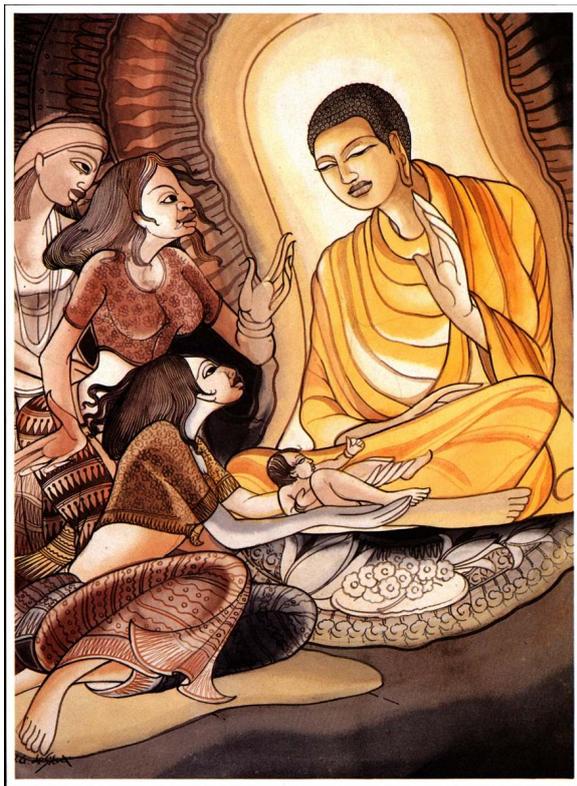


Revenge



Long, long ago, a farmer and his wife were blessed with a son, but they were both already middle-aged. After his father died, the son, who had by then become a young man, was left to do the farm chores, to manage the housework, and to look after his elderly mother all by himself.

One day, his mother called him and said, “My dear boy, let me find you a wife.”

“No, Mother,” he replied. “I’m fine. I just want to take good care of you as long as you live.”

“Son, there is too much for you to do!” she declared. “You’re doing all the farming and the housecleaning by yourself. You should get married. I’ll find you a suitable young

woman.”

No matter how much the young man protested, his mother insisted on finding him a wife, and he finally gave up.

When his mother announced that she was going to visit a good family to see about arranging a marriage, the young man told her that, if he really had to marry, there was another family that he preferred. His mother agreed to see that family and went to meet them. She interviewed their daughter and was satisfied, so the marriage was arranged. After the wedding celebration, the young woman came to live with them, but, even after many months, she had not become pregnant.

The mother called her son again and said, “My dear son, you should have a son of your own by now. You chose your wife, but she is barren. Without heirs our family will die out, and all our property will go to the king. I will find another young woman for you to marry.”

“No, Mother,” he replied. “You wanted me to get married, and I agreed. My wife is managing the chores and the housework. We are fine as we are. Let it be.”

His mother, however, refused to accept the situation. She was constantly fretting and fussing, and, finally, she announced that she would find another wife for her son—one who could give her grandchildren! Exasperated at the incessant nagging, the young man agreed to take another wife.

The young man's wife knew what was going on and thought, "Of course, a son cannot disobey his mother's commands. If this old woman finds another wife who is able to bear children, I'll be no better than a slave in this house! Why don't I take the initiative and find him a young woman myself, someone I can manage, someone beholden to me?"

As soon as she could, she approached a family she knew in the town and asked whether they would give their daughter to her husband.

"That is ridiculous!" the parents cried. "Why would you ask such a thing? It makes no sense!"

"Actually, friends, This is quite reasonable," she countered. "I am barren, and my husband is the only son. Without children, his family will die out. If your daughter has a son, she will become mistress of the family and all its property. If you give your daughter to my husband, she will become rich, and we will all be happy." After a lot of cajoling and many arguments, she, at last, convinced them, and they agreed to her proposal.

The wife presented the young woman to her husband, but she knew that she would have to be vigilant in carrying out her plan.

Later, when the two women were alone, the first wife said sweetly, "My dear, just as soon as you feel that you have become pregnant, let me know, and I'll make sure that you are looked after properly."

"Of course, Madam," the second wife gratefully replied.

In a short time, the young woman announced to the first wife that she thought that she was pregnant.

"Very good, my dear," the first wife replied. "Now you must rest and let us take care of you. You have nothing to worry about."

