



The Rice Flower

(Malaysia)

A long time ago, a woman named Mak Kantan and her daughter, Melur, were known to make the most delicious kuih in the village. One day, while preparing kuih, they heard a crying sound. They discovered that the voice came from the rice scattered on the ground that their neighbours had thrown towards the backyard of Mak Kantan and Melur.

“Why are you crying, Rice?” asked Mak Kantan.

“I am sad that humans do not appreciate me,” replied the rice. “I’m their food. But they throw me away instead.”

Mak Kantan and Melur felt the disappointment of the rice. So they picked up each grain of rice from the ground. Having gathered a bowl of rice, they formed it into the shape of flowers. The rice flowers gave out a sweet, lingering fragrance.

They sold the rice flowers along with the kuih. Because of the sweet smell of the rice flowers, they were popular among the villagers. From then on, Mak Kantan and Melur would save all the left-over rice from their neighbours to make rice flowers that they sold at the market.

One day, Mak Kantan wanted to present the rice flower to the king, Raja Amirul Alam. However, the guards stopped them at the palace gates.

“Those rice flowers are not beautiful enough for the king,” said the guards as they closed the gates.



While Mak Kantan and Melur were at the palace gates, the princess, Puteri Puspa Sari, was walking around the garden.

“What sweet smell in the air!” Puteri Puspa Sari said with delight. She followed the smell but she could not find where it came from. “I want that sweet smell,” she said to herself. But a moment later the smell had disappeared. Her longing for the sweet smell led to a strange illness.

Raja Amirul Alam was very worried for his beloved daughter. “My dear child, I will search for that scent for you so you will get well instantly,” the king promised.

A month passed but Raja Amirul Alam did not find the smell anywhere in his kingdom. Meanwhile, Puteri Puspa Sari was still ill. Her beauty was fast fading and the king was worried more than ever.

One day, Raja Amirul Alam passed by Mak Kantan's house. He was curious at the girl collecting left-over rice that people had thrown away. He saw how the girl made the rice into the shape of flowers.

“What sweet smell in the air!” the king said as he was standing outside Mak Kantan's house. He noticed that the sweet smell came from the rice flowers.

“My child, tell me about the story of the rice flowers and the sweet smell they give,” the king asked. Melur told him the story of how they made rice flowers from left-over rice. This impressed the king very much.

“I will invite you and your mother to the palace. Bring with you the rice flowers. I believe their sweet smell is what my daughter had been longing

for,” Raja Amirul Alam said.

So mother and daughter headed to the palace where they presented the rice flowers to Puteri Puspa Sari. “This is indeed the sweet smell I wanted!” exclaimed the princess. She quickly recovered from her strange illness upon smelling the rice flowers.

“Mak Kantan and Melur, you brought back the health of my daughter because of the sweet smell of the rice flowers you made. I am inviting you to live in the palace as a reward,” the king declared.

From then on, Mak Kantan and Melur lived in the palace where they made rice flowers to keep the princess happy.

Supplementary information

- **Kuih** are a variety of Malaysian bite-sized snacks or desserts made of flour from rice, taro, tapioca, corn, and wheat. Kuih may include cakes, cookies, dumplings, pudding, or biscuits.
- **Puteri** is the Malay word for princess.
- **Raja** is a term with roots in Sanskrit that refers to a king, monarch, or ruler. Raja also appears in the story The Attack of the Swordfish.