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Illustration, of "The Nutcracker," by Maxim Mitrofanov, a prolific Russian artist who illustrates children's books (among other things). Copyright, Maxim Mitrofanov, all rights reserved. Image of Marie, attempting to show her father proof that she is not lying about her trip with Nutcracker, provided here as fair use for educational purposes. Mitrofanov's illustrations appear in a version of Hoffman's tale—"The Nutcracker and the Mouse King"—translated into Russian by I. Tatarinov and published by Rosmen-Press in 2011.

As Marie sees more and more wonders, including a marvelous city, we begin to think that she is dreaming.

But then again ... what if she isn't?

Beyond the walls was a great market place lined with sugar houses. An obelisk - actually a giant iced cake - spouted fountains of lemonade. The square was crowded with delightful little people who were shouting, laughing and singing.

The noise grew louder because the Great Mogul, attended by seven hundred slaves, was crossing the square. Five hundred fisherman had set up their stalls nearby and, at just that moment, the Grand Turk, with three thousand of his janissaries, decided to cross, too.

There was so much pushing and shoving that everyone started to fight. One of the fishermen knocked off a brahmin's head.

A man suddenly shouted "Pastrycook!" three times, whereupon everyone fell utterly silent. Nutcracker explained, to Marie, that "Pastrycook" meant a terrible, unknown power that represented the ultimate fate of these people. The very word always silenced a noisy crowd.

But now Marie cried out in astonishment. She saw a beautiful rose-white castle shining with hundreds of towers. Exotic flowers bloomed from every wall.

"Welcome to Marzipan Castle," smiled Nutcracker. Marie noticed that one of the main towers was missing its sparkling roof. Nutcracker told her that the Giant Sweet Tooth had been passing one day and had bitten it off - much to the inhabitants' dismay!

Then Marie heard lovely music and out of the castle ran twelve pages, with heads made of pearls and bodies of emeralds and rubies. Behind them were four ladies, about the size of Miss Clara, but dressed so wonderfully that Marie knew they must be princesses.

"Dear Prince, our beloved brother!" The princesses wept for joy at seeing their family member.

"This is Miss Stahlbaum," said Nutcracker, introducing Marie. "She's the daughter of the good Dr.

Stahlbaum. She saved my life by throwing her shoe at the Mouse King and finding me a sword. Can Pirlipat, though a princess, ever compare with her?"

"Oh, no!" they cried and, hugging Marie, led the young visitor inside.

The castle's rooms were made of crystal and were full of the most perfect pieces of furniture. The princesses sat Marie and Nutcracker down, then told them there was going to be a banquet. They gathered fruits, spices and sugar almonds, and began to prepare the feast.

Marie was thinking how much she would like to help when Nutcracker's youngest sister, as though she heard Marie's thoughts, handed her a little golden pestle and mortar.

"Dear friend, my brother's savior" she smiled. "Would you mind crushing some sugar candy?"

Marie started grinding the candy while Nutcracker told the whole story of the battle with the Mouse King. His voice and the sound of the mortar were like a lovely, low chant, which grew fainter.

Suddenly, a silver mist descended like clouds in which the pages and the princesses and Nutcracker and Marie herself began to float. They rose higher and higher until - whoosh!! - Marie felt herself falling, falling ...

When she opened her eyes she was in bed again, and her mother was standing over her.

"You've had a long sleep," she said softly. "Up you go now, little one. Your breakfast is ready."

Marie told her everything that she'd seen in the Land of Sweets.

"What a beautiful dream!" agreed her mother, amused at her child's story.

Marie knew that it wasn't a dream and that she must have fallen asleep in the Marzipan Castle. The pages must have carried her home.

She went on insisting, until her mother took her to the cabinet and pulled out the nutcracker.

"Silly girl," she smiled. "How could this bit of wood be alive?"

When Marie answered that she knew he was young Drosselmeier, both her parents burst out laughing. They laughed and laughed and laughed, until Marie ran back into her bedroom and grabbed the Mouse King's seven crowns.

"There," she said proudly. "There's the proof!"

Her parents looked at the crowns in amazement. They really were very beautiful and made out of a metal her parents had never seen before. Papa demanded to know where Marie had really got them. He listened, then scolded her for lying. Poor Marie burst into tears.

The door opened, and in came Godpapa Drosselmeier.

"Hello!" he cried cheerfully. "Why is my little Marie so unhappy?"

Dr. Stahlbaum explained and showed him the crowns.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Drosselmeier. "They're the crowns from my watch-chain. I gave them to Marie for her second birthday. Don't you remember?"

None of them did remember, but now Marie ran up to him. "Godpapa," she begged. "Tell them I'm not lying. Tell them Nutcracker is really your nephew and he gave me the crowns!"

"Rubbish!" answered Drosselmeier crossly.

Papa told Marie that if she didn't stop lying he'd throw all her toys - and Nutcracker - out of the window.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/The-Metropolis>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/The-Metropolis>