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COPPELIA

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This story begins with a toy maker. He lived in a village on the very top of a mountain, and his name was Doctor Coppelius. He was old, and whiskery, and nobody knew much about him. He kept himself to himself, and this made him unpopular in a village where everyone liked to know everyone else's business.

The old people turned their backs on him, and talked together in low voices when they saw him walking by.

"What does he do in that workshop of his?" they asked each other. "All that banging and clanging, and nothing to show for it!"

"Up to no good, I'll be bound," said an old lady.

"No good at all," agreed her friends, and it was decided that the toy maker was a highly suspicious character.

The children heard the old people talking, and they ran away

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when they saw Doctor Coppelius. The young people laughed at him, whilst secretly afraid of his gruff voice and fierce gaze and the strange noises that came from his workshop.

"I think he's scary," said Swanilda, the prettiest girl in the village.

Franz, her sweetheart, put his arm round her.

"I'll protect you," he said, and Swanilda kissed him.

"Thank you," she said, and he kissed her back.

Doctor Coppelius pretended he didn't care what the villagers thought. He kept on working, day in and day out. He had spent the last months making a new life sized doll, and he was determined that she would be his finest creation ever … and now at last she was finished.

Click, click, clicketty click! He wound her up.

Whirrrrr! Whirrrr! Whirrrr! She moved her arms and legs.

Flip! Flip! She opened and closed her big blue eyes – and the toy maker sighed as he looked at her beautiful face.

"I shall call her Coppelia, and she will be like my daughter," he told himself, and he sighed again. "If only she were. A daughter would talk to me, and keep me company. It's a lonely life I lead."



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A thought came to him, and he picked Coppelia up and carried her out to the little balcony at the front of his house. There was a chair there, and he sat the doll down and put a book in her hands.

Standing back to inspect her, he actually smiled. She looked so lifelike he almost expected her to smile back, but she didn't. Her eyes stayed firmly on her book.

"Enjoy the sunshine, Coppelia," the toy maker said, and he went back inside.

It wasn't long before the villagers noticed the beautiful girl on the balcony.

"Who can she be?" they wondered. "Has Doctor Coppelius got a daughter? Has she come to visit?"

Swanilda decided she was going to find out. She went to stand underneath the balcony, and waved her hankie.

"Hello! Hello? My name's Swanilda! Let's be friends!"

But there was no answer. The girl didn't lift her eyes from her book; she went on reading. Swanilda tried again and again to catch her attention, but it didn't work.

"Oh well. She's obviously as grouchy as her father," Swanilda thought.

As she walked away, she saw Franz coming towards her – but he wasn't looking in her direction. He too was looking up at the



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balcony. As Swanilda watched in astonishment he began to blow kisses at the beautiful girl!

But she took no more notice of him than she had of Swanilda. She went on reading her book, and at last Franz sighed heavily and walked away.

Swanilda followed him, and her heart was very heavy. How could she marry Franz when he blew kisses at another girl? It seemed he didn't love her any more … and she'd be alone for ever.

A band of street musicians was playing in the village square, and the young men and women were dancing as first Franz, and then Swanilda, came to join them.

Franz looked as if he didn't have a care in the world, but Swanilda was very quiet. She was thinking about the girl on the balcony. Who was she? And did Franz really love her?

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" The mayor came bustling out of town hall. "Stop the music! I have news... special news!"

He winked at Franz and Swanilda.

"And you, my dears, listen very carefully! Our village has been given a gift – a wonderful new bell for our town hall. Tomorrow we'll be ringing our bell to celebrate all who are about to be married, and –" he nudged Swanilda – "I'm thinking that you and Franz will be there for sure!"

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Swanilda didn't answer. How could she? With a stifled sob she ran away, leaving Franz and the mayor looking after her in surprise.

The old toy maker had had a busy day, but now he was hungry. He moved Coppelia into his workroom, tucked her into an alcove behind a curtain, and picked up his stick. Then, after locking the door, he went out to buy bread and cheese … but as soon as he reached the village square a gang of boys came jumping and tumbling out of the shadows.

"Wooooooo! Wooooooo! Wooooooooo!"

They were hoping to scare him, but they only made Doctor Coppelius angry. He shook his stick at them, and chased them round the square.

"Be off with you, you rascals! Can't you leave a poor old man alone?"

As the boys finally fled, Swanilda and her friends came running to see what all the noise was about. They were just in time to see the toy maker marching off round the corner … but what was that lying on the ground?

"It's a key! It must be the key to the old man's house!" Swanilda held the key in the air, and danced with delight.



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"And he's gone for a walk! Let's go and find that girl!"

Her friends shivered. "No! It's too scary! There might be monsters!"

But Swanilda was determined to meet her rival. "Well, I'm going to go. And I'll go on my own if you're all scaredy cats." And she ran towards the toy maker's front door.

The other girls looked at each other, and then, not wanting to be left behind, they tiptoed after Swanilda.

Carefully, carefully, Swanilda put the key in the lock.

Carefully, carefully, she turned the key … and then – CLICK! The door opened, and she was inside Dr Coppelius' house.

