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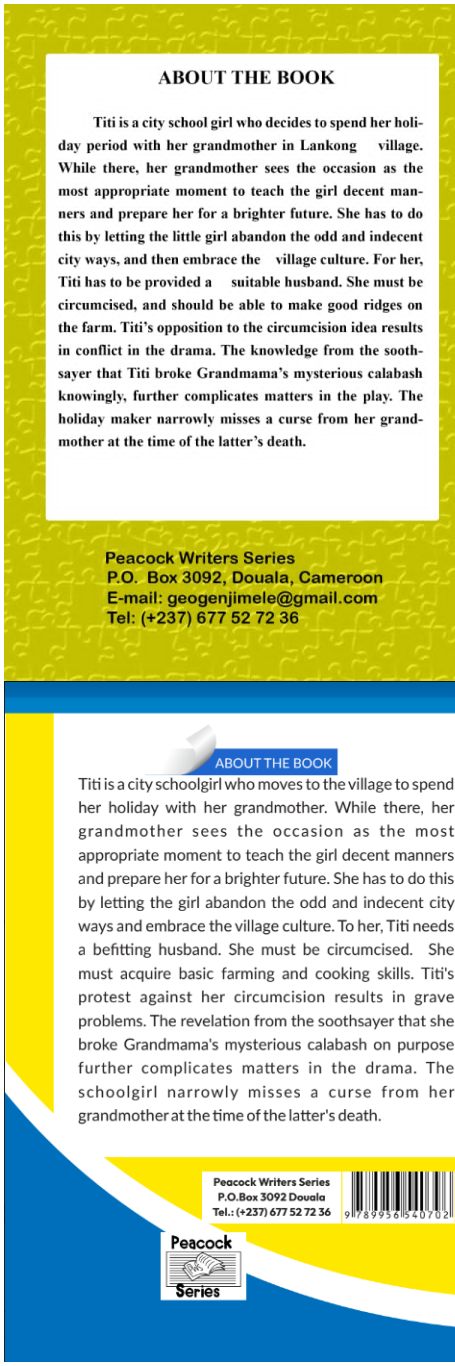
George Mbona Njimele

The Broken Calabash

Cameroon (2003)

TAGS: African Traditions





Courtesy of the Author.

General information	
Title of the work	The Broken Calabash
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon

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First Edition Date	2003
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Genre	Drama
Target Audience	Children
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Creators



Courtesy of the Author.

George Mbona Njimele , b. 1973
(Author)

George Njimele was born in Awing, Northwest Region of Cameroon. He attended the University of Buea in Cameroon where he earned a BA in English and French. He started writing at an early age and writes mostly for children and young adults. He took up writing full-time and started the Peacock Writers Series in Cameroon. Some of his works viz, *Madmen and Traitors* (2015), *The Queen of Power* (1998), *Undeserved Suffering* (2008) and *Poverty is Crazy* (2012) are prescribed in the Cameroon school curriculum (literature awareness) for beginners in secondary school. Other of his works include: *King Shaba* (2006), *House of Peace* (2007), *Land of Sweet Meat* (2017), *A Time to Reconcile* (2020). He won the National Poetry Prize in 1995 organised by the National Book Development Council. His other work, *The Lion and the Tortoise and other Stories* was selected for the Cameroon/World Bank Read at Home Project in 2021. He lives with his family in Douala, Cameroon.

Source:

Information provided by the author.

See also *The Forum with George Njimele* at Elie Smith YouTube channel (accessed: September 22, 2022).

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Additional information

Summary

Grandmama is sitting in front of her hut driving away flies around her. She suddenly feels thirsty and asks Titi, her granddaughter, to bring her a cup of water but unfortunately, Titi had used up all the drinkable water for laundry. Grandma is annoyed and asks her to take her calabash and go and fetch her some water. Titi obeys and some moments later, Titi returns crying with a broken Calabash. Grandma is furious and will not listen to any explanation. She shouts at Titi, seizes the broken pieces and goes inside her hut.

Later at night, Grandma has a nightmare. She dreams of her calabash being taken away from her by an evil being. Her granddaughter tries to console her by telling her that she will ask for some money from her rich uncle and get her a new calabash but Grandma tells her that the calabash she broke was not an easily replaceable one. They get back to bed and grandma has the same dream. It is almost morning and Titi tries consoling Grandma by telling her that it is just a dream. They have a brief discussion on dreams and prepare to go to the farm.

