

The adventures of the Nutcracker

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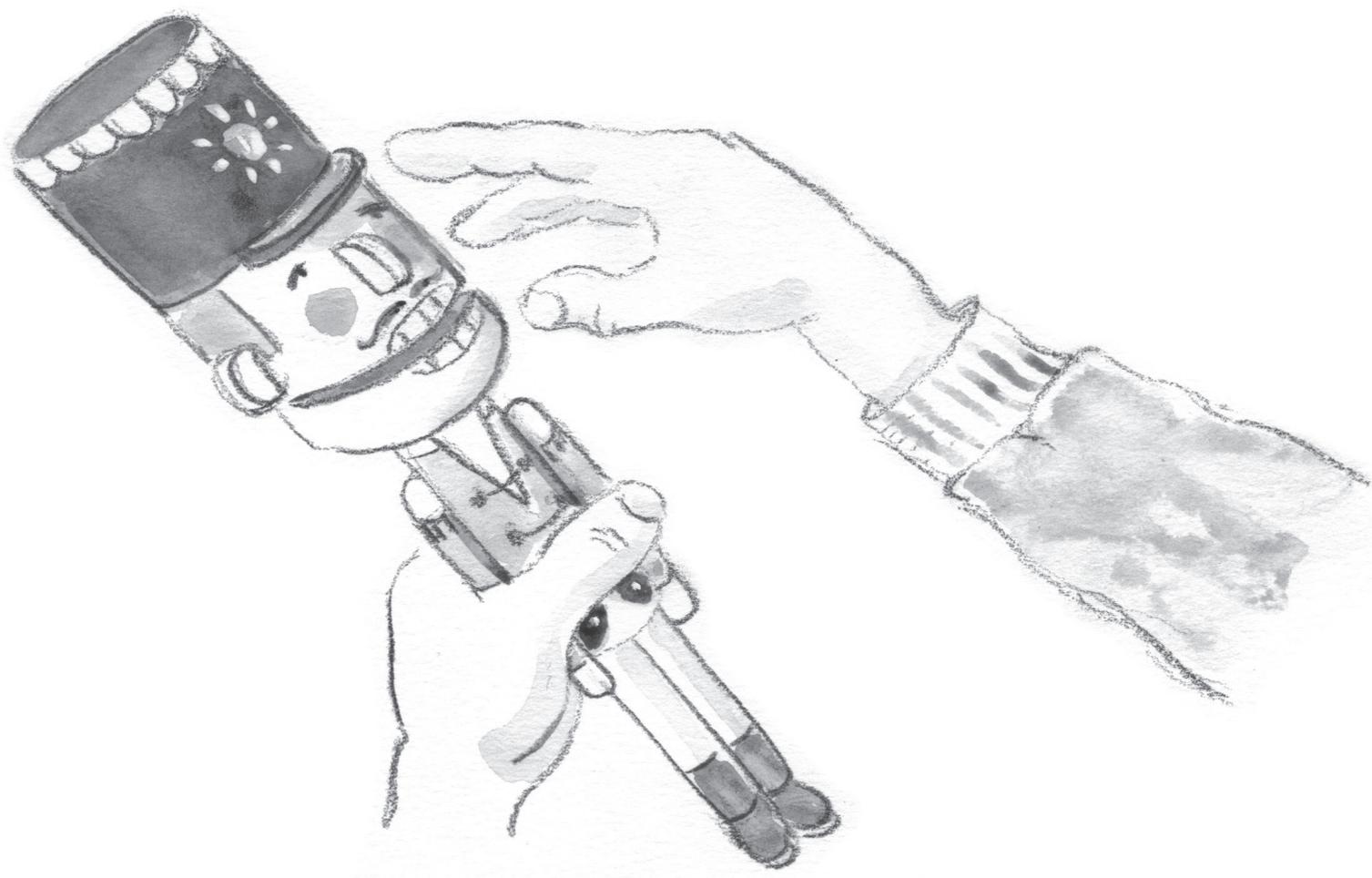
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The Nutcracker

Marie is in the window-seat looking dreamily at the snowflakes softly whirling down. They seem to dance to the music coming from the living room. If only she could float over the rooftops and trees like that, Marie muses. The doorbell rings.

