

The Rabbit Steals the Horse's Mouth

(as told by Bilinyi Chiikpaab at Kutol on 17/03/2022)

Introduction

The following story presents us with one of the rare occasions when the rabbit, who is the wisest animal character in Konkomba folklore, is at the receiving end of his antics. In this story, the rabbit's greed lands him in trouble when he decides to eat a billy goat alone in the bush. Unfortunately for him, a testicle wielding the power of life and death prevents him from enjoying the chevon. Added to this, the rabbit ends up with a big, swollen mouth. But typical of the rabbit, he employs wit to steal the horse's cute mouth during a communal event. The story essentially warns against selfishness.

Story

'My story is as follows:' Bilinyi announces to his audience and proceeds thus:

There's a reason *utaan* often sighs, hm hm hm! There's an unresolved problem. *Sandee* is the cause of *utaan*'s heavy sighs. The story has it that *sandee* once bought a billy goat to slaughter and eat. But because he didn't want to share the meat with his family, he decided to go and eat it in the bush alone. He lied to his family that he had to make a sacrifice in the bush to appease the gods.

He took the billy goat to the bush and slaughtered it. *Uja*, if you saw how fatty the billy goat was! (*Bilinyi addresses the last sentence to his audience directly amid body movements of exaggeration. This elicits laughter from the audience, after which he continues as follows:*) After chopping the meat into pieces, he started cooking it.

A cricket accidentally jumped out of one of the holes under the stones he used as his stove for cooking. Well, you know how fatty the cricket is (*Bilinyi addresses his audience again.*) The cricket's fat was all over the place. *Sandee*, unable to restrain himself, ate the cricket as an appetiser. He then decided to hunt for more crickets and eat in order to whet his appetite for the chevon that was still cooking. He started searching under every nearby stone. Unfortunately, under one of the stones, he saw a big testicle instead of a cricket. If you saw that testicle! He was a very big testicle – big and mature. If you saw the mass and height! He was visibly above ground level. (*The storyteller addresses the above directly to his audience again, employing gestures aimed at describing the size of the testicle while the audience laugh.*)

On seeing the testicle, *sandee* attempted to cover him again with the stone. But the testicle told him to do no such thing. *Sandee* ignored him and tried to return the stone to its previous position on top of the testicle. Before he could do that, the testicle said: 'Then die *bra bla kum*.' *Sandee* immediately fell over

dead. The testicle then said again, 'Fikrku.' At this command – or rather incantation – *sandee* came back to life again. The testicle then ordered *sandee* to pick him up. *Sandee* complied and carried the testicle on his back.

The testicle then saw smoke at a distance and ordered *sandee* to take him there. But *sandee* said the smoke was emanating from a fire *ubor's* herdsmen had made and that they would be angry if they (*sandee* and the testicle) went there. He didn't want to share the chevon with the testicle. (*Bilinyi says the latter amid laughter, together with some of his audience.*) The testicle sensed *sandee's* reluctance and said: 'Well, if that's the case, bla kum.' *Sandee* died instantly. The testicle again said, 'Fikrku' – and *sandee* came back to life. The testicle ordered him again to take him to the place from which the smoke was emanating. Left with no other option, *sandee* took him to the place he was cooking his meat.

When they arrived at the spot, the chevon had been well-cooked and ready for consumption. The testicle then asked, 'Sandee, what is being cooked?' *Sandee* replied that it was meat and that it belonged to *ubor's* herdsmen. The testicle ordered him to take the meat off the stove but *sandee* protested, saying that *ubor's* herdsmen would be displeased. Infuriated, the testicle said, 'Bra kum, ' whereupon *sandee* fell over dead. He then said, 'Fikrku' – and *sandee* regained consciousness. The testicle then told *sandee*, once again, to take the meat off the stove – to which *sandee* complied.

After that, the testicle told *sandee* to dish out the meat so that he would eat. *Sandee* complied again and said the testicle should eat the fleshy pieces so that he would eat only the bones. The testicle ate his fill of all the fleshy and fatty meat and became big beyond verbal description. After eating, the testicle topped it up with water and ordered *sandee* to carry him on his back again. But *sandee* declined, whereupon the testicle said, 'Bla kum.' *Sandee* died instantly. 'Fikrku,' he chanted again – and *sandee* was back to life. The testicle asked *sandee*, once more, to carry him on his back, to which *sandee* complied.

As *sandee* was carrying him, he saw a hawk hovering above them. By this time *sandee* was exhausted so he broke into song: (*Before intoning the song, Bilinyi admonishes his audience to sing along with him. He then intones the song and the audience join in.*)

Likpakpaln transcription

Kaasaa kaasaa, loon loonkaan
Ntakpapeen bu ee.
Kaasaa kaasaa, loon loonkaan
Ntakpapeen bu ee.
Kaasaa kaasaa, loon loonkaan
Ntakpapeen bu eeee!!!!

