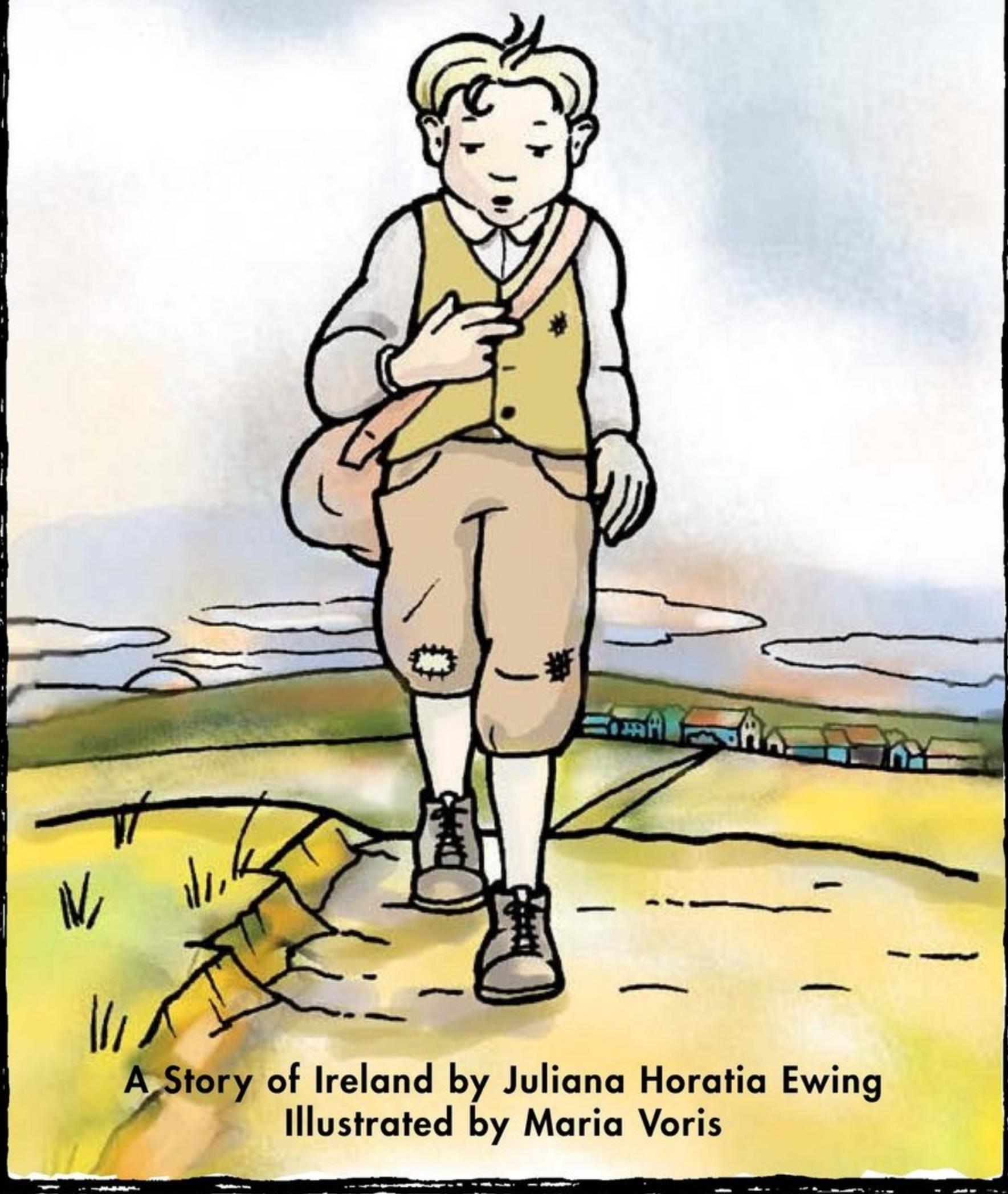


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Murdoch's Path



A Story of Ireland by Juliana Horatia Ewing
Illustrated by Maria Voris

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Chapter 1

Pat was a poor delivery boy, and all the townsfolk loved him. He was as **trustworthy** as a clock and always delivered goods and payment on time. And he always returned any change. He had as much work as he could handle. If it only paid well, he would have been a rich man. But Pat was so poor that when he walked on the highway, he kept his shoes in his pockets until he got to town. That way, the shoes would not wear out.

