

Folk Tales of the Maldives



Xavier Romero-Frias

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Collected and translated by
Xavier Romero-Frias

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This book is dedicated to Natxo Romero Frias (1958–2010), my younger brother and childhood companion. He was a man with a generous heart and an extraordinary gift for remembering humorous stories that he would store in his mind in order to entertain his friends and family. I strove to match my brother's talent of being able to memorize stories, a skill that would prove very useful while gathering and recording the oral tradition of the Maldivian Islands.

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Preface

This book was written with two groups of readers in mind. I trust that you belong to one or both of these. First, you may be one of those people interested to learn more about the Maldives and with luck visit that beautiful country. The stories found here offer insights into the lives, culture and history of the Maldivians not found in any guidebook.

Alternatively, you may be a scientist – say, an anthropologist, folklorist, linguist or Islamic scholar. The technical information and introduction that follow were written with you in mind and the stories themselves are annotated to add to their meaning.



Part of Huvadu Atoll, the largest atoll in the Indian Ocean (photo by Nils Finn Munch-Petersen)

Whichever type of reader you are, I hope that you enjoy reading this volume as much as I have done researching and writing it over the years.



The stories in this book were compiled between 1979 and 2007. Many people helped me during the long process of collecting the texts over the years. In the end the stories were very useful, allowing me to understand and appreciate the language, customs, values and complex courtesy of the Maldives.

I am especially grateful to a great number of people from Fua Mulaku Island, especially the late Magieduruge Ibrahīm Dīdī, the late Kenerige Muhammadu Saīdu, Nūdalhī Nasīmu, Karaange Fatma Dīdī, Hasan Dīdī and Husein Dīdī, Hudufini-fenmaage Ahmad Dīdī, ‘Light’ Hamīdu and Vaijehēge Alī Dīdī, Daḍimagi Abdul Raḥīgu, Bonḍoraage Muhammad Dīdī, Muhammadu (Kaḷu) Maniku, Vaḍige Bonḍobēbe and Kudubēbe, Daisyvilla Saalihu, Meṭa Muhammadu, Endīge Alī Hasanu and Havva Muhammadu, Hittange Ali Dīdī, Himitige Halīma, Finifenmaage Hasan Dīdī and Gulshad, Bēremagi Aliu, Mariyam Fāruq and Tuttu (Mubīnu’s dad), as well as Ahmed Naif and Mohamed Ibrahim Didi (Modi) for their pictures.

I have to thank also all the Maldivians from other islands who gave me time-honoured hospitality, told me stories casually – often not thinking that what they were telling me was important at all – or assisted me in other ways, like Aishath Naazneen, Ahmed Shakīb, Khatma Ibrahim, Tandiraiymaage Ahumadu Shafīgu, Manzil Abdurrahīm Abdul Majīd, Gage Naīma, Dōdil Maimūna, Nedunge Alī Najību, his son Muhammadu Najību and their friend Ba, Kolige Hasan Maniku, Maizan Hasan Maniku, Bashimāge Muhammadu Rashīdu, Habība Husein Habīb, Hirunduge Donkokko, Nihani Riza and Muhammad Āsim, all from Male’, as well as Abdul Rashīdu (Huraa); Abdul Haadi (Kuḍa Huvadū), Aishath Sōbira

(Filladū), Āmin Dhaitha (Felidū), Kambulō Daita and Husein Koi Bē (Hoḷudu), Kuḍafari Kalēfaanu (Kuḍafari); Beyya, Ahumadu Saīdu and Hasan Maniku (Gaddū); Afīfu (Ratafandū), Afīfu (Havaru Tinadū), Tuttu (Fares), Zāhira (Mātoḍā), Sharifu and Tuttubē (GA-Māmendū), and Dīdī (Devvadū); Saīdu and Nasīmu (Fēdū), Sēbuge Ali Dīdī, Fatma Dīdī and Jamshīdu (Mīdū) and Ibrahīm Dīdī and Havva Diye (Hitadū). Thanks to all these people, and to many others who I have no space here to mention, I have been able to fathom the depth of the Maldivian culture.

I thank also the officials at the Spanish Embassy in New Delhi, where I was registered as resident. I am especially grateful to Isabel and Carlos Fernández Espeso for their kindness and unwavering assistance whenever I needed something from them between the years 1979 and 2007.

Finally, special thanks to the people who helped me, assisted me and encouraged me in different ways during the process of translating and making the comparative analysis of the folktales I had gathered, like Suzanne Pruner, Philippe Coigne, Elfriede Kopf, Cos Rousso, Ewald Kiebert, Pitt Pietersoone and Nils Finn Munch-Petersen in the Maldives, as well as Ali Manikfan from Minicoy and Prof. V. Sudarsan, head of the Department of Anthropology, University of Madras, in India, and Ramon Faura Cunill, Manolo Martinez Martí and his wife Mercedes Sanchez Lodaes in my own country.

Xavier Romero-Frias
Bangkok, 2012

Names of Maldivians

Two ways of naming coexist in the Maldives, the formal and the traditional. Formal naming nowadays, and among the Arabicized elite in the past, follows Arabic rules with the given name followed by the father's name. An example is *Minna Wajeeh*, one of the first radio broadcasters.

The traditional way of naming in the Maldives, however, emphasizes kinship above fatherhood. Therefore the house name precedes the given name of a person, for all Maldivians belong to an extended family or household. An extra name denoting social status, such as 'Didi', is often attached at the end. An example is *Karaange Hasan Didi*.

The name of the island, and the section, village or quarter in large islands, is also important and often precedes the name of the person. To demean a person, Maldivians often would say '*Taneh doreh neiy mīheh*' (A person without location and door), emphasizing the fact of the person not belonging to a place and house.

Glossary

Note: Maldivian language words are in italics. Cross-references are marked by bold text. For the transcription of the Maldivian language the ISO 15919 transliteration of Indic scripts has been used, with some exceptions.

Areca nut (*fō* or *fuah*) The fruit of the Areca palm (*Areca catechu*), chewed with betel leaf. When eaten dry this nut is sliced with the *fōvvali*.

Ashi A raised platform found in traditional houses or built under a shade to rest or above the hearth to dry fish.

Baṇḍia A large metal pot used mainly by women to carry water.

Batteli A locally-built wooden merchant sailing vessel that usually has two masts. In Huvadū Atoll this word is used for the small sailing boats.

Betel (*bileiy*) The leaf of the betel vine (*Piper betel*), betel leaf is chewed along with **areca nut**. Formerly areca nut and betel were very important as gifts and to give to guests after the meals in funerary ceremonies.

Bēbē The form of addressing any older male person.

Datta The form of addressing any older female person.

Dāy (*dāu*) A grindstone with a stone roller. It is made from hard and heavy imported basalt, local coral

stone being unsuitable for the purpose. Ancient island lore claims that powerful sorcerers can make a grindstone float and use it as a ship.

Divehi This epithet means ‘from the islands’ and is used in the same sense as ‘native’. Among others, it is found in ‘*Divehi Raajje*’, the name of the country; ‘*Divehi bas*’, the Maldivian language; and ‘*Divehi akuru*’, a generic name for the ancient Maldivian scripts (later rechristened by H.C.P. Bell as ‘*Evēla akuru*’ for the older forms and ‘*Dives akuru*’ for the later form). The verb ‘*Divehi vun*’ refers to the fact of becoming naturalized.

Divehi hakuru The thick sweet syrup obtained after boiling the sap of the coconut palm.

Divehi ruh The coconut palm.

Dōni A small or medium-sized fishing boat.

Eterevaru The side of the coral reef facing the lagoon in an atoll.

Faṇḍita (fanditha) Local sorcery or magic; in the modern Divehi language ‘*faṇḍita*’ is homonymous with esoteric learning, sorcery or magic. It is never used like the word ‘*Paṇḍit*’ in Sanskrit and its derived forms in other Indian languages, where it is the title of a learned person or the respectful form of addressing that particular individual (the practitioner or sorcerer is known as *faṇḍitaveriya*).

Faṇḍiyāru (Fandiyāaru) The chief judge, the highest official in the country below the royal family.

Fannu The place where an island path meets the sea.

- Fātiha* A funerary ceremony which features the ceremonial reading of the exordium of the Quran.
- Fēli* The beautiful black and white waist cloth used by women of the nobility and the king's soldiers. The commoner women wore the plain black waist cloth known as *kaṇḍiki* (*alfaka* in the south).
- Findana* The Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), a bird living close to the shoreline.
- Fō* See Areca nut.
- Fōvvali* Areca cutter, a special scissor-like instrument.
- Fuah* See Areca nut.
- Furēta, ferēta* A monster or demon, usually ugly and scary.
- Fuṭṭaru* The ocean side of the coral reef that is incessantly pounded by the waves.
- Haṇḍi* An ambivalent spirit that appears either in the form of a beautiful woman or as a hideous, terrifying hag. It is usually connected to certain trees growing in the forest.
- Iloshi (ileishi or lieshi)* The thin nerves of the coconut palm, used to make brooms and toothpicks. These are separated from the palm-leaf blade (*fanvah*) using a knife.
- Kaṇḍiki* See *Fēli*.
- Keuḷu (Keyolhu)* The master fisherman in any fishing boat, one of whose activities is ***mākeuḷukaṇ***.
- Kokko* The form of addressing any younger person.
- Mākana* The Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), an ubiquitous bird in Maldivian folklore, one of whose main traits is obstinacy (*goiy dūnukurun*).

- Mākeuḷukañ* The fishing of large sharks by a master fisherman in order to obtain oil to treat the wood for boatbuilding.
- Mālimi* The navigator in an ocean-going trading ship.
- Māmuli, Māmeli* or *Mēliya* A middle-aged fairy-like woman (*Daita* or *Dhaitha*) having seven children. Some plants are named after her, such as *Achyranthes aspera* (*Mēliya kaṇḍi*) and *Phyllanthus amarus* (*Mēliya limboi*). She is said to live at the ‘end of the island’ (*Rakkoḷu*).
- Masdayffiyohi* Literally ‘fish-tooth knife’, a special knife used in *faṇḍita* with a handle made of sperm-whale-tooth ivory. The blade of the *masdayffiohi* knife is allegedly made of an alloy of seven metals (*haylō*). All *faṇḍita* men owned these knives in the past.
- Maulūdu* A traditional Muslim religious festival that involved chanting devotional songs in praise of the Messenger of Allah. A big *maulūdu* celebration involved the building of a decorated pavilion and much cooking of special food.
- Midili* A local tree (*Terminalia catappa*). The ripe fruit has a thin layer of pulp on the outside and a large pit inside in which there is a small seed. Maldivians say that after eating the pulp any water tastes better.
- Muḷōṣi (muḍeiṣi)* A simple basket made with two short sections of coconut palm fronds.
- Muṇḍu* A lunghi or sarong, the essential piece of men’s clothing in the traditional Maldives and in Minicoy. It was a simple, light and very sen-

sible way of dressing in the tropical heat until replaced by trousers. The ‘Haji Muṇḍu Shop’ that closed down in early 1979 was formerly one of the most important shops in Male’.

Oḍi, veḍi or *vodḍa* A bulky barque-type wooden merchant sailing vessel for long-range travel. These ships were mainly used in the yearly trading journey to harbours located on foreign coasts.

Oḍitān Kalēge A famous sorcerer in Maldivian tradition.

Rihākuru A salty and thick paste made by cooking tuna fish until most of the water evaporates. This is one of the most important items in Maldivian cuisine.

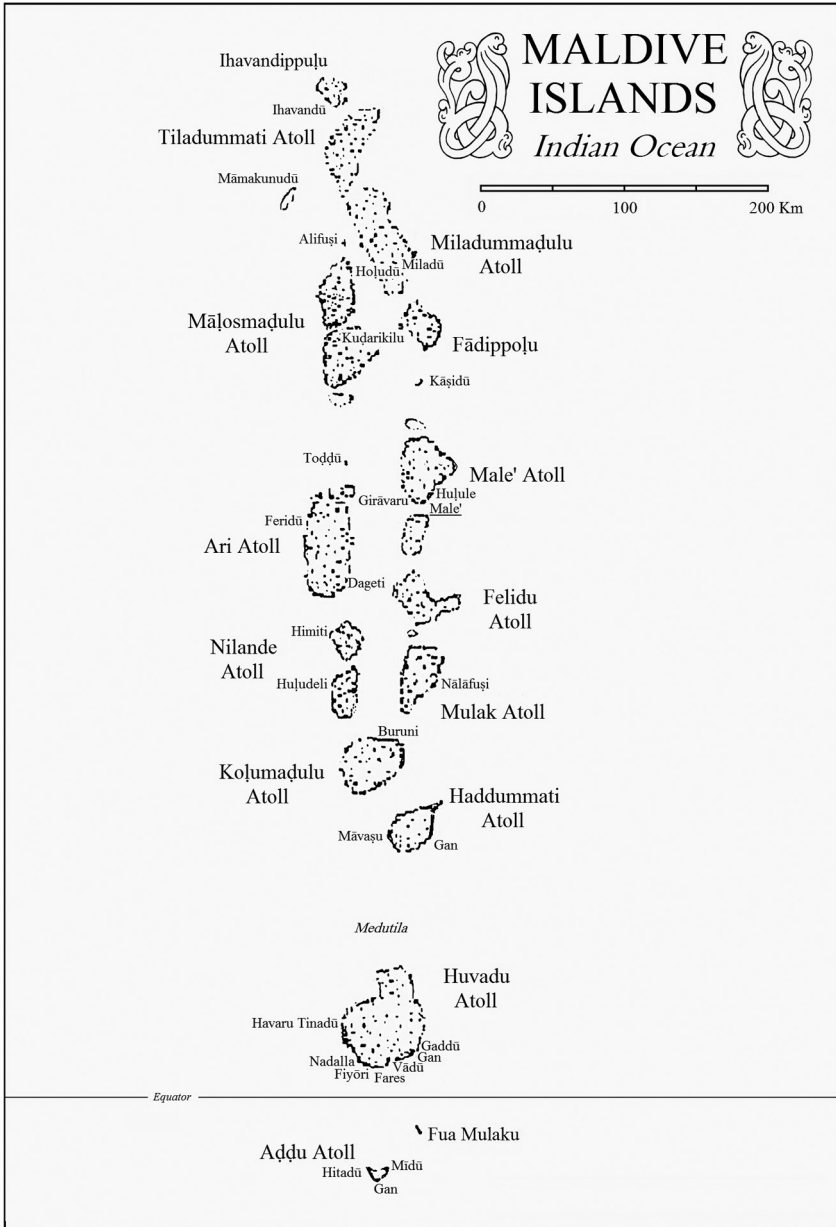
Taana The current Maldivian script, written from right to left.

Tuna The favorite fish of Maldivians; the preferred species is Skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*). In former times dry cured tuna pieces were one of the main sources of income for Maldivian traders.

Undōli (indōli) A large swingbed typical of island homesteads.

Veū (also spelled ‘veyo’) A stone pool with steps used as a bathing tank.

Ziyāray (ziyāray) A shrine erected over the tomb of a highly respected person. It usually has the shape of a little house. There are often white flags planted within the enclosure surrounding the small building. According to tradition a small lamp has to be kept burning inside during the night.



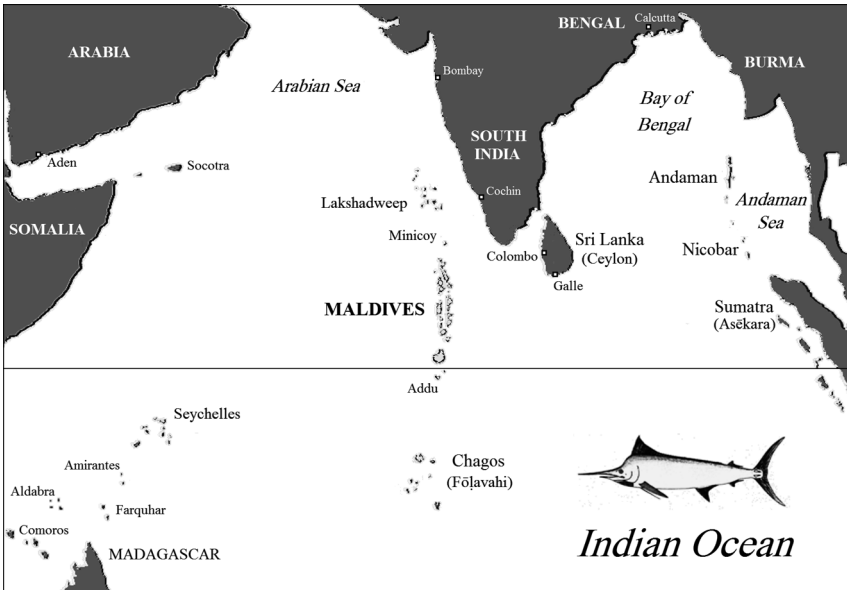
Map of the Maldives with the traditional names of the atolls and some of the main islands mentioned in the book.

Introduction: Maldivian Folklore and Popular Literature in the Divehi Language

BACKGROUND

The Maldivian nation is made up exclusively of coral atolls forming an island chain on an oceanic ridge surrounded by deep waters. On their reefs lie about 1,200 islands almost at sea level surrounded by turquoise lagoons. Only about 200 of them are inhabited today. These small islands are located away from the continents in the equatorial area of the Indian Ocean.

The Maldivian Islands – known by Maldivians as *Divehi Raaje*, meaning the ‘Kingdom of Islands’ or ‘Kingdom of the Divehi people’ – have been continuously populated for millennia; there-



fore their folklore is very ancient. Maldivian folk tales, however, are largely unknown to the outside world. Despite the existence of a large quantity of stories in the Maldivian oral tradition, no compilation in print has ever been undertaken.¹

There is high literacy in the Maldives, and the literacy rate of women is slightly higher than for men – by far the highest in South Asia. But traditional tales were not written. Usually folk tales were told by storytellers who were invited to entertain the audience of an island household, where several generations were living together under one roof. Storytellers used to be men, save a few exceptions, like the late Gōnahijje Fatma Didi of Fua Mulaku.

On a number of favourable occasions, stories were also told spontaneously, such as during the long journeys between distant islands on the decks of ships or on a veranda in the light of a dim oil lamp after sunset in the long equatorial night. In those cases anyone remembering a good tale would be willingly listened to.

Since there are a great number of islands in the Maldivian Archipelago, many of the local tales and legends have different versions according to the particular island or the storyteller in question.

During the 1980s, after the culture of the country became exposed simultaneously to the influence both of modernity and of militant Islam, the national myths and collective experiences were rewritten. Within the distortions imposed by the new scenario ancient local stories would lose their importance in Maldivian society. Even though they were an inseparable part of the national identity, Maldivian traditional stories were given no role in the contradictory “Islamic modern nation” that was being hewn.

Radio Maldives would organize storytelling contests during Ramadan, but none of the stories narrated over the airwaves stuck to the pattern of the atavistic oral folklore. In fact there

1. Clarence Maloney, *People of the Maldivian Islands*, Orient Longman, Delhi 1980.

was no effort to preserve and popularize the native stories in their original form. Only some old legends that had been printed in the Maldivian language, such as ‘Don Mohonu and the Shark’, ‘Doñ Hiyalā and Alifūlu’ or ‘*Haṇḍi Doñ Kamanā*’ managed to survive, albeit in a modified form. These stories remained familiar to Maldivians throughout the 1990s.

The end of the 20th century saw the steady decline of oral Maldivian folklore. The main reason was the vanishing of the large extended-family households, as well as the decrease of island community life in favour of private, secluded lifestyles. The influence of television, followed by the popularization of the internet and mobile phones, ended up weaning people away from the age-old tradition of storytelling.

WRITTEN MANUSCRIPTS: RELIGIOUS LITERATURE IN THE DIVEHI LANGUAGE

Almost all written manuscripts of the traditional literature of the Maldives were based on religious themes. The pious literature in Divehi, the Maldivian language, is composed of a great volume of texts dealing with various subjects of the Islamic religion. Usually the thin books used to teach the children the rudiments of Muslim doctrine were found in every island household. One of the most widely used to emphasize the broadly accepted social values (*heu nubai*) was ‘*Dhu ’ūsul Akhulaaq*’.² Another important religious text in Divehi, containing practical aspects of the Islamic religion, was the ‘*Boḍu Tartību*’,³ a large book found in many households, and not only in the homes of learned men.

2. *Heu nubai* means ‘right/wrong’; similar books were *Dīniyat* and *Ta’alim Diyaana*, among others

3. The author was the much respected *Vādū Dannakalēfānu* from the late 16th century, also known as *Nāibu Tuttu* and *Muhammadu Jamāl-ud-Dīn*. After living most of his life studying in Hadramaut, Southern Arabia, he spent his last years in near seclusion on *Vādū Island*, *Huvadū Atoll*.

Owing to their fixed, canonical nature, those texts differ very little from similar religious writings found among other South Asian Muslim communities, except that some of the interspersed explanations are written in Divehi, the Maldivian language.

These religious books teaching moral lessons and essential knowledge on devotion were the fruit of the efforts of a long line of Maldivian learned men, like Muhammad Jamil (Jamil Didi).⁴ Besides translating Arabic religious texts, Jamil Didi also rendered foreign tales and fables, adapted to the island context, into the Maldivian language.

Among the texts of the religious literature, by tradition the most popular among Maldivians was the translation of the *sirat* (سیرت النبوة), the biographical account of the Messenger of Allah.⁵ In a pious mood, people listened attentively to the stories of the *sirat* broadcast on Maldivian radio during the long Ramadan afternoons. None of these texts, however, belong to the home-grown oral tradition.

MALDIVIAN SECULAR LITERATURE

The 18th and the 19th centuries saw a flourishing of trade between the Maldives and the main harbours of the British Empire, foremost of which were Calcutta, Bombay, Cochin and Galle. At that time some Maldivians travelled for education to different cities of the Subcontinent, where they sought the environment of Muslim communities. There they learned mainly in Urdu, also known as Hindustani, a language easily translated into Divehi because of linguistic affinity. Several

4. Xavier Romero-Frias, *The Maldivian Islanders, A Study of the Popular Culture of an Ancient Ocean Kingdom*. Barcelona, 1999.

5. *As-Siyarat-un-Nabawīyyat*, translated by Husain Salahuddin, MA Sādāge, Male', 1967. Salahuddin also wrote the Bodu Takurufaanu Story, a book which became part of the official literature of the state. This epic story, the historical works Tarikh and Radavali, as well as the royal genealogies are quite tangential to the subject of Maldivian folklore and popular literature.



Representation of ‘Kāṣidū Haṇḍi Doṅ Kamaṇā’ in Ābāru, one of the first popular publications of the 1970s.

secular stories, such as ‘*Bīrubolu Vazīru*’,⁶ ‘*Juhā*’, and ‘*Boḍu Gohoḍā*’ made their way to the Maldives through Urdu-trained scholars such as Dommanikuge Ismail Didi, who published a number of them in manuscripts that were later copied by hand. Quite a few of these accounts became well known and intermingled with the local folklore.

In the mid-20th century there was an effort by Muhammad Amin (Amin Didi) to secularize the Maldivian state. Although

6. Urdu: *Birbal*. The name of the protagonist, a humorous minister of Emperor Akbar’s court

some secular literature was published during that period⁷ – part of it written by Amin himself – it was mainly of a sophisticated nature and therefore was valued only by the elite. Notwithstanding Amin’s attempts at modernization and despite the steady trading activity of the previous centuries, the Maldives had little contact with the outside world and remained a relatively obscure country until the advent of tourism in the 1970s.

At that time, during the brief secular period of President Nasser’s rule, the first modern popular publications were printed in the Maldives. Although often labelled as ‘magazines’, with names like ‘*Moonlight*’ for instance, they had the rudimentary format of fanzines and were printed using cyclostyle copiers. These early magazines were published mainly in Male’ as a result of the effort and initiative of editors like Kopi Mohamed Rasheed. For the most part they were intended to be issued on a monthly basis but often ended up being short-lived.

Thanks to the work of writers like Abdulla Sadiq a few indigenous folktales such as ‘*Haṇḍi Doṅ Kamaṇā*’ surfaced at that time in those basic magazines. Contact with the outside world had increased and Maldivian writers were exposed to writing in other languages. As a result, the native stories were perceived as unrefined and were reworked, often in the form of bowdlerization, expunging all mention of human excrement or extreme forms of cruelty, in order to adjust them to what writers deemed were general tastes.⁸ Even then stories based on the local oral tradition were not given the special prominence they deserved and ended up not being half as well liked as the translations of romantic love stories from North Indian publications in Urdu.

About a decade later, Suzanne Pruner, an American writer who was residing in Male’, published ‘*Finiashi*’, a collection

7. Daisymaage Āminatu Fāizā, *Amīnuge Handān*.

8. The alterations in the *Doṅkamaṇā* story, for example, which was published in Ābāru, Male’, 1974, followed the style used in the translated romance novels, for which there was great demand.

of booklets in English assisted by Novelty Ali Husein.⁹ Those booklets featured short stories in English written by contemporary Maldivian authors intermingled with translations of traditional folktales. Still, however, there was no publication devoted exclusively to the atavic folk tales and legends, not even a small booklet with a collection of them.

At the end of the 20th century, even with the availability of quality printing, the native legends that had been published were very few. The quality of the stories was random and they were found in scattered publications while still a very large proportion had never been put into writing.

MALDIVIAN ORAL TRADITION

The corpus of tales of the ancestral oral tradition in the Maldives has a haphazard quality. So far no attempt towards classification has been made.¹⁰ Most stories are told as tales for children although certain parts, or even the whole theme, may be gruesome by any standard.¹¹

Tentatively the tales of the oral tradition of the Maldives may be categorized as follows: 1, tales of spirits or monsters; 2, long fairy-tale style myths; 3, stories involving humorous characters; 4, fables with local animals; 5, seafaring stories; and 6, chronicles of semi-historical events. Many stories encompass two or more categories and, as they were intended to be handed down from the older to the younger generation, most accounts contain a moral lesson in some form.

9. *Finiashi – Heard in the Islands, Maldivian Stories Vols 1–4*, edited by Ali Hussain. ‘Novelty’ is a publishing company and bookstore in Male’.

10. Clarence Maloney, *People of the Maldive Islands*.

11. A lady from a noble family, encouraged by my example, tried to put into writing the tales her grandmother had told her as a child but realized that her memory had blocked them. The stories had terrified her so much at the time that she had suppressed the remembrance in order to be able to sleep.

1. Tales of spirits or monsters

The most popular and enduring tales of the Maldivian lore are about evil spirits and their interaction with the islanders. Reading those stories it becomes evident that certain patterns of behaviour became necessary in order to avoid trouble with the spirit world. Actions like staying at home in the night, the importance of keeping a secret, as well as the avoidance of certain areas of the island and of inauspicious times were an essential component of the ancient popular spirituality and way of life.

In the mythology of Maldivians, the sorcerer, or learned man of the island who knew the magic arts (*faṇḍita*), is always portrayed as a hero. He was an educated and respected person and only he knew how to appease the spirits that terrified average island folk day and night. Oḍitān Kalēge is the most representative sorcerer in the oral tradition of the islands and a *faṇḍita* man is the central figure of the myth that explains the origins of the first coconut trees. Relatively recent stories, such as *Gabuḷi Bādalū*, cast the sorcerer in the role of a villain, but these are new elaborations disconnected from the ancestral Maldivian lore.

*Haṇḍi*¹² is the name of one of the most prominent figures of the Maldivian popular mythology. Appearing as a very beautiful woman dressed in red and smelling like the sweet-scented flowers she often wears in her hair, she can also manifest herself in a way that strikes terror. The *haṇḍi* is said to inhabit some islands, mainly in the southern atolls, where she is commonly associated with specific species of trees.

Ruthlessly preying on unwary people, especially men, a *haṇḍi* may be a cause of illness or death. In a few tales she appears as a fearsome emaciated hag with unkempt hair and fangs, for instance in *Fūḷu Digu Haṇḍi*, a story popularized through school plays, while other legends emphasize her

12. From the Sanskrit: *Caṇḍi*, a form of *Dēvi*; Maloney *op. cit.*

gentle side. Other fierce female spirits with characteristics broadly similar to *hanḍi* are *Minikā Daita* (the cannibal aunt) who relishes human flesh, especially children, and *Dōgi Āihā*, *Oḍitān Kalēge*'s wife, who drinks blood and devours corpses. The abundance of women killing or eating people¹³ is one of the most distinctive features of Maldivian folklore.

These local stories about dangerous female spirits, often linked to disease, have a common origin in the ancient village goddesses¹⁴ of the neighbouring Subcontinent. They constitute an excellent indicator of the ethnic origin of the Maldivian people, as well as to the ancestral religious beliefs preceding Buddhism and Islam.¹⁵

Other fearsome spirits which are the subject of many folk tales in the Maldives are crude monsters broadly known as '*furēta*'. These are either coming from the ocean waters¹⁶ or dwelling in burial grounds.¹⁷

The tales about awful sea creatures are part of the native cultural background, characterized by the oceanic environment in which, through the millennia, the Maldivian ethnicity developed. The story *Arruffanno Ferēta*, for example, gives meaning to a particular landmark located in the shore of a certain island. On the other hand the stories of spirits of deceased people, like *Muladovi*, emphasize the importance of tombs and mortuary rituals in the traditional island culture.¹⁸

13. A fact that struck Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl and which he described in his book 'The Maldivian Mystery'.

14. Brubaker, 'The Ambivalent Mistress: A study of South Indian Village Goddesses and Their Religious Meaning', Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1978.

15. Even *Ranna Māri*, the demon said to have haunted the islands before the conversion to Islam has the name of a South Indian goddess. Romero-Frias, *The Maldivian Islanders*.

16. In Sanskrit: *Prēta*; *ferēta* in the Southern Maldivian languages, but not always anthropomorphic.

17. These are generically known as '*dovi*', Sanskrit: *Dēvata*.

18. Romero-Frias, *The Maldivian Islanders*.

While there is a large amount of stories in the Maldives about either female spirits or sea monsters, for reasons of space only a few of them have been selected for this volume.

2. *Fairy-tale-style myths*

In the oral tradition of the Maldives we find a certain type of very long popular story ever-present throughout countries of the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia. These are tales about young princes and beautiful heroines in which the spirit-and-sorcery theme is not central, but plays a secondary role.

The most significant is ‘Doñ Hiyālā and Alifuḷu’, the story about the ordeal of two good-looking lovers which is a much distorted Maldivian version of the Rāmāyaṇa myth. Such disparities are common among indigenous Rāmāyaṇa versions throughout the South and Southeast Asian spheres to which the Maldives belong.¹⁹ Despite the dissimilarities, the common sequential structure linking the elements of the Maldivian story with the Indian epic (the heroic married couple, the wicked but powerful king, the kidnapping of the beautiful heroine, etc.) is evident.²⁰ Traditionally these long tales were recited by storytellers and came in verse form, especially in a kind of couplet known as *raivaru*.²¹

Raivaru was a formerly very successful form of poetry adapted by islanders to a wide array of subjects, from short love poems with witty double meanings to the *Maakeyoḷukamuge Raivaru*, relating the exploits of the fishing of large sharks.

Although not part of the oral tradition, mention should be made of *Diyōge Raivaru*, a long literary work in the *raivaru*-form written in the 18th century by Maldivian writer Baṇḍēri

19. *Asian Variations in Ramayana*, edited by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar. Sahitya Akademi. Delhi, 1983.

20. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*.

21. *Furatama Satēka Raivaru*. Divehi Bahāi Tārikhah Khidmaiyykurā Qaumī Markazu. Male’, 1996

Hasan Manikufānu.²² A stanza of this interesting *raivaru* poem is quoted by Geiger in his work²³ on the Maldivian language:

Tavakkāshi eruvi nā / bāilate bīhēti nāfu
*Rasha' Diyōge / Adanāfu*²⁴

3. Stories with humorous characters

Stories about local characters, like *Mākumbē*, *Rōnu Eduru* or 'The Poor Man of Nalafushi', often involve humorous situations. They give us a glimpse of the way of life in the Maldives when the archipelago was a kingdom and Male', the capital, was a quaint, laid-back place. In some of those stories we learn also about the life at the court in Male' and about the mutual interaction between the *Radun*, the king of the Maldives, and his subjects.

Other comical Maldivian stories like '*Kaḷukuru*' (or *Karukuru*), a character who often runs into trouble with five robbers ('*Fas Muhvagun*') of the local lore, have not been included in this volume owing to limited space.

4. Fables with animals

In addition, tales, fables and aphorisms where fishes, crabs and seabirds are the heroes introduce us to the world of the local fauna of the atolls. The larger wild land animals are non-existent in the Maldives²⁵ but, owing to continuous trade with the neighbouring Subcontinent and Ceylon, elephants, tigers and large snakes were known from hearsay and visits by sailors.

22. This poetic composition is about Diyō, a mythical powerful queen, and her fleet of ships. The word '*diyō*' (Skt: *Dēvi*) can mean both a queen as well as an ancient female spirit of Maldivian lore.

23. Geiger, *Maldivian Linguistic Studies*.

24. 'The ship loaded with Coco de Mer (*Lodoicea maldivica*) was moored in a deep place so that it would not run aground, to (sail to) the land of Diyō, Aden.'

25. Wild land animals in the Maldives comprise only birds, fruit bats, rats, shrews, different types of lizards and two species of small non-poisonous snakes

Although adapted to the local environment and circumstances, several of these local fables are derived from stories of the Jātakas and the Panchatantra, a clear indication of the wide diffusion of these Ancient Indian collections of tales throughout Asia. In the Maldivian oral tradition, however, the Panchatantra tales have lost their distinctive feature of belonging to a common linked group and appear as disconnected individual stories.

Even the legend of the virgin and the sea monster told in the context of the conversion of the islands to Islam originated in the Panchatantra.²⁶ This legend is one of the few items of the Maldivian oral tradition that was mentioned by travellers and, mostly in an abridged form, was put into writing both in local and in foreign publications.²⁷

5. Seafaring stories

Nautical themes have a central role in many stories, like ‘The First Tunas’ or ‘*Bodu Maalimi*’, for the Maldives is a seafaring and fishing country where ships have always been important. ‘*Dombeyya*’ is an Odyssey-like account from the 17th or 18th century about the survivor from an ill-fated merchant ship. This sort of story illustrates well the background of Maldivians as seafarers, seasonally sailing across the Indian Ocean to trade with neighbouring countries. Not only are different types of vessels frequently mentioned in most stories, but there are also popular Divehi proverbs featuring ships, like the oft-quoted one that says: ‘The barque (*oḍi*) does not go punting to the dinghy (*bokkura*)’.²⁸

‘*Veshi*’ was a form of popular literature giving useful navigational hints through coral reef passages and atolls. This type

26. Emmanuel Cosquin, *Études folkloriques, recherches sur les migrations des contes populaires et leur point de départ*, Paris, 1922, pp. 301–304.

27. Ibn Batūta, *Travels in Asia and Africa* and François Pyrard de Laval, *Voyage aux Indes Orientales*, among others.

28. ‘*Bokkura dosha oḍi nu kanbaane*’.

of nautical narrative was an ‘oral map’, told in the form of a yarn mentioning geographical features like islands, reefs, channels, colours of the sea,²⁹ dangerous shoals, currents, etc. *Veshi* were ancient poems, usually in the ‘*bandi*’ form. A relatively recent version of the Huvadū *Atoleveshi*³⁰ begins sailing from Vādū Island and ends in Fares Island when the cock crows³¹ after completing the full circle of the atoll. In the atolls of the north of Maldives at least Māļosmaḍulu Atoll (Raa and Baa) also had a *veshi* in former times.³²

Regrettably most *veshi* have disappeared, but in the lonely island of Fua Mulaku just south of the Equator learned men put the local ‘*Rashoveshi*’ into writing. This trend began with Kaļuhuttu Didi in the early 20th century who used the less monotonous ‘*len*’ form for the verses. The ‘*Rashoveshi*’ poem also saw a further development, with an additional part called ‘*Etereveshi*’ describing landmarks inside the island and the customs and tasks of the inhabitants. About two or three expanded and modified versions of the *Rashoveshi* have been published locally since its first publication.³³

6. Chronicles of semi-historical events

There is a limited amount of local historical data in the oral tradition of the Maldives. The most accurate account of a historic incident included in this volume is the chronicle about the ‘monster’ of Himiti (*Himiccha’ eri Furēta*), narrated to

29. Colours of the sea are used for navigation by showing depth and bottom (sea floor) texture.

30. It mentions only the islands and geographical features of the southern administrative division known as Huvadū Atoll Dekunuburi (Gaaf Daal). Told by Murshidu, Fares Island, Huvadū Atoll.

31. *Vādūn hurā faññā kaṇḍahagā nubalaññā ... finally ending in Fares ... den kava hadā kava husvū farehu huṭṭē koḍē haulu govē.*

32. Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi of Fua Mulaku had heard it, but unfortunately did not memorize it.

33. Bondoraage Muhammad Didi published one *Rashoveshi* version in a booklet in 1978.

me by Ākakāge Ibrāhīm Hilmi, who experienced the episode personally and went to the island in question.

Stories such as ‘Khalidu and Sitti’ and ‘The Pride of the Fleet’ are based on historical occurrences. In addition a number of narratives contain scattered undated records of events that took place on specific islands, like people lost at sea, famine and epidemics, recurrent experiences of the communities in the Maldives through the centuries.

I found respected elderly men such as Magieduruge Ibrāhīm Dīdī and Nedunge Alī Najību who remembered unusual historical occurrences, from either their own experience or having been told them by their elders when they were young. These involved epidemics, the strange sunsets and sunrises after the Krakatoa explosion in the late 19th century and a ‘bomb’ on the island of Kuḍarikilu.³⁴ However, when events are related as a story by average islanders, the precise historical context is often vague or lacking. Therefore even a relatively recent episode like the story of Satō, a scuba-diver from Japan, has been invested with legendary qualities.

THE TWILIGHT OF FOLKLORE

Finally it should be mentioned here that Maldivians are wont to think that the outlying atoll of Minicoy is the ultimate abode of their ancestral traditions. The place is known locally as ‘*Maliku*’ and the inhabitants speak a variant of the Maldivian language

Located far to the north, beyond the broad 8th Degree Channel, lonely Minicoy has been under different Indian administrations since the 17th century. Although it is a fact that the people

34. ‘*Kuḍarikilu bomuge hādisā*’. In 1915 a naval mine drifted to the beach on Kuḍarikilu Island, Mālosmaḍulu Atoll. When some islanders tried to break open the strange steel object with iron rods (*fāntila*) it exploded killing the people that were working on it and a great number of onlookers. *Hādithā Kalanḍaru*. Ābadī āi Diriuḷētantanuge Bōhimenuñ. Male’ 1985.

of this isolated atoll have great cultural and ethnic affinity with the Maldivians, as regards the attribution of being the guardians of the old Maldivian traditions it is mostly wishful thinking on the Maldivian part. The ancient oral lore of Minicoy has to a large degree been lost, or gone underground.³⁵

I met Minicoy men and women of all ages in different towns of South India, but mainly in Mattancherry Island in Cochin harbour. They were pleasantly surprised when I talked to them in their own language, following which they never failed to become talkative and to shower me with warm and generous hospitality. But when I asked them about traditional Minicoy legends their minds went blank. My usual methods of encouraging people to tell me stories didn't work with Minicoians. Moreover, when I showed them a booklet used in Minicoy schools to teach the local language,³⁶ they told me that the stories in the book had been translated from a standard Hindi text.

I refused to give up and in 1997 my friend Ali Manikfan,³⁷ always ready to help, gave me hope by mentioning the name of Ali Ismail, an elderly gentleman. Unfortunately when I went to Cochin to meet that specific person – who would have known some tales and legends of the Maliku lore – I was told he had just died.

35. One of the few exceptions is the very brief 'Kambōrāni and Kohoratukamaṇā' account about two mythical princesses who came from the Maldives and were the origin of the local social divisions.

36. 'Mahl' is the local word for the Divehi or Maldivian language in Minicoy. The book was a language primer written in *Taana*, the current Maldivian alphabet, given to me in 1983 at the University of Madras by Prof. V. Sudarshan, who assisted me in my studies.

37. Ali Manikfan is an ecologist from Minicoy living in Southern India. He helped Tim Severin during the construction of the 'Sohar' dhow that sailed from Oman to China and offered his generous assistance and hospitality to me too.

1. The First Coconuts

Very, very long ago the first people who came to the Maldives couldn't survive on the islands because there were no coconut palms and no coconuts. The coconut palm is a marvellous tree. Food, drink, shelter, utensils, wood for boatbuilding, firewood, medicines, toys for children, whistles, baskets, cooking oil, lighting oil, hair oil, brooms, rope and shade – these are just a few among other benefits that can be got from the wonderful coconut tree and its fruit.

The very first men and women on the Maldivian Islands found it so difficult to live without those essential things that they died in great numbers. Their short lives were harsh and there were deaths on every island and in every family.

Among these first Maldivians there was a great *fandita* man (sorcerer), whose name has been lost. He was full of anguish seeing that too many islanders were dying every day around him. Fearing that the islands would become depopulated, this great man determined to do something to save the hapless islanders.

After much searching in his books, he prepared a secret magic mixture. Then he went to the graveyards and, before burial, he put a bit of that mixture in the mouth of every dead man, woman and child.

During the following weeks the deaths continued unabated. But before long, out of the mouth of every buried skull a green shoot came out that grew into a young coconut palm. As time went by the trees began to develop. Some were big, others small, some fairer and others darker, depending on the colour and size of the corpse from which they had originated.

In this manner the Maldivian islands were soon covered with coconut trees. However, only a few people remained alive to witness this splendour. Then the great *faṇḍita* man taught the much reduced number of survivors how to make use of everything the tree gives. After some time the people were able to increase in numbers.

Before long the subsistence of the first Maldivian islanders became easier thanks to the coconut palms. In recognition, they set some coconuts from every palm aside to plant new trees.

From that time onwards, the future looked bright and pleasant for the islanders of that nation, for there is no better wealth that a Maldivian father can give as a legacy to his



children than a great number of coconut palms planted by his own efforts.¹



When the husk is removed from a coconut, one can still see three holes that look like a face. Two are the eyes and the soft one is the mouth, the hole out of which the shoot of the new coconut tree comes.

There is little doubt that survival would have been impossible for the ancestors of the Maldivians without this amazing tree. Therefore, nowadays the coconut palm, known by Maldivians as '*Divehi ruh*' (Maldivian palm), occupies the position of honour in the Maldivian national emblem.

1. This myth of origin was told by Vaijehēge Alī Dīdī, Dūṇḍigan, Fua Mulaku.

2. Mākana Kalō

Once upon a time, a *Mākana*¹ was flying over a beach and landed there close to the waterline. He made a dropping and flew away. After a while he flew back to the same spot and saw that a wave had washed his faeces away. The bird asked the wave, “Where is my dropping?” The wave answered, “I have washed it away.” The *Mākana* said, “You have to give it back.” The wave meekly offered, “I cannot give you back your dropping, for it has dissolved, but I can give you a tuna fish instead.” Grudgingly the *Mākana* accepted the fish and flew away with it.

The bird then landed on the roof of a shed, left the fish there and flew away again. When he came back to the same place, he didn’t see the fish. He asked some young men there who were boiling fish and putting pieces out to dry, “Where is my fish?” The people answered, “We have cut it, boiled it and put it to dry.”²

The *Mākana* said in a huff, “You have to give it back.” The people meekly offered, “We cannot give you back a raw fish, we have already cut it all and boiled it, but we can give you a dry fish piece instead.” The *Mākana* accepted their offer and flew away with the piece of dry fish.

The bird then landed close to a kitchen, left the dry fish there and flew away again. When the *Mākana* came back to the same spot, he didn’t see his dry fish. He asked the women

1. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), a very important bird in Maldivian folklore. It is a solitary bird, often seen in on the reefs and beaches of the atolls, especially away from inhabited places.
2. This is the way of preparing the Maldivian fish, dry cured tuna pieces. Formerly it was one of the main export items for Maldivian traders.

there who were cooking *bōkiba*³ (fish cake), “Where is my dry fish?” One girl answered, “We have cut it into pieces and baked *bōkiba* with it.” The *Mākana* was indignant, “You have to give it back.” The women gently offered, “We cannot give you back a dry fish, we have finished it all, but we can give you a whole fish cake instead.” The *Mākana* accepted their offer and flew away with the *bōkiba*.



The bird then landed on a veranda, left the *bōkiba* there and flew away again. When he came back to the same place, he didn't see the fish cake. He asked the men and women he saw there making rope,⁴ “Where is my cake?” The people answered humbly, “It was tea time and we ate it with our tea.” The *Mākana* ruffled his feathers and said, “You have to give it back to me.” The people politely said, “We cannot give you

3. A thick and heavy cake made with soaked and pounded rice, grated coconut, fish and chillies. Traditionally the *bōkiba* was baked in a pot over an ember fire with more embers on a flat lid on top to cook the upper part. Now it is usually baked in an electric oven.

4. Maldivian rope is made with coconut husk fibres.

back the *bōkiba*, we ate it along with some tea, but we can give you a roll of good rope instead.” The *Mākana* accepted their offer and flew away with the rope.

The bird then landed under a shady tree, left the bundle of rope there and flew away again. When it came back to the same place, he didn’t see his rope. He asked some old men who were there making drums, “Where is my rope?” The men answered, “We have used it already to make all these drums.” The *Mākana* was very annoyed, “You have to give it back.” The people made the bird a generous offer, “We cannot give you back your rope, but we can give you instead two drums, choose the ones you prefer.” Thus mollified, the *Mākana* accepted their offer and flew away with one old drum and a new drum.

The bird flew now to a tall palm tree overlooking the beach and sat on a palm frond with his two drums. He tapped the drums with his beak and enjoyed their different sounds. The new drum was making the sound “*ṭo-ṭo*” and the old drum “*ḍan-ḍan*”.

A poor woman happened to pass under the coconut tree while she was combing the beach.⁵ Hearing the drumming noise she looked up and saw that the *Mākana* was engrossed beating his drums. She thought, “Those are nice drums, I wish I had some like those.”

And just at that moment the frond on which the *Mākana* had been sitting, which was not green anymore, gave way and fell with a crash to the sand. The drums hit the bird on the head and he died.

The woman then took the drums away and went home singing happily.⁶

5. It is a custom of Maldivians to comb the beach to see what has drifted to the island carried by the currents; the odd *Coco de Mer* (*tavakkashi*) and *ambergris* (*maavaharu*) were the most valuable items.

6. Told by Gāge Naima, Male’.

3. The Two Traders

Long ago a very rich trader named Hasanu lived in Male'. He was unmarried and had no living relatives, but he had a very good friend called Ali. Ali was also a merchant and he was almost as wealthy as Hasanu; the two of them were both young and successful. Their close friendship was much admired in the bazaar in Male',¹ for Hasanu and Ali never failed to help each other in case of trouble and there were no secrets between them.

One day both traders went to a distant atoll on one of Hasanu's ships. After a few days journey, they arrived at a certain island at dawn. They spent the morning doing business deals and had lunch together at the island chief's house. The merchandise had already been loaded and the ship was ready to leave, so Hasanu and Ali had nothing else to do there, except to wait for the high tide at sunset. After a long idle time on the veranda during the midday heat, both friends went for an afternoon walk around the island. On the way they stopped at a house to ask for water.

It was quite a humble house, but the girl who brought them water was so fine-looking that Hasanu wanted to linger there and talk to her. The girl's name was Mariatu and Hasanu discovered that their hearts were very close. He decided to marry her without delay, for he knew that he would be busy in the near future and would not be able to come back to that island for a long time.

Hasanu took the mother aside and spoke with her. Pleased to marry off her daughter to such a wealthy and distinguished

1. The commercial sector of the capital where all the trading shops were packed together.

merchant, the woman consented. Then Hasanu talked to Ali to make sure he agreed to postpone their departure. They went back together to the island chief's house and told him to arrange the wedding ceremony. Thus Hasanu and Mariatu were married that very evening.

After staying on the island some days, Hasanu brought his bride to Male'. He was looking forward to a few days of rest. Unfortunately, right upon their arrival in the capital there was an urgent business matter requiring his presence on a faraway island.

Hasanu had to leave the very next day, but he was very reluctant to do so. Ali was aware of Hasanu's predicament and offered to go instead of his companion, but Hasanu told him that it was not possible, for he had to go personally.

Hasanu told Mariatu, "Unfortunately I don't have a family that could look after you, but Ali is my best friend and I fully trust him. You will stay in his house until I return. Don Aymina, his wife, will keep you company."

Mariatu was full of confusion at having to spend a long time on an unfamiliar island without her husband. But she thought, "I am the wife of a trader, and this is their life. On the one hand my husband will bring wealth but on the other hand he will often be absent for a long time." Thus she hid her disappointment in order not to add to her husband's anxiety.

In the harbour, before Hasanu went aboard his largest trading ship, he spoke to Ali, "I am very distressed that I have to leave my wife alone so soon after marriage. Please look after Mariatu."

"Don't worry at all, my friend," Ali comforted him. "I will treat Mariatu as if she was my own daughter."

After his friend spoke these words of assurance, Hasanu felt better. While the sailors raised the anchors and the large merchant ship slowly left Male' harbour, he watched his friend Ali standing at the shore becoming smaller and smaller.



Meanwhile in another corner of Male', far away from the residences of the wealthy merchants, lived a poor woman named Don Fātuma. Her only son, Mohammadu, was almost a man, but she thought of him still as a child. The boy spent his time away from home playing with his friends. He held a kind of court under a big tree by the beach, for he was the leader of a large group of children. Since Mohammadu was the oldest and the wisest, the others looked up to him as if he were a young king.

One day Don Fātuma told him, "Son, you have grown up, and now you can think by yourself. I cannot prevent you from doing what you wish now. But just remember that no matter what you do, don't do anything which might bring disgrace upon you."

Very kindly Mohammadu replied, "You have no need to worry, Mother." Then he left to meet his friends under 'his' tree.



While Hasanu was away, Ali, instead of honouring his word, was busy plotting wicked schemes. The truth was that Ali was not Hasanu's friend. All his life he had been concealing his jealousy and bitterness against Hasanu for the mere fact that his companion was wealthier and more successful than he was.

In order to injure Hasanu, Ali was planning to seduce Mariatu. Every night since Hasanu had left, he had tried to put into practice his treacherous plan. But he had not gathered enough courage and hesitated to take the first step.

Finally one night Ali made sure that his wife was fast asleep, left his room and rapped on Mariatu's door. The girl opened the door slightly. Her shock quickly gave way to another thought, "I should not suspect my husband's best friend. Surely he doesn't have any bad intentions." Accordingly, she invited Ali to come in and he sat down without saying a word.



Mariatu was very uncomfortable, but she made an effort to be well-mannered and asked lightly, “Why do you come at such a late hour?”

“I came to smoke,” Ali answered.

She prepared the water-pipe,² putting tobacco in it and lighting it for him. Smoking silently, Ali studied the young woman through narrowed eyes, avoiding her glances. After a while he left.

Ali behaved in the same way every evening for several days. Mariatu sensed the man’s bad intentions. To make matters worse, she could not share her discomfort with anyone else. She was a guest in her husband’s best friend’s house and island hospitality codes are strict. Besides, no one would believe her, for everyone else would claim that Ali was a respectable man.

But Mariatu began to have severe doubts about the trust that her husband had put in Ali. Fearing him, she would not

2. Known as *guduguda*, an onomatopoeic word describing quite accurately the sound of the hookah.

facilitate any conversation and remained sullen. She came to detest Ali secretly, and one day she decided not to welcome him anymore.

The following night when he came, Mariatu tried to get rid of him claiming, “Ali, I am sick tonight, I have a bad headache.”

With a broad, sinister smile, Ali replied, “I shall send medicine for you tomorrow.”

As soon as he left the room, Ali pondered how to make the best use of this opportunity and, as he paced up and down his veranda, a wicked idea came to him.

Although it was way past midnight Ali left the house immediately and went straight through deserted streets to the gravedigger’s house. The gravedigger and his wife were sleeping soundly. Ali had to pound on their door for quite a while to rouse them.

The gravedigger was dazed, “Do you know what time it is? What has happened?”

“A big problem,” Ali said. Noticing that the wife was leaning forward to listen, Ali took the man’s arm and led him out into the night where no one would hear. Before he said a word, Ali gave the gravedigger more money than the man had ever seen before at one time.

Amazed, the digger gasped, “Why do you give me all this?”

Ali whispered, “You must do me a big favour.”

Trembling, the gravedigger reflected, “I wonder what favour would cost so much money.”

Ali calmed him, “It is very easy. Tomorrow night you will come with me and do as I say. Later when people ask you whether you have buried Mariatu, Hasanu’s wife, you will tell them that you did. That same night you must tell your wife that you have to leave on a trip to another island. You will be away for some time”

The gravedigger stared at the pile of money for a long time. Finally he assented and they parted.

Instead of going back home Ali went to the house of the *Hakīm*³ and told him, “Give me a medicine to make someone sleep deeply for a day and a night. It should take effect one hour after being swallowed.”

The *Hakīm* was drowsy with sleep, and clearly unhappy. But when Ali showed him a lot of money, he immediately went inside his house and brought out the medicine.

In the morning Ali went to Mariatu’s room and told her, “This remedy will cure your headache.”

Mariatu took the medicine as instructed and fell into a deep sleep. She remained asleep for the whole day. After sunset Ali went to her room, put the girl inside a sack and secretly carried her to the graveyard. There he left the sack on a platform and told the gravedigger, “Prepare her body as if for burial. I have brought camphor and five shrouds, but make sure that she can breathe. Work quickly; I will come back very soon, and everything must be ready.”

Assuming a sombre appearance, Ali went back home and told his wife, Don Aymina, “A terrible thing has happened, Mariatu is dead. We must go to see her face.” For it is a custom in the Maldivian Islands to go to see a person’s face for the last time before burial.

Don Aymina cried out in shock. It took a while for her to take in the unexpected news. Eventually she reflected, “There was certainly something wrong; today she didn’t come for lunch and stayed in her room. If I only could have known that her condition was so serious.” Weeping, she went to the graveyard along with her husband, bringing relatives and other members of the household along with her.

Noticing that her husband was very nervous and restless, Don Aymina tried to reassure him, “Ali, don’t worry so much. This was a sudden illness and we could not do anything. Hasanu will understand.”

3. A learned man specializing in herbal remedies.

But Ali was not relieved. He was actually anxious that the sun might rise before he had completed his evil plan. Finally before midnight, when all the mourners had left, Ali told the gravedigger to take the body. Furtively, they loaded Mariatu on a small boat and sailed to Guḷi, an inhabited island on the eastern reef of South Male' Atoll.

