

Broken But Not Beaten So Can You: Second Edition

Amanda Onwuka

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Broken But Not Beaten So Can You is a poignant novella in which a courageous woman survives impossible circumstances and works to help others.

In Amanda Onwuka's novella *Broken But Not Beaten So Can You*, a Nigerian woman overcomes traumatic events and draws helpful religious lessons from them.

When Amelia receives the opportunity to study nursing in Scotland, her parents encourage her to go. The move will allow Amelia to escape her brutal husband. But in Scotland, Amelia dies while giving birth. Her child, Amoris, is sent back to Nigeria to live with her grandmother.

Amoris has a difficult childhood; she is passed between different relatives. Still, she excels in school. In adulthood, she moves to the United States with her husband. There, she works as a teacher and social worker.

The text follows a loose chronology, but its focus is always on covering aspects of Amoris's life. There is some repetition involved: the details of how Amoris comes to live with an aunt in Lagos, for example, are shared more than once, leading to lulls. Further, there are muddled details: Amoris is said to live with an uncle after the Nigerian Civil War, but later the narrative says that she lived with her grandmother at the same time. Further, there's not enough room given to developing the book's cast, from important uncles and aunts to Amoris's half siblings, whom she learns about later in the book. Many leave only fleeting impressions, despite their significance in Amoris's life. And while the book's use of colloquial terms helps to establish a deep sense of its settings, they are underutilized.

But the book's language is most often clear and direct. Its emotional evocations are acute as well, from the events surrounding the civil war to those around Amoris's experiences of loss. In such moments, the turmoil that Amoris experiences is clear. There are wide narrative gaps between such scenes, though; only a few stand out, as with moments from Amoris's school years, or snapshots from her marriage and work lives. These moments are not made to bridge with others of similar weight, as with Amoris's experiences as a widow and her spiritual growth. As a result, the novella comes to read like a collection of standalone scenes, instead of a single cohesive story. Further, Amoris's tale is mined for lessons—to remark upon the importance of humility when dealing with others, for example, or to reframe personal trials as a means of building fortitude. There's a practical element to such morals, though Amoris's incomplete life story makes them less compelling.

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EDITH WAIRIMU (February 23, 2022)

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