

Sabertooth Berry

By: Indi

Rye felt like he regretted his job at least once a day. The sabertooth cat was dressed in a burgundy bodysuit that clung to his lean form. Normally he'd wear other clothing over it, but the task at hand meant anything else would likely end up ripped and torn. Only a bodysuit would be stretchy enough.

"Um, Indi, can't we just have the computer run tests on the new berries?" Rye sheepishly asked his boss.

On the other side of the room a blue jay was pouring over some last minute data. "That would only give us hypothetical results, not actual results! Berrification is too varied to rely on computer projections. We can only get accurate information by seeing just how well they make a person swell in reality."

It was an answer Rye had expected--and heard often while working as Indi's assistant—but for once he'd hoped he'd be wrong. Indi was a scientist with an obsession with berrification—the swelling and transformation into a living berry. Rather than relying on organic drones or simulations for his research, Indi tended to use Rye instead. The cat had become every sloshy fruit imaginable, sometimes for hours, even days at a time.

As embarrassing as it was to be inflated to immobility on a regular basis, the pay was too good for Rye to pass up. He just wished it involved more mundane work.

Indi removed a brilliant blue berry from a case and carried it over to Rye. The berry was a little bit larger than a cherry and shone brightly. "Fresh off a transport from a newly discovered planet with a whole biome ripe with berrification." He chuckled at his play on words, which only received a small frown from Rye. "Time to blimp you up for science!"

Rye accepted the berry and popped it into his mouth, hoping it wouldn't taste bad. Fortunately it was rather tasty—though not tasty enough to make up for what it was about to do to him. Shortly after eating the berry Rye felt a chill spreading from his stomach throughout the rest of his body, a common symptom of berrification.

He watched his paws and kept an eye on his face in a nearby mirror, waiting for his sandy brown fur to change color. The blue appeared on his neck first, heading upwards and dying every bit of fur and his nose as well. His sabertooth were the only thing that didn't end up a shade of blue.

Once Rye had completely turned blue he felt a surge in the chill and wiggled as he felt something pour into his stomach, as if a fountain had turned on within. Suddenly the slim sabertooth was swelling in every direction. Though he resembled an inflating balloon, it was juice he was rapidly filling up with, not air.

No matter how many times he experienced it, Rye never got used to becoming a blueberry. The sloshing and swirling of liquid within him. The steady and dramatic increase in weight. The stretching of hide.

He was frowning throughout, forced to constantly adjust his stance as he grew rounder and rounder. His arms and legs had puffed up, his middle an orb. He tried not to move too much, if only so he didn't have to hear any muffled splashing.

The bodysuit Rye wore expanded comfortably along with him—as designed. The seemingly-useless belt around his waist was always a tiny bit tight, though. It served as a visual measure of the pressure within him, and would snap off if Rye swelled past a point considered safe. "The point where you're in danger of becoming a berry bomb" Indi liked to say, much to Rye's dismay. It squeezed the ballooning sabertooth gently, just another reminder he was inflating,

Limbs became domes, then vanished completely. Rye's paws were jutting out, his head nestled snug atop his berry body. The swelling should've been coming to an end, but the sabertooth was still

growing.

Rye shuddered, the pressure belt digging into his taut circumference. “Um, Indi, I’m...I’m kind of feeling too big!”

The belt creaked loudly before bursting off and falling to the floor. The release in pressure caused Rye to blimp and bobble. He groaned as his hide tingled. Holographic alerts sprung up over the wide surface of his bodysuit, warning of pressure and strain and calculating the danger of Rye exploding. They were quickly muted by Indi, who only gave them a passing glance.

“Hmm, berry appears to be considerably volatile. No signs of exponential growth. Initiating safety precautions in case of rupture and contamination.” Parts of Indi’s own bodysuit began to extend, forming gloves, boots, and a modest helmet.

“I—*mrrmmph*—need to be...deflated!” Rye whined.

The blueberry cat was struggling to concentrate, the strain overwhelming. All he could think about was how big and heavy he was, how he was on the verge of becoming a giant berry. His paws were still sinking in, and so was his head. His saberteeth prodded his hide, and talking grew more difficult. He was convinced he was finally going to blow.