The wind was favourable and Ali's wicked plot succeeded, for they sailed in almost complete darkness and arrived at the island well before sunrise. Thus no one saw them unload the boat and sneak Mariatu into a store that Ali owned there.

"Take off the shrouds and dress her properly," he ordered the gravedigger. The man put a nice dress on the peacefully sleeping woman. Then he prepared the food they had brought. Ali and the gravedigger ate in silence.

Following the meal, Ali took leave, "Take care of her. If she, or any other people on this island, ask questions don't say anything at all." Then Ali sailed back to Male' alone on his sailing boat.

Mariatu woke up after a few hours, "Where am I?" she cried, terrified. She looked down at her dress and sniffed the camphor odour. Then she jumped out of the bed and tried to leave.

Braced against the door, the gravedigger threatened, "You will not go anywhere."

Facing him, the girl demanded, "Let me out! What are you doing to me?"

He said in a weary voice, "My orders are not to answer you. This is not Male'. We are in a small island with a few fishing people. You must stay in your room and keep very quiet. I don't know anything else."

Realizing Ali must be behind all this, Mariatu asked, "Where is Ali now?"

"I am under his orders," was all the gravedigger would say.

Mariatu's spirit was crushed. For the next several days she just lay on her bed and sobbed. Meanwhile the gravedigger

brought her food from another house regularly. Refusing to eat, the young woman drank only water.

At long last Hasanu returned to Male'. Weary from the long sea journey, the bad news about his wife's death met him before he stepped ashore and he was dumbfounded.

Ali embraced Hasanu weeping, "I am not a worthy friend of yours. You trusted me with only one thing and I failed you."

Hasanu, tried to swallow his deep grief and assured Ali, "I am sure you did your best, my friend."



One morning Mohammadu was about to go to his meeting place under the tree when his mother stopped him at the door. "My son, during the last months you haven't come home to sleep some nights. Now I see that you are very tense and restless. Do you remember what I told you?"

"Mother, I remember. I assure you that I am not doing anything that will bring disgrace upon me."

Still uneasy despite his answer, Mohammadu's mother let him go.

As soon as he reached the tree, the young man confided to his friends, "We know something of the utmost importance, but unless it is told straight to the *Radun* (king), it will have no effect."

"What should we do?" the boys asked.

Right at that moment, the son of the *Mirubaharu*⁴ passed by in the distance. Mohammadu told them, "Bring that boy here by force."

The boys thus ran after the son of the high official, beat him up and brought him tied up to Mohammadu. Some outraged passers-by saw what had happened and went straight to tell the king. Immediately the king sent his soldiers to determine who was responsible.

4. Harbour Master or Commodore, an important royal official in ancient times in the capital.

“It was us,” the boys admitted.

Mohammadu added, “I gave them the orders, I must go with them.”

The soldiers were puzzled at the open admissions of guilt and brought Mohammadu before the king. The other boys followed behind them.

“Why did you beat up the son of a high official?” enquired the *Radun*.

Mohammadu answered, “Your Majesty knows about this little incident. But far bigger and more heinous crimes are committed on these islands where you rule. However, Your Majesty ignores them.”

The *Radun* became irritated and asked, “What crimes do you mean? Speak at once!”

Then Mohammadu told him everything Ali had done to Hasanu’s wife. The *Radun* pondered over the boy’s tale. “This is unbelievable!” He declared sombrely, “You have made severe accusations against people who are highly respected here, in the capital of my Kingdom. Unless you have witnesses, this is slander and you will be harshly punished.”

Making a gesture towards his friends, Mohammadu asserted, “All these children here are witnesses.”

“What made you spy on Ali?” the *Radun* enquired. The whole situation had obviously aroused his interest and he was not aloof anymore.

“Once when I was very small, my mother went to beg from Ali when he was at his shop.” Mohammadu explained, “My mother was a very poor young woman and she had no family. Ali told her to follow him to the back of the shop and tried to abuse her sexually. When my mother refused his advances he slapped her hard and hurt her, all the while shouting at her rudely and harshly. My mother kept quiet, but even though I was very small I have always remembered her bitter humiliation.” Muhammadu was almost in tears.

The king was listening carefully and he made a sign for the boy to continue.

“After that time I knew that Ali was a heartless man. Even though everyone in Male’ says he is a good person, I don’t believe that. I have been watching him. Recently, I went to Ali’s house one night to observe what he was doing. I had no idea anything was wrong at that time. But when I saw him enter Mariatu’s room I caught a glimpse of his face in the lamplight, and I knew he had evil intentions. Since then we have followed Ali secretly every night. My friends and I were there hiding in the darkness and saw him and the gravedigger carry Mariatu to a boat and leave. Ali came back alone the next day before noon.”

After Mohammadu’s words the king seemed lost in thought. He ordered his guards: “Call Hasanu and Ali; bring them immediately here.”

When the two traders appeared before the *Radun*, he asked them to listen to Mohammadu’s words. The boy repeated his story. Meanwhile the *Radun* observed the men closely. Before Mohammadu could finish his description of events, all of a sudden Ali’s face paled and his lips quivered. Ali jumped up like a madman shouting, “No, don’t listen to him! That black boy is telling only lies!”

Calmly, the king directed his soldiers to have Ali flogged until he told all the truth. Ali was taken away and after a severe thrashing he confessed, confirming what the boy had said.

Envoys of the court were then sent to Guḷi Island. Mariatu and the gravedigger were brought before the *Radun* that very day. The young woman looked very ill. She could almost not stand upright.

The gravedigger and the Hakīm were given a hundred lashes each at the king’s order. After being given another rigorous round of lashes, Ali was banished to a very poor fishing island far away from the capital. Most of his property was confiscated by royal order.

After granting a reward to Mohammadu, the *Radun* dismissed him and asked to be left alone with Hasanu.

“I have noticed that you have remained silent all the time,” said the king. “After such a long absence, it must be difficult for you having to face so much trouble.”

Hasanu was bewildered and shook his head from side to side. He told the *Radun* that he was appalled that the man he thought was his best friend could have plotted against him in such a way, wishing to cause him so much harm. “I don’t know how he could hide so well the fact that he hated me. I don’t think I will ever be able to speak to him again.”

Still in shock, Hasanu left the palace and went home. Later he remembered Mohammadu and sent someone to look for the boy. Moved by gratitude, Hasanu gave him a good position in one of his stores.

Mariatu soon returned to good health. One day, when they were alone Hasanu remarked to her, “Only one’s best friend has the potential of becoming one’s worst enemy.”⁵

5. Told by Husēn Bē, Miladū Island, Miladummaḍulu Atoll.

4. Small Drops of Blood

One day a handsome and prosperous man from an island in the east of Ari Atoll came back from fishing in the late afternoon. As soon as he entered his home he told Kambulō, his wife, to close the door. She was surprised, for Maldivians always keep the doors of their houses ajar from dawn to dusk in order to welcome visitors.

Kambulō became alarmed when she saw that her husband, usually so brave and strong, was shivering with fear. He told her that, while he was fishing, another fishing boat had come alongside his and somebody he knew had mindlessly called out his name aloud. Though the man had meant no harm, now an evil spirit might have heard his name, for they were sailing over the dark ocean waters. His wife tried to calm him down gently and prepared some of his favourite food.

Night fell and the man became even more terrified. He didn't even want to go outside to urinate, so Kambulō brought him a large pot inside the house and told him she would wash it in the morning. He was very embarrassed, but his wife reassured him by promising that it would not be a difficult task for her. Kambulō slept very close to him, hugging him tight and whispering soothing words, but the man was so scared that he hardly slept.

The next morning he didn't go fishing and stayed in his home with the doors tightly shut. He told his wife not to let anyone inside the house, but she persuaded him at least to let the *fanđita* man (sorcerer) come, as he could surely help out. After a while, Kambulō came back with the sorcerer who performed some magic on her terrified husband. Three fur-

ther long nights and days passed in the same manner and the woman put up patiently with her husband's mood. People in the village feared that the man had become crazy, but his wife assured them that he was only ill.

Kambulō constantly tried to cheer her husband up and kept pampering him as much as she could. In the afternoon before the fifth night he seemed to have improved, but he still insisted on not going outside the house and in keeping both the front and the back door tightly shut. His wife told him, "Tonight is your father's yearly funerary *fātiha* reading,¹ and I have to go to your family's house to prepare for the feast."

Her husband was very scared. He told her to stay with him, but she was determined to go, "There is much washing and cooking to do, and if I don't go they will have a reason to say mean things about me. It is very important that I go."

Kambulō smiled affectionately at her husband and encouraged him, "Many days have passed and nothing has happened to you; don't be so sad! I will bring you some delicious things to eat." Then she opened the door and stepped out into the bright daylight. Immediately, the man bolted it from the inside and listened to the fading sound of his wife's steps as she left.

Kambulō worked very hard at her in-laws' house, helping the other women in the kitchen, grinding spices and cooking. When they asked her about her husband she just said that he was very sick.

A while after sunset the guests began to pour into the house to enjoy the special meal prepared for them. Once the ceremony was over, the last visitors left with their stomachs full, happily chewing betel and nut.² Then the women had to wash dishes, pots and pans and put the house back in order.

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1. The reading of the Faatiha, the exordium of the Quran, was an essential part of mortuary ceremonies, the most important celebrations in traditional island life.
 2. Providing areca nut and betel leaf to chew to visitors was an essential part of the hospitality norms in traditional Maldivian society.

It was already late in the night when Kambulō, happy but quite tired, went back home and walked hurriedly along the dark streets. She was carrying some choice food from the funerary ritual for her husband, in a bowl and in a rolled banana leaf bundle, which she deftly balanced on her head.

She had assumed that the door of her home would be shut. But as she got close, she realized that it was wide open and the oil lamp inside had blown out. Kambulō called her husband but there was no reply, only darkness and silence. Then the woman anxiously went to look for fire.

When she came back with a lamp she stepped inside the house and found no one there. She looked at the bed and to her horror she found that there was a large stain of blood on the mat. When Kambulō inspected the floor, she saw that there was a track of small drops of blood leading from the bed to the door. Her heart pounding, the woman followed the track holding the lamp. She kept walking and walking and didn't take her eyes off the regular line of dark spots on the sand for a long time.

All of a sudden she realized that she was on the beach. The small lagoon waves were lapping the woman's feet and a sudden gust of wind blew out the lamp she was clutching. Kambulō scrutinized the gloomy waters and the cloudy horizon in the faint starlight, but there was no trace of her husband. In despair, she screamed into the dark, desolate emptiness. Then her shoulders fell and abundant tears began to pour down her cheeks.³

3. Told by Muhammadu Nūrī of Dūṇḍigan, Fua Mulaku. He claimed he had heard this story on Ari Atoll.

5. Keuļa Bēbē Dūña

One day, a group of pretty and pert young women went to the harbour. They saw a *Keuļa* (master fisherman) while he was aboard his *dōni* and decided to approach him.

The girls giggled and asked him, “Darling (*dūña*) uncle, let’s go visit a foreign country. Bring us to see the landscape of the Andaman Islands (*Minikā Rājje*).¹ And then bring us back here.”

The fisherman agreed and the girls clapped their hands in joy. Before they went aboard he tried to start the engine of his boat, but it wouldn’t start. The girls teased him. “How can we travel abroad like this?”



1. The Andaman Islands are known as *Minikā Rājje* (lit. ‘islands of the cannibals’) in Maldivian tradition. The term ‘cannibal’ refers rather to the forbidding impression the inhabitants caused on Maldivian traders and sailors who reached the Andamans rather than to the actual practice of cannibalism among the ethnic groups over there.

Then poor *Keuḷu* had to face one problem after another, his engine made strange noises, it failed repeatedly, he had trouble with his crew, and he had to even face a fire on board. Nothing seemed to go well.

Meanwhile the young women kept pointing out the faults to him and teasing the *Keuḷu*, “How can one travel abroad like this?”

The master fisherman put up patiently with the mockery of the girls, but the journey to glimpse the landscape of the Andaman Islands never began.²

2. This story dates from the time when the first motors were fitted to local *dōnis*, which had been powered by sails and oars until then. The lack of trust in the new mechanized devices is the subject of these verses that became a popular Maldivian song, usually sung by young female voices, in the 1970s. Retold by Karange Fatma Didi, Fua Mulaku.

6. The Legend of Koimala

The following legend is about the origin of the Maldivian ruling dynasty.

Long ago, in the northern mainland, lived a poor couple in a hut deep in the forest. One day the husband went to hunt and didn't return. His wife, who was pregnant with her first child, went to look for her husband, dreading that something had happened to him. While she was walking through the forest, the woman suddenly felt the pains of childbirth. She sat under a *nikabilissa* tree¹ and gave birth there alone. While she was lying there exhausted, a tiger jumped out of a bush and devoured the woman. Since the child was hidden between two roots, the tiger didn't see him and went away.

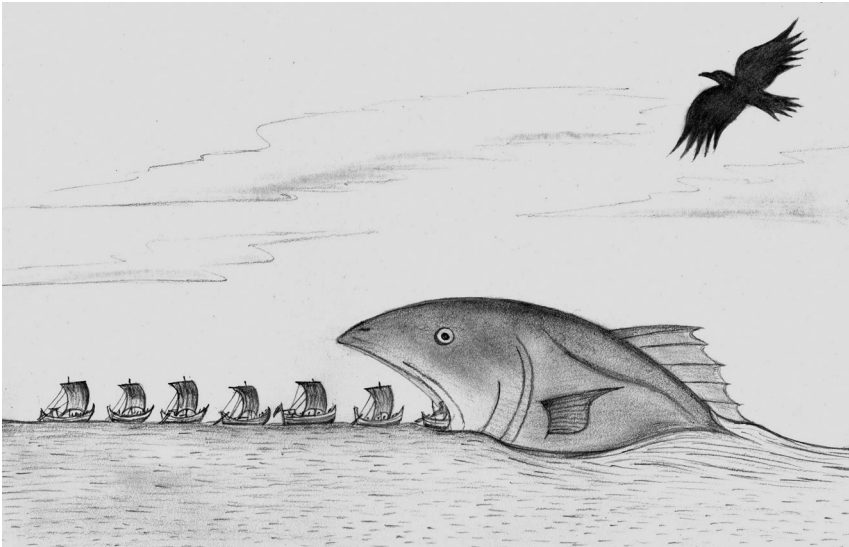
A herd of cows arrived after some time at that particular spot and one cow with a full udder happened to stand right above the child while she was grazing. The child felt for the nipple with his lips and sucked the milk. The cow, whose swollen udders had been hurting, felt relieved and returned everyday to that place under the *nikabilissa* tree. In this manner the baby grew and, as soon as he could crawl, he followed the herd of cows.

Years passed and the child became a handsome boy, but he walked on all fours and said only "moo" like the cows. Hunters who spotted him in the jungle told the king about this

1. The Asoka tree (*Saraca indica*). There were a few of these trees in the Maldives in former times. At least one grew in the gardens of the Royal Palace in Male'. When I visited the Maldives, none remained on most islands but I saw one on Ađdu Atoll.

wonder. His interest aroused, the monarch went out with his court into the forest where a trap was set. Shortly thereafter the boy was caught in a net and was brought to the palace in a cage. The king invited all the learned men and doctors of his kingdom to see this amazing individual. All agreed that the child was not a monster, but a normal human being. Teachers were appointed for him and soon he learned how to talk and to walk upright. The king remarked that he was an exceptionally handsome young man and gave him the name Maleffadakoi (the boy like a flower). Before long the monarch discovered that he was full of wisdom and honesty and came to trust him more than anyone else in his court.

One day the king asked Maleffadakoi, “During your life in the wilderness, what is the greatest wonder you saw?”



Then the lad told the following story. “One day I was walking with the cows by the coast and I saw seven large ships sailing at a distance. Suddenly an enormous fish came out of the waters, opened its jaws and swallowed the seven vessels in one gulp. But before the fish could plunge back into the depths, a

huge bird came from the sky and devoured the fish. However, the bird had flown but a short distance when an immense snake came out of a hole in a mountain and gulped down the bird.”

The king asked in amazement, “Would you be able now to show me that mountain?” The boy agreed and the next days were spent preparing for the journey, for it was in a very remote place.

After travelling a long distance the king arrived at the mighty mountain along with Maleffadakoi and the royal retinue. They climbed to the summit and stared at the gaping hole in awe, fearing the snake would come out at any moment. The king ordered that large quantities of wood be thrown into the hole. During the next days thousands of the king’s slaves carried logs of wood dumping them day and night into the hole, but it was so deep that it took three whole months to fill it. Then the king ordered his slaves to set fire to the wood. The pit burned for forty days and the whole mountain became so hot that it took as many days to cool.

Finally, one day they climbed the mountain and stood again close to the hole. The king looked down and ordered that a very long rope be brought. He first asked his warriors whether they dared to go into the pit. Since none of them had the courage, Maleffadakoi said he would go down himself. The boy went on a long descent, disappearing down into the depths of the mountain, while the king waited anxiously for him to come up. A long time passed and, as the monarch was repenting of having let his trusted friend climb down the hole, Maleffadakoi reappeared out of the darkness unscathed. He showed the king a fistful of gold dust he had kept in his robe and said, “I found it down there.”

The king realized that it was the purest gold he had ever seen and asked, “Is there a lot of it there?”

The boy answered that at the bottom of the pit there was nothing else but gold dust. However, he couldn’t tell how far down this went.

Then the king ordered all his slaves to bring all this treasure to the surface and to transport it to his palace. After arduous work and a long journey back, the slaves stored so many basketfuls of gold dust that the palace vaults were overflowing with it.

The king was very pleased. His kingdom had never been so wealthy. Full of gratitude, he went to Maleffadakoi to tell him, “I owe my good fortune to you. Ask me any favour you want and I will grant it to you.”

The young man said, “O King, the only thing I want is a large ship with a crew of experienced sailors and a load of gold dust.” The kind monarch readily agreed, thinking it was a small price to pay for the blessings the boy had brought upon him and his kingdom. Once Maleffadakoi obtained his ship, he bade farewell to the king and sailed away from the coast, southwards into the Indian Ocean.

The ship entered the Maldives from the north at Ihavandū Island (Tiladummati Atoll) and anchored there at sunset. On the following day a large white bird sat on top of the main mast. After squawking loudly, it flew southwards. This bird came again the next day and did the same thing. On the third day, Maleffadakoi told his sailors to follow the bird. Sailing southwards they finally entered North Male’ Atoll and arrived at an islet where the bird landed. This islet is called *Dūnidū* (bird-island) today. Then it landed on a large sandbank close by. This sandbank was where the fishermen of Girāvaru,² an island not far away to the west, used to cut and cook their fish. The sea surrounding the sandbank was always coloured red by the fish blood. Thus its name was *Mahalē* (Great Blood). There was no tree on Mahalē, but the bird was nowhere to be seen after it had landed there.

2. The islanders of Girāvaru were reputed to be the descendants of the first inhabitants of the Maldives when northern rulers arrived, but Girāvaru was not the only island inhabited then. In another narrative of the same event the visitors had been previously in Rasgetīmu and Angoḷitīmu islands (Māḷosmaḍulu Atoll) as well and had been proclaimed rulers by the local people there.

Maleffadakoi became friendly with the Girāvaru people. They liked him and gave him the shorter name ‘Koimala’. They traded goods with him in exchange for gold dust. They also welcomed him to settle in Mahalē.

Koimala built the first house in Mahalē and also planted the first tree, which was a papaya tree.³ He also built a large warehouse to store his gold dust. After some time, people from all the atolls gathered in Mahalē and crowned Koimala king.

As years went by, some wealthy traders settled in Mahalē, attracting other people until it became the most populous island. Eventually, the name of the island was shortened to Male’ and it became the capital of the island kingdom.

The islands then became Muslim and Koimala became a Muslim king. His name became ‘*Darumavanta Rasgefānu*’ (The Righteous King).

One day, on the street, coming out of the mosque after Friday Prayers, the king saw a child drawing a ship on the sand. The monarch thought it was very beautiful and asked the boy to sell him the ship. The boy said, “Majesty, I offer it to you.” Then the king went to the palace and ate lunch. After having finished his meal, while he was washing his hands, the child he had seen before came to him and said, “The ship is anchored in the harbour.”

The king went there and saw a large ship. The people on it were all dressed in white. Then a small dinghy brought Koimala aboard the mysterious vessel. As soon as the king had set foot on it, the ship flew away and disappeared.⁴

3. The feature of the papaya tree as the first tree growing on an island also appears in the popular Mākumbē story.

4. Abridged version of the story by the late Gōnahijje Fatmaifānu from Fua Mulaku told to Meṭa Muhammadu of Miskimmago on the same island. See also H.C.P. Bell, ‘The Maldivian Islands’.

7. The Skin Disease

Long ago a very pretty girl lived in Male'. She was of a marriageable age but she ignored all young men. At that time trading vessels from Bengal used to come every year to Male'. One day before sunset, the young woman was walking close to the harbour and she saw a Bengali sailor. He caught her attention, for the Bengali men were tall and strong people, and she fell in love with him.

The girl and the sailor used to meet every evening under a big mango tree and sat on a swing hanging from its branches chatting and chewing betel until it was late.

One day, the season when the trading fleet sailed back to Bengal arrived and the sailor went to meet the young woman. He told her seriously, "Tomorrow is the last night I am here and I don't want to leave without promising to marry you."

The girl gladly agreed and the sailor added, "Tomorrow in the evening I will come to your home and talk to your mother. I will bring cloth, perfumes and spices and we will settle the marriage."

The next day, the girl sat at home and waited patiently but the sailor didn't come ashore. Actually he was eager to go to meet her, but his captain would not give him leave, for there was too much work aboard to get the ship ready for departure.

Tired of waiting, the girl thought that perhaps instead of coming to her home, her sailor would be under the mango tree. So she ran to the swing under the tree. The sun had already set and the place was in darkness, but she saw a shadow in the starlight.

The young woman was sure it was the Bengali sailor and she sat down close to him. But he didn't speak a word. After a

while she said playfully, “You have been so kind with me all these days. Are you angry?”

Then she touched his arm and recoiled in horror. The arm she had touched was cold and slimy. It was covered with scales. Panic overtook the girl and she ran away as fast as her legs could carry her.

When she arrived home she threw herself on her bed. Alarmed at the way in which the girl had rushed in, her mother went close and noticed that there was something wrong. She brought an oil lamp closer and to her consternation saw that her daughter was covered with hideous boils.

The girl would not speak; she remained in bed crying day after day. During the days that followed, and despite the mother’s care, the boils burst open. They became oozing wounds and their stench was unbearable. Soon the neighbours complained about the smell and the hideous infection and the king was duly informed, for at that time people with serious diseases were not allowed to live within the community. They were put apart from other people in lonely corners of the island or on separate islands for fear that the curse would spread.

Thus the sick young woman was brought to the *Lonuziyaraykkoḷu*,¹ a place that was covered then by a dense jungle. Only her mother was allowed to visit her regularly to bring her food and water. The sick girl lived there alone in a hut, lying prone suffering in the midst of her own filth and stench. Her mother looked after her, washing her wounds regularly. But for the other islanders she was already as good as dead.



Months passed and the season came when the Bengali trading ships arrived. The sailor who was in love with the girl came ashore as soon as he could. He was in high spirits as he went straight to the girl’s house loaded with valuable merchandise

1. Formerly an isolated spot at the south-eastern end of Male’, so named because there was a *ziyaraiy*, the tomb of a venerated saint, in that corner.

and gifts. His intention was to marry her straight away. But his happiness soon turned to desolation upon arriving at the girl's house and talking to the mother.

“She was waiting for you the evening you left. She was so eager to see you, she left the house in despair, and when she came back her body was full of boils. She never said a word.”

The sailor asked, “Can I go to see her? Maybe she will talk to me.”

“No, the king has given strict orders that my daughter has to be left alone.”

But the Bengali sailor was undaunted. He was not going to give up, for he was courageous and had a noble heart. The first thing he did was to look for a good *fanđita* man. After much searching in the bazaar alleys, he found a sorcerer from the south of Maldives, one of the best in the country, and told him about the girl's disease.

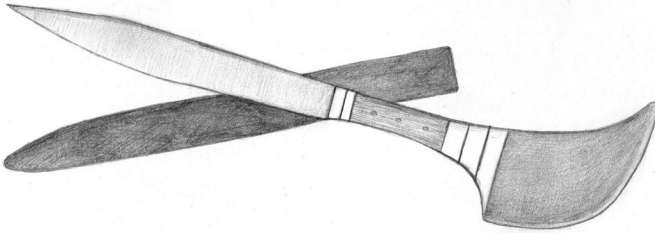
The man listened carefully and warned him that it was not a common disease, that a powerful spirit was harming the girl and not letting her go.

The sailor promised him a good sum of money if he would help him cure the girl. The sorcerer liked the brave and honest young man and he could see he loved the girl deeply. Out of sympathy for him he agreed, saying, “This is not an easy job; I may fail. Pay me only if I am successful.”

The sailor was relieved that the sorcerer accepted. “What shall we do next?”

The *fanđita* man gave careful instructions: “We need twelve strong men. They must be given a good meal of crushed rice (*aveli*) before going with us. If they have eaten well, they will not be afraid. Then we need twelve clubs of ironwood (*kuređi*).² You will bring these twelve strong men, each carrying one club, to our meeting place close to the forest tonight after sunset.

2. *Pemphis acidula*, a type of mangrove producing heavy and strong wood.



In the night the young man did as directed and brought twelve strong men, each carrying a big club, to the edge of the jungle. The sorcerer was already there. He was carrying a special magical knife (*masdaiyffiyohi*).³ “No monster can do me any harm if I have this knife with me”, he said, taking the lead.

They walked in silence through the dark *Lonuziyaraykkoļu* forest. When they arrived within sight of the dimly lit hut where the girl lay in agony, the sorcerer ordered them to stop. He whispered to the men not to be scared at whatever they saw and to strike all at the same time that he struck. They all silently agreed.

After waiting for some time they saw a monster (*furēta*) whose feet were at the southern tip of Huḷule Island,⁴ growing tall skywards and, forming an arch above of them, thrusting its horrible head through the door of the girl’s hut. Right then the sorcerer gave a sign and all of them jumped on the monster clubbing it with mighty blows. Meanwhile the magician moved quickly forward and thrust the magic knife in the doorsill of the hut.

3. A ritual knife used only in *faṇḍita* ceremonies.

4. A formerly inhabited island in North Male’ Atoll where the airport is now located.

After the men had given a great number of blows, the sorcerer removed the knife and the monster bolted away. Then they entered the room and found the young woman sleeping peacefully. They brought the lamp close to her and saw that she had no trace of the disgusting disease at all. Her skin was now smooth and clean.

The sailor carried the girl back to her mother's home. She was still sleeping when they put her on her bed.

The very next day the Bengali sailor and the girl were married. The sailor settled in Male' and opened a shop so that he would not have to travel. After that their lives were full of bliss.⁵

5. Told by Husein Koibe, Hojudū Island, Southern Miladummaḡulu Atoll.

8. Safaru Kaiddā

One evening a woman told her daughter, “Let’s hide the *vaḷudāni*¹ and the grinding stone (*fundā dāy*) and go to sleep.”

“Why should we hide them?” the daughter asked. “We never do.”

Lovingly the mother answered, “Tonight is the 15th of Safaru,² and every year Safaru Kaiddā comes this night with her seven daughters. One of them has an eye missing. So, you must hide the *vaḷudāni* and *dāy*.”

“Tell me why, mother!” the daughter insisted. “What will happen if we don’t hide them?”

Widening her eyes and lowering her voice, her mother explained, “Once, when I was a small child like you, we went to sleep on the 15th of Safaru without hiding them. That night Safaru Kaiddā came. She ground medicine for her seven daughters on the grinding stone and used the *vaḷudāni* to bathe them at the well. So, the whole night we heard the sound of water being pulled out of the well.

“At dawn, when she left, we went outside. There was a lot of filth around the well from the daughters’ bodies, for she washes her daughters only once year. When we cleaned up the mess, under the mud we found a gold *gilafati*.³ We could hardly make it out through the thick layer of grime covering it. My aunt took it and kept it hidden in the house.

1. A small bucket attached to a pole to scoop water out of a well.

2. Safaru, Arabic ‘Safar’, is one of the lunar months and the 15th is a full-moon night.

3. The *gilafati* is a very ancient, now obsolete, type of short, massive necklace worn close to the base of the neck.



“The next year, Safaru Kaiddā returned on the night of the 15th of Safaru. In a frightening voice, she asked, ‘Where is my daughter’s *gilafati*?’ Angrily she beat the walls of the house with her fists, demanding, ‘Give it back!’ Inside we were shaking with fear, without uttering a word. Then she threatened, ‘If you don’t give the *gilafati* back to me, I will take one of your eyes for my daughter to eat.’”

Then this terrible woman beat, kicked, and savagely shook the house. Finally, she broke the door forcefully, thrust her hand through it, gouged out my aunt’s eye, and left happily.”

The mother concluded, “You see what happens if, on the 15th of Safaru’s night, the *fundā dāy* and *vaḷudāni* are left out. So, my child, let’s hide them inside the house and go to sleep.”⁴

4. Told by Gāge Naima, Male’.

9. The Sandbank of the Seabirds

Once upon a time, on a certain atoll there was a large sandbank. It was in a privileged location, far away from the large islands inhabited by humans, which were barely visible in the horizon. Food was abundant there. The turquoise-blue lagoon close-by was teeming with schools of silvery fish. During low tide, a huge number of small crabs, sea worms and other animals found themselves exposed on the dry coral reef. Hence, a large number of seabirds felt safe there and used to breed and find rest on its white sands.

One day, shortly before sunset, a *Koveli* bird¹ flew to it and asked for permission from the seabirds to stay overnight with them. They didn't seem very happy, so he pleaded, "Birds, let me stay! I have been flying from one island to the other and I am very tired. I cannot fly any longer and I might fall into the sea and die. If you let me stay, I will not bother you and I promise I will leave tomorrow before sunrise."

The birds could see he was exhausted and felt sorry for him, so they allowed the newcomer to stay. The *Koveli* bird looked for a dry place well above the waterline, settled comfortably there, and immediately fell asleep.

Later in the night, under the starry sky, the oldest seabird made sure that the *Koveli* was sleeping and then went to the far end of the sandbank. There he gathered the other seabirds around him and spoke thus. "I didn't say anything before because I know you birds are very foolish and wouldn't have paid attention to my words anyway. However, I am telling you that you made a big error by allowing that land bird to

1. The Koel (*Culculus saturatus*).

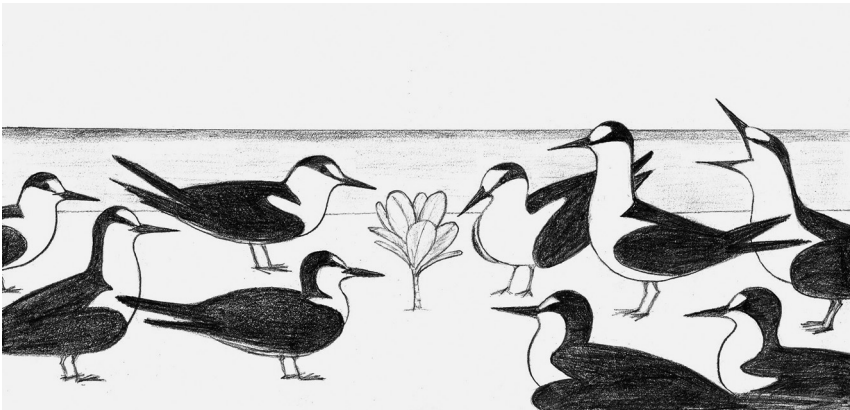
sleep here among us. I am sure that something bad will happen because of him.”

The other birds were annoyed. One of them confronted the old seabird. “The Kovele was tired. He had nowhere else to go. We did a good thing!” The old bird just said, “One day you will know I was right.” After that he went to sleep. Soon all the other birds fell asleep too.

At dawn, the Kovele, refreshed after a good night’s rest, flew away towards his destination. The seabirds mocked the old bird, saying, “You are always worrying too much. You see, nothing happened.”

But, unnoticed by the other birds, the intruder had left traces on the sandbank. His droppings carried seeds from berries he had eaten. Well lodged in the sand above the waterline, the steady wind covered them with a layer of fine sand. After the first rains, one of the seeds germinated and a pale-green bush began to grow. The birds eyed it with curiosity.

Months passed and the old bird, pointing at the big bush told the other birds, “Look! Before, this never happened. Soon there will be many bushes on our sandbank and we will have to move away.” The other birds didn’t worry. Since it was providing some shade when it was sunny and shelter in windy weather, they thought the bush was all right. They murmured, “Old bird is always grumbling.”



Soon berries fallen from that bush sprouted. As time went by the whole surface of the sandbank not reached by the tides was covered by lush, green vegetation.

One day a fisherman landed on the sandbank with his small sailboat and inspected it. Back on his island he wrote a letter to the Atoll Chief asking for the right to use the new islet. As soon as the Atoll Chief granted him permission the man decided to plant coconut trees on it.

Thus, a few days later the man went to the sandbank in the morning carrying small coconut palms and planted them among the bushes. He also planted other kinds of trees that grow well in poor soil and provide wood and shade. During the following months he used to go occasionally to see how his trees were doing.

Years passed and the palm trees produced coconuts. Then the fisherman built a hut and dug a well in the middle of the island. Now the man went often to the islet with his wife and children. He used to harvest coconuts while the woman looked for firewood. The children loved to scare the seabirds and looked for their eggs to eat. Their father caught a seabird every now and then and brought it home with its legs tied and its wingtips cut.

Finally, one night in the faint starlight, the old seabird gathered his few and battered surviving companions at the tip of the island. He was now almost blind and crippled with age and spoke gravely, "I warned you but you didn't heed my words. Now this island is not a safe place for us. It doesn't belong to us anymore. I told you long ago something bad would happen. Now we will have to leave."

And when dawn came, all the birds, giving a last, sorrowful look at the island they had lost, flew away in search of a safer place to settle.²

2. Told by Hasan Didi, Karaange, Dashokubai, Fua Mulaku.

10. The Fried Breadfruit Chips

Hasanfulu was a very young *Keulu* (master fisherman). He regularly went fishing and he enjoyed his work. One afternoon, on the way home, he bartered some fish for four large breadfruits and brought them home. He told his wife, “Sampafuła, fry these breadfruits now. I want to take some tomorrow when I go fishing,” for Hasanfulu loved fried breadfruit.

His wife spent the evening cutting and frying the breadfruit chips then she let them cool a bit and put them into two large tin cans. When she went to bed, her husband was already sleeping.

Before dawn, still in the dark of night, Hasanfulu heard someone call, “*Keulu! Keulu*, wake up quick! The boat cannot leave if you are not there.”

Hasanfulu woke up and jumped from his bed. The dark house was still filled with the smell of fried breadfruit. After filling a smaller tin can with breadfruit and sticking it under his arm, he placed an extra handful into a fold of his *lunghi* (*munđu*) and went out saying, “Let’s go.”

The man who had called him went ahead along the dark path. Hasanfulu followed him in silence. After a while he took some of the crisp breadfruit chips he had tucked in his *lunghi* and began chewing them.

The island was totally silent. Suddenly, the cracking noise Hasanfulu made while biting frightened the man in front of him beyond measure. Without even uttering a cry, he sprinted across the beach into the sea and disappeared leaving a wake of foam.

Hasanfuḷu was so perplexed he muttered to himself: “This Kuḍa Sālihu has always come to call me at the same time and he has never acted strangely. Now, in the middle of the night, he jumps into the sea! This is very odd.”

He kept walking along the beach until he saw his fishing boat in the starlight. He checked the eastern horizon, searching for some faint glow of dawn, but it was as dark as the surrounding sky. Puzzled, Hasanfuḷu went back inland. He walked straight to the mosque and looked at the clock there. He brought the dim oil lamp hanging from the ceiling close to the clock and realized it was only 2:30 a.m.!

Then Hasanfuḷu went back home to sleep some more. He thought, “If I am not there, the others will not go out fishing.”

A couple of hours later, when Hasanfuḷu’s boat crew went to wake him up, he didn’t answer. He heard them calling his name, but he kept mum. The other men thought Hasanfuḷu was sick and, since it was a good fishing season, they went to fish anyway.

When the fishing boat returned close to sunset it came back with a huge catch of tuna. Hasanfuḷu was waiting for his crew on the beach.

“Hasanfuḷu, what happened to you this morning?” the men asked laughing. But seeing that he was not smiling back and that instead his face had a grave expression, their laughter ceased.

“Last night I heard Kuḍa Sālihu calling me. But the truth is that I didn’t see him well. There was only a dark shape in front of me when I went out. Then on the way, while I was following that shadow, he heard me crunching breadfruit chips and then he dashed away and threw himself into the sea.”

Kuḍa Sālihu said, “It was not me. You didn’t come out to meet me and I didn’t jump into the sea.”

Hasanfuḷu continued, “I didn’t find anyone on the boat. Then I went to the mosque and saw that it was two hours earlier than

the usual time we go fishing. So the second time I was called, I didn't go, thinking something might happen to me."

The men and boys of the crew had been listening with serious expressions. They concluded, "This was surely the reef monster (Faru Furēta) who was out to get you. You happened to scare him by eating crunchy breadfruit chips. He didn't expect that noise and it frightened him. Maybe he thought you were a bigger monster than him."

Then the oldest man of the crew looked Hasanfulu in the face and said, "It was lucky that you didn't go fishing with us. Obviously this monster was out to get you today. He would have come out of the sea, attacked our boat, and all of us would have perished."

Thus Keulu Hasanfulu saved his life because of his love of crunchy fried breadfruit chips.¹

1. Told by Gāge Naima, Male'.

11. The Demon King

Long ago, Ođitān Kalēge, the best sorcerer of the Maldives, was residing in Male', the king's island, at a house called Keyoge. He always stayed in that particular house whenever he visited the capital of the kingdom and usually he entertained many visitors there.

One morning, the *Sarudāru*, an important servant of the palace, came to Keyoge to visit this famous sorcerer. After the usual introductory formalities he said, "There are unexplained things happening in the palace. The king goes every night into the enclosure where the goats are kept in the palace compound. He enters accompanied by a servant and then he comes out alone. The person who is in charge of the pen also says that often goats disappear mysteriously. The only traces left in the morning are some blood stains in the sand."

Ođitān Kalēge reflected about what the *Sarudāru* had just said. When the man left he waited for a while and then went into the street. It was the time of the Friday prayers and the king was walking with his retinue from his palace to the Friday Mosque. Ođitān Kalēge stopped and mingled with the crowd, watching the *Radun* walking slowly under the white royal umbrella (*haiykkolu*) followed by his court. Before the whole procession had passed, Ođitān Kalēge became very anxious. Then, deep in thought, he went back to Keyoge.

Ođitān Kalēge didn't talk much at home and after only nibbling at his lunch he went to rest for a little while. When he got up he took a bath and put new clothes on. In the afternoon light, Ođitān walked to the market place by the harbour. There he began to call the people and soon a crowd had gathered

around him. He told them that he had something very important to say and they demanded, “Speak, then.”

Then the respected sorcerer said that their king was not a human being. He was a demon (*furēta*). The people around Oḍitān Kalēge were alarmed and warned him, “How do you dare to say that? Be careful! The king will be very angry if he hears what you have said. You will be severely punished.”

Oḍitān Kalēge proclaimed in a loud voice: “What king? There is no king in this island! I am telling you he is a monster! I have a plan to catch him and you should help me. Do you agree?”

The people in the crowd were hesitant because they were afraid of the king, but they knew Oḍitān Kalēge well and they had great respect for him.

The great sorcerer went on, “I cannot prove anything right away, but if you help me now, by tomorrow morning you will see that I was right. At any rate, you must work hard, because everything has to be ready before sunset.”

After hearing this, the people reluctantly agreed and asked him, “What should we do?”

Oḍitān Kalēge instructed them to dig a wide pit in the middle of the market area. Then, the great *fanḍita* man worked hard to attach a big hook to a huge coconut-tree log which had been securely fixed at the bottom of the pit. When the fishing boats began to arrive full of tuna fish he had already finished his work. As he came out of the great pit, Oḍitān Kalēge told the fishermen to throw all the gills and innards of their fish into it and fill it. After cutting all their fishes, the men in the market came with dripping baskets full of a stinking mixture of fish offal and blood and slowly filled the huge pit.

Once it was almost full, Oḍitān Kalēge said that it was time to cover the pit with a thin layer of sand. When the work was done, the sun was setting and the sorcerer was relieved. Then Oḍitān Kalēge sternly warned everyone again not to say any-

thing to the *Radun*. The people present there promised to keep silent and when everyone had left, Oḍitān Kalēge went back to Keyoge. There he had dinner and went to sleep.

The next morning, the people of Male' went to the fish market at sunrise. There was an unbearable stench over the whole area and everyone could see, already from far away, that the pit had been disturbed. When the crowd came closer, they saw that in the middle of the pit there was a hideous creature on all fours, with its mouth firmly caught in the hook. In its voracious greed for fish innards and blood the monster had bitten the sorcerer's hook and was dead.

Oḍitān Kalēge explained to the assembled crowd that the hook he had attached to the log was a powerful magic hook; otherwise the awful demon would not have died. Casting frightened looks at the dead beast inside the pit, everyone sighed in relief.

The palace was thoroughly searched, but there was no trace of the king. Finally, close to the pit, among the sand, blood and fish gills and innards, the stained clothes of the king and his royal turban were found. Everyone agreed that Oḍitān Kalēge had been right and all were very pleased with him. The monster was buried in the large pit itself without ceremony. Later, the most powerful nobles of Male' chose a new king.

Shortly thereafter, Oḍitān Kalēge was invited to the palace. A ceremonial dinner was prepared in his honour, following which he was given many costly presents.¹

1. Told by Baṇḍēri Abdurrahmanu, Male'.

12. The Man Who Burned the Mosque

Long ago, on an island, lived a man who was known for being prone to anger. One day, he conceived a grudge against some people living at the other end of his island, relating to the ownership of some coconut trees. When the headman had ruled in favour of the others and declared that the trees belonged to them, this man had become very angry.

Hiding his wrath, he patiently waited for the night to come. Then he went to the mosque that was at the other end of the island, in the area where the people he loathed lived. Since it was midnight, the streets were deserted. Upon entering the mosque, he took the little oil lamp, went outside and set fire to the ends of the thatch roofing. Then he threw the lamp to the ground and left. He walked away as fast as he could, glad that he met no one on the dark streets. As soon as he arrived home he went to bed.

Meanwhile, the roof of the mosque caught fire very fast because it was a long time since it had rained and the thatch was dry. When the people living close by heard the crackling noises and noticed the bright flare, they got up at once and hurried to the site of the blaze. But it was already too late to save anything, because the beams had caught fire already. Men, women and children stood at the edge of the compound and watched helplessly as the mosque was consumed by flames.

In the morning, the angry man woke up and went out. Passing close to a group of women, he overheard the people talking about the mosque having been burnt. During the day, as he visited different houses, he noticed that no one was wonder-



Wooden mosque with attached well and burial ground, Keḍēre Miskit, Fua Mulaku (photo by Facundo Vidal Payá)

ing about who had put the mosque on fire. They didn't seem to suspect anyone of having committed the wicked deed.

The angry man grew restless. He had the impression that all the people on the island knew something that they wanted to keep him from knowing. This was perhaps because, in his nervousness, he thought he would end up being caught some day anyway, for there is a Maldivian proverb saying: "Thousand days a robber, one day under the power of the ruler", which means that offenders eventually always end up being brought to justice. Hence, try as he might he couldn't sleep well that night suspecting that, although the people knew it was him, there was a conspiracy not to tell him so.

The following morning he approached the same group of women close to his home and asked them, "Do people say that it is me who has burned the mosque?" They were a bit surprised by his question and also noticed the fear in his face. When they an-

swered, “No, nobody said it was you who burned the mosque!” the women could see that he was clearly relieved, and they grew suspicious.

Then the angry man went on, in the same manner, to the other people he had been with the previous day and all gave him the same answer. Thus he went back home, feeling that a weight had been lifted from him, and he slept soundly that night.

Meanwhile, all the people on the island talked about how anxiously the angry man had been asking around whether anybody was accusing him of having burned the mosque. This news reached the island authority. The headman, after pondering about the matter, ordered the town crier to bring the angry man to his home.¹ At first, when the headman asked him, “Who burned the mosque?” the man was irritated and lied, claiming that he was sleeping at that time. But, after having been intensely questioned by the headman, the man finally gave in and confessed.

The man who burned the mosque was immediately arrested and kept confined. Later, as a sentence, he was given a hundred lashes and was banished to another island.²

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1. In the Maldives when a person asks questions trying to find out whether others are talking about some wrong that he himself (or herself) has committed, people would say: “Like the man who burned the mosque!”
 2. Told by Rafīgu, Daḡimago, Fua Mulaku.

13. Havvā Dīdī

A pretty young woman called Havvā Dīdī was happily married. She was a devoted and resourceful housewife and the mother of one child. Her husband liked her very much. One day, while she was cooking, she removed a boiling pot from the fire bare handed. Now, a woman passing through her yard happened to glance in at the kitchen door and saw that Havvā Dīdī did not use anything to protect her hands from the burning hot metal. She gossiped through the village about what she had seen. The listeners widened their eyes and felt chills down their spines, for this was a sign of the most dreaded of diseases.

When the news reached the leaders of the island they met to discuss this matter seriously. They agreed that if Havvā Dīdī was allowed to roam freely around, that repugnant disease might spread like oil on water. Finally they agreed to take her to a little clearing in the middle of the jungle, close to a place at the southern end of Fua Mulaku called Kuduheraivali. This spot was far away from the inhabited parts of the island. The authorities ordered that a well be dug there and a small hut built; and this was done after a few weeks.

Meanwhile, Havvā Dīdī noticed a drastic change in people's attitudes towards her. Even her kinsmen started avoiding her. Conversation ceased abruptly as soon as she entered a house. If she walked past a group of people, she heard whispers behind her back. No longer did visitors drop into her home.

One day, a twelve-year old girl came to her kitchen and stood at the threshold looking inside. Havvā Dīdī commented, "You don't come by very often anymore, Sanfā Diye."

Not answering, the girl looked away.

“Are you not my friend?”

Sighing, Sanfā Diye stared sadly at the ground, saying, “You know I am your best friend. Why do you ask such a silly question?”

Havvā Dīdī avoided her eyes too. She looked at the kitchen floor while she was scraping coconut and spoke in a whiny voice, “Well, I don’t know what has happened these days. No one talks to me and nobody comes to my home anymore. You used to come here every day and spend long hours in this kitchen talking to me. But I haven’t seen you for a long time and I was thinking that you, like the others, wouldn’t come anymore. Now, after so many days avoiding me, you have come just like that, suddenly. Is this silly what I say?”

Then the girl answered, “No, that’s not silly at all. Things have really changed.” She longed to tell the news, but feared to hurt her friend.

Havvā Dīdī tenderly appealed to her friend, “Tell me what is wrong. When I ask, people become silent. There must be bad news going around the island, I can feel it. It will be fair if you tell me.”

Not bearing to look at her friend’s face, Sanfā Diye said, “The bad news concerns you. I am sorry to be the one to say this, but everyone is sure that you have some dreadful disease which cannot be cured. Just by being with you, others might catch this evil curse. Do you remember the cooked taro you brought to my home the other day? As soon as you left, my mother threw them into the fire. She warned me not to tell you anything. When I heard this news, I was so frightened I didn’t want to come here anymore.”

Attempting a smile, Havvā Dīdī only managed a strange grimace, but her eyes betrayed her shock. So this was why the burns and cuts she discovered lately on her hands did not hurt. She was a leper! Trying to appear calm, she asked Sanfā Diye, “If you are so afraid of me, like all the others, why are you here now, Diye?”

Aware of the sarcasm in her friend's voice, Sanfā Diye was close to tears. "Because I feel very sorry, and, some nights I cannot sleep, thinking of how nice you have always been to me. It is not right that I don't see you any more." She began to weep as she added, "They say they will put you in a little house in the middle of the forest. I heard that the well is finished and they will thatch the roof tomorrow. My brother is going there to work, too." At this point the girl could hardly control her sobbing. "My parents will not allow me to meet you there. So, I had to come here now. I don't know whether I will see you again!"

Tears streaming down her cheeks, Sanfā Diye watched her friend scrape coconut for a while. When she left, she covered her face with her hands, crying aloud.

Inside, Havvā Dīdī was seething. She had grown up in this island along with these people. She had been always kind to them; and now they were treating her this way. Her husband must have known, and even he had not told her. What kind of people were they? Waves of silent anger were replaced by suppressed grief. Then she thought, "What is the use of all this self-pity? I must stop it or I will become mad."

During the next few days, Havvā Dīdī became a stoical, serious woman. Her eyes held an unearthly look.

One day, her husband arrived home with the island authorities. They started flattering her, but she stared at them, narrowing her eyes. The young woman knew what they were going to say and she despised them.

Nervously, one of the men said, "We are sorry, but we must tell you some bad news. You have a very dangerous disease. It would be better for you to change the place where you are living. We have prepared another house for you and will provide for all your needs. It is useless to resist. We would have to use other means, and that would be unpleasant."

In a docile way, as directed, Havvā Dīdī packed her things. Again she thought, "What kind of people are these?"

Her husband said, “You must leave your son here. It is better. Otherwise he will become sick too.”

With her eyes like slits, the young woman glared at him. How she longed for him to stand up to the island chiefs in her defence! But he had not said even one word. Now she must leave her home and her child. She did not hate her kind husband; she only wished he had been more courageous.

Her head low, Havvā Dīdī picked up her bundle and followed the *sarudāru* (a minor government official) to the middle of the jungle. She wondered whether the people were regretting what they had done to her. She ended up thinking that probably they were relieved that she was moving far away.

In the beginning, many friends brought Havvā Dīdī bananas, choice taro tubers, cakes (*bōkiba*), fresh fish and other delicacies. Often she had more than she could eat. Over time, the special meals dwindled. In the end only the *sarudāru* came, and even the food he brought was of lower quality day after day.

Her first nights alone in that place were dreary. As any islander would, Havvā Dīdī feared the darkness and the strange jungle noises. During many dark and lonely hours she felt she was living a bad dream. She thought that at any time a demon would come to devour her and end her sufferings. She tried not to make any sound that might attract the spirits. But as time wore on, the young woman forgot about keeping quiet and she heard herself wailing her loneliness and misery. However, she was far away from the nearest house and no one heard her heart-rending sobs in the dark, long, tropical nights. In the morning, Havvā Dīdī, seeing her wet pillow, was ashamed of her weakness. During the daytime she tried hard to behave as if nothing bad was happening to her.

Weeks passed and, gradually, Havvā Dīdī became accustomed to the night. She learned to walk to the beach in the starlight and not fear looking at the dim sea. Watching the white, frothy foam of the waves breaking against the coral reef protecting the island suited her mood and fed her soul.

For hours she sat very still on the white boulders with her tresses untied. She liked to feel the salt spray on her face and the ocean wind thrashing her long black hair.

Some evenings, her husband came secretly to visit her. He kept at a distance, not wanting to approach her, just wanting to talk. The young woman grew very cold towards him. In the end she preferred that he not come. Havvā Dīdī would rather be alone in the darkness, watching the surf pound furiously against the island under the starry sky. Months later she heard that, pressured by his family, her husband had divorced her and married another woman. By now, she did not even care.

Havvā Dīdī repeatedly tore her clothes to make bandages to protect her wounded hands and feet, so that every so often she ended up without dress. Whenever other women in the island heard that she was naked they would leave old dresses and worn lengths of fabric close to her hut, but these did not last a long time.

Some people say that, as the sickness followed its course, Havvā Dīdī did not become ugly like the other lepers. Although her limbs became deformed, she died before her beautiful face became disfigured. She developed an exalted look about her, completely detached from her actual situation.

Others say that the important people on the island brought her to the Royal Air Force Base hospital on Gan Island, Aḍḍu Atoll. Thanks to medical care there, Havvā Dīdī was cured of her leprosy. She still looked very beautiful. Many begged her to return to Fua Mulaku, but she refused. She did not want either to talk to or look at anyone from her own island. Instead she went north. Her eyes dry, Havvā Dīdī boarded the ship, not looking backwards. She had no tears left for the place of her birth.¹

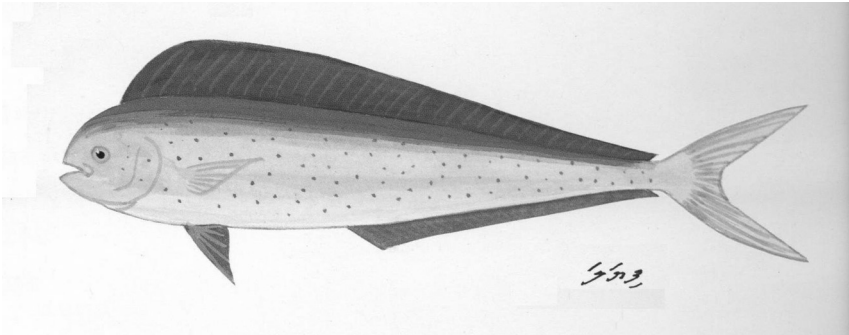
No one is sure of Havvā Dīdī's fate. It is said that she married a wealthy man on a northern atoll and lived happily ever after. Some people like to think she is still alive today.

1. Told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Funāḍo, Fua Mulaku. The spot where Havvā Dīdī was kept, now close to the runway of the airfield, is still known as "Havvā Dīdī Bēvi Tan".

14. The First Tunas (or Fiyala Bola Ođi Duvvi)

This story tells about the origin of the skipjack tuna, traditionally the most important food item for Maldivians.

Long ago, on the island of Feridū in Ari Atoll, lived a famous navigator (*mālimi*) called Bođu Niyami Takurufānu. One day he went on a trading journey with his ship and on the third day at sea his crew caught a large, beautiful fish of the *fiyala* kind.¹ Bođu Niyami, who happened to be up the mast at that time, busy with his astronomical calculations, saw the big fish from where he was and immediately called down to his men. He told them to keep the head of the fish for himself, after the fish had been duly boiled.



When he came down from the mast with his instruments, the navigator was hungry. He was looking forward to a meal of boiled fish head. But he got a shock when he found out

1. *Coryphaena hippurus* (*fiyala*). In the Maldivian language this story is known as ‘Fiyala Bola OBo Duvvi’, meaning ‘Travelled towards the head of the Fiyala’.

that, after the fish had been boiled, someone from the crew couldn't resist and had already eaten the head. The sailor who had done so had picked it clean and had thrown it into the sea, trying to hide the proof.

