Ja 62 — Andabhuta Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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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

“Blindfold, a-luting.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about another passion-tost person.

Said the Master, “Is the report true that you are passion-tost, Brother?” “Quite true,” was the reply.

“Brother, women can not be warded; in days gone by the wise who kept watch over a woman from the moment she was born, failed nevertheless to keep her safe.” 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 the child of the Queen-consort. When he grew up, he mastered every accomplishment; and when, at his father’s death, he came to be king, he proved a righteous king. Now he used to play at dice with his chaplain, and, as he flung the golden dice upon the silver table, he would sing this catch for luck—

’Tis nature’s law that rivers wind;

Trees grow of wood by law of kind;

And, given opportunity,

All women work iniquity.

As these lines always made the king win the game, the chaplain was in a fair way to lose every penny he had in the world. And, in order to save himself from utter ruin, he resolved to seek out a little maid that had never seen another man, and then to keep her under lock and key in his own house. “For,” thought he, “I couldn’t manage to look after a girl who has

seen another man. So I must take a new-born baby girl, and keep her under my thumb as she grows up, with a close guard over her, so that none may come near her and that she may be true to one man. Then I shall win of the king, and grow rich." Now he was skilled in prognostication; and seeing a poor woman who was about to become a mother, and knowing that her child would be a girl, he paid the woman to come and be confined in his house, and sent her away after her confinement with a present. The infant was brought up entirely by women, and no men—other than himself—were ever allowed to set eyes on her. When the girl grew up, she was subject to him and he was her master.

Now, while the girl was growing up, the chaplain forbore to play with the king; but when she was grown up and under his own control, he challenged the king to a game. The king accepted, and play began. But, when in throwing the dice the king sang his lucky catch, the chaplain added,—"always excepting my girl." And then luck changed, and it was now the chaplain who won, while the king lost.

Thinking the matter over, the Bodhisatta suspected the chaplain had a virtuous girl shut up in his house; and enquiry proved his suspicions true. Then, in order to work her fall, he sent for a clever scamp, and asked whether he thought he could seduce the girl. "Certainly, sire," said the fellow. So the king gave him money, and sent him away with orders to lose no time.

With the king's money the fellow bought perfumes and incense and aromatics of all sorts, and opened a perfumery shop close to the chaplain's house. Now the chaplain's house was seven stories high, and had seven gateways, at each of which a guard was set,—a guard of women only,—and no man but the brahmin himself was ever allowed to enter. The very baskets that contained the dust and sweepings were examined before they were passed in. Only the chaplain was allowed to see the girl, and she had only a single waiting-woman. This woman had money given her to buy flowers and perfumes for her mistress, and on her way she used to pass near the shop which the scamp had opened. And he, knowing very well that she was the girl's attendant, watched one day for her coming, and, rushing out of his shop, fell at her feet, clasping her knees tightly with both hands and blubbering out, "O my mother! where have you been all this long time?"

And his confederates, who stood by his side, cried, "What a likeness! Hand and foot, face and figure, even in style of dress, they are identical!" As one and all kept dwelling on the marvellous likeness, the poor woman lost her head. Crying out that it must be her boy, she too burst into tears. And with weeping and tears the two fell to embracing one another. Then said the man, "Where are you living, mother?"

"Up at the chaplain's, my son. He has a young wife of peerless beauty, a very goddess for grace; and I'm her waiting-woman." "And whither away now, mother?" "To buy her perfumes and flowers." "Why go elsewhere for them? Come to me for them in future," said the fellow. And he gave the woman betel, bdellium, and so forth, and all kinds of flowers, refusing all payment. Struck with the quantity of flowers and perfumes which the waiting-woman brought home, the girl asked why the brahmin was so pleased with her that day. "Why do you say that, my dear?" asked the old woman. "Because of the quantity

of things you have brought home." "No, it isn't that the brahmin was free with his money," said the old woman; "for I got them at my son's." And from that day forth she kept the money the brahmin gave her, and got her flowers and other things free of charge at the man's shop.

And he, a few days later, made out to be ill, and took to his bed. So when the old woman came to the shop and asked for her son, she was told he had been taken ill. Hastening to his side, she fondly stroked his shoulders, as she asked what ailed him. But he made no reply. "Why don't you tell me, my son?" "Not even if I were dying, could I tell you, mother." "But, if you don't tell me, whom are you to tell?" "Well then, mother, my malady lies solely in this that, hearing the praises of your young mistress's beauty, I have fallen in love with her. If I win her, I shall live; if not, this will be my death-bed." "Leave that to me, my boy," said the old woman cheerily; "and don't worry yourself on this account." Then—with a heavy load of perfumes and flowers to take with her—she went home, and said to the brahmin's young wife, "Alas! here's my son in love with you, merely because I told him how beautiful you are! What is to be done?"

"If you can smuggle him in here," replied the girl, "you have my leave."

