

The Millionaire Miser

Told by Aaron Shepard

Characters:

Narrators 1–4, Sushil, Boy, Nirmala, Sakka, Man, Woman, Rajah, (Servant), (Other Townspeople), (Children)

NARRATOR 1: Sushil was a miser. Though his treasure house was full, he was too stingy to give away even the smallest coin.

NARRATOR 4: And since food cost money, he ate almost nothing, and starved his family and servants besides.

NARRATOR 2: One morning, as Sushil took his daily walk through town, he saw a boy eating a sweet rice dumpling.

BOY: *(makes loud sounds of enjoyment as he eats)*

NARRATOR 3: Sushil's mouth watered as he made his way home. He said to himself,

SUSHIL: If only I could ask my wife to make me a sweet dumpling. But if *I* wanted one, so would my *wife*. And if my wife wanted one, so would the children. And if the children wanted one, so would the servants. So I had better just keep quiet.

NARRATOR 1: When Sushil arrived home, he said nothing about a dumpling. But he wanted one so badly, he felt weak. His legs shook, and he had to go to bed.

NARRATOR 4: His wife, Nirmala, came to him. She asked,

NIRMALA: What is wrong, my husband?

NARRATOR 2: Sushil lay groaning and clenched his teeth.

NIRMALA: Is there something you want?

NARRATOR 3: Sushil's face grew red, then purple. At last he squeaked,

SUSHIL: I would like a sweet rice dumpling.

NIRMALA: *That* is no problem. We are wealthy enough. Why, I will make sweet dumplings for the whole town!

SUSHIL: (*gasps*)

NARRATOR 1: Sushil gasped in horror.

SUSHIL: You will make a pauper of me!

NIRMALA: Well then, I will make dumplings for our family and servants.

SUSHIL: Why would the servants need any?

NIRMALA: Then I will make them for us and the children.

SUSHIL: I am sure the children can do without.

NIRMALA: Then I will make one for you and one for me.

SUSHIL: Why would *you* want one?

NARRATOR 4: Nirmala sighed and went out.

NARRATOR 2: After a while, she returned with a single sweet dumpling.

NARRATOR 3: Then she looked on as Sushil, moaning with delight, devoured every crumb.

SUSHIL: (*makes loud sounds of enjoyment as he eats*)

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NARRATOR 1: Now, it happened that all this was seen by Sakka, the King of Heaven, who was sitting on his marble throne in his thousand-mile-high palace.

SAKKA: (*appalled, looking down to earth*) Not in seventy-seven millennia have I ever seen such a miser! I will teach this fellow not to be so stingy.

NARRATOR 4: So the god waited till the next day, when Sushil left on his morning walk. Then he made himself look just like Sushil and came down to earth.

NARRATOR 2: Sakka walked into Sushil's house as if he were Sushil himself.

NARRATOR 3: In Sushil's own voice he told a servant,

SAKKA: (*imitating Sushil*) Run through the town and invite everyone you see. Today Sushil will share his wealth!

SERVANT: (*excitedly bows and runs off*)

NARRATOR 1: When Nirmala heard these words, she cried,

NIRMALA: Husband, can this be true? Heaven be praised for your change of heart!

NARRATOR 4: Then she helped him open the treasure house.

TOWNSPEOPLE (including WOMAN, MAN, BOY): (*enter*)

NARRATOR 2: Soon the people of the town arrived. The pretend Sushil told them,

SAKKA: Take what you will! And if anyone who looks like me tries to stop you, drive away the scoundrel!

MAN: Thanks to Lord Sushil!

WOMAN: The most generous man alive!

NARRATOR 3: They rushed into the treasure house and loaded themselves with gold, silver, diamonds, and pearls.

NARRATOR 1: Just then, the real Sushil came home.

NARRATOR 4: When he saw his treasure being carried out the gate, he screamed,

SUSHIL: Robbers! Thieves! Put that back! How dare you!

NARRATOR 2: But the townspeople said,

BOY: This must be the one that Lord Sushil warned us about!

NARRATOR 3: And they chased Sushil halfway across town.

WOMAN: (*chasing Sushil*) Be off with you!

MAN: (*chasing Sushil*) And don't show your face again!

NARRATOR 1: The crowd turned back. Sushil rushed on to the court of the Rajah.

SUSHIL: (*arriving out of breath, speaking frantically*) Your Majesty, the people of the town are taking all I own!

RAJAH: But your own servant invited them!

NARRATOR 4: . . . said the Rajah.

RAJAH: I heard him myself. Did you not give the order?

SUSHIL: Never! If the order was given, I beg you to bring the one who gave it!

NARRATOR 2: So the Rajah sent a messenger.

NARRATOR 3: Soon came Sakka, still pretending to be Sushil, along with Nirmala and the children. The children stared wide-eyed at the two Sushils, and Nirmala nearly fainted.

SUSHIL: Impostor!

SAKKA: Deceiver!

RAJAH: (*bewildered, looking from one to the other*) I cannot tell the difference between you!

NARRATOR 1: . . . said the Rajah. He turned to Nirmala.

RAJAH: Can *you* say which is the true Sushil?

NARRATOR 4: Nirmala looked at both men.

NIRMALA: Your Majesty, may I ask them a question?

RAJAH: Certainly.

NARRATOR 2: Nirmala turned to Sakka.

NIRMALA: Is it better to be generous to yourself, to your family, to your servants, or to your neighbors?

SAKKA: It is best to be generous to all! When you are generous, others also grow generous, and everyone is wealthier.

NARRATOR 3: Then Nirmala turned to Sushil.

NIRMALA: Is it better to be generous to yourself, to your family, to your servants, or to your neighbors?

SUSHIL: To none! It is a waste of wealth that can never be regained!

NARRATOR 1: Nirmala took a deep breath. She gathered the children, then drew close to Sakka.

NIRMALA: This is the true Sushil, Your Majesty.

SUSHIL: But, Nirmala! My wife! My children!

NARRATOR 4: At that, the god stepped forward. With a blinding flash of light, he changed back to his own shape.

SAKKA: Your Majesty, I am not Sushil but Sakka. I came down from Heaven to teach this man a lesson!

NARRATOR 2: He turned to the trembling and downcast Sushil.

SAKKA: Do you see? You are so stingy, even your wife and children deny you!

SUSHIL: (*moans*)

SAKKA: There is but one hope for you. Will you stop being such a miser?

SUSHIL: (*hesitantly*) Well . . . maybe I could be a *little* more generous.

SAKKA: (*sternly*) A *little* more?

SUSHIL: Well . . . maybe a little *more* than a little more.

SAKKA: You had better be a *lot* more generous. Or I'll be back!

NARRATOR 3: And with another flash of light, he vanished.

RAJAH: (*to Sushil*) Well!

NARRATOR 1: . . . said the Rajah to Sushil.

RAJAH: It seems you indeed have been taught a good lesson!

SUSHIL: I suppose so, Your Majesty.

NARRATOR 4: He turned shyly to Nirmala and held out his hand.

SUSHIL: (*questioningly*) Wife?

NARRATOR 2: Nirmala took it.

NIRMALA: (*smiling at him*) Husband! Oh, Sushil, let us celebrate! I have an idea. Let us make sweet rice dumplings for the entire town!

SUSHIL: (*gasps*)

NARRATOR 3: Sushil gasped in horror.

NARRATOR 1: His legs shook.

NARRATOR 4: He groaned and clenched his teeth.

NARRATOR 2: His face grew red, then purple.

NARRATOR 3: Then he squeaked,

SUSHIL: All right!