

Fairies danced, watching their reflections in the surface of an old spoon. The spoon had once belonged to an ancient Scandinavian king, and was the last thing he held before choking to death. At least, that's what Jep would tell you.

Jep shooed the fairies with a smile, the crags of his face capturing a little dust as they huffed by him, and began to polish the old silver. The fairies settled on the top shelf, pouting.

Once the spoon was shined to perfection he moved on to a pair of boots on the floor. One of the blue salamanders had curled up inside of the toe. Jep let out a low whistle, working his finger inside the boot. The salamander nipped at him, but only in minor annoyance. Jep didn't stop though. That salamander knew better than to burn the boot.

Finally, with a final hiss, the lizard vacated the boot. Despite the attitude he was getting, he just smiled and started to shine the shoe.

The bell rang.

Jep stood, and Father Time gave him a good crack across the back with his walking stick. He gritted his teeth until the spasm was through, silently praying that he would just die already.

He doddered towards the front of the store. A young man stood in the frame, the very picture of business. He couldn't have been much older than thirty.

Jep cleared his throat, warning the fairies not to come out unless they wanted a good hiding.

"I'm sorry to disturb you." The man said, sweeping off his hat. A mop of curly blond hair flopped across his head.

"I wasn't sure if anyone was here or not. I was told there was a shop a, but for the life of me I couldn't find it."

Jep wasn't surprised. The shop had seen far better days. When he'd bought the place, the bannisters were new. Now they sagged under the dust and other things. He really shouldn't be letting the drake be sleep up there. He shook himself. His customer was waiting.

"You found it. How may I help you?"

The man chuckled, shaking his head before stretching out his hand.

"Thank you, but I didn't call on you as a customer I'm afraid. I'm John Hawthorne. I just bought the building."

Well that was a pickle. Jep shook his hand stiffly.

"This is an... interesting shop you have. Most people choose one thing to sell."

Mr. Hawthorne bent to examine a pair of ripped boots. They had recently become a nest, though the bird that made it had flown south for the year. Jep fingered his suspenders. He'd been worried about this. The last landlord had been willing to overlook the shop's decline, but...

"It's special."

Jep looked up. Mr. Hawthorne stood, smiling. Jep couldn't tell if it was strained or not.

"Anyway, as I understand it, you've been behind on rent for the last-

One of the fairies dove out of shelves, streaking towards Mr. Hawthorne's face. Jep reached out, desperate to stop the misguided fae, but it was too late. Jep closed his eyes. He was ruined.

There was a small cry of surprise, and when Jep opened his eyes he wasn't greeted with an eyeless landlord. Mr. Hawthorne laughed, the misbehaving fairy tangled in his overcoat.

"Well, I had my suspicions."

He plucked the fairy out of his sleeve. It batted at his hand for a moment, before finally giving in. Mr. Hawthorne handed over the fairy, then turned to the door.

"Don't worry about the rent. I'm not about to shut down a home for magical beasts."

Jep nodded his thanks, dumbfounded. Mr. Hawthorne stepped outside, put on his hat, and never set foot in the shop again.