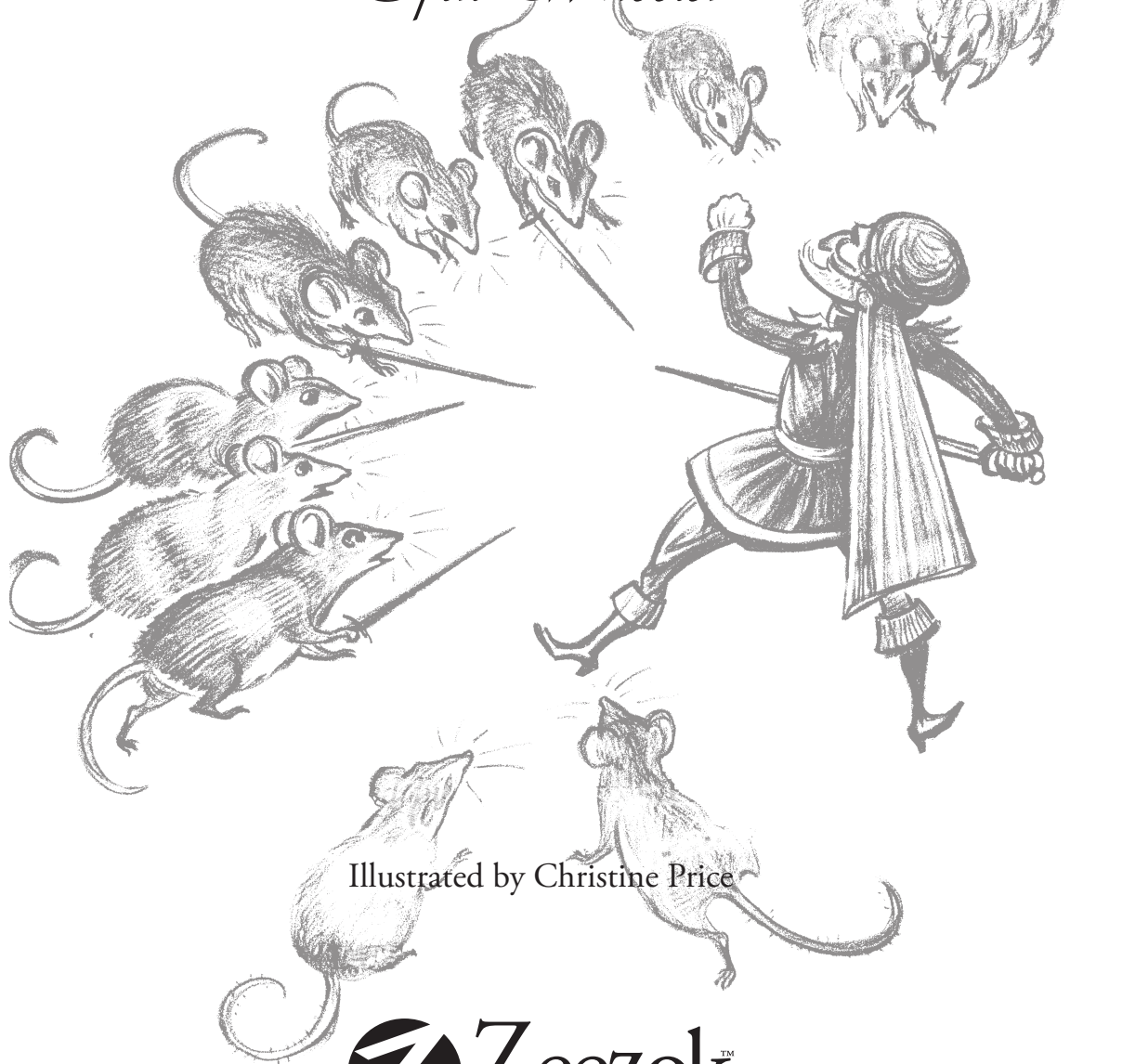


*Peter Tchaikovsky*  
AND THE NUTCRACKER BALLET  
*By*  
*Opal Wheeler*



Illustrated by Christine Price

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# *Peter Tchaikovsky and the Nutcracker Ballet*

