

Be Satisfied

In a certain town there once lived a rich merchant. He was so greedy, so grasping, that he was never satisfied. He had many servants who slaved so hard from dawn to dusk that they never had a chance to stand upright for a moment. But to the merchant it seemed that they accomplished little during the day.

The merchant decided to advertise throughout the town that he would give one hundred dollars to the person who would succeed in prolonging the length of day.

A certain peasant heard about this and went to see the merchant. “They say that you are looking for a man who will prolong the day. I wish to ask you if this is true because nowadays there are more liars than you could shake a stick at.”

“And can you prolong the day?” asked the merchant.

“Believe me, I can,” said the peasant, not blinking an eye. “Not long ago at a certain squire’s place a machine was built that feeds him, quenches his thirst, removes his clothes and even tells folk tales when he dreams.”

The merchant was so overjoyed that he rubbed his hands. “Very well, if you can build a machine that lengthens the day, the hundred dollars will be yours.”

“Good. I’ll do my best,” the peasant agreed. “But you yourself will have to work this machine.”

“Well,” replied the merchant scratching his head, “if I have to, I’ll do it, providing the day will get longer.”

The peasant set to work. He made a large wooden wheel, attached it to an axle, added some wings as though on a windmill, fitted it with a handle and the machine was ready!

“Now my dear sir, you start to turn it,” said the peasant, pointing to the handle. “In the evening I’ll come for the money.”

Happy or not, the merchant got hold of the handle. The wheel started to turn; it hummed, it buzzed. He cranked it for an hour or two, until he became completely exhausted. Oh, how hard the work was! And besides that, one couldn’t stop, couldn’t rest, because the day would once more become shorter. In the sweat of his brow the merchant worked and kept looking at the sun. But it didn’t seem to be in any hurry to go to bed for a rest.

Suddenly the peasant who had built such a skilful machine appeared. “Well dear sir, how are things going?” he asked, and laughed.

“What can I say? The money is yours. The day has become so much longer. Would it be possible to get someone else to crank the machine? I wouldn’t mind paying some more money.”

“Why not, dear sir,” said the peasant. “But then the day won’t get any longer.”

The merchant waved his hand. “That’s neither here nor there. It’s six if one and half a dozen of the other. Let the day stay the same length as it was before.”