

**THE PARABLE OF THE CHIMNEY.**

"Uncle Anthony," commanded Anthony's sweetheart, "tell me a story."

"Well, sweetheart," answered Anthony, waked from his dreaming by the fire, "what shall it be?"

Sweetheart climbed into his lap where he sat in his big rocker, and decided—oh! so sedately,—“about a little boy.”

"Once upon a time," commenced Anthony dubiously, "there was a little boy, and he had a pretty blue velvet jacket with silver buttons, and beautiful warm red knickerbockers that were made quite loose, and he wore nice shiny shoes with black silk stockings. How's that, Sweetheart?"

"Wasn't his legs cold?" asked Sweetheart.

"No," said Anthony, "for he had nice warm leggings, just the color of his jacket, and with silver buttons too. Now what do you think was the color of his cap?"

"I know!" cried Sweetheart, wriggling the crease of Anthony's trousers in the throes of inspiration, "red, just like his knickerbockers!"

"So it was! Don't you think that was a nice little boy?"

"Yes! that was a very nice little boy." And then the inevitable—"what did he do?"

"Why, what do you think he did?" procrastinated Anthony.

"I don't know"—slowly, then, the blue eyes big with a child's wonder at its own invention, "he went up the chimney!"

"My gracious!" said Anthony, "what a dirty place for such a nice little boy to go in! Was that the end of him?"

"No o. Why, Uncle Anthony, he wanted to see out the top."

"Oh," said Anthony, subsiding, "he wanted to see out the top!" And with a new look in his kindly blue eyes, "that accounts for it."

Anthony's study of the fireplace lasted till Sweetheart, in her face that queer reverence very small folk show when they take note in their elders of what they cannot understand, put her little soft hand to his face and turned it toward her. "How ever did he do it, Uncle Anthony?"

"Well," said Anthony rousing, "it was an awfully dirty place for a clean little boy to go into, but, you know, he wanted to see out the top, and he couldn't find any other way. There were plenty of people about who might have told him but none of them thought of it save one or two, and these knew but little of climbing.

"He might have gone upstairs to the garret, but, even after climbing all those stairs, he would have needed a ladder to reach the trap door in the roof, and but a very few people keep such ladders, Lassie, I'm sure I don't know who would give him one. And, if he had succeeded in getting a ladder, there would still have been the trap door, locked tight and fast, and how would he have gotten through it?"

"Could he open it with a key?" asked Sweetheart.

"I don't know about that," said Anthony, "it takes a very wonderful key to open such a door. Every little boy has just one such key, and never can get another, and it is risky work for him to try to file it to fit. He is more than likely to ruin it forever. So, you see, after he has climbed all those stairs, and had managed to get a ladder, his key might not have fitted that lock and he would have had to commence all over again—unless he were satisfied just to stay there in the garret and look out through the cracks. You sleepy?" This with a skake.

"No!" indignantly.

"Well, then there was another way the little boy might have gone to the top, but he never thought of it, and I don't believe he was strong enough. He

might have carried up boxes from down town and have built a stairway outside all the way up to the roof, just as you build with your blocks"

Sweetheart's thought went away up through all the floors and ceilings to the ridge pole. "Oh, my!" said she, "what a big lot of boxes!"

"Yes," said Anthony, "what a big lot of boxes! But that would have been safer, you know, though rather slow.

"So this little boy, being a rather pig-headed little boy with all, decided to go up the chimney. He might very easily have crawled up by bracing himself against the sides, but he didn't very much like crawling and, besides, he would have gotten very dirty so. He could see the beautiful blue sky through the top, but the chimney looked so dirty, but he was bound to go up and he thought he could keep clean well enough if he was careful. So he put out the fire.

"There are all sorts of fires, Sweetheart, and that was an awfully wicked fire, for all it sparkled and snapped and rustled and jumped so. It caused all the soot in the chimney! Where do wicked people go?"

"Bad place," answered Sweetheart, promptly.

"Just so," said Anthony, "and that's where the flame went when the little boy put out the fire. I am very sorry indeed for the folk who get their scorching in the particular corner where that flame is burning.

"So the little boy carried out all the ashes, and then he got the broom and swept down all the soot from just as far up as he could reach."

"Did he get any on his pretty clothes?" put in Sweetheart.

"Yes, dear, even then, before he was started. I am afraid he must have been careless. So when he was all ready he took four sticks which he'd had ever since he was a baby, and he pushed the sticks in between the stones of the chimney, just so," thrusting in matches between the bricks of the fireplace, "that he would have one for each hand and foot. But when he commenced to climb, and reached down for the lowest stick to place it above the highest one, he found he couldn't possibly pull it out, so then what?"

