

## Allergic Reaction

By: IndigoRho

“Fuck, fuck! Ouch!”

The frustrated cries of pain echoed through the forest, spooking nearby birds. Kyler was gripping his arm with a paw, eyes darting all around as he searched for the bee that'd just stung him without warning. The chubby orange-and-white rabbit had unintentionally tried to swat away the insect—thinking it was a mosquito—and was now stuck clenching his teeth through the lingering pain.

“Shit, what happened?” Kyler's friend Daniel asked. The kangaroo had been a little further up the trail when he'd heard Kyler cry out, and rushed back immediately.

“Just a stupid bee sting.” Kyler winced as he risked a glimpse beneath his paw.

Daniel seemed less concerned. “You allergic?”

“I don't think so? Never been stung before.” Kyler cursed a few more times to get it out of his system. “Just hurts like hell.”

“Well the campsite's just up ahead, so at least you can rest soon,” Daniel said, giving his friend a pat on the shoulder.

Kyler and Daniel had just graduated from high school a couple months before, and had decided to go on a short weekend camping trip one more time before their first semester of college at Columbia State University started. Fortunately the pain of the bee sting gradually faded, and the pair set up camp just like they always had. Having brought only the bare minimum for first-aid supplies, Kyler resorted to covering his sting in a gauze patch that was comically oversized for what he needed. The brief rest of the night was uneventful, spent roasting hot dogs and chatting about how excited they were for college, and shortly after the sun set they retired to their tents and passed out.

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The chirping of birds in the trees above caused Kyler to stir in his sleep much earlier than he'd of liked. He stubbornly kept his eyelids closed, clutching his pillow and shifting onto his side in an attempt to fall back to sleep. As the rabbit moved, though, he felt an unfamiliar weight in his gut. Kyler opened his eyes and leaned up on his elbows, staring down at his middle in confusion; he'd gained a potbelly overnight. For a moment Kyler thought he was still dreaming, but continuing to look at his round, white gut peeking from beneath his tank-top only made it realer. With unease he poked his middle, and felt the light sloshing of liquid within.

“Shit shit shit!” Kyler's heart began racing, and he quickly examined the arm that'd been stung the day before.

A large swathe of fur surrounding the patch appeared brighter than usual. Kyler tore away the bandage—wincing as it resisted—and was horrified to learn his fur was the same strange color underneath. He was clearly transforming.

Fruit reactions—sometimes generically referred to as berrification—were some of the most terrifying and dangerous afflictions a person could endure. They were predominantly caused by allergies, natural venom, or chemical reactions, but the symptoms were mostly the same. The victim's body would begin producing juice at a steady rate, while their hide and fur would gradually change color to match. If left untreated they would swell with juice until they were nearly spherical, before the internal pressure would inevitably grow too great and burst them apart. The juice itself was often volatile, potentially spreading the affliction to those exposed.

Of course, medical science had advanced greatly to combat the affliction. Juice suppressors could drastically slow down the internal production of juice, and tailored antidotes existed for the vast majority of fruit reactions. Pumps also existed to help drain victims before they popped. As long as your specific berrification wasn't particularly volatile and you had access to common medications, a

full recovery was possible. Prolonged exposure, however, could lead to the condition becoming permanent, which many dreaded as much as the idea of exploding itself.

Permanent berries were forced to revolve their whole lives around the affliction. They'd have to be juiced regularly to ensure they didn't burst, deal with a slew of medications, and likely wear clothing especially designed to expand with their bodies. Many were ostracized out of unwarranted fears of being contagious or worse: kidnapped so their internal juices could be used as the ingredient in various specialty drinks. None of that appealed very much to Kyler.

The rabbit crawled out of his tent and frantically woke Daniel while dialing an emergency number on his phone. Daniel wasn't overly fond of the early wake-up call, but when he opened his tent to curse out Kyler his eyes went wide.

"Shit, what happened!" Daniel scrambled from his tent, eyes glued to Kyler's round belly.

"The fucking bee, it was the fucking bee! I think I'm turning into an orange!" Kyler's voice cracked. "Shit I can't get a signal!"

