

AINUN AND THE LEAFMAN
Ainun dan Manusia Daun

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AINUN AND THE LEAFMAN

Ainun and Aida were two teenage girls who lived in Desa Sempalang, north Sulawesi. From the time they were children, the two were inseparable. As fate would have it, they were born on the same day and so both Ainun's mother and Aida's mother thought it would be fitting to give their daughters very similar names. They agreed to name one baby Ainun and the other Aida.

Although they were not sisters by blood, they had several things in common. They were both tall, slender and beautiful. Ainun was left without a mother. She had died when Ainun was nine years old. Meanwhile, Aida's father had died when she was just seven.

Ainun's father was Pak Liwai. By day, he worked as a farmer at a fishery pond about a mile away from his home. The passing of his wife left him stricken with loneliness, passing the time alone toiling away at the fishery. Ainun would help him cook and sweep before going to school and just like her late mother had always done, she would bring food for her father. But, whereas her late mother brought the food at around midday, Ainun would come by after school. She would often stay with her father at the pond until dusk.

As a father, Pak Liwai could not help but feel pangs of guilt when he saw just how many tasks and responsibilities his daughter had

taken on, from household chores to taking food to the pond as well as keeping up with schoolwork on top of everything else. He felt that it was too heavy a burden for his daughter.

One day, as Ainun arrived at the pond, winded and out of breath, a food parcel in one hand and a kettle of water clutched in the other, Pak Liwai was overcome with sadness.

"This life is too hard for you, my dear!" Pak Liwai thought silently as he wiped away a tiny droplet running down his dark cheek.

Pak Liwai loved Ainun very much. He worked every day until his bones ached, in the driving rain, in the searing heat to make ends meet and so that his only child could go to school. He could not bear the thought of causing his daughter any pain. Ainun was everything to him.

Ainun did not live very far from Aida. Ainun would often visit Aida's house to play. Ainun would even stay overnight whenever she lost track of time or when it got too rainy. It was the same for Aida. Ever since Ainun lost her mother, she became very close with Mak Singkay, Aida's mother. Mak Singkay thought of her as her own daughter. Mak Singkay could often be spotted, Ainun and Aida in tow, at the market shopping for everyday things.

Ainun and Aida's families had become so close, in fact, that there was talk among the townspeople of making a match of Aida's

mother and Ainun's father. Pak Liwai, Ainun's father, was not blind to this as he often overheard the neighbours chattering away. This was not lost on Mak Singkay either. The words of the local ladies often reached her ears, whether or not she was in the room to hear them.

"Singkay, it's no secret that you've grown very close to Ainun. Why not just take the plunge and marry her father?" said Bu Runtiya, Mak Singkay's neighbour.

"If only it were so simple, Bu Runtiya," Mak Singkay replied curtly.

"Not simple? You've grown very close with Ainun's family, haven't you?" Bu Runtiya prodded.

"Truly, I see no harm in it, Bu Runtiya, but we are women. To lose our heads over a man would be very unbecoming. We are easterners, after all," Mak Singkay answered with as much tact as she could muster.

Once, on a Sunday, Ainun came to Aida's house. When they had finished having lunch together, Mak Singkay asked the two girls to join her on the sitting platform in the corner of her front yard on the pretense of enjoying the evening breeze. Bu Singkay made small talk with Ainun and Aida about their friends and teachers at school but their conversation eventually turned to the subject of Ainun's father and how sad it was for Ainun to see him so lonely.

"It breaks my heart to see dad all alone, Mak. Sometimes he would just sit quietly, goodness knows what goes on in his head," Ainun told them ruefully.

"What do you think is troubling him, Ainun?" asked Mak Singkay.

"That's just it, Mak. I'm afraid to ask him. It might rub him the wrong way. Is he reminiscing over mum or....," Ainun cut herself short, throwing a furtive glance towards Aida.

"Or what, Ainun?" pressed Mak Singkay.

"Hmmm... I don't know, Mak," Ainun shook her head.

Ainun had been absent from school for two days. Aida wondered where Ainun had been. Aida got anxious for her. When the school time was over, Aida immediately went out of the classroom and rushed to Ainun, her close friend. The girl called out Ainun's name repeatedly but nobody replied. Since the door of the house was unlocked, Aida entered the house right away. She went to Ainun's room. She found Ainun lying on a small bed and moaning. She had a fever. Aida called out Ainun's father, but there was no reply at all. Then Aida took a small towel and a bowl. She poured some water into the bowl and applied a cold compress to Ainun's forehead. Aida left only after Ainun's father was already home in the evening.

When Aida got home, she described Ainun's fever to her mother. Mak Singkay got shocked. She immediately cooked some white rice porridge for Ainun. After passing the Maghrib prayer, Mak Singkay took Aida to Ainun's home. Although Ainun still suffered from the fever, she got excited when Aida and Mak Singkay arrived. Ainun tried to sit up. Mak Singkay touched Ainun's forehead to measure the temperature.

"Oh, you are having a fever, dear."

"Apply another old compress, Mak," said Aida while passing the compress.

