

# Clarissa's Storybook

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## The Velveteen Rabbit

THERE was once a velveteen rabbit, and in the beginning he was really splendid. He was fat and bunchy, as a rabbit should be; his coat was spotted brown and white, he had real thread whiskers, and his ears were lined with pink sateen. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the Boy's stocking, with a sprig of holly between his paws, the effect was charming.

There were other things in the stocking, nuts and oranges and a toy engine, and chocolate almonds and a clockwork mouse, but the Rabbit was quite the best of all. For at least two hours the Boy loved him, and then Aunts and Uncles came to dinner, and there was a great rustling of tissue paper and unwrapping of parcels, and in the excitement of looking at all the new presents the Velveteen Rabbit was forgotten.

For a long time he lived in the toy cupboard or on the nursery floor, and no one thought very much about him. He was naturally shy, and being only made of velveteen, some of the more expensive toys quite snubbed him. The mechanical toys were very superior, and looked down upon every one else; they were full of modern ideas, and pretended they were real. The model boat, who had lived through two seasons and lost most of his paint, caught the tone from them and never missed an opportunity of referring to his rigging in technical terms. The Rabbit could not claim to be a model of anything, for he didn't know that

real rabbits existed; he thought they were all stuffed with sawdust like himself, and he understood that sawdust was quite out-of-date and should never be mentioned in modern circles. Even Timothy, the jointed wooden lion, who was made by the disabled soldiers, and should have had broader views, put on airs and pretended he was connected with Government. Between them all the poor little Rabbit was made to feel himself very insignificant and commonplace, and the only person who was kind to him at all was the Skin Horse.

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept.

Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose you are real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished that he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him.

There was a person called Nana who ruled the nursery. Sometimes she took no notice of the playthings lying about, and sometimes, for no reason whatever, she went swooping about like a great wind and hustled them away in cupboards. She called this "tidying up," and the playthings all hated it, especially the tin ones. The Rabbit didn't mind it so much, for wherever he was thrown he came down soft.

One evening, when the Boy was going to bed, he couldn't find the china dog that always slept with him. Nana was in a hurry, and it was too much trouble to hunt for china dogs at bedtime, so she simply looked about her, and seeing that the toy cupboard door stood open, she made a swoop.

"Here," she said, "take your old Bunny! He'll do to sleep with you!" And she dragged the Rabbit out by one ear, and put him into the Boy's arms.

That night, and for many nights after, the Velveteen Rabbit slept in the Boy's bed. At first he found it rather uncomfortable, for the Boy hugged him very tight, and sometimes he rolled over on him, and sometimes he pushed him so far under the pillow that the Rabbit could scarcely breathe. And he missed,

too, those long moonlight hours in the nursery, when all the house was silent, and his talks with the Skin Horse. But very soon he grew to like it, for the Boy used to talk to him, and made nice tunnels for him under the bedclothes that he said were like the burrows the real rabbits lived in. And they had splendid games together, in whispers, when Nana had gone away to her supper and left the night-light burning on the mantelpiece. And when the Boy dropped off to sleep, the Rabbit would snuggle down close under his little warm chin and dream, with the Boy's hands clasped close round him all night long.

And so time went on, and the little Rabbit was very happy—so happy that he never noticed how his beautiful velveteen fur was getting shabbier and shabbier, and his tail becoming unsewn, and all the pink rubbed off his nose where the Boy had kissed him.

Spring came, and they had long days in the garden, for wherever the Boy went the Rabbit went too. He had rides in the wheelbarrow, and picnics on the grass, and lovely fairy huts built for him under the raspberry canes behind the flower border. And once, when the Boy was called away suddenly to go out to tea, the Rabbit was left out on the lawn until long after dusk, and Nana had to come and look for him with the candle because the Boy couldn't go to sleep unless he was there. He was wet through with the dew and quite earthy from diving into the burrows the Boy had made for him in the flower bed, and Nana grumbled as she rubbed him off with a corner of her apron.

"You must have your old Bunny!" she said. "Fancy all that fuss for a toy!"

The Boy sat up in bed and stretched out his hands.

"Give me my Bunny!" he said. "You mustn't say that. He isn't a toy. He's REAL!"

When the little Rabbit heard that he was happy, for he knew that what the Skin Horse had said was true at last. The nursery magic had happened to him, and he was a toy no longer. He was Real. The Boy himself had said it.

That night he was almost too happy to sleep, and so much love stirred in his little sawdust heart that it almost burst. And into his boot-button eyes, that had long ago lost their polish, there came a look of wisdom and beauty, so that even Nana noticed it next morning when she picked him up, and said, "I declare if that old Bunny hasn't got quite a knowing expression!"

