

Red, White, and Blueberry

By: Indi

Sam smiled as he retreated to the second floor, the noise of the party below fading behind him. The plump bald eagle honestly enjoyed the big parties his fraternity held, but sometimes he just needed to get away for a few minutes and take a breather. It was also getting a bit too warm for his liking, despite all the windows and doors being wide open. Which was why he'd grabbed a popsicle on the way up.

It'd been the last in a box crammed in the far back of the basement fridge. It resembled a firework, with sections of red, white, and blue—appropriate since it was the Fourth of July. Sam didn't remember ever seeing anyone else eating them, and hoped they hadn't been in there for ages. Though could popsicles even go bad?

In the end the desire to cool down won out, and Sam chowed down on his festive treat with haste. Cherry, coconut, and blueberry tastes washed over his tongue, an unexpected but welcomed combination. It certainly didn't taste bad, at least.

As Sam took a relaxing stroll around the second floor rec room he was woefully unaware that his yellow beak had begun turning a deep red—just like the popsicle had been. From his beak the red swiftly spread across his entire body. White and brown feathers were dyed different shades of red. When it was all over he vaguely resembled a parrot.

A cool chill filled Sam's stomach, but rather than be confused he felt relieved. Of course if he'd seen how his belly was starting to balloon outward his reaction would've been much different.

Muffled bubbling echoed out from the bald eagle's middle as it swelled and gently jiggled. Sam had taken a moment to look out onto the empty deck, watching the occasional firework go off. The pause delayed his realization that something strange was happening, even as his gut expanded out from under his shirt.

Eventually Sam decided his respite had lasted long enough, and turned to leave. As he did his belly sloshed and bounced heavily. He froze in place, eyes darting down in shock. Sam didn't believe what he was seeing at first. Why were his feathers red? Why was he inflating like a balloon? Why was he filling up with...with water?

The confusion only led to more delays, delays the bald eagle couldn't afford.

"Oh damn it, this has to be a prank!" Sam fumed as he pushed down on his swelling middle with both talons. He doubted it would help, but he had to try. "Did someone spike my beer? No way...the popsicle!?"

As silly as it seemed, it was the only sensible answer Sam had. The popsicle must've been leftover from an old frat initiation or a themed party or something, and of course he'd had the terrible luck of finding it. Considering his change in color and the sloshing he assumed he was becoming a berry—a cherry to be precise. Hopefully the bathroom had some medication to counter the effects before he ended up an immobile sphere.

The bald eagle had only gotten rounder as he stood in thought, and by the time he headed towards the door it was at a waddling pace. Sam's belly swayed from side to side, getting harder to balance by the second. Half-way there he was forced to hold his gut in his talons just to prevent from falling over.

Limbs started puffing slightly, slowing him down even more. Sam was quickly beginning to fear he wouldn't make it in time. And he was right.

Just from a glance the exit looked too narrow. Sam tried it anyway, wincing as his ballooning belly got wedged almost immediately. He wiggled and squirmed, but wasn't making any progress at all. If anything he was in danger of getting even more stuck as he continued to inflate.

Before things could get worse Sam pushed his way back out of the doorway and into the room.

His mind raced as he thought about his next move, the constant swelling impossible to ignore. He couldn't reach the phone in his back pocket—not with his talons and arms so puffed up—but he needed to find help, and fast.

The deck!

Though the deck was empty it looked out over the pool in the backyard, where most of the party had shifted to. Surely he'd be able to get someone's attention from there, and then they could get him juiced.

Sam's return waddle took much longer. The ripped remains of his clothes were dropping to the floor behind him. He was round—very round—more borb than bird. At a distance he looked like a feathered cherry. And of course cherry-flavored juice was starting to drip from his beak.

For once Sam's luck held out, and the double-doors that led out onto the deck were both open *and* wide enough for him to slowly shuffle through. He whimpered and groaned as he forced his juice-filled body to move forwards. His arms and legs had been completely enveloped, and at times his talons could barely reach the floor. At least he'd stopped inflating.

Eventually the bloated bald eagle made it to the deck's edge. His balloon of a body prevented him from looking down, but he could still hear the loud party below.

"Help! I need help up here!" Sam squawked. He tried to wobble in the hopes it'd help. "Anybody! I need help!"

Sam shouted and hollered and yelled, but being heard over the music and laughter proved impossible. After nearly shouting himself hoarse he gave up, accepting the fact he'd just be stuck as a cherry until someone stumbled upon him. It might not happen until the party ended, or even the next morning if he were really unlucky, but there wasn't much else the borb could do.

A new chill surged through Sam's body, perking him up. He thought it might be the breeze, but the wind hadn't been blowing at all. Meanwhile the color on his beak started to drain away, then his face. The brilliant shades of red were replaced by white, and Sam couldn't help but notice once the change spread to his round body.

The cherry taste that'd filled his mouth shifted as well, becoming coconut. Cherry. Coconut. Both had been flavors of the popsicle. Sam had never heard of something being able to turn a person into one type of berry and then another, but clearly he was experiencing it.

To the bald eagle's horror he felt himself swelling again. His talons lifted off the ground, wiggling in panic as they were sucked a bit further into his massive body. His hide was creaking, the pressure within him building from manageable to stressful.

Now looking like a blimped up seagull, Sam wobbled and sloshed, helpless. If a second flavor had kicked in then surely so would a third. He doubted he could hold together well enough to endure it. His talons vanished for good, making the bald eagle's body into a near perfect sphere just as a splash of blue hit his beak.

Just as expected—and feared—Sam was now transforming into a blueberry. His head was steadily sinking, with just his beak poking out. The pressure, the sensation of being enveloped, the rhythmic sloshing from within—all together it worked to put Sam into a daze. He groaned, gaze drifting, utterly unable to concentrate anymore. The strange warmth building inside his body wasn't helping, either.

With only an incoherent mumble Sam's head was gone, leaving behind a gently rocking blueberry. The borb continued to swell and creak. There was a faint orange glow at the berry's core. As taut as a drum, Sam's hide abruptly quaked and groaned.

A thunderous boom rang out as Sam popped. Instead of a wave of juice there was a shower of red, white, and blue sparkles. Feathers and hide shot off into the sky with a howl, bursting like firecrackers.

The partiers below were shocked initially, but swiftly cheered the mystery fireworks show going off above them. They had no way of knowing it was unwillingly provided by Sam, and his beak

plunged unnoticed into the pool, sinking to the bottom. It'd certainly make for an interesting souvenir when found...eventually.