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After a long and exciting day, the family members go to bed—everyone, that is, except Marie. She gets her mother's permission to stay up (and spend a little more time with her new things).

This chapter, of Hoffman's story, gives us a clue how "Marie" became "Clara" in later versions of the tale. It also introduces us to the fantasy world that will come to dominate the story.

With all the candles blown-out, in this pre-electricity era, only a single flickering lamp lights the room. It seems a fitting backdrop for what is about to happen.

In the sitting room, against the left-hand wall, was a tall, glass cabinet where the Stahlbaums displayed the children's Christmas books and toys. On the top shelf were Godpapa Drosselmeier's works of art, beneath them the picture books, below that Fritz's soldiers and, on the lowest shelf, Marie's dolls.

Miss Gertrude was sitting there now, on a floral sofa, in an elegant room with a lovely white bed, next to Marie's new doll, who—Marie had discovered—was called "Miss Clara."

It was getting very late, close to midnight, and Drosselmeier had gone home hours ago. But although it was long past their bedtime, the children's eyes were still fixed on that cabinet.

Fritz was getting tired: "My hussars must be exhausted, but while I'm watching, none of them dares to nod-off."

He saluted them sleepily, then went to bed. Marie begged her mother to be allowed to stay up a little longer. She was such a good little girl that her mother agreed. She put out all the candles, leaving only a lamp burning softly from the ceiling, and kissed her daughter goodnight.

When Marie was sure she was alone, she set-out to work. Laying the Nutcracker gently on the table, and unwrapping her handkerchief, she started to examine his wounds.

He looked really pale, but he was still smiling bravely. He seemed a bit sad, though.

"Darling Nutcracker," whispered Marie, "I'll nurse you back to health and make you happy again. Godpapa Drosselmeier will mend your teeth."

As the mention of Drosselmeier, something amazing happened. Nutcracker made a horrid, ugly face and a green glint sparked from his eyes.

Marie was terrified, until she looked at Nutcracker again. He was smiling back at her. She decided that the sudden change in his appearance must have been caused by the flickering lamplight.

Relieved, Marie picked Nutcracker up, and knelt down by the cabinet to address her new doll, Miss Clara.

"I want to ask a favor. Will you give-up your bed for my poor Nutcracker?" But Miss Clara didn't answer. Instead, she looked back so scornfully that Marie shrugged.

"Then I won't be polite either," she said. Pulling the bed forward, she laid Nutcracker down. She wrapped another ribbon around his shoulder and pulled the bedclothes up to his nose.

"You're not going to sleep next to nasty Miss Clara," Marie added coldly, before moving the bed to the next shelf, near Fritz's troops, and closing the cabinet door.

Just as the door shut, Marie heard a soft rustling all around her. The clock on the wall whirred louder and louder. It was ready to strike midnight. Marie suddenly saw that the golden owl on the top had spread its wings. Then the clock rang out with these strange words:

*Bells Chine
Now it's time...
In midnight's gloom,
Sing Mouse King's doom!*

When she looked at the clock again, instead of the owl, Godpapa Drosselmeier was sitting on the clock!

"Don't scare me, naughty Godpapa!" she cried.

But now the room was filled with wild squeaking and the tramp of thousands of little feet behind the skirting boards. Tiny lights began to glimmer through the cracks. Only they weren't lights. They were eyes. Thousands of glittering eyes!

Suddenly the room filled with mice, galloping everywhere and forming into troops, like Fritz's soldiers. Unlike many children, Marie wasn't afraid of mice, so she found it all rather comical. Until ... she heard a cry that froze her blood.

Sand and broken stones burst up at her feet and out of the floor rose an enormous mouse, with seven heads. On each head was a golden crown. He hissed horribly, and his army advanced out of the cabinet.

As Marie stepped back in terror, her elbow shattered a pane of glass in the cabinet. She felt a sharp pain in her arm, but her fear suddenly subsided. The squeaking had stopped. Marie thought she'd scared the mice back into their holes.

When everything was quiet, Marie heard urgent whispering from inside the cabinet.

*The battle's tonight.
Left, right!
Now we are to march
And fight!*

Behind the glass doors shone a brilliant light. The toys were coming to life! Nutcracker himself sprang out of bed and drew his sword.

"Who'll fight beside me in this great battle!" he cried valiantly.

Then he jumped from the second shelf and would have broken his legs had Miss Clara [the new doll] not caught him in her arms.

"My Lord," she wept, "stay with me! Let your subjects do the fighting!"

But Nutcracker kicked so hard that she let him go. Then she offered him her sash as a token of her favor. Although he thanked her graciously, the loyal Nutcracker took Marie's ribbon instead. He kissed it, then jumped to the floor where the mouse army was waiting, commanded by their terrible, seven-headed king.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Wonderful-Events>

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