Ja 202 — Keli-Sila Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol2/ja202.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

“Geese, herons, elephants,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about Lakuntaka the venerable and good.

Now this venerable Lakuntaka, we learn, was well known in the faith of the Buddha, a famous man, speaking sweet words, a honeyed preacher, of keen discernment, with his passions perfectly subdued, but in stature the smallest of all the eighty Elders, no bigger than a novice, like a dwarf kept for amusement.

One day, he had been to the gate of Jetavana to salute the Buddha, when thirty brothers from the country arrived at the gate on their way to salute him too. When they saw the Elder, they imagined him to be some novice; they pulled the corner of his robe, they caught his hands, held his head, tweaked his nose, got him by the ears and shook him, and handled him very rudely; then after putting aside their bowl and robe, they visited the Master and saluted him. Next they asked him, “Sir, we understand that you have an Elder who goes by the name of Lakuntaka the Good, a honeyed preacher. Where is he?” “Do you want to see him?” the Master asked. “Yes, Sir.” “He is the man you saw by the gate, and twitched his robe and pulled him about with great rudeness before you came here.” “Why, Sir,” asked they, “how is it that a man devoted to prayer, full of high aspirations, a true disciple—how is it he is so insignificant?” “Because of his own sins,” answered the Master; and at their request he told them an old-world tale.

Once upon a time, when king Brahmadatta reigned in Benares, the Bodhisatta became Sakka, king of the gods. Brahmadatta could not endure to look upon anything old or decrepit, whether elephant, horse, ox, or what not. He was full of pranks, and whenever he saw any such, he would chase them away; old carts he had broken up; any old women that he saw he sent for, and beat upon the belly, then stood them up again and gave them a scare; he made old men roll about and play on the ground like tumblers. If he saw none, but only heard that there was a greybeard in such and such a town, he sent for him thence

and took his sport with him.

At this the people for very shame sent their parents outside the boundaries of the kingdom. No more did men tend or care for their mother and father. The king's friends were as wanton as he. As men died, they filled up the four worlds of unhappiness; the company of the gods grew less and less.

Sakka saw that there were no newcomers among the gods; and he cast about him what was to be done. At last he hit upon a plan. "I will humble him!" thought Sakka; and he took upon him the form of an old man, and placing two jars of buttermilk in a crazy old waggon, he yoked to it a pair of old oxen, and set out upon a feast day. Brahmadatta, mounted upon a richly caparisoned elephant, was making a solemn procession about the city, which was all decorated; and Sakka, clad in rags, and driving this cart, came to meet the king. When the king saw the old cart, he shouted, "Away with that cart, you!" But his people answered, "Where is it, my lord? we cannot see any cart!" (for Sakka by his power let it be seen by no one but the king). And, coming up to the king repeatedly, at last Sakka, still driving his cart, smashed one of the jars upon the king's head, and made him turn round; then he smashed the other in like manner. And the buttermilk trickled down on either side of his head. Thus was the king plagued and tormented, and made miserable by Sakka's doings.

When Sakka saw his distress, he made the cart disappear, and took his proper shape again. Poised in mid-air, thunderbolt in hand, he upbraided him—"O wicked and unrighteous king! Will you never become old yourself? Will not age assail you? Yet you sport and mock, and do despite to those who are old! It is through you alone, and these doings of yours, that men die on every hand, and fill up the four worlds of unhappiness, and that men cannot care for their parents' welfare! If you do not cease from this, I will cleave your head with my thunderbolt. Go, and do so no more."

With this rebuke, he declared the worth of parents, and made known the advantage of reverencing old age; after which discourse he departed to his own place. From that time forward the king never so much as thought of doing anything like what he had done before.

This story ended, the Master, becoming perfectly enlightened, recited these two couplets—

"Geese, herons, elephants, and spotted deer

Though all unlike, alike the lion fear.

"Even so, a child is great if he be clever;

Fools may be big, but great they can be never."

When this discourse was ended, the Master declared the Truths and identified the Birth—at the conclusion of the Truths some of those Brethren entered on the First Path, some on the Second, and some upon the Fourth—"The excellent Lakuntaka was the king in the story, who made people the butt for his jests and then became a butt himself, whilst I myself was Sakka."

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

Vol. 1, translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895.

Vol. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

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

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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.