

The Ample Lake Burster: Chapter 05

By: Indigo Rho

Oscar whistled as the back of the truck opened up, revealing a wall of coolers, bags, and milk crates piled precariously high. Luckily, nothing had shifted during the drive, which saved Cody from being crushed by party supplies. "I forgot how much we managed to cram into the back." The tubby red fox's arms hadn't, though. He still felt a lingering ache from loading earlier that he was about to become woefully reacquainted with.

"Parties need a ton of snacks and drinks," Cody said, scowling at the imposing tower of supplies as if it'd personally insulted him. "Especially when our frat is filled with so many bottomless pits like you and Abel." The leopard jabbed Oscar's belly as if he was frantically calling an elevator.

Oscar jiggled with every poke but didn't bother swatting away Cody's paw. The sly cat would simply slip away if he did, like always. But while Cody was busy teasing Oscar's middle, Abel was sneaking up on him from behind. The arctic wolf winked at Oscar, and he winked right back.

Without a word, Oscar and Abel both stepped forward simultaneously, pinning Cody between their doughy middles.

"Let me go!" Cody hissed. The cat squirmed from side to side, but his efforts merely wobbled the bellies trapping him. His speed meant nothing when he was overpowered, and nothing overpowered Cody quite as efficiently as a wide rump or gut.

"Do you hear something?" Abel asked Oscar while scratching his ear.

"Nope," Oscar replied with a mischievous grin as he looked right at Cody. The leopard's face scrunched up in the funniest way whenever he was annoyed. "Probably just the trees swaying in the wind. But did you see where Cody went? I could've sworn he was here just a few seconds ago, being his delightfully chipper self."

"Beats me. Though I lose track of that little cat all the time. Some days I can't seem to pin him down, no matter what." Abel laughed, and Oscar felt its vibrations through his large middle.

"You both suck so much!" Cody howled and wiggled. His ears were flat against his skull, and his face was flushed red. Despite the futility of going up against two bellies nearly bigger than he was, the cat fought on out of habit. Oscar liked that about his spirited friend, if only because the squirms doubled as a belly massage.

"Well, darn. I bet the scoundrel's scampered off to be lazy while we do all the work! I don't want to believe our dear friend Cody would do such a thing, but

the evidence is clear as day.” Oscar shook his head and the rest of his body along with it, ensuring he rubbed his plush gut against Cody.

“I guess we’ll have to do all the work ourselves and hunt him down later. Maybe teach him a lesson by taking turns sitting on him,” Abel said, provoking frustrated meows from their captive.

Oscar and Abel stepped away, leaving the furious Cody stumbling in their wake. “*There* you are, Cody!” Oscar said with poorly feigned surprise. He slapped his friend hard on the back. “You went and vanished on us. Did you fall down a molehill or something?”

Cody’s tail was puffy and standing straight up. He clenched his fists and glared at his two frat brothers with a fury diminished by his small stature and the fact he’d spent the last few minutes squeezed between two bellies. “You’re the worst!” the cat declared, throwing around an accusatory finger. “You can’t be jerks just because I point out the truth!”

“And what truth is that?” Abel asked.

Cody artfully repositioned himself so he was no longer between the pair of menacing bellies. “That the two of you require truckloads of food to sate your damn appetites!”

“What’s so wrong about wanting to enjoy all the wonderful food life has to offer?” Oscar asked. The fox’s stomach rumbled just thinking about it, and he regretted not grabbing a second combo meal when they’d stopped for lunch on the way over.

“It makes more work for us.” Cody pointed at the party supplies. “So maybe you two should stop screwing around and help me.”

“You got it, boss.” Abel rubbed Cody’s head and grabbed a couple of bags off the top.

“You can count on us, spots!” Oscar bumped the distracted cat with his ample hips as he squeezed by to snatch some bags as well.

Cody had to stand on the tip of his toes to reach something safely, but he managed to grab as much as the other two.

Camp Ample’s small gravel parking lot seemed to be located as far from any building on the property as possible. The journey from the trucks to the mess hall required a brisk walk across uneven terrain and between trees whose thick roots bulged out of the ground.

“We should’ve parked closer,” Cody grumbled as they approached their destination.

“That would’ve required a tad bit of off-roading,” Oscar said. He adjusted his grip on the bags as their handles dug into his paws.

