

Excerpted from *Twenty Jataka Tales*, retold by Noor Inayat Khan. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1985.

The Monkey-bridge

A giant-like monkey once ruled over eighty thousand monkeys in the Himalaya mountains. And through the rocks where they lived streamed the river Ganges before reaching the valley where cities were built. And there where the bubbling water fell from rock to rock stood a magnificent tree. In the spring it bore tender white blossoms; and later it was laden with fruit so wonderful that none could be compared to them, and the sweet winds of the mountain gave them the sweetness of honey.



How happy the monkeys were! They ate the fruit and lived in the shade of the wonderful tree. From one side of the tree the branches spread over the water. Therefore, when the blossom appeared the monkeys ate or destroyed the flowers on those branches that the fruit might not grow on them, and if a fruit did grow they plucked it, were it no larger than the heart of a blossom, for the chief, seeing the danger, had warned them, saying: "Beware, let not a fruit fall into the water lest the river carry it to the city, where men seeing the beautiful fruit might search for the tree; following the river up into the hills, and, finding the tree, they would take all the fruit and we should have to flee from here." Thus the monkeys obeyed and for a long time never a fruit fell into the river. But the day came when one ripe fruit hidden by an ant's nest, unseen between the leaves, fell into the water and was taken by the flow of the river down, down the rocky hills, into the valley where the large city of Benares stands at the bank of the Ganges. And that day, while the fruit passed by Benares, pushed along by the little waves of the river, the King Brahmadata was bathing in the water between two nets which some fishermen held while he plunged and swam and played with the little sunrays caught in the water. And the fruit floated into one of the nets.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the fisherman who saw it first. "Where on this earth grows such a fruit as this?" And, seizing it, with sparkling eyes he showed it to the King.

Brahmadatta gazed at the fruit and marveled at its beauty. "Where is the tree which bears this fruit to be found?" he wondered. Then, calling some woodcutters from near the riverbank, he asked if they knew of the fruit and where it could be found.

"Sire," they said, "it is a mango, a wonderful mango. Such a fruit as this grows not in our valley, but up in the hills of the Himalaya, where the air is pure and the sunrays undisturbed. No doubt the tree stands on the riverside and a fruit having fallen in the water has been carried here. "

The King then asked the men to taste of it, and when they had done so, he also tasted it, and gave of it to his ministers and attendants. "Indeed," they said, "such a fruit is divine; never can another be compared to this. "

The days and the nights went slowly by and Brahmadata grew more and more restless. The longing to taste of the fruit once again became stronger as each day passed. In the night he saw in his dreams the enchanted tree carrying on each branch a hundred golden cups of honey and nectar.

"Indeed it must be found," said the King one day, and he gave orders that a boat be prepared to sail up the river Ganges, up to the Himalaya rocks where perhaps the tree might be found. And Brahmadata went himself with the men.

Long indeed was the journey passing the fields of flowers and rice, but at last the King and his followers reached the Himalaya hills one evening, and gazing in the distance what did they see? There, beneath the moonlight, stood the longed-for tree, its golden fruit glittering through the leaves.

But what was moving on each branch? What strange little shadows were sliding through the leaves?

"See," said one of the men, "it is a troop of monkeys. "

"Monkeys!" exclaimed the King; "eating the fruit! Surround the tree that they may not escape. At dawn we will shoot them and eat of their meat and of the mangoes."

These words came to the ears of the monkeys and, trembling, they said to their leader: "Alas! you warned us, beloved chief, but some fruit may have fallen in the stream, for men have come here; they surround our tree, and we cannot escape, for the distance between this tree and the next is too far for us to leap. We heard words coming from the mouth of one of the men saying, 'At dawn we will shoot them and eat of their meat and of the mangoes.'"

"I will save you, my little ones," said the chief, "fear not, but do as I say." Thus consoling them, the mighty chief climbed to the highest branch of the tree. And as swift as wind passing through the rocks, he jumped a hundred bow lengths through space and landed on a tree near the opposite bank. There, at the edge of the water, he took a long reed from its very root and he thought: "I will bind one end of the reed to this tree and the other end to my foot. Then I will spring again to the mango tree; thus a bridge will be made over which my subjects may flee. A hundred bow lengths I have jumped. The reed is so much longer than a hundred bow lengths that I can bind one end to this tree." And his heart filled with joy as he sprang back to the mango tree.