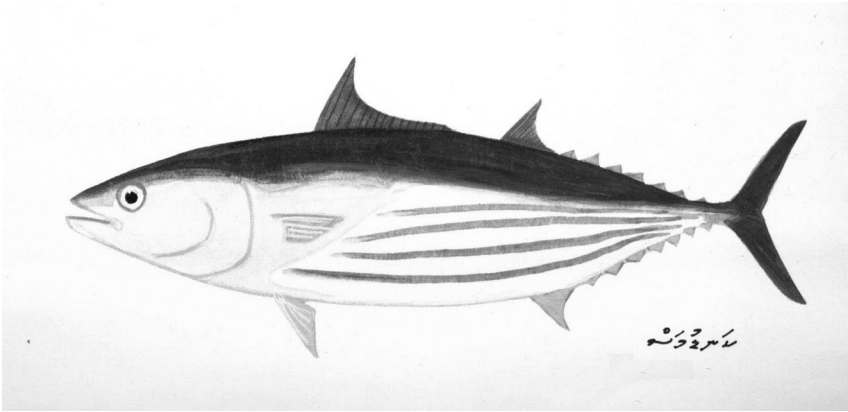
Bođu Niyami flew into a rage and obstinately refused to give any more indications to the helmsman. When the latter insisted, the outraged navigator cried, "Go towards the head of the *fiyala!*"

In this manner the ship sailed aimlessly for eighty-eight days until they reached the giant black-coral tree² at the edge of the world. It was a frightening place. The current was very strong and huge masses of water were falling in a big roar down the edge beyond the black tree. The crew were so scared that they threw a line in despair and fastened the ship to one of the branches of the huge tree. Following this, they fell down on their knees begging Bođu Niyami to save them.

Finally the navigator, seeing the poor sailors so helpless and frightened, relented and told them that his anger was gone. But they were still in a very difficult situation. They would have to wait some time before the wind and the tide became favourable. Although the anxious crew spent a sleepless night, the next morning they were pleasantly surprised. The sea had become calm and there were some strange big fishes leaping in the waters close to the giant tree.

Bođu Niyami thought, "This is a beautiful fat fish and its flesh must be good and firm." So he took a piece of parchment and traced on it the figure of this fish. Then he recited some magic words over it to capture the soul of the mysterious fish. After this he rolled the drawing, put it into a bamboo flask and sealed it.

2. Black coral (*Antipatharia*) is *enderi* in Maldivian. The mythical tree at the end of the world is known as *Dagas*. Other legends do not mention that this tree is made of Black coral.



After three days, the wind became favourable and the ship sailed back towards the Maldives. A school of the strange fish followed in its wake. After sailing for eighty-eight days they reached Tiladummati Atoll and the school of fish had increased in numbers to such an extent that there was almost no free water around the ship and every now and then a fish would land on the boat's deck.

As they approached the Baraveli Kaṇḍu, north of Ari Atoll, the crew saw something that looked like two huge rocks rising out of the sea directly ahead of them. Boḍu Niyami realized that those were the pincers of the Queen of the Hermit Crabs and that she had come up from the depths, attracted by the huge numbers of beautiful fish following his ship.

The great navigator quickly realized that he had to do something to send the whole school of fish towards the bottom of the ocean immediately. Otherwise the giant hermit crab might catch his ship instead of the fishes. Boḍu Niyami thus quickly took the rolled parchment out of the sealed bamboo flask and, after attaching a weight to it, threw the magical drawing into the dark blue waters as far away from his ship as he could. The crew watched in relief as the school of fish disappeared into the blue depths and the pincers of the Queen of the Hermit Crabs sank out of sight.

After arriving at Feridū without further incident, Boḍu Niyami went ashore to sleep. The next morning he sailed on his fishing boat to the west of his island and threw the empty bamboo flask into the ocean. Since then, at any time of the year, there are abundant schools of skipjack tuna in that area.³

3. Told by Nihani Riza, Male'.

15. Boat Number Ten

Years ago there was a certain Korean boat regularly stopping over in the remote atolls of the South Maldives. These islands are renowned because not much happens there ever. They are sleepy places where life is numbed by a sense of tranquillity and tediousness and only very rarely does something take place that shakes the islanders out of their peaceful stupor. One of these rare occasions was the arrival of that Korean ship. It became so famous in that corner of the Maldives that islanders knew it as *diha numbaru bōtu* (Boat Number Ten). This ship was sporadically buying fish from the local fishermen and freezing it in order to export it to Korea.

It is said that the ‘Sento’¹ of Boat Number Ten was a very handsome man. And it so happened that on Fua Mulaku Island three girls fell in love with him at the same time. These girls lived in the northernmost village of their island. Every time Boat Number Ten anchored off Fua Mulaku the three young women went to the anchorage to catch a glimpse of the Sento. Before long they struck up a friendship with him and they came to anticipate the visits eagerly.

The girls learned to recognize the silhouette of the vessel from afar. At odd times of the day they took turns to scan the horizon every day to see whether it was coming. No other island can be seen from Fua Mulaku, because the closest atoll is still too far to be perceived. It was very tedious to do the duty of watching the empty ocean and the young woman who was keeping watch often fell asleep. But, if the girl saw the

1. ‘Sento’ is not a Maldivian word but this is what islanders called the skipper.

outline of a ship in the distance, her heart began to beat fast, and she hoped and prayed it was Boat Number Ten. When the ship drew nearer and she was sure it was that boat, the girl would turn and run to look for her two friends.

Then the three young women would be thrown into a whirl of activity. There was much special cooking to do and they engaged in that task with enthusiasm. They cooked island delicacies, like *gūḷa* and *bōkiba* and went about their village looking for the best bananas and other fruits. After that the girls would be so tired and sweaty they would take a refreshing bath. Before sunset they would take on their best dress, put flowers in their hair and perfume themselves.

Then the three young women would walk eagerly to the place where the boat was anchored, which was quite a long distance. When they arrived at the anchorage point the girls would look for the handsome skipper, flashing bright smiles.

When the Sento disembarked, the girls would make signs for him to follow them. They walked together to the northern point of the island, to the Tūṇḍu, joking and laughing on the way. Since the Sento didn't understand the island language, the girls would find his calm expression funny, especially when it didn't change no matter what they said.

The Tūṇḍu is one of the loveliest places on earth, a huge deserted beach made up of very round polished white coral gravel, so smooth each piece looks like a glass bead. This beach changes its shape according to the seasons. It is subject to a constant breeze that is a relief in the humid tropical heat of the interior of the island.

There, under the moon and the starry sky, the girls would spread a cloth on the shimmering white sand and have a picnic with the food they had prepared. The Sento would light a fire and sing Korean songs. As the night drew along, the skipper and young island women would spend a very pleasant evening in one of the most wonderful settings of this world.

One day the Sento came for the last time, but he didn't tell the girls. They kept hoping that he would come again, but with the passing of time the three island women gave up looking daily at the horizon. Their dejection turned into resignation and a quiet acceptance of their lot. They married local men and had children. The handsome skipper never came back and only the girls kept memories of him.

Years later somebody in the capital composed a sarcastic song naming the girls and the handsome Korean skipper. But Fua Mulaku people didn't appreciate the mockery. Old men said, "These were young people having their fun. Old age comes quickly. If you don't enjoy life at that time, you will never get another chance. At our age you only get afflictions."²

2. Told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Funādo, Fua Mulaku.

16. The Fruits of Greed

Once upon a time, Maniku and his wife Kayddā lived on an island. They were very poor. This couple had two children, but they were not able to feed them. One day, while they were looking for firewood in the forest, they sat under a large tree with red flowers (*berebedi*)¹ and Kayddā began to wail in despair, “Why are we looking for firewood? We have nothing to cook! How can we go back home like this? Our children will be crying, dying of hunger!”

Her husband became miserable seeing his wife in this mood and he too began to sob aloud. The sun was setting and they should have been on their way home, but they were so hopeless that they dreaded seeing their children asking for food and not being able to feed them. So they just sat there crying and crying.

Suddenly Maniku and Kayddā realized that a very beautiful young woman was standing in front of them. She had a pleasant face, shining like the moon. Her dress was red and she wore the finest golden jewellery. In her straight black hair, there were bright red hibiscus and garlands of little white flowers. The poor couple stopped crying and, as they looked at her in awe, they became so scared they began to shiver with fear.

The pretty girl smiled kindly at them and spoke with a sweet voice, “Don’t be afraid, I am not going to hurt you!” She laughed. “Please listen to what I am going to tell you. I know you are a very honest couple and I know how poor you are. I have heard your cries and I came to do something good for you.”

1. The Indian Coral Tree (*Erythrina variegata*).

At this point the *haṇḍi* (female spirit) thrust her hand forward, opened it and dropped a few shiny coins² in front of Kayddā and Maniku.

“Here are some gold coins. With them you can build a small sailboat. You will be able to fish every day and you will live well. Then, you and your children will never be hungry anymore. But, remember” Suddenly her voice became frightening and her sweet expression vanished, “You must never tell anybody about this!”

Maniku and his wife were so terrified they didn’t dare to move. But the young maiden pointed at the coins and laughed again, “Take them, they are for you!” she exclaimed. And all of a sudden, she disappeared.

The distraught Kayddā and Maniku took the coins and went home. They were still shivering when they examined them at the light of the lamp.

The next day they bought food and had a good meal. They were pleased to see the children happy. Later on, Maniku went to a carpenter to have a sailboat built for him. The carpenter was surprised, for he knew Maniku was a poor man, but when he saw the gold coins he agreed.

After a few months the couple had used up their gold coins, but they had their own boat. Maniku went regularly to fish and they were not poor any longer. It is true that they were not rich either, but they never were miserable and hungry anymore, as the beautiful *haṇḍi* had predicted. Now husband and wife could live with dignity and there was laughter in their house. Kayddā, Maniku and their children were now content with their lot.

Meanwhile, the carpenter’s wife, Don Dalekka, became friendly with Maniku’s wife. She had been suspicious for a long time and asked her every day where they had got those gold coins from. But Kayddā eluded her probing and avoided talking about that subject.

2. Gold sovereigns, known as *faunu* or *favanu*.

Nevertheless, after much prying, Kayddā finally gave in and revealed the secret of her good fortune to nosy Don Dalekka. The carpenter's wife said, "You are silly! You should go more often to the forest and get more gold coins. You are maybe not as wretched as before, my dear, but you are still living in a very modest house. Just look at yourself! You have no beautiful dress and almost no jewellery. How can you say you are happy?"

Kayddā thought over what the carpenter's wife had said and felt miserable. When her husband came happily home after a good catch, he was surprised at his wife's unhappy face and asked, "Are you sick?"

Kayddā told Maniku in a whiny tone what was the cause of her sadness. Her husband was very annoyed and cautioned her, "You should not pay attention to the carpenter's wife. You should better be very grateful for what you have got. Have you forgotten the times when we went around the island begging for food?"

But Maniku's wife was not persuaded and pouted her lips. Spurred by Don Dalekka, Kayddā kept sulking and nagging her husband every day until he gave up, "All right! All right! We will go again under that tree to see whether we can get some more gold coins. But I still don't think it is right to do so."

So one day, late in the afternoon, the couple went back to the same spot in the jungle. When they arrived there it was close to sunset. Kayddā and Maniku sat under the tree in the same manner and howled and cried in the twilight as if they were really suffering.

All of a sudden a monstrous being appeared in front of them and they held each other in terror. It was not the lovely girl they had expected, but a hideous-looking woman. Her face was too horrible to behold, with a wide mouth full of huge sharp teeth, a wild mane of hair and hands with long nails, stained



with blood. She looked cruelly at them with bloodshot eyes and spoke with a roaring voice, “Why did you come here again? Did I tell you to come?”

The frightened couple didn’t dare to utter a word. Instead, they turned around in panic and fled as fast as they could. When Kayddā and Maniku arrived home, they were panting and shivering.

The very next day, while Maniku was out fishing, his sailboat crashed against a hidden coral reef and sank. He barely managed to save himself and came back home with only the clothes he wore. After this he and his wife Kayddā became again a poor wretched couple. They lived as miserably as they had been living before.³

3. Told by Don Kokko, Hirunduge, Male’, the former lamplighter of the King’s Palace.

17. Amboffuḷu and Damboffuḷu

Once on a certain island lived two seeds. One was Mr. Mangoseed (Amboffuḷu) and the other was Mr. Jamunseed (Damboffuḷu).¹ They were very good friends.

One day they went close to the beach and saw a *midili* tree. Hanging on one branch was a fruit and Mr. Jamunseed climbed the tree to get it. There was very strong wind and two branches that had grown twisted together became briefly separated when he happened to be between them. They then closed again trapping Mr. Jamunseed. He cried in alarm, “Mr. Mangoseed, I am stuck between two branches!”

Full of anxiety at seeing his friend’s predicament, Mr. Mangoseed ran to the master carpenter (*Māvaḍiya*) and told him, “*Māvaḍiya*, would you come with your axe to cut a branch to save Mr. Jamunseed?”

The carpenter said, “My axe won’t do, its blade needs to be honed.”

Then Mr. Mangoseed went to the blacksmith (*Kamburu*) and told him, “Kamburu, would you light a fire to spoil the steel of the axe of the carpenter who will not cut the tree?”

The blacksmith said, “Alas! My fire won’t do, the embers aren’t hot enough.”

Then Mr. Mangoseed went to the rain and called, “Rain, rain, would you soak and put out the fire of the blacksmith who won’t spoil the axe of the carpenter who won’t cut the tree?”

The rain answered, “I’m sorry, but now it is not the rainy season, so I can’t pour enough water.”

1. *Syzygium cumini*, a cherry-sized purple-coloured fruit.

Then Mr. Mangoseed went to the elephant and asked, “O elephant, would you drink the rainwater that won’t put out the fire of the blacksmith who won’t spoil the axe of the carpenter who won’t cut the tree?”

The elephant said, “This is an inconvenient time for me to do what you ask I’ve just come from the pond and drunk enough water there. My belly is full.”

Then Mr. Mangoseed went to the bumblebee and asked, “Bumblebee, would you sting inside the ear of the elephant who won’t drink the rainwater that won’t put out the fire of the blacksmith who won’t spoil the axe of the carpenter who won’t cut the tree?”

And the bumblebee said, “How can I do what you ask? The ear hole of the elephant is very deep and dark and I’m too scared to go in there.”

Finally, Mr. Mangoseed went to the white egret (*iruvai hudu*) and asked, “Iruvai hudu, would you eat the bumblebee who won’t sting inside the ear the elephant who won’t drink the rainwater that won’t put out the fire of the blacksmith who won’t spoil the axe of the carpenter who won’t cut the tree?”

The white bird told Mr. Mangoseed, “No problem!” and flew off to gobble up the bumblebee.

The bumblebee saw the white egret coming and went to sting the elephant. The elephant, seeing the bumblebee coming went to drink the rainwater. The rain saw the elephant coming and went to put out the blacksmith’s fire. The blacksmith, seeing the rain coming went to spoil the carpenter’s axe blade. The carpenter, when he saw that the blacksmith was coming went to the *midili* tree. But when he arrived there and cut the branch to free Mr. Jamunseed, poor Mr. Jamunseed was already dead.

And thus Mr. Mangoseed lost his best friend.²

2. Told by Ali Najibu, Nedunge, Male’.

18. Telabaguḍi Koe'

Once upon a time a very poor woman lived in Male'. She eked out a living by sweeping the yards of other people's houses. One day while she was bent low doing her humble job she chanced to find a *boḍulāri*.¹ The woman immediately stopped sweeping and went cheerily home to show the coin to her daughter. Koe', her only child, had always longed to eat sweet pancakes (*telabaguḍi*) but being so poor they couldn't afford to buy such an expensive sweet. Now this woman could fulfil her wish.

As soon as Koe' got hold of the coin she ran in joy across the island to buy pancakes. The girl had expected to get several, but she got only one for that price. On the way back home she couldn't wait and she began nibbling at the pancake. As she was walking close to the beach she went there to relieve herself. She still had half of her pancake, so first she looked for a clean spot, picked two big leaves, put the cake between them and laid it on the ground, covering all with a piece of coral rock. Then she squatted close to a bush and after defecating walked on the sand to the water to wash her private parts.

When Koe' went back to take her pancake home she saw that, even after all her precautions, it wasn't where she had left it. Fuming, she looked around and realized that it was not very far away; a ghost crab² was slowly pulling it towards its hole. But when the girl ran to catch it, the crab swiftly disappeared taking the sweet inside its lair. So she walked slowly back home feeling miserable.

1. 'Big laari', a 4 *lāri* coin.

2. *Ocypode* spp.

Three days later, when she happened to pass by the same spot of the beach on a walk, Koe' noticed that from the hole in the ground where the crab had taken her half-pancake a tree had started growing. As a good Maldivian, the girl knew the names of all the trees growing in the islands, but this was a kind of tree she didn't recognize.

Koe' was so thrilled that she didn't tell anybody; otherwise they would offer her tree to the King for his garden. Thus, every day she went alone to have a look at the amazing tree as it grew and grew. It developed faster than other trees and soon became very large with spreading shady branches.

One early morning Koe' went to look at the tree as usual and was surprised to see that its branches were full of *telabaguḍi* just like the one she had bought on that day. Cheerfully she climbed the tree and sat on a fat branch. When she tasted the first pancake it was so good that she could not stop. The girl went on eating and eating until her belly was so full that she could eat no more. Then Koe' climbed slowly down and had a good look at the mysterious tree. To her amazement, its branches seemed as full and heavy as before, even though she had eaten lots of those sweet pancakes. The sun was setting and the girl didn't want to be in the forest after dark, so she went back home, walking very slowly because she couldn't run after eating so much.

From that day onwards, Koe' went to her tree at sunrise and spent her days there idly munching pancakes from its branches until she could eat no more. In the beginning her mother wondered why her child didn't take any food when she came back home in the evening. She asked her, but the girl wouldn't say anything. However, as the days went by and she saw that her daughter looked well fed, she thought the girl was eating in some rich people's house and stopped worrying.

One day, while Koe' was sitting up the tree as usual, a woman came. The child was startled because this was the first time

someone had come to disturb her blissful days in the tree. When she looked down it wasn't easy for her to see the lady clearly between the leaves below her.

But below the tree stood a wild-looking female with a big mane of dishevelled hair and a large mouth with long sharp teeth. She was the Cannibal Woman (*Minikā Daitā*), who loved to eat human flesh.

“Can you throw me one?” asked the woman in a meek voice.

The girl did as requested and threw one pancake at her. The woman caught it but told a lie, “Oh! It fell into the sea. Throw another!”

Koe' didn't know that she was being fooled. The thick green leaves were hampering her vision of the ground. So she threw another pancake.

Again, the scary woman told a lie, “Oh! What a pity! It fell on a turd!” And in this way the woman kept fooling the girl until she looked up and said, “Look! I couldn't catch any of them. You are too far away. I think it will be better if you put a pancake between your toes and reach it out to me. It's no use throwing them, they all get wasted.”

Koe', who was tired throwing of pancakes down, agreed. She picked a pancake, put it between her toes and stretched her leg so that the woman could reach it. All of a sudden, the woman clutched the girl's ankle and pulled her down with formidable strength. Instantly she put the stunned Koe' into a sack and, carrying it on her shoulder, she went home.

When she arrived home the wicked woman left the sack on the veranda and told her daughter, “Child, go to cook while I take a bath. Today I have brought good food for us.”

Saying this, she went to take a bath while her daughter went into the kitchen to kindle the fire. After a short while, *Minikā Daitā*'s child felt a strong wish to see what was in the sack her mother had brought. She peeped out of the kitchen door and looked around to make sure that her mother was not there.

Then she strained her ears to make sure that her mother was indeed taking a bath and when she heard the sound of water from the stone pool (*veyo*) behind the house she swiftly came out of the kitchen and opened the sack.

Minikā Daitā's daughter was surprised to see a girl curled inside. Koe' was dazzled by the sudden bright light and closed her eyes tightly. Gradually she opened them and she was pleased to see a girl of her age instead of that ghastly woman. She giggled excitedly and Minikā Daitā's daughter beamed back at her, exclaiming, "How beautiful you are! Do you want to play with me?"

Koe' jumped gladly out of the sack and, clapping her hands, exclaimed, "Good! We are the same size! Let's exchange our clothes and our ornaments to see if you can look as pretty as me."

So both girls playfully took off their pieces of cloth and their jewellery and exchanged them. After doing so they looked at each other and laughed. Then Koe' slyly suggested, "Now let's play another game! Let's see who looks lovelier while sleeping. Lie down on this flat stone, close your eyes, and be very quiet."

The unsuspecting daughter of the Cannibal Woman stretched herself on the stone and, smiling, closed her eyes. At once, without hesitating, Koe' took a large *kativali*³ and hacked her head off with such a swift blow that the girl died instantly without uttering any cry.

Koe' then hastened to chop the body of Minikā Daitā's daughter into little pieces. Once she was done, she washed all the blood off the stone and cleaned the knife and her hands thoroughly. Then she put all the flesh into the cooking pot and boiled it on the fire.

When the mother came from her bath, she saw Koe's waist-cloth (*kaṇḍiki*), bangles (*uḷaa*) and *fattaru*⁴ by the kitchen door.

3. A cleaver or machete.

4. A long silver chain wrapped around the waist-cloth.

Then she found that the food was ready and greedily devoured the meat without knowing it was her own daughter's. While she was eating she went on saying: "It's delicious! Come to eat too. Are you not hungry, my child?"

Koe', hiding in the kitchen, said, "I will eat later, mother. Keep some for me."

Minikā Daitā didn't insist and went on relishing her food. When she was so full that she could eat no more, she went out, belching, to wash the dishes. Then she noticed that up a big tree by the well there was somebody singing a song.

Koe' sat safely on a very high branch and was singing a mocking song: "After eating up her own daughter this woman went to wash the dishes."

The Cannibal Woman, thinking it was her own child singing on the tree said smiling, "Daughter, daughter! To whom are you singing this song?"

"Oh! I was singing it to the crow."

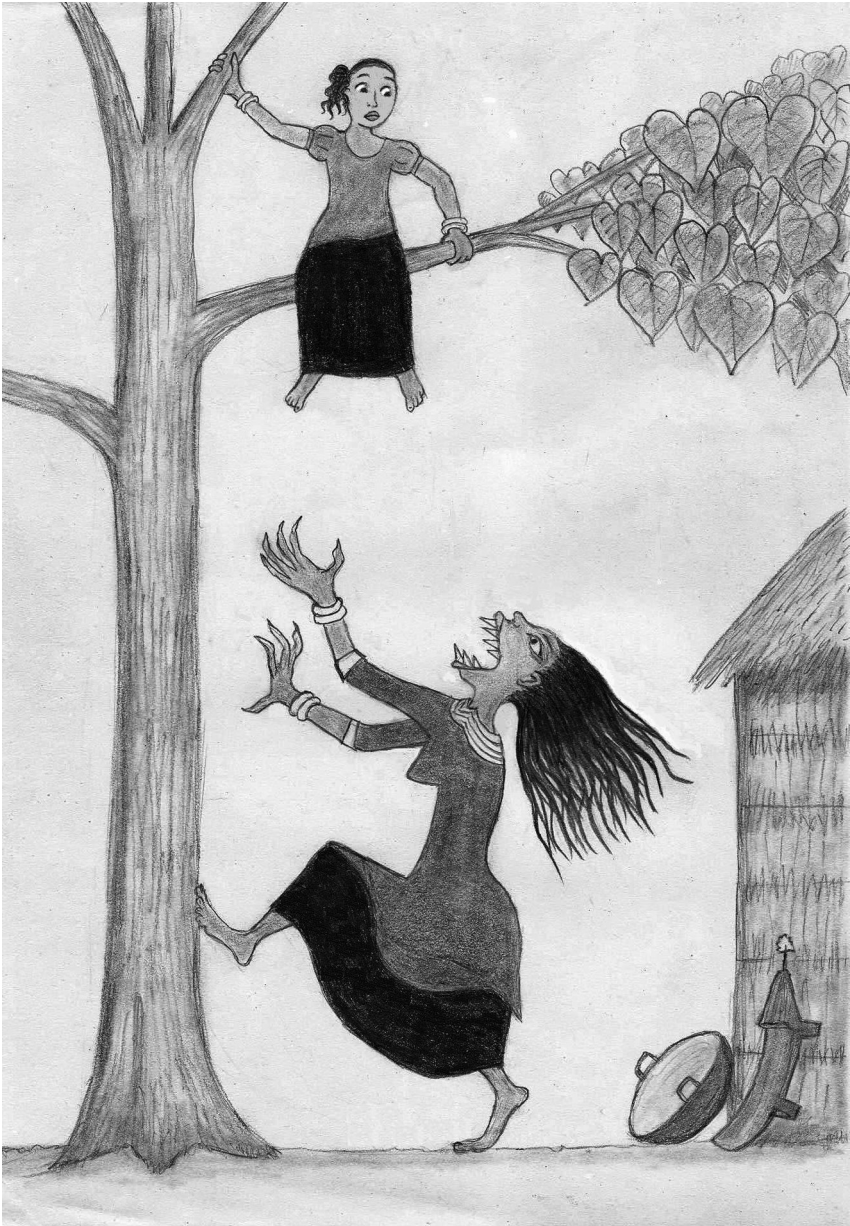
Koe' sang the song again and the woman asked, "To whom are you singing this song, my child?"

"I was singing it to the bat."

Mentioning a different animal every time Minikā Daitā asked, the girl went on singing from the tree the same nagging song over and over: "After eating up her own daughter this woman went to wash the dishes."

Koe' repeated the annoying song so many times that, even though the woman had eaten well, she was irritated and scolded the girl, "Daughter, stop that nonsense!"

At this point Koe' spoke plainly: "I am not your daughter. I am singing this song to you, evil woman! Today you pulled me down from my tree and brought me here in a sack, but your daughter let me go out, and we played and exchanged dresses. After that I tricked her and slaughtered her very easily. Then I cut her into little pieces, I washed all the blood, cooked her flesh and put it on your table. You ate her, not me!"



When Minikā Daitā heard this and realized what she had done, she flew into an awful rage. Her eyes looked fiercely up the tree and became red and very cruel. Her dishevelled hairs stood on end and became wilder and more entangled. Her

voracious wide mouth opened and showed her large, jagged teeth. She furiously tried to climb up the tree, scratching the bark with her long nails, jumping and uttering blood-chilling cries.

The fearful woman seemed to increase in strength as her anger grew. She was shaking the large tree with such violence that the girl became anxious. Finally, feeling no longer safe up there, Koe' jumped down in panic and fled as fast as she could. Minikā Daitā ran after her at frightening speed and the girl now feared she had no hope of escape.

But the Cannibal Woman was so blinded by her fury that she strayed off the path, fell into a burning lime-pit and caught fire. When Koe' heard that the awful cries were now far from her, she looked back and saw that Minikā Daitā was in flames. Then she stopped running and, panting, looked on as the living torch consumed itself.

Once the girl was sure that the dreadful Minikā Daitā was dead, she turned and went back home.⁵

5. Told by Gāge Naima, Male'.

19. Ukunumana and Līmana

Long ago there were two young girls who lived on the same island. One had many lice (*ukunu*) in her hair and was called Ukunumana, and the other had many nits (*lī*)¹ and was called Līmana. These girls were very lazy and careless about their appearance. They didn't like to work and they didn't care to comb and arrange their hair neatly like a proper island woman should.

Their favourite activity was to pick parasites from each other's hair and kill the louse or nit by squeezing it between their fingernails. Thus their hair was always in a mess and their hands were dirty with bits of dry blood from the dead insects. Everyone on the island could see Ukunumana and Līmana all the time doing the same thing: one of them indolently lying down with her hair on the other's lap, letting her head be searched, and the other going through her hair spotting lice or nits and picking them out.

Ukunumana and Līmana never seemed to be doing anything else, so the other women on the island never failed to give them advice. They told them to be cleaner and neater whenever they saw them. But the girls paid scant attention.

One day Ukunumana and Līmana saw that the beach had changed shape during a storm and a new sandbar had formed way offshore at the edge of the reef.² Ukunumana said, "Let's go there, it looks like a good place to search our heads."

1. The capsule containing the lice eggs.

2. 'Kaṇḍobissaveli' is a quickly-forming and quickly-eroding sandbar, a very rare phenomenon. It forms occasionally at the northern end of Fua Mulaku; not to be confused with a longer-lasting and much more common seasonal sandbar called simply 'Bissaveli', which forms closer to the shore.



Līmana immediately agreed, “Yes, so other people will not bother us.”

Thus the girls cheerfully went along a narrow spit of sand that formed a beautiful arc, like a long curved white path flanked by turquoise-blue water on both sides, and which stretched far away, close to the place where the reef ended and the breakers began.

The sand was not hot, but pleasantly warm, and the breeze was cool and refreshing. When they were far enough Ukunumana lay down languorously on the sand and Līmana began searching for her lice.

Suddenly the currents on the reef changed and the sandbar dissolved quickly. Some people saw them from the beach and shouted trying to warn them, but Ukunumana and Līmana were too far away and could not hear. The two girls were dreamily pursuing their activity, oblivious to the danger until the last minute. And so the sandbar dissolved from under them, and Ukunumana and Līmana were carried away by the current and drowned.³

3. Told by Katībuge Ibrahīm Saīdu, Diguvāṅḍo village, Fua Mulaku.

20. Ranna Māri

Trustedworthy men among the inhabitants of the Maldivian Islands told me that the population of the islands used to be infidels. There appeared to them every month an evil spirit from among the Jinn, who came from the direction of the sea. He resembled a ship full of lamps.

The custom of the natives, as soon as they perceived him, was to take a young virgin, to adorn her, and conduct her to an idol temple that was built on the seashore and had a window through which she could be seen. They left her there overnight and returned in the morning, when they found the young girl dishonoured and dead.¹ Every month they did not fail to draw lots, and he upon whom the lot fell gave up his daughter.

At length there arrived among them a man from the Maghreb called Abul Barakat-ul-Barbari who knew by heart the glorious Qurān. He was lodged in the house of an old woman of Mahal (Male') island. One day he visited his hostess and found that she had assembled her relatives and the women were weeping as if they were at a funeral. He questioned them upon the subject of their affliction, but they could not make him understand the cause.

An interpreter coming in informed him that the lot had fallen upon the old woman and that she had only one daughter, who was to be slain by the evil Jinn. Abul Barakat whispered secretly to the woman, "I will go tonight in your daughter's place."

1. The structure of this legend – the killing of the girls, the role of a book, etc. – is identical in the *Nandapakarana* story of the *Panchatantra*. See Finot, *Recherches sur la Littérature Laotienne*.

At that time Abul Barakat was entirely beardless. He was led the following night to the idol temple after he had done his ablutions. There he set himself to chant the Qurān. When he perceived the demon through the window, he continued his recitation. As soon as the Jinn came within hearing of the Qurān, he plunged into the sea.

When dawn came, the saint of the Maghreb was still occupied in reciting the Qurān. The old woman, her relatives and the people of the island came to take away the girl. They wanted to burn her corpse according to their custom. But they found the stranger reciting the Qurān, and conducted him to their king, by name Shanurazah, whom they informed of this adventure.

The King was astonished. Abul Barakat proposed to him that he embrace Islam and inspired him with a desire for it. Then King Shanurazah said to him, “Remain with us till next month, and if you do again as you have just done and escape the evil Jinn, I will be converted.”

The stranger remained among the infidels and Allah disposed the heart of the King to receive the Islamic faith. Thus Shanurazah became a Muslim before the end of the month, as well as his wives, children and court.

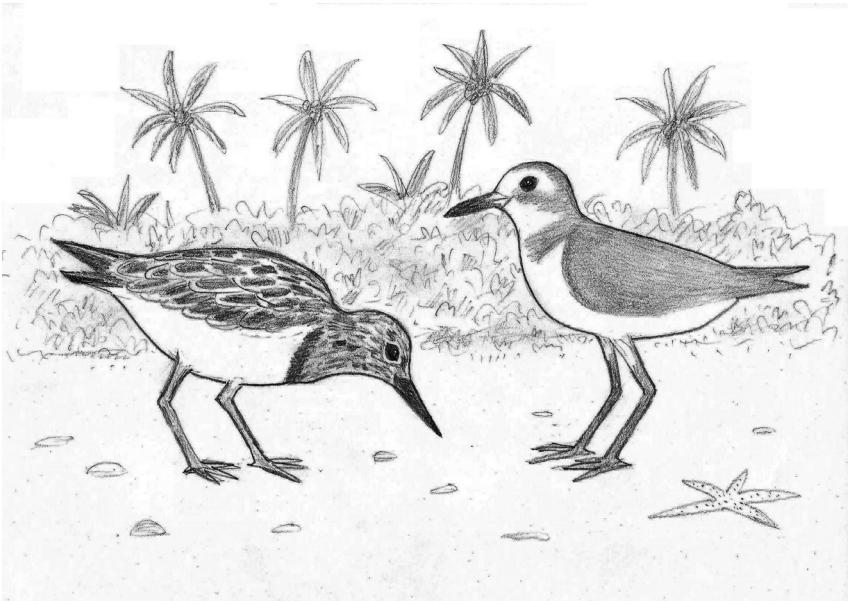
At the beginning of the following month the saint of the Maghreb was brought again to the idol temple, but the demon did not come. Abul Barakat chanted the Qurān till morning, when the King and his subjects came and found him still reciting. Then they broke the idols, and razed the temple to the ground.

The people of the island embraced Islam and sent messengers to the other islands, whose inhabitants were also converted.²

2. This is the legend of the conversion of the Maldives to Islam as written by Moroccan traveller Ibn Batuta (1304–1378) in what has been considered the earliest descriptive work on the islands. It is the most famous legend of the Maldives, found in Maldivian schoolbooks and tourist brochures alike. The local name for the demon that came from the sea is Ranna Māri.

21. Findanpuļu and Bondanpuļu

Long ago two birds of different species lived on an island: Findanpuļu and Bondanpuļu. *Findana*¹ is a bird that likes to live on the beach close to the waterline, while *Bondanu*² is a bird that prefers to live in the interior of the island.



One day they each decided to build a house and Findana built a shaky hut using the flimsy thin nerves of the coconut palm (*iloshi*). He built it right on the sandy shore, while Bondanu went into the forest, cut teakwood trees and built a solid house in the centre of the island.

1. Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*).
2. *Bondanu* or *Bondana* is a generic name referring to various species of genus *Charadrius*; in this story it refers to *Charadrius leschenaultii* (*Valu Bondana*).

During the night there came a storm and the tide rose, so Findana's house was washed away. Wet and cold, he went to Bondanu's house and knocked at the door. Bondanu asked, "Who's there?" Findana answered that he was cold and wet and begged to be let in. Bondanu then opened the door and let him in contemptuously. He showed Findana a place and told him, "You can sleep there."

However, no place was good enough for Findana and he kept refusing one spot after the other. Finally Bondanu showed him the wooden lid of the rice pot in the kitchen and Findana agreed to sleep on top of it saying, "Ah, this is a good place for me to sleep."³

Then Bondanu retired to his bed and left Findana there. After a while Findana removed the lid from the pot and ate some of the cooked rice inside. Bondanu woke up, "Findana! Findana! What is that noise?" And Findana answered, "I stretched my leg." Satisfied with the answer, Bondanu went back to sleep.

But before long Findana removed the lid from the pot again and ate some of the cooked rice inside. Bondanu woke up again and shouted, "Findana! Findana! What is that noise?" And Findana answered, "I coughed." And thus the night went by with the result that Bondanu didn't get much sleep and Findana ate all the rice. Just before dawn, with his belly full, Findana sneaked out of the house and fled.

Bondanu's children woke up at sunrise and asked for some boiled rice from their mother. She went to the kitchen and saw that there was no rice in the pot. Instead it was filled with faeces, for it is the custom of *Findana* birds to defecate every time they eat. Bondanu was greatly offended and he set out immediately to find that foul bird.

3. In southern versions of the story it is a can (*dabiya*) full of fried taro slices instead of a rice pot.

He looked all over the island and couldn't find him, but his children followed tracks in the sand and found that Findana was hidden under a half coconut shell. He was looking out in fear from one of the three holes. The children called their father and Bondanu came, red with anger, and beat up Findana, then took him by the wing and threw him into a thorny bush.

When he managed to get out of the thorns, Findana was wounded in one leg. He went to the beach and asked some fishermen who were there repairing nets whether they would help him, but they saw him looking so bedraggled that they paid no attention to his pleas.

Finally Findana, weary of misfortune, went to a lonely end of the beach and saw a wooden box floating on the waves. He sang: *Ranfotteh' laggalē, Mainmagah' laggalē*.⁴

When the box drifted to shore he opened it and saw that it was full of gold dust. Then Findana took the box with him and hid it. He wanted to measure some of the gold dust and went to Bondanu's house while he was not there. He asked his wife for a measuring cup (*lāhi*). Bondanu's wife wondered what Findana was going to measure and put a drop of sticky bread-fruit tree sap in the bottom of it. Findana took the measuring cup and measured out some gold dust to pay for a carpenter to build him a good house.

One day, after his house was finished, Findana went to Bondanu's wife and gave her the measuring cup back. Bondanu's wife noticed that what had stuck to the bottom of the measuring cup was a bit of gold dust. When she told her husband, he thought, "I must find out how Findana got the gold dust."

Thus Bondanu went to see Findana and found him sitting in his new home. Findana received him enquiring, "What brings you here my friend?" And Bondanu told him that he wanted to find a box filled with gold dust, too.

4. "Drift, O box of gold, drift in my path!"

Findana said, “It is easy. First you must let me beat you and take you by the wing and throw you into the thorny bush. Then you must go and ask the fishermen for help, but they will not help you. At last you must sit at the end of the beach and sing this song, *Ranfot̄teh’ laggalē*, *Mainmagah’ laggalē*.”

Bondanu agreed and Findana thrashed him thoroughly and threw him into the thorny bushes.

Findana meanwhile went to ask Bondanu’s wife where her husband was. She said, “He has not come home yet and my children have nothing to eat.” So Findana gave them food from his own home.

When Bondanu finally managed to come out all wounded from his thorny prison, he went to the beach but the fishermen who were there didn’t want to help him. Then, feeling miserable, he went to the lonely sandy point and sang the song Findana had taught him. After waiting for some time Bondanu saw a box among the waves. When it drifted to where he was he opened it without delay.

But instead of gold dust, this box was filled with wasps. They rushed out of the box and stung Bondanu furiously all over his body. And thus Bondanu died.

The next day Bondanu’s wife was very worried, “My children are hungry; there is no food in the house and their father has not come home yet.” So Findana gave them food again.

On the third day Findana brought Bondanu’s wife and children to his home. From then onwards he looked after them and everyone was happy.⁵

5. Told by Maimūna, Dōdil, Male’.

22. The Skull below the Tree

A very poor man called Ibrāhīmu lived long ago on an island in one of the northern atolls of the Maldives. Since there was very little food, when he became hungry he had to go and search for something to eat. He went to a *midili* tree at the edge of the village but there were no nuts.¹ Disappointed, with his stomach empty, he went into the forest and wandered for a long time searching for something edible. While he was in the deepest part of the forest, Ibrāhīmu noticed a shining glint below a big tree. Fearfully, he crept near and saw that it was only a human skull bleached white by the sun. When he had almost reached it, a noise startled him.

The skull said, “Come nearer!”

Alarmed, Ibrāhīmu responded, “I’m surprised that you speak.”

“Come, come nearer, my friend. I will do you no harm. I have been here a very long time, and no one has come. I’m very bored. Tell me, where are you going?”

Ibrāhīmu answered, “I am just a poor, hungry man looking for food. There is not much to eat on the island.”

“So you’re hungry. Don’t worry. Just go to the watermelon creeper behind this tree hanging over me.”

Ibrāhīmu thought, “Strange ... A watermelon creeper here in the wilderness!”

But to his amazement there behind the tree he found indeed a large vine with many big, beautiful watermelons.

The skull said, “Eat as many as you can. But, every day you must come and talk to me.”

1. *Terminalia Catappa*; the nuts of that tree are known as *kanamadu*.

The melons were excellent and Ibrāhīmu ate and ate until he was full. As he was about to leave, the skull said, “Be sure not to tell anyone about the melons you ate and about who is here under this tree. Remember that we are friends now.”

“I will remember,” Ibrāhīmu said before leaving that spot.

During the next weeks Ibrāhīmu was very happy. He went every day to talk with the skull and eat some melons. Each time the skull reminded him not to tell anyone about what he was doing. One day Ibrāhīmu commented, “I have been coming here so many days. You must tell me who you are and why you are like this.”

The skull answered, “Alas! Once I was a very wealthy and respected man. But my mouth killed me.”

“How could your mouth kill you?” Ibrāhīmu asked.

Impatiently the skull retorted, “That’s all the truth. Don’t ask any more about it.”

Ibrāhīmu left unsatisfied.

Many days later, when Ibrāhīmu came to eat his daily share of melons, the skull told him, “Now we have come to the point that we know each other well. You look better fed. People might ask, ‘How is that?’ and they see you disappear into the forest every day. But you must promise solemnly not to tell anybody about the watermelons and about me.”

“I will not tell anybody,” Ibrāhīmu pledged.

For some time everything went well and Ibrāhīmu kept his agreement. However, one fateful day, while he was idly sitting at home, he reconsidered the skull’s story. “How amazing! He says his mouth killed him. I must tell the *Radun* (the king). His Majesty will be pleased to hear that such bizarre things take place in his kingdom. Since the *Radun* is generous, he might even give me a big present.”

So, one day he went by sailboat to Male’ and told the whole story to the king. Naturally, the *Radun* was astonished. “Is it possible that such a thing could happen in my kingdom?”

The ministers did not trust Ibrāhīmu and stared at him in contempt, saying, “His Majesty should not pay attention to these crazy stories.”

The *Radun* asked Ibrāhīmu, “Do you swear to me that there is a talking skull below a tree on your island, and that in the same spot there is a big vine giving watermelons every day?”

Ibrāhīmu said, “Yes! I have been going there so many days, I know it well and I have eaten a great many very tasty watermelons.” Then he added, “The skull claims that his mouth killed him. Everything I have told you is true, Your Majesty.”

The *Radun* became very serious and warned him, “If you are trying to fool me, you will be punished severely.”

Ibrāhīmu smiled with assurance, “Your Majesty will not be deceived.”

The *Radun* sailed on the royal ship with his ministers to Ibrāhīmu’s island to see the wonder with his own eyes. Ibrāhīmu led them into the forest to show them the mysterious spot. However, when they arrived to that place neither the skull nor the melon vine were there. Everybody searched thoroughly, but there was no trace of a vine or a skull anywhere nearby. Looking at Ibrāhīmu angrily, the ministers declared, “You lied!”

Ibrāhīmu froze, staring at them in terror.

The *Radun* demanded, “Why did you try to fool us?” He reflected a moment. Then without waiting for any answer, his face grew hard and he announced, “Now you will know the punishment for anyone who dares to tell a lie to his king.”

Ibrāhīmu started weeping bitterly, swearing it was no lie.

“O king! Have no mercy on him,” urged the ministers impatiently. “Here we stand. We can see that this man has shamelessly lied, but still he refuses to admit what he has done. This worthless villain thinks he can continue fooling us.”

The king’s face was grim. Ignoring Ibrāhīmu’s frantic pleas, the *Radun* ordered his soldiers to tie Ibrāhīmu tightly to the tree. After leaving that place the king went to the island village

and sternly warned the people that no one should go to help Ibrāhīmu, or they would suffer a similar punishment. “Ibrāhīmu is condemned to death by Royal Order”, he concluded.

Meanwhile, left tied to the tree, Ibrāhīmu wept miserably. Suddenly he heard a laugh and at his left, under the tree, he saw the skull. Shocked, Ibrāhīmu cried, “Where have you been?”

“I came to tell you my mouth killed me as your mouth killed you.”

“What do you mean?” asked Ibrāhīmu.

“You are a foolish, unworthy man. Though I was your friend and treated you well, letting you eat my watermelons, you broke your promise to me. I should not even be here talking with you. But I will tell you my story.

“In my time, long, long ago, I was such a great *fandita* man that I was employed at the royal court. It so happened that with my own mouth I made a promise to the king one day. Some time later, I lied to him, breaking my promise, with my own mouth as well. That king executed me under this same tree just like this king has condemned you to die here. But that was long ago.”

Ibrāhīmu begged abjectly, “Help me, please!”

“No, no,” said the skull. “I warned you. We were friends, and we were bound by a pact, but you broke your promise. It is right that you die.”

Scorning Ibrāhīmu’s desperate supplication, with a burst of raucous laughter, the skull disappeared.²

2. Told by Aishath Naazneen, Gāge, Male’.

23. The Stingray

The following story shows how important it is for children to respect and obey the advice of their mother.

While most women on her island had delivered many children and had large families, Sampa Manike had only one son, Ali Maniku. One day an important learned man from another island came to her house and she asked him to predict the boy's future. The learned man looked at the boy's hand and became distressed.

Sampa Manike wanted to know what was wrong and begged him to tell her. Finally the sorcerer said, "I don't want to cause you grief so early, and I know this is your only child," he sighed, "But here it says that, before he becomes a full-grown man, a fish will kill him."

Shocked, the mother let out an instinctive howl of grief. From that day onwards Sampa Manike determined to protect her boy by keeping him always away from the sea. In this manner little Ali Maniku spent his childhood in the interior of the island, for his mother wouldn't let him go even close to the beach.

Years later when he was at the age when all other boys were going to fish and quickly learn to master the art, Ali Maniku was not allowed to go on the fishing boats of his island. His mother was very strict with him, telling the boy, "If you don't even look at the sea, you will be safe."

Ali Maniku was not happy. He didn't even have permission to go on a journey to another island. He told his mother, "What could happen to me if I stay aboard the boat?" Sampa Manike patiently explained to him that boats are not that

steady, that they could sink or he could slip and fall overboard into the ocean waters and then the fish would have a chance to kill him.

There is only a limited amount of games that can be played in the interior of an island. All Maldivian children love to go to the beach and spend a long time right by the shore or in the water, fishing and playing until they get tired.

One day, an old man, Don Hasambe, passed by while Ali Maniku was sitting under a tree alone, looking very bored. The boy saluted him, “Don Hasambe! Where are you going?”

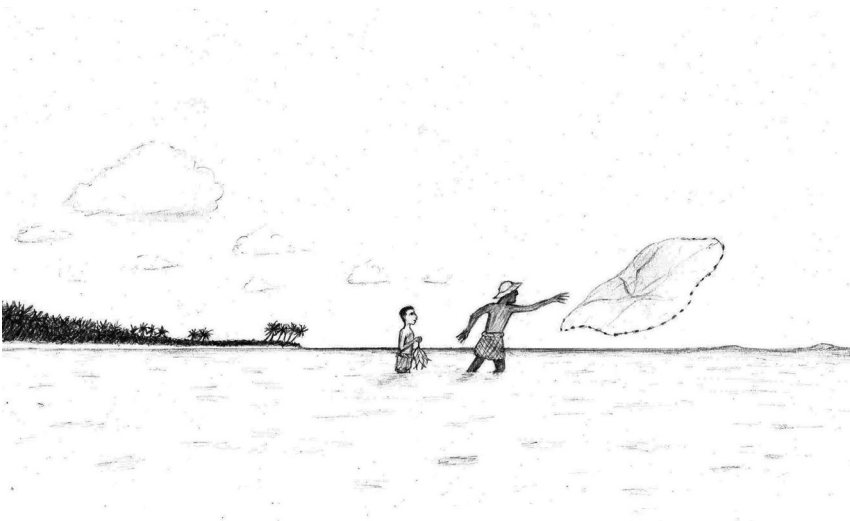
“I am going to cast my net on the reef.”

“Would you take me along with you?” asked the boy challenging the old man.

“You know well that your mother doesn’t allow you to go to the sea.”

“Why is that?” muttered Ali Maniku in frustration.

“Well, one day a learned man predicted that a fish would kill you. Whatever you may say, your mother is right. I would have done the same with a child of mine.”



But the boy was not satisfied. He looked very disappointed. Then the old man took pity on him and suggested, “You see, where I am going there are only small fishes. There is nothing that could really kill you. I will stay just in the shallow water of the reef all the time. You can come along.”

The boy’s face lit up and he got up right away.

Don Hasambe gave him a stretch of palm fibre and told Ali Maniku, “You will carry the bundle of fishes I catch; you just have to poke the point through the eye of every fish.”

Soon the old man and the boy were wading in knee-deep water on the reef, close to where the waves were breaking. It was a lonely corner of the island and there was no one to be seen. Feeling the sun and the salt spray on his face, the boy enjoyed the moment immensely.

Don Hasambe taught the boy how to hold steady when a wave breaking at the reef edge would rush through their legs making it hard to keep their balance. Ali Maniku did well, and was a quick learner.

It was a lucky day. After casting the net a few times, Don Hasambe had made a good catch and the boy was carrying a large bundle of small fishes. The old man was ready to go back home and told the boy, “I think this is enough, let’s wade back to the beach.”

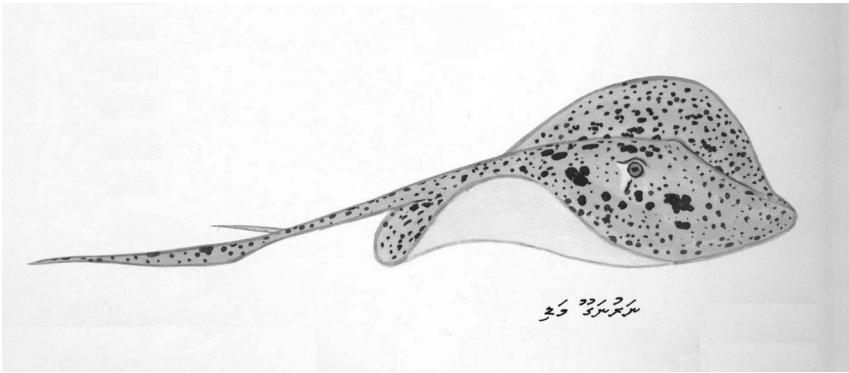
But Ali Maniku was too excited. He pleaded, “Let’s stay just a little bit longer. I have seen how you cast the net. Please let me try one time; then we will go home”

The old man agreed and handed the net over to the boy. The first time Ali Maniku did not do it too well, and the old man corrected his position. But the next time the boy cast the net it fell beautifully in a wide circle.

The boy was overjoyed and quickly went to gather the net. When he bent his body and thrust his hands underwater he said, “I think there is something big inside.” Suddenly he gave a sharp cry and the water below him became red.

“Ouch! I can’t pull my hand out!” howled the boy.

Don Hasambe quickly went to help him. The old man saw that there was a large stingray under the net. He told Ali Maniku to keep his hand still and took the net, hand, fish and all, lifting the whole bundle out of the water. The sharp barb of the ray had gone clean through the boy’s hand. It was the size and shape of a small knife and its viciously downward-pointing serrated edges clung to the sinews of the hand, making it impossible to pull out.



Don Hasambe calmly told the boy to walk along with him. He held the heavy stingray and net in a bundle close to the boy’s hand. Staying together, they both carefully waded towards the beach. But the fish was heavy and difficult to carry, and every time one of them took a false step, the boy cried out in pain.

Thus they went ashore and walked straight away to Māvāḍi Husēn’s house. Husēn was a carpenter and the old man knew he had many good tools.

Don Hasambe carefully put the stingray on the workbench. The boy’s hand was attached to the back of the stingray and the net was in between. The carpenter considered the situation and began by cutting the net off. When he could see the space between the palm of the boy’s hand and the back of the stingray, he told Ali Maniku to hold his hand very still.

Then Husēn carefully cut the base of the spike with a small saw. Now the boy was free. The carpenter then just pulled the spike upwards and it came clean out of the hand.

Meanwhile a lot of boys and girls had been gathering at the carpenter's shed out of curiosity. They made such a ruckus that soon the adults began to arrive. Among them was a furious Sampa Manike, who began to scream at Don Hasambe at the top of her voice. "What did you do to my son? Who told you to take him to the sea?" The old man had become very small and had no words to say.

Ali Maniku followed his mother sobbing. She didn't speak and her face was grim; she was disappointed that her son had not obeyed her.

But Sampa Manike could not be angry towards her son; she loved him deeply and was anxious about the future. When they reached home, she warily examined the nasty wound. Then she put medicine on her son's hand and wrapped it tenderly with cloth. However, the gash became badly infected and the hand swelled and stank with pus. In the days that followed the wound worsened and the whole arm became swollen. Despite Sampa Manike's constant care, Ali Maniku died within a month.

And thus the words that the learned man had spoken many years before came true in the end.¹

1. Told by Hasan Didi, Finifenmaage, Fua Mulaku.

24. Herra

Long ago a very witty man called Herra lived in Male'. He was a very big and black man. One day he was very hungry and stood at the entrance of a tea shop. As a rule, people standing like that are those who want to be engaged as crew on a fishing boat, because tea shops are good meeting points for fishermen.

Before long some people came and asked Herra, "Do you want to come fishing with us?"

Herra replied, "Only if you give me a good meal."

They agreed and entered the tea shop with him. Herra ate a lot of food and gulped many cups of tea. Afterwards he took his time and slowly chewed betel and arecanut. Then the fishermen paid the bill and said, "All right, let's go. We have been here long enough."

Herra told them to wait and made a declaration in a solemn manner that admitted no discussion, "If the sail makes the boat go forward when the wind blows on it, I cannot go on the boat."

And so the men had to leave him there.

On another occasion Herra hung around in the morning by the seafront in Male'. Finally he spotted some islanders from a distant atoll who had just disembarked. Herra went up to them and asked, "Do you have a place to stay?"

The men said, "No, do you know a good place?"

Herra said, "I can sell you a house for a very cheap price."

The price he quoted was so low that the men agreed right away.

And so Herra brought the travellers, weary from a long boat journey, to the Eterekōlu Miskiy, a famous mosque in Male'. Then he quickly disappeared.

The men were happy with the place and they made themselves comfortable there. But at noon the *Mudīmu* (caretaker of the mosque) came for the *Zuhur* prayers and chased them out.

When the king sent his soldiers to look for Herra, the captain of the soldiers caught him and said, "Herra, you are in trouble. Some men from another island say that you fooled them by selling them a mosque."

Herra acted offended and surprised. He opened his eyes wide, "No captain! The truth is that they actually tried to fool me, because they paid only a few *lāri* for a house. They surely knew that a building with a roof and a well in Male' doesn't cost just a couple of *lāri*. Everyone in this kingdom knows that."

