

Chapter 2: Carrying Leg

The Minj Agamp do not 'make love'; in their own language they 'give love'. Giving love, in a strictly physical sense, was of continual interest to them. A man had to give love to his wife or wives in order to obtain children, and he also had to give it to any of the unmarried girls who solicited him. The female life cycle was divided sharply from the onset of puberty into concupiscent adolescence and then severe married chastity, with no gradual preparation for this sudden change. The rules of social living forbade a man to give love to another man's wife, and there were drastic penalties, no longer enforceable in the 1950s, for an adulteress and a lover who was not her husband. On the other hand, a man who had a reputation of being sexually attractive was much admired. He achieved such a reputation when the young girls sought him and fought each other for the fleeting possession of him. He would strut about like a cock in a barnyard, trying to attract them. He would arrange a gaudy plumed head-dress on his carefully dressed hair; urge his mother and clan mothers to weave fresh fluffy aprons for him; hang crescents of goldlip [pearl]shell¹ at his throat and attach little wads of tree kangaroo fur to his ears; and he would tuck sprays of aromatic plants into his woven cane armbands and his leafy bustle, hoping that their love magic would work. But he himself could make no explicit advance to the girls; if one of them wanted him, she could summon him. No man ever disobeyed such a summons.

The most popular way of giving love was 'carrying leg': in Minj Agamp Yu, 'making a bridge of legs'. The man would sit on the grass beside the girl who had summoned him and stretch out his legs before him. She rested both her legs on one of his, and this was the signal for him to lock them between his own by crossing his ankles. They used to hold hands and talk softly. What they said to each other was private and rarely overheard by other couples sitting nearby. Perhaps they were planning to meet each other after dark in the bushes at the bottom of somebody's garden; or perhaps they were complimenting each other on the way their skins gleamed with pigs' grease or pandanus oil.

When the men of Kugika clan cleared their ceremonial ground at Kondambi in preparation for their Pig Ceremonial, they left a patch of grass for the young people to occupy while carrying leg. There was enough grass under the tall casuarinas to accommodate about twenty couples. It was ostensibly for parties of young people, but every mature man, even if he had grey in his beard, hoped

¹ An important wealth item in many parts of the Highlands, now superseded by money in most.

that the splendour of his regalia for the dances would dazzle the girls of other clans so that he too would be summoned to lock ankles and hold hands in public and demonstrate that he was still attractive.

Two Stay was nearly forty, but he had decorated himself with particular care one day early in the festival. Red, yellow, and black plumes shimmered upwards from his forehead, and a crescent-shaped pearlshell following the line of his jaw partly hid his thick black beard. The men of the clan, helped by their adolescent daughters and all the children who were old enough to pound a hand drum, had begun to dance early. Forming phalanxes corresponding to their subclans, they bent their knees and their heels stamped the dust in time to their drumbeats. The drumming and loud singing could be heard for miles around. Many people from neighbouring clans, hearing the festive sound, came to watch the spectacle and comment approvingly on the gorgeous and valuable adornments of the dancers.

Suddenly a girl dashed from the crowd of spectators and snatched a hand drum from a handsome young dancer, forcing him to follow her in order to retrieve it. The other men grinned as they continued to dance, for they knew that she had learned this bold ruse from watching the pig festivals held by people living north of the Wahgi. The local girls preferred more subtle ways of summoning partners to carry leg. During one of the pauses in the dancing, while the men stood around in groups, talking and smoking and parading their plumes, Two Stay was gratified to find a little Ngeni-Muruka boy approaching him to deliver the message that a certain girl of his clan was waiting near the patch of grass. Two Stay went to her at once, and soon they were sitting close together in company with several other couples and whispering to each other.

'Look at Two Stay carrying leg with the Ngeniga girl!' one of his clansmen said to me. 'A few plumes, and a man looks half his age. The girls think so, anyway.'

'But what will Apron say when she hears about it?' whispered one of the women, naming Two Stay's wife. 'I shall go and tell her.'

Apron was not present at the dancing. Her baby had been ill, so she was sitting huddled over a meagre fire inside her hut across a creek from the ceremonial ground. She came at once, with her baby astride her hip, as soon as she received the women's news. A good woman, who behaved as a wife should, did not complain when her husband carried leg but acted as if she were proud of his being successful and attractive. Apron, however, was not a particularly good woman by Minj standards. She was a jealous wife. Like many men who could afford no more than one wife, Two Stay was hen-pecked. But this was no time for whittling away his self-confidence by prolonged nagging until he gave in to her wishes. Apron strode purposefully on to the crowded ceremonial ground,

her eyes glowing with anger. It was inconsiderate of her husband, she said, to be playing around with girls while their baby was still recovering from an illness. The baby himself, jogging along astride her hip, sucked his fingers for comfort, too young to realize his mother's purpose but accustomed to her changing moods and sensitive to her displeasure.

Apron halted a few feet away from Two Stay and his pretty young companion. They stared at her speechlessly. They had stopped holding hands, but the girl's legs were still locked between the man's ankles. Apron seemed surprised that they did not spring apart and run away when she confronted them. She wrenched the baby from her hip, and his dark eyes grew wide with alarm.

'You want my man?' Apron cried. 'All right, you can carry the baby too!'

She threw the startled infant on to the Ngeniga girl's lap. The girl let him roll to the ground as she jumped up in fright and rushed away. Two Stay's clansmen and their wives were crowding round, eager to watch a man's reaction to his wife's interference. He scrambled to his feet, grasped her wrist, and struggled with her. But Apron was a robust woman, and her outraged feelings gave her added strength whereas Two Stay was hindered by his surprise and embarrassment.