“My truck can take it. It got down that dumb bumpy road fine.”

“Yeah, but could you drive it over without tearing up the grass along the way? Getting hit with a landscaping fine on the final bill would put Axel in a foul mood.”

Cody winced. No one wanted to test the limits of the frat president’s patience. “Well, they should’ve designed this place better,” the leopard continued, finding new ways to complain about the inconvenience.

Cody had to put down his bags to fish out the mess hall keys. Once he’d opened the doors, he shoved them open with his elbow and tracked down a light switch, not that it was necessary at that time of day.

The mess hall was spacious and bright. Sunlight flooded through the big windows lining the walls on either side. Exposed wooden beams opened up the main room further, partially concealing the light fixtures above. Two columns of long wooden tables ran the room’s full length, with benches for seating.

“Ah, it’s like an upscale high school cafeteria,” Oscar joked. “All the familiar comfort of firm seats, but without any of the widespread graffiti and questionable stains. I bet there’s not a single mound of hardened chewing gum under the tables, either!”

“The cafeteria at my school had round tables,” Abel said.

“We come from such different worlds, Abel. But I assume the students there still spent lunch gossiping about who was dating who while ignoring the pervasive aroma of dismal sloppy joes.” Oscar reminisced with a cheek-pinching grin.

“Good riddance to all that crap,” Cody said. “College is miles better than high school, despite the best efforts of you two doughy menaces.”

Oscar smirked at his friend’s goofy attempt at an insult. He always knew he’d gotten Cody good and flustered when the cat’s wit abandoned him. “I’m sure we could find a locker to shove you in, for old time’s sake.”

Abel snickered while Cody shot Oscar a dirty look. “That never happened to me, not once! It’s not even possible!”

“I don’t know, the swim complex on campus had some pretty big lockers. I’m pretty sure I could make you fit,” Abel said. Cody hissed at him.

“I guess I just imagined you were getting an up-close look at the local lockers,” Oscar told Cody. “So much of high school is a blur already, after all. Though I know for a fact you were a frequent target of hip checks. It’s like you’re drawn to their gravity or something.” Oscar drifted by Cody and motioned to bump him, giving the grumbly cat plenty of time to dodge. As much as he wanted to tease his friend, he didn’t want the snacks to get caught in the crossfire.

The inviting mess hall led to a far more subdued kitchen in the back. Stainless steel tables, counters, and appliances reflected the dim lights above. The walls were not quite white, and the floor tiles were a shade of beige. Open

cabinet shelves held plain sets of blue dinnerware that appeared plastic from a distance to Oscar. He considered it an odd thing for the place to cheap out on until he remembered the destruction a horde of drunken frat boys could cause to anything fragile. He assumed that was true for all sorts of drunk visitors, as well.

The trio set their bags on the counters and made the long trek back for more. They made trip after trip, slowly emptying the trucks of their precious, delicious cargo. Oscar was huffing and puffing after three trips, fiercely reminded of why he preferred relaxing on the couch to hitting up the gym. Abel didn't fare any better, panting non-stop. Cody sweated like the rest but hid his exhaustion better, making a habit of darting ahead of Oscar and Abel while shooting them self-satisfied smirks.

When the last bag was dropped on the packed counters, Oscar felt about to collapse. The wooden benches in the mess hall looked welcoming at that point.

"Are you two *really* wiped out after that?" Cody asked, despite breathing heavily himself. "Maybe you should look into more cardio." The cat performed a few simple stretches, as if it proved anything other than he remembered something from high school gym class.

Oscar wasn't about to let Cody get the upper hand on their back-and-forth teasing, not with such low-hanging fruit as his below-par endurance. After all, he had to keep the bratty cat in line, lest Cody get complacent and annoy the wrong person with his snark. Cody had ended up dangerously taut and round in the past because of that, and Oscar very much preferred him to remain in one piece.

Oscar caught his breath while Cody showed off. "Cardio's good, but I've always thought I needed to improve my lung capacity. Honestly, I might as well get in some practice now."

Cody raised a brow, oblivious to Oscar's mischievous plot until the fox suddenly grabbed his shoulders. By then, he was too late to do anything but meow in confusion.

Oscar took the deepest breath he could and locked lips with Cody, who blushed instantly. Then he blew with all his might into the flustered cat.