The manner in which he said this was so witty that it caught the captain of the soldiers off guard. He then burst out laughing and let Herra go free.¹

1. Told by Gāge Naima, Male'.

25. The Island of the Lepers

Long ago, when I was a child, I went on a trading journey across Huvadu Atoll. On the boat there were mostly people from our island. One afternoon, heavy rain and strong winds made the captain look for shelter leeward and he headed towards the closest island. As we drew near I could see that it was not a very big island; it had thick vegetation, mainly tall coconut trees. Some people aboard began to whisper in fear though. They said it was the island of the lepers, a dreary place.

As soon as we cast anchor we could see people on the beach and I became suddenly overwhelmed by fear. In front of my eyes was the most abject bunch of human beings I had ever seen. Some were walking like cats, others hobbling like rabbits, but most of them were crawling or dragging their miserable bodies on the sand. They were waving at us, calling us to give them something. The sound of laments filling the air and the pathetic sight were enough to leave us paralysed with terror. However, our captain remained calm and this was very reassuring considering our situation. He spoke matter-of-factly, “All the hopelessly sick men of Huvadu Atoll are left to rot in this island. The women are brought to the island of Funadū, farther away. If they were close by they would swim to meet each other.”

We kept very silent, staring mesmerized at the horrifying crowd on the beach. The captain went on, “It is strictly forbidden by the king to land on or even anchor close to these islands, but I need to have a look. I know all the islands of this large atoll very well except for these two places and I have

always wanted to see the interior of these islands. This is a good chance to go ashore and see it by myself.” Then he faced us and his voice became a little threatening, “I don’t want anybody on board to mention this later. Is this clear?” Since this captain was a much liked and respected person everyone on board assented.

Thus, the captain and three other men disembarked, bringing me along. Wading through the shallow, waist-high water they reached the beach. I was sitting on one of the men’s shoulders and once ashore I walked beside them. But, as soon as we were near the inhabitants of that island, I wished I had stayed on board. The deformed and maimed men on the sand were even more terrifying when seen close by. It was revolting to look at their hideous wounds. These were nauseating, without bandages or medicine, oozing fluids, and their sickly smell filled the air. But the thing that most horrified me was to stare at their repulsive faces with no eyes, no lips or no noses.

Despite their woeful existence, these wretched people were very kind and considerate. They kept all the time at a prudent distance from us, because they realized we were upset if they came too close. They were very silent while we walked through their island.

The interior of the island was green, lush and gloomy. Big banana clumps grew here and there. The sick and deformed inhabitants of the place lived in modest, tumbledown little huts, which were built at a relatively short distance from each other. The roofs of their shacks, thatched with woven coconut palm fronds, were no higher than a man’s chest. As we set off to leave the place to board our boat, some local men, who had been silently following us, told us to wait.

After a while they returned bringing a freshly cut banana bunch of the *māloskeu* variety (the type that are good for cooking) and they offered it to us. We were moved because the people who had been banished here were so poor and pa-

thetic, yet they still thought it was important to be kind and courteous. Then our captain spoke to one of the young men of the crew and sent him to the boat. He came back after a while with a basket full of mangoes. After the sailor deposited it on the beach, we all waded back to our vessel. Once aboard, we felt lighter.

Soon the sky cleared and in the golden light of the late afternoon we could see a rainbow in the east. The captain said it was all right to weigh anchor and leave. When we sailed away from the island of the lepers, all on board sighed with relief. Nothing in the world could have compelled us to spend the night close to that forlorn, desolate place.¹

1. Factual story told by Keḍēre Muhammadu of Fua Mulaku island.

26. Debō Dūnige Vāhaka (or The Two-headed Bird)

Very long ago there were two-headed birds (debō dūni) on earth. This was a rare type of bird endowed with keen wisdom, but now this species has vanished from this planet. The story that follows makes clear the reason behind their disappearance.

One day a two-headed bird happily sat on a branch of a shady tree in the forest. It was a very calm and beautiful day. The woods were silent except for the songs of birds and the wind blowing in the treetops.

After a while the bird saw a young man coming with an axe. He began to cut a tall palm that was very close to the tree where the two-headed was sitting. The newcomer made such an ear-splitting noise with his axe that it woke a tiger sleeping nearby. At once the tiger got up and appeared behind the man.

“I am going to eat you!” the tiger growled. “You woke me up and I am hungry.”

The man turned in fear and dropped his axe. “Please spare my life! I have a young wife; she is pregnant and I have to build a new house for my family.”

The tiger said, “If I go to disturb you where you people live, I surely will be killed. Now you have come here to my forest to disturb me.”

The man was apologetic, “I only needed wood. It was not my intention to bother you in your sleep. In fact, I respect you very much because I heard that you are the king of the jungle and no animal is greater than you.”

The tiger was a bit vain and enjoyed the flattery, so his mood mellowed. “Who told you that I am the king of the forest?”

“Many men say that, even our learned men,” said the woodcutter. “If you will allow me, I am ready to build you a house.”

“A house for me?” asked the tiger in puzzlement.

“Yes, of course,” said the man. “A kingly animal like you should not sleep just anywhere. Inside a house it will be much cooler on hot days like this; and it will keep you dry when it rains.”

The tiger thought it was a good idea and the man, who was also a skilled carpenter, began cutting wood and fashioning it into thick planks. After a while he was quite tired, but he had built a small, strong barn (*koshāru*).

The tiger, who had been keeping guard so that the woodcutter would not escape, exclaimed, “It looks very good indeed!”

The man said, “You see, it even has a door so that you can keep unwelcome visitors out. Come inside! See for yourself how comfortable it is.”

The unwary tiger went quietly in and inspected the wooden building from the inside. Suddenly, the man closed the door behind the animal. Then he bolted it tightly.

The tiger realized how foolish he had been and roared in anger, ferociously scratching the inside of the shed. However, the thing was so well built that it didn’t even shake. In the end the tiger began to wail and plead with the woodcutter, but the man paid no attention. He took his tools and left.

But the tiger’s ordeal was not over. After a while the young woodcutter came back with a pregnant girl. She carried a kettle full of boiling water in her hand. Through a crack on top of the structure, the girl poured hot water on the trapped tiger while shouting at it, “You mean tiger! You wanted to eat my husband, eh? Here, take this!”

The scalded tiger howled in pain and despair until he was reduced to whimpering. Then the young couple went back home, leaving the tiger there to die a slow and miserable death.

The two-headed bird, who had been watching the dramatic scene with keen attention, thought in abhorrence, “What a cunning, mean, and clever creature man is.” With a growing sense of alarm and unease he pondered over this issue for a while. Finally the bird reached a conclusion and started to shriek very loudly.

After some time, all the two-headed birds of the world gathered under the shady tree attending to his call. They asked, “Why did you call us? It seems to be an urgent matter.”

“Yes my friends,” said the bird gravely. He pointed towards the trapped tiger who was wailing in despair, and told the assembled two-headed birds what had taken place there. “Man looks very flimsy, but you birds can see for yourselves how he has outsmarted and defeated such a powerful and mighty creature as the tiger.”

He concluded, “O birds of my kind! Having seen with my own four eyes how crafty man is, I am telling you very seriously one thing. I don’t want to share the same world with such a smart and wicked creature. Therefore, in order to spare our offspring much suffering at the hands of man in the future, I propose that we all leave this world right now.”

All the two-headed birds looked at each other gravely and agreed. The whole group left the tree at the same time and flew upwards. They flew higher and higher, until they went out of this earth and reached the *dagas*, the mythical tree that grows out of this world. And that is where the two-headed birds live now.¹

1. Told by Hasan Didi, Karange, Fua Mulaku. In their youths, Karange Hasan Didi and Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi travelled together and their boat stopped over at Muli. They went ashore and visited a boat-building shed where there were tools and discarded lengths of wood strewn about. Using the carpentry tools and some pieces of wood, the youths made two good wooden hammers (*muguru*). An old man from the island who had been observing them, surprised at their skill, then told them this story.

27. Doñ Hiyalā and Alifulu

Aisā was a very beautiful woman from the north of the Maldives. She was married to Mūsa Maliku, a prosperous trader. They had settled on the island of Buruni where her husband's business prospered. Despite their wealth, Aisā and her husband were unhappy, for none of the six children born from Aisā's womb escaped death at birth. When Aisā became pregnant for the seventh time she didn't hide her sorrow and fear.

When Aisā felt the pangs of birth, the midwife who had assisted her during her previous six unfortunate deliveries happened to be far away on another island. Thus, a younger midwife from the other end of the village was engaged for the occasion. With her help Aisā gave birth to a girl of such breathtaking beauty that the new midwife was taken aback. While the mother was still unconscious from the effort, the midwife, without saying a word, showed the baby to the father.

Mūsa Maliku was alarmed when he saw the child. Now it dawned on him that the sinister old midwife, resentful of the prodigious beauty of the baby girls, had secretly killed the six of them. Mūsa Maliku was aware of the dangers awaiting his new-born daughter and whispered to the new midwife: "Don't tell anybody about this child and I will pay you well."

The woman nodded. She understood the situation at once and asked for a large amount of gold. Without hesitating, Mūsa Maliku gave it to her. The midwife went out and looked for a cat, killed it, and buried it in the darkness. In the morning, she showed the tiny mound of white sand in the burial ground and told everyone that Aisā's baby was born dead. The islanders

mourned her tragic fate. “Aisā is getting old, her beauty is fading, and all her children have died.”

Mūsa Maliku decided to keep his new-born daughter hidden from the sight of human eyes and kept her in an underground storeroom. A trustworthy old woman kept guard at the door and looked after the little girl. In the dark room there was a dim oil lamp always burning. Aisā, the mother, entered it only to give her breast to the baby.

This lonely child was called Doñ Hiyalā. She grew up concealed within the four walls of her abode where the sun never shone on her.



Meanwhile, on the same island there was a young goldsmith called Alifuḷu. His native island was Huḷudeli, on a neighbouring atoll. He had settled on Buruni because a spirit had told him in a dream that his future wife was there. A handsome and honest young man, Alifuḷu had had an awful experience back on his own island. Havvā Fuḷu, a proud and ruthless beauty, had fallen in love with him, but when she saw that her feelings were not reciprocated, Havvā Fuḷu tried to kill him with powerful sorcery.

After his sobering ordeal, Alifuḷu waited on Buruni for his true love and ignored all the young women of the island. The local girls, however, liked him very much and were often talking about his great skill in making ornaments. This news reached Mūsa Maliku’s ears too.

One day, Mūsa Maliku invited Alifuḷu to his home and received the young craftsman on his veranda with a great display of courtesy. Mūsa Maliku called his wife and ordered her to cook the best food for their guest. But Alifuḷu found all the food that was brought to him not to his taste.

Mūsa Maliku was upset that the meals his wife had cooked didn’t please Alifuḷu. At last he went inside the house down into the underground room and asked his daughter, “Hiyalā my

child, there is a guest in this house and your mother's cooking didn't taste good to him. Please cook something yourself or shame will fall upon our house."

Hiyalā, through a crack between two wooden planks had spied Alifuḷu. She said, "I shall cook something special for him, father." The girl knew that the purpose of Alifuḷu's visit was to try to catch a glimpse of her and she was annoyed. When her father left, she thought, "He will see what I will cook!"

Hiyalā boiled dirty rice with a lot of salt. Once it was cooked, she put mouldy fish sauce (*rihākuru*)¹ in a bowl and stale dry tuna, hard as wood, on a plate. Then she told her mother that the lunch for the guest was ready.

The young man ate with relish, emptying all the plates, and said to Mūsā, "I have never eaten such good food in all my life!" After that he chewed some betel leaf with areca nut and left. Hiyalā was impressed by his composure.

On the next day Hiyalā told her father, "I am sure that all the girls on this island have gold bangles, but my arms are naked." Her father promised, "I shall go to Alifuḷu and ask him to make bangles for you. He is the best goldsmith."

When Hiyalā's father came to his workshop, Alifuḷu asked, "Which size?"

Mūsā Maliku made a circle with his fingers saying, "Roughly so." Thus Alifuḷu made very large bangles and brought them to the girl's father.

When Hiyalā put them on, they were so big they went all the way up to her shoulders. She cried, "I won't wear these bangles!"

Mūsā Maliku took them back to Alifuḷu saying, "Please make them smaller." Alifuḷu asked, "How much smaller?"

"Much more," said Mūsā Maliku.

1. *Rihākuru* is a salty and thick paste made by cooking tuna fish until most of the water evaporates. This is one of the most important items in Maldivian cuisine.

This time the bangles didn't even fit. Hiyalā cried, "How can I put on such small bangles?"

Her father went back to Alifuḷu and said, "Please make them a little bigger."

The young man replied, "Mūsa Maliku, I cannot make bangles of the right size without seeing the arms of the young lady. Why don't you show them to me?"

Mūsa Maliku lied, "Her arms are full of wounds and she has scabies, that's why I can't show them to you."

But Alifuḷu was adamant. "I can only make the bangles of the right size if I see the arms of the young lady, I don't care if they are sick or ugly." After much discussion the father finally agreed and left.

Hiyalā's arms were shown to Alifuḷu through heavy curtains hanging over the door of her secret dwelling. Alifuḷu had already suspected they would be beautiful, but they were so lovely that he couldn't hide his astonishment. In a daze, he went back to his workshop and made bangles exactly her size. Mūsa Maliku brought them home that same evening.

In the dark hours before dawn Hiyalā made betel with nuts ready, put them in a special wooden tray and secretly sneaked out of the house for the first time in her life. She went straight to Alifuḷu's workshop and, finding him sleeping, she woke him up. The young man was so surprised and so overwhelmed by Hiyalā's beauty, that he thought he was still dreaming.

The girl smiled at him demurely and sat down beside him. Taking the cover off the tray she was holding, Hiyalā offered him betel leaves and areca nuts. Alifuḷu accepted and they chewed together observing each other in silence.

She found him very handsome; her eyes were shining. They felt awkward for a long while, but finally they managed to talk to each other. Even though they began shyly, soon their conversation flowed and flowed. Time passed and they didn't notice. When the light of dawn came, Hiyalā said, "I

must leave now!” Alifuḷu earnestly promised, “I will tell your father today that I want to marry you.”

Later that day, Alifuḷu, confident that he was on friendly terms with her father, went to Hiyalā’s house. He found Mūsa Maliku outside and asked, “Mūsa Maliku, would you give me your daughter in marriage?”

The old man was shocked and went inside the house as if he hadn’t heard. His wife seeing him so sad, asked, “What’s happened?”

Mūsa Maliku began to weep, “The treasure we were hiding so carefully has been discovered. Our times of happiness and peace are over.”

Aisā’s colour left her face, “Of course! He has seen our daughter’s arm! He is the only one who knows about her.”

After taking in the news, she ventured, “Well, he is good-looking and courteous, and a hard worker too – a good match for our daughter.” But Mūsa Maliku was full of foreboding.

That same afternoon Doñ Hiyalā’s father went to meet Alifuḷu. He spoke sternly, “Young man, I give you my consent to marry my daughter. Make everything ready and come tonight to my house, but the ceremony must be performed in secret.” Mūsa Maliku then went back home and asked the old woman who was looking after Hiyalā to embellish the room with special marriage decorations and to bathe, perfume, dress and make up Hiyalā as a bride.

Aisā was unhappy to marry her only daughter in such a secret and hurried way. She would have loved to give a party for all the islanders.

In the evening Alifuḷu came with two witnesses, Mūsa Maliku acted as the judge and they were married without further ceremony. The witnesses were given a great amount of gold to keep their mouths shut and went back to their homes without saying a word.

Doñ Hiyalā and Alifuḷu spent their wedding night and the day that followed in total bliss, unaware of the impending tragedy.



One evening, close to sunset, Alifuḷu arrived back from fishing while a trading boat from a northern atoll was entering Buruni's lagoon. Right at the moment that the ship's crew dropped anchor off the island, Alifuḷu saw a man slipping from the deck and falling into the water.

Actually the man was only pretending he had slipped, but Alifuḷu didn't know it. He was thrashing the water with his arms as if he was drowning, "I'm a poor blind stranger and I can't swim, please save me!" Alifuḷu jumped immediately into the lagoon and rescued the stranger, pulling him aboard his boat. Once on the deck, he asked, "Where do you come from?"

The sinister character answered meekly, "I'm from Laimagu and I've been blind since birth. My father is very rich and knowing that in this island there are good medicine-men he has sent me here to be treated, but I don't have any acquaintances here. Please take me to your home." Pointing to his vessel, he said, "I will give you the presents I carry in my ship." Moved by the pitiful look of the foreigner, Alifuḷu brought him to his home.

Since he thought his guest was harmless owing to his blindness, Alifuḷu let his guest sit inside Hiyalā's secret room, where no visitor was ever allowed.

Hiyalā looked intently at Laimagu Fagīru's eyes and became alarmed. Her intuition was right, for the stranger had seen Doñ Hiyalā in a dream in the past and he had a sly plan to profit from the knowledge of the zealously guarded secret that had been revealed to him. In order to succeed, Fagīru wanted to confirm to the *Radun* (king) that Hiyalā's beauty was flawless.

Quietly, she led her husband to a corner and whispered to him, “Alifuḷu my love, who have you brought into our house? I don’t think that man is blind, he only wants to deceive us.”

Her husband refused to be drawn into her mood, “How can you know?”

Doñ Hiyalā looked up in exasperation searching for a way to convince her husband, but before she could talk Alifuḷu held her hands saying, “Trust me Hiyalā; I know he is blind, I saw him fall from his boat and saved his life. He has come here for treatment. Don’t worry.”

However, during the following weeks, Hiyalā was unhappy about the devious guest dwelling right inside her home and persistently begged her husband to send the blind man somewhere else, “He is not a harmless person as you think.”

But Alifuḷu didn’t heed her words and relations between the newly married couple became troubled. Meanwhile, the wily visitor kept discreetly in the background, acting as if he didn’t notice the heated arguments going on between husband and wife.

One day, Alifuḷu told Hiyalā to grind a special medicinal ointment for their guest’s eyes. Dutifully, the young woman went inside the house to grind the medicine, but took instead charcoal, glass and chillies and ground them in the stone, handing the mixture over to her husband. When he smeared the medicine on the guest’s eyes, Fagīru howled and shook in an uncontrollable manner. Alifuḷu, feeling sorry for the man, asked her what had gone wrong. Hiyalā calmly replied that the ingredients must have been stale, but she was happy seeing the intruder suffer and hoped he would now realize he was not welcome. Yet even after this painful experience, Fagīru continued staying in Hiyalā’s house.

One morning, while Alifuḷu was away in his workshop, Doñ Hiyalā was in the stone pool (*veyo*)² behind the house taking

2. A stone pool with steps known as ‘*veyo*’ or ‘*veu*’. They were located in the backyards of houses or close to mosques. Deemed unhealthy during Muhammad Amīn’s government, most *veyo* were filled up with earth and the islanders were forced to build small wells.

a bath. Meanwhile Laimagu Fagīru sneaked into the kitchen³ and set it on fire. When she saw the massive flames the young woman ran in panic out of the pool across the house, forgetting that she was naked. Having carefully concealed himself, the guest could have a good look at Hiyalā and was pleased to see that Doñ Hiyalā was a woman fit for the *Radun*. Her body was flawless.

Upon reaching the main door, Hiyalā took her *fēli* (waist-cloth) and covered herself in haste. Then she called the old woman servant and her father to help her extinguish the flames. In a short time they managed to put out the fire but the kitchen was ruined. Later in the day, when Alifuḷu came back from fishing, Hiyalā told him about the fire and added scornfully, “I am sure that, somehow, that scheming stranger you keep here started the fire. ‘It is better to be under the sail of a capsized ship than under the power of a blind man’, as our old people say.”

Since Fagīru had seen all that he wanted to see, he now took leave of his hosts and sailed back to Male’ in his ship. Alifuḷu told Hiyalā, “Now you will be relieved.” But her face was grim when she replied, “I am feeling uneasy. I think he is still able to hurt us.”

Once in Male’, Laimagu Fagīru went straight to the royal palace, asked for an immediate audience with the *Radun* and demanded to be left alone with him. The king sternly warned Fagīru that he would be heavily punished if the news was not worth the inconvenience of dismissing the nobles present there.

Fagīru’s chest swelled with pride, “O *Radun*! I know a secret nobody knows. In your kingdom there is a young lady living on a certain island whose beauty is a true wonder.” The king’s face lit up at once.

3. A traditional kitchen was a separate hut.

Fagīru enjoyed the vile way in which he was arousing the king's interest. "O *Radun*! She lives on the island of Buruni. I have seen all the rare charms of that hidden lady with my own eyes. She is a *Faymini*, a rare kind of woman!⁴ You are a fortunate king, for sometimes many generations can pass without a *Faymini* arising in a country." The king ordered Fagīru to describe the lady in detail and eagerly listened to the careful description of Hiyalā's perfect body.

Without wasting any time, the king he ordered his naval commander to prepare his ship at once, "We are sailing immediately southwards, to Buruni Island!" Then, turning towards Fagīru, he sternly admonished him, "If I find that what you have told me is a lie, you will be put to death as a punishment."

After two days, the royal ship dropped anchor off Buruni and the king went ashore escorted by his soldiers. He was in no mood for protocol and ignored the welcome of the local authorities. Brushing aside the crowds that had gathered at the beach seeing the great vessel moored in their lagoon, the *Radun* went straight to Hiyalā's house. Finding the beautiful young woman alone, the vain king, dressed in his costliest regal robes, tried to impress her by displaying great wit, charm and florid speech. However, Doñ Hiyalā totally ignored him and, after a while, the monarch sat down in a sullen mood.

When Alifulu arrived, the *Radun* ordered him to divorce his wife immediately. But the young man courageously refused. Then the king flew into a rage and ordered the islanders to lynch Alifulu.⁵ The soldiers pushed the young man very roughly out and threw him into the hands of the assembled crowd outside. For a long time Alifulu was savagely beaten, scratched and cut by the bloodthirsty jeering mob. Finally, when they were tired, they left him in a lonely spot in the jungle thinking he was dead.

4. A woman of extraordinary beauty (Sanskrit *Padminī*).

5. A custom known as '*havaru*'.

Meanwhile, the king grabbed Hiyalā, who was pulling away from him, yelling and trying to break loose, and called the *Mudīmu*, the caretaker of the mosque and ordered him to marry them there and then. The *Mudīmu* was in a quandary because the conditions for a valid marriage were not present. But the king's wrathful countenance was frightening to behold, so willy-nilly he gave Hiyalā in marriage to the monarch saying, "Nu kiyā ranaka', nu dē valiyaka', mīhegge hagge' Manikufāna kāivenī koh' dīfīnī."⁶

Hiyalā screamed, shook and cried but she was forcefully taken by the king and his soldiers to the royal ship and, as soon as they set foot on board, the anchors were weighed. As the ship was leaving Buruni's lagoon a white crow followed it.



After the king was gone a heavy calm descended on the island. Mūsa Maliku, Aisā and the old woman went to look for Alifuḷu. When they found him he looked like a corpse, with bones broken and many bleeding wounds. Carefully they took the young man to their home and looked after him for months until he was completely healed. As he regained consciousness, Alifuḷu felt miserable because his wife was gone. Despite his wounds, his biggest woe was that Hiyalā was far away from him.

The white crow flew between the capital and Buruni carrying messages between the lovers. Thus Hiyalā got to know that Alifuḷu was healing. Once Alifuḷu felt strong and could stand on his feet, he decided to repair the *Enderi Oḍi*, his own ship. He was determined to go to rescue Hiyalā, but his boat it was in such bad shape that it took him many days to complete the work.

6. "Without the legal stipulations, I give your majesty in marriage a woman legally belonging to another man." The sentence uttered by the *Mudīmu* in the marriage ceremony reflected his helplessness at being unable to make the law prevail when the king wished to go against it.

Meanwhile in Male', the king was proud to have Hiyalā in his palace. He even had her paraded through the capital, soon after his arrival, so that his subjects could see what a charming new wife he had found. The *Radun's* other wives were no match for Hiyalā's extraordinary beauty and everyone stared at her in admiration.

But try as he might to attract her attention, she utterly ignored the king and all the presents he brought her. The young woman had only contempt for him. But the *Radun* had hopes of winning her heart and was always courteous to her.

During the long months that followed, Hiyalā, grieving deeply despite the luxury and comfort surrounding her, kept sending messages to Alifuḷu through the white crow. She was only thinking of him and hoped that her captors would one day lower their guard.

Finally, after Alifuḷu had repaired his boat, he didn't want anybody to come along with him on his dangerous mission. While he was sailing northwards, he sent the white crow with a message telling his lover to be ready to flee from the royal palace. He hoped to land in Male' at the little-guarded southwest point.

After the white crow came to Hiyalā's window, the *Radun* came to visit her. Seeing no way to escape, the young woman looked around in dismay. That day the monarch was loudly complaining, "You have been here for a whole year and still haven't said a word to me. If you were another person, I would have already given orders to put you to slow and painful death. But I still hope that you may change your attitude towards me. Nothing in my palace gives me pleasure anymore. At least I would like to eat some dish prepared by you."

Wishing to get rid of the *Radun*, Hiyalā obliged and cooked special food for him. The King was amazed at how easily he had finally found favour and looked satisfied when he left. Without wasting any time, the young woman boldly sneaked

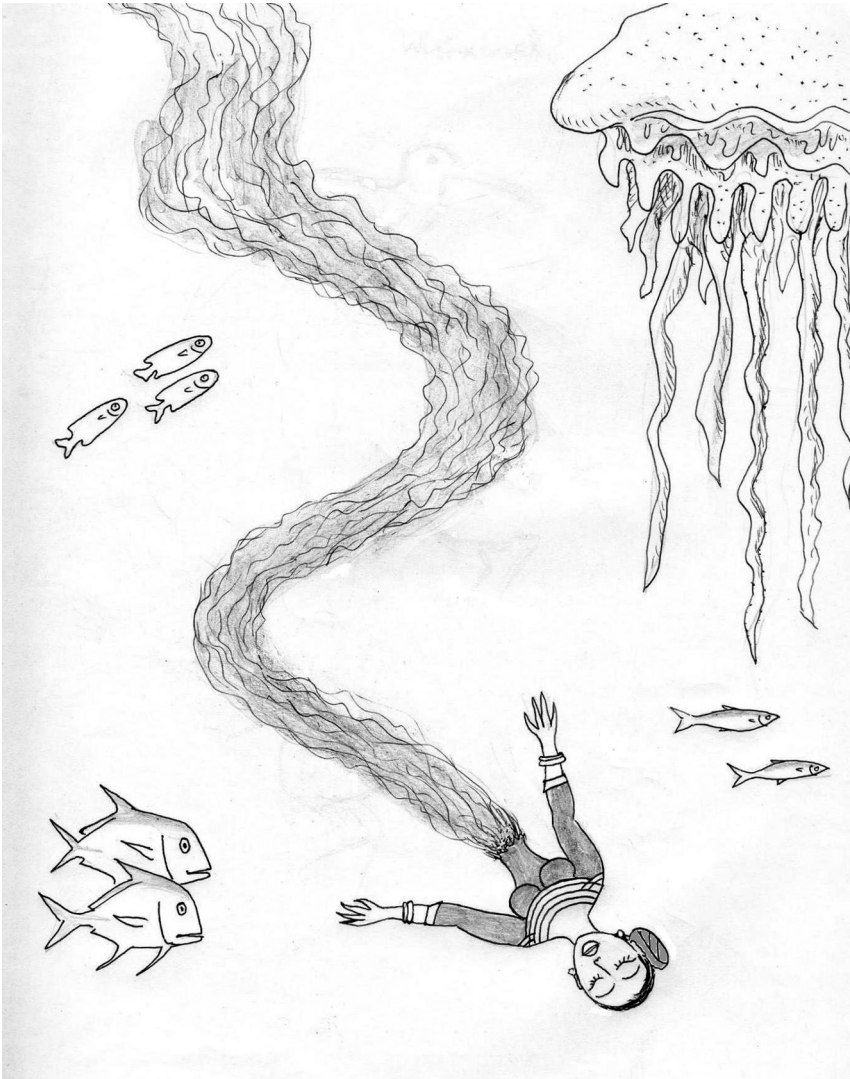
out of the palace and headed straight to the south-western corner of Male’.

Wading into waist-high water, Hiyalā managed to reach the coral reef-edge right at the time that Alifuḷu arrived with his boat. In a risky manoeuvre, the young man sailed alongside close enough for her to jump aboard and a sudden gust of wind helped them to leave the king’s island. Once in high seas, they tried to put as much distance as they could between themselves and Male’. Hiyalā was so relieved to be together with Alifuḷu that she couldn’t take her eyes off him while he held the rudder.

As soon as the *Radun* found out about Hiyalā’s escape, he was full of wrath and ordered a thorough search. The soldiers carefully looked for her in all the houses in Male’, but were unsuccessful. Finally they found out that a black boat had been seen sailing away from the south-western end. The king commanded that his royal ship be made ready to sail right away. Once aboard with his soldiers, the monarch gave orders to follow the small sail in the distance.

While the *Radun* was heading towards them at great speed, Alifuḷu and Hiyalā were anxiously looking astern. As time passed, the young woman was watching in dismay how the royal ship was fast catching up with them. Sure of his victory, with his soldiers arrayed behind his back, the wicked *Radun* was laughing with contempt and glee.

When the king’s vessel loomed behind their small boat, Hiyalā was in such a state of despair that she told Alifuḷu, “I will rather die than let this cruel demon of a man take me away again!” And before Alifuḷu could catch her, Hiyalā jumped into the ocean. All of a sudden, a huge jellyfish (*māvaru*) rose from the depths and, instead of falling into the water, the young woman fell into the middle of the monster. Since her waist was so incredibly slender, Hiyalā broke in two with the strength of the impact and both pieces of her body slipped into the sea.



Alifūlu let the rudder go and watched helplessly as the two parts of his lovely wife's body sank slowly into the ocean, leaving wide red trails of blood. Right then, with a great crashing noise, his black coral boat hit the jellyfish and shattered into pieces. When the young man fell into the water, he was already dead. Alifūlu sank along with his Doñ Hiyalā's broken body until they both were lost in the blue depths.

Thus were the faithful loving couple reunited at last and no one would be able to separate them again. The *Radun* was exasperated that they had escaped his authority but he was powerless to change things, so he ordered his men to tow the remains of Alifuḷu's boat back to Male'.

People say that the corpses of Doñ Hiyalā and Alifuḷu drifted together to a lonely beach.⁷ They were buried ashore at that very spot and a shrine (*ziyārai*) was erected over their tomb.⁸

7. Since the sea is no place for a body, the drifting of the corpses to a beach is considered a blessing from God. Such beachside tombs were auspicious places in Maldivian tradition.

8. This is an abridged adaptation of the version told by Aishath Naazneen, Gāge, Male'; since most of the traditional storytellers have died out, the '*Doñ Hiyalā āi Alifuḷu*' story by Abdullah Sādigu is now accepted as the 'standard version'. It dates, however, only from the 1970s.

28. The White Disk

In a house where a big family lived, there was a girl called Sanfā who wailed every evening. She sat close to the lamp or lay in bed crying her heart out without any reason at all. This young woman was in good health and there were no worries in the household, but whether she was surrounded by people or alone, Sanfā cried and cried.

Everyone at home was very anxious. How could this be a happy place with someone crying inside all the time? Visitors felt uneasy, especially if they happened to come after sunset. The presence of that young girl and her continuous weeping were impossible to ignore and made the atmosphere unbearable. Usually, all outsiders left after but a short time and henceforth kept away from that wretched house.

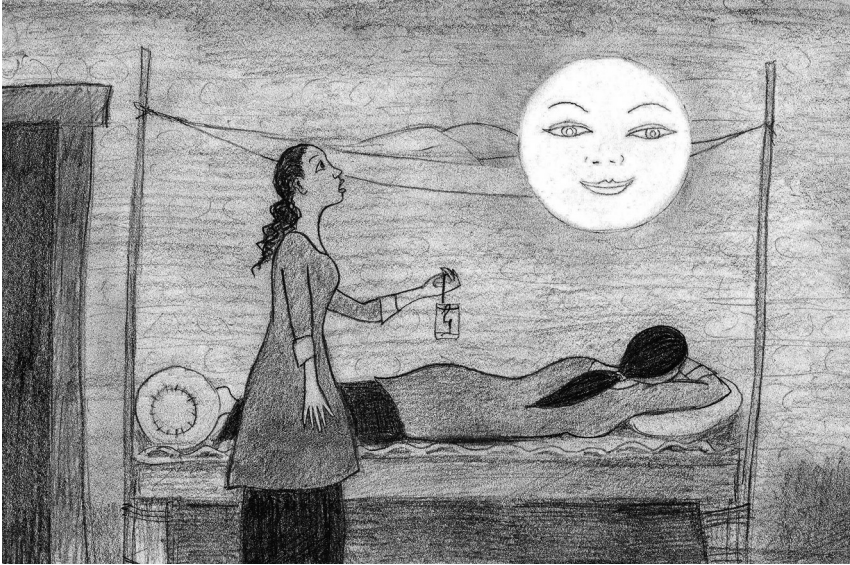
Her family had arranged for a *maitiri* (religious chant)¹ to be recited by a good *faṇḍitaveriyā* (sorcerer). They had also tried powerful magic on several different occasions, but nothing seemed to help. Thus, Sanfā kept crying every night until everyone in her home felt so miserable, they were thinking that they were going to become crazy.

Her family tried all means to cheer her up, engaging the girl in conversation, playing games, cracking jokes, singing or whatever they could come up with in order to make her happy. Her impatient father went as far as letting his irritation overcome him. He threatened her and scolded her, which only made matters worse.

One evening, while Sanfā was lying on her bed crying her heart out as usual, Āminā, Sanfā's older sister, brought in an

1. The recitation of a religious chant to subdue demons.

oil lamp to hang up inside the room. As she was trying to reach the hook, a gust of air blew the lamp out and she found herself suddenly in darkness. Startled, Āminā turned towards the sobbing girl and saw a luminous white disk suspended over her. The room was gloomy, but the round shape seemed to emit its own light.



When the girl went closer to it, she saw that in the disk there was a beautiful, smiling face. Its eyes, lips and nose were like those of a pretty young woman. Around it a much darker red halo was glowing. Amazingly this luminous disk was hovering in the air without any support. Fascinated, Āminā waved her hand before it and around it, to determine whether it was merely a reflection or whether it was caused by a beam of light coming from outside. But try as she might, the round white smiling face remained unchanged. Meanwhile under it Sanfā continued her endless weeping.

Suddenly, Āminā's expression became grave. She thought, "This may be a spirit!" Frightened, she went to her father and whispered to him, "Bappā, please come to see Sanfā's bed."

The man was relaxing on the swingbed on the veranda and was in no mood to get up, “What for?” he asked.

“There is something there. Maybe it is a spirit,” the girl answered.

The father reluctantly got up and stood grumbling at the threshold, “Do I now have two crazy daughters?” he protested, “I don’t see anything. It is too dark in here. Where have you put the lamp?”

Āminā, with awe on her face, ignored his mood and urged him, “Come into the room while it is dark.” Following him she whispered, “Look closely above the top of Sanfa’s bed. Do you see it, father?”

Now the man was staring at the smiling face in wonder and didn’t say a word. He then went out of the room and came back with a lamp and the *Tiris* (Qurān). After putting the book on its wooden support, he sat close to Sanfa’s bed and recited *Sifat-un-Nabī*, *Mūsal Qubūr*, and all chapters of the Qurān he knew how to read well. Āminā stayed for a while sitting close to him, staring at the pale disk now dimmed by the flame of the oil lamp. But, as the night wore on, the girl became tired and went to sleep.

While the *Tiris* was being read, the disk trembled slightly, but remained there. The girls’ father looked up and saw that it was smiling at him, unchanged. Below it, far from improving, his daughter Sanfā kept crying all the while.

At this point the man lost his patience. He just couldn’t stand that irritating smiling face anymore. It definitely seemed as if it was mocking him and his efforts. His anger welled up and he began beating it with his hands. But it was like beating air. Unaffected, the white shiny disk kept smiling at him. Then the man took Sanfa’s *kannai* (a long, cylindrical pillow) and trashed the disk in a fit of blind rage with such violence that the pillow broke and kapok was flying all over.

The lamp had fallen and its flame went out. The room was now in total darkness, but nothing happened to the pallid smil-

ing face. The pillow had broken by hitting the wall and the disk still stood there, its aloof smile a challenge, while Sanfā was bitterly weeping underneath. Breathing heavily, and painstakingly regaining his self-control, her father began to recite the *takbīr*² aloud.

This time, when he looked at the annoying round face, he noticed that it had become slightly smaller. Encouraged by this sign the father kept reciting the *takbīr* until the white disk had shrunk to the size of a coin. The man's voice had become hoarse, but after this he had to recite it only three further times until the smiling round face finally disappeared.

The house was now in complete silence. He got up and carefully checked his daughter's bed, and realized she had stopped crying. He sighed and went out to look for some fire. It was very late in the night, soon it would be dawn.

Sanfā was sitting on the bed when her father lit the lamp. They smiled at each other. He told the girl affectionately to lie down and sleep. Then, after smoking a *biḍi* (shredded tobacco rolled in a little piece of foreign newspaper) he himself went to bed. The next day he woke up late in the morning, but he was a satisfied man. Ever after, the mood in that household was happy, and Sanfā never again shed tears in the night.³

2. A religious chant in Arabic praising Allah.

3. Told by Vaijehēge (Unakeḍege) Ali Didi, Dūndigan, Fua Mulaku.

29. Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi

Once upon a time, a woman called Ayminā Bi went to get water from the well close to the graveyard by the mosque. As she turned to go home with the full pot she saw a sight that instantly chilled her blood. *Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi*¹ was sitting on the sand of a fresh grave nearby. It was a fearsome looking spirit, a skeletal and grey hag, with a wild mane of hair and a mouth full of jagged teeth. *Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi* was pouring sand on her own head with a human skull. Ayminā Bi was so terrified that she ran back home hastily and closed the door.

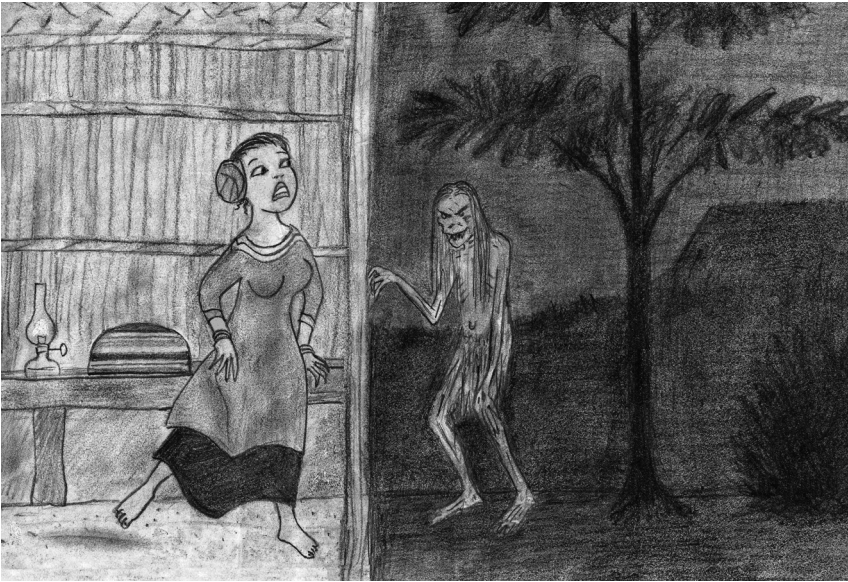
Ayminā Bi lay on her bed exhausted. She was frightened and felt very ill. She was alone; her husband Takurufānu was away on a trading trip. The sun set and Ayminā Bi got up, lit an oil lamp and hung it in its place. She was shivering with a very high fever and with terror.

In the middle of the night *Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi* came and, as she couldn't find a way to get in, walked around the house shouting, "Ayminā Bi, Ayminā Bi! Did you tell people that you saw me at the graveyard pouring sand on myself with a human skull?" The frightened woman screamed in terror, "No, I told them you were pouring gold dust on yourself!"

"Good!" exclaimed the spirit. "I will come back tomorrow night."

In the morning Ayminā Bi told all the women in the village about her ordeal and when the sun set, all the women in the village were frightened.

1. Unlike in most legends, in this story the *haṇḍi* spirit comes as an ugly and sinister crone.



Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi came at a very late hour and, as in the night before, she went walking around the house yelling, “Ayminā Bi! Did you tell people that you saw me at the graveyard while I was pouring sand on myself with a human skull?” The poor woman screamed, “No, I told them you were pouring gold dust on yourself!”

“Good!” The spirit was satisfied with the answer, saying “I will come back tomorrow night” and left.

The next morning, Takurufānu, Ayminā Bi’s husband, returned to the island and was upset to see his wife shivering in bed with a high fever. Crying, Ayminā Bi told him everything.

Takurufānu was incensed. “Let it come tonight! We’ll get rid of this nuisance! Don’t be afraid.” He called their neighbour Mariyambu and asked her, “Ayminā Bi is sick and cannot work, please grind *lonumirus*² for me.”

At sunset Mariyambu came with the thick red paste on a big green taro leaf. Takurufānu told her to stay with them that

2. A mixture of hot red chillies, black pepper, garlic and salt typical of Maldivian cuisine.

night and she agreed. As the night grew darker, Takurufānu told his wife to pretend not to be scared when *Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi* shouted and to answer “Yes!” this time. Ayminā Bi was so distraught she only said she would try her best. At midnight, Takurufānu was ready inside holding a knife and the salty chilli-pepper mixture.

After walking around the house in the dark, *Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi* called, “Ayminā Bi, Ayminā Bi! Did you tell people that you saw me at the graveyard while I was pouring sand on myself with a human skull?”

This time Ayminā Bi answered boldly, “Yes! I told everyone that you were pouring sand on yourself!”

At once *Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi* flew into a rage and roared, “Ayminā Bi, what did you say? How dare you! Wait, I will teach you a lesson you will never forget!” Then it began to thrust its umbilical cord through a hole in the thatch that covered the sides of the house.

Inside, the two women and the man watched in horror as the disgustingly long umbilical cord entered the room and moved about like a snake. It became longer and longer until it almost filled the house. Takurufānu moved close to the hole where the spirit’s umbilical cord had come into the house. Then he took his big knife, hacked the umbilical cord off at the root and immediately smeared the red salty paste on the cut. *Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi* screamed in pain and anger, “Ouch! My navel! Ouch! My navel!”

Yelling like mad, *Fūlu Digu Haṇḍi* fled into the night and was never seen again.³

3. Told by Aishath Naazneen, Gāge, Male’.

30. The Man on the Whale

Maldivians say that there is a man living in the middle of the ocean. He doesn't have a house or a country. This man has been for many years wandering across the oceans riding on the back of a whale (*bođu mas*), holding onto its back fin. The whale and its rider are very good friends and they never separate. The whale is very careful to keep always close to the surface, so that the man can breathe. Sometimes it will immerse, especially if it senses danger, but it will emerge very soon, because the whale knows that otherwise the man would die.



The man who lives on the whale eats only raw fish and he knows how to catch tuna with his bare hands. He spots the schools of tuna by following the flight of the frigatebirds in the sky, and then the whale helps him to catch fish by thrash-

ing the tunas with its large tail. The man grabs the stunned tunas and eats them there and then tearing the flesh with his long fingernails which are like claws.

The man on the whale has been living already for so long in the water that you almost can't see the skin of the lower part of his body. From the waist downwards, he is pale and covered with barnacles and seaweed, like the keel of a ship after having been submerged for a very long time.

Many fishermen in different parts of the Maldives claim that they have seen the man on the whale. However, as soon as he knows he has been spotted, the whale will dip and swim away from them at great speed, reappearing only at a great distance from them.¹

1. Told by Said Abdullah, Pearl, Male', my first Maldivian friend.

31. Oḍitān Kalēge and His Wife

Oḍitān Kalēge was a learned and powerful *faṇḍita* man (sorcerer). He lived on an island of Haddummati Atoll alone with his young and beautiful wife, Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge, a mighty *faṇḍita* woman, too.

Oḍitān Kalēge was a good-hearted man but, unknown to him, his wife was very wicked. People on adjacent islands were dying in horrible ways during the night and corpses in graveyards had been unearthed and eaten. One day, a frightened man came to Oḍitān Kalēge and whispered to him that Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge was responsible for the many deaths and the desecration of cemeteries. The great sorcerer was annoyed and refused to believe him because he was fascinated by his wife and she was always kind and affectionate to him.

The man calmed him, “Please don’t get angry. Just stay awake at night and watch what your wife does, especially on the dark nights of the new moon.”

Forgetting his usual good manners Oḍitān Kalēge dismissed the man rudely. Later he shared with his wife what the man had said. She laughed and replied, “How absurd! You know that I am always beside you and there is nothing I do that you don’t see.”

Even though he knew this was true, the great sorcerer wanted to be sure and asked, “Do you always stay on this island in the night-time?”

The young woman calmly looked into his eyes and earnestly declared, “I swear to you that I never leave this island during the night!” Then she smiled sweetly at him and pouted her lips, acting mockingly offended. Oḍitān Kalēge looked at his pretty wife and was relieved.

However, during the following months, the nightly carnage on the neighbouring islands continued unabated. And when the Atoll chief himself came to visit Oḍitān Kalēge and confirmed what the former visitor had said, doubts about Dōgi Āihā crept into the sorcerer's mind.

Thus one night, after he went to bed with his wife, Oḍitān Kalēge closed his eyes but didn't sleep. After about two hours, when he was almost dozing, he noticed her stirring. Stealthily Dōgi Āihā got up and left the room without making any noise. There was something uncanny about her manner that made the husband suspect that she was not just going to answer a call of nature, so he followed her secretly in the darkness to see what she was up to.

Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge left the house and walked hurriedly to the *tunḍi*, a sandy projection at one end of the island. There the young woman planted her two feet firmly on the sand and lifted her head towards the starry sky. Then she raised her arms and began to sway from her hip upwards, reciting magic words. First she moved very gently, but after some time her movements became wilder and wilder. Slowly, the upper part of her body extended itself towards the sky, making her waist into a long, long strip.

Oḍitān Kalēge was hiding in the bushes by the beach and, after seeing how Dōgi Āihā bent her body like an arch to reach one of the inhabited islands, he realized that he had been told the truth about his wife. And yet, the fact was that Dōgi Āihā had not lied either when she swore that she never left his island. While the upper part of her body was killing people, drinking their blood, eating their flesh, disturbing dead bodies in graveyards and incurring into other unmentionable deeds in distant places, her feet actually stayed at home.

Oḍitān Kalēge decided that he had to stop Dōgi Āihā's bloodshed there and then. Thus, without wasting more time, the sorcerer gathered firewood, built a fire close to where the woman was standing and dragged her feet into it.

Struck with burning pain, his wife's body shrunk. Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge was now awful to behold and Ođitān Kalēge was taken aback. Blood was dripping from her lips and her teeth were stained red with it. To make matters worse, she was glaring at him with fierce hatred. There was no love left for him in her fiery eyes, as she hissed murderous incantations against him.

Instantly, Ođitān Kalēge shielded himself against her venomous magic with his own *faṇđita*. However, Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge's power, compounded by her anger, was of such malignant intensity and ferociousness that he realized he could no longer protect himself. Thus the eminent sorcerer ended up having to flee from his angry wife. Frantically, he ran to their house, intending to leave on the boat.

Casting vicious spells in quick succession, Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge set on fire the house, the boat, as well as every piece of wood on the island. Desperately, her husband searched for a way to escape from her unleashed fury, running to and fro on the charred place, but there was none. Finally, Ođitān Kalēge found a grinding stone among the ashes of the kitchen.



He quickly carried it into the lagoon and made it float by the power of his magic. Then he took a little blade of grass and held it as a sail between his fingers. With the strength of his *fanđita*, sitting on the stone and powered by the ‘sail’ he was holding in his hand, Ođitān Kalēge sailed away from his island at great speed.

Furious at seeing him escape, his wife gathered all her perverse forces for a final blow. Standing in the shallow water of the lagoon, Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge thrust her right hand forward, raised three huge waves of fire from the sea, and hurled them after him. The massive effort left her exhausted. Instantly she died.

Meanwhile Ođitān Kalēge saw the three flaming waves fast approaching him. Being near an islet, he hastily made for its beach. The moment he stepped on the sand, he was beyond their reach. Hence, they turned into waves of water, and so he was saved.



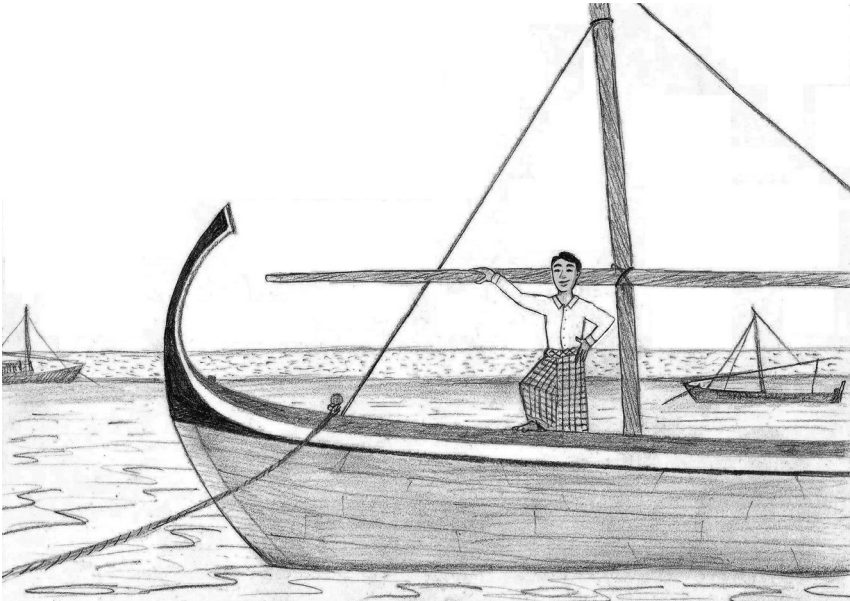
To this day, at a point near the beach of Golā Konā in Had-dummati Atoll, ocean swells break constantly into series of three waves. Natives of the atoll attribute this natural wonder to Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge. They say that her magic fire waves became normal ones and stayed there forever.¹

1. Told by Abdul Hamīdu, ‘Light’, Dūndigan, Fua Mulaku.

32. The Dōni Given to Mohan

A long time ago, a beautiful new boat that had just been built was put into the water at Male' harbour. There was a man called Mohan among the onlookers. The owner called him and told him to watch the boat while he went ashore on some business.

Mohan stood on the boat on guard, making sure no one would climb aboard and steal something. After a short time, someone strolling along the wharf exclaimed, "Mohan, how beautiful is your boat!"



Since Mohan was a poor man, he was pleasantly surprised that anyone would think the boat belonged to him. His conceit was stirred and he bragged to the next person who came along,

“This is my own boat,” in order to check whether others truly believed him.

Most took his claim at face value and Mohan’s chest swelled with pride. Many more people came to admire the boat and Mohan showed off and told everyone who would listen to him that it was his. Most passers-by paid compliments, and if someone happened to ask how he got it, Mohan said, “It has been given to me.”

After a long time the owner came back and stepped aboard. He said that he would keep watch himself, so he told Mohan that he could get down and go home if he wished.

Mohan went home, but he had told so many people that the fine-looking boat belonged to him that they truly thought it was his and the report went around the island. During the following days, and even for a long time after that, the baffled owner had to hear how everyone in Male’ harbour called his vessel “Mohan’s boat.”¹



The saying “*Mohanah dōni din hen*” (like the boat given to Mohan), can be used in two different ways. It can be either uttered in scorn about a person who is merely employed but pretends to be the one in command, or used when someone gets undeserved credit for something, eclipsing the recognition due to the rightful person.

1. Told by Gāge Naima, Male’.

33. The Cat and the Broken Jar

Once upon a time, a female cat found a jar which had some fish paste (*rihākuru*) in it. The cat forced its head through the narrow opening and licked as much as it could. Then she realized that she could not pull her head out and shook frenetically until the jar hit a stone wall and shattered into pieces. When the cat was finally free she realized that the mouth of the jar was around her neck like a collar.

The cat went to a puddle of water and looked at herself. She thought that the collar around her neck made her look respectable, so she went around the island walking proudly.

On the path she met a female rat. The rat was afraid of her and tried to run away, but the cat calmed her, “Why are you running away from me?”

“You make me afraid,” said the rat. “You look like a dangerous animal. You could hurt me.”

“Nonsense”, answered the cat acting offended. “I am very gentle and very religious. Don’t you see the prayer beads (*tasbīha*) around my neck? I spend the days fasting and the nights praying. How could I harm you?”

The rat was convinced and relaxed somewhat, “All right, let’s walk together. Where were you going?”

The cat said that she was from another island and that she was coming to assist her aunt’s daughter who was about to give birth, but that her aunt’s house was full of relatives and she had no place to stay. So she asked, “Can I stay at your place?”

The rat agreed and so they both went to the rat’s house.

It so happened that the rat was pregnant and she gave birth to seven little baby rats that same day.

That night the rat noticed that one of her babies had disappeared. In the morning she asked the cat. Full of outrage the cat replied, “I told you that I spend the days fasting and the nights praying. Last night I went out to the mosque to pray. How can I be guilty? I shall now leave your home and look for another place to stay.”

The rat calmed the offended cat down, “Forgive me for suspecting you. Please stay.”

And so the foolish rat kept the sly cat in her home. Every night the cat would eat one of the rat’s children, but every morning the rat allowed the cat to stay.

After one week the cat attacked the rat in the middle of night growling, “I am going to eat you!”

The rat realized how great her folly had been but it was now too late to mend things. She tried to run away in despair but the cat caught up with the rat and ate it.¹

1. Told by Gāge Naīma, Male’.

34. Bēri

On the southern rim of Miladummaḍulu Atoll there is an uninhabited island called Kaṇḍūdū that many years before had a thriving population. The following tale endeavours to throw light on the reason why it is now deserted.

Long ago, during a stormy night, a dark wooden log was thrown by the waves towards Kaṇḍūdū Island until it gently drifted to the beach. It seemed to have been carried about by the currents for a long time, because its surface was smooth and slimy except for some patches where the barnacles had established their colonies.

The following day there was no trace of the storm and in the soft early morning light three island girls walked along the path towards the beach joking and laughing in a carefree manner. They carried dirty pots and were going to scrub them with sand as they did every day at sunrise. These young women were very good friends and were always excited to spend time with each other. One of them was the island chief's daughter. She was much prettier than her two companions.

Once on the beach, the girls saw the log lying there, one of its ends still within the waterline. They inspected the dark piece of wood, chattering all the while. Absorbed in their talk, the young women soon forgot about the log. Squatting on the wet sand, they began to scrub their pots thoroughly.