A few minutes later, Mak Singkay unloaded the porridge parcel that she had brought. Affectionately, Mak Singkay fed Ainun with the porridge. Ainun had been sick for a week. In the meantime, Mak Singkay cooked porridge for Ainun. Sometimes the woman cooked some vegetable soup and some dishes for Pak Liwai as well. Likewise, after going home from school, Aida always visited Ainun. Some other times, she helped wash the dishes and clean up Ainun's house.

Realizing Aida and Ainun's intimate relation and Mak Singkay's sincere care for Ainun, Pak Liwai felt indebted to the family. One night, before Ainun went to bed, Pak Liwai called his daughter to have a conversation.

Pak Liwai asked Ainun if she would agree if he married Mak

Singkay to replace Ainun's mother.

"It's all up to you, Pak. If you think Mak Singkay suits you, then she suits me too," Ainun assured his father with her delighted smile.

"Alright then. The night after tomorrow we are going to your best friend's home," replied Pak Liwai in delight.

Happily, Ainun left her father alone and went to bed. Before she fully fell asleep, she imagined how happy it would be to share a home with Aida and Mak Singkay.

When the expected day came by, Pak Liwai and Ainun had already been fully prepared to visit Mak Lingkai and Aida. Ainun had finished reciting the Quran verses and prepared some gifts. They brought some pieces of fried fish collected from Pak Liwai's ponds. Pak Liwai and Ainun arrived at Aida's home. Mak Singkay got surprised when Pak Liwai and Ainun's unexpected visit.

"By the way, is Aida in, Mak?"

"Aida is inside." Mak Singkay replied.

"I see..." said Ainun.

Before Ainun stood up, Aida already got out of her room and shook Pak Liwai and Ainun's hands. Then she took Ainun to her

room. They did not care at all what their parents were discussing. The two girls just let their parents make a decision by themselves.

One month later, the happy day came by. Ainun's father married Aida's mother. It was such a happy time for Ainun. She would no longer live lonely. As she had always dreamt, the home would become more lively with the presence of new family members. Ainun would not have to deliver her father's lunch. Instead, Mak Singkay would just do it. Since the coming of new family members in the house, Ainun stopped doing the laundry at the well. Instead, Ainun found it more comfortable to do the laundry in the stream.

However, Ainun began seeing the changing attitude of Mak Singkay. She saw a change in her stepmother's attitude. The woman had stopped staying with Pak Liwai in the ponds. Even worse, she would rather ask Ainun to deliver the food parcel for her father after the school hours. As time went by, Mak Singkay's attitude had apparently changed.

One day, Ainun encouraged herself to ask her father about the changing attitude of Mak Singkay.

"Pak, in a few months, I have seen that Mak Singkay has changed. What's going on, Pak?" asked Ainun's more curiously when she noticed her stepmother's attitude changes. The girl did not have any courage to tell her father how poor Mak Singkay had treated her.

"That's just it, Ainun. I have no idea either. I'll find out the answer, and I'll let your mother know about this," Pak Liwai removed Ainun's anxiety.

Since then, Ainun had to accomplish nearly all heavy household chores, while Aida just had to do simple and light household chores. However, Ainun always did them patiently and earnestly.

Time flew fast. Pak Liwai had been married to Mak Singkay for three years. During that time, Mak Singkay had treated Ainun disappointingly. In fact, Pak Liwai had already noticed the changes in his wife's attitude. However, he did not want his daughter Ainun to know about it. In the first two weeks of marriage to Mak Singkay, Pak Liwai already identified some bad habits of his wife. Every morning, he found that she had messed up his wardrobe. In other occasions, Mak Singkay left him alone on the bed. He did not find her beside her when he had a sudden sleep interruption at nights. Occasionally, Pak Liwai noticed that his wife secretly searched something in the in the cupboard and scrambled the glass plates and bowls. She did it when all family members already fell asleep. The glasses and bowls were the property of Ainun's late mother. However, Pak Liwai did not object to that. He thought that his wife might have been arranging and tidying them. In the meantime, Pak Liwai constantly expected that Ainun would be patient and resolute. He expected that a man would come up and marry her soon. He wished to have a

grandchild from Ainun for a long time.

The sun had almost set and dusk would come soon. As usual, in the dusk, Ainun did the laundry at the stream. That day, Ainun went upstream. Carrying a laundry basket, the girl walked upstream along the path. She found many large beautiful rocks upstream. When she got upstream, she found that nobody was there. Ainun got scared. Suddenly she felt as if someone was watching her. Ainun looked around. Nobody was there. To remove the fear while she was doing the laundry, she hummed.

On the next day, Ainun went to the stream again for her usual laundry activity. She directly went upstream to the large rocks. Fearing that someone might have been following her along the pathway, she constantly looked around. Ainun felt relieved when she knew that nobody was there. However, when she got close to the stream, she saw the jungle man standing some distance away from her. He had some leaves all over his body. The man was sitting on the top of a rock beside the stream. She could not fully believe what she had seen. She put down the laundry basket and made sure that she was not dreaming. However, when she threw a glance at the initial spot, the man had disappeared in just a few seconds. Ainun got so scared. She took the laundry basket and scrambled down to the place where there were many people around.

"Why are you winded and short of breath like that, Ainun?" asked

a woman.

