Once upon the time in Germany's Erzgebirge lived a farmer. He was very very rich, but also very lonely because all his riches had made his heart as hard as the nuts of his big nut tree. Because he was such a miser he ate them all alone at Christmas.

But just because he was such a lazy to crack the nuts by himself, he promised a reward to that person, who could find an easy way to crack nuts without any trouble. Many people came to him with rather strange ideas.

There was that old veteran, who advised to shoot the nuts, a carpenter offered his saw, and the veterinarian recommended to put the best hens on the nuts and just to wait for them to hatch.

But that old puppeteer from Seiffen in the Erzgebirge was carving very diligently for three whole days. After that he had created a beautiful wooden puppet. It was painted in the colors of the Erzgebirge miners' dress uniform. It had a big mouth, a hard jaw and a strong tongue, just made for cracking nuts.

When the rich farmer saw it, he liked it so much that from that day on he wanted to crack his nuts only with that colorful little guy.

In fact he loved that little wooden man so much, that his heart softened like the wax of a Christmas candle. He gave all of his nuts to the people, and everybody in the village had a very special Christmas that year, with Christstollen (a german fruitcake), chocolate with nuts, and gold painted nuts on the Christmas tree.

The old Erzgebirge puppeteer, however, received a brand new workshop and from here the most beautiful nutcrackers went into all the world.

The rich farmer became the best friend of all the children because the wooden nutcracker had also cracked the hard shell around his heart once and for all.

Reprinted from the Volkmar Matthias Nutcracker Factory in Western Germany.