Wanderer 47

Chapter 47: Healed

A month went by in a flash.

Percy and Micky had grown a lot better at hunting the wasps, but today he didn't care about that. Something else was going through his mind as he sat on his bed, gazing down at his soul.

'It's finally healed… well, sort of…'

It had stopped absorbing more mana, although it wasn't back to 100% yet. The hole in his chest had mostly closed, but not completely, leaving a circular scar about the width of a strawberry right where the ethereal cord linked him to Micky.

'I suppose this is as good as it's going to get.'

It didn't look like it would recover entirely, as a part of him still existed within the bird. Perhaps he could fix it by retrieving the missing piece or severing the connection – he wasn't sure which – but he had no intention of doing either. Hopefully, this injury wouldn't affect him too much when creating more clones. Especially since that was exactly what he was planning to do right now!

It was early in the morning, although Percy's room was currently pitch black, as he had closed the curtains. The last thing he needed was somebody seeing what he intended to do today.

'Micky, start hunting!'

'CAW!'

The familiar was roaming the base of the Fungal Spire, searching for Starry Drones to munch on. He could already kill a couple Starry Workers by himself, but it took too long, and it was dangerous to let him hunt on the second floor by himself. Percy would have to settle for the less potent soul mana they could gather from the Red bugs. Still, between the crow's help and the increased regeneration brought about by the colourful motes, he estimated he would have a much easier time forming his new clone.

Pressing down his bubbling enthusiasm, he began by sending pulses of soul mana through his channels, letting them bounce off his soul's edge. Not wanting to interfere with his connection to Micky, he had adjusted the angle slightly, so that the mana would gather a few inches below the previous spot after being reflected. By the time that happened, he was ready to grab a hold of the bulge, pulling it out of his skin.

'Fuck. I sure didn't miss the pain.' he winced, as the strain cause some tears to form.

However, he quickly raised an eyebrow after examining them for a couple of seconds.

'Is it me, or is the damage less extensive than last time?'

This was strange. If anything, he would have expected his injury to have negatively impacted the integrity of his soul, making it more fragile than before. That didn't seem to be the case. It was hard to say for sure, but the cracks appeared both less numerous and less serious than the last time he'd done this.

'Has my soul grown stronger in the past year?'

Why would that be the case? He'd spent all this time recovering…

Then again, wasn't that how muscles and bones worked? Exercising essentially involved damaging and repairing one's body repeatedly. Perhaps, the same principle applied to his soul!

'Then, maybe I can strengthen my soul enough to use Circulation with my first core if I keep sending clones!'

This was an issue that had troubled him for a long time. Although the technique he'd learned on Huehue had served him well until now, he greatly lamented only being able to use it with his second core. After all, it was much weaker than the one in his sternum, both in grade and affinity. Evidently, the solution had been right under his nose all along!

In his excitement, the young man nearly let go of the bulge.

‘Shit. Focus Percy.’

It was a project for the future. While it was a nice surprise, it wasn’t worth ruining his current attempt. Shaking the distracting thoughts out of his head, he sent another pulse through his soul, which soon caused the bulge to grow. More soul mana began flowing into his core a few minutes later too, as Micky had already taken down the first drone.

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‘Keep it up buddy!’

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Eight hours later, Percy was holding an outstretched chunk of his soul larger than an apple. Thanks to his familiar’s diligent efforts, he had reached this step four hours sooner than the last time!

‘I can keep going, but it’s best not to risk it.’

This was already the same amount he’d used for his previous clone, so he knew it was enough to survive for a couple days. Perhaps, he could increase that if he gathered more of the silver flame before cutting it off, but he didn’t want to damage his soul more than he could handle.

‘Moving to the next phase then.’

Pulling the mana out of his core, he directed it all straight into the bulge, filling it up like a waterskin. Taking deep breaths, he strove to gather even more, as his familiar intensified his efforts to support him.

‘Let’s give the clone more mana than last time.’

