Ja 411 — Susima 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/ja411.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

“Heretofore the hairs,” etc.—The Master told this tale while dwelling in Jetavana, about the Great Renunciation. The Brethren were sitting in the Hall of Truth, praising the Buddha’s renunciation. The Master, finding that this was their topic, said, “Brethren, it is not strange that I should now make the Great Renunciation and retirement from the world, I who have for many hundred thousand ages exercised perfection: of old also I gave up the reign over the kingdom of Kasi, three hundred leagues in extent, and made the renunciation,” and so he told the old tale.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was conceived in the womb of his priest’s chief wife. On the day of his birth, the king also had a son born. On the naming day they called the Great Being Susima-Kumara, and the king’s son Brahmadatta-Kumara. The king, seeing the two were born on the same day, had the Bodhisatta given to the nurse and brought up together with his own son. They both grew up fair, like sons of gods: they both learned all sciences at Takkasila and came home again. The prince became viceroy, eating, drinking, and living along with the Bodhisatta: at his father’s death he became king, giving great honour to the Bodhisatta and making him his priest: one day he adorned the city, and decked like Sakka, king of gods, he went round the city in procession, seated on the shoulder of a royal elephant in his pride, equal to Eravana, with the Bodhisatta behind on the elephant’s back. The queen-mother, looking out from the royal window to see her son, saw the priest behind him as he came back from the procession: she fell in love with him and entering her chamber thought, “If I cannot win him, I shall die here “: so she left her food and lay there. The king, not seeing her, asked after her: when he heard she was ill, he went to her, and asked with respect what ailed her. She would not tell for shame. He sat on the royal throne, and sent his own chief queen to find what ailed his mother. She went and asked, stroking the queen-mother’s back. Women do not hide secrets from women: and the secret was told. The queen went and told the king. He said, “Well, go and comfort her: I will make the priest king, and make her his chief queen.” She went and comforted her. The king sent for the priest and told him the

matter, “Friend, save my mother’s life: thou shalt be king, she thy chief queen, I viceroy.” The priest said, “It cannot be “ but being asked again he consented: and the king made the priest king, the queen-mother chief queen, and himself viceroy. They lived all in harmony together, but the Bodhisatta pined amid a householder’s life: he left desires and leaned to a religious life: careless of the pleasures of sense he stood and sat and lay alone, like a man bound in jail or a cock in a cage. The chief queen thought, “The king avoids me, he stands and sits and lies alone; he is young and fresh, I am old and have grey hairs: what if I were to tell him a story that he has one grey hair, make him believe it and seek my company? “ One day, as if cleaning the king’s head, she said, “Your majesty is getting old, there is a grey hair on your head.” “Pull it out and put it in my hand.” She pulled a hair out, but threw it away and put into his hand one of her own grey hairs. When he saw it, fear of death made the sweat start from his forehead, though it was like a plate of gold. He admonished himself, saying, “Susima, you have become old in your youth; all this time sunk in the mud of desire, like a village pig wallowing in filth and mire, you cannot leave it: quit desires, and become an ascetic in the Himalaya: it is high time for the religious life,” and with this thought, he uttered the first stanza—

Heretofore the hairs were dark

Clustering about my brow;

White to-day: Susima, mark!

Time for religion now!

So the Bodhisatta praised the religious life: but the queen saw she had caused him to leave her instead of loving her, and in fear, wishing to keep him from the religious life by praising his body, she uttered two stanzas—

Mine, not thine, the silvered hair;

Mine the head from which it came:

For thy good the lie I dare:

One such fault forbear to blame!

Thou art young, and fair to see,

Like a tender plant in spring!

Keep thy kingdom, smile on me!

Seek not now what age will bring!

But the Bodhisatta said, “Lady, you tell of what must come: as age ripens, these dark hairs must turn and become pale like betel: I see the change and breaking up of body that

comes in years, in the ripening of age, to royal maids and all the rest, though they are tender as a wreath of blue lotus-flowers, fair as gold, and drunken with the pride of their glorious youth: such, lady, is the dreary end of living beings," and, moreover, showing the truth with the charm of a Buddha, he uttered two stanzas—

I have marked the youthful maid,

Swaying like the tender stalk,

In her pride of form arrayed;

Men are witched where'er she walk.

'Tis the same one I have scanned

(Eighty, ninety, years have passed),

Quivering, palsied, staff in hand,

Bent like rafter-tree at last.

In this stanza the Great Being showed the misery of beauty, and now declared his discontent with the householder's life—

Such the thoughts I ponder o'er;

Lonely nights the thoughts allow:

Layman's life I love no more:

Time for religion now!

Delight in layman's life is a weak stay:

The wise man cuts it off and goes his way,

Renouncing joys of sense and all their sway.

Thus declaring both the delight and misery of desires, he showed the truth with all a Buddha's charm, he sent for his friend and made him take the kingdom again: he left his majesty and power amid the loud lamentations of kinsmen and friends; he became an ascetic sage in the Himalaya, and entering on the ecstasy of meditation, became destined for the world of Brahma.

After the lesson, the Master declared the Truths, and giving the drink of ambrosia to many, he identified the Birth: "At that time the chief queen was the mother of Rahula, the king was Ananda, and king Susima was I myself."

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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