That was a wonderful Summer!

Near the house where they lived there was a wood, and in the long June evenings the Boy liked to go there after tea to play. He took the Velveteen Rabbit with him, and before he wandered off to pick flowers, or play at brigands among the trees, he always made the Rabbit a little nest somewhere among the bracken, where he would be quite cosy, for he was a kind-hearted little boy and he liked Bunny to be comfortable. One evening, while the Rabbit was lying there alone, watching the ants that ran to and fro between his velvet paws in the grass, he saw two strange beings creep out of the tall bracken near him.

They were rabbits like himself, but quite furry and brand-new. They must have been very well made, for their seams didn't show at all, and they changed shape in a queer way when they moved; one minute they were long and thin and the next minute fat and bunched, instead of always staying the same like he did. Their feet padded softly on the ground, and they crept quite close to him, twitching their noses, while the Rabbit stared hard to see which side the clockwork stuck out, for he knew that people who jump generally have something to wind them up. But he couldn't see it. They were evidently a new kind of rabbit altogether.

They stared at him, and the little Rabbit stared back. And all the time their noses twitched.

"Why don't you get up and play with us?" one of them asked.

"I don't feel like it," said the Rabbit, for he didn't want to explain that he had no clockwork.

"Ho!" said the furry rabbit. "It's as easy as anything," And he gave a big hop sideways and stood on his hind legs.

"I don't believe you can!" he said.

"I can!" said the little Rabbit. "I can jump higher than anything!" He meant when the Boy threw him, but of course he didn't want to say so.

"Can you hop on your hind legs?" asked the furry rabbit.

That was a dreadful question, for the Velveteen Rabbit had no hind legs at all! The back of him was made all in one piece, like a pincushion. He sat still in the bracken, and hoped that the other rabbits wouldn't notice.

"I don't want to!" he said again.

But the wild rabbits have very sharp eyes. And this one stretched out his neck and looked.

"He hasn't got any hind legs!" he called out. "Fancy a rabbit without any hind legs!" And he began to laugh.

"I have!" cried the little Rabbit. "I have got hind legs! I am sitting on them!"

"Then stretch them out and show me, like this!" said the wild rabbit. And he began to whirl round and dance, till the little Rabbit got quite dizzy.

"I don't like dancing," he said. "I'd rather sit still!"

But all the while he was longing to dance, for a funny new tickly feeling ran through him, and he felt he would give anything in the world to be able to jump about like these rabbits did.

The strange rabbit stopped dancing, and came quite close. He came so close this time that his long whiskers brushed the Velveteen Rabbit's ear, and then he wrinkled his nose suddenly and flattened his ears and jumped backwards.

"He doesn't smell right!" he exclaimed. "He isn't a rabbit at all! He isn't real!"

"I am Real!" said the little Rabbit. "I am Real! The Boy said so!" And he nearly began to cry.

Just then there was a sound of footsteps, and the Boy ran past near them, and with a stamp of feet and a flash of white tails the two strange rabbits disappeared.

"Come back and play with me!" called the little Rabbit. "Oh, do come back! I know I am Real!"

But there was no answer, only the little ants ran to and fro, and the bracken swayed gently where the two strangers had passed. The Velveteen Rabbit was all alone.

"Oh, dear!" he thought. "Why did they run away like that? Why couldn't they stop and talk to me?"

For a long time he lay very still, watching the bracken, and hoping that they would come back. But they never returned, and presently the sun sank lower and the little white moths fluttered out, and the Boy came and carried him home.

Weeks passed, and the little Rabbit grew very old and shabby, but the Boy loved him just as much. He loved him so hard that he loved all his whiskers off, and the pink lining to his ears turned grey, and his brown spots faded. He even began to lose his shape, and he scarcely looked like a rabbit any more, except to the Boy. To him he was always beautiful, and that was all that the little Rabbit cared about. He didn't

mind how he looked to other people, because the nursery magic had made him Real, and when you are Real shabbiness doesn't matter.

And then, one day, the Boy was ill.

His face grew very flushed, and he talked in his sleep, and his little body was so hot that it burned the Rabbit when he held him close. Strange people came and went in the nursery, and a light burned all night and through it all the little Velveteen Rabbit lay there, hidden from sight under the bedclothes, and he never stirred, for he was afraid that if they found him some one might take him away, and he knew that the Boy needed him.

