Wanderer 91

Chapter 91: Deal

In the end, Percy shook his mentor's hand, the weight of their agreement settling between them.

Twenty years were just a touch more than he needed to reach Yellow. It wasn't that much in the grand scheme of things, but he hoped his clones would bring back some additional advantages in that time. While the deadline added a tinge of pressure on his shoulders, he understood the enormity of Orin's concession.

Wanting to show his gratitude for everything the old alchemist had done, Percy offered to brew the new elixirs for him. The man was already at Blue, which would have normally been his upper limit as an Orange-born. However, thanks to the new recipe, he now stood a real chance of reaching Violet in his lifetime!

Yet his mentor's response surprised Percy.

"There's no need for that." Orin said with a dismissive wave. "The whole point of this twenty-year delay is to give you a head start. If I had you tied up brewing elixirs for me, it would defeat the purpose. Besides, I'll still need nearly two thousand years to advance. A couple of decades aren't going to make that much of a difference."

Percy was moved by his mentor's words. Especially because he knew it wasn't as simple as Orin had made it sound. Twenty years saved before his promotion would translate to sixty afterwards. Over half a century! Even for a powerful mage, it was still a sizeable amount of time to just give up on.

But he didn't insist, mainly because he understood he wouldn't be able to deliver anyway. After all, he was planning to leave the Guild in a couple years. So instead, he tried to make it up to Orin by sharing the details about the cyan powder, explaining how somebody with a pure affinity could condense the crystals. That way, the old alchemist could look for another way to brew the elixirs by himself.

Of course, Percy still left a few things out. As much as he trusted Orin, there was no reason to tell him how he'd stumbled upon this discovery, nor did he need to reveal the existence of his second core. Instead, he said he had a friend helping him get the powder.

In any case, this exchange solved most of Percy's immediate problems. The recipe was finally complete, and he'd successfully negotiated an acceptable deal with Orin. Yet, there remained one final obstacle to overcome.

'And it's the toughest one.'

It was already a struggle preparing four doses of elixir and cyan paste per day. Plus, he required even more now that he could consume them every eight hours. Not to mention the points he needed to afford Micky's potions. Suffice to say, his only path forward was to commercialize the new recipe.

Sadly, he had no experience trading, nor did he think he'd manage to learn the art anytime soon. He also had no connections, meaning he'd have a difficult time finding a customer by himself. Especially since he had to do it without alerting others.

He did ask Orin if he could help, but the man always dealt with the Guild's official stores directly – whether to purchase materials or sell his products. Regrettably, the old alchemist couldn't be of much assistance in these shady ventures. Consequently, Percy had no choice but to place his trust in one more person.

'I wonder if she even remembers me.'

Of course, he was thinking about Nesha. Though he didn't know her that well, and some of her personality traits would probably make her a little difficult to work with, it wasn't like he had any other options.

At least, she clearly had a good business sense, having established herself quite nicely over the past couple of years. Furthermore, their limited interactions had given him the impression she was honest.

More importantly, Percy had learned some more information about her since their last meeting. While he hadn't been aware of her lie detection bloodline originally, it wasn't exactly some great secret. Nesha actively publicized it upon establishing her gambling den, presumably to build up prestige. And the gossip had eventually reached Percy's ears too – mainly thanks to Freddy. If nothing else, this ability of hers would help them gauge whether their future business partners could be trusted.

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‘What’s up with the queue though?’

There was quite a crowd waiting outside the building, all of them surprisingly quiet. The corner of Percy’s mouth twitched at the sight.

“Hey, doesn’t she live next door? Have you guys tried knocking?” he asked a random guy in a yellow robe.

“Shhhhhh!” the latter replied, placing his index finger over his lips.

Then, he pointed at a sign propped-up against the building. In typical Nesha fashion, the words were written sloppily, and she hadn’t even bothered nailing the sign to the wall properly.

