

How undignified.

It was bad enough that he got caught in the state that he was in, now he had to make it up to the wizard by running *errands*?! Anthony would've almost preferred if the old man just cast a curse on him and sent him on his way, at least that way he could've been done and over with his torment in a manner of hours as opposed to never knowing when that wizened old magic man would bother to release him from his bind. Sure, the kobold *did* steal from the man's tower and he *did* try and run away in order to avoid punishment, but surely being inflated like a balloon would be punishment enough; why did the wizard feel like piling even more on top of it if not to teach him a lesson that he would forget the first opportunity he had to commit magical, wing-related larceny?

Speaking of, the way that bastard went about "protecting" him was nothing short of embarrassing. Now that he *had* wings, Anthony couldn't even use them properly, what with his fluffy new appendages not only still being awfully inflated and ballooned up, but deliberately bent around his body to serve as a form of improvised armor against the myriad of sharp, pointy things that could pop them *and* his whole body at a moment's notice. The only thing in between himself and a very loud bang was an enchantment placed on them by the wizard themselves, supposedly so they'd be extra-resistant to popping and just as capable of taking damage as they would be if they weren't filled up and inflated with air thanks to that potion he had carelessly guzzled down. The rest of his body had been slightly emptied out as well, just enough that he could use his claws to keep himself at ground-level... but not enough to prevent him from waddling from place to place instead of actually walking, and certainly not enough to make him look like anything other than a slightly kobold-shaped sphere. And while this would've been something... *usable* if he was in the safety of his own home, even if only for a wild night or two, Anthony was nowhere near a place of safety; quite the contrary in fact.

As "repayment" for having stolen a potion from them, the wizard, after catching Anthony stuck to his ceiling and about to push a fortune's worth of chemical equipment on the floor, demanded that the kobold do something for them: specifically, gather the ingredients necessary to brew another batch of the same draught that he had drunk, freshly-picked and harvested from just the right places at just the right times to maximize their efficiency and potency. It was complicated work, given that it was high-level alchemy of the sort that took decades to master, hence the parchment listing all the ingredients necessary was so big that Anthony had given up trying to roll it back up and just left it stuck to the side of his rotund body for whenever he needed to consult it again; it stuck to him well enough that he needn't worry about it too much, not as long as he kept part of it underneath of the many leather straps he had attached to him in order to keep his gear on him. Nevertheless, finding these things would've been bad enough on its own, even *if* Anthony was perfectly capable of moving around and using his wings to their fullest extent; some of them were only found out in the mountains or deep in abandoned barrows

beneath the earth, surely some kind of sick joke the universe was playing given what the resulting potion actually *did*. With his body still being shaped like a balloon as it was, an already-difficult task became all-but impossible, especially with how *sensitive* his everything still was.

The struggle to keep himself from wincing every time he got anywhere near something even slightly pointy or possessed of an edge was... starting to wear on him. Intellectually speaking, he *knew* for a fact that he wouldn't pop, not with the enchantment protecting the wings that were strapped all around his body. He *knew* that he was protected, and yet it was still so difficult to ignore the fact that, well, they were still very much bloated up like balloons and *looked* to be as fragile as one, not to mention that if he pushed his fingers into them, their surface still budged like it was as soft as it used to be. In those vanishingly few occasions where he was truly distracted and didn't see a thorn or jagged piece of rock until it was too late, his mind practically broke in half when he looked down and saw it piercing through his inflated feathers, pushing so deeply into them that it *should* have popped them there and then, if not for the magic provided by the wizard themselves. It was a constant battle between his rational self and the other ninety-percent of his brain, especially when one considered how much his new body still left him... slightly more aroused than it should.

Truth be told, it hadn't been the first time these thoughts had arisen before swimming around in his head without anyone to control them, just far enough away from his conscious self that the 'bold was barely aware of them at all, yet there they remained, eating away at his mental defenses and setting up the groundwork for when he would later be given just what he truly wanted; especially now that it was rendered "safe", at least to a certain extent, those same thoughts grew immensely bold, pushing against the forefront of his mind rather than being content with staying in the back. Not only did he have to constantly fight against the urge to run away from anything that could potentially physically endanger him, he also had to keep his own thoughts at bay, lest he stop in the middle of his gathering adventure to find out just how resistant his new form was to constant physical workout of a more... intimate variety. He found himself blushing at most times, his mind wandering at the *worst* of them whenever he really would've preferred for it to focus instead, and more than once he found himself in a situation where he needed to pay close attention to something, such as only plucking a fruit from a tree when the moon was at a specific angle from the northern star, and instead busied himself wondering about all sorts of lewd things that he could do with a floaty body equipped with fully functional wings, until the time had past, the fruit instantly shrivelled, and he had to make camp until the next night.

And yet, despite this, these thoughts never really went away. Be it when he was trying to fall asleep, after strapping himself to the ground to prevent his body from floating away, or during those long hours where he waddled his way over to the next item on the list and had nothing

better to do on the road than to amuse himself with his musings, Anthony always, *constantly* fell back on the exact same pattern over and over again: denying that he was enjoying his brand new body, which led to him wondering why he was randomly denying that unless he had a reason to do so, quickly followed by the inevitable storm of lewd thoughts that only ever multiplied upon themselves until he stopped dead in his tracks to force his mind to stop thinking about them by finding something else to occupy it with, such as re-reading the list of ingredients for the millionth time, even after he had already gone through it so often he could repeat it by sheer rote memorization.