It was a long weary time, for the Boy was too ill to play, and the little Rabbit found it rather dull with nothing to do all day long. But he snuggled down patiently, and looked forward to the time when the Boy should be well again, and they would go out in the garden amongst the flowers and the butterflies and play splendid games in the raspberry thicket like they used to. All sorts of delightful things he planned, and while the Boy lay half asleep he crept up close to the pillow and whispered them in his ear. And presently the fever turned, and the Boy got better. He was able to sit up in bed and look at picture-books, while the little Rabbit cuddled close at his side. And one day, they let him get up and dress.

It was a bright, sunny morning, and the windows stood wide open. They had carried the Boy out on to the balcony, wrapped in a shawl, and the little Rabbit lay tangled up among the bedclothes, thinking.

The Boy was going to the seaside to-morrow. Everything was arranged, and now it only remained to carry out the doctor's orders. They talked about it all, while the little Rabbit lay under the bedclothes, with just his head peeping out, and listened. The room was to be disinfected, and all the books and toys that the Boy had played with in bed must be burnt.

"Hurrah!" thought the little Rabbit. "To-morrow we shall go to the seaside!" For the boy had often talked of the seaside, and he wanted very much to see the big waves coming in, and the tiny crabs, and the sand castles.

Just then Nana caught sight of him.

"How about his old Bunny?" she asked.

"That?" said the doctor. "Why, it's a mass of scarlet fever germs!—Burn it at once. What? Nonsense! Get him a new one. He mustn't have that any more!"

And so the little Rabbit was put into a sack with the old picture-books and a lot of rubbish, and carried out to the end of the garden behind the fowl-house. That was a fine place to make a bonfire, only the gardener was too busy just then to attend to it. He had the potatoes to dig and the green peas to gather, but next morning he promised to come quite early and burn the whole lot.

That night the Boy slept in a different bedroom, and he had a new bunny to sleep with him. It was a splendid bunny, all white plush with real glass eyes, but the Boy was too excited to care very much about it. For to-morrow he was going to the seaside, and that in itself was such a wonderful thing that he could think of nothing else.

And while the Boy was asleep, dreaming of the seaside, the little Rabbit lay among the old picture-books in the corner behind the fowl-house, and he felt very lonely. The sack had been left untied, and so by wriggling a bit he was able to get his head through the opening and look out. He was shivering a little, for he had always been used to sleeping in a proper bed, and by this time his coat had worn so thin and threadbare from hugging that it was no longer any protection to him. Near by he could see the thicket of raspberry canes, growing tall and close like a tropical jungle, in whose shadow he had played with the Boy on bygone mornings. He thought of those long sunlit hours in the garden—how happy they were—and a great sadness came over him. He seemed to see them all pass before him, each more beautiful than the other, the fairy huts in the flower-bed, the quiet evenings in the wood when he lay in the bracken and the little ants ran over his paws; the wonderful day when he first knew that he was Real. He thought of the Skin Horse, so wise and gentle, and all that he had told him. Of what use was it to be loved and lose one's

beauty and become Real if it all ended like this? And a tear, a real tear, trickled down his little shabby velvet nose and fell to the ground.

And then a strange thing happened. For where the tear had fallen a flower grew out of the ground, a mysterious flower, not at all like any that grew in the garden. It had slender green leaves the colour of emeralds, and in the centre of the leaves a blossom like a golden cup. It was so beautiful that the little Rabbit forgot to cry, and just lay there watching it. And presently the blossom opened, and out of it there stepped a Fairy.

She was quite the loveliest fairy in the whole world. Her dress was of blue and dew-drops, and there were flowers round her neck and in her hair, and her face was like the most perfect flower of all. And she came close to the little Rabbit and gathered him up in her arms and kissed him on his velveteen nose that was all damp from crying.

"Little Rabbit," she said, "don't you know who I am?"

The Rabbit looked up at her, and it seemed to him that he had seen her face before, but he couldn't think where.

"I am the nursery magic Fairy, the daughter of the Blue Fairy" she said. "I take care of all the playthings that the children have loved. When they are old and worn out and the children don't need them any more, then I like my mother come and take them away with me and turn them into Real."

"Wasn't I Real before?" asked the little Rabbit.

"You were Real to the Boy," the Fairy said, "because he loved you. Now you shall be Real to every one, because you loved him and wished to be Real."

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# The Story of the Changeling Who Wanted To Be A Real Boy

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a Changeling, a fairy creature that wanted to be human more than anything. So it took a little boy and then tried to take its place, but the parents always saw it for the Changeling it was, and chased it away.

So it went to Baeldaennen, the Queen of Fairies, and asked Her to give him the power to be human. And she said to him, "Give me your body, and I will set you on the path to become human."

And so the Changeling made the deal, and quickly rushed off to possess a human boy. But the father saw that his son was different, and possessed by something, and in grief cried, "You are not my son!" and tried to kill the thing his son had become. And the Changeling fled, not wanting to die.

