



Coppélia

Once upon a time, in a far away city, there was a curious old man named Doctor Coppelius. Doctor Coppelius owned a toyshop where he invented the most wonderful toys any child could want. There were toys that danced and toys that talked and sang, and toys that played music and spun and twirled. They were mechanical marvels, all of them, and moved as if they were alive. But none of them were alive and that was why Doctor Coppelius was such a sad old man. He had spent his entire career trying to give his creations real life, but nothing he did could make them truly live, and so he was always in a bad humor. Despite this, the children still loved to come into his store and cause mischief while they played with his toys.

But even amongst the many wondrous playthings that lined his shelves, his first and most famous toy was a life-size ballerina that stood in the front window. Every morning Doctor Coppelius would wind the brass key in her back five times and she would dance all day long. She wore a frilly pink tutu and slippers with glossy bows. Her face was delicate and white with rosy circles painted onto her cheeks. Her hair was like the bark of a chestnut tree and was tied into streaming pigtails, with pink ribbons that gaily fluttered through the air as she twirled. Never did she tire as she danced, for she was nothing more than wood and metal, filled with springs and gears that operated with clockwork efficiency.

For some reason that we may never know, the toy maker was not very fond of the ballerina, however he kept her in the window and wound her faithfully every day because the people loved her. She would draw crowds of children and adults, alike, and they would flock to his shop to see his other creations. By late morning, the gawking crowds would move on for the children had school and their parents all had work to tend to. But there was one young man who was there every morning, just as surely as the sun was to rise, and was always last to leave.

His name was Franco and he would stand in front of the toyshop for hours, watching the ballerina's spinning steps for as long as he could. He was taken with her; so beautiful was her face and so graceful her dancing. Every morning Franco would ask Doctor Coppelius how much the ballerina cost and every morning the toy maker would respond with, "More than you can afford!" Then he would chase the young man off to the academy, waving his cane angrily, and knowing that the boy would still be back the next morning.

Now it was no secret that, aside from harboring a general disliking of people, Doctor Coppelius had a love of all things dark and mysterious. When his skill as an inventor had failed to bring about the miraculous results he desired for his toys he turned to ancient knowledge and forgotten magic. He had, locked away in his workshop, an old book of magic spells that he had studied inside and out. He read it through the late hours of the night and into the morning, absorbing all of its secrets so that he might some day control its power. For his dream was to bring life to his greatest creation; Captain Crank, a toy soldier of gigantic stature and with strength that could put whole armies to shame. Every night, he opened the magic book and recited a spell, hoping it would bring Captain Crank to life at long last. But every effort he made was a failure and, though the magic he wielded would make the whole shop aglow with

astounding sights and sounds, the toy would not live. So he closed the book and, leaning on his cane, wearily retreated to bed.

This had occurred every night for many years but one night something very different happened. As usual, the spell Doctor Coppelius recited would not bring Captain Crank to life, and the toy maker went sadly to bed. But once the old man had pulled up the covers and fallen silently into a deep slumber, something strange was going on in the shop downstairs. I cannot tell you how or why it happened, but that night the magic had some unintended effect and, though the giant toy soldier remained lifeless, the toyshop was not entirely without life. For, suddenly, the ballerina in the front window opened her eyes, looked around and found that she was alive.

She didn't know how it could have happened, nor did she know what to do about it. She didn't know much of anything, really, since she had never thought anything before. But one thing she understood was that she was bolted to the floor for some reason and this was rather a bother to her. So, with a tremendous effort, she freed her foot from the mechanical base that held her and stood on her own two legs for the first time, and rather clumsily I might add. She had never walked before but she slowly learned how by taking one step at a time, getting better by the moment, and the better she got the more she came to like it. She walked around the entire shop, marveling at the sights that surrounded her.

The things she saw made her heart sing and she wished so desperately to express her pleasure. But she did not know how to talk. The ideas were forming in her head but they could not leave her lips. Silently she observed the toys, from animals to building blocks to rubber balls and porcelain tea sets, when she finally came across something that looked a bit like her. 'Perhaps I'm not the only me after all,' she thought as she looked at the little doll sitting on the shelf. She tried to talk to it, hoping she had found someone she could communicate with. She tried and tried but still she could not utter a word and the doll just sat and smiled at her.

She picked the little thing up and it suddenly spoke. "Papa," it said with a diminutive squeak. She shook it and, again, it said, "Papa." The ballerina rather liked the sound of the word and, when she opened her mouth, the same word came out. Shocked, she opened her mouth and said it again. She didn't know much but she knew that she had just spoken for the first time and was thrilled by it. She was so excited that she began picking up every doll she saw. "Mama," they said, and, "I love you," and, "Will you be my friend?" And every time she heard a new word, the ballerina repeated it exactly until she was speaking in whole sentences all by herself. She was so happy that she danced around the toyshop, pulling strings and flipping switches and turning keys until the entire shop was alive with sound and music.

