Ja 335 — Jambuka Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol3/ja335.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 3, 1897

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

“Jackal beware,” etc.—This story was told by the Master while dwelling in the Bamboo Grove, about the attempt of Devadatta to imitate the Buddha. The incident that gave rise to the story has been told in full before. Here is a short summary of it.

When the Master asked Sariputta what Devadatta did when he saw him, the Elder replied, “Sir, in taking you off he put a fan in my hand and lay down, and then Kokalika struck him on the breast with his knee: and so in taking you off he got into trouble.” The Master said, “This happened to Devadatta before,” and being pressed by the Elder, he told an old-world legend.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born as a young lion, and dwelt in a cave of the Himalayas, and one day after killing a buffalo and eating of its flesh he took a draught of water and returned home. A jackal saw him, and being unable to escape lay down on his belly.

The lion said, “What is the meaning of this, Mr. Jackal?”

“Sir,” he said, “I would be your servant.”

The lion said, “Well, come on then,” and conducting him to the place where he dwelt, he day by day brought him meat and fed him. When the jackal had grown fat on the lion’s broken meat, one day a feeling of pride sprang up in him, and he drew nigh to the lion, and said, “My lord, I am ever a hindrance to you. You constantly bring me meat and feed me. To-day do you remain here. I will go and slay an elephant, and after eating my fill will bring some meat to you.” Said the lion, “Friend jackal, let not this seem good in your eyes. You are not sprung from a stock that feeds on the flesh of the elephants that it kills. I will kill an elephant and bring its flesh to you. The elephant surely is big of body. Do not undertake what is contrary to your nature, but hearken to my words.” And hereupon he

spoke the first stanza—

Jackal, beware!

His tusks are long.

One of thy puny race

Would scarcely dare

So huge and strong

A beast as this to face.

The jackal, though forbidden by the lion, issued forth from the cave and thrice uttered the cry of a jackal. And looking to the base of the mountain, he spied a black elephant moving below, and thinking to fall on his head he sprang up and turning over in the air fell at the elephant's feet. The elephant lifting up his fore foot planted it on the jackal's head and smashed his skull to pieces. The jackal lay there groaning, and the elephant went off trumpeting. The Bodhisatta came and standing on the top of the precipice saw how the jackal had met his death, and said, "Through his pride was this jackal slain," and uttered three stanzas—

A jackal once assumed the lion's pride,

And elephant as equal foe defied.

Prone on the earth, while groans his bosom rent,

He learned the rash encounter to repent.

Who thus should challenge one of peerless fame,

Nor mark the vigour of his well-knit frame,

Shares the sad fate that on the jackal came.

But who the measure of his own power knows,

And nice discretion in his language shows,

True to his duty lives and triumphs o'er his foes.

Thus did the Bodhisatta in these stanzas declare the duties proper to be done in this world.

The Master, having ended his lesson, identified the Birth: "At that time Devadatta was the jackal, and I myself was the lion."

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.