

Chapter 8: Wandering Wives

Love Woman was a morose character in her early twenties, quite plain by both Australian and Agamp standards, and with a rare smile that seemed shame-faced and tinged with bitterness. When I first met her, she was staying with her mother, Dance, and her stepfather, Forest Tree, who was her father's brother. Every morning Forest Tree asked her when she was going back to her husband, but Love Woman said nothing and went to help her mother in the gardens. Some of the other Kugika women told me that Dance's daughter was a wandering woman, 'a real harlot'. Gradually I learned her history.

When Love Woman had been attending courting ceremonies for a couple of years, Forest Tree had arranged for her betrothal to a Konumberga man, Ginger. But Love Woman liked Go Insect, who belonged to the same subclan as Ginger did, and she went to stay with him, asking him to let her remain as his wife. When Go Insect learned that Love Woman was betrothed to Ginger, he told Forest Tree to take her back. Forest Tree bathed her with pigs' grease and gave her to Ginger. Love Woman had some misgivings, because she knew that Ginger already had a wife, but she was not a rebellious girl and when the marriage ceremony was over she walked to Konumberga territory with her new husband and his clansmen. Ginger's senior wife, Witch-Flower,¹ did not receive the new bride kindly, but picked a quarrel with her whenever an opportunity arose. Eventually, Witch-Flower beat Love Woman with a stick and drove her from the locality where Ginger had built his houses. Love Woman went to Go Insect.

Ginger said generously that, as it was clear that Love Woman liked Go Insect, he himself would relinquish his claim to her and let her marry her lover. But Go Insect refused, saying that he did not want a married woman. 'When you were a young girl,' he said to Love Woman, 'I let you stay when you came to me. But now you are a married woman, and you cannot stay with me.' He gave her back to Ginger. But Ginger said he wanted a bride who did not go to other men, and he sent her back to Forest Tree. Forest Tree assumed that she had run away, and he made her go back to Ginger. This time, Witch-Flower beat Love Woman and drove her away again. Love Woman went home to her family.

Ginger visited Forest Tree and insisted on taking back the payment he had given. If he himself had sent the girl away, he told him, there would be no question of reimbursement, but it had been his senior wife who had driven her away. Forest Tree grudgingly collected the items Ginger wanted and gave them

¹ Referred to as Witchcraft Flower (see Chapter 5).

to the younger man. He was both distressed by the loss of the marriage payment and angry with Love Woman for occasioning this loss. He arranged a further marriage for her and gave her to Oak.

Oak was a member of Aiikup, a clan settled on the northern side of the Wahgi. The journey to visit her family would be longer than it had been when she was with the Konumbuga. She said goodbye to Dance, who embraced her with tears in her eyes, to Banana, her young half-brother, and to her little half-sister, Ma'am, whom she had often minded when Dance was gardening. She had heard that Oak, like Ginger, already had a wife, and she hoped that this senior wife would not resent her as Ginger's had done. Forest Tree was now well disposed towards her, because Oak had given him a handsome marriage payment to replace the plumes and shells Ginger had claimed back. Forest Tree needed the ornaments badly, for his clan was going to celebrate its Pig Ceremonial. Also, Oak had a widowed sister whom Forest Tree himself hoped to marry later.

Love Woman found that Oak's senior wife had her widowed mother living with her and that this woman supported her daughter in arguments. She lived with them as quietly as she could, although she knew that they resented her presence. It soon became obvious that Love Woman was pregnant, and the two women began to attack her with little or no provocation. One day they beat her with sticks, and she ran away to Go Insect. Go Insect knew that her husband would be angry with him if he let her stay, and he told Forest Tree that Love Woman had come to him. Forest Tree sent her back to her husband. The baby was born prematurely and died.

Oak was goaled for neglecting to work on the Government road, and while he was away Love Woman went to visit her parents. She told her mother how unhappy Oak's senior wife was making her, and Dance counselled patience. The senior wife attacked her on her return, thinking that she had gone to visit Oak in the jail at Minj.