The little musician figurines began to play as she twirled and skipped across the floor. All the little mechanical doggies woofed and howled and the mechanical kitties mewed and tumbled with their yarn balls. She made such a racket that Doctor Coppelius was roused from his sleep and pounded his cane against the floor as he rose from bed. Hearing this, the ballerina dashed back to her place at the window and became perfectly still and silent. Doctor Coppelius descended the stairs with slow steps and inspected all of the wildly animated toys, shutting them off, one by one, and wondering how they could have all sprung into action by themselves. Once all the toys had been silenced, he went to the window and checked the ballerina. She looked just as she always did and yet something was not right to him.

Just when he was about to return to bed, the ballerina turned to him with a smile and said, "Papa! I love you! Will you be my friend?" Then, before he could say anything, she danced across the room, talking and singing all the while. Well Doctor Coppelius did not know what to make of this. At first he rubbed his glasses, thinking that he may be seeing things. Then he cleaned out his ears, thinking he may have just been hearing things. Then he considered that it might just have been a problem with her mechanism that was making her do these things. But when he saw how she moved and listened to the things she said he realized that she was alive. She was truly alive.

One would believe that the inventor would have been happy to discover his creation was alive, and that he had finally achieved his dream. But he was not. He was quite displeased, in fact, that his magic had brought the wrong toy to life. "Now listen carefully, Ballerina," he said with a huff and a stomp of his cane. "I'm not sure what all this nonsense is about, but you'll stay right here by the window and not make a sound until I fix it!" Then, with a frown that could curdle milk, he hurried off to his study to consult his magic book. Furiously, he flipped through the pages, trying to understand why Captain Crank still would not live.

While he did this, the ballerina couldn't help but be curious. She listened to the strange words he was uttering and was sure they were no words she understood. 'Perhaps he's writing a song,' she thought to herself. 'Maybe I should help him.' But when she reached the doorway, she saw the huge figure of Captain Crank standing like an ominous metal golem, and didn't like the look of him at all. She decided it would be best if she stayed out of there and played with some of the toys instead. She poked the dollies until they cooed and she laughed and laughed until an angry growl from the other room told her she had better be quieter. 'I don't understand what the point of having a mouth is, if you're not allowed to use it,' she thought as she ran her finger against the toy's smile.

She strutted about the toy shop as Doctor Coppelius continued his magical studies, and she came upon a little red ball with yellow flowers painted all over the sides. Suddenly, a strange urge came over her and, biting her lip, she gave it a swift kick. Almost instantly she was seized by panic as the ball dashed back and forth across the room, smashing into toys and knocking jars off of shelves. She chased after it, hoping to stop it before it did any more damage. But before she could catch it, the ball bounced into Coppelius' workshop with a deafening crash. The ballerina had not been alive for even an hour, but she knew she was in trouble now.

The toymaker thundered out of the workshop, waving his black cane and spewing angry yells as he drove her back across the room. "Now you listen here, Ballerina," he shouted. "You were built for one thing and one thing only; to dance in that window! And *that* is what you'll do!" He spun her around and pushed her back into the display window. "From now on, we'll have no more frolicking, playing or nonsense of any kind, or I'll take you apart and use your pieces to make a set of clocks! You are going to stand in this window and dance just as you've always done!" With that, he clamped an iron brace around her leg and locked it, chaining her to the floor. "Now I am going to bed, and I expect I'll not have any further disturbances."

She stared at him with oily tears forming in her eyes. She wanted to say something, but just didn't understand what words to use. There were no words for what she was feeling. "Don't worry," he said as he climbed back up the stairs. "You won't have to worry about being alive much longer. Tomorrow, I'll discover where my spell went wrong and you'll go back to being a

toy just as you always were. Good night, Ballerina...” A moment later, he had disappeared into his room and the toyshop was dark and silent. The ballerina struggled with the chain, but it was locked tight. Fearing she would never leave that window, she began to cry, but kept her sobs low so as not to wake the old toymaker. She stood there for hours and hours, until the stars and moon faded and the sun began to stretch its yellow arms across the sky.

And her teary eyes were filled with a golden light as she saw the sun for the first time, rising over the rooftops of the city and pouring its radiance across the floor and walls of the toyshop. It was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen, and it made her realize something. She couldn't stay here. A new day was breaking and she wanted to see more...

