Wanderer 20

Chapter 20: Micky

‘I’m not calling you that. How about Micky?’

‘Suit yourself. I doubt we’ll survive in this state for very long anyway.’

Various senses assaulted Percy, from the external ones such as the thick odours of moss and excrement, to the internal ones like his chest heaving up and down, or the cold numbness of narrowly-missed death crawling along his limbs. His body felt unfamiliar, plus he wasn’t in control. He could try taking over – if he really wanted – but he’d promised not to. Besides, their soul wouldn’t take another round of infighting.

DRIP

Micky blinked as a drop landed in his eye. When he next opened it, Percy paid more attention to their surroundings. It was dark, the only source of light being the fluttering flame of a mounted torch somewhere in the distance. They were in a closed space that looked a bit like a cave, only one side covered in thick metallic bars. He recognized this place! It was the cell from Micky’s memories!

‘Is this where you live?’

‘It is. For the latter half of my life at least. And the first part of my afterlife too, it seems.’

Percy felt a pang of amusement seep through their connection. Then, his host stood up, the pain making both of them wince. That was when the young man remembered their body was a mess.

‘Fuck. Dying isn’t a joke.’

‘Tell me about it.’

Many places hurt, but none as much as a region right above their stomach. There appeared to be a gaping hole, perhaps the very wound that had claimed Micky's life. Even the slightest shift rattled their innards, making Percy sick. It was lucky he wasn't in charge, or they might have thrown up by now. The most annoying part was that his host clearly didn't give a shit, stretching his legs as if everything was fine.

'Are you sure you should be moving around so much? I don't know if you've noticed, but you're not in the best shape.'

Micky made a weird guttural sound that trailed off a bit like a cackle.

'I'm well aware of my injuries. I was there when they happened.'

Next, he flexed his arms, shocking Percy, who just now registered they had a couple too many.

'Must be convenient having four hands.'

'Why? How many do you have?'

'Just two.'

'Huh, you wouldn't be able to play the kik'lit.'

The image of a long flute-like instrument with dozens of holes appeared in his mind. It was wide like a trumpet on one end, though two shafts lead to it. He still couldn't understand Micky's language, but their link made communication convenient at least. If a bit intrusive.

'Now what?' Percy asked.

'What do you mean?'

‘What do you mean “what do I mean”? Isn’t there anything you want to do with your extra time? Somebody you’d like to speak to?’

His host remained quiet for a couple moments before replying.

‘You really don’t know anything about Huehue, do you? I’m sorry if you were expecting to be a passenger on some exotic vacation. The only thing your little stunt has bought us are a couple more fights before we die again.’

‘Fights?’

Micky shook his head – a universal gesture it seemed. He didn’t bother explaining.

Returning to the spot where they’d woken up, he looked at a small puddle on the ground. The water dripping from the ceiling was mixed with blood, but Micky wasn’t deterred, scooping some with his lower-left hand before bringing it to his face.

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Under other circumstances, Percy might have berated his host over his lack of hygiene. Right now, however, he was too busy gawking at the guy’s reflection, faintly visible on the surface of the murky water. For the most part, he resembled a human, even his skin colour not too dissimilar to his own – if a couple shades tanner. Though it was covered in all sorts of tribal tattoos, some depicting various celestial objects, while others showed Micky’s people in various poses.

‘Is it some kind of traditional dance?’

Not all the symbols were easy to make out, partly due to the poor lighting, and partly due to the crisscrossing scars of all shapes and sizes marring Micky’s body. His build was bulky too, his muscles toned, but Percy chalked those up to the harsh life he’d clearly lived.

There were other more glaring differences too, of course. Besides the obvious mismatch in the number of limbs, Micky’s nose and mouth were fused together into a long, pointy beak. While his eyes and scalp

weren't very different to Percy's, his ebony hair looked a little odd, reminding the young man of the fluff he often saw in newborn birds.

