Ja 419 — Sulasa 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/ja419.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

“Here is a golden necklace,” etc.—The Master told this tale while dwelling in Jetavana, concerning a female servant of Anathapindika. The story is that one feast-day, when she was going with a number of fellow-servants to a pleasure-garden, she asked her mistress Pannalakkhanadevi for an ornament to wear. Her mistress gave her an ornament of her own, worth a hundred thousand pieces. She put it on and went along with the other servants to the pleasure-garden. A certain thief coveted the ornament, and with the design of killing her and taking it he began talking to her, and in the garden he gave her fish, flesh and strong drink. “He does it, I suppose, because he desires me,” she thought, and at evening when the others lay down to rest after their sports, she rose and went to him. He said, “Mistress, this place is not private; let us go a little farther.” She thought, “Anything private can be done in this place: no doubt he must be anxious to kill me and take what I am wearing: I’ll teach him a lesson:” so she said, “Master, I am dry owing to the strong drink: get me some water,” and taking him to a well asked him to draw some water, shewing him the rope and bucket. The thief let down the bucket. Then as he was stooping to draw up the water, the girl, who was very strong, pushed him hard with both hands and threw him into the well. “You won’t die that way,” she said, and threw a large brick upon his head. He died on the spot. When she came back to the town and gave her mistress the ornament, she said, “I have very nearly been killed to-day for that ornament,” and told the whole story. The mistress told Anathapindika, and he told the Tathagata. The Master said, “Householder, this is not the first time that servant girl has been endowed with wits rising to the occasion; she was so before also: it is not the first time she killed that man; she did it once before,” and at Anathapindika’s request, he told the tale of old.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, there was a beautiful woman of the town, called Sulasa, who had a train of five-hundred courtesans, and whose price was a thousand pieces a night. There was in the same city a robber named Sattuka, as strong as an elephant, who used to enter rich men’s houses at night and plunder at will. The townsmen assembled and complained to the king. The king ordered the city-watch to

post bands here and there, have the robber caught and cut off his head. They bound his hands behind his back and led him to the place of execution, scourging him in every square with whips. The news that he was taken excited the whole city. Sulasa was standing at a window, and looking down on the street she saw the robber, loved him at sight and thought, “If I can free that stout fighting-man, I will give up this bad life of mine and live respectably with him.” In the way described in the Kanavera Birth she gained his freedom by sending a thousand pieces to the chief constable of the city and then lived with him in delight and harmony. The robber after three or four months thought, “I shall never be able to stay in this one place: but one can’t go empty-handed: Sulasa’s ornaments are worth a hundred thousand pieces: I will kill her and take them.” So he said to her one day, “Dear, when I was being hauled along by the king’s men, I promised an offering to a tree-deity on a mountaintop, who is now threatening me because I have not paid it: let us make an offering.” “Very well, husband, prepare and send it.” “Dear, it will not do to send it: let us both go and present it, wearing all our ornaments and with a great retinue.” “Very well, husband, we’ll do so.” He made her prepare the offering and when they reached the mountain-foot, he said, “Dear, the deity, seeing this crowd of people, will not accept the offering; let us two go up and present it.” She consented, and he made her carry the vessel. He was himself armed to the teeth, and when they reached the top, he set the offering at the foot of a tree which grew beside a precipice a hundred times as high as a man, and said, “Dear, I have not come to present the offering, I have come with the intention of killing you and going away with all your ornaments: take them all off and make a bundle of them in your outer garment.” “Husband, why would you kill met” “For your money.” “Husband, remember the good I have done you: when you were being hauled along in chains, I gave up a rich man’s son for you and paid a large sum and saved your life: though I might get a thousand pieces a day, I never look at another man: such a benefactress I am to you: do not kill me, I will give you much money and he your slave.” With these entreaties she spoke the first stanza—

Here is a golden necklace, and emeralds and pearls,

Take all and welcome: give me place among thy servant girls.

When Sattuka had spoken the second stanza in accordance with his purpose, to wit—

Fair lady, lay thy jewels down and do not weep so sore

I’ll kill thee: else I can’t be sure thou’lt give me all thy store—

Sulasa’s wits rose to the occasion, and thinking, “This robber will not give me my life, but I’ll take his life first by throwing him down the precipice in some way,” she spoke the two stanzas—

Within my years of sense, within my conscious memory,

No man on earth, I do protest, have I loved more than thee.

Come hither, for my last salute, receive my last embrace:

For never more upon the earth shall we meet face to face.

Sattuka could not see her purpose, so he said, “Very well, dear; come and embrace me.” Sulasa walked round him in respectful salutation three times, kissed him, and saying, “Now, husband, I am going to make obeisance to you on all four sides,” she put her head on his foot, did obeisance at his sides, and went behind him as if to do obeisance there: then with the strength of an elephant she took him by the hinder parts and threw him head over heels down that place of destruction a hundred times as high as a man. He was crushed to pieces and died on the spot. Seeing this deed, the deity who lived on the mountain-top spoke these stanzas—

Wisdom at times is not confined to men

A woman can chew wisdom now and then.

Wisdom at times is not confined to men:

Women are quick in counsel now and then.

How quick and keen she was the way to know,

She slew him like a deer with full-stretched bow.

He that to great occasion fails to rise

Falls, like that dull thief from the precipice.

One prompt a crisis in his fate to see,

Like her, is saved from threatening enemy.

So Sulasa killed the robber. When she descended from the mountain and came among her attendants, they asked where her husband was. “Don’t ask me,” she said, and mounting her chariot she went on to the city.

After the lesson, the Master identified the Birth: “At that time the two then were the same two now, the deity 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.

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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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