That morning, Franco ate breakfast in a hurry and dashed out of the house. Everyone he passed thought it odd that a young man would be so eager for school, but he wasn't going to the academy. He wanted to see the Ballerina dance. His feet barely touched the cobblestones as he ran and he turned the corner and stopped in front of Coppelius' shop just as the old toymaker was winding up the mechanical doll. Franco stood in wonder as the ballerina started to sway and step and twirl. But he noticed something different about her. She was chained to her base and she did not seem to enjoy her dancing at all. The expression on her face was not frozen in gentle pleasure as it had always been, and her movements, though no less beautiful or graceful, were less precise. He watched as her smile faded steadily and her eyes became heavy with grief. And when she finished her waltz, she stopped and looked directly into his eyes, placing her hands against the glass with a pouting frown. Then she silently mouthed the words, “help me,” and started to dance again. Franco left the shop that day, confused by what he saw. He couldn't possibly have seen the doll speak, could he?

But we know what a terrible situation the ballerina was in. Many, many days passed just like that one and she was reluctantly getting used to a life in captivity. Her understanding of language improved as she listened intently to her creator and his customers. However he strictly forbade her to speak to anyone, lest they discover that she was alive. Every day Franco would come by and see her and every day she wanted desperately to cry out to him. But she dared not and, so, remained sadly silent. She was steadfastly obedient to the toymaker during the day.

However, every night the dancing doll stood awake in her window, searching her mechanical brain for a plan that would save her from this life of slavery. When Dr. Coppelius blew out all the lights and went to bed, the ballerina immediately began struggling to free her leg from the chain around her ankle. She pulled and tugged but it would not open. It seemed a key was needed to unlock it, but Coppelius had placed it on a hook; mounted against the far wall and clearly beyond her reach. Distraught, she fell to the floor and sobbed when a little wind-up dog, hobbled over to her.

Truly the old toymaker was a genius, for the dog seemed so lifelike to the ballerina. But even she could tell that it was only a toy, designed to play fetch. It looked up at her with smiling, painted eyes and a faithfully wagging tongue; yipping and yapping playfully. She patted it tenderly on the head and it proceeded to dash across the room, returning to her with the little red ball the ballerina loved to play with. She was grateful at first, but then she had a clever idea. She peered across the room at the hook where the key sat hanging, nearly obscured in the shadows of the late night.

Taking the tiny ball in her hand, she took aim and cast it against the wall, just barely missing the key. There was a low reverberation as it hit the wood and bounced back across the shop to her. Catching it, she paused for a moment. She did not want to rouse the toymaker and, so, had to aim more carefully next time. Again she threw the ball and, again, it missed. She was growing frightfully frustrated now that her freedom was so close at hand. This time she bent all of her mechanical wits toward reaching that key and, with one final lob, knocked it to the floor.

The ballerina was so overjoyed she nearly forgot herself and cried out. But she was careful to remain as calm and silent as a relaxed spring. Now she wound the dog anew, placed it on the floor in the direction of the key and released it. With stubby, clicking steps and an occasional yip, the mechanical puppy scurried across the store and retrieved the key, returning to the ballerina without delay.

With a grin and a quick twist, the shackle opened and the ballerina was free at last. Giving the dog one last grateful pat on the head, she danced down from the wide window and started toward the front door. However, as she tugged on the handle, she found that it was also locked tight. And that key would not be so easy to get, since Doctor Coppelius always kept it in his pocket. There would be no way for the ballerina to sneak in and get it without waking the old man. She turned with a start as the grandfather clock sounded the chime of midnight. "How will I ever get out?" she found herself quietly asking the little toy dog.

Suddenly, a music box fell from a high shelf and began to play its little automated tune. Afraid the toymaker would hear it and awaken, the ballerina hurried to pick it off the floor and shut it. But no sooner had she done this, than the little toy dog, still wound up and traipsing about the room, had set off another one. And another one. And another! Soon the whole toyshop had erupted into the happy sound of musical toys and chiming cuckoo clocks.

The ballerina, however, was not happy at all and she rushed to shut them off one by one. When the last mechanical toy was silenced, she placed the little wind-up dog on a shelf and stared fearfully at the upstairs door, waiting for Doctor Coppelius to come thundering down the stairs in a rage. With freedom so close within her grasp, being caught now was her one real fear. But to her happy surprise, the toymaker did not awaken, and she still had some time yet to plan an escape.

At first she thought she might try and break the window, but the thought of damaging something was not a nice one. Then she thought she might wait until morning, when the door was unlocked. But the thought of having to stay cooped up for another night did not seem very nice to her either. At any rate, she didn't have much choice and was deep in thought when she stepped back onto a spilled set of marbles and tripped over a little toy soldier with a trumpet.

Without a moment's hesitation, the toy began blowing its trumpet and, as if signaling to his fellow military band members, set off a whole series of toy soldiers with drums, horns, violins, and tubas. The ballerina shook her head in despair as she knew this would surely be the end of her escape plans. She jumped off the floor and back into the window, setting the brace around her ankle again just as the upstairs door swung open and the crooked old man came storming down the steps.

