THE NUTCRACKER AND THE MOUSE KING by E.T.A. Hoffmann. CHRISTMAS EVE. During the long, long clay 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 ne
stled 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 ma
ny 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 p
leasure 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, sometime
s 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 as Godfathe
r 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 cast
le, 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 coll
ars around their necks, and sins: 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 Dro
sselmeier 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 t
o 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 t
ime 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, de
ar children, and see what Christmas has brought you this year." 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 f
irst 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 F
rederic 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 mid
dle 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 ov
er 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. Dis
mounting again, he said it was a wild creature, but that was nothing; he would soon break him. He then reviewed his new regiment of hussa rs, 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, w hich lay open on the table, where all kinds of beautiful flowers, and gayly dressed people, and boys and girls at play, were painted as natur
al 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. T hey knew that Godfather Drosselmeier was now about to display his Christmas gift, and ran towards a table that stood against the wall, co
vered 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 an
d golden turrets. A musical clock began to play, when the doors and windows flew open, and little men and women, with feathers in the ir 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 ma
ny little tapers were "burning in silver chandeliers, there were children in white frocks and green jackets, dancing to the soun d 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 t he castle, looked about him, and then went in again. Fred, with his arms resting upon the table, gazed at the beautiful castle, a
nd the little walking and dancing figures, and then said, " Godfather Drosselmeier, let me go into your castle." The Counsellor gav e 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 wit
h, 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 d
oor, and all without the least change; Fred called out impatiently, " Godfather Drosselmeier, come out this time at the other door." "Th at 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 m
ust remain." "So----o," cried Fred, in a drawling tone, "all that can never be! Listen, Godfather Drosselmeier. if your little dressed up f igures 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 t
hem. No, give me my hussars, who can maneuver backward and forward, as I order them, and are not shut up in a house." With this h e darted towards a large table, drew up his regiment upon their silver horses, and let them trot and gallop, and cut and slash, to h
is heart's content. Maria also had softly stolen away, for she too was soon tired of the sauntering and dancing puppets in the castl e; bu t as she was very amiable and good, she did not wish it to be observed so plainly in her as it was hi her brother Fred. Counsellor Dr
osselmeier turned to the parents, and said, somewhat angrily, "An ingenious work like this was not made for stupid children. I will put up my ca stle again, and carry it home." But their mother now stepped forward, and desired to see the secret mechanism and curious wo
rks by which the little figures were set in motion. The Counsellor took it all apart, and then put it together again. While he was em ployed in this man ner he became good-natured once more, and gave the children some nice brown men and women, with gilt faces, hands, and f
eet. They were all made of sweet thorn, and smelt like gingerbread, at which Frederic and Maria were greatly delighted. At her mother's requ est, 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, whe
n it came to her turn, thought she would like to look at hers a while longer as it hung. This was readily permitted. 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 beaut
y 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 ma
n of taste and good breeding. He wore a hussar's jacket of beautiful bright violet, fastened together with white loops and buttons, pan taloons 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 h is b ack 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 re
membered that Godfather Drosselmeier wore an old shabby cloak and an ugly cap, and still he was a dear, dear godfather. Maria co uld not help thinking also, that even if Godfather Drosselmeier were in other respects as well dressed as this little fellow, yet aft
