

Chapter 5: Lothario Gains a Bride¹

The two youths Head and Tail were age-mates belonging to Dambakanim subdivision of Penkup subclan. They had the same bestowed name, but they were such close associates that the use of the original name for both of them would have been confusing. They had gained the distinguishing nicknames in their childhood, when Head had eaten the head of a possum and Tail had eaten its tail. Now they were handsome young men who spent much time attending courting ceremonies and carrying leg with girls. Neither was married yet, though Tail had tried several times to obtain a bride for himself in exchange for his sister, Or Nothing.

Head had lived all his life with Kugika clan, but he was not Kugika by descent. His father had belonged to Mindjinga, a clan that had died out. This man and his brother had married Kugika Dambakanim women and had settled with their wives' relatives. Head grew up as a member of Kugika clan. His father had died, but his father's brother, Sickbill, behaved as a member of Kugika clan, Penkup subclan, and Dambakanim subdivision.

As the Pig Ceremonial progressed, several girls came to stay with Head—to carry leg, be washed with pigs' grease and be returned to their brothers with plumes and shells. One evening, Song arrived. She had carried leg with Head, and now she said that she wanted to stay with him as his wife. She begged him not to bathe her with pigs' grease and return her to her brothers. Song belonged to Ngeniga clan, and Head knew she was betrothed to a man of Bambilngya, a clan in the extreme north of the Wahgi Valley. He was uneasy, for he knew that her relatives would object to her going to the Kugika.

Three days passed, then Vain Tears, Song's step-father, visited the Kugika clutching his bow and a bundle of arrows. He demanded to know why the Penkup had not bathed his daughter with grease and returned her to the Ngeniga. If the Penkup did not give her back to him, he said, he would shoot an arrow into her side. The Penkup replied that Song did not want to go back.

'The Bambilngya marked Song when she was a child of about four years,' Vain Tears told them, 'though they did not give the betrothal payment till recently. I was on a long trading expedition when a European came to Pugamil to take Song to live with him. He gave her brothers ten goldlip shells and some shovels, which they accepted, and she went with him. When I returned, I took the pay back to the European and demanded Song's return. I wanted Bird of Paradise

1 Appendix B contains some of Reay's fieldnotes relating to Chapter 5.

plumes, which I knew I could get from the Bambilngya. Soon afterwards, the Bambilngya gave me the betrothal payment, which included two Raggiana plumes. I showed Song the pay, and she didn't say anything.'

'That's not true,' one of Head's age-mates stated. 'Song saw the payment and said that she did not want to marry the Bambilngya man. She wanted to marry Head, so she ran away to him when her father received the pay from the Bambilngya.'

'I shall come to Kondambi again tomorrow,' Vain Tears said. 'Big Insect and Raggiana will decide what is to be done. If they are not willing to send Song back to us, I shall complain to the Court of Native Affairs.'

He came back the next day, still clutching his bow and arrows. A crowd gathered on the ceremonial ground to hear what was happening.

'I want to speak to Song,' Vain Tears said, 'and then I shall go.'

'You can't speak to Song,' Big Insect replied firmly. 'She herself has chosen to come to this man, and you can do nothing about it.'

A Ngeniga man who had come with Vain Tears complained that another Ngeniga girl had run away to the Kugika a long time ago and she was still married to the Kugika. He said that they had taken the case to the Court of Native Affairs and had also fought with hatchets. If Song were to stay with the Kugika, the same thing would happen.

Big Insect wanted Song to stay, but Raggiana advised Head to bathe her with pigs' grease and give her back to the Ngeniga.

'You will get her in the end,' he said wisely. 'She will run away after they give her to the Bambilngya, and she will come back to you.'

Defecating In-Law, a Burikup man who had a Ngeniga wife and associated closely with the Ngeniga, had come along to support Vain Tears. Now he began to cry loudly.

'When the Ngeniga gave us pay for a woman recently,' he wailed, 'they gave my little son a small Princess Stephanie plume and that is all. He didn't want a little black plume; he wanted a big red one. I'm sorry for my little son, and I don't feel very kindly towards the Ngeniga.'

'Song's brother wants to exchange her for a bride for himself,' a Koimamkup man said, grinning. 'If another girl goes to him, he can have her.'