But, alas! the reed was too short and he was only just able to seize the end of a branch. It had not occurred to him that the reed should have been long enough to allow of the fastening to his foot. With a mighty effort he clung to the branch and called to his eighty thousand followers: "Run over my back on to the reed, and you will be saved."

One by one the monkeys ran over him on to the reed. But one among them called Devadatta jumped heavily upon his back. Alas! A piercing pain seized him; his back was broken. And the heartless Devadatta went on his way leaving his chief to suffer alone.

Brahmadatta had seen all that had happened and tears streamed from his eyes as he gazed upon the stricken monkey chief. He ordered that he be brought down from the tree to which he still clung, that he be bathed in the sweetest perfumes and clothed in a yellow garment, and that sweet water be given him to drink. And when the chief was bathed and clad, he lay beneath the tree and the King sat at his side and spoke to him. He said: "You made of your body a bridge for others to cross. Did you not know that your life would come to an end in so doing? You have given your life to save your followers. Who are you, blessed one, and who are they?"

"O King," replied the monkey, "I am their chief and their guide. They lived with me in this tree, and I was their father and I loved them. I do not suffer in leaving this world for I have gained my subjects' freedom. And if my death may be a lesson to you, then I am more than happy. It is not your sword that makes you a king; it is love alone. Forget not that your life is but little to give if in giving you secure the happiness of your people. Rule them not through power because they are your subjects; nay, rule them through love because they are your children. In this way only you shall be king. When I am no longer here forget not my words, O Brahmadatta!"

The Blessed One then closed his eyes and died.

But the King and his people mourned for him and the King built for him a temple pure and white that his words might never be forgotten.

And Brahmadatta ruled with love over his people and they were happy ever after.

The Guilty Dogs

One day, a king drove through the city in his magnificent chariot drawn by six white horses. And at the fall of night, when he returned, the horses were taken to the stable, but the chariot was left in the courtyard with the harnesses.

And when everyone was asleep in the palace, it started to rain.

"This is our time to have some fun," said the palace dogs, when they saw the leather harnesses wet and softened by the shower. Down they went, on tiptoe, into the courtyard, and bit and gnawed at the beautiful straps. And after thus playing the whole night, they slipped away before the dawn.

"The straps of the royal chariot, eaten! destroyed!" the stablemen exclaimed with horror as they entered the courtyard the next morning. And with trembling hearts they went to tell the King.

"Gracious lord," they said, "the trappings of the royal chariot have been destroyed during the night. It is certainly the work of dogs, who have been gnawing the beautiful straps."

The King rose up in fury.

"Kill them all," he commanded. "Slay every dog you see in the city."

The King's order soon became known to the seven hundred dogs of the city and they all cried bitterly. But there was one dog who was their chief, for he loved them and protected them, and in a long procession they set out to find him.

"Why are you gathered together today?" asked the chief, as he saw them come, "and what makes you all so sad?"

"Danger is upon us," replied the dogs; "the leather of the royal chariot, which stood during the night in the palace courtyard, has been destroyed, and we are blamed for the damage. The King is furious and has ordered us all to be killed."

"It is impossible for any dog of the city to enter the palace gates," thought the chief. "Who therefore could have destroyed the harnesses if not the dogs of the palace? Thus the guilty ones are spared and the innocent ones are to be destroyed. Nay, I will show the guilty ones to the King, and the city dogs shall be saved."

Such were the thoughts of the brave chief, and after consoling his seven hundred followers, he went alone through the city. At every step men were standing ready to kill him, but his eyes were so full of love that they did not dare touch him. And he walked into the palace, and the royal guards, spellbound at his appearance, let him pass through the gates.

