been so still. No-one moved, no-one dared to breathe, for the latch was lifting.

The door slowly opened.

On the threshold stood a man in a long black cloak with a loose hood like a monk’s. His grey hair hung down on either side of his face: a long, narrow face with a prominent nose and jaw, and eyes that looked like burning coals in caverns of darkness.

Oh, the silence as he stepped inside! Every single person in the parlour was gaping, mouth open, eyes wide; and when they saw what the stranger was pulling behind him – a little sledge with something wrapped in canvas – more than one crossed themselves and stood up in fear.

The stranger bowed.

‘Dr Kalmenius of Schatzberg, at your service,’ he said, in a harsh, grating voice. ‘I have come a long way tonight, and I am cold. A glass of brandy!’

The landlord poured it hastily. The stranger drained it at once and held out the glass for more. Still nobody moved.

‘So silent?’ said Dr Kalmenius, looking around
mockingly. ‘One might think one had arrived among the dead!’

The Burgomaster swallowed hard and got to his feet.

‘I beg your pardon, Dr – er – Kalmenius, but the fact is that—’

And he looked at Fritz, who was staring at Dr Kalmenius with horror. The young man was as pale as the paper in his hand. His eyes were nearly starting from his head, his hair was standing on end, and a ghastly sweat had broken out on his forehead.

‘Yes, my good sir?’ said Dr Kalmenius.

‘I – I—’ said Fritz, and swallowed convulsively.

The Burgomaster intervened: ‘The fact is that our young friend is a writer of stories, Doctor, and he was reading us one of his tales when you arrived.’

‘Ah! How delightful!’ said Dr Kalmenius. ‘I should greatly enjoy hearing the rest of your story, young sir. Please don’t feel inhibited by my presence – carry on as if I weren’t here at all.’

A little cry broke from Fritz’s throat. With a sudden movement he crumpled all his sheets of
paper together and thrust them into the stove, where they blazed up high.

‘I beg you,’ he cried, ‘have nothing to do with this man!’

And like someone who has seen the Devil, he ran out of the inn as fast as he could.

Dr Kalmenius broke into a wild and mocking laugh, and at that, several other good citizens followed Fritz’s example, and left their pipes and their mugs of beer, grabbed their coats and hats, and were off, not even daring to look the stranger in the eye.

Herr Ringelmann and the Burgomaster were almost the last to leave. The old clockmaker thought he should say something to a fellow craftsman, but his tongue was mute, and the Burgomaster thought he should either welcome the eminent Dr Kalmenius or send him on his way, but his nerve failed; and the two old men took their sticks and hurried away as fast as they could.

Little Gretl was clinging to her father the landlord, watching it all with wide eyes.

‘Well!’ said Dr Kalmenius. ‘You keep early hours in this town. I will take another glass of brandy.’
The landlord poured with a shaking hand, and ushered Gretl out, for this was no company for a child.

Dr Kalmenius drained the brandy at once, and called for yet another.

‘And perhaps this gentleman will join me,’ he said, turning to the corner of the bar.

For there sat Karl still. In the rush of all the other customers to leave, he had not moved. He turned his glowering face, now flushed with drink and sullen with self-hatred, to glare at the stranger, but he could not meet those mocking eyes, and he dropped his gaze to the floor.

‘Bring a glass for my companion,’ said Dr Kalmenius to the landlord, ‘and then you may leave us.’

The landlord put the bottle and another glass on the bar, and fled. Only five minutes before, the parlour had been full to bursting; but now Dr Kalmenius and Karl were alone, and the inn was so quiet that Karl could hear the whisper of flames in the stove, and the ticking of the old clock in the corner, even over the beating of his own heart.

Dr Kalmenius poured some brandy, and pushed the glass along the bar. Karl said nothing. He bore
the stranger’s stare for nearly a minute, and then he banged his fist on the counter and cried:

‘God damn you, what do you want?’

‘Of you, sir? I want nothing from you.’

‘You came here on purpose to jeer at me!’

