

# The Nutcracker Story

The Nutcracker is the story of a young girl, Clara, who receives a special gift from her Uncle Drosselmeyer at her family's annual holiday party. A variety of magical dolls entertain the guests, but Clara's gift, a magnificent Nutcracker doll is the best of all. Her brother, Fritz, is unhappy with his own gift and very jealous of Clara's. With the help of his friends, Fritz snatches the Nutcracker from Clara and breaks it. Uncle Drosselmeyer is able to repair the doll, and the party continues happily. After the guests leave, Clara falls into a deep sleep, nestling with her prized doll. The clock strikes twelve and Clara awakens to find herself in a battlefield of mice and rats, with a menacing Rat King, toy soldiers, and a life-size Nutcracker doll. The battle ends when, with the help of the Nutcracker, the Rat King is killed. Clara then travels on a magical journey to the Kingdom of Snow and the Land of Sweets where dancers from many countries celebrate. She finds herself home again and tells her Mother and Father of her adventure. It was only a dream – or was it?



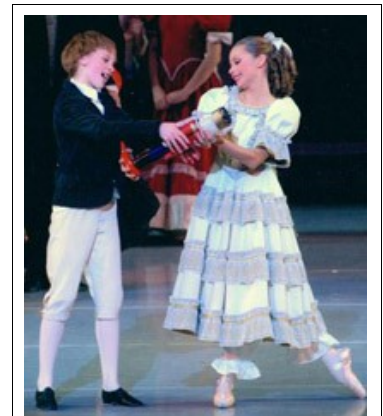
## Cast of Characters

**Clara** is the young girl who is the heroine of the story. She receives the Nutcracker doll at her parent's annual holiday party, which begins the adventure. She wears banana curls and ribbons in her hair, a pretty white dress and petticoats.

**Fritz** is Clara's mischievous younger brother. He breaks the Nutcracker Doll. He has short dark hair and wears white pants and a short jacket. It is Fritz's toy soldiers who help the Nutcracker battle the sinister Rat King.

**Uncle Drosselmeyer** is Clara's godfather, a toy maker, and also a mysterious, fun loving magician. His holiday gift to Clara is the Nutcracker Doll. He wears dark colors, a long cape and sometimes an eye patch.

**Dr. & Mrs. Stahlbaum** are Clara and Fritz's parents and hosts of the annual holiday party where Clara receives the Nutcracker Doll. They wear fancy party clothes like their adult guests.



Fritz & Clara



Uncle Drosselmeyer



Dr. & Mrs. Stahlbaum

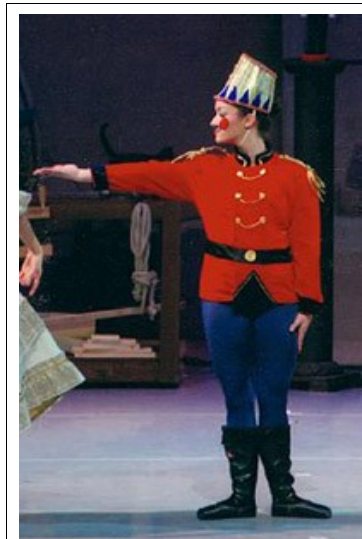
**The Nutcracker** is the Nutcracker Doll and handsome man brought to life by Uncle Drosselmeyer. He leads the toy soldiers in battle with the Rat King. He looks similar to the doll that Clara receives from Uncle Drosselmeyer.

**The Rat King** is an evil, scary creature that along with his rats and mice, battle the Nutcracker and toy soldiers. He is large and wears a crown. You can't miss him!

**The Snow King & Queen** are the protectors of the enchanted Kingdom of Snow that Clara passes through on her way to the Land of Sweets. They dress in white and dance a beautiful Pas de Deux (dance of two.)

**The Sugar Plum Fairy & Her Cavalier** are the guardians of the enchanted Land of Sweets. They welcome Clara with an international celebration of many dances. They dress in classical ballet costume: a tutu for the Sugar Plum Fairy and a tunic for her Cavalier. They dance a beautiful Pas de Deux at the end of Clara's visit.

**Other Characters** Clara meets along the way include Mother Ginger and her children, baby mice and rats, dancing flowers and many dancers from faraway lands such as Spain, Arabia, China, Russia and others.



