Ja 284 — Siri 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/ja284.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 2, 1895

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

“Whatever riches they who strive,” etc.—This story the Master told about a brahmin who stole good luck. The circumstances of this birth-tale are given above in the Khadiranga Birth. As before, the heretical spirit that lived in the gate tower of Anathapindika’s house, doing penance, brought four and fifty crores of gold and filled the store-rooms, and became a friend of the great man. He led her before the Master. The Master discoursed to her. She heard, and entered on the stream of conversion. Thenceforward the great man’s honour was great as before. Now there was living in Savatthi a brahmin, versed in lucky marks, who thought on this wise. “Anathapindika was poor, and then became famous. What if I make as though I went to see him, and steal his luck?” So to the house he went, and was welcomed hospitably. After exchanging civilities, the host asked why he had come. The brahmin was looking about to see where the man’s luck lay. Now Anathapindika had a white cock, white as a scoured shell, which he kept in a golden cage, and in the comb of this cock lay the great man’s luck. The brahmin looked about and spied where the luck lay. “Noble sir,” said he, “I teach magic charms to five hundred young fellows. We are plagued by a cock that crows at the wrong time. Your cock crows at the right time. For him I have come; will you give him to me?” “Yes,” said the other: and at the instant the word was uttered, the hick left the cockscomb, and settled in a jewel put away in the pillow. The brahmin observed that the luck had gone into this jewel, and asked for it too. As soon as the owner agreed to give it, the luck left the jewel, and settled in a club for self-defence which lay upon the pillow. The brahmin saw it and asked again. “Take it, and take your leave,” said the owner; and in an instant the luck left the club, and settled on the head of the owner’s chief wife, who was named the Lady Punnalakkhana. The thievish brahmin thought, when he saw this, “This is an inalienable article which I cannot ask for.” Then he told the great man, “Noble sir,” said he, “I came to your house to steal your luck. The luck was in the comb of your cock. But when you gave me the cock, the luck passed into this jewel; when you gave me the jewel it passed into your stick; when you gave the stick to me, it went out of it and passed into the head of the Lady Punnalakkhana. Surely this is inalienable, I can never get it. It is impossible to steal your luck—keep it, then!” and rising

from his seat, he departed. Anathapindika determined to tell the Master; so he came to the monastery, and after respectfully greeting him, sat on one side, and told the Buddha all about it. The Master listened, and said, “Goodman, now-a-days the luck of one man does not go to another. But formerly the luck belonging to those of small wit went to the wise;” and he told him an old-world tale.

Once on a time, when Brahmadatta reigned in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born into a Brahmin family in the realm of Kasi. On growing up, he was educated at Takkasila, and lived among his family; but when his parents died, much distressed he retired to the life of a recluse in Himalaya, and there he cultivated the Faculties and the Attainments.

A long time passed, and he came down to inhabited parts for salt and savouring, and took up his quarters in the gardens of the king of Benares. Next day, on his begging rounds, he came to the door of an elephant-trainer. This man took a fancy to his ways and manners, fed him, and gave him lodging in his own grounds, waiting upon him continually.

Now it happened just then that a man whose business it was to gather firewood failed to get back to town from the woods in time. He lay down for the night in a temple, placing a bundle of sticks under his head for a pillow. At this temple there were a number of cocks quite free, which had perched close by on a tree. Towards morning, one of them, who was roosting high, let fall a dropping on the back of a bird below. “Who dropt that on me?” cried this one. “I did,” cried the first. “And why?” “Didn’t think,” said the other; and then did it again. Hereupon they both began to abuse each other, crying—“What power have you? what power have you?” At last the lower one said, “Anybody who kills me, and eats my flesh roasted on the coals, gets a thousand pieces of money in the morning!” And the one above answered—“Pooh, pooh, don’t boast about a little thing like that! Anybody who eats my fleshy parts will become king; if he eats my outside, he’ll become commander-in-chief or chief queen, according as he’s man or woman; if he eats the flesh by my bones, he’ll get the post of royal Treasurer, if he be a householder; or, if a holy man, will become the king’s favourite!

