

Yamba Yilandu

The Famous Kissi Griot of Yilandu Village

By

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Story from – *Idols with Tears*

(Author's first book published by AuthorHouse/USA)

As the sun was about to rise to its highest point in the sky, the job now became very hectic and Yamba became the main focus on the farm. He was the most prolific storyteller of their time. On Tewa Kolloh's farm, he loudly tried to share some of his funny stories with the reapers, elders and helpers. He then narrated one of his funniest stories. The people listened to him attentively and he shook a small shaker, and commenced:

“Once upon a time, Lappia was one of the most gifted hunters in Yilandu, even in the entire clan. He took a very charming and a beautiful young woman as a concubine. She was called Lusuh. Her beauty also made her a target, widely eyed by the young men in the village in those days. She was very fond of him, too, because of her innocent age.

“Lappia was a very jealous man. He never stayed long or overnight, chasing animals during his hunting expeditions in the forest. He often returned home unannounced, thinking that Lusuh was going to be fooled by the young men who had also shown great love for her in the village. It was actually a situation that caused an occasional flash of disharmony between Lappia and the village lads, because of his very pretty and vivacious wife. He then decided to marry her. He called her relatives together, and he paid an exorbitant bride price for her dowry. He even gave her relatives cows, goats, tins of oil, and sacks of cleaned rice, gold, and lots of other expensive items. She now officially became his wife.

“At any time he decided to go on a hunting expedition to a far distance, he always returned abruptly to see if Lusuh was engaged in any promiscuous behavior. He would then lie to her that he had caught a trifling cold in the eerie forest, and decided to return home to warm himself near logs of fire in the hut. She would then make lukewarm water and massage every inch of his body and also poured oil on him, as he lay beside the logs of fire in the hut. She never believed that Lappia was just playing tricks to see if she would have been bold enough to invite one of the young men in the village to come to sleep with her in his hut during his absence.”

The huge crowd of reapers and onlookers lauded *Yamba* and, with their songs and encouragement, he was urged to continue his very funny story. He yelled, and the large crowd yelled after him, and he then continued his storytelling cunningly.

“A ferocious tiger attacked and killed the domestic animals and most of their kinsmen in Palama village, which was just three miles from Yilandu. Then, all the chiefs called all their most trusted hunters in the clan together and urged them to chase and kill the furious beast. Lappia was one of the hunters, and he was called to Chief Gbekah Kondo's shed.

“The chief then told him that he was very pleased to see him, and that there was a fierce tiger on the loose, moving toward Yilandu. It had already killed many domestic animals and even some of their kinsmen. The chief reiterated that it was an expedition fraught with the possibility of disastrous consequences, and they, the chiefs, had decided to call upon the most trusted hunters in the entire clan to hunt the savage beast down.

“Lappia had a craggy, handsome face with a generous but sensitive curved mouth, and he said with a fierce conviction, “That animal will be dead by tomorrow.”

“This made Chief *Gbekah Kondo* and the elders hush their voices and nod in benediction. They all cheered for Lappia. He then begged to leave so that he could hurry home to prepare his hunting satchel. He then explained to his wife about the daring hunting expedition. The chief and his council of elders also assured him that they were going to give him enough gunpowder.

“Oh, Lappia!” Yamba continued dramatically. He met his wife preparing some meal as she labored to blow the dry wood with her breath to make the fire blaze. He stood beside her and breathed heavily, pretending to be nodding with firmly closed eyes and rocking his head as if sleep wanted to hammer him into unconsciousness. He cleared his voice and smiled a smile, which wasn’t a good sign. He contorted his face as if he wanted to demonstrate cowardice. Yet, he told Lusuh about the tracking of the wild beast that headed toward Yilandu.

“Many farms were abandoned in those days, and the destructive animals and birds fed on the rice at their own convenience. Tears streamed down his face for leaving Lusuh, as he thought that any handsome youth that had previously eyed his beautiful wife would surely have heard about the long and fateful mission. It was therefore a good time to take chance to convince Lusuh that her husband had gone and was not to return soon. Lappia sat on a wooden stool and rested his back on the wall of the mud hut and started packing his hunting kit and his gun.

“How long are you going away, Lappia?” she questioned him with a cheerful grin on her face.

“Hum, Lusuh, I don’t actually know yet, but you will be sleeping in this hut with Sokeh, who is my neighbor’s second wife, and your little sister Surnah. I have already made the arrangements,’ he said.