His host moved again, shaking Percy out of his thoughts, as he walked to a wall before plopping down, resting his back on the coarse stone. It was cold and hard, except for a spot that felt a little grimy – a patch of moss most likely. Not the cosiest seat, though it still felt unbelievably sweet right now, considering how unpleasant standing had been.

Equally unpleasant was the terrible stench that assaulted their nostrils, which only intensified as Micky grabbed its source, bringing it to his mouth!

'Please… for the love of all that is holy… tell me you aren't going to eat this…' Percy begged.

His host frowned, glancing at the 'meal' in confusion.

'Why not?'

It was the half-eaten corpse of some kind of rodent, twice as large as a rat. Though it also had six limbs and its face was more flat.

'For starters, you have a hole in your stomach. Can you even eat?'

'It's not IN my stomach.' Micky rolled his eyes. 'Besides, I'd very much like to have one more meal, even if it kills me.'

'What's there to LIKE?!? It's rotten!!!'

Micky made the cackly sound again. Percy wanted to strangle him so damn much.

'What are you, some kind of princess? Don't tell me you only eat fresh kills where you're from?'

The bastard didn’t even wait for a reply before pecking a chunk off the corpse. Percy hurriedly summoned his Status. He’d been itching to do that since getting here and he desperately needed a distraction from the– Yeah. He needed a distraction.

Mictlantecuhtli (Percival's clone)

‘What’s that?’ Micky asked, a bone snapping inside his beak.

Percy wanted to swear.

‘I’ll tell you if you stop eating.’

His annoying host shrugged, tossing the rest of his meal inside his mouth, chewing it a couple of times before guzzling it down.

‘There, all done.’

It took Percy over a minute to recover. His main body would have nightmares of the spoiled rat meat for years.

‘It’s my Status. Do you not have it here?’

Micky shook his head.

Percy hadn’t known it was something exclusive to Remior. Either way, he read the rest, eager to find out if there was anything of value in this place.

Mana cores:

???:

‘The fuck?’

‘What?!’

Both exclaimed at the same time.

‘Why do I have a second mana core?’

‘I’d very much like to know that myself!’ Percy said. ‘It’s something I picked up from that baby I mentioned. It followed me home, but I didn’t realize all my clones would have it too.’

‘But why is it “Incomplete”?’ Micky asked again.

Indeed, why was it? Percy would have understood had it been ‘Fractured’ instead, requiring both mind and life mana like the first time. Apparently, the former part had stuck with him for whatever reason…

‘Does it matter?’ is what he ended up saying. ‘More importantly, can you think of a source of life mana we can tap into?’

A spark of annoyance passed through their bond.

‘Do I look like I can get life mana?’ Micky gestured at his wound.

‘Good point.’

At the end of the day, they didn’t really need to awaken their second core. They wouldn’t live long enough to use it anyway. Percy was more disappointed by the lack of another of those mysterious perks he could bring back to Remior. This trip was swiftly turning into a dud.

‘At least tell me you know your mana type.’

‘Of course I do! All the natives of Huehue have a pure affinity!’ Micky replied proudly.

But the young man wasn’t impressed.

‘No wonder they were enslaved…’ he thought, before realizing his gaff. ‘Fuck. I’m sorry. That was such a shitty thing to think.’

However, his host hadn’t taken offense.

‘You’d think that, yet it wasn’t weakness that turned us into targets. It was something else.’

Percy wanted to ask, but he didn’t want to be insensitive.

‘It’s fine. I don’t mind talking about it.’

Micky seemed about to elaborate, when they heard footsteps. Percy felt a wave of disgust oozing from his host as soon as the figure stepped into their sight. He appeared to be of the same species as Micky, though he lacked the tattoos and scars, dressed in clean, expensive clothes. The guard stopped by the entrance, searching through the keys strapped to his belt.

‘Actually, scratch that. It’ll be easier to show you why my people got enslaved.’ Micky said, before adding,

‘My next fight is about to begin.’