Ja 191 — Ruhaka Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol2/ja191.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

“Even a broken bowstring,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling in Jetavana, about temptation arising from a former wife. The circumstances will be explained in the Eighth Book, in the Indriya Jātaka. Then the Master said to this brother, “That is a woman who does you harm. In former times, too, she put you to the blush before the king and his whole court, and gave you good reason to leave your home.” And he told an old-world tale.

Once upon a time, when king Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born of his chief queen. He came of age, and his father passed away; and then he became king and ruled in righteousness.

The Bodhisatta had a chaplain named Ruhaka, and this Ruhaka had an old brahmin woman to wife.

The king gave the brahmin a horse accoutred with all its trappings, and he mounted the horse and went to wait upon the king. As he rode along on the back of his richly caparisoned steed, the people on this side and that were loud in its praise: “See that fine horse!” they cried; “what a beauty!”

When he came home again, he went into his mansion and told his wife.

“Goodwife,” said he, “our horse is passing fine! Right and left the people are all speaking in praise of it.”

Now his wife was no better than she should be, and full of deceit; so she made reply to him thus.

“Ah, husband, you do not know wherein lies the beauty of this horse. It is all in his fine trappings. Now if you would make yourself fine like the horse, put his trappings on

yourself and go down into the street, prancing along horse-fashion. You will see the king, and he will praise you, and all the people will praise you."

This fool of a brahmin listened to it all, but did not know what she purposed. So he believed her, and did as she had said. All that saw him laughed aloud: "There goes a fine professor!" said they all. And the king cried shame on him. "Why, my Teacher," said he, "has your bile gone wrong? Are you crazy?" At this the brahmin thought that he must have behaved amiss, and he was ashamed. So he was wroth with his wife, and made haste home, saying to himself, "The woman has shamed me before the king and all his army: I will chastise her and turn her out of doors!"

But the crafty woman found out that he had come home in anger; she stole a march on him, and departed by a side door, and made her way to the palace, where she stayed four or five days. When the king heard of it, he sent for his chaplain, and said to him,

"My Teacher, all womankind are full of faults; you ought to forgive this lady;" and with intent to make him forgive he uttered the first stanza—

"Even a broken bowstring can be mended and made whole:

Forgive your wife, and cherish not this anger in your soul."

Hearing this, Ruhaka uttered the second—

"While there is bark and workmen too

'Tis easy to buy bowstrings new.

Another wife I will procure;

I've had enough of this one, sure."

So saying, he sent her away, and took him another brahmin woman to wife.

The Master, after finishing this discourse, declared the Truths and identified the Birth—at the conclusion of the Truths the tempted Brother was established in the fruit of the First Path—"On that occasion the former wife was the same, Ruhaka was the tempted brother, and 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.

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.