

Sujan's Gifts

Adapted from an Indian folktale



Long ago, in India, a young grass-cutter named Sujan lived a simple life, alone in a tiny hut. He spent his earnings wisely and saved rupees in a jar, hoping to one day marry and start a family. At night, he prayed for peace in his homeland, which had long been at war with a neighboring kingdom.

The villagers said that King Nalin, who ruled the land, had failed to send a gift to Queen Ashna when she took the throne, as was the custom in the nearby empire. The queen was offended and thought King Nalin did not accept her as an equal. Their conflict quickly became a war, bringing sadness and fear to both lands.

Every day, Sujan passed the wide Dosti River that separated the two kingdoms. Both sides of the river were lined with poor villagers who had lost much due to the war. One day, Sujan decided to help. He counted his rupees and filled a pouch with coins. He took it to a courier boy and said, "Please take this to King Nalin. Ask him to use it to help the poor families along the Dosti River, and tell him I pray for *shanti*."

A few days later, the courier returned with a gift from the king—a dozen golden bangles! "What? What should I do with these?" gasped Sujan.

"You could sell them."

Sujan looked at the bracelets, thinking of all who were suffering in the war. He had an idea. "Take them to Queen Ashna and ask her to help her people along the Dosti River. Tell her I pray for *shanti*."

"But she and her people are barbarians!"

Sujan said firmly, "We're all human. Kindness may help bring peace."

The courier sped through Queen Ashna's land. He wanted to avoid her savage people. But he saw with surprise that Queen Ashna's kingdom and people were much like his own. The queen accepted the gift and sent Sujan a trunk of the finest Indian silk, embroidered with proud peacocks.

"What's going on here?" exclaimed Sujan. He sent the magnificent silk to King Nalin, along with another plea to help the poor.

The courier returned with a lotus blossom made of pearls—a symbol of honor. Sujan groaned, "What do I do now? I'm caught in a web of stuff I don't need. Please, take this to the queen. Tell her that all I *really* want is *shanti*."

At the palace, the courier heard the queen say, "Sujan must want *something* for himself. Why does he only ask for peace?"

"It could be a trick," her advisor said.

"I will send a gift he can never repay," declared the queen. Her servants brought a life-size marble sculpture of an elephant. She ordered, "Take this to Sujan—it is a symbol of power. Tell him *shanti* will come when King Nalin admits he was wrong."

The courier's horses slowly dragged the elephant to Sujan. Sujan's mouth dropped open. "I've never dreamed of such a thing!" he said. "Please, take it to King Nalin."

When the king saw the elephant, he too was astonished. "Whoever this Sujan is, he shows loyalty. Summon him, and I will make him an advisor." He sent Sujan a dozen *real* elephants, each carrying a tapestry!



Sujan was horrified. “Elephants? And he wants me to move to the palace? I just want to live in peace.”

“You can’t turn down the king,” said the courier.

“But when he sees I’m not wealthy and well educated, he’ll think I’ve fooled him. He’ll throw me in the dungeon—or worse. Take these to the queen. I’ll pray for an answer.”

When the queen saw the powerful elephants, she smiled. “I *must* meet Sujan. Where can I find him?”

“He—he—has been invited to be an advisor in King Nalin’s court,” the boy stammered.

“Such a noble man belongs in *my* court. I will go there with my guards. Take a message to the king.”

The courier was relieved to meet Sujan on the road, and they hurried to the king’s palace. The queen’s carriage soon arrived. All bowed low as King Nalin rode out to meet her.

“King Nalin,” Queen Ashna said sternly, “I wish to see the one called Sujan.”

King Nalin looked at her in surprise. “What do *you* want with Sujan? In fact, I wish to meet him myself.” He told the courier, “Bring Sujan to me.”

The courier mumbled, “I—uh—that is, Your Majesty—”

Sujan stepped forward. “Your Majesties, I am Sujan. I’m honored by your invitation. I sent those gifts to convey my prayers for shanti.”

The queen said suspiciously, “How could *you* send the gifts? You are just a peasant. A grass-cutter, I see.”

Sujan told them how he had wanted to share his



savings to help the war-torn families along the river. The queen said, “Well, if your king had been as considerate when I took the throne, we would not be at war.”

The king said, “If you had inquired, instead of hurling insults, you would have known it is not our custom to send gifts to a new ruler. We hold a festival instead. One was held in *your* honor.”

“I never knew that!” the queen said angrily.

“You called me a selfish pig and seized my land before I could say a thing!” the king yelled.

Bowing even lower, Sujan dared to interrupt. “Please, Your Majesties, your gifts show that you are *both* generous and good. Maybe it’s time for a new start.”

The queen and king glowered at him, then began to relax. The queen said, “You have a pure heart, Sujan. Few would let such wealth pass through their hands. Perhaps I will consider your advice.”

And so Queen Ashna and King Nalin began to talk. In time, they established peace, and everyone rejoiced. Sujan became an advisor after all, and he was given the job of rebuilding the land along the Dosti River. He urged the king and queen to work together. To the surprise of all, they grew to enjoy each other’s company. They were later married!

And though he was happy for the king and queen, Sujan did *not* send them a wedding gift.

