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bitterly. 'And how does he move? What does he do? He does work by clockwork, I suppose? Or is there some kind of goblin in there? A spirit or a devil of some kind?'

With a smooth whirr and a ticking of delicate machinery, the figure began to move. The knight raised his sword and turned his helmeted head to look for Karl, and then stepped off the sledge and moved towards him.

'No! What's he doing?' said Karl in alarm, backing away.

Sir Ironsoul kept going. Karl moved aside, but the figure turned too, and before Karl could dodge away, he was pinned in the corner, with the little knight's sword moving closer and closer.

'What's he doing? That sword is sharp – stop it, Doctor! Make it stop!'

Dr Kalmenius whistled three or four bars of a simple, haunting little tune, and Sir Ironsoul fell still. The point of the sword was right at Karl's throat.



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The apprentice eased his way past the figure and sank onto a chair, weak with fear.

'What – who – how did it start? This is uncanny! Did you set it off?'

'Oh, I didn't start him,' said Dr Kalmenius. 'You did.'

'I did? How?'

'It was something you said. His mechanism is so delicate, so perfectly balanced, that one word and one word alone will start him moving. And he's such a clever little fellow! Once he's heard that word, he won't rest until his sword is in the throat that uttered it.'

'What word?' said Karl fearfully. 'What did I say? Clockwork ... goblin ... move ... work ... spirit ... devil ...'

Once again Sir Ironsoul began to move. He turned round implacably, found Karl, and set off towards him. The apprentice was out of his chair in a flash and cowering in the corner.

'That was it!' he cried. 'Stop it again, please, Doctor!'

Dr Kalmenius whistled once more, and the figure stopped.

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‘What is that tune?’ said Karl. ‘Why does he stop for that?’

‘It’s a little tune called “The Flowers of Lapland”,’ said Dr Kalmenius. ‘He likes that, bless him. He stands still to listen to it, and that tips his balance wheel the other way, and then he stops. What a marvel! What a piece of work!’

‘I’m afraid of him.’

‘Oh, come, come! Afraid of a little tin man who likes a pretty tune?’

‘It’s uncanny. It’s not like a machine at all. I don’t like it.’

‘Well, that’s a great shame. What will you do without him tomorrow? I shall be watching with great interest.’

‘No, no!’ said Karl, in anguish. ‘I didn’t mean ... Oh, I don’t know what I mean!’

‘Do you want him?’

‘Yes. No!’ cried Karl, beating his fists together. ‘I don’t know. Yes!’

‘Then he is yours,’ said Dr Kalmenius. ‘You have wound up the future, my boy! It has already begun to tick!’

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And before Karl could change his mind, the clockwork-maker gathered his long cloak around him, swept the hood up over his head, and vanished out of the door with his sledge.

Karl ran to the door after him, but the snow was so thick that he could see nothing. Dr Kalmenius had vanished.

Karl turned back into the parlour and sat down weakly. The little figure stood perfectly still, with its sword upraised, and its blank metal face gazing at the young apprentice.

‘He wasn’t a man,’ Karl muttered. ‘No man could make this. He was an evil spirit! He was the dev—’

He clapped his hands over his mouth and looked in terror at Sir Ironsoul, who stood motionless.

‘I nearly said it!’ Karl whispered to himself. ‘I mustn’t ever forget – and the tune! How does it go? If I can remember that, I’ll be safe ...’

He tried to whistle it, but his mouth was too dry; he tried to hum it, but his voice was shaking. He held out his hands and looked at them. They were trembling like dry leaves.

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‘Perhaps if I have another drink ...’ he said.

He poured some more brandy, splashing most of it on the counter before he got some in the glass. He swallowed it quickly.

‘That’s better ... Well, after all, I *could* put him in the clock. And if I bolted him to the frame, he’d be safe enough. He wouldn’t be able to get out of that, no matter what words anyone said ...’

He looked around him fearfully. The parlour was as silent as the grave. Then he lifted the curtain and peered through the window, but there was not a single light in the town square. Everyone in the world seemed to have gone to bed, and the only beings awake were the clock-maker’s apprentice and the little silvery figure with the sword.

‘Yes, I’ll do it!’ he said.

So he threw the canvas over Sir Ironsoul, hastily pulled on his coat and hat, and hurried out to unlock the tower and prepare the clock.

