

The Nutcracker on Christmas Eve

by E.T.A Hoffman

Adapted by Jules de Jongh

Season 1 Episode 20

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Why hello and welcome. We have such a story for you it's one you may be familiar with, oh I can hardly contain myself. It's the Nutcracker! With the mouse king and the mighty battle. There I said it. And my neighbour Jules will be here with it any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: Hello, who is it?

Jules: It's your neighbour Jules with a story?

Nanny Bea: Hello and I'm sorry. I could not contain my excitement and already told our listening friends about our story.

Jules: I understand, this one has it all the excitement of Christmas Eve, a mechanical castle, a maniacal mouse.

Nanny Bea: And so many wonder words I've lost count. Tiggy called in to help us with a few.

[drum roll]

Tiggy: Hello Nanny Bea, it's Tiggy here with not one, not two but three wonder words for you today.

[Wonder Word theme]

The first is Hussar, Hussars are soldiers on horseback in elaborate costumes with gold braiding and large feathers in the top of their helmets. The other wonder words are scaramouche, and pantaloon, they are both comedy characters like clowns often foolish, cowardly and causing trouble. Bye.

[chime]

Jules: Tiggy's provided the wonder words, you've provided the tea I think it's time I provide the tale. Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Yes please

Jules: Okay then, The Nutcracker on Christmas Eve, from the first part of E.T.A Hoffman's book, adapted for radio

"On the 24th of December Fitz and Marie were not allowed into the drawing-room. All day long Fitz heard rattlings and rustlings, inside the forbidden room and saw Godpapa Drosselmeier creeping across the floor with a big box under his arm.

"Oh! I do wonder what pretty things Godpapa Drosselmeier has been making for us *this* time!" Marie exclaimed.

Godpapa Drosselmeier was a very, very clever man, who knew all about clocks and watches and all things that moved in such a way. Whenever he came he brought something delightful for the children. But for Christmas he would bring some specially charming, ingenious piece he had spent hours labouring over--for that reason it was always taken away and stored out of reach of the children.

Fritz believed this time, it would be a great castle, where soldiers would be marching about; and firing cannons, till everything banged and thundered.

'No, no,' Marie said. 'Godpapa Drosselmeier once told me about a beautiful garden, and a great lake and swans swimming with great gold collars, singing lovely music.'

Fritz replied rather rudely; 'Whatever he brings is always taken away from us. So I prefer the things from papa and mamma and the Child-Christ much better; we keep them ourselves, and we can do with them what we like.'

Fritz and Marie then sat very still and did not say another word as they felt a fluttering of gentle, invisible wings around them. Then a bright gleam of light passed quickly on the wall, and the children knew that was the Child-Christ speeding away, on shining wings, to bring gifts to other children. At this moment a silvery bell said, Kling-a-ling-a-ling! Kling-a-ling-a-ling! the doors of the drawing room flew open, and light came streaming out. Papa and Mamma came and took their children's hands, 'Come now, darlings, and see what the blessed Child-Christ has brought you.'

'Oh, how lovely! how lovely!' Marie Cried and Fritz gave several jumps of delight. The great Christmas tree on the table bore apples of silver and gold, and all the branches were heavy with bud and blossom, of sugar almonds, tinted bonbon sweets, and all sorts of things to eat. All round the tree on every side everything shone and glittered. Marie gazed at the dolls, and all kinds of toys.

Fritz, in the meantime, had been galloping his new fox, a wildish sort of brute he stated; but one he felt sure he could tame. He mustered his new squadron of hussars, a cavalry in red and gold uniforms, with real silver swords, and mounted on shining white horses.

When the children had sobered down a little, and were beginning upon the beautiful picture books, there came another "Kling-a-ling-a-ling! Kling-a-ling-a-ling" to announce Godpapa Drosselmeier's Christmas present, which was concealed by a curtain. When this curtain was drawn, what did the children behold?

But a castle with shining windows and golden towers. A chime of bells rang from inside; and you saw very small ladies and gentlemen, with plumed hats, and long robes, walking up and down in the rooms. In the central hall, there were little candles burning in silver chandeliers; and children dancing. Godpapa Drosselmeier himself (but scarcely taller than papa's thumb) came now and then, and stood at the castle door, then went in again.

Fritz had been looking on with the rest at the beautiful castle and the people walking about and dancing in it, then he said:

"Godpapa Drosselmeier, let me go into your castle for a while.'

Drosselmeier answered that this could not possibly be done for it was far too small.

