

# **Radio Man**

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## **NOTE**

*This is essentially a work of fiction. The main characters I have portrayed in this narrative have to be, and therefore are, fictitious. This excludes the names of certain public figures I have used to pin the story down to a time and place. The setting — Male', Maldives — is real.*

*This is essentially a "slice-of- life" story from a Maldivian perspective. I have actually presented you with three different time slices. As you read on, you will see where one slice separates from the other.*

*In writing this story, I have made every effort to avoid any pejorative or damaging references to any persons living or dead, to any places gone or existing, or to any cultural sensibilities real or perceived.*

*Those of you who are used to the British system of spelling must forgive me for having used American spellings throughout.*

*I have used certain Maldivian words in certain places. These have been italicized for your convenience. What they are would usually resolve from the context; no Dhivehi-English dictionary would be required to make sense out of them.*

## NOW...

Perhaps I should tell Suhana.....

Perhaps I should tell Suhana. Not now perhaps, but a bit later, when all the excitement of the wedding party has died down and when we could sit together. Perhaps when we have some private moments to ourselves.

Let me take a fifteen-minute walk down memory lane, exercise fifteen minutes of patience, sit down here next to Khadeeja, and then tell her.

## MINUTE ONE

### What I knew

When I was a little boy, my father died. At least that was what I was told. Personally, I have no recollection of him and, therefore, do not miss him. For as long as I could remember, my mother's brother Ramzi had always looked after me.

I have been told that soon after my father passed away, my mother had got married again and had moved to Addu Atoll in the south of the Maldives. She had apparently started a new family and was very happy in her new life. I knew that I had two half-sisters living with her. I had never met either of them. I have no memory of what my mother looks like either.

My life revolved around Uncle Ramzi and his wife Khadeeja. They had a small house in the Machchangolhi ward of Male' and we lived in it, happily I must say. Uncle Ramzi was the kindest man I knew. His wife Khadeeja was the world's most loving person.

I was born in 1960. That I already knew. It was a good year: Maldives saw its first paper money and formal English-medium education was introduced. Of course, I discovered these two latter facts much later.

The 1960's were good for the Maldives in general. The first radio station started broadcasting in 1962. In 1965, the Maldives ceased being a British Protectorate and became an independent country. In 1968, the country became a Republic.

As I said, I was largely unaware of many of these developments till I was in my teens. Much of my time before that had been dedicated to more important and absorbing activities like memorizing the multiplication tables, working towards finishing and officially celebrating my first complete reading of the Holy Quran at a ceremony called the *dhaskiyun*, learning to make kites, and looking after a banana patch Uncle Ramzi in our backyard.

However, there was of one thing I became aware of very early on in life: We needed a radio at home.

## MINUTE TWO

### How we needed the radio

I had always felt that we wanted a radio at home. Since want did not always match a need, especially in those days, I kept quiet about it until the want finally translated itself into a need. I would always remember the day that happened.

My uncle's cousin Ali Manik, who lived two houses away, had a huge Phillips radio and an Alba record player. Every afternoon, when he came home from work, Ali Manik would fire up one of his machines and we would hear it from three houses away. Often, it would be the melodious voice of Mohamed Rafi the Indian crooner that wafted over the air. Ali almost worshipped the man. My niece Suhana, who was about four years old at the time, would then try to sing what she called the 'oo-oo-laa-laa'. As the days went by, her efforts began to match some of the songs we heard.

On that fateful day, when the want turned into a need, Suhana became the instrument of that transformation. She began listening to Ali Manik's radio, got up from an unfinished lunch, pursed her lips, and insisted that we take her over to Uncle Ali's to enjoy the 'oo-oo-laa-laa' better!

So, little Suhana was taken over to Uncle Ali's to listen to the 'oo-oo-laa-laa'. She sat there for two hours, listening to song after song, much to the delight of Ali who loved children as much as he loved his music. However, even though Ali insisted that little Suhana should always be allowed to come and listen to the 'oo-oo-laa-laa' as often as she wished, Uncle Ramzi decided that it was high time we got ourselves a good radio.

That was how I found myself walking down Sayyid Kilegefaanu Magu the following Thursday in the morning, taking ourselves towards the acquisition of that wonderful box called a radio. The walk itself was a treat for me since well-brought-up little children of the day were very much confined to their yards most of the time. Keeping this in mind, the ever-considerate Uncle Ramzi kept me fed with snippets of information on what we came across *en route*.

Sayyid Kilegefaanu Magu was a road that had been named after a Maldivian *seedhee* noble who claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad himself. As we walked on the smooth coral sand that had been meticulously swept by the women of the neighborhood, I imagined each woman coming out of her compound, *iloshifathi* broom made of coconut leaf midribs in hand, and bending down to sweep the piece of road in front of her yard. I trod carefully indeed, so that I did not leave much of a footprint that disturbed the spotless look of the morning on the ground. Uncle Ramzi allowed me to walk beside him, which act itself was an honor bestowed upon me. Usually, younger lads had to walk one or two steps behind their elders.

As Uncle Ramzi and I turned right into Keneree Magu, a road known more famously as the “*Kaalhu Guirey Magu*” or “the road on which the crows defecate”, I kept a sharp eye open for any uncouth crows bent on polluting the pristine condition of my white sarong and shirt. I did not know that the crows had already been shot into non-existence on Male’ island a few years ago. I did know, however, that we were now walking into that sector of Male’ which contained the residences of some powerful nobles, including the famous “Maafannuge”, the residence of the brother of Sultan Muhammad Fareed al-Awwal who would later go down in history as the last Sultan of the Maldives.

Silence was a golden virtue in Male’ at that time. When men walked together, they spoke only when absolutely necessary and even then with very low voices. It was considered rude and low-class to speak to each other in loud voices on the roads, especially if you happened to be walking in that particular side of town where all these nobles resided.

Thus, in suitably subdued mood we passed the noble “Maafannuge” residence and proceeded along the shaded road to the famous Chaandhanee Magu where the government, in recent years, had built rows of shops on either side of a section of road to make in Male’ a good shopping area.

As we turned left into this famed Chaadhaanee Magu, I noticed the three blocks of two-storey buildings that housed the then very modern shops. We went past these and soon came to a shop past the Orchid Magu crossroads: A wooden name board that had been fixed on the wall over the door told us that this was our destination. The legend “SHOWROOM” in letters of white on a background of green paint looked very modern and chic to me.

As soon as we entered the shop, a man in a sky-blue shirt and a white sarong with a black striped pattern greeted us.