'You can't go and see my husband without asking me to go with you!' she cried, beating Love Woman with a stick.

Oak returned, and the two women complained to him that Love Woman could not cook and was not looking after his pigs properly. He decided to give her to a clansman.

'I am not a moron or a wanderer!' Love Woman cried. 'I will not be passed from one husband to another. I'll go back to my parents.'

Forest Tree, Dance, and their children were now living next door to me at Kondambi for the duration of the Pig Ceremonial. The dancing was at its height, and Forest Tree was wearing his finest plumes and shells nearly every day.

He was angry with Love Woman for leaving her husband, because he was reluctant to return the marriage payment. He urged her to go back to Oak, and when she refused he beat her viciously. Dance supported her daughter, saying that she should not go back to a man who wanted to divorce her.

Some months passed, and Love Woman remained with her parents. Oak wanted to know whether she would be returning to him and Forest Tree said that certainly she would be returning when she had seen some of the dancing. Forest Tree had a conversation with a man of Ngeniga clan, a neighbour of both the Kugika and the Konumberga.

‘My daughter, Love Woman, wants to marry you,’ he lied. ‘She has left her husband and has asked me to give her to you.’

The Ngeniga man was flattered and raised the required marriage payment, enabling Forest Tree to return the plumes and shells to Oak. The Ngeniga man came to take Love Woman to his home, and found her reluctant to go with him. Angrily, he turned to her stepfather.

‘Forest Tree!’ he cried, ‘You did not listen to Love Woman. She doesn’t want to marry me. You want the pay for yourself and have no other motive for arranging this marriage. Give me back the pay, and let Love Woman wait until she finds a man she wants to marry. If you want your daughter to marry a man you have chosen, ask her first. If she says no, forget it. You did not ask her this time. You were greedy for the pay.’

Three weeks passed. Forest Tree had not returned the marriage payment, so the Ngeniga man came and retrieved it. Oak still had the other marriage payment, which Forest Tree had returned to him, and had not yet used it to acquire another wife. Now that Forest Tree had failed to marry Love Woman to the Ngeniga man, he urged her to return to Oak. He invited Oak to visit him and try to persuade Love Woman to return.

Oak invented the story that a patrol officer taking a census of Aiikup clan had asked about Love Woman and, hearing that she had returned to her parents, had threatened to send her to jail if she did not go back to her husband. Love Woman did not believe the story. Then Oak brought a load of firewood to the house where she was living and told her that he intended to stay there as her husband and take her back to the Aiikup. Love Woman objected, and fled to seek support from her parents. Dance was sympathetic, but Forest Tree responded by beating her and, thoroughly enraged at her stubbornness, tried to strangle her. Love Woman escaped and complained to the *luluai* of Forest Tree’s treatment of her. Big Insect held a meeting on the ceremonial ground.

A few tall casuarina trees were still scattered about the ground, but most had been cleared for dancing and the earth was levelled by the stamping of hundreds of feet. Only one patch of grass remained where young lovers could sit and 'carry leg' while a big dance was in progress. A crowd of about fifty men and women gathered to listen to the dispute.

You Ate, the head of Forest Tree's subdivision and the orator of his subclan, was present. He berated Forest Tree.

'You're hungry for the marriage payment,' he said with discernment, 'but you should listen to Love Woman. If she does not want to go back to Oak, you should not make her go. I don't want my daughter to throw herself into the river or hang herself with a rope.'

When Love Woman heard You Ate supporting her against her stepfather, she said that she would like to stay with You Ate's family. The meeting agreed that she could do this, provided that when she eventually remarried Forest Tree should receive the marriage payment, since he had cared for her for such a long time. Love Woman went to stay with You Ate's family, and Oak returned to his clan.

You Ate was a genial, easy-going man dominated by his wife, You Did. They had three young children. Dance called to see Love Woman each day on the way to her gardens and found her contented. The general interest in the case the *luluai's* meeting had aroused died down. I heard from several people that Love Woman intended to return to Oak, and traced the story to Forest Tree. He had discussed the marriage again with Oak, who had agreed to come with his clansmen to take Love Woman back by force. Weeks passed without this happening.

