

When Life Gives You Bullshit

by Benjamin Rietema

WHY WE LIKE IT:

We think the comedic side of Raymond Carver lurks somewhere in the shadows of this briskly told and stylish minimalist modern day lamentation where one surreal improbability unfolds another. Absurdity and jest are nimbly honed to a keen edge and we love the author's tart prose, stone-faced humour and harried voice. In a tough genre/mode that is too often overwritten and overplayed, Rietema demonstrates the kind of control that makes us chartreuse with envy. Quote: When life gives you fruit it will be a two-hundred pound crate of fermented oranges that were supposed to go to Fritz Johansson in Norway. You contact Fritz and he says he ordered a pair of jeans.' We LOVE it and that's no bullshit!

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade and sell it to people who don't really want lemonade but pity your small business venture. Unfortunately, the key ingredient in lemonade is sugar, and without sugar, you have pulped lemons. Instead, look for some sugar because anything is possible with sugar, especially diabetes. This could be placed on a pamphlet and handed to children who grasp at their heart when they use the stairs.

In reality, when life gives you fruit, it will be a two-hundred-pound crate of fermented oranges that were supposed to go to Fritz Johansson in Norway. You contact Fritz but he says he ordered a pair of jeans. You contact the company but they say they've never heard of Fritz, you, or the country of Norway and that they provide data systems analysis for tech companies. You aren't sure what that means, so you nod, even though you're on the phone, and then hang up.

By this time, the oranges have become a foul mush that is staining the driveway concrete and attracting a bunch of raccoons, and the city has given you a ticket. The city is Boulder. The raccoons are rabid. The situation is problematic.

You don't know how to move the crate nor do you want to touch the oranges. So, you post them on the free section of Craigslist under the heading of "Free Kombucha" because you're still not sure what kombucha is but think it's something to do with fruit. It's not, and though a couple of people come by, no one takes the crate. However, you do meet an older gentleman who knows Fritz. They went to school together. He commiserates with you over the oranges, then gives you a tract on Mormonism. It's a nauseating shade of blue and gives you a headache.

In the meantime, another crate of oranges shows up. You manage to catch the guy delivering it and decide he's an all right sort of guy—if you like large, sweaty individuals who are sexist but lack the intellectual capabilities to understand the concept of sexism. He has a crooked nametag that says Kenneth and a truck with Eastern Exotic Imports on the side. When you ask what eastern exotic imports are, he winks and says it's a secret. When you press him, however, it becomes clear they sell cheap furniture.

"Why the oranges?" You ask. He shrugs. It's on the paper, he says, and then shows you a yellow sheet of paper covered in grease with your name, address, and "ORANGES" scribbled in the corner.

You ask him to take the oranges back because you didn't order them. He gives you a look reserved especially for people too dumb to understand they've ordered two crates of rotten oranges. It's condescending, and you feel offended but are paralyzed because your father never taught you to confront your problems head on. You mope about that for a few hours and make a

smoothie with fruit you buy from Whole Foods. Then, you call a removal company, which—if you're honest with yourself—you should have done in the first place.

Other times, life sells you plastic lemons—the kind of fake fruit you see in nursing homes and in children's playsets. The only thing to do with a hollow plastic lemon is to throw it away. They are not recyclable. They are created to assure you what they are not, like an off-brand cereal resembling Lucky Charms.

Eventually, you will need to ask why you're receiving so much fruit, fake or otherwise, and decide what you're going to do with it. *This is the time to take the advantage.* Don't make things with fruit no one likes. Instead, become the one who gives lemons.

Go ahead. Drink most of the milk but leave a little so the next person has to throw away the carton, steal all of the lightbulbs in your friend's house, decide tipping is only for when they do an extraordinary job, don't pick up your dog's poop.

In essence, when you find yourself with too many lemons, the most important question is not: Can I make these lemons into something? It is: What can these lemons make me into? If you do it right, the answer is God—or a monster.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I enjoy reimagining clichés and what follows from them when you do—and 'the lemons into lemonade' adage could certainly stand some further thought. I like the journey of the piece. This is how life goes It's filled with bureaucracy, strange connections, people who don't know what they're doing, personal shortcomings and it's really bizarre. Often as it happens, we are the ones making the lemons. But in the end, it's more important to laugh about it than anything. What else can you do?

BIO:

Ben Rietema lives, works and writes in Colorado. He publishes and writes *The Squid* weekly.