Defecating In-Law repeated his lament about the small plume the Ngeniga had given his little son.

‘The Ngeniga and the Kugika do not fight,’ a Ngeniga man intervened. ‘Later, when we give you the marriage payment for the last woman you gave us, you will realize that we are not enemies. Now you seem to be deaf. This afternoon you will recover from your deafness and hear what I am saying. Then you can bring the girl and let her go back with her father.’

‘When the Ngeniga came here to Kondambi to dance with the Kugika,’ another Ngeniga man said, ‘Song wanted to sleep here, but we wouldn’t let her. We wanted her to come with us the next day to Konmil, where we were to dance with the Konumbuga. You think, Song. If you want to stay with Tobacco Woman, your ‘sister’ who is married to a Kugika man, say so. If you don’t want to stay, come with your father. The Kugika cannot force you to stay.’

‘The Bambilngya brought pay for me and made me think,’ Song replied. ‘My mother’s people aren’t Bambilngya. If they were my mother’s people, I could stay with them. I have a ‘sister’ here with the Kugika, so I want to stay here.’

‘The white man brought ten goldlip shells and ten shovels,’ Vain Tears reiterated. ‘He said he wanted to buy Song. I said I didn’t want this pay. I wanted Bird of Paradise plumes, so I told him to take the pay back. Then the Bambilngya gave me Bird of Paradise plumes for the girl. Don’t let’s stay here talking. Come back now.’

‘Don’t get angry,’ Defecating In-Law interposed. ‘Let’s settle the matter and go.’

‘We have not many men,’ Vain Tears said. ‘Only two men and myself have come. Our throats are sore from talking.’

‘The girl comes,’ Big Insect said laughingly, ‘and you have talked yourselves hoarse. We haven’t, because we haven’t anything to say to you’.

‘If you want to stay,’ Defecating In-Law said to Song, ‘just think. Later, when the Kugika want to give a marriage payment for you, the Ngeniga won’t take it’. (The only circumstance when a payment was declined was when war was impending.) ‘That will make you think. Think well. Later, you may want to go back to your father, or you may want to stay. Think, and tell us now what you want to do.’

‘You’re a crazy girl to have come to the Kugika,’ one of the Ngeniga men said. ‘I stay in my own house.’

‘The girl herself wanted to come,’ Big Insect pointed out, ‘so she may stay’.

Sicklebill, Head’s father’s brother, spoke.

‘Yesterday,’ he said, ‘when Vain Tears came for Song, I didn’t tell her to stay inside the house. I didn’t imprison her. Her father wanted to take her back, but

she herself hid inside one of the houses. We asked her whether she wanted to go back with her father, and she said she didn't. She said she wanted to stay here. Now we have work to do. You have heard what we have to say.'

'If you want to give us a marriage payment later for Song,' said Vain Tears, 'we shan't take it'.

'The girl herself says she doesn't want to go,' Struck Arrow pointed out impatiently. 'We're not going to capture her and give her back to you. It is a matter for the girl herself to decide.'

One of the Ngeniga men, who was Song's subclan brother, complained, 'Yesterday I stood talking until my legs went to sleep. If you have a young girl you can give me in exchange for Song, you may have Song. If you haven't a young girl to give me in exchange, I'll take Song back. It's getting late if anyone wants to work.'

'That's true enough,' Big Insect said resignedly, for indeed the sun was high.

'You know the practice of the trade stores,' Song's brother continued. 'You don't get the goods until you have given the pay. We'll follow the same practice, and wait until you have paid.'

'Think well,' Defecating In-Law warned Song. 'If you think your parents ought to eat the pork the Bambilngya have given them, come back. And if you think Head may divorce you later, you'd better come back.'

'The Ngeniga talk a lot,' Sickbill said sneeringly. 'If we give you a marriage payment, you'll take it.'

'It is a matter for the girl's parents,' Defecating In-Law stated heavily. 'It is no good for the boy and girl themselves to decide.'

Tultul Unavailing of Koimamkup subclan arrived, carrying a length of bamboo.

'Look!' he said, aghast. 'There is a dispute going on, and the Government officer has ordered us to bring a load of bamboo to Minj. It is getting late.'

'That is the work we've been referring to,' Big Insect said. 'Let us settle this matter quickly.'

