Ja 417 — Kaccani 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/ja417.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

“Robed in white,” etc.—The Master told this tale while dwelling at Jetavana, concerning a man who supported his mother. The story is that the man was of good family and conduct in Savatthi: on his father’s death he became devoted to his mother and tended her with the services of mouth-washing, teeth-cleansing, bathing, feet-washing and the like, and also by giving her gruel, rice and other food. She said to him, “Dear son, there are other duties in a householder’s life: you must marry a maid of a suitable family, who will attend to me, and then you can do your proper work.” “Mother, it is for my own good and pleasure that I wait on you: who else would wait on you so well?” “Son, you ought to do something to advance the fortune of our house.” “I have no care for a householder’s life; I will wait on you, and after you are dead and burned I will become an ascetic.” She pressed him again and again: and at last, without winning him over or gaining his consent, she brought him a maid of a suitable family. He married and lived with her, because he would not oppose his mother. She observed the great attention with which her husband waited on his mother, and desirous of imitating it she too waited on her with care. Noticing his wife’s devotion, he gave her thenceforth all the pleasant food he could get. As time went on she foolishly thought in her pride, “He gives me all the pleasant food he gets: he must be anxious to get rid of his mother and I will find some means for doing so.” So one day she said, “Husband, your mother scolds me when you leave the house.” He said nothing. She thought, “I will irritate the old woman and make her disagreeable to her son”: and thenceforth she gave her rice-gruel either very hot or very cold or very salt or saltless. When the old woman complained that it was too hot or too salt, she threw in cold water enough to fill the dish: and then on complaints of its being cold and saltless, she would make a great outcry, “Just now you said it was too hot and too salt: who can satisfy you?” So at the bath she would throw very hot water on the old woman’s back: when she said, “Daughter, my back is burning,” the other would throw some very cold water on her, and on complaints of this, she would make a story to the neighbours, “This woman said just now it was too hot, now she screams “it is too cold”: who can endure her impudence?” If the old woman complained that her bed was full of fleas, she would take the bed out and shake her own bed over it

and then bring it back declaring, “I’ve given it a shake”: the good old lady, having twice as many fleas biting her now, would spend the night sitting up and complain of being bitten all night; the other would retort, “Your bed was shaken yesterday and the day before too: who can satisfy all such a woman’s needs?” To set the old woman’s son against her, she would scatter phlegm and mucus and grey hairs here and there, and when he asked who was making the whole house so dirty, she would say, “Your mother does it; but if she is told not to do so, she makes an outcry: I can’t stay in the same house with such an old witch: you must decide whether she stays or I.” He hearkened to her and said, “Wife, you are yet young and can get a living wherever you go: but my mother is weak and I am her stay: go and depart to your own kin.” When she heard this, she was afraid and thought, “He cannot break with his mother who is so very dear to him: but if I go to my old home, I shall have a miserable life of separation: I will conciliate my mother-in-law and tend her as of old”: and thenceforth she did so. One day that lay brother went to Jetavana to hear the law: saluting the Master he stood on one side. The Master asked him if he were not careless of his old duties, if he were dutiful in tending his mother. He answered, “Yes, Lord: my mother brought me a maid to wife against my will, she did such and such unseemly things,” telling him all, “but the woman could not make me break with my mother, and now she tends her with all respect.” The Master heard the story and said, “This time you would not do her bidding: but formerly you cast out your mother at her bidding and owing to me took her back again to your house and tended her”: and at the man’s request he told the tale of old.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, a young man of a certain family on his father’s death devoted himself to his mother and tended her as in the introductory story: the details are to be given in full as above. But in this case, when his wife said she could not live with the old witch and he must decide which of them should go, he took her word that his mother was in fault and said, “Mother, you are always raising strife in the house: henceforth go and live in some other place, where you choose.” She obeyed, weeping, and going to a certain friend’s house, she worked for wages and with difficulty made a living. After she left, her daughter-in-law conceived a child, and went about saying to her husband and the neighbours that such a thing could never have happened as long as the old witch was in the house. After the child was born, she said to her husband, “I never had a son while your mother stayed in the house, but now I have: so you can see what a witch she was.” The old woman heard that the son’s birth was thought to be due to her leaving the house, and she thought, “Surely Right must be dead in the world: if it were not so, these people would not have got a son and a comfortable life after beating and casting out their mother: I will make an offering for the dead Right.” So one day she took ground sesame and rice and a little pot and a spoon: she went to a cemetery of corpses and kindled a fire under an oven made with three human skulls: then she went down into the water, bathed herself head and all, washed her garment and coming back to her fireplace, she loosened her hair and began to wash the rice.

The Bodhisatta was at that time Sakka, king of heaven; and the Bodhisattas are vigilant. At the instant he saw, in his survey of the world, that the poor old woman was making a death-offering to Right as if Right were dead. Wishing to shew his power in helping her, he came down disguised as a brahmin travelling on the high road: at sight of her he left the road and standing near her, began a conversation by saying, “Mother, people do not cook

food in cemeteries: what are you going to do with this sesame and rice when cooked?" So he spoke the first stanza—

Robed in white, with dripping hair,

Why, Kaccani, boil the pot?

Washing rice and sesame there,

Will you use them when they're hot?

She spoke the second stanza to give him information—

Brahmin, not for food will I

Use the sesame and the rice:

Right is dead; its memory

I would crown with sacrifice.

Then Sakka spoke the third stanza—

Lady, think ere you decide:

Who has told you such a lie?

Strong in might and thousand-eyed

Perfect Right can never die.

Hearing him, the woman spoke two stanzas—

Brahmin, I have witness strong,

"Right is dead" I must believe:

All men now who follow wrong

Great prosperity receive.

Barren once, my good son's spouse

Beats me, and she bears a son:

She is lady of our house,

I an outcast and undone.

Then Sakka spoke the sixth stanza—

Nay, I live eternally;

'Twas for your sake that I came:

She beat you; but her son and she

Shall be ashes in my flame.

Hearing him, she cried, "Alas, what say you? I will try to save my grandson from death," and so she spoke the seventh stanza—

King of gods, your will be done:

If for me you left the sky,

May my children and their son

Live with me in amity.

Then Sakka spoke the eighth stanza—

Katiyani's will be done:

Beaten, you still on Right rely:

With your children and their son

Share one home in amity.

After saying this, Sakka, now in all his divine apparel, stood in the air by his supernatural power and said, "Kaccani, be not afraid: by my power your son and daughter-in-law will come, and after getting your forgiveness on the way will take you back with them: dwell with them in peace:" then he went to his own place. By Sakka's power they bethought themselves of her goodness, and making enquiry through the village they found she had gone towards the cemetery. They went along the road calling for her: when they saw her they fell at her feet, and asked and obtained her pardon for their offence. She welcomed her grandson. So they all went home in delight and thenceforth dwelt together.

Joyful with her good son's wife

Katiyani then did dwell:

Indra pacified their strife,

Son and grandson tend her well.

This stanza is inspired by Perfect Wisdom.

After the lesson the Master declared the Truths and identified the Birth: after the Truths that lay brother was established in the fruition of the First Path—“At that time the man who supported his mother was the man who is supporting his mother to-day, the wife of that time was the wife of today, and Sakka was 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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