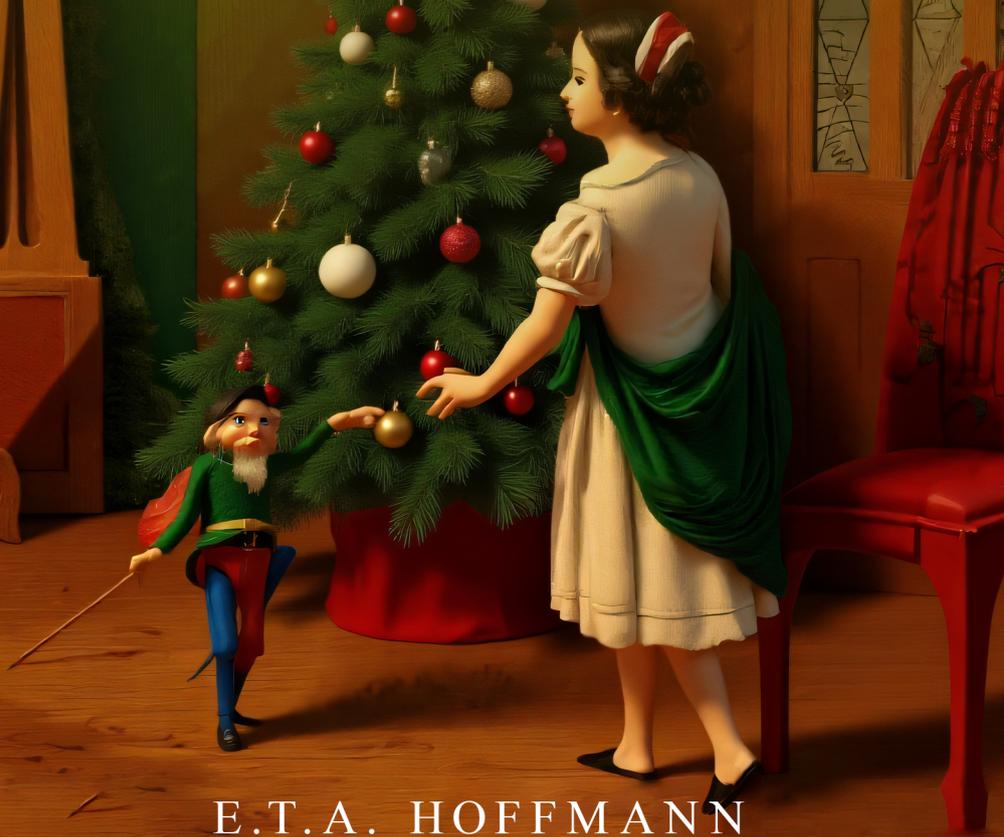


The NUTCRACKER *and the* MOUSE-KING

Behind the glittering Christmas tree lies a world of magic, courage, and wonder waiting.



E.T.A. HOFFMANN

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The Nutcracker
and the
Mouse-King

by

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translated from the German by

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THE NUT-CRACKER

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1. Christmas Eve

During the long, long day of the twenty-fourth of December, the children of Doctor Stahlbaum were not permitted to enter the parlor, much less the adjoining drawing-room. Frederic and Maria sat nestled together in a corner of the back chamber; dusky twilight had come on, and they felt quite gloomy and fearful, for, as was commonly the case on this day, no light was brought in to them. Fred, in great secrecy, and in a whisper, informed his little sister (she was only just seven years old), that ever since morning he had heard a rustling and a rattling, and now and then a gentle knocking, in the forbidden chambers. Not long ago also he had seen a little dark man, with a large chest under his arm, gliding softly through the entry, but he knew very well that it was nobody but Godfather Drosselmeier. Upon this Maria clapped her little hands together for joy, and exclaimed, “Ah, what beautiful things has Godfather Drosselmeier made for us this time!”

