

The Happy Man's Shirt

Adapted by Mistress Dervila ni Leanon

Based on Favorite Folktales from Around the World, page 417

Italian

Time:3:18

The prince mourned, and every day his face grew paler. His father the king looked on with worry.

[worried]“Why so sad, my son?”

[head hanging down slightly, almost monotone]“I don't know”, answered the prince

“Is there anything you need?”

“No”

“Are you in love?”

“No.”

[frustrated]“Then what is wrong?”

[looks up at his father] “I told you, father - I don't know.”

So the king called in his wisest and most learned advisors and asked them how to cure the prince. When they came back from their consultation, the chief among them said,

[big voice, yet humble] “Majesty, we have studied the stars and discussed the problem, and we know what you must do. Find a happy man and exchange his shirt for your son's. Then the prince will be cured”

So the king began his search for a happy man. He realized he could not offer a reward, for anyone seeking a reward was not happy as they were. No, he needed a man who wanted for nothing. He asked the palace priest

“Are you happy?”

“Why yes, Majesty, I am happy.”

“Would you like to be a bishop?”

“Oh, Majesty, if only it were so!”

“Away with you! You are not a truly happy man!”

And his son grew more pale and more sickly.

He heard of a king who ruled over a wealthy kingdom with no enemies. He had a good wife and many children - surely he must be happy! So the prince's father went to this king and asked

“Are you happy?”

[Sigh] “I should be, I know - Fortune smiles and smiles upon me. But I worry, day and night - what will happen to my kingdom when I die? No, I am not a happy man.” The prince's father went home, to find his son had taken to his bed.

One day the king was out walking in the forest alone, grieving over his son. Then he heard a man singing joyfully, and thought

“Surely a man who sings like that is happy!” He found the man, and asked him

“Are you happy?”

“Indeed, sir, I am.”

“Would you like to go to the capital?” The king held his breath

“No, indeed. I wouldn’t trade places with the king himself. I’m happy as I am.”

“At last! At last! My good man, I will give you anything you want - anything - just - just” [*look down at man’s chest*] And the king ripped the man’s jacket open and saw - [*pause, look up, grieved*] the happy man had no shirt.

Full bibliography of source:

*Yolen, Jane, editor. Favorite Folktales from Around the World. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
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