After she had finished, the island chief's daughter left her clean pots on the ground and stood close to the log. Then, casually, with one foot on the smooth dark wood and the other planted in the sand, she spoke to the other girls about her secret

sensual dreams. As none of them was yet married and they were full of curiosity, they ended up talking about marriage. Later, when her companions had finished, she removed her foot from the log and it was time for the three young women to put their pots on their heads and carry them back home.

The following day, the three girls met again as usual and went to the beach. The log was still there, close to the place where they scrubbed their pots. After their task was over, they stood for a while talking close to it and, again, the island chief's daughter, while talking about future marriage, ended up having a conversation about her desires with her friends while her foot was propped against the dark log.



On the third day, things happened in an identical manner. The three girls, exhilarated by each other's company, again had their secret conversation on the beach. Meanwhile the island chief's daughter nonchalantly leaned her foot against the now dry, and somewhat discoloured, surface of the log that had drifted there.

That very evening, the log, which was not a log after all, but a malevolent spirit, transformed itself into a handsome young man. Standing on the lonely windswept beach, the youth wiped off the sand that had stuck to his body and then walked resolutely into the island. The village was in darkness and most of the houses had closed their doors, their occupants having retired for the night.

The young man headed straight towards the island chief's house and found the door open. The inside was lit by the warm light of oil lamps. The chief was relaxing on the *undōli* (swingbed) on his veranda and, noticing the stranger at the threshold, invited him to come in. The young man said that he had jumped from a northbound sailboat. He explained that night had fallen, and that the captain, who was not familiar with this lagoon and its anchorage points, had not wanted to stop over at Kaṇḍūdū.

After some light talk, the newcomer mentioned that he had come to Kaṇḍūdū to marry. The island chief then had a good look at him, trying to be as discreet as possible, and decided the man was all right. He said, "I have one daughter of marriageable age. She is now in the kitchen boiling fish", and he called the girl.

The young woman entered the lamp-lit room and stood at the doorsill. As soon as her eyes fell upon the stranger, a weakness overcame her. Noticing that she liked the handsome young man, her father arranged the ceremony. Thus, the marriage was performed that same night.

Weeks passed and the pretty local girl lived very happily together with her handsome husband in her father's house, as was the Maldivian custom. She was so much in love with her husband that she seemed to walk on a cloud the whole day. Her eyes seemed to look far away and she wore always a mild smile on her lips. The other two girls felt slighted and began to tease her.

They found the new absent-minded attitude of their friend extremely annoying. From having been such a talkative girl, the island chief's daughter had suddenly become silent and had stopped sharing her secrets with the other two. Thus, the mutual friendship, which the three young women had previously enjoyed so much, cooled beyond improvement.

One day, a *faṇḍita* man (sorcerer) from the south arrived on Kaṇḍūdū on a journey. He was put up at the island chief's house, for it was the best in the island. He didn't fail to notice the sullen young man. When he had a chance to be alone with the chief, he casually asked, "Who is that handsome youth? Is he from this island?"

His host answered, "No, he is from another atoll. He is my son-in-law."

The sorcerer said nothing. However, he eyed the young man with distrust. He observed him very closely in a furtive manner during the following days. The sorcerer noticed that where the young couple slept there were a great number of white clothes, of the kind that are used as burial shrouds. He also noticed that there was a faint camphor smell in the air.

When the sorcerer casually asked the chief's daughter about the clothes, she said, "My husband brings new ones every night and I wash them in the morning. He says he finds them on the beach."

One night the sorcerer furtively followed the young man and in the starlight saw that he went to the graveyard, unearthed a corpse and ate it. Then he went to the beach and washed the shrouds in seawater before walking back home.

That same evening the sorcerer took the island chief aside and addressed him in a very serious and urgent tone, "Chief, the young man living in your home is not a son of Adam. He is the *bēri*, a malevolent spirit from the sea who has taken the appearance of a man!"

The island chief was so shocked that he remained speechless for a while. After pondering over the weird circumstances in which the young man had arrived on the island, late in the night, alone and wet, he sighed and asked the sorcerer, “What should I do?”

The sorcerer said, “The most important thing is to act as if you don’t know anything. Your son-in-law must not know that we are suspicious of him.”

The chief agreed and then the sorcerer continued, “Tomorrow, call the islanders and tell them to build a pavilion¹ to hold a festival with walls made of loose stones. When it is finished, call the entire island to celebrate a *boḍu maulūdu*.”²

The next day the sorcerer went from home to home, spoke in private with every adult male in each household and concluded by reminding every man to be ready for his signal. Then the men went to build the pavilion.

That same evening, after the building was finished, everything was prepared to celebrate the festival inside. The lamps were lit and lengths of decorated cloth were hung to cover the walls. Unwittingly, the island chief’s son-in-law entered the pavilion first and, finding that no one else had yet arrived, he sat there and waited. A man arrived after him, sat there beside him for a moment and then exclaimed, “Oh, so-and-so hasn’t come!” and he got up and left. The next man came, sat briefly beside the young man and remarked, “So-and-so hasn’t yet arrived. How strange! I shall go and fetch him.” And he got up and left too. Thus, in the same manner, all the men of Kaṇḍūdū came and went.

But they didn’t go far; they waited outside the pavilion in silence while the stranger was sitting inside alone. Suddenly, at one signal from the sorcerer, they all pushed the loose coral walls inwards and the whole building collapsed on the young

1. *Maulūdu haruge*, a decorated pavilion erected for the celebration.

2. Traditional celebration with Muslim religious chanting.

man. Trapped inside the heap of stones, he began to howl and howl, telling the islanders surrounding it that he would leave for Beriyāfaru³ and remain there if they promised not to hurt him anymore. The islanders agreed and went back to their homes.

Later in the night, the stranger, now a hideous slimy *furēta* (monster) crept from under the stones and hurried towards the beach. Once he reached the same spot where the log had been, the monster crawled into the sea and disappeared.

But it is always dangerous to hurt a spirit. Hence, many years later the *bēri* came back to Kaṇḍūdū to take revenge. The men, women and children of the island fell ill and died one after the other in quick succession. During those accursed days, the malignant monster roamed in the graveyard, close to the mosque, unearthing corpses, eating their eyes and drinking their blood. The constant presence of this evil was making the island a frightening place to live.

Before long, the wretched and small group of survivors decided to leave Kaṇḍūdū. Sick, thin and terrified, they loaded all their belongings on their sailboats and left for good. They settled on another island of the same atoll and thrived there.

Since those times, Kaṇḍūdū is considered a malevolent place and it has never again been inhabited.⁴

3. A large, empty reef located far to the western end of neighboring Māḷosmaḍulu Atoll.

4. Told by Huseinkoibē, Hoḷudū Island, Southern Miladummaḍulu Atoll. This story has variants set on different islands of the north-central Maldives.

35. Kullavah Falu Rani (Queen of the Mangrove Forest)

Once upon a time, a humble young couple lived on a large island fringing one of the atolls located at the northern end of the Maldive kingdom. On this island there was a vast mangrove forest (*kullavah falu*), covering more than half of its swampy surface. Since it was infested by hordes of mosquitoes, this was considered a very unhealthy place to live and most people avoided it. But in the middle of the mangroves, there was a small hut where the man and his wife lived.

They were so poor they lived a hand-to-mouth existence and were constantly foraging for food. The couple subsisted mainly on the *kullavah* fruit¹ they picked from the surrounding mangroves. These smelly fruits were so important in their diet that, except for a few small coconuts from the stunted palm trees growing close to their marshy wooded area and a few reef fish the husband used to catch in the shallow lagoon close by, they seldom had the chance to eat anything else.

Despite their poverty, this man and his wife lived very happily together in that lonely place. Even though there was a small village at the other end of the island, they rarely went there and seldom had visitors.

One day, the woman became pregnant. She had prayed for a good child and was rewarded with a beautiful girl who brought laughter and joy to their home. The baby used to play or sleep under the shade of the mangrove trees while her parents were busy picking the fruit. A few months later the woman decided

1. *Sonneratia caseolaris*.

that the milk from her breasts was not enough and that her daughter needed some food. So, the first thing the little girl was fed was a fine paste lovingly made by her mother by squeezing very ripe *kullavah* fruit with her hands.

As years went by, the child grew and her parents let her run about the mangrove forest as she pleased. She used to wander quite far away from her home, wading in the mud through the mosquito-infested swamps, but in each direction there was only mangrove. The girl ended up being very familiar with those trees and spent long hours perched in their branches idly munching *kullavah* fruit. When she went back home, she invariably had a plate of *kullavah* porridge before going to sleep.

More years passed and this lonely girl became a ravishing young woman. The mangrove forest had no secrets for her anymore. By now she was so skilled she knew how to climb even the most difficult trees. She also knew very well which ones gave the best fruit and could easily identify the different varieties of *kullavah* by their shape, colour and smell. Some had a sweeter taste when ripe and others had a stronger, slightly acid and pungent flavour, which she knew how to appreciate. The girl also found pleasure in eating the fruit in its last stage, when it was very soft, so ripe that it was almost decaying. She loved its intense putrid smell, which many refined islanders find extremely offensive.

Thus, in her early adolescence, this striking young woman lived alone, hidden from the rest of the world, inside the mangrove forest. She didn't find the steamy heat of the marshes unpleasant and the mosquitoes didn't bother her. The girl was happy there, gathering *kullavah* and playing under the trees and in the muddy swamps from dawn to dusk. After night-fall she would go to meet her loving parents in their tiny hut, where they would all eat *kullavah* for dinner. That was one of her favorite times, when they would talk, sing and make jokes until she fell asleep. This girl was completely illiterate and

had no higher dreams and aspirations than to spend her life in that place as her parents had done. Little did she know that her life was going to change very soon.



One afternoon, the royal ship anchored close to this island. The girl was sitting on a mangrove tree close to the lagoon and was completely hidden by the dense leaves of its branches. She watched the large vessel in awe and disbelief, for she had often seen sails in the horizon, but this was the first time she had seen such a large boat so near.

Aboard the royal ship, the *Radun*, on a journey to the northernmost atolls of his kingdom, inspected the long, densely wooded island and asked his minister, "Which trees are those?"

The minister answered, "These are mangrove trees, O *Radun*! This island is marshy, very poor and pest-ridden, but it has the largest mangrove forest in the Maldivian Islands."

The king was a young man and he was sick of being on board. Welcoming the opportunity of breaking the monotony of the trip, he enthusiastically exclaimed, "Let's go ashore for a visit then! I have never been in such a forest and I would enjoy a walk now."

Thus, everything was made ready for the *Radun* to disembark on that island with his retinue. He began by paying a brief visit to the humble, nondescript village located at the end of the island. After exchanging the usual formalities with the local chief, the king decided to walk northwards, towards the other end. The island chief was nervous and tried to prevent the young monarch from going there, saying it was not real land but a very large muddy place without paths, blighted by mosquitoes and other pests.

The king had made up his mind though. Seeing that his ministers were not enthused either by the idea of accompanying him to the forest he told them that he would go alone, and that they could remain at the village with the rest of his

escort. Ignoring their protests, he walked into the bush with only two personal guards. Soon the ground became marshy, the usual island vegetation gave way to mangrove trees and the *Radun* entered into the *Kuḷlavah Falu*, a huge, dismal-looking swampy area.

The young king, tired of protocol, found it exhilarating to be alone in this great silent forest, without an umbrella-bearer or other cumbersome attendants surrounding him. In spite of the difficulty of the terrain, he walked valiantly on, with his feet in the mud, avoiding the low branches. However, owing to the absence of paths, the place was a labyrinth and soon the *Radun* and his two soldiers got lost. They wandered in the forest without knowing where they were going.

The youthful monarch was leading the way, when he heard a sound. He thought it was some bird, and not wanting to scare it, he whispered to the soldiers following him to be quiet and walked stealthily in the direction of the noise. Carefully, he lifted some twigs and, all of a sudden, he was stunned. There, before his eyes was the gorgeous girl who lived there.

She was squatting very close to him, calmly filling a *muḷōṣi* (basket)² with the *kuḷlavah* she had just picked from the surrounding trees. The sunlight filtering in thin shafts through the high green branches fell on the lovely young woman, giving an eerie quality to the scene. The king, his heart beating fast, remained very quiet, enthralled by the beauty of the forest girl. The vision in front of him looked so unreal that he began to fear he was seeing a *haṇḍi* (spirit), an event not at all unlikely in such a dark and deep forest. Thus, the *Radun* backed away one step and a dry stick cracked under his foot.

Startled, the girl stood up and froze. She opened her large eyes and her beautiful mouth wide in amazement. Since she had never seen anybody in such fine dress in her life, the king was for her an imposing, awesome sight.

2. A simple basket, easily made from two short sections of coconut palm fronds.

All of a sudden, the young woman became conscious that she herself wore only a length of cheap, half-torn cloth around her waist. Quickly, she covered her breasts with her arms, and then she turned around and ran away.

The king immediately ordered his guards to follow her and hurried after them. As the girl moved with such swiftness and ease within the thick, swampy woods, they soon lost sight of her. But the men pressed ahead and followed the tracks her feet left in the mud. Thus they were led to a humble shack in the heart of the mangrove forest where they found the poor wretch trying to hide inside, trembling like a leaf.

Feeling frightened and exposed, the mangrove girl was screaming and shaking strongly like a wild cat when she was taken by force out of the hut. Her parents were unable to help her without opposing the king's wishes. Finally, the soldiers managed to calm her and she was brought whimpering aboard the royal ship. Meanwhile, the king, turning to one of his ministers, declared, "Verily, this is the most charming young woman in my whole kingdom! We will bring her along with us to Male'. I have decided to marry her." In this way, for the first time in her life, the lonely child born in the salty swamps left the mangrove forest that had sheltered her since her birth.

As she sailed towards the capital to become a queen, the young woman was terrified by the rolling seas and the creaking ship. She had never felt so homesick and dejected and was sobbing all the time. But she never let anyone come close to her and yelled like a madwoman if somebody did. Since there were no *kullavah* on board, she wouldn't eat anything; she would only drink some rice water. Anyway, she was so seasick that she was constantly throwing up during the long journey. The king was troubled to see the pitiful wretch always huddled in a corner with fear in her reddened eyes. She was reeking of vomit, with tears streaming down her dirty face, and nobody aboard liked her. The *Radun* kept away from her.

Days passed and he seriously doubted that the young woman would survive and was repenting of having brought her along with him.

But things looked better after their arrival at the capital island. Once inside the palace compound, the half-naked, filthy girl was immediately surrounded by pretty girl attendants who, after giving her a bath, pampered her and treated her like a child. Following a few days of rest, the girl of the mangrove forest began to smile again. She was now eating good meals and was being bathed and perfumed by her servants. They found her rude ways exhilarating and joked with her all the time. Dressed in fine silks and wearing expensive jewellery, the young woman now looked dashing. Everyone in the palace was amazed to see how beautiful the future queen was, in spite of her execrable manners.

Time passed and the mangrove-forest girl was formally wedded to the king, but her husband found it difficult to put up with his wife's gross behaviour. Thus, on the *Radun's* strict orders, the girl spent busy days learning from morning till evening. The coarse young queen was not willing at first and threw terrible tantrums. However, before long she was taught how to read and write, how to dress properly and how to talk and behave in the court as befits a Maldivian queen.

A few years later, a group of people from the small village at the end of the island of the great mangrove forest happened to arrive in Male' on a trading journey. They went to the palace and asked for an audience, saying that they were bringing a present for the queen. The audience was granted and the lovely young queen received them in her best dress and finest jewellery. "What has brought you here?" she enquired haughtily.

The people produced a basket (*mulōṣi*) full of *kullavah* fruit, opened it in front of her and said meekly, "O Queen, we are people from your island, friends of your parents. Don't you remember us?"



Coldly, she ignored their question and asked, “What is that inside that basket?”

A bit abashed, but smiling, one of the men in front explained, “This is our gift for you. We thought that you would be very happy to eat some *kullavah*, as they don’t grow here in the capital.”

Feigning surprise by raising her eyebrows high, the queen gracefully took one of the green fruits and held it in front of her. She turned it slowly in her hand, squinting. Then, without taking her eyes off the *kullavah*, she exclaimed, “This is a very interesting fruit! Is it attached to the tree from this side or from this other side?”³



If in the Maldives one forgets too quickly about one’s origins, or having grown wealthy one is ashamed of poor relatives, people would say, “This person is like the queen of the Mangrove forest.”⁴

3. Told by Aishath Naazneen, Gāge, Male’.

4. This story originated in one of the Jātaka tales.

36. Khalidu and Sitti

Long ago a poor boy called Khalidu lived in Male', the capital of the Maldive Islands. He fell deeply in love with Sitti, a girl belonging to an aristocratic family, and she loved him in return with the same intensity.

Khalidu and Sitti told their families that they wished to marry but Sitti's family adamantly refused to give their permission. They were upset and found the choice of their daughter deplorable, for they insisted that Khalidu did not belong to their social level. But Sitti had an impetuous character and felt affronted, so she ran away from home in a huff and married Khalidu secretly.

Very soon though, it dawned on Sitti that it was impossible for her to live in hiding in the Maldives. Her family had much power and influence in the government. So she knew that it would be difficult for her to have a happy life with Khalidu as long as her family was opposing her.

Sitti then decided to talk to her family, beginning with the persons she loved most. Her determination to succeed and her charm were such that she ended up convincing her family members, one by one. Thus the girl's family ended up accepting the situation and took no action against the young married couple.

Sitti and Khalidu lived together happy and peacefully for several years. People admired their mutual devotion and faithfulness. During this time they were blessed with three children.

One day Sitti became very ill and was taken to the best doctor in Male'. He operated on her belly urgently and said she had a very serious illness. The doctor also told her that

following the operation her state was very frail and that she should not sleep with her husband anymore.

Fearing Khalidu would divorce her, Sitti didn't dare to tell him anything about the sickness. She became dejected and cried for several days.

Her husband repeatedly asked, "Sitti, why do you cry? Why do you always look so worried?"

So she told him what the doctor had said. "It is not the sickness that I fear, Khalidu, but that you might leave me."

Very kindly and tenderly Khalidu allayed her fears, "You shouldn't cry, Sitti. I don't need anybody but you in this world. If you died, I would not marry anyone else. I will stay with you." Sitti was delighted to hear that.

As the young woman's condition deteriorated, Sitti could not walk or even sit on a chair. She was confined to her bed and Khalidu constantly remained at her side. Whether by day or by night he prepared food for his wife, bathed her, and told her interesting stories to keep up her spirits.

Reflecting on her worsening condition, Sitti told Khalidu one day, "I have only a thread of life left now; I keep hanging on to this world only for your sake. If it wasn't for you, I would already be gone."

Shortly thereafter Sitti died with her head resting on Khalidu's arm.

Khalidu was hiding his face in his hands, shaking in sorrow, while Sitti's body was being prepared for burial. The house was full of relatives organizing the funerary ceremonies. But Khalidu didn't notice the people, his eyes were like lost in the distance, looking somewhere else; copious tears were flowing from them continually. He helped carry his wife's coffin to the graveyard but he didn't say a word and didn't look at anyone.

Through his tears, Khalidu watched how Sitti's coffin was being lowered into her grave. At the conclusion of the burial, the young man returned home, his head bowed.

He collapsed right at the threshold (*oḷiganḍu*) of his house. The people who were coming with him from the cemetery thought he had fainted and shook Khalidu to get him to rise. Before long they realized that, without having suffered any injury, he had died. His face was full of peace.

That same day, Khalidu was buried in the graveyard right beside Sitti, so that the tombs of the faithful lovers would be together.

People said that in the hereafter his soul would tell Sitti's, "I came to meet you here because I could not stay in the earth without you."



This tale is based on a true story. It is told in a song and it concludes with the song's words.¹

1. Told by Mausūma (Tutta), Dōdil, Male'.

37. Dombeyya

Long ago the largest *oḍi* merchant vessel¹ in Gan Island (Huvadū Atoll)² was made ready for the yearly trading journey to Ceylon. The man who enrolled as cook on the ship was Dombeyya, a handsome man from the island who was happily married to a beautiful woman. On the day of departure his wife brought him betel leaves carefully wrapped in a perfumed kerchief (*rumal*) and asked him not to forget her. Then she stood on the shore watching as the ship weighed anchor.

The sails caught wind leading the heavy-laden vessel swiftly through the channel into the open ocean. Night fell and, while the traders and sailors were enjoying their evening meal aboard, the prevailing south-westerlies carried the ship onward at great speed. Smiling with approval, the captain calculated that at that rate they would be reaching Ceylon in a couple of days.

But over a week passed and they were not able to sight land. When the trading ship finally reached a heavily-forested shore, the navigator knew it could not be Galle, for they had surely passed the southern coast of Ceylon days ago. He said that they probably had reached Burma or the Andamans, but they had to check to make sure. The ship anchored in a calm cove that morning and a party of men went ashore in order to look for the local authorities. Dombeyya also went ashore and

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1. *Oḍi*, known as *veḍi* or *voḍḍa* in the south, a heavy barque-type wooden merchant vessel.
 2. There are three islands by the name of Gan in the Maldives. All three had been populated in ancient times and have Buddhist ruins.

erected a hut with good fat *kandu*³ poles and other sticks on the beach. Then he thatched the frame with palm leaves and set up some stones for a hearth inside in order to cook lunch.

After the meal was ready, a very long time passed and the men didn't come back. Dombeyya locked the hut, so that no animals could reach the food and resolved to go inland to look for the captain and his group. He needed to stretch his legs, so he enjoyed for a while walking through the woods. But the forest was thick and soon he realized he was lost. Walking for hours without finding his bearings, Dombeyya noticed in alarm that the sun was setting.

When it became dark he still was walking inside the strange forest. Finally Dombeyya discerned a light and walked cautiously towards it. As he got near he realized that it was a clearing with huts and there were some fires in an open space. He could hear some wild singing and other fearful noises, so he decided that he would peek carefully through the leaves of a nearby shrub before he stepped out into the light.

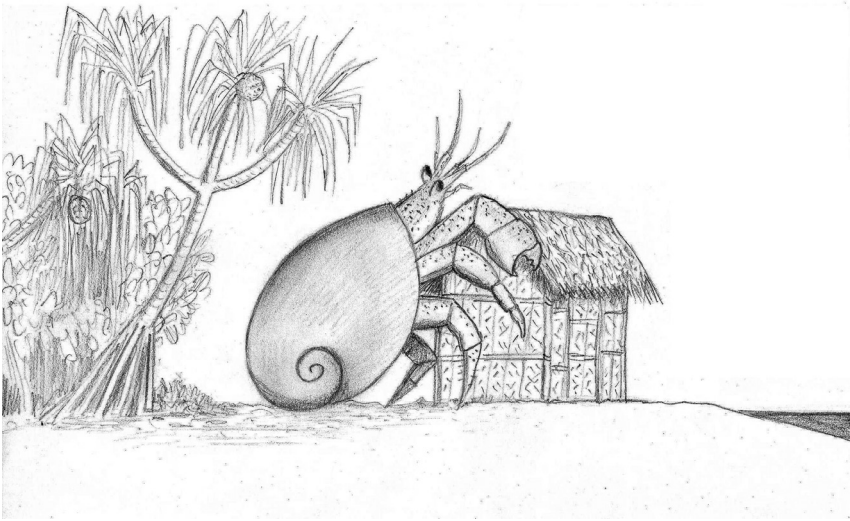
Dombeyya saw a fire around which a large group of fear-some naked people, their bodies smeared with mud, were eating amidst much savage merrymaking. To his horror he realized that these were cannibals and that they had killed the captain and the other crew members and were devouring them before his eyes.

He turned away from the horrid scene and walked resolutely into the bush. Rushing unflaggingly through the thick vegetation in the darkness, he didn't stop until he realized he had reached the shore. In the starlight Dombeyya was able to locate his hut and he was so exhausted that he locked it from the inside and instantly fell asleep on the floor.

Suddenly Dombeyya felt that the walls of his thatched hut were shaking. The sun had risen and someone was pushing

3. The Sea Hearse (*Hernandia ovigera*). Its light wood is not used for more permanent buildings.

heavily against his kitchen. The scene he had witnessed in the night came back to him and he thought the cannibals were coming for him now. Stealing a glance through the thatch he looked and saw no trace of people. Instead he caught a glimpse of a huge hermit crab who, smelling the food inside the pot, was trying to ram the hut. Quickly, Dombeyya thrust dry wood into the embers and lit some fire. Then he made an opening on the side of the hut and threw some hot coals in the direction of the crab's eyes. Mad with pain and anger, the monstrous crustacean pushed the hut across the beach and let it go only when it reached deep water.



Dombeyya scrambled to the surface and looked at the gigantic crab on the beach. To his relief, he saw that the hut he was sitting on was being carried away from the island by the currents. Then he tied the poles and thatch of the hut together, building an improvised raft.

Dombeyya spent many miserable days and nights on that raft tortured by hunger and thirst. When the sun shone he covered himself with his *munḍu* and when it rained he used it to

catch water to drink. The long nights were frightening and his raft was so poorly built that he could never keep completely dry. He was constantly afraid that it would fall apart, so that he would be left to swim in the dark waters. One day he lay down to sleep and seriously thought that he would die for he could not endure the hunger anymore.

When he opened his eyes he noticed that the raft was throbbing and, to his surprise, saw that land was quite close. The raft was caught in the middle of a swell. Big breakers heaved it and pushed it, the water breaking around him in white foam. Finally the flimsy raft broke apart and Dombeyya was hurled to the beach by an enormous crashing wave; then he lost consciousness. After a long time, he came to his senses when he felt the small beach-crabs pinching him. He was lying flat on the sand on his belly and the sun was setting.

Dombeyya found it hard to get up. His body was sore and he was weak from exhaustion. He looked at the long, unknown beach beaten by the waves. It was a desolate windy place and he decided to go inland the next day to look for signs of human habitation. Meanwhile he filled his belly with some leaves he pulled from the bushes growing on the shore and fell asleep under one of the trees. Early the next day he found marine birds' nests and ate the eggs. Feeling strengthened, he began to walk away from the shore.

Around noon, after a long march, Dombeyya found himself in a wide empty plain with a few scattered trees. Suddenly he heard a rumbling sound and saw a rhinoceros charging towards him.⁴ He ran away as fast as he could, dashing for the nearest tree which was quite far away. He felt the one-horned beast right behind him while he ran and was able to climb the tree at the last moment. The rhinoceros hit the tree repeatedly, making it shake, but Dombeyya held fast to the branches and

4. The mention of a rhinoceros (*arunu*) in the story indicates that it was probably Sumatra.

didn't fall down. Finally the large animal became tired and left, but the man waited for the sun to set before venturing down from his life-saving tree and walking away from the spot.

He marched under the starlight until he arrived at the edge of a forest. Dombeyya was very tired and did not want to enter the dark woods in the night. He decided to rest on the grass, but he could not sleep. Ants and mosquitoes tortured him. In the morning he went into the jungle. After walking many hours he arrived at a muddy lake. Trying to skirt it he walked along the shore but found no place across so he went back and tried in the other direction, but with the same result. He decided to wade across it for the water was not deep. When he was in the middle of the lake, he saw a floating log in the distance. But it was a crocodile that began to swim in his direction. Dombeyya tried to run but it was difficult to wade. His feet kept getting stuck in the mud. Finally after a great effort he reached the other shore and ran away from the lake into a wooded area.

In the days that followed he crossed more woods and more muddy ponds, but found no people and no houses. Dombeyya was constantly hungry; trying to find food he ate strange fruits and drank dirty water, so that often his belly ached. To compound his misery, in the nights the innumerable mosquitoes didn't let him sleep properly. Finally he fell ill and it became difficult for him to keep walking in the wilderness as he had been doing for the past weeks.

One night when he lay down to sleep he was so feverish that he thought his last hour had come. When he woke in the morning he realized that there was a huge snake in front of him. Dombeyya bolted in despair and ran for his life. Finally he came to a place to rest and decided that he would not get up. He was worn out; the last weeks had been terrible and Dombeyya decided that it was more than a man could endure.

But all of a sudden he heard the laughter of children. Despite his despondency he thought he should at least look. After a big effort he got up and hobbled in that direction. Coming out of the bushes, he found himself in the middle of a road and saw a few schoolchildren. He called to them, but when the children noticed him they looked at him in horror. Then Dombeyya realized that he was looking terrifying with his long hair, his scruffy beard, and his gaunt body full of wounds. He begged the children not to be afraid and to take him to their home, but they were so scared that they ran away from him. Then Dombeyya sat down by the side of the road in hopelessness. However, the children soon came back with some older people and found him there. A person who looked like a chief examined Dombeyya closely and asked the other men to help him to his feet.

That man was the village headman and Dombeyya was brought to his home where he was shaved, given a haircut, a bath and food. During the following days he was nurtured back to health. As soon as he felt fit Dombeyya worked with the local carpenter who admired his skill and was glad to have his help. Months passed and he learned the language.

One day the village chief asked Dombeyya to tell him his whole story, for he had only heard bits and pieces. After listening to the account of Dombeyya's ordeal, the chief reflected for a while on what he had heard. He was a kind-hearted man and knew that Dombeyya was afraid to be sent on his way; thus he told him: "You are lucky to have made it alive. If you try to go back, who knows how many more dangers will be in store for you and this time you may not survive. I know you are a good man; please stay with us. As you see, this is a good place." Then he gave him his daughter in marriage and Dombeyya accepted, for he felt sheltered in the village and was too terrified to travel again.

Years passed and Dombeyya was living very contentedly in the village, never stepping outside its limits. His wife had

given birth to children and he had friends and was respected. But one day the kind village headman died and Dombeyya had to travel to another place to arrange a funerary ceremony with his family. It was the first time that he had travelled away from the village since he had arrived but Dombeyya was able to overcome his fear.

Around that time his spouse began to have terrible nightmares. One night she told him: "I know you have been married before. I see your wife in my dreams. She is troubling me every night, so much that I am afraid to sleep." Dombeyya told her not to worry, but inwardly he was very disturbed by the news. Weeks passed and he noticed that his wife became haggard and that she was distancing herself from him. Finally one day she told him plainly: "It is better that you go away back to your own country. We have had some good years together, but now you are ruining my life." She cried and would not be soothed. Then she prepared him some food and some clothes for his trip and bade him farewell.

Dombeyya told his friends in the village that he was leaving and they were very sad and asked him repeatedly to change his mind. But he ignored their pleas. Some of them travelled a stretch along with him and before they parted they said: "Guard you heart our friend. We don't know where your country is, but look for the Dutch; they will be able to tell you." Then he was alone on the road.

One evening, on his way to the harbour town where the Dutch were, Dombeyya was assaulted by robbers. They attacked him, stole everything he had and beat him up, leaving him unconscious and badly wounded by the roadside. A kind woman helped him, and brought him to her home, feeding him and tending to his wounds. When he recovered, he told her his story and she was so touched that she cried. She then gave him all her money saying: "You need it more than me." Dombeyya reluctantly accepted the generous gift and contin-

ued his journey. Finally he arrived at the busy harbour, where he was allowed by the Dutch authorities to board a ship that brought him to Colombo.

Once in Colombo he waited for the season when the trading vessels from the southern Maldives arrived. Dombeyya reflected and realized it was seven years since he had left his island. At last one day the ships entered the harbour and he boarded a *veḍi* from Huvadū. The traders and the crew were calmly sipping tea on the deck and barely noticed him, but one man looked at him and his face became ashen. He exclaimed: “A ghost! A ghost!” and had to be calmed down. Dombeyya sat among them and narrated his terrible ordeal, without forgetting to mention the people who had been kind to him. The traders told him that his wife was married to another man. “Everyone thought you were dead.”

When Dombeyya arrived back to his island his wife’s marriage was promptly declared void. That evening when they were alone she told him: “My family forced me to marry after four years, four months and ten days had passed. But I knew you were alive. I spent all my money making powerful *fanḍita* to bring you back. I am so happy that you are now here with me!”

Dombeyya lived quietly in Gan for the rest of his life. Years after his death the island was abandoned following the outbreak of an epidemic.⁵ Most survivors went to live on nearby Gaddu Island. Gan has not been populated since then.⁶

5. Gan in Huvadū Atoll is presently uninhabited. It was depopulated following a deadly epidemic in the late 18th century. The survivors fled to Gaddu, claiming that cats could be heard all over their island during the nights while people of all ages fell ill struck by the mortal disease.

6. This is an abridged version of the long story, a kind of Maldivian Odyssey, told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Fua Mulaku.

38. Mākumbe

Long, long ago, a very fat man called Mākumbe lived in Male'. He was not a wicked man, yet he was greedy and selfish, for he was thinking only about eating. Mākumbe was happily married and had three girls and four boys. After the birth of his seventh child his wife died and Mākumbe was left alone to look after his children. Shortly thereafter he married a younger lady in the hope that she would help him in the house. The new wife was a thin and mean-spirited woman; she did not care for the children and was often nasty to them.

One day Mākumbe told his wife, "I am very hungry and I want to eat pancakes (*bōfoli*). I shall go to get the ingredients and you will cook them for me."

His wife replied, "In this house, no matter how many pancakes I cook, you will not get to taste many of them. Your children



always eat so much; they never seem to leave anything for the others.”

Mākumbe agreed with her, “We will not tell the children. I will bring the ingredients secretly into the kitchen and we will hide them there.”

That afternoon, while the stepmother took the children to the other end of the island to collect firewood, Mākumbe brought a large jar of palm sugar (*Divehi hakuru*), a sack of flour and many coconuts. Panting and sweating from the heavy work, he hid them as well as he could.

After sunset, Mākumbe sent the boys and girls to bed. His wife let a while pass to make sure that they were fast asleep. When she was sure that the children would not be awake, she went to the kitchen and started cooking as silently as she could. Mākumbe helped her and they made lots of pancakes.

Deep into the night, the smallest child woke up to go outside to urinate. As he was going back to bed he saw light in the kitchen and noticed the delicious smell that wafted through the night air. He rushed into the kitchen hut and cried, “Give me one! I am very hungry.”

Caught by surprise, Mākumbe gave his son a pancake. The stepmother warned the boy glaring at him sternly, “Don’t tell the others.”

The little boy ate the pancake silently, sitting in a corner of the kitchen. When he went back to bed he pinched the girl sleeping next to him and she woke up with a yell. He whispered, “Don’t be afraid.”

“Why did you do that?” she complained, tears running down her eyes.

“Mom and dad are cooking pancakes in the kitchen. They are doing it secretly because they don’t want to give us any.”

Smiling, she asked, “Did you get one?”

“Yes. It was delicious. You can also get one if you go to the kitchen and cry. Just pretend that you woke up to urinate and then saw the light.

The girl did as she was told. When she went back to bed, she pinched the child next to her and gave him the same instructions. She added that if they all went together, their father would get angry and they would get nothing. Thus, as the night drew on, every one of the children did the same thing in turn.

After the last child had left for bed, Mākumbe was bitter. “These children are a curse! Now every one of them has seen what we are doing. After they all wake up they will ask for more pancakes at once.”

Looking at the tall pile of pancakes, the wife commented, “They will not last very long then. In less than a day all of them will be gone.”

Mākumbe was brooding. Finally he decided to do something.

Husband and wife had worked hard during the night. When they finished it was dawn. Mākumbe hid the pancakes on some planks below the roof, under a cover¹ (*malāfa*). Still cursing the children, the couple went to sleep for a few hours.

Mākumbe woke up at midday and told all his children to go with him to the forest to cut firewood. The boys and girls followed him happily. In the forest Mākumbe cut wood of the *kandu* tree (*Hernandia ovigera*) and built a raft with some rope. Then he told the children to help him put the raft afloat in the lagoon. Once in the water he told the children to get aboard. He rowed beyond Vilingili Island, until Male’ disappeared below the horizon. The children kept asking, “Dad, where are we going?” But their father didn’t answer. His face was grim. All of a sudden Mākumbe jumped into the sea and swam back to Male’ without looking back.

When he arrived home wet and tired, Mākumbe told his wife, “From now on, the children will make no more trouble. I left them floating on a raft. They are drifting away from here into the ocean, so they will either die of hunger or drown.”

1. A dome-shaped lacquered wooden cover to protect the food against insects or birds

The stepmother smiled cruelly, displaying her buck-teeth, “Good! Now they will not make our lives difficult.”



Meanwhile, adrift on the high seas, the children were frightened and wet. They were unable to see any island and, beginning with the smallest, they began to whimper to the eldest brother, “Brother, we are hungry.”

“Be patient! And stop crying”, he said. “You all should be grateful that we are still alive.”

The sun set and in the moonless night the sea looked dark and ominous. Now they could not tell where they were drifting to. The sea became rougher, and the raft made scary squeaking sounds. They feared that it would not hold together much longer.

Their only hope was to keep floating on the raft, so each child held onto the raft with one hand, and onto a brother or a sister with the other. They were drifting at great speed, feeling wet and miserable, when dawn finally lightened the sky.

The sea showed no sign of calming, but God helped the children in their plight. That same morning they were washed onto a small islet that stood miraculously in their erratic path.

The children were relieved; they stepped onto the dry sand and stretched their legs. Then they inspected the place. It was a flat low sandbank. There was nothing else there, not even a bush. They scanned the horizon. While they could see some islands in the distance, none of them could swim that far to reach them.

Turning to the eldest brother, the youngest whined, “Brother, I am hungry.” The next child also joined in, until all were crying. The brother said, “Be patient, and grateful that we are saved. We could all still be floating on the waves in the middle of the ocean.”

The boy looked around and realized that the situation was bad. More as a distraction for the children than out of any real

hope of finding food, he said, “Let’s walk around the island and look for food.”

Miraculously, the children found a huge ripe papaya that had drifted there intact. They brought it to their elder brother full of pride. Since they had no knife, the boy cut it in seven equal pieces with a shard of a *naibu boli* seashell². He told the children, “Keep the seeds; we will plant them in the middle of the island.”

The boys and girls buried the seeds at regular distances from each other all over the place. For some time they managed to survive there, eating whatever drifted to the shore. They watched the papaya trees grow until their white flowers began to fall and the first tiny fruit appeared.

The smallest child went then to his brother and said, “Brother, I am hungry. Let’s pick the papayas.” The girl next in age to him also joined in, asking for the same, as did each of the other children. The brother told them, “Be patient; they must still grow bigger. You should be grateful. Do you remember how desolate this island looked when we came? Now it is covered with lush papaya trees and we have good shade.”

After some days had passed, a trading sailboat anchored off the island. Seeing the children standing on the shore and waving, the captain went to meet them.

Weeping, the children told their visitor that they were very hungry. Moved by their tears, the captain ordered his crew to unload them a heap of coconuts and dried fish. In this manner they had provisions until the papayas matured. Before long the trees began to give beautiful large fruit, sweeter than any they had tasted before.

The children had many more papayas than they could eat, so they repaired the raft, loaded it with fruit and went to one of the nearby islands. They traded their papayas for palm leaves, big wooden poles and coir rope.

2. The shell of the *Nautilus*

In this manner they built one separate house for each child and decided to stay on the island, claiming it as their own. They also buried coconuts and planted other trees around their island in order to shelter their papaya plantation from the wind.

As time went by their papayas became famous throughout the atoll. Their island became lush, green and productive and they bought a small boat. The children grew up and became so wealthy that each one of them built a stone house.

One day, when the children visited an island to sell their products, someone told them that Mākumbe, their father, was dead. As soon as they heard this the children dutifully returned to their island in order to cook for a funerary ceremony (*fātiha*).

Mākumbe, however, was not dead. He had happened to be on that very island his children had just visited and had heard that his sons and daughters had become wealthy. He tricked someone into telling them that he was dead so that he could see how he could take advantage of the situation. That same night he went to their island on a small sailboat.

To his surprise Mākumbe saw a row of beautiful, tidy and well-lit houses. He nearly lost his head from the good smells wafting from the kitchens. The fat man crept stealthily to the first house and banged the pole of the well-bucket against the rim of the well.

From inside the house a voice called out, “What is that noise?” Out of the darkness a voice replied, “This is Father Mākumbe.”

His son cheerfully urged him to come in. “Father! I am so happy you are alive! Someone told us you were dead and I have cooked all these things for a funerary ceremony in your honour.”

Mākumbe, eyeing the splendid array of food greedily, said, “It is too soon for that still. I am alive and well as you can see. Since the food is ready, I should not let it go to waste.

The food was delicious and Mākumbe ate greedily as was his custom. He left almost nothing on the table.

Then Mākumbe went to the next house and beat the rim of the well. He said the same thing to his daughter and stood speechless before an even more splendid array of dishes. In this manner Mākumbe went from house to house and gorged himself thoroughly at the table of each one of his children. As he came out of the eldest son's house he could hardly walk.

It was a gloomy, moonless night. After resting for a time sitting on a log in the darkness, the mosquitoes were biting him, so Mākumbe decided to walk towards the beach to find some relief in the cool breeze. His belly was so large that he couldn't see before him and he didn't know where he was going. In this way he wandered aimlessly in the darkness and walked towards the spot where coconuts were husked.

A sharp fat stick, which was used to remove the husks, was planted firmly in the ground at an angle. Mākumbe didn't see it and ran with his taut belly into the sharp point of the stick. When his skin was pierced his belly burst spilling his intestines out. And it was there, among the strewn coconut husks, that Mākumbe died.

In the morning the children found their dead father and buried his body according to the proper funerary rituals.³

3. Told by Aishath Naazneen, Gāge, Male'.

39. The Monster at the Kitchen Door

One dark night a reef monster (*faru furēta*) came ashore on an island. It was a slimy creature much larger than a man, almost as tall as a tree.

It crawled into the island in the darkness. The island was not inhabited, except for only one woman, *Daita* (aunt or elder sister), who had been banished there because of a skin disease. Even though it was a late hour that night, *Daita* was not yet sleeping. She was cooking palm-syrup sweets in her kitchen hut.¹

The monster saw the light in the kitchen hut and went towards it. Then it squatted and stayed very quiet at the threshold, watching *Daita* from its position in the shadows. It could see the woman's profile clearly, for her face was lit by the bright fire.

The kitchen was filled with a very sweet aroma, but suddenly *Daita* felt another kind of smell coming through the door. The monster stank like the reef, which is a fishy stench, like the smell of sponges and coral when they are taken out of the water and are exposed to the air for a while.

The woman was frightened beyond measure, but she made a big effort to regain control of herself. Pretending to be engrossed in ladling the sweet stuff, she looked with the corner of her eye towards the door. Her fears were confirmed, for filling the whole space there was an ugly-looking thing like a toad. The monster had a fearsome mouth full of large teeth, every tooth larger than a hand.

1. The traditional Maldivian kitchen was a separate hut a distance away from the main house because its roof frequently caught fire.

Daita then reminded herself to keep composed. Serenely, she took one of the blazing logs from the hearth and acted as if she was putting it in her mouth. She pretended to chew it as if she was eating the burning wood.

Then, from the side where the monster could not see what she was doing, the woman took a coconut and cut a few pieces into the shape of knife-blades. Calmly, she ingested the coconut pieces as if she was eating knives.

The demon lurking outside was horrified. It thought, “What will become of me in the hands of such a woman who eats fire and iron?”

The monster ran back to the sea in panic and thus *Daita*’s life was spared.²

2. Told by Abdul Haadi, an official in Kuḍa Huvadu Atoll Office, in 1986.

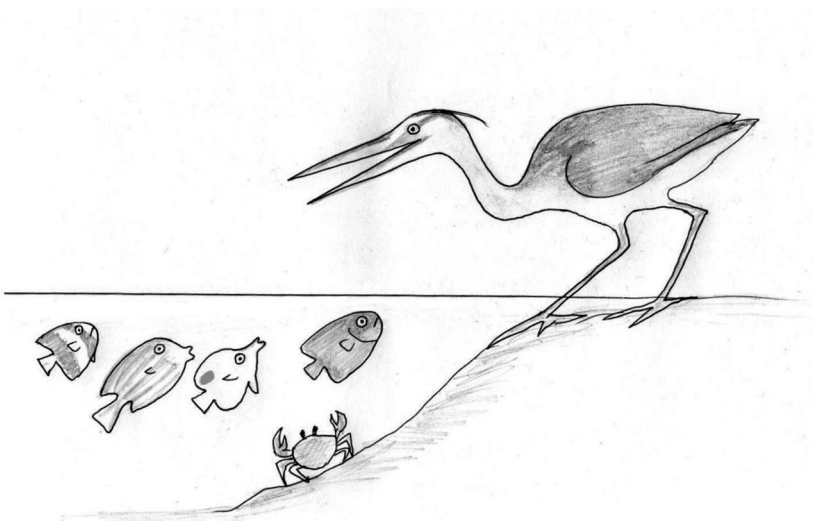
40. Mākana's Treachery

Once upon a time a very sly heron (*Mākana*) alighted near a pool over the reef-shelf at low tide. He looked at the fishes swimming there and thought, "Those fishes look very foolish. I have an idea how to eat them all without much effort."

Mākana went close to the edge of the pool and spoke to the fishes in a gentle and polite manner, "You look very tight swimming so closely in this small puddle. This doesn't look like a good place."

In the same pool there was a crab at the bottom who told the fishes, "Don't talk to him. He is dangerous, he wants to eat you."

But the fishes didn't pay attention to the crab and talked to Mākana, "You're right it is a bit crowded here. Do you know a better place than this?"



“Of course, I can fly high and, at a glance, I can see the best places in the reef. Not far from here there is a beautiful blue pool. It is much deeper and the water is cooler. It will be a much more pleasant place for you fishes to live.”

The fishes were beginning to feel the heat of the midday sun in their shallow pool, so they were very interested and asked the bird, “How can we get there?”

“Nothing can be easier,” replied the sly bird, wading into the pool and opening its beak right below the surface of the water. “I can bring one fish at a time inside my beak. Then I will come back for the next one.”

The crab warned the fishes “Don’t do that! This looks like a mean trick to me.”

But the silly fishes were so excited they were already jostling each other trying to get into the beak first, so they didn’t even notice the crab’s warning.

Thus Mākana brought the fishes one by one away from the pool. And do you think he was bringing them to a better place as he promised? Of course not! He brought them to a rock that was awash at the edge of the reef and devoured them, smiling in satisfaction at how clever he was.

Finally the crab was alone in the pool and Mākana returned, belching and flying with difficulty because he was so full. The crab refused to go, but the bird, eager for a crab meal, insisted. “You will be so bored alone here in this warm puddle. The fishes are having such a great time in that cool large pool.”

With his cunning words, Mākana managed to persuade even the wary crab, and finally the crustacean agreed to be carried by the bird in his beak.

While they were flying, the crab felt that the bird was holding him too tight, so he protested, “You are hurting me! Hold me in a more gentle way if you please.”

But the bird told him, “I don’t need to be gentle. I am going to eat you, just as I ate all those foolish fishes.”

Suddenly the huge betrayal of the Mākana dawned on the crab and he became full of indignation. In anger and despair he reached with his claws towards the long neck of the bird. When he felt it with one claw, the crab squeezed the neck with such strength that he severed it. Unexpectedly the crustacean was freed from the tight grip, but he began to fall.

While the dead bird and the crab were falling and falling, the latter thought serenely, “We are over the reef and I may hit a rock. I don’t mind if I die. At least I am glad that this unrighteous bird got the lesson he deserved.”

But it so happened that the crab ended up falling unhurt into a beautiful deep pool where he spent the rest of his days in good company and in peace.¹

1. Told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Fua Mulaku; this fable originated in the Panchatantra

41. The Girl in the Shark's Belly

Long ago on the island of Fiōri, in the massive coral reef that fringes the ocean in Southern Huvadu Atoll, lived a young girl who was her parent's only child. She was a very pretty girl and her manners and learning were excellent, for her parents had looked after her very well. But she felt that they were always protecting her too much and she wanted to have more freedom, like the other girls on the island.

One day she told her mother, "I am always inside the house. The other girls say it is such fun to go to the beach to bring saltwater."

Her mother replied affectionately, "You don't need to go to look for saltwater. We are well-off and there are people who will do it for us."

But the girl insisted, "Please, let me go with them!"

Then the woman told her daughter this story. "When you were a baby, a learned man from Vādū came here and read our palms. He told your father and me that you would always be our only child and that we would never have any more offspring. Then he looked at your tiny hand and said that something would happen to you before becoming a woman. We asked him what he meant, but he told us that he didn't know. However, he instructed us to watch over you very well."

But the daughter insisted, promising that she would be very careful and that the other girls who would go with her could watch over her, too. Finally, she cried and looked so desolate that her mother let her go.

The girl was given a *guli* (terracotta pot)¹ and went along

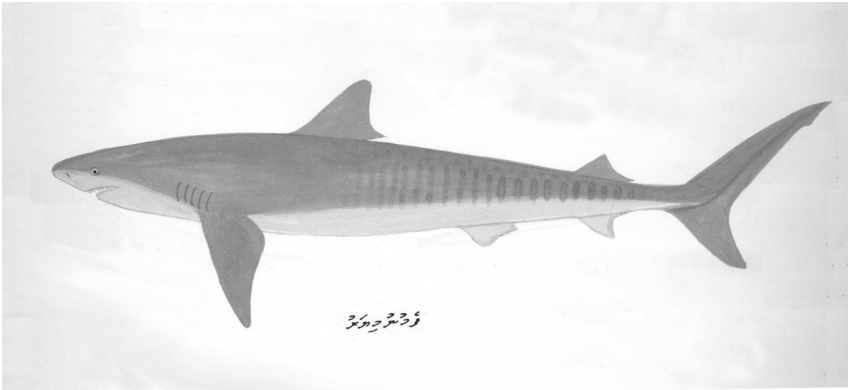
1. A cylindrical ceramic pot with a wide mouth, generally used to store food items.

with the other girls to the beach to a spot called Aḍḍanāhutṭā. There she had a great time playing in the water and in the sand with her friends. After a while, when it was getting late, her companions went to a deeper place and filled their pots with saltwater. Then they waded up to the beach and every girl, after putting the pot on her head, went home.

Now this girl had been left alone because she could not wade as well as her friends. She tried to do as they did and went to the edge of a deeper place to fill her pot. Unfortunately she lost her balance and fell splashing into the water. She managed to keep afloat by holding the pot filled with air with the mouth downwards but the current carried her swiftly away from Fiōri, across the lagoon towards the ocean. The girl panicked when she saw that the bottom under her was becoming a deeper shade of blue. She screamed and yelled for help until her voice was hoarse but, as nobody had seen her falling in, no one could hear her.

The island was now far off in the distance and the girl was being tossed by the surf over the dark waters. She was terrified and held tightly to her pot, closing her eyes all the time.





Far offshore, one of the huge predator sharks that cruise the Indian Ocean close to the surface saw the little figure floating over the dark blue depths and, without hesitating, opened its mouth open wide and gulped her in an instant.

After some days had passed, in a northern atoll of the Maldivian kingdom, there were some fishermen who had sailed far into the ocean to hunt the big sharks, as was customary on their island. Those sharks are killed for their liver oil, which is mainly used to coat the wood below the waterline in Maldivian boats.

That day, the men aboard the boat caught a big fish and were full of joy. They followed it, slowly drawing in the line all the while, and saw that it was a very large tiger shark. When they got close enough, the *Keulu* (master fisherman) exclaimed, "Look! It is turning and showing its belly."

The other fishermen looked at him and asked in puzzlement, "What does this mean, *Keulubē*?"

The master fisherman looked at the huge white belly of the shark above the water as if lost in thought and said, "I have never seen this before, but I heard old people say that this means that a human being is inside."

Thus, the fishermen threw their harpoons skilfully, close to the jaws, taking care not to touch the shark's belly. Blood oozed abundantly from the wounded gills, staining the ocean

around them red. Once they were sure that the mighty fish was dead, they tied it along the boat and sailed immediately to the uninhabited island where they usually slaughtered their catch. When they pulled the shark ashore, they carefully opened the big belly with a knife and, to their astonishment, found a girl cuddled inside, holding her pot tightly against her. She was miraculously alive.

The girl opened her eyes wide and looked frightened. She didn't say a word when the fishermen addressed her and didn't offer any resistance when they took her out of the belly. They washed her with sea water and brought her to their boat. The girl watched the men in silence while they cut the huge liver out of the shark and prepared it to extract its oil. Once they had finished their work the fishermen jumped aboard and sailed back to their island.

Everyone was surprised when they saw the men who had gone fishing sharks arrive with an unknown young woman. Soon a crowd gathered around the fishermen. *Keulubē* brought the perplexed girl to his home and, after she had had a bath and some food, she went to sleep.

During the following days the girl didn't speak at all. *Keulubē*'s family found out that she was very well-bred, but only after a long time she began to stammer some words. She didn't remember from where she had come from and when they tried to ask her about her island of origin, she became so terrified that she fell completely silent, staring into the void.

Years passed and *Keulubē* continued to look after this mysterious girl as if she had been his own daughter. When she became a grown-up woman, she married one of the *keulu*'s sons. This made her adoptive father very happy, because both his son and his daughter-in-law remained in his own home. As years went by, the girl had children and everyone forgot about the extraordinary way in which she came to the island. The only odd thing about her was that she stayed all the time

in the interior of the island and was very afraid of the sea. She would refuse to go to the beach even to wet her feet because she could not bear to look at the blue waters.

One day a *batteli* (trading boat) came from the south and the father of the long-lost child happened to visit the island where *Keuḷubē* lived. He was now a very old man with white hair. Once ashore, he said he was exhausted from the trip and needed some rest. He was brought to the *keuḷu*'s home and sat on the *undōli* (swing) in the cool verandah. When he asked for a glass of water, his own daughter came and gave the glass to him. The old man was startled and told her not to go. While she stood puzzled in front of him, he studied the young woman carefully.

“Who is this girl?” he asked *Keuḷubē*. Then his host sent her back to the kitchen and described in detail the circumstances of the girl's arrival on the island.

Once his host had finished the story, the old man didn't know what to say. Suddenly tears welled up in his eyes and *Keuḷubē* asked him, “What is happening?” And then the father of the girl narrated how his only daughter had disappeared long ago from Fiōri and how, after months of fruitless search, they had given up all hopes of ever finding her alive.

At this point *Keuḷubē* told the girl to come and asked her whether she knew who their guest was. She looked at the old man, squinting with her eyes, but after a while she said that she didn't recognize him. Then the old visitor told her the whole story. All of a sudden, the girl remembered her loving parents and began to weep.

Everyone watching them was in complete silence, even the children. Suddenly, the young woman ran away and hid in the kitchen, where she began to sob aloud. After a long while the girl came out, her eyes still wet with tears. This time she looked at the old man again and smiled. Beaming with pride she called her children to show them their real grandfather.

