Ja 208 — Sumsumara 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/ja208.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

“Rose-apple, jack fruit,” etc.—This story the Master told at Jetavana, about Devadatta’s attempts to murder him. When he heard of these attempts, the Master said, This is not the first time that Devadatta has tried to murder me; he did the same before, and yet could not so much as make me afraid.” Then he told this story.

Once upon a time, while Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life at the foot of Himalaya as a Monkey. He grew strong and sturdy, big of frame, well-to-do, and lived by a curve of the river Ganges in a forest haunt.

Now at that time there was a Crocodile dwelling in the Ganges. The Crocodile’s mate saw the great frame of the monkey, and she conceived a longing for his heart to eat. So she said to her lord: “Sir, I desire to eat the heart of that great king of the monkeys!”

“Good wife,” said the Crocodile, “I live in the water and he lives on dry land: how can we catch him?”

“By hook or by crook,” she replied, “caught he must be. If I don’t get him, I shall die.”

“All right,” answered the Crocodile, consoling her, “don’t trouble yourself. I have a plan; I will give you his heart to eat.”

So when the Bodhisatta was sitting on the bank of the Ganges, after taking a drink of water, the Crocodile drew near, and said:

“Sir Monkey, why do you live on had fruits in this old familiar place? On the other side of the Ganges there is no end to the mango trees, and labuja trees, with fruit sweet as honey! Is it not better to cross over and have all kinds of wild fruit to eat?”

“Lord Crocodile,” the Monkey made answer, “deep and wide is the Ganges: how shall I get across?”

“If you will go, I will mount you on my back, and carry you over.”

The Monkey trusted him, and agreed. “Come here, then,” said the other, “up on my back with you!” and up the monkey climbed. But when the Crocodile had swum a little way, he plunged the Monkey under the water.

“Good friend, you are letting me sink!” cried the Monkey. “What is that for?”

Said the Crocodile, “You think I’m carrying you out of pure good nature? Not a bit of it! My wife has a longing for your heart, and I want to give it her to eat”

“Friend,” said the Monkey, “it is nice of you to tell me. Why, if our heart were inside us when we go jumping among the tree-tops, it would be all knocked to pieces”’

“Well, where do you keep it?” asked the other.

The Bodhisatta pointed out a fig-tree, with clusters of ripe fruit, standing not far off. “See,” said he, “there are our hearts hanging on yon fig-tree.”

“If you will show me your heart,” said the Crocodile, “then I won’t kill you.”

“Take me to the tree, then, and I will point it out to you hanging upon it.”

The Crocodile brought him to the place. The Monkey leapt off his back, and climbing up the fig-tree sat upon it. “O silly Crocodile!” said he, “you thought that there were creatures that kept their hearts in a tree-top! You are a fool, and I have outwitted you! You may keep your fruit to yourself. Your body is great, but you have no sense.” And then to explain this idea he uttered the following stanzas—

“Rose-apple, jack-fruit, mangoes too across the water there I see;

Enough of them, I want them not; my fig is good enough for me!

“Great is your body, verily, but how much smaller is your wit!

Now go your ways, Sir Crocodile, for I have had the best of it.”

The Crocodile, feeling as sad and miserable as if he had lost a thousand pieces of money, went back sorrowing to the place where he lived.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he identified the Birth—“In those days Devadatta was the Crocodile, the lady Cinca was his mate, and I was the Monkey.”

The following variant, from Russia (Moscow district) may be of interest. It was given me by Mr I. Nestor Schnurmann, who heard it from his nurse (about 1860).—Once upon a time, the King of the Fishes was wanting in wisdom. His advisers told him that once he could get the heart of the fox, he would become wise. So he sent a deputation, consisting of the great magnates of the sea, whales and others. “Our king wants your advice on some state affairs.” The fox, flattered, consented. A whale took him on his back. On the way the waves beat upon him; at last he asked what they really wanted. They said, what their king really wanted was to eat his heart, by which he hoped to become clever. He said, “Why didn’t you tell me that before? I would gladly sacrifice my life for such a worthy object. But we foxes always leave our hearts at home. Take me back and I’ll fetch it. Otherwise I’m sure your king will be angry.” So they took him back. As soon as he got near the shore, he leaped on land, and cried “Ah you fools! Have you ever heard of an animal not carrying his heart with him?” and ran off. The fish had to return empty.

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.

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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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