Hereupon the old woman set to work sweeping together all the dust she could find in the house from top to bottom; this dust she put into a huge flower-basket, and tried to pass out with it. When the usual search was made, she emptied dust over the woman on guard, who fled away under such ill-treatment. In like manner she dealt with all the other watchers, smothering in dust each one in turn that said anything to her. And so it came to pass from that time forward that, no matter what the old woman took in or out of the house, there was nobody bold enough to search her. Now was the time! The old woman smuggled the scamp into the house in a flower-basket, and brought him to her young mistress. He succeeded in wrecking the girl's virtue, and actually stayed a day or two in the upper rooms,—hiding when the chaplain was at home, and enjoying the society of his mistress when the chaplain was off the premises. A day or two passed and the girl said to her lover, "Sweet-heart, you must be going now." "Very well; only I must cuff the brahmin first." "Certainly," said she, and hid the scamp. Then, when the brahmin came in again, she exclaimed, "Oh, my dear husband, I should so like to dance, if you would play the lute for me." "Dance away, my dear," said the chaplain, and struck up forthwith. "But I shall be too ashamed, if you're looking. Let me hide your handsome face first with a cloth; and then I will dance." "All right," said he; "if you're too modest to dance otherwise." So she took a thick cloth and tied it over the brahmin's face so as to blindfold him. And, blindfolded as he was, the brahmin began to play the lute. After dancing awhile, she cried, "My clear, I should so like to hit you once on the head." "Hit away," said the unsuspecting dotard. Then the girl made a sign to her paramour; and he softly stole up behind the brahmin and smote him on the head. Such was the force of the blow, that the brahmin's eyes were like to start out of his head, and a bump rose up on the spot. Smarting with pain, he called to the girl to give him her hand; and she placed it in his. "Ah! it's a soft hand," said he; "but it hits hard!"

Now, as soon as the scamp had struck the brahmin, he hid; and when he was hidden, the girl took the bandage off the chaplain's eyes and rubbed his bruised head with oil. The moment the brahmin went out, the scamp was stowed away in his basket again by the old woman, and so carried out of the house. Making his way at once to the king, he told him the whole adventure.

Accordingly, when the brahmin was next in attendance, the king proposed a game with the dice; the brahmin was willing; and the dicing-table was brought out. As the king made his throw, he sang his old catch, and the brahmin—ignorant of the girl's naughtiness—added his "always excepting my girl,"—and nevertheless lost!

Then the king, who did know what had passed, said to his chaplain, "Why except her? Her virtue has given way. Ah, you dreamed that by taking a girl in the hour of her birth and by placing a sevenfold guard round her, you could be certain of her. Why, you couldn't be certain of a woman, even if you had her inside you and always walked about with her. No woman is ever faithful to one man alone. As for that girl of yours, she told you she should like to dance, and having first blindfolded you as you played the lute to her, she let her paramour strike you on the head, and then smuggled him out of the house. Where then is your exception?" And so saying, the king repeated this stanza—

Blindfold, a-luting, by his wife beguiled,

The brahmin sits,—who tried to rear

A paragon of virtue undefiled!

Learn hence to hold the sex in fear.

In such wise did the Bodhisatta expound the Truth to the brahmin. And the brahmin went home and taxed the girl with the wickedness of which she was accused. "My dear husband, who can have said such a thing about me?" said she. "Indeed I am innocent; indeed it was my own hand, and nobody else's, that struck you; and, if you do not believe me, I will brave the ordeal of fire to prove that no man's hand has touched me but yours; and so I will make you believe me." "So be it," said the brahmin. And he had a quantity of wood brought and set light to it. Then the girl was summoned. "Now," said he, "if you believe your own story, brave these flames!"

Now before this the girl had instructed her attendant as follows—"Tell your son, mother, to be there and to seize my hand just as I am about to go into the fire." And the old woman did as she was bidden; and the fellow came and took his stand among the crowd. Then, to delude the brahmin, the girl, standing there before all the people, exclaimed with fervour, "No man's hand but thine, brahmin, has ever touched me; and, by the truth of my asseveration I call on this fire to harm me not." So saying, she advanced to the burning pile,—when up dashed her paramour, who seized her by the hand, crying shame on the brahmin who could force so fair a maid to enter the flames! Shaking her hand free, the girl exclaimed to the brahmin that what she had asserted was now undone, and that she could

not now brave the ordeal of fire. “Why not?” said the brahmin. “Because,” she replied, “my asseveration was that no man’s hand but thine had ever touched me; and now here is a man who has seized hold of my hand!” But the brahmin, knowing that he was tricked, drove her from him with blows.

Such, we learn, is the wickedness of women. What crime will they not commit; and then, to deceive their husbands, what oaths will they not take—aye, in the light of day—that they did it not! So false-hearted are they! Therefore has it been said—

A sex composed of wickedness and guile,

Unknowable; uncertain as the path

Of fishes in the water,—womankind

Hold truth for falsehood, falsehood for the truth!

As greedily as cows seek pastures new,

Women, unsated, yearn for mate on mate.

As sand unstable, cruel as the snake,

Women know all things; naught from them is hid!

“Even so impossible is it to ward women,” said the Master. His lesson ended, he preached the Truths, at the close whereof the passion-test Brother won the Fruit of the First Path. Also the Master showed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying—“In these days I was the king of Benares.”

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

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