

The Magic of the Ballet



The Nutcracker

ADÈLE GERAS & EMMA CHICHESTER CLARK



First published in Great Britain in 2000 by
David & Charles Children's Books,
Winchester House, 259-269 Old Marylebone Road, London NW1 5XJ

Text © Adèle Geras 2000
Illustrations © Emma Chichester Clark 2000

The rights of Adèle Geras and Emma Chichester Clark to be identified as the author
and illustrator of this work have been asserted by them in accordance with the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

ISBN: 1 86233 236 3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording or otherwise, without prior permission.

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Belgium

The Magic of the Ballet



The Nutcracker

RETOLD BY ADÈLE GERAS

ILLUSTRATED BY EMMA CHICHESTER CLARK



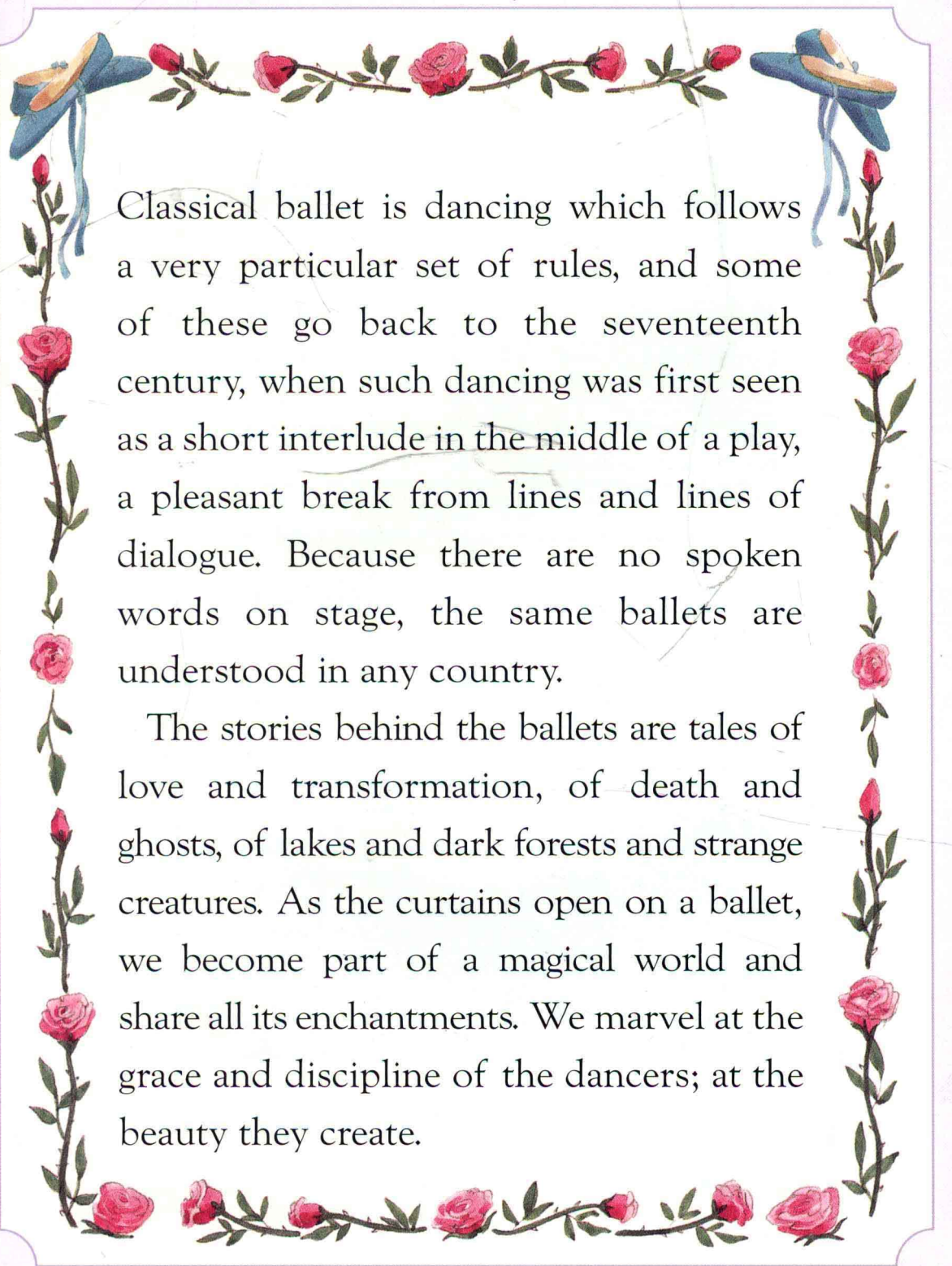
David & Charles