‘GAMBLING DEN’

‘ANYBODY WHO BOTHERS ME AT HOME WILL BE BANNED FOR LIFE’

Percy failed to suppress a chuckle.

“Seriously? Has she actually banned people before?”

The guy seemed taken aback by the question.

“Keep your voice down.” he hissed, before pointing at a different sign, a few meters away from the first one.

This one was also propped-up, but at least the handwriting was much neater. In fact, it seemed to have been authored by multiple people – none of them being Nesha. Upon closer examination, it contained a list of names, each written slightly differently to the one above, probably added on different occasions.

Percy raised an eyebrow.

“Wow. Did all those people get banned just for knocking on her door?”

“Well, most of them. Though a few were rude to her or tried to cheat.”

Ok, perhaps the last two transgressions did warrant the treatment, but not the first one. Looking up at the sky, Percy noticed the sun was still just a little below its apex, partially obscured by the thick cloud of colourful motes descending from the Spire.

It was early afternoon. Nesha should have opened by now, yet she was clearly content chilling at home instead. Not just that, but she’d apparently gone to great lengths to ensure nobody would disturb her.

“Why do you guys even put up with this nonsense?”

The guy shrugged.

“What else are we supposed to do? This place is pretty much the only source of entertainment around here.”

Percy scratched the back of his neck.

“Well, why doesn’t anybody else try opening a gambling den then?”

But the guy shook his head.

“Some people have tried, but it’s not so easy. Obviously, you need to rent a building for this sort of thing. A street stand isn’t very suitable. Unfortunately, due to the high rent for independent businesses in the Guild, you need to manage things really well for it to survive.”

Hearing the man’s words, Percy’s expression was mixed. On one hand, he couldn’t help but be impressed that Nesha had achieved so much in so little time. Though her ruthless nonchalance towards her clientele was more than a little concerning. As was the prospect of collaborating with her.

‘I guess I’m not here to gamble anyway.’ he thought, casually walking towards her front door.

The crowd drew sharp breaths, seemingly shocked by his boldness. Many stepped away from Percy, presumably to dissociate themselves from him. He didn’t miss the disdainful looks aimed his way either.

‘What’s even the big deal? I just want to talk to her…’

KNOCK, KNOCK

Looking back, he noticed their expressions growing even more incredulous after he dared to go through with it. Shaking his head, he turned back towards the door, waiting a few seconds.

No response.

Percy was a little more forceful the second time.

KNOCK!!! KNOCK!!!

“Nesha?! I know you’re in there!”

Yet it wasn’t until a couple minutes and twice as many escalating knocks later that the door finally opened.

“Can you idiots not read a simple sign?” she asked in an irritated tone.

It was a little funny actually. Percy could tell she was annoyed enough she wanted to yell, but raising her voice was too much of a bother for her. Luckily, her expression did seem to ease ever-so-slightly upon failing to recognize him as one of her regular customers.

“Hey, I’m really sorry for the intrusion, but I–” Percy started speaking, though he cut himself off after thinking of something.

Looking around, he saw the crowd still staring at them curiously. Dialling down his voice, he shielded his mouth, muttering his next words as softly as he could manage, making sure nobody but Nesha heard them.

“I have a business proposal for you. I promise it’ll be worth your time.”

Nesha narrowed her eyes, staring at him silently for a few seconds.

“I remember you.” she eventually said. “You’re the guy who wrote me a new sign a while back. I can’t recall your name though.”

“It’s Per–”

She raised a hand to stop him.

“I don’t care. You interrupted me in the middle of a nice bowl of strawberries. I’ll let it slide this once, but if you have something to tell me, wait until I open shop.”

BANG

And just like that, she slammed the door right in Percy’s face, leaving him staring with his mouth agape.

“Hey, at least you didn’t get banned.” some guy consoled him a few seconds later.

Percy frowned.

‘It’s going to be soooooo much fun working with her.’