

William Blake

“The Chimney Sweeper”¹

When my mother died I was very young.
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry “ ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!”
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl’d like a lamb’s back, was shav’d: so I said:
“Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack,
Were all of them lock’d up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open’d the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we arose in the dark,
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

“The Chimney Sweeper”²

A little black thing among the snow:
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father & mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil’d among the winters snow:
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

¹ *Songs of Innocence*

Dover Publications, New York © 1971
[original self-publication 1789]

² *Songs of Experience*

Dover Publications, New York © 1984
[original self-publication 1794]