When Prince Otto married his Princess Mariposa, the whole city rejoiced: fireworks were lit in the public gardens, bands played all night in the ballrooms, and flags and banners waved from every rooftop.

‘At last we’ll have an heir!’ the people said, for they had been afraid that the dynasty would come to an end.

But time went by, and more time, and no child came to Prince Otto and Princess Mariposa. They sought the opinions of the finest doctors, but still no child came. They made a pilgrimage to Rome to seek the blessing of the Holy Father, but still no child came. Finally, as Princess Mariposa stood at the
THE PRINCESS WAS CALLED MARIPOSA. SHE WAS VERY BEAUTIFUL, BUT WHAT PRINCESS ISN’T? BEING BEAUTIFUL IS THEIR PROFESSION. PRINCESS MARIPOSA SPENT MOST OF HER TIME SHOPPING. THE DRESS DESIGNERS LET HER BUY DRESSES AT HALF-PRICE, BECAUSE SHE WORE THEM AT FASHIONABLE PARTIES AND MADE THE DESIGNERS FAMOUS. IF YOU WANT TO BUY THINGS CHEAP, IT HELPS TO BE RICH, STRANGE AS IT SEEMS. POOR PEOPLE ALWAYS HAVE TO PAY THE FULL PRICE.
palace window, she heard the chiming of the cathedral clock, and said, ‘I wish I had a child as sound as a bell and as true as a clock’; and when she had said those words, she felt her heart lift.

And before the year was out, she did have a child. But alas for her and for everyone, her labour was hard and painful, and when the baby had taken one breath in this world, he could take no more, and he died in the arms of the nurse. Princess Mariposa knew nothing of that, for she was in a dreadful swoon, and no-one could say whether she would live or die. As for Prince Otto, he was nearly out of his mind with fury. He snatched the dead child from the nurse’s arms and said, ‘I will have an heir, come what may!’

He ran down to the stables and ordered the grooms to saddle his fastest horse, and with the dead child clasped to his breast he galloped away.

Where was he going? North, and further north, until he came to the workshop of Dr Kalmenius, near the silver mines of Schatzberg.

There it was that the great clockwork-maker created his wonders, from the celestial clocks that told the position of every planet for the next twenty-five thousand years to the little figures that
danced, and rode miniature ponies, and shot tiny arrows, and played the harpsichord.

‘Well?’ said Dr Kalmenius.

Prince Otto stood in his riding-cloak with the snow still white on his shoulders, and held out the body of his child.

‘Make me another child!’ he said. ‘My son is dead, and his mother lies between life and death! Dr Kalmenius, I command you to make me a child of clockwork who will not die!’

Even Prince Otto, in his madness, didn’t believe that a clockwork toy could resemble a living child; but the silver they mined in Schatzberg was not the same as other metals. It was malleable and soft and lustrous, with a bloom on it like that on a butterfly’s wing. And as for the great clockwork-maker, the task was a challenge to his artistry that he couldn’t resist, and so, while Prince Otto buried the dead child, Dr Kalmenius set to work to make the new one. He smelted the ore and refined the silver, and beat it into a subtle thinness; he spun gold into filaments finer than spiders’ silk, and attached each one separately to the little head; he cast and filed and tempered, he soldered and riveted and bolted,
he timed and adjusted and regulated, until the little mainspring was tight, and the little escapement on its jewelled bearings was ticking back and forth with perfect accuracy.

When the clockwork child was ready, Dr Kalmenius gave him to Prince Otto, who scrutinized him carefully. The baby was breathing and moving and smiling and even, by some secret art, warm. In every way he looked exactly like the child who had died. Prince Otto wrapped his cloak around the baby, and rode back to the palace, where he laid the child in the arms of Princess Mariposa; and the princess opened her eyes, and the joy of seeing her own child, as she thought, alive and well, brought her back from the brink of the grave. And besides, she looked so pretty with a child in her arms; she had always known she would.

They named him Florian. A year went by, two years, three, and the little boy grew up beloved by everyone, happy and sturdy and clever. Prince Otto took him riding on a little pony, taught him to shoot a bow and arrow; he danced, he picked out tunes on the harpsichord; he grew stronger and bigger, more merry and lively all the time.

But in the fifth year of his life, the little prince began
to show signs of a disturbing illness. There was a painful stiffness in his joints, he had a constant feeling of chill, and his face, which was normally so lively and expressive, was becoming mask-like and rigid. Princess Mariposa was worried to distraction, for he no longer looked nearly so handsome next to her.

