

# Salak

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Every summer solstice I play a trick on my mind, I transform the past, I travel back and revamp history, and gazing at granite carvings of Hanuman brings me back to Monkey Forest Road. I imagine a girl standing by the side of a temple with my father eyeing

mounds of salaks in rattan baskets. In lilac lace and batik sarong, the street-vendor, on a strip leading down to rice paddies, picks one from the tip of the mound. Shaped like a russet teardrop, primal and Jurassic to touch, she peels the fruit like tearing off the skin

of an armadillo, exposing pale nude lobes, the crop of indecency, on her out-stretched palm. She takes no notice of the bare body of the fruit. Instead, her other hand, brown, wiry, cuticles yellowed by turmeric, smelling of cumin and ginger, waves away the flies.

She rubs her waist on my shoulder, the way my mother and aunt would if they wanted to read my dreams. She isn't so unusual. Someone's always stealing a dream or being possessed by a spirit and attending the dead in shifting shapes. *Homegrown*, she says.

The word reveals a tobacco-stained mouth. I grab the naked lobe, bite into its flesh, suck and chew its pulp til two black stones are left reminding me of my father's eyes. At noon, Kuta Beach is almost deserted, except for the coconut and mango trees.

A lone fisherman pulls his boat onto the shore. A few feet away, his aging wife crouches on the sand, pouring oil onto the neck of a tourist. Sweat trickles down her forehead as she massages her client's lumbar plexus, her elbow rolls flesh into little waves

reaching the buttocks, folding and unfolding the tissue wrapped around the femur, and ironing out calf-muscles as if the meat she's squeezing is weaving itself into human cloth. To learn her skill I must watch closely. But I kick the Venus clam into the salty water

when I realise where I'm from. Some nights, when my mind is present and aligned with my heart rhythm, the salak's tartness, the silence between the trees, the blue of the fishing boat, the black oil and the flaming orange of my father's barong t-shirt

merge into a giant collage. It's strange to think I can make up stories before I've spent years sorting out what was lost during years of sleep and what's been kept at the end of each day. I thought I knew all there was to know about salvageable memories locked in mental trunks.