

B. The Loving Nature of Prince Siddhartha

'One day when the Prince was sitting in the garden, a flock of white swans flew overhead. Suddenly an arrow shot up into the air, striking one of them. It fell out of the sky and landed at the Prince's feet, the arrow still stuck into its wing.

'Oh, you poor swan," Siddhartha whispered as he gently picked up the wounded bird, "do not be afraid. I shall take care of you. Here let me remove this arrow." Then, with one hand he gently stroked the bird, calming its fear. With his other hand he slowly pulled out the painful arrow. The Prince was carrying a special lotion with him and softly rubbed it into the bird's wing, all the time speaking in a low, pleasant voice so that the swan would not become afraid. Finally he took off his own silk shirt and wrapped it around the bird to keep it warm.

After a short time, another young boy came running into the garden. It was the Prince's cousin, Devadatta. He was carrying a bow and some arrows and he was very excited. "Siddhartha, Siddhartha," he shouted, "great news! I got a swan! You should have seen me; I hit it with my first shot! It fell down somewhere near here. Help me look for it."

Then Devadatta noticed one of his arrows, with blood still on its tip, lying on the ground near Siddhartha's feet. Looking closer he saw that the Prince was holding some thing in his arms, and realized it was the swan he was searching for. "Hey, you took my swan," he yelled. "Give it back to me. I shot it and it's mine!" Devadatta grabbed at the bird, but the Prince held onto it, keeping his angry cousin from even touching the injured creature.

"I found this bird lying here bleeding," the Prince said firmly, "and I don't plan to give it to anyone while it is still wounded."

"But it's mine!" shouted Devadatta again. "I shot it fair and square, and you've stolen it from me. Give it back or I'll take it back."

The two boys stood arguing like this for some time. Devadatta was getting angrier and angrier, but Siddhartha refused to give him the swan. Finally, the Prince said, "When two grown-ups have a quarrel like this, they settle it in court. In front of a group of wise people, each one explains the story of what happened. Then the wise people decide who is right. I think you and I should do the same."

Devadatta did not like this idea very much. But because it was the only way he could ever get the swan back, he agreed. So the two of them went to the palace and appeared in front of the King and his ministers. The people at (the) court smiled at each other when they heard what these two children wanted. "To think," they said,

"that they want to take up our time over a mere bird!" but the King said, "Both Siddhartha and Devadatta are royal princes, and I am glad they brought their quarrel to us. I think it is very important that, as future rulers, they become used to the ways of this court. Let the trial begin!"

So in turn each of the boys described what happened. Then the ministers tried to decide which boy was right and should therefore have the swan. Some thought, "Devadatta shot the bird; therefore it should belong to him." Others thought, "Siddhartha found the swan; therefore it should belong to him." And for a long time the ministers talked and argued about the case.

Finally, into the court came a very old man whom no one remembered ever seeing before. But because he looked so wise, they told him the story of the boys and their swan. After listening to what they had to say, he declared, "Everyone values his or her life more than anything else in the world. Therefore, I think that the swan belongs to the person who tried to save its life, not to the person who tried to take its life away. Give the swan to Siddhartha."

Everyone agreed that what the wise man said was true, so they decided to let the Prince keep the swan.'

(From "**Prince Siddhartha -The Story of Buddha**",
Jonathan Landaw, Wisdom London, 1984)