

THE KIDS WHO SAVED THE QUEEN

Stories for Malaysian Kids | Ruth Wickham

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None of the kids could remember exactly why the Queen was coming to the little airport at Kuala Terengganu, but it didn't really matter. The group of seventeen 'Standard Six' boys and girls from this school had been selected to go to the airport and represent the children of Terengganu state when the Queen arrived.

Their parents had washed them so clean their skin was almost shiny. The boys had their short black hair combed and sprayed to keep every strand in place. The girls' headscarves had been ironed smooth and each one was held in place with a sparkling pin.



Their excitement was almost suffocated by their nervousness – what if they made a mistake when they sang to the Queen? What if one of them sang a wrong word or a note out of tune? Would the Queen stare at them in anger, and would their teacher scold them later?

They arrived at the airport a whole hour before the Queen’s special plane was due. Their teacher stood up at the front of the bus, and her face was very serious. She looked like she wished she could wrap them all in plastic wrap for the next hour. In a quiet voice, she reminded them that they must sit quietly and be ready to sing when the Queen arrived.



Stepping off the air-conditioned bus into the stifling heat of the car park, the children were keen to run into the cool interior of the airport building, but their teacher's frown made them walk demurely in two straight lines. The boys especially were impressed by the number of fierce-looking security men who were everywhere, watching everything.

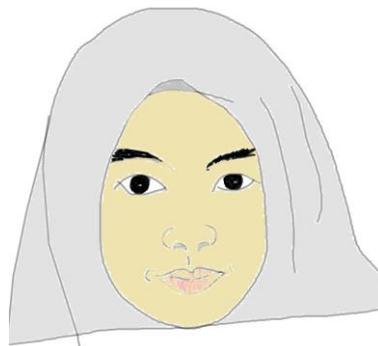
Once inside the building, they were led to a special room inside the Arrivals hall, and there was a double row of chairs where they were to sit and wait, and stay clean and tidy. All twenty children obediently sat and waited.



It only took a few minutes for Faris to start fidgeting. The teacher looked at him. He looked at the floor, and swung his legs back and forth. Next it was Amir who reached his arms up for a stretch. His eyes met the teacher's eyes, and he sighed and put his hands in his lap. This was going to be a long hour! How come the girls all manage to sit so still?

Puteri quietly raised her hand. "What is the matter?" asked the teacher in a strained voice.

"Toilet?" she answered hurriedly. The nervousness was getting to her.



Straightaway several other children raised their hands with worried looks on their faces.

“Okay, but you must take turns, walk with a partner, and come back quickly.” She went across and talked quietly to one of the security guards, who nodded and pointed down a hallway.

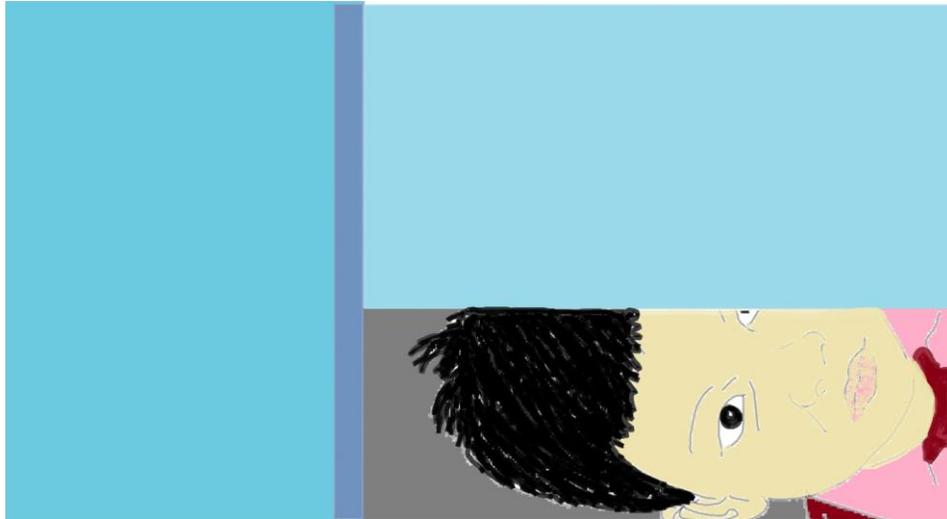
Puteri and Lily set off to the “Ladies”, while Amir and Azhad walked to the next door for the “Men”.

