Ja 514 — Chaddanta Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

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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

“Large-eyed and peerless one,” etc.—This was a story the Master, while sojourning at Jetavana, told of a female novice. A girl of good family at Savatthi, they say, recognizing the misery of the lay life, embraced asceticism, and one day went with other Sisters to hear the Law from the Bodhisatta, as he sat preaching from a magnificent throne, and observing his person to be endued with extreme beauty of form arising from the power of illimitable merit, she thought, “I wonder whether in a former existence those I once ministered to were this man’s wives.” Then at that very moment the recollection of former existences came back to her. “In the time of Chaddanta, the elephant, I was previously existing as this man’s wife.” And at the remembrance great joy and gladness sprang up in her heart. In her joyous excitement she laughed aloud as she thought, “Few wives are well disposed to their husbands; most of them are ill disposed. I wonder if I were well or ill disposed to this man.” And calling back her remembrance, she perceived that she had harboured a slight grudge in her heart against Chaddanta, the mighty lord of elephants, who measured one hundred and twenty cubits, and had sent Sonuttara, a hunter, who with a poisoned arrow wounded and killed him. Then her sorrow awoke and her heart grew hot within her, and being unable to control her feelings, bursting into sobs she wept aloud. On Seeing this the Master broke into a smile, and on being asked by the assembly of the Brethren, “What, Sir, was the cause of your smiling?” he said, “Brethren, this young Sister wept, on recalling a sin she once committed against me.” And so saying he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time eight thousand royal elephants, by the exercise of supernatural powers moving through the air, dwelt near lake Chaddanta in the Himalayas. At this time the Bodhisatta came to life as the son of the chief elephant. He was a pure white, with red feet and face. By and bye, when grown up, he was eighty-eight cubits high, one hundred and twenty cubits long. He had a trunk like to a silver rope, fifty-eight cubits long, and tusks fifteen cubits in circumference, thirty cubits long, and emitting six-coloured rays. He was the chief of a herd of eight thousand elephants and paid honour to pacceka buddhas. His two head queens were Cullasubhadda and Mahasubhadda. The king elephant, with his

herd numbering eight thousand, took up his abode in a Golden Cave. Now lake Chaddanta was fifty leagues long and fifty broad. In the middle of it, for a space extending twelve leagues, no sevala or panaka plant is found, and it consists of water in appearance like a magic jewel. Next to this, encircling this water, was a thicket of pure white lilies, a league in breadth. Next to this, and encircling it, was a thicket of pure blue lotus, a league in extent. Then came white and red lotuses, red and white lilies, and white esculent lilies, each also a league in extent and each encircling the one before. Next to these seven thickets came a mixed tangle of white and other lilies, also a league in extent, and encircling all the preceding ones. Next, in water as deep as elephants can stand in, was a thicket of red paddy. Next, in the surrounding water, was a grove of small shrubs, abounding in delicate and fragrant blossoms of blue, yellow, red and white. So these ten thickets were each a league in extent. Next came a thicket of various kinds of kidney beans. Next came a tangle of convolvulus, cucumber, pumpkin, gourd and other creepers. Then a grove of sugar-cane of the size of the areca-nut tree. Then a grove of plantains with fruit as big as elephant's tusks. Then a field of paddy. Then a grove of bread-fruit of the size of a water jar. Next a grove of tamarinds with luscious fruit. Then a grove of elephant-apple trees. Then a great forest of different kinds of trees. Then a bamboo grove. Such at this time was the magnificence of this region—its present magnificence is described in the Samyutta Commentary—but surrounding the bamboo grove were seven mountains. Starting from the extreme outside first came Little Black Mountain, next Great Black Mountain, then Water Mountain, Moon Mountain, Sun Mountain, Jewel Mountain, then the seventh in order Golden Mountain. This was seven leagues in height, rising all round the lake Chaddanta, like the rim of a bowl. The inner side of it was of a golden colour. From the light that issued from it lake Chaddanta shone like the newly risen sun. But of the outer mountains, one was six leagues in height, one five, one four, one three, one two, one a single league in height. Now in the north-east corner of the lake, thus girt about with seven mountains, in a spot where the wind fell upon the water, grew a big banyan tree. Its trunk was five leagues in circumference and seven leagues in height. Four branches spread six leagues to the four points of the compass, and the branch which rose straight upwards was six leagues. So from the root upwards it was thirteen leagues in height, and from the extremity of the branches in one direction to the extremity of the branches in the opposite direction it was twelve leagues. And the tree was furnished with eight thousand shoots and stood forth in all its beauty, like to the bare Jewel Mount. But on the west side of lake Chaddanta, in the Golden Mount, was a golden cave, twelve leagues in extent. Chaddanta the elephant king, with his following of eight thousand elephants, in the rainy season lived in the golden cave; in the hot season he stood at the foot of the great banyan tree, amongst its shoots, welcoming the breeze from off the water. Now one day they told him, "The great Sal grove is in flower." So attended by his herd he was minded to disport himself in the Sal grove, and going thither he struck with his frontal globe a Sal tree in full bloom. At that moment Cullasubhadda stood to windward, and dry twigs mixed with dead leaves and red ants fell upon her person. But Mahasubhadda stood to leeward, and flowers with pollen and stalks and green leaves fell on her. Thought Cullasubhadda, "He let fall on the wife dear to him flowers and pollen and fresh stalks and leaves, but on my person he dropped a mixture of dry twigs, dead leaves and red ants. Well, I shall know what to do!" And she conceived a grudge against the Great Being. Another day the king elephant and his attendant herd went down to lake Chaddanta to bathe. Then two young elephants took

