Folktale corner

Friendship between a deer and a crow
An Ao Naga folktale

Once upon a time a deer and a crow were great friends. They were always together and shared whatever food they could find in the jungle.

One day, the deer met a fox, who had been observing him for a long time. The fox started to praise the deer for its beauty of form and elegance and expressed a wish to become his friend. The deer, intoxicated by the heady praise, readily agreed to accept the fox for a friend. From that day onwards, the deer neglected his old friend, the crow, and began to spend almost all his time with the fox. The crow was saddened by the turn of events but he merely withdrew into the jungle. However, being a loyal friend, he kept a constant watch over his fickle minded friend, the deer.

The fox, however, had cultivated the deer’s friendship with an ulterior motive. He had devised a plan by which the deer would be killed and he could eat some of its flesh. Accordingly, one day he took the deer to a lush field nearby and left him to graze there to his heart’s content. This went on for several days before the farmer discovered that his crop was being destroyed by a deer. He could make out from the footprint left by the animal that it was a deer. Just as the fox had known, the farmer set a trap in the field to catch the deer and put an end to the destruction to his crops. The fox was overjoyed when he saw the trap because he was now certain that there would be a kill and that he would certainly get to eat at least the offal that the farmer would throw away. Sure enough, that day, the deer was caught in the trap set by the farmer. The fox saw that his so-called friend was helpless and would die if he did not do anything but he simply hid himself and watched greedily from a distance.

But the crow, who was always near, saw his friend in this situation. He flew over the trapped deer and whispered in his ear, “Do not worry, when the farmer comes, pretend to be dead and I will be picking at your eyes to show that you really are dead. When the farmer begins to undo the trap, I shall fly up to a tree and watch. When I give you a signal by cawing, you gather all your strength and jump and run as fast as you can.” When the farmer came to saw the deer appeared to be dead he undid the trap. But at just that moment the crow begin to caw and the deer took a mighty leap and ran away to safety.

The farmer was so incensed at the trickery played on him that he threw his spear in the direction where the deer ran, but instead of hitting the deer it struck the fox who was hiding there and killed him instantly.