Holding her breath, she crept up the stairs and her friends followed nervously behind her.

Someone else was also trying to get inside the house. Franz had made his plans. As Swanilda was sneaking up the stairs, he was carrying a long ladder across the square, planning to climb in the balcony window.

He was determined to meet the beautiful girl who sat there every day – and who wouldn't look at him!

Swanilda's heart was beating fast as she peeped round the door … and she gasped.

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The room was full of people, people frozen into stillness. They weren't moving, or blinking, or even breathing.

"Have they been enchanted?" she wondered. "Could Doctor Coppelius be a sorcerer?"

Creeping further in, she saw a velvet curtain drawn across a corner of the room. Greatly daring, she twitched the curtain aside – and there, right in front of her, was the beautiful girl, still reading her book.

"At last!" Swanilda came closer. "I've come to meet you. What's your name?"

There was no answer.

"Why won't you talk to me?" Swanilda came closer still. "Don't you know it's rude to ignore people?'

There was still no answer.



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"Boo!" Swanilda clapped her hands … and then she began to giggle. Her friends, still huddled together at the door, stared at her.

"What's so funny?" a tall girl whispered.

"They're dolls! They're only dolls!" Swanilda came running back, pirouetting in delight. "Come and see!" And she ran to the nearest doll and wound it up.

CLICK CLICK CLICKETTY CLICK! The doll began to jerk its arms.

WHIRRR! WHIRRR! WHIRRR! Swanilda wound up another, and it kicked its legs.

T'RRRRK! T'RRRRK! T'RRRRK! A third nodded its head, and opened and closed its eyes.

With a whoop of joy Swanilda's friends forgot their fears and ran to join in. They wound up every doll in the workshop, and they jumped and hopped and danced among them. They were making so much noise that they didn't hear Doctor Coppelius opening the door, and they didn't see him staring at them in horror.

"Out! Out! Get out of here! How dare you?"

The toy maker rushed in, shouting and waving his stick, and the girls fled, shrieking and screaming as they went scurrying down the stairs. They never noticed that Swanilda wasn't with

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them. She had slipped behind the velvet curtain where Coppelia was sitting with her book – and she was hiding!

As the toy maker slammed the door shut after the girls, there was a scratching at the window. The scratching was followed by a screech, and the window was pushed open; a moment later Franz stepped over the ledge.

His eyes widened as he saw the dolls tumbled in heaps, but before he could go and look at them Doctor Coppelius had caught him by the arm.

"What do you want, young man? Breaking in to my workroom! Are you a thief?"

Franz hesitated, wondering what to say. He desperately wanted to meet the beautiful girl, but here was her father scowling at him.

"Please excuse me, sir! I wanted to speak to your lovely daughter. I saw her reading on your balcony, and my heart skipped a beat."

For a moment, Doctor Coppelius didn't answer. He was thinking. In his bookshelf was a book of dark magic; a book he only dared to read at night. It was full of spells and enchantments, and one in particular had fascinated him for years … a spell that would take the soul from a real person, and turn his beloved doll into a living, breathing human being.

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"If Coppelia was alive, I wouldn't be lonely any more," he thought. "I'd have a friend, a companion. I'd have someone to talk to, someone to look after me…"

He looked again at the handsome young man lounging against the wall, and did his best to look welcoming. "Of course you shall meet her. My daughter told me that she'd noticed you."

Seeing Franz's face brighten, he added, "She often talks about you. But before I call her, let us have a glass of wine together. We can toast her!"

Franz didn't hesitate. "Thank you," he said, and he threw himself into an armchair as Doctor Coppelius poured the wine. He didn't see the old man slip a powder into his glass – but Swanilda, peeping through a hole in the curtain, saw everything.

"On no! What's he up to?" she wondered, and she went on watching.

Franz drank his wine in a gulp. "Now may I meet your daughter?" he asked.

Doctor Coppelius poured the wine a second time. "First: a health to my daughter!"

"Of course." Franz rubbed his eyes, then raised his glass.

"To the lovely … lovely … love—"

He never finished his sentence. He flopped forward onto the table, fast asleep.

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The toy maker rubbed his hands together in glee, and hurried to fetch his magic book. Flicking over the pages he found the spell he wanted, and he began o chuckle.

"At last! A soul for my Coppelia! I'll bring her to life! Now, let me see… Ullaboo hullaboo gillaboo ha!"

And he began to mutter the words of the spell and wave his arms over the body of the sleeping Franz.

On and on went the spell, until finally—

"HULLABOO – and HA!"

Doctor Coppelius ran to the curtain and pulled it back. Holding his breath, he held out his hand to the beautiful girl. "Come, my darling … come to me!"

Coppelia stared, then blinked her eyes.

She turned her head … and the toy maker gasped.

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He watched in awe as she moved first her hands, and then her feet. Slowly, slowly, she began to move, stiffly at first, but gradually more and more easily.

"I've done it! I've done it! Oh, my darling!"

Doctor Coppelius rushed towards Coppelia to hug her, but she pirouetted away and he couldn't hold her. Next minute she was whirling round and round, and as she twirled she knocked the magic book off the table and it fell to the floor with a crash.