"Oh, I'm alright, Bu. I'm just afraid of getting home late," replied Ainun spuriously. She did not want to tell them what had just happened.

When she had finished the laundry, Ainun went home right away. Along the way home, she was fully occupied with a fear. Most importantly, she was afraid that Mak Singkay would get angry when she got home late. And she was right. When she just arrived at the house yard, Mak Singkay was already expecting her in a hostile look.

"Sorry, Mak. I get home late because I had a serious conversation with the women," Ainun apologized and made an excuse.

"Well, that's alright. Now cook the rice right away! That's your duty, isn't it!" Mak Singkay replied arrogantly.

"Alright, Mak. I'll cook the rice right away," said Ainun with her head bowed. She hurriedly rushed to the kitchen. Meanwhile, Aida, failing to do any favour to her, just looked at her from the back of the window.

Actually, Aida had already noticed that her mother became fierce and vicious. She also knew her mother's evil intention to take over the whole properties of Pak Liwai. Getting annoyed with her mother's bad attitude over the time, Aida arranged a time to talk

personally to her mother. The girl expected that her mother would stop insisting Ainun to do all household chores.

"Mak, Ainun and I have been like sisters by blood. We have been good friends long before you married her father. We have been good friends since we were only children," said Aida to her mother.

"Ah! You are the only one who said that I have changed!" Mak Singkay denied the accusation arrogantly.

"Don't you realize that your attitude has changed much? We have lived with Ainun for more than three years. Only for a few months have you treated Pak Liwai and Ainun well!" Aida claimed.

"So, does it matter?" Mak Singkay started losing her emotional control.

"I want you to treat Ainun like the way you treat me. Equally important, I want you to stop acquiring the properties inherited by Ainun's late mother," said Aida.

"Oh, so you dare to speak that way to your own mother!" Mak Singkay got furious.

Aida thought that she had to talk explicitly to her mother since she was very ashamed of her behaviour to Ainun and Pak Liwai.

Meanwhile, Ainun constantly wondered what she had experienced in the stream in the past several days. What and who was the leafman whom she had seen? Did the man intentionally scare her? Since then, Ainun stopped doing the laundry by herself. Instead, she preferred doing the laundry together with other women.

Ainun wanted to describe the man she had seen in the stream to her father. But, she was afraid that it would make her father anxious. Her father had constantly insisted her to give him a grandchild.

"Umm.., I haven't got married yet. How can I bear a baby?" Ainun mumbled while staring at the ceiling of her room.

"Of course, a devoted daughter should have always obeyed what her parents instructed. But, to whom will I get married?" Ainun asked silently.

That day, after she had been absent from doing the laundry while carrying a laundry basket, Ainun walked upstream along the pathway. Apparently, nobody was there.

However, while she was intensely doing the laundry, unexpectedly Ainun saw the man she had previously seen a few months earlier. The man was sitting on the top of the rock over

the stream. Ainun scrambled down right away and went home with only a sarong around her body.

When Mak Singkay saw Ainun getting home that way, she scolded her.

"Ugh...what the hell do you think you are wearing? Just a sarong instead of a proper dress?. What's going on?"

"Uh-huh...There is..... Mak!" Ainun said haltingly.

"What are you talking about?" asked Mak Singkay more loudly.

"When I ...was at the r....stream I saw a jungle man, Mak. His body was fully covered with leaves ."

"Ah...How can I believe that a jungle man lives in this town! If you are truly tired and refused to do the laundry, don't make any unreasonable excuse!" Mak Singkay snapped.

Ainun said no word. She did not want to talk back to her stepmother although she protested silently. Still, in a deep anger, Mak Singkay prodded Ainun to collect the laundry she had left at the stream.

To avoid a further conflict, with an intense fear in her mind, Ainun encouraged herself to collect the laundry that she had left, in spite of the fact that it was almost dusk. When she arrived at the stream, the fear turned into a wonder and curiosity. She found

that the laundry had been accomplished.

"Oh my God. What's going on here," Ainun yelled in wonder.

She looked around but she found nobody. She got scared more intensely. While carrying the basket of laundry magically laundered by an unidentified person, Ainun went home right away.

After the Isya prayer, Ainun approached his father who was taking a rest on the spread pandanus mat in the living room. Initially, Ainun would just let her father know that in the coming few days, she would temporarily stop doing the laundry at the stream.

However, since her father consistently insisted her to tell the reason, she reluctantly told his father about what had happened. The girl told his father about the leaf man she had found in the stream. She described that the man's body was covered by some leaves. Pak Liway did not believe what her daughter's had described. However, Ainun constantly assured his father that she had told the truth. Clearly, she described that he was hardly visible since his body was fully covered with leaves.

"Well, if you don't believe it, that's alright. But, have I told you a lie previously?" Ainun insisted.

"What matters isn't whether you lie or not, my dear. I am just not

sure if in the stream there is a strange man whose body is fully covered with leaves. We call it the leafman then! Oh, where does he come from?," Pak Liway responded doubtfully.

Temporarily Pak Liway stopped talking. He knew and realized that Ainun had never told a lie to him. In the following morning, before leaving for the fishery ponds, Pak Liway shared her daughter's story to the men in the coffee shop. Unexpectedly, some of them believe the story.

