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extracts from

Ballet Stories

Written by

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For Clare and Kate - M.G.
For my mother - L.K.



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Ballet Stories



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Illustrated by Lisa Kopper

"Your Highness is kind," said Giselle shyly, "but I can never leave the village. I am soon to be married."

The princess smiled at her kindly.

"Then you must have a wedding gift."

She took off her golden necklace and clasped it round the girl's neck. Giselle curtsied her delighted thanks, then danced away to show the jewel to her friends, while her mother invited the royal party to rest in her cottage.

Soon afterwards Loys returned with the grape-gatherers, ready to celebrate the harvest. Giselle, chosen as queen of the festival, led them in a joyful dance. In her love and happiness she was swift and light and graceful as a flying bird.

But suddenly Hilarion was among them. White-faced and grim, he broke up the dance, parting the lovers with the jewelled sword which he thrust between them.

"Traitor! Deceiver!" he shouted. "Look at this blade! Look at the crest on the hilt! Albrecht, Duke of Silesia, you will never marry a peasant girl! You have stolen Giselle from me only to betray her. Let all the world know your treachery."

He lifted his horn and blew such a blast that even the prince and his daughter came out to see what was happening. Bathilde gave a startled cry.

"Albrecht! My betrothed! Why are you here, disguised in those peasant's clothes?"

Stricken with fear, Giselle looked from her lover to Princess Bathilde.

"No! No!" she whispered. "It is not true. Say it is not true! He is to marry me." She turned to face her lover. "Loys, why do you not deny it?"



She had collected dolls from everywhere – Chinese dolls and Indian dancers, dolls from Russia and England and Norway – and now they were all dancing together. Like the Christmas tree, they had mysteriously grown in size and were now as big as herself.

A sudden sound disturbed them, and they crowded together as if afraid. With a rustling and a scraping and a scurrying of grey furry bodies, out into the room marched a company of mice as big as the dolls. Their leader wore a crown and brandished a bright sword and frightened Clara with his glittering eyes and sharp white teeth.

They were met by a defiant trumpet call. Marching across the carpet to confront them was a regiment of her brother's toy soldiers, led by none other than her own ugly nutcracker.

