



## Pumpkin

*From the Asylum (Oct. 2009)*

I woke up and I was a pumpkin. Not so surprising, really. My face had looked flushed for weeks, but my skin felt cool. Menopause, I thought. A rough, itchy patch had formed on my head. I smeared Benadryl cream on it, but the irritation remained.

Arnie awoke and stared at me resting on the pillow. “You’re a pumpkin,” he said.

“I know,” I said. “I’m sorry. You didn’t sign on for this.” I started to cry. My orange skin turned moist, as if touched by early morning dew.

Arnie took me in his arms. He stroked my shell. Fondled my stem. He’d always been affectionate, comforting.

“It’s okay,” He said. “I told you I was in this for the long haul. I’m not going to abandon you just because you’re a pumpkin. Shit happens.”

I nestled in his embrace and sniffled.

“Besides,” he said, “you’re a beautiful pumpkin.”

Every day, Arnie gently dusted my skin, making sure I remained clean and shiny. He placed me on his computer monitor while he read email. When he returned home from his office, we discussed his day. I sat on the kitchen counter as he cooked dinner, although I felt nervous placed so close to the stove. We watched TV together in the evenings. I sat on his lap and we guessed who the murderer was on “Law and Order,” laughed at Jon Stewart’s jokes on “The Daily Show.” We continued to solve the *New York Times* Crossword Puzzle. We slept next to each other every night, his cheek warm against me.

In October I had a panic attack. I feared Arnie might put me on display on the doorstep. Two eyes, a nose and mouth carved into my firm skin. A candle burning my pulp, toasting my seeds. Finally, I expressed my anxiety. We’d always been honest about our feelings.

“How could you think that?” he said. “Oh, sweetie! I’d never, never, never.” He held me close, hugged me and covered me with nibbling kisses.

In November, I started to feel funny inside, mushy, not myself. My usual fresh, clean smell turned sickly sweet. I could deny it no longer.

“Arnie,” I said. “We need to talk.”

His face turned gloomy.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “It had to happen eventually.”

“No,” he said.

“Yes,” I said. “I’m rotting. I won’t last much longer.”

“We’ll get help. I’ll refrigerate you. I’ll talk to a farmer or the produce manager at Whole Foods. There must be something we can do.”

“No,” I said. “I can tell.”

He sobbed.

“I want you to...this is hard. . .”

“Anything,” he said.

“I want you to bake me into a pumpkin pie. I know it’s your favorite.”

“How can I . . .”

“Shhh,” I said. “Make a wondrous pie. From scratch. There’s a good recipe in the Moosehead Restaurant Cookbook. Lots of nutmeg.”

Thanksgiving was coming.