One day, Love Woman had brought me some vegetables and had stayed to chat with me and her half-brother, Banana, when the *luluai* arrived. He greeted me briefly, and then asked Love Woman why she was staying so long with her own clan, as it was time she found a husband. Love Woman replied that she intended to go back to her original husband, Ginger, when the Pig Ceremonial had finished. The *luluai* was obviously surprised at this, but he made no comment. You Ate's wife, You Did, was a Konumbuga woman by origin, from Ginger's subclan, and had probably influenced Love Woman's decision.

At last Oak came again, this time with several of his clansmen. Forest Tree helped them to capture Love Woman, and they dragged her back to Aiikup territory. I did not hear of her for two weeks, and I thought that her wanderings were over. Then young Banana told me that Love Woman and Oak's senior wife were in the jail at Minj, having been arrested for fighting each other. When Love Woman was released she came to Kondambi to tell Forest Tree and Dance what had happened. Oak had wanted to give her to another man, and she had

refused again. Angered, he had told his senior wife and this woman's mother to attack her. Forest Tree was angry with Oak when he heard this, and advised Love Woman to stay at home with her parents.

Love Woman was still with her parents when I left Kondambi in 1955. Soon she would go to another man, perhaps to Ginger. She continued to be friendly with You Ate and You Did, who had given her support when she had needed it. Members of other subclans, who did not know her well, had noticed and commented on her periodic return to her parents, and they knew that she had had at least two husbands. 'Wandering woman!' they would whisper disgustedly when her name was mentioned.

I do not know the full story of Love Woman's further adventures, but by 1963 she was back with the Aiikup and had worked out an adjustment to uncongenial circumstances which were made tolerable by a private plan, a hope which may have been no more substantial than a dream. When I saw her she looked much more than ten years older than she had been when I knew her first. She worked fanatically hard in her husband's gardens to produce vegetables to take home to her mother, and carrying loads of sweet potatoes and greens across the valley enabled her to see Dance and Banana and her little sister more often than many women married into neighbouring clans managed to visit their families. These journeys enabled her to avoid becoming closely identified with her husband's clan, so she appeared to get into few fights with the other women of the Aiikup. She was plainly hoping that she and Forest Tree might finally persuade her husband to settle with the Kugika and save her making the long and frequent journeys, but I came across no evidence that he might be persuaded.

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The people of Kugika clan regarded Red Earth too, as a wandering woman. I did not know Red Earth: she was married to a Kondika² man, one of the traditional enemies of the Kugika, who glimpsed the Kondika when they visited the Government Station but had no social relations with them. Someone had seen Red Earth at Minj and had come back with the news that 'the wandering woman of the Kondika' was going to have a baby. The men of Penkup subclan had a special interest in Red Earth, so I asked some of them for the story.

Red Earth was a girl of Konumberga clan. She had been attending courting ceremonies for at least a year when her father arranged for her betrothal to Good, the son of Eastern Mother and protégé of Big Insect. She continued to attend courting ceremonies. The Roman Catholic Mission had established a small station in Kugika territory, and two native catechists from Chimbu were stationed there. Red Earth was attracted by one of these men and went to live

2 Reay alternately spelt this groupname as Kondiga and Kondika.

with him. Good did not mind her having casual affairs, but he objected to her going to live with one particular man. He and some other members of his subclan captured her and took her to his house. She tried to escape, but Good guarded her carefully. At last, evidently after about a month, he judged that she would no longer try to escape and he set off for the Jimmi River on a trading expedition.

Good was a handsome young man by Minj standards. His eyes sparkled above a flat nose and generous lips, and his face was round. He was tall and well-built, and his light skin had a golden glow when he rubbed it with pigs' fat or pandanus oil. He was popular with the youths of his subclan, who looked up to him as their leader, and the older men expected him to be the next head of Raggiana's group. He was the kind of man over whom girls fought jealously, and his success with women brought him great prestige.

