

Chapter 3: A Girl is Marked

Black-bearded As If was an ageing hypochondriac who had neglected his gardens since his younger brother, Proud, had died some months ago. Proud had been a young man of fire and promise; so long as he had lived As If derived a certain prestige and respect from being his older brother and no one realized how fully the older man depended upon his initiative and labour. After Proud's death the true character of As If gradually revealed itself. He had married, many years earlier, a woman of Ngeni-Muruka clan who had given him two daughters and then died. Snailshell, the older girl, was twelve and she was about to participate in her first courting ceremony. Grass Woman was several years younger. The two girls lived with their father. When Proud died, As If lamented loudly and announced in tones of despair that he had nothing to live for because he had lost his wife and now his only remaining brother had died and left him bereft. He did not actually try to commit suicide, for when the other men of Penkup subclan saw how stricken he was they guarded him constantly in case he should hang himself from a tree and end his life through grief. The guard was relaxed as soon as it was clear that As If was reconciled to his brother's death. He continued, however, to complain, whenever an occasion arose, that he was a lonely man with no wife and no brother. The other Penkup men were glad to see him inherit Proud's widow, for they sympathized with him in his loss and loneliness. When As If sought their help in building a new house at Kondambi for the Pig Ceremonial, they gave their labour willingly and the house was soon completed.

The wife As If had inherited from his brother was a Konumberga woman by birth, so it was natural for him to assure the young people of his subclan that they could use his house for a courting ceremony at which they proposed to entertain young people belonging to that clan. But the rain that had begun at four o'clock that afternoon was heavier than ever in the evening and the Konumberga did not arrive. Some of the youths and girls who lived nearby had come to the house early, as soon as they had finished their evening meal. They were so eager to hold the courting ceremony that they waited for some hours before accepting the fact that the Konumberga were not coming.

Ko II had come with the Penkup girls to await the guests. Being Konumberga by birth and Kugika by long residence, she was in an ambiguous position. She treated the Kugika girls, especially those of Penkup subclan, as age-mates, but she was unequivocally a Konumberga girl in courting ceremonies and in her private love life. A Kugika boy could give love to her, and indeed everyone expected that she would eventually marry a Kugika man. She could find partners in courting ceremonies and in carrying leg with Kugika, not Konumberga, boys.

This afternoon she had been carrying leg with Good, a handsome and well-built young man of Kugika clan who was the acknowledged leader of the young men of Penkup subclan. Now they slept in each other's arms in the inner room of the house.

In the outer room two young men, Head and Konangil, sang courting songs with three young girls of their own clan, Kugika. One of the girls was Or Nothing, an age-mate of Ko II and, like her, well versed in the actions and songs of the courting ceremonies. The other two were As If's elder daughter, Snailshell, and her age-mate. This first courting ceremony was to mark the beginning of a new life for them, but there was no ritual to signify their transformation from girl children into nubile adolescents: they would simply begin to take part in the courting ceremonies and public petting parties that were the business of marriageable girls. They were learning the songs and the movements of the courting ceremony from Or Nothing and the two youths.

There was a lapse in the singing just after I arrived, and Konangil began to joke with the girls.

'Do you want to get married, Or Nothing?' he asked. 'Or do you want to go to courting ceremonies all your life? You want to get married, don't you?'

Or Nothing hung her head and did not answer.

'Or Nothing has been attending courting ceremonies for a year now' Konangil said, turning to me. I knew that it had been longer, but I did not shame him by correcting his statement. 'In another year she will be married, and a year after that she will have a child.'

Or Nothing simpered and started another song. As they all sang softly, she demonstrated to Snailshell and the other girl the movements they would soon have to perform, swaying their bodies and turning their heads first towards their partners and then, provocatively, away from them—in flickering firelight, looking as sinuous and devious as snakes slipping almost unseen through the bushes.

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A crowd of Penkup had gathered at Mountain Tree's house to hear a complaint that Blood had to make. Mountain Tree was not directly concerned, but he was head of the subdivision to which Blood belonged and so had a right to be present and represent him when necessary.

Blood, a little man with perpetual lines of anxiety on his face, gave a lengthy harangue. He began on a note of self-pity, stressing (as he often did) his misfortune in having no sons but only daughters, who were therefore his

particular concern. Now his eldest daughter, Ko I, was causing him to worry. She and her age-mate, Or Nothing, were continually carrying leg and he was continually cross with them. This judgment surprised me until I discovered that he was cross because they carried leg unvaryingly with the same man, without distributing their favours among many. Their latest offence was that they had dared to tell him that they wanted to marry Stony and Strong Stone, although they were both betrothed to other men. They were trying to upset the arrangements the men of Penkup had made for them, simply on account of the foolish whims that were common in young girls. A girl, as everyone knew, was like the branch of a casuarina tree: the wind blew this way, and it would follow; the wind blew the other way, and it would go that way instead. Ko I and Or Nothing were trying to decide their own future, deluded that they were responsible persons.

