

Unexpected Side-effects:

By: IndigoRho

A loud growl echoed from Indigo's stomach, and the blue cheetah sighed in dismay. Against his better judgment he'd decided to take a brief excursion down to a pleasant looking planet his ship had stumbled upon, despite being more of a merchant than explorer. Normally his older brother Viridian would have forced someone to watch after him on such a visit, but Indigo had wanted to finally prove he could handle himself alone, sneaking away while everyone else on the ship was still sleeping. Within ten minutes of landing the overweight cheetah was huffing through the underbrush being chased by hungry wildlife. By some miracle he'd managed to outpace a terrifying creature that resembled a cross between a shark and an angry lap dog, scrambling up a ledge and through a painfully narrow crevasse that lead into a small canyon.

Escape hadn't given Indigo much relief, though. His personal teleporter had been damaged while fleeing, and attempts to contact the ship had simply failed outright. For the last hour he'd sat on a rock hoping for an impossible rescue, growing hungrier by the minute. Overindulgence on the delicious foods he transported and sold for a living had caused Indigo to blimp up over the last couple years, and the fatter he got the greater his appetite became, creating a vicious cycle the cheetah had actually grown rather content with. Of course that also made him feel like he was starving despite having eaten an excessively large breakfast before leaving the ship.

Another growl and twang of hunger pain prompted the desperate cheetah to search for something edible, at least as a distraction. He pouted while waddling through the rather sparse initial stretch of the winding canyon, finding only barren trees and prickly shrubs. After nearly half-an-hour of walking the scenery grew greener, though, and Indigo's spirits were lifted once he turned a corner and was greeted by a lush, colorful tangle of life. Tall trees stretched higher than the canyon walls, providing a comforting shade and healthy fruits, while a bubbling spring gave Indigo hope for fresh water. A nervous gulp not only quenched his thirst, but teased his tastebuds; the spring water somehow tasted faintly of juice.

Curious, Indigo scanned over the area more thoroughly, his eyes growing wide once he noticed the thick vines weighed down by what appeared to be oversized berries. The smallest were the size of a bowling ball and the largest bigger than any beachball Indigo had ever seen, and their colors varied greatly. He wandered to the nearest bunch, bright yellow berries that glistened enticingly in the sun. Indigo gently grabbed one in both paws—surprised by its light weight—and practically drooled looking at it. His brother was always lecturing him about never eating anything he found in the wild unless he was absolutely certain of what it was. The berry before him was something Indigo had never heard of nor seen to his recollection, was of suspicious size, and had somehow managed to flavor a natural spring. To Indigo, though, it was still a berry, and the cheetah was very familiar with berries.

Indigo chomped into the mystery treat in his paws, a gush of cold, yellow juice pouring from the wound and running down his lips. The taste nearly made him purr on impact. Having stuffed himself with practically every food and drink the sector had to offer, Indigo could say without a shadow of a doubt that the berry was one of his favorites after only a single bite. The slick skin and pulpy interior would have been delightful on their own but the abundance of juice trapped within made the taste an unforgettable one. He greedily tore into the berry with reckless abandon, squirting juice onto his orange jumpsuit as he feasted. His soft belly quickly rounded out even more as it began filling with juice, though the ultra-stretchy material of the jumpsuit made the swelling difficult to notice.

After a couple minutes of furious pigging out, Indigo fell onto his butt and sighed contently, rubbing his bloated middle and licking the juice from his lips, then paws. Though his hunger was satisfied, Indigo couldn't help but desire more of the delectable fruit. A lot more. Purrs had begun rumbling from the cheetah, and he turned to eye the rest of the berries in the same way the dog-shark had eyed him up earlier. He pushed a paw against the ground to help himself up, but chirped in surprise

as he nearly toppled over when his belly wobbled far more than expected. The cheetah looked down at his gut, realizing right away that something was wrong; he was much rounder than usual.

While the berry had been fairly large, there was no way eating it alone could have caused his middle to bulge out as much as it was. In fact, he looked like he'd eaten two of the massive berries. Indigo poked and shook his belly in confusion, wondering if the berry had given him a bad case of gas, or if he was having an odd allergic reaction. His gut didn't feel taut, though, just heavy and sloshy. Really, really sloshy. A frustrated wobble of his belly caused it to abruptly swell in his paws, causing Indigo to chirp in fear. The once-subtle growth seemed to pick up speed exponentially after Indigo noticed it, his entire middle expanding rapidly before his very eyes. Indigo desperately attempted to stand again, but the weight in his stomach had grown along with its size, and the cheetah could barely manage to get his butt off the ground.