"Well, if the figure really exists, ask Ainun to be careful, Liway. Never let her go alone to the stream, especially in the dusk," one of the men gave advice to Pak Liway.

"Someone may want to tease your daughter, Liway. Your daughter is beautiful," another man interrupted.

"That's right. Who knows the young man who likes her wants to be unidentified?" another man added.

"Oh come on. No kidding. I mean it. My daughter is an honest girl. She told it since she truly saw it with her own eyes. She had seen him several times," Pak Liway assured.

"Well, I remember now. Some of the elderly people in this town had ever told about it in this shop. They said that several decades ago, most parts of this town were jungles. Few people lived in the inner part of the jungle. Currently, we don't know if the jungle

man still exists," Pak Soki, the coffee shop owner explained.

Hearing Pak Soki's story, the men held their words. They looked at each other.

With the strong bond of solidarity in the village, they agreed to go upstream to have a direct observation. However, when they arrived at the forest, they did not see the expected leafman.

In the sky, the moonlight was gleaming. Some stars were loyally gleaming along with the moon. Ainun sat alone on the bamboo couch at the front part of her house. That night, she attempted to recognize the figure sitting on the large rock at the upstream. She got scared and curious at once. Fear and curiosity came one after another and changed alternately. Ainun sat still. Slowly, she looked up the sky. She looked up a little bit higher. The beautiful girl engaged in a conversation with the moon far away in the sky.

"Dear the moon. Tonight many stars accompany your lonely night. When no star stays with you, you will get lonely too. However, you remain strong."

Ainun stared the moon even more sharply, expecting that the moon would respond accordingly. A sudden reply came into her mind.

"The moon has never been afraid of being lonely. The moon is not afraid of loneliness. How about me? Why should I be afraid

of anything that I have never known previously? Why should I be scared of the man sitting on the large rock? I have to learn the lessons from the moon. I have to be brave and I can manage it."

Having absented from doing the laundry in the stream for three days, Ainun encouraged herself to do the laundry at the stream the next day. After accomplishing all of the household chores, she persuaded Aida to go along with her. Aida declined the persuasion. The girl had slept all day long. Although Aida refused to go along with her, Ainun was not disappointed at all. Carrying a laundry basket, she surely walked upstream. Along the pathway, she constantly attempted to remove the unexpected appearance of the leafman that came into her mind. She continuously prayed that the figure would disappear. When she arrived at the stream, she soon put off her clothes and put a sarong around her body. When her feet nearly touched the water, she heard a voice calling her. Ainun was startled. She looked around to find where the voice came from.

The voice called out Ainun's name repeatedly. "Ainun... Ainun..."

"Who are you calling out my name?" Ainun asked back and looked around her.

Nobody was there. In an intense anxiety, Ainun turned around. Precisely at the bottom of the Ara tree, she saw the leafman standing upright. Ainun was startled. When she was about to run

away, her feet accidentally hit the rock in front of her. Ainun fell off and slipped into the water.

In response to Ainun's slipping into the water, the leafman helped her. He lifted up Ainun's body. Ainun struggled to get loose of his hands. In the end, the man managed to lift up Ainun's body and put her on the flat surface of grass. Ainun looked at the face of the leafman. However, she failed to identify the man since he had his body completely covered with leaves. In such a situation, she remembered that she should not have been afraid. She had to be courageous.

"Don't be afraid, Ainun. I'll not hurt you."

"Who the hell are you?" Ainun asked with a weakening voice of a tired girl.

The leafman did not reply. Even he turned his face to the left to avoid Ainun's stare.

"Ainun, if you are tired, you had better go home now," the leafman said calmly.

Feeling very tired, Ainun decided to go home. Along the way home, Ainun's mind was confused by questions of all sorts. Who was the leafman and what did he want?

When she was already at the front fence, Ainun realized that she had left her laundry basket at the stream. Ainun was so afraid that

Mak Singkay would get angry when she knew that Ainun got home without the laundry basket. Ainun turned around right away and went back to the stream to collect the laundry. When she had already reached upstream, vaguely Ainun saw the leafman doing the laundry. She got increasingly curious. Ainun stopped for a while and stepped backward. Then she sat between the senduduk trunks waiting until the leafman left the stream.

When the leafman got out of the stream, Ainun kept herself from being visible. When the leafman had totally disappeared, Ainun got down to the usual rock in the stream to collect the laundry.

"I am sure that I haven't done the laundry, but why is the laundry accomplished? Who has done the laundry?" asked Ainun curiously.

She looked around but she found nobody there. The women usually did the laundry at the downstream. Suddenly beyond Ainun's anticipation, the leafman stood up right before her.

"Ainun, it's me who had done the laundry. Go home now or your mother will get angry with you. We can see each other again some time," said the leafman tenderly.

"What!" Ainun jerked in a surprise. "Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you mean? It seems that you have given me some favours. Oh...," Ainun took a long and deep breath.

Ainun asked questions consecutively, but the leafman did not give any answer. However, from the holes of the leaves covering his face, the two eyes of the leafman looked at Ainun with a sincere care. Because she got no answer at all, Ainun got vexed. She took the laundry basket and left the leafman.