‘To jeer at you? Come, come, we have better clowns than you in Schatzberg. Should I come all this way to laugh at a young man whose face shows nothing but unhappiness? Come, drink up! Look cheerful! It is your morning of triumph tomorrow!’

Karl groaned and turned away, but Dr Kalmenius’s mocking voice continued:

‘Yes, the unveiling of a new figure for the famous clock of Glockenheim is an important occasion. Do you know, I tried to find a bed in five different inns before I came here, and they were all full up. Visitors from all over Germany – gentlemen and ladies – craftsmen, clockmakers, experts in all kinds of machinery – all come to see your new figure, your masterpiece! Isn’t that something to be joyful about? Drink, my friend, drink!’

Karl snatched the glass and swallowed the fiery liquor.

‘There won’t be a new figure,’ he muttered.
‘What’s this?’

‘I said there won’t be a new figure. I haven’t made one. I couldn’t. I wasted all my time, and when it was too late I found I couldn’t do it. There you are. Now you can laugh at me. Go on.’

‘Oh, dear, dear,’ said Dr Kalmenius solemnly. ‘Laugh? I wouldn’t dream of it. I’ve come here to help you.’

‘What? You? How?’

Dr Kalmenius smiled. It was like a flame suddenly breaking out of an ash-covered log, and Karl recoiled. The old man came closer.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘I think you may have overlooked the philosophical implications of our craft. You know how to regulate a watch and repair a church clock, but had you ever considered that our lives are clockwork, too?’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Karl.

‘We can control the future, my boy, just as we wind up the mechanism in a clock. Say to yourself: I will win that race – I will come first – and you wind up the future like clockwork. The world has no choice but to obey! Can the hands of that old clock in the corner decide to stop? Can the spring in
Now we’re getting to the heart of it. This is Dr Kalmenius’s philosophy. This is what he wants Karl to believe. Well, there may be something in it. There are plenty of people who think they only have to wish for something, and it’ll come true. Doesn’t everyone think like that when they buy a lottery ticket? And there’s no doubt, it’s a pleasant thing to imagine. But there’s a flaw in it . . .

your watch decide to wind itself up and run backwards? No! They have no choice. And nor has the future, once you have wound it up.’

‘Impossible,’ said Karl, who was feeling more and more light-headed.

‘Oh, but it’s easy! What would you like?

Wealth? A beautiful bride? Wind up the future, my friend! Say what you want, and it will be yours! Fame, power, riches – what would you like?’

‘You know very well what I want!’ cried Karl. ‘I want a figure for the clock! Something to show for all the time I should have spent in making it! Anything to avoid the shame I’ll feel tomorrow!’

‘Nothing could be easier,’ said Dr Kalmenius. ‘You spoke – and there is what you wished for.’

And he pointed to the little sledge he’d pulled behind him into the parlour. The runners stood in a
puddle of melted snow, and the canvas cover was damp.

'What is it?' said Karl, who had suddenly become very afraid.

'Uncover it! Take off the canvas!'

Karl got unsteadily to his feet and slowly untied the rope holding the cover down. Then he pulled the canvas off.

In the sledge was the most perfect piece of metal sculpture he had ever seen. It was the figure of a knight in armour, made of gleaming silvery metal, holding a sharp sword. Karl gasped at the detail, and walked round looking at it from all angles. Every piece of armour-plating was riveted in such a way that it would move smoothly over the one below, and
as for the sword—

He touched it, and drew his hand back at once, looking at the blood running down his fingers.

‘It’s like a razor,’ he said.

‘Only the best will do for Sir Ironsoul,’ said Dr Kalmenius.

‘Sir Ironsoul . . . What a piece of work! Oh, if this were in the tower among the other figures, my name would be made for ever!’ said Karl 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.

\[\text{Music notation}\]

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.

‘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!’

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
Philip Pullman

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.

‘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 clockmaker’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.
Clockwork or All Wound Up

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 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 ought to tell
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 scorned for their pains.
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.