Counsellor Drosselmeier was not a very handsome man; he was small and thin, had many wrinkles in his face, over his right eye he had a large black patch, and he was without hair, for which reason he wore a very nice white wig; this was made of glass however, and was a very ingenious piece of work. The Godfather himself was very ingenious also, he understood all about clocks and watches, and could even make them. Accordingly, when any one of the beautiful clocks in Doctor Stahlbaum's house was sick, and could not sing, Godfather Drosselmeier would have to attend it. He would then take off his glass wig, pull off his brown coat, put on a blue apron, and pierce the clock with sharp-pointed instruments, which usually caused little Maria a great deal of anxiety. But it did the clock no harm; on the contrary, it became quite lively again, and began at once right merrily to rattle, and to strike, and to sing, so that it was a pleasure to all who heard it. Whenever he came, he always brought something pretty in his pocket for the children, sometimes a little man who moved his eyes and made a bow, at others, a box, from which a little bird hopped out when it was opened—sometimes one thing, sometimes another.

When Christmas Eve came, he had always a beautiful

piece of work prepared for them, which had cost him a great deal of trouble, and on this account it was always carefully preserved by their parents, after he had given it to them. “Ah, what beautiful present has Godfather Drosselmeier made for us this time!” exclaimed Maria. It was Fred’s opinion that this time it could be nothing else than a castle, in which all kinds of fine soldiers marched up and down and went through their exercises; then other soldiers would come, and try to break into the castle, but the soldiers within would fire off their cannon very bravely, until all roared and cracked again. “No, no,” cried Maria, interrupting him, “Godfather Drosselmeier has told me of a lovely garden where there is a great lake, upon which beautiful swans swim about, with golden collars around their necks, and sing their sweetest songs. Then there comes a little girl out of the garden down along the lake, and coaxes the swans to the shore, and feeds them with sweet cake.”

“Swans never eat cake,” interrupted Fred, somewhat roughly, “and even Godfather Drosselmeier himself can’t make a whole garden. After all, we have little good of his playthings; they are all taken right away from us again. I like what Papa and Mamma give us much better, for we can keep their presents for ourselves, and

do as we please with them.” The children now began once more to guess what it could be this time. Maria thought that Miss Trutchen (her great doll) was growing very old, for she fell almost every moment upon the floor, and more awkwardly than ever, which could not happen without leaving sad marks upon her face, and as to neatness in dress, this was now altogether out of the question with her. Scolding did not help the matter in the least. Frederic declared, on the other hand, that a bay horse was wanting in his stable, and his troops were very deficient in cavalry, as his Papa very well knew.

By this time it had become quite dark. Frederic and Maria sat close together, and did not venture again to speak a word. It seemed now as if soft wings rustled around them, and very distant, but sweet music was heard at intervals. At this moment a shrill sound broke upon their ears—*kling, ling—kling, ling*—the doors flew wide open, and such a dazzling light broke out from the great chamber, that with the loud exclamation, “Ah! ah!” the children stood fixed at the threshold. But Papa and Mamma stepped to the door, took them by the hand, and said, “Come, come, dear children, and see what Christmas has brought you this year.”

2. The Gifts

Kind reader, or listener, whatever may be your name, whether Frank, Robert, Henry,—Anna or Maria, I beg you to call to mind the table covered with your last Christmas gifts, as in their newest gloss they first appeared to your delighted vision. You will then be able to imagine the astonishment of the children, as they stood with sparkling eyes, unable to utter a word, for joy at the sight before them. At last Maria called out with a deep sigh, “Ah, how beautiful! ah, how beautiful!” and Frederic gave two or three leaps in the air higher than he had ever done before. The children must have been very obedient and good children during the past year, for never on any Christmas Eve before, had so many beautiful things been given to them. A tall Fir tree stood in the middle of the room, covered with gold and silver apples, while sugar almonds, comfits, lemon drops, and every kind of confectionery, hung like buds and blossoms upon all its branches. But the greatest beauty about this wonderful

tree, was the many little lights that sparkled amid its dark boughs, which like stars illuminated its treasures, or like friendly eyes seemed to invite the children to partake of its blossoms and fruit.

The table under the tree shone and flushed with a thousand different colors—ah, what beautiful things were there! who can describe them? Maria spied the prettiest dolls, a tea set, all kinds of nice little furniture, and what eclipsed all the rest, a silk dress tastefully ornamented with gay ribbons, which hung upon a frame before her eyes, so that she could view it on every side. This she did too, and exclaimed over and over again, “Ah, the sweet—ah, the dear, dear frock! and may I put it on? yes, yes—may I really, though, wear it?”