"*Mrrmmph!*" Cody's eyes shot wide open, and his tail stuck out as he filled with air like a feline balloon. His flat stomach billowed out from under his hoodie, giving the lean cat a beach ball belly in seconds. He twisted and turned, but Oscar was determined to puff his buddy up and didn't let go.

Oscar breathed in deep through his nose, then blew into Cody again. He felt the frantic feline jolt as his belly ballooned out further, pushing against Oscar's own. Breath after powerful breath made Cody swell. *Just a little more*, Oscar thought. *Just a little bit more*. Part of him wanted to blow Cody up until

the cat was a helpless ball, but he wasn't sure he'd be able to roll him out of the kitchen afterward if he did. Better to leave him mobile but creaky. Besides, he was still tired from moving the party supplies and didn't want to pass out immediately after teasing his friend.

In between breaths, Oscar glanced down at Cody's rounding middle. Only when he was certain Cody's balloon belly was rounder than his own did he release the cat.

Cody floundered backward against a counter, gasping for breath. He looked down at his round middle, and his jaw dropped open, briefly rendering him speechless. "What the hell was that for?!" he demanded, his belly wobbling up and down with every angry word.

Oscar couldn't help but chuckle at his furious, bloated friend. He wondered if Cody realized how obviously he was blushing. "I just wanted to test my lung capacity and thought I might as well give you a taste of the big life while I was at it. It's kind of like walking a mile in someone's shoes, but you're waddling a mile with their waistline instead."

"I don't need to blimp up to know I want to stay lean and fit forever." Cody crossed his arms over his bouncing belly, and his muzzle twisted in embarrassment. "I don't need to blimp up at all!"

"But cats make such cute balloons," Abel said. The wolf slid over and smacked Cody's middle like a drum. Cody wobbled out of Abel's reach and right into Oscar's, who drummed on him, too.

"Quit that!" Cody hissed. The cat swatted at the rowdy frat boys playing with his taut belly, almost toppling over in the process. He stormed away from the teasing, his swollen middle swaying wildly from left to right. "I'm going to deflate!"

"We have to put away all the stuff we brought in, though." Oscar stifled a laugh.

"You should've thought about that before inflating me, jumbo!" Cody huffed on his way out of the kitchen. The door was tragically wide enough for the leopard to fit through without getting wedged.

"Still worth it," Oscar said. He and Cody had made a game of inflating each other since their first day of college, when Cody had pumped him up and used him as an air mattress because he didn't like his dorm bed. The cat had backed down after Oscar had used *him* as an air mattress the following night—Oscar had never had a creakier bed—but the tit-for-tat inflation never died. There wasn't any malice to the back-and-forth, just mutually assured flustering and some friendly public embarrassment. No doubt Cody would find a way to get back at him, prompting Oscar to get back at him in turn, and so on and so forth for as long as their friendship persisted.

“Why didn’t you puff him up till he couldn’t wobble away?” Abel asked.

“Trust me, I’m always tempted to round out our spotted friend, but he can make quite a fuss as a balloon. Would you want to put things away while he serenaded us with howls and creaks? I dare say he might have bounced aggressively if he felt *truly* slighted.” Oscar thought about the time a fully inflated Cody had managed to knock him over and roll over him, an impressive feat for a blimp.

“A pressure daze would’ve solved that problem.”

“Yes, but then we’d have to worry about him springing a leak. It’s all fun and games until someone goes boom, and I can’t say I want to see Cody end up as confetti.” Oscar had actually had nightmares about that before, though he kept them to himself. Such thoughts were best buried deep down and forgotten.

“Too bad. Kitty looks really cute in a daze when his eyes glaze over and he starts mumbling.”

Oscar began emptying the numerous bags. There were chips and dips of all flavors—and not just store brands, either. Rho Theta Rho had dug deep into their party budget for this one. Whole bags were filled with spaghetti and the red sauce to go along with it. Dinner wouldn’t be fancy, but at least the guests would fill their stomachs with something other than liquor and snacks.

Then there were the s’mores supplies. Bag after bag of graham crackers, chocolate bars, and fluffy marshmallows. It was as if the fraternity had bought a whole aisle at the grocery store.

