

# Tales of Hans Christian Andersen

## THE BRAVE TIN SOLDIER

Adapted by Sue Reid

Once there were twenty-five tin soldiers. They were all made out of the same tin kitchen spoon and were all alike – except for one. This soldier had only one leg. He was the last to be moulded and there had not been enough tin to give him two. But he stood just as straight and proud as his brothers, in his smart red and blue uniform, his musket over one shoulder.

The soldiers were a birthday present for a little boy. The boy was very pleased with his soldiers and he took them out of their box and stood them up on a table. The table was already covered with toys. The prettiest toy of all was a paper castle. It had little windows so you could see into the rooms and in front of it were tiny trees around a lake of glass. On its surface were little swans made out of wax. In the castle's open doorway stood a girl.

She was the prettiest girl the soldier had ever seen. She was made of paper like the castle, but she wore a skirt of finest muslin and had a scarf of blue ribbon, which was fastened by a glittering tinsel rose. Her arms were outstretched and she stood on one leg, like a dancer. Her other leg was raised so high behind her that the soldier couldn't see it. He thought she had only one leg like him.

'Why, that girl has only one leg like me,' he thought. 'What a perfect wife she would make me. But,' he sighed sadly, 'she is too grand for me. She lives in a castle and my home is a box which I share with twenty-four soldiers. I can't ask such a pretty creature to live in a box! But I could try and get to know her.

What harm would there be in that?'



So the soldier lay down behind a jack in a box, which was where he could see her best, and gazed and gazed at the little dancer.

That evening, when all the other tin soldiers had been put back in their box and everyone had gone to bed, the toys began to play. What a din they made. The tin soldiers rattled in their box. The nutcrackers turned somersaults. The slate pencil squeaked on the slate. They made such a noise that the canary woke up and joined in too. The only two that were quite still were the soldier and the dancer. She stood on one toe and he on his one leg – and not once did he take his eyes off her.

The clock struck twelve. Suddenly the lid flew off the jack in a box, and out popped a goblin. He looked at the soldier who was still gazing at the dancer. 'Tin soldier,' he screeched. 'Don't wish for what does not belong to you.'

The tin soldier pretended he hadn't heard.

'Just you wait till morning. And don't say I haven't warned you,' the goblin said.

In the morning the children came in to play and the little boy put the tin soldier on the window sill. But all of a sudden something - maybe it was a draught or the little goblin - made the window swing open. And the poor soldier was knocked right off the sill and out of the window. Down, down the soldier fell, spinning like a top all three storeys to the ground. It was a dreadful fall. His leg pointed upwards, his head was down and he came to a halt at last with his bayonet stuck in between the paving stones.

The boy and a servant went outside to try and find him. They looked for him everywhere. They almost stood on top of him but even then they didn't see him. The soldier was so quiet and still. He was too proud to call for help. Soldiers in uniform don't call for help, he thought.

While he was lying there it began to rain. The drops splashed on the soldier. Faster and faster the rain fell. It ran down the pavement and splashed into the gutter. Soon the poor soldier was drenched through.

When the rain stopped at last two boys came out to play on the pavement. They saw the tin soldier standing there, his bayonet still stuck in the ground. 'Look! A tin soldier,' one of them said. 'Let's put him out to sea.'



They made him a boat of newspaper, put the soldier aboard and set the boat down in the gutter, which by now was full of rainwater. Away the boat sped, floating down the gutter. The boys ran alongside, clapping their hands. But oh, how rough the water was in that gutter. Up and down the boat rocked and big waves picked the boat up and whirled it about until the poor soldier felt quite giddy. But he stood as steadfast as ever, looking straight ahead, his musket over his shoulder.

Suddenly the boat tipped into a tunnel that ran under the pavement. It was dark in that tunnel, as dark as the box at home. 'Where am I?' the soldier wondered. 'Where am I going? This must be all the fault of that goblin. Ah, if only that pretty girl was here in the boat with me, I wouldn't care how dark it was.'

