

# **An Orphan's Tears Bring Dead Mother Back To Life**

**(As narrated by Inimoan at Chakping on 16/03/2022)**

## **Introduction**

The following story highlights the plight of an orphan girl who suffers at the hands of her stepmother. Fortunately for her, and by some divine providence, her incessant tears and singing at her mother's grave resurrect the mother. The story seeks to highlight a problem prevalent in polygamous homes while simultaneously warning against the maltreatment of children – especially orphans.

## **Story**

'My story is as follows:' announces Inimoan, after which she continues thus:

There once lived a woman. She gave birth to a child but passed away. The child subsequently grew up with another mother – the deceased's co-wife.

Unfortunately, the stepmother of the child maltreated her. Whenever it was the season for harvesting okro (or okra) on the farm, it was the orphan who did all the work. Even though the stepmom had children, at the crack of dawn, it was only the orphan she would wake up to go and harvest okro on the farm.

The orphan would usually oblige, go to the farm and harvest the okro. Whenever she got tired, she would visit her mother's grave and break into song:

### **Likpakpaln transcription**

Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
ɲma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,

Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
ɲma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,

M poo imɔan ki ila ɲɔk la;  
M poo imɔan ki ila bukr eeee!!!!

### **English translation**

If my mom were alive,  
Who would have sent me to harvest  
okro?

If my mom were alive,  
Who would have sent me to harvest  
okro?

I've harvested premature okro pods;  
I've harvested barely mature okro  
pods!!!!

After singing for a while, she would resume harvesting the okro. But on getting tired again, she would return to the grave and sing:

### **Likpakpaln transcription**

### **English translation**

Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
 ɲma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,  
 Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
 ɲma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,  
 M poo imɔan ki ila ɲɔk la;  
 M poo imɔan ki ila buukr eeee!!!!

If my mom were alive,  
 Who would have sent me to harvest  
 okro?  
 If my mom were alive,  
 Who would have sent me to harvest  
 okro?  
 I've harvested premature okro pods;  
 I've harvested barely mature okro  
 pods!!!!

One day after singing the song, she noticed that the grave burst open.

'It cracked,' interjects one of Inimoan's audience.

'Mm, the grave cracked,' Inimoan agrees and corrects that detail, after which she proceeds thus:

On seeing the crack, the girl commenced singing again:

#### **Likpakpaln transcription**

Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
 ɲma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,  
 Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
 ɲma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,  
 M poo imɔan ki ila ɲɔk la;  
 M poo imɔan ki ila buukr eeee!!!!

#### **English translation**

If my mom were alive,  
 Who would have sent me to harvest  
 okro?  
 If my mom were alive,  
 Who would have sent me to harvest  
 okro?  
 I've harvested premature okro pods;  
 I've harvested barely mature okro  
 pods!!!!

The grave developed further cracks after that. The girl resumed singing:

#### **Likpakpaln transcription**

Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
 ɲma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,  
 Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
 ɲma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,  
 M poo imɔan ki ila ɲɔk la;  
 M poo imɔan ki ila buukr eeee!!!!

#### **English translation**

If my mom were alive,  
 Who would have sent me to harvest  
 okro?  
 If my mom were alive,  
 Who would have sent me to harvest  
 okro?  
 I've harvested premature okro pods;  
 I've harvested barely mature okro  
 pods!!!!

The orphan's mother's body emerged from the grave - this time only to the neck level.

After this, the girl sang her song again:

**Likpakpaln transcription**

Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
ŋma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,  
  
Ma'na yaa ba bi ee,  
ŋma ban tun mi limɔnpool ee,  
  
M poo imɔan ki ila ŋɔk la;  
M poo imɔan ki ila buukr eeee!!!!

**English translation**

If my mom were alive,  
Who would have sent me to harvest  
okro?  
If my mom were alive,  
Who would have sent me to harvest  
okro?  
I've harvested premature okro pods;  
I've harvested barely mature okro  
pods!!!!

Her mother's body emerged further, so the orphan pulled and succeeded in pulling the mother out of the grave alive.

That is why in this world when someone dies and you're entrusted with bringing up the person's child, you must treat that child exactly as you would your own. Do not maltreat the child because the child is an orphan. (*Inimoan says the above, aided intermittently by some of her audience.*)

'Maatiin gur ki m muun chaa,' she signs off.

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

**maatiin 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 '*Maatiin gur ki m muun ke n-yaaja aagbem na*' (translated as, 'May my story diminish while I grow as tall as my grandfather's 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 the Konkomba belief system that it is even believed that when a child engages in storytelling in the daytime - for Konkomba storytelling sessions are held normally in the evenings after supper - he or she will suffer stunted growth.

**mm:**

one of the numerous ideophones in Likpakpaln. It is often used to say 'yes' or express an agreement with someone - as the storyteller does in this tale.