er 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 fi rs t sight, the more she was sensible how much good nature and friendliness was expressed in his features. Nothing but kindness and be
nevolence shone in his clear green, though somewhat too prominent eyes. It was very becoming to the man that he wore about his chin a ni cely trimmed beard of white cotton, for by this the sweet smile upon his deep red lips was rendered much more striking. "Ah, dea
r father," exclaimed Maria at last, "to whom belongs that charming little man by the tree there?" "He shall work industriously for yo u a ll, 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." W
ith these words her father took him carefully from the table, and raised up his wooden cloak, whereupon the little man stretched hi s mout h wi de o pen, and showed two rows of very white sharp teeth. At her father's bidding Maria put in a nut, and—crack —the man had bitte
n 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 tha t this dainty little man came of the family of Nutcrackers, and practiced the profession of his forefathers. Maria was o
ver joyed at what she heard, and her father said, "Dear Maria, since friend Nutcracker is so great a favorite with you, I place him under yo ur particular care and keeping, although, as I said before, Louise and Fred shall have as much right to his services a
s 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 s tretch his mouth open so wide, which in truth was not very becoming to him. Louise sat down by her, and friend Nutcr
acker must perform the same service for her too, which he seemed to do quite willingly, for he kept smiling all the whi le ve ry pleasant ly. In the mean time Fred had become tired of riding and parading his hussars, and when he heard the nuts crack so mer
rily, he ran to his sister, and laughed very heartily at the droll little man, who now, since Fred must have a share in the sp ort, pa ssed 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—cra
ck —crack—it went, and three teeth fell out of Nutcracker's mouth, and his whole under jaw became loose and rickety. "Ah, m y poor dear N utcracker I" said Maria, and snatched him out of Fred's hands. "That's a stupid fellow," said Fred. "He wants to be a nutcrac
ker, 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 hi s tee th, an d 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 ha rd -hearted fe llow; 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 beg an to cr y 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 N utcracker expressly under Maria's protection, and as I see that he is now greatly in need of it, I give her full authori
ty over him, and no one must dispute it. Besides, I wonder at Fred, that he should require farther duty from one who has be en 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 oppos ite end of t he table, where his hu ssars, 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 u p the little fel lo w m ore carefully than ever in her handkerchief, for he looked very pale and frightened. Thus she held him, rocki
ng him in her arms like a little child, while she looked over the beautiful pictures of the new picture-book, which she found a mong her other Christmas gifts. Contrary to her usual disposition, she showed some ill-temper towards Father Drossel
meier, who kept continually laughing at her, and asked again and again how it was that she liked to caress such an ugly little fe ll ow . That singular comparison with Drosselmeier, which she made when her eyes first fell upon Nutcracker, no
w came again into her mind, and she said very seriously: "Who knows, dear godfather, if you were d ressed li ke my sweet Nu tc racker, and had on such bright little boots —who knows but you would then be as handsome as he is?" Mari
a could not tell why her parents laughed so loudly at this, and why the Counsellor's face turned so r eel , an d l ie, 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 particul
ar reason for it. WONDERS UPON WONDERS. In the sitting-room of the Doctor's house, just as you enter the ro om , there stands o n 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 skillful jo ine r, who set in i t su ch large, clear panes of glass, and arranged all the parts so well together, that everything looked much brighter
and handsomer when on its shelves than when it was held in the hands. On the upper shelf, which Mari a and Fred were unabl e to re ach, stood all Godfather Drosselmeier's curious machines. Immediately below this was a shelf for the picture-boo
ks; the two lower shelves Maria and Fred filled up as they pleased, but it always happened that Maria u sed the lower one as a house for her dolls, while Fred, on the contrary, cantoned his troops in the one above. And so it hap
pened to-day, for while Fred set his hussars in order above, Maria, having laid Miss Trutchen aside, and having in stalled the new and sweetly dressed doll in her best furnished chamber below, had invited herself to tea with he
