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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Polly Alakija. *Catch That Goat!* Cambridge: Barefoot Books, 2002. 32 pp. \$16.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84148-908-7.

Reviewed by Toyin Falola (The University of Texas at Austin)

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This is a picture book, and the focus on the colors and illustrations must be kept in mind when reading or recommending it to children under the age of four. Children between the ages of four and seven can read it alone, but not too many times because of the story's sheer simplicity. Those above the age of seven are most likely to find it boring, although they will find the colors very attractive. The story line is set like a hide-and-seek caper. I think that the essence of the book is to solve a simple problem, less than to enjoy the words and sentences. Let us follow Ayoka, the main character, with her problems. A family goat was left for Ayoka to take care. The goat, presented in its usual character as stubborn, disappeared. As Ayoka began to look for the goat, she ran into Mama Kudi. Hoping for help, Ayoka asked Mama Kudi whether she had seen the goat. A second problem emerged: one of the eleven Mama Kudi's *boli* (roasted plantain) was missing.

As Ayoka searched the streets for the goat, she discovered that the runaway animal had visited many market stalls and created one trouble or another. Eventually, she caught up with the goat whom she recovered with joy, as others also picked up their missing objects: paint pot, bread, chicken, sunglasses, wig, dress, handbag, shoe, hat, and even a young boy, all of whom the runaway goat had dragged along.

Set in the context of a Nigerian society, the names and characters are drawn from the Yoruba. Ayoka, Kudi, and other names "blend" very well with the setting and the story line. The approach also takes from the Yoruba

how to teach children good manners, interpersonal relationships, and arithmetic at the same time, all through the medium of simple stories. There is also a morality dimension: children should take responsibility very seriously, and they are accountable for their actions. Young kids can use the story to learn how to count backward, from ten to one, without the need to learn by rote.

I found the illustrations more impressive than the story. The colors are many, bold, and bright, and they capture the energy and vibrancy of a Nigerian street market. Children interested in drawing and painting have a lot to practice with and copy. The goat and Ayoka look really nice, and Mama Ayoka is both attractive and well dressed. Introduced to a Western audience in very creative ways are various objects from Africa—the goat, hen, pots, fruits, vegetables, pepper, yam, cage, mortar, pestle, pots, broom, fabric, market scene, market stalls, and babies carried on the back by their mothers. Children will see a different concept of a market and grocery store, as yams are sold together with oil in the same location, while a photographer and a painter carried on their duties by the side of women traders.

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