Ja 292 — Supatta 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/ja292.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 Benares city,” etc.—This story the Master told in Jetavana, about a meal of rice mixed with new ghee, with red fish to flavour it, which was given by Elder Sariputta to Bimbadevi. The circumstances are like those given above in the Abbhantara Birth-tale. Here too the holy Sister had a pain in the stomach. The excellent Rahula told the Elder. He seated Rahula in his waiting-room, and went to the king to get the rice, red fish and new ghee. The lad gave it to the holy sister, his mother. No sooner had she eaten than the pain subsided. The king sent messengers to make enquiries, and after that always sent her that kind of food. One day they began to talk about it in the Hall of Truth: “Friend, the Captain of the Faith satisfied the Sister with such and such food.” The Master came in, and asked what they were talking about: they told him. Said he, “This is not the first time, Brother, that Sariputta has given Rahula’s mother what she wanted; he did the same before.” So saying, he told an old-world tale.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born as a Crow. He grew up, and became chief of eighty thousand crows, a Crow king, by name, Supatta, or Fairwing; and his chief mate went by the name of Suphassa or Softie, his chief Captain was called Sumukho—Prettybeak. With his eighty thousand subjects, he dwelt hard by Benares.

One day he and his mate in search of food passed over the king’s kitchen. The king’s cook had been preparing a host of dishes, of all sorts of fish, and he had uncovered the dishes for a moment, to cool them. Queen Crow smelt the odour of the food, and longed for a bit. But that day she said nothing.

However the next day, when King Crow proposed that they should go a-feeding, she said, “Go by yourself: there’s something I want very much!”

“What is it?” asked he.

“I want some of the king’s food to eat; and as I can’t get it, I am going to die.”

The Crow sat down to think. Prettybeak approached him and asked if anything had displeased him. King Crow told him what it was. “Oh, that’ll be all right,” said the Captain; and added, to console them both, “you stay where you are to-day, and I’ll fetch the meat.”

So he gathered the Crows together, and told them the matter. “Now come, and let’s get it!” said he; and off they all flew together to Benares. He posted them in companies here and there, near the kitchen to watch; and he, with eight champions, sat on the kitchen roof. While waiting for the king’s food to be served, he gave his directions to these: “When the food is taken up, I’ll make the man drop the dishes. Once that is done there’s an end of me. So four of you must fill your mouths with the rice, and four with the fish, and feed our royal pair with them; and if they ask where I am, say I’m coming.”

Well, the cook got his various dishes all ready, hung them on a balance-pole, and went off towards the king’s rooms. As he passed through the court, the Crow Captain with a signal to his followers flew and settled upon the carrier’s chest, struck him with extended claws, with his beak, sharp as a spear-point, pecked the end of the man’s nose, and with his two feet stopped up his jaws.

The king was walking up and down upon an upper floor, when looking out of a large window he saw what the crow was doing. He hailed the carrier:”—Hullo you, down with the dishes and catch the crow!” so the man dropt the dishes and caught the crow tight.

“Come here!” cried the king.

Then the crows ate all they wanted, and picked up the rest as they had been told, and carried it off. Next all the others flocked up, and ate what remained. The eight champions gave it to their king and queen to eat. The craving of Softie was appeased.

The servant who was carrying the dinner brought his crow to the king.

“O Crow!” said he, “you have shown no respect for me! you have broken my servitor’s nose! you have smashed my dishes! you have recklessly thrown away your life! What made you do such things?”

Answered the Crow, “O great king! Our king lives near Benares, and I am captain of his forces. His wife (whose name is Softie) conceived a great longing, and wanted a taste of your food. Our king told me what she craved. At once I devoted my life. Now I have sent her the food; my desire is accomplished. This is the reason why I acted as I did.” And to explain the matter, he said

“Here in Benares city, O great king,

There dwells a king of Crows that Night Fairwing;

Who was attended by a following

Of eighty thousand Crows.

“Softie, his mate, had one o’ermastering wish:

She craved a supper of the king’s own fish,

Fresh caught, cooked in his kitchen,—such a dish

As to kings’ tables goes.

“You now behold me as their messenger;

It was my royal master sent me here;

And for that I my monarch do revere

I wounded that man’s nose.”

When the king heard this, he said, “We do great honour to men, and yet cannot make friends of them. Even though we make presents of such things as a whole village, we can find no one willing to give his life for us. But this creature, crow as he is, sacrifices life for his king. He is very noble, sweet-speaking, and good.” He was so pleased with the crow’s good qualities that he did him the honour of giving him a white umbrella. But the crow saluted the king with this, his own gift, and descanted upon the virtues of Fairwing. The king sent for him, and heard his teaching, and sent them both food of the same sort as he ate himself; and for the rest of the crows he had cooked each day a large measure of rice. He himself walked according to the monition of the Bodhisatta, and protecting all creatures, practised virtue. The admonitions of Fairwing the crow were remembered for seven hundred years.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he identified the Birth: “At that time the king was Ananda, the Captain was Sariputta, but Supatta was I myself.”

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

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Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

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