When he saw the musical mess that his toys had become he naturally blamed the ballerina first. However, seeing that the brace and chain were still around her leg, he decided it

might not have been her fault after all. He shut the toys off and gave the ballerina one last inspection, grimacing at her innocent smile.

“You aren’t making any mischief, are you, my little ballerina?” he asked.

“No, Papa. I haven’t even moved,” she answered in an angelic tone.

“Good,” he replied. “And don’t call me Papa! I am not your father and you are not my daughter. You are just a machine and I am your maker.”

“I’m sorry, Papa. I just can’t help it,” she said somberly. “After all, isn’t everyone entitled to parents? You’re the closest thing I’ve got.” The toymaker did not respond but rather adjusted his glasses with a grumble and turned away. “Those boys have been sneaking around here lately,” the mechanical doll said suddenly.

“What boys?” Doctor Coppelius asked, turning his head toward her.

“Oh you know. Just some boys who like to cause trouble at night. I was afraid they might try to break a window, but I didn’t want to disturb your sleep.”

“Are they out there now?” he asked, getting his cane ready.

“Perhaps,” she replied, shrugging her jointed shoulders.

“I’ll teach those young hoodlums to sneak around my shop,” Coppelius growled, unlocking the front door and standing outside the shop with his cane held high.

Without a moment to spare, the ballerina ran out the open door and past Doctor Coppelius, as fast as her slender wooden legs would carry her. But the crafty doctor, spotting her escape grabbed her by the giant brass key in her back. With a fierce effort he began pulling her toward him until, SNAP! The key came out of her back and Coppelius fell to the ground with a thud. By the time he put his spectacles back on his face, all he could see was the ballerina disappearing into the night.

If I could only describe the anger the toymaker felt at losing his only living toy. ‘What if someone finds her?’ he thought. ‘What if someone discovers the secret of the magic that makes her live? What then? Whoever that person is will be rich and I’ll be ruined!’

He picked the ballerina’s wind-up key off the ground and hurried back into the shop. “What will I do?” he asked aloud. “What can I do? I must get her back before someone steals my secrets! But I cannot call the police to find her because they would never believe that she was really a toy! I cannot tell anyone the truth because her enchantment must be kept a secret! There is only one who could find her and I cannot get him to live!” Frustrated, he was about to return to bed when he looked at the brass key in his hands; the same key that he wound five times every morning to animate the ballerina. As he held it, he felt a powerful energy coursing through it and a most diabolical idea came to him.

Rushing into his workshop with the key in hand, he inserted it into Captain Crank’s back and began to turn it. Once and the toy’s huge metal fingers began to move, twice and the ears began to twitch. Three times and the gears began to turn. Four times and the hulking mechanical soldier began to breathe, spewing black smoke from his nostrils and the whistles at the sides of his head. Five turns and the monstrous metal man opened his eyes and moved his gigantic jaw. Doctor Coppelius was silent as he watched his beloved creation awaken, but words were unnecessary now; he had finally done it. Captain Crank was alive, and *he* would find the ballerina and bring her back.

And speaking of the ballerina, she knew nothing of the trouble that awaited her. She was just so relieved to be free that she kept running and running until she left the city behind completely and stopped in a clear farmyard on a hill. Looking back at the city where she had been just moments ago, she marveled at its size. ‘Had I really been in that huge place all my life?’ It seemed like a whole world within a world, and she decided that she would have to go back and explore it. But for now she had to stay out of the toymaker’s reach, lest he catch her and put her back in the window of his shop.

There were sheep sleeping soundly in a pen and a little pond nearby where the ballerina stopped to rest. She lay down on the soft grass and looked at her reflection in the water. How funny it seemed that she could be on the ground and yet in the pond at the same time. But when she touched the water and saw her image ripple away, she realized that it was only an illusion. The same kind of illusion that she saw sometimes in the window of the toyshop. At times she would think that she was outside the shop, and would cry when she discovered that she was still locked in.

“Not anymore,” she said as she put her head back upon the grass and looked up at the moon. From inside the toyshop it always looked so far away but from the hilltop it looked to her like she could just snatch it out of the sky. She was a little disappointed when she reached for it and could not hold it. But then she began to think of how wonderfully vast the world around her was now, and how many adventures she could have exploring it. She closed her eyes as the trickle of gently running water lulled her to sleep.

She awoke to a strange sound. It was one she knew she had heard before, in the toyshop, but couldn’t place what it was. She opened her eyes and was startled to see an odd thing looking back at her. She threw herself back and sat up with a start, then began to laugh when she realized it was a sheep. The thing called to her with a *baa* and she giggled, throwing her arms around its fluffy white neck. She knew a sheep because there were several stuffed animals in Coppelius’ shop, which made sounds when squeezed. However, she had never seen a real animal before at all, and she was so happy to discover that they were just as beautiful and soft in real life.

