Ja 142 — Sigala Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja142.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 1, 1895

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

“Thy tightening grip.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove, about Devadatta’s going about to kill him. For, hearing the Brethren talking together as to this in the Hall of Truth, the Master said that, as Devadatta acted now, so he acted in times gone by, yet failed—to his own grievous hurt—of his wicked purpose. And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Behaves, the Bodhisatta was born a jackal, and dwelt in a charnel-grove with a great following of jackals of whom he was king. And at that time there was a festival held at Rajagaha, and a very wet festival it was, with everybody drinking hard. Now a parcel of rogues got hold of victual and drink in abundance, and putting on their best clothes sang and made merry over their fare. By midnight the meat was all gone, though the liquor still held out. Then on one asking for more meat and being told there was none left, said the fellow, “Victuals never lack while I am about. I’ll off to the charnel-grove, kill a jackal prowling about to eat the corpses, and bring back some meat.” So saying he snatched up a club and made his way out of the city by the sewer to the place, where he lay down, club in hand, feigning to be dead. Just then, followed by the other jackals, the Bodhisatta came up and marked the pretended corpse. Suspecting the fraud, he determined to sift the matter. So he went round to the lee side and knew by the scent that the man was not really dead. Resolving to make the man look foolish before leaving him, the Bodhisatta stole near and took hold of the club with his teeth and tugged at it. The rascal did not leave go: not perceiving the Bodhisatta’s approach, he took a tighter grip. Hereon the Bodhisatta stepped back a pace or two and said, “My good man, if you had been dead, you would not have tightened your grip on your club when I was tugging at it, and so have betrayed yourself.” So saying, he uttered this stanza—

Thy tightening grip upon thy club doth show

Thy rank imposture—thou’rt no corpse, I trow.

Finding that he was discovered, the rogue sprang to his feet and flung his club at the Bodhisatta, but missed his aim, “Be off, you brute,” said he, “I’ve missed you this time.” Turning round, the Bodhisatta said, “True you have missed me, but be assured you will not miss the torments of the Great Hell and the sixteen Lesser Hells.”

Empty-handed, the rogue left the cemetery and, after bathing in a ditch, went back into the city by the way he had come.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, “Devadatta was the rogue of those times, and I the king of the jackals.”

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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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.