

“Who is asking? The head of the family? Or my grandpa?”

“Does it matter?” baldy asked.

Percy shrugged.

“Percy... I am the *third* head of the House. I’ve been in charge for less than 200 years. Our family has existed for nearly ten times as long.”

This wasn’t exactly news to the young man. He had read about the family’s history. So, he just waited to see what the man was getting at.

“I’m sure you knew most of that already, but what you might have not read about in your books, was that the second head – my great-grandpa – died about 20 years before I advanced to Violet.”

GULP

Percy swallowed a mouthful of saliva. On Remior, a noble House without a Violet core at the helm was like a tasty meal lying on the ground. He could imagine all the alliances, conflicts and betrayals that must have happened during those two decades. They had probably been some of his family’s darkest years.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“I want you to appreciate how precarious our situation is. How it has always been. Out of the 1000 Violet cores on Remior, how many do you think will make it to White?”

“You tell me. 20? 50?” Percy threw a guess.

Archibald chuckled bitterly.

“We’ll be lucky if one or two do. The rest are mostly hoping they can get another Violet in their family before they die, otherwise they’re screwed. Every time I make a choice, every time I allocate resources, it can make the difference between our House surviving or dying out.”

This time Percy lost his patience.

“Look, I get it! You don’t have to explain that at this late stage. But why couldn’t you just *treat* me like a *grandson*?!”

Archibald’s eyes wavered for a moment. Who would have thought that emotionless prick could even *feel* things?

“Because it’s easier that way.”

SIGH

“Have you any idea how many people I’ve buried? Uncles, brothers, cousins, children, grandchildren... The less attached I am, the more impartial I can be.”

his voice was soft. It cracked many times, as the powerful Violet core struggled to form his words.

Percy *truly* looked at his grandpa for the first time. What was he even supposed to say to *that*?

“*Now*, will you tell me what you need all that mana for?” Archibald asked.

Percy smiled. It wasn't like their brief chat could magically erase a lifetime of bitterness, but he saw no point in hiding the truth either.

“Remember how I said my version of Clone did something interesting? I may have undersold *how* interesting it was.” he chuckled, before elaborating. “I didn't understand it at the time, but I believe it allowed me to send a fragment of my soul to possess somebody *outside Remior*.”

“*Somebody with two cores*.” he added after a second.

Archibald's eyebrows would have hit the ceiling if they weren't attached to his face.

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“The Moirai!!!” he exclaimed.

‘Ah, right. I knew it was moi-something!’

“In any case, my clone brought back whatever it is that gives them their second core, although it was broken, and it needed fixing.”

Archibald remained silent for a few minutes. Percy didn’t rush him either.

“And how close are you to fixing it?” he eventually asked.

“If the jade tree has enough mana... 5 minutes.” the young man replied.

Archibald nodded.

“Wait, what?! Are you actually giving me the tree?! Just like that?!” Percy couldn’t conceal the shock in his voice.

Baldy looked him in the eyes before replying.

“Absolutely not.”

Percy would have strangled him if he could. Why was he playing with his feelings like that?! Yet Archibald wasn’t done.

“Listen, Percy.” he said in a serious tone. “A human having two cores is *unheard of*. And who knows what else you can get through your bloodline? Even though it might not be enough to bridge the gap between you and an Orange-born right now, I’m willing to invest in your potential. From now on, you will have access to the advanced elixirs.”

The young man’s heart skipped a beat. The advanced elixirs would let him reach Yellow in 50 years. That’s *half a century* saved! If it was one month ago,

he would be jumping up and down. However, there were other things he wanted more now.

“But I can’t even use my second core without the tree.”

“I can’t give up the tree on a gamble. Let alone you, even if it was Elaine having a second core, I couldn’t do that. The tree might help me protect our family next year. Your second core might need centuries to pay off, if it ever does.”

Percy deflated as he listened to his grandpa. Still, he couldn’t argue with his logic.

“But... that doesn’t mean we’re giving up on it either.” baldy added, rekindling a spark of hope in his grandson’s eyes. “I will get you a different source of life mana.”

KNOCK, KNOCK

Percy reluctantly opened his eyes, not fully awake yet. He was tempted to tell his visitor to piss off, whoever it was. But he didn't. Few people ever wanted anything from him, so it could be important.

YAWN

Getting up, he slowly made his way to the door. On the way, he glanced out the window. It was still dark.

'What's so urgent it couldn't wait a couple more hours?'

Turning the handle, he pulled the door open, seeing nobody but his grandpa standing at the entrance. Percy blinked a couple of times. Then, he massaged his eyelids. Baldy was still there when he was done. The realization jolted the last traces of sleep out of the young man's system.

"You brought it?! The life source?!"

Archibald wasn't holding anything. Percy looked behind him, trying to see if there was an attendant carrying something. Yet the corridor was empty, other than his grandpa who was dressed in his training robes.

"Are you done?" the man asked in irritation. "May I come in?"

Percy shrugged, making way for him. He gestured towards his bed as he didn't have any other furniture to offer. Archibald sat there, patting the space next to him. The young man joined his grandfather, still curious to see what he wanted.

"We don't have any other potent life treasures in the family." baldy said.

Percy was about to voice a protest, but Archibald stopped him, patting his shoulder.

"Instead, I'll be your life source."

Then, he repeated his actions from last week, sending the potent mana in his grandson's body. Only this time, he didn't target Percy's legs, but directly focused it on the young man's abdomen, relinquishing control over it as the seed absorbed it. Percy creased his forehead. Truth be told, his feelings were mixed.

'Stingy old man. If he didn't want to give me the tree, he should have just left it at that. What do I make of this?'

It wasn't like he didn't appreciate the elixirs and this gesture. That was a lot more than he'd ever expected from his grandpa. Still, how would it help him?

Not that Archibald was weak. Not even close. A Violet core was 4 grades above Orange. This meant the man possessed about 81 times as much mana as him. *The gap was insane.*

'But far from enough.'

Forget about the liquid in the sacred pool. That was the concentrated mana of a titaness. Even the tree contained within it countless times more than his grandpa's core. In fact, Archibald would be hard-pressed to produce as much mana as a single leaf.

And sure enough, five minutes later baldy was completely tapped out, breathing heavily. Had this been before their meeting, Percy might have voiced a snarky comment, but right now he wasn't in the mood.

"Thanks..." he said. "For trying, at least."

Archibald gave him a strange look as the corner of his lips twitched.

"Huh? How little do you think of me? You think I'm trying to cheat you out of our deal?!"

He chuckled.

"Of course I can't match Phoebe's pinkie toe in mana capacity, but that's only if we compete fairly." he said. "But what if I keep emptying and refilling my core? 10 times? 100 times? 1000 times?!"

Baldy flashed his grandson a resolute look.

“Percy... I’ll repair your second core no matter how long it takes.”