Ja 432 — Padakusalamanava Jātaka

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

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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

“O Patala, by Ganges,” etc.—This story the Master dwelling at Jetavana told concerning a certain boy. He was, they say, the son of a householder at Savatthi, just seven years old, and skilled in recognizing footsteps. Now his father being minded to prove him went without his knowing it to a friend’s house. The boy, without even asking where his father had gone, by tracing his footsteps, came and stood before him. So his father one day asked him saying, “When I went off without telling you, how did you know where I was gone?” “My dear father, I recognized your footsteps. I am skilled in this way.” Then his father, to prove him, went out of his house after the early meal, and going into his next-door neighbour’s house, from it passed into another, and from this third house again returned to his own home, and thence made his way to the North gate, and passing out by it made a circuit of the city from right to left. And coming to Jetavana he saluted the Master and sat down to listen to the Law. The boy asked where his father was, and when they said, “We do not know,” by tracing his father’s steps, and starting from the next-door neighbour’s house he went by the same road by which his father had travelled to Jetavana, and after saluting the Master stood in the presence of his father, and when asked by him, how he knew that he had come here, he said, “I recognized your footsteps and following in your track came hither.” The Master asked, “Lay Brother, what are you saying?” He answered, “Your Reverence, this boy is skilled in knowing footsteps. To test him I came hither in such and such a manner. Not finding me at home, by following in my footsteps, he arrived here.” “There is no marvel,” said the Master, “in recognizing steps upon the ground. Sages of old recognized steps in the air,” and on being asked, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time in the reign of Brahmadatta, king of Benares, his queen-consort after falling into sin was questioned by the king, and taking an oath she said, “If I have sinned against you, I shall become a female Yakkha with a face like a horse.” After her death she became a horse-faced Yakkha and dwelt in a rock-cave in a vast forest at the foot of a mountain, and used to catch and devour the men that frequented the road leading from

the East to the Western border. After serving Vessavana three years, it is said, she got leave to eat people in a certain space, thirty leagues long by five leagues broad. Now one day a rich, wealthy, handsome brahmin, accompanied by a large suite, ascended that road. The Yakkha, on seeing him, with a loud laugh rushed upon him, and his attendants all fled. With the speed of the wind she seized the brahmin and threw him on her back, and in entering the cave, through coming into contact with the man, under the influence of passion she conceived an affection for him, and instead of devouring him she made him her husband, and they lived harmoniously together. And thenceforth the Yakkha whenever she captured men, also took their clothes and rice and oil and the like, and serving him with various dainty food she herself would eat man's flesh. And whenever she went away, for fear of his escaping, she closed the mouth of the cave with a huge stone before leaving. And while they were thus living amicably together, the Bodhisatta passing from his former existence was conceived in the womb of the Yakkha by the brahmin. After ten months she gave birth to a son, and filled with love for the brahmin and her child, she fed them both. By and bye when the boy was grown up, she put him also inside the cave with his father, and closed the door. Now one day the Bodhisatta knowing she had gone away removed the stone and let his father. out. And when she asked on her return who had removed the stone, he said, "I did, mother: we cannot sit in darkness." And through love for her child she did not say another word. Now one day the Bodhisatta asked his father, saying, "Dear father, your mouth is different from my mother's; what is the reason?" "My son, your mother is a Yakkha and lives on man's flesh, but you and I are men." "If so, why do we live here? Come, we will go to the haunts of men." "My dear boy, if we shall try to escape, your mother will kill us both." The Bodhisatta reassured his father and said, "Do not be afraid, dear father; that you shall return to the haunts of men shall be my charge." And next day when his mother had gone away, he took his father and fled. When the Yakkha returned and missed them, she rushed forward with the swiftness of the wind and caught them and said, "O brahmin, why do you run away? Is there anything that you want here?" "My dear," he said, "do not be angry with me. Your son carried me off with him." And without another word, owing to her love for her child, she comforted them and making for her place of abode she brought them back after a flight of some days. The Bodhisatta thought, "My mother must have a limited sphere of action. Suppose I were to ask her the limits of space over which her authority extends. Then I will escape by going beyond this." So one day sitting respectfully near his mother he said, "My dear, that which belongs to a mother comes to the children; tell me now what is the boundary of our ground." She told him all the landmarks, mountains and such like in all directions, and pointed out to her son the space, thirty leagues long and five leagues broad, and said, "Consider it to be so much, my son." After the lapse of two or three days, when his mother had gone to the forest, he put his father on his shoulder and rushing on with the swiftness of the wind, by the hint given him by his mother, he reached the bank of the river that was the limit. The mother too, when on her return she missed them, pursued after them. The Bodhisatta carried his father into the middle of the river, and she came and stood on the river bank, and when she saw that they had passed beyond the limits of her sphere, she stopped where she was, and cried, "My dear child, come here with your father. What is my offence? In what respect do not things go well with you? Come back, my lord." Thus did she beseech her child and husband. So the brahmin crossed the river. She prayed to her child also, and said, "Dear son, do not act after this sort: come back again." "Mother, we are men: you are a Yakkha.

