

# Queen of the Forgetful

(as told by Inimoan C. Wungemi in Chakping on 18/03/2022)

## Introduction

This story cautions against discrimination by advocating that husbands love their wives equally. Centered on polygamous marriages, it interrogates the possibility of a man to love his wives equally. The story has it that the political head of an unidentified Konkomba community has two wives, of whom he secretly loves one more and wishes to declare that based on a test. Unfortunately, the one he secretly loves and is rooting for so that he can openly declare that he loves her more, fails the test while the one he dislikes passes the test. To watch the Likpakpaln narration [click here](#).

## Story

‘My story is as follows,’ Inimoan announces to her audience.

‘M-hmm!’ respond some audience.

Inimoan proceeds:

There lived an ubor who had two wives. One day he took his son to farm, set aside some tubers of yam in his libool and told his son that the next day he would bring his wives and test them. According to him, of the two wives, the one that was able to tell him the name of the tubers of yam he had set aside, would be his most cherished wife from then on.

Now, his two wives were of different personalities: one was noted for her cleanliness and retentive memory while the other was noted for her untidiness and forgetfulness. The boy ubor took to the farm was the son of the wife who was noted for cleanliness and information retention. Fortunately for the untidy and forgetful wife, her child was eavesdropping on the conversation between ubor and the hygienic wife’s son. The child therefore ran home and told the mother that the tubers of yam the father had set aside to test them on were called kpiknandin, and that when asked, the mother should say the yam-type was kpiknandin.

The next day, when they all went to farm, the untidy and forgetful wife’s son was lingering around the barn and playing a song on his liwul:

### Likpakpaln transcription

Nna usunsunbor ee,  
Taa tin len ki i sun na ee.  
Nna upiigiinbor ee,  
Taa tin len ki i sun na ee.

### English translation

Mother, queen of the forgetful,  
Don’t go and say you’ve forgotten.<sup>1</sup>  
Mother, queen of the gentle,  
Don’t go and say you’ve forgotten.

Maa-te fi yin linuli kpiknandin.

Kpiknandin, ki gir ki din,  
kpiknandiiin!!!!

Yesterday, father called the yam  
kpiknandin.

Kpiknandin, again, kpiknandiiin!!!!

When the man opened the libool and entered with his wives, he asked the hygienic wife what the tubers of yam were called. Unfortunately, she didn't know the answer. But before the man could ask the untidy wife, her son broke into his song again:

### **Likpakpaln transcription**

Nna upiigiinbɔr ee,  
Taa tin len ki i sun na ee.  
Nna upiigiinbɔr ee,  
Taa tin len ki i sun na ee.  
Nte fi yin linuli kpiknandin.

Kpiknandin, ki gir ki din,  
kpiknandiiin!!!!

### **English translation**

Mother, queen of the gentle,  
Don't go and say you've forgotten.  
Mother, queen of the gentle,  
Don't go and say you've forgotten.  
Yesterday, father called the yam  
kpiknandin.  
Kpiknandin, again, kpiknandiiin!!!!

The man then called the untidy wife and asked, 'What is the name of this yam?'

Due to the boy's song, the mother remembered the name and told her husband that the yam was called kpiknandin. On hearing the answer, ubor became dumbfounded. The wife from whom he had expected to elicit the correct answer failed; but the one he had least expected to provide the correct answer, got it right.

That is why a man should never love one wife more than the other. On that day the untidy, unloved wife became the hygienic, loved one. (*The storyteller and one of her audience say the last bit of this sentence simultaneously.*)

'Maa tiin gur ki m muun chaa', Inimoan concludes.

## **Notes**

### **1.**

This line translates fluently into English and contextually as, 'On entering the barn, don't say you've forgotten.' The literal translation in the text is meant to register the linguistic structure of the Likpakpaln language in the text and ultimately foreignize it.

## **A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words and Phrases**

### **libool:**

Likpakpaln word for a yam barn (aka yam shed). Libool is the traditional

yam storage facility for Konkomba yam farmers. It is a thatch structure usually erected, ideally, under a shady tree. After harvest, a traditional Konkomba yam farmer proudly displays his/her yams – which are always grouped according to sizes and types – in the barn. The bumper one's harvest is, the bigger his/her yam barn. In Konkomba achievement culture, yam barn size is one of the benchmarks for measuring one's wealth, success, and subsequently social status. For more details, please read Tasun Tidorchibe's article titled 'Concepts of Achievement among Konkombas: Representations in Their Folktales' ([https://books.ulb.hhu.de/index.php/hhu\\_books/catalog/view/21/13/221](https://books.ulb.hhu.de/index.php/hhu_books/catalog/view/21/13/221)).

**liwul:**

Likpakpaln word for a flute. It is typically a (wooden) stick with curved holes.

**maa tiin gur ki m muun chaa:**

translated as, 'May my story diminish while I grow very tall.' This is a shortened version of the standard conclusion, '*Maa tiin gur, ki gur, ki gur ki m muun, ki muun ke n-yaaja agbenja na*' (transliterated as, 'May my story diminish and diminish and diminish while I grow and grow as tall as my grandfather's male Kapok tree'). This standard conclusion is one of the numerous ways in which a Konkomba storyteller can end his/her story. The ending and its numerous variants suggest that Konkombas believe that storytelling (or entertainment in general) has health benefits, especially healthy physical growth. The association of storytelling with physical growth is so entrenched in Konkomba belief system that it is even believed that when a child engages in storytelling at daytime – for Konkomba storytelling sessions are held normally in the evenings/night after supper – he or she will have stunted growth.

**ubor:**

the political head of a Konkomba community. Ubor is usually the eldest male member of the royal family. He inherits that position from his father after the latter's demise. Thus, Konkombas practice the patrilineal system of inheritance.