‘Can’t you do something to cure him?’ she demanded of the Royal Physician.

The physician tapped the boy’s chest, and looked at his tongue, and felt his pulse. It was like no disease he had ever seen. If he hadn’t known the prince was a little boy, he’d have said he was seizing up like a rusty clock, but he could hardly say that to Princess Mariposa.

‘Nothing to worry about,’ he said. ‘It’s a condition known as inflammatory oxidosis. Give him two spoonfuls of cod-liver oil three times a day, and rub
his chest with oil of lavender.’

The only one to suspect the truth was his father, and so Prince Otto set off once again for the mines of Schatzberg, and knocked at the door of Dr Kalmenius’s workshop.

‘Well?’ said the clockwork-maker.

‘Prince Florian is ill,’ said Prince Otto. ‘What can we do?’

He described the symptoms, and Dr Kalmenius shrugged his shoulders.

‘It’s in the nature of clockwork to run down,’ was the answer. ‘His mainspring was bound to weaken, his escapement to become clogged with dust. I can tell you what will happen next: his skin will stiffen and crack, and split from top to bottom to reveal nothing but dead, seized-up metal inside him. He will never work again.’

‘But why didn’t you tell me this would happen?’

‘You were in such a hurry that you didn’t ask.’

‘Can’t you just wind him up?’

‘Impossible.’

‘But what can we do?’ said Prince Otto in his rage and despair. ‘Is there nothing that can save his life? I must have an heir! The survival of the Royal
Family depends on it!"

‘There is one thing,’ said Dr Kalmenius. ‘He is failing because he has no heart. Find him a heart, and he will live. But I don’t know where you’ll find a heart in good condition that its owner is willing to part with. Besides—’

But Prince Otto had left already. He didn’t stop to hear the rest of what Dr Kalmenius was going to say. That’s often the way with princes; they want instant solutions, not difficult ones that take time and care to bring about. What the great clockwork-maker had been going to say was this: ‘The heart that is given must also be kept.’ But quite possibly Prince Otto wouldn’t have understood anyway.

He rode back to the palace, turning the problem over in his mind. And what a dilemma! To save his son, he had to sacrifice another human being! What could he do? And whom could he ask to make such a great sacrifice?

And then he thought of the Baron Stelgratz.

Of course! There was no-one better. Baron Stelgratz was an old, trusted adviser, a staunch friend, faithful, brave, and true. The little prince loved him, and he and the baron used to play for hours at mock-battles with
Prince Florian’s toy soldiers, and the good old nobleman would teach him how to handle a sword or fire a pistol, and tell him all about the animals of the forest.

The more Prince Otto thought about it, the better a choice it seemed. Baron Stelgratz would leap at the chance to give his heart for the family. Better not tell him yet, though; better wait till they were at Dr Kalmenius’s workshop; then he would see the necessity quite clearly.

When Prince Otto arrived back at the palace, he found that the little prince had got worse. He could hardly walk without falling over stiffly, and his voice, which had been so full of life and laughter, was becoming more and more like a musical-box; he said very little, but he sang the same few songs over and over. It was clear that he wouldn’t last very long.

So Prince Otto went straight to the princess, and persuaded her that a few days’ hunting, some brisk exercise in the forest, would do the little child a power of good. Furthermore, he said, Baron Stelgratz would come too; no harm would come to Florian in the baron’s company.

So Prince Otto wrapped the little boy up well, and set him in the sledge with Baron Stelgratz
beside him, and off they set.

But on the way through the forest, as darkness was falling, the sledge was attacked by wolves.

Maddened by hunger, the great grey beasts poured out of the trees and sprang up at the horses. Prince Otto lashed his whip furiously, and the sledge leapt forward, with the wolves tearing after. Prince Florian sat beside the baron, gripping the side of the sledge, and watched fearfully as the wolf-pack raced closer and closer. Baron Stelgratz emptied his rifle at the pack of leaping, slavering beasts, without deterring them in the least, and the sledge bumped and swayed from side to side on the rough track. At any moment they might crash, and then they would all perish.

‘Highness!’ cried the baron. ‘There is only one thing to do, and I do it with all my heart!’

‘And the good old man threw himself off the sledge. To save his friends, he sacrificed himself.

Instantly the wild wolves turned on him and tore him to pieces, and the sledge drove on into the silent forest, leaving the snarling, howling beasts far behind.

And now what could Prince Otto do?
Drive on, was the only answer; drive on! And hope