



Nectarines

Cassandra Atherton

He ate her nectarines at night.

Sucked them slowly until the pulp turned to liquid and spiralled down his throat. He ate her nectarines while she lay on a pale blue banana lounge in a *broderie Anglaise* bikini and white silk sarong. Dripping moonlight in the back garden. Gardenias were balancing across the tops of her ears. Precariously placed possessions. He ate nectarines like apples, circling the centre of the fruit with his thick, sticky lips. Leaving a pale, orange gorge between the two scarlet hemispheres at his thumb and index finger. Sometimes he peeled off pieces of yellow and red skin with his thumb nail. They curled into tight little cylinders and stuck between his back teeth.

Tonight she wore white sequinned scuffs. She had stuck a silver jewel on each of her big toes. They cast shafts of metallic light onto the sand. Illuminating the shells she had placed there. Mother of pearl.

He held the bottom of the nectarine carefully and tugged at the top

hemisphere with his bottom teeth. He eased the flesh off the rough stone and into his mouth. It made the most delicious sound as it separated from the stone. Like that time he screwed Tuppy Teganbaum in her treehouse late that May. A succulent noise as he slid into her. She had tipped her head back, exposing a freckled neck. Like cookies-and-cream ice-cream. From his favourite gelateria in Williamstown. Nectarine juice clung to the corners of his lips. Two fat yellow droplets hanging. Bulbous beads. He remembered kissing Tuppy's neck, burying his fingers in her thick, black hair. He smiled and the sticky juice raced down his chin and onto his t-shirt. It tickled like somebody almost touching the hairs on the nape of his neck. He wondered why they didn't sell nectarine juice in big three-litre bottles in the supermarket. Pure. Pungent. Pulp.

She drew circles in the sand with her index finger. An oval moonstone shone a milky silver. He remembered the time the truck had delivered the sand. It was the only time he had ever seen her during the day. She had worn a black medieval gown and fanned herself with a gold lace fan. Spanish infanta. She had covered the back lawn with sand. Layers of it. Brilliant yellow. Suffocating the long green blades. That night she had placed her banana lounge beneath the nectarine tree and soaked up the moon. She had a lime bucket full of shells and over the next week placed them in circles around the trunk of the tree. Deep in the sand. Buried treasure.

He reached for another nectarine. His sixth. Its waxlike skin shining temptingly. She reached for a silver hand mirror she had placed in the sand beside her. She held the mirror above her as she slowly reclined, rubbing her metallic blue lips together. Eskimo lovers. She saw him in the mirror. Eating her nectarines. She untied her sarong as he pulled at the stringy pieces of yellow flesh trapped in the holes of the nectarine stone. He especially liked the long piece trapped in the hollow around the circumference of the fruit. He tugged at it with his front teeth while she unpinned her mass of jet hair. It tumbled to her shoulders and shone amethyst in the pale light.

He jumped the fence and went to her. Soft sand caressed the hardened soles of his feet. Enchanted beach in the backyard. He held the seventh

nectarine in his palm. He straddled her, careful to distribute his weight evenly so the banana lounge wouldn't overbalance. He rolled the scarlet fruit between her breasts and down onto her flat stomach. It rested on her navel like a red-gold golf ball on a tee. He bent his head and devoured the fruit. The juice ran over her smooth skin and pooled in her belly button. He lapped it up. She embraced him and encouraged his sticky kisses. Her skin was cool, his flesh was hot. He seared her as he moved on top of her. He placed his palms down in the sand while he writhed between her thighs. 'Get me a nectarine.' He groaned and stood up, plucking a juicy red fruit from a low branch. She held her hands up to him and he tossed it to her. She took a bite, tugged at his grey shorts and smothered him in nectarine pulp. His knees trembled and he collapsed on top of her. She sighed, wiped her mouth and chewed on the nectarine stone.

Cassandra Atherton collects Christian Louboutin shoes. Her dreams are full of Mikhail Baryshnikov and Ethan Stiefel. She lives with her husband and their two beautiful ragdoll cats, Bellamy and Tallulah. ■