We cannot always abide with you." "And will you not return?" "No, mother." "Then if you refuse to return—as it is painful to live in the world of men, and they who know not any craft cannot live—I am skilled in the lore of the philosopher's stone: by its power, one can follow after the lapse of twelve years in the steps of those that have gone away. This will prove a livelihood to you. Take, my child, this invaluable charm." And though overcome by such great sorrow, through love of her child, she gave him the charm. The Bodhisatta, still standing in the river, folded his hands tortoise-wise and took the charm, and saluting his mother cried, "Good-bye, mother." The Yakkha said, "If you do not return, my son, I cannot live," and she smote upon her breast, and straightway in sorrow for her son her heart was broken and she fell down dead on the spot. The Bodhisatta, when he knew his mother was dead, called to his father and went and made a funeral pile and burned her body. After extinguishing the flames, he made offerings of various coloured flowers, and with weeping and lamentation returned with his father to Benares.

It was told the king, "A youth skilled in tracking footsteps is standing at the door." And when the king bade him enter, he came in and saluted the king. "My friend," he said, "do you know any craft?" "My lord, following on the track of one who has stolen any property twelve years ago, I can catch him." "Then enter my service," said the king. "I will serve you for a thousand pieces of money daily." "Very well, friend, you shall serve me." And the king had him paid a thousand pieces of money daily. Now one day the family priest said to the king, "My lord, because this youth does nothing by the power of his art, we do not know whether he has any skill or not: we will now test him." The king readily agreed, and the pair gave notice to the keepers of the various treasures, and taking the most valuable jewels descended from the terrace, and after groping their way three times round the palace, they placed a ladder on the top of the wall and by means of it descended to the outside. Then they entered the Hall of Justice, and after sitting there they returned and again placing the ladder on the wall descended by it into the city. Coming to the edge of a tank they thrice marched solemnly round it, and then dropped their treasure in the tank, and climbed back to the terrace. Next day there was a great outcry and men said, "Treasure has been stolen from the palace." The king pretending ignorance summoned the Bodhisatta and said, "Friend, much valuable treasure has been stolen from the palace: we must trace it." "My lord, for one who is able to follow the traces of robbers and recover treasure stolen twelve years ago, there is nothing marvellous in his recovering stolen property after a single day and night. I will recover it; do not be troubled." "Then recover it, friend." "Very well, my lord," he said, and went and saluting his mother's memory he repeated the spell, still standing on the terrace, and said, "My lord, the steps of two thieves are to be seen." And following in the steps of the king and the priest he entered the royal closet, and issuing thence he descended from the terrace, and after thrice making a circuit of the palace he drew near the wall. Standing on it he said, "My lord, starting in this place from the wall I see footsteps in the air: bring me a ladder." And having had a ladder placed for him against the wall, he descended by it, and still following in their track he came to the Hall of Justice. Then returning to the palace he had the ladder planted against the wall, and descending by it he came to the tank. After thrice marching round it he said, "My lord, the thieves went down into this tank," and taking out the treasure, as if he had deposited it there himself, he gave it to the king and said, "My lord, these two thieves are men of distinction: by this way they climbed up into the palace." The people snapped their fingers

in a high state of delight, and there was a great waving of cloths. The king thought, “This youth, methinks, by following in their steps knows the place where the thieves put the treasure, but the thieves he cannot catch.” Then he said, “You at once brought us the property carried off by the thieves, but will you be able to catch the thieves and bring them to us?” “My lord, the thieves are here: they are not far off.” “Who are they?” “Great king, let any one that likes be the thief. From the time you recovered your treasure, why should you want the thieves? Do not ask about that.” “Friend, I pay you daily a thousand pieces of money: bring the thieves to me.” “Sire, when the treasure is recovered, what need of the thieves?” “It is better, friend, for us to catch the thieves than to recover the treasure.” “Then, sire, I will not tell you, “So and so are the thieves,” but I will tell you a thing that happened long ago. If you are wise, you will know what it means.” And herewith he told an old tale.