r. I have said that the chamber was well furnished, and it is true; here was a nice chintz sofa and s everal t iny chairs, th ere 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, an d it will readil y 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 h ome, yet s till 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 litt le rest, a nd as long as I am here, not one of them will dare to nod—I know that." With these words he went up to b
ed, but Maria begged very hard, "Only leave me here a little while, clear mother. I have two or t hree th ings t o a ttend to, an d 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 playthings without anxiety. But fo r fe ar she might b e co me so much i nterested in her new doll and other presents as to forget the lights which burned around the gla
ss case, her mother blew them all out, and left only the lamp which hung down from t he ceil ing in the mi ddl e o f the chambe r, and which diffused a soft, pleasant light. "Come in soon, dear Maria, or you will not be up in time t
o-morrow morning," called her mother, as she went up to bed. There was something M aria h ad at he art 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 po cket ha ndkerchi ef. Now she laid him carefully upon the table, unrolled the handkerchief softly, and examined his wound. Nu
tcracker was very pale, but still he smiled so kindly and sorrowfully that it went straight to Mari a's h eart. "Ah! N ut cracker, Nutcracker, do not be angry at brother Fred because he hurt you so, he did not mean to be so roug
h; it is the wild soldier's life with his hussars that has made him a little hard-hearted, but otherwise h e is a good fel low, I can assure you. Now I will tend you very carefully until you are well and merry again; as to fastening in y
our teeth and setting your shoulders, that Godfather Drosselmeier must do; he understands suc h things." But M aria was ha rdly able to finish the sentence, for as she mentioned the name of Drosselmeier, friend Nutcracker made a
terrible wry face, and there darted something out of his eyes like green sparkling flashes. Mari a was jus t going to fall into a dreadful fright, when behold, it was the sad smiling face of the honest Nutcracker again, w
hich she saw before her, and she knew now that it must be the glare of the lamp, which, stirr ed by th e draught, had flared up, and distorted Nutcracker's features so strangely. "Am I not a foolish girl,
" she said," to be so easily frightened, and to think that a wooden puppet could make face s at me? But I love Nu tcracker too well, because he is so droll and so good tempered; therefore he shall be taken good
care of as he deserves." With this Maria took friend Nutcracker in her arms, walked to th e glass cas e, s tooped do wn, and said to her new doll, "Pray, Miss Clara, be so good as to give up our bed to the sick and wo
unded Nutcracker, and make out as well as you can with the sofa, Remember that you are well and hear ty, or you would n ot h ave such fat red cheeks, and very few little dolls have such nice sofas." Miss Clara, in her gay
Christmas attire, looked very grand and haughty, and would not even say "Muck." "But why sh ould I s tand upon ceremony" said Maria, and she took out the bed, laid little Nutcracker down up
on it softly, and gently rolled a nice ribbon which she wore around her waist, a bout his po or should ers , and then drew the bedclothes over him snugly, so that there was nothing to be seen
of him below the nose. "He shan't stay with the naughty Clara," she said, and rais ed the bed with Nutc racker in it to the shelf above, and placed it close by the pretty village, where Fred's hussa
rs were quartered. She locked the case, and was about to go up to bed, whe n—listen c hildren—wh en softly, softly it began to rustle, and to whisper, and to rattle round and round, under th
e hearth, behind the chairs, behind the cupboards and glass case. The great clock wh ir—red lo uder and lou der, but it could not strike. Maria turned towards it, and there the large gilt owl that sat on
the top, had dropped down its wings, so that they covered the whole face, and it str etc hed out its ugly head with the short crooked beak, and looked just like a cat. And the clock whirred louder in
plain words. "Dick—ry, dick—ry, clock—whirr, softly clock, Mouse-King has a f ine ear —prr— prr—pu m—pum—the old song let him hear—prr—prr—pum—pum—or he might—run away in a fr
ight —now clock strike softly and light." And pum —pum, it went with a dull deadened sound t we lve times . Maria began now to tremble with, fear, and she was upon the point of running out of the r
oom in terror, when she "beheld Godfather Drosselmeier, who sat in the owl's place o n t he to p of the cl ock, and had hu ng down the skirts of his brown coat just like wings. But she took courage, and cried out lou
dly, with sobs, " Godfather Drosselmeier, Godfather Drosselmeier, what are you doin g up ther e? Co me down, an d do not fri ghten me so, you naughty Godfather Drosselmeier!" Just then a wild squeaking and whi
