

# Rabbit Cheats Chameleon at a Marriage Contest

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

## Introduction

The story below details how the rabbit beats the chameleon at a marriage contest centred around uncovering the names of their political leader's daughters. The story has it that the chameleon employs tact to uncover the names of the girls. However, his careless handling of the information results in his inability to receive the ultimate reward of marrying the girls – a loss that causes him so much agony that his head eventually deforms.

## Story

'There once lived an ubor who had two daughters,' Abena commences and proceeds thus: One day he summoned all animals and told them that anyone who was able to tell him the names of the girls would get to marry them. Various animals subsequently took up the challenge and tried to no avail to guess the girls' names.

One day the girls decided to go to the riverside and do their laundry. On learning this, *umuatoon* quickly went ahead of them and hid in a nearby shrub. At the river, one of the girls finished washing her underwear and dried it on the shrub in which *umuatoon* was hiding. *Umuatoon* immediately took the underwear and hid it. If the girl couldn't find the underwear, wouldn't she be forced to call her sister's name and ask? (*Abena asks her audience, in an attempt to explain umuatoon's reason for hiding the underwear.*)

'Mmm!' responds one of Abena's audience, after which she continues thus:

When the girl returned and didn't see the underwear, she called out to her sister, 'Tiborkuun, have you seen my underwear?' Her sister responded in the negative: 'I haven't seen it.' After a while, the other sister called out to her sister and asked, 'Doyala, have you seen it yet? I didn't pick it.' In the end, didn't *umuatoon* get to know their names as a result? (*Abana asks her audience again.*)

'He did,' a child from the audience responds.

'*Umuatoon* got to know the girls' names,' Abena affirms and continues as follows:

The girls were soon done and returned home. *Umuatoon* climbed out of the shrub and also headed homewards. On his way, having forgotten how slowly he walks, *umuatoon* started singing:

**Likpakpaln transcription**

**English translation**

Udaan u b̥ɔr Tibɔrkuun ee  
Ukpaakun bɔnn Doyala.  
M-mmm, Ukpaakun bɔnn Doyala

The person who hid Tibɔrkuun  
Ukpaakun has befriended Doyala.  
M-mmm, Ukpaakun has befriended  
Doyala.

Unii u b̥ɔr Tibɔrkuun ee  
Ukpaakun bɔnn Doyala.  
M-mmm, Ukpaakun bɔnn Doyalaa!!!

The person who hid Tibɔrkuun  
Ukpaakun has befriended Doyala.  
M-mmm, Ukpaakun has befriended  
Doyalaa!!!

As he was singing the song, *sandee* – who was resting in a shrub along the path – heard the song and quickly ran ahead of *umuatoon* to ubɔr's palace. On arrival he said, 'Ubɔr, I've discovered your daughters' names.' Ubɔr then asked him what the names were, whereupon *sandee* replied that one was called Tibɔrkuun while the other was called Doyala.

Meanwhile, *umuatoon* was still on his way to the palace. He was still singing his song:

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Ukpaakun bɔnn Doyala.  
M-mmm, Ukpaakun bɔnn Doyalaa!!!

The person who hid Tibɔrkuun  
Ukpaakun has befriended Doyala.  
M-mmm, Ukpaakun has befriended  
Doyalaa!!!

Eventually he arrived at the palace, where he was informed by ubɔr that *sandee* had already revealed the girls' names. But *umuatoon* insisted that he was the one who uncovered the girls' names. Ubɔr then asked, '*Sandee* has been here for a while now; where have you been all this time?'

*Sandee* was therefore adjudged the winner of the contest. A sorrow-stricken *umuatoon* burst into uncontrollable tears. He wept so much that his head eventually deformed into a helmet shape. *Umuatoon*'s head was originally not shaped like a bicycle helmet.

*Sandee* has always been wiser than *umuatoon*. *Umuatoon* can't walk fast but he was smart to hide the girl's underwear in order to discover the girls' names. Unfortunately, in the end, *sandee* outsmarted him and got the girls.

'*Maatiin gur ka m muun chaa*,' Abena signs off. But one of her audience cuts in even before she ends the signing off statement:

'He should have kept quiet while slowly making his way to the palace. He

shouldn't have composed a song with the girls' names,' he says the latter sentence simultaneously with some other audience.

'Enn! He mistakenly sang the song – which made it possible for the wise *sandee* to cheat him,' the storyteller concurs with her audience.

'Mm! Well, let's end the post-narrative discussion and listen to other stories,' another person from the audience interjects. The discussion consequently ends and the next storyteller commences.

## **A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words and Phrases (or Expressions)**

### **maatiin gur ka 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, such as the one in the story above, 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 during the day – for Konkomba storytelling sessions are held normally in the evenings after supper – he or she will suffer stunted growth.

### **sandee:**

Likpakpaln word for a rabbit, bunny or hare. 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.

### **umuatoon:**

Likpakpaln word for a chameleon.