Children's Books

The Magic of the Ballet



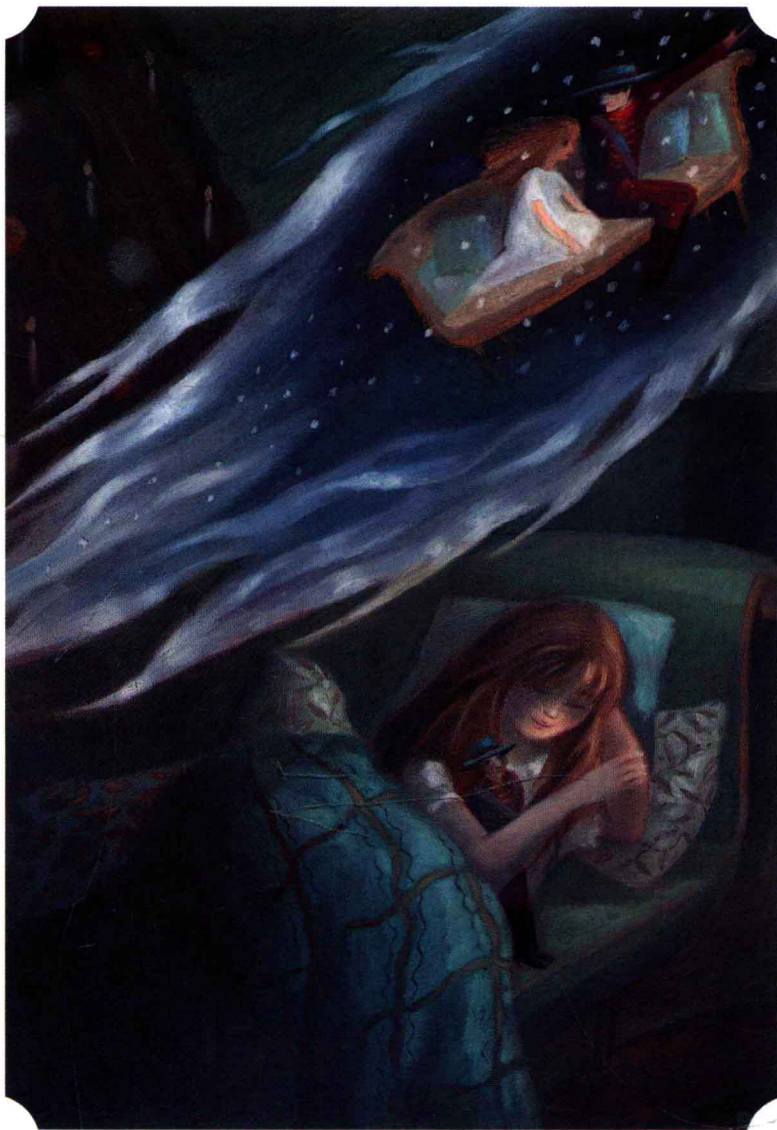
HUMAN BEINGS LIKE TO move their bodies in time to rhythm. Even the tiniest babies enjoy being rocked or gently bounced as you sing to them, and we all know how feet long to move when we hear a strong and exciting beat. 'That's toe-tapping music,' we say, and what we mean is we would like to dance to it.

There are many different kinds of dance: folk, disco, ballroom, tap and so on.

A decorative border surrounds the text, featuring a central horizontal vine with several red roses and green leaves. At each end of this top vine is a blue bow with a yellow center and a long blue ribbon. Vertical vines with red roses and green leaves run down the left and right sides of the page. At the bottom, another horizontal vine with red roses and green leaves spans the width of the page.