The stick-picker heard all this, and pondered. “Now if I become king, there’ll be no need of a thousand pieces of money.” Quietly he climbed the tree, caught the topmost. cock and killed him: he fastened him in a fold of his dress, saying to himself—“Now I’ll be king!” As soon as the gates were opened, in he walked. He plucked the fowl, and cleaned it, and gave it to his wife, bidding her make the meat nice for eating. She got ready the meat with some rice, and set it before him, bidding her lord eat.

“Goodwife,” said he, “there’s great virtue in this meat. By eating it I shall become king, and you my queen!” So they took the meat and rice down to the Ganges bank, intending to bathe before eating it. Then, putting meat and rice down upon the bank, in they went to bathe.

Just then a breeze stirred up the water, which washed away the meat. Down the river it floated, till it came in sight of an elephant-trainer, a great personage, who was giving his elephants a bath lower down. “What have we here?” said he, and picked it up. “It’s fowl and

rice, my lord," was the reply. He bade wrap it up, and seal it, and sent it home to his wife, with a message to open it for him when he returned.

The stick-picker also ran off, with his belly puffed out with sand and water which he had swallowed.

Now a certain ascetic, who had divine vision, the favourite chaplain of the elephant-trainer, was thinking to himself, "My patron friend does not leave his post with the elephants. When will he attain promotion?" As he thus pondered, he saw this man by his divine insight, and perceived what was a-doing. He went on before, and sat in the patron's house.

When the master returned, he greeted him respectfully and sat down on one side. Then, sending for the parcel, he ordered food and water to be brought for the ascetic. The ascetic did not accept the food which was offered him; but said, "I will divide this food." The master gave him leave. Then separating the meat into portions, he gave to the elephant-trainer the fleshy parts, the outside to his wife, and took the flesh about the bones for his own share. After the meal was over, he said, "On the third day from this you will become king. Take care what you do!" and away he went.

On the third day a neighbouring king came and beleaguered Benares. The king told his elephant-trainer to dress in the royal robes, bidding him go mount his elephant and fight. He himself put on a disguise, and mingled with the ranks; swift came an arrow, and pierced him, so that he perished then and there. The trainer, learning that the king was dead, sent for a great quantity of money, and heat the drum, proclaiming, "Let those who want money, advance, and fight!" The warrior host in a twinkling slew the hostile king.

After the king's obsequies the courtiers deliberated who was to be made king. Said they, "While our king was yet alive, he put his royal robes upon the elephant-trainer. This very man has fought and won the kingdom. To him the kingdom shall be given!" And they consecrated him king, and his wife they made the chief queen. The Bodhisatta became his confidant.

After this discourse the Master, in his perfect wisdom, gave utterance to the two stanzas following:

"Whatever riches they who strive amain

Without the aid of luck can ever gain,

All that, by favour of the goddess Luck,

Both skilled and unskilled equally obtain.

"All the world over many meet our sight,

Not only good, but creatures different quite,

Whose lot it is fruition to possess

Of wealth in store which is not theirs by right."

After this the Master added, "Good air, these beings have no other resource but their merit won in previous births; this enables you to obtain treasures in places where there is no mine." Then he recited the following scripture.

"There is a treasury of all good things

Which both to gods and men their wishes brings.

Fine looks, voice, figure, form, and sovranty

With all its pomp, lies in that treasury.

Lordship and government, imperial bliss,

The crown of heaven, within that treasure is.

All human happiness, the joys of heaven,

Nirvana's self, from out that store is given.

True ties of friendship, wisdom's liberty,

Firm self-control, lies in that treasury.

Salvation, understanding, training fit

To make Pacceka Buddhas come from it.

Thus hath this merit a virtue magical;

The wise and stedfast praise it one and all."

(415] Lastly the Fowl repeated the third stanza, explaining the treasures in which lay the luck of Anathapindika,

"A fowl, a gem, a club, a wife—

All these with lucky marks were rife.

For all these treasures, be it known,

A good and sinless man did own."

Then he identified the Birth: “Elder Ananda was the King, and the family priest was the Very Buddha.”

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.