One night, his deliveries had kept him so late that he rushed down the dark road, his shoes still on his feet. This is what he was saying to himself:

"A dozen balls of gray yarn for Mistress Murphy. Three dozen bright buttons for the tailor. Half an ounce of throat drops for Father Andrew." These were the items he had been sent to **fetch**. He repeated them so he would be sure to remember them.



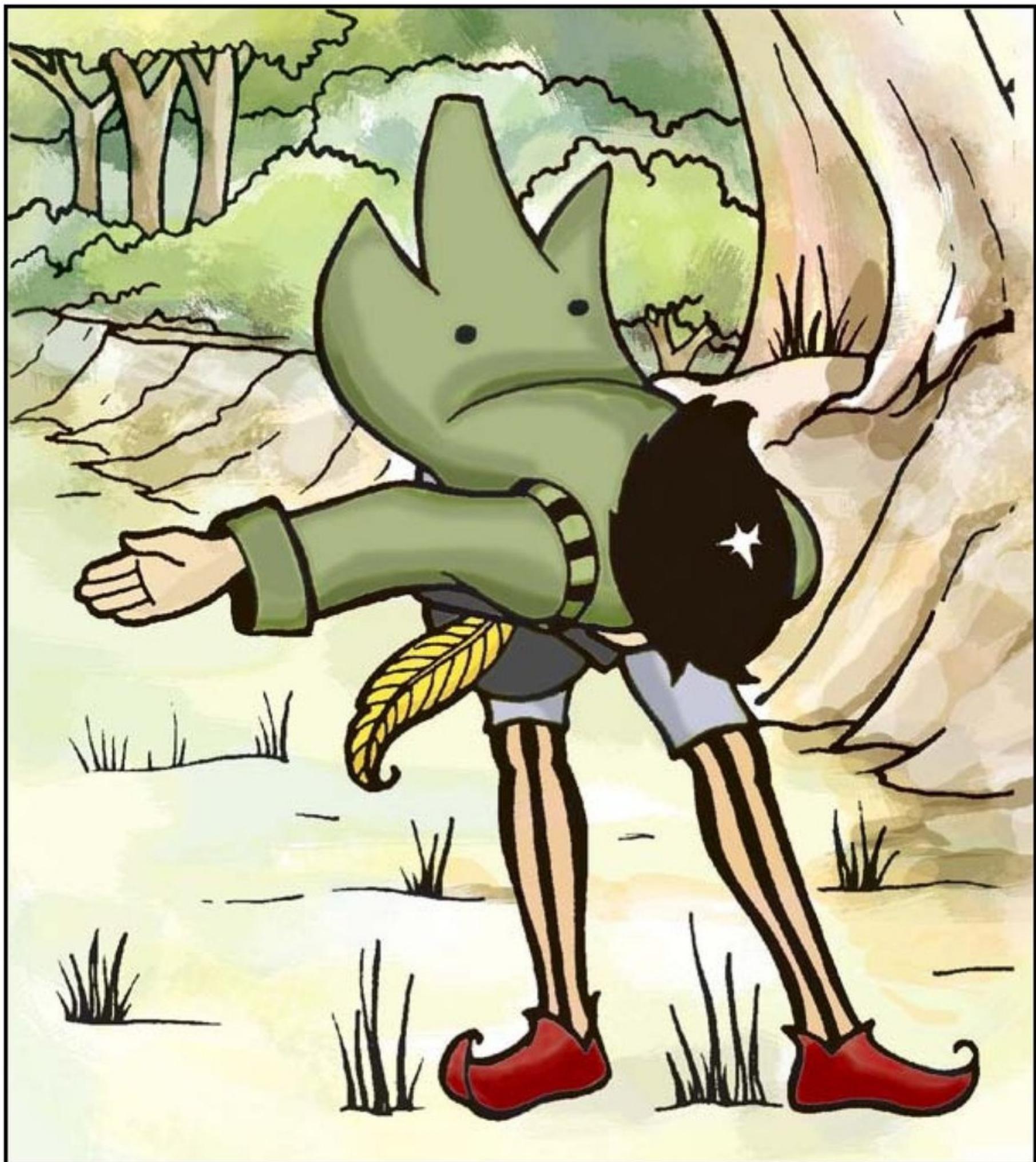
Now, everyone knew that there were two ways home from town. One was the proper highway, and the other was Murdoch's Path. The Path was nothing more than a wet, swampy, **brambly**, overgrown ditch. No one dared go there because it was **infested** with fairies. In all the years Pat had gone to and from town, he had always taken the highway. But poor Pat was so late and so deep in thought that when he came to the fork where the Path split off, he didn't even look up. He marched right down Murdoch's Path without even noticing.





