



more jāataka tales
The Red-Bud Tree



Once upon a time four young princes heard a story about a certain wonderful tree, called the Red-Bud Tree. No one of them had ever seen a Red-Bud Tree, and each prince wished to be the first to see one. So the eldest prince asked the driver of the king's chariot to take him deep into the woods where this tree grew. It was still very early in the spring and the tree had no leaves, nor buds. It was black and bare like a dead tree. The prince could not understand why this was called a Red-Bud Tree, but he asked no questions. Later in the spring, the next son went with the driver of the king's chariot to see the Red-Bud Tree. At this time it was covered with red buds.

The tree was all covered with green leaves when the third son went into the woods a little later to see it. He asked no questions about it, but he could see no reason for calling it the Red-Bud Tree. Some time after this the youngest prince begged to be taken to see the Red-Bud Tree. By this time it was covered with little bean-pods. When he came back from the woods he ran into the garden where his brothers were playing, crying, "I have seen the Red-Bud Tree."

"So have I," said the eldest prince. "It did not look like much of a tree to me," said he; "it looked like a dead tree. It was black and bare."

"What makes you say that?" said the second son. "The tree has hundreds of beautiful red buds. This is why it is called the Red-Bud Tree." The third prince said: "Red buds, did you say? Why do you say it has red buds? It is covered with green leaves." The prince who had seen the tree last laughed at his brothers, saying: "I have just seen that tree, and it is not like a dead tree. It has neither red buds nor green leaves on it. It is covered with little bean-pods."

The king heard them and waited until they stopped talking. Then he said: "My sons, you have all four seen the same tree, but each of you saw it at a different time of the year."

