Ja 32 — Nacca Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja32.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

“A pleasing note.” This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a Brother with many belongings. The incident is just the same as in the Devadhamma-jataka supra.

“Is this report true, Brother,” said the Master, “that you have many belongings?” “Yes, sir.” “Why have you come to own so many belongings?” Without listening beyond this point, the Brother tore off the whole of his raiment, and stood stark naked before the Master, crying, “I’ll go about like this!” “Oh, fie!” exclaimed every one. The man ran away, and reverted to the lower state of a layman. Gathering together in the Hall of Truth, the Brethren talked of his impropriety in behaving in that manner right before the Master. In came the Master and asked what was the theme of discussion in the conclave. “Sir,” was the answer, “we were discussing the impropriety of that Brother, and saying that in your presence and right before all the four classes of your followers he had so far lost all sense of shame as to stand there stark naked as a village-urchin, and that, finding himself loathed by everyone, he relapsed to the lower state and lost the faith.”

Said the Master, “Brethren, this is not the only loss his shamelessness has caused him; for in bygone days he lost a jewel of a wife just as now he has lost the jewel of the faith.” And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time, in the first cycle of the world’s history, the quadrupeds chose the Lion as their king, the fishes the monster-fish Ananda, and the birds the Golden Mallard. Now the King Golden Mallard had a lovely young daughter, and her royal father granted her any boon she might ask. The boon she asked for was to be allowed to choose a husband for herself; and the king in fulfilment of his promise mustered all the birds together in the country of the Himalayas. All manner of birds came, swans and peacocks and all other birds; and they flocked together on a great plateau of bare rock. Then the king sent for his daughter and bade her go and choose a husband after her own heart. As she reviewed the crowd of birds, her eye lighted on the peacock with his neck of jewelled sheen and tail of

varied hue; and she chose him, saying, “Let this be my husband.” Then the assembly of the birds went up to the peacock and said, “Friend peacock, this princess, in choosing her husband from among all these birds, has fixed her choice on you.”

Carried away by his extreme joy, the peacock exclaimed, “Until this clay you have never seen how active I am;” and in defiance of all decency he spread his wings and began to dance; and in dancing he exposed himself.

Filled with shame, King Golden Mallard said, “This fellow has neither modesty within his heart nor decency in his outward behaviour; I certainly will not give my daughter to one so shameless.” And there in the midst of all that assembly of the birds, he repeated this stanza—

A pleasing note is yours, a lovely back,

A neck in hue like lapis lazuli;

A fathom’s length your outstretched feathers reach.

Withal, your dancing loses you my child.

Right in the face of the whole gathering King Royal Mallard gave his daughter to a young mallard, a nephew of his. Covered with shame at the loss of the mallard princess, the peacock rose straight up from the place and fled away. And King Golden Mallard too went back to his dwelling-place.

“Thus, Brethren,” said the Master, “this is not the only time his breach of modesty has caused him loss; just as it has now caused him to lose the jewel of the faith, so in bygone days it lost him a jewel of a wife.” When he had ended this lesson, he shewed the connexion and identified the Birth by saying,

“The Brother with the many belongings was the peacock of those days, and I myself the Royal Mallard.”

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.