bundles of usira root in their trunks and gave him a bath, rubbing him down as it were mount Kelasa. And when he came out of the water, they bathed the two queen elephants, and they too came out of the water and stood before the Great Being. Then the eight thousand elephants entered the lake and, disporting themselves in the water, plucked various flowers from the lake, and adorned the Great Being as if it had been a silver shrine, and afterwards adorned the queen elephants. Then a certain elephant, as he swam about the lake, gathered a large lotus with seven shoots and offered it to the Great Being. And he, taking it in his trunk, sprinkled the pollen on his forehead and presented the flower to the chief elephant, Mahasubhadda. On seeing this her rival said, "This lotus with seven shoots he also gives to his favourite queen and not to me," and again she conceived a grudge against him. Now one day when the Bodhisatta had dressed luscious fruits and lotus stalks and fibres with the nectar of the flower, and was entertaining five hundred pacceka buddhas, Cullasubhadda offered the wild fruits she had got to the pacceka buddhas, and she put up a prayer to this effect: "Hereafter, when I pass hence, may I be reborn as the royal maiden Subhadda in the Madda king's family, and on coming of age may I attain to the dignity of queen consort to the king of Benares. Then I shall be dear and charming in his eyes, and in a position to do what I please. So I will speak to the king and send a hunter with a poisoned arrow to wound and slay this elephant. And thus may I be able to have brought to me a pair of his tusks that emit six-coloured rays." Thenceforth she took no food and pining away in no long time she died, and came to life again as the child of the queen consort in the Madda kingdom, and was named Subhadda. And when she was of a suitable age, they gave her in marriage to the king of Benares. And she was dear and pleasing in his eyes, and the chief of sixteen thousand wives. And she recalled to mind her former existences and thought, "My prayer is fulfilled; now will I have this elephant's tusks brought to me." Then she anointed her body with common oil, put on a soiled robe, and lay in bed pretending to be sick. The king said, "Where is Subhadda?" And hearing that she was sick, he entered the royal closet and sitting on the bed he stroked her back and uttered the first stanza:

Large-eyed and peerless one, my queen, so pale, to grief a prey,

Like wreath that's trampled under foot, why fadest thou away?

On hearing this she spoke the second stanza:

As it would seem, all in a dream, a longing sore I had;

My wish is vain this boon to gain, and that is why I'm sad.

The king, on hearing this, spoke a stanza:

All joys to which in this glad world a mortal may aspire,

Whate'er they want is mine to grant, so tell me thy desire.