This part of the airport was quiet right now, so the boys were surprised to hear men’s voices and to notice two pairs of feet under one of the stall doors.



The men were talking quietly in another language which sounded like Arabic.

Without dirtying his clean clothes, and making no sound, Amir very carefully bent down, putting his face near the floor so he could see under the door. All he could see was two pairs of legs in suits and two ... guns?



He turned a terrified face towards Azhad and used hand-signs to tell him what he had seen. Together they rushed out the door, letting it slam noisily behind them.

Forgetting all their teacher's warnings, and with their feet sliding around on the tiled floor, they ran back down the hall to their class. As they turned the corner, Azhad glanced back just in time to see two men in suits, with their hands in their pockets, exit the Men's room.

Puteri and Lily, coming out of the Ladies' room, were just meeting Sofea and Nadhah, who were on their way in. The four of them stopped for a chat in the hallway, out of sight of the teacher. The two men with guns had to wait a moment, smiling politely at the girls, and the boys were already well around the corner back in their seats.



By the time the two men came around the corner, the kids were all sitting quietly in their seats, and they couldn't tell which two boys might have seen and heard them making their plans. The teacher's face gave nothing away, and they could not tell if she knew anything either. As the men hurried away, Amir looked at the teacher, and she turned and nodded to a security guard who quietly moved towards the two men.

At last the plane arrived, and excitement mounted. The boys and girls had started feeling sleepy and hungry but now they were wide awake. They stood up in front of their chairs, straightened their uniforms, and cleared their throats ready to sing.



It was hard to say what they were really expecting after seeing pictures of the Queen. Somehow she seemed much smaller than they expected. And *old!* They had forgotten that she was so old. Close up they could see that she looked tired, but she had a kind face and they all looked towards her eagerly and smiled their broadest smiles.



As they started to sing “God save our gracious Queen”, Azhad noticed that the two men from earlier were standing among a group of officials over the other side of the room.



He nudged Amir, and pointed with his eyes and eyebrows. The men were looking at the group of children, and they seemed to notice Azhad’s slight movement, because now they were staring directly at him.

Suddenly pretty little Puteri, who was standing in the front row very close to the Queen, fainted, and flopped quietly onto the floor. The others tried to keep singing, but Lily was very worried about her friend and kneeled down next to her as several security people scurried across to remove her.



Nobody knew quite what happened, but somehow Sofea leaned forward and got in their way, and one of them tripped over her and fell on the floor in front of everyone. Nadhah stepped out to help, and soon there seemed to be a pile of people all falling on top of each other.

Amir looked up from the confusion in front of him to see the two men making their way across the room. He and Azhad dropped to the floor behind the chairs. Faris, Fahmee and Zakwan climbed onto the chairs to get above the mayhem.



Aimi, Syam and Shakir ran over and stood in front of the Queen, maybe thinking that somehow they could help protect her. Of course, the security guards now rushed from everywhere to remove the three boys.



Being a very caring person, Nur Aqlima looked carefully at the Queen, wondering if such an old person would be okay with all this excitement. She was standing perfectly still, looking rather startled, surrounded by a cloud of security people who wanted to remove her to safety but obviously weren't sure which was the best direction. Nur Aqlima could not think what to do.



By now the two boys hiding on the floor had decided to crawl out from between the chairs, hoping they could find somewhere safer. Azhad bumped his head against someone's legs, and looked up to find their teacher staring down at him. But she didn't look angry, she looked frightened. Then he noticed one of the men standing behind her, and realised the gun was probably pressed into her back.

The other five boys, Ahmad, Aimi, Azzam, Shakir and Syam, quickly joined Faris, Fahmee and Zakwan by also standing on their chairs and inexplicably started to sing loudly together “Negaraku”, the Malaysian national anthem. Without hesitation the rest of the girls, Lily, Nadhah, Nur Fakhira, and Maisarah, hitched up their long skirts and climbed onto their chairs, singing loudly with the boys.

Of course, everyone turned to stare at the kids, the bad guys were momentarily distracted, but the security people remembered their training and took control of the situation, quickly leading away the two men.



Someone had brought a comfortable chair and the Queen was sitting down relaxing with a nice cup of tea, as they do in England. The children were occupied with selecting delicious-looking food from the table, and their teacher was sitting chatting to the Queen. The doors of the special room had been locked and there were only a couple of security guards inside the room. Later they would think about how to explain the whole incident to the waiting reporters, and their parents and school friends.