Blood's wife, Flying, and a man of his subdivision, Struck Arrow, added their comments. Blood had been cross with Ko I the day before, and she had run away and slept with one of his clansmen's wives. Early this morning she had run away into the bush but Struck Arrow had found her and brought her back.

Raggiana delivered a speech with an air of wisdom and authority. He said that it was unthinkable that the girls could marry men who had not been chosen for them. The brother of Or Nothing, Tail,¹ had promised to give her to a Konumberga man who lived some distance up the Minj River in exchange for the other man's sister, and this promise had to be honoured if Tail were to get a wife. Kobia, the brother of Go Insect, had betrothed Ko I and established his claim by giving Blood a pig. Kobia lived in adjacent Konumberga territory, but Go Insect lived with the rest of this family inside Kugika territory and acted as a go-between in arranging many marriages between the two clans. All had agreed, Raggiana said, that Ko I would be bathed in pigs' grease after the Pig Ceremonial was over and would be given to Go Insect for his brother.

Struck Arrow reiterated that Ko I wanted to marry Stony and Or Nothing wanted to marry Strong Stone. He thought it would be better to give the girls to their affianced husbands straight away, without waiting for the end of the Pig Ceremonial. They had had enough freedom, and should not be encouraged to think that it could last forever. It was time they both submitted to the discipline of marriage.²

1 Tail and a man named Head were age-mates who began life with the same given name. The new names to distinguish them sprang from their eating these particular parts of a possum they shared as children (see Strathern, Andrew, 1977, 'Melpa food-names as an expression of ideas on identity and substance', *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 86: 503-511).

2 'Freedom' and 'discipline' are not literal translations of what Struck Arrow said. He used circumlocutions contrasting what it was fitting for the two girls to do now and what it was fitting for them to submit to later.

Several of the men contributed to the discussion. One said that as the Konumberga men had betrothed Or Nothing and killed a pig and given it to the Kugika, she should not carry leg with other men. This was the only time I ever heard this view expressed; everyone else had told me, both spontaneously and in answer to my queries, that betrothal was no impediment to a girl's participation in courting ceremonies, public petting, and private love life: the only difference was that she now actively avoided carrying leg with the betrothed himself—not because the avoidance was prescribed by the men but because she herself felt that she had a lifetime of marriage in which to be intimate with him and only a limited time, before her marriage, to be intimate with other men. No one, however, corrected the man who had uttered this unconventional opinion and I am inclined to think the others took the statement as referring to a girl's habit of carrying leg with one particular man instead of distributing her favours among many.

Raggiana strolled through the crowd, talking quietly.

'I have something to say to you' he said to Mountain Tree, Blood and Struck Arrow. He retired to Mountain Tree's cooking grove, behind a screen of trees.

Big Insect was giving an address on the differences between marriage now and before the white man came. Before, he said, if a man wanted to marry he would simply capture the girl without bothering to betroth her first. (Perhaps this did happen in fact, but there was certainly a clear rule requiring formal betrothal.) Now it was the custom to give a betrothal payment. Now girls married men with whom they had carried leg instead of the men their fathers had chosen for them.

Mountain Tree, Blood, and Struck Arrow followed Raggiana into the cooking grove. Raggiana nodded to Blood, and the worried-looking little man began to speak.

'Ko I told me that she had a perfect right to carry leg with Stony' he said. 'Kobia had promised to give me a betrothal payment as soon as he came back from his trading expedition. He has been back for some time now, and he hasn't given me the payment yet. That is what Ko I has been thinking about.'

Ko I, I thought, is growing into an astute woman. I had no doubt that her unwillingness to marry Kobia was based simply on her overwhelming preference for Stony. But she knew that the only arguments that were likely to impress her father and his clansmen were those that touched their own interests in her marriage: the acquisition of material gain, and the cementing of friendly alliances. She was the oldest of the girls who were still going to courting ceremonies. For years now she had supported her age-mates in fights against rivals from other clans; for years she had helped her clan brothers by entertaining their honoured guests and by refusing to entertain any who had insulted or fallen out with them; for years she had identified herself proudly as a girl of the Kugika, the clan

that had declined in numbers but, small though it had been in recent years, had vanquished its worst enemies. It is likely that she identified herself so closely with her clansmen that Kobia's failure to provide the betrothal payment had genuinely offended her, though his giving it would have been against her own present interests. But I could not help admiring her astuteness in appealing to her clansmen's greed for wealth. Blood's report that Ko I was concerned with securing a betrothal payment for them so impressed Raggiana that he announced, 'Ko I must be called, so that she can speak for herself.'

Struck Arrow called out for Ko I to come and dismissed a crowd of small boys who accompanied her through curiosity. Ko I's mother, Flying, stayed with her. The older woman's demeanour suggested that she knew she had not been invited to be present at the discussion but was determined to stay until she was told to leave.

