

VALOROUS AND PICKAX HEAD

Once, in the center of a big endless plain there was a salty pond. A tadpole lived in it. A small black raven came to the pond's edge and drank water. Each time the raven drank, his mouth watered with a desire to eat the tadpole. But since the tadpole went underwater, it was difficult for him to fulfill his hopes. The raven thought, "I'll entice him with deceptive words, and I want to find a good way to eat him."

One day, the little black raven alit at the pond's edge and after he had drunk a few mouthfuls of water, he stood erect and bent down, to show he had a good character. Simultaneously he croaked, "Outside my feathers are black, but inside my mind itself is white," and in a gentle voice he said,

Hey listen, little friend in the water!
I have some innermost feelings that are agreeable to mouth and mind.
Don't sit there casually; come here to the bank of the pond,
So I can tell you without reservation.

The tadpole thought, "He's well-spoken and speaks gentle words, but who knows whether what he says is true or false. So first I'll reply to what he has said, and only then I'll look at what he does." With doubts, to test the raven, he said,

You've made lots of noisy speech,
But how can you say so, when we don't know each other?
If your lust for tea and meat is too great,
Isn't this an example of the fish and the hook?

The raven said, "How could it be like that? Not only are we of the same ancestry and fellow countrymen, but we've been together as friends at this pond for several years; so there's no way you can say we've no knowledge of one another. So tell me what you're called and what your ancestry is, and we'll become loving friends and play together. Since we can go to other lands more pleasant and ponds more clear and clean than this, you need not fear." He lifted his throat and sang this little song.

Here there is no forest like palmyra trees,
Nor even plants like grass and flowers.
Rather than staying here in this dirty pond,
It'd be better if we two young men went around the kingdom.

After the tadpole listened to this, he asked, "I don't know what sort of paternal lineage and maternal origin I have, but my name is Valorous. I can go travel together with you to a more pleasant land to see things, but isn't it possible that you hold some evil intent toward me? So, what's your name?"

The little black raven answered, "My name is Pickax Head." The tadpole thought, "If I consider this name, it looks disrespectful, so it's still not right to trust him." To examine the raven's mind further, he said, "I'd feel ashamed of wandering to another land, abandoning the old place of my ancestors. I want to leave this salty little pond, but were I to befriend an immoral person, what would I do?"

The raven knew that now the time to catch the tadpole had come, and he lied, "Valorous, if you don't trust me like that, it's also ok if we don't go to another land. Now it's the afternoon. Come to the bank and after we've played a while, I'll go home too."

In any event, I don't tell lies
Even if I were hot or cold, starving or thirsty, I wouldn't deceive friends.
I don't do reckless things.
Why would I foxily deceive a friend?

The tadpole believed him and said, "Well, let's do it."

He came to the water's edge and when he was diverted, pretending to play games, the raven who had never had good intentions, suddenly scratched with his claws and caught the tadpole. "Ha, ha!" he said, preparing to eat him,

Having cheated you like you were blind,
I've got you in my grasp, tadpole, whom I'll eat.
Rather than being good friends,
Isn't it better to fill one's stomach with meat?

Frightened, the tadpole said, "Sir, wait a bit. Let me say three words and then you can eat me."

The raven said, "Well tell me quickly," and stood there listening. The tadpole thought, "This evil omen sweet-talked me so much and fooled me, so I've come to such an end. Now I regret it, but it's too late. So, I have to retaliate cleverly and get a chance to escape." He said,

You won't want to swallow quickly
My dirty body, clothed in dirty stink;
Even if you don't take off my dirty outer skin,
If you wash off the mud and eat me, won't I taste better?

The raven thought, "That's true as well, but in any case, he won't escape. Why shouldn't I eat him after I wash him clean and peel off his nauseating skin." When he was washing him in the water, the tadpole wriggled, got out of his hands, and went under the water.

In a rush the raven called, "Hey! Valorous, Valorous!"

Angrily, the tadpole scolded him, "Dirty! You're so ravenous you'd eat the offerings to the gods! Shameless! Untrustworthy! Pickax Head, you almost ate me, didn't you?" The raven did not know what to do. He lamented,

Oh, oh, that sweet tasting flesh!
It got to my, elder brother's, mouth, but from inside my nose
The nery way it got away,
Alas, makes me so sad, but what can I do?

Together with the dusk, he put his hands on his chest, and flew off to
his own nest.

—Phun bkras, *Qinghai Folk Literature* 3, 1994