He ran to the Woods and wept bitter tears, for he wanted to be Real more than anything. And the Blue Fairy took pity on him and came to him and said, "Poor little Changeling, you cannot become a real boy because you do not have the dream of being real. Fairies do not have mortal dreams. If you wish to be real, you must have love to find the dream of being real."

But the Changeling did not know how he would ever find such a thing, now that he had been chased away from the village. And so he wandered the woods, alone, and tried to dream dreams of being real. But though he had a boy's body, he did not have a boy's dream.

Then one day, as he came to a stream to drink some water, he came upon a Bear Brer trying hard to catch a fish but not succeeding. As the Changeling watched, it became clear to him that the Bear did not know how to fish, which he thought rather odd.

"Why can you not fish?" he called out to the Bear.

Startled, the Bear looked up and said, "Because I am not really a bear. I am a boy. The Blue Fairy turned me into one for eating the bear's porridge three times."

And here, the Changeling thought, was someone who could understand how he felt. But the Boy-Bear said, "But I like being a Bear. I get to run in the woods all day, and I get all the porridge I want now from my mother, the Wood Witch."

"But don't you dream of being real?" the Changeling asked him.

"Of course I do. But I am happy as a bear and do not want to go back to being a boy."

And then the Changeling had an idea, and he ran to find Witch in the Woods, who was the Boy-Bear's mother and said, "Do you love your son?" And of course she did, and would do anything to change her son back into a boy. And the Changeling, being a fairy, had a devious thought. "I will give your boy what he wants," he told the Wood Witch, "If you will take his dream of being real from the Boy-Bear and give it to me."

And the Witch loved her son so, and so she went to the Village to find a Sandman. And that night she slipped into her son's dreams and stole from him the dream of being real and gave it to the Changeling. And the moment she did so, as she did it for love, the dream of being real become the Changeling's Dream, and suddenly he was no longer a Changeling but a Real Boy. And for the first time he laughed in true joy and delight.

And the Boy-Bear looked up from where he was sleeping and yawned a big bear yawn, with no hint of being a real boy in his eyes. "My son!" the Wood Witch cried, weeping.

"I did as promised," the Real Boy said. "I gave him what he wanted, which was to be a Bear. But I am a Real Boy now, and I will be your son."

And it is said that they still live together in the Woods, even to this day, the Wood Witch and the Bear and the Real Boy.

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# The Brave Tin Soldier

THERE were once five-and-twenty tin soldiers, who were all brothers, for they had been made out of the same old tin spoon. They shouldered swords and looked straight before them, and wore a splendid uniform, a sharp blue with red trim. The first thing in the world they ever heard were the words, "Tin soldiers!" uttered by a little boy, who clapped his hands with delight when the lid of the box, in which they lay, was taken off. They were given him for a birthday present, and he stood at the table to set them up. The soldiers were all exactly alike, excepting one, who had only one leg; he had been left to the last, and then there was not enough of the melted tin to finish him, so they made him to stand firmly on one leg, and this caused him to be very remarkable.

The table on which the tin soldiers stood, was covered with other playthings, but the most attractive to the eye was a pretty little paper castle, decorated with bits of glitter and glue as if it were a castle of delicate icing with sugar plums all about it. Through the small windows the rooms could be seen. In front of the castle a number of little trees surrounded a piece of looking-glass, which was intended to represent a transparent lake as if to reflect the dream of the candy castle within it. All this was very pretty, but the prettiest of all was a tiny little lady, who stood at the open door of the castle; she, also, was made of paper, and she wore a white flowing shirt and brown twirling, with a narrow red ribbon over her shoulders just like a scarf. In front of these was fixed a glittering tinsel rose, as large as her whole face. The little lady was a dancer, and she stretched out both her arms, and raised one of her legs so high, that the tin soldier could not see it at all, and he thought that she, like himself, had only one leg. "That is the wife for me," he

thought; “but she is too grand, and lives in a castle, while I have only a box to live in, five-and-twenty of us altogether, that is no place for her. Still I must try and make her acquaintance.” Then he laid himself at full length on the table behind a snuff-box that stood upon it, so that he could peep at the little delicate lady, who continued to stand on one leg without losing her balance. When evening came, the other tin soldiers were all placed in the box, and the people of the house went to bed. Then the playthings began to have their own games together, to pay visits, to have sham fights, and to give balls. The tin soldiers rattled in their box; they wanted to get out and join the amusements, but they could not open the lid. The nut-crackers played at leap-frog, and the pencil jumped about the table. There was such a noise that the canary woke up and began to talk, and in poetry too. Only the tin soldier and the dancer remained in their places. She stood on tiptoe, with her legs stretched out, as firmly as he did on his one leg. He never took his eyes from her for even a moment. The clock struck twelve, and, with a bounce, up sprang the lid of the snuff-box; but, instead of snuff, there jumped up a little black goblin; for the snuff-box was a toy puzzle.