Defecating In-Law walked across to where Song was sitting on the ground.

'If you want to go,' he said, 'get up and go now. If not—well, you have heard what I have said.'

Song left the group and walked slowly northward in the direction of Gibbis, where Head lived.

'Song's brother wants to exchange her for another girl,' Defecating In-Law stated.

'We've talked a lot,' Vain Tears said. 'We want to exchange Song for another girl. If a Kugika girl comes to us, we'll exchange.'

'We have no girls to spare,' one of the Kugika replied. 'If we had, we would give you one.'

Big Insect ended the discussion by pointing out that Song had gone away in the direction of Head's house and by commanding the Kugika to get about their work of taking bamboo to Minj.

A few days later, Vain Tears and his two companions came again. Vain Tears held his bow and arrows, and the girl's brother and the other man carried spears. They arrived at nine o'clock in the morning.

'Vain Tears is constantly coming here,' one of the Kugika grumbled. 'We wait around and don't get any work done. Let us wash Song with pigs' fat and send her back, so that we may get on with our work.'

'We have to get our decorations ready for tomorrow's dance,' Tultul Unavailing agreed. 'Why not simply wash her with grease and let her go? We have work to do. Wash her with grease quickly. If you don't want to, then talk it over quickly so that we can get back to work.'

'We intend to talk agreeably,' Vain Tears said gently. 'We don't want to quarrel with the Kugika. If we don't talk amicably, a fight may arise like that of the Konumberga. If you keep the girl here, you will all go to jail, just like the Konumberga.'

Vain Tears referred to a fight that had taken place when a girl who was betrothed went to stay with a Konumberga man and refused to let him bathe her with pigs' grease and return her to her parents. Forty victims of the fight were still in the Native Hospital at Minj, and about a hundred and twenty men were in jail.

The men of Penkup subclan huddled together at their end of the ceremonial ground and discussed the case quickly before advancing to meet Vain Tears.

'Song's mother saw her come,' the leader of the girl's subclan brothers was saying. 'Vain Tears came to get her, and she said that she wanted to stay. Vain Tears did not turn his back on her.'

'This dispute must die down,' Big Insect stated. 'If it doesn't, and if you capture the girl, later there will be a court case at Minj. Song's brother did not suggest

to me that he should exchange her for another girl. We didn't capture Song. She came because she wanted to. If a girl comes to the Kugika, it is a matter of her own choice whether she stays or gets bathed with grease. Bring Song.'

Song came shyly. Big Insect told her not to sit at the back of the crowd, and she sat in the second row from the front.

'The Ngeniga and the Kugika cannot have big disputes,' the leader of her brothers said. 'Song has come, and you have kept her a prisoner. My legs are going to sleep from standing up so long talking. The first time you Kugika saw Song, you thought she was a nice girl and you wanted to marry her. Later you will not think so, and you will want to send her away. It is better for her to come now. Her mother told her to go, and she came. Now her mother has come and we shall hear what she and Song have to say. We'll talk about payments later.'

'If she marries and later leaves for another man,' Defecating In-Law said, 'it will be because the payment given for her was not enough. So send her back'.

'She is young and good-looking,' said Big Insect, 'and we should like to marry her. Later she will be slightly older and she will still be here. We want her to stay here.'

'We have much work to do, and cannot talk all day,' Defecating In-Law complained. 'Let us hear what the girl has to say.'

'A man brought red Bird of Paradise plumes,' Vain Tears stated, 'and Song's mother said, 'This man's place is a long way away. We cannot see the smoke from their fires'. Song heard her say this, and I think her mother sent her to the Kugika. She has slept with Head for two nights, not a long time. I think her mother sent her here to stay a couple of nights.'

'That conversation took place,' Song agreed, 'but it was forgotten. I myself decided to come.'

'I have already told you to bathe Song with pigs' grease,' Vain Tears complained to the Kugika. 'You're taking a long time.'

'Song's mother sent her,' Big Insect stated. 'The place you wanted to send her is too far. She told us this herself. What do you think the Government officer would say about this?'

'Vain Tears and Song's brother wanted Bird of Paradise plumes,' said the Ngeniga man who had accompanied them. 'My own wife is a Kugika woman, but they didn't give me any of the Bird of Paradise plumes.'

