# SAMPLE

## The Guardian's Shadow: Hantu Pisang

The Banana-Tree Spirit — The Flower That Bleeds, the Bride That Was Grown, and the Taboo That Kills Her

Aiden Nightfall

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# Contents

Introduction

Chapter 2: The Origins and History of the Banana Spirit

Chapter 4: The Powers and Abilities of the Banana Spirit

Chapter 6: How to Protect Yourself From the Banana Spirit

Chapter 7: The Banana Spirit in Modern Media and Culture

Chapter 8: The Moral Lessons of the Banana Spirit

Chapter 9: Separating Fact from Fiction: The Science of the Banana Spirit

Chapter 10: Living with the Legend — The Flower at the Edge of the City

Glossary

References

The Guardian's Shadow

This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

# Introduction

There is a rite the kampung knew by heart, told at the fire and dared at the banana clump, in which a lonely man could manufacture a wife. Take the heart of a blooming banana flower — the purple bud that hangs like a sealed secret at the top of the stem. Hang it, or hold it, and pierce it with a nail or a needle tied to a thread. Feed the flower a drop of your blood — one drop a day, some tellings say; seven days, others say — and wait. When the blood is drunk and the flower is ripe, a woman steps out of the clump: young, beautiful beyond the village's statistics, white-skinned and long- haired and devoted to you alone.

She cooks. She keeps the house. She loves you as the made thing loves its maker. And she carries one condition, older than the rite: never tell anyone what she is — and never let the flower be harmed. The day the origin is named, or the flower is cut, the woman goes back into the tree. And the man who made her learns what the tradition thought of men who make women: it ends at the moment of explanation.

The Hantu Pisang — the banana-tree spirit, the banana ghost, the woman of the flowering clump — is the Malay-Indonesian tradition's strangest love story, and this volume walks her whole length. She is the catalogue's only woman who was never born and never died: not a langsuir of the childbed, not a pontianak of the violence, not a jinn of the census — a grown woman, rooted and blooming, her life tied to the flower that made her and her death tied to the sentence that names her. Her Thai cousin, Nang Tani, floats the same groves as a guardian: the spirit of the wild banana who protects those who show her respect. Her tree is the same tree the tradition fed its gods with — the plantain laid on every sacrificial tray Skeat recorded — and her blood is the tree's own: the sap that darkens red where the flower is cut.

Over the next ten chapters, this book follows the rite from the banana's deep place in the Malay world (planted at evening, offered to the spirits, dreamed as trouble, chanted by children), through the flower's anatomy and the bride's taboos, to the modern afterlife on both shores — and ends with the volume's hard question, which is also the tradition's: what kind of man wants a woman who exists only because he made her, and what does it cost him to keep her? The answer the folklore gives is the reason this figure survived every generation that told her. She is not a warning about ghosts. She is a warning about love that cannot survive being known.

The rite's ingredients cost nothing — a nail, a thread, a flower, a drop of blood — and the legend has been recalled, retold, filmed, and filed across the region

for as long as the region has told stories about lonely men and the women who appeared for them. She belongs to the shared curriculum of both shores: the kampung canon of Malaysia and Singapore, the ghost- lists of the anthologies, and the Thai border's own version of the same woman. And she carries the catalogue's most unusual horror: not the woman, but the sentence that ends her.

# Chapter 1: What Is Hantu Pisang? The Banana-Tree Spirit of Malay Folklore Explained

The Hantu Pisang is the spirit of the banana clump — specifically, in the core legend, the woman the blooming banana becomes when the flower is pierced and fed. Her standard dossier is short and sharp: a female spirit associated with the banana tree (in the wider tradition, one of the trees the pontianak and langsuir favour for their hauntings — the flowering clump is the maternity ward of the tradition's night); a woman who can be made, by the nail-and-thread rite, from the flower's heart; a bride whose beauty and devotion are the rite's products; and a being whose existence is conditional — tied to the flower, terminated by the telling. In the regional register she manifests "as a white-skinned, long-haired" woman in the groves at dusk — the pontianak's silhouette in a tree the tradition itself associates with the birth-death family.

Sorting her is the volume's first task, and the sort is exact. She is not a langsuir or pontianak — no woman died to make her; there is no grief in her origin, only horticulture. She is not a jin of the unseen nation — she belongs to no census, holds no colour, converts to no religion; the rite that makes her is older in spirit than the Book's taxonomy. She is not a familiar of the sorcerer's keeping-trade — she is not kept, fed on egg and blood under the floor; she keeps — house, kitchen, husband.

And she is not an earth-spirit of the jembalang's type — the ground's officer holds a jurisdiction; the banana woman holds a marriage. The catalogue has mothers who died (Volumes 1 to 3), servants that were bought (Volumes 6 to 8), officers of ground and sky (Volumes 10 to 11). The Hantu Pisang is the register's one original invention beyond all of it: the woman who was planted, and loved, and lost to a sentence.

And the name deserves the same note every volume gives it, because this name confesses more than most. Hantu Pisang is simply "banana ghost" — the tree's ghost, spirit, being. But the legend's own vocabulary is careful: the made woman is not usually called a hantu at all. In the tellings she is a isteri — a wife — until the day she is named; the word "hantu" arrives with the explanation, in the mouth of the man who breaks the taboo or the neighbour who forces it. The tradition encoded its whole doctrine in the naming: she is a ghost only when called one.

The being's ontology — what she is, made or born, spirit or wife — is decided not by her nature but by her husband's speech, and the legend's engine is exactly that: the made thing is real until described, and the description is the death. Chapter 8 returns to the doctrine as the volume's moral centre. It is the

inversion of the series' oldest protection — where knowing a spirit's origin renders it harmless, naming this woman's origin renders her gone.

Her appearance deserves its own entry in the dossier, because it is the tradition's maternal palette again. The banana bride appears in the white-skinned, long-haired register of the catalogue's birth-death line — the langsuir's ankle-length tresses, the pontianak's fragrance and flower, the same face arriving at the banana clump by a different door. The folklorist's note is the interesting one: the made woman inherits the family's looks without the family's grief. The langsuir is beautiful because she died of love; the pontianak haunts because she died of violence; the banana bride wears the same beauty with no death behind it at all — the tradition, having built its most beautiful women out of its worst losses, then built one out of gardening, and found the same face at the door.

The reading the volume offers and defends: the beauty of the catalogue's women was never the death's residue — it was the standard the tradition set for the feminine sublime, and every woman of the unseen world, born or grown, was issued it on arrival. The banana bride did not come out of the flower looking like the langsuir by accident. She came out looking like the tradition's idea of a woman — which is the whole critique, and Chapter 8 completes it.

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