Chapter 2

He wasn't sure how far he'd gone when suddenly a full moon came from behind the clouds. It made the land as bright as day. Pat looked up and realized he had taken the wrong turn, for right in front of him was a circle of dancing fairies. They danced around and around until Pat's feet **tingled**. Fairy music makes anyone want to dance, no matter how late it is and no matter how tired he is. Pat simply waited and watched. After a long time, a little man in a black hat, a green coat, and red shoes **beckoned** him into the circle.



"Won't you dance a song with us, Pat?" asked the little man, bowing till he nearly touched the ground. He didn't have far to go, for he was barely two feet high.

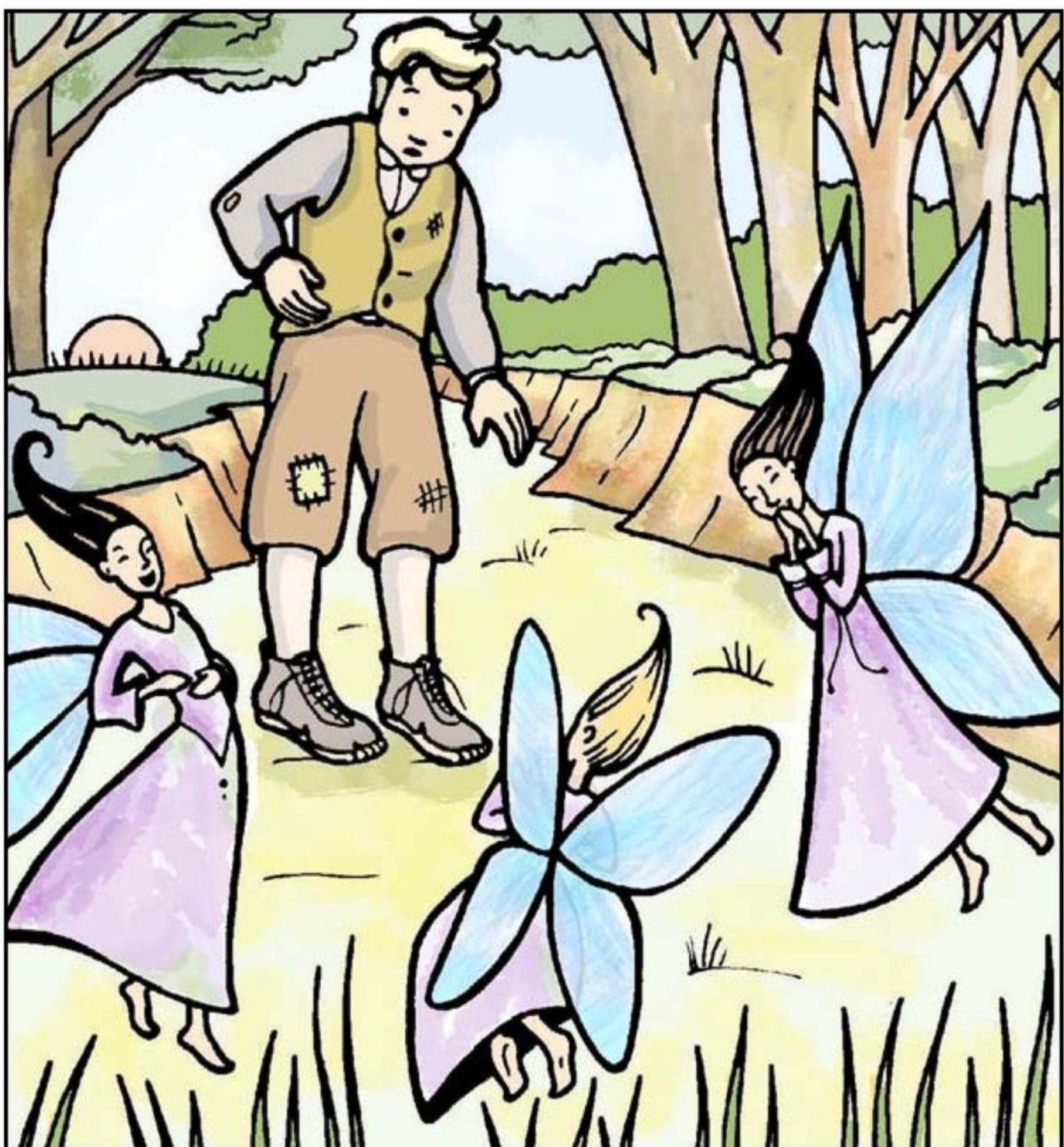
"I'll be proud to dance with you," replied Pat. Before he could look around, Pat jumped in the circle and began dancing as though his life depended on it.

