

Rain Collector

By: IndigoRho

Craig struggled against his bindings once more, hoping the rope that held his paws in place behind the chair would magically break this time. They didn't, of course. His teeth clattered both out of fear and cold, a stiff breeze blowing over the covered patio as rain began to fall. The otter wasn't sure how long he'd been strapped to the cheap plastic lawn chair, or what exactly had been used to knock him unconscious in the middle of a video game marathon, but he was uncomfortably certain as to *whom* was behind everything. All the more reason to break free and run.

"Took you long enough to wake up."

The otter cringed. "L-Lyle, this is about the rent, isn't it? I swear I can get you the money, I just need another..."

Two paws gripped firmly onto Craig's shoulders, and the otter gulped as a rather round-faced ferret leaned over into view. "You've already had two months, and I'm tired of waiting. I'm thinking about finding a new roommate instead."

"I-I'll get packed right away, I'll leave tonight!" Craig sputtered. He'd heard rumors of the things Lyle had done to past roommates, and if being kicked out was the worst that happened to him he'd be overjoyed.

"Now now, no need to rush. I wanted to give you one last chance to square away your debt and stick around." Lyle's words were far from comforting. "My old rain collecting barrel sprung a leak, and I haven't been able to replace it because I covered you for rent. Only seems fair for you to take its place now that the rain's back."

Craig was confused until he saw Lyle lift a thick tube off the ground, one that lead straight up to the gutters, a steady stream of water already trickling out. He frantically squirmed in the chair, but Lyle had little trouble shoving the tube down the otter's throat.

"Here's the deal Craig. If you survive tonight without going kaboom I'll ignore the money you owe and let you mooch off someone else in peace. If you don't, well..." Lyle gave the frightened otter's flat stomach a pat before walking off with a chuckle. "Good luck Craig, I hear the storm's gonna be a doozy!"

Craig shivered as he felt the chilly rain water begin to empty into his stomach through the tube, alarmed to notice his middle was already swelling ever-so-slightly. He tried shouting for help, but the tube garbled and muffled his words with horrific ease, ensuring he wouldn't be heard by neighbors. The sound of the pouring rain had always been relaxing to Craig, but now it filled him with utter dread. And water. Lots of water.

His shirt grew tighter and tighter with each passing minute as the otter slowly gained a small, water-fueled pot belly. A faint, babbling noise echoed from within his inflating gut, growing noticeably louder whenever the downpour picked up. Less than an hour into his "task", Craig felt his bloated sides press into the lawn chair's arms, and the chair itself seemed to let out slight creaks and groans every so often. His belly looked like a brown beachball, wobbling and sloshing as it continued to fill. Craig had never inflated before and—despite knowing it was possible for some to expand to incredible widths—was convinced every odd noise was the herald of his end.

With Craig's belly spreading over his lap and uncomfortably heavy, the cheap chair he'd been tied to finally gave out, its legs snapping apart and sending the otter crashing to the ground with a thud and a wobble. Thankfully his body was a bit more durable than the chair, leaving the living water balloon intact aside from some harsh aches. He recovered relatively quick and attempted to stand, but just enough rain had accumulated in his stomach to immobilize him. The storm grew stronger.

Minutes turned into hours, and all Craig could do was rock back-and-forth in desperation as his belly swelled ominously. His shirt was shredded by the uncontrolled expansion early on, a tattered mess hanging on by the sleeves. The sheer weight of his own gut was enough to make breathing

difficult. He could *feel* his hide being stretched thin, almost painfully so, growing more sensitive to the gusts of wind and occasional drizzle. Any time the rain slowed he'd gain a little hope, only to have it all dashed by a downpour twice as fierce as ever. Craig was starting to hear the creaking sounds again, but this time they were from his own terribly bloated gut. The end was near, it had to be.

The weather, though, seemed intent on prolonging Craig's suffering. An abrupt lull in the storm brought the flow of water down to a trickle, not that the otter had any way to take advantage of the reprieve. Jagged pieces of lawn chair littered the patio around Craig, and his belly had gradually ballooned over them over time; merely breathing too deeply was enough to give the otter a painful reminder of their existence, so sudden movements were guaranteed to tear him open. All he could do was whimper and wait.

In the dead of the night, when the howling wind was at its loudest, the first pinprick of a hole appeared in Craig's mountainous belly. Craig barely had time to feel the sudden sting of pain as the tiny tear spread across his entire middle in a heartbeat. A water-logged squeak was swiftly silenced as Craig burst apart, scraps of hide hurled against the walls and into the lawn amidst a small tidal wave of newly-freed rainwater. The explosion had been so thorough and violent that nothing recognizable remained of the unfortunate otter. Maybe a neighbor or two would come across some pitiful shreds of stretched brown hide, but the chances of them knowing—or for that matter even caring—who they'd once belonged to were slim. Accidents happened, people popped, and everyone was used to Lyle going through roommates regularly...