



## The Steadfast Tin Soldier

### Description

Once upon a time there were twenty-five lead soldiers, all brothers, for they were born from an old lead spoon. With their weapons in their arms, their eyes fixed, their uniforms red and blue, what a proud look they all had!

The first thing they heard in this world, when the lid of the box containing them was removed, was the cry of a little boy, « Lead soldiers! They had been given to him as a present for his birthday, and he was having fun arranging them on the table. All the soldiers looked exactly alike, except for one, which had only one leg: it had been thrown into the mold last, and there was not enough lead left. However, he stood as firm on that leg as the others on two, and it is precisely him that we need to know.

On the table where our soldiers were arranged, there were many other toys; but the most curious thing was a charming paper castle. Through the small windows you could see into the living room.

Outside, there were small trees around a small mirror imitating a small lake; wax swans swam and were reflected in it. All this was very pretty; but what was even prettier was a little lady standing at the open door of the castle.

She too was made of paper; but she wore a petticoat of transparent and very light linen, and above her shoulder, as a scarf, a small blue ribbon, narrow, in the middle of which sparkled a sequin as big as her face. The little lady held her two arms outstretched, for she was a dancer, and she raised one leg so high in the air, that the little tin soldier could not discover it, and imagined that the lady had only one leg like him.

« Here is a woman who would suit me, he thought, but she is too tall a lady. She lives in a castle, I live in a box, with twenty-four comrades, and I couldn't even find a place for her there. However, I must make her acquaintance. »

And, saying this, he stretched himself out behind a snuffbox. There he could at his ease look at the elegant little lady, who always stood on one leg, without losing her balance.

In the evening, all the other soldiers were put back in their boxes, and the people of the house went to bed. At once the toys began to amuse themselves: first they played blind man's bluff, then they made war on each other, finally they gave a ball.

The toy soldiers were fidgeting in their box, because they would have liked to be in it; but how to lift the lid?

how to lift the lid? The nutcracker did somersaults, and the pencil drew a thousand crazy things on its slate. The noise became so loud that the canary woke up and began to sing. The only ones who didn't move were the tin soldier and the little dancer.

the little dancer. She was still standing on tiptoe, arms outstretched; he was standing fearlessly on his one leg, and not stopping to spy on her.

Midnight sounded, and crack! there was the lid of the snuffbox which jumped; but, instead of tobacco, there was a small black wizard. It was a surprise toy.

« Leaden soldier, » said the wizard, « try to look elsewhere!

But the soldier pretended not to hear.

« Wait until tomorrow and you'll see, » said the wizard.

The next day, when the children were up, they placed the tin soldier on the window; but suddenly, taken away by the sorcerer or by the wind, he flew down from the third floor, and fell headlong on the pavement.

the pavement. What a terrible fall! He found himself with his leg in the air, his whole body on his shako, and his bayonet stuck between two paving stones.

The maid and the little boy went down to look for him, but they almost ran over him without seeing him. If the soldier had shouted, « Beware! » they would have found him, but he thought it would be a dishonor to the uniform.

The rain began to fall, the drops soon followed each other without interval; it was then a real deluge.

After the storm, two kids came to pass:

« Ahoy! » said one, « this way! Here's a tin soldier, let's sail him. »

They built a boat out of an old newspaper, put the tin soldier in it, and sailed him down the stream. The two kids ran alongside and clapped their hands. What a stream it was! How strong the current was! But it had also rained heavily. The paper boat was strangely tossed about, but, in spite of all this noise, the tin soldier remained impassive, with his gaze fixed and his weapon in his arm.

Suddenly the boat was pushed into a small channel where it was as dark as in the soldiers' box.

Where am I going now? » he thought. Yes, yes, it is the sorcerer who is doing me all this harm. However, if the little lady was in the boat with me, even if the darkness was twice as deep, it wouldn't matter to me.

»

Soon a large water rat showed up; it was an inhabitant of the canal:

« Let's see your passport, your passport! »

But the tin soldier kept silent and clutched his rifle. The boat continued on its way, and the rat chased

it. Phew! » he gnashed his teeth, and shouted at the straws and small sticks, « Stop him, stop him! He has not paid his toll, he has not shown his passport. »

But the current became stronger, always stronger; already the soldier saw the day, but at the same time he heard a murmur capable of frightening the most fearless man. There was a waterfall at the end of the canal, as dangerous for him as a waterfall is for us. He was already so close to it that he could not stop. The boat launched itself into it: the poor soldier stood as stiffly as possible, and no one would have dared to say that he was even blinking. The boat, after having turned around several times, had filled with water; it was about to sink.

The water was up to the soldier's neck, the boat was sinking more and more. The paper unfolded, and the water suddenly closed in on our man's head. Then he thought of the sweet little dancer he would never see again

and thought he heard a voice singing:

– Soldier, the peril is great;

– Here is the death which awaits you!

The paper tore, and the soldier passed through. At the same moment he was devoured by a large fish.

It was then that it was dark for the unhappy man! It was even worse than in the canal. And then as it was tightened there! But always intrepid, the lead soldier stretched out his whole length, the weapon in his arm.

The fish was waving in all directions and making terrible movements; finally it stopped, and a flash of lightning seemed to pierce it. The day was seen, and someone cried out, « A tin soldier! » The fish had been caught, exposed in the market, sold, carried into the kitchen, and the cook had opened it with a large knife.

She took the tin soldier by the middle of his body with two fingers and brought him into the room, where everyone wanted to look at this remarkable man who had traveled in the belly of a fish. However, the soldier was not proud of it. He was placed on the table

table, and there – as strange things sometimes happen in the world! – he found himself in the same room from which he had fallen through the window.

He recognized the children and the toys on the table, the charming castle with the sweet little dancer; she was still holding one leg up, she too was fearless. The tin soldier was so touched that he wanted to cry lead, but it was not appropriate. He looked at her, she looked at him, but they did not say a word to each other.

Suddenly a little boy picked it up, and threw it into the fire for no reason at all; it was undoubtedly the snuffbox wizard who was the cause of it. The tin soldier was standing there in the bright light, feeling

a horrible heat. All his colors were gone; no one could tell if it was the aftermath of the trip or grief. He was still looking at the little lady, and she was also looking at him. He felt himself melting; but, still fearless, he held the weapon in his arm.

Suddenly a door opened, the wind took the dancer away, and, like a sylph, she flew over the fire near the soldier, and disappeared in flames. The lead soldier had become a small mass.

The next day, when the maid came to remove the ashes, she found an object in the shape of a small lead heart; all that had remained of the dancer was a flake, which the fire had turned black.

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