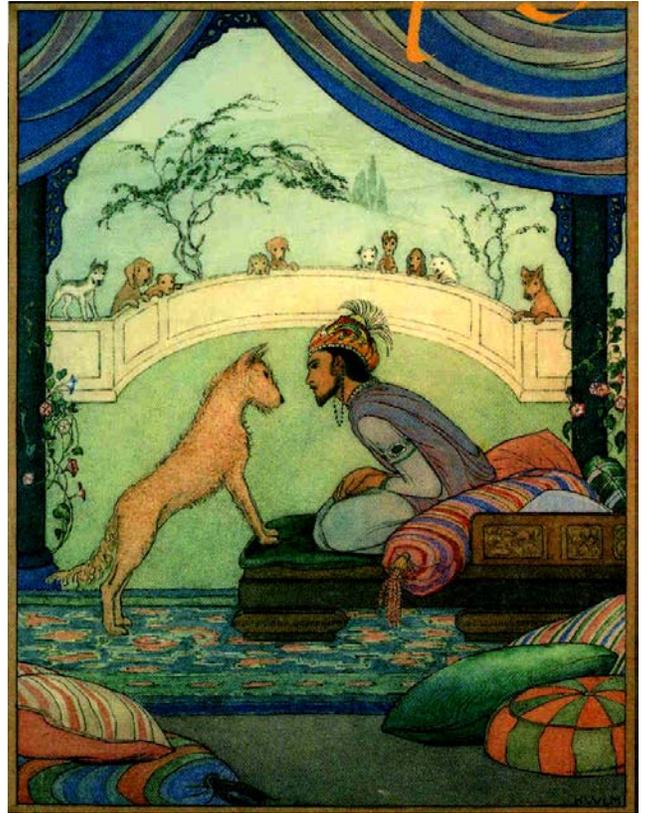
Thus he entered into the hall of justice where the King sat on his throne and the courtiers stood around; and at sight of his fiery eyes, all remained silent.

After some time the chief spoke.

"Great King," he said, "is it your command that all the dogs of the city be killed?"

"Yes," replied the King, "it is my command."

"What harm have they done, O King?" he asked.



"They have destroyed the leather harnesses of the royal chariot," the King replied.

"Which dogs have done the harm?" asked the chief.

"I know not," replied the King; "therefore have I ordered them all to be killed."

"Is every dog of your city to be killed," asked the chief, "or are some dogs to be allowed to live?"

"The royal dogs only are to be allowed to live," the King replied.

"O King," said the chief in a gentle voice, "is your command just? Why should the dogs of the palace be innocent and the dogs of the city be judged guilty? The ones you favor are saved and the ones you know not are to be killed. O just King, where is your justice?"

The King thought for awhile and then said:

"Wise chief, tell me, then, who are the guilty ones?"

"The royal dogs," replied the chief.

"Show me that your words are true," said the King.

"I will show you," answered the chief.

"Order that the palace dogs be brought here to the hall of justice and be given kusa grass and buttermilk to eat."

The King did as the chief asked, and the royal dogs were brought before him and given kusa grass and buttermilk to eat.

Soon after they had eaten, shreds of leather came out of their mouths and fell on the ground. The guilty ones were found.

The King rose gently from his throne. "Your words are true," he said to the wise chief, "true and pure, as the raindrops which fall from the sky. I shall never forget you as long as I live. "

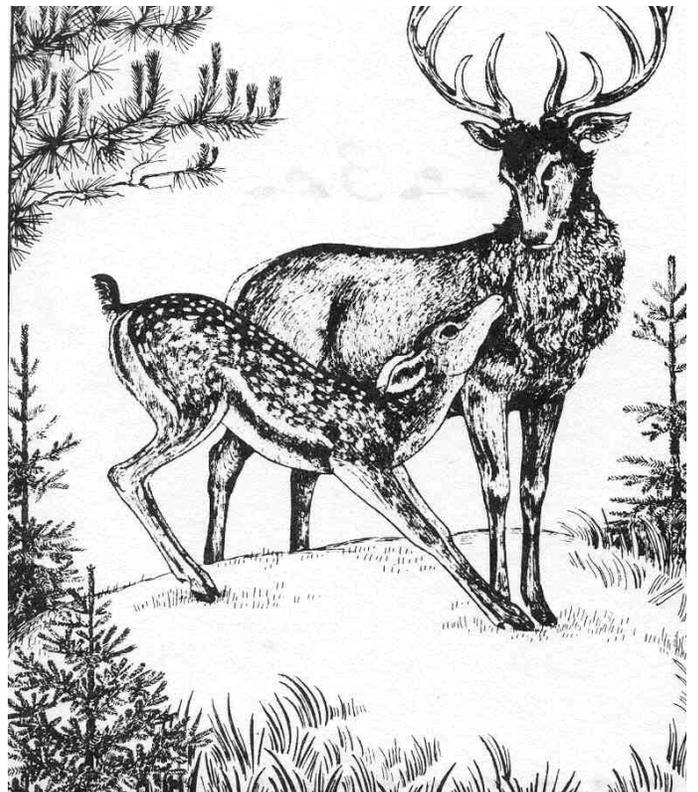
He then ordered that all the dogs of the city be given rich food and royal care every day of their lives, and they all lived happily ever after.

