

The Nutcracker

By E.T.A. Hoffman

Act I

It's a cozy Christmas Eve at the Stahlbaum's house. Their house is decorated with Christmas ornaments, wreaths, stockings, mistletoe and in the center of it all, a majestic Christmas tree. As the Stahlbaum's prepare for their annual Christmas party, their children, Fritz and Clara, wait anxiously for their families and friends to arrive. When the guests finally appear, the party picks up with dancing and celebration. A mysterious guest arrives dressed in dark clothing, nearly frightening Fritz, but not Clara. Clara knows he is Godfather Drosselmeyer, the toymaker. His surprise arrival is warmly accepted and all the children dance and carry on with

laughter. The celebration is interrupted again when Drosselmeyer reveals to the children that he has brought them gifts. The girls receive beautiful china dolls and the boys receive bugles. Fritz is given a beautiful drum, but Clara is given the best gift of all, the Nutcracker. Fritz grows jealous, snatches the Nutcracker from Clara and plays a game of toss with the other boys. It isn't long until the Nutcracker breaks. Clara is upset, but Drosselmeyer fixes it with a handkerchief.

Drosselmeyer's nephew offers Clara a small make-shift bed under the Christmas tree for her injured Nutcracker.

The party grows late and the children become sleepy. Everyone generously thanks the Stahlbaum's before they leave. As Clara's family retires to bed, she checks on her Nutcracker one last time and ends up falling asleep under the Christmas tree with the Nutcracker in her arms.

At the stroke of midnight Clara wakes up to a frightening scene. The house, the tree and the toys seem to be getting larger. Is she shrinking? Out of nowhere large mice dressed in army uniforms, led by the Mouse King, begin to circle the room while the toys and Christmas trees come to life. Clara's Nutcracker groups the soldier toys into battle formation and fights the mouse army. The Mouse King



traps the Nutcracker in the corner, but the Nutcracker can't overcome the Mouse King's strength. Clara makes a desperate move to save her Nutcracker from defeat and throws her slipper at the Mouse King. She hits him directly in the head! The Nutcracker is able to overcome the stunned Mouse King and claims victory. The mice army quickly carries away their King.

Clara falls onto the Nutcracker's bed, overwhelmed by the moment. As angels and delightful music hover over their heads, the bed turns into a magical sleigh, floating higher and higher. The Nutcracker is transformed into a human prince (who looks strikingly similar to Drosselmeyer's nephew). He gets on Clara's sleigh and drives through a snowy forest where the snowflakes turn into dancing maidens.

Act II

After their magical journey through the snow forest, they come to their destination in the Land of the Sweets. Clara can't believe her eyes; ladyfinger mountains topped with whipped cream whiter than snow, sweetly glazed flowers and butter-cream frosting everywhere she looks. Upon their arrival, they are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. As they reenact the night's events, the Sugar Plum Fairy becomes impressed with Clara's bravery and the Nutcracker's heroism. In their honor, the Sugar Plum Fairy takes them inside the Candy Castle and throws a lavish festival. They are treated like royalty and presented with every imaginable sweet. Shortly thereafter, the dancing begins.

Hot coco dances to the lively music of trumpets and castanets of the Spanish fandango. The women of coffee dance in veils and move their bodies like rising steam to an Arabian song, while Mandarin tea dances to an exotic Asian flute chorus. Matroishkas (Russian dolls) follow the Mandarin tea leaping and dancing to an invigorating Russian Trepak.

To Clara's enjoyment there is still more to be seen. A giant gingerbread house, known as Mother Ginger, dances onto the Sugar Plum Fairy's court. She opens her skirt and eight little gingerbread children come dancing out circling around her. After the Mirliton dance is over, the children quickly file back into the large gingerbread house and Mother Ginger



leaves the room. Soon after Mother Ginger exits, the dancing flowers enter to the tune of the harp. Perhaps the most beautiful waltz she has ever heard, Clara and the Nutcracker Prince watch with amazement. The flowers dance in beautiful mesmerizing patterns as a single Dewdrop floats above them.

Silence quickly follows the end of their dance. Clara doesn't know what to expect next. A handsome Cavalier enters the scene and escorts the Sugar Plum Fairy to the center of the room. They dance to the most recognizable song in the entire work. The captivating pair dance lighter than air. This beautiful dance completes Clara's most perfect evening. The festival concludes when everyone comes together on the court and bids Clara and the Nutcracker Prince farewell. She tells the Nutcracker she wishes the adventure would never end and he tells her it won't for those who have an eye to see it.

Clara wakes up the next morning under the Christmas tree with her Nutcracker still in her arms.