Good already had one wife, Talking Woman, a gentle creature who belonged to Red Earth's own clan, Konumberga. Her parents had lived with Kugika clan, the clan of her mother, so she had grown up with Good. The Kugika had given her father land on the understanding that his daughter would marry a Kugika. When Talking Woman attended courting ceremonies, she and Good were constant partners and everyone knew they slept together. Talking Woman's father said to Good, 'You two are continually sleeping together. You may as well get married. Don't bother about the marriage payment yet.' Good handed over the marriage payment two years later as a gesture of sympathy when Talking Woman's father died. The payment was a generous one, for Talking Woman had exhibited all the domestic virtues. She worked hard in the gardens he allotted her, and cooked his meals both willingly and well; she tended his pigs carefully, and was never involved in disputes with other women; she helped him spontaneously in any work he was doing.

Talking Woman never displayed jealousy towards other women, and she accepted Red Earth (already a 'sister' and age-mate) quietly. Red Earth's only complaint was that she did not want to be Good's wife. As soon as he had departed on his trading expedition, she went back to her parents.

When Good returned home, he found that Red Earth was living in Minj as the mistress of a white man. He complained to the Court of Native Affairs, and she was returned to him.

Good was no longer interested in keeping Red Earth as his wife, though he had taken her to court to establish his right to dispose of her. Another Konumberga girl was already betrothed to him, and, being a wealthy and attractive man, he could easily obtain more wives. He decided to give Red Earth to his father's father's brother's son, Good Bird.

Good Bird was more than ten years older than Good. He was neither outstandingly wealthy nor handsome. He had one wife, Creamy, by whom he had two little boys. Creamy was one of those rare people among the Agamp with extremely pale skins. She was a spirited woman, who did not want to share her husband's attentions. She made it plain that Red Earth was unwelcome, beating the younger girl and forcing her to run away again. Red Earth went back to her parents. They were annoyed with her for running away, and they notified Good Bird that she was with them. Good Bird and his relatives captured her and brought her back.

Creamy could not be induced to accept her as a co-wife, so Good Bird decided to give Red Earth to As If, a member of his subdivision whose only wife had died and who had not yet inherited a further wife. Red Earth protested that As If was an old man, and pleaded not to be given to him. He was indeed older than Good Bird, but Good Bird would not listen to her protests and she was taken to As If's house. Soon she ran away again. She did not go home to her parents, for she knew that they would simply return her to the Kugika and perpetuate the match with As If. This time, she ran away to a man of Kondika clan with whom she had attended courting ceremonies before going to live with the catechist such a short time ago.

Good Bird and As If could not go to snatch her back from the territory of their traditional enemies, so they complained again to the Court of Native Affairs. The court ruled that Red Earth should not have been given to three different men in succession, and she was permitted to stay with the Kondika.

Red Earth was still married to the Kondika man when I heard her story from Good, Good Bird, and other men of their subclan. Good Bird was excited by the news that she was pregnant, and wondered audibly whether the child she was bearing was his. (The Minj people did not know how much time elapsed between conception and parturition.) Now that she was going to bear a child, Good Bird regretted having given her to As If, for now she was able to produce children who would be reared as members of Kondika, the traditional enemies of Good Bird's own clan. It seemed that Red Earth had revenged herself on a man she disliked by using his seed for the increase of his enemies.

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Ko III was Konumberga by birth. Her parents gave her to a Berebuga man as soon as she began to attend courting ceremonies, but she ran away to another man. She led the life of a 'wandering woman' who went from man to man and from place to place without settling down to tend pigs and work in gardens. Then she went to Fig, a man of Baiman clan who lived near Kerowil, and seemed content to stay with him.

Fig's mother gave Ko III two piglets to care for. The young wife could give them to her parents, she said, when they had grown. Ko III tied the two piglets to a casuarina tree. Later she found them fighting, and one broke its back and died. Ko III was frightened.

'You must have given me a pig that was sick,' she lied to her mother-in-law. 'See, it has died.'

Fig's mother butchered the little pig before cooking it, and she found that its spine was broken.

'You must have hit the pig across the back and broken its spine,' she accused Ko III.