After a short time, as the ladies and gentlemen kept on walking, the children kept dancing, and little Godpapa Drosselmeier kept coming to the door, Fritz cried impatiently:

"Godpapa Drosselmeier, please come out at that other door!

"That can't be done, dear Fritz,' answered Drosselmeier.

"Well,' resumed Fritz, 'Make the children come down, then, I want to see them nearer.'

'Nonsense, nothing of that sort can be done,' cried Drosselmeier, with impatience. 'The machinery must work as it's doing now; it cannot be altered, you know.'

'Very well,' said Fritz, ' If your little creatures in the castle always do the same, I prefer my hussars. They manoeuvre just as I want them, and are not fastened up in a house.'

Fritz went back to his cavalry to play. Marie had slipped away softly, for she too was tired of the promenading and dancing in the castle, though, kind and gentle as she was, she did not like to show it as her brother did. Drosselmeier, somewhat annoyed, said to the parents--'An ingenious mechanism like this is not a matter for children, who don't understand it; I shall put my castle back in its box again.' But mother came to the rescue, and made him show her the clever machinery which moved the figures, Drosselmeier recovering his temper in the process. So that he gave the children all sorts of delightful gingerbread men and women, and that pleased them greatly.

It was only then Marie caught sight of something near the tree, something she had not observed at first. A most delicious little man, who was standing there quiet and unobtrusive, as if waiting patiently until it should be his turn to be noticed. His body was rather too tall and stout for his legs, which were short and slight; moreover, his head was a good deal too large. But much of this was atoned for by the elegance of his costume, which showed him to be a person of taste and cultivation. He had on a very pretty violet hussar's jacket, covered in knobs and braiding, and the loveliest little boots fitting his dear little legs as if they had been painted on to them.

As Marie kept looking at this little man, whom she had quite fallen in love with at first sight, she saw more and more clearly what a sweet nature he had. Those green eyes of his (which stuck a little more prominently out of his head than was desirable) beamed with kindliness. It was one of his beauties, too, that his chin was set off with a well kept beard of white cotton, as this drew attention to the sweet smile which his bright red lips always expressed.

'Oh, papa, dear!' cried Marie at last, 'whose is that most darling little man beside the tree?'

'Well, that little man is going to do plenty of good service for all of you; he's going to crack nuts for you.' With which papa took him up from the table, and on his lifting the end of his wooden cloak, the little man opened his mouth wider and wider, displaying two rows of very white, sharp teeth. Marie put a nut into his mouth, and—crack— he had bitten it in two. 'And,' said papa, 'as this Nutcracker seems to have made such an impression on you, Marie, he shall be given over to your special care and charge although he belongs to all of you.'

Marie took him into her arms at once, and made him crack some more nuts; but she picked out all the smallest, so that he might not have to open his mouth too terribly wide.

Fritz was a little tired, after so much manœuvring, so he joined his sister and laughed at the funny little fellow. Fritz gave him all the biggest and hardest nuts he could find, but all at once there was a 'crack--crack,' and three teeth fell out of Nutcracker's mouth, and all his lower jaw was loose and wobbly.

'Ah! my poor darling Nutcracker,' Marie cried, and took him away from Fritz.

'Calls himself a Nutcracker' said Fritz, 'and can't give a decent bite. What's the good of a chap like him!'

'You're a hard-hearted creature!' said Marie in tears, 'You beat your horses, and you've had one of your soldiers shot.'

Fritz was much ashamed, and, troubling himself no further as to nuts or nutcrackers, crept off to the other side of the table, where his hussars were sheltering for the night. Marie got Nutcracker's lost teeth together, bound a pretty white ribbon, taken from her dress, about his poor chin, then wrapped the poor little fellow, who was looking very pale and frightened, more tenderly and carefully than before in her handkerchief. She grew quite angry (which was not usual with her) with Godpapa Drosselmeier because he laughed so, and kept asking how she could make such a fuss about an ugly little fellow like that.

Christmas toys are stored in the sitting-room, where there stands a glass-fronted cupboard. In the upper shelves, which were beyond the reach of Fritz and Marie, were Godpapa Drosselmeier's works of art; immediately under them was the shelf for the picture-books. Fritz and Marie were allowed to do what they liked with the two lower shelves, Marie selected the lowest of all as the place of residence for her dolls, whilst Fritz utilized the shelf above as a camp for his troops. Marie's new doll (whose name Marie discovered, was Miss Clara) settled in comfortably.