“As-salaam-alaikum!” He said in a soft voice that held a smile of welcome as well as a certain familiarity. It was obvious that he knew Uncle Ramzi from somewhere.

“Wa-alaikum-us-salaam!” Uncle Ramzi was quick to return the universal greeting of Islam, “We have come to buy a radio.”

“Do you want the big one or the small one?” The man asked, indicating two precious objects that stood on a wooden table further inside. Radios were very costly objects at the time and had to be registered with the government as valuable property before they could be legally used.

Uncle Ramzi and I looked at the radios. Both of them bore the same brand – Phillips. The smaller radio had a green dial on an off-white face that looked like the relatively new material called plastic. It looked fragile compared to the beauty that stood beside it. A cabinet of a substance that I was told was called Bakelite and looked like highly polished wood, fabric-covered speaker grill and a dial that was obviously reverse-painted glass looked too good to pass. It would look good standing on its own table in the front room generally referred to as the *fenda* where visitors were usually welcomed.

I watched Uncle Ramzi count out the money for the radio and stood there in respect and awe. The radio cost all of five hundred and sixty Rufiyaa. That represented two months’ wages to him! The radio was indeed a very valuable object that would have to be looked after very carefully. Baby Suhana was a very lucky girl indeed.

“Here is your receipt!” I heard the cashier-cum-clerk say to Uncle Ramzi, “Your radio will arrive when *M/V Maldiva Star* comes in in about a month.”

It turned out that we had to wait for the radio set for a very long time indeed!

## MINUTE THREE

### Unloading

Days turned into weeks, as they always did in these cases, and soon a month passed. It was rumored that *Maldives Star* had had a problem with its engine and that expert engineers from Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was then known, had been making every effort to make it run again. How much truth these rumors had was open more to speculation than judgment, since the people that had the firmest of opinions had no access to any physical means of communication with the rest of the world. Perhaps the *Jinn* — those supernatural beings the local quacks falsely swore they had contact with —with helped quicken their imaginations.

Given the stage of life I was in, I was quite content to let my imagination run with the juiciest of these rumors which said that the most wizard-like of Ceylonese engineers had actually managed to fix the wayward engine with nothing more than a woman's hair pin and a brass nail where lesser mortals from England had failed with the best of tools their most famous British workshops had to offer. Engineers and their ilk were, after all, none less than the local *fandithaverin*. These were the self-professed black magicians who claimed they could make reluctant young maidens run to the most hated among their prospective suitors as soon as the latter wore the amulets the former had to sell.

Women's hair pins, tools made in England or even simple miscalculation on the part of the captain aside, *Maldiva Star* finally arrived, a month and a long half behind schedule. As soon as news spread that the ship had arrived, people flocked to the waterfront on the northern side of Male to see for themselves if indeed the long-awaited ship had arrived with their matches, bolts of cloth, cooking utensils, or whatever they had been waiting for in expectation. In my case, the ship was no lesser than the bearer of that magical radio set which would bring Lata Mangeshkar and her most melodious voice right into our house.

Thus, I was only one of the many that stood on the waterfront that day as the wonderful Mercury, one of the two small but relatively powerful launches that served as tugs, went out with a heavy barge in tow to meet the *Maldives Star* which rode at anchor a mile or so outside the house reef of Male'. As we marveled at the skill with which the captain spun the traditionally shaped wheel of the Mercury to guide his craft and the towed barge out to the good ship, I imagined the radio being



brought up from the innards of the vessel to be handed over to him for delivery to us.

“Want to be sailor when you grow up?” I heard someone say. I looked around behind me. I saw a man dressed in the oily shirt and dirty pants of someone who obviously worked on a foreign-going ship. He looked friendly enough and spoke in the dialect and accent of our parts.

“No, sir!” I answered in the polite second register of the Dhivehi language which is reserved for addressing one’s elders that did not belong to the noble classes. “I am waiting for that ship to unload the radio we had ordered.”

“Oh, that would be easy!” said the man in a kindly tone. “They will soon lift it from the hold and put it on the barge.”

Obviously, I saw nothing of the kind happen. The distance between the ship and I prevented that from happening. All I saw was the ship’s only derrick system hoist sacks, bales and crates of different sizes from somewhere in the ship into the barge which soon obediently returned to Male’ behind Mercury.

I assumed that the radio must be in one of the crates on the barge and came home.

## MINUTE FOUR

### The radio arrives

I found out how correct I was only the following day. A messenger from the MGBS Show Room came home and informed Uncle Ramzi that the latter's radio had arrived and would be ready for picking up in an hour. Uncle Ramzi did not wait the hour but promptly mounted his bicycle and pedaled off in the general direction of the Customs, leaving me and the rest of the family in great expectation of the arrival of the precious radio. What he had to do or had in mind was quite beyond us!

Uncle Ramzi's wife Khadeeja, for the third time in ten minutes, polished the top of a little wooden table that stood in an outer room of her little house and said, "Today my little Suhana is going to listen to Lata!"

I smiled in response and tried to hide my excitement. I was no less a fan of the great Indian diva. Moreover, I would not have minded a bit of the other singers that India had to offer as well. In addition, it was rumored that some local musicians were also busy recording for the new Male' Sinaco Radio. That would be something worth listening to indeed!

With these thoughts in mind, I stood just outside the door of our yard, looking up the road for a sign of Uncle Ramzi or the radio. Every bicycle that rang its bell and every cart that appeared round the bend sent pangs of expectation up and down my spine.

And then there he was! Uncle Ramzi rode his bicycle slowly, keeping pace with the hand-pulled *gaadiya* cart that obviously had something on it. I could not wait for the cart to come to our door but ran up the road to it with a wide grin on my face. That something turned out to be a huge crate made of narrow boards of a light-colored wood. Obviously, the crate contained the precious radio!

I tried hard not to shout out my expressions of exhilaration and glee since that might have meant loss of face for Uncle Ramzi in our neighborhood. Instead, I followed the cart as it made its way towards our house. It appeared to me,

however, that the betel-chewing puller of the cart was not doing enough to get the radio over to our house as fast as possible, despite the fact that the veins stood out on his muscled forearms and bare torso that were oily and sweaty with the humidity and the hard work.

Eventually, the cart arrived right outside the gate of our compound. The puller of the cart placed a jute gunny bag over his shoulders, heaved the massive crate off the cart and carried it on his back into our compound and into the outer *fenda* of our house. Uncle Ramzi paid him off with the princely sum of five Rufiyaa and sent him away smiling. This gave us the necessary family privacy to look upon the wonderful radio for the first time, or so I thought.

