

The Happy Man's Shirt

ITALY



The king's son was so sad that his eyes forever threatened a downpour of tears. In the palace, servants catered to his every need. The cooks prepared the tastiest dishes for him. Toy makers created the cleverest playthings. Tutors shared their most stimulating ideas. Yet he remained sullen and sad.

The king cherished the boy and wished only for his happiness. Finally, unable to bear the prince's despair a moment longer, the king called for advisers from far and wide to study the situation and provide a solution to the prince's sorrow. After much stargazing, consideration, and calculation, the wise counselors decreed, "You must dress the prince in the shirt of a truly happy man, and he will be cured of his sorrow."

Delighted with this simple solution, the king set out on a journey to find a truly happy man whose shirt would make his son happy again. With a great retinue he traveled to a nearby town where there lived a pious priest whose radiant smile cheered and comforted the heart of everyone he met. Because the priest was known to be a happy man, the king went directly to his home. The priest greeted the king with a humble bow. "To what do I owe this honor, Your Majesty?" asked the priest.

The king replied, "Since you are so revered for your holiness and good nature, I would like to know if you would accept the position of bishop, should it be offered to you?"

The priest smiled happily and replied, "Most certainly!"

The king frowned and said to himself with a sigh, "This man's shirt will not do. He is not truly happy. If he were truly happy, he would want no more than what he already has."

The king journeyed on to another land where lived a sultan whose kingdom was peaceful and whose people were content. The visiting king was welcomed with a royal feast. At the dinner, the visiting king said to the sultan, "You seem to be a happy man. What makes you so?"

The sultan replied, "I have everything I could possibly want and truly want no more. Yet late at night as I fall asleep, I worry about losing all I have worked so hard to gain."

Once again the king sighed and said to himself, "This man's shirt will not do."

In place after place, the king searched but could not find a man who was truly content with his life.

The king was about to give up the quest when he happened to be riding across a vineyard and heard the most joyous singing. In the distance he saw a poor farmer who was harvesting his grapes and singing at the top of his lungs in a voice that rivaled the birds. The king approached the peasant, who turned with a sunny smile and said, "Good day!"

The king climbed down off his horse and walked toward the man. "You seem so happy today," said the king.

The man replied, "Indeed I am, every day. I am blessed with a wonderful life!"

The king said, "Your smile is so radiant. Come with me to the royal castle. You will be surrounded with luxury and never want for anything again."

The man munched a grape and said, "No, thank you. I would not give up my life for all the castles in the world."

The king could not contain his joy. "My son is saved! My son is saved!" he shouted. "Please, you must do something for your king!"

The man bowed and said, "Anything you wish, Your Majesty."

The king reached out and, opening the farmer's ragged jacket, shouted,

“You must give me your shirt!”

The king's eyes stared wide with astonishment at the sight of the young man's muscular chest. The truly happy man was not wearing a shirt.