It was getting very late, nearly midnight, Godpapa Drosselmeier had been gone a considerable time. Mother reminded them once again that it was long after bedtime. 'Yes,' said Fritz, 'I know these poor fellows (meaning his hussars) are tired, and would like to turn in for the night, but as long as I'm here none dares to nod his head.' So he left them to get some sleep. But Marie begged for just a little while longer, she had such a number of things to see to, and promised to go to bed straight after. Marie was a very good and reasonable child, therefore her mother allowed her to remain for a little longer with her toys. 'Come soon to your bed, Marie, or you'll never be up in time in the morning,' cried her mother as she went away into the bedroom.

As soon as Marie was alone, she unwrapped Nutcracker from her handkerchief, and laid him softly down on the table, and examined his wounds.

Nutcracker was very pale, but at the same time he was smiling with a sad kindness which went straight to Marie's heart.

'Oh, my darling little Nutcracker!' said she, very softly, 'don't you be vexed because brother Fritz has hurt you so: he didn't mean it, you know; he's only a little bit hardened with his soldiering, but he's a good, nice boy, I can assure you: and I'll take the greatest care of you, and nurse you, till you're quite, quite better. And your teeth shall be put in again for you, and your shoulder set right; Godpapa Drosselmeier will see ----'

Marie could not finish what she was going to say, because at the mention of Godpapa Drosselmeier, Nutcracker made a most horrible face. A sort of green sparkle seemed to dart out of his eyes. This was only for an instant, however; and just as Marie was going to be terribly frightened, she found that she was looking at the very same nice, kindly face, she had seen before, and she saw plainly that it was nothing but some draught of air making the lamp flicker that had seemed to produce the change.

'Well!' she said, 'how silly to be so easily frightened, and think that a wooden doll could make faces at me! The Nutcracker is so kind; and must be taken the greatest care of, and properly nursed till he's quite well.'

With which she took him in her arms again, approached the cupboard, and kneeling down beside it, said to her new doll:

'I'm going to ask a favour of you, Miss Clara--that you will give up your bed to this poor sick, wounded Nutcracker, and make yourself as comfortable as you can on the sofa here..'

"Miss Clara, said not so much as 'Muck!'

'Very well,' said Marie, and she took the bed and laid Nutcracker carefully and tenderly down on it; wrapped another pretty ribbon, taken from her own dress, about his hurt shoulder, and drew the bed-clothes up to his nose.

'But he shan't stay with that nasty Clara,' she said, and moved the bed, with Nutcracker in it, to the upper shelf, near the military camp. She closed the cupboard, and was moving away to go to bed, when there begun a low soft rustling and rattling, and a sort of whispering noise, all round, in every direction, under the chairs, behind the cupboards. The clock on the wall 'warned' louder and louder, but did not strike. Marie looked and saw that the big gold owl on the top had drooped its wings so that they covered the whole of the clock and he kept growing louder and louder about the mouse king's ears and the fated time.

Marie grew terribly frightened, and was going to rush away as best she could, when she noticed that Godpapa Drosselmeier was on the top of the clock instead of the owl, with his yellow coat-tails hanging down on both sides, like wings.

"Godpapa! godpapa! what are you up there for? Come down and don't frighten me so terribly, you naughty, naughty Godpapa Drosselmeier!"

But then there began a sort of wild kicking and queaking, everywhere there was a sound as of running and trotting, of thousands of little feet behind the walls, then thousands of little glittering eyes were peeping and squeezing themselves out through every chink. The mice trotted out forming themselves into regular troops and squadrons, in good order, just as Fritz's soldiers did before. As Marie was not afraid of mice she could not help being amused by this, and her first alarm had nearly left her, when suddenly there came such a sharp and terrible piping noise that the blood ran cold in her veins.

Right at her feet, through the floor came bursting up seven mouse-heads, with seven shining crowns upon them. Quickly the body of the mouse which had those seven crowned heads forced its way up through the floor, and this enormous creature shouted to the assembled multitude, squeaking to them with all the seven mouths in full chorus; and then the entire mouse army set itself in motion, and went trot, trot, right up to the cupboard--and, to Marie, who was standing beside it.

Marie's heart had been beating so with terror that she had thought it must jump out of her breast. Half fainting, she leant backwards, and then there was a 'klirr, klirr, prr,' and the pane of the cupboard, which she had broken with her elbow, fell in shivers to the floor. For a moment, everything was quiet; and right behind Marie a movement seemed to commence in the cupboard, and small, faint voices began to be heard, saying:

'Come, awake,;
Out to the fight,
Aim and away,
this is the night.'

