Ja 389 — Suvannakakkata 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/ja389.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

“Gold-clawed creature,” etc.—The Master told this tale when dwelling in the Bamboo-grove, of Ananda’s dying for his sake. The occasion is told in the Khandahala Birth about the hiring of bowmen, and in the Cullahamsa Birth about the roar of the elephant Dhanapala. Then they began a discussion in the Hall of Truth: “Sirs, has the Elder Ananda, Treasurer of the Law, who attained all the wisdom possible to one still under discipline, given up his life for the Perfect Buddha when Dhanapala came?” The Master came and was told the subject of their discussion: he said, “Brother, in former times also Ananda gave up his life for me:” and so he told an old tale.

Once upon a time there was a brahmin village called Salindiya on the east side of Rajagaha. The Bodhisatta was born there in that village in a Brahmin farmer’s family. When he grew up he settled down and worked a farm of a thousand karisas in a district of Magadha to the north-east of the village. One day he had gone to the field with his men, and giving them orders to plough he went to a great pool at the end of the field to wash his face. In that pool there lives a crab of golden hue, beautiful and charming. The Bodhisatta having chewed his toothpick went down into the pool. When he was washing his mouth , the crab came near. Then he lifted up the crab and taking it laid it in his outer garment: and after doing his work in the field he put the crab again in the pool and went home. From that time when going to the field he always went first to that pool, laid the crab in his outer garment and then went about his work. So a strong feeling of confidence arose between them. The Bodhisatta came to the field constantly. Now in his eyes were seen the five graces and the three circles very pure. A she-crow in a nest on a palm in that corner of the field saw his eyes, and wishing to eat them said to the he-crow, “Husband, I have a longing.” “Longing for what?” “I wish to eat the eyes of a certain brahmin.” “Your longing is a bad one: who will be able to get them for you!” “I know that you can’t: but in the ant-hill near our tree there lives a black snake: wait on him: he will bite the brahmin and kill him, then you will tear out his eyes and bring them to me.” He agreed and afterwards waited on the black snake. The crab was grown great at the time when the seed

sown by the Bodhisatta was sprouting. One day the snake said to the crow, “Friend, you are always waiting on me: what can I do for you?” “Sir, your female slave has taken a longing for the eyes of the master of this field: I wait on you in hopes of getting his eyes through your favour.” The snake said, “Well, that is not difficult, you shall get them,” and so encouraged him. Next day the snake lay waiting for the brahmin’s coming, hidden in the grass, by the boundary of the field where he came The Bodhisatta entering the pool and washing his mouth felt a return of affection for the crab, and embracing it laid it in his outer garment and went to the field. The snake saw him come, and rushing swiftly forward bit him in the flesh of the calf and having made him fall on the spot fled to his ant-hill. The fall of the Bodhisatta, the spring of the golden crab from the garment, and the perching of the crow on the Bodhisatta’s breast followed close on each other. The crow perching put his beak into the Bodhisatta’s eyes. The crab thought, “It was through this crow that the danger came on my friend: if I seize him the snake will come,” so seizing the crow by the neck with its claw firmly as if in a vice, he got weary and then loosed him a little. The crow called on the snake, “Friend, why do you forsake me and run away? this crab troubles me, come ere I die,” and so spoke the first stanza: —

Gold-clawed creature with projecting eyes,

Tarn-bred, hairless, clad in bony shell,

He has caught me: hear my woeful cries!

Why do you leave a mate that loves you well?

The snake hearing him, made its hood large and came consoling the crow.

The Master explaining the case in his Perfect Wisdom spoke the second stanza—

The snake fell on the crab amain, his friend he’d not forsake:

Puffing his mighty hood he came: but the crab turned on the snake.

The crab being weary then loosed him a little. The snake thinking, “Crabs do not eat the flesh of crows nor of snakes, then for what reason does this one seize us?” in enquiry spoke the third stanza—

’Tis not for the sake of food

Crabs would seize a snake or crow:

Tell me, you whose eyes protrude,

Why you take and grip us so?

Hearing him, the crab explaining the reason spoke two stanzas—

This man took me from the pool,

Great the kindness he has done;

If he dies, my grief is full:

Serpent, he and I are one.

Seeing I am grown so great

All would kill me willingly:

Fat and sweet and delicate,

Crows at sight would injure me!

Hearing him, the snake thought: “By some means I must deceive him and free myself and the crow.” So to deceive him he spoke the sixth stanza—

If you have seized us only for his sake,

I’ll take the poison from him: let him rise:

Quick! from the crow and me your pincers take;

Till then the poison’s sinking deep, he dies.

Hearing him the crab thought, “This one wishes to make me let these two go by some means and then run away, he knows not my skill in device; now I will loosen my claw so that the snake can move, but I will not free the crow,” so he spoke the seventh stanza—

I’ll free the snake, but not the crow;

The crow shall be a hostage bound:

Never shall I let him go

Till my friend be safe and sound.

So saying he loosened his claw to let the snake go at his ease. The snake took away the poison and left the Bodhisatta’s body free from it. He rose up well and stood in his natural hue. The crab thinking, “If these two be well there will be no prosperity for my friend, I will kill them,” crushed both their heads like lotus-buds with his claws and took the life from them. The she-crow fled away from the place. The Bodhisatta spiked the snake’s body with a stick and threw it on a bush, let the golden crab go free in the pool, bathed and then went to Salindiya. From that time there was still greater friendship between him and the crab.

The lesson ended, the Master declared the Truths, and identifying the Birth spoke the last stanza—

“Mara, was the dusky serpent, Devadatta was the crow,

Good Ananda was the crab, and I the brahmin long ago.”

At the end of the Truths many reached the First Path and the other Paths. The female crow was Ci###324###camanavika, though this is not mentioned in the last stanza.

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.

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