Ja 501 — Rohanta-Miga 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

“In fear of death,” etc.—This story the Master told while dwelling in the Bamboo Grove, about the reverend Ananda, who made renunciation of his life. This renunciation will be described in Book Xxi., under the Culla-hamsa Birth, the Subduing of Dhanapala. When this reverend man had renounced his life for the Master’s sake, they gossiped about it in the Hall of Truth: “Sirs, the reverend Ananda, having attained to the detailed knowledge of the course of religious training, renounced his life for the Dasabala.” The Master came in, asking what they spoke of as they sat there. They told him. Said he, “Brothers, this is not the first time he has laid down his life for my sake; he has done it before.” Then he told them a story of the past.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king in Benares, his chief consort’s name was Khema. At that time the Bodhisatta was born in the Himalaya region, as a stag: golden-hued he was and beautiful, and his younger brother, named Citta-miga, or Dapple Deer, was also of the colour of gold, and so also his younger sister Sutana. Now the Great Being’s name was Rohanta, and he was king of the deer. Traversing two ranges of the mountains, in the third he lived beside a lake called Lake Rohanta, and surrounded by a herd of eighty thousand deer. He used to support his parents, who were old and blind.

Now a hunter, who lived in a village of hunters near Benares, came to the Himalayas, and saw the Great Being. He returned to his village, and on his death-bed told his son, “My boy, in such a part of our hunting-ground there is a golden deer; if the king should ask, you may tell him of it.”

One day Queen Khema, in the dawning, saw a dream, and this was the manner of that dream. A gold-coloured stag sat on a golden seat, and he discoursed to the queen on the Law with a honey-sweet voice, like the sound of a golden bell tinkling. She listened with great delight to this discoursing, but before the discourse was ended the deer rose and went away; and she awoke, crying out—“Catch me the stag!” The attendants, hearing her

cry, burst out a-laughing. “Here’s the house shut close, door and window; not even a breath of air can get in, and at such a time my lady calls out to catch her the stag!” By this time she understood that it was a dream. But she said to herself, “If I say, it is a dream, the king will make no account of it; but if I say, it is my woman’s craving, he will attend to it with all care. I will hear the discourse of the golden stag!” Then she lay down as though sick. The king came in: “What is wrong with my queen?” said he. “Oh, my lord, only my natural craving.”—“What do you wish?”—“I wish to hear the discourse of a righteous golden stag.”—“Why, my lady, what you crave does not exist: there is no such thing as a golden stag.” She said, “If I don’t get it, die I must on the spot.” She turned her back on the king, and lay still. “If there is one, it shall be caught,” said the king. Then he questioned his courtiers and brahmins, just as in the Peacock Birth, whether there were such things as golden deer. Finding that there were, he summoned the huntsmen, and asked, “Which of you has seen or heard of such a creature?” The son of the hunter we spoke of told the story as he heard it. “My man,” said the king, “when you bring me this deer I will reward you richly; go and bring it here.” He gave the money for his expenses, and dismissed him. The man said, “Never fear: if I cannot bring the stag I will bring his skin; if I can’t get that I will bring his hair.” Then the man returned home, and gave the king’s money to his family. Then he went out and saw the royal stag. “Where shall I lay my snare,” he mused, “so as to catch him?” He saw his chance at the drinking-place. He twisted a stout cord of leather thongs, and set it with a pole at the place where the Great Being went down to drink water.

Next day, the Great Being with the eighty thousand deer during his search for food came thither to drink water at the usual ford. Just as he was going down, he was caught in the noose. Then he thought, “If I cry out the cry of capture, all my troop will flee in terror without drinking.” Although he was fast at the end of the pole, he stood pretending to drink, as if he were free. When the eighty thousand deer had drunk, and now stood clear of the water, he thrice jerked at the noose, to break it if possible. The first time he cut his skin, the second time cut into his flesh, and the third time he strained a tendon, so that the snare touched the bone. Then, unable to break it, he uttered the cry of capture: all the herd of deer fled terrified in three troops. Citta-miga could not see the Great Being in any of the three troops: “This danger,” thought he, “which has come upon us, has fallen on my brother.” Then returning, he saw him there fast caught. The Great Being caught sight of him, and cried, “Don’t stand there, brother, there is danger here!” Then, urging him to flee, he repeated the first stanza:

“In fear of death, O Cittaka, those herds of creatures flee:

Go thou with them, and linger not, for they shall live with thee.”

The three stanzas which follow are said by the two alternately:

“No, no, Rohanta, I’ll not go; my heart has drawn me near;

I’m ready to lay down my life, I will not leave thee here.”

“Then blind, with none to care for them, our parents both must die:

O go, and let them live with thee: O do not linger nigh!”