“Well, here it is! This is our very own radio.” Uncle Ramzi could not hide the wide grin on his face either. “Now we can listen to the news and songs as often as we want without going to the neighbors or to Ali’s.”

“All thanks are due to Almighty Allah and His Greatness.” Khadeeja was not only a dutiful wife but a practicing and devout Muslim like Maldivian wives are expected to be. “I thank Him for giving us the *rizq* of His Bounty to buy this radio. Let us quickly open this crate and listen to some good songs.”

“It’s not that easy, Khadeeja.” Uncle Ramzi said, “First, we will have to get the radio set up in the proper manner by an expert. Let me go and get our friend Thuththu Manik to do it for us. He promised me he would do it for me.”

So saying, Uncle Ramzi went out again, leaving us looking at a wooden crate in great expectation.

## MINUTE FIVE

### What I knew about Thuththu Manik

Thuththu Manik was a repository of vast amounts of knowledge on the new-fangled contraptions that had recently started arriving on Maldivian soil from the *vilaathu* countries. These were realms that lay beyond the more familiar *kara* countries like India, Ceylon and Greater Arabia. Even though some older members of the community steadfastly ignored, avoided, shunned or sometimes reluctantly accepted some of these *vilaathu*-origin contrivances, there were some diehards who stolidly maintained that these new things were usually made in violation of some vaguely-defined, semi-holy precept. They swore that people who drank the unclean and intoxicating substance called *bangu raa*, wore full-brimmed hats, and tended to drag around loathsome dogs with ropes around their necks made these devilish contraptions.

While these people regarded Thuththu Manik with deep suspicion, I suspected that there were many that wished that they themselves had access to the kind of knowledge the former had. Thuththu Manik himself never divulged where he had acquired the knowledge but was quite free with utilizing it to help his friends. It was quite normal those days to keep for oneself what specialized knowledge one had. For example, it was established practice for the more respected practitioners of the *Dhivehi-beys* traditional medicine to keep what they knew even from their own children. That was how we eventually lost some of our folk remedies and most of our black and white magic *fanditha*. That, however, is another story altogether.

There were many stories that surrounded the persona of the great Thuththu Manik. It was, for example, said that he once acquired for nothing, repaired and drove a car that had belonged to a former cabinet minister. The car, one of the dozen or so in Male' at that point in time, had been declared irreparable by a Ceylonese engineer who had been shipped in for the purpose by the government. Then there was the story about the British principal of a Maldivian school whose expensive Hasselblad camera had fallen into the sea. Thuththu Manik had retrieved the camera and repaired it. The good principal had called Mr. Manik a magician. The stories went on and on, making Mr. Manik a hero in the eyes of the young, the forward-looking and the progressive.

Thuththu Manik was generally held in much better regard than even those Ceylonese engineers who repaired British engines with hairpins and brass nails.

## MINUTE SIX

### Thuththu Manik sets up the radio

On the appointed hour of the setting up of the radio, we had a handful of eager and willing neighbors who were ready to lend their muscle to the task of setting up the wonderful machine as soon as the grand maestro of technology arrived. Khadeeja herself had lent herself to the effort by making a substantial number of four different types of spicy local hors d'oeuvres called *hedhikaa* and strong tea sweetened with generous amounts of sugar and condensed milk. Uncle Ramzi had splurged on the occasion by keeping at hand generous amounts of betel leaves, areca nuts and the famous Three Roses cigarettes.

As soon as Thuththu Manik arrived, he was taken in to the crate containing the radio. He smiled, walked around it, smiled, and nodded his satisfaction. He patted the crate and traced patterns on the top of the wood as he regarded the markings on the outside.

“Hmm... A genuine B3G63A!” Said Thuththu Manik, “Good choice. A very good choice indeed. I will enjoy setting this radio up. Let us open this crate now.”

As mentioned before, the crate was made of boards of a light-colored wood. Uncle Ramzi referred to this wood as *orimas vakaru*. Bands of metal went around the crate, reinforcing it. Thuththu Manik promptly asked someone to carefully remove these and put them away where they would do no one any harm. Next, the boards on the top of the crate were carefully pried away, making sure that the nails that held them together came away clean. It was the culture those days not to throw away anything: the nails would be re-used and the wooden boards would definitely see a second life as some utilitarian furniture.

Once the top of the crate came away, it was time to take out the radio, I thought. However, it was not to be so. All we saw inside was a mass of something that looked like straw: And straw it was. Thuththu Manik asked us to carefully remove handfuls of it and put it away.

I soon saw the reason for the care. Halfway down the crate, we suddenly struck something that looked like a highly polished slab of wood. I remembered seeing that texture somewhere before. It was the top of the precious radio!

“Careful friends! That there is the radio!” I said.

Soon the radio was gingerly lifted out of its crate, which was left for lesser mortals to attend to. Uncle Ramzi, Khadeeja and I joined Thuththu Manik in taking the radio to the small table in an inner room where it would stand and entertain the family.

I had assumed that as soon as the radio was plugged into the power socket that had been specially prepared for it, it would spout forth glorious song after magnificent song. However, that was not be. Thuththu Manik wanted to connect the radio to what he called the earth and the aerial.

First came the earth. This happened to be a length of mild steel pipe that was hammered four feet into the ground by dint of strong young arms wielding a heavy hammer. Once the pipe reached the predetermined depth, a thick wire was connected to it via a clip and bolt. The free end of this wire was fed through a hole in the wall into the house and right to the connector on the back of the radio.

The aerial turned out to be a contraption of very thick copper wire that had the appearance of a school globe with the wire representing the major latitudes and longitudes. I was entrusted with the task of carrying this aerial unit up to the topmost branches the huge mango tree which grew in the yard. I removed my shirt, tied a piece of coir rope round my waist, fastened the aerial contraption and a pair of wire snips to it to keep my hands free, slipped a coil of heavy connecting wire over my head and onto my shoulders, and made myself ready to climb the tree.

Then I stood in the yard and hooted as loudly as I could. This was to alert anyone in the neighborhood who could have been using the Maldivian open-air *gifili* toilet or bathing area. An answering hoot would have meant that I would have had to wait. In this instance, however, there was no answer. Therefore, I swung myself onto the corrugated iron roof of the house via an exterior wall and climbed my way into the dense foliage of the mango tree.

