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The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep was written by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), and was translated from the Danish by M. R. James (1862-1936) as part of his *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories* (1930).

Title: Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories — The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep

Author: Andersen, Hans Christian (1805-1875)

Translator: James, Montague Rhodes (1862-1936)

Date of first publication: 1930

Place and date of edition used as base for this ebook: London: Faber and Faber, 1953

Date first posted: 21 March 2010

Date last updated: 17 June 2014

Faded Page ebook#20100313

This ebook was produced by: David T. Jones, Mark Akrigg & the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep

by

Hans Christian Andersen

(from *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories* [1930], translated by M. R. James)

Have you ever seen a real old-fashioned cupboard, quite black with age, carved with flourishes and foliage? Just such a one stood in a sitting-room; it had been inherited from a grandmother, and was all carved with roses and tulips from top to bottom: there were most elaborate flourishes on it, and among them little deer stuck out their heads with lots of antlers. But in the very middle of the cupboard was carved a whole figure of a man. He made you smile to look at him, and he did grin—you couldn't call it laughing—and he had goats' legs, little horns in his forehead, and a long beard. The children of the house called him "Top-and-bottom-general-commander-in-chief-sergeant-billy-goats'-legs"; a difficult name to pronounce, and a title earned by very few: but, after all, it was no light job to have carved him out. Anyhow, there he was, and he was always looking across at the table under the mirror, for there stood a pretty little Shepherdess of china. Her shoes were gilt, her skirt charmingly looped up with a red rose, and besides she had a gold hat and a shepherd's crook: she was beautiful. Close by her stood a little Chimney Sweep as black as coal, but, like her, made of China. He was as neat and clean as anyone could be; it was only pretence that he was a Chimney Sweep, the china-maker could just as easily have made a Prince of him; it was all one. There he stood with his ladder, looking very pretty, and with a face as pink and white as a girl's—which really was a mistake, for he had better have had a little black on it. He stood quite close to the Shepherdess; both of them had been put where they were, and because they had been put there, they became engaged. They suited each other very well; both of them were young, both of the same china, and both equally brittle. Beside them was yet another figure, three times as big: it was an old Chinese man, who could nod his head. He too was made of china, and he asserted that he was the little Shepherdess's grandfather. But this he could not prove. He insisted that he had authority over her, and therefore he had nodded his consent to "Top-and-bottom-general-commander-in-chief-sergeant-billy-goats'-legs" when he proposed for the little Shepherdess. "In him", said the old Chinaman, "you will have a husband, a husband who I almost think is made of mahogany, and who can make you 'Lady-Top-and-bottom-general-commander-in-chief-sergeant-billy-goats'-legs'. He owns that whole cupboard full of silver plate, in addition to what he has in secret hiding-places."

"I don't want to go into that dark cupboard," said the little Shepherdess. "I've heard tell that he's got eleven china wives in there."

"Then you can be the twelfth," said the Chinaman. "To-night, as soon as the old cupboard cracks, your wedding shall take place, as sure as I'm a Chinaman." And with that he nodded his head and went to sleep.

But the little Shepherdess began to cry and looked at her heart's dearest—the china Chimney Sweep.

"I think I must ask you", she said, "to come out into the wide world with me, for we can't stay here."

"Your will is mine," said the little Chimney Sweep. "Let us set off at once; I feel sure I can support you by the exercise of my profession."

"I wish we were safely down off the table," said she; "I shan't be happy before we are out in the wide world."

Then he encouraged her and showed her where to set her little feet on the carved corner, and gilt foliage down the legs of the table. He took his ladder, too, to help her, and so they got down to the floor. But when they looked at the old cupboard—such a commotion was going on! All the carved deer stuck their heads further out and pointed their antlers and turned their necks about. Top-and-bottom-general-commander-in-chief-sergeant-billy-goats'-legs leapt high in the air and shouted across to the old Chinaman: "They're running away! They're running away!"

This alarmed them somewhat, and they jumped quickly up into the drawer of the window seat. Here lay three or four imperfect packs of cards, and a little toy theatre that had been set up as well as it could be. A comedy was being acted, and all the Queens—diamonds and hearts, clubs and spades—were seated in the front row fanning themselves with their tulips, and behind them stood all the Knives, and you could see they had one head at top and another below (as cards do). The comedy was about two people who couldn't marry, and it made the Shepherdess cry, because it resembled her own story. "I can't bear it," she said; "I must get out of the drawer." But when they reached the floor and looked up at the table, the old Chinaman had waked up and was rocking with the whole of his body—the lower part of him was all in one

piece.