'Uncle Drosselmeyer!' Marie and Fritz yell in unison; they adore him. Uncle Drosselmeyer is a clockmaker. He always has exciting stories to tell, and every year he brings extraordinary, self-made gifts. Fritz gets an army of tin soldiers with horses, rifles and cannons. Marie also gets some kind of soldier, but with a very large head and gigantic teeth.

'This is not just any soldier,' uncle Drosselmeyer explains. 'He can crack real nuts with his teeth. Go on, just try!'

Fritz thinks the Nutcracker doll looks a little bit foolish, but Marie only sees his beautiful, sad eyes. She takes the Nutcracker in her arms and picks only the smallest nuts, so her new friend doesn't have to work too hard. But Fritz impatiently snatches the doll from her hands and stuffs the biggest nut he can find between the Nutcracker's teeth.

Craaaaack! Two front teeth snap off. Now he looks even uglier. Marie starts to cry...and for a moment the Nutcracker appears to give her a sad look.

'Don't cry,' uncle Drosselmeyer tries to comfort her. 'I will fix it for you. In the morning when you wake up, it will be as good as new!'

The battle against the mice

When Marie wakes up, the house is pitch-dark and dead silent. She sneaks downstairs to see if the Nutcracker has been fixed yet, but when she's halfway down a mouse dashes past her feet. And another one, and another! Suddenly, she is surrounded by mice!

'Make way for the King!' the mice yell. Here comes the Mouse King. He is so terribly scary he would make a hasty escape from his own reflection in the mirror. He has seven heads with seven dirty crowns, all his teeth are yellow and he smells of rotten eggs.

'To battle!' he screams with a shrill voice. Marie hides behind a chair and barely dares to breath. But then, the living room doors open and Fritz's army of tin soldiers comes in.

'Don't be afraid, Marie!' their brave leader shouts. 'I will protect you!'

'The Nutcracker!' Marie yells surprised. And that's how it starts, right then and there on the living room carpet: the bloodiest battle ever fought between a pack of mice and a toy army.

All toys and teddy bears bravely fight alongside the tin soldiers; even Clara the doll pelts the mice with marbles and beads. But there are too many of the evil mice and soon it looks like the toy army will lose the battle.

To make matters worse, the Nutcracker stumbles. He crashes to the ground, right in front of the Mice King's dirty feet. The creature raises his sword with a loud shriek...

'No!' Marie cries out. With all the strength she has in her, she throws one of her slippers at the Mouse King's head. Alarmed, he falls over, straight into the Nutcracker's sword...dead!

With a deafening cry, the army of mice sounds the retreat. Marie heaves a sigh of relief.

'Thank you so much!' the Nutcracker cheers. 'With your help I finally defeated that dirty rat! Now the curse can be lifted, because I haven't always been a doll, you know.' And he tells Marie the amazing story of a young man who was turned into a Nutcracker.



Madam Mouserink's curse

Once upon a time, there was a King who loved parties. He would invite all his friends for an exuberant meal which would last all night.

'You know, my darling,' he said coaxingly to the Queen, 'how much I love sausage.' The Queen had the big, golden sausage kettle and the silver knives brought into the kitchen. A great fire was lit, the Queen put on her apron, and soon the sweet scent of sausage meat rose from the kettle. But as soon as the lard was sizzling a soft voice said: 'Let me taste. I am a Queen as well, and I want to tuck into all the goodies, just like you.'

The Queen knew that the voice belonged to Madam Mouserinks, the Queen of the Mice, whose court was underneath the fireplace. The Queen was in a good mood and gave Madam Mouserinks some pieces of tender meat. But suddenly, all the cousins, nieces, nephews, uncles and aunts came out. Even the seven brazen sons greedily hurled themselves at the fat sausages. Within one minute, they devoured everything.