Banyan

Whose are those jewel eyes, piercing the shadows of the forest? Those horns bright as silver crescents? Watch, my children, how swiftly those pearl hoofs pass through the bushes! Have you not heard about the golden deer, my little ones? 'Banyan,' the King of the deer, he is called.

But Banyan was not the only monarch in the forest of Benares. He reigned over five hundred deer and another king, 'Branch,' ruled another five hundred.

It was the habit of the King of Benares to hunt the deer each day. Before reaching the forest there were numberless fields to cross, and the horses of the King and his noblemen trampled the rice, the corn, and the tender plants that the peasants



cultivated. "Mercy," cried the peasants, but the trumpets blew and their poor voices were lost in the fields.

"How can we change this?" thought the peasants. "Let us chase all the deer into the King's own gardens, then he will no more pass through our fields to hunt."

Thus the peasants, after sowing grass and digging ponds in the palace woods, called the men of the city, and with sticks and spears they went to the forest to chase the deer. The men first surrounded the forest, that from no side the deer might escape, and then clashing their spears and weapons they drove the deer into the woods of the palace and closed the gates behind them. Then they went to the King and said: "Sire, we could no longer work. Alas! When you and your noblemen went hunting the horses trampled our fields; therefore have we driven the deer into the palace woods; we have sown grass and dug ponds that they may eat and drink. Thus you need no longer cross our fields."

From that time the King went no farther than his woods to hunt. Each day he watched the beautiful herd, and he saw that among them were two golden ones. "The golden deer must not be killed," he said to his men; thus Banyan Deer and Branch Deer were never touched by the piercing arrows. But of the others one was killed each day for the feast of the King, after having been wounded over and over again. And some deer were wounded a thousand times before at last they fell to the arrow of the hunters.

Branch, therefore, went one day to Banyan, and said: "Friend of the woods, take heed of my words. Our subjects are not only being killed but wounded uselessly. Alas! One must be killed each day, such is the wish of the King, but why should so many be wounded before one alone is caught? Would it not be wiser if each day one of our subjects went to the palace to be killed?"

Banyan agreed, and so it was ordered. Each day in turn a deer went to the palace and placed its pure white forehead on the stone before the door. One day one of Banyan's herd, and the next day one of Branch's.

Now one day a young doe of the herd of Branch, mother of a small baby-deer, was told that her turn had come. Upon hearing the news she ran to Branch and said: "Lord, this day my turn has come to go to the palace, but my little one is weak and still needs a mother's care. May I not go later when he is older?"

"Go," said Branch; "another cannot take your turn; go to the palace as it has been ordered you to do."

Her little heart trembling with sorrow, the doe ran to Banyan and said: "O King Banyan, my turn has come to go to the palace, but I have a little one who needs me still. Can I not go a little later when he is older?"

"Return to your little one," said Banyan; "I will see that another takes your turn." And as lightning pierces the clouds, he ran through the trees and the bushes and bent his forehead to the stone before the palace door.

"O golden one! Here on this stone to be killed! Oh, what does it mean?" exclaimed the man who each day killed a deer for the feast of the King. His knife fell to the ground, and, spellbound, he ran to the King to tell him what he had seen. Just as you, my little one, would run to the brother who is dear to you, thus the King ran to Banyan. "O beautiful one," he exclaimed, "what has brought you to this stone of pain? Did you not know I ordered that you must never be killed? Golden deer, tell me what has brought you here?"

"Lord," replied Banyan, "today was the turn of a white doe, mother of a small deer; I came in her place, for her little one is yet too young to be alone."

Tears streamed down the cheeks of the King and fell on the golden head of Banyan, which he held between his hands. And bending over Banyan, he said: "Your life, O divine one, and the life of the doe shall be spared. Arise, and run into the woods again."

"Lord," answered Banyan, "our lives are to be spared, but what of our kindred who run within the woods?"

"Their lives shall also be spared," replied the King.

"Thus the deer in the woods of the palace are saved, but what of all the other deer in your kingdom, Lord?"

"They, too, shall all be spared, " answered the King.

"O King," said Banyan, "you will spare the deer, but what of the lives of all other four-footed creatures?"

"O merciful one," said the King, "they shall all be free."

"Lord, they shall all be free, but what of the birds that fly through space?"

"They shall be spared also," said the King.

"Lord," said Banyan, "you will spare the lives of the four-footed creatures and of the birds, but what of the fish that live in the water?"

"They shall be spared also," said the King.