After playing with the grazing sheep for a while she stood up and took in the grand view of the city at daybreak. There were so many buildings and the spires of the cathedrals seemed to touch the sky. There was so much to see that she almost wanted to turn the other way and forget about venturing back there. But she had spent too long cut off from the other sights and people of the world to run away without having tasted it. She moved her pink slippered feet down the hill one tiny step at a time, until she was pushing forward with an energy she had never known and, before long, she was running.

She dashed through the cobblestone streets, meeting amazed face after amazed face as she went. The people simply did not know what to make of this dark-haired girl in her strange little pink dress and ribbons, who danced through the town as if she were on the stage. But for the ballerina, who had known nothing but dancing since the day she was built, it was as natural to her as breathing would be to anyone else and now she was just thrilled to be able to do it; not because she was forced, but because she was free.

She strolled down the cobblestones, passing the bakery and the bank; spinning past the library and the shoemaker’s shop, and stopping in front of the fountain at the center of the city. She leapt up onto the stone circle surrounding the gaily frolicking water and began to step swiftly

around its edge with movements so precise that no human would be able to do the same without falling in. But during the course of her endeavor, something unexpected happened.

Just about that moment Franco, who was on his way to the academy, passed the fountain and was caught by surprise by what he saw. A girl was dancing around the water and he cried out when he realized that it was the ballerina from Coppélius' toyshop. This startled her so that she nearly did fall in but Franco caught her by her white hand and pulled her away to safety.

"Thank you very much," she said with a bow. "I don't know much yet but I am fairly certain it would not do at all for my inner mechanisms to get wet!" Franco watched as the girl stretched her wooden limbs, just barely revealing the springs and cogs nestled inside her joints.

"You're the doll from the toyshop," the young man finally blurted out, unable to contain his amazement.

"Yes, I am," she responded matter-of-factly.

"But you're as alive as I am! How is it possible?" She was a little confused by his question, as she hadn't attached much significance to her condition, not yet understanding how truly remarkable it was.

"Are there not many things in your world that live?"

"Not things made of wood and metal," he responded, inspecting her polished white arm as she recoiled a bit.

"And what are you made of?" she asked, inspecting his arm the same way. "Does this soft material make you any more deserving of life than I? Surely you must be filled with mechanics of some kind that allow you to move and speak, just like I do."

"But we human beings are different from machines. We have minds and souls."

"How do you know I don't have a soul?" she asked, somewhat insulted. "Whatever that is."

"I suppose I don't know for sure, but you would be the first doll with a soul I ever saw."

"Forgive me if I'm wrong, but am I not also the first doll you ever saw who was alive?"

"You are indeed," he said, finally conceding to her wisdom. "Do you have a name?"

"I'm not sure. Why do you ask?"

"Because all rational beings must have a name of some kind."

As it was her desire to be the rational being he spoke of, she hoped desperately to have a name of her own. Sadly, she knew of none except what the toymaker called her, "Ballerina."

"That's no name," Franco said, shaking his head. "That's merely what you're modeled after. You must have a name of your own." The ballerina sat herself on the edge of the fountain, drooping her head and lamenting her sad predicament when Franco noticed something written on the side of her forearm.

"Ballerina Coppelia," he read aloud. "Perhaps that's your name!"

"My creator, the toymaker, was Doctor Coppélius," she said with a hopeful tone, lifting her eyes toward the young man. "Yes, that must be my name!"

She rose happily and Franco said, "I will call you Coppelia for short." It would be impossible to describe Coppelia's joy at finally having a name all her own; just as it would be futile to guess what a clock feels when it runs slow and is wound up again.

"Now that I have a name am I a fully rational being, as you put it?"

Franco thought on it a moment and decided that the only thing she was still missing was a friend. "For," he explained. "Everyone must have a friend to comfort them and look out for them when they are troubled. But don't worry," he said happily. "I will be your friend and take care of you."

She was very glad indeed now for she had a name and a friend and felt just as human as anyone else who lived in that vast city and, suddenly, the world seemed less frightening and foreign to her. Franco led her through the streets and showed her all that there was to see in the city, explaining the ins and outs of human life. She marveled at all the different shops and stores and learned, among other things, that humans sold more than just toys to one another. Franco explained to her that they also sold clothing, food, services, books, supplies, and even flowers; illustrating that fact, soon after, by stopping at the florist and buying the ballerina a small bunch of daffodils.

Coppelia was not the only one who had found unexpected happiness that day. Ever since he had first seen the ballerina in the toyshop window Franco had dreamt of meeting a girl just like her. He had once been captivated by her grace and beauty but now he knew for sure that he was connecting with a beautiful soul. He didn't know how or why the ballerina doll had come to life. He was only glad that she had.

