Ja 125 — Katahaka Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja125.html

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

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Pinned source revision: https://github.com/suttacentral/sc-data/commit/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

Scope: Complete numbered source article from the traditional Jātaka commentary; canonical verses appear in story context. This is not a verse-only edition.

Changes: Converted the pinned SuttaCentral HTML article to plain text; removed inline print page-reference labels and normalized whitespace. The original source retains references.

Text

"If he 'mid strangers."—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a boastful Brother. The introductory story about him is like what has been already related.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was a rich Treasurer, and his wife bore him a son. And the selfsame day a female slave in his house gave birth to a boy, and the two children grew up together. And when the rich man's son was being taught to write, the young slave used to go with his young master's tablets and so learned at the same time to write himself. Next he learned two or three handicrafts, and grew up to be a fair-spoken and handsome young man; and his name was Katahaka. Being employed as private secretary, he thought to himself, "I shall not always be kept at this work. The slightest fault and I shall be beaten, imprisoned, branded, and fed on slave's fare. On the border there lives a merchant, a friend of my master's. Why should I not go to him with a letter purporting to come from my master, and, passing myself off as my master's son, marry the merchant's daughter and live happily ever afterwards?

So he wrote a letter, saying, "The bearer of this is my son. It is meet that our houses should be united in marriage, and I would have you give your daughter to this my son and keep the young couple near you for the present. As soon as I can conveniently do so, I will come to you." This letter he sealed with his master's private seal, and came to the border-merchant's with a well-filled purse, handsome dresses, and perfumes and the like. And with a bow he stood before the merchant. "Where do you come from?" said the merchant. "From Benares." "Who is your father?" "The Treasurer of Benares." "And what brings you here?" "This letter will tell you," said Katahaka, handing it to him. The merchant read the letter and exclaimed, "This gives me new life." And in his joy he gave his daughter to Katahaka and set up the young couple, who lived in great style. But Katahaka gave himself airs, and used to find fault with the victuals and the clothes that were brought him, calling them "provincial." "These misguided provincials," he would say, "have no idea of dressing. And as for taste in scents and garlands, they've got none."

Missing his slave, the Bodhisatta said, “I don’t see Katahaka. Where has he gone? Find him.” And off went the Bodhisatta’s people in quest of him, and searched far and wide till they found him. Then back they came, without Katahaka recognizing them, and told the Bodhisatta.

“This will never do,” said the Bodhisatta on hearing the news. “I will go and bring him back.” So he asked the King’s permission, and departed with a great following. And the tidings spread everywhere that the Treasurer was on his way to the borders. Hearing the news Katahaka fell to thinking of his course of action. He knew that he was the sole reason of the Treasurer’s coming, and he saw that to run away now was to destroy all chance of returning. So he decided to go to meet the Treasurer, and conciliate him by acting as a slave towards him as in the old days. Acting on this plan, he made a point of proclaiming in public on all occasions his disapprobation of the lamentable decay of respect towards parents which shewed itself in children’s sitting down to meals with their parents, instead of waiting upon them. “When my parents take their meals,” said Katahaka, “I hand the plates and dishes, bring the spittoon, and fetch their fans for them. Such is my invariable practice.” And he explained carefully a slave’s duty to his master, such as bringing the water and ministering to him when he retired. And having already schooled folk in general, he had said to his father-in-law shortly before the arrival of the Bodhisatta, “I hear that my father is coming to see you. You had better make ready to entertain him, while I will go and meet him on the road with a present.” “Do so, my dear boy,” said his father-in-law.

So Katahaka took a magnificent present and went out with a large retinue to meet the Bodhisatta, to whom he handed the present with a low obeisance. The Bodhisatta took the present in a kindly way, and at breakfast time made his encampment and retired for the purposes of nature. Stopping his retinue, Katahaka took water and approached the Bodhisatta. Then the young man fell at the Bodhisatta’s feet and cried, “Oh, sir, I will pay any sum you may require; but do not expose me.”

“Fear no exposure at my hands,” said the Bodhisatta, pleased at his dutiful conduct, and entered into the city, where he was feted with great magnificence. And Katahaka still acted as his slave.

As the Treasurer sat at his ease, the border-merchant said, “My Lord, upon receipt of your letter I duly gave my daughter in marriage to your son.” And the Treasurer made a suitable reply about ‘his son’ in so kindly a way that the merchant was delighted beyond measure. But from that time forth the Bodhisatta could not bear the sight of Katahaka.

One day the Great Being sent for the merchant’s daughter and said, “My dear, please look my head over.” She did so, and he thanked her for her much-needed services, adding, “And now tell me, my dear, whether my son is a reasonable man in weal and woe, and whether you manage to get on well with him.”

“My husband has only one fault. He will find fault with his food.”

“He has always had his faults, my dear; but I will tell you how to stop his tongue. I will tell you a text which you must learn carefully and repeat to your husband when he finds fault again with his food.” And he taught her the lines and shortly afterwards set out for Benares. Katahaka accompanied him part of the way, and took his leave after offering most valuable presents to the Treasurer. Dating from the departure of the Bodhisatta, Katahaka waxed prouder and prouder. One day his wife ordered a nice dinner, and began to help him to it with a spoon, but at the first mouthful Katahaka began to grumble. Thereon the merchant’s daughter remembering her lesson, repeated the following stanza—

If he ‘mid strangers far from home talks big,

Back comes his visitor to spoil it all.

—Come, eat your dinner then, Katahaka.

“Dear me,” thought Katahaka, “the Treasurer must have informed her of my name, and have told her the whole story.” And from that day forth he gave himself no more airs, but humbly ate what was set before him, and at his death passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, “This bumptious Brother was the Katahaka of those days, and I the Treasurer of Benares.”

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Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

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