In passing, I must mention that that mango tree had a special place in our hearts. Twice a year it provided all of us with a bumper crop of very sweet and succulent ripe mangoes. In between, we plucked unripe mangoes for use in our pickles and chutneys. The tree also provided a large area of shade in the yard. This area was the playground for the children. It also served as the outdoor sitting area for casual

visitors. This latter function was served by a series of homemade *joli* seats which were basically a kind of reclining chair comprising a wooden frame and coir netting. Once every month or two, we bought fresh white coral of the coarser kind called *kashiveli* to keep the area clean, sparkling white and cozy.

The mango tree also served me personally as a place of solitude and meditation. There was a certain branch near the top of the tree that had a certain gentle curve to it. I called this spot my seat in the air. It that supported me very comfortably in a sitting position. When I sat there, I could peek out over Male' in different directions and see some islands nearby as well as any ship that lay at anchor in the harbor. And now, the mango tree was going to perform another important function. It was going to hold up that very important aerial unit of our family radio.

I snipped off a piece of connecting wire from the coil around my neck and tied the aerial to one of the topmost branches of the tree with it. I made sure that the aerial unit could see as much of the horizon as was possible. Then I connected one end of the connecting wire around my neck to the bottom of the aerial contraption as shown to me previously by Thuththu Manik. Winding some of the wire round a branch for support, I tied the wire snips as a weight to the other end of the connecting wire and fed it down through the foliage of the mango tree. I knew that gravity would help it find the shortest possible way to the ground. Soon, a hoot from below told me that they had acquired the wire successfully. Thus reassured, I made my way down the tree, immensely proud of myself for having played a crucial part in the installation of the wonderful radio.

As soon as I reached the ground myself, I rushed back to where the radio was and saw that it had been set up for use. The wires from the aerial and the earth had been connected and the power plug had been inserted into the socket in the wall. All was ready for Thuththu Manik to teach us how to use the unit.

What I learnt that day would always help me in later life: there is always a right procedure to follow in getting anything to work!



## MINUTE SEVEN

### A lesson in starting up a good radio

Here then, is the gist of what Thuththu Manik told us about starting up a good radio.

First came the philosophy of it all: Treat a radio right and it would last a lifetime. No mention was made as to whose life the lasting referred to. However, the safe bet was that Thuththu Manik was making a simple reference to Uncles Ramzi's, the then average life expectancy figure for the Maldives being somewhere around the early 50's.

Then came the practice.

The first thing that one had to do when someone wanted to switch on the radio was to decide on what station one wanted to listen to. This was done so that one could determine whether that station broadcast on the short wave, medium wave or even the long wave band. Apparently, it was important that the band switch be pushed in while the power was off. This, we were told, would lessen the chance of something potentially dangerous called a switching spark inside the radio. The usual band selected was the medium wave band on which the local station broadcast most of the time.

Next, the power switch was turned on, making sure that the volume knob was turned all the way to left to the 'min' position. You had to switch the radio on at least ten minutes before you wanted to listen. This was to allow the valves inside the radio to warm up. When you switched on the radio, you could easily see these valves begin to glow through the perforated board at the back of the radio.

Then, when the valves had warmed up, you would gently turn the volume up a bit and turn the tuning knob so that a pointer on the tuning dial indicated the station you wanted. When you got the station, you would adjust the volume to the desired level.

Firing up a radio was indeed serious business those days. Only the trained could do it! Very fortunately for me, I was one of the persons trained in the science by the great Thuththu Manik himself. Thus started my love affair with radios.

“If you look after this radio carefully, it will serve you a lifetime!” said Thuththu Manik.

“This is an investment in our future!” Uncle Ramzi said. At that point in time, no one knew what he meant.

With these words of wisdom uttered by the grown men in our lives, we joined the rest of the workforce who, in our absence, had made short work of clearing the *fenda* of the remnants of the crate and had been waiting for the radio to start playing. Instead of music, however, we enjoyed a hearty repast of good Maldivian *hedhikaa* and sweet milky tea.

Soon thereafter, the great Thuththu Manik bid us a good day, walked out to his scooter, kicked it to life and put-putted away to his next adventure with modern technology.

Little Suhana was fast asleep while all of this happened. Perhaps that was all for the best.

However, from the time she woke up after the installation of the radio, she spent much time listening to many ‘oo-oo-laa-laa’ on the wonderful box her father had brought home for her.

## MINUTE EIGHT

### Time passes by

Indeed, time passed us by as we listened to the radio. Suhana changed from being a cute four-year-old into a pretty teenager who demanded bell-bottoms and fancy hair bands as necessities of life. I joined a special class that would enable me to acquire a basic civil service *sanadhu* which was certificate that would enable me to get a job with the Maldivian government as a clerk. Uncle Ramzi became an older, less agile man whose was prone to bouts of giddiness, especially after a meal of rice and *rihaakuru*, the latter being that uniquely Maldivian fish sauce which was simply out of this world even though it tended to be rather salty at times. Khadeeja was drawn closer to Allah and His Wisdom and devoted much time to prayer and reading the Holy Quran.

My initial interest in the family radio and the many songs it threw out at me changed as well. As the months passed us by, I discovered myself listening more and more to the news. This was plain old curiosity in the beginning. However, as time passed by, I slowly developed a world vision of my own which soon included not only our road and how it related to our ward of Male', but also the other islands of the Maldives and the world beyond. On the dial of the radio were marked names of places I had never heard of before: Monte Carlo, Luxembourg, Brussels, and Lisbon! In my ever-expanding world, I soon discovered other nations in which people chose to talk different languages, wanted to follow other customs, believed in other gods, and ate things that I never dreamed were edible.

Soon, Monte Carlo, London and Paris felt like places I had known all my life. My improving command of the English language made sure that I was fast becoming a citizen of the world. BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, became one of my greatest friends.

As Uncle Ramzi had told all of us, the radio was proving itself to be a very good investment indeed!

## MINUTE NINE

### One old radio retires...

I must mention here something that was a watershed moment in contemporary Maldivian culture. It was not directly related to the radio but was, in my mind, somehow associated with what happened to all of us in the following years, radio included: the official dress code for male civil servants changed from shirt, sarong and sandals to shirt, pants and shoes.

In the days preceding, when the sarong was the norm for all men follow, it was quite an art to maintain one's modesty and dignity in a sarong. For the *mundu* sarong, being nothing more than a folded and tucked-in skirt of sorts, took a little more than dexterity to wear with panache.