Just then a water rat rushed out of its home in the tunnel. 'Where do you think you're going,' it growled. 'This is *my* tunnel. Show me your passport. You can't travel through this tunnel without a passport.'

The soldier didn't answer. He gripped his musket even more tightly and the boat hurtled on. The rat swam after it, grinding its teeth angrily. 'Here. Stop him. Stop him,' the rat yelled to the sticks and straws floating on the water. 'He hasn't shown me his passport. He hasn't paid his toll.'

But nothing could stop that boat now. The stream ran stronger and stronger. Ahead now the soldier could see glimpses of daylight where the tunnel came to an end. He could hear a strange roaring in his ears, like the noise a waterfall makes. There, at the end of the tunnel, the stream thundered downwards into a canal. Imagine! It must have been as frightening a ride for the tin soldier as a plunge down a giant waterfall would be for us.

But he was so near the edge now that there was nothing he could do. So he stood stiff and still while the boat raced on and plunged downwards, over the edge. Down the boat hurtled on that great tide of water. He didn't blink an eye...as once, twice, three times the boat whirled round, each time filling up more with water. Soon the boat was full to the brim and only the tin soldier's neck and head could be seen.

Deeper and deeper the boat sank. Softer and softer the paper grew, until the water closed right over the tin soldier's head. And as he sank, he thought about the lovely little dancer who he would never see again. In his ears rang the words of a song.

*'Onward, onward, warrior,*

*Meet your fate; show no fear.'*

The boat reached the bottom and away floated the soldier – straight into the open mouth of a huge fish. And with one great gulp the fish had swallowed the tin soldier whole.

It wasn't at all comfortable inside that fish. It was dark – even darker than the tunnel - and there wasn't much room to move about. But the soldier didn't lose his courage. He lay there in the fish's stomach, his musket still over his shoulder.

Suddenly he felt the fish jerk, and it began to twist and thrash around in the water. Inside the fish's stomach the poor soldier bumped up and down and from side to side. Then just as suddenly the thrashing stopped and something flashed through the fish like a streak of lightning.

The soldier looked up – into the bright light of a busy kitchen. After the dark the bright light dazzled him. 'Why! It's the tin soldier!' he heard a voice exclaim.

And how had he come to be there? Well, the fish that had swallowed him had been caught, taken to market and sold and then carried into the kitchen where the cook had cut it open with a large knife.

Now the cook picked up the soldier, between her finger and thumb, and carried him into the living room so that all the family could see and admire him. 'What a remarkable soldier he is,' he heard the family say. 'He must be proud of himself.' But the tin soldier didn't feel proud. 'What have I to be proud of?' he thought.

He was put down on the table – in the very room where all his adventures had begun. And there were all the toys; there were the children. There was the fine paper castle. And there too was the little dancer, still poised just as gracefully on one leg.

'She is as steadfast as me', the soldier thought. He felt his eyes fill with tears. He wanted to cry. But soldiers don't cry. He looked at her and she looked at him. But neither of them said a word to the other.

And then something dreadful happened. One of the children picked up the tin soldier and flung him headfirst into the burning stove. Why did he do such a thing? It must have been the goblin's fault. He must have whispered in the boy's ear and guided his hand.

The soldier stood steadfast, while all around him the flames danced and crackled. The heat in the stove felt very fierce. But whether such fierce heat came from the flames or from his burning love he did not know. His bright colours had all gone now, but whether they had faded on his journey or through his sorrow, who could say?

He looked at the little dancer and she at him. He felt as if he was melting in the heat, but he stood as steadfast as ever, his musket still over his shoulder.

Suddenly the door of the stove flew open. A gust of air caught the pretty little paper dancer and she flew like a fairy right into the stove, straight to the waiting tin soldier. And there the flames caught her and in a flash she was gone.

Soon the soldier had melted down to a lump of tin. In the morning the maid came into the room to rake out the ashes in the stove. And there she found the soldier – in the shape of a little tin heart. But what was left of the dancer? Only her tinsel rose – and that was charred and as black as soot.