'You told me once' she screamed so that everyone could hear 'that if I ever found you with a girl I could give her the baby'.

The crowd laughed uproariously at this revelation from the intimacies of marriage, and Two Stay looked sheepish. He hit out at Apron, but she evaded him so he appealed to the other men to help him. He addressed some of the men of his own subclan by name, but they folded their arms and stood well back.

'It is a private quarrel between husband and wife' they muttered. 'A man has to settle that himself.'

Two Stay looked about him helplessly. At last a young man, Dog, shouldered his way to the edge of the crowd.

'The members of a man's group support him in any quarrel with outsiders' he said proudly, stating a maxim all his hearers knew to be true, 'but when he quarrels with his wife that is judged to be a private matter and he has to settle it himself. Two Stay's subclan, Burikup, is only a little group. His subclan brothers will not help him, because they do not like to interfere between a man and his wife. I am Koimamkup. We Koimamkup are strong men. We do not let our wives interfere with our pleasures. Men should be able to carry leg when they want to, without their wives preventing them. I will help you, Two Stay.'

Dog strode forward and grabbed Apron by the wrists. She wriggled in his grasp, but she was not strong enough to shake him off.

'Now beat her!' Dog cried to her husband. 'I will hold her for you.'

Two Stay struck his wife soundly again and again— on the shoulder, on the chest, on the back, on the hip, on the buttocks, wherever his hand was able to touch the body that still twisted in Dog's grasp. The women in the crowd watched earnestly for awhile, knowing that they too would be treated in this way if they were bold enough to interfere with their husbands' right to carry leg. Two Stay's brother's wife had picked up Apron's baby and was rocking him gently on her shoulder. But soon the crowd drifted away. The phalanxes of plumed men re-formed to resume the dancing. Two Stay was too exhausted to join them, and he contented himself with strutting about the edges of the ceremonial ground, satisfied that he had won a point.

Apron fled, as soon as Dog released her, to have a good cry in the privacy of her house. She told me later that she had achieved her purpose, which was to separate Two Stay and the Ngeniga girl. Taking a beating was a small price to pay.

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The ceremonial village of Kondambi was deserted, for it was the weekly day of Government work for Kugika clan. I used to spend this day at home, for the absence of the Kugika gave me an opportunity to put my notes in order and write letters for the weekly mail. But the weather was perfect and I needed little incentive to go outdoors. Hearing faint voices, I strolled out on to the ceremonial ground to investigate. The rectangular ground was lined with long-houses belonging to different groups within the clan. Burikup, the smallest subclan, had a single long-house. Koimamkup, a larger group, also had a single long-house, but most of the Koimamkup people had built their long-houses at Bomung, a smaller ceremonial village half a mile away from Kondambi. The dominant subclan, Penkup, had four long-houses. Penkup, like the other subclans, consisted of three named subdivisions. Damba subdivision had a long-house of its own, and Kumnga subdivision had another. The two wealthiest and most important men of the clan, the brothers Raggiana and Big Insect, belonged to Penkup Baiman subdivision, and each of the brothers had built a separate long-house for himself and his immediate followers.

The voices came from the Penkup Kumnga long-house. They belonged to Ko I, a Penkup Kumnga girl, and Ko II, a Konumberga girl whose maternal uncle had adopted her and kept her with the Kugika. The two girls were fourteen or fifteen years old, age-mates who had both been attending courting ceremonies for more than a year. Both of them had the large eyes, flat noses, and full lips the Minj Agamp admired in people of both sexes. Ko II was lean and supple; it was easy to visualize her trudging to the gardens in ten years' time, with the weight of an infant pulling the loop of her net bag taut across her forehead and another child

toddling beside her. But Ko I had that extra attribute of Minj beauty which she was likely to lose early, possibly before the birth of her first child: a rounded plumpness that showed a wholesome bulge above her strained cummerbund of woven cane and on either side of the woven cane bands that clasped her upper arms like broad tourniquets. Ko I was a favourite of the headman or *luluai*, Big Insect, for he delighted in the prospect of the large marriage payment the Kugika would receive for such a luscious bride. The Minj Agamp did not expect unmarried girls to work hard, and when Ko I complained that she had a headache after staying up all night at a courting ceremony the *luluai* told her to take Ko II as a companion and go home to rest.

I never found Minj teenagers stimulating companions, because they seemed empty-headed, all the time preoccupied with the dreary nonsense of petting and courting ceremonies. But I was curious to know how the two girls would idle away their day while their mothers and their less fortunate sisters were engaged in trimming grass on the Government Station, so I greeted them from the doorway of the Kumnga long-house.

‘You have come, White Woman!’ Ko I returned my greeting. ‘Sit with us awhile.’

She patted the floor beside her, and I scrambled inside. Like the floors of the dwelling houses, this one was carpeted with dried grass and rubbish consisting largely of the spongy cores of sucked sugarcane which people discard where they sit as they take refreshment. Ko II had brushed away a little of the grass and rubbish in front of her to reveal a small patch of dirt floor. Now she smoothed the dirt with the back of her hand and traced a drawing with her fingers. I had seen many drawings like it made by women and children in idle moments and recognized it as the stylized design of a pig’s carcass. Ko II divided it up with straight lines, as was the custom. This portion, she said, was for Ko I, this for me, and that for herself. She apportioned the other sections among various absent relatives.