Let us, for example, consider what it took a wearer of sarongs to mount and ride a bicycle. The trick there was getting all the moments and movements just right. First, you put your left leg on the left pedal of the machine, planted your right foot firmly on the ground, and gave yourself and the bicycle a couple of strong pushes. This would give you just the right amount of forward momentum to lift your right leg off the ground and plant yourself in a partially sideways position on the saddle . Then you lifted your right leg in front of you and cleared it clean over the cross bar and down onto the right pedal before the bicycle stopped. Then you simply turned the pedals forward and kept going without getting your sarong tangled up in the chain drive. This took a lot of practice, and a lot of falls I am sure, before you mastered the art of doing it gracefully.

While most men would insist on walking with the sarong almost brushing the ground, it was considered good manners to lift up the sarong and tie it at knee level in the *aruva* position if you had to do a bit of manual work in the nature of helping a neighbor dig a hole in the ground for a banana shoot or if you joined him in helping clean up the neighborhood. Many a writer and poet used this word '*aruva*' in their works to denote daring, courage and willingness to work hard.

When one needed to climb a coconut tree, the sarong took on yet another form: it was tucked up between the legs in the *foogelhun* position which barely concealed one's modesty! However, it was considered very proper if one was climbing a coconut tree.

However complicated the wearing of a sarong in its proper manners was, the more intractable stalwarts of the community did not welcome the changeover to pants easily. Some of these who were employed in the civil service voiced great discontent at the enforced change, albeit within the confines of their bedrooms, or in the relative immunity of a teashop. However, the change went ahead as announced and all civil servants of a certain rank and above soon got used to the new-fangled item of clothing, helped not in the least by graduates from grade school. The latter had got used to wearing pants as part of their school uniform.

Now, the same happened to the radio. This is not to say that the radio began to wear pants. What happened was that the radio slowly transformed itself from being a heavy faux-wood Bakelite cabinet that matched the furniture transformed itself into something that was significantly more portable. What had to be set up laboriously slowly was no more. Newer radios came in ‘plug and play’!

Modern radios came in plastic cases in many different colors and sleek shapes. The older watt-guzzling thermionic valves gave way to the relatively new production-line transistors. Most radios began to be powered by dry cells that lasted a long time.

In keeping with the times and the Maldivian equivalent of the Jones’s, our first family radio was soon retired from service and placed in the back of a cupboard. Its place was usurped by a more modern Hitachi which did not require the elaborate earth and aerial setup or the complicated start-up procedure. One simply switched it on and tuned into stations as one desired. It looked better than the Phillips in soft green plastic with reverse-painted dial, sounded much better, and saved Uncle Ramzi much money as far as the electricity bill went.

On the day we retired the old radio, Uncle Ramzi looked at it fondly for one last time, or so it seemed, and said, “What a good investment this has been! It kept me informed and helped educated my family. I can’t bear to throw this away or give it away to someone.”

I understood exactly what he meant. Or did I? And time passed us by.

## MINUTE TEN

### Still a radio, by any other name

“I wonder how long these shops have been standing around.” I said to my friend Zameel as we cycled side by side on that section of Chaandhanee Magu informally called the Singapore Bazaar, “I remember coming here to buy a radio a long time ago with my Uncle Ramzi.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t know.” Zameel said, a hint of laughter in his voice, “I remember them being here for as long as I can remember too. Do you think I am your grandfather to remember anything you wouldn’t?”

Zameel rode a Shimano XT, a new-fangled Japanese off- roader, which was one of the newer bicycles in vogue at the time. It had very smooth derailleur gearing and wonderful road-holding characteristics. It handled the muddy potholes of Male roads very well in the rainy season as if they did not exist. In contrast, I rode my conservative Raleigh Classic with the three-speed Sturmey Archer rear hub. Personally, I still preferred it more out of love than anything else.

It was one of those afternoons when it had rained the previous night and left the road in a nasty state of half-caked mud and depressions filled with thick gray water. Zameel and I tried to avoid the holes and mud patches, while keeping our eyes open for oncoming traffic and those special pedestrians that still deemed it a status symbol to walk down the middle of the road. Much practice had made the usual maneuvers along these lines second nature and we had enough brain left over for a perfectly normal conversation.

We had just reached what we called the Fareedhee crossroads and turned left when Zameel pointed to a hoarding on the side of the road and said, “Hey look at this. Ahmed Fulhu was right about the grand mosque! I wonder how grand this would be, considering that Hassanal Bolkiah himself is footing part of the bill.”

I had heard that His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, was one of the richest men in the world. Brunei, after all, was an oil kingdom. I had heard it over the radio that he had a most amazing and probably the fastest-growing collection of expensive cars in the world. Therefore, contributing

to a grand mosque in the Maldives would not be too much of drain on his finances, I assumed.

“Oh, him? That’s like tea money for him. Two pieces, a black and a betel-chew!” I used as example the Maldivian tradition of having a cup of black tea with two pieces of hors d’oeuvres of what is called *hedhikaa*, followed by a chew of areca nut and betel leaf. Maldivians would use the slightest excuse at any time of the day for one of these ‘teas’. Two-piece-and-black-with-chew would cost nothing more than two Rufiyaa at a local teashop.

“And there is going to be an Islamic Center with a library and other facilities attached to it. Read the board!” Zameel said, “This is going to be something, I tell you! I wonder why they haven’t said anything on television about this.”

“Maybe they did and you missed it. I remember hearing something about the Maldives and the Sultan on the radio. This could even be the new Friday Mosque someone – can’t remember who – was talking about the other day,” I said.

I was still very much a radio fan. In fact, my colleagues at work sometimes ragged me for sometimes carrying with me a small pocket radio, especially during the Holy Month of Ramadan when the empty lunch hour was filled in most joyously by the *Seerath-un-Nabawee* or the life of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH. Even to this day I consider that particular version of the *Seerath-un-Nabawee*, written as a compiled translation by that great scholar Sheikh Hussain Salaahudhdheen, to be one of the greatest works ever written in the Dhivehi language. Mr.Thoufeeq’s superb diction and magnificent voice added much to the grandeur of it all. There was no way I would miss it on any given day!

I was called Radio Man by many of my friends because I carried one and swore by one. At any given point in time, I was generally more informed than most of my colleagues simply because I listened to the news more often. Most of them had switched allegiance to the more modern item on the scene — television.