On hearing this the queen said, “Great king, my desire is hard to attain; I will not now say what it is, but I would have all the hunters that there are in your kingdom gathered together. Then will I tell it in the midst of them.” And to explain her meaning, she spoke the next stanza:

Let hunters all obey thy call, within this realm who dwell,

And what I fain from them would gain, I’ll in their presence tell.

The king agreed, and issuing forth from the royal chamber he gave orders to his ministers, saying, “Have it proclaimed by beat of drum that all the hunters that are in the kingdom of Kasi, three hundred leagues in extent, are to assemble.” They did so, and in no long time the hunters that dwelt in the kingdom of Kasi, bringing a present according to their means, had their arrival announced to the king. Now they amounted in all to about sixty thousand. And the king, hearing that they had come, stood at an open window and stretching forth his hand he told the queen of their arrival and said:

Here then behold our hunters bold, well trained in venery,

Theirs is the skill wild beasts to kill, and all would die for me.

The queen, on hearing this, addressed then and spoke another stanza:

Ye hunters bold, assembled here,

Unto my words, I pray, give ear:

Dreaming, methought an elephant I saw,

Six-tusked and white without a flaw:

His tusks I crave and fain would have;

Nought else avails this life to save.

The hunters, on hearing this, replied:

Ne’er did our sires in times of old

A six-tusked elephant behold:

Tell us what kind of beast might be

That which appeared in dreams to thee.

After this still another stanza was spoken by them:

Four points, North, South, East, West, one sees,

Four intermediate are to these,

Nadir and zenith add, and then

Say at which point of all the ten

This royal elephant might be,

That in a dream appeared to thee.

After these words Subhadda, looking at all the hunters, spied amongst them one that was broad of foot, with a calf swollen like an alms basket, big in the knee and ribs, thick-bearded, with yellow teeth, disfigured with scars, conspicuous amongst them all as an ugly, hulking fellow, named Sonuttara, who had once been an enemy of the Great Being. And she thought, “He will be able to do my bidding,” and with the king’s permission she took him with her and, climbing to the highest floor of the seven-storeyed palace, she threw open a window to the North, and stretching forth her hand towards the Northern Himalayas she uttered four stanzas:

Due north, beyond seven mountains vast,

One comes to Golden Cliff at last,

A height by goblin forms possessed

And bright with flowers from foot to crest.

Beneath this goblin peak is seen

A cloud-shaped mass of darkest green,

A royal banyan tree whose roots

Yield vigour to eight thousand shoots.

There dwells invincible in might

This elephant, six-tusked and white,

With herd eight thousand strong for fight.

Their tusks to chariot-poles are like,

Wind-swift are they to guard or strike.

Panting and grim they stand and glare,

Provoked by slightest breath of air,

If they one born of man should see,

Their wrath consumes him utterly.

Sonuttara on hearing this was terrified to death and said:

Turquoise or pearls of brilliant sheen,

With many a gold adornment, queen,

In royal houses may be seen.

What wouldst thou then with ivory do,

Or wilt thou slay these hunters true?

Then the queen spoke a stanza:

Consumed with grief and spite am I,

When I recall my injury.

Grant me, O hunter, what I crave,

And five choice hamlets thou shalt have.

And with this she said, “Friend hunter, when I gave a gift to the pacceka buddhas, I offered up a prayer that I might have it in my power to kill this six-tusked elephant and get possession of a pair of his tusks. This was not merely seen by me in a vision, but the prayer that I offered up will be fulfilled. Do thou go and fear not.” And so saying she reassured him. And he agreed to her words and said, “So be it, lady; but first make it clear to me and tell me where is his dwelling-place,” and inquiring of her he spoke this stanza:

Where dwells he? Where may he be found?

What road is his, for bathing bound?

Where does this royal creature swim?

Tell us the way to capture him.

Then by recalling her former existence she clearly saw the spot and told him of it in these two stanzas:

Not far this bathing-place of his,

A deep and goodly pool it is:

There bees do swarm and flowers abound,

And there this royal beast is found.

Now lotus-crowned, fresh from his bath

He gladly takes his homeward path,

As lily-white and tall he moves

Behind the queen he fondly loves.