Love had entered into the heart of the King. And he reigned with love over his people, and all the living creatures in his realm were happy ever after.



The Fairy and the Hare

A young hare once lived in a small forest between a mountain, a village, and a river. My children, many hares run through the heather and the moss, but none as sweet as he.

Three friends he had: a jackal, a water-weasel, and a monkey.

After the long day's toil, searching for food, they came together at evening, all four, to talk and think. The handsome hare spoke to his three companions and taught them many things. And they listened to him and learned to love all the creatures of the woods, and they were very happy.

"My friends," said the hare one day, "let us not eat tomorrow, but the food we find in the day we will give to any poor creature we meet."

This they all agreed to. And the next day, as every day, they started out at dawn in search of food.

The jackal found in a hut in the village a piece of meat and a jar of curdled milk with a rope tied to each handle. Three times he cried aloud: "Whose is this meat? Whose is this curdled milk?" But the hut was empty, and hearing no answer, he put the piece of meat in his mouth, and the rope of the jar around his neck, and away he fled to the forest. And laying them at his side he thought: "What a good jackal I am! Tomorrow I shall eat what I have found if no one comes this way."

And what did little water-weasel find on his rounds?

A fisherman had caught some sparkling golden fish, and after hiding them under the sand he returned to the river to catch more!

But the water-weasel found the hiding place, and after taking the fish out of the sand, he called three times: "Whose are these golden fish?"

But the fisherman heard only the rippling of the river and none answered his call! So he took the fish into the forest to his little home, and thought: "What a good water-weasel I am! These fish I shall not eat today, but perhaps another day."

Meanwhile monkey-friend had climbed the mountain, and finding some ripe mangoes, he carried them down into the woods and put them under a tree, and he thought: "What a good monkey I am!"

But the hare lay in the grass in the woods, and his beautiful eyes were moist with sadness. "What can I offer if any poor creature should pass by the way?" he thought. "I cannot offer grass, and I have neither rice nor nuts to give."

But suddenly he leaped with joy. "If someone comes this way," he thought, "I shall give him myself to eat. "

Now, in the sweet little wood lived a fairy with butterfly-wings, and long hair of moonlight-rays. Her name was Sakka. She knew everything that took place in the wood. She knew if a small ant had stolen from another ant. She knew the thoughts of all the little creatures, even of the poor little flowers, trampled over in the grass. And she knew that day that the four friends in the wood were not eating, and that any food that they might find was to be given to any poor creature they might meet.

And so Sakka changed herself into an old beggar man, bent over, walking with a stick. She went first to the jackal and said: "I have walked for days and weeks, and have had nothing to eat. I have no strength to search for food! Pray give me something, O jackal!"

"Take this piece of meat, and this jar of curdled milk," said the jackal. "I stole it from a hut in the village, but it is all I have to give."

"I will see about it later," said the beggar, and she went on through the shady trees.

Then Sakka met the water-weasel and asked: "What have you to give to me, little one?"

"Take these fish, O beggar, and rest awhile beneath this tree," answered the water-weasel.

"Another time, " the beggar replied, and passed on through the woods.

A little farther Sakka met the monkey and said: "Give me of your fruits, I pray. I am poor and starved and weary."

"Take all these mangoes, " said the monkey. "I have plucked them all for you."

"Some other time," replied the beggar, and did not stay.

Then Sakka met the hare and said: "Sweet one of the mossy woods, tell me, where can I find food? I am lost within the forest and far away from home."

"I will give you myself to eat," replied the hare. "Gather some wood and make a fire; I will jump into the flames and you shall then have the flesh of a little hare."

Sakka caused magic flames to rise from some logs of wood, and full of joy the hare jumped into the glowing fire. But the flames were cool as water, and did not burn his skin.

"Why is it," said he to Sakka, "I do not feel the flames? The sparks are as fresh as the dew of the dawn."

Sakka then changed herself into her fairy form again, and spoke to the hare in a voice sweeter than any voice he had ever heard.

"Dear one," she said, "I am the fairy Sakka. This fire is not real; it is only a test. The kindness of your heart, O blessed one, shall be known throughout the world for ages to come."

So saying Sakka struck the mountain with her wand, and with the essence that gushed forth she drew the picture of the hare on the orb of the moon.

Next day the hare met his friends again, and all the creatures of the woods gathered round them. And the hare told them of all that had happened to him, and they rejoiced. And all lived happy ever after.

This reading assignment continues with "The Image of the Buddha," H&F, 200-204