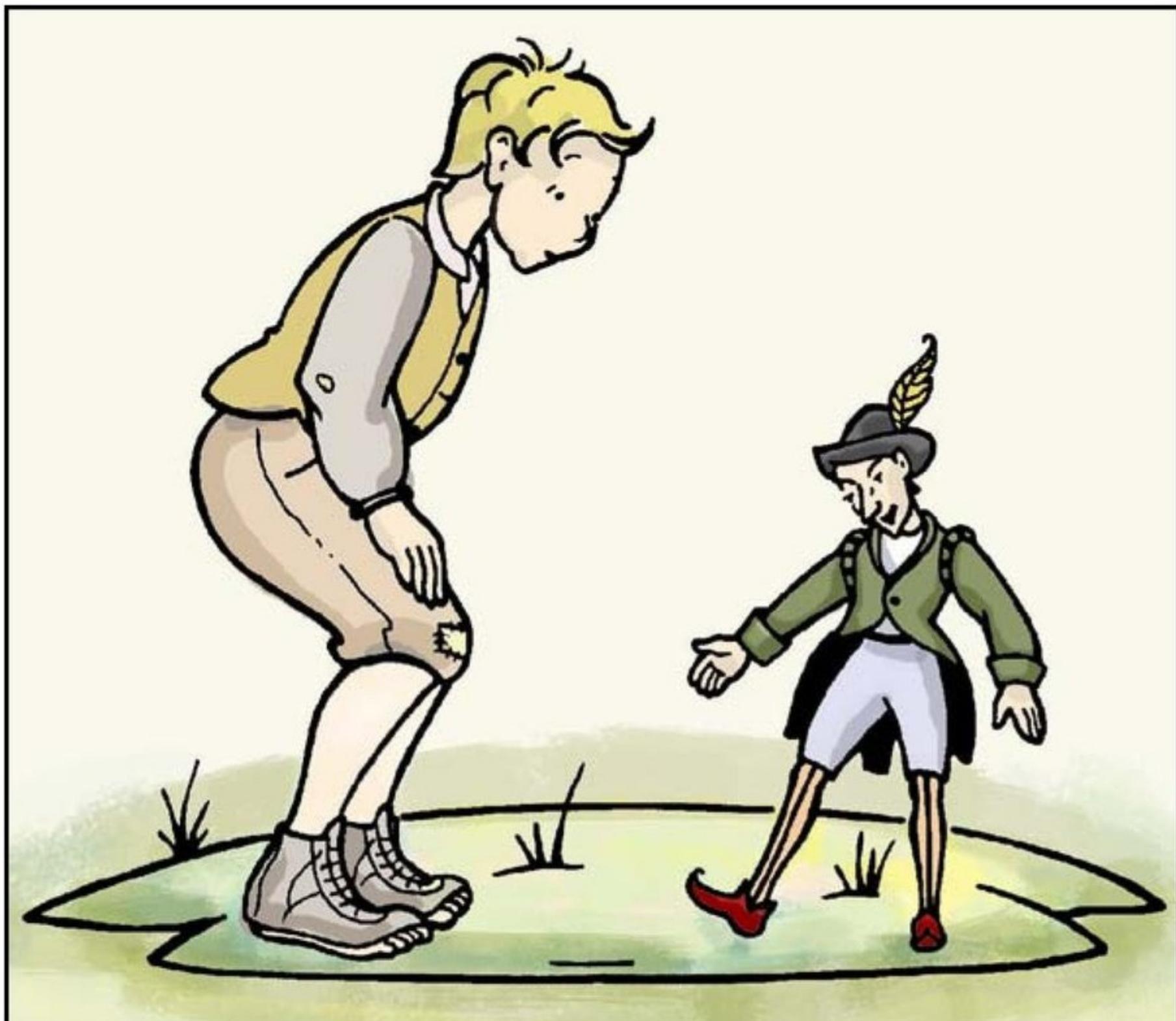


At first, his feet felt lighter than feathers. It seemed as though he could have danced forever. But soon he grew tired and would have liked to stop, yet the fairies wouldn't let him. So he danced on and on. Pat realized that he was under a spell and tried to think of some magic words to break it. But all he could think was:

"A dozen balls of gray yarn for Mistress Murphy. Three dozen bright buttons for the tailor. Half an ounce of throat drops for Father Andrew," over and over.

It seemed to Pat that the moon had almost set below the grass by the time the fairies finished dancing. But he couldn't be sure with all the spinning and running around. One thing he was sure of, though. He had danced every bit of leather off the soles of his shoes. His feet were blistered so that he could hardly stand. All the little fairies stood and held their sides while they laughed at him.





Chapter 3

At last, the fairy with the green coat and the red shoes stepped up to him. "Don't worry about it, Pat," he said. "I'll lend you my red shoes until morning, for you seem to be a good-natured sort of boy."

Well, Pat looked at the fairy man's shoes. They were the size of a baby's. He didn't wish to be rude, so he said, "Thank you, sir. If you would be kind enough to put them on my feet for me, perhaps you won't spoil their fine shape."



Pat thought that if the fairy man put them on Pat's big feet, it wouldn't be Pat's fault if the tiny shoes broke. So he sat down on the side of the Path, and the fairy man put the shoes on Pat's feet. As soon as they touched Pat's feet, the shoes grew to just the perfect size and fit him better than his socks. In addition, when he stood up, he didn't feel his blisters at all.

"Make sure you bring them back to the Path at sunrise," said the little man. Then Pat climbed the ditch and looked around. All around the roots of the bushes and in the grass were jewels and pearls.