In the meanwhile Fred had been galloping round and round the room, trying his new bay horse, which, true enough, he had found, fastened by its bridle to the table. Dismounting again, he said it was a wild creature, but that was nothing; he would soon break him. He then reviewed his new regiment of hussars, who were very elegantly arrayed in red and gold, and carried silver weapons, and rode upon such bright shining horses, that you would almost believe these were of pure silver also. The children had now become somewhat more

composed, and turned to the picture books, which lay open on the table, where all kinds of beautiful flowers, and gayly dressed people, and boys and girls at play, were painted as natural as if they were alive. Yes, the children had just turned to these singular books, when—*kling, ling, kling, ling*—the bell was heard again. They knew that Godfather Drosselmeier was now about to display his Christmas gift, and ran towards a table that stood against the wall, covered by a curtain reaching from the ceiling to the floor. The curtain behind which he had remained so long concealed, was quickly drawn aside, and what saw the children then?

Upon a green meadow, spangled with flowers, stood a noble castle, with clear glass windows and golden turrets. A musical clock began to play, when the doors and windows flew open, and little men and women, with feathers in their hats, and long flowing trains, were seen sauntering about in the rooms. In the middle hall, which seemed as if it were all on fire, so many little tapers were burning in silver chandeliers, there were children in white frocks and green jackets, dancing to the sound of the music. A man in an emerald-green cloak, at intervals put his head out of the window, nodded, and then disappeared; and Godfather Drosselmeier

himself, only that he was not much bigger than Papa's thumb, came now and then to the door of the castle, looked about him, and then went in again. Fred, with his arms resting upon the table, gazed at the beautiful castle, and the little walking and dancing figures, and then said, "Godfather Drosselmeier, let me go into your castle."

The Counsellor gave him to understand that that could not be done. And he was right, for it was foolish in Fred to wish to go into a castle, which with all its golden turrets was not as high as his head. Fred saw that likewise himself. After a while as the men and women kept walking back and forth, and the children danced, and the emerald man looked out at his window, and Godfather Drosselmeier came to the door, and all without the least change; Fred called out impatiently, "Godfather Drosselmeier, come out this time at the other door."

"That can never be, dear Fred," said the Counsellor.

"Well then," continued Frederic, "let the green man who peeps out at the window walk about with the rest."

"And that can never be," rejoined the Counsellor.

"Then the children must come down," cried Fred, "I want to see them nearer."

“All that can never be, I say,” replied the Counsellor, a little out of humor. “As the mechanism is made, so it must remain.”

“So———o,” cried Fred, in a drawling tone, “all that can never be! Listen, Godfather Drosselmeier. If your little dressed up figures in the castle there, can do nothing else but always the same thing, they are not good for much, and I care very little about them. No, give me my hussars, who can manœuvre backward and forward, as I order them, and are not shut up in a house.”

With this, he darted towards a large table, drew up his regiment upon their silver horses, and let them trot and gallop, and cut and slash, to his heart’s content. Maria also had softly stolen away, for she too was soon tired of the sauntering and dancing puppets in the castle; but as she was very amiable and good, she did not wish it to be observed so plainly in her as it was in her brother Fred. Counsellor Drosselmeier turned to the parents, and said, somewhat angrily, “An ingenious work like this was not made for stupid children. I will put up my castle again, and carry it home.” But their mother now stepped forward, and desired to see the secret mechanism and curious works by which the

little figures were set in motion. The Counsellor took it all apart, and then put it together again. While he was employed in this manner he became good-natured once more, and gave the children some nice brown men and women, with gilt faces, hands, and feet. They were all made of sweet thorn, and smelt like gingerbread, at which Frederic and Maria were greatly delighted. At her mother's request, the elder sister, Louise, had put on the new dress which had been given to her, and she looked most charmingly in it, but Maria, when it came to her turn, thought she would like to look at hers a while longer as it hung. This was readily permitted.

