Ja 267 — Kakkata 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/ja267.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

“Gold-clawed creature,” etc.— This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about a certain woman.

We are told that a certain land-owner of Savatthi, with his wife, was on a journey into the country for the purpose of collecting debts, when he fell among robbers. Now the wife was very beautiful and charming. The robber chief was so taken by her that he purposed killing the husband to get her. But the woman was good and virtuous, a devoted wife. She fell at the robber’s feet, crying, “My lord, if you kill my husband for love of me, I will take poison, or stop my breath, and kill myself too! With you I will not go. Do not kill my husband uselessly!” In this way she begged him off.

They both got back safe to Savatthi. Then it occurred to them as they passed the monastery in Jetavana, that they would visit it and salute the Master. So to the perfumed cell they went, and after salutation sat down on one side. The Master asked them where they had been. “To collect our debts,” they replied. “Did your journey pass off without mishap?” he asked next. “We were captured by robbers on the way,” said the husband, “and the chief wanted to murder me; but my wife here begged me off, and I owe my life to her.” Then said the Master, “You are not the only one, layman, whose life she has saved. In days of yore she saved the lives of other wise men.” And then at his request the Master told an old-world tale.

Once on a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, there was a great lake in Himalaya, wherein was a great golden Crab. Because he lived there, the place was known as the Crab Tarn. The Crab was very large, as big round as a threshing floor; it would catch elephants, and kill and eat them; and from fear of it the elephants durst not go down and browse there.

Now the Bodhisatta was conceived by the mate of an elephant, the leader of a herd, living hard by this Crab Tarn. The mother, in order to be safe till her delivery, sought another place on a mountain, and there she was delivered of a son; who in due time grew to years of wisdom, and was great and mighty, and prospered, and he was like a purple mountain of collyrium.

He chose another elephant for his mate, and he resolved to catch this Crab. So with his mate and his mother, he sought out the elephant herd, and finding his father, proposed to go and catch the Crab.

“You will not be able to do that, my son,” said he.

But he begged the father again and again to give him leave, until at last he said, “Well, you may try.”

So the young Elephant collected all the elephants beside the Crab Tarn, and led them close by the lake. “Does the Crab catch them when they go down, or while they are feeding, or when they come up again?”

They replied, “When the beasts come up again.”

“Well then,” said he, “do you all go down to the lake and eat whatever you see, and come up first; I will follow last behind you.” And so they did. Then the Crab, seeing the Bodhisatta coming up last, caught his feet tight in his claw, like a smith who seizes a lump of iron in a huge pair of tongs. The Bodhisatta’s mate did not leave him, but stood there close by him. The Bodhisatta pulled at the Crab, but could not make him budge. Then the Crab pulled, and drew him towards himself. At this in deadly fear the Elephant roared and roared; hearing which all the other elephants, in deadly terror, ran off trumpeting, and dropping excrement. Even his mate could not stand, but began to make off. Then to tell her how he was held a prisoner, he uttered the first stanza, hoping to stay her from her flight:

“Gold-clawed creature with projecting eyes,

Tarn-bred, hairless, clad in bony shell,

He has caught me! hear my woful cries!—

Mate! don’t leave me—for you love me well!”

Then his mate turned round, and repeated. the second stanza to his comfort:

“Leave you? never! never will I go—

Noble husband, with your years threescore.

All four quarters of the earth can show

None so dear as thou hast been of yore.” this s way she encouraged him; and saying, “Noble sir, now I will talk to the Crab a while to make him let you go,” she addressed the Crab in the third stanza:

“Of all the crabs that in the sea,

Ganges, or Nerbudda be,

You are best and chief, I know:

Hear me—let my husband go!”

As she spoke thus, the Crab’s fancy was smitten with the sound of the female voice, and forgetting all fear he loosed his claws from the Elephant’s leg, and suspected nothing of what he would do when he was set free. Then the Elephant lifted his foot, and stepped upon the Crab’s back; and at once his eyes startled out. The Elephant shouted the joy-cry. Up ran the other elephants all, pulled the Crab along and set him upon the ground, and trampled him to mincemeat. His two claws broken from his body lay apart. And this Crab Tarn, being near the Ganges, when there was a flood in the Ganges, was filled with Ganges water; when the water subsided it ran from the lake into the Ganges. Then these two claws were lifted and floated along the Ganges. One of them reached the sea, the other was found by the ten royal brothers while playing in the water, and they took it and made of it the little drum called Anaka. The Titans found that which reached the sea, and made it into the drum called Alambara. These afterwards being worsted in battle with Sakka, ran off and left it behind. Then Sakka caused it to be kept for his own use; and it is of this they say, “There is thunder like the Alambara cloud!

When this discourse was ended, the Master declared the Truths, and identified the Birth—at the conclusion of the Truths both husband and wife attained the ‘Fruit of the First Path— “In those days, this lay sister was the she-elephant, and I myself was her mate.”

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