Every morning, the first wife prepared rice-porridge and gave it to her rival for breakfast. When she was certain that the second wife was indeed expecting, she mixed a drug into the porridge. This caused a miscarriage, and the fetus was aborted.

The second time the young woman conceived, she again informed the first wife, and the same thing happened..

The other women in the neighborhood were curious and gossiped about what was going on in that household. One day, they asked the young woman directly, and she explained that she had had two miscarriages.

"That is not natural," one of the women said.

"Isn't it obvious?" a second asked.

"What do you mean?" the young woman replied.

"Your rival is meddling," said a third.

“She’s jealous and doesn’t want you to have a baby,” said a fourth.

“She must be doing something to cause you to abort,” said a fifth.

The young woman thought back on all that had happened, “Well,” she began, “each time, I have told her that I thought I was pregnant. She told me to rest, and, every morning she prepared rice porridge for my breakfast. She is a very good cook.”

“Of course, that’s it!” the first woman exclaimed.

“You foolish girl!” cried the second. “Don’t trust her!”

“She’s afraid you’ll become mistress in her place,” explained the third.

“She must have mixed something in the porridge to cause you to miscarry,” added the fourth.

“Next time, don’t tell her you are pregnant! Be careful!” advised the fifth.

The young woman realized that what these women were saying was probably true, so, when she conceived the third time, she remained silent. After a few months, the first wife noticed signs of the pregnancy. One morning, when they were alone, she accosted her rival and softly asked, “My dear, why didn’t you tell me that you are expecting again?”

“Why should I tell you anything?” the second wife snapped. “You brought me here and pretended to be my friend. You said that you would take care of me, but twice you’ve made me suffer a miscarriage! I’ll never trust you again!”

Feigning shock and indignation, the first wife just shook her head and walked away. “Oh dear!” she thought. “I’m finished! If she has this baby, I’ll lose my place completely! I must watch her carefully and catch her off guard.”

One day, shortly before the baby was due, she found her chance. She made up a very strong potion and stirred it into the curry that had been prepared for the second wife. The drug induced labor pains and caused a breech birth. Both the unborn baby and the mother were in terrible pain and distress.

From her bed, the second wife cried, “You wicked woman, you brought me here, lied to me, and killed two of my babies! Now you are killing not only my third baby but me as well! I solemnly vow,” she declared loudly “that when I pass away from this life, I will be reborn as an ogress able to devour your children!” As that final word escaped from her mouth, the poor woman died.

When the young man heard this, he realized what his first wife had done. Overcome with rage, he grabbed her and beat her with his fists. “You are a monster!” he shouted. “You have cruelly destroyed my family! I never should have married you! I never should have trusted you! Get out of my house!” The woman was so traumatized by this unexpected turn of events that she became sick and died.

The barren wife was reborn as a hen, and the second wife was reborn as a cat, both in that same house. Every day, the cat stealthily watched the hen. One day, after the hen went out into the yard, the cat crept to the hen's nest, broke the egg, lapped up the yolk, licked her whiskers happily, and scampered away. A few days later, the cat did the same thing again. After the third time, the hen understood what had happened and confronted the cat. "Three times," she declared, "you have eaten my eggs. I can see from your eyes that you are just waiting for an opportunity to eat me too! In my next life, may I be able to devour you and your offspring!"

Not long after that, the hen died and was reborn as a leopardess. The cat also died and was reborn in the same forest as a doe. Three times, the doe gave birth, and, each time, the leopardess killed and ate the newborn fawn. Heartbroken at the death of her young, the doe reflected: "Three times this wicked creature has devoured my helpless babies, and she longs to kill me, too!" Filled with hatred, she loudly declared, "When I have passed away from this existence, may I, in my next life, be able to devour her and her offspring!"

The doe was reborn as an ogress, and the leopardess was reborn as the daughter of a good family in Savatthi. The girl grew up, married into another good family, and went to live with her husband's family near the city gate. As soon as the wife had given birth to a son, the ogress disguised herself as a young woman and went to the house.

"Where is my friend?" the ogress said sweetly. "I haven't seen her in a long time."

"She's in an inner room," replied the servant. "She has just given birth to a child."

"How wonderful!" beamed the ogress as she entered the house. "Is the child a boy or a girl?" she asked the other women who had gathered there.

"It's a healthy son." they replied.

