

SYNOPSIS

A freezing winter, a long time ago... In the street, in front of a large house, the two Drosselmayer brothers, dressed in rags, sell dried fruits, like every winter. They are poor and alone but happy, they dance and play in front of their makeshift stall, where they sell the best hazelnuts in Palermo. But a little mouse sneaks in to steal the nuts. Pietro and Dario trap it: but in a deafening explosion, the mouse becomes a furious and hungry half-human, half-rodent creature that casts a spell on Pietro, transforming him into a wooden nutcracker. Dario, desperate, hugs the Nutcracker tightly. He hears a heart beating weakly: Pietro is imprisoned in this wooden shell, he must find a way to free him. The housekeeper comes out of the big house, picks up poor Dario, curled up on the ground with his Nutcracker, and brings him inside: she gives him new clothes to take part in the Christmas celebrations where he meets Maria, the eldest of the Hoffmann children. At the Hoffmanns, Christmas Eve is a big event. Maria and Fritz, her brother, are very excited. The atmosphere created by the candles, the refined smells from the kitchens, the presence of the majestic Christmas tree, the gifts, the dolls... everyone dances, laughs, and sings. This year Maria's father has given her a magnificent tutu to dance in front of the guests.

During the party, Dario convinces Maria to help him break the spell of Pietro. Maria is a dreamer and loves to read: as soon as Dario hands her the Nutcracker, she feels Pietro's heart beating inside. When the guests leave,

Maria hides Dario behind the fireplace, in order to continue discussing with him the plan to free Pietro.

Shortly after midnight Maria is awakened by strange noises, like claws scraping the floor, and decides to go back to the living room to make sure that Pietro and Dario are not in danger. Arriving in the room, she discovers the monstrous mouse-man Jean-Georges who, like a ballet master, leads a corps de ballet of mice. Maria, although terrified, tries to protect the wardrobe in which the Nutcracker is hidden. But by magic the Christmas tree starts moving, the lights flicker, the wardrobe doors open. The Nutcracker, now at man-scale, is followed by a squadron of hussars, Fritz's trusted army. The living room becomes a battlefield between the dancing mice and the Nutcracker soldiers, who try to stop them. Dario and Maria are tied up and immobilized in a chair: despite their efforts, the Dance Master Jean-Georges manages to kidnap the Nutcracker. Maria and Dario find themselves alone: he is desperate, but his friend has decided: they will immediately go in search of the Nutcracker in the Kingdom of Mice. She asks the governess, who will accompany them, to prepare a suitcase with sweets and the tutu that her father has given her. Well covered to protect themselves from the cold, the three cross the garden following the footprints of mice in the snow.

The journey seems to last for days... But they finally arrive in front of a beautiful building, the Teatro Massimo in Palermo. In one of the boxes, imprisoned by a grate, they discover Pietro asking for help. On stage the Mice dance, led by their hysterical Dance Master, who as usual is hungry and gets angry with everyone, sending them away. Maria, Dario and the governess try to free Pietro, but are discovered by Master Jean-Georges who, ravenous and furious, opposes. However, the housekeeper offers to prepare him a gigantic dinner and Maria to dance his favorite pas de deux with Dario, wearing her brand new tutu. Jean-Georges lets himself be convinced and Peter returns to human form... the dinner and the dance begins! By magic, a throng of waiters appears who in an instant

set a huge table. Jean-Georges believes he is living in a dream, he has been hungry for many years and now he finds himself surrounded by Pasta, Cassate, Cannoli, Sette Veli cake and the Martorana fruit of the nuns of the Monastery of Santa Caterina, all protagonists of this great feast. During dinner, a playful Bee, attracted by the sweets, circles around the Dance Master, who runs away, frightened. The nuns try to distract the rowdy Bee with some beautiful roses, but are unable to prevent a crazy waltz between bees, butterflies, beetles and roses.

The grand finale is the pas de deux between Maria and Dario, and the magical evening amidst sweets ends... but... Maria starts... she is back in the living room of the big house... she had fallen asleep while reading in front of the fireplace... Was all this only a dream? Or did it all really happen?

She immediately runs to check the toy closet: the Nutcracker is gone.

Maria opens the front door: it's dawn, on the corner of the street Dario and Pietro prepare their stall and start to sell, like every day, the best dried fruits in Palermo.