Wanderer 105

Chapter 105: Escape

‘She’s taking forever…’ Percy tapped his foot.

Standing at the base of the Fungal Spire, he was waiting for Nesha to arrive. The two hours she’d mentioned were nothing more than the time until she closed the gambling den for the night. Despite the urgency of the situation, she couldn’t just drop everything and run away abruptly, as that would raise more than a couple eyebrows.

‘At least the guards didn’t search me on the way here.’

Evidently, the Divine Root had only bothered to increase the security at the gate leading outside the Guild, and presumably the Spire’s perimeter. Even in normal times, they mostly cared about people leaving the settlement, to ensure they weren’t carrying any nectar with them, breaking the Guild’s monopoly on the substance.

It was why Percy hadn’t been checked thoroughly upon first arriving. Also, why the Agent hadn’t encountered too much trouble smuggling the Aurora Dew or the enlightenment potions over the past few months. As for the people hunting on the mushrooms, nobody ever bothered to track their movements.

Noticing something by the corner of his eye, Percy turned to see his familiar swiftly approaching.

“CAW!” the bird greeted upon landing.

‘Caw indeed.’ Percy replied, before sifting through the bandage wrapped around Micky’s abdomen.

It was the same one he’d used back when he still met the Agent regularly. Since he no longer had to do that, he’d long passed it to the crow to conceal its new core. Not that a beast adorned with an accessory wasn’t conspicuous, but it was certainly better than the alternative. Especially since Percy had purposely commissioned for the bandage to be crafted out of a dark fabric, to more easily blend in with the bird’s plumage.

‘Where is it?!’ Percy’s heart skipped a beat after failing to find what he was looking for. ‘Don’t tell me you dropped it?!’

“KRAA! KRAA!!” the bird protested in indignation before pecking his shoulder.

It was only a few seconds later that he finally located a small object somewhere between the cloth and the feathers, dousing his rising panic. Next, Percy wore it around his neck. It was a pendant, with a weirdly shaped gem as its focus. Cut into a perfect cube, the lustrous stone somewhat resembled onyx, though that wasn’t quite what it was. Countless tiny lights glittered like stars across its faces, contrasting against the ebony backdrop they dotted. Looking closer, the particles weren’t splayed randomly, instead forming orderly constellations. Percy knew those were the runes responsible for the enchantment.

‘It’s pretty AND useful. But still lacklustre compared to what they have in the Vault.’

“I admit rushing to buy the spatial amulet was the right move.” Nesha said, having arrived at some point.

He shrugged.

“Well, we couldn’t exactly carry everything around without it.”

After awakening the familiar’s second core, Percy hadn’t really had much else he’d wanted to spend his money on. His only goal at that point had been to amass enough brewing materials to last him for some time. Of course, considering his and Micky’s rate of consumption, and his less-than-stellar-yield, Percy currently needed around twenty doses of the regular elixirs per day, which translated to thousands over the course of a single year.

Luckily, he’d made plenty of contribution points during the past nine months. Over eight million in total!

Of those earnings, he’d spent more than a million on the enlightenment potions and another million on the amulet. As for the other tools and secondary materials he needed to brew on the run… Well, those cost peanuts comparatively speaking. In any case, that had still left him over six million to buy the primary ingredients of the Aurora Dew – the regular elixirs. □åŊŐЬEş

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“I can’t believe there are nearly twenty thousand doses in this tiny necklace.” he mused.

Though one cubic metre of space wasn’t that much, it could easily fit enough of the pinkie-sized vials to last him for years. Nesha had also pitched in, converting her own share into materials, storing them in Percy’s amulet. With these, they could both keep drinking Aurora Dew for the next two years.

Of course, he’d originally planned to remain here longer. Sadly, that wasn’t possible now. As things stood, they’d run out of elixirs right after the lotus bloomed. And depending on how their escape went, they might not be able to return to the Guild for more.

‘Oh well. That’s a problem for future Percy…’

“Are you sure this is the best move?” Nesha suddenly asked, fidgeting.

