

THE BARBER

After a busy market day in the town, a trader wished to stay the night before returning home the next day. He enquired at the inn where he usually took his meals about a bed for the night. The landlord didn't want to disappoint his regular customer, but all his rooms were full — except one. This was a room in which nobody ever stayed the night, and which had not been used for years. It was supposed to be haunted by a strange spirit. His guest was not deterred, saying "After a long day, when I hit the sack I can sleep through anything. No ghost is going to bother me. And I really do need a bed for the night."

The landlord agreed and arranged for the maid to make up the room for his guest. In the meantime the trader retired to the bar where he enjoyed a glass or two of the local wine. It was soon very late, and taking a lamp with him, he went upstairs to his room. The bed was very comfortable and within minutes of his head hitting the pillow, he was fast asleep.

He had maybe slept a few hours — it was still dark — when he was awakened by a loud rattling of his door. It was probably some other drunken guest trying to find his room, so he was thankful that he had locked and bolted the door. So, he was more than a little surprised when he saw the door open. He was even more surprised when a little old man with a long grey beard drifted into the room. The little old man wandered over to the wall opposite the bed and took a small key out of his pocket. With the key he opened a hidden cupboard in the wall, took out a razor, brush and soap, and went to the washstand. After stropping the razor and lathering the brush, the little old man signalled that the trader should come over to him. —

The trader may have been nervous, but he did as he was bid. He got up out of bed, pulled on his trousers and walked over to the washstand. There he sat in the chair in front of the little old man. The little old man took the brush and thoroughly lathered the trader's beard. When he had finished soaping, the little old man took the sharp razor in his hand and — carefully gave the trader a perfect close shave.

The little old man then packed up his shaving equipment, leaving it on the washstand. Then, he sadly turned towards the door. But, the trader was an honest man who firmly believed that one good turn deserves another, and he understood the old man's miserable expression. He quickly stood up, and asked the old man to take his place in the seat, while unpacking the razor, brush and soap. The trader took the brush and thoroughly lathered the old man's long grey beard. When he had finished soaping, he took the sharp razor in his hand and carefully gave the old man an equally perfect close shave. Then, he packed up the old man's shaving equipment and left it on the washstand. When he saw himself in the mirror, freshly clean shaven, the old man smiled happily and nodded his thanks to the trader. As he turned to go, he placed the key in the trader's hand and winked.

When the trader opened the cupboard to return the shaving set, he found that it was not empty. Inside was a great treasure of gold and silver coins. He was now a very rich man, and with this wealth he became the greatest merchant in the country.