Once upon a time, sire, a certain dancer named Patala lived not far from Benares, in a village on the river’s bank. One day he went into Benares with his wife and after gaining money by his singing and dancing, at the end of the fete he procured some rice and strong drink. On his way to his own village he came to the bank of the river, and sat down watching the freshly flowing stream, to drink his strong drink. When he was drunk and unconscious of his weakness, he said, “I will fasten my big lute about my neck and go down into the river.” And he took his wife by the hand and went down into the river. The water entered into the holes of the lute, and then the weight of his lute made him begin to sink. But when his wife saw he was sinking, she let go of him and went up out of the river and stood upon the bank. The dancer Patala now rises and now sinks, and his belly became swollen from swallowing the water. So his wife thought, “My husband will now die: I will beg of him one song, and by singing this in the midst of the people, I shall earn my living.” And saying, “My lord, you are sinking in the water: give me just one song, and I will earn my living by it,” she spoke this stanza:

O Patala, by Ganges swept away,

Famous in dance and, skilled in roundelay,

Patala, all hail! as thou art borne along,

Sing me, I pray, some little snatch of song.

Then the dancer Patala said, “My dear, how shall I give you a little song? The water that has been the salvation of the people is killing me,” and he spoke a stanza:

Wherewith are sprinkled fainting souls in pain,

I straight am killed. My refuge proved my bane.

The Bodhisatta in explanation of this stanza said: “Sire, even as water is the refuge of the people, so also is it with kings. If danger arises from them, who shall avert that danger? This, sire, is a secret matter. I have told a story intelligible to the wise: understand it, sire.”

“Friend, I understand not a hidden story like this. Catch the thieves and bring them to me.” Then the Bodhisatta said, “Hear then this, sire, and understand.” And he told yet another tale.

“My lord, formerly in a village outside the city gates of Benares, a potter used to fetch clay for his pottery, and constantly getting it in the same place he dug a deep pit inside a mountain-cave. Now one day while he was getting the clay, an unseasonable storm-cloud sprang up, and let fall a heavy rain, and the flood overwhelmed and threw down the side of the pit, and the man’s head was broken by it. Loudly lamenting he spoke this stanza:

That by which seeds do grow, man to sustain,

Has crushed my head. My refuge proved my bane.

“For even as the mighty earth, sire, which is the refuge of the people, broke the potter’s head, even so when a king, who like the mighty earth is the refuge of the whole world, rises up and plays the thief, who shall avert the danger? Can you, sire, recognize the thief hidden under the guise of this story?” “Friend, we do not want any hidden meaning. Say, “Here is the thief,” and catch him and hand him over to me.”

Still shielding the king and without saying in words, “Thou art the thief,” he told yet another story.

In this very city, sire, a certain man’s house was on fire. He ordered another man to go into the house and bring out his property. When this man had entered the house and was bringing out his goods, the door was shut. Blinded with smoke and unable to find his way out and tormented by the rising flame, he remained inside lamenting, and spoke this stanza:

That which destroys the cold, and parches grain,

Consumes my limbs. My refuge proves my bane.

“A man, O king, who like fire was the refuge of the people, stole the bundle of jewels. Do not ask me about the thief.” “Friend, just bring me the thief.” Without telling the king that he was a thief, he told yet another story.

Once, sire, in this very city a man ate to excess and was unable to digest his food. Maddened with pain and lamenting he spoke this stanza:

Food on which countless brahmins life sustain

Killed me outright. My refuge proved my bane.

“One, who like rice, sire, was the refuge of the people, stole the property. When that is recovered, why ask about the thief?” “Friend, if you can, bring me the thief.” To make the

king comprehend, he told yet another story.

Formerly, sire, in this very city a wind arose and broke a certain man's limbs. Lamenting he spoke this stanza:

Wind that in June wise men by prayer would gain,

My limbs doth break. My refuge proved my bane.

"Thus, sire, did danger arise from my refuge. Understand this story." "Friend, bring me the thief." To make the king understand, he told him yet another story.

Once upon a time, sire, on the side of the Himalayas grew a tree with forked branches, the dwelling-place of countless birds. Two of its boughs rubbed against one another. Hence arose smoke, and sparks of fire were let fall. On seeing this the chief bird uttered this stanza:

Flame issues from the tree where we have lain:

Scatter, ye birds. Our refuge proves our bane.

"For just as, sire, the tree is the refuge of birds, so is the king the refuge of his people. Should he play the thief, who shall avert the danger? Take note of this, sire." "Friend, only bring me the thief." Then he told the king yet another story.

In a village of Benares, sire, on the western side of a gentleman's house was a river full of savage crocodiles, and in this family was an only son, who on the death of his father watched over his mother. His mother against his will brought home a gentleman's daughter as his wife. At first she showed affection for her mother-in-law, but afterwards when blest with numerous sons and daughters of her own, she wished to get rid of her. Her own mother also lived in the same house. In her husband's presence she found all manner of fault with her mother-in-law, to prejudice him against her, saying, "I cannot possibly support your mother: you must kill her." And when he answered, "Murder is a serious matter: how am I to kill her? " she said, "When she has fallen asleep, we will take her, bed and all, and throw her into the crocodile river. Then the crocodiles will make an end of her." "And where is your mother?" he said. "She sleeps in the same room as your mother." "Then go and set a mark on the bed on which she lies, by fastening a rope on it." She did so, and said, "I have put a mark on it." The husband said, "Excuse me a moment; let the people go to bed first." And he lay down pretending to go to sleep, and then went and fastened the rope on his mother-in-law's bed. Then he woke his wife, and they went together and lifting her up, bed and all, threw her into the river. And the crocodiles there killed and ate her. Next day she found out what had happened to her own mother and said, "My lord, my mother is dead, now let us kill yours." "Very well then," he said, "we will make a funeral pile in the cemetery, and cast her into the fire and kill her." So the man and his wife took her while she was asleep to the cemetery, and deposited her there. Then the husband said to his wife, "Have you brought any fire?" "I have forgotten it, my lord." "Then