Sonuttara on hearing this agreed, saying, “Fair lady, I will kill the elephant and bring you his tusks.” Then in her joy she gave him a thousand pieces and said, “Go home meanwhile, and at the end of seven days you shall set out thither,” and dismissing him she summoned smiths and gave them an order and said, “Sirs, we have need of an axe, a spade, an auger, a hammer, an instrument for cutting bamboos, a grass-cutter, an iron staff, a peg, an iron three-pronged fork; make them with all speed and bring them to us.” And sending for workers in leather, she charged them, saying, “Sirs, you must make us a leather sack, holding a hogshead’s weight; we have need of leather ropes and straps, shoes big enough for an elephant, and a leather parachute: make them with all speed and bring them to us.” And both smiths and workers in leather quickly made everything and brought and offered them to her. Having provided everything requisite for the journey, together with firewood and the like, she put all the appliances and necessaries for the journey, such as baked meal and so forth, in the leather sack. The whole of it came to about a hogshead in weight. And Sonuttara, having completed his arrangements, arrived on the seventh day and stood respectfully in the presence of the queen. Then she said, “Friend, all appliances for your journey are completed: take then this sack.” And he being a stout knave, as strong as five elephants, caught up the sack as if it had been a bag of cakes, and, placing it on his hips, stood as it were with empty hands. Cullasubhadda gave the provisions to the hunter’s attendants and, telling the king, dismissed Sonuttara. And he, with an obeisance to the king and queen, descended from the palace and, placing his goods in a chariot, set out from the city with a great retinue, and passing through a succession of villages and hamlets reached the frontiers. Then he turned back the people of the country and went on with the dwellers on the borders till he entered the forest, and passing beyond the haunts of men he sent back the border people too, and proceeded quite alone on a road to a distance of thirty leagues, traversing a dense growth of kuca and other grasses, thickets of basil, reeds and rest-harrow, clumps of thick-thorn and canes, thickets of mixed growth, jungles of reed and cane, dense forest growth, impenetrable even to a snake, thickets of trees and bamboos, tracts of mud and water, mountain tracts, eighteen regions in all, one after another. The jungles of grass he cut with a sickle, the thickets of basil and the like he cleared with his instrument for cutting bamboos, the trees he felled with an axe, and the

oversized ones he first pierced with an auger. Then, pursuing his way, he fashioned a ladder in the bamboo grove and climbing to the top of the thicket, he laid a single bamboo, which he had cut, over the next clump of bamboos, and thus creeping along on the top of the thicket he reached a morass. Then he spread a dry plank on the mud, and stepping on it he threw another plank before him and so crossed the morass. Then he made a canoe and by means of it crossed the flooded region, and at last stood at the foot of the mountains. Then he bound a three-pronged grappling-iron with a rope and flinging it aloft he caused it to lodge fast in the mountain. Then climbing up by the rope he drilled the mountain with an iron staff tipped with adamant, and knocking a peg into the hole he stood on it. Then drawing out the grappling-iron he once more lodged it high up on the mountain, and from this position letting the leather rope hang down, he took hold of it and descended and fastened the rope on the peg below. Then seizing the rope with his left hand and taking a hammer in his right he struck a blow on the rope, and having thus pulled out the peg he once more climbed up. In this way he mounted to the top of the first mountain and then commencing his descent on the other side, having knocked as before a peg into the top of the first mountain and bound the rope on his leather sack and wrapped it round the peg, he sat within the sack and let himself down, uncoiling the rope like a spider letting out his thread. Then letting his leather parachute catch the wind, he went down like a bird—so at least they say. Thus did the Master tell how in obedience to Subhadda's words the hunter sallied forth from the city and traversed seventeen different tracts till he reached a mountainous region, and how he there crossed over six mountains and climbed to the top of Golden Cliff:

The hunter hearing, unalarmed,

Set forth with bow and quiver armed,

And crossing o'er seven mountains vast

Reached noble Golden Cliff at last.

Gaining the goblin-haunted height,

What cloud-shaped mass bursts on his sight?

A royal banyan 'Tis whose roots

Support eight thousand spreading shoots.

