



The Attack of the Swordfish

(Singapore)

Long ago, it is said, swordfish began to attack Singapura (or present-day Singapore). When sailors went out to sea, swordfish sprang out of the sea and attacked them in the head, chest, and abdomen. The people were very afraid, for even people on the seashore were attacked by the swordfish that leapt out of the waves and everyone who was attacked died.

The Raja of Singapura, Paduka Sri Maharajah, went down to see for himself the tragedy of the attacking swordfish. He saw the dead covered in blood and their relatives rocking and wailing with grief.

The Raja ordered that soldiers stand side by side to form a barrier with their shields. But they were all attacked and died as well. No one seemed to know what to do!

A little boy watching could not bear to see more men die. He thought hard and soon had an idea.

“Why don’t we form a barrier with banana stems instead? When the swordfish attack, their snouts will be trapped in the stems and we will be saved.”

Everyone, including the king, was impressed and astonished to see that the idea came from such a young boy, an orphan who lived with his grandmother. The king ordered his men to build a fence of banana stems along the seashore, just as the boy had suggested. Once again the swordfish attacked,



while the people waited to see what would happen.

“Look at the swordfish getting stuck to the stems! We are saved!” the people rejoiced. They had a big feast to celebrate the wisdom of their little hero!

However, soon the king began to worry that such a clever boy could grow up into a very clever man and become a threat. Evil plans began to brew in his mind.

One night, the Raja's men sneaked up to the boy's home, up on a hill. But the boy's grandma heard them coming. She was old and wise and knew just what to do.

She faced the men bravely. “This will remind you of your treacherous intentions!” she said while she waved her hands. The boy disappeared and to the men's surprise what seemed like blood flowed out of the spot where the boy's hut stood. The hill was turned red.

To this day, no one has seen that little boy again; but from that day on the soil in the area has been stained red, which earned it the name Bukit Merah, or Red Hill.

Supplementary information

- **Raja** is a word with roots in Sanskrit that refers to a king, monarch, or ruler. The term raja is also used in the story The Rice Flower.