'Kobia hasn't given your father the payment' Raggiana said to Ko I, 'so you are not inclined to marry him and want to go to another man. Is that correct?'

'Yes' said Ko I sullenly.

'If Go Insect and Kobia give the payment' Flying interposed, 'Ko I will behave herself and she will wait and marry Kobia.'

Mountain Tree silenced her with a gesture, and said 'We men are dealing with this.'

Big Insect had finished his speech about the changing marriage and betrothal customs of his people, and he strode into the cooking grove in time to hear what Flying had said.

'If they give the payment' he repeated 'Ko I will behave herself and marry Kobia. You may remember' he continued 'that True House marked Go Insect's mother for another man, just as Go Insect marked Ko I for Kobia; but then he married her himself. The other man killed one of us. Bloodshed, strife between friends: that is what will happen if Ko I marries someone besides Kobia.'

There was an uncomfortable silence while the men remembered the incident and its aftermath. Go Insect's mother was a Kugika woman; his father, True House, was a Konumberga man but not the man to whom she had been betrothed. The Kugika had condoned the marriage, since True House was willing to live with them and give them substantial help in addition to enabling a beloved daughter to stay close to her people after her marriage. But the disappointed fiancé had tried to claim his bride; a brawl developed, and a Kugika man was killed. Generally a man's clansmen would avenge his death by killing, as soon as possible, someone from the clan of the murderer. But Kugika and Konumberga clans were 'as brothers'. There had been so much intermarriage between them

that there was scarcely a member of the small Kugika clan who did not have close relatives among the Konumbuga. This death had never been avenged: the debt of blood could never be repaid without damaging the Kugika's valued friendship with their powerful neighbours.

Blood addressed his daughter loudly, so that all the assembled company could hear: 'Shall we wash you with grease now and give you to Kobia, or shall we wait until the Pig Ceremonial is over?'

No one expected Ko I to answer, and the men agreed that it might be better to give her to Kobia quickly. But Ko I herself spoke.

'I am thinking of the payment' she said, to attract their attention. 'I shall wait until the Pig Ceremonial is over. If Kobia gives the payment I'll behave myself and not carry leg with the other man. But I would rather marry Stony.'

Big Insect and Struck Arrow reminded her that if she married someone else Kobia would resent it and there would be bloodshed and killing.

'Before' Ko I told them, 'Stony told Blood and Struck Arrow that he wanted to marry me. He promised to give them plenty of pay when he came back from the coast at the end of his term as a labourer. But Blood and Struck Arrow refused. They said they wanted to give me to Kobia. Now that Kobia's payment hasn't appeared, I like to carry leg with Stony. At the time of the Pig Ceremonial there is plenty of pay about, and yet Kobia hasn't given you the payment he promised.'

'To mark a girl isn't enough without paying' Mountain Tree said dubiously. 'When Go Insect comes, we'll tell him we want plenty of pay quickly.'

'Ko I can't just go and marry as she likes' Big Insect stated. 'We shall wash her with grease and give her to the man we choose. Ko I is silly, carrying leg and getting fond of a man who is not her betrothed.'

'When we kill the pigs at the end of the ceremonial' Raggiana said 'we'll wash Ko I with grease and give her to Kobia. When Go Insect comes, we'll tell him we want a large betrothal payment now.'

Big Insect made an impatient gesture.

'Let us wash Ko I with grease and give her to Go Insect when he comes' he suggested. 'Don't wait for the pig-killing.'

'Yes' Blood agreed, 'let us wash her with grease and give her to Go Insect when he comes. This morning I was very sad. All my brothers are dead, and my daughter is carrying leg with the wrong man. I don't want to wait for the pig-killing. Let's get it over.'

‘When Go Insect comes’ Big Insect resumed ‘we’ll tell him to take Ko I. We’ll put her inside her mother’s house and wash her with grease.... When the Konumberga killed one of our men because of Go Insect’s mother, they did not give us enough compensation. They know about it, and they will have to give us plenty of pay when they marry this Kugika girl.’

There was much discussion of the arguments already mentioned. Finally Big Insect agreed that as Raggiana wanted to wait for the pig-killing they should do so. Raggiana looked pleased, for he had not expected his brother to support him. I wondered cynically whether Big Insect was ceding a point in order to win Raggiana’s support on some other issue affecting the subclan. But I knew he was fond of Ko I and he may have had the sentimental motive of wishing to delay her departure from Kondambi.

The men in the cooking grove turned expectantly when the young Konumberga man, Go Insect, arrived. Tall and graceful, he wore a grubby red *lap-lap* fastened with a leather belt, instead of the long net apron, dark with pigs’ grease, which was the uniform of the others. Go Insect had worked as a labourer at the coast, and more recently he had been a cargo-boy on the Government Station. He listened carefully while the Kugika told him of the discussion they had had.

