Ja 486 — Maha-Ukkusa Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“The country churls,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling at Jetavana, about Mitta-gandhaka, a lay Brother. This man, they say, the offspring of a decayed family at Savatthi, sent a companion to offer marriage to a young gentlewoman. The question was asked, “Has he friend or comrade who can dispose of any matter that needs looking to?” Reply was made, “No, there was none.” “Then he must make some friends first,” they said to him. The man followed this advice, and struck up a friendship with the four gatekeepers. After this he made friends by degrees with the town warders, the astrologers, the nobles of the court, even with the commander-in-chief and the viceroy; and by association with them he became the king’s friend, and after that a friend of the eighty chief Elders, and through Elder Ananda, with the Tathagata himself. Then the Master established his family in the Refuges and the Virtues, the king gave him high place, and he was known as Mitta-gandhaka, the “man of many friends.” The king bestowed a great house upon him, and caused his nuptial feast to be celebrated, and a world of people from the king downwards sent him gifts. Then his wife received a present sent by the king, and the viceroy’s present sent by the viceroy, and the present of the commander-in-chief, and so forth, having all the people of the city bound to her. On the seventh day, with great ceremony the Dasabala was invited by the newly married pair, great gifts were bestowed on the Buddha and his company to the number of five hundred; at the end of the feast they received the Master’s thanks and were both established in the fruit of the First Path.

In the Hall of Truth all were talking about it. “Brethren, the layman Mitta-gandhaka followed his wife’s advice, and by her means became a friend to every one, and received great honour at the king’s hand; and having become friends with the Master both husband and wife were established in the fruit of the First Path.” The Master entering asked what they talked of. They told him. He said, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that this man has received great honour by reason of this woman. In days long gone by, when he was an animal, by her advice he made many friends, and was set free from anxiety on a son’s behalf.” So saying he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, certain men of the marches used to make a settlement, wheresoever they could best find their food, dwelling in the forest, and killing for meat for themselves and their families the game which abounded there. Not far from their village was a large natural lake, and upon its southward shore lived a Hawk, on the west a she-hawk; on the north a Lion, king of the beasts; on the east an Osprey, king of the birds; in the middle dwelt a Tortoise on. a small island. The Hawk asked the she-hawk to become his wife. She asked him, “Have you any friend?” “No, madam,” he replied. “We must have some one who can defend us against any danger or trouble that may arise, and you must find some friends.” “Whom shall I make friends with?” “Why, with king Osprey who lives on the eastern shore, and with the Lion on the north, and with the Tortoise who dwells in the middle of this lake.” He took her advice and did so. Then the two lived together (it should be said that on a little islet in the same lake grew a kadamba tree, surrounded by the water on all sides) in a nest which they made.

Afterwards there were given to them two sons. One day, while the wings of the younglings were yet callow, some of the country folk went foraging through the woods all day and found nothing. Not wishing to return home empty-handed, they went down to the lake to catch a fish or a tortoise. They got on the island, and lay down beneath the kadamba tree; and there being tormented by the bites of gnats and mosquitoes, to drive these away, they kindled a fire by rubbing sticks together, and made a smoke. The smoke rising annoyed the birds, and the young ones uttered a cry. “‘Tis the cry of birds!” said the country folk. “Up, make up the fire: we cannot lie here hungry, but before we lie down we will have a meal of fowls’ flesh.” They made the fire blaze, and built it up. But the mother bird hearing the sound, thought, “These men wish to eat our young ones. We made friends to save us from that danger. I will send my mate to the great Osprey.” Then she said, “Go, my husband, tell the Osprey of the danger which threatens our young,” repeating this stanza:

“The country churls build fires upon the isle,

To eat my young ones in a little while:

O Hawk! to friend and comrade give the word,

My children’s danger tell to every bird!”

The cock-bird flew at all speed to the place, and gave a cry to announce his arrival. Leave given, he came near to the Osprey, and made his greeting. “Why have you come?” asked the Osprey. Then the cock repeated the second stanza:

“O winged fowl! chiefest of birds art thou:

So, Osprey king, I seek thy shelter now.

Some country-folk a-hunting now are fain

To eat my young: be thou my joy again!”

“Fear not,” said the Osprey to the Hawk, and consoling him he repeated the third stanza:

“In season, out of season, wise men make

Both friends and comrades for protection’s sake:

For thee, O Hawk! I will perform this deed;

The good must help each other at their need.”

Then he went on to ask, “Have the churls climbed up the tree, my friend?” “They are not climbing yet; they are just piling wood on the fire.” “Then you had better go quickly and comfort my friend your mate, and say I am coming.” He did so. The Osprey went also, and from a place near to the kadamba tree he watched for the men to climb, sitting upon a tree-top. Just as one of the boors who was climbing the tree had come near to the nest, the Osprey dived into the lake, and from wings and beak sprinkled water over the burning brands, so that they were put out. Down came the men, and made another fire to cook the bird and its young; when they climbed again, once more the Osprey demolished the fire. So whenever a fire was made, the bird put it out, and midnight came. The bird was much distressed: the skin under his stomach had become quite thin, his eyes were blood-shot. Seeing him, the hen-bird said to her mate, “My lord, the Osprey is tired out; go and tell the Tortoise, that he may have a rest.” When he heard this, the bird approaching the Osprey, addressed him in a stanza:

“Good help the good: the necessary deed

Thou hast in pity done for us at need.