Hugging the little boys and girls, the unexpected visitor told her, “This is the happiest day in my life. I will send word to your mother to come here so that she can see her daughter again in this world.”²

2. Told by Ahmad Didi, Alifūluge, Fua Mulaku. According to many storytellers this story is based on a true event.

42. Delikoļu and Aļikoļu

Long, long ago there were two girls living in a certain island. One was called Bit of Charcoal (*Delikoļu*) and the other Bit of Ash (*Aļikoļu*).¹ One day they went together to the beach with their pots (*baņdiya*) to fetch saltwater to cook fish. It was high tide and they didn't dare to fill their pots in the rough waters. Bit of Charcoal told Bit of Ash, "Get in first!"

Bit of Ash looked warily at the waterline and said, "No, you get in first!"

Bit of Charcoal insisted, "You get in first!"

Bit of Ash said, "No, you get in. Just jump!"

Again, Bit of Charcoal said, "You jump first!"

Bit of Ash answered, "No, you jump, and then I will jump in too."

Finally Bit of Charcoal said, "All right! Let us jump together at once."

As soon as Bit of Ash hit the water, she dissolved, while Bit of Charcoal floated. The currents carried Bit of Charcoal far, far away. At last Bit of Charcoal drifted to the place called Māmelifannu, where Māmeli's house path meets the beach. In that house lived Māmeli Daita, a woman who had seven children.

Māmeli's eldest daughter (*Mēliyage Diye*)² went to the beach to defecate and while she washed herself she saw Bit of Charcoal being lapped by the waves on the sand. She lifted Bit of Charcoal

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1. Delikeđe and Alikeđe in the far south of Maldives (Ađđu and Fua Mulaku).
 2. Māmeli Daita is a kind of fairy whose names are Mēliyagefanno, Mēliyage Daita and Mēliyage Diye in the far south of the Maldives.

gently and found that the girl was so little she fitted in the palm of her hands. Māmeli's daughter examined the charcoal girl and nudged her affectionately, but there was no reaction, she was dead. Then she went ashore and walked to a spot between the bushes by the beach, squatted on the ground holding the little girl and cried. There Māmeli's daughter dug a hole in the sand with her bare hands and buried Bit of Charcoal.



Māmeli's girl remained at the burial spot and said, "Sprout quickly!" three times. Suddenly the shoot of a banana plant began to grow in the place where Bit of Charcoal had been buried.

Beaming, Māmeli's daughter said three times, "Grow quickly!" And a tall banana plant grew. Next, clapping her hands she said three times, "Give fruit quickly!" (*halihah fōvah*) and, like a snake, a big purple banana flower grew out of the top of the stalk and shed its thick petals one by one leaving the green bananas exposed in many rows along a very long pod.

Then, eagerly, Māmeli's girl said three times, "Ripen quickly!" And so the bananas grew full in size and became yellow.

But the stalk was too tall and the ripe bananas were out of her reach.

A little boy came by while Māmeli’s girl was making big efforts jumping up, unable to reach the bananas. Panting and sweating, she looked at the boy and said, “Go up the stalk and throw me the bananas one by one.” She tried to fool the boy by adding, “But don’t eat them, they are an inedible medicinal plant.”

The boy went up the tall stalk and did what she said. But after he had thrown the first banana, he saw Māmeli’s daughter eating it greedily and said, “If you can eat it, I can eat it as well.” Taking one banana, he said, “So, one for you and one for me,” and he stuffed the fruit into his mouth. Then the boy threw one more to the girl repeating, “One for you, one for me.”

And in this way the little boy and Māmeli’s girl finished the whole bunch of bananas.³

3. Told by Aminat Didi, Vaḍige, Fua Mulaku. According to many storytellers this story is based on a true event.

43. Arruffanno Ferēta

Long ago on Fua Mulaku Island's western edge, where a village path joins the beach at a place called Arruffanno, a monster came ashore from the sea. Some people casting a net on the coral reef at night saw it. They said that this evil spirit looked sometimes like a huge, pale flame over the reef.

The monster could change shape and would creep inland in the night. It would reach the populated areas in order to kill people and drink their blood. It kept coming ashore so many nights and killed so many men, women and children that the inhabitants of Dīguvāṇḍo, the village nearby, feared that it would become deserted. The situation was desperate.



Arruffanno Ferēta or Demon Rock (photo by Ahmed Naif)

Edurutakkānge Muhammad Dīdī, a big *fanḍita* man, spent many days on the reef making magic. Although he worked very hard at his sorcery, the demon still came ashore at night and went on killing people.

Distressed that all his sorcery had failed, Muhammad Dīdī used all his skills into casting one last, very powerful spell. It worked and the monster became a large coral rock.

This rock can still be seen at Arruffanno in the western shore of Fua Mulaku. There the reef surface is flat and that isolated rock stands out in the landscape.

The local people call it *Ferēta Gal*, the Demon Rock. When you hit it with an iron rod, it still oozes blood. It is said that it will do so forever, whenever it is struck.¹

1. Told by Mariyam Fārūgu, Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi's granddaughter, Funāḍo, Fua Mulaku.

44. The Scarlet Wake

Long ago, a handsome middle-aged man came to an island in Aḍḍu Atoll on a trading journey and had to stay there for a few weeks. He hadn't met his hosts previously, but they were good-natured and very kind to him. There was such a pleasant atmosphere in their home that the stranger felt obliged to have all his meals there, steadily refusing the frequent invitations from other houses.

In that happy house lived a pretty young woman, Eḷa Fātumā, who was unmarried. She didn't belong to the house-owners' family. Her parents were very poor and she had been working in that house since she was a little girl. She didn't miss her family. As she was treated very well and loved her employers, she was very glad to live there.

Eḷa Fātumā did all the household work in a cheerful mood. She was always smiling and singing. Among her daily chores, she often had to serve food, drink, or betel and nut to the stranger. One day his eyes met hers and she flashed an alluring smile. Thereafter, whenever the young woman brought a glass to the handsome guest they playfully touched each other's hands while nobody was looking. It took but little time and they fell deeply in love with each other.

The man asked the girl to marry him, but he also told her that he had to go back and that perhaps it would be difficult for her to live far away from her home island. However, Eḷa Fātumā was so much in love with this man that she already had made her decision. She told him that she was ready to go with him wherever he went. Shortly thereafter, they were married.

The time came for the newly wedded couple to board a boat and leave for the man's island. The young woman was thrilled and she considered herself very lucky. Suddenly, upon arrival at the island that would be her new home, Eḷa Fātuma, to her dismay, found out that her husband was a widower who had already been married before. He even had two grown-up daughters who came to greet him at the beach. The girls looked very arrogant and were almost as big as she was.

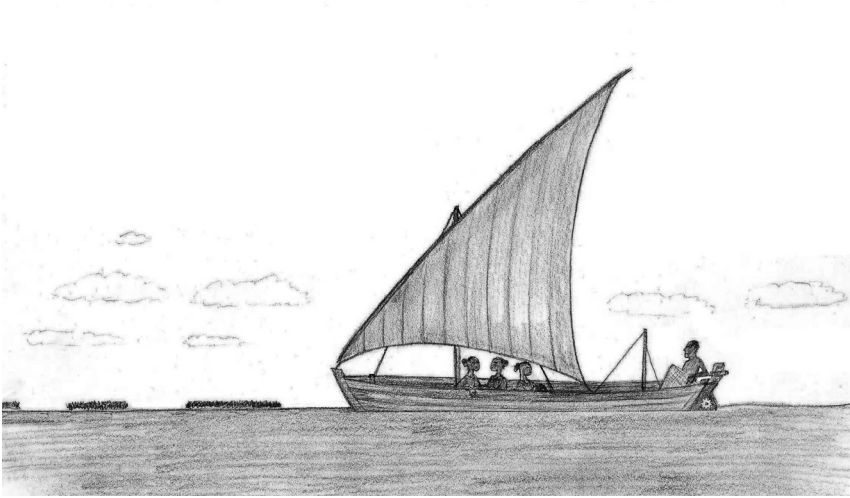
How outraged she was! She thought, "I almost died of shame." Her world, from being golden, had suddenly become very bitter. Making an enormous effort, the young woman swallowed her feelings of humiliation and smiled wanly to everyone she met in her husband's home. During the following gloomy days Eḷa Fātumā was very careful not to show either anger or disappointment. But her husband felt some change in her mood and said: "I know why you are angry." She answered: "I am not angry."

He knew she was, though; and he missed her bright, easy smile and her lively chatter. So, he tried to be nice to her, giving excuses like: "I didn't dare to tell you about these girls, because I thought that you wouldn't want to marry me. But you don't have to worry; they will help you in the house. Life will be easier for you."

Eḷa Fātumā looked around her in consternation, but acted as if she was contented. She tried to be friendly to the girls, but they were cold and indifferent towards her. The two young women and their deceased mother's relatives clearly resented the attention their father was giving to this stranger from another island. They were extremely unfriendly and their constant ill-will didn't make life easy for her.

Months passed and Eḷa Fātumā had to endure the nagging, disdainful ways of the other women in silence. The injury in her heart was by now too deep to heal; she felt lonely, trapped and hurt. She sorely missed the happy and carefree ways she

had left in her home island, among her own people. Her husband was the only person in that hostile place who had some sympathy for her, but she knew well that even his heart was divided. It was useless to complain to him because he was very fond of his daughters and she would look like the bad person. Whenever she was alone, Eļā Fātumā crouched in a dark spot and cried bitter tears in secret.



The fishing season was approaching. One day, at dawn, the husband brought his wife and his two daughters to a certain uninhabited island to cut a large amount of firewood. They travelled on a small sailing boat. The women carried some food, pots and their *kativali* (large machete knives). The man repaired the little hut on the island with some new thatching and sticks. As he was leaving he told Eļā Fātumā and the girls that he was going to catch some reef fish and that he would be back before sunset.

Once her husband was away, Eļā Fātumā told one of the daughters to stay at the hut and cook something while she and her sister went to cut firewood. Then she walked with the

other girl resolutely into the bush. When they had been going for a while, the daughter was tired and sweating from trying to keep up with her stepmother. Finally she whined: “Why are we going so far away? We can start cutting firewood here; there is so much of it around us.” Eļa Fātumā didn’t answer. She kept walking obstinately at a fast pace and the daughter, who was afraid to be left alone in the wilderness, had to follow her grudgingly. The jungle was thick and, to be able to move forward, now and then both women had to cut low branches with the *kativaḷi* they were holding.

All of a sudden, when they came to a small clearing, Eļa Fātumā stopped. But before her stepdaughter standing behind her could move, she turned and gave the stunned girl such a violent blow with her *kativaḷi* that her head, cleanly separated from her neck, flew into the tangled bushes and rolled on the dry leaves. Then the woman took a shortcut across the forest and went to the waterside, where she washed her bloody hands and knife. After letting some time pass, Eļa Fātumā walked along the beach towards the hut.

The other girl had made a hearth with stones close to the hut and was squatting there in the shade of the large trees, cooking rice in a pot. She was busy keeping the fire going, so she didn’t get up when she heard someone arriving. The daughter didn’t look properly at the woman’s face either when Eļa Fātumā came close to her, firmly clutching the murderous weapon in her hand. Vaguely looking around she just asked: “Where is my sister?”

Eļa Fātumā, ominously looming behind her, said: “She went to the beach at the other end to take a bath,” and while the girl was distracted fanning the fire to reduce the smoke, the woman’s *kativaḷi* hit her neck from the back with all her strength. The blow was so powerful that the daughter’s severed head banged against the pot, spilling the water. Part of the long, black hair was instantly burned in the fire.

Then Eḷa Fātumā walked again into the forest and returned with the bleeding head of the other girl. She wove palm-leaf baskets (*muḍeiṣi*) and put each head in a separate basket and brought them to the brightly lit lagoon. There, holding a basket in each hand, she waded in until the water was waist-high. Only then did she release the baskets, setting them adrift. The young woman watched how the current carried the girls' heads away, their scarlet wakes slowly fading. After a while, Eḷa Fātumā washed herself with the sea water and walked back to the bushes fringing the beach above the waterline.

Eḷa Fātumā sat very still under the shade of a tree and looked persistently at the horizon. She was squinting with her eyes, waiting only to see the sail of her husband's boat. Many hours passed and in the late afternoon, when the little vessel was in sight, the woman had not stirred at all.

Now she got up and walked calmly to the beach to meet him, holding one *kativaḷi* in each hand. As the boat touched the sand, the man stepped out. His wife was standing in front of him but didn't say a word. She was looking at his eyes with intense fierceness, breathing heavily. Her long black hair was a wild, uncombed mane blown larger by the wind.

The island was eerily silent. The man nervously looked around and then, reluctantly, at fearful-looking Eḷa Fātumā. He hesitated, and then his voice trembled when he asked, "Where are the girls?"

Without answering, holding the knives upright, blades inwards, Eḷa Fātumā stretched her neck and, with a swift and vigorous movement, crossed her hands over her chest.¹ Her severed head fell at the feet of her husband and a thick jet of blood splashed him before the young woman's body collapsed.²

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1. At this point the storyteller mimicked the powerful, scissor-like motion with his own arms.
 2. Told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Funāḍo, Fua Mulaku. Although the specific atoll was not mentioned, the story is likely set in Huvadū Atoll.

45. The Navigator under the Tree

Once upon a time in the Maldives there was a man who was a navigator (*mālimi*) by profession. He lived in Male' in a house right by the seashore where there was a *muranga* (drumstick) tree¹ in the middle of the yard. There were never many leaves on that tree because his wife used them for cooking, and branches broke off easily when she cut the long green *muranga* pods. But that suited the navigator well for he needed an ample view of the sky above him anyway.

This mariner liked to sit in his favourite spot below the tree and take measurements with his sextant. At his side he always



1. *Moringa oleifera* tree, a source of food and medicine. Formerly very common in island homesteads.

had the *Alimaniku*, the Mariner's Almanac giving the lists of angles and logarithms. This man was able to calculate a position with great accuracy looking at the horizon beyond the fence. He was skilled both at measuring the latitude using the location of the sun during the daytime, and by means of the stars during the night.

This navigator was also famous for knowing how to determine the longitude under his *muranga* tree with tremendous precision. In order to do that he made measurements with the sextant and checked the clock in his house. His clock was always on time and the navigator never forgot to wind it up scrupulously every night before going to sleep.

When this *mālimi* was aboard a ship (*nā*)² on long journeys, he changed. As soon as he had to perform his duty as a navigator he became nervous and distraught, so that his calculations lost accuracy.

And yet he knew how to work faultlessly with the sextant when he was in his favourite spot under the *muranga* tree.³



Maldivians say, “*Murangasdoshuge mālimi hen*” (“like the navigator under the *muranga* tree”) when a person's knowledge and skill fail at the critical moment or in the place where they are needed most.

2. *Nā* or *nau*, large ships of foreign design, such as brig- or schooner-type vessels.

3. Told by Muhammadu Rashīdu, Bashimāge, Male'.

46. Findana and the Cat

One day a cat wandered towards the far end of an island at noon. There were no shady trees and it was hot there, so he headed towards the seashore to feel cooler. When he came to the beach he saw a Findana bird pecking the sand at the edge of the waterline. The cat thought, “I am hungry after so much walking. This bird shall make a good meal.”

Thus he moved stealthily ahead towards the bird and jumped in front of it. Findana was caught by surprise and froze on the spot.

“I am going to eat you,” said the cat.

Findana told him, “Please don’t eat me before I have drunk part of this ocean.”

Somewhat bemused, the cat agreed and the bird continued pecking the wet sand under the watchful eye of the feline.

The clever bird actually went on eating little worms or crabs, as Findana birds always do, but the cat believed that Findana was truly drinking the water of the sea.

After a while the cat was dumbfounded. He could clearly make out that the sea receded and that the bird was moving farther and farther away, following the increasingly lower shoreline.

The real cause was that the tide was going out, but the foolish cat didn’t know it. Hence the cat was now very quiet. It followed Findana, walking behind him in amazement at how such a little bird could perform such a feat.

Suddenly the bird challenged him, “You can see how much I have been drinking. I am sure you cannot drink as much.”

The cat took up the challenge, scoffing at the bird, “I am much bigger than you, so I can drink much more.” Thus the cat began licking the saltwater with greed while Findana watched him.

But the tide had reached its lowest point, and the cat saw to his dismay that the waterline was not receding.

Findana goaded the cat on, “You should drink faster, because you have not drunk yet your part of the ocean.”

Eager to save his honour he cat swallowed mouthfuls of water zealously while the bird kept teasing him, “You have still drunk less than I did.”

In the end the cat’s belly was so full that it burst when it touched the sharp end of a broken seashell that was stuck in the sand.

When Findana saw that the cat was dead, he flew away relieved.¹

1. Told by Dombeage Muhammad Dīdī, Funāḍo, Fua Mulaku.

47. Nađalla Takuru

Nadalla is an island on the long coral reef fringing the western side of Huvadu Atoll. Takuru was born and raised in Nađalla. His parents were poor, ignorant and backward people, so he received no schooling. From the time of his childhood he used to do menial tasks instead of learning how to read and write, and as time went by he remained rude and illiterate. When he came of age, he realized the girls did not want to talk with him and that no one esteemed him. They said he was the poorest and least educated man in his island. But instead of accepting his fate, Takuru was unhappy, for he resented being despised by everyone.

Having decided to put an end to his wretched condition, Takuru left his home island and sailed southwards to Ađđu Atoll. In the hope that his luck would improve, the young man tried staying on different islands, but nobody paid much attention to him and the only tasks they would give him would be mere rough, hard work.

Takuru loathed toiling in unskilled jobs. What he longed for was to be respected and live a more refined life. But his way of talking was uncouth and he did not know any good stories or how to discuss interesting things, so he could not get along with the wealthier and more distinguished islanders.

Finally he ended up on the impoverished island of Hankeđe. He settled there and climbed palm trees and harvested coconuts for rich people. Takuru became used to the hard work and meagre income and lived in an untidy little shack like everyone else in the island. He was quite depressed, because his lot had not improved at all since he had left his home

island. “When I was living in Huvadu Atoll things were not worse than here,” Takuru pondered.

But time went by and after three years of this dull life, he married a young woman named Hankedē Havva. She was a dark-skinned and somewhat thickset girl. Since she had lived in the extreme poverty of all Hankedē islanders, she was as steeped in ignorance and darkness as Takuru himself. And yet he liked her very much because she always looked at him with admiration in her eyes and this gave the young man a much-needed dose of optimism.

One dark rainy night in their miserable little home, Takuru confided an ambitious plan to Hankedē Havva, “I am only a poor man now,” he told her, “but I have a plan for returning to my island in a few years rich and respected.” Then he warned her not to tell anyone about it. The young woman agreed and duly kept the secret.

Takuru and Havva lived humbly in Hankedē for another year. They would have been quite happy if they could have ignored the limitations of their poverty. But all that time Takuru loathed to be always surrounded by the bunch of coarse people that lived in Hankedē. His ambitions were set somewhere else and, with the exception of his wife, he treated everyone else in that benighted island with persistent contempt.

Finally the day came when Takuru decided that it was time to prepare to move back to Naḍalla. A few months before leaving, he stopped shaving and began grow a long beard. One day he took all his hard-earned savings and went to Hitadu. There he bought beautiful white clothes for himself: a white shirt, a lunghi (*munḍu*) of the best quality and a finely knitted white skull-cap (*tākiha*).

There was no money left to buy good clothes for his wife, and Takuru told her to be patient. Even though she was quite poorly dressed, the young woman didn’t complain because

her husband had explained to her that this was part of his plan to become rich.

When the Southwest Monsoon began to blow, Takuru took his few possessions and sailed with Hankedē Havva on a northbound boat back to the island of his birth. Reaching Huvadu Atoll, the boat stopped first at the island of Fiōri. Takuru decided that it would be a good idea to try his plan right there before reaching his own island. Thus he donned his new white clothes, covered his head with his *tākiha* and went ashore. Adopting a proud, aloof attitude, he informed everyone that he had just completed four years of studies in Arabia. The people believed him and were impressed. They invited him into their houses, and gave him good food and gifts. Takuru's instant success took him by surprise and he concluded, "My plan really works!"

But that same night Takuru was invited to take part in a *Maulūdu* (religious festival) and he felt anxious. Just before going, when his wife was helping him to arrange his white clothes, he became a bit nervous and Hankedē Havva reminded him, "You see, it's not so easy."

Knowing he must go or lose face, Takuru developed a bold plan of action and hoped for the best. That night the most venerable old men of the island gathered around him and sat down inside the pavilion. After a while, when everything was ready, Takuru was asked to begin the *Maulūdu* celebration. He swallowed his fear, and maintaining a dignified attitude, he began by chanting nonsense, combining Divehi words and sounds he deemed similar to Arabic.

*Hajakudaturuhadaifuuu haaduu dēhaaaduuu
matibandē muhailu ...*

*Vaaduudaturuhadaifuuu haaduu dēhaaaduuu
matibandē muhailu ...*

*Gadduudaturuhadaifuuu haaduu dēhaaaduuu
matibandē muhailu ...*

His poise was such that he convinced everyone that he knew what he was saying. Thus, Takuru fared even better than he had hoped and he was very satisfied with the results.

Back aboard the next day Hankedē Havva could not hide her delight and kept staring at her husband opening her eyes very wide in an admiring way. Takuru looked back at his wife's sweet round face and felt so flattered he had to smile.

Upon arriving to Naḍalla, his fame preceded him. The people on his boat had informed everyone that a very great and holy man was about to disembark. Thus, the men, women and children of the island were waiting for him at the beach and Takuru didn't disappoint them. He created a very good impression disembarking in his immaculate white clothes, striking a grave posture.



During the months that followed Takuru managed extremely well. The islanders seemed to have totally forgotten his humble origins; now everyone had a high regard for him. The important people of the island sought advice from him, and often even asked him to lead prayers in the mosque. Takuru was invited to recite religious chants in the houses of Naḍalla and other

islands. He was always given choice food and gifts and treated with deference in the best households. In time Takuru became wealthy and influential, and Hankedē Havva was very pleased with him. She enjoyed her status as a respectable woman, for she now could afford fine clothes and gold ornaments.

Many years passed and Takuru and his wife lived very well and had children. But, inevitably, one day their happiness came to an end.

A learned man from the island of Vādu in the same atoll, who was well-versed in Arabic, appeared one evening in Naḍalla just before sunset. Usually, whenever Takuru heard that an important person was expected in his island, he made an excuse to get firewood from a deserted island nearby. Thus he carefully avoided those who could have unmasked him. But this man was an unassuming person who arrived quietly and caught Takuru completely off-guard.

The scholar entered a house while Takuru was chanting in a corner, pretending to read from a book opened on a wooden holder by a lamp.

*Ilaa hatarudannagili faskanlōtari gobunneyyfaaan-
tilaaaa ...*

A sandalwood stick was burning in front of him. Carefully listening to Takuru's chant, the learned man could hardly believe his ears. He wondered, "What is that gibberish he is reciting?"

*Muhammaaaatakurufaaanu magaatukē mabaaaa-
nishiuru ...*

Going to stand next to Takuru, the man from Vādu glanced at the book and noticed that it was written in bold Arabic characters. "Were you reading this?" he interrupted Takuru, pointing at one page of the open book.

Having been respected in Naḍalla for years, Takuru replied "Yes," serenely and with haughtiness.

“You are an impostor!” proclaimed the man from Vādu and began reading in clear and fluent Arabic from the same book. “I am on my way to Havaru Tinadu and I will tell the Atoll Chief about you.”

Suddenly Takuru’s expression changed. Filled with fear, he begged the learned man not to tell anyone. He told him about his sad and hopeless youth, hoping to warm the old learned man’s heart. But the man was relentless in his resolve. He left the house and went about asking questions to find out more about Takuru from the people of Naḍalla.

The next day the learned man from Vādu sailed to the capital island of the Atoll and spoke to the Atoll Chief, revealing the truth about Takuru. “There is a wretched man on the island of Naḍalla who claims that he is a learned person who spent four years studying in Arabia. The fact is that he actually spent that time in Hankedē climbing coconut palms.”

The Atoll Chief sent a party of men to Naḍalla to locate Takuru. They found him cowering in his home and brought him to Havaru Tinadu by force. After giving him a hundred lashes, he was sent back to Naḍalla unceremoniously.

When Takuru was unmasked, Havva thought she would die of shame. Everyone teased and mocked her on the street and women and children made catcalls right by her house the whole day and a great part of the night, so she didn’t even dare to get out. Feeling deeply disappointed and betrayed by her husband, Hankedē Havva left Takuru. One night while he was sleeping, the woman furtively went aboard a boat and sailed back to Aḍḍu Atoll without leaving any trace.

Takuru would never see his wife again. He remained in Naḍalla the rest of his life in a state of dejection and despair. Even in his old age he was the poorest and least respected man of the island.¹

1. Told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Fua Mulaku.

48. Holḷavai (Fōḷavahi)

A very long time ago a twelve-oared *dōni* from Fua Mulaku was driven off course by a strong gale during a trading journey to Huvadū Atoll in the *iruvai* season.¹ There were sixteen people aboard, fourteen men and two women. After five days of howling winds and lashing rain, the weather conditions improved and the sun shone brightly.

That same day they saw some islands on the horizon that looked much like the Maldives. But they had been heading straight southwards for too long² and there are no more Maldivian Islands that further south. Thus the people in the *dōni* knew that they were in Holḷavai³ (the Chagos Archipelago), a remote desolate place. Even so, the familiar-looking islands seemed full of promise for the occupants of the boat after so many long days of being wet and cold in the high seas.

They sailed for hours around the unknown coral reef, lashed by the waves, examining it carefully. Unfortunately sunset was getting close and they were not able to find a passage. After a hefty discussion, they resolved not to spend another night on the boat running the risk of being carried further away by the ocean currents. So they decided to try to force their way through

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1. The Northeastern Monsoon, roughly between December and April. Hulangu season, the Southwestern Monsoon, is from May to November.
 2. The distance between Gan in Aḍḍu Atoll, the southernmost island of the Maldives, and Ile Yéyé in Peros Banhos Atoll, the closest island of the Chagos, is about 500 km.
 3. These islands were known as Holḷavai by people in Fua Mulaku and Aḍḍu. Oral tradition told about previous landings on the Chagos by southern Maldivians in former times and about the fact that the islands were uninhabited. In standard Maldivian, the Chagos are called Fōḷavahi (Fōlhavahi).

the reef. When they found a spot that looked favourable, the helmsman sailed the *dōni* straight across the reef towards the lagoon while all were holding their breath. But in the last minute, heaved by a powerful wave, the boat veered out of control and crashed heavily against the coral heads. Overwhelmed by the white foam of the breaker everyone fell in confusion into the shallow water. After wading through the lagoon, the men and women on the boat eventually reached on the beach, having salvaged all that they could from the *dōni*. Except for a few cuts and bruises everyone was safe ashore that evening.

The island was covered by thick, unkempt, brooding trees. The sun had set and the light was quickly disappearing. The men dug a well and, to everyone's delight, the water was good. After drinking and taking a bath to get rid of the salt, the first thing they noticed with alarm was that there were many very large crabs among the dead leaves. These crabs were of a type not found in the Maldives. There was no question of sleeping on the ground. Thus in the near-darkness they worked hard cutting sticks and lengths of flexible bark⁴ (*vāna*) to build platforms (*ashi*). They first built one for the women who quickly climbed on it and fell asleep. When all platforms were ready the men also stretched on them and slept soundly.

In the morning a few of the men went to catch fish while the others went to the reef to check the *dōni* that still was standing where it had run aground, smashed against the coral. After much effort they brought the boat to the beach. Then the same men went to explore the island. They found screwpine trees and, after cutting more sticks, they used the leaves to make thatched roofs as shelters over the platforms they had built the night before. Later they would build proper thatched houses.

4. Used as rope; from the *Hibiscus tiliaceus* tree, a tree with yellow or reddish flowers.

After inspecting the boat, everyone could see that the damage was serious. The hull was so badly shattered that the boat could not be repaired in a way that it would be able to withstand the 300-mile oceanic journey back to their island. Even though there was good wood around them, they had no proper tools and no one among them was a skilled carpenter.

The castaways had carried little food aboard the *dōni*, except for some presents intended for relatives and friends in Huvadū. Most of these were sweets⁵ that had already been eaten during the previous stormy days aboard. After more exploration they found some coconut trees on the island, as well as the nuts of the *midili* tree and leaves of the *bōshi* and *loho* trees.⁶

Weeks passed and then months. The men built a *kandofati* (raft)⁷ and thoroughly explored the area. They realized they were in an atoll with many small islands, very similar to the ones in the Maldives.⁸ Certain foods they didn't lack; they had reef fish in abundance, as well as birds and turtles and their eggs. But the craving to eat their home island fruits and tubers, like bananas, sweet potatoes and *kēvah* (cultivated screwpine), which were not available in Holļavai, was stronger day by day. They also were missing their families and friends. The women especially longed to see children, any children, and some evenings they cried, which put everyone in a sombre mood. All of them suffered from the thought that, since no one in Fua Mulaku could possibly know that they were languishing there, their people would think that they were dead.

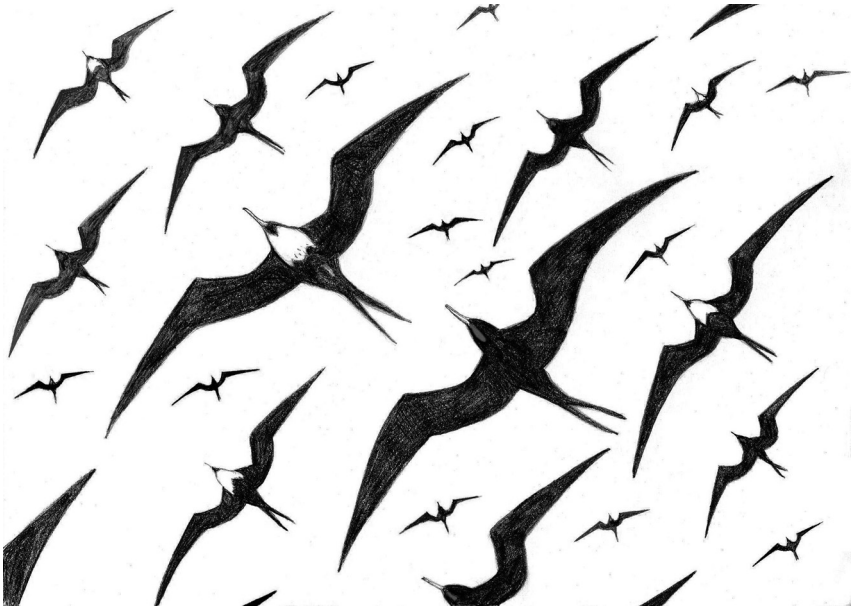
5. *Bonđi* and *āros* are home-made sweets wrapped in banana leaves.

6. *Terminalia catappa* nuts and *Heliotropium foertherianum* (*boshi*) and *Pisonia grandis* (*los*) leaves, usually not very valued as daily food.

7. Rafts were usually built with trunks of 'kandu' or 'kando', the Sea Hears (*Hernandia ovigera*).

8. Possibly one of the two atolls that would be later known as Peros Banhos and Salomon Atoll. Historically Maldivians never gave names to the different atolls of the Chagos. Fōļavahi was a collective name.

One day one man had an idea. He noticed that on one of the islands the frigatebirds⁹ were nesting. Then he told the assembled men and women that after a few weeks the frigatebirds would be leaving for the north. That was the time of the year when those birds came in great numbers to Fua Mulaku, and back then the islanders used to catch those birds during their yearly migration as a welcome addition to their diet. So if they could tie messages to the legs of the frigatebirds, there was a chance that somebody in Fua Mulaku would catch one of the birds with a message and come to their rescue.



The castaways all thought it was a good idea and became active at once. The women and men cut lengths of palm-leaves (*fanvah*) and, with the tip of their knife, engraved their names¹⁰ as well as the word ‘Hollavai’ in clear letters. Then the men went to the island of the frigate birds during the night while the birds were sleeping. Braving the stench of the place,

9. Large oceanic birds (genus *Fregata*) that visit the southernmost atolls of the Maldives seasonally.

10. The person’s name was preceded by the house name, like for example ‘Kub-beage Huseinu’.

they caught as many frigatebirds as possible and after tying the written strips of leaf around their legs, left the island.

A few weeks later, the stranded islanders observed that there was a big commotion going on in the frigatebirds' island. Finally the large black birds took off and began ascending higher and higher. They formed big regular clouds of many individuals in the sky that smoothly were carried northwards by the prevailing winds.

A few days later one boy in Fua Mulaku caught a frigatebird swooping over the treetops of the island. He found the message tied to the leg of the bird and promptly showed it to his parents, who brought it to the *ravveri*, the island chief. Subsequently a gathering was organized and three boats were sent to look for the lost men and women. Thus all the castaways were brought back home safe and sound.¹¹

11. Told by Kaṭiḅuge Ibrahīm Saīdu, Diguvāṇḁo, Fua Mulaku. He calculated that the events took place around the late 17th century, referring to the king who was ruling in that period. According to him this story is based on a true event.

49. A Heavy Kurumba

A blind man went out for an afternoon walk on his island. Along the way, his arm struck a passer-by, who was also blind.

This man exclaimed angrily, “Are you blind?”

The islander was surprised. “You should also have seen me, no?”

“Of course I saw you, but I am not from this island and this is no way to treat a visitor. I have just disembarked and I am not familiar with this place. You could have got out of the way.”

“Please don’t get angry, I didn’t recognize that you were not from here. I shall show you this island. Let’s go together for a walk. There is a very good palm tree grove along this way. We can cut some *kurumbas* (young coconuts) and drink the water.”

The visitor was mollified and agreed, “This is an excellent idea, let’s go together.”

As they walked, they talked of this and that, telling a bit about themselves. From time to time each blind man mentioned some object nearby, asking “Did you see that?” The other always answered, “Yes.”

When the islander ran into a palm tree, he announced, “Ah, here it is. A magnificent coconut palm, do you see it?”

“Of course I see it! It’s a fine palm tree indeed,” said the visitor touching the trunk.

“Today, before I met you, I went up so many palms that the skin under my feet has become thin. You will climb this one,” directed the islander. “As you drop the *kurumbas*, I will cut

them open. When you come down, they will be ready for us to drink.”

Promptly, the newcomer started going up the tree. After a while the local man shouted from below, “Not those, the paler bunch on the other side is better. That one on the right, do you see it?”

The climber responded, “Yes, yes, I see it.”

Suddenly, the man below heard the heavy thump of something falling from the palm. He demanded, “What did you do? Those are not *kurumbas*.”

But the other replied with a moan “Right! Those are not *kurumbas*! It’s me!”

The tree had no top. It was a dead palm trunk standing upright.¹

1. Told by Aishath Naazneen, Gāge, Male’.

50. Faḥḍiyāru Crab

Long ago, on a certain island there were many crabs living by the beach in their holes. The crab population was very high there. Unfortunately during the night many were being massacred.

Some crabs became very concerned about the numerous deaths. They went to ask Faḥḍiyāru crab (chief-judge crab) to do something about it.

Faḥḍiyāru crab came out of his hole one morning when the tide was low and went up a small sand mound. Then he gathered all the crabs of the beach around him. It was a massive congregation. As far as the eye could see, the sand and the dry reef were full of crabs.



Then Faṇḍiyāru crab cleared his throat and began his speech, “O crabs! Too many of us are being slaughtered. Yes! A thousand or a thousand and two hundred are killed every night while we are sleeping in our holes. There is no doubt that this is a great calamity for us crabs!”

Faṇḍiyāru crab looked around to see the effect of his speech. Not a sound could be heard. All crabs were listening with rapt attention. Then he continued, “Crabs! I myself I am going to stay awake tonight to see what is going on!”

The great multitude of crabs made sounds of approval clicking their claws and Faṇḍiyāru crab proudly walked down the sand heap.

That night Faṇḍiyāru crab did not sleep. He stayed awake, spying cautiously from the mouth of his hole. All of a sudden he saw such a huge *buḷitumbu*¹ coming towards him that his heart burst and he died.²

1. *Buḷitumbi* (*Numenius phaeopus*), a crab-eating bird having a large beak curving downwards.

2. Told by Karange Ahumadu, Fatma Didi’s son, in the Huvadū language.

51. The Honour of the Big Seashell

Long ago a small boy lived on an island in the north of Maldives. His parents were very poor and he had no education at all.

One morning the Atoll Chief came to this island with some important people. The boy saw the big boat anchored in the lagoon of his island and he went to the beach. When the visitors disembarked they brought ashore some equipment. The boy didn't know what those things were so he went closer to have a good look.

Seeing the boy there, a member of the small group of important people told him to hold some of the equipment. The man then asked the boy to come along with them. One of the persons in the party was a white man.

The boy walked along with the experts to different spots of the island carrying the equipment. They were planting poles at certain places and taking measurements. He enjoyed going along with the big people and he felt important when they were addressing him politely and giving him instructions from time to time. They explained that they were making charts, and that they went to all the islands drawing them on a big paper.

At lunch-time they were served a very good meal at the island chief's home. There was rice and chicken curry and other good things the boy had never eaten before. Already the visitors had become so familiar with him that they were calling the boy by name, and talking and joking with him. He felt so flattered being addressed by such refined people as if he was one of them that his chest swelled with pride.

In the afternoon he helped the party to take the equipment back to the ship, and when the dinghy brought him aboard, the boy was beside himself with joy. The ship was large and beautiful; everything was clean and in order. Tea was served and the boy sat on the deck dreaming, looking towards the shore of his island and feeling like a big man.

Yet the ship had to leave and the boy eventually was told to go down to the dinghy and back to his island. From the shore he watched the big ship weigh anchor and leave.

During the following days the boy was feeling wretched. He used to strike an aloof attitude that irritated his brothers and sisters as well as all the other children. He tried to make big talk and pretended that he was a more important person than them. The boy said that he would leave the island and become a wealthy and educated person. In the end he annoyed everyone and they avoided him. But he resented being left alone.

One day, after a quarrel with his siblings he went crying to his mother and said, “Mother, why are they all against me?”

His mother saw his predicament and told him, “They have no bad intentions, they just don’t like the way you talk to them now, after those visitors came here.”

“Mother, they gave me a position of honour. My brothers don’t respect me,” protested the boy.

“They are going to respect you even less if you are unfriendly with them, son,” explained the mother patiently. “We are all the same, from one island and one background. You are not a big person. Why should the other boys and girls fuss about you?”

“Listen very well my son: The honour you received is the honour of the big seashell (*fen kakkā boli*).¹ You know that shell – we leave it lying about in the yard, people and chickens step on it, it becomes dirty and we forget about it, even if it is

1. A kind of very large marine sea snail belonging to the *Cassidae* family



in front of our eyes. But then one day, when somebody needs a certain medicinal treatment, we take the shell and clean it thoroughly, then we look for a big pot and cook it, in order to use the water.

“Finally after fussing so much about it, we return it to its corner and the big seashell is forgotten again for a very long time.”

Thus the boy learned his lesson and was able to be happy and content again.²



In the Maldives when a person gets short-lived fame and attention, people often say, that person has got “*fen kakkā bolige izzaiy*” (the honour of the big seashell).

2. Told by Ibrahim, the barman at Halaveli resort, in 1985.

52. The Land Crab in the Kitchen

Land crabs¹ used to be very common in the Maldives. They are curious and intrusive. Unlike most crustaceans, they don't live in the sea, but on land. They are more active in the night and will enter a house not caring if people are living there. These crabs like to make their lairs in corners, under the beds or behind furniture.

Long ago all land crabs in the Maldives were fair in colour. But one day a carefree land crab entered a kitchen while a woman was boiling palm syrup (*rā hiyani*). This was not any ordinary kitchen, for the woman cooking there was Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge, a very beautiful woman and also a great sorceress. Instead of using firewood, she was thrusting her feet under the pot and abundant fire came out of them.

Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge had warned that no one should enter the kitchen while she was cooking, not even her husband. She was married to Ođitān Kalēge, the greatest *faṇḍita* man of the Maldives, who both loved and feared his wife.

The crab didn't know that Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge was a hot-tempered lady and that she would get very angry if someone saw her cooking. It just entered the kitchen because there was a nice smell, walking cautiously on tiptoes, as land crabs always do.

When this crab reached the threshold of the kitchen, it thought that no one had seen it. But Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge was

1. Tropical land crabs (*Gecarcinus lateralis*) lay their eggs in the water, where the juveniles live. Once they reach the adult stage they become fully terrestrial crabs.

always watchful, and she saw the intruder from the corner of her eye. She became furious at once.

The woman instantly got up from the fireplace and stepped with her left foot, still on fire, on top of the crab's shell. Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge moved so fast that the poor crustacean didn't have time to escape. When she saw that the back of the crab was burned, she let it go.

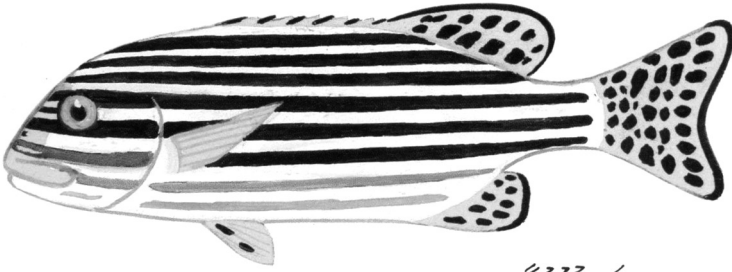
Outside it was raining heavily, and quickly the fire on the crab's back was extinguished. But the crustacean had a large black stain where he had been charred by Dōgi Āihā Kānlēge's foot.

And that is the reason why nowadays all land crabs in the Maldives have a black spot on top of their bodies.²

2. Told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Funādo, Fua Mulaku.

53. The Obstinate Mākana

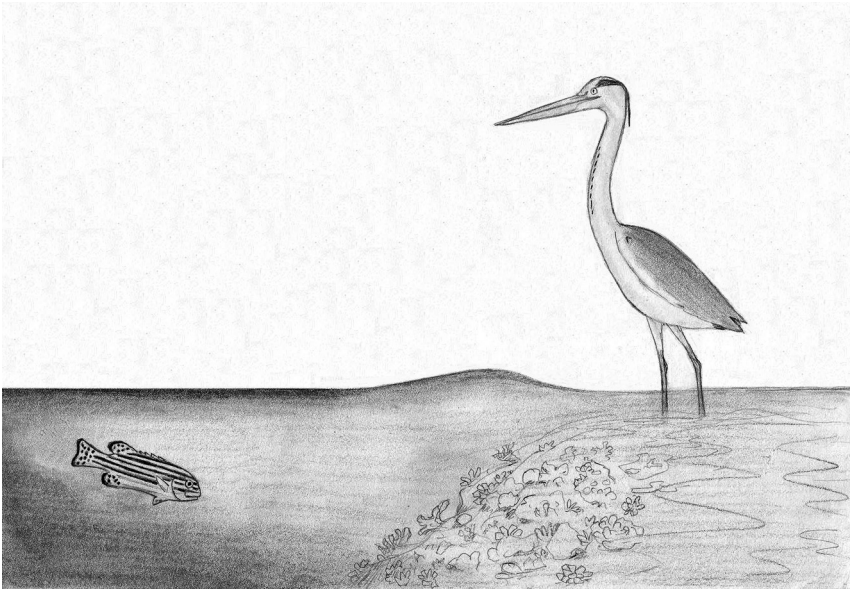
Once there was a grey heron (*Mākana*) who flew above the reef edge on a clear day. The ocean was unusually calm and all the details underwater could be easily seen. The bird looked down where the shelf quickly sinks and the water takes a darker blue-greenish hue and saw the back of a *Kaṇḍuguruva*, a beautiful fish swimming slowly under the water.¹ This fish was of quite a good size and *Mākana* thought, “Exactly the size of a good meal. I am bored of eating little fish.”



From then onwards *Mākana* went every day to that very spot at the outer side of the reef. It was a hard place to stand, for there was a steep slope where the waters quickly became deep. And in order to hold his ground, the bird could not go to a place deeper than his legs. This position was difficult because sometimes the ocean swell would make the bird’s feathers wet. *Mākana* often would get cold, but he held on.

From his vantage point at the edge of the reef, *Mākana* could see the striped fish he longed for in the bluish waters at a certain distance. He hoped for it to get close, but the fish

1. *Plectorhinchus orientalis*, a grunt striped lengthwise in alternate black and white.



remained at a level that was too deep for *Mākana* to catch it. For a bird like him cannot go under water.

Smaller fishes would dart close by, but the obstinate bird would ignore them. He had set his mind on eating only a *Kaṇḍuguruva* fish. His determination was such that he preferred to go hungry rather than giving up on his goal.

Days passed and the bird was weakening, but his stubbornness kept him going. The fish he wanted was not getting any closer, but he could glimpse its tantalizing shape in the depths before him.

Mākana proudly held on. Other birds passing by saw how he stood always at his spot, weary but full of dignity, for he knew what he wanted to eat and he was prepared to endure every trial.

But the *Kaṇḍuguruva* didn't come closer to the surface.

Finally *Mākana* was so exhausted that he died on that spot. He never got what he wanted, but he had never given up.²

2. This is the story of a popular song by Jēmu Donkamana. The tale is based on a Panchatantra story.

54. Satō and the Giant Crab

Now there are many divers in the Maldives, but few know the story of one of the first scuba divers to come to the islands.

Long ago, a man called Satō came to the southern islands of the Maldives with a boat. He was from Japan and he was not young anymore, for he had wrinkles around his eyes and his temples had gone grey. On his boat he had iron bottles and a loud compressor. In those times no Maldivian yet knew that it was possible to dive with bottles. So people were very surprised to see him coming back to the boat after many minutes under water.

From the bottom of the sea Satō brought out things the islanders had never seen before. Sea urchins, starfish, shells, sea-worms and certain fishes – these were creatures no one knew on the island but which had been always there offshore, very close by.

He often came with his wife; she was Japanese too. She was much younger than him and to the people of our island she looked just like a schoolgirl. She didn't dive; she just sat on the boat and smiled. Both Satō and his wife were very polite and gentle; they were always talking to the people with a smile on their faces. This is the highest form of courtesy in Maldivian culture.

Satō was a very courageous man. He dived in deep and scary places where the water looked dark blue. Regardless of the weather, even under bad seas, strong winds and rain, he would go down to the depths alone. Before jumping from the boat into the gloomy seas, he would not show the slightest indication of fear in his face.

One day Satō went to dive at a very dangerous place, the Medutila (also called Derahā), which is the peak of a submarine mountain in the middle of the vast Suvadiva Channel (*Huvadū Kaṇḍu*). This place is very difficult to spot. It looks like a paler blue patch surrounded by dark, deep ocean water. There, no island can be seen on the horizon for many dozens of miles.

Satō didn't flinch when he jumped into the sea over the Medutila. Then he came up to the boat and told the crew that there were submarine caves, so he needed to have another look. Satō took a new bottle and dived again at the same spot.

Southern islanders say that Satō died there. On that fateful day the boat crew saw the Japanese diver disappear underwater but he never came up again.

“Satō ventured into an underwater cave and a giant crab devoured him,” a crew member confirmed.¹



This is a local legend with some facts based on a real story. Apparently Satō went back to Japan and didn't die in the Maldives.

1. Told by Karange Husein Didi, Fua Mulaku

55. Mākana and his Brother-in-Law

Once upon a time, a grey heron (*Mākana*) lived on an island with his wife. One day his brother-in-law proposed that they plant a field together. “It will be hard work, but if you help me I will give you half the harvest.”

Mākana told his wife about the job, but she warned him, “My brother is a very cheeky person. Watch out.”

The next day Mākana went to his brother-in-law’s field and helped him weed it. It was difficult to do because the field was in an area that had been left to become jungle. It took them three days of constant effort, and Mākana was suspecting that his brother-in-law was giving him the worst tasks. But finally they cleared the field.

Then it took them three more days to plough it. Again Mākana thought that his brother-in-law was not working as hard as he was, but he brushed the thought aside.

The following day, the brother-in-law planted the field. When finally the work was done, he told Mākana, “I promised that I would give you half the harvest. I shall take the lower part and you will take the upper part of the plants that will grow.”

Mākana agreed and they both went home and waited for a few months.

It so happened that, when the time for the harvest came, Mākana realized with dismay that his brother-in-law had planted sweet potatoes. Thus, while the brother-in-law took home four big baskets of sweet potatoes, Mākana brought to his wife a big bunch of leaves.

She was annoyed, “You see, I warned you about my brother. But you paid no attention.”

During the next days Mākana sighed every time he had to eat the boiled leaves. Meanwhile the cunning brother-in-law blissfully ate sweet potatoes every day

At the next rainy season the brother-in-law came again to Mākana and asked him whether he would help him to plant another field. Mākana agreed, but added, “This time I want the lower part.”

For the next week Mākana toiled very hard with his brother-in-law in order to prepare the field. This time he was more eager to work because he was sure that he would get the better part of the harvest. After the ground was ready, the brother went alone to plant the field.

But this time the wily brother-in-law had planted bananas. After a few months had passed Mākana went back to the field for the harvest and saw how his brother-in-law carried away a dozen of banana bunches home, while he only had three baskets of banana roots, a very rough food item.¹

His wife got angry. “Why did you let yourself be fooled by my brother again?”

And this time it took Mākana a very long time to calm his wife down.²

1. Usually eaten only in times of famine in the Maldives.

2. Told by Ali Najibu, Nedunge, Male’.

56. The Vigani That Haunted Toshali Takuru

Once upon a time, on an island of the Maldives there lived a man called Toshali Takuru. One afternoon he decided to go to cut some small trees to make poles. On the way to the forest he passed close to an abandoned graveyard, a desolate place where people had been buried long ago. The tombs were unkempt, full of weeds, and the tombstones had fallen or stood at odd angles.



Island graveyard with ancient tombs, Fua Mulaku (photo by Mohamed Ibrahim Didi (Modi))

Suddenly Takuru felt that there was something behind him. He tried not to look back but after a while he was quite sure that there was definitely something. Finally, when he glanced without turning his whole head, he realized to his horror that it was a *Vigani*.¹

1. A generic name for the spirit of the dead (Sanskrit: *Vighna*).

Takuru saw that the *Vigani* was hovering in the air behind him and that it was alarmingly close to him. The man kept on walking without accelerating his pace, pretending that he had not noticed. He was expecting the *Vigani* to strike him dead and devour him any minute, but time passed and the spirit didn't attack.

Takuru cut some of the wood he needed, praying that the malevolent ghost behind his back would go away if he ignored him. But he sensed that it was just staying behind him, at a distance of about one foot. The *Vigani* didn't increase the gap between them, but it never went close enough to touch him.

The sun was setting and Takuru ran home hoping to outrun the evil spirit, but the *Vigani* stayed close to him even when he ran very fast. Panting and sweating, Takuru entered his home and closed the door. The *Vigani* stayed out, but during the night Takuru had the need to go to answer a call of nature. He hoped that the evil thing was gone, but as soon as he stepped out of the house, the *Vigani* was right there. Now it loomed terrifyingly in the darkness behind his back.

During the days that followed, whenever Takuru went out of the house the malevolent presence would follow him closely, always at his heels.

In the end Takuru became so desperate, he truly wished that the *Vigani* would either attack him and kill him or leave him alone.²



Nowadays in the Maldives if somebody gets into a situation or has a problem that neither gets solved nor reaches its dire conclusion, people will say, “*Toshali Takurah jehunu vigani,*” (This is like the *Vigani* that haunted Toshali Takuru).

2. Told by Aishath Naazneen, Gāge, Male’.

57. Haṇḍi Don Kamaṇā

Long ago Don Ahamadu, a handsome young carpenter, lived on Kāṣidū Island. He had no close relatives and lived alone in a small house where he had his workshop. He was a strong and hard-working person. Every day he left the village early in the morning and went into the forest to cut wood. He usually went there with a young boy who helped him to carry his tools. When they reached the middle of the forest, the boy would leave and Don Ahamadu would begin his toil.

One day, after finishing his hard work, Don Ahamadu sat under a tree and ate. Then he opened his cloth bag and sat calmly chewing betel and areca nut. He enjoyed this peaceful moment and began to sing couplets (*raivaru*) in a loud voice.

When he finished his song, he heard an eerie female voice sing in reply. Don Ahamadu wondered where that voice came from. “I didn’t know any woman on this island could sing like that,” he murmured to himself.

During the following days, Don Ahamadu heard that mysterious voice answering his songs again and again. One day the young man was sitting in his usual place chewing betel and he began to sing his desire to marry the woman who sang so sweetly in reply. All of a sudden the girl appeared before him and Don Ahamadu was so stunned he almost fell backwards.

In front of him stood a young woman of such radiant beauty her face seemed to shine. “I am Don Kamaṇā from Kāṣidū,” said the girl smiling at him. She was wearing a lovely red dress with *fēli* waistcloth and delicate flowers in her hair.

“I’ve never seen or heard of you. Did you grow up in this island?” Ahamadu tried to sound calm.

“Yes, I did. Perhaps you didn’t look around in the village very much.” She laughed.

He agreed. “That’s why I was so surprised. I didn’t know there was such beauty in Kāṣidū Island. I thought I loved you because of your voice. But now, having seen you, I love you more deeply than I thought I could ever love anyone. When shall we marry?”

“I am ready now. But, first, you must accept my conditions.”

“Tell me your conditions and I will agree.”

Then the girl said, “You must solemnly swear you will never ever look at me while I am by the well. Second, you must never look at me while I am in the kitchen. Third, you must never ask where I get fish and other food. And fourth, you must always allow me to wear the dresses I like.”

Relieved that her conditions seemed so easy, Don Ahamadu assented. As he walked home along with the pretty girl through the forest in the twilight he could not believe he was so lucky. The very next day the two young people were married.

Years passed and husband and wife lived together in bliss, as deeply in love as the day they met. Don Ahamadu was very proud of Don Kamaṇā. She was as beautiful as when he first saw her. Don Ahamadu faithfully kept his promise not to look while his wife was by the well or in the kitchen. He never asked where she got their fish either.

Don Kamaṇā chose her dresses, which were always red, and she liked wearing sweet-smelling flowers in her hair. Her husband didn’t find anything wrong with that. To him she always looked very pretty and neat.

As years went by, Don Kamaṇā gave birth to a girl and two boys who were as beautiful as she was. The three children cheered the house even more and the young couple was so happy they were all the time singing or laughing.



Unfortunately, after twelve years of marriage this happiness

came to an abrupt end. One fateful day Don Ahamadu went to the beach and saw a trading sailboat lowering its sails. Suddenly, he realized that while others travelled and kept in contact with people in other islands, he had isolated himself for years from his friends.

He asked somebody sitting there, “Where did that ship come from?”

“From the south. I think it is Takurufānu’s sailboat.”