Ko III told her what had happened, but the older woman would not believe her, since she had lied to her once before.

'You were hungry for pork' she said finally 'and somehow the pig was killed. You'd better eat some of it.'

Ko III left the other piglet fastened to the casuarina and forgot about it. The little animal died from neglect.

Ko III did not work. Fig's mother dug out his sweet potatoes and cooked his meals. Fig himself prepared his new gardens and planted all the foods his wife should have planted. He asked her to smooth the earth in the near garden, but she replied, 'I don't know how. I am only a little girl.' This was her standard response whenever he asked her to help him, though she was now a married woman.

Ko III did not greet visitors with a happy shout as the other women did. Instead, she would say quietly and stiffly 'So you have come.' She did not give her sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law food when they visited her. Instead, she would say to them, 'I have just put the spinach on to cook. It will be a long time, so you'd better go.'

Fig's mother, puzzled at this behaviour, asked the girl why she was lazy and why she slept so much during the daytime. Was she thinking of a child? she asked, but her daughter-in-law made no reply. Soon it became obvious that Ko III was pregnant. Fig and his family thought that she would act more normally after the child was born. But when Ko III was walking about again after bearing a daughter, she still did not help her husband, she still did not tend his pigs, and she still neglected his gardens. Eventually Fig said, 'You are not a normal woman; you are another kind. Go back to your parents, and they can give you to a different man. You may take the child with you—it is only a girl.'

Ko III neglected her baby daughter, and it died soon after she returned to her parents. She stayed with her mother for a few months. Then she went to Kondambi to watch the Konumbuga dance with the Kugika, and she saw Dog. Her mother was talking to some Konumbuga women who were married to the Kugika.

'I think that Ko III wants to stay and marry Dog,' she told them. 'But she won't stay long. She is not a normal woman. She has the makings of a wanderer.'

'We'll look after her,' You Did and Hat assured her. 'Dog's sister, who was married to the Konumbuga, died and the Konumbuga didn't give the Kugika any death compensation. If Ko III marries Dog, this will balance things nicely.'

Dog was a handsome and popular young man. He swaggered a little when he found that Ko III intended to stay with him. She stayed for a week, then she ran away, to be captured and dragged back by the Koimamkup, Dog's subclan. She ran away several times.

Spinning Top, my servant, was sceptical.

'Why doesn't she run away during the night, when it is dark and everyone is asleep?' he asked rhetorically. 'She always runs away during daylight, so of course she gets brought back.'

The Koimamkup assumed, without asking Ko III, that she wanted to go to another man. That was the behaviour expected of a wanderer. They held an informal meeting to decide her fate. Most of the Koimamkup men made ribald comments and said they would like to have her. Dog decided to give her to You Ate. You Ate was Burikup, and the men of Koimamkup subclan objected that he should have given her to a Koimamkup man, but Dog was adamant. After all, he said, You Ate's wife, You Did, had made the girl stay. You Did was disconcerted; she had wanted Ko III to stay with the Kugika, but she had not wanted to gain a co-wife.

There was a heavy downpour of rain in the afternoon. Then the air cleared, and heavy beads of rain dangled from the edges of the long-houses. I heard You Did's voice raised angrily and went to see what was happening.

'What were you and Ko III doing in the house at Mangi during the rain?' she demanded of her husband. 'You were giving love, I know.'

'We were sheltering from the rain,' You Ate answered. 'Ko III is a wandering woman. There is no need for you to be jealous of her. You helped to get me this woman, so why are you cross? She doesn't stay long in one place. Dog and I are always looking for her and bringing her back. She was running away again, but when it rained she came into the house. She doesn't like me, and is determined to run away.'

'Yes, I saw her running away,' a Koimamkup woman asserted. 'I got wet watching her.'

'When the Konumberga gave me Shell,' You Ate said, referring to a bride he had had about a year before, 'you all talked and she ran away. Now you do the same.'

'Ko III and I went to get some sweet potatoes,' You Did said. 'I gave her some sweet potatoes to give to the pigs. I knew that she wanted to run away, and I told her to go straight along the path and not to linger in the houses.'

