

## A Cat Saves an Old Lady from a Troublesome Wolf

(as narrated by Yajonignan in Chakping on 16/03/2022)

### Introduction

This story offers insights, from a Konkomba mythological viewpoint, into the reason most old ladies are cat lovers. The story has it that an old lady is the target of a wolf. The wild creature usually appears whenever the old woman finishes cooking her supper, scares her away, and eats her food. Of all the animals, the cat is the only one who successfully captures the wolf in the end; hence the old lady's decision to keep the cat as her protector – and, since then, all old ladies' preference for cats as pets.

### Story

“There once lived a certain upininkpil ...,” Yajonignan commences his story amid some chatter.

“Mhm!” *(Some of his audience respond to assure him that they're listening.)*

“... and there also lived a wild creature – nachiin,” he adds, and proceeds:

Upininkpil had a habit of pounding fufu in the evenings. Whenever she cooked her yam and started pounding, she would sing this song:

*(The storyteller intones the song and his audience join in.)*

#### Likpakpaln transcription

Kpa ti lap! }  
M ni ŋma gi? } 3x

Kpa ti lap!  
M ni ŋma gi?  
M gi mbaa la.

#### English translation

Kpa ti lap! }  
With whom do I eat? } 3x

Kpa ti lap!  
With whom do I eat?  
I eat alone.

*(The last 3 lines are added by the audience while the storyteller bursts into laughter.)*

At the sound of upininkpil's song and pounding, the wild creature would emerge from nowhere and start singing:

*(The storyteller intones the song and his audience join in again.)*

**Likpakpaln transcription**

**English translation**

Kaduun san san san;

Kaduun has pounded;

Tin dii bitindam saa.<sup>1</sup>

We'll eat the landowners' food.

'San san san;

'Has pounded;

Tin dii bitindam saa.

We'll eat the landowners' food.

Kaduun san san san;

Kaduun has pounded;

Tin dii bitindam saaa!

We'll eat the landowners' food!

On hearing the singing and the approaching wild creature, upininkpil would run away and the wolf would feast on her fufu. Such was the predicament of upininkpil that she decided to seek protection. Unfortunately, all the animals – including ibɔja – from whom she sought protection, could not stop the wolf from harassing her.

One day jakuno approached upininkpil and offered to capture the wild creature for her. Jakuno instructed upininkpil to cook yam and start pounding fufu as usual. Upininkpil obliged and when the yam was cooked, she started pounding and singing:

*(The storyteller intones the song and his audience join in again.)*

**Likpakpaln transcription**

**English translation**

Kpa ti lap!

Kpa ti lap!

M ni ŋma gi?

With whom do I eat?

Kpa ti lap!

Kpa ti lap!

M ni ŋma gi?

With whom do I eat?

On hearing upininkpil's singing and pounding, the wild creature emerged as usual and started singing:

*(The storyteller intones the song and his audience join in.)*

### Likpakpaln transcription

Kaduun san san san;

Tin dii bitindam saa.

'San san san;

Tin dii bitindam saa.

Kaduun san san san;

Tin dii bitindam saaa!

### English translation

Kaduun has pounded;

We'll eat the landowners' food.

'Has pounded.

We'll eat the landowners' food.

Kaduun has pounded;

We'll eat the landowners' food!

When the wild creature entered upininkpil's house to eat her food, jakuno pounced on it and killed it.

That is why to date, every upininkpil keeps jakuno as a pet.

### Note

1. This line features a linguistic blend of Likpakpaln and Dagbani. Dagbani is spoken by the Dagomba people, who are one of the neighbors of the Konkomba people. They are migrants from present-day Lake Chad region, who have since the 15<sup>th</sup> century settled mostly on lands previously owned by Konkombas. The cross pollination of linguistic, cultural, social, political, etc. ideas and practices that has been ongoing since these two ethnic groups encountered each other, manifests in this tale's musical interlude, especially in lines 2, 4 & 6 of the wolf's song, where the storyteller engages in code mixing – of Dagbani and Likpakpaln. From a historical-geographical perspective, this tale seems to have been borrowed from Dagomba folklore.

### A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words and Phrases

**nachiin (aka ɬɔkɔ):** Likpakpaln word for a wolf. In Konkomba folklore, nachiin is the most unintelligent animal character. It almost always falls prey to the antics of sande (i.e., rabbit), who is the wisest and trickster character in Konkomba folklore.

**kpa ti lap!** an onomatopoeic phrase that captures the sound produced by upininkpil's pounding and simultaneous turning or driving of the fufu in the mortar. Fufu is a popular West African cuisine made from pounding cooked yam, cassava, or plantain – or a combination of any two of these –into a starchy form. The pounding is usually done with a mortar and pestle. Among the Konkomba people, and other northern ethnic groups in Ghana, yam and/or cassava fufu is common, while cassava and/or plantain fufu is popular with southern ethnic groups like the Akan.

**ibɔja:** Likpakpaln word for male dogs. The singular form is ubɔja. In everyday usage, the plural form, ibɔja, is sometimes inappropriately used as a plural form for all dogs – male and female – instead of the correct word, ibɔ. In the context of this story, therefore, when the storyteller says ibɔja, he means all dogs – both male and female. FYI, the Likpakpaln word for a female dog is ubɔsal – ibɔsal is the plural form.

**jakuno:** Likpakpaln word for a domestic cat.

**upininkpil:** Likpakpaln word for an old lady or old woman.