It was nearly dusk when Ainun got home. As it had been expected, with her usual sullen expression Mak Singkay was standing in front of the door. Ainun was prepared to hear whatever Mak Singkay would say.

"Well, it's difficult to make you understand, Ainun. How frequent have you got home late? You know? In any way, I care about you!" Mak Singkay called her down while standing with her arms akimbo.

Ainun gave no reply. When Mak Singkay stopped expressing her harsh words, Ainun passed by and put the laundry basket in the kitchen.

"Hmm... it's of no use telling about this to Mak Singkay. Later, before Daddy goes to bed, I'll tell all about this to him," said Ainun silently while she poured some boiling water on coffee for her father.

The night was already late when Aida slept soundly in her bedroom. Pak Liway and Mak Singkay were sitting in the living room. Ainun was expecting a chance to talk personally to her

father. She walked in and out of the room. Pak Liway noticed the gestures of her daughter. As a father who had brought her up, the man knew exactly why her daughter was anxious. Pak Liway asked Mak Singkay to go to bed earlier. Ainun wondered that the middle-aged woman obeyed her husband's instruction of going to bed earlier.

When finally her father sat alone, Ainun approached him. She told the incidences that she had experienced at the upstream that day. Pak Liway nodded his head and listened to the story told by his daughter.

"So, are you not scared of seeing the leafman?" Pak Liway asked.

"Why should I be scared? The daughter of Pak Liway can always get along well with anybody, including the man whom she has never met."

"Wow...wow...wow..... It seems that my daughter has grown up now. Would you mind describing how he looks like?"

"Now then! That's just it. It makes me curious, Daddy. His face is wholly covered with leaves. How can I make sure if he has a nose and if he is a real human? I cannot guess at all."

"But, he is a nice man, isn't he?" Pak Liway comforted his daughter.

"He is absolutely kind, Daddy. When I slipped into the water, he

lifted me up. When he saw me that I looked tired, he asked me to go home. It's amazing that he did all the laundry for me," Ainun replied honestly.

Pak Liway was stunned when he heard what Ainun had said.

Aida had been ill for a week. Ainun always took care and treated Aida. Everyday Ainun applied a cold compress to cool down Aida's fever. However, Aida's fever was persistently high. Pak Liway and Mak Singkay got worried about Aida's health. However, they had no idea of what they had to do. Then Ainun remembered that onions could relieve fever. She peeled off some pieces of onion. She pounded them and put some vegetable oil on them. She rubbed the mixture over Aida's stomach. Apparently, Ainun's herbal medicine relieved Aida's fever. With the blessing of Almighty God, eventually, Aida totally relieved.

Since Ainun had to take care of Aida when she was sick, Ainun temporarily stopped doing the laundry at the stream. That day, after accomplishing the household chores, she carried the laundry basket to the stream. When she got there, many women were still doing the laundry. Since Ainun had many laundry works to do, the girl took a long time to do the laundry all people but her left. She coughed slightly. It seemed that she had a common cold after being in the water too long.

"Ainun, if you come here in the dusk, I can help you," the strange

man suddenly appeared and said.

Ainun gave no reply. She was familiar with that voice. She pretended that she heard nothing and expected that the voice would not be heard any longer.

"Ainun, if you come here in the dusk, I can help you."

"His voice sounds familiar to me. That's the voice of Tama, a handsome young man I ever met. At that time, about three years ago, he came with his father to the fishery pond. But, that's impossible. Tama 'is.... Ah! It's impossible. Absolutely impossible," Ainun said to herself.

When she heard the voice again, Ainun threw her glance to the right. She was very close to the leafman. The leafman asked Ainun to leave the laundry. Ainun just obeyed the leafman and she went to the bamboo trees around the stream.

Not long after that, the leafman got out of the stream. When Ainun saw that the leafman had already left the stream, Ainun immediately went down to the stream to go on the laundry work. However, she got startled to see that the whole laundry work had been accomplished by the leafman.

Since Ainun had not been familiar with that man, Ainun reserved some hesitation and fear although she already had a commitment not to be increasingly scared.

"Oh my God... why am I still scared of that man? Help me God," Ainun talked to herself.

"Don't be scared of me, take the laundry and go home now or your stepmother would get angry." Apparently, the leafman heard when Ainun talked to herself.

"How can the leafman know my name and how does he know that Mak Singkay frequently gets angry with me? Who is actually the leafman?" Ainun mumbled on her way home.

That evening, the breeze blew gently and the sky was clear of clouds. On the wooden desk behind the house, Pak Liway was sitting alone. He kept thinking of what his daughter had said about the leafman who frequently had helped Ainun do the laundry. Sometimes, Pak Liway doubted that story. However, he trusted Ainun since she had never told any lie. He once dreamt that her daughter was twisted by a large snake. Pak Liway was very anxious and curious at once. He decided to express his anxiety to a spiritually pious man.

One night, Pak Liway went to a pious relative, Pak Suib. Pak Liway told him that her daughter, Ainun, had encountered the leafman in the river. Pak Suib seriously listened to what Pak Liway had said.