mpering broke out on all sides, and then there was a running, trotting and gallo ping behind the w alls, as if a thousand little fe et were in motion, and a thousand little lights flashed out of the crevices in the floor. B
ut they were not lights —no —they were sparkling little eyes, and Maria percei ved that mice were all around, peeping ou t an d working their way into the room. Presently it went trot—trot—hop—hop about the chamber,
and more and more mice, in greater or smaller parties galloped across, and at l ast placed themselves in line and column, just as Fred was accustomed to place his soldier
s when they went to battle. This Maria thought was very droll, and as she had not t ha t aversion to mice which most children have, her terror was gradually leaving her, when al
l at once there arose a squeaking so terrible and piercing, that it seemed a s if ice-c old w ater was pour ed d own her back. Ah, what now did she see! I know, my worthy reader Frederic,
that thy heart, like that of the wise and brave soldier Frederic Stahlba um, sits in the right place, but if thou hadst se en what Maria now beheld, thou wouldst certainly have run away; yes, I believe that thou wouldst
have jumped as quickly as possible into bed, and then have draw n the covering ov er thine ears much farther than was necessary to keep thee warm. Alas! poor Maria
could not do that now, for—listen children—close before her feet, the re bur st out sand an d lime and crumbled wall stones, as if thrown up by some subterranean force,
and seven mice-heads with seven sparkling crowns rose out of the floor, squ eaking and squealing ter ribly. Presently the mouse's body to which these seven heads belonged, worked it
s way out, and the great mouse crowned with the seven diadems, squeakin g loudly, huz zaed in full chorus, as he advanced to meet his army, which at once set itself in motion, and ho
tt —hott—trot—trot it went—alas, straight towards the glass case—straigh t to wards poor M aria who stood close be fore it! Her heart had before beat so terribly from anxiety and fear,
that she thought it would leap out of her bosom, a nd then she knew sh e mus t die; but no w it seem ed as if the blo od stood still in her veins. Half fainting, she tottered backward,
when clatter —clatter —rattle —rattle it went—and a glass pane which she had struck with her elbow fell in pieces at her feet. She felt at the moment a sharp pain in
her left arm, but her heart all at once became much lig hte r, sh e heard no more squeak ing and s quea lin g, a l l had become still, and although she did not dare to look,
yet she believed that the mice, frightened by the clatt er o f th e broken glass, had ret reated int o thei r holes. But what was that again! Close behind her in the glass case
a strange bustling and rustling bega n, and little fine vo ices were he ard. "Up, u p, a wake—a rms take —a wake—to the fight —this night—up, up—to the fight
." And all the while something rang out clear an d sweet li ke l ittle bell s. "Ah , that is my clear musical clock!" exclaimed Mari
a joyfully, and turned quickly to look . Sh e then saw how it fla she d a nd lightened strangely in the glass case, and
there was a great stir and bustle up on t he sh elves. Many little figur es crossed up and down by each other, and wor
ked and stretched out their arms as if the y were mak ing read y. And now, Nutc rac ker raised himself all of a sudden, threw the
bedclothes clear off, and leaped wit h bot h feet at o nce out o f bed, cr ying aloud, " Crack —c rack—crack—stupid pack—drive mouse bac
k—stupid pack—crack—crack—mo use—ba ck—crick— c rac k—stup id pack." W ith these w ords he drew his little sword, flourished it in the air,
and exclaimed, " My loving vassals , friend s and brother s, will you stand b y me in the hard fight?" Stra igh tway three Scaramouches, a Harlequin, four
Chimney-sweepers, two Guitar-play ers and a dru mmer cried o ut, " Y es, my lord , we w il l follow you with fid elity and co urage —we will march with you to battle —to
victory or death," and then rushed after th e fiery Nutc rack e r, who ve ntured the dangerous leap down from th e upper s hel f. Ah, it was easy enough for them to perform
this feat, for beside the fine garmen ts o f thick cloth an d silk which the y w ore , the inside of their bodies were made of cotto
n and tow, so that they came down plump, like bags of wo ol. But poor Nutc racker had c ertai nly "broken his arms or his legs, for remember, it
was almost two feet from the shelf where h e sto od to the floor, and his body was as br ittle as if it had been cut out of Linden wood. Yes, Nutcrac
ker would certainly have broken his arms o r h is legs, if, at th e mo me nt w hen he leaped, Miss C lara had not spr ung quickl y from the sofa, and caught the hero with his d
rawn sword in her soft arms. "Ah, th ou d ear, goo d C lar a," sobbe d Maria," ho w l have wronged th ee! Thou didst cert ai nly resign thy bed willingly to little Nutcracker.
" But Miss Clara now spoke, as she softl y pr esse d t he yo ung hero to he r silken bosom. "You will not, oh , my lor d! si ck a nd w ou nded as you are, share the dangers of the fight.