'Song used to sleep at Konmil with the Konumbuga,' the girl's mother said irrelevantly. 'I told her to come back.'

'A long time ago,' the Ngeniga man resumed, 'I said that if Song were to go to the Kugika we should gather some food together and give her to them. I didn't see her go.'

'You have kept her a prisoner,' Vain Tears told the Kugika.

'We're not making her stay,' Big Insect rejoined.

Vain Tears and Song's brother suddenly tried to seize her, but the girl shrank back amongst the Kugika.

'When a Kugika girl comes to our place,' her brother grumbled, 'we don't keep her a prisoner. We let her go back.'

The Burikup orator, You Ate, noted my presence and he interrupted to make a pronouncement on the customs of the white people. I wondered where he had gathered his information.

'When a white man marries a white woman,' he said with an air of wisdom, 'he only gives a marriage payment if the woman tells him to. Now a white woman is here watching us, and she has seen you trying to seize Song.'

'Song has talked to me,' Big Insect said, 'and I have listened.'

'I told you before what to do,' Defecating In-Law said impatiently. 'You ought to have washed her with grease the first time she came and married her next time.'

'When her father tried to seize her just now,' Good Bird stated, 'she held Mountain Tree's leg and she hung on to Witchcraft So, and we told them not to hold her. You saw it happen.'

That was indeed what had happened. The Penkup had allowed Song to shrink against them and cling to them, but they had not held her.

'I talked to the girl myself,' Defecating In-Law said. 'I told her that if she married Head he would send her away.'

'One old man,' said Raggiana obliquely, not looking at Vain Tears, 'stood up and talked about eating pork. He said nothing about marriage payments. We are not cross with him.'

Big Insect spoke to Song: 'Your father came to get you. Do you want to stay or go back? Have we kept you here against your will?'

'I want to stay,' Song declared.

Defecating In-Law said that Head had been silent all this time.

'What do you want me to say?' Head asked him. 'If you want to wash her with grease, that is all right. If you want her to stay, that is all right.'

'At first,' Big Insect said, 'we wanted to wash her with grease, and we prepared some valuables to give her brothers. But Song said that she wanted to stay. That is all right; she can stay.'

'Head is an attractive young man,' You Ate said without malice. 'The Konumberga girl House Tongue wants to marry him, but she can't because she is already betrothed to another man. Another Konumberga girl has carried leg with Head, and if she comes to him later we'll keep her.'

'We're not talking about later,' Vain Tears objected. 'I want to take Song back now. The Kugika have to dance at Konmil tomorrow, and you will all have to be in good breath. We can't stay here talking all the time, but we shall stay until you give us the girl.'

Konangil and Tail, both age-mates of Head, were whispering together. They agreed that if the Ngeniga tried again to seize Song they would hold her and help her to escape.

'We want to go,' Vain Tears resumed. 'We shall go as soon as Song is ready to come with us.'

'We have talked enough,' said Tail's father. 'The girl is adamant in wanting to stay. It is a matter for her.'

'The first time Song visited the Kugika,' Vain Tears remembered, 'she came to a courting ceremony. Later, she came with the dancers for the Pig Ceremonial. Then she came with us when we brought plumes and shells for your Pig Ceremonial. Then she came again. Now her fathers want to take her back. Her own father wanted to seize her, but she resisted and held on to the Kugika man.'

'The *luluai* has asked the boy and the girl what they want to do,' one of the Ngeniga men said. 'That is not enough. I want to see the two girls together. If Tobacco Woman and Song come and sit down together, that will be all right.'

'If Tobacco Woman and Song come at once and say that they want to stay,' Vain Tears echoed, 'that will be all right. But Tobacco Woman hasn't come.'

'When a man asks a woman something,' Defecating In-Law stated wisely, 'she does not tell him what she thinks. She only tells women what she thinks.'

Song and Head drifted away from the crowd and began to walk towards Gibbis.

'You can see for yourselves,' Sicklebill said, 'that the girl herself wants to stay.'

‘Why had Head taken Song away?’ Vain Tears demanded, but nobody heeded him.

‘I’m going home,’ said Defecating In-Law. ‘I can’t be bothered talking any more.’

‘Now that you’ve heard it all,’ Big Insect said to the Ngeniga men, ‘you can go back. The girl held the men’s legs when you tried to take her back. You saw her. There is no point in talking further. We have work to do.’