"In my opinion, we don't have to be scared of the leafman. What matters is that he does not hurt your daughter," Pak Suib assured.

"Alright, but why has he met Ainun, Sir. He even helped Ainun do the laundry," Pak Liway insisted.

"I tell you what, Pak Liway. Tell Ainun not to speak rudely to the man she has not known well. Who knows that God is arranging a good plan behind the incidences?"

"What do you mean by a good plan, Pak Suib?"

"Or else, has the leafman come to you, Liway?" Pak Suib reciprocally asked.

"No, never," Pak Liway replied while shaking his head. "But, once I dreamt of Ainun being twisted by a large snake."

Pak Suib was silent and said nothing. He could understand Pak Liway's anxiety and could equally comprehend what would happen to Ainun.

"I hope that your dream signifies a good luck, Liway. The leafman may come to your home."

"What? Coming to my house? Do you mean it, Pak Suib? My wife and children must be scared."

"Don't be scared. Let's just pass prayer for our goodness. May Ainun get a spouse in the near future."

"A spouse?" Pak Liway got even more confused. However, he

endorsed Pak Suib's words.

Ainun already told Aida about her encounter with the leafman in the stream. Since then, Aida always insisted to go along with Ainun to the stream. One day, when Ainun and Aida went to the stream to do the laundry, they did not see the leafman. Aida was very disappointed because she wanted to prove what Ainun had said.

The next day, when Ainun was doing the laundry by herself, unexpectedly and easily she could meet the leafman. However, again she failed to identify the face of the leafman clearly.

"Ainun, actually I want to have a visit to your family. I want to get acquainted with your father and mother."

Hearing to what the leafman had just said, Ainun recalled what her father had said three days previously that he had met a spiritually pious man. The pious man expected that the leafman would have a visit to her family. Ainun was silent.

"Why are you silent, Ainun?" the leafman asked.

"I'll have to let my father know about this in advance. If he approves, I wouldn't mind. Then you may come to my home," Ainun replied and carried her basket. After that, she left the leafman alone.

Ainun was very glad. Until the time when her father got home,

she reserved her delight. Recognizing the happy look on his daughter's face, Pak Liway asked Ainun.

"What's up, Ainun? You look different today."

"I have good news for you, Pak. Later, when I have finished the household chores, I'll let you know," Ainun replied happily.

Besides telling the good news to her father, Ainun also told it to Aida. Aida did not believe it. She even said that Ainun was having a hallucination. However, Ainun persistently assured Aida. In the end, Aida believed what Ainun had said. They were not aware that Mak Singkay was listening to what they were talking from her bedroom.

After the dinner, Ainun approached her father and told her that the leafman would come to see him. Hearing such news from his daughter, Pak Liway took a long breath.

"Alright, I will be looking forward to seeing him coming here. Ask the leafman to come here."

Secretly Mak Singkay was listening to Ainun's conversation with Pak Liway. The next day, when Ainun met Mak Singkay, it was apparent that Mak Singkay had totally changed her gesture.

She instantly showed a kind gesture to Ainun. It seemed that she believed the story about the leafman. However, why had Mak Singkay had changed her gesture that fast? Heaven knows.

"Pak, what should I say to the leafman?" Ainun asked his father when he was about to leave for the pond.

"Tell her that I look forward to seeing him."

"Will Mak Singkay not get angry, Pak?" Ainun asked her father further.

"No, last night she expressed her agreement."

Hearing such an explanation from her father, Ainun felt relieved.

In that midday, Ainun collected the laundry and went to the stream accordingly. Knowing that Ainun was going to the stream, Aida asked to go along with her, but Ainun objected.

Only after Ainun was on the way to the stream was she aware that the sun had not set. She expected that many women were still doing the laundry in the stream. The leafman would not show up. Therefore, Ainun decided to go back home. It was a coincidence that she had to collect the laundry at home.

When Aida saw that Ainun had got home without the laundry, Aida wondered and asked, "Where have you put the laundry, Ainun?"

"I left them near the stream. There were still many people doing the laundry," replied Ainun.

Aida persuaded Ainun to let her go along to the stream.

"I have told you that he will come to our house Aida, haven't I? Just be patient. You will see him soon."

A few moments later, Ainun was ready to go to the stream. When she arrived at the stream, only a few women were there. As usual, Ainun started signaling her presence to the leafman by coughing slightly. She expected that the leafman heard and recognized that she was already there in the stream. However, the leafman did not appear right away. While Ainun was busy with doing the laundry, suddenly she heard the sound of dried leaves and twigs being stepped on.

"Is he the leafman?" Ainun asked with a pulsating heartbeat. In a flash, the leafman already stood up in front of Ainun. "I thought you won't be coming," Ainun said nervously.

"I thought you won't be coming either," the leafman repeated Ainun's words.

Ainun was silent and bowed her head.

"Tell me! Are your father and mother looking forward to seeing me at your home?" the leafman spoke further.

Ainun remained silent. Then she nodded her head.

"Thank God. When I arrive at your home, I want you to pick me

up in front of the fence. Besides, don't switch on the front lamp, please."