Our young are safe, thou living: have a care

Of thy own self, nor all thy strength outwear.”

On hearing these words, loud as a lion’s roar he repeated the fifth stanza:

“While I am keeping guard about this tree,

I care not if I lose my life for thee:

So use the good: thus friend will do for friend:

Yea, even if he perish at the end.”

But the sixth stanza was repeated by the Master, in his Perfect Wisdom, as he praised the bird’s goodness:

“The egg-born bird that flies the air did a most painful work,

The Osprey, guarding well the chicks before the midnight murk."

Then the Hawk said, "Rest awhile, friend Osprey," and then away to the Tortoise, whom he aroused. "What is your errand, friend?" asked the Tortoise.—"Such and such a danger has come upon us, and the royal Osprey has been labouring hard ever since the first watch, and is very weary; that is why I have come to you." With these words he repeated the seventh stanza:

"Even they who fall through sin or evil deed

May rise again if they get help in need.

My young in danger, straight I fly to thee:

O dweller in the lake, come, succour me!"

On hearing this the Tortoise repeated another stanza:

"The good man to a man who is his friend,

Both food and goods, even life itself, will lend.

For thee, O Hawk! I will perform this deed:

The good must help each other at their need."

His son, who lay not far off, hearing the words of his father thought, "I would not have my father troubled, but I will do my father's part," and therefore he repeated the ninth stanza:

"Here at thy ease remain, O father mine,

And I thy son will do this task of thine.

A son should serve a father, so 'Tis best;

I'll save the Hawk his young ones in the nest."

The father Tortoise addressed his son in a stanza:

"So do the good, my son, and it is true

That son for father service ought to do.

Yet they may leave the Hawk's young brood alone,

Perchance, if they see me so fully grown."

With these words the Tortoise sent the Hawk away, adding, “Fear not, my friend, but go you before and I will come presently after.” He dived into the water, collected some mud, and went to the island, quenched the flame, and lay still. Then the countrymen cried, “Why should we trouble about the young hawks? Let us roll over this cursed Tortoise, and kill him! He will be enough for all.” So they plucked some creepers and got some strings, but when they had made them fast in this place or that, and torn their clothes to strips for the purpose, they could not roll the Tortoise over. The Tortoise lugged them along with him and plunged in deep water. The men were so eager to get him that in they fell after: splashed about, and scrambled out with a belly-full of water. “Just look,” said they: “half the night one Osprey kept putting out our fire, and now this Tortoise has made us fall into the water, and swallow it, to our great discomfort. Well, we will light another fire, and at sunrise we will eat those young hawks.” Then they began to make a fire. The hen-bird heard the noise they were making, and said, “My husband, sooner or later these men will devour our young and depart: you go and tell our friend the Lion.” At once he went to the Lion, who asked him why he came at such an unseasonable hour. The bird told him all from the beginning, and repeated the eleventh stanza:

“Mightiest of all the beasts, both beasts and men

Fly to the strongest when beset with fear.

My young ones are in danger; help me then:

Thou art our king, and therefore I am here.”

This said, the Lion repeated a stanza:

“Yes, I will do this service, Hawk, for thee:

Come, let us go and slay this gang of foes!

Surely the prudent, he who wisdom knows,

Protector of a friend must try to be.”

Having thus spoken, he dismissed him, saying, “Now go, and comfort your young ones.” Then he went forward, churning up the crystal water. When the churls perceived him approaching, they were frightened to death: “The Osprey,” they cried, “put out our fire-brands; the Tortoise made us lose the clothes we had on: but now we are done for. This Lion will destroy us at once.” They ran this way and that: when the Lion came to the foot of the tree, nothing could he see. Then the Osprey, the Hawk, and the Tortoise came up, and accosted him. He told them the profitableness of friendship, and said, “From this time forth be careful never to break the bonds of friendship.” With this advice he departed: and they also went each to his own place. The hen-hawk looking upon her young, thought—“Ah, through friends have my young been given back to me!” and as she rejoiced, she spoke to her mate, and recited six stanzas declaring the effect of friendship:

“Get friends, a houseful of them without fail,

Get a great friend: a blessing he’ll be found :

Vain strike the arrows on a coat of mail.

And we rejoice, our younglings safe and sound.

“By their own comrade’s help, the friend who stayed to take their part,

One chirps, the fledglings chirp reply, with notes that charm the heart.

“The wise asks help at friend’s or comrade’s hand,

Lives happy with his goods and brood of kind:

So I, my mate, and young, together stand,

Because our friend to pity was inclined.

“A man needs king and warriors for protection:

And these are his whose friendship is perfection:

Thou cravest happiness: he is famed and strong;

He surely prospers to whom friends belong.

“Even by the poor and weak, O Hawk, good friends must needs be found:

See now by kindness we and ours each one are safe and sound.

“The bird who wins a hero strong to play a friendly part,

As thou and I are happy, Hawk, is happy in his heart.”

So she declared the quality of friendship in six stanzas. And all this company of friends lived all their lives long without breaking the bond of friendship, and then passed away according to their deeds.

The Master, having ended this discourse, said, “This is not the first time, Brethren, that he won to bliss by his wife’s means; it was the same before.” With these words, he identified the Birth: “At that time the married pair were the pair of Hawks, Rahula was the young Tortoise, Moggallana was the old Tortoise, Sariputta the Osprey, and I was myself the Lion.

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