And so enamored was she of the world she was joining that Coppelia took to twirling in the streets with the bunch of flowers clutched in her hands, scattering soft yellow petals wherever she danced. She was innocent and carefree, knowing nothing of the dangers of the human world nor of the sinister figure that was menacing close behind.

Captain Crank had been sent by Doctor Coppelius to find and retrieve his 'sister,' the ballerina. He could sense her presence and had more than enough strength required to capture her by force if necessary. But because he was of a stature many times that of a mortal man and was made of tin and iron he, unlike the slender and lovely Coppelia, could not easily pass for a human being. So he wore a dark cloak which covered his monstrous body and obscured his face from view. From the shadows he observed Coppelia and Franco, watching their every move and awaiting the perfect time to strike.

Unaware of this threat to her freedom, Coppelia explored every inch of the city coming at last to the theater. She heard beautiful music coming from within, much like the kind that many of the toys used to make at home. She asked Franco what the purpose of the theater was and he explained that it was a place where people came to see performances and were entertained by actors and musicians and dancers. This piqued the girl's interest and she couldn't help but look inside.

Franco paid admission for the two of them and they stepped into the darkened theater. Ahead, Coppelia could see a brightly lit stage where girls dressed in tutus were stepping and twirling and leaping as gracefully as swans. Her little clockwork heart swelled when she saw that there were others who loved dancing as much as she and began to feel that perhaps this was where she was meant to be. Before Franco could stop her, her pink slippered feet were carrying her down the aisle and up onto the stage.

The other girls were much taken aback at having their routine suddenly interrupted but nobody could have held Coppelia back as she joined the dance. Her ribbons fluttered at a dizzying pace as she matched every step every turn and every twist of the other ballerinas.

Ultimately, the audience thought it was all part of the performance and sent up a rousing storm of applause, so impressive was the new dancer. Coppelia had danced hundreds of times but never had her efforts been applauded. She liked it and took a grateful bow.

When she hopped off the stage and bounded back up to Franco, the young man was eager to find the exit, fearing the worst for both of them. When the balletmaster approached them with fervent steps, Franco was certain they would be in dire trouble for interrupting the show. But he couldn't be more wrong. The man simply wished to meet the finest dancer in all the world. He humbly took Coppelia's hand and informed her that he had never before witnessed such spectacular dancing in his entire career and offered her a place with his ballet troupe.

Coppelia was confused, for she knew nothing of careers or troupes at all. But when the balletmaster explained that she would dance every day and be adored by people all over the world, the girl became quite excited. Franco tried to dissuade her from making any kind of commitment but Coppelia was far too enthralled with the idea of seeing the wide world, and dancing upon every inch of it, to listen. She happily signed up with the balletmaster and was informed that the troupe was leaving for France that very day.

"Did you hear that?" she asked Franco, hardly able to contain her enthusiasm. "We're going to France. Wherever that is."

"*You* are going to France," he corrected, glumly.

"You mean you aren't going with me? But I thought we were friends." Her joy quickly faded.

"We are friends, but I can't leave my home just like that. I still have family and school here."

"Then I can't go, either," she said, half to him and half to the balletmaster.

"I think you must go. You wanted to see the world and learn about all there is to know. I can't teach you all of that here. Besides, you love dancing more than anything else and I know your talent will bring people a great deal of happiness." Finally, Coppelia agreed with the boy and, though reluctantly, decided to join the ballet troupe in its journeys.

Later that day, the troupe's caravan was leaving the city and Franco saw Coppelia off on her journey. They met by the very fountain where their companionship began. Their parting was bitter, for each of them was bidding farewell to their only real friend in all the world. "But I'm sure you will be happy," he said to her. "and we will see each other again. Perhaps very soon." Sadly, she started off toward the place where the troupe was leaving but stopped short.

"How can I leave my only friend like this?" In this moment of hesitation Captain Crank who, had been lurking in the shadows behind them for some time, finally saw his opportunity to capture the ballerina and bring her back home to the toyshop. One pounce was all that was needed to subdue the girl and put an end to her hopes of escape. But fate happened to lean in favor of Coppelia that day as a familiar chime sounded in the air. You see Captain Crank, being the first of his kind, was not ideally constructed and Doctor Coppelius had used a great many recycled parts in his construction. Several of these came from cuckoo clocks and music boxes, the chimes and whistles of some the toymaker neglected to remove.

So, as the hulking Captain was emerging from his hiding spot, Coppelia recognized the tune she had heard so many times in the toyshop and became aware of the monster's presence. Before the gigantic soldier could catch the ballerina by surprise, she dashed from his grasp and,

seeing no alternative now, somberly waved farewell to Franco and hurried to the balletmaster. Inside the ballerinas' wagon she was well hidden from her wicked brother and felt she would be safe for now. But, the whole journey, she stared down at the daffodil clutched in her hand and hoped that her decision would be worthwhile. After all she found herself missing home, and Franco, already.