Television, I always said to my friends, was nothing more than a radio with just the pictures added as a bonus. It was introduced to us in the Maldives in 1978 with the first non-test transmission having been made on the 29th March of that year. There was just one channel and transmission time was from about five in the evening to ten in the night. News was presented once in Dhivehi at eight o’clock in the evening and once in English at nine, with the announcers doing nothing more than

just reading the printed news just as they did over the radio. News with video was introduced a few months later. Radio, on the other hand, started before six in the morning and went on until a half past ten in the night. This meant more on-air time, more slots for news, and greater opportunity for busy listeners to tune in. Yes, I was definitely a radio fan!

“You and your box, Radio Man!” Zameel said with mock derision and laughed.

“As far as the news in concerned, don’t you think TV is nothing but radio with a picture of the announcer? I mean, do you miss anything by just listening to the TV news from another room? So what is the difference between the two?” I tried to explain things to Zameel as they really were.

“You and your radio!” Zameel said, “So what is going to happen to this Friday Mosque?”

We had cycled up to the old Friday Mosque. Built of blocks of intricately carved massive coral and delicately decorated wood more than eight hundred or so years ago, but with its original roof replaced with an unsightly roof of corrugated iron sheets much later, this much-loved mosque was a living example of Maldivian craftsmanship.

“Tell you what! This mosque will never ever be dismantled or left unused no matter how many grand mosques are here. Mark my words.” I said.

“Do you want to keep it on record at the radio station, Radio Man?” Zameel was still trying to prick me. He was like that. He was also one of my best friends.

Apart from the radio, that was.



## MINUTE ELEVEN

### Little girls do grow up, or do they?

“Where is my green pair of pumps?” Suhana shouted from somewhere inside, probably from the room she used as her den. “I had them here a moment ago. I hope someone did not throw them out with that pest of a cat!”

First of all, Suhana hated cats. Second, cats that passed by our house seemed to know it. They would always walk past her window when they arrived. Then they would stop by and make themselves comfortable near our kitchen where Khadeeja would often feed them with scraps. Khadeeja was that kind of woman. She would assume that any animal that showed up near her kitchen was a starving creature that had to be fed immediately. Uncle Ramzi used to say that even the cockroaches stayed out of sight not because they couldn't find food in the spotlessly clean kitchen but because they were so well fed by Khadeeja.

On that particular day when Suhana's green footwear went missing, there had been a particularly scruffy stray that had sashayed in so brazenly that Suhana had immediately asked me to make sure it departed, forcefully if not willingly. I had promptly chosen the former, thrown it into a bag, and taken it to better hunting grounds in the public dumping grounds in the south of Male' where even the very air reeked of organic material in different states of putrefaction. Suhana had seen me take the bag and was already accusing me of throwing out her precious footwear in revenge for having coerced me into throwing out the cat, knowing that I loved cats.

“Oh, come on, Suhana!” I yelled back. “Even I could not have loved that mangy cat. In any case, consider the possibility of the pumps having taken a walk under your bed as quite a lot of your fancy footwear often seems to do.”

“Will someone please give back my green pumps? I need them to wear to Shani's party tonight. I am wearing my emerald outfit and those are the only matching ones I have! Hullo!” Suhana was still yelling for her footwear.

I wondered why our Cinderella-in-reverse had not heard me the first time.

“Look under your bed, Suhana!” I yelled back.

“Now, now! What seems to be the matter?” Khadeeja came in from the kitchen, “Why are you people shouting like they do at the fish market?”

Now Khadeeja had never been to the fish market. It was considered extremely improper for ladies to go to that part of town. Therefore, I was very sure that she had never seen or heard how people behaved at the fish market. What she used, however, was a common simile in use at that point in time in Male’.

“We are not shouting at all. Suhana wants to know where her green pumps went and seems to think that I threw them out with the cat.” I told Khadeeja, “I am asking her to look under her bed where some very strange creatures live!”

“How do you know what lies under her bed?” Khadeeja asked in an ominous tone.

“*Kamanaafaanu*’s command has been my pleasure on many an auspicious occasion.” I made light of her remark by referring to Suhana with the Maldivian equivalent of Her Ladyship, “I know that the missing shoes will be found there along with, maybe, a few hair bands, a couple of hair brushes, a perfectly good selection of Bob Marley cassette tapes and a few other objects I would not dare name in front of you.”

“Where are my pumps?” Suhana yelled again. Maybe her ears had finally given out, retiring under the constant assault they had to suffer from their mistress.

The thought and mention of cassette tapes gave me an idea. I went looking for Suhana and found her standing right beside her bed, looking around but not under that piece of important furniture. Moreover, what I had suspected was the cause of her deafness was right there on her head — a pair of Sony Walkman headphones! Little Suhana had not outgrown the need for her ‘oo-oo-laa-laa’.

As soon as they hit the world market, the Sony Walkman and its imitators and cheap clones had made it to Maldivian shops in double quick time. Every young man who considered himself fashionable had one. Every young lady who wanted to look chic had to have one. People went by on the roads wearing headphones with those little pads of colored sponge on them, smiling and nodding in time to the latest Boney M, Eric Clapton or the ever-lasting Asha Bhosle and R.D.Burman.

Traffic and the rest of the world went by in relative peace, each moving and grooving to his or her own choice of tune.

I walked up to Suhana, lifted the phones off her head and said to her right ear in a mock whisper, “My little Suhana seriously needs to turn off her ‘oo-oo-laa-laa’ before she finds her itsy-bitsy, teeny-weenie, lovey-dovey pair of oh-so-green pumps. Look under your bed, you cute little dummy, before Mummy comes in looking like a flustered hen wondering why her sweet little Bunny Suhie has suddenly gone hard of hearing.”

Sure enough, Suhana found her pumps right under her bed, lying around beside a good collection of costume jewelry. Just as Suhana was getting up off the floor after retrieving these, Khadeeja came in, looking very worried, “Is everything all right here? What have you been doing kneeling on the ground?”

“Oh, nothing Mother.” Suhana replied, “I just retrieved my shoes from under the bed.”

“And more, after a temporary spell of deafness brought about by overindulgence in the ‘oo-oo-laa-laa’!” I said.

That set all three of us laughing. Everything was fine in our little world.

“Do you know it was your ‘oo-oo-laa-laa’ that made us by our first radio?” Khadeeja asked, a far-away look on her face.

I was sure they had forgotten where that particular radio sat at that point in time. I knew where it was. It was still sitting in the back of that dusty old cupboard in the room that housed those bits of old furniture which held so many precious family memories that no one had the heart to throw them away.

