Ja 206 — Kurunga-Miga 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/ja206.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

“Come, Tortoise,” etc.—This story the Master told at Veluvana, about Devadatta. News came to the Master that Devadatta was plotting his death. “Ah, Brethren,” said he, “it was just the same long ago; Devadatta tried then to kill me, as he is trying now.” And he told them this story.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta became an Antelope, and lived within a forest, in a thicket near a certain lake. Not far from the same lake, sat a Woodpecker perched at the top of a tree; and in the lake dwelt a Tortoise. And the three became friends, and lived together in amity.

A hunter, wandering about in the wood, observed the Bodhisatta’s footprint at the going down into the water; and he set a trap of leather, strong, like an iron chain, and went his way. In the first watch of the night the Bodhisatta went down to drink, and got caught in the noose: whereat he cried loud and long. Thereupon the Woodpecker flew down from her tree-top, and the Tortoise came out of the water, and consulted what was to be done.

Said the Woodpecker to the Tortoise, “Friend, you have teeth—bite this snare through; I will go and see to it that the hunter keeps away; and if we both do our best, our friend will not lose his life.” To make this clear he uttered the first stanza:

“Come, Tortoise, tear the leathern snare, and bite it through and through,

And of the hunter I’ll take care, and keep him off from you.”

The Tortoise began to gnaw the leather thong: the Woodpecker made his way to the hunter’s dwelling. At dawn of day the hunter went out, knife in hand. As soon as the bird saw him start, he uttered a cry, flapped his wings, and struck him in the face as he left the front door. “Some bird of ill omen has struck me!” thought the hunter; he turned back, and

lay down for a little while. Then he rose up again, and took his knife. The bird reasoned within himself, “The first time he went out by the front door, so now he will leave by the back:” and he sat him down behind the house. The hunter, too, reasoned in the same way: “When I went out by the front door, I saw a bad omen, now will I go out by the back!” and so he did. But the bird cried out again, and struck him in the face. Finding that he was again struck by a bird of ill omen, the hunter exclaimed, “This creature will not let me go!” and turning back he lay down until sunrise, and when the sun was risen, he took his knife and started.

The Woodpecker made all haste back to his friends. “Here comes the hunter!” he cried. By this time the Tortoise had gnawed through all the thongs but one tough thong: his teeth seemed as though they would fall out, and his mouth was all smeared with blood. The Bodhisatta saw the young hunter coming on like lightning, knife in hand: he burst the thong, and fled into the woods. The Woodpecker perched upon his tree-top. But the Tortoise was so weak, that he lay where he was. The hunter threw him into a bag, and tied it to a tree.

The Bodhisatta observed that the Tortoise was taken, and determined to save his friend’s life. So he let the hunter see him, and made as though he were weak. The hunter saw him, and thinking him to be weak, seized his knife and set out in pursuit. The Bodhisatta, keeping just out of his reach, led him into the forest; and when he saw that they had come far away, gave him the slip and returned swift as the wind by another way. He lifted the bag with his horns, threw it upon the ground, ripped it open and let the Tortoise out. And the Woodpecker came down from the tree.

Then the Bodhisatta thus addressed them both: “My life has been saved by you, and you have done a friend’s part to me. Now the hunter will come and take you; so do you, friend Woodpecker, migrate elsewhere with your brood, and you, friend Tortoise, dive into the water.” They did so.

The Master, becoming perfectly enlightened, uttered the second stanza—

“The Tortoise went into the pond, the Deer into the wood,

And from the tree the Woodpecker carried away his brood.”

The hunter returned, and saw none of them. He found his bag torn; picked it up, and went home sorrowful. And the three friends lived all their life long in unbroken amity, and then passed away to fare according to their deeds.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he identified the Birth—“Devadatta was the huntsman, Sariputta the Woodpecker, Moggallana the Tortoise, and I was the Antelope.”

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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