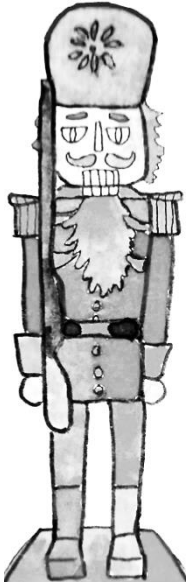


Name: _____



The Nutcracker (Part 1)



The original Nutcracker story comes from the book, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" by ETA Hoffmann, who wrote it in 1816. The story was later made into a ballet by the famous Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

The story takes place on Christmas Eve. It is about two children, Clara and Fritz, who have a very unusual godfather who makes inventions out of clockwork (or maybe by magic) and his Christmas presents are always amazing and wonderful.

However, this year he gives them something rather small and simple—a nutcracker-doll in the form of a soldier. It's rather ugly, and soon it is broken, but Clara loves it all the same. And then . . . Well, wait and see!

The Story of the Nutcracker

It was the night before Christmas. Clara and Fritz were sitting by the door of the kitchen. Their cheeks were red after throwing snowballs outside in the cold air. Their eyes shone brighter than the candles on the Christmas tree, and were chattering very excitedly about something.

What were two children so excited about on Christmas Eve? You don't have to be a genius to guess the answer to that question - for they were talking about . . . presents, of course.

The presents for Clara and Fritz were wrapped up and waiting for them on the kitchen table, just on the other side of the door. But the children were forbidden to go through the door until it was time - time for presents. And as they couldn't see the presents, *they* talked about them instead.

"I hope," said Fritz, "that this year, Godfather Drosselmeyer has made us two entire armies of clockwork soldiers - thousands and thousands of them; cavalry, and infantry, and artillery - and they'll go to war with each other and fire cannons and guns like this: BAAAMMMMM! It will be just like a real battle!"

Name: _____

"Oh no!" Said Clara. "I do hope he's made something much prettier than that. I think he's made a toy theatre with an orchestra that plays, and ballerinas who look like swans and dance on their tip-toes. In fact, Godfather Drosselmeyer has told me himself that he had been to see the Russian dancers - and that they were the most marvelous thing he had ever seen - and that's why I think he's making a *magic* theatre for us."

"You're such a silly nincompoop sometimes," said Fritz. "Godfather Drosselmeyer doesn't do magic. He makes clockwork that you can wind up."

"Oh yes he does do magic," said Clara. "And in any case, you're the silly nincompoop - so there!"

The children chattered on, until at last the door-bell rang to announce that Godfather Drosselmeyer himself had arrived at the house. The children rushed to meet him in the hall.

"Oh godfather, do please come into the kitchen so we can open our presents," begged Clara.

Drosselmeyer was a funny-looking man, who wore a wig that sometimes slid half off his head. He had a faint mustache that had never grown very bushy, and his left eye was usually half closed. His hands and fingers were very tiny, but he was ever so clever with them - for Fritz was right; Godfather Drosselmeyer was a watch and clock maker— and one of the cleverest who had ever lived. But perhaps Clara was right too - maybe, just maybe, he also could do a little magic. But in any case, his presents were always amazing and wonderful.

It took a while to gather the whole family; including parents, children, aunts, uncles and godparents. Finally, it was time to open the presents. Sweets, dolls, and tin soldiers all emerged out of the wrapping, and even a sultan's palace beautifully carved and painted.

They were exciting and lovely presents - and, at last, they were all opened - yet they hadn't found any gift at all from Godfather Drosselmeyer. Fritz thought that their strange godfather had forgotten all about presents this year, but Clara understood that he was keeping back an extra special surprise for them.

Name: _____

Both children were too polite to say anything - but Clara gave her Godfather a gift of her own - a picture of a sugarplum fairy that she had painted herself. The old man was clearly delighted with it.

"And what have I got for dear Clara and Fritz this year?" he teased. "Ah yes, I remember now. It's here in my waistcoat pocket."

He pulled out a very small present - no longer than his hand. "Which one of you two wants to open it this year?"

Fritz saw how small the present was and said, "Let Clara open it. She's so excited about it because she's still a baby."