Ko I said nothing. She was plainly bored. I noticed on a second patch of dirt that was incompletely covered sure signs that they had tried this pastime before. She unrolled a handkerchief that contained her supply of tobacco and found that she did not have enough to make a cigar. There were no children to send for some, and her mother’s deserted house was half a mile away. Ko II had no tobacco at all. I rolled cigarettes, but the fine and faintly sweet imported tobacco was a poor substitute for a coarse and strongly flavoured cigar and Ko I threw hers away after a couple of puffs. Ko II did not seem to have any ideas to relieve her age-mate’s boredom, and she sat awkwardly with her legs stretched out in front of her, her fingers sifting the soft rubbish on the floor.

Suddenly, noticing Ko II's legs stretched out beside her, Ko I glanced across at her companion. Her interest sparked quickly and she swung both her own legs over one of the other girl's. Ko II grinned broadly and locked her age-mate's legs with her ankles.

'I am a man' Ko II joked, as they played at carrying leg.

'And I am a girl' Ko I answered, gaily but with obvious pride. 'You mustn't carry leg with all the girls— only with me!'

Both girls plainly enjoyed carrying leg with their male partners, but there were no men in Kondambi on that day. As they carried leg with each other they reminded me of girls at country socials in Australia who so love dancing that they dance with each other when there are not enough boys to go round. Later, however, I wondered about the tender attachment the women of the Minj Agamp form for their age-mates in the days of their youth. They are inseparable companions until marriage forces them to live in different communities; up to that time they walk about with their arms round each other, and most nights they sleep in one another's arms. This was the only time I ever saw girls carrying leg together, but Ko II's easy response to her age-mate's joking advances made it seem that it may have happened before. Special friendships among age-mates can be lifelong among the Agamp; occasionally I have seen them renewed by mature women who meet at a mourning feast after a death that has affected the clans of both their husbands, though they have not seen each other for many years.

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As months went by, the dancing in the Pig Ceremonial grew more and more spectacular and more and more visitors came from near and far to view the waving plumes. People came from all over the Wahgi Valley, and one day a young man from Chimbu arrived. The men of Kugika clan carried leg with girl visitors and the girls of Kugika clan carried leg with male visitors on the patch of grass where Two Stay and the Ngeniga girl had been sitting when Apron interrupted them. Here also the young man from Chimbu was the centre of a small drama.

Ko II was the first girl to notice him when he arrived in the middle of the morning as the first dance was beginning. He was good-looking in a conventional way, with tawny-gold skin and a broad, flat nose and, though his dress was undistinguished in this company of colourful plumes and glittering ornaments, a visitor from afar is an exotic conquest and it was a feather in Ko II's cap to ensnare him before any of the other girls had done so. A little boy delivered her message to him, and he went at once to the patch of grass, where they carried leg together for the rest of the morning.

There was a lull in the dancing about midday while the Kugika men refreshed themselves with sugarcane, cucumbers, and cooked snacks. Most of the married women were away gathering vegetables in their gardens for the evening meal, and the couples who had been petting on the patch of grass had dispersed. But everyone reassembled in the afternoon, and the scene of the morning was repeated. Plumes waved gaily as the dancers pounded their hand drums and lifted their voices in unison. The patch of grass was covered with flirtatious couples, but there was one significant difference. The men of Penkup subclan were only singing intermittently while they whispered to one another.

‘Look at the man from Chimbu!’ one of them hissed. ‘Ko I’s giving him love now.’

‘But I saw Ko II with him this morning.’

‘Yes, Ko II was carrying leg with him first.’

‘But where’s Ko II now?’

‘I can’t see her anywhere.’

‘What will she say when she knows Ko I’s got him?’

‘Ko I is very bold to carry leg with the man from Chimbu when everyone knows Ko II had him this morning.’

‘Will Ko II attack her?’

‘Ko II will be jealous, of course, but they’re very special friends and Ko I is the leader of their age-group.’

The whispered speculations continued, and the men of Penkup subclan stared so hard at Ko I and her partner that they were soon out of step. At last they stopped dancing altogether, though the Burikup and Koimamkup sang and danced on awhile longer. Some of the Penkup youths darted away eagerly to find Ko II and tell her that Ko I had taken her man. Ko I sat stolidly beside the young man from Chimbu, her legs clasped in his ankles, though she must have been well aware of what was happening.

Ko II received the news calmly. Ordinarily she would have attacked another girl who carried leg with a man she herself had summoned earlier the same day, for at least temporarily he was hers, but she did not want to fight with her age-mate, particularly with her special friend among age-mates as Ko I was. The question of her being Konumbuga, not Kugika, by birth did not suggest to anyone that she might have had less right to entertain visitors at Kondambi than the daughter of a Kugika man, for her long association with her maternal uncle’s clan had led her to identify herself in many respects with her age-mates in her adopted clan.

All the Penkup watched as Ko II strolled along to the patch of grass where the couple sat. Without a word and with no emotion showing, she bent down and lifted Ko I's legs gently from those of the young man, then she walked away. She had made the gesture her adopted clansmen required her to make, but she had not offended her age-mate. In fact Ko I expressed amusement, but the young man from Chimbu looked uncomfortable, for the incident had shamed him before strangers.