See how your brave vassals assem ble themselve s, ea ge r f or t he affray, and certain of co nq uest. S car amou ch , Harlequin, Chimney-sweepers, Guitar- players
, Drummer, are all ready drawn up b elow, an d t he ch in a f igures on the shelf sti r and mo ve s trangel y! Wil l you not, oh, my lord! repose upon the sofa, or f
rom my arms look down upon your v icto ry? "Th us spoke Cla ra, but Nutcracker deme aned himself very ung ra cio us ly, for h e ki ck ed and struggled so violently with his legs, tha
Clara was obliged to set him quickly dow n upon the floo r. He then, how ev er, dr op ped grace ful ly upo n one knee, and said, "Fair lady, the recollecti
on of thy favor and condescension w ill go with me int o t he ba ttl e a nd th e s tri fe." C lara th en stooped so low that she could take him b
y the arm, raised him gently from his knees , too k o ff her b es pa n gled gi rdle , a nd wa s a bout to throw it across his neck, but little N
utcracker stepped two paces backward, laid his ha nd upo n h is br eas t, an d said ve ry ear nes tly, " Not so, fair lady, lavish not thy favor
s thus upon me, for—" he stopped, sighe d heavily, to re off th e rib bo n whic h Maria had bound about his shoulders, pr
essed it to his lips, hung it across him li ke a scarf , a nd th en bol dly fl ou rishing his "bright little blade, leaped li
ke a bird over the edge of the glass cas e u pon th e flo or. Yo u u nder sta nd m y k ind and good readers and listeners th
at Nutcracker, even before he had thus com e to li fe, h ad fe lt very se nsi bly th e kindness and love which Maria had shown to
wards him, and it was because he had b eco me so parti al t o he r, th at he would no t receive and wear the girdle of Miss Clara, al
though it shone and sparkled so brightly. The tru e and faithf ul Nu tc rack er pr eferr ed to wear M aria's simple ribbon. But what will no
w happen? As soon as Nutcracker had leaped ou t, t he squeaking a nd wh is tli ng wa s hea rd again. Ah, i t is under the large table, that the hat
eful mice have concealed their countless bands, a nd hig h above them all t ow ers t he d rea dfu l mo use wit h s even heads! What will now happen! THE BAT
TLE. "Beat the march, true vassal Drummer!" scream ed N utcracker very loudly, a nd im m ed ia tely the d rummer beg an to rattle and to roll upon his drum so skillfully, that the windo
ws of the glass case trembled and hummed again. Now it r ustled and clattered therein, a nd M ar ia pe rceiv ed that the covers of t he little boxes in which Fred's army were quartered, were bursting open, a
nd now the soldiers leaped out, and then down again upon the lowest shelf, where they drew up in fine ar ra y. Nu tcra cker ran up and down, speaking inspiring words to the troops —" Let no dog of a trumpeter blow or sti
r!" he cried angrily, for he was afraid he should not be heard, and then turned quickly to Harlequin, w ho had grown a lit tle p ale, and chattered with his long chin. "General," he said, earnestly, "I know your courage and your experience; t
here is need now for a quick eye, and skill to seize the proper moment. I entrust to your command all the cavalry and artiller y. You d o not need a horse, for you have very long legs, and can gallop yourself tolerably well. I look to see you do your d
uty." Thereupon Harlequin put his long, thin fingers to his mouth, and crowed so piercingly, that it sounded as if a hundred shrill trumpets we re blown merrily. Then it stirred again in the glass case—a neighing, and a whinnying, and a stamping were heard, a
nd see! Fred's cuirassiers and dragoons, but above all, his new splendid hussars marched out, and halted close by the case. Regiment after regiment now d efiled before Nutcracker, with flying colors and warlike music, and ranged themselves in long rows across the floor of the
chamber. Before them went Fred's cannon rattling along, surrounded by the cannoneers, and soon bom—bom it went, and Maria could see how the mice suffered by the fire, how the sugar plums plunged into their dark, heavy mass, covering them with white powder, and throwing t
hem more than once into shameful disorder. But the greatest damage was done them by a heavy battery that was mounted upon mamma's footstool, which—pum, pum—kept up a steady fire of caraway seeds against the enemy, by which a great many of them fell. The mice, notwith
standing, came nearer and nearer, and at last mastered some of the cannon, but then it went prr—prr—and Maria could scarcely see what now happened for the smoke and dust. This however was certain, that each corps fought with the greatest animosity, and the victory was for a l
ong time doubtful. The mice kept deploying more and more forces, and the little silver shot, which they fired very skillfully, struck now even into the glass case. Clara and Trutchen ran around in despair. "Must I die in the blossom of youth V said Clara." Have I so well preserved mys
elf for this, to perish here in these walls?" cried Trutchen. Then they fell about each, other's necks, and screamed so terribly, that they could be heard above the mad tumult of the battle. Of the scene that now presented itself you can have no idea, good reader. It went prr—prr—puff