"I must congratulate her!" declared the ogress, and she marched into the bedroom.

Bending over the child's bed, she pretended to admire the baby. Suddenly, she grabbed the boy, gobbled him up, and, in the confusion, escaped back to the forest.

When the young wife gave birth a second time, the ogress took on a different disguise, managed to get into the house, and ate the baby in the same way.

As soon as the young woman became pregnant for the third time, she appealed to her husband. "My dear," she said, "twice, an ogress has managed to enter our house and to devour our two sons. Each time, she has been able to escape. I am certain she will come again. As my delivery nears, I want to go to my parents' home to have this baby in safety."

The ogress knew that the young wife was expecting, but, at the time of the birth, she was obliged to stay in the Himavat, performing her duty to Vessavana, drawing water

from Lake Anotatta. As soon as she was released from this task, she rushed to Savatthi and asked after the woman.

“She’s not here!” the servant told her. “In order to escape from an ogress that has devoured her first two babies, she’s gone to her parents’ home.”

The ogress walked away, but, overpowered by hatred, she swore to herself, “Go where she will, she cannot escape from me!”

At the same time, the young woman and her husband were taking the baby to Jetavana for the naming ceremony. When they arrived at the tank, they decided to bathe before entering the monastery. They took turns, each holding the baby while the other bathed. As the mother sat nursing her little son, the ogress happened to pass by.

The woman recognized the ogress and screamed for her husband. Not daring to wait, she dashed into the monastery grounds with the baby clutched tightly to her breast. The ogress tried to follow her but was prevented from doing so by Sumana, the deva who resided in the monastery gate.

At that time, the Buddha was teaching the Dhamma to a large group of lay followers. The young woman rushed to the front of the assembly, laid her baby at the Buddha’s feet, and breathlessly declared, “Venerable Sir, I give you my son! Please spare his life!”

Understanding exactly the meaning of the woman’s request, the Buddha calmly asked Venerable Ananda to go to the gate and to bring the ogress back with him.

“No, Venerable Sir!” the young wife cried, “She will eat my child!”

“Let her come,” the Buddha said softly. “Make no noise.”

When Venerable Ananda returned with the ogress, the Buddha asked the enemies: “Why have you done these cruel things? Had you not come face to face with a Buddha like me, you would have continued to cherish hatred toward each other for an eon, like the snake and the mongoose, who tremble with enmity, like the crows and the owls, who are constantly at war. Why do you return hatred for hatred?” Then he pronounced a verse:

Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world.

By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.

– Dhammapada 5

The ogress immediately understood and was established in the first path.

The Buddha turned to the woman and said, “Give your child to this ogress.”

“I am afraid to, Venerable Sir,” she replied meekly.

“Don’t be afraid,” the Buddha assured her. “You have no reason to fear her.”

Trusting the Buddha, the young woman raised the baby toward the ogress. The ogress took the baby in her arms, kissed him, and caressed him tenderly. Then she gently handed him back to his mother and began to weep.

“Why do you shed tears?” the Buddha asked.

“Venerable Sir,” the ogress replied, “all my life, I have managed somehow or other to survive, but I have never had enough to eat. Now how am I to live?”

“Do not worry,” the Buddha comforted her.

Turning again to the woman, he said, “Take this ogress with you, let her live in your home, and feed her every day.”

Thanking the Buddha for his kindness, the woman left with the ogress and lodged her on the central rafter of the threshing barn.

Later, at the request of the ogress, the woman found a more suitable place outside the city, where the ogress could stay by herself, undisturbed. Daily, she continued to provide the ogress with the choicest rice-porridge.

Grateful for the care she was being given, the ogress used her magic power to advise her friend, “This year, there will be an abundance of rain; you must plant your crops in a dry place,” or “This year, there is going to be a drought; you must plant crops in a well-watered spot.” Thus, while other farmers’ crops suffered from extremes in the weather, the woman’s crops invariably flourished.

People noticed this and asked her, “Friend, your crops are never damaged by flood or drought. You seem to know in advance whether the weather will be wet or dry. How do you do it?”

“I have a friend, an ogress, who predicts the weather for me, and I plant my crops accordingly. Every day, I provide her with the choicest rice-porridge. If you do the same, I am sure that she will look after your crops as well.”

Hearing this, many of the citizens of Savatthi began paying great honor to the ogress. In return, she looked after their crops, and all lived in harmony.