



*It was a crisp, winter day, but all was snug in the house. The sweet smells of food wafted through the rooms, soft music played and laughter tinkled. Clara and her brother Fritz could not wait to see what gifts they would find under the family Christmas tree.*

*The drawing room doors opened and the children's eyes grew wide with amazement. A tremendous tree stretched from floor to ceiling. It was trimmed in silver apples and iced almonds, while clusters of bright sweets hung like buds and blossoms from every branch. The twinkling lights of the tree reflected in the ribbons and wrappings of the gifts spread out across the floor.*

*Just then, the children's godfather—a man called Drosselmeir—swept into the room with presents for the children. For Fritz there was a miniature castle with clockwork figures that twirled inside tiny windows.*

*"And for you, my dear Clara, I have a special gift," said Godfather Drosselmeir. "It is a nutcracker. See how the soldier's strong jaw can crack any nut."*

*Clara held the little man carefully. He was dressed in a handsome red jacket lined down the front with white loops and brass buttons. His painted eyes sparkled a brilliant green, while a kind, good-natured smile hid beneath a snowy cotton beard. "I love him," she whispered.*

*Without warning, Fritz yanked the Nutcracker from his sister and jammed a gigantic nut in its mouth. With a sickening crunch, several pearly white teeth broke off.*

*Almost in tears, Clara gathered the fallen teeth. Then she found a white ribbon and wrapped it as a bandage around the Nutcracker's wounded chin.*

*"Don't fret," she whispered. "I will tend to you."*