Ja 519 — Sambula Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja519.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

License: Public Domain (original English edition, published 1895–1907)

Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 5, 1905

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

“Tied to the spot,” etc. This story the Master, while dwelling at Jetavana, told of queen Mallika. The introductory story is related at length in the Kummasapinda Birth. Now by the efficacy of a gift of three portions of sour gruel to the Tathagata, she that very day rose to the position of chief queen, and being possessed of faithful servants and endued with the five feminine charms, full of knowledge, and a disciple of the Buddha, she showed herself a devoted wife. Her devotion was blazed abroad throughout the city. So one day a discussion was started in the Hall of Truth, how that queen Mallika was a faithful and devoted wife. The Master, on his coming there, asked the Brethren what was the topic they were discussing as they sat together, and on hearing what it was he said, “Not now only, but formerly too, Brethren, she was a devoted wife”; and so saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time king Brahmadatta had a son named Sotthisena, and when he had come of age the king set him up as viceroy. His chief consort, Sambula by name, was extremely beautiful, and gifted with so radiant a form that she appeared like a lamp-flame shining in a sheltered spot. By and bye leprosy showed itself in Sotthisena and the physicians failed to cure it. When the sore discharged, he became so loathsome that in his depression he cried, “What good is my kingdom to me? I shall perish without a friend in the wilderness.” And, bidding them tell the king, he left his harem and departed. Sambula, though he made many attempts to stop her, refused to return, and saying, “I will watch over you, my lord, in the forest,” went forth from the city with him. On entering the forest, he built a hut of leaves and took up his abode in a shady and well-watered spot, where wild fruit abounded. How then did the royal lady watch over him? Why she rose up early in the morning, swept out his hermitage, set some water for him to drink, furnished him with a tooth-stick and water to wash his mouth, and when his mouth was cleansed, she ground various simples and anointed his sores, and gave him luscious fruits to eat; when he had rinsed his mouth and washed his hands, she saluted him and said, “Be earnest in well-doing, my lord.” Then taking a basket, a spade and a hook, she went into the forest to gather wild fruit, and she

brought and set it on one side, and fetching water in a jar, she with various powders and clay washed Sotthisena and again offered him wild fruit. And when he had finished his meal, she brought him scented water and herself partook of the fruit. Then she arranged a board with a coverlet, and as he lay down on it, she bathed his feet, and after dressing and cleaning his head and back and feet, she came and lay down by the side of the bed. In this way did she watch over her lord. One day, as she was bringing fruit from the forest, she espied a mountain cave, and putting down the basket from her head, she stood on the edge of the cave, and, stepping down to bathe, she rubbed her body all over with yellow dye and took a bath. After washing herself, she climbed up again and put on her bark garment and stood on the edge of the pool. And the whole forest was lighted up with the radiance that was shed from her person. At that moment a goblin, going forth to find his prey, caught sight of her, and falling in love with her, he repeated a couple of stanzas:

Tied to the spot and trembling as in fear,

Who in this rocky cave is standing here?

Tell us, I pray, O slender-waisted dame,

Who may thy kinsmen be, and what thy name.

Who art thou, lady, ever fair and bright,

And what thy birth that thou canst flood with light

This grove, fit home of every beast of prey?

An ogre I to thee due homage pay.

On hearing what he said, she replied in three stanzas:

Prince Sotthisena, know full well, is heir to Kasi throne,

And I, this prince’s wedded wife, as Sambula am known.

Videha’s royal son is sick and in the forest lies;

Alone I tend him, mad with pain, or else he surely dies.

This savoury bit of venison I picked up in the wood,

And bear it to my lord to-day, now faint for want of food.

This is followed by stanzas spoken alternately by the goblin and the lady:

What good is this sick lord of thine, O Sambula, to thee?

No wife, but nurse is what he craves. I will thy husband be.

With sorrow worn, a wretch forlorn, no beauty can I claim,

If thou art fain a bride to gain, go woo some fairer dame.