The men of Burikup and Koimamkup subclans had also stopped dancing by this time, and they had seen Ko II's action. They were indignant with her for interfering, and several of them protested to the Penkup men. But the Penkup men, like Ko I, were amused. It was indiscreet of her, they said, to carry leg with the young man from Chimbu so soon after Ko II had done so, and Ko II had acted with tact and decision.

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The men of Kugika clan had built my house, at Big Insect's urging, only six feet away from a new house belonging to his second wife, Goodly, beside the ceremonial ground. In fact Goodly was so busy tending her pigs at Weeping Bamboo, three miles along the ridge, that she never moved to her new house but simply visited Kondambi daily when the dancing began. A man named Vomit became my neighbour instead. Vomit was a birth member of a different division of Penkup subclan, but he had attached himself to Big Insect, helping the *luluai* in a thousand small chores; in return, Goodly looked after his pigs. Vomit was a middle-aged bachelor, a man of the type the Minj Agamp called a 'knockabout man', a short and ugly fellow who could never hope to find a wife. He was a quiet neighbour. The girls had never bestowed their favours on him. Whenever the clan was holding a particularly important dance and many visitors were expected, the leaders of Penkup subclan told him not to bother decorating himself to participate in the dance because they wanted to impress the visitors as a body of well-built and handsome men. Nevertheless, Big Insect was glad to include Vomit's pigs, which Goodly had tended, among those he was responsible for distributing at the climax of the Pig Ceremonial in which the owner was forbidden to participate fully.

When the festival was more advanced I acquired more neighbours, this time a family. My house had been built at the boundary between Penkup and Koimamkup territory on land belonging to Forest Tree, a man of the third subclan, Burikup. Soon Forest Tree built two houses next to mine. One was ostensibly for himself and the other for his wife, Courting Ceremony, but actually they used Courting Ceremony's house for cooking their meals and Forest Tree's own house for sleeping. The houses built ostensibly for particular married women in the temporary ceremonial village were not 'women's houses'

built to accommodate pigs but were the same kind of structures as the houses built for men. No especial taboos were associated with these houses, so they could conveniently house visitors when necessary. Forest Tree built his own house so close to mine that the wall was less than two feet from that of my bedroom and the grass thatch of the two roofs was touching. The temptation to eavesdrop on family discussions was irresistible.

Forest Tree was a perfect miniature of a man. Most of the Minj Agamp males grew to about five feet six inches tall, and one man in Kugika clan was nearly six feet in height, but Forest Tree was below five feet. Nevertheless his well-set head with its crop of curly hair and trim black beard, his broad shoulders and slim hips, and the rippling muscles of his arms and legs were beautifully proportioned. No one called him short— partly because the Minj Agamp Yu word for ‘short’ implies stockiness and ungainliness, and partly too because ‘knockabout men’ are supposed to be short in stature and they are always ‘rubbish men’— dependent, like Vomit, upon a man of means to act as their sponsor. Forest Tree was himself a man of means. Though not of outstanding wealth like Big Insect’s, he was an independent farmer and pig-keeper. He had inherited his brother’s widow, Courting Ceremony, and was hoping to acquire a second wife within the next year or two. He had been a competent warrior and sorcerer; though he had not practised sorcery since his clan had been forced to live in an uneasy peace with others, the knowledge that he could do so enhanced his prestige. He still maintained a small war-sorcery house hidden in a grove of bamboos near his usual place of residence. He had shown great initiative in deciding to cultivate a long-abandoned burial ground near his home, arguing that the human remains had enriched the soil, and had transformed it into a productive garden. He was a man of moderate consequence.

One evening, Banana, Forest Tree’s eight-year-old son, called to see me as he did nearly every day.

‘I cannot stay and talk with you, White Woman-o,’ he said. ‘My father went home to fetch firewood, but he had been gone a long time and my mother has sent me to see what has happened to him. Come for a walk with me while I go and meet my father.’

I understood the boy’s reluctance to go alone. Adults among the Minj Agamp never walked alone, for if they did they might be suspected of practising witchcraft or going to an adulterous assignation. Even a youngster might be accused of witchcraft, but a healthy lad like Banana was unlikely to be thinking of such things. Darkness was approaching, and he was more likely to be sensitive to the dangers from ghosts and bush demons lurking in the scrub. Anyway, he and I enjoyed each other’s company. He picked up my notebook and carried it for me, as was his custom, although I doubted whether I would

find anything to record during our evening walk to Forest Tree's home and back apart from a few more names for plants and insects I had little hope of ever identifying botanically.

We had gone no further than the ceremonial ground, now deserted by its dancers, when we saw the tiny figure of Forest Tree approaching from the direction of his home under a load of firewood. A group of his clansmen were sitting about idly gossiping, and he made his way towards them. They looked up as he swung his heavy load to the ground and began to address them.

'You all saw the fight young K- had yesterday with the Ngeniga girls' he said. They all knew K-, another Konumberga girl whose whole family lived with the Kugika. They had seen her fighting the day before against a girl she had found carrying leg with a man who interested her. I had also seen the fight develop into a flurry of brawling women. Out of the general hubbub one could distinguish screams of agony and abuse and the sharp crack of a stick landing on someone's head or shoulders. On the fringe of the crowd a hefty young girl was dragging a scrawny matron along the ground by her hair; the older women's thin dugs flapped against her ribs, and her string apron was immodestly askew.

'All the Ngeniga girls helped their age-mate, but not one of the Konumberga girls helped K-' Forest Tree grumbled. 'The girls of a clan ought to stand up for one another. But none of K-'s age-mates stood up for her, so all the Konumberga women who are married to Kugika men fought by her side.'