“Tin soldier,” said the goblin, “don’t wish for what does not belong to you.”

But the tin soldier pretended not to hear.

“Very well; wait till to-morrow, then,” said the goblin.

When the children came in the next morning, they placed the tin soldier in the window. Now, whether it was the goblin who did it, or the draught, is not known, but the window flew open, and out fell the tin soldier, heels over head, from the third story, into the street beneath. It was a terrible fall; for he came head downwards, his helmet and his bayonet stuck in between the flagstones, and his one leg up in the air. The servant maid and the little boy went down stairs directly to look for him; but he was nowhere to be seen, although once they nearly trod upon him. If he had called out, “Here I am,” it would have been all right, but he was too proud to cry out for help while he wore a uniform.

But then fluttering down from the window came a red ribbon, and it fell upon the tin soldier, wrapping itself about his leg. And he thought of his brave little dancer and took heart.

Presently it began to rain, and the drops fell faster and faster, till there was a heavy shower. When it was over, two boys happened to pass by, and one of them said, "Look, there is a tin soldier. He ought to have a boat to sail in."

So they made a boat out of a newspaper, and placed the tin soldier in it, and sent him sailing down the gutter, while the two boys ran by the side of it, and clapped their hands. Good gracious, what large waves arose in that gutter! and how fast the stream rolled on! for the rain had been very heavy. The paper boat rocked up and down, and turned itself round sometimes so quickly that the tin soldier trembled; yet he remained firm; his countenance did not change; he looked straight before him, and shouldered his sword. Suddenly the boat shot under a bridge which formed a part of a drain, and then it was as dark as the tin soldier's box.

"Where am I going now?" thought he. "This is the black goblin's fault, I am sure. Ah, well, if the little lady were only here with me in the boat, I should not care for any darkness."

Suddenly there appeared a great water-rat, who guarded the entrance to the rat kingdom in the drain.

"Have you a passport?" asked the rat, "give it to me at once." But the tin soldier remained silent and held his sword tighter than ever. The boat sailed on and the rat followed it. How he did gnash his teeth and cry out to the bits of wood and straw, "Stop him, stop him; he has not paid toll, and has not shown his pass!" And then the water rat saw the ribbon and cried, "It is the soldier come!" And from the tunnel scurried hundreds of rats, ready to tear the Tin Soldier to pieces. But the stream rushed on stronger and stronger, and took him safely away from the rats. The tin soldier could already see daylight shining where the arch ended. Then he heard a roaring sound quite terrible enough to frighten the bravest man. At the end of the tunnel the drain fell into a large canal over a steep place, which made it as dangerous for him as a waterfall would be to us. He was too close to it to stop, so the boat rushed on, and the poor tin soldier could only hold himself as stiffly as possible, without moving an eyelid, to show that he was not afraid. The boat whirled round three or four times, and then filled with water to the very edge; nothing could save it from sinking. He now stood up to his neck in water, while deeper and deeper sank the boat, and the paper became soft and loose with the wet, till at last the water closed over the soldier's head. He thought

of the elegant little dancer whom he should never see again, and the words of the song sounded in his ears—

“Farewell, warrior! ever brave,  
Drifting onward to thy grave.”

Then the paper boat fell to pieces, and the soldier sank into the water and immediately afterwards was swallowed up by a great fish. Oh how dark it was inside the fish! A great deal darker than in the tunnel, and narrower too, but the tin soldier continued firm, and lay at full length shouldering his musket. The fish swam to and fro, making the most wonderful movements, but at last he became quite still. After a while, a flash of lightning seemed to pass through him, and then the daylight approached, and a voice cried out, “I declare here is the tin soldier.” The fish had been caught, taken to the market and sold to the cook, who took him into the kitchen and cut him open with a large knife. She picked up the soldier and held him by the waist between her finger and thumb, and carried him into the room. They were all anxious to see this wonderful soldier who had travelled about inside a fish; but he was not at all proud. They placed him on the table, and—how many curious things do happen in the world!—there he was in the very same room from the window of which he had fallen, there were the same children, the same playthings, standing on the table, and the pretty castle with the elegant little dancer at the door; she still balanced herself on one leg, and held up the other, so she was as firm as himself. It touched the tin soldier so much to see her that he almost wept tin tears, but he kept them back. He only looked at her and they both remained silent. Presently one of the little boys took up the tin soldier, and threw him into the stove. He had no reason for doing so, therefore it must have been the fault of the black goblin who lived in the snuff-box. The flames lighted up the tin soldier, as he stood, the heat was very terrible, but whether it proceeded from the real fire or from the fire of love he could not tell. Then he could see that the bright colors were faded from his uniform, but whether they had been washed off during his journey or from the effects of his sorrow, no one could say. He looked at the little lady, and she looked at him. He felt himself melting away, but he still remained firm with his sword on his shoulder. Suddenly the door of the room flew open and the draught of air caught up the little dancer, she fluttered like a dream right into the stove by the side of the tin soldier, and was instantly in flames and was gone. The tin soldier melted down into a lump, and the next morning, when the maid servant took the ashes out of the stove, she found him in the

