

The quails



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A story from the Jataka tales

Ages ago a flock of more than a thousand quails lied together in a forest in India. They would have been happy, but that they were in great dread of their enemy, the quail catcher. He used to imitate the call of the quail; and when they gathered together in answer to it, he would throw a great net over them, stuff them into his basket, and carry them away to be sold.

Now, one of the quails was very wise, and he said: "Brothers! I've thought of a good plan. In the future, as soon as the fowler throws his net over us, let each one put his head through a mesh in the net and then all lift it up together and fly away with it. When we have flown far enough, we can let the net drop on a thorn bush and escape."

All agreed to the plan. The next day when the fowler threw his net, the birds all lifted it together in the very way that the wise quail had told them, threw it on a thorn bush and

escaped. While the fowler tried to free his net from the thorns, it grew dark, and he had to go home.

This happened many days, till at last the fowler's wife grew angry and asked her husband: "Why is it that you never catch any more quail?"

Then the fowler said: "The trouble is that all the birds work together and help one another. If they would only quarrel, I could catch them fast enough."

A few days later, one of the quails accidentally trod on the head of one of his brothers, as they alighted on the feeding ground.

"Who trod on my head?" angrily inquired the quail who was hurt.

"Don't be angry, I didn't mean to tread on you," said the first quail. But the brother quail went on quarreling.

"I lifted all the weight of the net! You didn't help at all!" he cried.

That made the first quail angry, and before long all were drawn into the dispute. Then the fowler saw his chance. He imitated that cry of the quail and cast his net over those who came together. They were still boasting and quarreling, and they did not help one another lift the net. So the hunter lifted the net himself and crammed them into his basket.

But the wise quail gathered his friends together and flew far away, for he knew that quarrels are the root of misfortune.

Moral: *If we work together we can succeed, but if we fight amongst ourselves we will get nowhere.*

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