Sweetheart took a long long look at the lowest of the matches.

"Why, Uncle Anthony, I guess he could break it off."

"Yes," said And so he did, but it was rough on the stick. And so he kept on breaking off the lowest stick and putting it above the highest one, till he had gotten up as far as he had cleaned the chimney, when, all at once, he got a blotch of soot right on his nose."

"Oh, my!" grieved Sweetheart.

"This startled him so," continued Anthony, "that he fell clear down to the bottom of the chimney, breaking off all his sticks on the way, and there he was!"

"Make him go up, Uncle Anthony!" cried Sweetheart.

"Yes," promised Anthony, a queer set on his lips, "I'll make him go up."

"So the little boy thought over it for a long time, and finally went out and got a board that just exactly fitted the chimney, and he put the board on his head and started up again, pushing all the soot before him. That was a very rough, ugly looking board, Sweetheart, and it was full of nails sticking through on the outside, and whenever one of those nails would strike anything the harder it scratched, the more it pushed back through the board and hurt the little boy. But he didn't care, just so it would keep off the soot."

"Oh, Uncle Anthony," cried Sweetheart, "don't let him get very dirty!"

"No! by heaven, I'll not," said Anthony, swinging up from his chair and walking the room with the little tot in his arms, his face aquiver with the thoughts that were in him.

"And so the little boy went up and up and up, and the board and load of soot got so heavy and it was all so hard for him that he had to bend his head and take the load upon his shoulders, and it kept getting heavier and heavier, till, at last he bent so that the board was on his back and all he could see was the bottom of the chimney and the long way he had come; and he got, oh, so tired; and so hungry; and so lonely; and his hands hurt so; and every little they would slip against the rough rocks and get all bruised and dirty, and he was almost ready to drop the board and just scramble up any way, but, somehow, he wouldn't let himself do that. And then a great many people came to the bottom of the chimney, and some of them wondered what in the world he was doing up there, and others called up to him and told him how he should have set about it, and others told him that he should have gotten different sticks that would not have broken so easily. They were very careful, those people down below, to keep clear of the soot and so they couldn't help him any.

"The little boy couldn't tell at all how much farther he had to go, but he knew there was blue sky above him, and he knew he must go on now, for his sticks were so short he couldn't possibly climb back to the bottom, and if he fell he would drop in the fireplace before the people, all bruised and helpless and covered with the soot he'd gathered in falling, and just as he was getting so weak that it seemed as if he couldn't help but lean against the dirty wall—all of a sudden the board flew out the top of the chimney."

"Goodie!" shouted Sweetheart, jumping in his arms as he walked.

"The little boy was so surprised that he very nearly fell back after all, but, with a good scramble he came out on top and there, all about him, was the glorious, sunlit world for him to enjoy. So then all the people ran out of the house to see him, and they looked, oh, so glad, because he was safely out on top."

Sweetheart gave a long sigh. "I'm so glad too!" she said.

Together they sank again in the old chair, and Anthony, his hand a bit shaken, somehow, with his story telling, rolled a cigarette and lit it.

Presently Sweetheart asked, "did he come down again Uncle Anthony?"

"Oh, yes, he could come down well enough, for those trap doors open very easily from above, and he just dropped through to the garret floor and went down stairs to all the good people he had wanted to see for so long. And didn't they wash all the soot off him so nicely, and feed him so well?"

"Yes," added Sweetheart gravely, "and they tied up where his poor hands were cut just like mamma did my thumb."

"So they did, God bless them," said Anthony.

After a time Sweetheart asked, drowsily, "did the little boy ever go up again Uncle Anthony?"

"Why bless you, yes, Sweetheart, his long climb had made him so strong that he could just run up those stairs, and the door was always open for him, and there were plenty of good people ready to give him ladders. He hadn't known there were so many ladders in all the world; though he had noticed most of the people before.

"So now all that he had to bother him was the scramble up the roof, and he took his key and made a pair of climbing irons just like those Papa puts on his boots when it's icy."

And so they rocked before the fire till, at last, Anthony carried the dozing child away to Mama and to bed.

The shock of the cold sheets roused her, and, as Anthony came in for his good night kiss, she asked,

"Where did all the soot go to? Uncle Anthony?"

"It blew into the eyes of those who kindled that wicked fire, dearie." Anthony bent closer to catch the murmuring as the blue eyes closed. "I think he ought to go and wipe 'em out!" RIDGWAY VAN BLARCOM.



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