## MINUTE TWELVE

### I acquire the radio

Two months after Uncle Ramzi expired, I was witness to the partitioning of the family land. It turned out that my mother was also one of the rightful owners of the land. She did not come to contest the right but sent a lawyer in place. This particular lawyer was very rude and obnoxious to the highest possible degree. He might have been chosen by my mother's husband. Our letters and phone calls to my mother went unanswered for a while. A fax message sent via the Atoll Office was returned to us with the text 'refer to appointed lawyer' written on it. We were told by the Atoll Office that the signature endorsing that direction was my mother's.

Four months after that, the case was over. The land on which I grew up was divided neatly in half. One half went to Khadeeja and Suhana. The other half went to my mother. She and her two daughters decided that they would sell the land to a rich businessman in Male' and use the money to build a lavish house in Addu after sufficient money was set aside for the education of the two girls. I was not consulted. Khadeeja and Suhana invited me to stay on with them.

It just happened that the room that held the old memory-furniture as Khadeeja called it was on the wrong side of the divide. Since the new owners of the property decided to demolish everything on their newly-acquired land, Khadeeja decided to let everything go as half of the old house was demolished along with much of what she had cherished almost all her adult life.

Therefore, just before the wreckers arrived, I asked her if I could retrieve and keep the old radio that was, after all, the first radio we ever had.

"If you are so attached to it, you may keep it. But please don't let me see it!" Khadeeja told me in a strangely subdued, yet strong, voice.

I retrieved the radio, gently brushed the dust off it, made a polyurethane cover for it, and kept it in the little room I used as my study-cum-bedroom.

Even though I never used it after that, that radio always seemed to radiate a certain serenity all over the room.

Perhaps it was Uncle Ramzi smiling at me from heaven.

## MINUTE THIRTEEN

### About a marriage and a house

“Is the designer going to be here before Sham has to leave?” Suhana asked in a worried voice. Sham was her boyfriend. He had a non-commissioned officer’s job with the MNDF, the Maldives National Defence Force, and had to leave in time to go on duty at 2200 hours. The time, in civilian terms, was already 7.40 pm.

“Oh, he will be here exactly on time. I know him. For him, 7.45 is exactly that.” I reassured them.

Sham and Suhana were planning on getting married in June next year and they needed to make sure that their living quarters were in place before that. Their old house was no more; a modern five-storey block of apartments was taking shape on half of the land it used to occupy, the other half being allocated to the trendy three-storey house that Suhana and her husband would set up house in. Senior partner and Managing Director of Infra-Tech Architects and Designers PTE and my good friend Mr. Mohamed Shanun was joining us for dinner at the Sri Lankan Foods Corner of West Park, the famous sea-front restaurant on the north western corner on Male’, to help us design that house.

A salty breeze blew in, carrying with it a barely perceptible whiff of diesel smoke. That made my nose twitch. My companions did not seem to notice it. This was not surprising since I knew was overly sensitive to diesel smoke. Suhana and Sham seemed to enjoy the sight of boats of all shapes and sizes going by at various speeds, some of them easily doing twenty knots in an area that had a ten-knot restriction in place. Sooner or later, the Coast Guard would get them. I was sure of that because two nights ago I had heard a public announcement made over the radio on that very subject.

I was still very much the well-informed Radio Man as my friends had continued to call me over the years. Meanwhile, Suhana had even given up her Sony Walkman in favor of an Apple iPod. What she had not given up was a penchant for her ‘oo-laa-laa’!

At exactly 7.45 pm, Mohamed Shanun walked in through the door and strode up to our table. He was dressed casually in a smart black shirt and black jeans. Sham

looked down at his watch and came up with a military man's seal of succinct endorsement — a smile of manly approval.

“Good evening!” This was directed at me. Then he turned to Suhana and Sham, “My clients, I presume. My name is Mohamed Shanun. I am Managing Director of Infra-Tech Architects and Designers PTE. Here is my card.”

“Good evening, sir! I am Sergeant Mohamed Sham and this is my fiancée Suhana Ramzi. Please do join us.” The way Sham stood up and welcomed Shanun impressed me much. My cousin had chosen well.

A rushed-looking waiter in a white shirt came over and asked us as to what we wanted. Even though there were printed menu cards on call, the very limited number of items usually available made their use a rather facetious exercise. All of us wound up ordering string hoppers, chicken curry, *kirihodhi* and *pol sambol* with a simple limejuice to wash it down.

“You see Mr. Shanun; we have a bit of land on which there is part of an old Maldivian-style single-story house. We would like to have whatever is left of the old house restored and incorporated in to a three-story building. Now that would call for a seamless merging of the old into the new. Now, this is just an idea. However, I have a feeling that with a man as creative as you are, we might just be able to achieve it.” Suhana knew what she wanted and she usually got what she wanted. If anybody could do it, Shanun would. However, even I had had my doubts if what she wanted was possible.

“Oh I am sure that can be done. I accept that this is the first time someone has approached me with that idea. Everyone wants to knock down old houses and go for something that looks ultra-modern. But I think I can accept your challenge.” Shanun had a confident smile on his face, “I will need to come over and take a good look at whatever is left of the old house and see exactly what kind of restoration it needs. I will also have to figure out a way of laying a solid foundation to hold up the two floors that will have to go over it. When can I come?”

“Oh, as soon as you are ready. I am on leave and can make myself available at any time.” Suhana was all smiles. She was going to have her own way with this one as well.

“How about three o'clock in the afternoon tomorrow?” Shanun asked.

“Perfect!” Suhana said, “Sham is off duty at that time as well. We shall be honored to receive you then.”

The rest of the evening passed very pleasantly indeed. Even though the curry and the *sambol* were a bit heavy on the chili peppers, we enjoyed the food. Half way through the meal, a nearly full moon made an appearance through the clouds and we enjoyed the golden shimmer on the gentle waves of the sea between Male and Villingilli as an added bonus.

During the meal, Suhana added to her wish list that even though much of what was left of half of the old house was to be preserved, that all of the electrical wiring and equipment there were to be removed and replaced with modern stuff that would be safer and required less energy. She was an active member of EcoCare, one of the more active environmental NGO’s in the country.

The only odd note continued to be the whiff of diesel smoke. That, however, was only for me to discern.

That and the realization that the old Phillips radio, which I wanted to give her as a wedding present, would not find a home in Suhana’s new house.



## MINUTE FOURTEEN

### A shop that sold some strange stuff

I did not know that the Maldives had antique shops. However, I discovered, almost by accident, that the culture of collecting and appreciating antiques was gaining a certain momentum in the country. This, perhaps, could have been the result of tourism, which began as an organized commercial activity in the early 1970's.