Time passed swiftly for the little ballerina as she traveled across the world, moving from stage to stage. The days when she once danced only in a tiny window at the command of her creator were a life away. Now she was adored for her talent by people on every continent. She had changed her name to Giuseppina, to avoid being caught by her villainous brother Captain Crank, and it was by this name that she became known in every great city on the planet and was hailed as the finest ballerina in all the world. But always she carried the single yellow daffodil with her, watching somberly as it wilted and shriveled up. And when it was dead, she pressed it under glass and kept it with her always.

Before she realized what had happened, three years had passed and her career had brought her to a place never before reached by any dancer in history. Dancing for, what human beings called, a career was a rewarding experience for her. But, even as she received accolade after accolade with each stage she graced, something happened that she had never expected; she had grown tired of dancing.

She danced in Berlin and in St. Petersburg and in Rome. She danced from morn 'til night and, though she was no longer forced to do so, she began to feel no less trapped by this life than when she was behind the glass of the shop window, and now every step wearied her. After a performance one night in Paris she retired to her dressing room, sat down at her vanity and gazed at her image in the mirror. She did not see the fabulous Giussepina, darling of the world stage. All she saw was the same little clockwork girl she always saw staring back at her from the reflection in the window.

"Giuseppina! What troubles you?" asked Swanhilda, one of the other ballerinas. "You look so tired, my pretty one."

"Perhaps I just need to rest a bit before the next performance," Coppelia responded, closing her eyes. After Swanhilda left her, the mechanical girl opened her eyes again and noticed, for the first time, a vase of flowers on the table beside her bed. She had received a great many flowers from admirers over the years but never, until now, had she been given daffodils. Not since she left her home in the city.

She removed one from the vase and looked over to where she had kept her first preserved under the glass; the one given to her by Franco. She held the fresh one to her face and strode over to the balcony and looked out over the garden beyond. There, in the moonlight, stood a young man staring up at her. He seemed familiar to her yet she did not quite recognize him either.

"The flower I gave you has wilted and died by now," he said to her, "but you have not changed in all these years, my Coppelia." Then she realized that it was Franco who she was looking at. He had grown much over the years and had since graduated from the academy and had used what money he had set aside to visit her in Paris.

So thrilled was she to see him that she dashed out to the garden to meet him and took him in her arms. "How I've missed you, Franco. Seeing the world has been a wondrous and exciting experience, but how weary I've grown of it all."

"Are you all right?" he asked, his happy face turning to one of great concern for his beloved friend.

"I am just so tired of this life. Each performance is a greater burden than the last and I find I lack the strength even to step out onto the stage."

"Are you coming home, then?"

She looked up at the bright, white moon; the same that used to lull her to sleep so long ago. "Yes, Franco. I think my next performance shall be my last and, after that, I shall rest for a very long time."

And so word went far and wide that the great ballerina Giuseppina would be dancing for the final time and all of Paris was abuzz with a bittersweet thrill. The grand theater was adorned in the most gorgeous of decor for the girl's farewell performance and crowds of society's finest gentry gathered in the main hall. Under the glow of a sparkling chandelier, glittering with the light of a thousand candles, Coppelia gracefully descended the winding, red-carpeted stair to where her adoring fans awaited. Franco was there as well, very proud as he watched the glory of her entire career represented in a single wonderful night.

But he feared also for her, not just because she was giving up this life of fame and fortune, but because she truly did look so very tired. She seemed even too weary to wave at her fans and, after a short time, took only to smiling as warmly as she could, when she had even the energy for that. These things worried Franco and he only hoped that she would be well again after tonight.

There was another in the crowd who noticed these same flaws in Coppelia's manner but, rather than being worried, he welcomed them. Gentlemen and ladies to the left and right were greatly insulted by the tall stranger in the black hood who had taken to pushing his way through to the front of the throng, nor did they think too highly of the little old man who walked beside him. Together the arrogant pair appeared at the center of the hall as Coppelia, herself, had reached the floor. In an instant her guise of contentment was thrown off when she looked into the scowling face of her creator, Doctor Coppelius.

"At last I've found you, my little Ballerina, and, at last, you are coming home with me!"

"I am going home with Franco," she retorted, barely able to muster enough passion even to become upset.

"Don't be foolish," the toymaker scolded. "You've lost your key." He motioned toward her back with his cane and, suddenly, Coppelia realized why she had grown so tired over the years. "It is a miracle you've been functioning this long without it. Another day or so and you shall freeze up altogether, unless you return with me."

"I can't go back there, Papa."

"I am not your Papa," he raged. "I am your creator and you are returning to the toyshop with me!"