3. The Favorite

The truth is, Maria was unwilling to leave the table then, because she had discovered something upon it, which no one had yet remarked. By the marching out of Fred's hussars, who had been drawn up close to the tree, a curious little man came into view, who stood there silent and retired, as if he were waiting quietly for his turn to be noticed. It must be confessed, a great deal could not be said in favor of the beauty of his figure, for not only was his rather broad, stout body, out of all proportion to the little, slim legs that carried it, but his head was by far too large for either. A genteel dress went a great way to compensate for these defects, and led to the belief that he must be a man of taste and good breeding. He wore a hussar's jacket of beautiful bright violet, fastened together with white loops and buttons, pantaloons of exactly the same color, and the neatest boots that ever graced the foot of a student or an officer. They fitted as tight to his little legs as if they were painted

upon them. It was laughable to see, that in addition to this handsome apparel, he had hung upon his back a narrow clumsy cloak, that looked as if it were made of wood, and upon his head he wore a woodman's cap; but Maria remembered that Godfather Drosselmeier wore an old shabby cloak and an ugly cap, and still he was a dear, dear godfather. Maria could not help thinking also, that even if Godfather Drosselmeier were in other respects as well dressed as this little fellow, yet after all he would not look half so handsome as he. The longer Maria gazed upon the little man whom she had taken a liking to at first sight, the more she was sensible how much good nature and friendliness was expressed in his features. Nothing but kindness and benevolence shone in his clear green, though somewhat too prominent eyes. It was very becoming to the man that he wore about his chin a nicely trimmed beard of white cotton, for by this the sweet smile upon his deep red lips was rendered much more striking. "Ah, dear father," exclaimed Maria at last, "to whom belongs that charming little man by the tree there?"

"He shall work industriously for you all, dear child," said her father. "He can crack the hardest nuts with his teeth, and he belongs as well to Louise as to you and

Fred.” With these words her father took him carefully from the table, and raised up his wooden cloak, whereupon the little man stretched his mouth wide open, and showed two rows of very white sharp teeth. At her father’s bidding Maria put in a nut, and—crack—the man had bitten it in two, so that the shell fell off, and Maria caught the sweet kernel in her hand. Maria and the other two children were now informed that this dainty little man came of the family of Nutcrackers, and practised the profession of his forefathers. Maria was overjoyed at what she heard, and her father said, “Dear Maria, since friend Nutcracker is so great a favorite with you, I place him under your particular care and keeping, although, as I said before, Louise and Fred shall have as much right to his services as you.”

Maria took him immediately in her arms, and set him to cracking nuts, but she picked out the smallest, that the little fellow need not stretch his mouth open so wide, which in truth was not very becoming to him. Louise sat down by her, and friend Nutcracker must perform the same service for her too, which he seemed to do quite willingly, for he kept smiling all the while very pleasantly. In the mean time Fred had become tired of riding and parading his hussars, and when he

heard the nuts crack so merrily, he ran to his sister, and laughed very heartily at the droll little man, who now, since Fred must have a share in the sport, passed from hand to hand, and thus there was no end to his labor. Fred always chose the biggest and hardest nuts, when all at once—crack—crack—it went, and three teeth fell out of Nutcracker’s mouth, and his whole under jaw became loose and rickety. “Ah, my poor dear Nutcracker!” said Maria, and snatched him out of Fred’s hands.

“That’s a stupid fellow,” said Fred. “He wants to be a nutcracker, and has poor teeth—he don’t understand his trade. Give him to me, Maria. He shall crack nuts for me if he loses all his teeth, and his whole chin into the bargain. Why make such a fuss about such a fellow?”

“No, no,” exclaimed Maria, weeping; “you shall not have my dear Nutcracker. See how sorrowfully he looks at me, and shows me his poor mouth. But you are a hard-hearted fellow; you beat your horses; yes, and lately you had one of your soldiers shot through the head.”

“That’s all right,” said Fred, “though you don’t understand it. But Nutcracker belongs as much to me as to you, so let me have him.”

Maria began to cry bitterly, and rolled up the sick

Nutcracker as quickly as she could in her little pocket handkerchief. Their parents now came up with Godfather Drosselmeier. The latter, to Maria's great distress, took Fred's part. But their father said, "I have placed Nutcracker expressly under Maria's protection, and as I see that he is now greatly in need of it, I give her full authority over him, and no one must dispute it. Besides, I wonder at Fred, that he should require farther duty from one who has been maimed in the service. As a good soldier, he ought to know that the wounded are not expected to take their place in the ranks."