There stood invincible in might

An elephant six-tusked and white,

With herd eight thousand strong for fight;

Their tusks to chariot-poles are like:

Wind-swift are they to guard or strike.

Hard by a pool—'Tis full to the brim,

Fit place for royal beast to swim;

Its lovely banks with flowers abound

And buzzing bees swarm all around.

Marking the way the creature went

Whene'er on bathing thought intent,

He sunk a pit, to deed so mean

Urged by the wrath of spiteful queen.

Here follows the story from beginning to end: the hunter, it is said, after seven years, seven months and seven days, having reached the dwelling-place of the Great Being in the manner related above, took note of his dwelling-place and dug a pit there, thinking, "I will take my stand here and wound the lord of elephants and bring about his death." Thus did he arrange matters and went into the forest and cut down trees to make posts and prepared a lot of material. Then when the elephants went to bathe, in the spot where the king elephant used to stand, he dug a square pit with a huge mattock, and the soil that he dug out he sprinkled on the top of the water, as if he were sowing seed, and on the top of stones like mortars he fixed posts, and fitted them with weights and ropes and spread planks over them. Next he made a hole of the size of an arrow and threw on the top earth and rubbish, and on one side he made an entrance for himself, and so, when the pit was finished, at break of day he fastened on a false top knot and donned robes of yellow and, taking his bow and a poisoned arrow, he went down and stood in the pit.

The Master, to make the whole thing clear, said:

The pit with planks he first did hide,

Then bow in hand he got inside,

And as the elephant passed by,

A mighty shaft the wretch let fly.

The wounded beast loud roared with pain

And all the herd roared back again:

Crushed boughs and trampled grass betray

Where panic flight directs their way.

Their lord had well nigh slain his foe,

So mad with pain was he, when lo!

A robe of yellow met his eyes,

Emblem of sainthood, priestly guise

And deemed inviolate by the wise.

The Master, falling into conversation with the hunter, spoke a couple of stanzas:

Whoso is marred with sinful taint

And void of truth and self-restraint,

Though robed in yellow he may be,

No claim to sanctity has he.

But one that's free from sinful taint,

Endued with truth and self-restraint,

And firmly fixed in righteousness,

Deserves to wear the yellow dress.

So saying, the Great Being, extinguishing all feeling of anger towards him, asked him, saying, "Why did you wound me? Was it for your own advantage or were you suborned by some one else?"

The Master explaining the matter then said:

The beast with mighty shaft laid low,

Unruffled still, addressed his foe:

"What object, friend, in slaying me,

And, pray, who instigated thee?"

Then the hunter told him and uttered this stanza:

The king of Kasi's favoured queen

Subhadda told me she had seen

Thy form in dreams, "and so," said she,

"I'll have his tusks; go, bring them me."

Hearing this, and recognizing that this was the work of Cullasubhadda, he bore his sufferings patiently and thought, "She does not want my tusks; she sent him because she wished to kill me," and, to illustrate the matter, he uttered a couple of stanzas:

Rich store of goodly tusks have I,

Relics of my dead ancestry,

And this well knows that cursed dame,

'Tis at my life the wretch doth aim.

Rise, hunter, and or ere I die.

Saw off these tusks of ivory:

Go bid the shrew be of good cheer,

"The beast is slain; his tusks are here."

Hearing his words the hunter rose up from the place where he was sitting and, saw in hand, came close to him to cut off his tusks. Now the elephant, being like a mountain eighty cubits high, was but ineffectually cut. For the man could not reach to his tusks. So the Great Being, bending his body towards him, lay with his head down. Then the hunter climbed up the trunk of the Great Being, pressing it with his feet as though it were a silver rope, and stood on his forehead as if it had been Kelasa peak. Then he inserted his foot into his mouth, and striking the fleshy part of it with his knee, he climbed down from the beast's forehead and thrust the saw into his mouth. The Great Being suffered excruciating pain and his mouth was charged with blood. The hunter, shifting about from place to place, was still unable to cut the tusks with his saw. So the Great Being letting the blood drop from his mouth, resigning himself to the agony, asked, saying, "Sir, cannot you cut them?" And on his saying "No," he recovered his presence of mind and said, "Well then, since I myself have not strength enough to raise my trunk, do you lift it up for me and let it seize the end of the saw." The hunter did so: and the Great Being seized the saw with his trunk and moved it backwards and forwards, and the tusks were cut off as it were sprouts. Then bidding him take the tusks, he said, "I don't give you these, friend hunter, because I do not value them, nor as one desiring the position of Sakka, Mara or Brahma, but the tusks of omniscience are a hundred thousand times dearer to me than these are, and may