You Ate began to walk back towards his house.

'Ko III doesn't want to stay,' he said resignedly. 'All right, she can go if you bring Shell and give her to me. If Ko III doesn't want to marry me, no matter. Go and get Shell and give her to me.'

'You Did won't go and get Shell for you,' Raggiana laughed, coming up to the group. 'You Did sent Shell away. Ko III, when you were at Konmil, did you yourself go to Dog, or did he capture you?'

'You Did went and captured her' You Ate told him.

'Dog's sister died, and the Konumberga didn't give any death compensation, so we said we would take Ko III,' Hat explained. 'She said she wanted to marry Dog.'

'We can't sleep at night' You Ate complained 'in case she runs away. We are always getting up and building the fire. You Did said I was giving love to Ko III, so I was angry.'

'You were both in that house during the rain,' You Did explained, 'so of course I thought you were giving love. The Konumberga can't take Ko III back, because you all say that she is a Kugika wife now and has to marry a Kugika man.'

Hat and the other Koimamkup women were discussing Ko III's escape and subsequent recapture. She had gone out in the rain, telling You Did's little boy that she would be back. One of the Koimamkup women had seen her crossing the ceremonial ground and had told her to go inside one of the houses, but she had ignored the advice and fled towards Mangi. The Koimamkup woman had called out to You Ate and Dog, and they had followed Ko III. They had found her at Mangi, and they had taken her inside a house there to shelter from the rain.

'We brought her back,' You Ate explained, 'because I want to keep her here until she decides which man among the Kugika she wants to marry.'

'Come here,' Raggiana said gently to Ko III, 'and tell me whom you want to marry. You Ate can't marry you. Tell me whom you want to go to, and you can marry him.'

Ko III was silent, her gaze stubbornly glued to the ground. Raggiana and Shield, a Koimamkup man, took her aside and spoke to her quietly.

‘Do you want to stay with You Ate?’ they asked her.

‘No,’ Ko III answered reluctantly. ‘The wife he has already hits me.’

‘Would you like to come with me and marry a Penkup man—say, Original?’ Raggiana suggested, naming his own eldest son.

There was no reply. Shield began to speak, but Raggiana interrupted him, ‘Wait for her to say. If she would like to go to the Penkup, I’ll take her to my subclan.’

‘First she went to the Berebuga,’ Shield said warningly. ‘I told them she wouldn’t stay, and in fact she did run away. She went to the Baiman man, Fig. She came back. Then she went to Dog. At first it seemed that she wanted to stay, but then she began to run away. Now she doesn’t want to go to another Kugika. She will run away soon to another clan. That is the way of wandering women. Ask her again, and if she wants to go to the Penkup she can do so.’

Shield left as Two Stay arrived.

‘I’ll go by this little path behind the long-houses’ Ko III said ‘to avoid the crowd on the ceremonial ground.’

Raggiana showed her the way to Penkup territory, but Two Stay, the *tultul* of Burikup subclan, blocked their path.

‘This morning you said you wanted to go to [space in original],’ he told Ko III, naming a Burikup youth. ‘Now you talk differently. You can’t sneak away like that. If you want to go to the Penkup, go through the ceremonial ground.’

‘I don’t want to go to the ceremonial group,’ Ko III protested. ‘There are too many people.’

‘You ran away to Tunambauolg and were brought back, and then you ran away to Mangi and were brought back,’ Raggiana said. ‘It is better to go through the ceremonial ground and let everyone know what you’re doing.’

‘First she says one thing’ Two Stay grumbled ‘and then she says another. She won’t stay permanently with any man.’

‘If she doesn’t,’ Raggiana observed, ‘everyone will call her a wandering woman.’

Ko III burst into tears.

‘You Did hits me,’ she wailed. ‘I don’t want to stay with You Ate.’

'Come,' said Raggiana, leading the way to the entrance of the ceremonial ground.

'Come, hurry up!' Two Stay urged Ko III. 'I can't understand you. In the morning you say one thing, and in the afternoon you say something different.'