‘Go now’ Raggiana told him ‘and get the pay. Ko I will stay with us until the Pig Ceremonial is over.’

Ko I began to stroll away, but Big Insect called her back.

‘Don’t go’ he instructed her. ‘We have to deal with Or Nothing now.’

The men began to discuss Or Nothing. They summoned her to their presence and told her that she must not carry leg with Strong Stone while she was betrothed to another man. At the pig-killing, they assured her, they would wash her with pigs’ grease and give her to the Konumberga.

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Two months later, the dancing in the Pig Ceremonial was at its height, and scrambling on top of one of the long-houses for a better view one looked down upon a sea of gaudy plumes. The Penkup men stopped dancing when they saw that Ko I was carrying leg with Stony, the young man she had wanted to marry. They told her to stop. Ko I said sulkily that she wanted to marry Stony. She walked away. Go Insect, whose role in betrothing her to Kobia gave him a special interest in these events, had helped the Penkup men to separate her from her lover and he watched her to see where she was going. He realized that she had gone in the direction of the Minj River, the stream that flowed swiftly through the deep gully dividing Kondambi from the Government Station. Sensing what

was in her mind, he ran after her and dragged her back. Ko I protested that life had no meaning for her if she could not marry Stony and that, as Go Insect had guessed, she wanted to throw herself into the river.

In the evening, Tail found his sister Or Nothing carrying leg with Strong Stone in one of the Penkup long-houses. He ran forward with an angry cry and struck her. Strong Stone ran away and went home to Konmil. Tail continued to hit Or Nothing about the head.

Dog walked on to the ceremonial ground and saw them struggling. He was a handsome young man, strong and well-built, and Tail, who was a few years younger, looked a mere boy beside him. Dog had a special interest in Or Nothing. Although he belonged to the Koimamkup subclan, he was her half-brother: their mother had been wife to their fathers in turn. Now he attacked Tail for hitting her. He made it clear that he intervened because of his blood relationship with the girl, not because he agreed with her view. He tore Tail's waistband and bark corset off him, while Or Nothing sat crying on the ground.

Several Penkup men arrived and separated the two young men. Head and Tail tried to drag Or Nothing away and take her to her home, but the girl sat stolidly on the ground. One of the men succeeded in grasping her arms in a strong grip and, handing one arm to another man, was able to pull her away. Tail found a slim switch of bamboo and threatened to beat Or Nothing with it if she did not go quietly. He struck her with it whenever she tried to break away from her captors on the journey home.

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Another month passed. Then Tail told me that he had broken off his betrothal and taken back the payment he had made. The Konumberga girl up the river had wanted to marry him and he had promised to give Or Nothing to her brother in exchange. But now he was cross because his betrothed had been carrying leg constantly with another man, who had kept her for a few days then bathed her with grease and sent her home. Tail did not want to marry her now. Later, he said, if he were to find a girl he wanted to marry he would give Or Nothing to her brother. If Or Nothing herself wanted to marry someone, it would have to be a man who could provide a sister to marry Tail.

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Snailshell had been attending courting ceremonies for about two months now. She was a slim, awkward girl, with none of the dimpled roundness of Ko I and Or Nothing, and her characteristic expression was a vacant stare. She helped to swell the numbers at the courting ceremonies, but no one had composed a song

about her yet. One of the favourite songs at the courting ceremonies of the time was one which told of an old man coming from the east, seeing Or Nothing, and deciding to stay.

As If's other daughter, Grass Woman, was looking forward to attending courting ceremonies in a year or two. It was a shock to the two girls when their father told them that he had arranged for them both to be betrothed to the Konumberga.

'I am only a little child!' Snailshell protested. 'I have not been attending courting ceremonies long. I can't marry Konumberga Vomit. He is an old man, and I won't marry him.'

As If did not argue with her. There could be no argument. Snailshell would have to marry Vomit, for As If could repay his debt to the Konumberga man in no other way. He was a poor man, and all his brothers had died. He himself had recently been ill, and the men of Penkup subclan (aggrieved with him for being lazy and begging from them) neglected him. Vomit, his Konumberga friend, had faithfully nursed him through his illness, even carrying his excreta out of the house. He had no way of reimbursing Vomit for his kindness, other than promising him his daughter in marriage. In fact he had a double debt to Vomit, for his father had been wounded in warfare and Vomit's father had nursed him in the same way. When Vomit suggested that Grass Woman would be a fitting bride for his brother, As If found himself concurring.

'You are giving too many girls to the Konumberga!' Snailshell cried. 'They have only given you one.' This was the wife As If had inherited from his dead brother. 'My mother belonged to a different clan, and her ghost will come and make you sick.'

'Stop that talk!' As If growled, rubbing his beard.

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Seven months had passed since the meeting in Mountain Tree's cooking grove. The dancing in the Pig Ceremonial had become more spectacular, but the Kugika had not yet killed their pigs. One morning there was a stir on the ceremonial ground. Konangil appeared panting at my door and told me to come quickly.