As Indigo wobbled and bloated pitifully, the swelling spread to his chest and even his limbs. His entire body began cooling down as bending his elbows and knees gradually became impossible. The cheetah had no idea what was happening, completely overwhelmed by a dozen different conflicting sensations and persistent terror. Indigo's hide started itching and he nervously spotted the color of the fur on his paws shifting from blue to yellow. The same yellow as the berry he'd so rashly consumed. His saliva now tasted sweet, reminiscent of the juice, and the sweat pouring down his brow smelled uncomfortably of fresh fruit. Whimpers and whines filled the air as Indigo's body swelled and sloshed, enveloping his stiff limbs and neck.

Indigo's impossible expansion lifted him off the ground as he was rocked back and forth by his squirms. The sturdy jumpsuit stretched with him dutifully without a single tear, as if it had been tailor-made for a nearly six-foot wide sphere. Not that Indigo seemed to appreciate it. Juice sporadically spilled from Indigo's mouth, muffling his cries, and the cheetah was essentially a large yellow orb clad in orange. His paws were just barely visible, while his head had sunk in just enough to make talking difficult. Indigo's hide felt horribly taut and uncomfortably slick, and he was convinced he was going to burst into a cloud of juice and scraps at any moment. He cursed his stubbornness and gluttony, wishing he had simply staid on the ship and continued being lazy. All his brother and crew-mates would find would be shredded bits of hide and a discarded jumpsuit in impeccable condition, maybe even his shoes if they weren't hurled out of the canyon when he blew.

Seconds turned into minutes as Indigo awaited the inevitable. And waited. And waited. In his state of total panic, Indigo hadn't realized the expansion had ceased. Eventually, though, the cheetah caught on, breaking into nervous laughter. He didn't know why he'd stopped swelling when he did, but the sudden relief of not exploding temporarily boosted his mood. Indigo hastily thanked every God and entity he could think of, even his jumpsuit at one point. His purrs returned in full force, tickling his body and gently sloshing the juice within him. An exasperated voice brought him back to reality, though.

“You've really done it now, haven't you...”

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Indigo stood silently, wishing he were still capable of looking away in shame. The rescue he'd dreamed of had happened, but the embarrassment of being discovered as a defenseless berry by the crew made him wish he'd actually popped. He'd been teased relentlessly when he needed a heavy cargo teleporter to beam back to the ship and was outright rolled down the corridors to sick-bay for examination. Worst of all, his brother Viridian had berated—and occasionally fussed over—him the entire time, much to the crew's amusement. Now he was alone in a mostly-empty cargo bay with Viridian.

Viridian, a dark green cheetah not much slimmer than Indigo, glared at his brother. “Alright berry-boy, what do you have to say for yourself?”

"I shouldn't have gone down alone, I was dumb and stupid and could've gotten myself eaten," Indigo mumbled, doing his best to avoid eye-contact.

"And." Viridian said.

"And I shouldn't have eaten a suspicious berry, no matter how delicious it looked." In his current state Indigo couldn't shuffle nervously, and instead wobbled slightly. "I've learned my lesson, Viri, please drain this juice out me!"

Viridian sighed. "Not an option, Indi."

"Giving me a dumb berry time-out isn't fair, bro!" Indi replied in a huff.

"I'm not giving you a time-out you gluttonous doofus, we literally can't juice you," Viridian said.

Indigo was confused. "W-what do you mean you can't juice me?"

"You aren't a damn water balloon filled with juice, a whole pulpy tangle grew inside you when you swelled, and a rigid one at that." Viridian slowly approached his brother. "If we drained you, you wouldn't lose your shape, just your stability. Without the juice you'd just be a floppy mass of overstretched hide."

"There's a cure, right? There has to be something, I don't want to be a berry forever!" Indigo was on the verge of a panic attack.

"Well unfortunately not many people have been dumb enough to eat those berries, so there isn't a guaranteed method to reverse the effects yet," Viridian said. "So yes, for the foreseeable future you're going to be a big, regretful berry."

Indigo whimpered in dismay. "No no no, this isn't fair! What if I'm popped!"

"We'll make sure you're kept safe and sound until this is sorted out. You'll be isolated to this cargo bay until we figure out how contagious your juice is, and I'll make sure a terminal is set-up so you can entertain yourself and ask for help if you topple over or whatever." Viridian rolled his eyes. "But for now just sit tight. I need to call mom and dad and explain why their youngest son is a cheetah berry now."

"W-wait, please don't tell them, I'm begging you!" Indigo pleaded as his brother walked away. "They'll tell the rest of the family and I'll never hear the end of it! I'll pop myself if you do, I swear!"

The door to the cargo bay slid close as Viridian continued on his way, ignoring his younger brother's whining.