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The China Shepherdess And The Picture

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Once upon a time, in the parlor of an old farmhouse, there stood a delicate little china shepherdess on the mantel. With her hand shading her eyes, she gazed across the room at a newly hung picture on the wall. Leaning against a candleholder, she held a gilt crook in her other hand, as if searching for her lost sheep.

However, the shepherdess wasn't actually in search of sheep, not even in the days when a wax candle flickered in the holder behind her. In truth, she had no sheep at all and knew nothing of them, despite her appearance as a shepherdess. For many years, the candlestick remained empty, yet she stood there, as if forever lost in her thoughts. Now, the little china shepherdess was looking at someone in particular. She was fixated on the pretty boy depicted in the picture, pondering where she might have seen him before. It had only been a few days since the picture was hung in front of her.

One day, when the house was enveloped in tranquility and only the gentle humming of bees from the garden could be heard through the window, the little boy in the picture seemed to smile at the little china shepherdess. He was a beautiful child, with big eyes and curly hair. One solitary curl hung down in the middle of his forehead, much like the shepherdess herself. This little boy, however, was a good and sweet-natured child. He sat in a chair adorned with fringe, his arm casually resting on its armrest. One foot dangled below him, held in place by his little hand, while the other foot hung over the front of the chair.

The little china shepherdess was certain that the boy in the picture smiled at her. Feeling it was perfectly appropriate to speak, considering how long she had been there, she asked, "Have I not seen you somewhere before?" The boy's big eyes twinkled, and a wide smile spread across his chubby face. "Of course, you have," he replied. "Don't you remember me?"

"I do seem to recall your face," the shepherdess replied, "but I cannot say I have ever seen you looking just as you do now. Are you a newcomer?"

"Oh, dear, no!" the little boy chuckled. "I have been here in this parlor for years, but I used to hang on the other side of the room, right beside you. You couldn't see me from there. I've only been moved here because my grown-up picture now occupies my former spot."

"Then I must have been mistaken," said the little shepherdess, feeling a pang of embarrassment. "I apologize for speaking to you."

"No need to apologize," reassured the little boy. "You have seen me before, but not in this picture. Take a moment and see if you can remember. Here's a hint: the hand you're using to shade your eyes is broken at the wrist and has been glued back on."

The little china shepherdess blushed with shame, realizing that her secret was known. "Oh, how did you know?" she asked.

"Don't you remember the day it was broken?" the little boy replied.

After pondering for a moment, the shepherdess smiled. "Of course! It was you. I remember now. You climbed up on one of the slippery chairs, picked me up in your hand, and accidentally dropped me on the floor."

"Yes, I did it, and I am so sorry," the little boy said, his eyes filled with sadness. "As a punishment, I was confined to my room without dinner for coming in here alone."

"Oh, please don't feel bad about it," the little china shepherdess comforted him. "These days, no one even notices the broken wrist."

"But I have never forgotten," the little boy confessed. "Someday, when I am grown up, I will have you for my own and take you away to the city where I live."

Just then, the parlor door swung open, and a gentleman entered, holding the hand of a little boy. "Here she is," the gentleman exclaimed, taking the china shepherdess down from the mantel. "This is where I dropped her and broke her pretty little hand," he said, showing the mended place to the little boy.

"Isn't she beautiful? I adored her when I was little, just like you," he said. "But I was naughty and entered the parlor alone, resulting in her broken wrist." When the door closed, the little china shepherdess looked at the boy in the picture and smiled. "It was worth it, even if I have had a broken wrist all these years," she whispered. "I hope they don't take me away from here now. I know you love me."

"Oh, that won't happen for many years, I believe. And when it does, I will go with you. I'm certain of it," the little boy responded.

In the stillness of the night and the quiet moments of the day, the little china shepherdess and the little boy in the picture continued to gaze at each other,



exchanging smiles. Though they may not utter a word, they knew that the love they shared in the past remained forever young.

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