Ja 61 — Asatamanta Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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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

“In lust unbridled.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a passion-tost Brother. The Introductory Story will be related in the Ummadanti-jataka. But to this Brother the Master said, “Women, Brother, are lustful, profligate, vile, and degraded. Why be passion-tost for a vile woman?” And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life as a brahmin in the city of Takkasila in the Gandhara country; and by the time he had grown up, such was his proficiency in the Three Vedas and all accomplishments, that his fame as a teacher spread through all the world.

In those days there was a brahmin family in Benares, unto whom a son was born; and on the day of his birth they took fire and kept it always burning, until the boy was sixteen. Then his parents told him how the fire, kindled on the day of his birth, had never been allowed to go out; and they bade their son make his choice. If his heart was set on winning entrance hereafter into the Realm of Brahma, then let him take the fire and retire with it to the forest, there to work out his desire by ceaseless worship of the Lord of Fire. But, if he preferred the joys of a home, they bade their son go to Takkasila and there study under the world-famed teacher with a view to settling down to manage the property. “I should surely fail in the worship of the Fire-God,” said the young brahmin; “I’ll be a squire.” So he bade farewell to his father and mother, and, with a thousand pieces of money for the teacher’s fee, set out for Takkasila. There he studied till his education was complete, and then betook himself home again.

Now his parents grew to wish him to forsake the world and to worship the Fire-God in the forest. Accordingly his mother, in her desire to despatch him to the forest by bringing home to him the wickedness of women, was confident that his wise and learned teacher would be able to lay bare the wickedness of the sex to her son, and so she asked whether

he had quite finished his education. “Oh yes,” said the youth.

“Then of course you have not omitted the Dolour Texts?” “I have not learnt those, mother.” “How then can you say your education is finished? Go back at once, my son, to your master, and return to us when you have learnt them,” said his mother.

“Very good,” said the youth, and off he started for Takkasila once more.

Now his master too had a mother,—an old woman of a hundred and twenty years of age,—whom with his own hands he used to bathe, feed and tend. And for so doing he was scorned by his neighbours,—so much so indeed that he resolved to depart to the forest and there dwell with his mother. Accordingly, in the solitude of a forest he had a hut built in a delightful spot, where water was plentiful, and after laying in a stock of ghee and rice and other provisions, he carried his mother to her new home, and there lived cherishing her old age.

Not finding his master at Takkasila, the young brahmin made enquiries, and finding out what had happened, set out for the forest, and presented himself respectfully before his master. “What brings you back so soon, my boy?” said the latter. “I do not think, sir, I learned the Dolour Texts when I was with you,” said the youth. “But who told you that you had to learn the Dolour Texts?” “My mother, master,” was the reply. Hereon the Bodhisatta reflected that there were no such texts as those, and concluded that his pupil’s mother must have wanted her son to learn how wicked women were. So he said to the youth that it was all right, and that he should in due course be taught the Texts in question. “From to-day,” said he, “you shall take my place about my mother, and with your own hands wash, feed and look after her. As you rub her hands, feet, head and back, be careful to exclaim, ‘Ah, Madam! if you are so lovely now you are so old, what must you not have been in the heyday of your youth!’ And as you wash and perfume her hands and feet, burst into praise of their beauty. Further, tell me without shame or reserve every single word my mother says to you. Obey me in this, and you shall master the Dolour Texts; disobey me, and you shall remain ignorant of them for ever.”

Obedient to his master’s commands, the youth did all he was bidden, and so persistently praised the old woman’s beauty that she thought he had fallen in love with her; and, blind and decrepit though she was, passion was kindled within her . So one day she broke in on his compliments by asking, “Is your desire towards me?” “It is indeed, madam,” answered the youth; “but nay master is so strict.” “If you desire me,” said she, “kill my son!” “But how shall I, that have learned so much from him, how shall I for passion’s sake kill my master?” “Well then, if you will be faithful to me, I will kill him myself.”

(So lustful, vile, and degraded are women that, giving the rein to lust, a hag like this, and old as she was, actually thirsted for the blood of so dutiful a son!)

Now the young brahmin told all this to the Bodhisatta, who, commending him for reporting the matter, studied how much longer his mother was destined to live. Finding that her destiny was to die that very day, he said, “Come, young brahmin; I will put her to

the test." So he cut down a fig-tree and hewed out of it a wooden figure about his own size, which he wrapped up, head and all, in a robe and laid upon his own bed,—with a string tied to it. "Now go with an axe to my mother," said he; "and give her this string as a clue to guide her steps."

So away went the youth to the old woman, and said, "Madam, the master is lying down indoors on his bed; I have tied this string as a clue to guide you; take this axe and kill him, if you can." "But you won't forsake me, will you?" said she. "Why should I?" was his reply. So she took the axe, and, rising up with trembling limbs, groped her way along by the string, till she thought she felt her son. Then she bared the head of the figure, and—thinking to kill her son at a single blow— brought down the axe right on the figure's throat,—only to learn by the thud that it was wood! "What are you doing, mother?" said the Bodhisatta. With a shriek that she was betrayed, the old woman fell dead to the ground. For, says tradition, it was fated that she should die at that very moment and under her own roof.

Seeing that she was dead, her son burnt her body, and, when the flames of the pile were quenched, graced her ashes with wild-flowers. Then with the young brahmin he sat at the door of the hut and said, "My son, there is no such separate passage as the 'Dolour Text.' It is women who are depravity incarnate. And when your mother sent you back to me to learn the Dolour Texts, her object was that you should learn how wicked women are. You have now witnessed with your own eyes my mother's wickedness, and therefrom you will see how lustful and vile women are." And with this lesson, he bade the youth depart.

Bidding farewell to his master, the young brahmin went home to his parents. Said his mother to him, "Have you now learnt the Dolour Texts?"

"Yes, mother."

"And what," she asked, "is your final choice? will you leave the world to worship the Lord of Fire, or will you choose a family life?" "Nay," answered the young brahmin; "with my own eyes have I seen the wickedness of womankind; I will have nothing to do with family life. I will renounce the world." And his convictions found vent in this stanza—

In lust unbridled, like devouring fire,

Are women,—frantic in their rage.

The sex renouncing, fain would I retire

To find peace in a hermitage.

With this invective against womankind, the young brahmin took leave of his parents, and renounced the world for the hermit's life,—wherein winning the peace he desired, he assured himself of admittance after that life into the Realm of Brahma.

“So you see, Brother,” said the Master, “how lustful, vile, and woe-bringing are women.” And after declaring the wickedness of women, he preached the Four Truths, at the close whereof that Brother won the Fruit of the First Path. Lastly, the Master chewed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying,

“Kapilani was the mother of those days, Maha-Kassapa was the father, Ananda the pupil, and I myself the teacher.”

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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