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## Fruit Leather Suit

Jim Richards

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I couldn't decide which flavors to buy for which parts of the suit. Strawberry for the pant pockets? Fruit punch for the shirt sleeves? Apricot for the inseam? I called home to ask. "Just get any flavors!" she yelled. It cost thirty-three dollars and sixteen cents. The lady let me keep a penny. "Why?" I said, "I want to pay what it costs." She re-opened the till and put the penny in; she seemed kind of mad. "At least it's shiny," I said, but she was already helping the next person who was buying cans of tomato soup, among other things.

On the way home—I might add it wasn't raining today, at least—on the way home a police officer—with a handsome mustache, a mustache that says, "humph humph humph, I am a real man"—this police officer turned on his lights behind me, so I pulled over. "Can I see your license, humph humph humph," he said. I didn't need to check my back pocket; I could tell it wasn't there because my fine rump was nestled snugly into the bucket seat of my VW GTI. My wallet was buried under the pounds of fruit leather. I had dumped them out of the bags and put the bags back at the check stand since I didn't need them. In fact, I think that is when I said, "at least it's shiny," and she wasn't with a customer, she just paid no attention to me. Some people are like that.

"That's quite a load of dry fruit rolls you got there," the mustache said.

## Fruit Leather Suit

Jim Richards

But this part about the officer isn't really important, so let's get to the part where I was finally at home, sitting on the couch, watching *Jeopardy* as I opened the fruit leathers and stripped them from their plastic lining. "What is a horse?" I said and peeled a shiny moon of apricot from its plastic sky. "What?" my wife yelled from the shower. She thought it would stick better if her skin were hot and steamy. "Nothing," I said, "I was just playing Jeopardy."

"What?" she said.

"Playing Jeopardy!" I yelled. She turned off the water just before I yelled, "Jeopardy." I guess she heard me because she didn't say anything else. Did I mention that my name is Larry? Anyway, I'm Larry, I work at the Hospital.

"Well, let's get started," she said, waddling out of the bathroom with a towel around her. I wouldn't want her to know that I used the word "waddling," you know? "What's all this?" she said, looking down at the plastic sheets piled at her feet. Some sort of static cling reaction was attracting the wrappers to her feet and ankles. She bent to peel them off, and a few more clung onto her arm. "What the hell?" she said and dropped her towel. The more she tried to get them off of her the more they clung.

"Who is St. Anselm?" I said to the TV as I tried to peel the plastic sheets from her skin.

She yelled, "Get away from me, you idiot!" and kind of knocked my hands away. Her body was covered in sheets of plastic. Sometimes I don't know how to help people. Like that little boy who got hit by a car on our street when I was walking home from the blood bank, which happened to be out of orange juice that day. I didn't know what to do because I'd never seen a body all spread out like that before.

My wife got quite angry about the plastic sheets, and then she just wanted to take a nap. We never did get to make the suit. After a few hours, the fruit leather got kind of hard and crusty. Our front room smelled like an exotic fruit-stand. I ate a few before they got hard. I like apricot best. But what I really would have liked is to have made that suit. To mold a circle of apple leather around her shoulder. To form a collar around her neck out of fruit punch. To lick the smooth side of a strawberry circle and seal it perfectly over the mild curves of her lower back. That way I could give Alex Trebek the question "What is love?" and really know what the answer would be.