



胡桃夹子与四个王国







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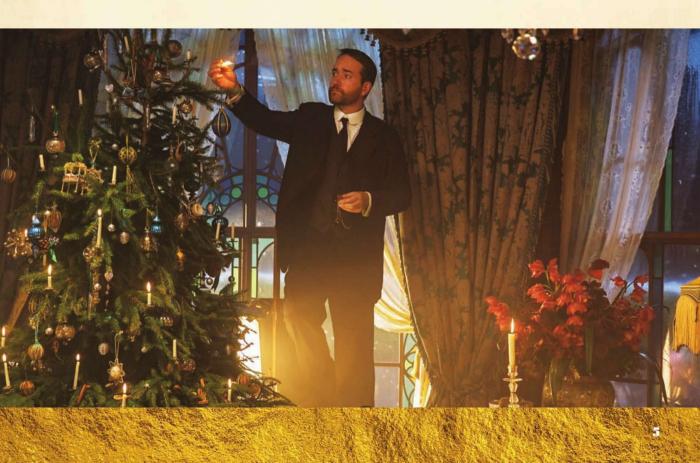








was Christmas Eve in London, and Charles Stahlbaum was trying to appear cheerful. "Now, children, I have some presents for you." Less than a year had passed since they'd lost their mother, and they were missing her dearly. He explained the gifts were from her. "She asked me to give them to you on Christmas Eve. So."





Fritz, the youngest, tore open his gift of ten tin soldiers. Louise, the oldest, was given her mother's favorite dress. Mr. Stahlbaum turned to his other daughter as she reluctantly opened her present.





"It's an egg of some sort. I think it opens." The family looked on curiously as Clara tried to open it. "It's locked." She rummaged through the wrapping, searching for a key, but found only a note from her mother. She hurried upstairs with the note in hand.

It read, To my beautiful Clara. Everything you need is inside. Love, Mother.

Clara picked up a small magnifying glass from her desk and inspected the lock as her father walked in. "This is a pin-tumbler lock. It's impossible to open without a key."

"I see. Well, why don't you get ready for the party and you can work it out tomorrow?"

"I don't want to go to the party."

Mr. Stahlbaum told her that was not an option. "Yes, but it's important to maintain traditions as a family. It's what's expected of us."





As her sister helped her get ready, Clara examined the egg. She turned it over and noticed an engraved letter *D*. "Drosselmeyer! Godfather must have made this. That means . . . maybe he can open it!"

Later that evening, when the family climbed into the carriage and left for Drosselmeyer's holiday party, Clara brought the egg along.

On their way, Mr. Stahlbaum reminded the children to be on their best behavior. "And I expect one dance with you, Louise. And you, Clara."

"Do I have to dance—"

"Yes, you do. And no disappearing tonight, Clara."

Clara hung her head. "Yes, Father."

They entered Drosselmeyer's grand home to find the great hall bursting with cheer. Guests danced around a towering Christmas tree glittering with ornaments and lights. Clara pushed through the crowd and began searching for her godfather.





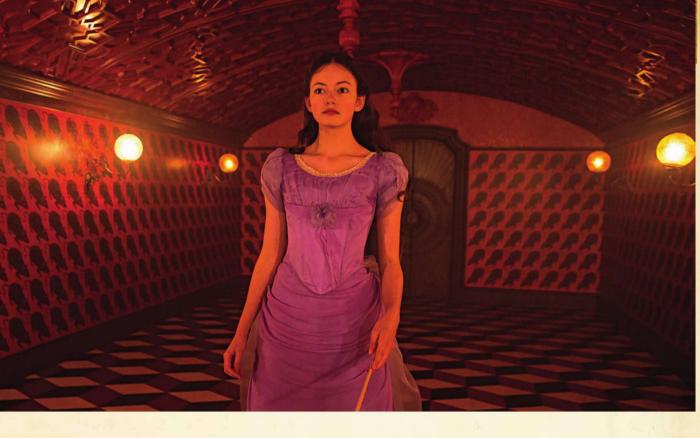
She found him in his workshop. "Backwards. It moves backwards." He turned the swan toy on to demonstrate.

Clara unscrewed one of the parts, inspecting it. "It looks like the idler wheel has slipped." She used her tools to fix it.

"Clever girl!"

When she revealed the egg, Drosselmeyer smiled. "I haven't seen this in a long, long time." But he couldn't help—the lock was too difficult to pick.

When the clock chimed, Drosselmeyer grinned. "You run along, and I'll be up shortly."



Mr. Stahlbaum frowned when he saw Clara. "I told you not to disappear.

And I was expecting to dance with you."

"I really don't want to dance."

"Why, Clara, must you think only about yourself?"

"I could ask you the same thing."

Hurt, he walked away.

Out in the garden, strings were woven through statues and branches. Each strand had a name on one end and a gift from Drosselmeyer on the other. Clara found her name and followed the string. It wound back into the house, through narrow hallways and dark rooms . . .



And finally to a snow-covered forest! Clara continued until she saw the string's end—where a key glittered, deep within the branches of an enormous tree. She knew it must be her missing key! "Clever Godfather."

As she reached for it, a mouse scampered up the trunk and snatched it!

"Hey! That's mine." Clara chased the mouse deep into the woods until it ran over a frozen river. She carefully stepped onto it, and the ice cracked.