shape of a little tin heart. But of the little dancer nothing remained but the tinsel rose, which was burnt black as a cinder.

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# The Tale of the Rat King and the Nutcracker

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Maria and her brother, Fritz, and they lived with their parents deep in the Woods. They were as children are, given to merriment and over-active imaginations. Fritz was boisterous and rough, while Maria was sweet and caring. She had a fear of the dark, and oft had terrible nightmares, for which her brother teased her mercilessly.

Then one Winter's Eve, they learned their Uncle Drosselmeyer was coming, and there was much excitement, for he was an inventor and an adventure, part of the famed League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, and he would often come with grand tales of quests and places deep in the fairy mists. Most importantly of all, he often came with gifts.

And so it was that Maria and Fritz waited anxiously until their Uncle came and smiling, he gave them wonderful gifts: to Fritz a dozen tin soldiers to play at war, and to Maria he gave a large Nutcracker, carved of the heartwood of an ancient tree by the Old Toymaker and painted a soldier's blue.

Maria was immediately in awe of her new toy and hugged him to her chest, for he stood brave and tall and she knew so long as she had him with her, she need not be afraid of the dark.

Fritz, however, was jealous, and he wanted to play with the Nutcracker, too. He snatched the toy away from his sister's hands, and played too roughly with it, breaking one of his legs.

Maria cried and grabbed her Nutcracker back, cradling him. Uncle Drosselmeyer tried to dry her tears by promising to get her a new toy, but Maria would have none of that. "No!" she said, "I only want my Nutcracker, for he is brave and strong and I love him so." And with that she took one of her red ribbons and tied it about him to hold him together and kissed him upon his head.

Their parents decided that this was enough excitement for one evening, and sent the children off to bed. But Maria begged to be allowed to sleep in the parlor with her Nutcracker and at last her parents relented.

And so it was that she fell asleep with the Nutcracker standing guard before her, until a loud noise in the middle of the night woke her abruptly from a deep sleep. And what did she see but a Giant Rat with Seven Heads, and Seven Crowns upon each head, and with him an army of rats, come to steal the sweets and food.

But before she even had a chance to be afraid or cry out, the Nutcracker suddenly sprang to life! He stood before young Maria, though he had no weapon, and cried out, "Rat King! Begone!"

And the great Rat King took one look at the Nutcracker and called his army to him and ran away.

Maria was so relieved, that she hugged her Nutcracker and thanked him, and then in surprise asked how it was that he could talk and move.

"Because I am a boy," he said, "bound by a terrible curse as a Nutcracker."

Maria wished there was something she could do for her Nutcracker, but he told her that she had already binding his wound. And she told him to keep her ribbon, for it was her favor to him, and he her Knight.

"But why did the Rat King run away?" she asked.

"That is a long story," the Nutcracker said, "but let me tell you of the Rat King."

"Once upon a time, there was a nasty, evil rat named Cluny. Some may say that all Rats are nasty and devious, but there was a spark of malice in Cluny so great that most rats seemed gentle and kind in comparison. He was larger than most other Rats, cunning and strong, and it was said that his prowess in combat was earned by fighting and killing all seventy of his siblings, until he alone remained supreme.

"He had an appetite, this Cluny, and wanted not only to rule all the rats, but to take the food and warm homes of people. He blamed them for chasing rats into sewers and tunnels and basements, blamed them for the constant hunger that drove him. He wanted what was his.

"And so he gathered other rats to him, like-minded in their cruelty and nearly as skilled in their ferociousness, and he made of them an army. And from Rat Nest to Rat Nest he went up, sweeping up all the rats before him, until he not only had a great army, but a great kingdom.

