Ja 318 — Kanavera Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol3/ja318.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

"'Twas the joyous time," etc.—This was a story told by the Master at Jetavana, about a Brother who was tempted by thoughts of the wife he had left.—The circumstances that led up to the story will be set forth in the Indriya Birth. —The Master, addressing this Brother, said, "Once before, through her, you had your head cut off." And then he related a legend of the past.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born in a village of Kasi in the home of a certain householder, under the star of a robber. When he grew up to be a man, he gained his living by robbery, and his fame was blazed abroad in the world, as a bold fellow and as strong as an elephant. And no man could catch him. One day he broke into a rich merchant's house and carried off much treasure. The townsfolk came to the king and said, "Sire, a mighty robber is plundering the city: have him arrested." The king ordered the governor of the city to seize him. So in the night the governor posted men here and there in detachments, and having effected his capture with the money upon him, he reported it to the king. The king bade the governor cut off his head. Then the governor had his arms tightly bound behind him, and having tied a wreath of red kanavera flowers about his neck and sprinkled brickdust on his head, had him scourged with whips in every square, and then led to the place of execution to the music of the harsh-sounding drum. Men said, "This rapacious robber who loots our city is taken," and the whole city was greatly moved.

At this time there lived in Benares a courtezan named Sama, whose price was a thousand pieces of money. She was a favourite of the king's, and had a suite of five hundred female slaves. And as she stood at an open window on the upper floor of the palace, she saw this robber being led along. Now he was comely and gracious to look upon, and stood forth above all men, exceedingly glorious and god-like in appearance. And when she saw him being thus led past, she fell in love with him and thought within herself, "By what device can I secure this man for my husband? " " This is the way," she said, and sent by the hand of

one of her female attendants a thousand pieces of money to the governor, and “Tell him,” she said, “this robber is Sama’s brother, and he has no other refuge except in Sama. And ask him to accept the money and let his prisoner escape.” The handmaid did as she was told. But the governor said, “This is a notorious robber, I cannot let him go free after this sort. But if I could find another man as a substitute, I could put the robber in a covered carriage and send him to you.” The slave came and reported this to her mistress.

Now at this time a certain rich young merchant, who was enamoured of Sama, presented her every day with a thousand pieces of money. And that very day at sunset her lover came as usual to her house with the money. And Sama took the money and placed it in her lap and sat weeping. And when she was asked what was the cause of her sorrow, she said, “My lord, this robber is my brother, though he never came to see me, because people say I follow a vile trade: when I sent a message to the governor he sent word that if he were to receive a thousand pieces of money, he would let his prisoner go free. And now I cannot find any one to go and take this money to the governor.” The youth for the love he bare her said, “I will go.” “Go, then,” said she, “and take with you the money you brought me.” So he took it and went to the house of the governor. The governor hid the young merchant in a secret place, and had the robber conveyed in a close carriage to Sama. Then he thought, “This robber is well known in the country. It must be quite dark first. And then, when all men are retired to rest, I will have the man executed.” And so making some excuse for delaying it awhile, when people had retired to rest, he sent the young merchant with a large escort to the place of execution, and cutting off his head with a sword impaled his body, and returned into the city.

Thenceforth Sama accepted nought at any other man’s hand, but passed all her time, taking her pleasure with this robber only. The thought occurred to the robber: “If this woman should fall in love with any one else, she will have me too put to death, and take her pleasure with him. She is very treacherous to her friends. I must no longer dwell here, but make haste to escape.” When he was going away, he thought, “I will not go empty-handed, but will take some of the ornaments belonging to her.” So one day he said to her, “My dear, we always stay indoors like tame cockatoos in a cage. Some day we will disport ourselves in the garden.” She readily assented and prepared every kind of food, hard and soft, and decked herself out with all her ornaments, and drove to the garden with him seated in a close carriage. While he was disporting himself with her, he thought, “Now must be the time for me to escape.” So under a show of violent affection for her, he entered into a thicket of kanavera bushes, and pretending to embrace her, he squeezed her till she became insensible. Then throwing her down he spoiled her of all her ornaments, and fastening them in her outer garment he placed the bundle on his shoulder, and leaping over the garden wall made off.

And when she had recovered consciousness, rising up she went and asked her attendants, what had become of her young lord. “We do not know, lady.” “He thinks,” she said, “I am dead, and must in his alarm have run away.” And being distressed at the thought, she returned thence to her house, and said, “Not till I have set eyes on my dear lord, will I rest upon a sumptuous couch,” and she lay down upon the ground. And from that day she neither put on comely garments, nor ate more than one meal, nor affected scents and

wreaths and the like. And being resolved to seek and recover her lover by every possible means, she sent for some actors and gave them a thousand pieces of money. On their asking, “What are we to do for this, lady?” She said, “There is no place that you do not visit. Go then to every village, town and city, and gathering a crowd around you, first of all sing this song in the midst of the people,”—teaching the actors the first stanza,—“And if,” said she, “when you have sung this song, my husband shall be one of the crowd, he will speak to you. Then you may tell him I am quite well, and bring him back with you. And should he refuse to come, send me a message.” And giving them their expenses for the journey, she sent them off. They started from Benares, and calling the people together here and there, at last arrived at a border-village. Now the robber, since his flight, was living here. And the actors gathered a crowd about them, and sang the first stanza—

’Twas the joyous time of spring,

Bright with flowers each shrub and tree,

From her swoon awakening

Sama lives, and lives for thee.

The robber on hearing this drew nigh to the actor, and said, “You say that Sama is alive, but I do not believe it.” And addressing him he repeated the second stanza:

Can fierce winds a mountain shake?

Can they make firm earth to quake?

But alive the dead to see

Marvel stranger far would be!

The actor on hearing these words uttered the third stanza:

Sama surely is not dead,

Nor another lord would wed.

Fasting from all meals but one,

She loves thee and thee alone.

The robber on hearing this said, “Whether she be alive or dead, I don’t want her,” and with these words he repeated the fourth stanza:

Sama’s fancy ever roves

From tried faith to lighter loves:

Me too Sama would betray,

Were I not to flee away.

The actors came and told Sama how he had dealt with them. And she, full of regrets, took once more to her old course of life.

The Master, when his lesson was ended, revealed the Truths and identified the Birth—At the conclusion of the Truths the worldly-minded Brother attained to fruition of the First Path—“At that time this Brother was the rich merchant’s son, the wife he had left was Sama, and I myself was the robber.”

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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