"The King and the Shirt"

by Leo Tolstoy

A king once fell ill. "I will give half my kingdom to the man who can cure me," he said.

All his wise men gathered together to decide how the king could be cured. But no one knew. Only one of the wise men said what he thought would cure the king. "If you can find a happy man, take his shirt, put it on the king—and the king will be cured."

The king sent his emissaries to search for a happy man. They traveled far and wide throughout his whole kingdom, but they could not find a happy man. There was no one who was completely satisfied: if a man was rich, he was ailing; if he was healthy, he was poor; if he was rich and healthy, he had a bad wife; or if he had children they were bad—everyone had something to complain of.

Late one night, the king's son was passing by a poor hut and he heard someone speak: "God be praised. I have finished my work. I have eaten my fill, and I can lie down and sleep! What more could I want?"

The king's son ordered that the man's shirt be taken and carried to the king. "Give the man as much money as he wants," said the king's son.

The emissaries walked into the hut to take off the man's shirt, but the happy man was so poor that he had no shirt.