Ja 11 — Lakkhana Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja11.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

“The upright man.”—This story was told by the Master in the Bamboo-grove near Rajagaha about Devadatta. The story of Devadatta will be related, up to the date of the Abhimara-employment, in the Khandahala-jataka; up to the date of his dismissal from the office of Treasurer, in the Cullahamsa-jataka; and, up to the date of his being swallowed up by the earth, in the Sixteenth Book in the Samudda-vanija-jataka.

For, on the occasion now in question, Devadatta, through failing to carry the Five Points which he had pressed for, had made a schism in the Brotherhood and had gone off with five hundred Brethren to dwell at Gaya-sisa. Now, these Brethren came to a riper knowledge; and the Master, knowing this, called the two chief disciples and said, “Sariputta, your five hundred pupils who were perverted by Devadatta’s teaching and went off with him, have now come to a riper knowledge. Go thither with a number of the Brethren, preach the Truth to them, enlighten these wanderers respecting the Paths and the Fruits, and bring them back with you.”

They went thither, preached the Truth, enlightened them respecting the Paths and the Fruits, and next day at dawn came back again with those Brethren to the Bamboo-grove. And whilst Sariputta was standing there after saluting the Blessed One on his return, the Brethren spoke thus to him in praise of the Elder Sariputta, “Sir, very bright was the glory of our elder brother, the Captain of the Truth, as he returned with a following of five hundred Brethren; whereas Devadatta has lost all his following.”

“This is not the only time, Brethren, when glory has been Sariputta’s on his return with a following of his kinsfolk; like glory was his too in bygone days. So too this is not the only time when Devadatta has lost his following; he lost it also in bygone days.”

The Brethren asked the Blessed One to explain this to them. The Blessed One made clear what had been concealed by re-birth.

Once on a time in the city of Rajagaha in the kingdom of Magadha there ruled a certain king of Magadha, in whose days the Bodhisatta came to life as a stag. Growing up, he dwelt in the forest as the leader of a herd of a thousand deer. He had two young ones named Luckie and Blackie. When he grew old, he handed his charge over to his two sons, placing five hundred deer under the care of each of them. And so now these two young stags were in charge of the herd.

Towards harvest-time in Magadha, when the crops stand thick in the fields, it is dangerous for the deer in the forests round. Anxious to kill the creatures that devour their crops, the peasants dig pitfalls, fix stakes, set stone-traps, and plant snares and other gins; so that many deer are slain.

Accordingly, when the Bodhisatta marked that it was crop-time, he sent for his two sons and said to them, “My children, it is now the time when crops stand thick in the fields, and many deer meet their death at this season. We who are old will make shift to stay in one spot; but you will retire each with your herd to the mountainous tracts in the forest and come back when the crops have been carried.” “Very good,” said his two sons, and departed with their herds, as their father bade.

Now the men who live along the route, know quite well the times at which deer take to the hills and return thence. And lying in wait in hiding-places here and there along the route, they shoot and kill numbers of them. The dullard Blackie, ignorant of the times to travel and the times to halt, kept his deer on the march early and late, both at dawn and in the gloaming, approaching the very confines of the villages. And the peasants, in ambush or in the open, destroyed numbers of his herd. Having thus by his crass folly worked the destruction of all these, it was with a very few survivors that he reached the forest.

Luckie on the other hand, being wise and astute and full of resource, never so much as approached the confines of a village. He did not travel by day, or even in the dawn or gloaming. Only in the dead of night did he move; and the result was that he reached the forest without losing a single head of his deer.

Four months they stayed in the forest, not leaving the hills till the crops were carried. On the homeward way Blackie by repeating his former folly lost the rest of his herd and returned solitary and alone; whereas Luckie had not lost one of his herd, but had brought back the whole five hundred deer, when he appeared before his parents. As he saw his two sons returning, the Bodhisatta framed this stanza in concert with the herd of deer—

The upright kindly man bath his reward.

Mark Luckie leading back his troop of kin,

While here comes Blackie shorn of all his herd.

Such was the Bodhisatta’s welcome to his son; and after living to a good old age, he passed away to fare according to his deserts.

At the close of his lesson, when the Master had repeated that Sariputta's glory and Devadatta's loss had both had a parallel in bygone days, he shewed the connexion linking the two stories together and identified the Birth, by saying, "Devadatta was the Blackie of those days; his followers were Blackie's following; Sariputta was the Luckie of those days, and his following the Buddha's followers; Rahula's mother was the mother of those days; and I myself was the father."

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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