Classical ballet is dancing which follows a very particular set of rules, and some of these go back to the seventeenth century, when such dancing was first seen as a short interlude in the middle of a play, a pleasant break from lines and lines of dialogue. Because there are no spoken words on stage, the same ballets are understood in any country.

The stories behind the ballets are tales of love and transformation, of death and ghosts, of lakes and dark forests and strange creatures. As the curtains open on a ballet, we become part of a magical world and share all its enchantments. We marvel at the grace and discipline of the dancers; at the beauty they create.



*'Snowflakes, enormous and intricately patterned,
circled all about us.'*

The Nutcracker



“DREAMS,” WHISPERED A DISTANT voice in Clara’s ear, “are strange and wonderful things, and dreams that are dreamed on Christmas Eve are the strangest and most wonderful of all.”

Clara opened her eyes. There was the china cabinet, and the fireplace, and there in the corner was the Christmas tree. This was most definitely the parlour. Why was she lying on the scratchy plush of the sofa? Why was she not in her own bed, waking up to look for her stocking full of nuts and oranges and twists of golden barley sugar? Clara turned her head and caught sight of the present Dr Drosselmeyer had given her last night at the party: a wooden nutcracker

in the shape of a man. Clara picked him up and cuddled him.

“I love you best, Nutcracker,” she said. “Better than my dolls. Better than any game. Better than all my other presents. Do you remember being in my dream last night? Do you remember how it all started? I do.”

Clara sat up and gathered the travelling rug more closely round her shoulders.

“Now I shall tell you the whole story, Nutcracker,” Clara said. “Sit comfortably on this cushion and I’ll go right back to the beginning of our party.”

The nutcracker said nothing, but he seemed content to listen, so Clara continued. “We always have a party, every year on Christmas Eve. Everyone comes to it: grandfathers and grandmothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends and neighbours and Dr Drosselmeyer. Dr Drosselmeyer is not a relation and he’s not really a friend but he always comes to the

house on Christmas Eve and brings the most marvellous presents.

The preparations for the party were almost as exciting as the party itself. All day long, the house had been full of the most mouth-watering smells, and at last Mama began to set out the food on the long table.

‘If you children help with the cakes and sweets,’ Mama said, ‘there will be none left for the guests! Go instead and fetch your Papa and decorate the tree.’

That’s what we did, Nutcracker, and oh, when we’d finished, it was the most beautiful Christmas tree in the whole world. We tied red ribbons on the branches. We hung up painted pine cones, and gingerbread biscuits iced in pink and white, and chocolate coins in glittery paper, and Papa found a silver star for the very top of the tree.

As for the food, you cannot imagine how delicious it was. There were cinnamon

THE MAGIC OF THE BALLET

biscuits and golden shortbread and animals made out of marzipan. There were tiny crystallised fruits, and sugared almonds and salted almonds, and every cake you can think of: ginger cakes and chocolate ones, and apple cakes and sponges, all set out on dainty china plates patterned with flowers, ivy leaves and trailing ribbons.



The snow started falling at about four o'clock. Fritz and I watched it from our nursery window as it fell from the dark sky, dancing and whirling as the wind lifted it and

tossed it over the rooftops, but always in the end falling and falling until everything we could see was covered in white.

‘Just like the icing on one of the cakes downstairs,’ said Fritz.

When the guests came into the house, snowflakes came in with them: on their hats and capes, on their gloves and boots, and they shook them off, laughing.

‘Dr Drosselmeyer is here!’ Fritz cried and we both went into the hall to greet him.

‘Good evening, children,’ he said in his gravelly voice. ‘Come and see who I have brought to your party.’

Standing behind him in the shadows were a pretty young lady and a young man wearing a harlequin costume.

‘I have taken the liberty of inviting the real Harlequin and Columbine to the festivities.’ He put a skinny finger to his lips and whispered to us, ‘They are dancing dolls, my



dears, nothing more. Lifesize and very convincing, but only dolls, when all is said and done. Let us see if we can play a trick on the grown-ups.'