‘Don’t go!’ Vain Tears commanded. ‘Stay here!’

Big Insect laughed, shrugged, and walked a little distance away.

‘What do you think?’ one of the Ngeniga men said to Raggiana. ‘Is the dispute over?’

‘No,’ Raggiana answered, ‘it is not over’.

‘It is all right for you and us to go when the dispute is over,’ Vain Tears said. ‘But it is not over yet, and all the Kugika are going.’

‘We have plenty of work,’ said Raggiana, ‘but we cannot go while Vain Tears is still here’.

‘Say something clearly and quickly,’ Big Insect commanded, ‘and I shall hear it and go. I myself have a few words to speak, and then I shall go. Song came to us, and she and Head said that they wanted to marry. We told the girl to go back, but she didn’t want to.’

‘Her mother and Vain Tears sent her to the Kugika,’ ventured one of the Ngeniga men, ‘but her brother thinks otherwise’.

‘We have heard all this before,’ Defecating In-Law protested. ‘The *luluai* spoke truly about Song.’

‘If she wants to come,’ Song’s brother said, ‘let her come quickly. You have heard her say that she wants to stay.’

‘Tomorrow,’ Big Insect reminded the Kugika, ‘we have a big dance at Konmil. Now we have finished talking about Song.’

Raggiana shouldered his hatchet and departed while Big Insect was talking. Then Big Insect himself left. The crowd of Penkup people dispersed when their own leaders had gone. Two young men stayed to gossip with some of the Koimamkup.

'Before,' a Ngeniga man said to Vain Tears, 'the Kugika and Kondiga fought. The Ngeniga are not going to fight the Kugika. If the girl wants to stay here, let us go without her.'

'We're not talking about fighting,' one of the Koimamkup men protested. 'If we don't settle this matter, we shan't be able to dance well tomorrow.'

'It is true,' said Sicklebill, who had not gone far, 'that if we have disputes on the dancing ground we shall not be able to dance well. Let us go somewhere else. We have talked about Song, and Song has gone back to Gibbis with Head. What is this talk about the Kondiga? We have no quarrel with the Ngeniga. It was the girl's idea to stay here.'

Vain Tears visited the Kugika again the next morning, but they were busy preparing for the big dance at Konmil and refused to discuss the matter further. He asked them to give Song back to him. When they refused, he promised that if they were to give her to him he would bathe her with pigs' grease and give her back to them. The Penkup laughed. 'You would be more likely to bathe her with pigs' grease and give her to the Bambilngya,' they said.

A couple of days later, Vain Tears came again and seized Song. The Penkup did not resist him, but let him drag her back to Pugamil. 'Never mind,' they told one another. 'Later she will run away and come to Head again.'

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Several months passed, and the Kugika recognized that Head had lost Song. He continued to carry leg with other girls. House Tongue, the Konumberga girl who had previously expressed her intention of marrying him, stayed with him for a few days and was bathed in pigs' grease and returned to her parents with a payment of plumes, shells, two hatchets, and a dog. She told Head that she would come again and stay to be his wife.

Ginger, the full brother of House Tongue, had arranged to give her to the Djegga of the northern Wahgi in exchange for a bride for himself. Ginger already had one wife, Witchcraft Flower, who was a mature woman, but he wanted a young wife. Head knew that Ginger would object strongly if House Tongue wanted to marry him.

House Tongue arrived one evening to stay with Head, and the men of Penkup subclan met on the ceremonial ground the next morning to discuss what they were going to do. Opinions varied as to whether they should allow the Konumberga to take her back. Head had already lost Song, and all were in favour of House Tongue staying and marrying him, but there was little agreement on what resistance, if any, they should offer the Konumberga when Ginger and his friends came to take her away. A Pingya man who was visiting the Penkup had

a lot to say. The Kugika, he said, should help the Konumbuga to take House Tongue back in order that Ginger might obtain another girl in exchange for her. Tail, who was still hoping to obtain a bride in exchange for his sister, Or Nothing, echoed this opinion. Big Insect was against giving House Tongue back. He listened attentively while Dog, the young Koimamkup man, who was related to the Konumbuga, outlined a scheme for keeping her. Dog suggested that they should allow the Konumbuga to take House Tongue as far as the clump of strong bamboo that grew on the ceremonial ground. Then, having allayed the Konumbuga's suspicions, they could rescue House Tongue from her captors and take her back to Gibbis. They could do this with little violence, he said, if they managed to surprise the Konumbuga. They did not want to fight their 'brothers-in-law', the Konumbuga. Big Insect approved of Dog's suggestion.

