Ja 241 — Sabbadatha Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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 as the Jackal,” etc. This story the Master told while staying in the Bamboo-grove, about Devadatta.

Devadatta, having won favour in the eyes of Ajatasattu, yet could not make the repute and support which he received last any time. Ever since they saw the miracle done when Nalagiri was sent against him, the reputation and receipts of Devadatta began to fall off.

So one day, the Brethren were all talking about it in the Hall of Truth: “Friend, Devadatta managed to get reputation and support, yet could not keep it up. This happened in olden days in just the same way.” And then he told them an old-world tale.

Once upon a time, Brahmadatta was king of Benares, and the Bodhisatta was his chaplain; and he had mastered the three Vedas and the eighteen branches of knowledge. He knew the spell entitled ‘Of subduing the World.’ (Now this spell is one which involves religious meditation.)

One day, the Bodhisatta thought that he would recite this spell; so he sat down in a place apart upon a flat stone, and there went through his reciting of it. It is said that this spell could be taught to no one without use of a special rite; for which reason he recited it in the place just described. It so happened that a Jackal lying in a hole heard the spell at the time that he was reciting it, and got it by heart. We are told that this jackal in a previous existence had been some brahmin who had learnt the charm ‘Of subduing the World.’

The Bodhisatta ended his recitation, and rose up, saying—“Surely I have that spell by heart now.” Then the Jackal arose out of his hole, and cried—“Ho, brahmin! I have learnt the spell better than you know it yourself!” and off he ran. The Bodhisatta set off in chase, and followed some way, crying—“Yon jackal will do a great mischief—catch him, catch him!” But the jackal got clear off into the forest.

The Jackal found a she-jackal, and gave her a little nip upon the body. “What is it, master?” she asked. “Do you know me,” he asked, “or do you not?” “ I do not know you.” He repeated the spell, and thus had under his orders several hundreds of jackals, and gathered round him all the elephants and horses, lions and tigers, swine and deer, and all other fourfooted creatures; and their king he became, under the title of Sabbadatha, or Alltusk, and a she jackal he made his consort. On the back of two elephants stood a lion, and on the lion’s back sat Sabbadatha, the jackal king, along with his consort the she jackal; and great honour was paid to them.

Now the Jackal was tempted by his great honour, and became puffed up with pride, and he resolved to capture the kingdom of Benares. So with all the fourfooted creatures in his train, he came to a place near to Benares. His host covered twelve leagues of ground. From his position there he sent a message to the king, “Give up your kingdom, or fight for it.” The citizens of Benares, smitten with terror, shut close their gates and stayed within.

Then the Bodhisatta drew near the king, and said to him, “Fear not, mighty king! leave me the task of fighting with the jackal king, Sabbadatha. Except only me, no one is able to fight with him at all.” Thus he gave heart to the king and the citizens. “I will ask him at once,” he went on, “what he will do in order to take the city.” So he mounted the tower over one of the gates, and cried out—“Sabbadatha, what will you do to get possession of this realm?”

“I will cause the lions to roar, and with the roaring I will frighten the multitude: thus will I take it!”

“Oh, that’s it,” thought the Bodhisatta, and down he came from the tower. He made proclamation by beat of drum that all the dwellers in the great city of Benares, over all its twelve leagues, must stop up their ears with flour. The multitude heard the command; they stopped up their own ears with flour, so that they could not hear each other speak—nay, they even did the same to their cats and other animals.

Then the Bodhisatta went up a second time into the tower, and cried out “Sabbadatha!”

“What is it, Brahmin?” quoth he.

“How will you take this realm?” he asked.

“I will cause the lions to roar, and I will frighten the people, and destroy them; thus will I take it!” he said.

“You will not be able to make the lions roar; these noble lions, with their tawny paws and shaggy manes, will never do the bidding of an old jackal like you! The jackal, stubborn with pride, answered, “Not only will the other lions obey me, but I’ll even make this one, upon whose back I sit, roar alone!”

“Very well,” said the Bodhisatta, “do it if you can.”

So he tapped with his foot on the lion which he sat upon, to roar. And the lion resting his mouth upon the Elephant's temple, roared thrice, without any manner of doubt. The elephants were terrified and dropped the Jackal down at their feet; they trampled upon his head and crushed it to atoms. Then and there Sabbadatha perished. And the elephants, hearing the roar of the lion, were frightened to death, and wounding one another, they all perished there. The rest of the creatures, deer and swine, down to the hares and cats, perished then and there, all except the lions; and these ran off and took to the woods. There was a heap of carcases covering the ground for twelve leagues.

The Bodhisatta came down from the tower, and had the gates of the city thrown open. By beat of drum he caused proclamation to be made throughout the city: "Let all the people take the flour from out of their ears, and they that desire meat, meat let them take!" The people all ate what meat they could fresh, and the rest they dried and preserved.

It was at this time, according to tradition, that people first began to dry meat.

The Master having finished this discourse, identified the Birth by the following verses, full of divine wisdom:

"Even as the Jackal, stiff with pride,

Craved for a mighty host on every side,

And all toothed creatures came

Flocking around, until he won great fame:

"Even so the man who is supplied

With a great host of men on every side,

As great renown has he

As had the Jackal in his sovranty."

"In those days Devadatta was the Jackal, Ananda was the king, and I was the chaplain."

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.