

“Come in.” an authoritative voice said.

Elaine opened the door, dragging Percy behind her. The two found a man sitting at his desk, the afternoon sun reflected off the top of his head. Despite his shaved scalp, he didn't look old, his appearance was that of a burly man still in his late twenties, even though he had lived for centuries.

“Grandpa!” the girl said, clearly eager to share the good news.

Archibald lifted his eyes, his gaze briefly lingering on Percy, before it returned to the documents he was reading. The latter rolled his eyes, realizing this was already a lost cause, but his cheerful cousin didn't seem ready to give up just yet. She bit her lower lip for a moment before speaking again.

“Grandpa, Percy is ok! He—”

“The answer is no.” the man cut her short.

“Just hear me out. He has managed to—”

“Elaine.” Archibald stopped her again. “I can tell he’s at Orange. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t change anything. You know that already.”

The girl deflated, looking down at her feet.

On Remior, the most important trait determining one’s achievements in life was the grade of their mana core at birth. Sure, one could continue to advance throughout their lives, but each promotion was exponentially more difficult than the one before. The first typically required about a decade, the second a century, the third a millennium and so on. Having access to more valuable resources could halve each of those milestones of course, but that didn’t affect the way they scaled.

At the same time, each subsequent grade typically tripled one’s physical and magical ability as well as their remaining lifespan. Somebody who spent their whole life at Red would only live about 80 years at most, while somebody at Orange would get 240. Naturally, this meant that somebody like Percy would never get to Green in his life. Having reached Orange at 15, he could maybe

hope to reach Yellow by 115 and then remain stuck at that level until he died of old age at 400.

Even if his grandpa decided to treat him to the same resources his cousins had access to and he reached Yellow by 65, he would only live to about 500, which wouldn't be enough for the next grade. By comparison, somebody born at Orange – just one grade above Percy – could potentially live for thousands of years and reach all the way to Blue – two grades above him.

As for those born at Yellow like Elaine and Archibald, they could even reach Violet and White, living up to 40000 years! Percy's grandpa was already at Violet, having lived for over 700 years, but he still had several millennia of lifespan left as well as the hope of reaching White.

Elaine clenched her fists.

“He can still be of value to the family. His mana core and lifespan may be capped at Yellow, but he can still pass his bloodline and affinity on!” she said.

For the first time since the two walked into the room, Archibald raised his eyebrows. He tossed another look at his grandson, this time not so quick to dismiss him.

“You’ve used Clone?” he asked.

Percy nodded.

“Actually *used* it? There have been others without the life affinity in the past, but water clones and pure clones just disperse.” Archibald asked again.

“It definitely did *something* interesting. As for what exactly, I don’t fully understand it yet.”

His grandpa furrowed his brow at the implications. Noticing that, Elaine was over the moon.

“See? Even if Percy can’t become too powerful himself, his *kids* could start a new branch of the family! We should invest in him!”

Archibald tapped his fingers on the mahogany desk for a few seconds, seemingly lost in thought.

“What you said makes some sense. We’ve never had another useful affinity paired with Clone. If the new bundle is truly useful and easy to pass on, it could indeed be good for the family.” he said.

Elaine clapped her hands, excited to receive a positive response, but her grandpa spoke again.

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“However, that doesn’t mean we should spend cultivation resources on Percy. 400 years are more than enough for him to sire plenty of children. He doesn’t need to be stronger to do that.”

Percy gritted his teeth. As much as he would have liked those resources, he was more annoyed by the callousness of his grandpa, treating him more like

an asset than family. Still, he had agreed to follow Elaine here for a reason, so he didn't let it get to him as he spoke again.

“I don't want your cultivation resources. I'm only asking for a better affinity test. After all, that can help us both figure out how the bloodline works in my case.”

The man looked him in the eyes for a while.

“Very well. Gawain will accompany you for the trip. Elaine too. She can use some experience.”

Archibald turned back to the scroll, not leaving much room for debate. Still, this worked for Percy and Elaine too, so they rushed out of the office before their grandpa changed his mind.