Perhaps the worst part of it all was that he couldn't really... act on this newfound self-love, especially not in *that* kind of way, and certainly not in that *other* sort of manner; regardless of how much he wanted to explore himself, for lack of a better word, he *was* still a puffy, air-filled ball of a kobold who could barely even walk properly, let alone do anything that required the slightest amount of dexterity. His arms and legs still protruded at an awkward angle from his inflated body, making it difficult for him to grab onto anything (such as the multitude of ledges he was made to climb), and more or less impossible for Anthony to reach more private parts of himself. Not that this stopped said private parts from experiencing some inflation of their own, though thankfully (or not, the more he thought about it) they were kept from going through the same kind of transformation the rest of him had. No, nothing but the natural turgidity of a shaft fueled by a million arousing thoughts, rubbing against against a decidedly *unnatural* belly pressing down on it, giving the kobold something to think about during those long hours where he travelled barely-traversed roads in search of the next ingredient on the list.

He didn't even know why he was doing it, seeing as the wizard cast no restraining spell on him and didn't offer any sort of compensation if he managed to complete his task. Perhaps the old man assumed the 'bold would be unable to do so, and would end up meeting their end in some way or another along the way. There weren't even any promises of making Anthony return to normal, though this was sounding less and less like something he really wanted the longer he experienced life as an overinflated, ballon version of himself; no, he was out there collecting ingredients based on on misbegotten sense of duty and responsibility towards a man that he had literally tried to burgle for his own personal benefit, an attempted larceny that had led him to this predicament in the first place! It was absurd to think about, but at the same time, Anthony was too fearful of what might happen if he turn around and stop through the list; for all he knew, the parchment itself might be cursed, and his body would return to the same-old uncontrollable form it had taken back when he first drank the potion that gave him wings... and while the sensations would no doubt be ones he'd remember for the rest of his life, this wouldn't exactly be a very long time if he was out there in the open with nothing to hold him back once he inevitably floated up towards the sky.

So he carried on. Through hills and valleys, mountains and small lakes that turned out to be spatially distorted to hide the fact they were very large seas with their own archipelagos, Anthony the waddling kobold did his best to find the ingredients for a replacement potion, becoming increasingly convinced that he'd been sent on a snipe hunt and that most of what was on the list was entirely unnecessary, purely because of how ungodly difficult it was to come across. Surely, if this potion was brewed out of such impossibly rare ingredients, it'd be locked up somewhere safer than behind a single pane of glass; hell, it'd be *labelled* properly as well! Instead, he was out there in the great wilderness, risking his life on a semi-daily basis trying to swing a sword when he could barely even swing his arms around fully without bumping into some inflated part of himself, all while constantly dreading the possibility that the protective charm keeping his wings all-but indestructible would wear off around the next spiky thing that reared its ugly head.

If nothing else, it was an eye-opener regarding his own adventuring prowess. The kobold had spent so much time and energy robbing others of their possessions for meager earnings that he never considered the possibility that he might actually be competent at heading off and slaying monsters, let alone good enough to overcome the many obstacles being thrown his way. If he were to toot his own horn, he might even feel extra proud for doing so while his body was in the state that it was, utterly unable to really do anything at all without having to do a full three-sixty swivel and hoping that his blade connected with whatever was trying to chomp his head off at any given moment. Perhaps it was the magic on his wings, or maybe he was just good at what he was doing, but things grew progressively easier as he went down the list and slowly scratched off everything that he had collected; it took around three months before he finally got everything, but once he did... he began to wonder what the point even was.

In his journey, he had met a great number of people who were happy to spend a night camping while waiting for the sun to come up, and if there was anything that Anthony had learned, it was that the wizard had *most likely* fooled him into undertaking something that was deliberately designed to kill them. A chance encounter with an alchemist on the road to a gathering of scholars all-but confirmed this when the old woman read through the list and could do little but scratch her head at what she called a "hodge-podge of mismatching paraphernalia", whatever that was supposed to mean; when Anthony recounted the incident with the potion, she very helpfully pointed out that something like that was probably the result of a bad batch and only useful for recycling down the line, and that the potion itself was one of the first that most chemists who seriously wished to improve their skills would learn. The ingredients required for it could probably be harvested in just a couple of hours, assuming one had a flightless bird from which to pluck a feather from, and certainly didn't include the likes of the storm lilly or the arctic tulip.

“Whoever that wizard was, he’s trying to get you killed,” she said back then, her words still resonating with the kobold, “I would advise you to stop while you’re ahead... though how you got this far is anyone’s guess.”

Anyone’s guess, sure. He got that far because he was *good*. He got that far because he knew what he was doing and now he had the skills and experience to back that statement up. He got that far because, quite contrary to what the wizard expected, he wasn’t a poor, defenseless little ‘bold who could barely swing a sword, but an *adventurer*, albeit a very waddly one who could barely keep his balance without tipping over... but that was now. That was with his body being the way that it was. And as he approached the wizard’s tower, carrying a bag of ingredients in one hand and his blade in the other, a smirk on his face and a plan in mind, he was going to prove his worth.

And wrench his body back from the clutches of that wizened old bastard.