

The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep

Have you ever seen a very, very old cupboard, blackened by time and adorned with carved scrolls and leaves? Such a cupboard—a great-grandmother's inheritance—stood in the drawing room. It was covered entirely with carvings: roses, tulips, and the most intricate scrolls. Peeking out from among them were deer heads with branching antlers, and right in the center was carved a little man, full length. One could not look at him without laughing, and he himself grinned from ear to ear; such a grimace could hardly be called a smile. He had goat's legs, small horns on his forehead, and a long beard. The children called him Ober-Unter-General-Kriegskommissar-Sergeant Goat-Legs, because pronouncing such a name is difficult, and such a title is not given to many. Yet carving such a figure is not easy either, but nevertheless, it was carved. The little man constantly gazed at the mirror table, where stood a pretty porcelain shepherdess. Gilded shoes, a skirt gracefully pinned up with a crimson rose, a gilded hat on her head, and a shepherd's crook in her hand—was that not beauty! Beside her stood a little chimney sweep, black as coal, yet also made of porcelain and just as neat and charming as all the others. After all, he only represented a chimney sweep, and the craftsman could just as well have made him a prince—it would have been all the same!

He stood gracefully, holding a ladder in his hands, and his face was white and pink, like a little girl's, which was somewhat incorrect; he could have been a bit sootier. He stood quite close to the shepherdess—just as they had been placed, so they stood. And since that was so, they went and got engaged. The pair was splendid indeed: both young, both made of the same porcelain, and both equally fragile.

Right beside them stood another doll, three times their height—an old Chinaman who knew how to nod his head. He too was made of porcelain and called himself the little shepherdess's grandfather, though he lacked proof of this. He insisted that she must obey him, and therefore he nodded his head to Ober-Unter-General-Kriegskommissar-Sergeant Goat-Legs, who was courting the shepherdess.

"You will have a good husband!" said the old Chinaman. "He seems even to be made of mahogany. With him, you will become an Ober-Unter-General-Kriegskommissar-Sergeantess. He has a whole cupboard full of silver, not to mention what lies in the secret drawers."

"I do not want to go into a dark cupboard!" replied the shepherdess. "They say he already has eleven porcelain wives there!"

"Well, then you shall be the twelfth!" said the Chinaman. "Tonight, as soon as the old cupboard begins to creak, we shall celebrate your wedding; otherwise, I am no true Chinaman!"

Then he nodded his head and fell asleep.

But the shepherdess burst into tears and, looking at her beloved—the porcelain chimney sweep—said:

"I beg you, run away with me, wherever our eyes may lead us. We cannot stay here."

"For your sake, I am ready for anything!" answered the chimney sweep. "Let us leave at once! Surely I can support you with my trade."

"If only we could get down from the table!" she said. "I shall not breathe freely until we are far, far away!"

The chimney sweep comforted her and showed her where best to step with her porcelain foot, onto which ledge or gilded scroll. His ladder also served them well, and finally, they safely descended to the floor. But glancing at the old cupboard, they saw a terrible commotion there. The carved deer stretched out their heads, thrust forward their antlers, and twisted them in every direction, while Ober-Unter-General-Kriegskommissar-Sergeant Goat-Legs leaped high into the air and shouted to the old Chinaman:

"They are running away! Running away!"

The shepherdess and the chimney sweep grew frightened and darted into the window box.

There lay scattered packs of cards, and a puppet theater had been hastily set up. A performance was taking place on the stage.

All the ladies—diamonds and hearts, clubs and spades—sat in the front row, fanning themselves with tulips, while behind them stood the knaves, trying to show that they too had two heads, like all the figures in a deck of cards. The play depicted the sufferings of a loving couple torn apart, and the shepherdess began to weep: it reminded her so much of her own fate.

"I can bear it no longer!" she said to the chimney sweep. "Let us leave this place!"

But when they found themselves on the floor and looked up at their table, they saw that the old Chinaman had awakened and was rocking his whole body—for inside him rolled a leaden ball.

