It was important to prepare before fighting a wizard, lest one end up as a small puddle of vaguely red-coloured soup smeared against a wall… or worse. As much as Anthony was convinced that he had learned enough to tackle this task, he wanted to stack the odds as much in his favour as he possibly could, especially since he *was* going up against someone who could very much just throw curses at him as easily as they could breathe. Seeing as there was no time limit imposed on his little fetch quest, the ballooned kobold figured he could spend some time making sure that the old coot's routine hadn't changed, all while training further and perusing whatever scrolls he had on him for protection against magic. He was happy to find out that the wizard was just as predictable then as they had been before, even down to the bi-weekly visits to the nearby town and the odd nightly rituals (which he himself now understood better after the ridiculous list of ingredients he went through); from there, it was easy enough to create a plan of action to attack his prey at their most vulnerable moment: when they were fiddling with their keys after returning from their shopping trip.

It was a risky plan, but Anthony wasn't about to lie down and wait for fate to reward him because of his moral high ground when he could very much just snatch his just dues from the grasp of the very man who took them away from him… even if that only happened because he tried to rob them in the first place, but who was really keeping track? What mattered was that he spent months on a potentially-suicidal journey to grab ingredients that were entirely unnecessary for a potion that didn't need them at the behest of someone he really didn't care for, purely because he felt it was the "right" thing to do; well, the 'bold no longer *cared* about what was "right" or "wrong" with that wizard, because clearly the potion he himself had tried stealing was so trivial to produce that even keeping it behind a locked glass cabinet was too much security! Honestly, having been sent on a mission designed to kill him felt like a slight bit of an overreaction, and a more than adequate excuse for him to bring some balance into the world by showing that wizened old man just who he had messed with.

The kobold waited patiently, waking up early on the day of the confrontation, his eyes glued to the tower in the middle of the clearing. Soon, the door would open to reveal the man that had left him as a blimped-out version of himself, right before he turned on the spot and teleported to the nearby town in order to purchase supplies; as soon as that happened, Anthony fastened his gear to his body, made sure to readjust his wings so they'd keep on serving as improvised armor, and promptly waddled over as closely as possible to the tower's base. There, a large patch of shrubs served as the perfect camouflage for his large, spherical self, big enough that he could hide behind them while still getting a view through the foliage at the front door; the wizard always teleported straight onto the threshold, taking anything from ten to thirty seconds to find the correct key from among the many he kept on a chain attached to his belt, *plenty* of time for the kobold to spring into action and challenge the man to a duel!

So he waited again, and waited some more, sweating with anticipation and nervousness as he reviewed his battle plan in his head again and again, knowing for a fact that he'd have to abandon it anyway the moment hit made first contact with reality. Still, he offered a short prayer to his draconic gods and kept his eyes firmly on the door, almost subconsciously anticipating the moment that the wizard would appear from thin air with a loud crack; he had seen it so many times before that he practically flinched *before* it happened, almost like an internal timer had gone off, with Anthony using the momentum to propel himself forward and straight at his target, who had just then realized someone was "running" (for lack of a better word) directly at him while brandishing a sword. It took the old coot a couple of seconds to remember who the kobold even *was*, at which point he sighed, snapped his fingers, and Anthony's plan fell apart.

In a single moment, all the protections that had kept his wings from ever popping vanished, lifted as easily as could be from someone who had completely forgotten that *removing* a beneficial enchantment was not the same as placing a malicious one, and thus had happily forgotten that the wizard still held *that* bit of leverage over him. His fluffy, inflated appendages sprang back into their old shape, open wide behind him and offering plenty of air resistance as Anthony continued to sprint towards the wizard and the base of the tower. He wasn't even thinking anymore, no longer caring that his one protection had been removed with a literal snap of the fingers; all he cared about was getting that sword of his *somewhere* inside the wizard's body, or at least close enough that they'd have to concede defeat and finally give him what he wanted… even if he didn't really know what that was.

And yet, the closer Anthony got to his quarry, the more easily he could see the wide, predatory grin that adorned their lips, letting the kobold know just what was in store for him if he dared to make a wrong move. Suddenly, all the counter-magical preparations he had on him didn't feel all that effective; the balloon 'bold could practically sense the malice and hatred seeping from the wizened old man staring him down, the air crackling with electricity as they raised a hand to strike him down just as easily as they would swat a fly… but Anthony was ready for it. He'd spent *months* travelling the lands and fighting his way through foes much more powerful than that man while running on pure annoyance alone, so surely a simple practitioner of the magical arts should be no match for him, *especially* now that righteous indignation was his chosen fuel and he had actual experience to draw from; indeed, his body reacted almost entirely by itself when he saw the lightning bolt fly towards him, anchoring its claws on the ground before pushing itself off to the side, using its own buoyancy to fly through the air and land right-side up with enough velocity left to be transferred to forward momentum once again! It was an impressive bit of acrobatics, especially since Anthony himself hadn't done it on purpose, and an opportunity to finally strike at the man that had cursed him to remain as a blimped-out version of himself!

But the wizard was quick, and reacted just as easily to the dodge as the 'bold himself did to the first attack, preparing a second lightning strike that just *barely* missed Anthony's main body… and promptly exploded one of his wings instead. The kobold had assumed that such a thing would've hurt, would've left him incapacitated and unable to think properly, but it barely even registered, presumably because that thing was mostly air rather than anything else; still, it was his wing… it *was* his wing. It had ceased to be.

And he was going to do something about it.