Don Ahamadu decided to wait. Takurufānu, who was a trader and a highly respected *faṇḍita* man (sorcerer), was his friend and he had not seen him since the days before his marriage. After the vessel dropped the anchor and the passengers came ashore, Don Ahamadu went on board and met his friend.

Takurufānu was surprised at seeing his old friend. “Don Ahamadu! You are looking very well! Where have you been all this time?”

Don Ahamadu replied, “Here, on my island. It has been many years since I last saw you!”

Although very pleased to meet him, Takurufānu pretended he was annoyed. “Hmm! Before you used to visit me and come to my island. Now, for so long, you have kept to yourself. You could as well have been dead. I didn’t even get any news about you.”

A bit abashed, but smiling, Don Ahamadu explained, “Well, I am married now. But let’s go ashore!”

Arriving at Don Ahamadu’s home, Takurufānu sat down and considered his surroundings. He was impressed, “You have a very good house. No wonder you have kept to yourself. You must have a wonderful wife also, because everything is in its proper place. The richness of a home is not in its furnishing, but in orderliness and cleanliness. So ... where is your wife? Is she pretty too?”

Don Ahamadu was enthusiastic. “My friend, you know that people say that *‘A knife is pretty when it is sharp and a wife is*

pretty when she is kind.’ But my wife is not only very loving, but truly beautiful as well!”

His friend was amused by the sudden rapture and had to smile, “Well, well. You must show her to me, then.”

Don Ahamadu called Don Kamaṇā. The lovely young woman entered silently and leaned against the door frame in a graceful position. Takurufānu eyed her with a penetrating stare. Don Kamaṇā turned her gaze away from him. She tried to smile, but she couldn’t and a veil of deep sorrow passed across her face.

After some tense moments, seeing that neither his wife nor his guest said a word to each other, Don Ahamadu sent her away on some pretext.

Smiling nervously to break the tension he asked, “Isn’t she charming?” But as soon as he noticed the look on his friend’s face, Don Ahamadu’s grin froze.

Takurufānu was alarmed. “What have you done, my friend? Where did you find that woman?”

Don Ahamadu was puzzled, “In the forest. You know I cut firewood. Why are you so worried?”

“She is not human! You are married to something which is not a human being!”

“What! What is she then?” Don Ahamadu asked in shock.

“She is a *haṇḍi!*”

Fear overtook Don Ahamadu and he cried out, “Takurufānu! What can I do? I even have children from her!”

Seeing the shock in his friend’s face, Takurufānu told him, “Come with me.”

They both went to the island chief’s house and Takurufānu gave Don Ahamadu a very powerful magic spell written on a sharpened piece of *kuredi* (a very hard wood). He said, “Bury this stake in the *varuvā* corner¹ of the house. Your wife will be forced to leave by herself.”

Still frightened, Don Ahamadu asked, “What if she gets angry?”

1. The north-western corner.

“Why do you fear that woman so much? Is there something you have not told me about her?”

“Well, yes. She forbids me to look at her while she is by the well and while she is in the kitchen.”

“How could you agree to that? How foolish!”

The young man lowered his eyes. “I love her.”

Takurufānu ignored the sadness in his friend’s voice. “When you go home,” he told him, “spy on what she is doing and tell me later.”

Don Ahamadu went home in an anxious state and quickly buried the charm as instructed. Hearing his wife by the well, he peeked around the corner. Instantly he regretted it. Her appearance was terrible to behold. She bent over the well, and caught a tuna fish using her sharp, long teeth. Her face was hideous, her loosened hair looked wild and her every movement was repulsive.

Don Ahamadu concealed himself, so his wife would not know he was home. Later, hearing a noise in the kitchen, he peeked through the door at her. Don Kamaṇā sat with her legs thrust between the three stones supporting the cooking pot.



Where the firewood was normally placed, he saw flames flare from her feet. Shortly thereafter, the fish started boiling. A great chill went down the young man's spine and he fled into the house and sat on the bench.

Soon she came to him, "Do you want to eat?" she asked with her usual kind and musical tone which he had found so pleasant before.

Startled at hearing his wife's voice, the man said, "No!"

"Are you not hungry?" Don Kamaṇā enquired with a concerned look on her face.

Uncontrollable quivering overcame Don Ahamadu. "I'm not feeling well."

"What has happened to you?" she asked gently. "You have never been like this! You are shivering!"

He did not answer and stared in front of him, avoiding her gaze.

Then the beautiful woman spoke with a voice full of sadness, "You shouldn't think I'm ignorant of what's going on. I know everything. The moment I saw Takurufānu, I knew that he would bring us misfortune. Haven't we already been married twelve years? Isn't that of any value to you? All those years of blessings, along with the joy of our three children, you've sacrificed to that man's empty words. Why give so much importance to an outsider who just arrived this morning? Now, I know you don't love me! If you did, you would have valued my words, not someone else's." The harrowing tone of his wife's voice made Don Ahamadu realize, all of a sudden, how deeply he had hurt her.

He now turned his eyes towards his wife's charming face. She was holding her tears. He remained silent, remembering the bliss they had known together and feeling his love revive.

"It is true," she continued in sorrow, "I am a *haṇḍi*. But, even if I am a spirit and not human, what disgrace has befallen you? You knew only happiness with me. It was to spare you

the shock of seeing me in my other shape that I made those conditions when we married. I wanted to be a human being just for you.”

Her husband didn't know what to say and sighed. Now it dawned on him that he had made a huge mistake that was impossible to mend.

The young woman spoke in tears, “I know you have used potent magic to get rid of me. Therefore I must go. I could easily take revenge, and yet I have no wish to hurt you, because I still love you. Although I am more powerful than you can imagine, I will never use that power to harm you.”

Don Ahamadu began to cry, too. “I'm sorry for what I did. Please don't leave.”

She narrowed her eyes. “I will go, because you want to send me away. I will take half of my offspring and leave no other trace. Everything will be as it was before I came. I am sorry I made any difficulties for you. You shall not be troubled any more.”

Don Ahamadu pleaded, “Don Kamaṇā, please stay! I love you.”

Ignoring him, the woman took their three sobbing children to the beach. Then Haṇḍi Don Kamaṇā literally split her offspring in two equal halves, like fishermen do with a catch. She gave one child to Don Ahamadu and kept another child with her. The remaining child she deftly cut lengthwise in two with a cleaver (*kativali*). While the husband's half-child fell down and died immediately, Don Kamaṇā's half-child was alive. It stood up, followed his mother and sister into the sea and disappeared.

The young man followed her to the seashore, knelt down on the coral sand and wailed in despair. His son stood there crying with him. He pointed at the dead half-child which had begun to rot. Don Ahamadu buried it not far from the beach, close to the place where his wife had entered the sea. Every single day of his life he returned to that place. He remained for hours looking towards the sea, weeping bitterly.

Don Ahamadu never married again. He never talked to anyone and aged quickly. Claiming he was crazy, people avoided him until he died.

Don Kamaṇā never returned.



The place they lived was called Haṇḍi Gaṇḍuvaru. Until recently, the ruins could still be seen in Kāṣidū Island. Now, even those are gone.²

2. Told by Naima, Gaage, Male'. In ancient versions of the legend, the characters were not named. Abdulla Sādigu, a contemporary writer, popularized the names in the story.

58. Himiccha' eri Furēta (The Monster of Himiti)

In the 1950s the islanders of Himiti, an island in Nilande Atoll, informed the government that a sea monster (*furēta*) had come ashore. This is a frequent claim in the Maldives, for often monsters or evil spirits are sighted by islanders and then they usually disappear the following morning.

However, this time there was a difference; the islanders maintained that the monster was there, and an unusual amount of people had witnessed the comings and goings of the monster. Thus, the late Ibrāhīm Hilmi, Ākakāge, Male', a cultured gentleman and member of the administration, was sent by the government to investigate the matter. His instructions were to go to Himiti to verify the presence of a monster which was terrorizing the local population.

When Mr. Hilmi arrived on the island, the local authorities had prepared a formal welcome for him. He thought that it was uncanny that everyone he met agreed that the monster was there, even people he assessed as serious and balanced. He had expected to arrive on the island and find out that everything had been a bluff, a story concocted by the popular imagination and blown out of proportion by collective hysteria.

Questions were asked and some islanders said that presently the monster was hiding inshore because of the harsh midday sun. They seemed to know its habits. Ibrāhīm Hilmi was ushered onto a dinghy and went with a couple of officials to the place where the monster was.

It was noon and when the little boat touched the sand, the men accompanying him pointed to the spot where the monster

was supposed to be. There were indeed strange tracks in the sand. The other members of the group didn't seem to be willing to come along, so Mr. Hilmi walked up the beach to the tree-line. He was quite nervous because he was not sure what he would find there and he prayed it would not attack him.

Suddenly, under the bushes by the beach, in the soft green light, he saw a large seal¹ calmly resting on the dry leaves. It was grey in colour and very fat. The seal looked at Mr. Hilmi, but didn't move from the spot. It was neither aggressive nor scared; it just seemed indifferent.

Relieved, Ibrāhīm Hilmi went back to the dinghy and the frightened officials. Then he went to the Himiti Island office and told the authorities not to worry, that it was a stray sea animal and that it would go away on its own. Then he wrote his official report before returning to Male'.²

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1. In the Indian Ocean, seals are common in the cold islands and island groups lying thousands of miles south of the Maldives. However, these animals are extremely rare in the warm equatorial waters of the Maldivian Islands.
 2. Told by Ibrāhīm Hilmi, Ākakāge, Male'.

59. Santimariyambu

Long ago in the Maldives there were two young friends. One was called Angagadamituru and was very talkative, while the other was called Angamaḍumituru and was a quiet person. One day these two friends ate a dish called *māfuh* together. This is a mixture of millet flour, grated coconut and palm syrup.

Right after the good meal Angamaḍumituru went immediately to sleep on a wooden platform close to the beach. While he slept deeply, the fairy Santimariyambu came with her sack full of teeth. She checked his mouth and saw that Angamaḍumituru's teeth were dirty from having eaten *māfuh*, so she pulled them out and put a new set of teeth in his mouth. Angamaḍumituru saw the fairy but he kept very quiet and went on sleeping.

In the morning, Angamaḍumituru went to meet his friend Angagadamituru and showed him his beautiful new teeth. He told his friend that the fairy Santimariyambu had done that act of kindness while he was sleeping.

Just as his friend had done the night before, Angagadamituru ate *māfuh* that same night and went to sleep right away on the same wooden platform. He only pretended to be asleep though, and watched while Santimariyambu came with her sack full of teeth.

She looked into Angagadamituru's mouth and saw that his teeth were dirty from having eaten *māfuh*. After she pulled them out, Angagadamituru was so impatient that he opened his eyes and told the fairy, "Give me a beautiful set of teeth!" and startled Santimariyambu.

Offended, the fairy took her sack of teeth and emptied it on Angagadamituru's face.

The next morning Angagadamituru got up and realized that he had teeth sticking out all over his face.

He then got up from the platform and went back home in a most unhappy mood.¹

1. Told by Muhammadu Rashīdu, Bashimāge, Male'.

60. The Tree at the Island End

Long ago, a man called Kalēfānu lived on an island in the far north of the Maldives. He was the island chief and one of the wealthiest men in the whole atoll. He owned three boats and many coconut trees. His favourite son was Tuttu Kalēfānu, a handsome young man. Tuttu was kind and trustworthy, and his manners were flawless, as befits a person of his standing.

One morning, while drinking tea, Kalēfānu told his son, “Tuttu, I should have gone this morning to inspect our coconut trees at the southern end of the island, but I am sick with joint pains (*rājjebali*), and I cannot walk that far. You should go and check the condition of the trees before I send our men to bring down the coconuts.”

The young man dutifully agreed and left right after drinking his tea.

Tuttu Kalēfānu walked along the forest path to the area where his family owned all the coconut trees and inspected them. His island had been hit recently by unusually strong winds. But the young man could see that the palms were all right, except for some that were close to the southern point. The coconut trees stood more exposed to the elements in that place where the island becomes narrow, so they had been somewhat damaged by the weather. Tuttu was now ready to go back home. He was eager to give the favourable report to his father.

As he stood on the sandy landspit of the southern end, Tuttu Kalēfānu looked at the reef. It was a cloudy day, but there was no rain and there was a good wind. Despite being almost noon, it was not hot. Where Tuttu stood, he could clearly see

the neighbouring island. It lay on the same reef, but he had never been there unaccompanied. It was a poor island, without a harbour. Because of the shallow lagoon, the people there could not have boats to go fishing tuna, and anyway no one could even afford to build a boat there. People lived in shacks. They eked out a living from the reef fish they could catch.

Tuttu looked at the vegetation of the island in front of him; even trees didn't grow well there. They looked scruffy and stunted. Suddenly the young man felt curiosity and decided to go over to that island to have a look.



After wading in the lagoon for almost a mile, Tuttu Kalēfānu reached the beach of the other island. There were only *magū* bushes¹ and many small hermit crabs under them. He walked inland and heard a noise. Walking in the low jungle he came across a girl bent over a dry root, hacking it for firewood.

When the young woman saw him, she was startled and was about to flee. Tuttu told her not to be scared and smiled, “I am from the other island, and I just came over here to see how it is.”

1. *Scaevola taccada*, a bush growing close to the waterline.

The girl relaxed. She thought Tuttu Kalēfānu had an honest face and she liked him.

Tuttu suggested, “Let’s sit down here at the point.” Taking some betel leaf and arecanut from his pouch he offered it to the girl and she accepted. When he asked for her name, she said, “My name is Havvafuḷu.”

They sat down chewing and talking, feeling the breeze. The girl told him about her hard life. “We don’t have drinking water in the wells here. So I have to dig the ground with coconut shells and scoop some water out every morning. After we fill our pots we cover the hole again. The next day we have to dig another hole, in another spot. This is the only way we can get fresh water here.”

Tuttu found that she was articulate and bright. He had thought that poor people like her would be dull, like the men who worked for his father or the women who helped his mother in the kitchen.

Havvafuḷu said, “I have to go. It is difficult to get firewood in this low scrub and see how little I have got. My mother will be upset.” Then she pointed towards the dark silhouette of Tuttu’s island. “There are many trees in your place, lots of firewood there.”

“Have you been there?” asked Tuttu.

“No, but I can tell.” said Havvafuḷu smiling. She smiled in a certain way that Tuttu found irresistible. He fell in love with her.

He told her. “Can we meet again?”

“Perhaps,” the girl reflected, “I always have a lot of work.”

“I have an idea!” exclaimed Tuttu, “You will wade over to my island and collect all the firewood you want. It will be easy. Then we can meet.”

Havvafuḷu asked, “Will the girls there let me?”

Tuttu had to laugh, “There are no girls going there. All that area belongs to my father, and he doesn’t let anyone get close. The people obey.”

The girl abruptly became wary and opened her eyes wide. “You are Kalēfānu’s son?”

The boy said, “Do you know him?”

“Of course, everyone knows him,” she frowned, “What are you doing here? I have been thinking all this time you were an ordinary person like me. Are you trying to ridicule me?”

Tuttu didn’t understand. “I was not teasing you.” Then he told Havvafulu that he was in love with her.

She was shocked. “But I am just a poor, thin, dark girl. You are a handsome, educated, wealthy man. I think you are just trying to fool me.” Then she got up and went away.

Tuttu Kalēfānu followed the young woman and tried to convince her that he was sincere. She stopped to listen, but it took him a long time to persuade her to accept his words.

Havvafulu agreed to come to Tuttu’s island, but she cautioned, “If I cross over during the daytime, people may see me. I shall wade over tomorrow after sunset. My mother sleeps deeply and will not notice that I am out.”

And thus they parted.



The following evening Havvafulu stepped into the cool water of the reef and waded over to Tuttu Kalēfānu’s island. The water didn’t reach her waist. It was dark and there was only a faint crescent moon. The girl was frightened about what she was doing, but she liked Tuttu very much. She had been thinking about him during the previous night and the day that had just passed, so that her excitement made her forget her fears.

Meanwhile Tuttu Kalēfānu was not sure that Havvafulu would come. He was waiting at the point under a lone old tree and had gathered firewood for her to take. All of a sudden he could make out a shape on the reef and quicker than he had expected the girl drew near and looked for him in the shadows.

He whispered Havvafulu’s name, and she was a little bit startled; then she saw him and sat by his side. Tuttu told

Havvafuḷu how he had been thinking only about her the whole day. They talked about their lives and their families and the night went by. All too soon they heard the cuckoo birds sing. “It is going to be dawn, I have to go now!” said Havvafuḷu.

The girl tied the firewood into a bunch. She allowed Tuttu to help her balance the heavy, long bundle on her head. She said, “I shall come back tomorrow at the same time.” Then she bravely stepped into the water and was gone.

Tuttu Kalēfānu watched until her shape with the big load on her head disappeared into the night. Then he went home still feeling her warmth on him.

The following nights these two young people were as if in heaven. They met every evening under the solitary tree. The tree was gnarled. It had been damaged by the storms, and most of its branches were missing, but in the night the boy and the girl didn’t need the shade anyway. They were now deeply in love with each other and had lost the fear of dark and lonely places. Nights went by in a pleasant way and every time before dawn they experienced the pain of being separated.

One evening Tuttu told Havvafuḷu, “My father has noticed that I don’t care about other girls anymore. I told him that when my time to marry comes, I will marry. Pretending it was a joke I smiled and asked him, ‘Father, what if I marry a poor girl?’ But he didn’t like the joke. His face became grim. He told me that he trusts my good judgement and he warned me to be careful about what I choose in my life.”

The girl sighed and fell silent for a long time.

Tuttu told her, “I told you at the beginning that I didn’t want to betray you, but the situation is complicated. I know my father is very fond of me and I thought I would be able to dupe him very easily. But now I am not sure.”

Havvafuḷu was quiet for a while; then she spoke slowly, “Since I was small, my life has been very hard. Suddenly, when I knew you, I thought that this would change. But I don’t have

any hope now.” The girl got up, walked into the water and left. She didn’t even take the bundle of firewood that night.



The next evening Tuttu Kalēfānu went to the tree and saw that Havvafuḷu was already there. He could discern her shape under the tree against the starlit lagoon.

He was relieved to see the girl in that spot. When he went close to her, Tuttu said, “I am so glad to find you here. You left in such a bitter mood last night that I thought you would not come again.”

The girl remained quiet. After some time Tuttu tried to tease her and touched her face, but she turned towards him and opened her mouth.

Tuttu Kalēfānu froze in horror. The shape before him was not Havvafuḷu. In the darkness he could see a huge gaping mouth like a shark’s with big sharp white teeth. Then the figure he had mistaken for the girl began to grow until it was as tall as a coconut palm.

Tuttu tried to flee, but he was petrified. Even before he could utter a cry, the tall monster bent down and devoured the boy in one gulp.

The next morning Kalēfānu was told that his son had not slept in his bed. Nobody knew where he was.

People searched the entire island for Tuttu Kalēfānu, but the only thing they found was a big stain of blood in the sand right by the withered tree at the southern end.²

2. Told by Huseinkoibē, Hoḷudū Island, Southern Miladummaḍulu Atoll.

61. Māmeli Daita and Her Seven Children

Māmeli Daita is a fairy-tale woman who lives with her seven children, four daughters and three sons in a house at the end (*Rakkoļu*) of a certain island but nobody knows where it is.

One day the seven boys and girls went to the forest to forage for food at dawn and came back home with one breadfruit each. The children gave the seven breadfruits to their mother and told her, “Mother, cook *hiti* (a kind of stew with fish and spices) with these breadfruits. We will eat it when we come back home from school.” Then each of the children took their *liyāfila* (writing board) and left.

After her children went away Māmeli Daita peeled and cut the breadfruits and cooked *hiti*. As she sat in front of the pot stirring the stew, she took the ladle and tasted it. Then she went to look up the lane to see whether her children were coming. The woman tasted and looked again and tasted and looked again many times until she had eaten all the *hiti*. When she realized that the pot was empty, she put seven coconut half shells over the fireplace and put the pot on top of them.

When her seven children arrived, the eldest girl demanded, “Where is the *hiti*, mother? We are hungry.”

“Look over the fireplace”, Māmeli Daita said.

The seven children went there and didn’t see any *hiti* inside the shells.

The mother, seeing their disappointed faces, said, “Māgoļa Mādūni (the giant bird)¹ crapped on the grindstone while I was

1. A mythical giant Mākana (heron) that sits in the fork of a large two-branched Ashoka tree (*nikabilissa*); this bird is known as Māgalimatte Boņdo Dīni in the southernmost atolls.

grinding spices. I tried to clean the grindstone with my hand and water, but it was still dirty, then I tried to clean it with my hair, but the dirt didn't go. So I couldn't cook *hiti*, I had to throw the breadfruits away."

The children became angry. They looked at each other and vowed, "We will kill that bird tomorrow! Mother, make us bows and arrows."

Māmeli Daita tried to dissuade them from killing the bird, but the children were determined to go ahead. So she spent the night making bows and arrows for her children.

In the morning the mother was sleeping. Then each child took a bow and an arrow and they set off to kill the bird.

On the way the children saw some people who were bending coconut trees with their bare hands in order to drink the tender coconuts (*kurumba*).

The people saluted the children in the traditional Maldivian way by asking them, "Where are the seven Māmeli children going?"

The children replied in unison, "If you know that we are the seven Māmeli children, then you also should know where we are going."

One of the persons gathered there answered, "Hmm. If you can bend a coconut tree with your bare hands in order to drink the tender coconuts, then you surely can kill that bird."

The children tried and tried, but they could not bend any of the palms even an inch. Ashamed, they went on their way.

Before long they saw some people pulling up a stone well and drinking straight from it holding it with their hands. They saluted them, "Where are the seven Māmeli children going?"

Again the children said, "If you know that we are the seven Māmeli children, you also should know where we are going."

The men there answered, "Hmm. If you can pull up this stone well from the ground and drink straight from it holding it with your hands, you surely can kill Māgoḷa Mādūni."

The children tried and tried, but the well would not even budge. Quietly, they left and proceeded on their way.

They arrived at a spot where some people were thatching a mosque. The men below were hurling huge bunches of forty-two woven palm-leaves (*toshali*) to those who were sitting on the beams and tying them with rope to cover the roof. They paused and asked them, “Where are the seven Māmeli children going?”

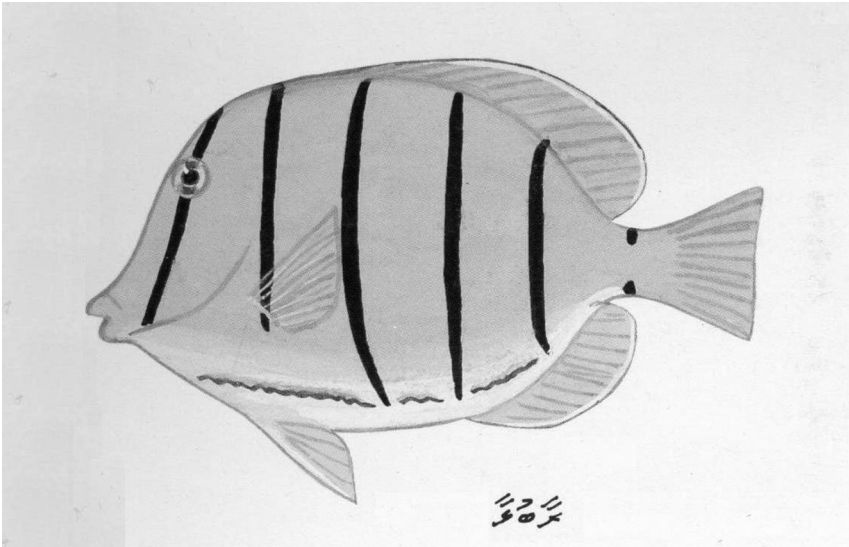
The children replied, “If you know that we are the seven Māmeli children, you also should know where we are going.”

The men answered, “Hmm. If you can throw this bunch of forty-two woven palm-leaves in the air to those people on the roof, you surely can slay the bird.”

The children tried and tried, but the bunch of forty-two woven palm-leaves was so massive they could barely move it.

Crestfallen, they left the place and continued their journey.

Then they came to a beach and saw a group of people eating small fishes (*rābuḷa*)². After eating the flesh of the fishes, they put the skeletons in the water and they swam away.



2. The Convict tang (*Acanthurus triostegus*), a small surgeonfish striped vertically in black.

The people there asked them, “Where are the seven Māmeli children going?”

The children replied, “If you know that we are the seven Māmeli children, you also should know where we are going.”

The people said, “Hmm. If you can eat the flesh of one of these fishes and make the skeleton swim in the sea, you surely can kill that bird.”

The children ate the fish but could not get the skeletons to swim away; instead they sank to the bottom. Ashamed, they continued their quest.

Close to the far end of the island, they saw a very old man sitting at a point where there was a fork in the path. “*Bēbe* (older brother)”, the children asked, “Do you know where the Māgoḷa Mādūni is?”

The man pointed to the left path and they followed it. And there at the other end of the island in the midst of a bleak landscape there was a big *nikabilissa* tree.³ Its branches formed a huge fork and the giant bird was sitting in the middle of it.

Māgoḷa Mādūni did not fear the children so it didn’t move. It was looming large, with its huge beak and grey feathers, looking down at the children sternly.

But the children were not scared. Each of them knotted an arrow to their bow-string. The first to shoot was Māmelige’s eldest daughter. She went close to the tree, aimed towards the bird and shot. But her arrow missed and hit the trunk of the tree in the middle. Then the bird caught her in his beak and gulped her down.

The second Māmeli child, a boy, aimed and shot his arrow. It hit the left branch close to the trunk. The bird caught him in his beak and gulped him down.

The third Māmeli child, a girl, shot her arrow. It hit the right branch close to the trunk. The bird caught her in his beak and gulped her down.

3. The Ashoka tree (*Saraca indica*).

The fourth Māmeli child, a boy, shot his arrow. It hit the far end of the left branch. The bird caught him in his beak and gulped him down.

The fifth Māmeli child, a girl, shot her arrow. It hit the far end of the left branch. The bird caught her in his beak and gulped her down.

The sixth Māmeli child, a boy, shot his arrow. It flew over the head of the bird between the two branches. The bird caught him and gulped him down.

The seventh and last Māmeli child shot her arrow. It hit the roots of the tree. The bird caught the small girl with his beak and gulped her down.

After a while the sun set and no child was left. The bird still sat on the fork of the tree brooding.

Māmeli Daita heard the news at dusk while she was sitting on her veranda. She fell onto the swingbed and cried and cried for a long time.

When it was completely dark outside, the woman got up and, still crying, went into the house. She let one tear drop fall on a taro leaf,⁴ folded it and tied it with a piece of cloth. Then she put the little bundle in her box very carefully.

Before long the box began to shake. So she took the little bundle out of the box and put it under her pillow. But the pillow also quivered. Then she put her tear drop bundle under the door, and the door shook. Then she put it under the mat, and the mat began to tremble.

Finally, Māmeli Daita took the small bundle and went close to the oil lamp. When she opened the taro leaf, the woman gave a cry of joy, for there was a beautiful little baby inside.

Māmeli Daita gave him one of her breasts and the baby sucked so eagerly that she could see how the boy quickly became big. Then she gave him her other breast and the baby

4. A drop on a taro leaf would stay as a little round droplet, without wetting the leaf.



finished all her milk. Since the woman had no more milk left she looked for food in the house. While Māmeli Daita was giving him food, the boy was growing before her eyes. Soon he had eaten all the food in the house.

Then the boy stood up, smiled and asked Māmeli Daita, “What is my name?”

The woman looked at him fondly and said, “You are Māmeli’s tear drop”.

The boy then asked, “Mother, don’t you have any other children?”

Yes I have, but Māgoḷa Mādūni, that wicked bird, ate them.

Māmeli’s Tear Drop was upset. “That wicked bird did that to you? To you who are so kind? I will kill it!”

The woman tried to dissuade him. “Now you are the only child I have left. If I lose you, I will have lost everything.”

“Mother!” exclaimed the boy, “a bird that did such a thing to you cannot dwell in this world without me killing it. Make me a bow and seven arrows!”

And thus Māmeli Daita spent the night making a bow and seven arrows for her Tear Drop.

The next morning Māmeli’s Tear Drop woke up early, took the bow and arrows and left.

On his way he met a group of people bending coconut trees to drink *kurumbas* from them. They greeted him, “Hey, Māmeli’s Tear Drop, where are you going?”

“If you know that I am Māmeli’s Tear Drop, you also know where I am going”, he answered.

The men said, “If you can bend the palm trees and drink *kurumbas*, you surely can kill that giant bird.”

He went to the nearest coconut tree, bent it down and drank a *kurumba*. When they saw this, they said, “You can do anything you want.”

Then he went happily on his way. After a while he met a group of people picking up a well as if it was a bowl, and drinking from it. They greeted him, “Hey, Māmeli’s Tear Drop, where are you going?”

“If you know that I am Māmeli’s Tear Drop, you also know where I am going”, the boy said.

The people challenged him, “If you can pick up the well and drink from it, you surely can kill Māgoḷa Mādūni.”

He grabbed the well, lifted it up and drank from it, as if from a bowl. Amazed, the people said, “No doubt, you will achieve what you have decided to do.”

Happily he continued on his way. Not far from there he met the group of people who were thatching the mosque. They were throwing huge bunches of thatch to the roof when they greeted him, “Hey, Māmeli’s Tear Drop, where are you going?”

“If you know that I am Māmeli’s Tear Drop, you also know where I am going”, said the boy

“Let’s see. If you can fling this big bunch of thatch up there, you surely can kill that bird.”

Māmeli's Tear Drop lifted the huge bunch of forty-two palm fronds, and without effort, flung it to the top of the roof. The people said, "Yes, you surely can do whatever you want."

The boy continued on his way happily until he arrived at the bend in the path close to the beach where there was a group of people eating *rābuḷa* fishes and putting their skeletons in the water to swim away. They greeted him, "Hey, Māmeli's Tear Drop, where are you going?"

The boy told them, "If you know that I am Māmeli's Tear Drop, you also know where I am going."

They said, "Well, if you can eat a *rābuḷa* and let its skeleton swim away, you surely can kill that bird."

Without further ado, Māmeli's Tear Drop took one of the fishes that they had caught, roasted it carefully and ate the flesh from it, then he put the skeleton into the water and it swam away.

The people were impressed, "You surely are able to kill that bird!"

Māmeli's Tear Drop continued cheerfully along the path.

Close to the end of the island, he came to the place where an old man was sitting in the middle of the fork in the path. The boy asked, "*Bēbe*, where is the Māgoḷa Mādūni? The old man pointed out the left path to him, and Tear Drop went on.

At the end of the island he saw the huge forked *nikabilissa* tree. The giant bird was sitting ominously in the middle of the fork among the red blossoms of the tree.

When he was under the tree, facing the bird, Tear Drop strung his bow, put one arrow on his string, and aimed. The first arrow hit the bird in its right leg. The bird was so surprised it didn't move.

The second arrow hit the bird in its left leg and left it immobilized. The third hit it in its forehead, the fourth in its belly, the fifth in the right wing, the sixth in the left wing, and the seventh in the throat. When the last one struck, Māgoḷa Mādūni fell messily from the tree.

Tear Drop took the giant bird by one wing and pulled it all the way home. While the sun was setting, Māmeli Daita saw him arriving and she was happy and relieved. Quickly, she went to the kitchen to take a big knife.

When the woman cut open the belly of the colossal bird, she saw that her seven children were sitting there in a circle juggling with green limes.

Then they all went to bathe in the *veu* (a stone pool with steps).

While Māmeli Daita and her seven children were bathing and playing in the pool, Tear Drop suddenly dissolved in front of them. The reason was that, after all, he was a tear drop.⁵

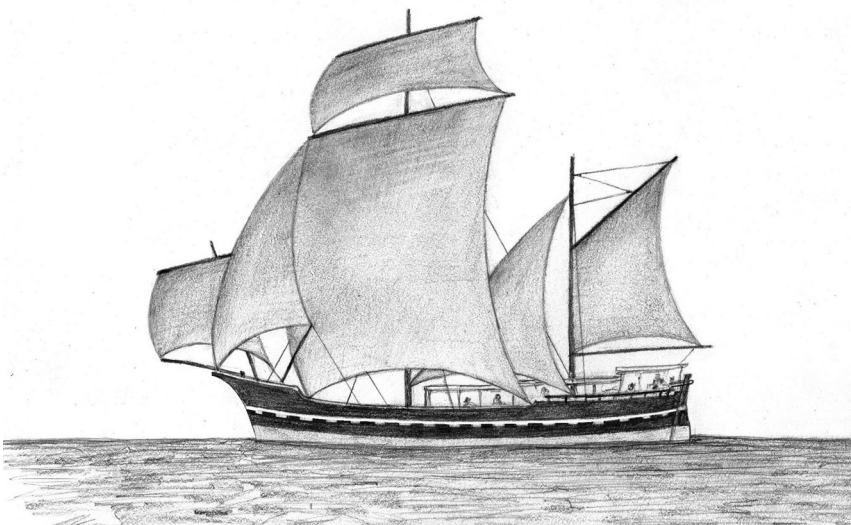
5. Told by Muhammadu Sālihu, Daisy Villa, Dūndigan, Fua Mulaku.

62. The Pride of the Fleet

In the early 1940s the Yā-hum-barās was the biggest trading ship (*veḍi* or *oḍi*) ever built in the Maldives. It was the pride of Aḍḍu Atoll, for no other atoll could boast of such a large vessel. It regularly made the annual thousand-mile journey between the south of the Maldives and Ceylon.

While the Second World War was raging, the Maldive Islands were a British Protectorate and stood on the side of the Allies. But, being away from the main scenes of battle, the Maldivians felt almost no ripple from the war. Their trade with Ceylon and southern India continued undisturbed

As it did every year, the Yā-hum-barās, fully loaded with a cargo of dry tuna fish and other island products, left Aḍḍu Atoll and sailed towards Ceylon.



Following the currents and carried by the Southwest monsoon winds, the journey posed no major difficulty. But several days out from Aḍḍu, a submarine of the Japanese Navy surfaced near the unarmed trading ship. The Japanese sailors boarded the Yā-hum-barās and cold-bloodedly killed some of the seafarers. A few of them, including the captain and chief officer, were taken on board the submarine. The rest were drowned.

The following day, the Ganduvari *veḍi*, another trading ship from Aḍḍu that was following the same route to Ceylon, sighted the abandoned Yā-hum-barās. Adrift in the middle of a cloud of marine birds, the once proud vessel was listing badly. The *mālimi* (navigator) thought, “Something wrong has happened there”. So he ordered the helmsman to turn and get closer.

The sails were hauled down and, as the Ganduvari *veḍi* approached the Yā-hum-barās, its passengers saw a decomposed body being eaten by the sea birds on the deck. The birds were fighting over the pieces of human flesh strewn about. The men aboard the Ganduvari *veḍi* then decided that it was better not to go on board and let it drift.

“There must be a demon there”, they concluded. “We must sail straight away from this accursed spot.”

But some of the traders were sceptical about the demon explanation. Hence they went across on a dinghy (*bokkura*), saying that they needed to have a closer look. When they climbed aboard the Yā-hum-barās, they noticed the dry blood and the traces of bullets on the wood. They returned to their ship saying this was no demon.

“Where are the people?” someone asked.

“We didn’t see anyone alive,” answered a trader. “There is only one dead body. As for all the others, we don’t know.”

“The ship has been attacked, but its freight has been left intact,” said another man who had been aboard the Yā-hum-barās.

Hearing this, the eyes of the traders aboard became big with greed.

Thus a party was organized to loot some of the goods on board the drifting ship.

However, since their ship was almost fully loaded, the captain warned the traders not to take too many heavy things aboard. So they brought only choice pieces of the derelict ship's cargo and some valuable things lying about. The *mālimi* also remembered to warn them not to take anything that could later be identified. After several trips on the *bokkura*, the Ganduvari *veḍi* was nearly overloaded; its hull was almost fully underwater. Finally they hoisted the main sail and sailed away, leaving the doomed Yā-hum-barās astern to its fate.

That night, everyone on the Ganduvari *veḍi* was silent. The traders and crew were satisfied with the booty they had taken. They had all liberally filled their pockets and were wealthier now. But on the other hand, the fact of not knowing what was the fate of all the people they had known was haunting them. What's more, having seen the decomposing body that had not been properly buried was a horrible memory, so that even after arriving at Ceylon, nearly everyone on board had nightmares for weeks.



A year later, in an island in Aḍḍu Atoll, a woman spread a mat on the sunny sandy street in front of her home. Then she put some pillows into the sunlight to get rid of the mouldy smell.

An older woman passing by saw one of the pillows and thought it looked familiar. She picked it up to examine it and suddenly she started screaming and crying, "I recognize it! I sewed it with my own hands! I know well the stitches I made to close it after stuffing in the kapok."

The woman of the house came out upon hearing the commotion, "What do you say? This is our pillow!"

“I swear in the Name of God that this is my husband’s!” exclaimed the older woman. Meanwhile passers-by and neighbours began to flock to the scene.

“You must be crazy”, yelled the younger one.

The older woman looked the other in the eyes and became very serious, “No, I am not. I am sure something has happened to my husband. I will go to the Atoll office and report this”

Having listened to the weeping woman’s declaration, the Atoll chief called together all those who had been on the Ganduvari *vedi* on that trip.

The traders and the crew of the Ganduvari *vedi* on that fateful journey were taken in one by one to the Atoll Office and closely questioned. Finally, despite their pact of silence, one revealed the secret, following which all the others confessed. After the matter was brought to the court they were all punished.

Years later the Second World War ended and the survivors of the Yā-hum-barās who had been taken prisoners by the Japanese came back to Aḍḍu Atoll from a concentration camp in Singapore.¹

1. Told by Katībuge Ibrahīm Saīdu, Diguvāṇḍo village, Fua Mulaku. The full version of this story, told by one of the survivors, appeared in the Maldivian magazine *Moonlight* in the 1970s.

63. The Mud Wasp (or Vērehuli)

A long time ago, there was a man who was very wise, learned and polite. This man had six wives. One day, he went home to the house of his first wife. She entertained him by talking of interesting things, telling him a lot of news. Thinking he had already eaten, she did not offer him food. The man was too polite to ask for it. He did not want his wife to think of him as greedy or eager, so he did not request a meal.

He went to the second wife's house, hoping that she would give him something to eat. She greeted him, asking, "Where have you come from?" He answered that he came from the first wife's house. Very happy to see him, his second wife made him sit down while she cleaned his clothes. Thinking he had already eaten, she did not give him any food.

While the man was very hungry, he did not want to give this wife cause to despise his first wife by asking for food. It could easily lead to an argument between them, he reflected.

Hoping to be fed in the next house, he set out for the third wife's home. Before he entered, he tightened the string around his waist holding up his *mundu* (lungi), and straightened the cloth folds. Very politely, the third wife asked him, "Where have you come from?" He said he had just visited his first and second wives.

Fearing he might think she assumed the other wives were keeping him hungry if she offered him food, and not wanting to get a nasty answer from him, the woman talked about many other pleasant things. Kindly, she urged him to stay.

By now, the man was very hungry. Seeing that his third wife was not preparing any food, he set out for the next house. Because his belly had shrunk, before he entered, he tightened the string around his waist.

The sun was now past noon and declining to the west. When his fourth wife came out to greet him, she had finished eating, and naturally thought that he had been fed in the three other wives' houses. She entertained him, but did not provide a meal.

Since he was very wise, the man understood immediately that no food would be given him in that house at this time. So he left.

Arriving at the house of the fifth wife, before he entered he again tightened the string around his shrinking waist. Being terribly hungry, he felt that this time the woman would surely realize his condition at her first glance at his face.

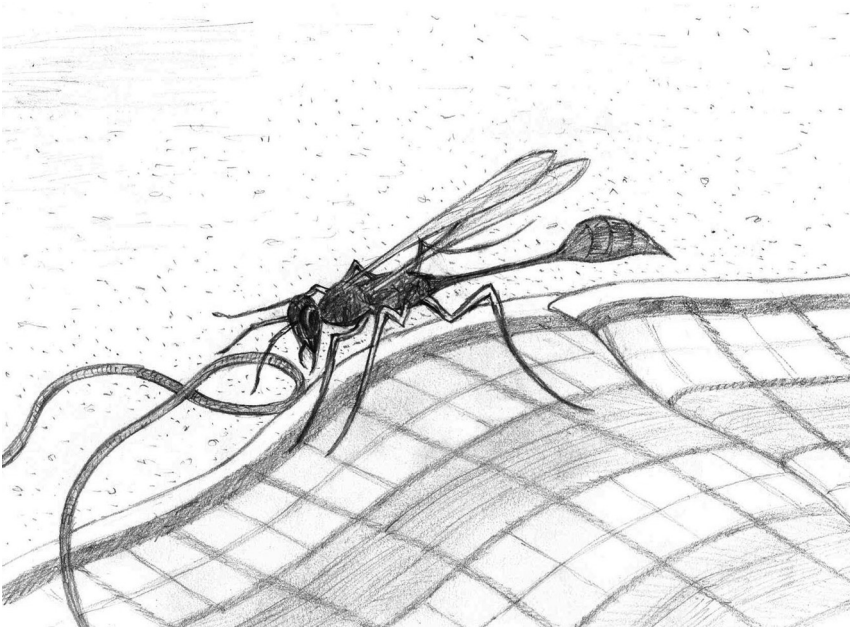
But his fifth wife only thought he was sick, and told him to rest on the swingbed. Meanwhile she entertained him by telling him very interesting stories and poems.

When it became clear to the man that he would not be fed, he got up, muttered some excuse, and left.

On his way to his sixth wife's house, the man was so hungry that his belly had shrunk to nothing. Before entering, he tightened the string around his waist once again, holding up his *muṇḍu* and straightening the cloth folds.

Seeing him so weak, his sixth wife exclaimed, "Stay here. Don't move, and don't go anywhere else". He lay down on the swingbed and she spoke to him very pleasantly. Then he told her that he had come from the other wives' houses. Angry that they had let him go in such a condition, she slandered the other wives, pointing out that she knew very well how to treat a sick man. However, she never talked about food.

Finally the man decided that the best thing was to return to his first wife's house and ask for food straight away. He



tightened the string around his waist again, and set out for her house. But on the way, he became so light, he started to fly.

By the time he arrived there, he was only a mud wasp (*vārehuli*), and his wife did not recognize him.

And that is how the mud wasp¹ got its very thin body.²

1. The mud wasp or mud dauber (*vārehuli*) is a long slender wasp with a thin thread-like waist.

2. Told by Rafīgu, Daḍimago, Fua Mulaku.

64. The Man Who Learned from Two Books

Having completed his education abroad, a young man called Rekifutu¹ returned to his island in Aḍḍu Atoll. He was handsome, from a good family, and was now well versed in the Qurān, Arabic and certain sciences. His parents were very proud of him, for he was their only male child, and his four sisters had missed him sorely and were very happy to have him back. The girls kept flattering their brother and fussing about him, and the truth is that he himself could not hide his pride in his achievements.

Soon after his return, Rekifutu went to the main mosque for the Friday prayers. The island chief was leading the prayers and, in the customary sermon (*khutuba*), this cunning man asserted that all islanders had the obligation to be very kind to their island chief and bring him money and presents whenever they could. God didn't want the island chief to be poor; instead He was pleased to see islanders treat their chief well. The sermon went on for quite a while, with the chief praising himself and bragging about his goodness.

Rekifutu was dismayed to hear these words. As soon as the sermon concluded, knowing that the islanders couldn't understand Arabic, he rose and directly addressed the boastful chief in that language, "What kind of sermon is this? You use your craftiness and the name of God to become richer at the expense of people who are quite poor. It is wrong to do that! Surely God is not pleased with your behaviour."

1. In the southern Maldives, the name "Reki" is given by parents after many stillbirths to a child who survives.

The chief was surprised, but he quickly smiled and replied in not-so-perfect Arabic, “Look here, my son, don’t get angry. These people are like animals, ignorant and stupid. If I can get revenue from them, I will do it. I am the chief of this island and I must be wealthy. I deserve it! It is difficult and tedious to rule over them all the time.” Finally, with a wink, he offered, “We can both benefit from this situation. If you are smart and don’t tell anybody about this, I shall give you part of my wealth.”

Rekifutu did not reply and the Friday prayers went on. At the end, when everyone was leaving the mosque, the young man stood at the gate of the compound, gathered the people about him and told them that their chief was a deceitful man, who was abusing his authority over them to increase his wealth. He declared, “God never said that chiefs should become rich at the expense of poor people.”

Furiously, the island chief elbowed his way through the crowd, demanding in a very loud voice, “Who is this insolent young man talking to you and insulting me? I have known this Rekifutu since he was a baby. What does he know about life? He went to a foreign country, and already thinks that everything can be done here as foreigners do. Now he has come back to our island and has become so arrogant that he wants to turn you against me. This impertinent youngster is not interested in the welfare of our island! His only aim is to put me down, I who have been so good to you, so that he may become a tyrannical ruler over you. If you listen to his subversive words, all of you will suffer. Think of me. You know me. I am your chief and I have always been good to you.”

Reacting angrily, the islanders became a blind mob who beat Rekifutu savagely. When they had had enough, they left the poor young man unconscious and bleeding at the gates of the mosque.

As soon as they heard the terrible news, Rekifutu’s sisters ran to the mosque with tears in their eyes. Since nobody was

willing to help them, the four sobbing girls had to carry their badly bruised brother home as well as they could. His mother tenderly cared for his wounds for many anxious weeks until he was completely healed. However, even after he was cured, her son was apathetic. He seemed to be always lost in thought, never smiling and joking as he had done before. Rekifutu's parents and sisters were worried, for he had become very silent and his eyes stared all the time vacantly. They feared the beating had affected his mind.

But Rekifutu's mental state was fine and during the time of his recovery he had been nurturing a hidden purpose. As soon as he felt fit enough, he left Addu Atoll without saying a word to anyone and went to Male'. There, in the capital, the young man frequented the dark alleys of the bazaar area and boldly became involved with the worst outlaws and thugs of the island kingdom. For two years Rekifutu lived discreetly among criminal elements and wanton women, cleverly disguising his identity and not telling any of his relatives.

When he returned to his island, everybody welcomed Rekifutu. Most people had forgotten how badly they had treated him. His parents and sisters were delighted to see the young man back safely. They hadn't had any news about him for a very long time and had feared that some disgrace had befallen him. As he hadn't told them of his whereabouts, they all assumed that he had spent the years abroad continuing his studies. In a breezy manner, Rekifutu tactfully avoided all the questions about his more recent activities during the happy and carefree days that followed.

Friday came and Rekifutu, impeccably dressed in white, went to the mosque. There, the chief gave his usual boastful, greedy and self-serving speech. Rekifutu said nothing and smiled confidently. The island chief studied him with slight apprehension. But after a while, as Rekifutu just kept smiling, he was pleased. He assumed that the learned young man was

now his supporter. Once he had finished his sermon without any unpleasant interruption, the chief thought “Good! I taught him a lesson. He has finally learned to respect his elders.”

At the end of the Friday prayers, Rekifutu very politely asked the chief for permission to speak. The island chief became alarmed and wondered, “What is he up to now?”

Rekifutu quickly calmed him saying he just intended to make a little speech to tell the islanders how fortunate they were to have such a good leader. Since the chief was a very vain man, he felt flattered and gave his permission readily.

Rekifutu addressed the crowd praising the chief in the most exaggerated terms. The unsuspecting island chief, standing beside him, was immensely satisfied. At the conclusion of his speech the young man emphatically assured the islanders that their leader was such a worthy and holy man, that if one of them was lucky enough to get hold of a droplet of his blood, or a piece of his clothing, or a tuft of his hair, the gates of heaven would surely be open for that person.

Suddenly, all the people turned towards the island chief and started to look at him with relish. Calmly detaching himself from the crowd, Rekifutu walked back home without hurry.

It is said that the chief didn’t make it to the gates of the mosque. The mob, in the ensuing frenzy, tore him to pieces. Some even used knives. Soon nothing was left of the island chief, not even a single blood droplet on the sand.²

2. Told by Ahmed Naseem, Nūḍalhī, Funāḍo, Fua Mulaku

65. The Legend of the Sandara Shell

The king of the moon lived very happily in his palace with his wife. Her beauty eclipsed all other women and she was very intelligent and courageous.

The king was a hugely wealthy man. But one day a hideous demon emerged from the sea, stole all the king's gold and jewels, and carried them away to his lair in the ocean's depths.

Stricken by this calamity, the king became very depressed and ill. The doctors feared for his health, agreeing, "The king is going to die."

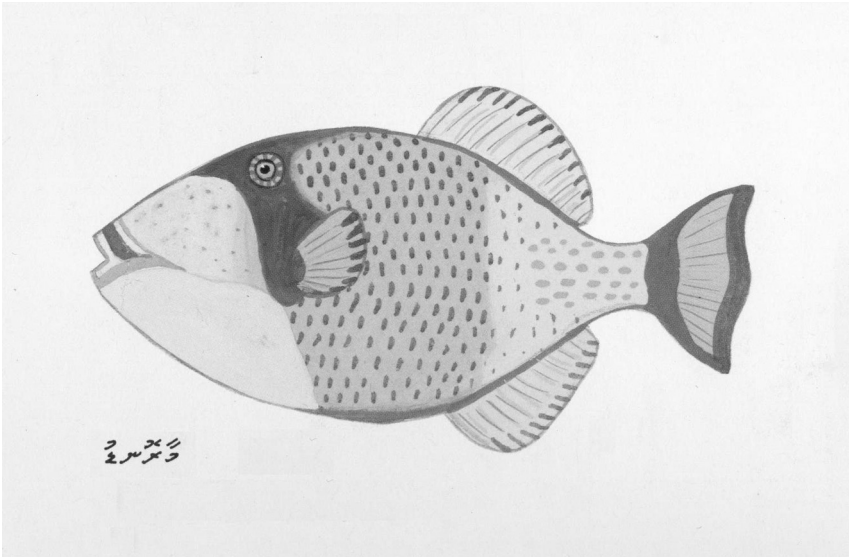
His wife was worried. She longed to bring the jewels and gold back from the bottom of the sea, but she didn't know how. She spent many sleepless nights in distress as her husband's condition worsened.

Finally the queen decided to go to the bottom of the sea and to retrieve the king's gold and jewels herself. Furtively, she left the palace in the middle of the night and went to the beach alone. She removed her royal dress, stepped into the dark water, and began swimming boldly into the black depths.

A big triggerfish (*māronḍu*)¹ met her. He carried a Sandara shell² between his teeth and dropped it into her right hand as she swam. Then he told her, "It is not fitting for you to swim

1. Titan triggerfish (*Balistoides viridescens*).

2. The Sandara *boli* is the cap, or *operculum* of a turbinid sea snail. It is hard and shaped like a half sphere and its flat side is white and marked with a spiral. When the round side is polished, its concentric circle looks like an eye. Even now, people occasionally wear it mounted in gold or silver as a necklace for a charm to ward off sickness. It is also ground into a powder to use in local medicine.



further, your majesty. If you continue, the demon will tear you to pieces.”

“But I must recover the jewels and the gold from the hand of that wicked demon”, she said. “If I don’t go my husband will surely die.”

The fish replied, “O Queen. I admire your courage. Take this Sandara shell to your husband. He must wear it. Then he will become strong enough to fight the demon.”

But she said, “My husband is very weak, and almost dead. He will not be able to fight.”

The triggerfish said, “The king will be strong, if he wears this shell.”

Clutching the Sandara shell in her hand, the queen swam rapidly back to the beach. She ran to the palace, arriving before dawn. There she made a necklace with the shell. Then she washed and perfumed herself, put on an elegant dress and went to her husband’s chambers.

The king was sleeping, but as soon his beautiful wife entered, he awoke. He looked very bad. “You are so beautiful and I am going to die,” he moaned.

Pressing the shell necklace into his hand, the Queen said, “You must wear this on you.”

When she put the shell on him, new vigour filled the king’s body. He exclaimed, “I feel very strong now, strong enough to take my jewels and my gold back from the bottom of the sea.”

So the king went down to the beach. As soon as he dived into the water, he became a mighty fish with powerful jaws and huge teeth.

Plunging into the gloomy abyss, he devoured the demon and returned with the jewels and the gold. As soon as the magnificent fish touched the sand, the king took his human form again and waded out of the water. Then his servants, who had been waiting on the beach, took the treasures back to the palace.

On his arrival at the palace everyone rejoiced and praised the king for his brave deeds. “Long live the King of the Moon!” the crowds shouted.

But turning to his wife he said, “This is your shell. If you hadn’t given it to me, I would not have had the strength to defeat that demon and get back the gold and the jewels, for it was awfully deep and dark in the ocean, and the demon was very powerful.”

Hence the merit went to the Queen of the Moon. Even now, in Adḍu Atoll, when children play with Sandara shells, they say, “This is the *kubus*³ of the King of the Moon’s wife.”⁴

3. A type of local cake shaped like half a sphere.

4. Told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Funāḍo, Fua Mulaku.

66. The Master Navigator

A man called Hasanu, from an island in Huvadu Atoll, was brought in chains to Havaru Tinadu Island, the atoll capital. Since he was accused of robbery, the Atoll Chief locked him in a room of the Atoll Office, expecting to banish him soon. Hasanu sat silently in the room, wondering what would happen to him.

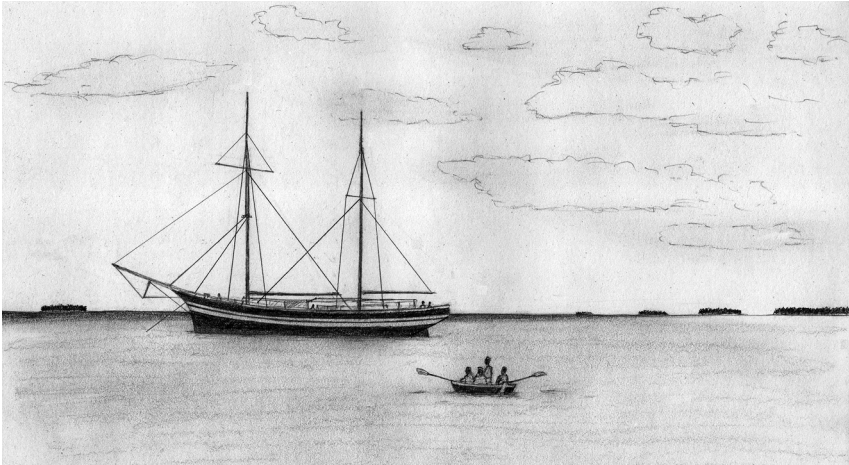
After a few days, a big sailing vessel (*nau*), anchored off Havaru Tinadu at a late hour. When the sailors entered the Atoll Office, they could not find anyone. The building was in darkness except for a small oil lamp. The Atoll Chief had left and was at his home having dinner. The crew called and called into the empty Atoll Office building until Hasanu, who had been dozing, answered.