“No, no, Rohanta, I’ll not go; my heart has drawn me near;

I’m ready to lay down my life, I will not leave thee here.”

He took his stand, supporting the Bodhisatta on the right side, and cheering him.

Sutana also, the young doe, ran about among the deer, but could not find her brothers anywhere. “This danger,” she thought, “must have fallen upon my brothers.” She turned back and came to them; and the Great Being, as he saw her come, repeated the fifth stanza:

“Go, timid doe, and run away; an iron snare holds me:

Go with the rest, and linger not, and they shall live with thee.”

The three next stanzas are said alternately as before:

“No, no, Rohanta, I’ll not go; my heart has drawn me near;

I’m ready to lay down my life, I will not leave thee here.”

“Then blind, with none to care for them, our parents both must die:

O go, and let them live with thee: O do not linger nigh!”

“No, no, Rohanta, I’ll not go; my heart has drawn me near;

I’ll lose my life, but never leave thee snared and captured here.”

Thus she also refused to obey; and stood by his left side consoling him.

Now the huntsman saw the deer scampering off, and heard the cry of capture. “It must be the king of the herd is caught!” he said; and, tightening his girdle, he grasped the spear to give him the death, and ran quickly up. The Great Being repeated the ninth stanza as he saw him coming:

“The furious hunter, arms in hand, see him approaching near!

And he will slay us here to-day with arrow or with spear.”

Citta did not flee, though he saw the man. But Sutana, not being strong enough to stand still, ran a little way for fear of death. Then with the thought—“Where shall I flee if I desert my two brothers?” she returned again, renouncing her own life, with death on her brow, and stood by the left side of her brother.

To explain this, the Master recited the tenth stanza:

“The tender doe in panic fear a little way did fly,

Then did a thing most hard to do, for she returned to die.”

When the hunter came up, he saw these three creatures standing together. A pitiful thought arose in his heart, as he guessed they were brothers and sister born of one womb. “Only the king of the herd,” thought he, “is caught in the snare; the other two are bound with the ties of honour. What kin can they be to him?” which question he asked thus:

“What are these deer that wait upon the prisoner, though free,

Nor for the sake of very life will leave him here, and flee?”

Then the Bodhisatta answered:

“My brother and my sister these, of one same mother born:

Nor for the sake of very life will leave me here forlorn.”

These words made his heart more exceedingly soft. Citta, that royal stag, perceiving that his heart grew soft, said, “Friend hunter, do not imagine that this creature is a deer and no more. He is king of fourscore thousand deer, one of virtuous life, tenderhearted to all creatures, of great wisdom; he supports his sire and dam, now blind and old. If you slay a righteous being like this, in slaying him you slay dam and sire, my sister and me, all five; but if you grant my brother his life, you bestow life on the five of us.” Then he repeated a stanza:

“Grown blind, with none to care for them, they both will perish so:

O grant thou life to all the five, and let my brother go!”

When the hunter heard this pious discourse, he was glad at heart. “Fear not, my lord,” said he, and repeated the next stanza:

“So be it: see I now set free the parent-fostering deer:

His parents when they find him safe shall make a merry cheer.”

As he said this, he thought: “What do I want with the king and his honours? If I hurt this royal deer, either the earth will gape and swallow me up, or a thunderbolt will fall and strike me. I will let him go.” So approaching the Great Being, he pulled down the pole, and cut the leather thong; then he embraced the deer, and laid him close to the water, tenderly and gently loosed him out of the noose, joined the ends of the tendon, and the lips of the flesh-wound, and the edges of the skin, washed off the blood with water, pitifully chafed

him again and again. By the power of his love and the Great Being's perfection all grew whole again, sinews, flesh, and skin: hide and hair covered the foot: no one could have guessed where he had been wounded. The Great Being stood there, full of happiness. Citta looked on him and rejoiced, and rendered thanks to the hunter in this stanza:

"Hunter, be happy now, and may thy kindred happy be,

As I am happy to behold the mighty stag set free."

Now the Great Being thought, "Is it of his own doing this hunter snared me, or at the bidding of another?" and he asked the cause of his capture. The huntsman said: "My lord, I have nothing to do with you; but the king's consort, Khema, desires to hear you discourse of righteousness; therefore I snared you at the king's bidding."—"That being so, my good friend, you did a bold thing to set me free. Come, bring me to the king, and I will discourse before the queen."—"Indeed, my lord, kings are cruel. Who knows what may come of it? I don't care for any honour the king might show me: go where you will." But again the Great Being thought it was a bold thing to set him free; he must give him a chance of winning the promised honour. So he said, "Friend, chafe my back with your hand." He did so; his hand became covered with golden hairs. "What shall I do with these hairs, my lord?"—"Take them, my friend, show them to the king and queen, tell them here are hairs from that golden stag; take my place, and discourse to them in the words of these verses I shall repeat: when she hears you, that will alone be sufficient to satisfy her craving." "Recite the Law, O king!" said the man; and the other taught him ten stanzas of the holy life, and described the Five Virtues, and dismissed him with a warning to be vigilant. The hunter treated the Great Being as one would treat a teacher: thrice he walked round him right-wise, did the four obeisances, and wrapping the hairs in a lotus leaf went away. The three animals accompanied him for a little way, then after feeding and drinking, returned to their parents.