Later that evening, Grandma advises Titi on the need to be hardworking. Jacob Komofor, Titi's friend, comes in. Grandma does not appreciate the visit but welcomes him because his father is a good man. After a short while, she asks him to leave and never to return because she does not want Titi to have relationships with boys.

Sometime later, Grandma visits the shrine of Nkeh, the soothsayer, to report about her broken calabash and express the urgency of replacing it, which they both know would not be easy. The soothsayer tells her Titi broke the Calabash on purpose and that she should be very careful for Titi maybe ill-intentioned. Nkeh tells her to bring a live goat for the task to be performed.

A few days later, grandma sees Titi applying cosmetics on her face and she scolds her. Titi is angry but Grandma is not remorseful and rather informs her that she will be circumcised the following day. Titi refuses and tells Grandma that her mother has to approve of it. Grandma tells Titi that neither she nor her mother will tell her what to or what not to do. She goes ahead to say circumcising her is for her good.

Grandma returns to Nkeh's shrine to inform him that the goat he requested will soon be available. Nkeh brings up the idea of getting

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Titi and his son married. Grandma accepts and Nkeh happily offers her protection under the pretext that they are already in-laws. Grandma leaves happy and relieved.

On the day of the planned circumcision, the traditional midwife comes and knocks at the door. Titi opens and immediately she recognizes her, she runs away. The midwife reproaches grandma for informing Titi of the circumcision. It was supposed to be a surprise. The midwife leaves and grandma starts crying. Some moments later, Mafor, Grandma's daughter, comes in and asks Grandma why she is crying. Grandma tells her that Titi has run away because she does not want to be circumcised. Mafor reproaches her mother for wanting to circumcise Titi without seeking her opinion. Mafor finds Titi and Titi narrates to her the recent happenings, insisting on the fact that she did not break Grandma's calabash on purpose. They suddenly hear a sound and rush to Grandma who had fainted. They help her and she tells them that she is dying. She asks Titi for the last time if she broke the Calabash on purpose. Titi maintained that she did not. Grandma forgives her and then dies.

Analysis

The story gives an insight into conflicts provoked by generational gaps and the complexities of beliefs. In some African cultures, it is believed that people's lives are linked to some objects or animals such that when these are destroyed, the people whose lives are linked to them die. In the above story, Titi's grandmother insinuates such a connection between her life and her calabash* such that when Titi breaks the calabash, Grandma becomes restless. Her dream of her calabash being taken away from her by an evil one, and her insistence that the calabash is not easily replaceable, predict her end, which is witnessed. That is why even the soothsayer's attempts at getting a new calabash fails.

The story also evokes the practice of female genital mutilation which was the custom in some African cultures. Grandma wishes for Titi to be circumcised, as was the practice in her girlhood days, but she resists and is supported by her mother. This indicates that the practice is slowly dying particularly with the health issues involved.

Furthermore, the story raises questions on the credibility of soothsaying. Though many Africans believe in the power of soothsaying, it does not follow that all soothsayers are genuine

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communicators with divine powers. The soothsayer in the above story proves to be a charlatan by revealing that Titi broke Grandma's calabash on purpose yet tries to get Titi to marry his son.

Finally, the story accentuates on truth, love, reconciliation and forgiveness as required for a peaceful life and a peaceful death. Grandma seeks the truth from Titi about the broken calabash and when she gets it, she forgives her and dies peacefully. Despite the generational gap between Grandma and Titi, the filial bond is very much present. Grandma, like many other grandmothers, is protective of Titi, advising her on the necessity of hardwork and against having male friends.

* The calabash, in most African cultures, is much more than a piece of art. It is used to symbolise women's womb, thus procreation and life.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Death Expectations Family Girls Love Reconciliation Tradition
Further Reading	Konan, Mildred, "Calabashes in Northern Nigeria", *Expedition Magazine* 17.1 (1974): 3–8. Rice, Christina Emma, "Re-thinking the Calabash: Yoruba Women as Containers", *Leeds African Studies Bulletin* 78 (2017): 118–149.
Addenda	*Liste des manuels scolaires autorisés en 2012/2013. Enseignement*

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Maternel et Primaire, official textbook list for nursery and primary education published by the Ministry of Basic Education of Republic of Cameroon (the scholar year 2012/2013) includes *The Broken Calabash* as readers for Primary Four (New edition class 5 and 6).

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