Sicklebill and Head did not take an active part in the discussions, but their views were well known. They wanted House Tongue to remain, but they were not willing to do anything to ensure this against the wishes of the strong Penkup group. Raggiana and Good Bird said that they would not resist the Konumbuga's attempts to take House Tongue, as they did not wish the Konumbuga to get the impression that the Kugika were determined to keep her. At the same time, they said, it was plain that Head had lost Song because he did not guard her closely and prevent the Ngeniga from finding her.

The Konumbuga arrived the next morning to settle the fate of House Tongue.

'We have come to take House Tongue back,' announced Stony, her half-brother.

House Tongue, who had slept with You Ate's Konumbuga wife, You Did, at Kondambi, strolled on to the ceremonial ground.

'Are you cross,' her mother asked her, 'that you have run away from us?'

'No,' House Tongue answered, 'I am not cross. I want to get married, that is all. I am tired of staying at Pagnga, and have come here.'

Witchcraft Flower, the wife of Ginger, looked at the girl and said scathingly, 'Your stomach is fat and your nose is so close to your eyes that you look as if you only have eyes. We have looked after you well, and you have grown big. So think well. Do you want to be with your mother's brothers and your father's sister, that you come here?'

'My mother's brothers and my father's sister may die,' said House Tongue 'but I shall stay here'.

Stony said, 'We have brought back your dog, the hatchets, and the shells the Kugika gave us when you stayed with Head last time. The Kugika can take these things back, and you can come back with us.'

'Did your mother tell you to come?' asked Witchcraft Flower.

'This woman and I,' said House Tongue, indicating her mother with a deprecating gesture, 'do not hold hands and sleep together. I myself came because I wanted to.'

'Well,' said Witchcraft Flower, 'You can marry Head if he gives his sister to Ginger to marry. I need someone to help me with the pigs.'

Silence greeted this remark, for everyone knew that Head had no sister. The mother of House Tongue grew impatient.

'We came here early in the morning,' she complained. 'Now the sun has come up strongly, so come with us and let us go.'

'House Tongue only sleeps in men's houses,' Witchcraft Flower said nastily. 'She never sleeps in women's houses.'

'You Kugika haven't bathed House Tongue in pigs' grease,' Stony said accusingly. 'I am waiting for you to do so.'

'I don't want to be washed with grease,' House Tongue protested. 'I want to be married.'

Stony looked enquiringly at the Kugika. They were mostly sitting around munching groundnuts, relic of a recent exchange between clans.

'We have nothing to say,' a Koimamkup man told Stony. 'If you have anything to say to House Tongue, she can answer you. We are only waiting.'

'Did you come here to eat groundnuts?' Stony cried angrily at House Tongue.

'If the Kugika are eating groundnuts,' his half-sister replied, munching placidly, 'I can eat with them.'

Stony crossed to where the Penkup were standing and sitting. He carried two hatchets, and House Tongue's ten-year-old brother carried the little dog Head had given them. They put these on the ground. Stony stretched forward and grasped House Tongue by the arm. He pulled her to her feet, and dragged her towards the strong bamboo. House Tongue struggled with him, but the Kugika did not help her. House Tongue's mother, Stony's mother, and Ginger's wife came forward. The girl's mother held up a bush knife and struck her on the head. Fortunately the blade turned and the blow glanced off. The mother helped Stony to pull the girl along. When they drew level with the strong bamboo, Dog and another Kugika man grasped House Tongue and wrested her from the grip of Stony and his companions. House Tongue went to You Ate's house and was greeted by You Did, who sympathized with her for the blows she had suffered.

'I made you a nice new bunch of cords,' Ginger's wife, Witchcraft Flower, called after the girl, 'and I want them back'.

'Not now,' Stony said, 'You can see about it tomorrow. Tomorrow Dog and this other man can bring House Tongue back to us. If they don't, we'll complain to the Court of Native Affairs.'

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