Ja 49 — Nakkhatta Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja49.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

“The fool may watch.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana about a certain Naked-ascetic. Tradition says that a gentleman of the country near Savatthi asked in marriage for his son a young Savatthi lady of equal rank. Having fixed a day to come and fetch the bride, he subsequently consulted a Naked-ascetic who was intimate with his family, as to whether the stars were favourable for holding the festivities that day.

“He didn’t ask me in the first instance,” thought the indignant ascetic, “but having already fixed the day, without consulting me, just makes an empty reference to me now. Very good; I’ll teach him a lesson.” So he made answer that the stars were not favourable for that day; that the nuptials ought not to be celebrated that day; and that, if they were, great misfortune would come of it. And the country family in their faith in their ascetic did not go for the bride that day. Now the bride’s friends in the town had made all their preparations for celebrating the nuptials, and when they saw that the other side did not come, they said, “It was they who fixed to-day, and yet they have not come; and we have gone to great expense about it all. Who are these people, forsooth? Let us marry the girl to someone else.” So they found another bridegroom and gave the girl to him in marriage with all the festivities they had already prepared.

Next day the country party came to fetch the bride. But the Savatthi people rated them as follows—“You country folk are a bad lot; you fixed the day yourselves, and then. insulted us by not coming. We have given the maiden to another.” The country party started a quarrel, but in the end went home the way they came.

Now the Brethren came to know how that Naked-ascetic had thwarted the festivity, and they began to talk the matter over in the Hall of Truth. Entering the Hall, and learning on enquiry the subject of their conversation, the Master said, “Brethren, this is not the first time that this same ascetic has thwarted the festivities of that family; out of pique with them, he did just the same thing once before.” And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, some townsfolk had asked a country-girl in marriage and had named the day. Having already made the arrangement, they asked their family ascetic whether the stars were propitious for the ceremony on that day. Piqued at their having fixed the day to suit themselves without first taking counsel with him, the ascetic made up his mind to thwart their marriage festivities for that day; and accordingly he made answer that the stars were not favourable for that day, and that, if they persisted, grave misfortune would be the result. So, in their faith in the ascetic, they stayed at home! When the country folk found that the town party did not come, they said among themselves, "It was they who fixed the marriage for to-day, and now they have not come. Who are they, forsooth?" And they married the girl to someone else.

Next day the townsfolk came and asked for the girl; but they of the country made this answer—"You town-people lack common decency. You yourselves named the day and yet did not come to fetch the bride. As you stopped away, we married her to someone else." "But we asked our ascetic, and he told us the stars were unfavourable. That's why we did not come, yesterday. Give us the girl." "You didn't come at the proper time, and now she's another's. How can we marry her twice over?" Whilst they wrangled thus with one another, a wise man from the town came into the country on business. Hearing the townsfolk explain that they had consulted their ascetic and that their absence was due to the-unfavourable disposition of the stars, he exclaimed, "What, forsooth, do the stars matter? Is not the lucky thing to get the girl?" And, so saying, he repeated this stanza—

The fool may watch for 'lucky days,'

Yet luck shall always miss;

'Tis luck itself is luck's own star.

What can mere stars achieve?

As for the townsfolk, as they did not get the girl for all their wrangling, they had to go off home again!

Said the Master, "This is not the first time, Brethren, that this Naked-ascetic has thwarted that family's festivities; he did just the same thing in bygone times also." His lesson ended, he shewed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying, "This ascetic was also the ascetic of those days, and the families too were the same; I myself was the wise and good man who uttered the stanza."

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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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.