Ja 277 — Romaka 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/ja277.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

“Here in the hills,” etc.—This story was told by the Master when at the Bamboo-grove, about attempted murder. The circumstances explain themselves.

Once on a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta became a Pigeon, and with a large flock of pigeons he lived amidst the woodland in a cave of the hills. There was an ascetic, a virtuous man, who had built him a hut near a frontier village not far from the place where the pigeons were, and there in a cave of the hills he lived. Him the Bodhisatta visited from time to time, and heard from him things worth hearing.

After living there a long time, the ascetic went away; and there came a sham ascetic, and lived there. The Bodhisatta, attended by his flock of pigeons, visited him and greeted him respectfully; they spent the day in hopping about the hermit’s abode, and picking up food before the cave, and returned home in the evening. There the sham ascetic lived for more than fifty years.

One day the villagers gave him some pigeon’s flesh which they had cooked. He was taken with the flavour, and asked what it was. “Pigeon,” said they. Thought he, “There come flocks of pigeons to my hermitage; I must kill some of them to eat.”

So he got rice and ghee, milk and cummin and pepper, and put it by all ready; in a corner of his robe he hid a staff, and sat down at the hut door watching for the pigeons’ coming.

The Bodhisatta came, with his flock, and spied out what wicked thing this sham ascetic would be at. “Yon wicked ascetic sitting there goes under false pretences! Perhaps he has been feeding on some of our kind; I’ll find him out!”

So he alighted to leeward, and scented him. “Yes,” said he, “the man wants to kill us and eat us; we must not go near him;” and away he flew with his flock. On seeing that he kept

aloof, the hermit thought, “I will speak words of honey to him, and make friends, and then kill and eat him!” and he uttered the two first stanzas:

“Here in the hills, for one and fifty years,

O feathered fowl! the birds would visit me,

Nothing suspecting, knowing nought of fears,

In sweet security!

“These very children of the eggs now seem

To fly suspicious to another hill.

Have they forgotten all their old esteem?

Are they the same birds still?”

Then the Bodhisatta stept back and repeated the third:

“We are no fools, and we know you;

We are the same, and you are too:

You have designs against our weal,

So, heretic, this fear we feel.”

“They have found me out!” thought the false ascetic. He threw his staff at the bird, but missed him. “Get away!” said he—“I’ve missed you!”

“You have missed us,” said the Bodhisatta, “but you shall not miss the four hells! If you stay here, I’ll call the villagers and make them catch you for a thief. Run off, quick!” Thus he threatened the man, and flew away. The hermit could live there no longer.

The Teacher having ended this discourse, identified the. Birth: “At that time Devadatta was the ascetic; the first ascetic, the good one, was Sariputta; and the chief of the Pigeons was I myself.”

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.