Father and mother questioned him: "Rohanta, my son, we heard you were caught, and how came you free?" They put the question in a stanza:

"How didst thou win thy liberty when life was nearly done:

How did the hunter set thee free from treacherous trap, my son?"

In answer to which the Bodhisatta repeated three stanzas:

"Cittaka won me liberty with words that charmed the ear,

That touched the heart, that pierced the heart, words uttered sweet and clear.

"Sutana won me liberty with words that charmed the ear,

That touched the heart, that pierced the heart, words uttered sweet and clear.

“The hunter gave me liberty, these charming words to hear,

That touched the heart, that pierced the heart, words uttered sweet and clear.”

His parents expressed their gratitude, saying:

“He with his wife and family, O happy may they be,

As we are happy to behold Rohanta now set free!”

Now the huntsman came out of the wood, and went to the king; then saluting him stood on one side. The king when he saw him said:

“Come tell me, hunter: dost thou say, “See the deer’s hide I bring”:

Or hast thou no deer’s hide to show because of any thing?”

The hunter replied:

“Into my hands the creature came, into my privy snare,

And was fast caught: but others, free, attended on him there.

“Then pity made my flesh to creep, a pity strange and new.

If I should slay this deer (thought I) then I shall perish too.”

“What were these deer, O hunter, what their nature and their ways,

What colour theirs, what quality, to merit such high praise?”

The king put this question several times over, as one much astonished. The hunter replied in this stanza:

“With silvery horns and graceful shape, with hide and fell most bright,

Red slot, and shining brilliant eyes all lovely to the sight.”

As he repeated this stanza, the huntsman placed in the king’s hand those golden hairs of the Great Being, and in another verse summed up the description of the character of these deer:

“Such is their nature and their ways, my lord, and such these deer:

They used to find their parents food: I could not fetch them here.”

In these words he described the qualities of the Great Being, and of the stag Citta, and of Sutana the doe; adding this, “The royal stag, O king, showed me his hairs, commanding me to take his place, and to declare the Law before the queen in ten stanzas of a holy life.” Then sitting upon a golden throne, he declared the Law in those stanzas. The queen’s craving was satisfied. The king was pleased, and repeated these stanzas, as he rewarded the huntsman with great honour

“A jewelled earring give I thee, a hundred drachms of gold,

A lovely throne like flower of flax, with cushions laid fourfold,

“Two wives of equal rank and worth, a bull and kine five score,

My benefactor! and I’ll rule with justice evermore.

“Trade, farming, gleaning, usury, whate’er thy calling be,

See that thou sin not, but by these support thy family.”

When he heard these words of the king’s, he answered, “No house or home for me; grant me, my lord, to become an ascetic.” The king’s consent given, he handed over the king’s rich gifts to his wife and family, and went away to Himalaya, where he embraced the ascetic life, and cultivated the Eight Attainments, and became destined for Brahma’s world. And the king clave to the Great One’s teaching, and went to swell the hosts of heaven. The teaching endured for a thousand years.

This discourse ended, the Master said, “Thus, Brethren, long ago as now Ananda renounced life for my sake.” Then he identified the Birth: “At that time, Channa was the huntsman and Sariputta the king, a sister was Queen Khema; some of the king’s family were the father and mother, Uppalavanna was Sutana, Ananda was Citta, the Sakiya clan were the eighty thousand deer, and I was myself the royal stag Rohanta.”

“To friends and courtiers, warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

“In war and travel, warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

“In town and village, warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

“In every land and realm, O king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

“To brahmins and ascetics all, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

“To beasts and birds, O warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

“Do righteously, O warrior king; from this all blessings flow:

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

“With watchful vigilance, O king, on paths of goodness go:

The brahmins, Indra, and the gods have won their godhead so.

“These are the maxims told of old: and following wisdom’s ways

The goddess of all happiness herself to heaven did raise.”

In this manner did the huntsman declare the Law, as the Great Being had shown him, with a Buddha’s skill, as though he were bringing down to earth the heavenly Ganges. The crowd with a thousand voices cried approval. The queen’s longing was satisfied when she heard the discourse.

“Unto thy parents, warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

“To wife and child, O warrior king, do righteously; and so

By following a righteous life to heaven the king shall go.

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