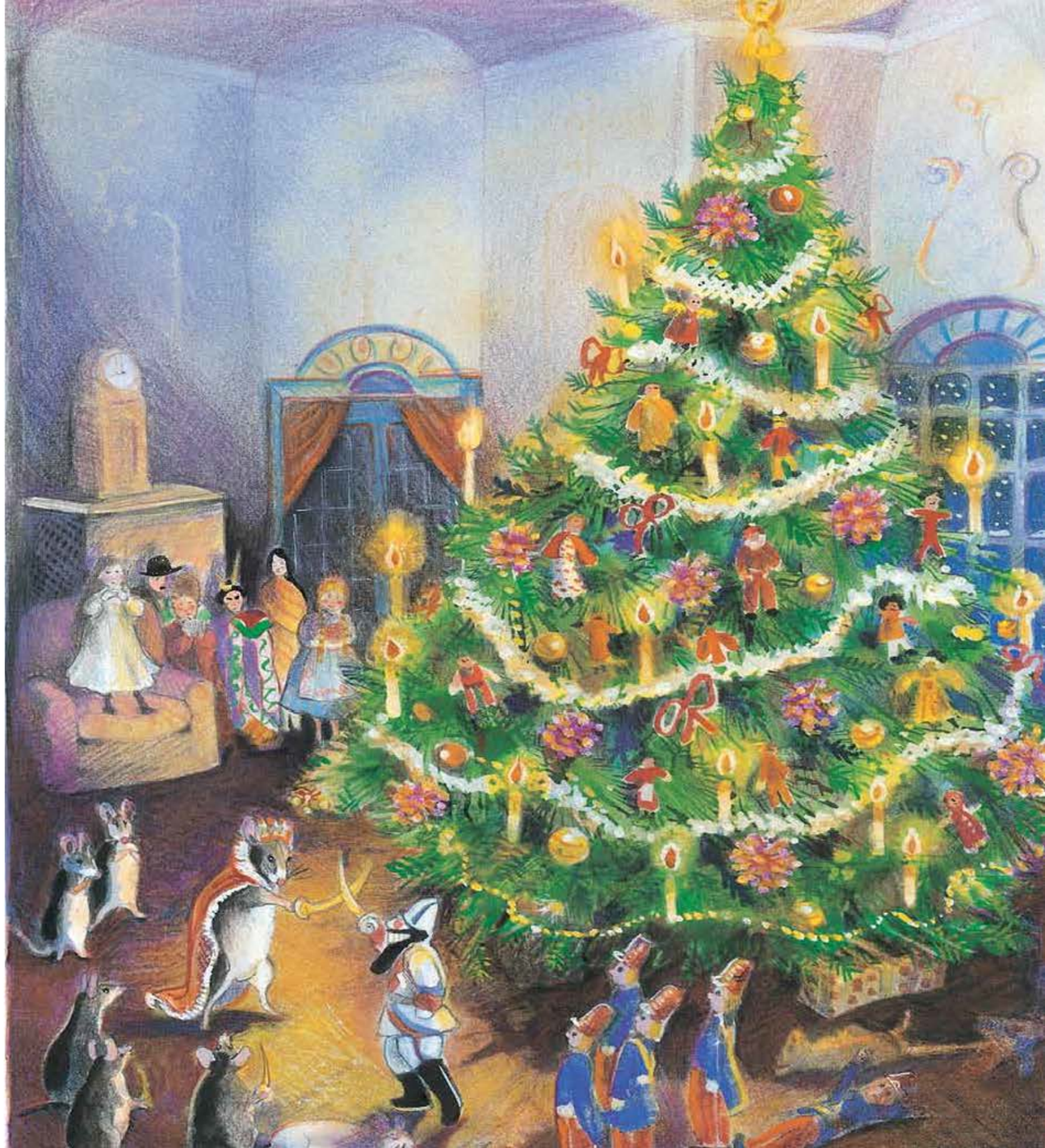
The battle was fierce, and Clara watched in terror for her nutcracker's safety as he fought the Mouse King hand to hand. Suddenly she saw her favourite fall. Desperate to help him, she snatched off her slipper and threw it at his enemy with all her strength. Instantly the whole company of mice fled, but the nutcracker lay where he had fallen. Clara ran to him in tears and kissed him.

Then an astonishing thing happened.

At the touch of Clara's lips, the ugly nutcracker doll disappeared and a handsome young man sprang up in his place.

"Your gentleness has saved me!" he exclaimed. "How can I ever thank you?"

"She has broken half the spell," said Drosselmeyer, "but there is more to be done. Years ago the wicked Mouse Queen bit the Nutcracker Prince and transformed him into the doll I gave you. He could be changed to his own form again only by a girl who would love him despite his ugliness.



Siegfried glimpsed white shapes moving between the trees.

"Wait here," he whispered. "So many of us would startle them. I will go on alone."

Slowly and cautiously he crept forward, slipping from tree to tree. Now he saw that the great white birds were swans. Some were already floating on the smooth water, others flying down to join them. The prince marked one of these, knelt, and raised his bow to shoot.

His hand was already on the string when, just as his chosen swan touched the ground, an amazing thing happened. The bird's head drooped, the strong white wings folded, the feathers fell away, and from their shining softness stepped a girl more lovely than Siegfried had ever imagined. All round her the other swans too, as they alighted or swam to the shore, where changed. They shed their glimmering feathers and rose up from them as graceful young girls. Marvellous as they were, the prince had eyes only for the girl he had first seen.

With beating heart he ran forward to speak to her, but his movement was too sudden. Frightened as if she were truly a bird, she shrank from his outstretched hands. The prince followed her through the gathering shadows, calling softly to reassure her. In a tree high above them an owl hooted, a harsh menacing sound, and the girl ran from him.

Siegfried dropped his crossbow and knelt in the grass until at last she ceased to elude him, and waited timidly for him to speak.

"Lady," said the prince, "you are in no danger from me. How could I ever harm someone so beautiful? Only, I beg you, explain this mystery."

The girl looked at him and saw that he was kind and gentle, and knew that she could trust him.