Abel shook his head and laughed as he pulled out yet another bag of giant marshmallows. “Dude, we totally overestimated how eager people are for s’mores. And we’ve only got one fire pit, anyway. Who’s gonna want to bother with waiting in line to roast marshmallows when they’re drunk and cruising for action.”

“You’re forgetting how romantic eating fresh s’mores by the fire is,” Oscar said. “Cuddling up on a log for warmth as the light of the flames dances across your faces. Chomping down on those gooey s’mores, with the marshmallows toasted *just* right and the chocolate starting to melt. Going in for that sugary kiss.” The fox winked at the wolf.

Abel snorted at the story Oscar weaved for him. “Cool story, bro, but cheesy romantic fantasies aren’t gonna save this mountain of delicious marshmallows from going to waste. Good thing I’m around to save the day.” The wolf opened the nearest bag of marshmallows and tossed a few into his maw. “Fuck me, these are so damn good.”

“I’d warn you that you are what you eat, but I see I’m too late for that. You already resemble a big marshmallow. And if you scarf down a few bags, you’ll puff up like one, too, and *stay* puffed up.” Oscar wagged his eyebrows.

“Don’t throw stones in glass houses,” Abel said. He shoveled a few more marshmallows into his mouth before waddling up to Oscar.

Oscar stepped back to get out of the hungry wolf’s way but discovered he was right against a counter. The fox was suddenly acutely aware that Abel had about a foot on him as he looked up at his frat brother’s toothy grin. With Abel’s belly pressing into his, he was also learning how hefty the wolf had grown. He gulped, not out of fear but of swiftly disguised excitement. He had a not-so-secret crush on wolves and wider folk, and Abel was both. By the way the wolf smiled down on him, Oscar suspected Abel knew exactly where his interests lay. Perhaps Cody had told Abel as a way of getting back at him for his usual teasing.

Abel grabbed the soft sides of Oscar’s belly and gave them a gentle squeeze. It took everything for Oscar to hold back a flustered squeak. He didn’t bother squirming like Cody did when pinned; he wasn’t getting free until Abel had had his fun, whatever that would be.

“You’ve always been a big guy, haven’t you?” Abel asked.

Oscar nodded. “You could say that.” The fox lacked any concept of “thin” in relation to himself. He’d lived a lifetime of curves.

“Yeah. And I can’t help but notice you’ve only grown bigger and bigger since joining Rho Theta Rho.” Abel hadn’t let go of Oscar’s belly. He closed and opened his paws, kneading the fox’s gut like dough.

“The freshman fifteen is a well-documented phenomenon. It’s affected pretty much everyone in our frat who isn’t a snarky cat incapable of gaining an ounce no matter what he eats.” Oscar liked to joke that Cody hadn’t changed at all since they’d first met ages ago, that he hadn’t grown an inch in any direction. That comment tended to bring out Cody’s claws—both figuratively and literally.

“This ain’t the freshman fifteen.” Abel jiggled Oscar’s sides, sending a ripple up the fox’s rotund form. “This is a belly that’s always asking ‘Are you gonna finish that?’ before someone’s taken their first bite. This is a balloon that’s spent semester after semester slowly blowing up. This is a fox who’s going to find himself getting wedged in doorways any day now.”

Abel had honed in on the sort of idea that made Oscar wiggle like a fox-seeking missile. Oscar *had* recently become more and more mindful of how little room there was between doorframes and his hips as he entered rooms. Slipping through doors after inflating even a minimal amount required effort. He actually had to plan his route through the frat house when he was inflated to ensure he wouldn’t get stuck and teased relentlessly. He doubted anyone else in the frat intimately knew the width of various doors and hallways as he did.

“I, uh, don’t think I’m *that* fat.” Oscar laughed nervously. Laughter only jiggled him further.

“Whatever you say, blimp. But do be careful when you’re waddling through a narrow doorway. Too tight a squeeze might pop you.” Abel gripped Oscar’s belly hard before smacking the round ball of blubber. He pulled away from the blushing fox and went back to eating marshmallows as he lazily put things away.

Oscar fussed with his flannel shirt while he regained his composure. He would have to be careful about teasing Abel since the handsome wolf knew how to push his buttons with ease. And unlike Cody, Oscar couldn’t simply sit on Abel to quiet him down. If anything, the wolf would sit on him instead. He tucked the flustering thought away for later and hoped Abel never caught wind of it.