

**U Kyaw Zwa****LOVE AND THE THEATRE**

I have been working for this theatrical company for ten years. Our work involves traveling from place to place. It's something like a circus. When we arrive at a place, we look for a suitable plot of land to build a bamboo theatre. It's temporary, of course. Then we put up performances - singing, dancing, plays, opera, - the whole night through. This goes on for about five or ten days. When it's time to move, we take down the makeshift theatre and move on.

I am the manager. My work involves managing, that is, everything short of directing, producing and entertaining. But now, I have done something more than managing. To be more precise, I have done a good deed. What kind of good deed? Well, to begin at the beginning, it's like this...

I met them at the ticket office. I was selling tickets, which is part of a manager's job in this line of work. They were five youths with expensive clothes and motorcycles. One of them was called Khin Maung Kyi. They bought tickets and watched the performances. They came again the next day and the next.

We soon became friends. I invited them to see the inside of the theatre. They were delighted. If only I had known...

The performances went on for another five days. They continued to come. They also came to visit me inside the theatre. As I was busy I said to them, "Well, go and see for yourselves what goes on behind the scenes." And left them to their own devices.

On our last evening I went for a walk in town. I saw two motorcycles in front of a coffee shop. I recognized them. So I went inside. There, I found Khin Maung Kyt and one of his friends Banyar Aung and our top dancer, Mi Thu Zar.

I had known her when she was working with a small troupe of traveling entertainers. She had talent.

So I brought her to our troupe. The owner also liked her and made her the top dancer.

She danced well. But I'm afraid that's all I can say to her credit.

Apart from that, she was.... how shall I put it--too flirtatious. Anyone who looks into her eyes could not fail to be caught by her charm, and she knew it and took advantage of it.

The next day, Khin Maung Kyi's friends came and confided in me.

"We have a problem, Uncle", they said" First, we thought it was just a passing passion. But now, Khin Maung Kyi wants to marry Mi Thu Zar, His parents are very unhappy about it. What shall we do?" Mi Thu Zar had agreed to marry Khin Maung Kyi under two conditions: that he comes with the troupe and that she be free to continue her dancing career. They thought that the conditions would deter him from going ahead with the marriage. But that was not to be.

Khin Maung Kyi came and confided in me. He said he had already made plans to marry Mi Thu Zar. But he would wait until the next Tbadingyut festival. I was

non-committal. It gave me time to carry out my plan. I said, "We'll be here for the next pagoda festival. There's going to be a new play. It's special. I hope you and your friends will come and see it."

The day came. The play was really special. It was based on one the Jataka stories- the story of Oggasena, a rich man's son who married a dancer. After the usual songs and dances, the play began with a soliloquy by Oggasena. It went as follows:

"The air is her element. As she dances in the sky, she does not leap, but floats like a cloud on a summer morning. How she manages her supple body with grace and skill just as she manages this heart of mine to throb with longing."

The girl in question was Maya, the top dancer of a traveling troupe of performers. Oggasena was a rich man's son who had fallen in love with her. Maya agreed to marry him under two conditions - that he come and stay with her and travel with the troupe, and that she be free to continue her career as a dancer.

So Oggasena and Maya got married. As agreed, he traveled along with the troupe and Maya continued her dancing.

After the soliloquy came the usual songs and dances typical of a Myanmar '*zat pwe*' (a mixture of play, opera and concert).

Before Oggasena married the girl, he had always been treated with respect as a rich man's son. Because of his status, he and his friends used to occupy the best seats in the makeshift theatre. But now he could see sons of rich men occupying the best seats and enjoying the entertainment while he was running errands and looking after their baby. One of the highlights of the play was the quarrel scene between Oggasena and his wife.

Maya (talking to the crying baby), "Hush, baby, son of a know-nothing, a water carrier, runner of errands."

Oggasena: "Wife, take care whom you call know-nothing,"

Maya: "I can call whom I like. What business is it of yours?"

Oggasena: "I am your husband, and I am educated, rich in fact. I am rich enough to buy this whole troupe."

Maya: "You still don't realize, do you, that we don't care an elephant's dropping for your education and richness. Don't you realize that in our line of work, a man's esteem is judged by what he can perform, his contribution to the show, and not by how educated or rich he is. So, a clown is held in higher esteem than you."

That was when Oggasena decided to become a performer. But, he decided, he would be no ordinary performer. Everyone would come to address him as Oggasena the Great!

Just wait and see.

One of the wife's greatest performances was dancing on top of a four-foot pole. To prove to the world that he was the greatest, Oggasena decided that he would dance on top of a six-foot pole. For him, the sky would be the limit! He could imagine how people would gaze in wonder and excitement at Oggasena the Great. The great day came. Everyone was waiting. Oggasena stood on top of the pole. First, he acted like a clown. He acted as if he was having difficulties in balancing himself. People watched him in silence. Then he prepared his greatest feat.

At that very moment, Lord Buddha arrived. Everyone who was watching the show left the performance to pay respects to the Buddha.

Oggasena was dejected. “0, Gautama Buddha, the Omniscient One, Crown of the three worlds,” Oggasena was thinking, “why did you have to come and spoil what would have been the greatest performance of my life?”

The Lord Buddha, whose wisdom is infinite, unbounded and without limit, knew what was passing in the mind of Oggasena and addressed to him thus:

“Oggasena, King of the performers, Oggasena the Great, perform for the crowd, perform for me!

Hearing these words, Oggasena replied:

“0 Lord Buddha of the Ten Powers, I obey

Your words, I perform for the crowd, I perform for you. See, how I turn fourteen summersaults in the air and alight on my feet on top of the pole and balance myself once more.”

Even while Oggasena was performing. Lord Buddha addressed him as follows:

“The past is gone,

The future has not come,

The present is here and now.

If your heart be freed from every attachment,

you will undergo no rebirth, old age and death.

A far greater glory awaits, my son,

Touch and awareness.

Be mindful of these two.

For that is the way to end all suffering,

That is the way to Enlightenment.

For the one who is mindful

Of the awareness of touch, sensation and Knowing

Shall be free

Never to be reborn,

Never to suffer

Never to die.”

Hearing these words, Oggasena became mindful of the awareness of the touch his foot on the top of the pole, and the touch, the sensation, the mindfulness, and the knowing all integrated to become one. Everything he had fulfilled in his past lives came to him, he became free from desire, anger and ignorance, and attained Enlightenment in the end.

The audience enjoyed the play. All members of the troupe were delighted. The greatest reward was still to come. Khin Maung Kyi gave up his plan to marry Mi Thu Zar, to the delight of his parents and friends. I said to myself “Here’s a good deed done in the right spirit.” Because... well, Let me explain...

My life was ruined the day I married my wife who was a dancer with the troupe. My parents were very unhappy. I traveled with the troupe and every one looked down on me. Then, one day I made a decision. I worked very hard. Then the owner of the company appreciated my work and made me manager.

But in case of Khin Maung Kyi, things would be different. He could not endure the things I had endured. So, I really felt that I had saved Khin Maung Kyi’s from a disastrous life. That’s why I said it’s a good deed done in the right spirit.