go and fetch it." "I dare not go, my lord, and if you go, I dare not stay here: we will go together." When they were gone, the old woman was awakened by the cold wind, and finding it was a cemetery, she thought, "They wish to kill me: they are gone to fetch fire. They do not know how strong I am." And she stretched a corpse on the bed and covered it over with a cloth, and ran away and hid herself in a mountain cave in that same place. The husband and wife brought the fire and taking the corpse to be the old woman they burned it and went away. A certain robber had left his bundle in this mountain cave and coming back to fetch it he saw the old woman and thought, "This must be a Yakkha: my bundle is possessed by goblins," and he fetched a devil-doctor. The doctor uttered a spell and entered the cave. Then she said to him, "I am no Yakkha: come, we will enjoy this treasure together." "How is this to be believed?" "Place your tongue on my tongue." He did so, and she bit a piece off his tongue and let it drop to the ground. The devil-doctor thought, "This is certainly a Yakkha," and he cried aloud and fled away, with the blood dripping from his tongue. Next day the old woman put on a clean undergarment and took the bundle of all sorts of jewels and went home. The daughter-in-law on seeing her asked, "Where, mother, did you get this?" "My dear, all that are burned on a wooden pile in this cemetery receive the same." "My dear mother, can I too get this?" "If you become like me, you will." So without saying a word to her husband, in her desire for a lot of ornaments to wear, she went there and burned herself. Her husband next day missed her and said, "My dear mother, at this time of day is not your daughter-in law coming?" Then she reproached him saying, "Fie! you bad man, how do the dead come back?" And she uttered this stanza:

A maiden fair, with wreath upon her head,

Fragrant with sandal oil, by me was led

A happy bride within my home to reign:

She drove me forth. My refuge proved my bane.

"As the daughter-in-law, sire, is to the mother-in-law, so is the king a refuge to his people. If danger arises thence, what can one do? take note of this, sire." "Friend, I do not understand the things you tell me: only bring me the thief." He thought, "I will shield the king," and he told yet another story.

Of old, sire, in this very city a man in answer to his prayer had a son. At his birth the father was full of joy and gladness at the thought of having got a son, and cherished him. When the boy was grown up, he wedded him to a wife, and by and bye he himself grew old and could not undertake any work. So his son said, "You cannot do any work: you must go from hence," and he drove him out of the house. With great difficulty he kept himself alive on alms, and lamenting he uttered this stanza:

He for whose birth I longed, nor longed in vain,

Drives me from home. My refuge proved my bane.

“Just as an aged father, sire, ought to be cared for by an able-bodied son, so too ought all the people to be protected by the king, and this danger now present has arisen from the king, who is the guardian of all men. Know, sire, from this fact that the thief is so and so.” “I do not understand this, be it fact or no fact: either bring me the thief, or you yourself must be the thief.” Thus did the king again and again question the youth. So he said to him, “Would you, sire, really like the thief to be caught?” “Yes, friend.” “Then I will proclaim it in the midst of the assembly, So and So is the thief.” “Do so, friend.” On hearing his words he thought, “This king does not allow me to shield him: I will now catch the thief.” And when the people had gathered together, he addressed them and spoke these stanzas:

Let town and country folk assembled all give ear,

Lo! water is ablaze. From safety cometh fear.

The plundered realm may well of king and priest complain;

Henceforth protect yourselves. Your refuge proves your bane.

When they heard what he said, people thought, “The king, though he ought to have protected others, threw the blame on another. After he had with his own hands placed his treasure in the tank, he went about looking for the thief. That he may not in future go on playing the part of a thief, we will kill this wicked king.” So they rose up with sticks and clubs in their hands, and then and there beat the king and the priest till they died. But they anointed the Bodhisatta and set him on the throne.

The Master, after relating this story to illustrate the Truths, said, “Lay Brother, there is nothing marvellous in recognizing footsteps on the earth: sages of old recognized them in the air,” and he identified the Birth—At the conclusion of the Truths the lay Brother and his son attained to fruition of the First Path—“In those days the father was Kassapa, the youth skilled in footsteps was myself.”

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