

The Happy Man's Shirt
or
The Shirt of the Happy Man

Italian Folktale
adaptation of original retold by Italo Calvino

Once upon a time, there was a happy and wealthy kingdom. An honest and just King ruled the land. But all was not well.

The Queen was worried. She had noticed a change in the King's behavior. He had gone from happy and pleasant to irritable and angry. Sometimes would even seen him crying and moping around the castle. He would not eat the food on his plate and at night he would toss and turn in his bed.

One morning, the King refused to get out of bed. The Queen immediately called for the royal physician. He examined the King from head to toe and decided that there was nothing physically wrong with him. The Queen did not believe it. She called for other doctors from far away kingdoms, but they too said the same thing. The Queen did not give up, for she knew there was something very wrong with the King.

There was one doctor left. Dr. Monticarlo, from far away, saw the problem right away.

"He has a severe case of Melancholia," he exclaimed. Everyone was shocked.

The King's royal physician scoffed. "And what do you prescribe for this Melancholia?" he asked sarcastically.

"Why the shirt of a happy man," Dr. Monticarlo pronounced. "The King must find and then wear the shirt of a truly happy man. That is all that will cure him." The King looked up from his bed. "That is all? That is easy to do. Ask the Prime Minister to give me his shirt, for he is a very happy man."

The Prime Minister came immediately to the King's bedside. When the King told him about his situation, the Prime Minister backed away from the bed. He looked down at the expensive mosaic tile on the floor. "I am sorry your highness, but I am not that man."

"How can that be? You are an excellent Prime Minister. You are second in power and wealthy. You have a beautiful wife. Why do you say you are not happy?" the King blurted out.

"I will only tell this to you my king: it is my son. We never got along, he never listened to me. He has been skipping school and now I found out that he does not want to be a Prime Minister and serve with you. He wants to be a Blacksmith." The Prime Minister sobbed.

"I am sorry to hear that," the King stated. He dismissed the Prime Minister and called for all the Nobles in the land to be brought to the castle immediately.

One by one the Nobles were interviewed, but none of them could say they were truly happy. The Duke of Ajonjoli was going through a nasty divorce. The Duke of Mofongo admitted that he felt dirty all the time and took 20 baths a day. The Baroness of La Macarena whispered in the king's ear that she has had a pain in her leg for the last 20 years, ever since her favorite horse kicked her. The Count of Jurutongo said that he was having nightmares and was afraid of the dark. The Marchioness of Mandingo talked about her elderly mother who lives with her and how she must take care of her day and night. The countess of Marcella admitted she was under a load of stress and the school principal has called 3 times about little Gargamel's bullying of the other children.

The king threw up his hands in disgust and frustration.

"I can't believe it! My nobles are healthy, wealthy, successful, with big mansions and expensive carriages and their children all intelligent and beautiful. They live in the most prosperous and wealthy country in the world and they say that they are unhappy." The King dismissed everyone and cried.

The Queen would not give up. She sent the royal army to search the kingdom for a happy man. Sadly, the soldiers came back with the same story. They couldn't find a truly happy man. "Then go look far into the mountains. Find me that man," exclaimed the Queen.

Finally, one bright and sunny day way way up in the Huge-o-mous Mountains, Captain Pursuto heard a happy tune being sung down the mountainside. Curiously, the Captain found the cave where the song was coming from. When he looked inside, he saw a skinny man singing loudly.

"What do you have to sing about? You live in a cave and don't have anything. You are poor," the Captain scoffed.

"My song comes from the happiness in my heart," proudly answered the man.

"Happiness? In a cave?" The Captain laughed.

"Oh, but I am happy. I have everything I want and I don't desire what I cannot have," the Man said.

"Come with me then. I have to take you to my king, he must wear your shirt," the Captain said urgently.

The Captain jumped from his stead and pulled the man out of the cave by his arm. When they were outside in the sunlight, the Captain was shocked. He saw that the man did not have a shirt.