all those years before that they didn't even dare to call him on the telephone even though they missed the old cobbler so much. Needless to say, they were overjoyed! The cobbler father listened proudly to his sons tell tales of bank business, football and hysterical princesses, and his eyes swelled with tears when they all sang “Silent Night”.

He said a fond farewell and gave all three sons a warm hug before pulling his seven-mile boots on once more and stepping out into the snow falling all around.



“That fairy saved me after all, even though she didn’t want to,” he muttered to himself, but this time, instead of grouching, he grinned and gave a little giggle. “If only I could meet her again to say thank you for all she has done.”

And at that second, as if by magic, tiny black footprints appeared in the fresh snow. The cobbler instantly recognised the fairy’s boots and his face broke out into a broad smile.

“If it’s the last thing I do, I’m going to find that fairy!” he shouted out into the snowy landscape, and set off to follow the footprints.

I don’t know where the cobbler eventually caught up with the fairy, whether it was in the Himalayas or on Mont Blanc. The only thing I do know is that two pairs of footprints were soon to be seen crisscrossing the world from Berlin to New York, and from Milan to Kuala Lumpur, all the way to the very highest peak of the might Himalayas. The man’s boot-prints followed the woman’s for the longest while, but they eventually stood side by side and that his how they remained until the very end of time. You can still see them for yourself if the snow hasn’t melted yet!







© Orchard Literary Agency