Now, as it happened, there was one other person awake, and that was Gretl, the landlord’s little daughter. She couldn’t sleep at all, and the

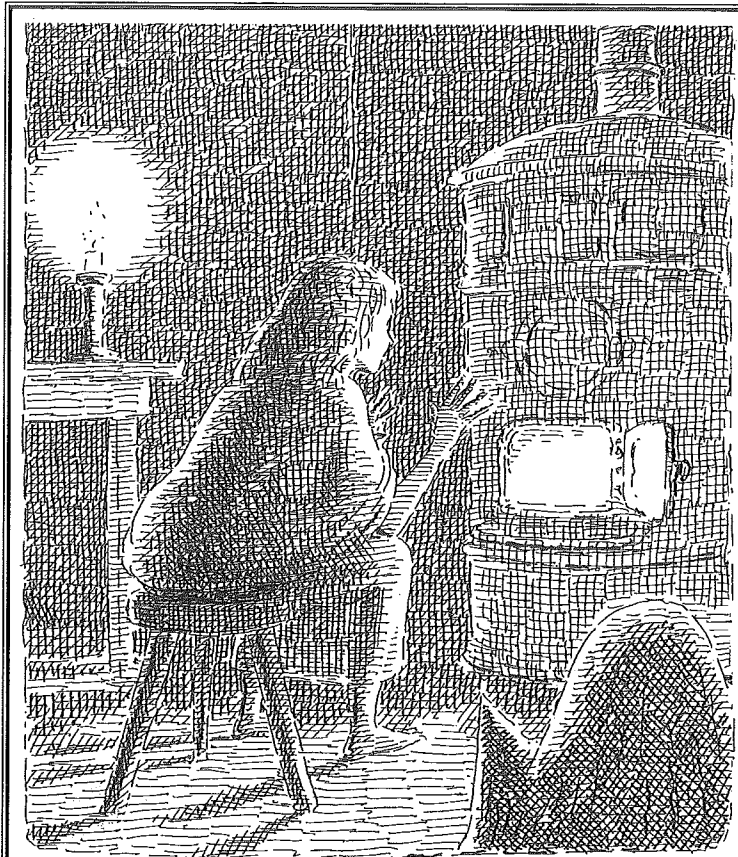
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reason for that was Fritz’s story. There was one thing she couldn’t get out of her mind. It wasn’t the clockwork in the dead prince’s breast; it wasn’t the horses foaming with terror or the dead driver behind them; it was the young Prince Florian.

She thought: poor little boy, to travel home in that frightful way! She tried to imagine what terrors he must have faced, alone in the sledge with his dead father, and she shivered under her blankets, and wished that she could comfort him.

And because she couldn’t sleep, she thought she’d go down and sit by the stove in the parlour for a while, because her bed was cold. So she wrapped a blanket around her shoulders and tiptoed down the stairs just as the great clock in the tower was chiming midnight. There was no-one in the parlour, of course, and the lamp was burning low, so she didn’t notice the little canvas-covered figure in the corner, and sat down to warm her hands at the stove.

‘What a strange story that was going to be!’ she said to herself. ‘I’m not sure that people



GRETL WAS KIND-HEARTED, YOU SEE. HER HEART WAS IN THE RIGHT PLACE. HER HEART WAS WARM, HER HEART WAS TENDER, SHE HAD A HEART OF GOLD. YOU KNOW THOSE EXPRESSIONS? THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE, LIKE GRETL, WHO CAN'T HEAR OF ANYONE ELSE'S PROBLEMS WITHOUT SUFFERING ALMOST AS MUCH AS THEY DO. THE WORLD IS A CRUEL PLACE SOMETIMES, AND WARM-HEARTED PEOPLE DO MOST OF THE GOOD IN IT. AND MUCH OF THE TIME, THEY'RE MOCKED AND SCORNE



ought to tell stories like that. I don't mind ghosts and skeletons, but I think Fritz went too far that time. And didn't everyone jump when the old man came in! It was as if Fritz conjured him up out of nothing. Like Dr Faust, conjuring up the devil ...'

And the sheet of canvas fell softly to the floor, and the little metal figure turned his head, and raised his sword, and began to move towards her.

OH, NO! GRETL, BE CAREFUL! STOP! DON'T SAY IT! ... AH! TOO LATE ...