And they believed him, Nutcracker. Everyone believed him. Harlequin and Columbine danced for all the guests, and everyone thought they were real. When the dance was over and the secret a secret no longer, all the children clustered round the dolls, touching their stiff limbs that only a moment ago had been so full of life and movement.

The page is framed by a decorative border of holly leaves and red berries. The border runs along the top, bottom, and sides of the text area.


THE NUTCRACKER

Then, Dr Drosselmeyer gave us our presents. There was a set of soldiers in a wooden box for Fritz and you were my gift. Oh, I was delighted with you, and everyone admired you greatly. During the parlour games and dances, I never let you out of my sight, and when Fritz and the other boys took you and began cracking nuts with you, why, I nearly burst into tears. I did cry when they broke you. Anyone would have. How could they have given you such an enormous nut? It would have broken the strongest nutcracker in the world. Dr Drosselmeyer noticed my tears.

‘Do not cry, Clara. This is a prince among nutcrackers, and see, a twist here and a turn there and he is as good as new.’ The doctor’s bony, white hands moved so fast that I could not see what he did, but you were quite mended when he returned you to me.

The end of a party is a sad time, Nutcracker, isn’t it? All the candles on the

THE MAGIC OF THE BALLET



tree had burned out, the gingerbread biscuits were all eaten, the table had been cleared and the white lace cloth folded away. Fritz had put his soldiers back into their box, and I had put you here, on the sofa cushions, to rest until morning. But I couldn't sleep. The thought of you, all alone in the dark parlour, kept me awake. I thought: I will creep down and sit on the sofa and keep my Nutcracker company for a while.

The room was in darkness, except for a faint glow from the embers in the fireplace. I tiptoed to the sofa and sat holding you in my hand. From a long way away, I heard the town clock chiming midnight. Suddenly, the Christmas tree, standing like a shadow in the corner, began to grow. It grew and grew, up and up towards the ceiling with a rustling and creaking and sighing of the branches, and as it grew, the candles seemed to be alight once again, and in a few moments, the tree

THE NUTCRACKER

was towering high, high above my head. Now I know I must have been dreaming, but last night I thought there was a special Christmas magic in the air, for all at once, you and I were the same size and I didn't even stop to consider how strange this was. Then, in the silence of the night, we heard a scratching and a squeaking from behind the Christmas tree.

'It's the Army of Mice,' you said. Yes, you could speak and it seemed to me altogether normal that you should. 'They have come to do battle with the toy soldiers.'

I could hardly believe my eyes. The mice and the soldiers were enormous. They were the same size as we were, and some were even larger. Our Turkish carpet was turned into a battlefield, with Fritz's army waving their swords and shooting their cannons and marching towards their enemy.

You, my brave Nutcracker, decided to attack the Mouse King, a fearsome iron-grey





creature with glittering red eyes.

‘Nutcracker!’ I cried, afraid. ‘He will break you . . . I cannot let you be broken again!’

Suddenly, I was no longer frightened. Instead, I was filled with anger. I took off my slippers and threw them, as hard as I could, at the Mouse King. Perhaps I was helped by Christmas magic once more, for both slippers hit the Mouse King full in the face. He was not expecting slippers to come flying through the air, and he ran away squealing into the shadows under the sideboard. His Mouse Army followed him and soon the soldiers were

marching triumphantly back to their box.

‘Thank you, Clara,’ you said to me. ‘You saved my life.’

When I turned to look at you, you were no longer made of wood. You had become a real person, living and breathing . . . a handsome prince. Then you took my hand and we came to sit together on this sofa.

‘Your kindness deserves a reward,’ you said. ‘Close your eyes and do not open them until I tell you to.’

I closed my eyes and felt the sofa moving. It seemed to me that I was flying up and up. I could feel a breeze around us, but I wasn’t cold, in spite of being dressed only in my nightgown.

‘Open your eyes, Clara,’ you said to me. ‘We are in the Land of Snowflakes.’

There was nothing in the Land of Snowflakes but clear, dark blue everywhere: above, below and all around us. The sofa was floating on it, through the velvety night. Snowflakes,