—piff—clitter—clatter —bom, burum —bom, burum—bom—in the wildest confusion, while the Mouse-King and mice squeaked and screamed, and now and then the mighty voice of Nutcracker was heard, as he gave the necessary orders, and he was seen striding along through the
battalions in the hottest of the fire. Harlequin had made some splendid charges with his cavalry, and covered himself with honor, but Fred's hussars were battered by the enemy's artillery, with odious, offensive balls, which made dreadful spots in their red jackets, for which reason t
hey would not move forward. Harlequin ordered them to draw off to the left, and in the enthusiasm of command headed the movement himself, and the cuirassiers and dragoons followed; that is, they all drew off to the left, and galloped home. By this step the battery upon the footst
ool was exposed to great danger, and it was not long before a strong body of very ugly mice pushed on with such determined bravery, that the footstool, cannons, cannoneers and all were overthrown by their headlong charge. Nutcracker seemed a little disturbed at this, and gave o
rders that the right wing should make a retreating movement. You know very well, oh my military reader Frederic, that to make such a movement is almost the same thing as to run away, and you are now grieving with me at the disaster which impends over the army of Maria's darlin
g Nutcracker. But turn your eyes from this scene, and view the left wing, where all is still in good order, and where there is yet great hope, both for the general and the army. During the hottest of the fight, large masses of mice cavalry had de-bouched softly from under the settee, an
d amid loud and hideous squeaking had thrown themselves with fury upon the left wing; but what an obstinate resistance did they meet with there! Slowly, as the difficult nature of the ground required —for the edge of the glass case had to be traversed — the china figures had adva
nced, headed by two Chinese emperors, and formed themselves into a hollow square. These brave, motley, but noble troops, which were composed of Gardeners, Tyrolese, Bonzes, Friseurs, Merry-andrews, Cupids, Lions, Tigers, Peacocks, and Apes, fought with coolness, courage
, and determination. By their Spartan bravery this battalion of picked men would have wrested the victory from the foe, had not a bold major rushed madly from the enemy's ranks, and bitten off the head of one of the Chinese emperors, who in falling dashed to the ground two Bonze
s and a Cupid. Through this gap the enemy penetrated into the square, and in a few moments the whole battalion was torn to pieces. Their brave resistance, therefore, was of no avail to Nutcracker's army, which, once having begun to retreat, retired farther and farther, and at every
step with diminished numbers, until the unfortunate Nutcracker halted with a little band close before the glass case. "Let the reserve advance! Harlequin —Scaramouch— Drummer—where are you?" Thus cried Nutcracker, in hopes of new troops which should deploy out of the glas
s-case. And there actually came forth a few brown men and women, made of sweet thorn, with golden faces, and caps, and helmets, but they fought around so awkwardly, that they did not hit one of the enemy, and at last knocked the cap off their own general's head. The enemies' c
hasseurs, too, bit off their legs before long, so that they tumbled over, and carried with them to the ground some of Nutcracker's best officers. Nutcracker, now completely surrounded by the foe, was in the greatest peril. He tried to leap over the edge, into the glass case, but found h
is legs too short. Clara and Trutchen lay each in a deep swoon, —they could not help him—hussars, dragoons sprang merrily by him into safe quarters, and in wild despair, he cried, " A horse—a horse—a kingdom for a horse!" At this moment two of the enemies' tirailleurs seized hi
m by his wooden mantle, and the Mouse-King, squeaking from his seven throats, leaped in triumph towards him. Maria could no longer control herself. "Oh, my poor Nutcracker I" she cried, sobbing, and without being exactly conscious of what she did, grasped her left shoe, and th
rew it with all her strength into the thickest of the mice, straight at their king. In an instant, all seemed scattered and dispersed, but Maria felt in her left arm a still sharper pain than before, and sank in a swoon to the floor. THE SICKNESS. When Maria woke out of her deep and deathl
ike slumber, she found herself lying in her own bed, with the sun shining bright and sparkling through the ice-covered windows into the chamber. Close beside her sat a stranger, whom she soon recognized, however, as the Surgeon Wendelstern. He said softly, "She is awake!" Her
mother then came to the bedside, and gazed upon her with anxious and inquiring looks. "Ah, dear mother," lisped little Maria, "are all the hateful mice gone, and is the good Nutcracker safe?" "Do not talk such foolish stuff," replied her mother; "what have the mice to do with Nutcr
acker? You naughty child, you have caused us a great deal of anxiety. But so it always is, when children are disobedient and do not mind their parents. You played last night with your dolls until it was very late. You became sleepy, probably, and a stray mouse may have jumped out