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Illustration, by Roberto Innocenti, depicting the Mouse King paying Marie a very scary visit. Published by Innocenti in a 1940 version of "The Nutcracker."

After Marie hears Drosselmeier's whole story, about the nutcracker and his terrible fate, her words make it sound as though she thinks it's all true, not just a tale.

Could Marie—the believer in "other worlds"—be right?

*Finishing his story, Drosselmeier said: "There. That was a hard nut to crack, but at least you know why nutcrackers are so ugly."*

*Marie sat up in bed, frowning. She was thoughtful for a moment, then she said sadly, "I think Pirlipat is horrid and ungrateful."*

*"If Nutcracker had been a real soldier," scoffed Fritz, "he'd have settled the Mouse King and got back his looks."*

*Godpapa Drosselmeier just smiled to himself and said nothing.*

*Now a glass cut can be very nasty. Marie felt so dizzy that she had to stay in bed for a whole week. At last she felt better and jumped around as happily as before. She ran to the cabinet and peered through the glass panes. The toys were fine, and there was Nutcracker with his teeth all perfectly in place.*

*Marie guessed that Godpapa Drosselmeier's story had been about himself and his feud with Dame Mouserink.*

*"Godpapa Drosselmeier and the clockmaker must be the same person," she thought as she looked at the silent Nutcracker. "And, dear Nutcracker, you must be my Godpapa's nephew from Nuremberg. You should have married Pirlipat," she sighed. "In that case, you are the rightful King of Toyland," she told him, and then addressed the toys: "But you see, he is still under an evil spell - just like a handsome prince from a fairy tale!"*

*Now that Marie had worked all this out, she expected the toys to show her they were alive. But they stayed absolutely still. "You can count on me, sweet Prince," whispered Marie, rather forlornly, "and I'll ask Godpapa to help."*

*Nutcracker remained motionless, but Marie thought she heard a sigh from the cabinet and a familiar voice say:*

Marie so fair  
Like golden sunshine,  
I'll be yours  
If you'll be mine!

She felt a thrill of delight tinged with apprehension. That evening, the family had gathered for tea and Marie was sitting on her little stool by Godpapa Drosselmeier.

"Godpapa, I know that Nutcracker is really your nephew," she said, "so why don't you help him fight Mouserink's son?"

Now she told them all about the battle between the toys and the mice.

"What a story!" laughed Mama.

"Utter nonsense," smiled Papa.

"My soldiers would never be such cowards," protested Fritz.

But Godpapa took her on his knee. "Marie," he whispered, "you have more power than us. You are a born princess, like Pirlipat. But if you really want to save Nutcracker, there are still many challenges facing you. You're the only one who can help him, so be faithful and true."

One moonlit night, not long after this, Marie was woken by a strange scratching sound in the corner of her bedroom. She was going to run to her mother to tell her that there were mice in the house, when she saw the terrible Mouse King pushing through a hole in the wall. He jumped onto the table and hissed and squeaked. "Give me your candy," he cried, "or I'll chew Nutcracker into sawdust!"

Marie froze with terror.

The next morning, still pale from fright, she didn't dare tell Fritz or her mother and sister what had happened, because she was sure they would laugh at her again. But Marie knew she had to help Nutcracker. So that night, she left all her sweets at the bottom of the cabinet. When the sun rose, the next day, all the sweets were bitten and chewed up, except the marzipan, which the picky Mouse King did not like.

Marie didn't mind about her sweets, simply feeling glad that she had saved Nutcracker. But, of course, the sweets weren't enough for the Mouse King. He returned that night. With a nasty gleam in his eyes, he squeaked: "Give me your sugar toys!"

Marie was very sad as she put out her beautiful collection of sugar toys. She kissed the shepherds and shepherdesses, the jumping dog, the milk-white sheep and the pretty Maid of Orleans. But her most precious sugar toy was a tiny girl with rosy cheeks. When Marie thought of losing this little one, her eyes filled with tears.

Nutcracker looked up at her so pitifully, however, that Marie decided she would happily sacrifice everything to save him.

When Marie's mother saw the sad remains of the sugar toys the next morning, she was furious and told her husband and Godpapa Drosselmeier that mice had made a hole in the cabinet.

Fritz claimed that the baker's cat downstairs could bite off the Mouse King's head. But Mama was worried that a cat would cause all sorts of mischief in the house, so Fritz suggested Drosselmeier set one of the traps he had invented. His parents laughed at this, but Drosselmeier put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a little box.

The children rushed downstairs to the kitchen, where the cook started to brown some bacon to put inside the trap.

"Be careful, Queen!" warned Marie as she watched. "Remember the Mouserink family!"

But Fritz drew his toy sword and cried, "Let them come - if they dare!"

When the fat was ready, Drosselmeier fixed the browned slab on a fine thread and set the trap down gently in the glass cabinet.

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

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:  
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Uncle-and-Nephew>