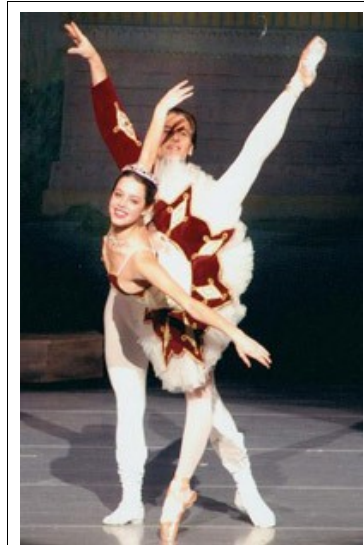
The Nutcracker



The Rat King



The Snow King and Queen



The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier

## The Original Story

The ballet is based on *"The Nutcracker and The Mouse King"* by E.T.A. Hoffman published in 1816. Hoffman never intended this story about childhood to be for children, as his words portrayed a bleak view of humanity and relationships. His plot is centered around Marie, a German girl who lives in a loveless house. Clara, the name of the central character in The Nutcracker ballet, was the name of Marie's favorite doll. Her godfather, Herr Drosselmeier, gives her a nutcracker doll for Christmas. But at night, the vicious seven-headed Mouse King and his mouse soldiers appear and try to destroy her dolls. The Nutcracker comes to life and battles in Marie's defense, but he is easily beaten by the Mouse King. Marie does her best to defend herself by throwing her slipper at the Mouse King. She then faints. The battle is unresolved.



E.T.A. Hoffman

Marie is found by her family lying in a pool of blood. Apparently she has fallen into a toy cabinet and cut herself on the glass. Rather than comforting her, Marie's parents scold her and send her to her room. During her convalescence after the battle, Marie is visited by Herr Drosselmeier. He tells her the story behind the Nutcracker and the Mouse King: beautiful princess Pirlipat is cursed to be forever ugly by the Mouse King's mother. The only way to stop the curse and get the princess' hand in marriage is for a brave and handsome man to find the hardest nut in the world, crack it with his teeth, and deliver the kernel to the princess to eat. The king has promised his daughter's hand in marriage to the man who breaks the spell.

Drosselmeier's nephew succeeds in cracking the nut and delivers the kernel to the princess. As soon as she eats it, she becomes breathtakingly beautiful. However, instead of a happy fairy tale ending, the nephew inherits the curse and becomes a wooden-faced nutcracker! Disgusted with his appearance, the princess has him banished by the king. During the confusion of the cure, curse transfer and banishment, Drosselmeier accidentally steps on the Mouse King's mother, killing her. The Mouse King vows vengeance on Drosselmeier and the Nutcracker.

Another battle between the Mouse King and the Nutcracker occurs. The Nutcracker is victorious, and he takes Marie to a land where he is a prince. After a marvelous journey, they return to the Marie's house. The story closes when Marie meets and marries Drosselmeier's nephew.

The story was revised considerably by Alexander Dumas père and published as *The Nutcracker of Nuremberg*. In 1891, Marius Petipa commissioned Tchaïkovsky to write a ballet based on the Dumas revision. Petipa decided to simplify Hoffman's story of princess Pirlipat. In the ballet, the Nutcracker manages to defeat the Mouse King and all characters find their happy ending.

On December 17, 1892, the first showing of *The Nutcracker* took place at the Mariinsky Theatre of Russia, home of the Kirov Ballet. *The Nutcracker* made its way to Western Europe in the 1930's and to America by 1940, performed by Ballet Russe. The first American full length *Nutcracker* was performed by the San Francisco Ballet, choreographed by William Christensen. *The Nutcracker* has since become an annual holiday tradition.

## **The Author**

Ernest Theodor (Wilhelm) Amadeus Hoffmann was born in 1776 in Königsberg, Germany. He changed his third name, Wilhelm, to Amadeus in 1813 in homage to the great composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Originally educated as a jurist, he is one of the main figures of German Romanticism as a writer, composer and artist. His works are eclectic and his characters show an amazing world of fantasy which interacts with everyday life. His literary work, which influenced Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, features supernatural characters that reveal people's hidden secrets. The father of the fantasy/horror story or novella, he was the forerunner of American authors Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allen Poe. His literary stories inspired many musicians: *The Tales of Hoffman*, by Offenbach or *The Nutcracker*, by Tchaïkovsky. Hoffman died in Berlin in 1822.

## **Historical Relevance**

The 18th century was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. In both *The Nutcracker* and *Coppélia*, E. T. A. Hoffman presents mechanical dolls that are almost human. The doll makers in both stories are regarded as magicians by the other characters, and have supernatural powers. What does this tell us about the attitudes towards machines and their designers at this time?