It so happened that the key had been left in the lock to the room where Hasanu was held, so that the unsuspecting sailors opened the door and he came out. At once Hasanu saw that they were strangers from another atoll. Since they were not likely to know about him, he told the ship's crew that he had been locked in accidentally.

When Hasanu asked why they had come to Havaru Tinadu, the sailors explained that they were from Aḍḍu Atoll. They were heading for Bengal when their master navigator (*boḍu mālimi*) was washed overboard and got lost at sea. They wanted to know if there was a master navigator in the island to lead the ship to her destination. Anxiously they explained, "It will be difficult to sail back to Aḍḍu against the prevailing winds and if the journey is delayed much longer, all our cargo will get spoiled."

Hasanu thought quickly and, seeing an opportunity to escape, he seized the chance. Hiding his excitement he assumed a detached manner and told them, “You are very lucky you Ađđu people, because I happen to be the best navigator in this atoll, but tomorrow I may have important matters to attend to, so only if you take me aboard immediately shall I go with you.”

The ship’s crew agreed gladly and Hasanu began to strike a proud and aloof attitude as they led him to their dinghy.



Thus Hasanu was brought aboard and the large ship was made ready to set sail. Suddenly it dawned on Hasanu that he had done a very foolish thing, for he knew nothing about navigation and the tall ship was imposing with its great amount of masts, spars, sails and ropes. Hasanu was so intimidated that he froze. He didn’t dare to move from where he was standing and began to shiver in fear.

When the ship’s first mate (*kođa mālīmi*) came close, asking him to take command of the ship. Hasanu explained that he was feeling unwell. The first mate could see plainly that Hasanu’s face was not looking well at all, so he asked, “What shall we do then?”

Hasanu replied, “I will need some time to recover from my present state, but surely you know more or less how to run the ship.”

The first mate proudly replied, “Of course I do!” Glad at the chance to display his skill, he eagerly assumed command.

Days passed, and, as the Boḍu Mālīmi, Hasanu enjoyed the luxury of being treated with respect by such important people as traders and sailors. He had good food and the best cabin aboard. From time to time the first mate would deferentially approach Hasanu to tell him that he had taken a certain decision, and he, as the Boḍu Mālīmi, would smile in a condescending way and say, “Good, Koḍa Mālīmi, very good, I am glad you did that.” Then the first mate’s chest would swell with pride.

One day as they were approaching Calcutta, Hasanu strolled leisurely along the deck. Noticing the big ring at the top of an anchor, he asked one of the seamen, “What is this for?”

Quickly the sailor went to the first mate and reported that the Boḍu Mālīmi had asked a very silly question. The first mate pondered over the fact that if the biggest navigation master in Huvadu Atoll gave a hint like that, there must be some meaning to it.

Finally he came to the conclusion that the Boḍu Mālīmi was tactfully suggesting to him that he should drop anchor, and that he had done so indirectly in order not to hurt his pride by giving the order aloud to him. Thus the first mate told the crew to leave their course and head towards the shore in order to drop anchor in the first favourable place they saw. In his heart the first mate was grateful to the Boḍu Mālīmi for being so considerate and kind.

The ship anchored on the leeward side of a large sand bar close to the shore, in a very sheltered spot. That night, the biggest typhoon ever blew ferociously over the coast. Secure in their safely anchored ship the men aboard were quietly having dinner. The first mate pointed to the storm raging outside

and whispered to the traders and sailors, “If it had not been for our Boḍu Mālimi we would now be at sea. Our lives and our merchandise would have been lost.”

Meanwhile, Hasanu slept comfortably in his warm and dry cabin, hearing the wind and the rain lashing the ship. When he went out for some fresh air to the wind-beaten deck next morning he didn’t fail to notice the increased regard in which everyone held him. The younger sailors and the traders looked at him in awe and got humbly out of the way when Hasanu crossed their path. Hasanu wondered about the reason for the change in attitude but couldn’t find an explanation. “What did I do?” He marvelled.

After a few days, the storm finally calmed, the anchors were hauled up and the ship finally set sail for its destination. In Calcutta the traders sold their merchandise for an unusually good profit, for most ships had been sunk in the storm. When it was time to return to the Maldives the traders on Hasanu’s ship left Bengal loaded with a much better cargo than they had ever hoped to get.

On the journey back to the Maldivian Islands, Hasanu became bored with travelling. Even though there was good food day after day on board, he felt uneasy and lonely. Hasanu could not get used to being treated with respect, for no one would joke in his presence or would dare to be informal with him. When they came closer to the Maldives, Hasanu told the traders and crew that he had been already too long at sea, and that he was longing to go back home.

Therefore, when the ship arrived at Huvadu Atoll, Hasanu disembarked at Havaru Tinadu Island. The first mate was so sad to see Hasanu leave that he was in tears and the grateful traders and sailors overwhelmed their Boḍu Mālimi with so many presents that it took three dinghies to bring all his goods ashore. Hasanu was now a wealthy man. After exchanging courtesies, the big ship weighed anchor and left.

When the Atoll Chief saw him, he exclaimed angrily, “Hasanu! Where have you been? I nearly went crazy looking for you. You should have been locked up in that room.”

When Hasanu related his adventure, the Atoll Chief was in awe.

After thinking for a while he told Hasanu, “This is a sign from God. You have been greatly blessed.” He looked into his eyes and said, “Hasanu, you were a useless man before, but if you begin a righteous life now, I shall let you go free.”

Hearing this Hasanu promised the Atoll Chief that he would become an honest person. Thereupon the Atoll Chief allowed him to return to his home island. In gratitude Hasanu gave him part of his presents.

Hasanu came back to his island as a wealthy and free man. He became a worthy and respected islander and kept his word to the Atoll Chief till the end of his days.¹

1. Told by Vaḍige Kudu Bēbe, Fua Mulaku.

67. The Moon in the Jar

Once upon a time on the island of Dageti in Ari Atoll lived a man called Sēku Vasallī. He was a big, tall and very black man. His teeth were very white. He was just a bit crazy, but had a very good heart. Therefore, all the islanders liked him very much.

After his parents' death, Sēku Vasallī inherited a big coconut plantation. He was very well off and had his own fishing sailboat as well. His wife was called Maryambu and they had two daughters.

One day, on Friday, Sēku Vasallī's sailboat was in drydock. He and two boys were scratching the seaweed off its keel. Close to noon, Sēku Vasalli told the two boys, "You boys should go to Hukuru prayer now. But first you must go and take a bath. I will go later, after swimming in the sea."

The two boys left and Sēku Vasallī went to the beach. Walking along the white sandy beach, he was nearly blinded by the noon glare. He thought he saw something shiny far off on the white sand, close to the water's edge. "What is that?" he wondered.

Forgetting about his sea bath Sēku Vasallī went closer and saw that it was a very unusual seashell. He held it in his hand and admired it, fascinated by its beauty. His first thought was, "I have never seen this before. I must take it to the *Radun*. He will give me presents in return."

When he arrived home his wife could not fail to notice his big grin. "Why do you smile so much today?"

He said, "I come from the beach; look what I found!" And he opened his hand.

With big surprised eyes she exclaimed, “How wonderful! What are you going to do with it?”

“I will go to Male’ to give it to the *Radun*. Surely he will like it, and perhaps he will give me many gifts.”

Maryambu agreed, “Yes, this is true. But meanwhile don’t leave it lying about.”

So the woman covered the lovely shell with a piece of cloth and kept it in her husband’s box.



Sēku Vasallī went to Male’ on the next sailboat. Right upon arrival, he went straight to the palace and told the Doruvān (sentry) at the palace gate, “I have come to see the *Radun*.”

The Doruvān asked, “What is your name?”

Proudly, he answered, “Dageti Sēku Vasallī.”

The Doruvān went inside to the king’s chamber and announced, “A man from Dageti called Sēku Vasallī has come to meet you.”

The *Radun* thought, “Today has been a very boring day.” He said, “I don’t know anyone from that island, but let him come in.”

Thus, Sēku Vasallī came into the presence of the *Radun*.

The king realized that he had been right allowing the man to come into his presence because he looked really amusing. “What have you come for?” he asked.

Sēku Vasallī was a bit scared. He said, “I come with a present for your Majesty.”

“Where is that present?” enquired the *Radun*.

Sēku Vasallī came closer, extended his arm and opened his hand, smiling.

The *Radun* was truly amazed, and his mouth opened while he looked at the shell exclaiming, “What a beauty! This must be a very rare shell, for I have never seen one like this in my entire kingdom.”

The *Radun* took it gratefully and ordered nice presents to be given to Sēku Vasallī, concluding the audience saying, “Next time you come to Male’, just come to meet me. Now, we are friends.”

The truth is that the *Radun* had become fond of Sēku Vasallī because he was a quite comical man, but he did not tell him so.

Thus, Sēku Vasallī went back to his island loaded with presents. All the islanders were astonished, and shook their heads saying, “So crazy, but now he is the friend of the *Radun*.”



A year later, around the time of Boḍu Īdu (the Muslim festival of sacrifice), when many islanders used to travel to Male’, Sēku Vasallī also decided to go.

This time he went on his own sailboat, bringing fish, *rihākuru* (salty tuna sauce) and palm syrup for the *Radun*. As he was travelling on the broad channel between Ari Atoll and Male’ Atoll, Sēku Vasallī was lying on the deck of the sailboat enjoying the soft midnight breeze. There was a most beautiful full moon in the sky and the man relaxed while thinking about the impression he would make arriving at the palace with all his presents. Suddenly, he was thirsty and he went to the stern post where the water jar was secured.

Sēku Vasallī took off the wooden cap and saw the moon reflected in the water inside the jar. He froze in his position, thinking, “Eh, this is better than the gifts I bring. This moon must be brought to the *Radun*.”

Promptly, he took a piece of cloth and, making sure that the moon was still inside with a quick final glance, Sēku Vasallī put it over the mouth of the jar and fastened it with rope. He was satisfied; the *Radun* would think of him as a man bringing rare presents. Once he arrived in Male’, Sēku Vasallī went to the palace straight away.

The *Radun* received him happily, saying, “Come in, come in.”

Nervously, Sēku Vasallī said, “I brought presents.”

“That’s good. Bring them here,” said the *Radun* smiling.

Sēku Vasallī went back to the sailboat, unloaded the presents and brought them to the king. The *Radun* saw that the presents looked like the average stuff islanders would bring and said, “I am very pleased with you Sēku Vasallī. But you didn’t need to bring those presents, because I told you that we were friends. I am glad just to see you.”

Sēku Vasallī smiled, “Wait, I brought a present which will make you even happier.”

“What could that be?” wondered the *Radun*.

Swelling his chest with pride, and showing his broadest grin, Sēku Vasallī said, “This time I brought your Majesty the moon as a present!”

“The moon?” asked the *Radun*, frowning.

“Yes. I was on the journey last night, and saw it inside the water jar, so I quickly caught it,” he said patting the water jug beside him.

Repressing laughter, the *Radun* said, “No, no, no, that can’t be.”

Sēku Vasallī looked at the king with a serious and frank face, “It’s inside the jar.” With bright eyes, he said, “Your Majesty should open it.”

Of course, the *Radun* was not fooled, but kept acting his part. Smiling, he untied the rope. Then he took off the cloth and looked. “There is nothing here.”

“Nothing?” Sēku Vasallī went to look inside the jar, then stared in shock at the *Radun*, his mouth gaping.

The *Radun* tapped his shoulder, “I told you, Sēku Vasallī. I had enough with the other present. You didn’t need to bring anything more. Every time I look at that beautiful, rare shell, I remember you.”

Despite the *Radun*'s words of comfort, Sēku Vasallī went out of the palace in a very dejected mood. He avoided his friends in the bazaar area and when night fell, he went to his sailboat to sleep. Stepping over loose planks on deck, he looked down into the calm keel water inside the boat and saw the reflection of the full moon.

Furiously Sēku Vasallī exclaimed, “You cunning little scoundrel! Where have you been? How did you get out? Because of you I suffered great shame at the king’s court. Now, you will see!” Saying thus he took the long wooden pole and started to pound the keel of the sailboat. Finally the hull, damaged by the repeated impacts, let water seep in and the sailboat sank.¹

1. Told by Aishath Naazneen, Gāge, Male’.

68. The Lament

In Miladummaḍulu Atoll there is an uninhabited island called Burehifasdū. Long ago, an old man from a distant island and two young sisters from Hembadū, the neighbouring inhabited island, lived there as caretakers. The girls worked very hard during the day, thus they retired early.

One evening, while the sisters were sleeping inside their thatched hut as usual, the mosquitoes were especially irritating and the old man decided to drive them away. He made a little heap of coconut husks in front of the door and set them on fire. After a while, he put the flames out, so that the breeze would carry the smoke into the hut to drive away the mosquitoes. Then he left to finish some work he had to do before going to sleep.

However, the old man didn't check the smoking heap well and, while he was away, it caught fire. The flames licked the front of the hut and, feeling the heat, the sisters woke up. The girls stared horrified at the fierce flames which were now blocking their only exit. In sheer panic, the younger sister sprang recklessly past their fiery gate. But the elder sister didn't dare to jump after her and, in despair, took the fatal decision of hiding under the cot.

Soon the blaze enveloped the whole hut. Presently, the old man, having seen the light of the tall flames, returned in haste. He found the younger woman badly burned and in shock.

She yelled at him, "Go, and get *Dattā* (elder sister) out!"

Frantically the girl ran back and forth. The old man was at a loss about what to do and the girl stared at him fiercely and demanded, "Do something!"

Right then, the burning walls collapsed inward and the elder sister gave a piercing death scream through the flames, “*Addōy, ma saharō!*” (“Woe to me!”)

Hearing this, the younger sister went mad. The old man tried to calm her, but the girl kept darting about like one possessed, waving her arms wildly and muttering incoherent words.

Running onto the shallow reef, she piled up firewood on a flat coral rock rising above the waterline, screaming, “We must warn the people in Hembadū! *Dattā* must be saved! *Dattā* must be saved!” She kindled the wood, but the wind blew the flames out.

Seeing her signalling fire fail, the girl rushed to their dinghy, pushed it into the lagoon and jumped in it. Ignoring her painful injuries, she rowed frenziedly. However, the wind and the current were very strong that night and, despite her superhuman efforts, the young woman was unable to reach Hembadū. Instead, the dinghy drifted towards another island, Bōmasdū. There the girl jumped ashore and, even though she was not familiar with the village, she went screaming along the dark, empty streets until the people woke up. Weeping, she told them what had happened.

Immediately, some men brought the girl on a sailing boat to nearby Hembadū, where her people lived. She was sobbing all the time, wiping her face with her bloody hands. The young woman was a scary sight with her face smeared with blood, her hands scraped raw from so much rowing, her feet bleeding from the wounds (inflicted by sharp corals while she walked on the reef carrying firewood) and the burns on different parts of her body. Seeing the girl in such a state and crying hysterically, her family brought her immediately home and tended her wounds.

In the morning a group of people went to Burehifasdū. The party searched through the small smoking ruin, while the bewildered old caretaker stared, as though hypnotized, at the charred remains of the hut.

The young woman's body was completely carbonized, except for her silver bracelet and a small piece of her intestines.

Since then, no one has lived on Burehifasdū. However, even now, people who happen to go there say that, once a day, you may hear the girl's tormented wail: "*Addōy, ma saharō!*" eerily echoing all over the island.¹

1. Told by Mohamed Ibrahim, Selvio, Male'.

69. The Fish That Had More Bones

Long ago two fishes met each other. One was a silvery *bēngu* and the other was a reef flounder (*filōmaḍi*).¹ At that time, the flounder had an eye on each side of its head, like all the other fish.

Both fishes have a great many small bones, which makes them undesirable for eating. Maldive Islanders eat them only as emergency food, when tuna and other big ocean fishes are scarce.

Upon their meeting, the fishes began a conversation with each other. Since they were insignificant fish with little else to brag about, they started boasting about the great number of bones they had. Each fish claimed that it had more bones than the other, and they kept mutually disagreeing in a loud manner.

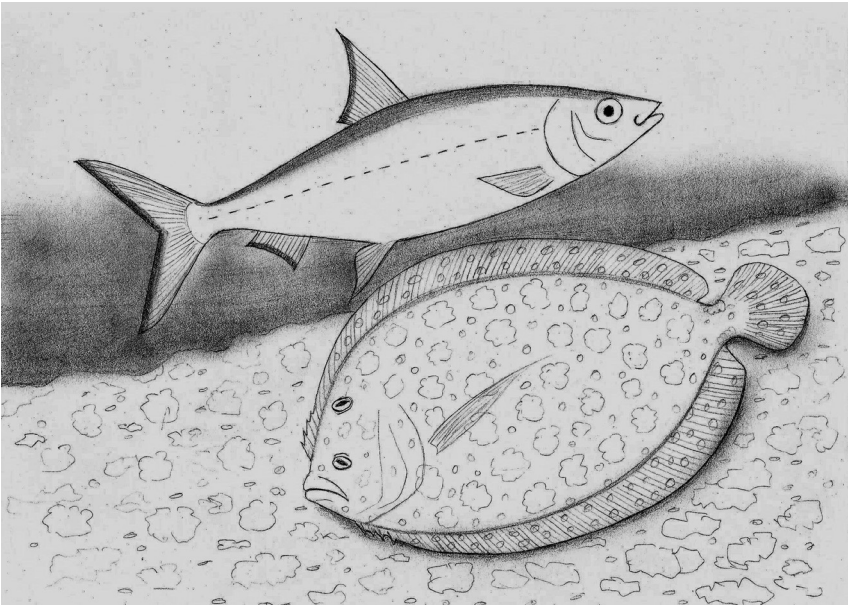
While they were thus quarrelling about which fish had the most bones, they saw a small boat above on the surface. The fishes decided that the fisherman on board would settle their dispute.

Hence both fishes swam up to the surface and asked the fisherman, “Bēbe, which one of us has the most bones?”

After thinking a little, the man answered, “The *bēngu* has one more bone than the flounder.”

Relieved, the *bēngu* swam away proudly. This silvery fish with a happy face can still be seen swimming freely in lagoons and inshore lakes.

1. *Bēngu* is the milkfish (*Chanos chanos*), known as *bēki* in Fua Mulaku; *filōmaḍi* is the reef flounder (*Bothus mancus*).



Meanwhile the flounder was so embarrassed that she remained on the reef, crying and crying. She cried so hard that both eyes slid onto one side of her head. Deeply ashamed of her defeat, she no longer swam freely and went to the bottom, trying to hide by stretching out as much as possible against it.

Nowadays, the flounder is still so shy that she lies flat, camouflaging herself on the reef floor with the same colour and spots as the surrounding coral sand or rock. One cannot tell where she is unless one looks very carefully at smooth places on the reef under water.

This is how the flounder got her sad face and strange habits.²

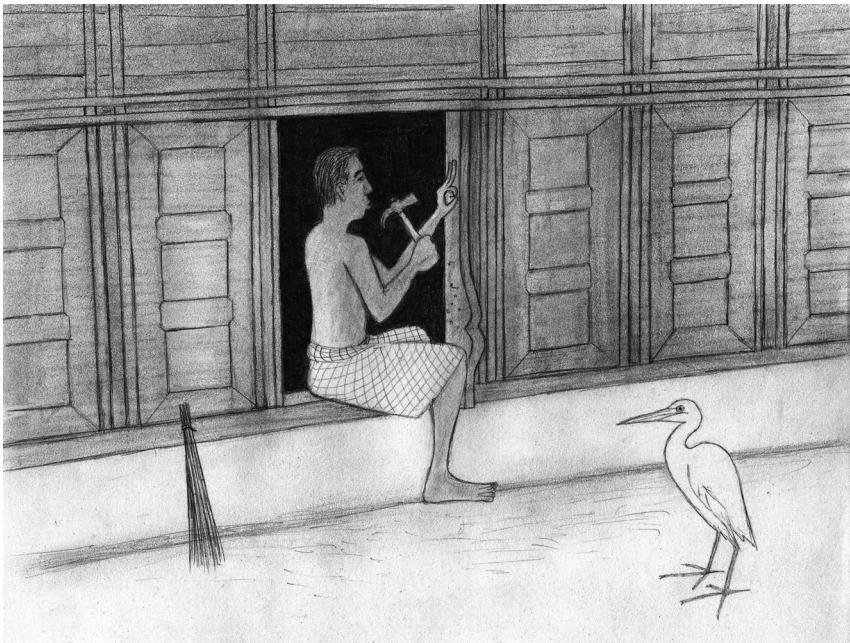
2. Told by Karange Fatma Didi, Fua Mulaku.

70. Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdī's Nails

Long ago there was a nobleman called Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdī living in Male'. At that time the houses of the noblemen were built of wood and the main entrance to go from the veranda into the house proper had a sliding door with a raised door sill.

One day, at Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdī's home, the vertical lath of the sliding door, which is used to push the door to close or to open it, fell off. Instead of calling a carpenter who would have done the job properly, Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdī wanted to repair the sliding door himself.

After buying many nails, he decided that a long nail driven into the upper end of the vertical wooden lathe would be enough.



But when he hit the nail with the hammer, it would not get in. He tried to drive the nail in many times, and there was no way, for that wooden piece was made of very strong *niroļu* (hardened coconut palm wood).

However, lower down the same piece was somewhat decayed and the wood had become softer. When Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdī saw that the nails went in easily there, he hammered all the remaining nails on that soft part of the wood. The resulting job was shoddy, but Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdī left it as it was.

The door looked very bad and it could not be hidden. Visitors to the house didn't fail to notice and word went around Male' Island about Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdī's way of repairing his door.¹



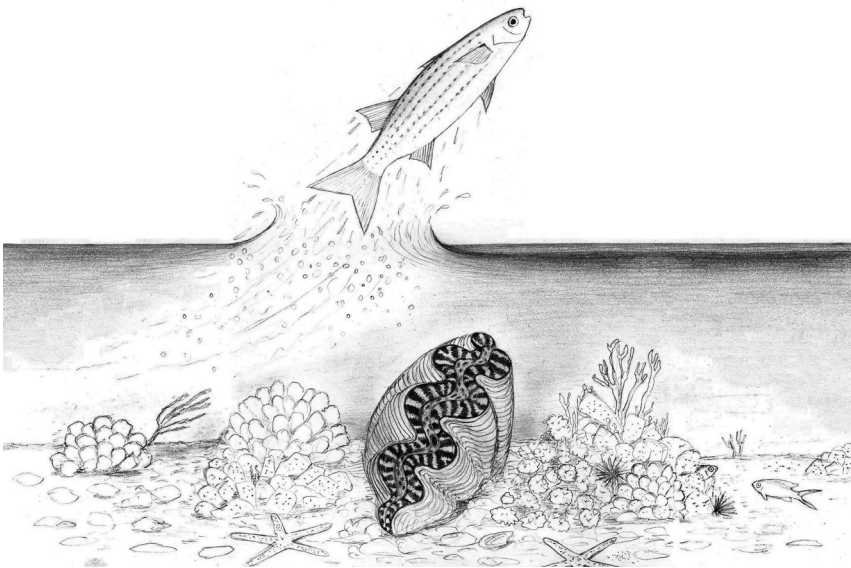
Since then, whenever someone gives up on the hard part of some work, venture or activity, and instead concentrates on the easy part, people in Male' often say, “*Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdīge mohoru hen*” (like Kuḍa Tuttu Dīdī's nails).

1. Told by Muhammadu Rashīdu, Bashimāge, Male'.

71. The Mullet and the Clam

It is a fine morning and there is a soft breeze creating small ripples on the blue water surface. The mullet is swimming in the crystal clear water of the lagoon. It swims fast; in very little time it can cover a great distance on the vast reef.

The mullet's silvery scales reflect the sunlight. Now it swims over coral patches and the fish leaps out of the water exulting in joy.



Below, the giant clam¹ sees the mullet leaping and wails, “Woe is me, how hard is my lot! While the mullet lives in bliss, free to swim as it pleases, I am a prisoner for life, always anchored to the same spot. What a dull and wretched

1. *Gāhaka* (*Tridacna gigas*).

existence I lead, stuck forever to the coral rock here at the bottom.”²



When something that is achievable for one person is impossible for another, Maldivians often say: “*Mekunu fumunakas gāhakayaka nufumuvēne*” (even though the mullet may jump, the giant clam can not).

2. Told by Ali Najibu, Nedunge, Male’.

72. Rōnu Eduru

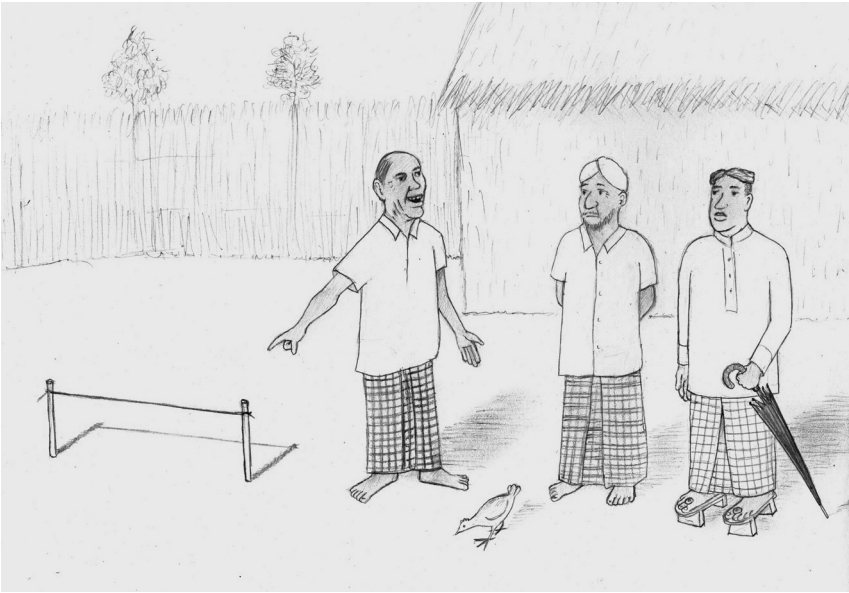
Long ago a man in Male' observed that the shade on the southern side of his house was subject to changes according to the seasons. After giving frequent thought to the matter, he came up with an idea on how to observe this phenomenon better. He thus stuck two sticks in a sunny spot in the yard of his house. Then he tied the ends of a coir rope to the two sticks, stretching it from east to west. From then onwards, he would observe the shade of the rope on the sand every day. In this manner he took due notice of the changes of the sun's angle as indicated by the rope.

As years went by this man became aware that around the *Dosha* and *Mula nakaiy*¹ the shade of the rope reached its southernmost limit, so he laid a small stone on the sand to mark the spot. The northernmost limit of the rope's shade was reached at the *Miyaheli* and *Ada* time of the year and the man duly marked this as well.

This man was so proud of his methods of observation by means of the coir rope that he became vain. He thought he had made a great discovery and never missed a chance to boast about it, calling himself an 'Eduru' or man of learning. This man used to bring the subject of his rope up in every conversation, often in matters that had nothing to do with the narrow field of the sun's angle in different seasons. He also pretended that he knew much about other issues but in reality he did not.

Ultimately, both learned men and common people in Male' grew tired of this man's continuous bragging. They whispered often behind his back and finally came up with a derogatory

1. Approximately thirteen day nakshatra (*nakaiy*) or stellar periods.



nickname for him: “*Rōnu Eduru*”, which means “The Rope Scholar”.²



When someone having only limited knowledge blows his own trumpet and meddles in fields that are beyond his competence, people in Maldives would say: “That person is like *Rōnu Eduru*.”

2. Told by Muhammadu Rashīdu, Bashimāge, Male’.

73. The Cat That Chased Two Rats

Once upon a time a very hungry cat was walking through a coconut grove. He saw a rat coming down from a coconut tree and waited until it was far enough from the tree to chase it. Then he went after the rat at great speed. This caught by surprise another rat which was on their path. This second rat also began to run ahead the cat.

While he was pursuing them, the cat was gleefully thinking, “I shall have two rats for my meal. I am very lucky.”

Suddenly the two rats took different paths and the cat was in a dilemma. He decided, “I shall follow the one on the left, it runs slower.”

However, after a while of chasing the rat unsuccessfully he thought, “This rat is too fast; the first rat I was chasing was not so quick and will now be more tired.”

Thus the cat turned right and went again after the first rat he was chasing, but it was now far away. It looked back at him and climbed a tall coconut tree.

The cat thought, “Oh, this one got away. I shall chase the other one again.”

But by then the second rat had disappeared in the undergrowth and was nowhere to be seen.

Finally, with his head hanging down in shame at his foolishness, the cat left the area.¹



Whoever is unable to make up his mind or becomes indecisive by greed is said to be like “*de mīdā fehi buḷā*” (the cat that chased two rats).

1. Told by Rafīgu, Daḍimago, Fua Mulaku.

74. Fanvakkolu and Valikolu

Palm-leaf blade (*Fanvakkolu*) and Knife (*Valikolu*) were two brothers who grew up together. Palm-leaf blade was tall and weak, and Knife was small and strong.

One day they went to the beach together to play. While they were playing they had a disagreement. Instead of calming down, Palm-leaf blade started a quarrel. Suddenly Knife got angry and cut Palm-leaf blade into little pieces.



It is foolish and dangerous to begin a quarrel with a person who is more powerful than oneself.¹

1. Told by Don Kambulō, Maavashu Island, Haddummati Atoll.

75. The Poor Man of Nalafushi and his Cow

One day, a poor person from the island of Nalafushi (Mulak Atoll) travelled to Male'.¹ While he was in the capital of the island kingdom, this man went to the house of a wealthy man to have a look at a cow, because he had never seen one before. At that time cattle were rare in the Maldives and only some houses in Male' had a few cows.

While the poor man gaped at the cows in wonder, the cattle owner began a conversation with him. The Nalafushi man told him his story and complained about the humiliations of his poverty.

After hearing his sad story the rich man was deeply moved. Since he was in a generous mood, he told the poor man of Nalafushi, "Listen. I will give you one of my cows. If you have a cow, your life will be very good, you will have milk every day and you can sell the milk," said the rich man, determined to alleviate the poverty of the newcomer.

The poor man was very grateful and thanked his benefactor profusely. Yet, all of a sudden, the rich man felt in his heart that he had been too rash and repented of having taken the decision to give the cow as a gift to the unfortunate man of Nalafushi.

"Shall I leave now with my cow then?" asked the poor man.

1. Nalafushi is H.C.P. Bell's spelling and this is one of the Maldivian proverbs gathered by Bell in his *Excerpta Maldiviana*. In the ISO 15919 transliteration the name of the island is Nālāfuṣi

“It is better that you don’t take it yet,” cautioned the wealthy owner gently without giving a hint that he had gone back on his word. “A cow is a valuable thing. It should not be left lying about unprotected. First you have to make sure that you find good wooden posts to build a cow pen.”

The poor man left in consternation; it would not be easy for him to get wooden posts. He had no money and neither family nor friends in Male’. It was already difficult enough for him just to survive and barely fill the stomach every day.

Only after a very long time, after he had managed to obtain some wood, did he return to the house of the rich man.

When the poor man showed him the wooden poles, the rich man shook his head. “No, these will not do. This type of wood will soon rot if stuck in the ground.”

Thus the man from Nalafushi went to look for better wooden posts.

But what he needed were poles of expensive timber and the man was taken aback when he realised how hard it would be to get them. After doing odd jobs, the poor man eventually got some good quality wooden poles and went to claim his cow.

A very long period of time had passed, but the rich man was not welcoming, “There are far too few posts here, you cannot build a pen.”

Thus many more months went by before the poor man of Nalafushi was able to get hold of an adequate number of poles. Then he went to the wealthy man and said, “I shall take my cow now, I have enough poles to build a pen.”

But the rich man said, “A cow is a big animal and needs a proper enclosure. You shall have to look for more poles. Meanwhile here in my house your cow is very well looked after. There is no reason for you to worry.”

It is said that during the years that followed the rich man, by means of one pretext or the other, kept the poor man from

taking the cow away. Thus one day the poor man from Nalafushi died and the cow had still not been given to him.²



When a person is promised something by someone who is not delivering, people in Maldives would often say, “*Nalafushi Fagīrah geri din hen*” (Like the cow given to the poor man of Nalafushi).

2. Told by Muhammadu Rashīdu, Bashimāge, Male’.

76. The Awful Giant Fish

Sea cucumbers are very common in the Maldives. They look like enormous slugs and live in the broad and sandy expanses of shallow submerged reefs. They are slow and lethargic animals who spend their lives swallowing sand as they lay half-buried on the sunlit reef. The only remarkable thing about sea cucumbers is that there is a certain small fish living inside some of these sluggish creatures.



This fish is long and eel-like, but smaller than a pencil.¹ It has a delicate, glassy body, so transparent that its bones and internal organs can be seen. Since it is a weak fish, it always lives in hiding and the best way to get a glimpse of it is by catching a sea cucumber and squeezing it strongly.

Yet Maldivians are certain that this is only a very young fish and regard it with awe. They whisper that after it reaches a certain age it leaves the sea cucumber by itself and swims away from the sunny reef into the cold ocean depths. There, in the darkness, this fish grows at an amazing rate unseen by anyone.

1. The Pearlfish (*Carapus* spp.).

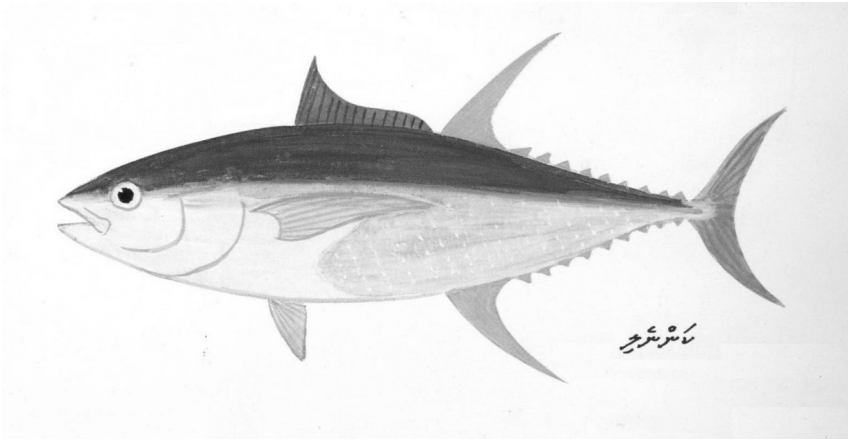
After many years of living in the darkest waters it becomes a huge and ferocious beast. It is said that in the end this fish reaches such colossal proportions that it could gobble down a whole ship, with masts, sails, crew and all, in one gulp.

Therefore, Maldivians commonly call that fragile translucent creature living inside the sea cucumbers “*oḍi k̄a boḍumas*”. The meaning of that name in their language is “the big fish that devours ships.”²

2. Told by Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, Funāḍo, Fua Mulaku.

77. Kaḷobondāge Diye

One day a young yellow-fin tuna¹ went to visit a triggerfish and said, “Please, triggerfish,² can you do me a favour?”

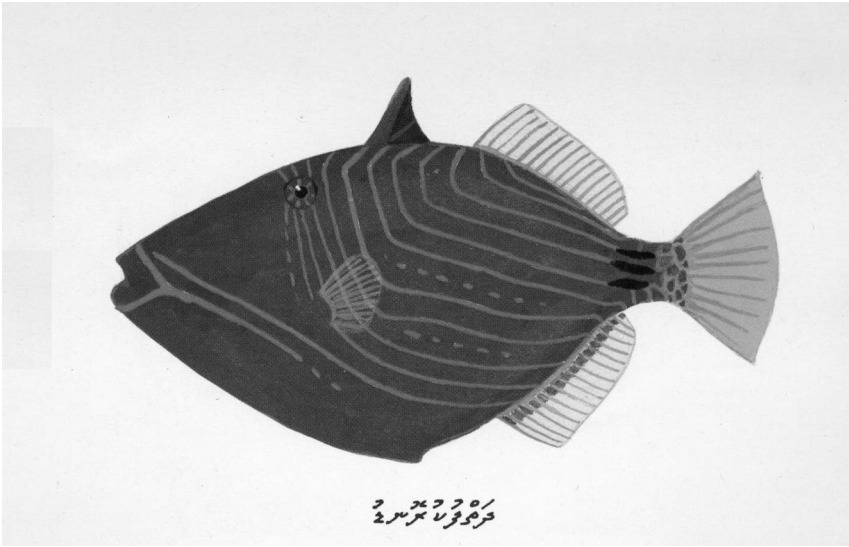


“Which favour is that?” enquired the triggerfish, flattered by the presence of the illustrious yellow-fin tuna, the son of the *faṇḍiyāru* (chief judge) of the fishes.

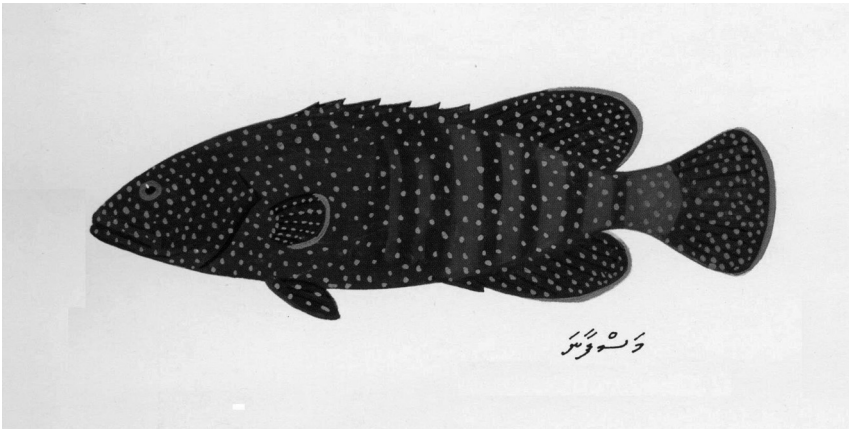
“Please ask the grouper’s daughter whether she will marry me”, requested the yellow-fin tuna.

The triggerfish agreed and then she went to a pool on the reef behind the island. She bathed and jumped with joy at the chance to visit such a distinguished lady and made her tail red (as if she was a girl dyeing her feet with henna). Then she dashed off along the reef probing beside this rock, over that

1. *Faṇḍiyārokannella oḷakannella*, the yellow-fin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*), son of the *Faṇḍiyāru*.
2. *Daffukuroṇḍaa*, the orange-lined triggerfish (*Balistapus undulatus*). The triggerfish represents an ugly girl with buck-teeth proud to carry messages between high-status lovers.



rock, then below another. While she was searching like this, she finally found the grouper's daughter.



The proud fish³ was combing her hair when she saw the triggerfish and asked, “Eh, triggerfish. Why have you come here?”

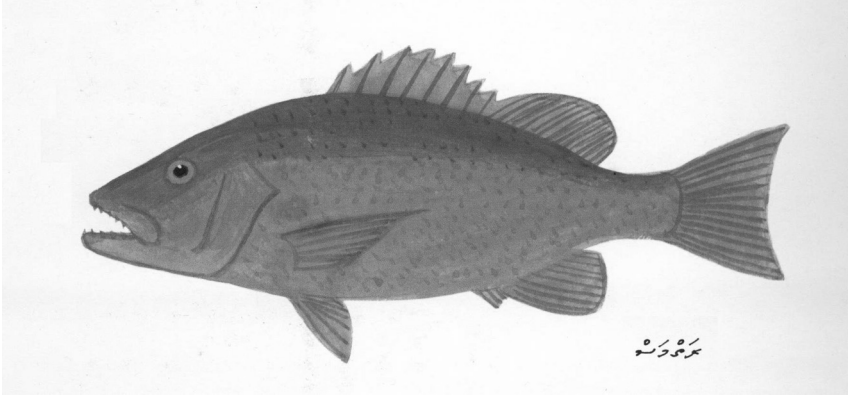
“I came to do someone a favour”, replied the triggerfish.

“Which favour is that?” wondered the grouper's daughter.

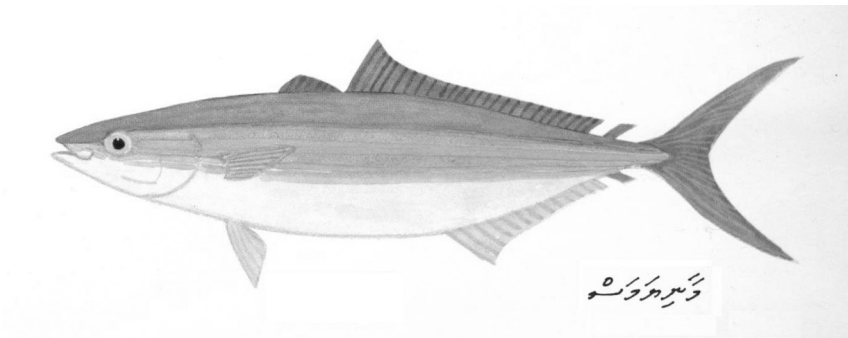
“The yellow-fin tuna asked whether you would marry him”, the visitor revealed.

3. The grouper, genus *Epinephelus*, is a fish having an arrogant-looking face.

The grouper's daughter proudly shook her head, "I won't marry him!" Then she boasted, "I have had the same offer from the skipjack tuna, the king of the fishes,⁴ with his honest face, but I didn't marry him because he has so much flesh in the thighs. I also had the same offer from the red snapper, the

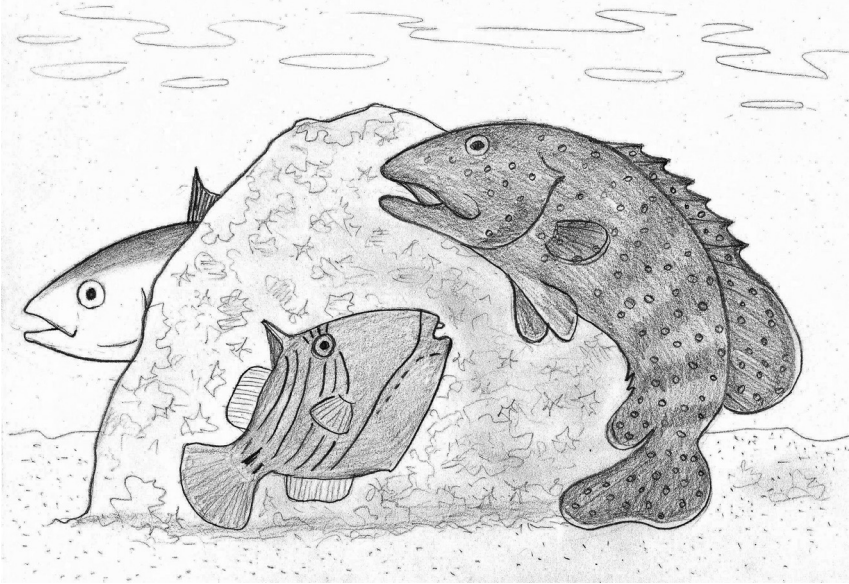


wealthy merchant.⁵ But I didn't want to marry him because he is gross and eats too much. I had also the same offer from rainbow runner, the beautiful boy.⁶ I didn't marry him because



4. *Godaraha alimūna*. The social status of the fishes is deemed according to the taste, texture and firmness of their flesh. The Goda, a large skipjack tuna, is the king.
5. *Ratemaha ratejāḍiya*, in reference to the *jāḍiya* containers merchants used to store goods. The red snapper has gross eating habits, as it favours fish gills and innards.
6. *Maanemaha rīṭikalō*, Rainbow Runner (*Elagatis bipinnulata*); not appreciated. *Raberrakuge darraku*, the palm-sap tapper's son, belonging to the lowest class in the traditional social order.

he is a low-class fish, the son of a palm-sap tapper. I shall marry the son of my maternal uncle.”



As soon as she said this, the yellow-fin tuna, who had been listening, quickly left the reef waters in shame and embarrassment along with all the fishes who were escorting him in the front and at the back. The yellow-fin tuna fled so fast that the silver streak he made was as bright as the sharpened edge of the chisel belonging to carpenter Suleimānu of Ratafandū Island.

Seeing the commotion the grouper’s daughter smugly repeated, “I won’t marry him!”⁷

7. A complex story with many hidden meanings where the protagonists are locally well-known fishes. The kind that asked the grouper in marriage represent the former social divisions, as well as the quality of their flesh. Told in the Huvadu language by Muhammadu Sālihu, Daisy Villa, Dūndigan, Fua Mulaku.

78. The King of the Sea

Long ago, in an atoll in the Maldives lived a poor woman who had no family and lived alone in a hut. She was learning to be a midwife and went along to help the old midwives whenever there was a delivery.

One day just after sunset this woman went to an isolated spot of the beach to relieve herself. When she was washing her private parts she noticed how the waters in the sea in front of her were foaming as if something was boiling underneath. The woman was afraid, but instead of running away she remained there out of curiosity.

Two men came out of the waters and asked her to go with them.

She was still frightened and asked, “What for?”

The men answered, “We don’t know. But someone very important has sent us.”

She refused to go with them but they insisted, “We will do you no harm. Just come with us. If you don’t like it, we will bring you back.”

Seeing that they were handsome and courteous men, and feeling that they had a good heart, the woman agreed and followed them. Each man took one of her hands and they walked into the waters, beyond the reef. She was surprised that she did not feel any discomfort, even though she was under water.

They brought the woman to the place where the King of the Sea (Kaṇḍu Rasgefānu) lived. It was a magnificent palace, with many big rooms inside. Many beautiful and unknown flowers bloomed there. Inside the palace the chairs and swing-beds were splendid.

The King of the Sea asked the woman to sit down and when she did he told the two men to go.

Then the King spoke in an anxious tone, “The Princess, my daughter, is in a very serious condition. She can’t deliver her child owing to a complication. It is her first child. The midwives of the palace say they cannot help. I called the *faṇḍita* men (sorcerers). They used their charms but couldn’t do anything. Finally the chief *faṇḍita* man said, ‘Your Majesty, your daughter the Princess is in a critical condition. I fear that she and her child will die.’ I asked if there was anything to be done. He said, ‘If you bring a midwife from the world above, the princess will give birth.’ So, without delay, I sent my guards to look for you.”

Before the midwife could protest, saying that she was still not a senior midwife, the king called a maidservant and told her to bring the woman from the world above to the princess’s chambers immediately. “There is no time to lose.”

So the apprentice midwife was brought close to the princess’s bed. She looked at the princess. The girl lay in pain and her strained face was grey. It was obvious that she had been suffering for a long time. The midwife knew what to do. With expert hands, she worked and the baby was delivered after a tense time.

Now, the princess and the baby were peacefully sleeping. As her work was done, she said to the maids and sorcerers there, “Now I want to go home.”

A girl brought her to the king. When the midwife assured him that both the princess and the baby were safe, the king was relieved. Happily, he declared, “You are a good midwife.”

She protested, “I am only an apprentice. I am still learning. I wanted to tell you before.”

The smile on the king’s face disappeared. He forcefully proclaimed, “I, the King of the Sea, say you are the best midwife of the Island Kingdom.”

She blushed.

The king said, “You can have what you want from here.”

She was a humble woman and did not want to take anything. She said, “I have no husband and it is not easy for me to get fish. What I would like is to get a fish every day.” The king said, “That is not a problem. At the same place and at the same time that my envoys met you, there will be a fish for you every day.” Then he added, “Take at least something with you.” And he gave her some rare jewels. But then he warned her, “Remember never to tell anyone where you got the fish and the jewels from.”

The woman accepted the advice and the king left. Then the two palace envoys carried her back to the same beach on her island. When she arrived home, the sun was rising.

The woman hid the jewels well and went to sleep. In the evening she went to the beach where she had been the previous evening and saw a tuna swimming slowly towards the shore and getting stuck in the sand right below her feet. Then she took the fish home, cut it and cooked it. It was a long time since she had eaten so well.



After some time she felt the need of a better home, because she was living in a shack and it was now leaking and eaten by vermin. She travelled to Male' and tried to sell one jewel to a local trader. The trader realized the jewel was rare and asked the midwife where she had got it. Seeing that the woman would not tell him, he informed the king. The king had the midwife brought into his presence and asked her, “Where did you find this?”

She had to say that she found it in the sea. Anyway he would not have believed her if she had told him that it was a present from the King of the Sea.

The king told the midwife that it was his property, for any valuable item found in the sea, like shipwrecks or ambergris,

belonged to the royal treasure. The woman had to give up the jewel and then left the palace.

The next time the midwife went to a foreign trader instead. He didn't ask any questions and she sold a jewel to him without difficulty. As a result she could build a good solid house for herself.



After the oldest midwife died this woman was acknowledged to be the best midwife and became a respected person on her island. She even found a husband and lived much more comfortably than before.

One day, however, her husband asked her, "How do you get fish every day?"

She begged him not to ask her, because otherwise she would stop getting fish. But the husband became even more suspicious. He thought she might be getting the fish by doing repeatedly secret favours to some fisherman.

The midwife was very sad, but she had to tell her husband the truth. Thus one evening she brought him to the beach right after sunset. Then the unbelieving husband could witness how in the twilight the tuna came on its own and softly landed on the beach at his wife's feet.

But the woman had broken her vow of secrecy and that was the last time that the midwife would get a fish from the King of the Sea.¹



People in Aḍḍu Atoll say that this midwife really existed. Her name was Gami Edurubī and she hailed from Gan Island, which later became a British air base.

1. Told by Kaṭibuge Ibrahīm Saīdu, Diguvāṇḍo, Fua Mulaku. He also pulled a weed from his garden and said it was a herb that Gami Edurubī had brought from the palace of the King of the Sea.

79. The Palace Bedbug

Very long ago, inside the palace in Male', a bedbug was living in the bed of the king. He was very wise, courteous and learned.

One day in the morning, a flea entered the palace jumping and jumping and happened to land on the bed. She saluted the bedbug. "How are you brother bedbug? I come from the street and I am tired. It's so hot and dusty out there."

The bedbug calmly answered, "Take a rest here my young friend. This is a very good place. It is never very hot and it is very quiet."

The flea asked: "Can I stay here with you for a long time?"

The bedbug hushed his voice. "As you can see, the servants clean the rooms of the palace very thoroughly and there are no other bedbugs here. But I have a very good hiding place and I can live here because I am extremely careful. Now, for example, I just came out because no one was around. If you want to live here you must be very cautious, too. Otherwise things could easily go wrong. Please listen to me very well my friend and pay good attention to my words. Then you can live here with me without problems."

The flea happily accepted his hospitality and listened to the bedbug as he explained the rules of living in the palace.

"The king is a very high nobleman. He needs to be treated with respect. When he comes to the bed, I keep quiet and wait for a long time until he is in deep sleep. Then I go and bite him in only one spot and suck a moderate amount of blood every night. In this manner the king sleeps well and does not notice that I am here. Do you understand?"

“Yes”, said the flea, admiring how clever the bedbug was.

The bedbug looked very serious but spoke kindly, “As you see, the rule is very simple but very important. Please don’t be rash and do as I say. Then we can live together in this pleasant place for a very long time without troubles.”

The flea promised that she would obey the rules and both quietly waited for the evening in their hiding spot.

After a few hours the king came and lay down on the bed. Soon he fell asleep. While the bedbug waited patiently, the flea thought, “How hungry I am! I have already been waiting far too long.” Thus she quickly jumped onto the king and pierced his skin. The flea was so hungry and so careless that she sucked his blood in many places, saying to herself how tasty it was.

Almost immediately the king got up and, scratching himself, called loudly for his servants. At once seven attendant girls came into the room holding oil lamps and the king complained to them that something had bitten him. They searched the bed carefully for a long time until one of them dislodged the bedbug from his crack with an *iloshi*. Holding it between her finger and thumb, the attendant showed the bedbug to the king who ordered her, “Kill it at once! That brazen thing didn’t want to let me sleep.”

While the servant girl squeezed the bedbug between her fingernails, the flea watched the scene from a safe distance in horror. Now she realized that her foolishness alone had brought about the death of such a fine and hospitable friend. Jumping and jumping, she left the palace feeling awful, but now there was nothing she could do but grieve.¹

1. Told by Don Kokko, Hirunduge, Male’, the former lamplighter of the King’s Palace.

80. Muladovi

Long ago, in the capital Male', there was a nice large house which was always empty. As soon as people moved in, they fell sick and, if they didn't soon leave the place for good, they died in a very short time. The owner ended up asking for a very cheap rent, but even then no one wanted to live in it.

One day, an Englishman residing in Male' happened to hear this story and told the owner to let him live in that house for some time. The owner readily agreed and the foreigner moved in. He slept during the daytime, which is easy in Male' during the hot hours between forenoon and late afternoon. At sunset, he got up and moved a table and two chairs to the middle of the main room. As it became dark, the Englishman placed a small, dim oil lamp on the table. Then he sat on one of the chairs holding a notebook and a pen and waited.

After a long time, in the middle of the night, a thin man with a sad face appeared and sat down on the other chair. The man told the foreign gentleman that he had been murdered by a former owner of the house many years ago. To confirm this he pointed to the spot where he had been mortally wounded, displaying a broad gash under his shoulder. After the Englishman had a look at the wound, the thin man told him that the wicked killer had buried him secretly inside that same room, cunningly wiping off every trace of the crime. Saying thus he pointed to the floor at the place where his body had been buried. The man complained that he had been given a hasty burial without having been duly washed and without any ceremony, and he was bitter about that. Then, without saying another word, the spirit disappeared.

The next morning, the Englishman told his landlord about his meeting with the ghost (*muladovi*).¹ They first had tea and breakfast together and then they brought an adze and a spade to dig in the exact location the spirit had pointed out. It took but a little digging when they suddenly found human bones. Carefully, they removed all of the mortal remains and brought them to the graveyard where they were finally given a proper burial. After that the house ceased to be haunted.²

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1. A *muladovi* is the spirit of a dead person who has found no rest. The spirits known as '*dovi*' are related to the dead. Mr. Hasan A. Maniku called these spirits '*dovi*' but I never heard the name so spelled from the mouth of old Maldivian storytellers. Ali Najeeb, Nedhunge, confirmed that '*dovi*' is the correct name by pointing out that it is the name that appears in a poem in Arabic written by the Maldivian learned man Ahmad Haji Edurukalēfānu at the beginning of the 18th century.
 2. This story was told by Huseinkoibē, Kambulō Dhaita's husband, Hoḷudū Island, Southern Miladummaḍulu Atoll.

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Āfatis

Danfuli

Dīnuge Magu

Faiytūra

Fōvahi

Furadāna

Havīru

Hukuru

Khabaru

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