

Patricia Thirdday and the Citrus Sorrow

“What can I help you with, Mr. Royce?”

The trim man across from her stared directly into her eyes.

“Sometimes I turn into a citrus fruit.”

After a short pause, she nodded slowly. “You transform into a spherical, orange or yellow fruit full of pulp and juice.”

“Yes. Well, not literally.”

She looked at him and waited.

“I curl up into a ball, I know because I've been told, and I realize I'm a lemon, or a grapefruit, or this last time a clemantine.”

“A clemantine?”

Royce made a small sphere with his hands. “One of those tiny tangerines.”

“Ah.”

“It's terribly embarrassing, and you can imagine not good for my career for it to happen, say, in the middle of a meeting, like yesterday.”

“When was the first time one of these transformations occurred?”

“I was about twelve, I think.”

“Have you sought help before?”

“No.”

She looked at him and waited.

“It didn't seem ... I wasn't ...” He leaned towards her. “I'm completely normal otherwise.”

“Is there any pattern to when these transformations occur? Any particular trigger?”

“No. I know what you're thinking, stress. Everything is stress these days, don't know the cause, its stress. Do you think its stress?”

Royce was leaning forward, elbows on his knees. He was beginning to spit a little when he talked.

“No, Mr. Royce. Some things just are the way they are. Pity you can't predict it.” Her eyes swept her office. “Observing one of these transformations,” - he started to tremble - “would be a great help,” - his eyes rolled back into his head - “in my...” he curled up on the couch in a ball.

She stood up, grabbed her stainless steel thermos off of her end table, and hurried over to the couch. She lept on Mr. Royce, shoving the thermos against his ribs.

“I'm juicing you, Mr. Royce,” she yelled. “I've shoved a spout into you and I'm juicing you.” Mr. Royce emitted a keening wail. She shoved the thermos against his ribs rhythmically and continued to yell, “I'm juicing you Mr. Royce, I'm juicing you.” Her assistant, Denise, knew better than to come to the door.

After about 30 pumps with the thermos, Mr. Royce's wail subsided to an occasional whimper. She stood up and returned to her chair, straightening her clothes. She picked up the magazine she had been reading when Mr. Royce had arrived, without an appointment.

Royce slowly uncurled from his ball. He sat up and tried to comb his hair with his fingers. When his breathing returned to normal, he looked at her, and she dropped her magazine to her lap.

“I don't think it'll happen again,” he said.

“Good.”

He left. He didn't thank Patricia Thirdday, Problem Solver, but he did stop and pay his bill on the way out.