

How a Young Man Got Married Without Paying a Dowry

Contributed by Tony Dilworth

As told by Bonaventure C. K. Mkumbi of the Warimi tribe in the Singida district of Tanzania. Tony Dilworth spent many years in Tanzania where he collected and translated stories told to him by the local people.

Tony comments: *This story is close to the original as the English is very good. Kasunta is the word used for a bird. It is a Kirimi word and, as it was written with a capital letter, I have retained it as though it were a personal name for the bird. The young man's song is in the original Kirimi as well as the English translation.*

There was once an old woman who lived with her grandson. They were very poor and so the young man could not get married as he was unable to give a prospective bride's father a dowry. His grandmother thought about this for a long time and eventually formed a plan to get her grandson a wife without his having to pay any dowry.

There was a tree in the garden, just behind their hut. There were beautiful flowers on this tree. The old lady said to her grandson, "You must guard the flower on that tree against insects. If any insect lands on a flower you must bring this insect home and guard *it* after that instead of guarding the tree. If any creature kills the insect you must bring it home and guard that creature. If any creature kills that creature, you must bring the new creature home and guard it, and continue doing this on and on."

"But grannam," said the lad, "what is the point in telling me this?"

"My dear grandson," the old woman answered, "obey me and you will eventually get married without paying any dowry."

The young man did what his grandmother told him. He looked after the flowers and one day, when he was watching over them, he found an insect sucking the nectar of one of the flowers. He caught the insect and, as he was taking it home, he sang happily:

Jingili watomole uluva,

Uluva mama walemile iyene.

Solo: Kisoita jingili uka kwende ukhaitu
Ou, jingili!

Chorus Uka kwende ukhaitu

[*trans*] The insect sucked the flowers
The flowers which my grandmother alone grew

Solo This is my will, you insect, let's go to our home
Oh, insect!

Chorus Let's go to our home.

The young man reached home, still singing his song repeatedly. His grandmother was pleased to see him with an insect in his hand. "Well done, my little one!" the old woman said happily. "Now leave the flowers alone and care for this insect lest any living creature should kill it. If any creature kills it, catch the killer and bring it home and keep it. Go on doing this and in the end you will get a wife of your own without paying any dowry. Understand?"

"Very well grannam," the lad replied. "But is that really true?"

"It's as true as truth itself, my dear grandson," she said.

The grandson looked after the insect but after a few days it was killed by a small bird called Kasunta. He caught the bird and brought it to his grandmother as he sang this song:

Kasunta watomole jingili,
Jingili watomole uluva,
Uluva mama walemile iyene.

Solo: Kisoita Kasunta uka kwenda ukhaitu
Ou, Kasunta! Ou, jingili!

Chorus Uka kwende ukhaitu

[*trans*] Kasunta pierced the insect,
The insect sucked the flowers

The flowers which my grandma alone grew

Solo This is my will, you Kasunta, let's go to our home
Oh Kasunta! Oh, insect!

Chorus Let's go to our home.

A few days later the bird was flattened under one of the hooves of a huge gelded bull which was on its way to a green meadow. The poor bird died, of course. The boy stopped the bull and took it home to show his grandmother. As he went, he sang his song again:

Njiku eye apondile Kasunta,
Kasunta watomole jingili,
Jingili watomole uluva,
Uluva mama walemile iyene.

Solo: Kisoita njiku eye uka kwenda ukhaitu
Ou, njiku eye! Ou, Kasunta! Ou, jingili!

Chorus Uka kwende ukhaitu

[*trans*] This bull stamped on Kasunta,
Kasunta pierced the insect,
The insect sucked the flowers
The flowers which my grandma alone grew

Solo This is my will, you Kasunta, let's go to our home
Oh this bull! Oh Kasunta! Oh, insect!

Chorus Let's go to our home.

The young man kept the bull, but a few weeks later it was beaten to death by a beautiful girl who found it eating the millet in her father's field. The girl stood staring at the dead bull as it lay on the ground when suddenly her arm was caught firmly by the young man.

“My wife,” the young man whispered to her. He realised at once that what his grandmother had told him had come true. He embraced the girl and took her home, holding her hand gently as he sang his song:

Munch uyu waponbile njiku ane,
Njiku eye aponbile Kasunta,
Kasunta watomole jingili,
Jingili watomole uluva,
Uluva mama walemile iyene.

Solo: Kisoita munchu uyu uka kwenda uhkaitu
Ou munchu uyu! Ou, njiku eye! Ou, Kasunta! Ou, jingili!

Chorus: Uka kwende ukhaitu

[*trans*] This girl murdered my bull,
This bull stamped on Kasunta,
Kasunta pierced the insect,
The insect sucked the flowers
The flowers which my grandma alone grew

Solo: This is my will, you Kasunta, let's go to our home
Oh, this girl! Oh this bull! Oh Kasunta! Oh, insect!

Chorus: Let's go to our home.

When the old woman heard her grandson's song, she came out of the hut as she understood at once that he had won a beautiful girl. She welcomed the two young people gladly, she congratulated her grandson and gave the girl a new name, Mjaire, which means beauty, as she was such a beautiful attractive maiden.