English translation

Hawk, hawk, swoop in stealthily
And drop on a rocky ground.
Hawk, hawk, swoop in stealthily
And drop on a rocky ground.
Hawk, hawk, swoop in stealthily
And drop on a rocky ground!!!!

That the hawk should quietly swoop in, snatch the testicle and drop him on a rocky ground. That's the meaning of the song. (*Bilinyi explains to his audience*

amid gestures.)

The hawk got the message. It swooped in, snatched the testicle and flew very high while *sandee* urged it on: 'Take him higher and higher and higher and higher. Take him to a rocky ground; take him to a rocky ground.' (*Bilinyi mimics sandee, amid gestures, as he renders these sentences.*) When the hawk got to the rocky area, it dropped the testicle and he fell and spurted, *kpinn!* The billy goat's fat was scattered all over the place. *Sandee* rushed there and started licking the fat while remarking, 'Yes, that's my billy goat's fat.' By the time he was done licking all the fat, his mouth became very big.

On arriving home, *sandee's* kids could not recognise their father. 'This can't be our father's mouth,' they remarked. *Sandee* then hatched a plan and told everyone in the community that night that *ubor* had asked that the next day everyone should go to the dam and fetch water. He entreated all to turn up so that they could fetch the water. Mark you, his plan was to steal *utaan's* mouth. *Utaan's* mouth wasn't as big as it is today. *Utaan* is now saddled with *sandee's* big mouth. (*Bilinyi tells his audience.*)

When everyone converged at the dam, *sandee* told them that the order was that everyone must leave their mouths at the shore before fetching the water. Meanwhile, *sandee* had told his children that at midmorning, they should set ablaze the pile of dry grass outside his house. As *sandee* and the others were fetching the water, the former kept looking intermittently in the direction of his house. As soon as he saw the smoke from the fire at his house, he shouted that *ubor's kinakook* was on fire, adding that everyone should grab the closest mouth and rush there. His target was *utaan's* mouth. So on saying that, he quickly picked *utaan's* mouth and took off running homeward. When *utaan* went to pick a mouth, he realised that all that was left was *sandee's* big mouth. He therefore took it and ran home as well.

On arrival, he accused *sandee* of taking his mouth. But *sandee* insisted that the mouth was his. He asked *ubor* to take a good look at both mouths and determine which one was more likely his. Before *ubor* could reply, he turned and asked *utaan*: 'How can a big fellow like you have this tiny mouth while a tiny creature like me will have such a big mouth?' *Ubor* subsequently ruled in favour of *sandee*, thereby allowing the latter to keep *utaan's* mouth while the latter kept *sandee's*. So *sandee* is using *utaan's* mouth. That is why occasionally *utaan* will sigh heavily, 'hm hm hm hm!' His problem is that he is now saddled with a mouth that was originally not his. (*On hearing this, Bilinyi's audience burst into laughter while the storyteller signs off thus:*)

'Tiin tiin kulb.'

A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words and Phrases

bra bla kum:

this phrase has no semantic value in Likpakpaln since it is merely an incantation employed by the testicle in this story.

fikrku:

an incantation employed by the testicle to bring the rabbit back to life. Its root is the Likpakpaln verb, *fikr* – which means ‘to resurrect.’ In this story, therefore, the word ‘*fikrku*’ means ‘come back to life’ or ‘regain consciousness’ or ‘resurrect.’

kinakook (also spelt kinakuok):

a round room that serves as the main entrance to a typical Konkomba house. It has two doors at both ends to serve as the passage in or out of a house. It also serves as a place for relaxing or hosting visitors/guests. In ubor’s palace, kinakook usually has a stage/platform where ubor sits to hold meetings and perform other functions.

kpinn!

an onomatopoeic word employed by the storyteller to capture the loud sound made by the testicle when it fell on the rock and spurted.

ntakpapeen:

Likpakpaln word for rocky ground. The word is also variously spelled ntakepateer or ntakepateen depending on the Likpakpaln dialect being used.

sandee:

a rabbit, hare or bunny. Sandee is the wisest and trickster character in Konkomba folklore. It is notorious for often using its cunning and witty nature to wriggle its way out of difficult situations or to cheat others – as it does in this story.

tiin tiin kulb:

translated as ‘the end of my story.’ This is one of the commonest and easiest ways to end one’s story in the Konkomba storytelling culture.

uja:

Likpakpaln word for a man or a male. The plural form is *bijab* (i.e., men, males, guys, etc.). However, in everyday usage, *uja* is also commonly used as an emphasis marker or as an affectionate address to a friend or colleague. In such situations, *uja* sheds off its gender associations and assumes a new role as an intensifier of something a speaker wants to emphasise or as a noun to refer to someone as a buddy or a friend. In the context of this story, when the storyteller addresses his audience as ‘*uja*,’ he employs it in the latter two senses – that is, to emphasise what he says and also as a rhetorical tool to establish camaraderie with his audience.

utaan:

Likpakpaln word for a horse.