There was something more than grief welling up inside of him, even if it was the most powerful emotion he was feeling at that exact moment in time. It was something more powerful, something that burned brightly enough that it felt like an actual fire raging within him, something that, contrary to the loss making him want to fall over and weep, instead urged him to keep going, to carry on with his charge and plunge his blade deep into the chest of the man responsible for stripping him of his wing. It was anger, rage, *righteous* rage at that, one that could only come from one who'd been wronged and scorned by another who paid no heed to what they thought, and the same kind that refused to be doused even if plunged into the deepest of oceans. *It* was the light at the end of the tunnel, even if Anthony knew that it was probably some kind of steam vehicle ready to run him over in this metaphor, because he no longer cared; if it meant he could take revenge on the wizard, he would gladly sacrifice his other wing to do so.

And this… gave him an idea. In the split-second during which he experienced all of this, the kobold realized that if there was anything that could give him an advantage, it was his now-lopsided nature. The wing that burst had done so in a large shower of feathers and fluff, projected outwards by the force of the air pressurized within it, which could only mean that if the other wing went the same way, then he could *weaponize* this minor burst and use it to his own advantage. Acting more on instinct than anything else, he reacted to the wizard raising his hand again by slamming one of his feet on the ground, jumping and sending himself into a spiralling dive towards the sorcerer; his single remaining wing rotated rapidly along with him, and with some minor adjustments mid-flight, Anthony managed to time it so that the lightning bolt fired in his direction hit nothing but feather.

With a horrifyingly loud pop, the second wing on his back was destroyed; this time, however, rather than all of its constituent fluff flying harmlessly away from the two combatants, Anthony's forward momentum and expert positioning ensured that the cloud of feather scraps was projected directly towards the wizard himself, whose reaction times were so terrible that he was already blinded by the time he raised his hands to cover his eyes. Sputtering and tripping over himself as he tried to spit out bits of the destroyed wing from his mouth, the wizard was stunned and out of it for just long enough that his kobold nemesis managed to recover from his

self-imposed tailspin and find his footing again, launching himself through the air towards the one who had robbed him of his greatest accomplishments yet. And while his body might very well be mostly air even in its diminished state, he still crashed into the sorcerer with enough strength to punt him onto the ground, immobilizing them under his girth and giving the 'bold enough time to draw his blade and point it straight at the old man's throat.

It was all over in just a handful of seconds, barely ten having passed between the first wing being popped and the man responsible being flat on the ground with a sharp piece of metal about to cut open an unfortunately wide smile on his neck. Both him and Anthony were breathing deeply, trying to anticipate one another's next move, with the latter in particular feeling the strain of having to keep himself in an *extremely* uncomfortable pose just to keep his sword tip close enough to the wizard for it to be a genuine threat; he *was* still a big balloon-shaped 'bold, and had to anchor himself onto the ground to keep the man beneath him from kicking him away. It was a game of chicken that Anthony couldn't possibly win, but he could try and bluff his way through anyway… and much to his surprise, the wizard he had "defeated" in single combat sighed, rolled his eyes, and then finally opened his mouth to speak.

"What do you want?" he queried, sounding more bored than truly afraid.

"Uuuh…" Anthony mumbled in reply, slightly surprised by the suddenness of it all, "M-Myself, back to normal! No air, no nothing… a-a-and a proper pair of wings, ones that can actually make me fly!"

The sorcerer raised a single eyebrow at the request, but didn't raise any objections. Snapping his fingers with a much louder noise than should be possible, he simply turned Anthony… back to normal. The kobold had been expecting a long, drawn-out draining where he'd have to exhale all the excess air inside of him, but instead he was given the most anticlimactic transformation possible; then again, given who he was dealing with, perhaps it was for the best that the wizard didn't get *inventive* with his solutions, lest Anthony end up having to go on a second fetch quest. His body being returned to normal did help him keep his blade in place a lot easier though, even if he was reasonably certain he didn't actually pose any threat at all to someone who could wield magic so easily; nonetheless, he kept his tiny sword pointed straight at the old man's throat until they snapped their fingers once again, finally giving the kobold exactly what he wanted.

It was just like when he first stole the option and guzzled it down all that time ago, just as instant and immediate and frankly mundane as his first transformation had been, maybe even more. But that hardly mattered, because he had wings again! There, on his back, flapping about a bit uncontrollably until his brain rewired itself to handle them, two fluffy, feather-covered appendages jutting out from his shoulder blades exactly where they should be, and just as mobile

as any bird's; no extra air, no inflation, no being turned into a barely-mobile balloon 'bold, just a pair of wings *exactly* like he'd always wanted!

For a moment, he forgot just who he was handling and stepped aside away from the wizard, letting them getting back on their feet to dust their robes off, all while the 'bold hopped from place to place while trying to take off from the ground, even if for just a couple of seconds. It was a dream come true, and given the lack of any obvious side-effects, it seemed as if his quarry had decided to keep to their word and not try to needlessly prolong their feud, no doubt because they learned a valuable lesson about how far Anthony was willing to go, and how skilled and powerful he had become in his travels… doubtlessly.

In reality, the sorcerer was just happy to get rid of a nuisance, hence why they turned around and headed straight into their tower, wanting to brew some tea to forget that this whole nasty business ever happened, all while Anthony was still busy frolicking about to celebrate his brand new pair of wings. It was the best ending he could've asked for, honestly: no one got hurt, everyone got what they wanted in the end, and he could finally take off and fly towards the rising sun, ready to start a brand new life putting his adventuring skills to good use.

After all, he had wings now. The world was his oyster!