

Synopsis

The nutcracker

Act One

It is Christmas Eve early in the nineteenth century. The wealthy Mayor, Dr. Stahlbaum, is giving a party for his friends and their children. The children are dancing and playing in excited anticipation of the approaching Christmas festivities and of their presents. Herr Drosselmeyer, an old friend of the family, arrives bringing the children gifts and amuses them by his conjuring tricks. He gives Clara, his favourite, a nutcracker which delights her. Her brother Fritz spitefully breaks it, but Herr Drosselmeyer mends it for her. After the grandparents arrive and join in the dancing, Clara becomes very tired and, falling asleep in her chair, has a vivid dream.

The room and the Christmas tree seem to grow. A swarm of rats appear trying to capture the nutcracker, but Clara hurries to his rescue, throwing them her favourite dolls in an effort to distract them from him. From their toy fort an army of soldiers led by the nutcracker (who suddenly springs to life) comes to help fight against the rats and their leader, the Rat King. A Company of Hussars and another of Marines fight the rat army but are overwhelmed. Only the nutcracker and the Rat King are left on the battlefield. Desperately Clara flings her shoe at the Rat King. As it strikes him he falls dead and a sudden transformation takes place, revealing the nutcracker as a young, handsome prince.

Act Two

Together *The nutcracker* (now changed into the Prince) and Clara are carried away to an enchanted grotto. There Clara becomes frightened by bats but when the Prince comes to protect her she realises that they are actually her family and friends transformed by her nightmare. The grotto mysteriously changes into Clara's own toy theatre, where she finds many of her favourite dolls brought to life. The mood changes to one of happiness and everyone dances. As Clara's dream closes she is found still sleeping in her chair. Her mother and father waken her and as the guests take their leave the party comes to an end. Clara is left alone, enthralled by memories of her adventures.