Four hundred wives have I to grace my home on yonder hill;

O lady, deign o'er them to reign, and each fond wish fulfil.

Fair maid so bright with golden light, whate'er is dear to thee

Is mine to give, so come and live a life of joy with me.

But if denied to me as bride, thou art my lawful prey,

And wilt be good to serve as food to break my fast to-day.

(That ogre grim with his seven tufts inspiring dread alarm,

Found helpless Sambula astray and seized her by the arm.

Thus held by him, that ogre grim, her lustful, cruel foe,

She still deplored her absent lord, nor e'er forgot his woe.)

No grief to me that I should be this hateful ogre's prey,

But that the love of my dear lord from me should fall away.

No gods are here, but absent far they flee,

Nor any guardians of the world I see,

To check the course of outrage and suppress

All acts of unrestrained licentiousness.

Then was the abode of Sakka shaken by the efficacy of her virtue, and his throne of yellow marble showed signs of heat. Sakka, on reflection, discovered the cause, and, taking his thunderbolt, he came with all speed, and, standing above the goblin, spoke another stanza:

'Mongst women folk the chief in fame,

She's wise and perfect, bright as flame,

Shouldst thou eat her, thy skull be riven.

O goblin, into fragments seven.

So harm her not; let her go free,

For a devoted wife is she.

On hearing this the goblin let Sambula go. Sakka thought: “This goblin will be guilty of the same thing again,” and so he bound him with celestial chains and let him loose on the third mountain from thence, that he might not return; and, after earnestly exhorting the royal lady, he departed to his own abode. And the princess, after sunset, by the light of the moon reached the hermitage.

To explain the matter, the Master repeated eight stanzas:

Escaped from ogre, to her hut she fled,

As bird returning finds its fledglings dead,

Or cow, robbed of her calf, laments an empty shed.

Thus Sambula, of royal fame, made moan,

Wild-eyed and helpless, in the wood, alone.

Hail, priests and brahmins, righteous sages too,

Deserted, I for refuge fly to you.

All hail, ye lions and ye tigers fell,

And other beasts that in the woodland dwell.

All hail, ye grasses, herbs and plants that creep,

All hail, ye forests green and mountains steep.

All hail to Night, bedecked with stars on high,

Dark as blue lotus of the deepest dye.

All hail to Ganges: mother of rivers she,

Known amongst men as famed Bhagirathi.

Hail, Himavat, of all the mountains king,

Huge rocky pile, o'ertopping everything.

Regarding her, as she uttered this lamentation, Sotthisena thought, "She is overdoing her lamentation: I do not quite know what it all means. If she were acting thus for love of me, her heart would be broken. I will put her to the test." And he went and sat at the door of his hut. She, still lamenting, came to the door, and, making a low obeisance, she said, "Where has my lord been?" "Lady," he said, "on other days you have never come at this hour; to-day you are very late," and in the form of a question he spoke this stanza:

Illustrious lady, why so late to-day?

What favoured lover led to this delay?

Then she made answer, "My lord, I was returning with my fruit when I beheld a goblin, and he fell in love with me, and seizing me by the hand, he cried: "Unless you obey my words, I will eat you alive." And at that moment, sorrowing for you only, I uttered this lament; and she repeated this stanza:

Seized by my foe, I, full of woe, these words to him did say;

"No grief to me that I should be a hateful ogre's prey,

But that the love of my dear lord from me should fall away."

Then she told him the rest of the story, saying, "So when I was seized by this goblin, and was unable to make him let me go, I acted so as to excite the attention of the god. Then Sakka came, thunderbolt in hand, and, standing in the air, he threatened the goblin and made him release me. And he bound him with magic chains and deposited him on the third mountain range from here, and so departed. Thus was I saved by means of Sakka." Sotthisena, on hearing this, replied: "Well, lady, it may be so. With womenkind it is hard to discover the truth. In the Himalaya region dwell many foresters, ascetics and magicians. Who shall believe you?" And so saying, he repeated a stanza:

You jades are ever by far too clever,

Truth among such is a great rarity,

Ways of the sex are enough to perplex,

E'en as the course of a fish in the sea.