this meritorious act be to me the cause of attaining Omniscience." And as he gave him the tusks, he asked, "How long were you coming here?" "Seven years, seven months, and seven days." "Go then by the magic power of these tusks, and you shall reach Benares in seven days." And he gave him a safe conduct and let him go. And after he had sent him away, before the other elephants and Subhadda had returned, he was dead.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

The hunter then the tusks did saw

From out that noble creature's jaw,

And with his shining, matchless prize

Home with all speed he quickly hies.

When he was gone, the herd of elephants not finding their enemy came back.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

Sad at his death and full of fright,

The herd that took to panic flight,

Seeing no trace of cruel foe,

Returned to find their chief laid low.

And with them also came Subhadda, and they all then and there with weeping and lamentation betook them to the pacceka buddhas who had been so friendly to the Great Being, and said, "Sirs, he who supplied you with the necessaries of life has died from the wound of a poisoned arrow. Come and see where his dead body is exposed." And the five hundred pacceka buddhas passing through the air alighted in the sacred enclosure. At that moment two young elephants, lifting up the body of the king elephant with their tusks, and so causing it to do homage to the pacceka buddhas, raised it aloft on a pyre and burned it. The pacceka buddhas all through the night rehearsed scripture texts in the cemetery. The eight thousand elephants, after extinguishing the flames, first bathed and then, with Subhadda at their head, returned to their place of abode.

The Master, to make this matter clear, said:

They wept and wailed, as it is said,

Each heaping dust upon his head,

Then slow returning home were seen,

Behind their ever gracious queen.

And Sonuttara within seven days reached Benares with his tusks.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

The hunter straight to Kasi hies

Bearing his bright and matchless prize

—The noble creature's tusks, I mean,

Cheering all hearts with golden sheen—

And to that royal dame he said,

"Here are his tusks: the beast is dead."

Now in offering them to the queen, he said, "Lady, the elephant, against whom you conceived a grudge in your heart for a trifling offence, has been slain by me." "Do you tell me that he is dead?" she cried. And he gave her the tusks, saying, "Be assured that he is dead: here are his tusks." She received the tusks adorned with six different coloured rays on her jewelled fan, and, placing them on her lap, gazed at the tusks of one who in a former existence had been her dear lord and she thought, "This fellow has come with the tusks he cut from the auspicious elephant that he slew with a poisoned shaft." And at the remembrance of the Great Being she was filled with so great sorrow that she could not endure it, but her heart then and there was broken and that very day she died.

The Master, to make the story clear, said:

His tusks no sooner did she see

—Her own dear lord of old was he

Than straight her heart through grief did break

And she, poor fool, died for his sake.

When he, almighty and all wise,

Broke into smiles before their eyes,

Straightway these holy Brethren thought,

"Sure Buddhas never smile for nought."

"She whom you used to see," he said,

“A yellow-robed ascetic maid,

Was erst a queen and I,” he cried,

Was that king elephant who died.”

“The wretch who took those tusks so white,

Unmatched on earth, so shining bright,

And brought them to Benares town

Is now as Devadatta known.”

Buddha from his own knowledge told

This long drawn tale of times of old,

In all its sad variety,

Though free from pain and grief was he.

That elephant of long ago

Was I, the king of all the band,

And, Brothers, I would have you so

This Birth aright to understand.

These stanzas were recorded by elders as they chanted the Law and sang the praises of the Lord of all Power.

And on hearing this discourse a multitude entered the First Path, but the Sister afterwards by spiritual insight attained to Sainthood.

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.

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