Fred was much ashamed, and without troubling himself farther about nuts or Nutcracker, stole around to the opposite end of the table, where his hussars, after stationing suitable outposts, had encamped for the night. Maria collected together Nutcracker's lost teeth, tied up his wounded chin with a nice white ribbon which she had taken from her dress, and then wrapped up the little fellow more carefully than ever in her handkerchief, for he looked very pale and frightened. Thus she held him, rocking him in her arms like a little child, while she looked over the beautiful pictures of the new picture-book, which she found among her other Christmas gifts. Contrary to her

usual disposition, she showed some ill-temper towards Father Drosselmeier, who kept continually laughing at her, and asked again and again how it was that she liked to caress such an ugly little fellow. That singular comparison with Drosselmeier, which she made when her eyes first fell upon Nutcracker, now came again into her mind, and she said very seriously: “Who knows, dear godfather, if you were dressed like my sweet Nutcracker, and had on such bright little boots—who knows but you would then be as handsome as he is!” Maria could not tell why her parents laughed so loudly at this, and why the Counsellor’s face turned so red, and he, for his part, did not laugh half so heartily this time as he had done more than once before. It is likely there was some particular reason for it.

4. Wonders Upon Wonders

In the sitting-room of the Doctor's house, just as you enter the room, there stands on the left hand, close against the wall, a high glass-case, in which the children preserve all the beautiful things which are given to them every year. Louise was quite a little girl when her father had the case made by a skilful joiner, who set in it such large, clear panes of glass, and arranged all the parts so well together, that every thing looked much brighter and handsomer when on its shelves than when it was held in the hands. On the upper shelf, which Maria and Fred were unable to reach, stood all Godfather Drosselmeier's curious machines. Immediately below this was a shelf for the picture-books; the two lower shelves Maria and Fred filled up as they pleased, but it always happened that Maria used the lower one as a house for her dolls, while Fred, on the contrary, cantoned his troops in the one above.

And so it happened to-day, for while Fred set his hus-

sars in order above, Maria, having laid Miss Trutchen aside, and having installed the new and sweetly dressed doll in her best furnished chamber below, had invited herself to tea with her. I have said that the chamber was well furnished, and it is true; here was a nice chintz sofa and several tiny chairs, there stood a tea-table, but above all, there was a clean, white little bed for her doll to repose upon. All these things were arranged in one corner of the glass case, the sides of which were hung with gay pictures, and it will readily be supposed, that in such a chamber the new doll, Miss Clara, must have found herself very comfortable.

It was now late in the evening, and night, indeed, was close at hand, and Godfather Drosselmeier had long since gone home, yet still the children could not leave the glass-case, although their mother repeatedly told them that it was high time to go to bed. "It is true," cried Fred at last; "the poor fellows (meaning his hussars) would like to get a little rest, and as long as I am here, not one of them will dare to nod—I know that." With these words he went up to bed, but Maria begged very hard, "Only leave me here a little while, dear mother. I have two or three things to attend to, and when they are done I will go immediately to bed."

Maria was a very good and sensible child, and therefore her mother could leave her alone with her play-things without anxiety. But for fear she might become so much interested in her new doll and other presents as to forget the lights which burned around the glass case, her mother blew them all out, and left only the lamp which hung down from the ceiling in the middle of the chamber, and which diffused a soft, pleasant light. "Come in soon, dear Maria, or you will not be up in time to-morrow morning," called her mother, as she went up to bed. There was something Maria had at heart to do, which she had not told her mother, though she knew not the reason why; and as soon as she found herself alone she went quickly about it. She still carried in her arms the wounded Nutcracker, rolled up in her pocket handkerchief. Now she laid him carefully upon the table, unrolled the handkerchief softly, and examined his wound. Nutcracker was very pale, but still he smiled so kindly and sorrowfully that it went straight to Maria's heart. "Ah! Nutcracker, Nutcracker, do not be angry at brother Fred because he hurt you so, he did not mean to be so rough; it is the wild soldier's life with his hussars that has made him a little hard-hearted, but otherwise he is a good fellow, I can assure