'That is so' one of the men replied. 'My wife and yours were among them. After seeing my wife hit a Ngeniga girl on the head with a stick, I'll be careful what I say to her in future.'

There was a mild ripple of amusement, for the speaker was known to have a hard time controlling his wife, but Forest Tree did not smile.

'It is not fitting that married women should fight' he said with the air of a man who proclaims a well known truth; and indeed this was a set phrase some man or other always reiterated when women were brawling. 'The girls who attend courting ceremonies should have fought on K-'s behalf.'

Forest Tree's clansmen did not answer. Plainly they agreed with him but did not feel strongly enough to stir up trouble among the young girls. He shouldered his firewood and went on his way.

'Hurry, Banana!' I whispered. 'Your father will get home before you do.'

'But I can run fast, as you know' the boy grinned. 'I'll put your book inside your house first. I knew there would be something for you to write.'

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The Minj Agamp's Pig Ceremonial is clearly divided into two phases. The first was called Pig Houses, a name signifying the period from the erection of a white post in a high part of the clan's territory where people from miles around could see it and know that the clan was preparing to kill its pigs until the ceremonial ground was cleared and a temporary village was built around it. The main work of this period was the construction of the long-houses, the Pig Firewood Houses which gave their name (shortened to Pig Houses) to this period and also to the site of the pig festival, whether it was being currently held there or not. The second phase was called Pig Songs, for the main work of this time was for clan members to gather daily and dance in formation while they sang and pounded their hand-drums. Pig Songs could not begin until the long-houses lining the ceremonial ground had been completed. Whenever one of these buildings was finished the builders notified their affinal and maternal relatives in nearby clans that the roof would be thatched on a certain day. They invited these relatives to participate. The visitors arrived, their womenfolk stooped under loads of kunai grass which they placed in an impressive pile before the newly completed long-house. Their hosts danced around the heap of grass while their wives brought food to present to the visitors. The men visiting from other clans had come to do the work of thatching, and when the preliminary festivities were over some of them climbed to the roof while others handed up bundles of grass for them to fasten. There were always many willing workers, and the thatching was done quickly and skilfully.

The ordinarily slothful girls of the thatchers' clans were always eager to help their mothers in gathering and carrying the kunai grass on such an occasion, for this provided an excuse for them to attend the festivities and they knew that they would be meeting the handsome young men of the host clan. The thatchers themselves, who were mostly young, were looking forward to being invited to carry leg with the girls of the place.

People of the neighbouring Ngeni-Muruka and Konumbuga clans had come to Kondambi to celebrate the completion of one of the long-houses for the Kugika Pig Ceremonial. The men were dressed for dancing: coloured plumes waved in their head-dresses, and pieces of pearlshell dangling from their waistbands clicked together as they strode proudly along the well-trodden paths. Their womenfolk were clad simply in drab and meagre string aprons that swished from side to side as they plodded along with their loads of grass.

The dancing and the thatching were over by the time the women of the Kugika began to arrive. Their bodies leaned forward and the loops of their net bags were stretched tight across their foreheads from the weight of the vegetable food they carried on their backs. The Kugika were treating their visitors royally, and even the young girls who were not generally expected to do women's work had been pressed into service to bring still more food from the gardens and

the cooking groves. After some speech-making, bags of raw vegetables changed hands. The mood was one of feasting, but the Minj Agamp did not gorge themselves on these occasions. The important thing was the presentation, not the consumption, of food. Nevertheless, the women distributed light snacks for the visitors to eat with their hosts.

Two of the Penkup girls, Ko I and Or Nothing, leaned against the wall of the new long-house, resting after their unaccustomed exertions as they surveyed the visitors.

'I can't see Stony' Ko I said. Her great brown eyes searched the groups of Konumberga people sitting around the ceremonial ground but could not find the handsome youth she had been carrying leg with earlier in the day. 'I want to carry leg with him again.'

Ko I was unusually attached to Stony. She carried leg with him nearly every day, and she had even asked her father to let her marry him, but he had replied gently that he had other plans for her.

'There he is' Or Nothing answered. 'He's already carrying leg with a Ngeniga girl.'

Ko I regarded the couple with blazing eyes, but Or Nothing spoke again.

'They are going against the customs of our fathers and our grandfathers' she said wisely. 'This is Kugika territory. A Ngeniga girl cannot carry leg here unless it is with a Kugika man, and a Konumberga man can only carry leg here with Kugika girls. Let us drive her away.'

Ko I was not concerned with the customs of her forefathers at this moment of discovering that she had a rival.

'Yes' she agreed. 'I don't like other girls to carry leg with Stony. Let us drive her away.'

Together they went to the girl and pulled her roughly to her feet. Stony stood up and walked away as unobtrusively as he could while the two attacked her. Only one girl of Ngeniga clan had come, and she had no age-mates to help her, but she hit Or Nothing a nasty blow on the head and Or Nothing had no chance to retaliate before the Kugika men separated them. The Ngeniga girl fled, and Or Nothing resolved to get even with her later.