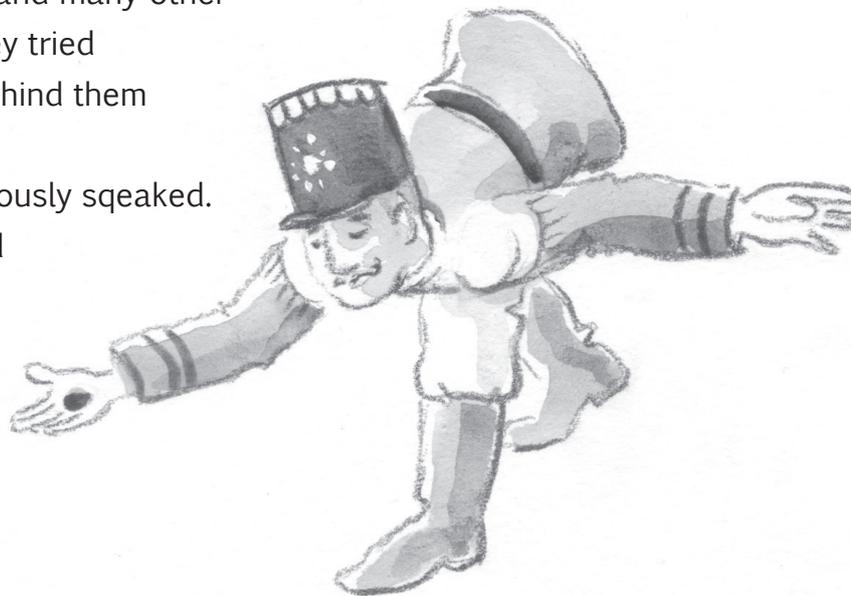
Shamefacedly, the Queen had to tell her husband that the party had to be cancelled, because there was nothing left to eat. The King was furious.

He asked the clockmaker for help, who then invented a curious little trap to catch the mice.

Madam Mouserinks herself was way too smart to be tricked, but despite all her warnings, her seven sons and many other family members were caught. As soon as they tried to take the lard, an iron fence came down behind them and they were trapped.

'You will pay for this!' Madam Mouserinks furiously squeaked.

'Just wait until you have a baby, then me and my entire family of mice will take revenge!'



Princess Pirlapat

A few years later, a princess was born. When the King looked at his daughter in her crib, he jumped with joy and cried out: 'Has there ever existed something more beautiful than my little Pirlapat?' And right he was: nobody had ever seen such a beautiful child. Her eyes were as clear as the ocean, she had golden curls of hair and beautiful pearly white teeth which she showed all day, giggling and laughing.

Pirlipat slept in a huge bed and on the bed were as many as twenty cats who had to protect the girl from mice. But the cats fell asleep, and that's how Madam Mouserinks could take revenge after all. One night, she sneakily climbed on the bed and bit the poor princess. At once, Pirlipat started to change. On her small body her head grew too big and strangely shaped, her eyes became glassy and her mouth was stretched into a hideous grin from ear to ear.

The King nearly died of grief and asked his astrologer for advice.

The astrologer gazed at the stars and studied the princess's wretched fate. He predicted the curse could be lifted from Princess Pirlipat, but it wouldn't be easy. She had to eat the very rare nut Crackatook. This nut's shell was so hard it couldn't be broken, not even by a horse and carriage riding over it. Crackatook had to be cracked and handed to the Princess by a man with closed eyes. He was to open his eyes only after taking seven steps backwards without stumbling.

The King regained hope and promised his daughter's hand and his entire kingdom to the man who was able to crack the nut Crackatook.

Many handsome men – with full confidence in their strong teeth – were ready to try to lift the curse. But to no avail! No set of teeth could resist the rock-hard shell, and as soon as they looked at the Princess's monstrous face they fled away at lightning speed. The end of the line was already showing, and the King grew more desperate by the second. But then it was young Drosselmeyer's turn, the clockmaker's nephew. He effortlessly bit the nut into two pieces and handed it courteously to Princess Pirlipat with his eyes closed. The Princess ate it and, as if by magic, her ugliness disappeared. Her frightening mouth changed back into a beautiful smile.

