Wanderer 72

Chapter 72: Unexpected visitor

…DRIP. DRIP. DRIP.

Tossing the empty gland aside, Percy picked the next one, carving a small incision into the soft tissue before squeezing it over the vial. A few seconds later, he threw another one to the pile – which contained hundreds by now – before moving on.

Gone were the days when he and Micky spent all their time hunting together on the Spire. Over the past several months, Percy had focused on his alchemical endeavours, leaving the crow alone to tend to its own needs. Nowadays, they only met up once a week, for Percy to retrieve the glands stashed by his familiar, handing him rejuvenation potions in return.

CAW! CAW!

'There you are! Running a little late today?' the young man grinned.

He waved at the crow flying rapidly towards him, a small pouch held in its beak. Percy returned to the task at hand, emptying the last couple of glands by the time Micky reached him. The bird landed on the dirt right next to him, as the amber lines on its plumage faded. Next, Micky gently placed the linen bag on the ground.

Handing a different pouch to the crow, Percy watched his familiar fly excitedly to a nearby tree, the gem vials making clinking sounds as they tumbled inside the cloth. Having learned from his mistakes, Percy now carried even the cheaper potions in the expensive vials, to prevent them from breaking.

Micky dropped his new supplies in an oversized nest, as the young man opened the pouch the familiar had brought, picking another gland from the fresh batch.

'Keep up the good work buddy. I'll get you the mind mana as soon as I can.'

CAW!

If Percy dropped everything else and merely focused on making as much money as possible, he could amass enough enlightenment potions in under two years. However, not only would that slow down his own progress, but he also strongly suspected it wouldn't even be the quickest way. He had a hunch he could make a lot more money once he figured out how to profit from the cyan paste.

Of course, there were a few obstacles to overcome. First, he couldn't sell it in its raw form, as that would risk people figuring out how to reproduce it. After all, the only thing one needed was a pure affinity, which was extremely common on Remior.

In fact, Percy was surprised nobody had discovered the usefulness of the powder before. His guess was that it took too much effort for people under Blue to crystallize their mana. They were unlikely to stumble upon the spell by mistake. As for those above, they were already too fixated on their ways by the time they reached Blue, so even if they accidentally condensed their mana, they wouldn't necessarily realize the implications. The natives in that world had probably tried everything they could to alleviate their poisoning, stumbling upon this secret out of sheer desperation.

'Or luck.'

But people weren't dumb. If Percy sold the paste directly, it wouldn't take them long to figure it out. Consequently, he'd have to incorporate it inside the elixirs before profiting off it.

The next issue was finding a suitable location for his experiments. He couldn't work on the new recipe in the public labs, so he'd have to come clean to Orin. Percy greatly respected his old mentor, but he also had no idea how the alchemist would react to such a revolutionary discovery.

Finally, even if everything went well, he'd still have to find a proper avenue to sell the product safely and secretly. After all, he wouldn't be able to create too much of the improved elixir by himself. If knowledge of it leaked and he couldn't meet the demand, the Divine Order would skin him alive for the recipe.

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'Oh well, if I mess things up, I'll just publicize it and wash my hands of the mess.'

It wouldn't be ideal, as he'd be giving up on his advantage, but it would be better than losing his life. Unlike his other secrets, he could claim he had just stumbled upon Crystallization by accident. It wasn't nearly as exotic as a second core or Circulation, so he wouldn't have to spill the beans on his bloodline.

'It's such a pain, keeping so many secrets.' he grimaced. 'At least nobody came to me asking about the missing guy. I suppose it's safe to assume I got away with it by now.'

Bidding his familiar farewell, Percy returned to the settlement. On the way to Freddy's, he tossed a quick glance at the spot where Nesha's stand used to be. It had already changed hands multiple times, the current owner being a Yellow core with a life affinity, offering cheap healing services.

As for Nesha, she had rented a stone building a long time ago, opening a proper gambling den. It was quite impressive too. Based on what Percy had heard, the Guild charged a lot more when leasing buildings for commercial reasons than they did for accommodation. Not that there was a shortage or anything, but they did it on purpose, to discourage small business owners from renting buildings they didn't really need. In any case, it only spoke to how much money the girl was making. Percy was confident she was even wealthier than him, despite his recent success.

'Good for her.' he shrugged.

At least the new owner of the stand had spent a lot more effort on the sign.

"Oh! Hi Percy!" Freddy greeted him with a smile, which quickly morphed into a mischievous grin. "I thought it was your time of the month again."

Percy snorted. His friend had been teasing him about this for a while now. In hindsight, he should have realized altering his schedule for a few days per month would lead to… misunderstandings.

Not that he could do much about it. This was simply the most convenient timing to send out his clones, taking into account the average length of his trips and the impact they had on his main body. In the end, he'd given up, simply playing into the joke.

"No, my period is next week." he shot back.

They stared at each other silently for a couple of seconds. Freddy was the first to burst into laughter, Percy joining him a moment later.

“There you go man.” the plump guy handed him the steaming snack, as the young man paid him a brown chip – worth a tenth of a contribution point.

Percy held the Honey Roll with both hands as if it was the most precious treasure, biting a huge chunk out of it. He closed his eyes to savour it too, as the crispy dough blended with the warm honey in his mouth.

“If I hadn’t watched you eat them every night for the past two years, I’d have thought it was your first one.” Freddy said. “Haven’t you grown sick of them yet?”

“Never!” Percy protested in shock a few seconds later – but only after swallowing.

The two chatted for a while longer. It was mostly Freddy gossiping, really, as Percy didn’t have too much to talk about, since he tended to spend most of his days holed up in a lab.

At the end, the young man waved his friend goodbye, but not before buying a second Honey Roll to take home. Part of it was to make a statement, while the rest was just because the things were that damn good. It was late by the time he reached his place. Shockingly, he saw a woman in green standing outside.

‘The hell?!’ Percy paled.

He never got visitors, so his mind instantly went to the worst-case scenario.

‘Don’t tell me I’ve jinxed myself again!’

Part of him wanted to run, but it would only make things worse. Maybe she was here for something else.

“Hello? How may I help you?” he asked, trying to sound calm.

It was only now the woman seemed to notice him.

“Are you Percival Avalon?” she asked, prompting him to swallow hard.

‘Geez, calm down Percy. Even if they learned about the missing guy, how would they link it to you after a year?’

In the end, he just nodded silently. The woman didn’t say anything either, approaching him instead. She placed her hand in her pocket, searching for something. Right when Percy expected her to pull out a pair of handcuffs, she took out an envelope instead, handing it to him.

“It’s a letter from your House.” she said.

Then she left without even waiting for the reply, as Percy watched her walk down his porch, his mouth agape.

‘Seriously?! Have you people never heard of mailboxes?! You almost gave me a heart attack!’

It wasn’t until a few minutes later that he had calmed down enough to look at the sender’s name.

‘Elaine Avalon’