Ja 523 — Alambusa Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol5/ja523.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

“Then mighty Indra,” etc. This story the Master, while residing at Jetavana, told about the temptation of a Brother by the wife of his unregenerate days. The subject-matter of the tale is related in full in the Indriya Birth. Now the Master asked the Brother, “Is it true, Brother, that you were rendered discontented?” “It is true, Reverend Sir.” “By whom?” “By my wife of former days.” “Brother,” he said, “this woman wrought mischief for you: it was owing to her that you fell away from mystic meditation, and lay for three years in a lost and distracted condition, and on the recovery of your senses you uttered a great lamentation,” and so saying he told him a story of the past.

Once upon a time in the reign of Brahmadatta in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born of a brahmin family in the kingdom of Kasi, and when of age he became proficient in all liberal arts, and adopting the ascetic life he lived on wild berries and roots in a forest home. Now a certain doe in the brahmin’s mingeing-place ate grass and drank water mingled with his semen, and was so much enamoured of him that she became pregnant and henceforth ever resorted to the spot near the hermitage. The Great Being examining into the matter learned the facts of the case. By and bye the doe gave birth to a man child, and the Great Being watched over it with a father’s affection. And his name was Isisinga. And when the lad reached years of discretion, he admitted him to holy orders, and when he himself grew an old man, he repaired with him to the Nari grove and thus admonished him, “My dear boy, in this Himalaya country are women as fair as these flowers: they bring utter destruction on all that fall into their power: you must not come under their sway.” And shortly afterwards he became destined to birth in the Brahma world. But Isisinga, indulging in mystic meditation, made his dwelling in the Himalaya region, a grim ascetic, with all his senses mortified. So by the power of his virtue the abode of Sakka was shaken. Sakka, on reflection, discovered the cause and thinking, “This fellow will bring me down from my position as Sakka, I will send a heavenly nymph to make a breach in his virtue,” and after examining the whole angel world, amongst twenty-five millions of handmaids, save and except the nymph Alambusa, he found no other that was equal to the task. So

summoning her, he bade her bring about the destruction of the saint's virtue.

The Master, in explanation of this matter, uttered this stanza:

Then mighty Indra, lord of lords, the god that Vatra slew,

Unto his hall the nymph did call, for well her wiles he knew.

And "Fair Alambusa," he cried, "the angel host above

To Isisinga bid thee go, to tempt him with thy love."

Sakka ordered Alambusa, saying, "Go and draw nigh to Isisinga, and bringing him under your power destroy his virtue," and he uttered these words:

Go, Temptress, ever dog his steps, for holy sage is he,

And, seeking ever highest bliss, still triumphs over me.

On hearing this Alambusa repeated a couple of stanzas:

Why, king of gods, of all the nymphs regardst thou me alone,

And bidst me tempt the saintly man that menaces thy throne?

In happy grove of Nandana is many a nymph divine,

To one of them—it is their turn—the hateful task assign.

Then Sakka repeated three stanzas:

Thou speakest sooth; in happy grove of Nandana, I ween,

May many a nymph, to rival thee in loveliness, be seen.

But none like thee, O peerless maid, with all a woman's wile

This holy man in folly's ways so practised to beguile.

Then queen of women as thou art, go, lovely nymph, thy way

And by the power of beauty force the saint to own thy sway.

On hearing this Alambusa repeated two stanzas:

I will not fail, O angel-king, to go at thy behest,

But still with fear this sage austere I venture to molest.

For many a one, poor fool, has gone (I shudder at the thought)

In hell to rue the suffering due to wrongs on saints he wrought.

This said, Alambusa, fair nymph, departed with all speed,

Famed Isisinga to entice to some unholy deed.

Into the grove for half a league with berries red so bright,

The grove where Isisinga dwelt, she vanished out of sight.

At break of day, ere yet the sun was scarce astir on high,

To Isisinga, sweeping out his cell, the nymph drew nigh.

These stanzas owed their inspiration to Perfect Wisdom.

Then the ascetic questioned her and said:

Who art thou, like to lightning flash, or bright as morning star,

With ears and hands bedecked with gems that sparkle from afar?

Fragrant as golden sandal-wood, in brightness like the sun,

A slim and winsome maid art thou, right fair to look upon.

So soft and pure, with slender waist and firmly springing gait,

Thy movements are so full of grace, my heart they captivate.

Thy thighs, like trunk of elephant, are finely tapering found,

Thy buttocks soft to touch and like to any dice-board round.

With down like lotus filaments thy navel marked, I ween,

As though with black collyrium ’twere charged, from far is seen.

Twin milky breasts, like pumpkins halved, their swelling globes display,

Firm set, although without a stalk all unsupported they.

Thy lips are red as is thy tongue, and, O auspicious sign,

Thy neck long as the antelope's is marked with triple line.

Thy teeth brushed with a piece of wood, kept ever clean and bright,

Gleam in thy top and lower jaw with flash of purest white.