Back then, Percy had done this out on a limb, without knowing if it would help in any way. Still, that had obviously been the correct decision. His clone had greatly relied on the stashed mana multiple times during his adventure – whether to bond with Micky's soul initially or to deliver the killing blow to Mixcoatl near the end. Suffice to say, the young man didn't mind investing a few more hours to overcharge his clone again.

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It wasn't until another four hours later that Percy stopped. Right now, the bulge had bloated up by about 50% of its previous volume. It still contained the same amount of his soul as before, but its surface stretched due to the dense quantity of mana sealed within.

The young man briefly considered pushing some more into it, but at this rate he might cause the clone to burst before he even sent it out. Plus, the mana was already slowly leaking, as his willpower was scarcely sufficient to keep it contained.

'It actually resembles baldy's clones somewhat.'

Unlike his previous attempt, the soul mana was so concentrated it was fully visible even to the naked eye, appearing like a silver bubble pulsing akin to a beating heart.

This reassured Percy somewhat. All this time he'd been fumbling in the dark with his bloodline, mostly doing whatever he instinctively felt made sense. Still, the more his efforts looked like what his family did with their version, the more confidence he had that he was on the right track.

'Ok then. Now for the really painful part.'

After refilling his core one last time, he tossed another glance at his handiwork, nodding in appreciation. Then, he stirred his bloodline, feeling the ghostly claw forming in his sternum.

'Please go where I want you to go…'

If it insisted on heading to the previous spot, it could harm his connection to the familiar. Percy focused all his willpower to direct it slightly lower, towards the thrumming bubble he had spent all day cultivating.

Luckily, the ghostly claw didn't need much prodding either, as it gladly acquiesced, pouncing on the bulge like a cat would a mouse. Percy gritted his teeth in agony as all the tears in his soul widened. He held his breath, watching the ghostly claw clamp the soul and mana alike, twisting them and pulling them out of his body.

SNAP

And with an audible popping sound, accompanied by a violent shockwave rippling through his very existence, Percy felt his world tremble as the silver bubble was ripped out of his stomach, shooting off like a meteor. By the time his head sank into the pillow, his eyes had already closed shut.

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'…'

'…AW!'

'CAW! CAW!'

Percy's eyes bolted open, a splitting headache making him dizzy.

'Fuck, I'm alive.' was his first thought.

Wait, no. That was supposed to be a good thing.

'CAW!' the familiar called to him again.

Percy could practically taste the palpable sense of panic oozing through their bond. The realization simultaneously gave him a fuzzy feeling at having somebody who cared, but also a pang of guilt in his chest.

'It's ok, buddy. I'm ok. I'm sorry I worried you.'

Getting off his bed was tough, but it was promising he was even capable of standing. Pulling the curtain open, he noted it was dark outside.

'How long was I out?'

He knew it shouldn't have been more than a day or two, otherwise he would have starved. Well, he was feeling a little peckish, but not quite starving yet.

'CAW!'

Micky sent him an image of a single sunset, though no sunrise. It was still the same day. This was good. He couldn't afford to knock himself out for a week every time he sent out a new clone.

Walking was a hassle, but he made his way to the door. He sure hoped Freddy was open, as he was too tired to cook, and he could use a Honey Roll right about now.

THUD

Suddenly, he lost his balance, falling to his knees, his consciousness sucked right out of his body. One moment he was still in his room, the next he felt the wind press against him, colourful motes whizzing by from all directions. He was diving towards a bug, its carapace pitch black, with bright spots glistening all over the sleek chitin.

'A drone? I'm Micky?!'

They felt dizzy, banking towards the left. Flapping their wings at the last second, they barely managed to soften their landing, narrowly avoiding a nasty crash on the ground.

‘What the hell?’ he thought, as he returned to his own body, lying against the cold stone of his room’s floor.

More came gushing through the cord. Images, feelings, memories, thoughts. He felt his familiar’s confusion, as his mind drifted back and forth between the bodies a couple more times.

‘Are you doing this?’ he asked the bird once the situation seemed to stabilize.

‘CAW…’

The reply was strained. Micky didn’t seem to understand much more than he did.

What was going on?