As they walked back to his room, he replayed the conversation in his mind, his hands balled into fists, drained of all colour. Faced with his grandfather's coldness, Percy had come this close to spilling the beans on his second mana core. He so wanted to see baldy's face twist as he learned the grandson he treated like trash had achieved something no human ever had. Not the White

cores. Not even the lofty existences in the Divine Order could boast of such a feat.

*He had stolen the most important secret of one of the strongest races in the universe! He had done that! With a worthless Orange core.*

But he'd held himself back. First of all, it sounded quite unbelievable, and he couldn't exactly prove it. Speaking of the event might have made his grandpa think he was lying about the whole thing and robbed him of the affinity test. More importantly, he owed him nothing. If it wasn't for Elaine, he would have left this shitty family already. Whatever his second core meant for him, he would discover on his own and forge his own path.

His biggest regret was that he needed to get close to his grandpa's treasured tree. It was his family's most prized possession, and he hoped it was precisely the potent source of life mana he needed to germinate the seed.

*'Let's leave it for now. If baldy was so stingy with the affinity test and the cultivation resources, there's no chance he'd let me anywhere near the tree in a million years.'*

But it didn't matter. He knew where it was. He could figure out a way to sneak there later. Besides, he still needed to find a source of mind mana for this to work. Thinking of something, he grinned. As it so happened, the advanced affinity test would be held at precisely such a place.

The duo were about to enter Percy's room, but he stopped at the entrance. This caused Elaine to look at him in concern.

"Percy... Don't let this get to you... If your affinity is really useful, we can convince him to give you more resources later."

He chuckled.

"It's not that. I've just realized that I haven't even tried practicing with my core since it evolved. Between everything that happened with the bloodline, I never got the chance."

As he was about to head to the training grounds, she grabbed his arm again.

“Seriously?! You were in a coma for a week, and we are about to head out in a couple of days. What you need right now is to get some rest.”

Percy looked her in the eyes as his lips curled and parted. Smiling he said, “thanks.”

Seeing her forehead crease in confusion, he hurriedly added, “for caring. You’re the only one who does. But I still need to do this.”

Then he walked away, leaving her behind.

It was true he could use some sleep. His mind was still exhausted, his body weak. But he had to get stronger soon. He understood there weren’t many people he could rely on. No handouts for him. Everything he needed, he had to fight for.

Soon, he reached the training grounds. Just a section of the garden really. He briefly paused to appreciate the birds chirping on the trees, and the squirrels bolting up and down their trunks. Then, he walked to the middle of the grass, facing a wide, dead oak tree that people typically used for target practice. Nobody else was around right now. His cousins rarely trained. They were

mostly content lazing around and gulping expensive elixirs that cleansed their cores and lengthened their lives. They didn't need to practice their magic to be stronger than the likes of *him*.

Shaking the irritating thoughts away, he raised his palm towards the aged trunk and willed his mana to accumulate in his hand. He held it, until the pressure in both his core and mind became unbearable and then he released it.

A faint distortion phased through the tree but didn't do much else.

Percy wasn't exactly surprised. His unknown affinity had done nothing back at Red, besides giving people a slight chilling sensation. It was to the point that nobody was sure he even had an affinity back then. But he now knew he did, so he was determined to make it count.

He gathered more mana, this time holding it a moment longer and trying to condense it even further before firing. It still didn't do anything, but he didn't care.

*'Again.'*

He kept firing, bolt after bolt, minute after minute, hour after hour. Every so often, he would take a break to refill his core, before resuming his practice. By the time he fell to his knees, the sun had already set. He had practiced as long as he could. And then some. But it wasn't enough. Not nearly enough.

*'Not yet.'*

They all looked down on him. He didn't care about most of them. He was used to it by now. But he cared that *Elaine* looked down on him. Unlike the others, she didn't do it on purpose. She didn't do it maliciously. But she did it all the same. She had been *surprised* he had reached *Orange* at *15*. As if it was some great achievement. She had pushed him to beg for scraps from their grandpa. *And it stung so fucking much.*

But *he'd* never given up on *himself*. He was the only one who knew. His heart too thrummed with ambition. And one day he would show them.

*He would show them all.*