"The old Chinaman's coming!" screamed the little Shepherdess, and in her terror she fell on her china knees.

"An idea occurs to me," said the Chimney Sweep. "Let's creep into the big pot-pourri jar that stands in the corner; we can lie there among the roses and lavender and throw salt in his eyes if he comes." "That'll never do," said she; "besides, I know that the old Chinaman and the pot-pourri jar were engaged at one time, and there's always some kind feeling left when people have been in that situation. No, there's nothing for it but to go out into the wide world."

"Have you really the courage to go out into the wide world with me?" asked the Chimney Sweep. "Have you considered how large it is, and that we never can come back here?"

"I have," she said.

The Chimney Sweep looked at her quite sternly and then said: "My way lies through the chimney. Have you really the courage to crawl with me through the stove, through tunnel and pipe as well? We shall then be in the chimney, and there I know how to manage. We shall climb so high that they cannot follow us, and right up at the top there is a hole which goes out into the wide world."

He led her across to the stove door.

"It looks very black," she said. Still, she went with him, both through the tunnel and through the pipe, and there it was night, as dark as pitch.

"Now we are in the chimney," said he. "And look! Look! The loveliest star is shining right over us."

There was indeed a star in the sky, shining right down to them, as if it would show them the way. They clambered and they crawled—it was a terrible way—up and up; but he lifted her, eased her, held her and showed her the best places to set her little china feet on, and at last they got right up to the edge of the chimney-top, and there they sat down, for they were tired out; as they had every right to be.

The sky, with all its stars, was over their heads, and the roofs of the town below; they could see far around, far out into the world. The little Shepherdess had never imagined it was like that, and she laid her head on her Chimney Sweep's shoulder and cried till the gold came off her sash.

"It's too much," she said. "I can't bear it! The world's much too big! Oh, I wish I was back on the little table under the mirror. I shall never be happy till I'm there again. I've come out with you into the wide world, and now do please come back home with me, if you have any love for me."

The Chimney Sweep reasoned with her, and spoke of the old Chinaman and Top-and-bottom-general-commander-in-chief-sergeant-billy-goats'-legs, but she sobbed so violently and kissed her little Chimney Sweep so that he couldn't but yield to her, foolish as it was.

So they crawled back down the chimney, with infinite trouble, and crept through the tunnel and the pipe, which was most unpleasant, and at last there they were in the dark stove. There they listened behind the door to find out what was going on in the room. Everything was quiet. They peeped out, and goodness! There in the middle of the floor lay the old Chinaman. In his efforts to follow them he had fallen off the table and lay there in three pieces. The whole of his back was broken off in one piece, and his head had rolled into a corner, and lay there. Top-and-bottom-general-commander-in-chief-sergeant-billy-goats'-legs stood where he always had stood, thinking about it all.

"This is awful," said the little Shepherdess. "Poor old grandfather is broken to bits, and it's our fault; I shall never get over it." And she wrung her little hands.

"He can be riveted all right," said the Chimney Sweep. "He can perfectly well be riveted; don't be so hasty. If they glue his back and put a good rivet in his neck he'll be as good as new again, and be able to say all sorts of nasty things to us."

"Do you really think so?" said she; and then they climbed up on to the table again, where they used to stand before.

"Well, what a way we've been!" said the Chimney Sweep. "And we might just as well have spared ourselves all that trouble."

"Oh, if only old grandfather were riveted!" said the little Shepherdess. "Will it be very expensive?"

Well, he was riveted: the family glued up his back, and a good rivet was put into his neck, and he as was good as new; only he couldn't nod his head.

"You've got proud since you were broken to bits," said Top-and bottom-general-commander-in-chief-sergeant-billy-goats'-legs. "I don't see that that's anything to boast of. Am I to have her, or am I not?"

The Chimney Sweep and the little Shepherdess looked pleadingly at the old Chinaman, and were dreadfully afraid he would nod, but he couldn't, and it was disagreeable to him to have to tell a stranger that he had a permanent rivet in his neck. So the china people remained together, and blessed the grandfather's rivet, and continued to love each other until they were broken to bits.

[End of *The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep* by Hans Christian Andersen, from *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories*, translated by M. R. James]