“While they were in the midst of the discussion, Tambelleh, the chief’s emissary bumped into them and told Lappia that the other hunters anxiously awaited his presence at the chief’s shed. He then hurriedly took a few morsels of rice, ate hastily, and bade Lusuh farewell, as tears welled in his eyes for leaving his beautiful wife behind.

“Goodbye, Lusuh.’

“Goodbye and good luck. May God guide you during that dangerous mission,’ she said. ‘I promise to be a good wife in your absence,’ she added with a contented face and courteous manner.

“The wives consoled the other hunters who had sat in the chief’s shed. Lappia hurriedly left, and Lusuh quickly

glanced at him marching away like a giant. Beside the chief's shed the hunters' wives and children and kinsmen stood speechless. There were now no farewells and no smiles. They all looked at each other while some of the children yelled for their fathers, falling constantly on the dusty ground, kicking their legs up in the air. The situation was unbearable and poignant. The hunters couldn't look back, according to their custom.

"Some of the elders accompanied them to a considerable distance on the outskirts of the village where they stopped. There they poured gin on the ground, prayed on a few kola nuts, and recited a mysterious incantation as a libation to their great forebears and the gods to guide the hunters during the dangerous mission. After this, the elders stood, and the hunters disappeared on the dusty footpath that led toward the forest. The elders then returned to the village."

Yamba yearned again, and the crowd echoed. The traditional musical instruments played non-stop music, especially when their illustrious and most gifted griot was narrating his very funny story. The mild dancing continued, and the palm and bamboo wine was in abundance. An eagle circled above them in the sky, and a toucan cried incessantly on a distant tree.

Yamba could interpret all the signs of the cries of the birds. After taking a few sips of the *Tamba Nanjah* gin, he continued his story amid the thundering of the talking drums, the shakers and the *KaeNdeh*.

"The hunters knew a secret place in the deep forest where they all gathered, and there they poured a libation and each of them had some idols in their possession. All the other hunters had now joined them. Bopleh the chief hunter again called all of them together. He cautioned them to be very quiet and to only whistle as he demonstrated the sound to them. He then picked some herbs and poured some sacred ointment on them, and recited a mysterious incantation. The herb was to make them invisible. He rubbed it on their faces, hands and legs. They were altogether twenty in number. They were all wonderful men, energetic and strong. Only Bopleh and Kepah were old men among them, and they served as powerful men who had mastered the rudiments of forest protection.

"After the ceremony they all remained invisible in the forest. Only they could see each other, but no evil or ferocious animals could see them. They shared their gunpowder. Their guns were loaded by putting long iron rods through the mouths of the ancient guns until the gunpowder was completely loaded and ready to be fired. They wore hunting charms in the form of sacred shirts made of cotton threads, on which hung different types of idols. This made the hunters armored, too. It was indeed a very fearful sight to see in those days. They could even kill an elephant when they were in that mood. They then searched the forest but couldn't find the wild animal they tried to kill," *Yamba* echoed again.

The crowd answered in unison and he continued.

"Tiny clouds of yellow and black spotted butterflies circled above their heads. They saw the vipers, boa constrictors and other poisonous pests, but they couldn't shoot to kill them because they knew that the sound would have alerted the beast. They could see the red streaked sky and the darkness of the night snuffing out the surrounding mountains. Deep in the vast forest surrounding Palama village, they made their camps and rested every night. Monkeys made taunting gestures at them, but the hunters couldn't shoot. It was during one of those nights that Lappia dreamt of his wife, and he woke up abruptly.

“In the dark, eerie, and very fearful night, he decided to return to Yilandu to see if his wife had kept her promise. He surreptitiously slipped out when the other hunters had gone sound asleep and took his loaded gun and jumped into the dark forest. Knowing the footpath very well, he reached the outskirts of Yilandu in the very early hours, yet in pitch darkness. Dogs barked angrily at him, and the cats purred continuously. However, he reached the door of his hut. He then looked through a chink and saw someone inside. He knew that it wasn’t his wife, and he knocked at the door heavily and waited. There wasn’t any response.

“He knocked continuously, but Lusuh feared to open the door because she had Tosah, one of the handsome young men of the village, inside. Lappia had had lots of altercations with him and had openly told him to leave his wife alone. The continuous banging frightened them in the mud hut. Tosah then very frightened, slipped under the bed where he lay comfortably and Lusuh finally opened the door in a very frightened manner. Lappia’s gun was aimed in a shooting position when he finally entered into the hut. She could see the devilish manner in him. He was in a fighting mood, and she could see vengeance in his eyes,” Yamba said delightfully.