'Today we are giving Ko I and Snailshell and Or Nothing to the Konumberga' he said. 'Yesterday Ko I went to Stony, and some of the Kugika pulled her back. All the girls have been playing up. Ko I bosses the other girls, so when we give her we are going to give them all.'

There was a great gathering of Penkup people in Mountain Tree's long-house. Big Insect addressed the crowd at length, saying that the Kugika were giving Ko I and Snailshell to the Konumberga Pipikanim and Or Nothing to the Konumberga Gaimakanim. He told Blood and Tail to get some feathers to decorate the girls.

Ko I and Or Nothing were crying. Snailshell sat near them, looking bewildered but apparently unmoved. Ko I and Or Nothing laughed faintly when Big Insect made an obscene pun on the word for 'drum'. He was referring to a northern custom Or Nothing had adopted: a girl's direct approach to a man when he was dancing, and snatching his drum as a signal that she wanted to carry leg with him.

The men guarded the girls closely. Ko I tried to enter a yard beside the long-house, but Konumberga Vomit, Snailshell's betrothed, blocked her way. She waited until Vomit's attention was diverted and entered the yard, but some of the other Konumberga men pulled her back.

Tail grumbled that Ko I had given Stony her decorations, including a goldlip shell of his own. Stony had run away when the Penkup arrived to take Ko I back yesterday, and Tail knew that his goldlip shell would never be returned to him.

'Ko I has been attending courting ceremonies for a long time' one man ventured, 'so it would be better to give her to the man of her choice. Snailshell is a different matter. She is rather simple-minded, so she can go to the man who has marked her.'

No one heeded this interesting opinion, for the man who had voiced it belonged to Koimamkup subclan. This was a Penkup matter; it was none of his concern.

Tail had brought some ornaments with which he intended to decorate Or Nothing, and he fetched a gourd of pigs' grease with which to bathe her.

'No, no!' she cried. 'I don't want to marry the Gaimakanim.'

Tail held Or Nothing's arms and called to the Konumberga Gaimakanim men while she squirmed in his grasp.

'Take her now' he commanded them. 'I'll bring her back tomorrow and grease her and decorate her. She is too determined now.'

The Konumberga Gaimakanim took her from her brother and dragged her from Kondambi screaming.

Ko I and Snailshell were prisoners in the little yard of Blood's house. Go Insect and Struck Arrow held Ko I, and As If and Konumberga Vomit held Snailshell. Guards stood at all the gates. Both girls struggled when the men tried to fasten new waistbands on them, and Ko I trampled hers on the ground. At last the

men managed to fasten the waistbands, new bunches of cords, and some goldlip shells. The girls were crying with grief and frustrated rage. Snailshell was biting and kicking her tormentors, while Ko I strained away from the men and sat down violently in an effort to wrench herself free. At last their struggles ceased, and the wives of Struck Arrow and As If rubbed pigs' grease on to their skin.

Blood made a long and tearful speech. He said that he had no sons, only daughters, and Ko I was the eldest of these. He had wanted to give her to the Konumbuga Pipikanim after the pig-killing, and would have done so if she had behaved properly. But she had made trouble, so he had to give her to the Konumbuga now instead. His speech was so moving to the hearers that both Go Insect and Tail wept.

Ko I began to struggle again, though Go Insect and Struck Arrow still held her firmly. Raggiana pointed his spear at her and said angrily, 'If I weren't afraid of going to jail when I want to be free to kill my pigs, I would run you through with this for going to another man when you are already betrothed.'

The two girls submitted to having their faces painted with decorative designs. A strip of red and yellow chevrons adorned each side of Ko I's broad forehead, and another ran from the outer corner of each eye down to her mouth, with the rest of her forehead and her cheeks painted dark green. The slant of these strips of colour made Ko I look much more amiable than she was evidently feeling. Snailshell's eyes looked fearfully from between broad bands of colour painted over with contrasting spots.

'Look!' Tail cried suddenly. 'There's Or Nothing.'

The girl's slight, rounded figure dashed past the long-houses and beyond the ceremonial ground in the general direction of Gibbis, where Or Nothing's family lived. Big Insect, Tail, and Go Insect rushed after her and brought her back. The Konumbuga Gaimakanim men she had eluded were just arriving.

'Don't try to escape again' Big Insect warned her. Then he turned cheerfully to the others. 'Now we shall wash her with grease and decorate her.'

The men led Or Nothing to the yard of Blood's house, where Ko I and Snailshell were sitting on pandanus mats, fully decorated except for the plumes that were to adorn their heads. Or Nothing was crying. She grasped the railings of the fence, but Go Insect prised her fingers loose. Big Insect warned the men to guard the girls and prevent them from escaping, but not to hit them, as the pigs still had to be killed and he did not want anyone to go to jail. Tail, who had reached forward to strike Or Nothing, drew back when Big Insect spoke.