'Wait until Shield comes back,' Raggiana suggested, 'and hear what the Koimamkup have to say'.

'This girl will run away' Two Stay said 'if we give her to another man'.

Wood Stone, who was the father of [space in original] had joined the group.

'You Ate told me that she would stay with him until she was given to another man,' he said now. 'I want to take her for [space in original] has been sleeping with other men's wives, and I am continually paying out plumes and shells as compensation for his adultery. It would be cheaper for me if I could take this woman and give my son a wife of his own.'

'We asked her once' Raggiana said, turning back 'what she wanted to do. We asked her, "Do you want to stay with You Ate". She said, "No, I shall go to the Penkup."'

Raggiana took Ko III into his long-house, and some of the others followed.

'You didn't consult You Ate when you brought Ko III here,' said Sinning, the Koimamkup woman who had seen Ko III running away in the rain. 'He will be angry, because he is a Burikup man.'

'Shield asked her whether she wanted to stay with You Ate,' Raggiana replied. 'She answered that she wanted to go with me. I thought You Ate had given her to me, as he did not object when I brought her here.'

'He will be angry' Sinning insisted 'because we didn't bring Shell when you took Ko III'. She turned upon the girl. 'Your father was a real man, not a wild pig, so why do you run away? I got wet watching this girl run away. Dog said, Ko III doesn't come into the house and cook my food, so she can marry You Ate. But she didn't like You Ate and she ran away. I got wet watching her. You Ate followed her to Mangi to bring her back, and You Did thought he was giving love to Ko III and got angry with him.'

'She told Shield she wanted to come to the Penkup,' Raggiana repeated. 'I didn't tell her to come to the Penkup.'

'Let's talk on the ceremonial ground,' Sinning suggested, 'not in a Penkup long-house. If she says the same then, the Penkup can have her.'

Ko III protested almost inaudibly that she did not want to go out among the people.

'Her father looked after me,' Sinning explained to Raggiana, 'so I have to watch her interests. Come with me, Ko III.'

Wood Stone entered Raggiana's long-house.

'Hat brought her to give to the orator [space in original] and the orator gave her to Dog when she said that was the man she wanted to marry,' he said. '[space in original] and Dog were both Koimamkup. Then Dog gave her to the Burikup. If she doesn't like You Ate, there are other Burikup men.'

Good Bird, who was secondary leader to both Raggiana and Big Insect, bent and peered under the roof of the long-house without entering.

'Bring Ko III to the ceremonial ground,' he advised Raggiana. 'This is a matter that affects all three subclans.'

'Come,' said Wood Stone, taking Ko III's hand. 'If you like a particular man, you can marry him. If not, we'll marry you to someone who has no wife.'

'If she had been given to Penkup,' Good Bird said bitterly, 'there are plenty of men she could marry, for there are plenty of men who have no wives.'

'If later she leaves the man and comes to the Penkup,' Raggiana said, aware of Ko III's habit of running away, 'we can't give her back to the Koimamkup or Burikup. You Ate said he didn't want her, and put his finger to his nose to show that he was speaking the truth. If she comes to Penkup, we can't give her back.'

'What is there to say?' Tultul Spear of Koimamkup subclan asked the assembled company. 'She doesn't like one man, so he gives her to another. She doesn't like the new man, so he gives her to someone else. She won't stay with You Ate, that is clear. If she knows a man she wants to marry, she can go to him—so long as he is a Kugika.'

Some of the men left to investigate a complaint about a pig. Among them were Tultul Two Stay and Wood Stone.

'If Two Stay and Wood Stone come to get the woman Ko III' Raggiana said, 'I can't give her to them. If she comes to the Penkup, we'll keep her.'

'I wanted to marry her myself,' one of the Penkup men grinned, 'but the Burikup said I couldn't'.

'If she says today that she wants to marry some man, she can,' Spear pronounced. 'If not, she can wait. If she says tomorrow that she wants to marry someone, she can. If not, she can wait. There is no hurry.'