Clara took the present and felt it. Yes here was its head - a little on the large size, and here were its legs. She smiled and said, "It's a doll. I bet it dances."

She carefully unwrapped it, and saw that it wasn't just a doll. It was a nutcracker - painted to look like a soldier. The handles were legs in bright red trousers with shiny boots on the little feet, and the part where you put the nuts to crack them looked like an oversized head with giant jaws. On top of its head it wore a tall furry hat. To tell you the truth, it was rather ugly.

"Why, thank you," said Clara.

"You're not disappointed, are you?" Godfather Drosselmeyer asked.

"No," she said. "I love the nutcracker soldier because he's funny," and she gave her godfather a big hug and a kiss.

But Fritz did not like the nutcracker soldier at all. He thought it was useless - well almost - you *could* use it to crack nuts.

And after dinner that's what they did. Clara and Fritz sat under the Christmas tree and cracked walnuts in the mouth of the soldier.

Clara wasn't quite strong enough to break the shells, but Fritz found it easy, until he tried to break open an extra hard nut. He squeezed and squeezed and squeezed until the nutcracker eventually broke. One of its jaws came off, leaving the poor soldier with half a mouth.

Name: _____

"Oh no!" cried Clara. "Why did you do that?"

She grabbed the nutcracker and the broken off piece of its jaw, and ran off to find their mother. But what could her mother do? All she could do was to hug Clara and promise that Godfather Drosselmeyer would make the nutcracker as good as new in the morning.

It was funny, but now that the nutcracker soldier was damaged, Clara felt sorry for it. Even though it had an ugly face, she began to love it as much as if it were the most beautiful doll in the world.

When Clara went to lay the nutcracker under the Christmas tree, she felt so sad that she lay down and held the broken soldier closely to her. She cried a little, and soon she fell asleep amongst the presents. If you had come into the room just then, you might have thought that Clara herself was a big doll, like the others, flopped under the tree.

At midnight, the twelve chimes of the grandfather clock roused Clara from her sleep. She sat up and wondered for a while where she was. As she looked around her, she thought she saw Godfather Drosselmeyer sitting on the very top of the tree in the place of the angel.

"Godfather! What are you doing up there?" she asked. But he did not answer. And, when she'd rubbed her eyes and looked again, he was gone.

Then she saw the nutcracker. Oh, how sad it looked, lying there with a piece missing. Then the nutcracker-soldier suddenly turned over... and it smiled at her with its broken face. She screamed and started to run for the door.

She had only taken a few steps when she saw that the whole floor in front of her was covered with mice - only they weren't ordinary mice because they were dressed as soldiers and they had swords and rifles. Out in front, they were led by a terrible rodent with seven heads, each with a golden crown on it.

Anyone can get a fright from a mouse - they are so small and squeaky, but at the same time they appear out of holes and cracks so suddenly that they catch us by surprise. But an army of mice? And a Seven-headed Mouse King? This was a terrible sight indeed! Perhaps I don't need to tell you that Clara started to scream!

Name: _____

But before she could scream, or cry, or run, the nutcracker doll rushed forward followed by his own army of dolls and tin soldiers. And the battle between the toys and the mice broke out all around Clara's feet.

The mice squeaked and guns and cannons fired on both sides. Clara wondered why the whole family was not awoken by the terrible noise. Toys and mice lay wounded on all sides, and the nutcracker was fighting with the Mouse King.

The Mouse King was biting the nutcracker with his seven heads, but the nutcracker fought on - if only he was not broken he could have caught the Mouse King in his jaws, but as it was all he could do was to dance, jump, and kick with his long legs. He was winning the fight with the king, but losing the battle, for he was surrounded by mice soldiers who caught him by the feet and started to drag him away.

"Oh no you don't!" shouted Clara, and she took off her shoe and threw it as hard as she could at the Mouse King. She just missed him, but he took fright and started to run.

When the army of mice saw their king running from a giant girl and her flying shoes, they turned and fled in terror. In a moment they had vanished into the cracks between the floor boards, leaving their prisoner, the nutcracker, behind them.

All the toys cheered and began to dance, until at last, when the first light came through the window they crept back into the toy box, or went back to sleep under the Christmas tree.

Clara pulled herself back to her own room and fell into a deep sleep.

(TO BE CONTINUED. . .)