On hearing his words, she said: "My lord, though you do not believe me, by virtue of the truth I speak, I will heal you." So, filling a pot of water and performing an Act of Truth, she poured the water on his head and spoke this stanza:

May Truth for aye my shelter be,

As I love no man more than thee,

And by this Act of Truth, I pray,

May thy disease be healed to-day.

When she had thus performed an Act of Truth, no sooner was the water sprinkled over Sotthisena than the leprosy straightway left him, as it were copper rust washed in some acid. After staying a few days there, they departed from the forest, and, coming to Benares, entered the park. The king, being apprised of their arrival, went to the park, and there and then bade the royal umbrella to be raised over Sotthisena, and ordered that Sambula, by sprinkling, should be raised to the position of chief queen. Then conducting them into the city, he himself adopted the ascetic life and took up his abode in the park, but he still constantly took his meals in the palace. And Sotthisena merely conferred on Sambula the rank of chief consort, but no honour was paid her, and he ignored her very existence and took his pleasure with other women. Sambula, through jealousy of her rivals, grew thin and pale of countenance, and her veins stood out upon her body. One day when her father-in-law, the ascetic, came to have a meal, to get rid of her grief she came to him when he had finished eating, and saluting him, sat down on one side. On seeing her in this languid condition, he repeated a stanza:

Seven hundred elephants by night and day

Are guarding thee, all ready for the fray,

Hundreds of archers shielding thee from harm;

Whence come the foes to fill thee with alarm?

On hearing his words she said, “Your son, my lord, is no longer the same to me”; and she repeated five stanzas:

Fair as a lotus are the maids he loves,

Their swan-like voice his deepest passion moves,

And as he listens to their measured strain,

In his affections I no longer reign.

In human shape but like to nymphs divine,

Adorned with ornaments of gold they shine,

Of perfect form the noble maidens lie

In graceful pose, to charm the royal eye.

If I once more might wander in the wood,

To glean a portion for his daily food,

Once more I should a husband's love regain,

And quit the court in forest realms to reign.

A woman may in softest robes be drest,

And be with food in rich abundance blest,

Fair though she be, yet if an unloved wife,

Best fix a rope and put an end to life.

Yea the poor wretch on bed of straw that lies,

If she find favour in her husband's eyes,

Enjoys a happiness unknown to one,

Rich in all else, but poor in love alone.

When she had thus explained to the ascetic the cause of her thus pining away, he summoned the king and said, "Dear Sotthisena, when you were crushed by the disease of leprosy and hid yourself in the forest, she went with you and ministered to your wants, and by the power of truth healed your sickness, and now after she has been the means of your being established on the throne, you do not even know the place of her sitting and uprising; this is very wrong of you. An act of treachery to a friend like this is a sin," and reproving his son, he repeated this stanza:

A loving wife is ever hard to find,

As is a man that to his wife is kind:

Thy wife was virtuous and loving too;

Do thou, O king, to Sambula be true.

After he had thus reproved his son, he got up and went away. The king, when his father was gone, called for Sambula and said, "My dear, forgive the wrong I have done you this long time. Henceforth I confer on you all power," and he repeated the final stanza:

Shouldst thou, with wealth in great abundance blest,

Still pine away, by jealousy opprest,

I and these maidens, creatures of thy hand,

Will be obedient to thy command.

Thenceforth the pair lived happily together and after a life of charity and good works they departed to fare according to their deeds. The ascetic, after entering upon ecstatic meditation, passed to the heaven of Brahma.

The Master here ended his lesson and saying, “Not now only, but formerly too, Mallika was a devoted wife,” he identified the Birth: “At that time Sambula Was Mallika, Sotthisena was the king of Kosala, and the ascetic father 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.

These translations are in the public domain. You are free to do whatever you like with them.

Scanned, proofed and formatted at sacred-texts.com, January 2006–February 2010, by John Bruno Hare and others. Thanks to the Sacred Texts Archive for making these texts available in digital form.

Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.