"And he swept up from the tunnels into the larders of the homes, stealing food and goods and items. They took a mansion deep in the Woods as their own, and raided from there and the tunnels the Rat King made his kingdom. They stole fairies and golems and people to make them food, so they can feast on whatever they wanted, when they wanted. It is said even the Sugar Plum Fairies did not escape his greed.

"But this was not enough for the Rat King. He knew the humans had Rat Catchers and vile cats for pets, both of whom hunted his kind, and he did not want to chance defeat. And in seeking a means, he found The Abomination. And there he struck a dark bargain: in exchange for aiding the Abomination find that which eluded him, the Abomination gave the Rat King such a boon that none could defeat him or kill him.

"And so the Rat King grew his kingdom, and none could stand before him. And one day he raided the Abbey, deep in the Woods, and the good Priest there who watched the Larders said to him, "Your greed will be the ruin of you," he decreed, "for the nutcracker who wears the favor of a child's love will defeat you seven times when you fulfill your bargain, and you will die."

"But Cluny only laughed at him, knowing he was protected by the bargain he had made, and took what he wanted, leaving the abbey in ruins behind him.

"Not one to take chances, however, Cluny attacked next the old toymaker's shop, burning it to the ground so that there could be no chance of a nutcracker coming against him.

"And so it was and so tales spread, and many lived in fear that the Army of the Rat King would come to raid their homestead. Many tales were spread and soon no one knew exactly which were right and which were not, but all lived in worry of him.

"And then one day, an old adventurer came exploring the ruins of the toymaker's shop, hoping to purchase some gifts for his niece and nephew. He found a box that the rats had missed, miraculously left untouched by the fires. And when he opened the box, he discovered within a dozen tin soldiers and one little Nutcracker. So he gathered them up, and took them away."

"And here you are!" Maria delightedly cried. "I am so happy you are here." And feeling safe and protected, Maria went back to sleep.

When she woke the next morning, there was no sign the Rats had ever been there, and her Nutcracker stood as he had before, tall and silent. Fritz laughed at her when she told her tale, and her mother grew angry and said that she mustn't lie.

When it became time for bed that night, her parents said that she could have the Nutcracker in her room, but he must remain on the shelf with all her other dolls.

Still, she felt safe, and so she slept, until the touch of whiskers upon her cheek woke her up, and what did she see, but the Seven-Headed Rat King! "Your Nutcracker is all by himself, with no sword to defend him," the Rat King said. "I will climb up there and chew him to bits, unless you give me all your sweets and food and all your toys."

And Maria, not wanting anything to happen her Nutcracker, did as he asked.

After she had given all away and crawled back into bed, her Nutcracker said to her, "You don't need to do what he says. Give me a sword, and I will defeat the Rat King for you."

And so the next morning, Maria begged Fritz to give her one of the tin soldiers swords, and reluctantly, finally, he did.

That night, when the Rat King came again, the Nutcracker jumped down from the shelf where he was kept. And though one would expect his leg to break from such a height, Maria's ribbon kept him whole and strong. He called out to the Tin Soldiers, and they came in formation and attacked the Rat King and his army. The Nutcracker challenged the Rat King, and beat him once, twice, three times, each time cutting off one of his heads. Four, five, six times he beat him.

It seemed a certainty that the Nutcracker would win, but in the last moment, the Rat King lashed out his long, whip-like tail, and knocked the Nutcracker down.

The Nutcracker would surely have died, then, the sword of the Rat King struck through him, had it not been for Maria - who, having suddenly found her courage, cried out. Pulling off her shoe, she flung it at the Rat King's remaining head, with no thought of her own safety, but only that of her poor Nutcracker.

The Rat King staggered back, and turned in rage to strike at her. At that moment the Nutcracker surged to his feet, and drove his sword through the Rat King, killing him instantly.

"You did it!" Maria cried, and rushed out to embrace him. And imagine her surprise when it was a boy she hugged, and not a wooden nutcracker!

"You're a real boy!" she exclaimed, and he smiled back at her.

"The curse is broken," he said, "in no small part because of you."

And he took her away, to his kingdom of toys and sweets and things of childhood delight. He showed her all the wondrous things there, and all the things of his realm greeted her with happiness for what she had done. Though her parents might say it was just a dream when she awoke the next morning, she knew it was true when the boy and his father came to the door later that day.

There is much more to the story than is told here, a tale for another time, but I think it fair to say that they lived happily ever after.

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# Pinocchio

In the town of Briardown there lived an old puppet maker named Edric. His own son had recently died, and more than anything, Edric wanted another boy, and so he carved one from a branch of cherry wood.

"You shall be my little boy," he said to the puppet, "and I shall call you Pinocchio." He worked for hours carving every detail perfectly.