The next day the Konumberga also celebrated the completion of a long-house by holding a similar feast at Konmil, and the Kugika girls went along to help their mothers in gathering and carrying the kunai and to watch their clansmen dance. Suddenly there was a disturbance at one end of the ceremonial ground. Or Nothing had seen the Ngeniga girl carrying leg again with Stony and had

attacked her with her fists. This time Stony decided to help the girl, for he was on his own clan land now and she had every right to invite him to carry leg with her. He picked up a stick, which he held horizontally to ward off the blows. Stripping herself of her ornaments, which might have got broken in the fight, Or Nothing gave to one of the Kugika girls the goldlip shells, the bailer shell, and the trade rings she had been wearing and returned to the fray. Stony did not try to hit Or Nothing; he merely warded off the blows that were meant for the Ngeniga girl and pleaded with them both not to fight. Other men remonstrated, but the girls did not heed them. Or Nothing, joined now by other Kugika girls, was winning the battle and was chasing Stony and the Ngeniga girl across the ceremonial ground. Some of the girls armed themselves with sticks. Their own clansmen urged them on, but the Konumberga men were alarmed lest a full-scale brawl should develop on their land. When Or Nothing overtook her opponent she attacked her again, but the Ngeniga girl hit back. The girls continued to struggle for a quarter of an hour before the Konumberga men intervened and managed to separate them.

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Sometimes a girl would choose one particular man as her constant partner, and her brothers might then suggest that she should go and stay with his clan in order to spare him the labour of walking daily from his home to hers in answer to her invitation. She would stay for a couple of days, and then her brothers arrived to take her back. During this time she had been carrying leg several times in public with the man of her choice, but ordinarily she seems to have slept with one or two of the women of his clan. She and her lover had little time for privacy during her visit. He and his clan relatives bathed her with pigs' grease on the day her brothers were to arrive, and loaded her with costly decorations which she wore home. The plumes and ornaments were for her brothers, though they usually gave her for her personal use a pretty bird skin of little value; she kept the new garments (the fluffy strings, netted skull cap, and any cane bands one of her lover's clansmen might have plaited for her) and often a single goldlip shell. The rest of the bounty went into her brothers' stock of valuables, from which they unfailingly supplied her with decorations when she needed them. Sometimes she returned home willingly, proud that she had been able to contribute to the wealth of her brothers and their clan as a whole. But sometimes she was so attached to her lover that she wanted to stay with him and be accepted as his wife.

Good Bird was an important man among the Kugika Penkup. In middle age he was the oldest direct descendent, in the senior line, of the man who had founded his subdivision of the subclan. When the previous leader of the group had died Good Bird had been too young to succeed him and Raggiana, the oldest member of a more junior line, had taken his place. Now that he would

have been old enough to succeed if the role had been vacant again, he helped Raggiana administer the affairs of his subdivision and of the whole subclan. Good Bird already had one wife, Creamy, who had borne him two sons, but he was ambitious to have more wives and sire more boys to add to the strength and glory of his clan. Creamy always objected when he wanted to get another wife, and she had driven away several new wives he had tried to keep.

Good Bird had been visiting Omngar clan in the northern part of the Wahgi Valley. On each of his three recent visits Waiting, a young girl of the clan, had invited him to carry leg. At last, at the suggestion of her brothers, Waiting accompanied him home to Kondambi and stayed there a couple of days. Creamy did not show any jealousy, as she knew that the girl's brothers would be taking her back as soon as Good Bird had bathed her with pigs' grease.

Good Bird waited impatiently for Waiting's brothers to arrive. She had told him the evening before that she did not want to go back with them but would prefer to stay with him and be his wife. She told him that her parents had said she could marry him if she wished. Her mother had told her that she was not formally betrothed and so would be able to marry any man she had carried leg with and wanted to marry. But Good Bird knew that Waiting's brothers would have the final say. Perhaps one of them might want to exchange her for a bride for himself. Good Bird knew that he could not provide a girl in exchange for Waiting, for other marriages were already planned for all the Kugika Penkup girls as well as for all the girls among Creamy's relatives. Nevertheless he hopefully lined up some plumes and ornaments ready to offer to Waiting's brothers as a betrothal payment.

It was a busy morning for the Kugika. The Konumberga had brought a large marriage payment for a Kugika girl, who was decorated and handed over to them. The pole bearing the payment had been driven into the ground, and it still stood there when Waiting's brothers arrived. They eyed it admiringly, exchanged a few words softly, then went behind the long-house to meet Good Bird.

'Why haven't you bathed Waiting with pigs' grease?' one of them demanded while the other stood by in silence.

Raggiana, ceremonial leader and leading war sorcerer of Kugika clan and orator and government-appointed *tultul* (deputy headman) of Penkup subclan, indicated with a grand gesture the plumes and shells Good Bird had laid out on the ground for inspection. Waiting's brothers could have this payment, he said, if they permitted the girl to stay with Good Bird. If she had to go back, Good Bird would bathe her with pigs' grease and give them only a few plumes and shells.

Waiting's brothers eyed the payment greedily for a moment, then the one who was spokesman made a long and earnest speech to the Penkup, facing Raggiana as he orated. He said he understood that their father and mother had pronounced that Waiting could marry any man she liked, and he wanted to respect their wishes. But he had to insist on a generous payment for her— as large a payment, in fact, as the one he had seen on the ceremonial ground that morning. He indicated Good Bird's payment with a disparaging gesture, saying that it was obvious that Good Bird himself had provided the plumes and shells. He could not contemplate leaving Waiting, the brother went on, unless the big men— Raggiana and his brother, Big Insect, and perhaps others as well— also contributed toward the payment.

Good Bird replied that he was willing to give only this little pay² at present, though he could well afford more. The brothers, he said, could understand the unwillingness of the other big men to give plumes and shells at this stage. The girl might leave him after awhile and go to another man, and the payment would have been given for nothing.