After making a deal, while carrying a laundry basket, Ainun stepped off the stone on which she usually doing the laundry. She took leave of the leafman. On the way home Ainun asked to herself, "Who might that man be? It seems that he is a nice person. Has he been cursed to look that way? Ah!"

Meanwhile, at home Mak Singkay asked Aida.

"Aida, has Ainun got home from the stream?"

"Not yet Mak. I think Ainun will get home in a moment." Aida looked at Mak Singkay's hands that were holding some spices. "By the way, what are you going to do with the spices in your hand Mak?" asked Aida.

"I'm going to use these cooking spices for warding off the wild animals just in case the leafman turns into the real form of a snake."

"Mak, you already believed it. Why are you doubting it now? Even worse, you are accusing him of a snake manifestation!" asked Aida.

Not long after that, Ainun got home. She rushed home with a happy gesture. Aida's conversation with her mother halted when Ainun came. Hurriedly Aida stepped down the staircases and met

Ainun.

"Ainun, will the leafman surely be coming here?"

"Yes, he will be coming here tomorrow evening."

How happy Aida was when she heard Ainun's confirmation since she was very curious to see the leafman. Meanwhile, Pak Liway asked Ainun to spare the front room for the leafman to take a rest and get away from the public sight.

In the morning on the next day, when the cocks crowed one after another, Ainun got up earlier. After passing the Subuh prayer, she went to the kitchen to boil some water. While boiling the water, Ainun repeatedly attempted to wake Aida up. Although Ainun had taken some attempts, Aida remained asleep. Only after Ainun gave a number of light taps on Aida's feet, Aida finally woke up. Ainun asked Aida to wash up her face. After that, she asked Aida to help her cook in the kitchen.

When they had finished cooking, they immediately cleaned up the house. They had moved the equipment in the front room to the back room. They had cleaned up the floor as well.

The moon and the accompanying clouds looked beautiful. Consecutively, the stars were glowing. The breeze blew softly. Ainun was wearing a long wine-colored dress. She had her hair braided into two with small ribbons at the end of the plaits.

Accompanied by her father, Ainun was sitting fearfully and hopefully in front of the entrance door. She was expecting the arrival of the leafman. She had been waiting for nearly twenty-five minutes.

Suddenly, Ainun heard someone coughing lightly three times at the front door. Ainun was very familiar with that voice.

"I think he has arrived. Get inside the room, Pak. I'll pick him up to the yard."

"Alright, take care, dear," said Pak Liway while holding his daughter's shoulders.

When her father had got into the house, Ainun stepped forward to the yard. She gave a signal by a light cough accordingly. When she arrived at the yard gate, again, Ainun signified her presence by having some other light coughs.

"Humph...! Humph...! Humph...!"

"Ainun... is that you there?" asked the leafman.

"Yes, it's me. Come in," Ainun invited him.

Ainun stepped into the house while the leafman followed. When they arrived at the front room, in compliance with the deal with

her father, Ainun asked the leafman to get into the room right away. When the leafman had entered the room, Ainun immediately closed the room door without glancing at the face of her guest. Heaven knows, although she had met him quite often, she still was still scared of the man whose face was persistently hidden. A moment later, Ainun went to the kitchen to prepare some drink.

While Ainun was in the kitchen, Mak Singkay prodded her husband to stay alert at the back of the house. She also insisted Aida get out of the back room, but Aida declined the request.

"Why do I have to see the leafman, Mak? He's a friend of Ainun, not mine!" Aida refused the request.

Furiously and rudely, Mak Singkay grabbed Aida's arms and dragged her to the door of the room where the leafman was taking a rest. She knocked the door. The leafman opened the door slowly.

"What is it, Mak?" asked the leafman politely.

While the woman was not scared at all when she was standing face to face with the leafman, Aida standing precisely behind the woman was scared and trembling.

"Hey! Who the hell are you really? Why have you come here? Do you think I'm scared of you?" asked Mak Singkay angrily.

"Well, I'll reply it later, Mak," replied the leafman calmly.

"The sooner the better! That's what I want." Mak Singkay got outrageous.

Suddenly, Ainun came up with some glasses of hot coffee. Hurriedly, she put the hot coffee on the extended floor mat. When the leafman saw Ainun coming, he turned around and slowly closed the door. Ainun approached Mak Singkay and Aida who were standing in front of the door.

"What's up, Mak? Why are you standing here?" asked Ainun curiously.

"It's none of your business!" replied Mak Singkay curtly. Then, she just left Ainun.

"What do you mean by none of my business, Mak?" Ainun bewildered.

Knowing that Ainun was all alone, the leafman opened up the door quietly.

When Ainun glimpsed at the leafman, she got surprised. Instead of seeing the leafman, she saw a handsome young man whom she ever met at the pond. His voice was similar to that of the leafman. In disbelief, Ainun tried to make sure that she was not dreaming by pinching up her cheek and rubbing her eyes with the back of her hands. Her pomegranate-like lips smiled enchantingly before

she returned to silence for a quite long time.

They stood quietly. The young man said no word at all. He stole a glance at Ainun silently. Both of them had delighted facial expression.

"Oh! It seems like a dream," said Ainun. She put the tips of her fingers on both right and left forehead. "Why has Kak Tama disguised to be the leafman so far? You had scared me, you know!"