And harmonica-bells began ringing as prettily as you please.

"Oh! that's my little peal of bells!" cried Marie, and went nearer and looked in. Then she saw that there was bright light in the cupboard, and everything busily in motion there; dolls and little figures of various kinds all running about together, and struggling with their little arms. At this point, Nutcracker rose from his bed, cast off the bedclothes, and sprung with both feet upright, shouting about the cowardly, foolish mouse pack.

And with this he drew his little sword, waved it in the air, and cried:

'Ye, my trusty vassals, brethren and friends, are ye ready to stand by me in this great battle?'

Immediately three scaramouches, one pantaloon, four chimney-sweeps, two zither-players, and a drummer cried, in eager accents:

'Yes, your highness; we will stand by you in loyal duty; we will follow you to the death, the victory, and the fray!' Nutcracker in the excitement of the moment, dared that dangerous leap to the bottom shelf. He would have broken his arms and legs, had not Miss Clara leapt up and caught the hero, drawn sword and all, in her tender arms.

'Oh! you are a dear Clara!' cried Marie, 'how I did misunderstand you believing you would not let Nutcracker have your bed.'

Miss Clara cried, as she pressed the young hero gently to her silken breast:

'Oh, my lord! go not into this battle sick and wounded as you are. See how your trusty hussars, scaramouche and pantaloon are already arrayed below! Rest in these arms of mine, and contemplate your victory from a safe distance.'

Clara offered him her ribbon,

But the Nutcracker refused, as even before he really came to life, he felt and understood all Marie's goodness, and because of his gratitude and devotion to her, he would not take the ribbon of Miss Clara.

The Nutcracker gave a deep sigh, and, waving his glittering sword, sprang, like a bird, over the ledge of the cupboard down to the floor.

'Beat trusty drummer!' cried Nutcracker, Then there began a cracking and a clattering as all the lids of the boxes in which Fritz's army was quartered burst open, and the soldiers all came out and jumped down to the bottom shelf. Nutcracker hurried up and down the ranks, speaking words of encouragement.

Then he turned to the pantaloon (who was looking decidedly pale), and wobbling his long chin a good deal, and said:

'I know how brave and experienced you are, General! I entrust you with the command of the cavalry and artillery. Do your duty!'

Immediately Pantaloon put his long, lean fingers to his mouth, and gave such a piercing crow that it rang as if a hundred little trumpets had sounded. Then there began a tramping and a neighing in the cupboard; and Fritz's cavalry including the new glittering hussars--marched out. The artillery cannons began the battle with a 'boom-boom!' and Marie saw the sugar-plums blasted to pieces covering the mouse-battalions with white powdery sugar. Then the heavy guns fired 'poom-poom-poom!' at the gingerbread nuts mowing the mice down in great numbers. But the enemy kept increasing and fired back 'prrr-prrr-prrr!' and Marie could scarcely see what was happening, for smoke and dust; but this much is certain, that each side fought with the utmost bravery and determination. Clara ran up and down in utter despair.

"Must I--the very loveliest doll in all the world--perish miserably in the very flower of my youth?"

All around her the hurley-burly continued prrr-prrr-poof, piff-schnetterdeng--schnetterdeng--boom-boom all confused and higgledy-piggledy. The mice squeaked and screamed; and the Nutcracker's powerful voice was heard shouting commands, and issuing important orders to the thick of the fire.

Pantaloon had made several most brilliant cavalry charges. But the hussars were subjected to a heavy fire. In the excitement of the moment, Pantaloon led his men into imminent danger, and they fell into the enemy's hands. But there was still hope for the Nutcracker and his cause.

Masses of mouse-cavalry kept surfacing, increasing still in number uttering loud and horrible squeakings. The Nutcracker's army, although fighting admirably continued suffering greater

and greater loss. So that the unfortunate Nutcracker found himself driven back close to the front of the cupboard, with a very small remnant of his army.

Soon the mice knocked off the cap of their commander-in-chief, Nutcracker, himself. Nutcracker was closely hemmed in by the enemy, and in a position of extreme peril, He tried to jump the bottom ledge of the cupboard, but his legs were not long enough. Clara fainted; so she could give him no assistance and he shouted in wild despair:

'A horse! a horse! My kingdom for a horse!'

At this moment two of the enemy's riflemen seized him by his wooden cloak, and the king of the mice went rushing up to him, squeaking in triumph out of all his seven throats.