"Oh, the old Chinaman is chasing us!" cried the shepherdess, and in despair she fell upon her porcelain knees.

"Stop! I have an idea!" said the chimney sweep. "Do you see over there, in the corner, the large vase filled with dried fragrant herbs and flowers? Let us hide inside it! We shall lie among the rose and lavender petals, and if the Chinaman reaches us, we shall sprinkle salt into his eyes."

"That will come to nothing!" said the shepherdess. "I know the Chinaman and the vase were once engaged, and something always remains of old affection. No, we have only one path—to venture out into the wide world!"

"But do you have the courage for that?" asked the chimney sweep. "Have you thought how vast the world is? That we shall never be able to return?"

"Yes, yes!" she answered.

The chimney sweep looked at her intently and said:

"My way leads through the chimney flue! Do you have the courage to climb with me into the stove, and then into the chimney pipe? There, I know exactly what to do! We shall climb so high that no one can reach us. At the very top, there is a hole through which we can emerge into the bright world!"

And he led her to the stove.

"How dark it is here!" she said, but nevertheless climbed after him, both into the stove and into the flue, where it was pitch dark.

"Well, here we are in the chimney!" said the chimney sweep. "Look, look! Directly above us shines a wonderful little star!"

Indeed, a star shone in the sky, as if pointing out their way. And they climbed, scrambled along that dreadful path higher and higher. But the chimney sweep supported the shepherdess and told her where best to place her porcelain feet. Finally, they reached the very top and sat down to rest on the edge of the chimney—they were very tired, and no wonder.

Above them stretched the star-filled sky, beneath them lay all the rooftops of the city, and around them, in every direction, near and far, unfolded the free world. The poor shepherdess had never imagined the world to be so vast. She leaned her

head against the chimney sweep's shoulder and wept so bitterly that her tears washed away all the gilding from her belt.

"This is too much for me!" said the shepherdess. "I cannot endure this! The world is too huge! Oh, how I wish to be back on the mirror table! I shall not have a single peaceful moment until I return there! I followed you to the ends of the earth, and now, if you love me, you must take me back home!"

The chimney sweep tried to reason with her, reminding her of the old Chinaman and of Ober-Unter-General-Kriegskommissar-Sergeant Goat-Legs, but she only sobbed inconsolably and kissed her chimney sweep. There was nothing for it but to yield to her, unreasonable though it was.

So they climbed back down the chimney. It was not easy! Finding themselves once again in the dark stove, they first stood by the door, listening to what was happening in the room. All was quiet, and they peered out from the stove. Ah, the old Chinaman lay sprawled on the floor: having chased after them, he had fallen from the table and broken into three pieces. His back had flown off completely, and his head had rolled into the corner.

Ober-Unter-General-Kriegskommissar-Sergeant stood, as always, in his place, deep in thought.

"What horror!" exclaimed the shepherdess. "Our dear grandfather has broken, and we are to blame! Oh, I shall not survive this!"

And she wrung her tiny hands.

"He can still be repaired!" said the chimney sweep. "He can be excellently repaired! Only do not worry! They will glue his back on, and drive a good rivet into the back of his head, and he will be quite as good as new again, and able to say all sorts of unpleasant things to us!"

"Do you think so?" said the shepherdess.

And they climbed back up onto their table.

"How far we have gone with you!" said the chimney sweep. "It was not worth the trouble!"

"If only grandfather gets repaired!" said the shepherdess. "Or will it cost very much?..."

Grandfather was repaired: they glued his back on and drove a good rivet into the back of his head. He became as good as new, only he could no longer nod his head.

"You have grown rather proud since you broke!" said Ober-Unter-General-Kriegskommissar-Sergeant Goat-Legs to him. "But why, pray? Well then, will you give me your granddaughter?"

The chimney sweep and the shepherdess looked pleadingly at the old Chinaman: they were so afraid he might nod. But he could no longer nod,

And explaining to strangers that you have a rivet in the back of your head brings little joy either. So the porcelain couple remained inseparable. The shepherdess and the chimney sweep blessed Grandfather's rivet and loved each other until they broke.