Thy eyes are long and large of shape, a lovely sight to view,

Like gunja berries black, marked out with lines of reddish hue.

Thy tresses smooth, not over long and bound in neatest coil,

Are tipped with gold and perfumed with the finest sandal oil.

Of all that live by merchandise, by herds or by the plough,

Of all the mighty saints that live true to ascetic vow

Amongst them all in this wide world thy peer I may not see,

Then what thy name and who thy sire, we fain would learn from thee.

While the ascetic thus sang the praises of Alambusa, from her feet to the hair of her head, she remained silent, and from his long drawn out speech observing how disturbed was his state of mind she repeated this stanza:

Heaven bless thee, Kassapa, my friend, the time is past and gone

For idle questions such as these—for are we not alone?—

Come let us in thy hermitage embracing haste to prove

The thousand joys well known to all the votaries of love.

So saying Alambusa thought, "If I stand still, he will not come within reach of me; I will make as if I were running away," and with all the cunning of a woman's wiles she shook the purpose of the ascetic, as she fled in the direction from which she had approached him.

The Master, to make the matter clear, spoke this stanza:

This said, Alambusa, fair nymph, departed with all speed,

Famed Isisinga to entice to some unholy deed.

Then the ascetic, on seeing her depart, cried, "She is off;" and by a swift movement on his part he intercepted her as she was slowly making off and with his hand seized her by the

hair of her head.

The Master, to make the matter clear, said:

To check her flight, the holy man with motion swift as air

In hot pursuit o'ertook the nymph and held her by the hair.

Just where he stood the lovely maid embraced him in her arms,

And straight his virtue fell before the magic of her charms.

In thought she flew to Indra's throne in Nandana afar;

The god at once divined her wish and sent a golden car,

With trappings spread and all adorned with manifold array:

And there the saint lay in her arms for many a long day.

Three years passed o'er his head as though it were a moment's space,

Until at last the holy man woke up from her embrace.

Green trees he saw on every side; an altar stood hard by,

And verdant groves re-echoing to the loud cuckoo cry.

He looked around and weeping sore he shed a bitter tear;

I make no offering, raise no hymn; no sacrifice is here.

Dwelling within this forest lone, who can my tempter be?

Who by foul practice has o'ercome all sense of right in me,

E'en as a ship with precious freight is swallowed in the sea?"

On hearing this Alambusa thought: "Should I not tell him, he will curse me; verily, I will tell him," and standing by him in a visible form she repeated this stanza:

Sent by king Sakka, here I stand

A willing slave at thy command;

Though far too careless to know this,

’Twas thought of me that marred thy bliss.

On hearing her words he called to mind his father’s admonition, and lamenting how he was utterly ruined by disobeying the words of his father he repeated four stanzas:

Thus would kind Kassapa, my sire,

With prudence heedless youth inspire:

“Women are fair as lotus flower,

Beware, good youth, their subtle power.

Of woman’s budding charms beware,

Beware the danger that lurks there.

’Twas thus my sire, by pity moved,

Would fain have warned the son he loved.

My wise old father’s words, alas!

Unheeded I allowed to pass,

And so alone, in sore distress

I haunt to-day this wilderness.

Accursed be the life of old,

Henceforth I’ll do as I am told.

Far better death itself to face,

Than be again in such a case.

So he forsook sensual desire and entered upon mystic meditation. Then Alambusa, seeing his virtue as an ascetic and aware that he had attained to a state of ecstasy, became terrified and asked his forgiveness.

The Master, to make the matter clear, repeated two stanzas:

Alambusa no sooner knew

His steadfast power and courage true

Than bending low, the sage to greet,

The nymph straightway embraced his feet.

“O saint, all anger lay aside,

A mighty work I wrought,” she cried,

When heaven itself and gods of fame

Trembled with fear to hear thy name.”

Then he let her go, saying, “I pardon thee, fair lady; go, as thou wilt.” And he repeated a stanza:

My blessing on the Thirty-three

And Vasava, their lord, and thee:

Depart, fair maid, for thou art free.

Saluting him she departed to the abode of the gods in that same golden car.

The Master, to make the matter clear, repeated three stanzas:

Embracing then the sage’s feet and circling to the right,

With hands in suppliant attitude, she vanished from his sight,

And mounting on the golden car, with trappings rich o’erspread,

All splendidly caparisoned, to heavenly heights she sped.

Like blazing torch or lightning flash, she passed athwart the sky,

And Sakka, glad at heart, exclaimed, “No boon can I deny.”

Receiving a boon from him she repeated the concluding stanza:

If Sakka, lord of sprites, thou wouldst my heart’s desire allow,

Let me ne’er tempt a saint again to violate his vow.

The Master here ended his lesson to that Brother and revealed the Truths and identified the Birth—At the conclusion of the Truths that Brother was established in the Fruit of the First Path—“At that time Alambusa was the wife of his unregenerate days, Isisinga was the back-sliding Brother, and the great saint his 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.

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