“For me, yes.” Percy replied, before elaborating. “Coming clean to the Divine Root is admittedly tempting, but I have other secrets besides the elixirs that I don’t want them to learn.”

Nesha gave Micky a cursory glance.

“You mean this Orange cored beast you’ve somehow tamed?”

“Among other things…” he replied vaguely.

Even if he could somehow guard all his secrets from them, he wasn’t entirely convinced they’d treat him as fairly as they claimed. After all, he’d seen the disdainful looks the people of the Divine Root had given him, and he’d heard the sheer contempt with which Hermes talked about Red-borns. The moment they realized how easily the pure mana could be crystallized, he’d lose all worth in their eyes.

‘No, escaping is my only option…’

Not Nesha's though. Glancing at her, he pondered the implications of what he was asking her to do. Depending on how everything went, they might end up as fugitives on the run from actual gods.

"You don't have to come with me."

Nesha raised an eyebrow.

"They're more likely to notice my involvement. I was the one in charge of everything. And unlike you, I won't be able to give them what they want. They'll skin me alive…" she said, biting her lip.

But Percy shook his head.

"My mentor knows the recipe. Find him and work together to make a deal with them. They only want the elixirs. They don't really care what happens to you."

What Percy had left unsaid was that this way, he'd lose both his advantage and his means of making money. In a few years, he might be the only one on Remior who couldn't afford the Aurora Dew.

'Well, me and all the other Red-borns.'

Still, it wouldn't be fair to force his problems on Nesha. The girl nervously crossed her arms, apparently considering it. At first, he gave her a couple of minutes to think. It was a huge decision, and he didn't want to rush her. However, as she continued to remain silent, he was about to urge her, when she suddenly spoke.

"I'll come with you."

Percy carefully scanned her. Nesha had stopped shaking, her eyes now burning with determination. He didn't mind her tagging along – he trusted her after working together for so long. Plus, she was useful, not only because of her bloodline and commercial skills, but also due to her affinity.

Though there was one thing he needed to know first.

“Why?”

Nesha furrowed her brow, apparently contemplating the question.

“Before we started collaborating, I was working towards a certain goal… Though I suppose I always knew deep down that it wasn’t a very realistic one.” she ultimately said.

“What changed?” Percy asked.

She shrugged.

“Well, I’ve made more money in the past year than I would’ve made in a decade. Not to mention, the elixirs gave me hope of catching up to my enemies in this lifetime.”

“Lifetime?” Percy failed to suppress a chuckle. “If you come with me, I can’t even promise we’ll be alive tomorrow. Plus, the recipe is going public in nineteen years regardless of what we do.”

She certainly knew he was telling the truth, though she didn’t seem deterred.

“I have a hunch that sticking with you will give me a chance to get my revenge. That’s enough.”

Percy grinned.

“Welcome to the team then. By the way, the bird is Micky.”

She nodded.

“So, what’s the plan? Are we going to look for a weak point in the perimeter?” she asked.

But Percy shook his head.

“Even on the off chance we get out, they’ll spot us. It’ll only be a matter of time before they let the people in charge know. And we can’t outrun a Blue core.”

“What other choice do we have? We can’t leave through the front gate…”

Percy smiled.

“How about below the Guild?”

Nesha tilted her head. She appeared about to voice her confusion when…

CRACK

A loud noise came from a bunch of boulders a few dozen metres away from them. There seemed to be a hole in the rocky formation, though it was only big enough for something the size of an apple to squeeze through. The sounds escalated, as the stones by the tiny entrance began to shake.

A few moments later, a pair of oversized mandibles pierced through, followed by a head, and a torso… Before long, a man-sized wasp emerged, widening the tunnel in its passing. Nesha took a step back, already drawing mana from her core, as a pitch-black bubble manifested in her hand. But she didn’t stop there, gathering more as she stared at the bug.

“How the hell did a Starry Soldier end up on the first level?!” she asked nobody in particular.

Percy placed his hand on her shoulder.

“Stop. The bug is our way out.” he said, eliciting an odd expression from his friend.

Nesha turned towards the wasp again, her features twisting in incredulity upon seeing the creature wave at her with its forelimb.