The men and their wives removed Or Nothing's beads and goldlip shell and rubbed grease on to her skin. They polished her with a folded bark cloth.

Or Nothing, still crying, wiped her eyes with the grubby red handkerchief the women had taken from her head. The women brought new garments, and the men brought ornaments. By the time the men were hanging the sixth goldlip shell around her throat, Or Nothing was taking a tearful interest in the proceedings and holding a trade mirror belonging to one of the young men.

Now that all the girls were decorated, Ko I's mother and Or Nothing's stepmother began to cry as they would for a dead relative or a favourite pig. Ko I's mother shrieked and wailed in a virtuoso demonstration of grief. She dashed inside her house and rolled in the dead ashes of the fire. Then she followed the crowd who were taking the girls on to the ceremonial ground.

The Konumberga sat waiting. Big Insect greeted them as 'fathers-in-law', for two of his wives were Konumberga women. The Penkup men formed two lines between which the girls had to walk.

Snailshell was the first to walk along the aisle while Big Insect made a speech about her. She had not been attending courting ceremonies long, he said, but she had been misbehaving so the Penkup wanted to give her to the Konumberga at the same time as they gave the other girls. He stressed particularly that Snailshell's mother was dead and that her father, having only one other child, was bereft by her departure. Then Big Insect called out for Ko I to come. He handed Snailshell to Go Insect, who led her across to the Konumberga.

Ko I walked reluctantly between the two rows of men, and Big Insect took her hand.

'Ko I has stayed with us a long time' he said sadly. 'She has attended courting ceremonies longer than any of the other Penkup girls, so we shall miss her. Her father has other daughters, and Ko I has stayed to look after her little sisters. Now she is leaving us.'

Ko I's four little sisters, I remembered, had seen little of her during the year I had known them all. Up to the time her attachment to Stony changed her ways she had devoted herself to furthering her clansmen's interests in getting the best advantage for them from the arrangement of courting ceremonies, public petting parties, attraction and entertainment of visitors—the legitimate exercise of an adolescent girl's power over men. But looking after her little sisters could have had another meaning for Big Insect besides the obvious one. As the oldest of the Penkup's nubile girls, she had 'looked after' or led her 'sisters' or subclan age-mates and seen that they acted in their clansmen's interest too.

Big Insect burst into tears, and his shoulders heaved with great sobs as he handed Ko I to Go Insect. Or Nothing came quickly down the aisle. Big Insect, who was still holding one of Ko I's hands in one of his, took Or Nothing's hand in the other.

'Or Nothing has not been with us as long as Ko I has' he said, 'but it has been a long time. We do not like losing her. Look after Or Nothing well. If she is not happy she will come back to us. Look after her well. Her own mother is dead and Tail's mother is crying because she is going.'

Big Insect gave Go Insect both the girls at once, and Go Insect took them to where the Konumberga were waiting.

The ceremonial ground is a public place, and many of the Koimamkup people had gathered to watch the proceedings. They huddled together while the Konumberga men passed with the three brides, and they discussed the day's events with interest.

'We do not follow the customs of the Penkup' they said self-righteously. 'Our girls can wait until they want to marry. They can certainly wait until we kill the pigs, and if they want to stay longer they may do so. We certainly shan't grab them and fasten them like fowls when we want to give them to another clan.'

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The next afternoon, Or Nothing ran away and hid in the bush on her way back to Kugika territory. Some Konumberga men found her and took her to one of their wives' houses, but she ran away again in another direction. Eventually, she was discovered and taken to her husband, a long way up the Minj River. Tail told me he did not think she would run away again.

Another day passed. Late at night, some young men returned from a courting ceremony at Konmil and brought the news that Ko I and Snailshell had escaped. They thought the girls had gone north of the Wahgi, where Snailshell had a lover, but soon the two girls arrived at Kondambi. The Kugika Penkup gave them back to the Konumberga. More than a week later, Snailshell ran away and sought refuge with her mother's brother, a man of the neighbouring Ngeni-Muruka clan. He brought her to Kondambi to interview As If.

'Snailshell is only very young' he said 'and you have given her to the Konumberga already. She does not belong to Ko I's age-set; she is much younger. You want to get the Konumberga's payment, but you haven't given us our payment yet as compensation for the death of Snailshell's mother. Have your old enemies the Kondiga routed the Kugika and burnt all your houses, that you are so anxious to give little girls to the Konumberga?'

As If objected that he had pressing obligations towards the Konumberga, and told his brother-in-law how Vomit's father had nursed his father and Vomit had later nursed him.

'You see' he said 'I am obliged to give Snailshell to the Konumberga. I cannot do anything else.'

'Let us go to Minj' Snailshell suggested 'and settle this at the Court of Native Affairs. I don't want to marry.'