The brother agreed that he appreciated this point, but stressed that he himself wanted some plumes. After all, his sister was a good-looking girl and the Kugika should be prepared to pay well for her. He preferred to hold out for a substantial payment.

The discussion had been amicable. Good Bird agreed to send the girl back, and he prepared to bathe her with pigs' grease. Waiting was not consulted; the men had settled her fate between them.

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The Kugika headman, Big Insect, was considerably younger than his brother, Raggiana, but he was also a mature and wealthy man. He had three wives, but he wanted more. This was partly because the Minj Agamp judged the importance of a man by the number of wives he had, and both he and Raggiana used to boast that their father had ten wives. (They could only remember six when I questioned them on details.) It was Big Insect's ambition to have ten wives also, in order that he might be known as more than a 'strong' man (his people's term for 'big' man). Occasionally a leader among the Minj Agamp achieved such wide renown that others said of him 'His name is up on top', and this was the reputation Big Insect coveted. A more pressing reason for his wanting more wives quickly was the barrenness of those he had already. Indoors, his senior wife, had borne him only one child, who had died young; the faithful Goodly had borne him one son and was to give birth to another soon after my departure;

² Reay is probably adopting common Tok Pisin usage here, 'pay' for 'payment', here with reference to shells and other valuables, not only money.

Weeping was a recent wife, but Big Insect suspected that it was by her own wish and the furtive skills of the older women that she was not yet a mother. He was a 'strong' (that is, eminent) man, headman of his clan and a leader among his people, but he had one son and the foetus in the belly of his second wife might turn out to be merely a daughter. He wanted ten sons, the greatest number that could be counted on two hands, to carry on his line.

Some men of Waga clan had invited Big Insect and a few other Kugika to visit them at Nondugl, and they had instructed the young girls of their group to be kind to their guests. A plump and personable girl asked Big Insect to carry leg with her and he did so, with the Waga and their other visitors watching. He and his companions stayed for several days, and Big Insect spent some part of every day carrying leg with this handsome creature. He learned that her name was Weeping, and he surmised from the generous curves of her body that she might bear a man many sons.

Weeping's father and mother and a man called Good Little, her father's elder brother's son, urged her to go with Big Insect to stay for a couple of days and be bathed with pigs' grease and decorated. Big Insect, they told her, was a wealthy man and would be generous in loading her with plumes and ornaments for her 'brother' and father. They themselves would accompany her as chaperones; they would take this opportunity to visit Mountain Tree, a man of Big Insect's subclan who had married Weeping's paternal aunt.

Walking across the valley to Kondambi, Big Insect fell into step with Good Little and began to discuss with him the possibility of marriage with Weeping. He knew that Good Little, as the girl's closest 'brother', had the most say in disposing of her. There had been no marriage between the Waga and the Kugika in recent years; the son of Weeping's aunt was twelve years old, and he suggested that they should give the Kugika more brides if they wanted to keep their friendship.

Back at Kondambi, Big Insect lost no time in lining up a betrothal payment for Good Little and Weeping's father to inspect. Women of his subclan brought food, and the men joked with one another in high spirits as they ate. Beside them, the sun touched with gold the rich plumes Big Insect was offering with the shell ornaments for his betrothal. The women had retired. Weeping and her mother were in a nearby house with their relative, Mountain Tree's Waga wife.

Good Little said that he and Weeping's parents wanted to give her to Big Insect. He was a great man and their friend, and they were happy to help him by giving him a bride. Also, of course, they hoped that the Kugika would be giving women to the Waga in exchange for her. He regretted that Original Woman,

another Waga girl who had come to stay with the Kugika, was already betrothed elsewhere and so could not marry a Kugika man, for he would have liked their two clans to exchange many women.

Mountain Tree brought up the question of Weeping's own choice.

'I am married to a Waga woman' he said 'and I too would like our clans to exchange many women. But has anyone asked Weeping whether she is willing to marry Big Insect? Kondambi is not far from the Government Stations, and a girl who is taken to a man she does not like can go to the Court of Native Affairs and complain. The officers say we should not give girls to men they do not like, and if the case comes up some of us will go to jail.'

No one had asked Weeping whether she was willing to marry Big Insect. He himself admitted that he had not discussed the matter with her. But he assured Good Little that if Weeping were given to him Mountain Tree's young son, Now Spirit, would be entrusted with the duty of seeing that she did not run away. If she did not want to marry him, the Government officers would only discover that the Kugika were keeping her against her will if she succeeded in escaping and went to Minj.

Mountain Tree insisted that girls who were being held against their will were cunning in devising ways of escaping. Now Spirit was young and inexperienced, and he could not guarantee that the boy would succeed in preventing Weeping from going to Minj with her complaint. It would be wiser, he urged, to consult the girl herself and, if she were unwilling to marry Big Insect, try to persuade her. Weeping was brought on to the ceremonial ground, and Good Little addressed her.

'We want you to stay and marry Big Insect' he said. 'Your aunt is here, so you will not be lonely. Are you agreeable?'

Weeping wasted no time in replying.

'No' she cried clearly. 'I agreed to come to Kondambi with him and be bathed in pigs' grease and decorated and returned to my people. There was no question of marriage. I expect to stay here tonight, but tomorrow I want to go home.'

'Your aunt is a Waga women' Good Little reminded her 'and she is here.'

'There are Waga women closer to home' Weeping insisted. 'They also are my aunts. I do not want to live at Kondambi, and I do not want to marry Big Insect.'