Appreciation of the old and the antique did not start as a positive activity in connection with tourism. Priceless old chinaware that had served generations with their Eid *salawat* rice and curry disappeared from old family chests as unscrupulous dealers persuaded owners to sell them off, eventually to be carried out of the country by private collectors. Old coins and jewelry went the same way. On a lighter note, the toddy tappers utilitarian sap collection vessels, called the *gudi* and the *raabadhi*, found themselves hanging in tourist resort restaurants as exotic decorations.

One sunny Friday afternoon, I was trying to dodge the screaming stream of Honda Waves that surged round me past the traffic lights near the Salsa Royal restaurant on Orchid Magu, when a rather strange shop caught my attention. I dismounted, placed my ageing Raleigh Classic bicycle between two identical scooters in the two-wheeler parking zone on the side of the road, and walked into the shop.

Rows of *gudi* and *raabadhi* that had magically acquired a definitely non-traditional coat of clear lacquer hung around in profusion, obviously waiting for owners of new resorts to snap them up to outfit their premises with ersatz Maldivian doodads. Objects found in kitchens of yore, ranging from the low-slung traditional coconut scraper *hunigondi* seats to the hand-operated rice grinder *handoo muguraa dhathi* lay beside the almost complete range of fishing gear used on a traditional fishing boat. Bunches of *koari* fisherman's hats competed with small woven-reed *kunaa* mats for attention.

And right in the midst of it all, high on a shelf in dignified silence, sat the brother of that old radio we had at home! Not a Phillips but what looked to me like a circa 1960 Grundig.

“Is that an old Grundig sitting up there?” I asked the very young man behind the desk that obviously served as the cashier’s counter.

“Yes, sir! That is a very special radio indeed. And how right you are! It is a 1960 Grundig 2440 and is connected to the name of a very illustrious person in the history of the Maldives. If you are interested in buying it, I can offer it to you for twelve thousand Rufiyaa.”

I was not Radio Man for nothing. I knew that the current market price of that particular model or a similar model would be between two and three hundred US dollars on the American market. After adding shipping, handling and insurance, I could have one for about four hundred dollars, which would come to something slightly over five thousand Rufiyaa.

“Isn’t that slightly overpriced? I know I can get one down from the USA for about half that.” I told the young man.

“If it is readily available, if they are willing to ship it fast!” The young man countered, “Also, you have no guarantee that it will work when it arrives. This one, on the other hand, has had its power cord, all cloth-insulated internal wiring and all its capacitors professionally replaced and is in perfect working condition. In addition, it has the distinction of having once been owned by a very distinguished Maldivian family. At twelve thousand, sir, you still have a bargain.”

I knew he was right. The power cord, certain types of internal wiring including the cloth-clad ones, and old capacitors are the bugbears of older radios. Not only do they fail and damage other components but can easily cause fires. A professionally reconditioned radio was definitely worth the extra cost.

“You are right.” I told the young man. “Are you interested in buying old radios?”

“Certainly!” The young man told me, “Especially if they are in good shape and are of well-known brands and models. In fact, I have had a few inquiries from a very rich man who happens to be looking for the old Phillips valve radios that were in use in this country in the late sixties and early seventies.”

Jackpot! That was what I had hit.

“How much would you give me for a working Phillips B3G63A?” I asked my new-found friend.

“That model number sounds very familiar to me. Let me look at my wanted list.” The young man rummaged around in the drawer of his desk and brought out a dog-eared notebook. He riffled through it, muttering to himself.

“Phillips... Phillips..... Ah, Yes! Phillips B3G63A. It *is* on my list. Why, do you have you can sell me?”

He could have told me it was not on his list and got the radio for a cheaper price. However, he was honest enough to tell me it was. I was fast beginning to like this man. So told him, “Yes, I do! How much will you give me for an un-restored Phillips that was in use when it was retired somewhere in the late 1970’s and has since been sitting in a dark cupboard? ”

“How about six thousand Rufiyaa?” The young man asked me. “That is the best I can do and one of my regular customers definitely needs one.”

I sealed the deal without any more discussion, delay or bargaining. My precious radio changed hands that very day.

## MINUTE FIFTEEN

### Radio come home

Six thousand Rufiyaa bought the compact Sony entertainment system I gave Suhana as a wedding gift. It played CD's and the older cassette tapes of which Suhana still had a good collection. It could also handle VCD's and function as a DVD player. Moreover, to put some old icing on a new cake, it also had a built-in FM/AM radio!

I had the entertainment system packed in its own shock-proof cardboard case, wrapped it in very special red paper with gold stars on it, and affixed a great big white ribbon flower to it. I had it brought into the foyer of Nassandhura Palace Hotel where Suhana and Sham stood together with smiles on their faces to greet those who had been invited to their wedding party. Everyone gasped when they saw it being brought in by the two bow-tie-clad bearers I had hired for the occasion. Clearly, mine was the biggest parcel anyone saw that night.

“What is it? Suhana asked me in a conspiratorial whisper. I was, after all, her favorite cousin.

“Entertainment set.” I told her.

“You always read my mind, don't you? That is exactly what I wanted for our bedroom. But I told only Sham.” Suhana's eyes shone with a mixture of gratitude and admiration.

“Hey, I know you still need your ‘oo-oo-laa-laa’” I said with a laugh.

A far-away look crossed Suhana's eyes; I was sure she was reminded of how her father had first catered to that need.

“Enjoy, Suhana. You are not only my cousin but also the only sister I ever had. I will always read your mind. And I will always be there for you guys.” I smiled at Suhana and Sham. Suhana smiled back, our eyes locking into the truth of that. I looked around and saw Khadeeja smiling back at me.

Yes, it was a happy night indeed.

## AND NOW...

Perhaps I should tell Suhana.....

Perhaps I should tell Suhana where the money I used to pay for her new entertainment system came from. Not now, perhaps a bit later, when all the excitement of the wedding party has died down and when we could sit together once again as a family and have some private moments to ourselves.

Now my fifteen minutes of patience have run out. However, a greater patience has come over me. There stretches before me a lot more than fifteen minutes of giving and caring for my sister who will always remain my little Suhana. She will look for me if ever her supply of 'oo-oo-laa-laa' dries up.

I remember that day so long ago when we set up that first radio of ours and Uncle Ramzi telling us, "This is an investment in our future!"

How right you were, Uncle Ramzi!

*--- the end ---*