The enchanting story he was narrating made the reapers on both farms laugh hysterically. Others laughed until they rolled on the ground because his stories were very meaningful and amusing.

“Lusuh laughed sadly, but pretended that she was only fooling Lappia to believe that she was with someone inside. She never expected him to know exactly what had taken place in the hut. She had perfectly tied her boyfriend in a large mat and pushed him under the bed. Lappia then nodded. He sat on a wooden stool and continued to hold his gun in the same position. It was a very fearful sight to see. Lusuh could see a very baleful look on his face. It was then that she knew that she was in trouble.

““Why did you come so soon, Lappia?” she questioned him in surprise and shrugged.

““Don’t ask me that stupid question!” he roared back at her. ‘Please keep your small mouth shut or else you are going to get yours!’ he bellowed again in trembling anger.

““I have some boiled yams in the calabash. Won’t you eat something?” she questioned him quietly and respectfully in her sweet voice.

““I will not eating anything. I told you to close your small mouth,’ he said angrily.

““Aren’t you going to lay your gun down?” she again questioned him sadly.

““No!” he yelled with a very scolding boldness.

“She finally cried and shivered uncontrollably.

“There was another knock on the door, and the jealous hunter rushed and stood behind it. He held his gun firmly

as if he were about to shoot at any moment. His wife then sat down and cried bitterly. She continued to bow her head in a great lamentation and disgrace.

“Lappia slowly opened the door and Soni, another young man, entered. He was greatly surprised when he saw Lappia instead of Lusuh, and the door slammed violently behind him. He then saw a gun aimed at him. He urinated violently in his trousers, and every inch of his body was drenched profusely in sweat. He raised his hands as if he was a captured prisoner of war. He cried in deep sorrow and begged for forgiveness. Lappia wouldn’t listen to any of his pleas,” Yamba said emotionally.

The reapers yelled, and the drummers continued to play and others danced. The wonderful reapers enjoyed every bit of it, and the entertaining griot continued to regale them with his very funny story.

““What did you come to do in the very early hours of the morning in my hut?” the outraged husband yelled at the young man.

““Oh! God,’ exclaimed Soni. ‘I beg you, Lappia. Don’t kill me. Please! Please! Lappia don’t kill me!’ he cried continuously. ‘I only came to beg for fire to light my pipe,’ he said in his deepest sorrow.

““To light what?” Lappia asked.

““A pipe. Oh! My God, help me.’

““Hey! Lusuh, give him my big tobacco box so that he can smoke his guts out since my hut is the only place in the entire village he had found to be a suitable venue to light his pipe at such an eerie hour of the morning. You stupid fool. I will teach all of you fools in this village a good lesson in my hut today,’ he said in annoyance.

“Soni obeyed his orders. He crawled on the bare ground and a bunch of tobacco leaves were ignited and he was forced to smoke it.

““Hey! Smoke your lungs out. Smoke everything, you stupid fool,’ Lappia yelled. ‘You are the most notorious smoker in Yilandu who disturbs others even during the eerie hours of the morning just to light a pipe,’ he growled and hissed at him scornfully, and even spat in his face.

“There the poor young man sat and inhaled clouds of very black smoke into his young lungs. Lappia only made derisive laughter at him. He also pointed his gun at him at a very close range and continued to force him to smoke all the wads of tobacco leaves Lusuh had given to him.

“Lusuh then sat sorrowfully and sobbed incessantly. Lappia had managed to draw Tosah, the first young man, who had wrapped himself inside a large mat out from under the bed and made him into a seating stool. He sat on him so hard that he cried in great pain,” said Yamba empathetically.

The huge crowd of reapers, helpers and dancers roared, “Osieh!” and they all answered in unison again, “Eh!” and died down to allow Yamba to continue with his funny story.

“There was another knock on the door, as the guard dogs barked loudly. Lappia again slipped behind the door gently. He pointed his gun at another intruder. He referred to all of them as troublemakers in the village, whose duty was to chase others’ wives. He saw another figure in front of him.

“Oh, no! It’s you Manfoh. You insulted me on a series of occasions for my wife, and today you have fallen into my snare,” he roared and pointed his gun directly at his head.

“Manfoh raised both hands upright and begged for forgiveness.