The men watched her stalk away in the direction of her aunt's house. Some of them commented that she was strong willed and knew what she wanted and what she did not want. Mountain Tree muttered that if they were to marry her to Big Insect they would all find themselves in jail.

The girls of Big Insect's subclan held a courting ceremony that night for the Waga men who had come with Weeping and Original Woman. The two girls watched the ceremony, but did not participate. Big Insect slept at Kondambi in the house he had built for Goodly, with the bearded Vomit as his only companion. He dreamed that he gave love to Weeping and then discovered that it was not Weeping at all but a bush demon masquerading in her form. This was a common nightmare among the Minj Agamp.³ It was generally assumed to portend some evil, perhaps sterility in the dreamer's wives. Did the nightmare mean that marriage with Weeping would bring him no more sons?

The next morning Now Spirit, Mountain Tree's young son, greeted me as I was eating breakfast, and I asked him whether Weeping was going to marry Big Insect or be bathed in pigs' grease and sent home.

'She will stay and marry Big Insect' he answered. 'I shall claim her and give her to him.'

I knew that Now Spirit could do this. Weeping's father was his mother's brother, and in Minj custom a man who wanted a wife for himself or a clansman asked his mother's brother to supply one. If this man had a daughter who was not bespoken he could not refuse to give her to his nephew. Now Spirit could not claim Weeping for himself, as she was his cousin, but he could claim her for a clansman. If he himself wanted a wife he could ask Weeping's father to find him a Waga girl who was not related.

'I shall tell her' he continued 'that I want her to stay with the Kugika so that she can bend my legs for burial when I die.'

The Minj Agamp were traditionally buried in a sitting position with their knees touching their chins. It was the duty of a dead man's maternal cousin to break his knees to make this possible.

'Then' Now Spirit told me 'if Weeping tries to get away and go home to Nondugl I shall restrain her.'

3 Australian National University Archives: ANUA 440. 2013. Marie Reay collection (item list): 440:466: Myths and Legends, A Draft of a Paper by Reay entitled: Fiddling with the Future in False Creations: Standardised Dreams and Visions among the Kuma. Available at <http://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/marie-reay-collection> (accessed 26 February 2014).

We walked together on to the ceremonial ground where Original Woman, who had slept with Two Stay's wife, Apron, was already bathed with grease and decorated for her return. Big Insect, seeing her, went to get a gourd of pigs' grease to wash Weeping.

'If the girls don't want to stay' he said resignedly 'they won't stay. So let us bathe Weeping with pigs' grease and send them back.'

Two Stay heard him, and a wicked smile lit his face.

'Apron is good at capturing girls' he said slyly. 'Some of the women and some of the men can grab Weeping for you.'

Big Insect turned to his senior wife, Indoors, with a mischievous gleam in his eye.

'When the girl comes to be bathed with grease, Indoors,' he said in a conspiratorial whisper, 'hold her and say "Stay with me".'

A man of Big Insect's subclan told him that he had been talking with Weeping's mother and brother.

'They said "We'll tell her that Big Insect has gone to Minj and that we're tired of waiting for him to come back and bathe her with grease. We'll say that she can come home later with some of the Kugika who want to visit us. We'll be pretending, and just leave her with you"'. That's what they said.'

A crowd had gathered in the yard where Big Insect still stood holding the gourd of pigs' grease. When Weeping herself appeared, he made a speech that was designed to reassure her.

'Original Woman has been washed with grease and has gone' he said. 'I wanted to marry Weeping. Her father and her mother and her brothers told the interpreter Arrow at Minj that they wanted to give her to us, and Arrow said it would be all right.' Big Insect was referring to an interpreter who enjoyed the confidence of both the Minj Agamp themselves and the Government officers, and whom he and his clansmen were accustomed to consulting in order to predict official reactions to various courses of action. Arrow and other interpreters acted informally as legal advisers to the Minj Agamp.

'So we have been thinking a lot' Big Insect continued. 'But let us hurry and wash Weeping and decorate her and send her back with her father. She doesn't want to stay with us; she has said so. She has no need to be frightened of us. We don't kill girls and eat them as we eat pigs; we're not like the barbarians of Goroka, who we all know are cannibals. The girl may go when we have decorated her. But let us hurry' he joked 'in case she runs away first!'

The men and women stood ready to hold the girl and make her stay. One of the women addressed me in an excited whisper, 'Have you heard that we're going to capture Weeping?'

A girl of Big Insect's subclan brought a pandanus mat for Weeping to sit on while being decorated. Goodly screamed at her, 'Spread it neatly, or the girl won't be comfortable. When you're washed with grease, you want everything nice.'

The pigs' grease was rubbed into Weeping's skin until she gleamed. Goodly fastened two furry new aprons over the old one the girl was wearing. Mountain Tree handed over some goldlip shells to hang about his niece's throat. Others came forward with plumes, a headband sewn with *tambu* shells, some earrings of fur from the tree-kangaroo, and other decorations. These splendid gifts were really meant, as everyone knew, for Weeping's father and brothers; she would keep little for herself. As the dressing proceeded, the crowd began to disperse. Indoors had departed to tend a wayward pig. Nobody grasped Weeping's arm and said 'Stay with me.' The people who remained hung about quietly; I am certain they would have captured the girl if Big Insect had told them to do so, but he gave no such order. He looked thoughtfully after the party of Waga as they walked homeward with the girl who was nearly his bride.

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