Coppelia turned in terror as the tall man beside Coppelius cast aside his black cloak and the gleaming metal form of Captain Crank towered over her. The titanic soldier was truly enraged now for he had tracked the girl all over the world and was grown very impatient with her

for forcing him to do so. His eyes burned like coals within the deep sockets of his iron face and steam whistled angrily from the sides of his huge head.

With lumbering steps the giant pounced upon Coppelia and the girl put all she had into escaping. But she was very tired now, indeed and could barely keep herself from the monster's clutches. Franco took her in his arms and attempted to shield her from her attacker but Captain Crank was far too massive for any mortal to fend off.

Coppelius was pleased that he was finally bringing the ballerina back to his workshop so his secrets could be preserved, but he was troubled by his herculean toy soldier's reckless method for retrieving her. The monstrous mechanical man was so filled with rage that he was at great risk of destroying the entire theater, endangering the lives of all within.

Captain Crank's powerful fists bashed the floor into rubble as evil black smoke billowed forth from his nostrils. The dreadful groan of his inner workings seeped out of every crack in his colossal form and his goal to capture Coppelia had quickly spiraled into a singular hatred and an unwavering desire to destroy.

Now the toymaker was greatly afraid, not only for his life and the lives of the other people there; for the first time he feared for his ballerina's life. For, in that moment, he saw her not as a machine but as a living girl that he had created. Coppelius was a sad old man but his ballerina was the nearest thing he had to a child and he would not allow Captain Crank to harm her now. With the immense juggernaut trudging toward the weakened Coppelia with thundering steps, the toymaker stepped behind the brute and, with the crooked head of his cane, snagged the brass key from his back and removed it.

Captain Crank turned his rage briefly upon his creator now, fuming and bellowing at the old man, until, as Coppelius had hoped, the monster's mechanisms ran down. The light in his eyes flickered and faded, the steam subsided and his whole heaving body fell silent and still. The toymaker was now greatly relieved at having averted such a crisis, but his relief soon turned to grief when he saw that Coppelia was now lying upon the ground, with Franco leaning over her, and she was growing ever nearer to a similar fate.

Her mechanisms had also run down and the gentle ticking of her heart was slow and feeble. Desperately the old man turned her over and inserted the big brass key into her back, turning it once. Twice. Three times. He was determined not to lose her now; not after so sorely mistreating his only child. Four times. Five times. He turned her over again but she appeared no stronger than before.

"What is wrong, my child?" he pleaded with her. "Why are you not regaining your strength?"

"I am," she said weakly. "But it doesn't matter any more because I can feel the life leaving my body. The key has no more magic in it so it will do me no good. It's all right. It is what you had hoped would happen, Papa; I am going to be a toy again and dance forever and ever just like you had intended when you built me." Then, before their eyes, her sad and tired face assumed the same timeless smile that she had always had; frozen in an eternal state of joy. She was now just a machine, like any other; a collection of cogs and springs and gears fitted together so as to simulate, but not to equal, life.

"No, my child. I was wrong." He took her jointed wooden hand into his and wept. "I was wrong to call you a machine. You see, I had a daughter once and misfortune took her from me.

You, my little ballerina, were modeled in her image. Seeing you live made me bitter and angry and it blinded me to the fact that you were, indeed alive, and just as much my child as she was. Now I have lost my beloved daughter again and I would give anything to bring that magic back now!”

The tears streamed down his face and wetted her rosy cheeks, dripping down the side of her head and down to the key beneath. Both the Doctor and Franco lamented over Coppelia’s sad fate but their cries were cut short by the sound of ticking. It was not cold mechanical ticking like that of a clock, but a warm and deep thump. It was Coppelia’s heart. They looked down and saw that the girl’s eyes were no longer frozen in lifeless delight but had a mind and a soul staring through them and they knew that their beloved ballerina was alive.

“How can this be?” Coppelius marveled as he wiped the tears from his face.

“You are truly a great magician, Papa,” the girl responded happily. “Only one so great as you could have called upon such magic and I am very glad I won’t be leaving you after all.” The toymaker embraced Coppelia and he and Franco helped her to her feet. “Now,” she said gazing lovingly upon them both. “I think the time has come for us all to go home.”

And so they did. They all returned together to the little toyshop in the city where Coppelia continued to dance to her heart’s content, and not a single step less or more than that. Franco visited her every day and watched her frolic in the afternoon sun, and he never loved her more than in the years that followed. Doctor Coppelius put away his book of black magic and concentrated only on making playthings for children, much to the delight of all. Never again was he cross or bitter for, after so long, he at last had a family and friends once more and lived only to provide for his darling daughter’s happiness. As for Captain Crank, he was forcibly retired from military service and, after some remodeling and reconstruction, the toymaker converted him into a candy machine. And though Coppelia had seen and tasted much in her travels across the globe, she still insisted that his were the most wonderful chocolates and bon-bons in the whole world.

THE END