The Ngeniga man left and Snailshell stayed with As If. Good Bird and Struck Arrow came on to the ceremonial ground and, hearing that Snailshell had come back, they went to As If's house. Snailshell and As If were inside.

'Snailshell!' Struck Arrow shouted. 'You must go back to the Konumberga at once!'

'I don't want to go back' Snailshell replied. 'The Konumberga have a lot of girls who are really big, with breasts that hang down, whereas the Kugika give the Konumberga little girls with breasts that have scarcely begun to develop.'

'Come outside!' Good Bird commanded.

'No!' Snailshell replied.

Struck Arrow lounged against the fence and let Good Bird do the talking. The two men had been visiting another clan, and they wore the long black plumes of the Princess Stephanie Bird of Paradise on their heads. They did not want to risk breaking their plumes by crawling through the low doorway into the house.

'Go back to the Konumberga at once' Good Bird commanded 'before we have to go in and grab you.'

'No' Snailshell objected, 'I shall stay here.'

'If you stay here' As If's voice rumbled from inside the dwelling, 'whose house are you going to sleep in? Certainly not mine.'

Good Bird looked around for some Konumberga women who were married to Kugika men, and saw Indoors (the headman's senior wife) in company with Good's wife, Talking Woman. He called them over and sent them into the house. As If tried to push Snailshell through the doorway while the two women pulled her by the arms. He slapped her hard. The shock of the blow released Snailshell from the women's grip. She seized a length of firewood from the shelf above the fire and hit her father. Indoors and Talking Woman helped As If to wrest the stick from the girl's hand. She seized another stick and hit As If again before Indoors took it from her. Talking Woman and As If pulled Snailshell through

the doorway, urged on by Good Bird's cries. 'You are a couple of strong women. You are not weaklings, and she is only little. Hurry up!' Snailshell clung to the fence, but Good Bird and Struck Arrow pulled her away. She went without resistance on to the ceremonial ground, but suddenly darted inside one of the Penkup long-houses.

The Konumbuga man who had been guarding Snailshell on Vomit's behalf had arrived at Kondambi, hearing that she had gone there. Seeing her escape from the two Kugika men, he shook his head sadly and said, 'She doesn't like me. I can't do anything with her.'

Big Insect's second wife, Goodly, who was also Konumbuga by birth, was inside the long-house tending her fire when Snailshell dashed in. Goodly grabbed the girl's arm as As If arrived. Together, they struggled with Snailshell.

'Your father has a sore leg' Goodly reproached Snailshell. 'He is sick and will die soon. Aren't you sorry for him?'

'I am only a little child' Snailshell objected, 'not a big girl.'

Eventually, Goodly and Indoors led her away to Konmil. Good Bird called to the Konumbuga man who was following them, telling him not to let Ko I and Snailshell get together and talk in case they planned to escape again.

The excitement subsided on the ceremonial ground. Then news came that Or Nothing had run away from her husband and was staying with her mother's brother, halfway between her husband's home and Kondambi.

A fortnight after Big Insect had given Ko I to the Konumbuga, the Pipikanim brought her to Kondambi. Kobia and his clansmen were now ready to give the marriage payment.

The Penkup bathed Ko I in pigs' grease and decorated her splendidly. They also decorated Go Insect's mother, Bluebell, who had been a Kugika woman, and her daughter.

The Konumbuga had brought three cooked pigs. Go Insect handed pork-fat around to the Penkup, and everyone feasted. Then Big Insect handed the women to Go Insect, who led them over to the Konumbuga as he had previously led Ko I with Snailshell and Or Nothing. The Konumbuga women embraced Ko I and Bluebell and [space in original] and made them sit with them and eat some more pork.

The Penkup were pleased with the marriage payment the Konumbuga had brought. Plumes waved and ornaments dangled from a heart-shaped bamboo frame attached to a pole which the men stood in the ground. It was a very

satisfactory payment. The Penkup let it stand there for several hours before pulling it down and dismantling it to distribute the valuables, to remind them what good friends the Konumbuga were.

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Or Nothing came back to Kondambi a week later. Her mother's brother, himself a Konumbuga man, had been angry with the Kugika for giving her to his clan so soon. He made them promise that she could attend courting ceremonies again and be considered unmarried.

'Snailshell will be angry when she hears about this' Tail predicted. 'Or Nothing attended courting ceremonies for a long time before Snailshell began.'

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Two Konumbuga girls had come to stay with Kugika men and carry leg with them. Both the men belonged to the Penkup subclan, so all the women of this group contributed fruit and vegetables to present to the girls. Big Insect and the other men arranged the food in three generous piles. Ko I, who had come to visit her parents and was watching the piling of the food with interest, knew that one of the heaps of food was for her.

'Ko I was a girl we hated to lose' Big Insect said at the end of his speech about the Konumbuga girls. 'But fortunately she has married a Konumbuga man and is living nearby, so we still see her and she can come to visit us. Look, she is with us today. This food is for you, Ko I.'