Daniel noticeably kept some distance between the two while he brought out his phone. "Nothing."

Kyler was on the verge of a full blown panic attack, unable to think straight. "Oh God, I'm gonna pop, I'm gonna fucking pop!"

"No you're not!" Daniel wasn't necessarily confident in the claim, but he needed to calm his friend down. "You barely swelled up during the night, so it's probably not that bad. "We'll just pack up and hike back to the park entrance where the ranger station is. They'll have meds there and I bet we can get an ambulance to meet us by the time we arrive."

The assurances helped, at least a little. "O-ok. Just...fuck we need to hurry."

The pair hastily threw together their bags and started the long walk back. Kyler obsessively checked his arm and belly for signs of change, his panic building as he noticed the bright orange coloration spreading. His gut was slowly but steadily expanding as time passed, the sloshing inside growing louder and louder. Being awake seemed to dramatically hasten his transformation, and within half-an-hour of leaving camp Kyler was having to waddle due to his disruptively round middle.

He kept expecting his belly to suddenly balloon out of control, to fill with a torrent of juice until he exploded all over the foliage. Kyler had seen footage of people suffering from flash berrification, even witnessed it once in person. The victim always looked terrified, usually toppling over in a panic as others fled the impending detonation. Creaks and gargles were the worst part, at least until they burst into a tidal wave of bright juice and hide scraps. One of his cousins had suffered such a fate after a prank went bad; Kyler wasn't eager to join him.

After an hour of walking they were only half-way back to the entrance, and were forced to take a breather. The entire upper half of Kyler's body was a brilliant shade of orange. His belly had swollen to the size of a large beach ball, his breath now smelling distinctly of citrus. The weight of the juice had already taken its toll on the rabbit, who was exhausted. He was convinced his arms and legs felt thicker than normal, and his fingers fatter, though at that point Kyler was far too paranoid to accurately know what state he was in. Daniel tried his best to boost his friends morale, but the continued lack of signal and Kyler's slower pace made the roo's efforts difficult.

They had just exited the dense forest and entered the main path of the park when Kyler's limbs became too bloated to move any further. His chest, belly, and thighs had all merged into a rotund form, and the rabbit whimpered as he realized he was essentially immobile.

"F-fuck, I can't move anymore!" Kyler was close to tears.

For a moment Daniel considered trying to half-drag Kyler to their destination, but knew that'd be pointless. "Dude, my phone's finally picking up a faint signal again, I'll run to the ranger station and bring help, just hold tight!"

Kyler nearly begged the roo to stay with him, afraid of being alone if the worse came to pass, but he was too panicked to say a word. The wait was excruciating. His limbs gradually swelled up,

partially engulfed by his expanding body, and it took all Kyler's effort to not fall over. His cheeks rounded out, and his mouth began to taste strongly of orange while citrus flooded his sinuses. The pressure within him had been growing stronger, nerve wracking creaks increasing by the minute as his hide was stretched thinner than ever before. He could feel every small breeze that wafted against his sensitive skin. Kyler was utterly convinced the end was near, that any minute now he'd hear a horrific tear before coming apart in an instant, reduced to a pool of juice in the grass.

On that day, though, the tiniest bit of luck was on Kyler's side. Daniel and a trio of rangers came sprinting up to the spherical rabbit, quickly forcing him to down a bottle of liquid meant to suppress his body's production of juice. The creaks ended—for the most part—and the internal pressure became more bearable. As tears streamed down his swollen cheeks the rabbit was told an ambulance was on its way, and that they'd have him juiced to a safe size soon. Kyler was saved.

Unfortunately, there were consequences. While the timely arrival of medical personnel managed to drain the volatile orange juice from Kyler's body before he popped, the affliction had had hours to settle in. Even with every ounce of juice removed, more would still eventually be produced; Kyler would be a permanent orange. The rabbit's entire life was thrown into chaos—his routines, life goals, and status in society would be forever affected, all because of a casual swat at a bee. Suddenly college wasn't the biggest challenge Kyler faced...