Later that afternoon, when Raggiana was busy elsewhere, Two Stay and Wood Stone went to his long-house and dragged Ko III away to You Ate's house. They were determined that the Penkup should not marry her.

A couple of days later, Konangil told me that Ko III had run away to him. He said he was pleased that she had done so but was afraid that he would not have enough valuables to give her family if she should become pregnant to him. Konangil said in a bored voice that Ko III was not a very good-looking woman and he did not like her particularly, but she had insisted on going to him. Knowing that he was a good actor, I did not know whether to believe him or not.

A little later, I saw Tail and asked him where Ko III was.

'Haven't you heard?' he asked me. 'Together Small captured Ko III from the Burikup and gave her to Konangil. She didn't like Konangil, so she has run away again and Together Small is very angry.'

It took me some time to learn the true story. When Raggiana learned that Two Stay and Wood Stone had taken Ko III back, he had a long discussion with Two Stay (as one *tultul* to another), who agreed to let him have Ko III for Konangil. Raggiana gave her to Konangil. Konangil had heard the other men's ribald joking and knew that they all considered Ko III to be a wandering woman. He watched her as she cooked some food for him. Like all Minj men, he had wanted his first wife to be a young girl untried in marriage, a girl whose skin gleamed with pigs' grease when her family decorated her and presented her to him. A woman who had previously been married, like Ko III, would have been satisfactory enough as a second or third wife, but his prestige would suffer if this were the only kind of wife he could find. Anyway, everyone knew that Ko III was a wanderer who would not work in the garden and look after pigs but would think only of men. His wife in name only, she would really be a concubine. Raggiana had even suggested jokingly that he might share her with another man. Konangil threw the food in her face, crying impatiently, 'You harlot! Why did Raggiana give you to me?' Ko III fled.

Mountain Tree's wife, Woman of Waga Clan, saw Ko III running away, and she told Together Small and Original Man, two members of her husband's subdivision, to go after her and bring her back. Woman of Waga Clan told Raggiana that Original Man wanted a wife, and he said that the Kumngakanim subdivision could have her for Original Man. Original Man took her to his house in the evening and tried to give love to her. Ko III scratched him and made his ear bleed. She managed to run away again. Together Small, Original Man, and Sleeping brought her back and guarded her during the night. Ko III ran away again the next day and took refuge inside my fence. Raggiana and Big Insect

told Sleeping to capture her and take her back. Sleeping hesitated, because he did not want to break my fence. He knew that I had been angry with Two Stay for damaging the step when he had dragged the girl You Heard from my house.

Ko III told me that she now wanted to go back to her Baiman husband. She said that she would not have left him if Dog had not persuaded her to come to Kondambi. There had been nothing but trouble ever since. She told me tearfully that because she had left her husband all the Kugika thought that they could do as they liked with her.

‘Of course we can do as we like with you’ one of the men interrupted her ‘because you’re a wandering woman’.

Wood Stone suddenly swept through the crowd, grasped Ko III, and dragged her off to Gwaip to give her to [space in original]. The Penkup men were startled and did not resist him. Raggiana and Mountain Tree, who had been away at Minj, came and learned that the Burikup had taken Ko III.

‘I don’t want the Penkup to lose her to another group, even to Burikup,’ Raggiana said. ‘Married women who leave their husbands are unfortunately rare, and how else can we get wives?’

‘True,’ Mountain Tree agreed. ‘Young girls are always given to young men who still carry leg. The older men who don’t carry leg have no hope of finding new wives unless they take women who have run away from their husbands.’

‘Who wants to hear what you two say?’ Big Insect said jeeringly. ‘No one wants to listen to you.’

Raggiana commanded the Burikup to bring Ko III to the ceremonial ground in order that everyone might discuss her fate. There was no response. He yodelled to Two Stay to bring her, but Two Stay did not appear. Then he sent Original and Konangil to Gwaip to interview Wood Stone. They reported that he was determined to keep Ko III for [space in original].

Ko III stayed with the wild young man, [space in original] as his wife. She was still with him when I left Kondambi two months later.

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