"It's a long story, Ainun. It's a long ...long story," Tama replied. He extended his arms. Ainun laughed since Tama's hand extension reached the corner of Ainun's right eye. They all smiled.

Pak Liway vaguely heard Ainun's laugh when he was walking towards the back door of the house. Curiously, the man walked into the room and peeped through the partition. He found that Ainun was sitting with a handsome young man. Pak Liway did not tell what he had seen to his wife. The man was happy.

Meanwhile, Mak Singkay grumbled while she was lying on the wooden bed. She constantly grumbling about unnecessary things. Therefore, she did not realize what was going on outside of the room. She had declared that Ainun must not surpass Aida.

"Ainun, I will let you know about my long story some other time.

What matters now is that I would like to talk to your father and mother."

In response to Tama's request, Ainun called Pak Liway and Mak Singkay. How surprised Mak Singkay was when she saw a handsome young man in front of her.

"What's really going on here?"

She stared at Tama. Tama shook the hands of Pak Liway and Mak Singkay. After the handshaking, Mak Singkay left for the back room to page Aida. Aida followed her mother.

When Tama saw Aida coming up, he immediately stood up and shook Aida's hand. Aida was startled to see such a handsome young man. She wondered who this man was and why he came to her house.

Mak Singkay looked happy. Her sullen gesture turned into a very nice look.

On the yellowish brown mat, they were sitting while enjoying the hot coffee served by Ainun. Repeatedly, Mak Singkay stared at Ainun. She was wondering about the relation between the young man and Ainun.

If they had no intimate relation at all, she would ask Aida to approach Tama. She smiled by herself as she was expecting for something delightful. Mak Singkay repeatedly smiled.

"Alright, firstly I would like to apologize to you Pak, Mak, Ainun, and Aida since I have thrown you into a panic and confusion today and the previous days. My special apology goes to Ainun."

"Oh, no, that's not confusing at all," Mak Singkay interrupted the conversation.

"Go on, Son," Pak Liway prodded.

"Well, alright. I am coming here to propose your daughter for a marriage Sir."

In response to what Tama had said, Mak Singkay suddenly gave a sign to Aida to move forward.

"You mean our daughters?" asked Mak Singkay.

"Yes, Mak.

Pak Liway and Ainun sat silently and noticed Mak Singkay's gesture. Then, decisively and confidently, the woman moved closer to Aida.

"This is our daughter. Her name is Aida. She is older than Ainun. We have agreed that when a man proposes our daughters for a marriage, it is Aida who will get married first," said Mak Singkay while holding Aida's shoulder.

Aida sat silently. Her bright-red face indicated that she was

embarrassed. Pak Liway said nothing but shaking his head in response to his wife's whims. Meanwhile, Ainun and Tama just smiled. They looked at each other and felt amused.

"That's not what I mean, Mak. No, not Aida."

Then the handsome young man threw a glance to Ainun. "Tonight I am asking you to marry me, Ainun."

Ainun sat silently. She said nothing. Meanwhile, Mak Singkay looked shocked with her eyes widely opened.

"What do you think Pak Liway? Can you approve it?"

"It's all up to Ainun. If Ainun agrees, I will absolutely approve it," Pak Liway said wisely. Then, he asked Ainun to give a reply.

"What do you think Ainun? Will you marry him?"

Ainun sat with her head bowed. A moment later, she replied shyly and softly.

"If you agree, I'll marry him."

Hearing what Ainun had said, Tama felt relieved. He thanked God. Mak Singkay was stunned and silent. As he saw that his wife was sitting quietly, Pak Liway approached her and whispered something to Mak Singkay. Mak Singkay's sullen gesture turned into a nice look. She apologized to Ainun and hugged Ainun firmly. Eventually, Aida shook Tama's hand. Then

she hugged Ainun, her sister, and her best friend at once, firmly.

When everyone had regained the emotional control, Tama continued.

"Pak, Mak, it's already late at night. It would be improper for a man dropping in a girl's house until late at night. My father and mother must have been expecting me at home."

"Oh, alright then, Son," said Pak Liway.

"Tomorrow I'm going to come here again, Pak. If you don't mind, I'm going to take Ainun to my home. My father and mother are looking forward to seeing Ainun. They just know Ainun from my stories."

As Tama had introduced Ainun to his parents, the two families arranged a family meeting. Not long after that, on a good day and month, Ainun and Tama got married.

Amidst the incessant sounds of drums and acoustics, Ainun and Tama walked slowly to the bridal dais.

When the bridal couple was sitting on the bridal dais, Ainun stole a glance at Tama. She stared at Tama's glowing attire covering from the neck to the feet. Ainun was silent for a long time.

"Why are you staring at me that way, Ainun?" asked Tama in wonder.

"I am still not sure if Tama who is sitting beside me is the leafman or..." Ainun teased him with a smile pasted on her face.

"Yes... it was me, Tama, the leafman. However, today I am Tama, a handsome young man from Minahasa who has found his love."

Tama's eyes looked at Ainun intimately. He was proud of her since he finally managed to marry Ainun, an elegant girl whom he had adored for years.