“You idiot. Who do you think you are? What made you come this very early in the morning to see my wife?” Lappia said very angrily.

“Eh! Lappia, I felt too hot in my hut, and I only came to cool myself outdoors,’ Manfoh said hesitantly and clumsily. His hands remained raised in the air as if he was another prisoner of war, caught by the mighty Lappia.

“What! To keep yourself cold? Hey! Lusuh, take that calabash of water and pour it all on his head since he is feeling so hot this very early hour in the morning. This will also help him to feel chilly.’

The reapers and the crowd of onlookers who continued to listen to Yamba’s very funny story couldn’t help laughing. They all praised him. He was indeed an old man who was very gifted with ancient tales, myths, and legends. He was indeed the best storyteller in the Toli Clan. After all the eulogies, he continued with his storytelling after sipping the *Tamba Nanjah* gin, which he always carried with him in a small bottle, neatly hidden in the many pockets of his country-cloth gown. He then continued:

“Lappia continued to punish his prisoners who were guilty of chasing his wife. When the first calabash of water was poured on his head, Manfoh sat down on the muddy floor sadly and cried sadly in Lusuha’s name, thus making Lappia more agitated. Manfoh looked around him and saw Soni who had been captured earlier. There he sat gulping unnecessary clouds of a very black smoke into his poor lungs.

“Oh! Lusuh, you have betrayed us,’ all of them cried sorrowfully.

“Don’t call my wife’s name, you stupid fools. Don’t you know that she is a married woman in the village?’ Lappia questioned angrily.

“They were now at the mercy of the most jealous man on Earth.

“Lappia told Lusuh to continue pouring water on Manfoh’s head with very harsh commands. Tosah, the first intruder who had hidden, wrapped up in the mat, also suffered a lot. Lappia sat on him constantly, and he cried in sorrowful pain since he couldn’t bear Lappia’s weight who continued to sit all over him as if he was a sack of

cleaned rice. Lappia was a fat man with a bulging stomach, the result of his constant drinking the palm wine and bamboo wine.

“Tosah suffered massive injuries all over his body. His hands were tied in the mat and he couldn’t move to free himself. His pains were more severe than the other prisoners kept by Lappia in his hut. There, Tosah lay and cried in the anguish of severe pain like a baby. Lappia couldn’t forgive them. As Soni continued his chain-smoking game, Lusuh continued to pour water on Manfoh’s head, while Tosah cried hysterically.

“As the crying continued into the early hours in the morning, the fowls started to declare daylight. The distant frogs and toads played drumming tunes, too. The ugly voices of the intruders or prisoners in Lappia’s hut were now audible. Bandabellah, an old man whose hut was closer to Lappia’s, heard the noises and the incessant cries. He then awoke and slowly opened the door of his hut. He went to Lappia’s hut and slowly knocked at the door. Lappia thought that it was another intruder, and he gently opened the door as usual. It was to his greatest surprise that he saw the old man, who stood in front of him and asked him what was happening in his hut?

“Ah! Ha! I used to tell all of you in the village to tell your sons to leave my wife alone. They ignored all my warnings. They are all intruders who did not see any woman in this village but my wife, Lusuh. Today, I have caught all of them red-handed.”

“Lusuh tied her head tie and then closed her eyes because of the very shameful act that was surely going to tarnish not only her image, but also that of her entire family in the clan. Old man Bandabellah then begged Lappia who was so furious and continued to stand with his gun, aiming it at all the intruders who were now his prisoners, to carry the matter to the chief’s shed. The hunter agreed, and by then, the entire village had awoken and heard how the entire episode had unfolded. Many of the villagers went to the chief’s shed.

“Many of them shook their heads incredibly. They all felt that the victims had actually wronged Lappia. Some even suggested that they were very lucky because he could have killed all of them. They were accused of dismantling marriages in the village. Lusuh continued to sit discontentedly. She bowed her head in total disgrace. She was caught in the web of her own stupidity. Yet, she was loved dearly by Lappia. The villagers begged him to forgive her, as the young men too begged for forgiveness. They also agreed to respect Lappia and his life from that very day.

“Lappia then left his wife in the chief’s care and returned to rejoin the other hunters in the forest. He explained to them about what had taken place in Yilandu, and they joked over it for a couple of days. That was how Lappia finally got control of his wife,” Yamba said with an abrupt pause.

The huge crowd echoed again, and the songs and drummers joined the festivities.