Marie could contain herself no longer. 'My poor Nutcracker!' she sobbed, then took her left shoe off, and threw it as hard as she could straight at the Mouse King.

Instantly everything disappeared. All was silence. But Marie felt a more stinging pain in her arm, and fell to the floor.

When Marie awoke she was lying in her bedroom; the sun was shining brightly in at the window and a doctor sat at the end of her bed. 'She's awake,' he said softly, and her mother came at once.

'Oh, mother!' whispered Marie, 'are all those horrid mice gone away, and is Nutcracker quite safe?'

'What have the mice to do with Nutcracker?' said Mother, 'You have worried us all. I don't know whether some mouse jumped out and frightened you, but, you broke a pane of the glass cupboard with your elbow, and cut your arm. I found you bleeding frightfully on the floor, with a number of soldiers scattered round you, and other toys, broken motto-figures, and gingerbread men; and Nutcracker was lying on your bleeding arm, with your left shoe not far off.'

'Oh, mother, mother,' said Marie, 'these were the remains of the tremendous battle between the toys and the mice; and what frightened me so terribly was that the mice were going to take Nutcracker prisoner. Then I threw my shoe in among the mice.'

'Never mind, dear the mice are all gone away, and Nutcracker's in the cupboard, quite safe and sound.'

Marie's father came in, and she heard them talking about 'wound-fever.' She had to stay in bed, and take medicine, for some days, although she didn't feel at all ill, except that her arm was rather stiff and painful. She knew Nutcracker had got safe out of the battle, and she seemed to remember, as if in a dream, that he had said, quite distinctly:

'Marie! dearest lady! I am most deeply indebted to you. But it is in your power to do even more for me still.'

She thought and thought what this could possibly be as she spent days recovering in bed. Her mother came and sat at her bedside, telling and reading her all sorts of nice stories. She

had just finished telling her the story of Prince Fakardin, when the door opened and in came Godpapa Drosselmeier, saying:

'I've come to see with my own eyes how Marie's getting on.'

When Marie saw Godpapa Drosselmeier in his little yellow coat, the scene of the night came so vividly back to her that she couldn't help crying out:

'Oh! Godpapa Drosselmeier, how nasty you were! I saw you sitting on the clock, preventing it from striking and frightening the mice. Why didn't you help Nutcracker? Why didn't you help *me*?'

Her mother, in much alarm, asked what she meant. But Drosselmeier began acting like the small version of him on top of the clock on Christmas Eve.

Marie fixed wide eyes of terror upon Godpapa Drosselmeier, because he was looking quite different, as if he were some puppet moved by a handle. Fritz (who had arrived in the meantime) laughed heartily, crying, 'Why, godpapa, you *are* going on funnily!

'My goodness!' said Drosselmeier, laughing, 'did you never hear my nice Watchmaker's Song?' Then he said to her, 'Don't be vexed with me because I didn't gouge out all the mouse-king's fourteen eyes. That couldn't be managed exactly; but, to make up for it, here's something which I know will please you greatly.'

He dived into one of his pockets, and what he slowly, slowly brought out of it was--Nutcracker! whose teeth he had put in again quite firmly, and set his broken jaw completely to rights. Marie shouted for joy, and her mother laughed and said, 'Now you see for yourself how nice Godpapa Drosselmeier is to Nutcracker.'

"I say, Godpapa Drosselmeier,' interrupted Fritz at this juncture, 'you've put Nutcracker's teeth in all right, and his jaw isn't wobbly as it was; but what's become of his sword? Why haven't you given him a sword?'

'What have I to do with Nutcracker's sword?' cried Drosselmeier, annoyed, 'I've put his mouth to rights for him; he must look out for a sword for himself but that is another story.'

The End

Nanny Bea: Thank you Jules for that riveting story. You know I met a Nutcracker once on the platform of the Bakerloo line. We spoke for sometime. Sadly he was heading south and I north so our story ends there.

Jules: Well maybe someday I'll tell you what happens with Marie and her Nutcracker but not next week because I have something amazing for you. As it is the most wonderful time of the year, I will bring you the story of The Nativity, when baby Jesus was born. For more details...

Thomas: Go to NannyBea.com

Jules: Go there to find out about all our episodes. On NannyBea.com there's our entire collection of stories to listen to and to read along. As well as how you can be part of the show like the gorgeous Tiggy with her wonder words.

[Be on the Show jingle]

Mr Announcer: This has been a Toad in the Hole production for NannyBea.com.