

Rough Cut

by John Wentworth Chapin

Cut jakfruit sits on the tin table. The flesh is pale yellow and rubbery, cadaver labia. He shakes his head, wrinkles his nose.

She chooses a breadfruit instead. “*Del*,” she says, slicing off the stem with her crude knife: rusted with splintering, village-made almondwood handle, sever a man's neck in two strokes.

“Deeellll,” he repeats, savoring the new word.

“*Del, hari*,” she nods, *okay*.

It's nothing like bread. It is the color and feel of skin: khaki, firm, a man's neck behind the ear. He bites and imagines, numbed by want.

In the States, the kitchen was his domain; here, women cook and he flounders. Last week, he beseeched her to teach him to make curry and *pol sambol*. She was bemused but resistant. This week she caved. She is dark brown, old, wrinkled, less than a third his weight. He watches her carefully in his sarong and Polo shirt.

She sits on the cement floor, legs extended, knife held between her feet as she shreds *kopakola* leaves against the knife-tip. Americans bring knife to leaf. Not she.

A durian fruit reeks from next to the washbasin, powerful funk of gangrene and crotchrot. The village storekeeper across the road whiffs it as he sits on a bag of onions, tapping his bare toes in the dust. He strokes himself in his ratty sarong, thin cotton between calloused hands and dark penis, sniffs his fingers absent-mindedly. His iron machete rests next to piled coconuts, blade oiled.

