

Making a Splash

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The blazing sun of a warm Summer day shone through the massive windows of the campus gym, lighting up its busy indoor pool. Near the deep end an overweight, tan-scaled lizard leapt into the air and curled up into a rather wide ball, hitting the cool water with a thunderous splash. A chubby ram standing at the side of the pool shielded his face from the flying water and laughed as he waited for his friend to resurface.

The lizard soon did, sporting a grin. "Hey Graham, I bet if you put on some weight you'd be able to make a splash almost as good as that one!"

"There's easier ways to convince me to get fatter Victor," Graham said, shaking his head. "Besides, a good cannonball isn't *all* about weight."

"I don't know, someone as tiny as you might barely cause a ripple," Victor teased.

Graham was on the verge of making a snarky comeback when an idea suddenly hit him. "I can prove you wrong tubbs, but I'll need your help to do it." He crouched down near the edge. "Get in closer and I'll give ya the details."

Victor paddled over to listen, giggling as Graham explained his plan.

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Elsewhere at the pool, the lifeguard on duty sat atop his perch, keeping a modest watch on the swimmers. Ryker, a tall and lanky ferret, enjoyed the general laziness of his part-time summer job. The swimmers were mainly students and alumni, and for the most part they all behaved. At the very least he'd never had to actually dive in and rescue anyone. As a result the ferret could instead simply sit around comfortably and occasionally pretend to be stern.

"Life-guard, help!"

Ryker looked around in surprise until he found the source of the voice, a fat lizard waving his arms wildly.

"My friend belly flopped in the deep end and hasn't come back up!" The lizard was pointing vaguely at a spot in the pool nearby.

"On it!" Ryker's instincts kicked in so fast he didn't notice the somewhat lackluster concern in the lizard's voice, sliding down his post and diving into the pool in seconds.

Ryker spotted the face-down form of what he thought might be a ram at the very bottom and rocketed towards him. The swimmer didn't look too heavy, so Ryker was confident he could swiftly grab him and launch right off the pool's bottom, rescuing the poor ram from certain doom. As soon as his paw lightly grazed the victim's back, though, the ram spun around, causing Ryker to unintentionally gasp in surprise. Graham couldn't believe his luck. When his savior's mouth opened he spun the nozzle on the helium tank he'd smuggled to the pool's depths and shoved it right past the ferret's jaws before he could react.

Ryker's cheeks puffed up as helium began gushing into them, until another rough shove from the treacherous ram forced the tank into the back of his mouth, forcing him to gulp it down whole. The ferret's slim middle rapidly began to swell and round as helium flooded his stomach. He frantically pushed at his ballooning belly in an effort to cough up the tank, but being underwater seemed to make him instead far more likely to belch up the limited air he was holding in. His back arched upward as his buoyancy grew with his waistline, and Ryker began slowly rising up towards the surface against his will.

Graham grabbed onto Ryker's wrists to tag along, grinning as he watched the ferret rapidly inflating with each passing second. Ryker's middle was nearly three feet wide when his chest and limbs started to puff up as well. Treading water became impossible, and the ferret was completely reliant on

the expanding helium within him to reach the safety of the surface. Soon his rounded butt breached the water, drawing the attention of confused swimmers as Ryker's bloated form slowly rose into view. By the time the life-guard could finally gasp for air again, his body was nearly spherical. The unexpected ferret balloon was quickly followed by Graham, who retained a firm grip on one of Ryker's swollen paws.

The bizarre prank had left Ryker flustered, the ferret blushing in embarrassment as he heard laughter and saw glimpses of phones being aimed in his direction, ready to snap pictures and record video of the whole ordeal. While he was fairly fond of inflation, being inflated against his will at work with so many witnesses was a far different matter. He glared at the content ram who'd tricked him and prepared a scathing rant.

"You'll never swim at--" Ryker clamped his mouth shut as soon as he heard how squeaky his voice had become, unable to take even himself seriously at that point.

Graham laughed. "Dude, I'm doing you a favor! You'll be able to keep watch over the entire pool once you're bobbing up on the ceiling!"

Ryker was obviously holding back a stream of curses, but instead decided to focus on other concerns. The ceiling had its fair share of pointy hazards, and the pressure building within the ferret was already on the verge of being uncomfortable; he swore he could hear a few light creaks and groans, too. The only thing worse than being inflated unwillingly was being popped unwillingly, at least in his mind. Sure he'd just re-form back home later on, good as new, but then he'd spend the next few months being antagonized by whichever co-workers were forced to fish his scraps out of the pool.

Fortunately the hissing of the helium tank inside Ryker had ceased, and the ferret's body still had plenty of give once he finally bumped into the ceiling. Graham swaying from his paw caused him to bounce a little afterward, though thankfully there didn't seem to be anything sharp waiting to burst him. The ram looked down on the pool from his vantage point in awe, still somewhat surprised his scheme had worked. He'd turned friends into personal blimps before in the past, but usually there was far more planning involved, and his ride tended to be willing. Inflating a stranger was always a guessing game, as Graham could never be certain of their capacity. There'd been a considerable chance of him outright blowing up the life-guard before they reached a proper height.

"Alright big guy, have fun up here!" Graham shouted, giving the bloated ferret a teasing slap with his free paw.

Confident the water was clear below, Graham finally let go. He wrapped his arms around his knees and formed as solid a ball as he could, heart racing as he tried anticipating the water. An audible gasp echoed throughout the pool as the audience watched the ram plummet, peaking as he hit the surface with an astounding splash. The resulting spray of water was just high enough to sprinkle Ryker's round middle, and a small wave raced across the pool. Graham looked ecstatic when he resurfaced, paddling back to the edge where Victor was waiting for him.

"Told ya I could make a bigger splash without being fatter!" the ram grinned. "My thighs and butt are sore as heck, but it was worth it."

"Honestly I can't believe that worked," Victor laughed. "I was sure the life-guard would just end up lugging you back out, maybe even make you eat the helium tank yourself as punishment!"

Graham pulled himself out. "Well luck was on my side, cause he's the blimp and I'm firmly on the ground. Please tell me you recorded that?"

"Yep, got the whole thing on my phone!" Victor said. "We might want to make ourselves scarce before watching it, though. Someone's bound to grab another staff member to get the poor life-guard down from there, and I doubt we're welcome here now."

"Yeah, probably not. Still worth it." Graham looked up at the obviously-frustrated ferret wobbling around on the ceiling and gave him a wave. He was certain a scowl was all he got in return.

Ryker watched the pair of troublemakers leave with a quiet sigh of relief. Though they'd turned him into a massive balloon, at least they weren't sticking around to cause him more problems. The

ferret tried to distract himself by thinking of all the ways things could be worse. He could have exploded, of course, and if the pool had been outdoors he'd be up in the clouds right now, hoping to burst. A coworker was bound to wander in eventually, maybe sooner if a swimmer was kind enough to track someone down. Forcing a positive attitude upon himself, Ryker went back to doing his job. Being on the ceiling *did* give him a commanding view of the pool, after all.