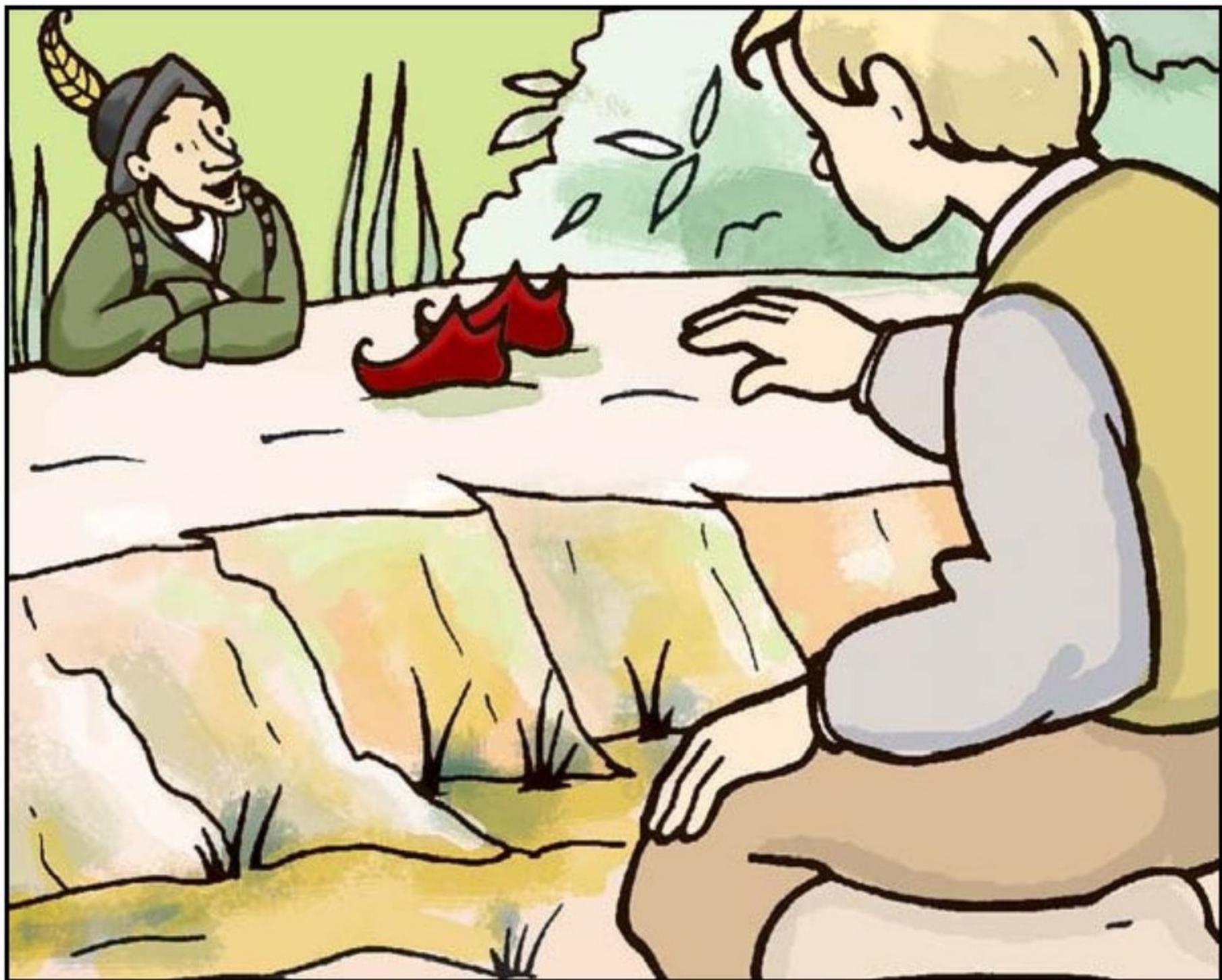
"Do you want to help yourself, Pat, or will you take what I give you?" asked the little man.

"I'll take whatever you give me and be thankful," said Pat, remembering his manners. The fairy man picked a large handful of yellow flowers from the bushes and filled Pat's pockets.

"Make sure you keep those, Pat," he said. Pat would have liked some of the jewels, but he said nothing. "Oh, and before you go, let me polish those shoes for you."