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But Ko I was not yet reconciled to her uncongenial marriage. A month later she and Snailshell ran away again. Big Insect, Raggiana, and Mountain Tree went northward across the Wahgi River to find them, and the girls came sullenly back to Kondambi. Raggiana announced that the Penkup should beat the girls before giving them back to the Konumbuga. Go Insect and Vomit, who had arrived to take the girls back, agreed that they should be punished.

A man of Ko I's subdivision, Together Little, cut two bamboo switches and gave one to As If. As If hit Snailshell four times on the buttocks. Snailshell did not resist, but she put her hand out, with the palm facing As If, to urge him to stop. He did not hit her further. Snailshell stood quietly with tears coursing down her cheeks. Together Little hit Ko I, who was sitting on the ground. She screamed, but he continued. When he had hit her a dozen times, she put up her hand as Snailshell had done and he desisted. But when he was passing behind her to take his place beside Mountain Tree and the other men he hit her a few more times.

The men had a lively discussion, trying to decide what the girls had intended to do. Their natural suspicions were that Ko I and Snailshell had intended going to their lovers, but, though Snailshell had a lover on the other side of the Wahgi, it was well known that Ko I's lover was Stony, who lived nearby. Finally, the men agreed that the girls were probably speaking the truth when they said that they wanted to stay unmarried until their breasts dropped.

Or Nothing's father delivered a long tirade against the three girls the Penkup had given to the Konumbuga. Or Nothing had heard that her new husband was taking another wife, and she had run away to a Tengelap man. Tail looked on without saying anything. It was true that Or Nothing had not been seen that day, but rumours were prevalent. Goodly rebuked Snailshell severely, stressing the facts that Snailshell's mother was dead and that Vomit had cared for As If.

Big Insect delivered an oration, rebuking the two girls and expressing his disappointment with Ko I. He said that they must stay in their own houses and must not visit Kondambi again.

'But they may need to get food from their gardens' Go Insect's mother objected.

'Very well' Big Insect agreed, 'they may come to Kondambi for that purpose alone, so long as they go back promptly.'

Vomit took Together Little's switch and threatened to hit Ko I if she did not hurry up and go back with them. Ko I, who was sobbing convulsively, took no notice. Snailshell cried in sympathy. Big Insect was plainly sorry for Ko I, but he could do nothing.

Raggiana ridiculed the two girls.

'Did you smell your menstrual blood and find it good?' he cried. 'Is that why you want to walk about?'

Snailshell protested that they had not gone to any other men: they simply wanted to stay unmarried until their breasts fell.

'We walked about nothing' she said, meaning that they had walked about with no ulterior motive.

Go Insect, who was sitting at Snailshell's feet, laughed and flicked her bunch of cords with his hand.

'Did you really walk about nothing' he asked, meaning with no clothes on, 'or did you wear your cords?'

The men and the women exchanged other ribald jokes and puns within hearing of the two girls.

Later in the day, Blood and his wife, Flying, came back from visiting relatives and learned what had happened. They were angry with Together Little for beating their daughter, Ko I, and they tried to find him. He was not at Kondambi, so they went to Mountain Tree.

'You are the big man of Kumnga subdivision' Blood said to him. 'You needn't have let that happen.'

Mountain Tree listened to the protestations of Blood and Flying, and then he told them that he had gone across the Wahgi River to find the girls and had brought them back. He had thought that they had run away to their lovers, but they merely objected to being married.

'But I am Ko I's father' Blood protested. 'Only a girl's father may hit her.'

'Ko I deserved it' Mountain Tree said. 'I think you will find that all the Penkup agree.'

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Tail was looking dispirited, and I asked him what was wrong.

'It's Or nothing' he said.

A man of Waga clan had taken Or Nothing to carry leg in Waga territory. She had stayed there for a couple of days, and then had said, 'I don't want to go back to Kondambi. I shall stay here and marry you.'

Or Nothing might have expected some trouble about her own clansmen's attitude to such a marriage, but nothing had prepared her for her lover's own reaction. I myself have never heard of any other man among the Agamp who spoke to a marriageable girl as this man did according to Tail's account.

'I don't want to marry you' he told her simply.

Or Nothing was infuriated.

'You have deceived me!' she cried. 'All right, I shall go to another man and look after his pigs, and you can watch me.'

Or Nothing went to Mountain Tree's brother-in-law, Herb, one of the men who had approached Tail about marrying her.

'Now I am annoyed too' Tail told me. 'Or Nothing has married Herb, and I wanted to exchange her for a bride for myself.'

He said that he was so annoyed that he would not go to see her, even to bring her back.

As we talked, we saw two young women coming from the direction of Konmil, bent beneath the weight of their bulging net bags. They came nearer, and we could see that they were Ko I and Snailshell. They paused to speak to us in subdued voices. They were taking a load of green vegetables to Bluebell, Ko I told us.

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