"Oh no!" The old man ran to pick up his precious book, but before he could reach it Coppelia had sent the wine bottle flying – followed by a row of boxes from the shelves. Glass eyes, china heads, metal hinges, strips and springs crashed onto the floor and scattered in all directions, and still the doll whirled and twirled.

"Stop! Stop! My darling – please! Please! Oh … stop! Do stop!"



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The toy maker ran after Coppelia, pleading with her as she spun round and round leaving chaos in her wake. She took no notice of him at all, until he sank to his knees with his head in his hands. "Ruined! Everything is ruined!"

For a moment she paused, and as she did so Franz stirred, coughed, sat up, and rubbed his eyes. "What's going on?" he asked. He rubbed his eyes again, and stared in astonishment. "Swanilda! Is that you? Why are you dressed like that?"

By way of answer, Swanilda ran to the curtain and pulled it back … and there was the real Coppelia, collapsed in a heap.

Franz's eyes opened wide. "She's a doll!"

"Exactly!" Swanilda was laughing at him. "You were blowing kisses to a doll!"

"Oh." Franz blushed scarlet. "How silly am I?"

"Very silly," Swanilda told him.



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His blush grew deeper, and he hung his head.

"I don't deserve you," he said.

"No. You don't," Swanilda told him, but she kissed him as she took his hand – and the two of them ran out of the workroom, leaving Doctor Coppelius weeping amongst his bent and broken inventions.

It was the next day, and the village square was buzzing. Dressed in their best clothes, everyone was looking forward to hearing the new bell rung for the first time, and even more to the celebration party afterwards.

Franz and Swanilda were arm in arm, smiling at everyone; as their friends congratulated them, Swanilda curtsied and Franz bowed, while making sure he kept tight hold of his sweetheart's arm.

"Dum, dum, dumdiddle DUM!"

The band stopped playing, and the mayor came stomping out of the town hall – but before he could begin his speech, there was a stirring in the crowd, and a figure came pushing and shoving his way through.

"Justice! I want justice!"

It was Doctor Coppelius …although he was hardly recognisable. His hair was standing on end, his clothes were dirty and torn, and his face was streaked with dust and tears.

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"My whole life's work: destroyed! Broken! Ruined!" He pointed to Swanilda with a trembling finger. "It was her! That wicked, evil girl – she wrecked my workroom, and everything that was precious to me… Why? WHY? What did I ever do to hurt her?"

The mayor frowned. "Look here, my good man! This is a day of celebration – no time for complaints! Come and see me tomorrow—"

"No." Swanhilda stepped forward. She was very pale, but her voice was firm as she said, "Doctor Coppelius is right. I did damage his workroom."

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She gave Franz a sideways glance.

"I was angry; I thought he had a beautiful daughter who had stolen my Franz away from me. Please, Doctor Coppelius … let me pay you for what I did. I saved money to bring to my wedding – but you shall have it all, every penny. It might not be enough, but it's all I have. And I'm sorry. I really, really am. Your doll was truly wonderful – a work of art."

The crowd around Swanilda and the toy maker began to murmur, and to whisper to each other.

"So that's what he makes? Dolls! Why didn't he say?"

"And there was me thinking it was a real live girl on the balcony!"

"He had us all fooled! That was a proper work of art, and no mistake."

An old woman put out her hand and touched the toy maker's sleeve. "Can you make another one? I'd surely like to see it if you did. I'd pay good money, too!"

Doctor Coppelius hesitated. For the first time in his life people were looking at him hopefully, and admiringly … and Swanilda's smile was warming his poor lonely old heart.

"Perhaps I can pick up the pieces," he said gruffly. "I'll have to see."

Franz bowed. "I'd be delighted to help you, sir."

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"Me too," said another young man, and his offer was echoed by other young men and women.

"Let us help!"

"Show us what you do!"

"So you'll accept the money I saved?" Swanilda asked.

"Please?"

There was another pause, and then Doctor Coppelius actually smiled. "No, my dear. Keep your money. But if ever you should feel like visiting a grouchy old man, I'll always be pleased to see you."

"Thank you! Thank you, so very very much!" Swanilda flung her arms round the toy maker, and hugged him. "I'll never forget you – never."

"Ahem!" The mayor coughed loudly. "Let me assure the gentleman that, given the remarkable skill he has demonstrated – not, of course, that I was fooled for a moment – I feel it only right that he is compensated for his losses by the village corporation. In addition…"

He coughed again, and puffed out his chest so his chain of office glinted in the sunshine.

"I declare Doctor Coppelius to be a National Treasure! And now: let the bell be rung, and our celebrations begin!"

DING, DONG, DING, DONG!

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The great bell rang out, and everyone cheered. The band began to play, and Franz took Swanilda's hand.

"Have you forgiven me?" he asked, "Will you dance with me?"

Swanilda laughed. "Of course! And I'll dance with you for the rest of our lives - but right now, I'm going to dance with Doctor Coppelius!"

And to the old man's astonishment, Swanilda swept him off to dance round and round the village square until he was breathless … and very happy.



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