So Pat lifted each foot. The little man dusted the shoes off by breathing on them and rubbing them with the tail of his little green coat. "Home!" said the little man with a magical snap of his fingers. In an instant, Pat found himself standing on his own doorstep with all his deliveries safe around him.





Chapter 4

The next morning, Pat got up before sunrise and carried the shoes back to the Path. As Pat came up, the little man looked over the edge of the ditch.

"Top o' the morning to you," said Pat. "Here are your shoes."

"Why, thank you, Pat. Have you had a chance to take a look at those flowers yet?"

"No, sir," replied Pat. "I came straight here when I woke up this morning."

"Make sure you look when you get back, Pat. And good luck to you." And with that, the little man disappeared. When Pat got home, he took a look at the little yellow blossoms. He had to rub his eyes twice. They had all turned to pure gold pieces.

Well, the first thing Pat did was go to the shoemaker to have him make a beautiful pair of new shoes. And being a kind boy, he told the curious shoemaker the whole story. The shoemaker began to feel greedy. He wondered if he could go to the Path and dance with the fairies that night.





Chapter 5

The shoemaker found his way to the Path all right. And when he got there, the fairies were dancing. But instead of waiting politely, he **barged** right in and began to dance with them. He danced the soles of his shoes off, as Pat had, and the fairy man lent him the red shoes. When the shoemaker came out of the ditch, he saw the jewels and pearls scattered in the grass.

"Will you help yourself, or will you take what I give you?" asked the little man.

"Why, I think I'll help myself, if you please," said the shoemaker. And he stuffed every pocket, plus his socks, with precious stones. The little man made him promise to return the shoes in the morning and sent him home in a twinkling.



When the shoemaker got home, he immediately pulled the jewels from his pockets. But not a single jewel remained; there was nothing but a heap of ordinary pebbles. The shoemaker swore and stomped, and then he thought to himself that he would keep the little man's shoes. "Who knows what magic is in them?" he thought.

So he made a tiny pair of red shoes just like the fairy shoes. He covered the real shoes with black polish, so they couldn't be recognized. Then at sunrise he went back to the Path. Just as before, the fairy man appeared at the edge of the ditch.





Chapter 6

"Top of the morning to you," said the shoemaker. "Here are your shoes." He handed the fairy man the pair he had made. The little man looked at them, but he said nothing, and he did not put them on.

"Have you looked at the things I gave you last night?" said the little man.

"Oh, no. I came here as soon as I woke up," lied the shoemaker.



"Be sure to look when you get back," said the little man. And then the shoemaker grinned. He was sure that the fairy man had just **uttered** the magic words that would turn the pebbles back into jewels.

"Ah, sir," said the fairy man, "I believe there's a bit of dust on your shoes. Let me polish them for you."

"That means I'll be home in an instant," thought the shoemaker. But the little man breathed on his shoes and **muttered** some words the shoemaker couldn't hear. Soon, the shoemaker's feet began to tingle. Then they itched, and then they burned. Finally, he began to dance, and he danced all around the Path. The fairy man laughed and laughed, holding his sides. The shoemaker danced until he cried out from **exhaustion**, but the fairies drove him away. Where he went, nobody knows, but some say they've seen the greedy shoemaker dancing from sunset to sunrise around Murdoch's Path.



Glossary

barged (<i>v.</i>)	jumped or rushed in impolitely (p. 16)
beckoned (<i>v.</i>)	called toward something (p. 7)
brambly (<i>adj.</i>)	covered with thorn bushes (p. 6)
exhaustion (<i>n.</i>)	extreme tiredness (p. 21)
fetch (<i>v.</i>)	to bring; to get (p. 5)
infested (<i>adj.</i>)	inhabited by many dangerous or troublesome creatures (p. 6)
muttered (<i>v.</i>)	said quietly under the breath (p. 21)
tingled (<i>v.</i>)	felt prickly or itchy (p. 7)
trustworthy (<i>adj.</i>)	honest; easily trusted (p. 4)
uttered (<i>v.</i>)	spoke, especially important words (p. 20)

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