Abruptly the swelling stopped. The bubbling within was gone, the pool of juices rocking gently. Rye would’ve been relieved if he weren’t in a partial daze. He still felt like the slightest touch might pop him, and groaned at the sensation of phantom pokes and prods.

“Oh good, looks like we won’t need a cleanup after all!” Indi said cheerfully. He tracked the readings on his bloated assistant’s bodysuit and pressed his palm against Rye’s side to see how they changed. The act prompted whines and some gurgling as juice trickled down the sides of the sabertooth’s muzzle. “Now to roll you to the juicing lab so we can collect those samples!”

A careful nudge rolled Rye onto his back, sending surges of pressure throughout him. He wasn’t in danger of bursting, but the feeling still made him shudder and wiggle, especially as the juice sloshed about. There was just so much of it inside him, making him feel like a giant water balloon. For someone so used to being rather thin, being massive was incredibly disorienting.

Though getting seen by others in his current state might’ve been worse. As soon as Rye was on his back Indi began rolling him out of the room, the automatic doors sliding open for them.

Slorsh. Splish. Splosh. Rye’s juices echoed down the corridor as he was rolled around. Though he couldn’t see much, he could hear others stepping aside to let them pass, chuckling at the helpless berry and congratulating Indi on his harvest. Of course Indi indulged them, he always did.

“We need to hold a contest one day—I’m sure Rye would win a blue ribbon for sure with how big and juicy he always gets!” Indi laughed, giving his assistant a teasing squeeze to make him wobble and slosh more.

After a short trip they arrived in the juicing lab, Rye rolled atop the raised ring that’d keep his spherical body in place. A facemask with a tube attached was placed over his mouth. Instructions from Indi caused Rye’s bodysuit to steadily contract, squeezing juice out of the sloshy sabertooth. He blushed deeper than before, eyes twitching. Though embarrassing, it was also pleasurable, which only made him more embarrassed.

The juicing ceased the second a large enough sample was collected, leaving Rye spherical. The bubbling returned moments later, and Rye had to deal with his slight overinflation all over again. For nearly an hour Rye sat in place, growing frustratingly accustomed to his size and shape. He didn’t enjoy forgetting what it felt like to be mobile and thin. He wasn’t meant to be a berry forever, but that’s what he always feared after being berrified.

“The results are in!” Indi had been quiet the entire time, and his sudden declaration spooked Rye and made him wobble. “As I guessed, your berrification is very volatile, almost record-setting. Of course that means you’ve become a berry permanently now, but that’s not really surprising given the circumstances.”

Rye whined on instinct. Being a permaberry really just meant he’d continue producing juice

until cured, no matter how thoroughly he was juiced. The technicality didn't give him much comfort. "C-Can we begin—*mrrrrmph*—treatment now?"

"Oh, I hadn't gotten to the best part—there's no cure! Your strain of berrification doesn't match any existing variations, so a cure hasn't been synthesized yet. I've never had a chance to work on a new strain before, this is really exciting!" Indi was practically giddy.

"Wh-What!!" Rye wobbled frantically until the pressure forced him to stop. "How long will it take to make a cure?"

"Could take weeks, could take months. I know it took five whole years to create a cure for the *Rafelis Gigantus* strain, but that one was a doozy. We can't all hope to have that kind of groundbreaking luck!"

Before Rye could panic further the pumping mask was placed back over his mouth, silencing his worries as more samples were taken. He couldn't believe he could be stuck as a permaberry for months, maybe even longer. What if he never turned back? What if his fur remained blue forever? What if he swelled even larger? What if he was accidentally popped? It was a lot for the unlucky sabertooth to take in at once.

Meanwhile, Indi's mood had soared. "I can't wait to start on a paper detailing my findings! You know how much I love studying the effects of long-term berrification. And of course I'll need to take thorough scans and recordings of the whole process. Oh gosh I should start clearing out my schedule."

Rye was left alone, hooked to a juicer that'd never actually slim him down. For the foreseeable future he was just a blueberry, a sloshy sphere that vaguely resembled a sabertooth cat. He really did regret his job sometimes.