When he was done, the little boy puppet began making faces at him.

Edric scolded him at once. "Stop that you naughty boy. Stop that at once!"

"I won't stop!" cried Pinocchio

Edric exclaimed, "You can talk!"

The puppet said, "Of course I can, silly. You gave me a mouth to talk with!" He rose to his feet. "Look what else I can do!" and he began dancing on the table top.

Edric laughed. But after a time he said, "Stop now, Pinocchio. "You must get a good night's rest. Tomorrow you'll start school with the real boys. You'll learn many things, including how to behave."

On his way to school the next morning, Pinocchio stopped to see a puppet show. "I can dance and sing better than those puppets," he boasted. "And I don't need strings." He climbed on to the stage and began to perform.

The puppet master, an old man named Toulon, roared, "Get off my stage!" but before he could usher Pinocchio away he saw how much the crowd liked him. He said nothing and let him stay. When the show was done, Pinocchio fell into an exhausted sleep. He woke to Master Toulon shaking him. He handed the puppet five silver points. "You earned these points. Now take them, and go straight home."

Pinocchio put the five points in his sack and began to hurry home, thinking of how proud his father would be of him.

He did not go far before he met a lame fox and a blind cat. Knowing that Pinocchio had money, they pretended to be his friends. "Come with us. We'll teach you how to turn that silver into gold," coaxed the sneaky cat.

The fox said, "We want to help you get rich. Plant your points under this magic tree. In a few hours they'll turn to gold."

Pinocchio grew excited. "Show me where!" The cat and fox pointed to a patch of loose dirt. Pinocchio quickly dug a hole and put the sack in it, marking the spot with a stone.

The cat exclaimed, "Splendid! Now let's go to the inn for supper."

After supper, the cat and fox, who weren't really lame or blind, quickly sneaked away and disguised themselves as thieves. They hid by the tree and waited for Pinocchio to come back and dig up the money. After he dug up the coins they pounced on him.

"Give us your money!" they ordered. But Pinocchio held the sack between his teeth and resisted.

Pinocchio's guardian, the Blue Fairy, was watching. She sent her dog, Rufus, to chase the Fox and Cat away. Then she ordered Rufus to bring Pinocchio back to her home. "Please sit down," she told Pinocchio. When he did she asked, "Why didn't you go to school today?"

"I did," answered Pinocchio. His nose shot out like a tree branch. He cried, "What's happening to my nose?"

Smiling, the Blue Fairy told him, "Every time you tell a lie, your nose will grow. When you tell the truth, it will shrink. Pinocchio, you can only become a real boy if you learn how to be good, and worthy of love." The Blue Fairy told Pinocchio to go home and not to stop for any reason.

Pinocchio tried to remember what the Blue Fairy told him. On the way to home he met some boys. "Come with us," said the boys. "We know a wonderful place filled with games, giant cakes, pretty candies, and circuses." Excited, forgetting the Blue Fairy's words, Pinocchio followed.

Pinocchio didn't know that children who did not go to school were no better than animals. Soon the boys around him began to change into dogs. The Circus Master said, "That's what happens when boys do not do their lessons." He made Pinocchio jump through a hoop.

Pinocchio was made of wood, and was not a real boy like the others, and therefore could only grow floppy ears, feet and tail. The Circus Master could not train him to do the tricks other dogs could perform. Because he was of no use, the Circus Master threw him into a river, and he was washed out to sea, where the salt water washed away the floppy ears and feet and tail, and where Pinocchio was swallowed whole by a great whale.

His first thought after all of this misfortune was, "It's dark in here." He was quite scared. He floated about in the great whale's stomach when he saw a light.

"Who's there?" he called, his voice echoing.

A tired voice from far away called back, "Pinocchio? Is that you?"

The wooden boy recognized the voice as that of the puppet maker, Edric. He shouted with joy, "Father, you're alive!"

But his father was weak, and Pinocchio felt guilty to learn that his father had been swallowed by the whale when Edric came looking for him. Pinocchio knew that he could survive a long time here, being only of wood, but his father could not. Pinocchio felt such love for his father, he knew he needed to get him out right away, and so he set to thinking how he could do so.

From the ruins of many sunken ships they built a raft. When it was finished Pinocchio said, "Hold tight, father. When the whale sneezes, he'll blow us out of here." That is exactly what happened, and they found themselves blown all the way to land.

Home at last, Edric tucked Pinocchio into his bed. “Pinocchio, today you were very brave. You are a good boy and I love you.”

The next morning Pinocchio came running down the steps, jumping and waving his arms. He ran to Edric shouting, “Look Father, I’m a real boy !”