Nephew Drosselmeyer determinedly started walking backwards and was just about to take the seventh step when Madam Mouserinks came out from beneath the floorboards, squeaking. His foot landed on her head and just like that, he broke her neck.

What a cruel fate! In mere seconds, Drosselmeyer's body shrivelled up until it could barely carry his big, misshapen head. His eyes became glassy and his mouth was stretched from ear to ear... Madam Mouserinks squeaked: 'Oh, Nut Crackatook! You have killed me, but my son with seven crowns will show you his teeth at night!' After this last exclamation, Madam Mouserinks died.

The King remembered his generous promise of his daughter's hand and called Drosselmeyer in. But when the poor lad came closer, the Princess covered her face with her hands and yelled: 'Get that ugly nutcracker out of here!'

The young hero was taken by the scruff of his neck, and relentlessly banished from the castle.

This, children, is the story of the Nut Crackatook. Now you know why people so often say: 'That was a hard nut to crack!'



The Kingdom of the Sugar Plum Fairy

‘Come on, Marie, now that the awful Mouse King is dead, I would like to show you where I come from.’ The Nutcracker stopped in the hallway in front of a large, antique wardrobe. Nimble, he climbed up along the back of a coat and when he tugged at a button, a wooden ladder came down from the coat’s sleeve. ‘Up the stairs, please,’ the Nutcracker points. Marie does as he says, but just as she reaches the collar, a dazzling light blinds her.

Suddenly, she finds herself in a sweet scented meadow, surrounded by millions of sparkles like bright and shining jewels.

‘We are in the Kingdom of the Sugar Plum Fairy,’ the Nutcracker explains. ‘Come on, I will introduce you. We have to go that way, through the gate.’ On the arcade over the gate, six monkeys dressed in red jackets are playing cheerful music.

‘Oh, what a wonderful place,’ Marie cries out, overcome by happiness. A bit further along there is a quaint little village; all the houses, churches and barns are a dark brown colour and have golden rooftops. ‘That’s Gingerbread Village’, the Nutcracker says. ‘The residents look beautiful, but they are rather grumpy, because of their toothaches. We’d better skip that village. Let’s sail to the capital across Rose Lake.’

The Nutcracker takes Marie's hand and climbs into a golden boat. Mary looks down into the rosy water and sees the face of a girl smiling up to her.

'Oh!' she exclaims. 'Look, in the water, Princess Pirlipat! She has to be the prettiest girl alive!' The Nutcracker laughs. 'That's not Pirlipat in the water, Marie, it's your own reflection!'

Lastly: Waltz of the Flowers

Marie enjoys their boat trip immensely. Wherever they pass by, a crowd of people enthusiastically waves at them.

'Here we are!' the Nutcracker says, and they moor at an enormous candy palace with beautifully decorated spires and colourful garlands merrily flapping in the wind. The palace is incredibly beautiful but still Marie notices a tower without a roof, being repaired with cinnamon glue by a few men.

'Oh, that's right, the Big Sweet Tooth bit the roof right off that tower,' the Nutcracker explains. 'But I will tell you about that later. Now we have to move on. The Sugar Plum Fairy is expecting us!'

When they arrive at the palace gate, they are welcomed by ballerinas dancing gracefully ahead of them. 'These are the Sugar Plum Fairy's maids. They dance all day. Unfortunately, they know only one dance, which they keep repeating,' the Nutcracker sighs.

The ballerinas guide them through a maze of halls and rooms until they arrive in the great ballroom. There, a dazzling woman sits on a gloriously decorated throne. 'The Sugar Plum Fairy,' the Nutcracker whispers full of awe.

'Marie,' the Sugar Plum Fairy says, 'you have been incredibly brave. We have been suffering from this horrible mouse pest for years, but with your help my friend was finally able to defeat the ghastly Mouse King. Now I can lift that villain's curse!'

The Sugar Plum Fairy claps her hands three times.

Suddenly, there's a handsome soldier standing next to Marie!

'You saved me,' he says gratefully.

Marie immediately recognizes the Nutcracker's voice.

Enchanting music sounds from everywhere.

'The waltz of the flowers, will you give me the honour of this dance?'

