Ja 33 — Sammodamana Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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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

“While concord reigns.” This story was told by the Master while dwelling in the Banyan-grove near Kapilavatthu, about a squabble over a porter’s head-pad, as will be related in the Kunala-jataka.

On this occasion, however, the Master spoke thus to his kinsfolk—“My lords, strife among kinsfolk is unseemly. Yes, in bygone times, animals, who had defeated their enemies when they lived in concord, came to utter destruction when they fell out.” And at the request of his royal kinsfolk, he told this story of the past.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, the Bodhisatta was born a quail, and lived in the forest at the head of many thousands of quails. In those days a fowler who caught quails came to that place; and he used to imitate the note of a quail till he saw that the birds had been drawn together, when he flung his net over them, and whipped the sides of the net together, so as to get them all huddled up in a heap. Then he crammed them into his basket, and going home sold his prey for a living.

Now one day the Bodhisatta said to those quails, “This fowler is making havoc among our kinsfolk. I have a device whereby he will be unable to catch us. Henceforth, the very moment he throws the net over you, let each one put his head through a mesh and then all of you together must fly away with the net to such place as you please, and there let it down on a thorn-brake; this done, we will all escape from our several meshes.” “Very good,” said they all in ready agreement.

On the morrow, when the net was cast over them, they did just as the Bodhisatta had told them—they lifted up the net, and let it down on a thorn-brake, escaping themselves from underneath. While the fowler was still disentangling his net, evening came on; and he went away empty-handed. On the morrow and following days the quails played the same trick. So that it became the regular thing for the fowler to be engaged till sunset disentangling

his net, and then to betake himself home empty-handed. Accordingly his wife grew angry and said, “Day by day you return empty-handed; I suppose you’ve got a second establishment to keep up elsewhere.”

“No, my dear,” said the fowler; “I’ve no second establishment to keep up. The fact is those quails have come to work together now. The moment my net is over them, off they fly with it and escape, leaving it on a thorn-brake. Still, they won’t live in unity always. Don’t you bother yourself; as soon as they start bickering among themselves, I shall bag the lot, and that will bring a smile to your face to see.” And so saying, he repeated this stanza to his wife—

While concord reigns, the birds bear off the net.

When quarrels rise, they’ll fall a prey to me.

Not long after this, one of the quails, in alighting on their feeding ground, trod by accident on another’s head. “Who trod on my head?” angrily cried this latter. “I did; but I didn’t mean to. Don’t be angry,” said the first quail. But notwithstanding this answer, the other remained as angry as before. Continuing to answer one another, they began to bandy taunts, saying, “I suppose it is you single-handed who lift up the net.” As they wrangled thus with one another, the Bodhisatta thought to himself, “There’s no safety with one who is quarrelsome. The time has come when they will no longer lift up the net, and thereby they will come to great destruction. The fowler will get his opportunity. I can stay here no longer.” And thereupon he with his following went elsewhere.

Sure enough the fowler came back again a few days later, and first collecting them together by imitating the note of a quail, flung his net over them. Then said one quail, “They say when you were at work lifting the net, the hair of your head fell off. Now’s your time; lift away.” The other rejoined, “When you were lifting the net, they say both your wings moulted. Now’s your time; lift away.”

But whilst they were each inviting the other to lift the net, the fowler himself lifted the net for them and crammed them in a heap into his basket and bore them off home, so that his wife’s face was wreathed with smiles.

“Thus, sire,” said the Master, “such a thing as a quarrel among kinsfolk is unseemly; quarrelling leads only to destruction.” His lesson ended, he shewed the connexion, and identified the Birth, by saying, “Devadatta was the foolish quail of those days, and I myself the wise and good quail.”

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. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

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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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