Written by Opal Wheeler

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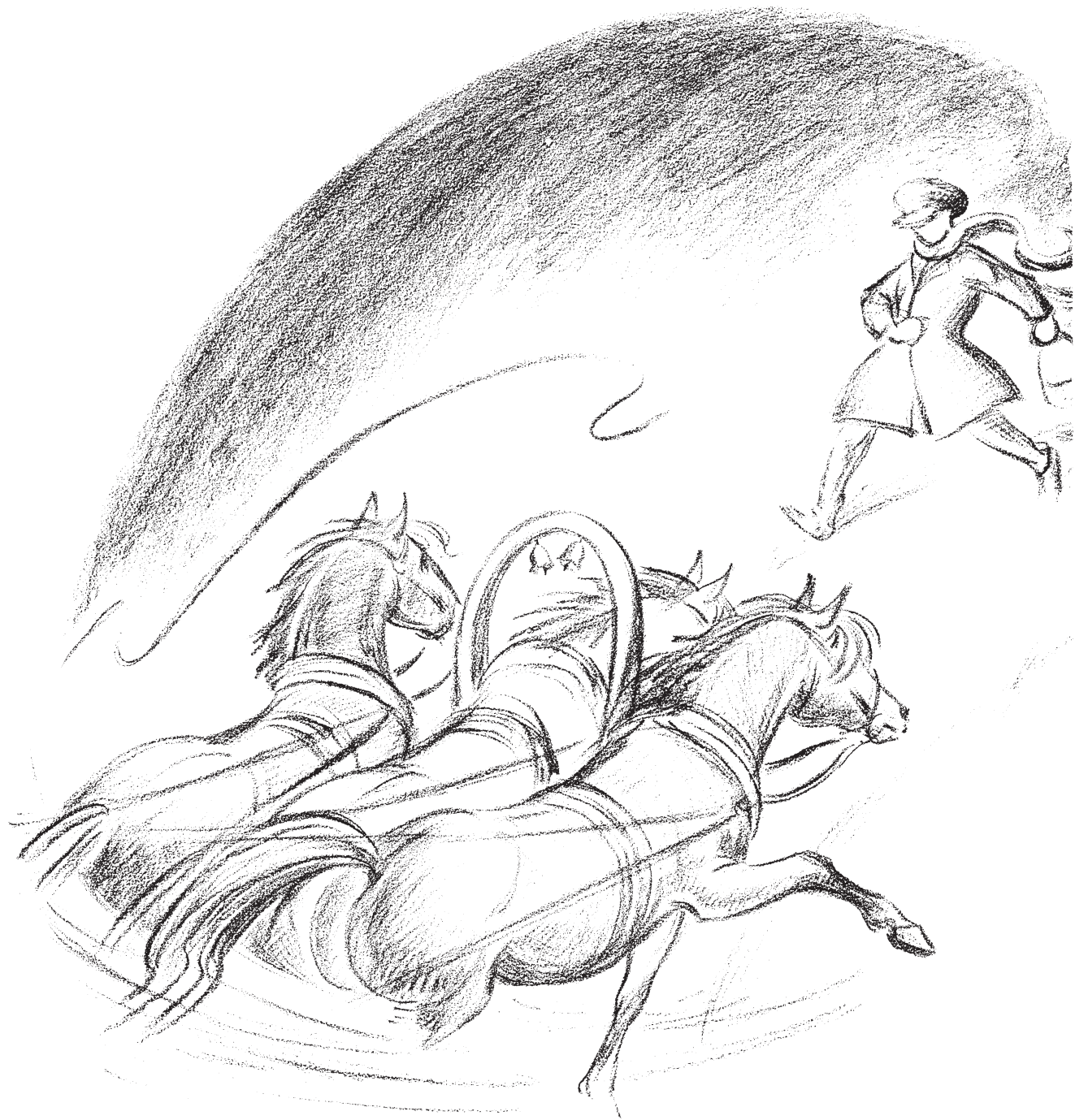
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## CHAPTER ONE

The troika bells pierced the January darkness with their silvery clingety-clang, clingety-clang. Around the corner and up the hill they rang more slowly as the horses pulled the long sleigh through the snowy streets.

“Petia! The Moscow coach is here! Hurry!”

The twins raced to the door to pile the bags and bundles of their beloved older brother into the arms of the waiting servant.

“Moscow! On to Moscow!” they shouted, pulling on long greatcoats as they ran into the icy courtyard.

“Goodbye! Goodbye!” Aunts, uncles, and cousins filled Peter’s hands with tidbits for the journey as he stood in the doorway, ready to leave.

“Heaven knows we shall miss you, my son.” Ilya brushed the tears from his eyes. “God keep you safe and happy and bring you success in your new work.”

“Petia! Petia!” The calls were far down the street, and Peter’s long legs followed after the twins. Now and then he turned and waved to the dear ones behind, calling back his goodbyes as he ran.

The boys were holding the coach, and the driver was grumbling into his beard as Peter climbed aboard.

“Always a passenger late while we freeze to death.”

The door slammed behind him, and panting from his run, Peter fell into a seat beside a dark plump woman. Sudden shrill barking filled the coach, and the next moment, strong arms flung him into the aisle.

“Oh, oh, my Tou-Tou! You have sat on my poor dear little Tou-Tou! Yes, almost you have finished her. Monster!”

The angry woman lifted the toy animal to her cheek,



stroking it and murmuring endearing words into the tiny ears.

Peter looked down at her helplessly.

“I am sorry, so sorry, Madame,” he stammered. “There seemed to be only a folded blanket on the seat. If only I could help—”

At the torrent of bitter words from her lips, he fled to the only place left. The handsome young man next to him was shaking with silent laughter.

“This is the third experience for small Tou-Tou,” he explained. “Must be a sturdy little beastie.” Quietly he turned to watch the small creature. “Have no fear. It is as frisky as a lamb on a bright spring morning.”

He held out a box of beautifully decorated cakes to Peter.

“Good food eases the mind, my friend. Eat plentifully. “

The dapper stranger placed the tin between them, and the two munched the excellent cakes in silence as the sleigh coach made its slow way over the icy roads.

“Are you traveling far?”

“To Moscow, where I visited long ago as a boy.”

The stranger nodded. “Wish I could be as lucky. I start work as a lawyer in a small town nearby, in the office of a crochety old uncle.”

Peter turned to him sharply,

“A lawyer did you say? I, too, studied for long years to become one, just to please my good father. But I was not much use, especially on the day I was asked to take a very important document to an official for the gold seal of state. In the warm, lazy sunshine, the loveliest melodies kept running through my mind, and as I strolled along, the paper tapped against my lips. By the time I reached the building, I found to my horror that I had eaten almost the entire document!”

Hearty laughter rang through the coach, and the stranger turned merry eyes on his companion.

“You must have been hungry, indeed, my friend.”

“Yes, hungry for music.” Peter’s face lighted suddenly.