

Fairy Tail 36

Chapter 36: Investigating the Pens

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Lupinus Town.

May 9, x776.

"Well, now that I know you two really are wizards from Fairy Tail, allow me to introduce myself." Reno said. "I am this town's mayor, Reno Fox."

"I'm Alfonzo Marcus." Alfonzo said, introducing himself in a simple manner.

"Nice to meet you." Elicia said energetically. "I'm Elicia Taylor."

"A pleasure." Reno said with a nod.

"Now that introductions are out of the way, what can you tell us about the incidents?" Alfonzo asked after getting his emotions in check. "For example, where are the livestock pens that have been getting hit? How many of each kind of livestock disappears each time, etc."

Sitting across from Reno, Alfonzo began asking the questions he felt were necessary for their investigation. On top of that, he could tell that Reno had noticed his discontent at the assumed underestimation. So, he tried to move the conversation along as quickly as possible.

"All the pens that have been attacked are on the north side of the town, those closest to the castle ruins have been hit most frequently." Reno replied, ignoring the discontent expression Alfonzo wore moments ago. "As for the numbers... If I'm not mistaken, no more than one of any of the animals has been killed and dragged away each time the pens were attacked."

Hearing Reno's response, Alfonzo fell into contemplation. Meanwhile, Elicia asked a question of her own.

"On the quest sheet, you only mentioned that there was a howling that could be heard from the castle ruins." Elicia said, pointing at the notes section of the quest sheet that was now laying on the coffee table. "Can you tell us what the howl sounded like, though?"

"Ah... Sorry about that." Reno replied. "That was an oversight on my part. From what the town's folk have said, the howl sounded like that of a wolf."

"A wolf, huh?" Elicia said curiously. "Is there anything else you can tell us about the howling?"

"Such as?" Reno asked.

"Frequency? time of day? things like that." Elicia replied.

Standing up from the couch, Reno walked over to the bookshelf behind the couch he was sitting on. After rummaging through the documents for a few seconds, he pulled one from the shelf and returned to his seat.

"Let's see, according to the reports, the howling can be heard every night." Reno said while reading the document in his hands. "Sometimes, they can even be heard during the day as well."

Finally coming out of his contemplation, Alfonzo looked up at Reno.

"And no one has seen any of the attacks on the pens?" Alfonzo asked.

"No." Reno replied while shaking his head as he placed the document on the coffee table. "They always happen late at night, when the people tending the pens have gone to sleep."

"I see." Alfonzo replied. "And when was the last attack?"

"Last night." Reno answered. "One of the cows was taken this time."

Half an hour later, after asking all the questions they could think of Alfonzo and Elicia bid Reno farewell. After that, they decided to check out the scenes of the attacks.

"Do you think it could be a pack of wargs?" Elicia asked. "You know, like the ones I had to hunt down for my first quest."

"I doubt it." Alfonzo replied. "Had it been a pack, they would have taken more than one animal at a time. But it is possible that it's only one warg that was either kicked out of or separated from its pack."

Nodding in understanding, Elicia continued walking alongside Alfonzo.

"So, we're going to the pens to find any tracks, right?" Elicia asked.

"That's right." Alfonzo replied with a nod. "Plus, we should see what the people who tend to the pens know about the attacks."

Once again, Elicia nodded in agreement. Then, she looked at Alfonzo with worry. Noticing Elicia's worried expression, he knew what it was that she was worried about. Unfortunately, he did not know how to console her.

"Fonzie, are you okay?" Elicia asked with concern in her tone.

"*Sigh* Yeah... I'm okay." Alfonzo replied.

"But you almost lost control in the mayor's office." Elicia continued.

"*Sigh* I know." Alfonzo said while shaking his head. "I thought it was bad controlling myself with a kid's body. But now that I'm going through puberty, my hormones are out of control."

Hearing that, Elicia giggled involuntarily. After a few seconds, however, she stopped. Leaving Alfonzo to look at her with confusion in his eyes.

"Sorry... Sorry..." Elicia said with a smile on her face. "I'm not laughing at you... Well, I guess I kinda am."

That last part of Elicia's statement left Alfonzo even more confused than he already was. However, he remained silent, waiting for Elicia to continue.

"I just remembered what you used to say." Elicia said, starting to giggle again. "You always said that teenagers were scary and unpredictable. Now I understand why."

In response, Alfonzo smiled wryly.

"Well, with the mood swings that came along with my time as a teen in our past life, I know firsthand just how unpredictable a hormonal teenager can be." Alfonzo said. "Besides, I've seen teenagers get angry over the smallest things."

"You never did that with me, though." Elicia said curiously.

"That's because something about you always made me calm down." Alfonzo replied.

Elicia smiled brightly hearing that. Then, she grabbed Alfonzo's hand and began to swing it happily as they walked.

About ten minutes later, Alfonzo and Elicia arrived at the manager of the cow pen's office. Like they had with the mayor, they asked all the questions they could think of. Then, with the company of the manager, they examined the pen, more specifically, where the cow was attacked last night.

"Eww... It stinks." Elicia said as the trio walked through the cow pen.

"What did you expect?" Alfonzo asked with a wry smile. "Cows shit wherever they are when they get the feeling. So, you'd better watch your step."

Instead of watching her step, Elicia decided to avoid the problem of possibly stepping on a cowpie altogether. By jumping on Alfonzo's back and letting him carry her through the cow pen, she would no longer have anything to worry about. Meanwhile, Alfonzo could only shake his head while smiling wryly at Elicia's antics.

Meanwhile, the pen's manager paid little attention to the young wizards as he led them to where the cow that was attacked had been sleeping the night before.

"We're here." The pen manager said in a deep, raspy voice.

Looking at the area in front of them, Alfonzo and Elicia could see that blood had been splattered over the grass. They could also see a bloody trail that led toward the north. Following the trail, they noticed that there were no footprints. However, after seeing the trail that the cow's carcass left, they understood why.

"So, whatever did this was smart enough to use its prey to cover its tracks, huh?" Alfonzo asked himself.

"Does that mean it's not a warg?" Elicia asked from Alfonzo's back.

"Probably." Alfonzo replied. "Had it been a warg, then we should have seen its tracks to the side of the trail dragging the cow left."

"Oh, I get it." Elicia said with a nod. "That means whatever it was dragged the cow directly behind it, right?"

"That's right." Alfonzo replied with a nod.

Eventually, following the trail, the group of three reached the fence enclosing the pen. What surprised Alfonzo and Elicia, however, was that the fence was not damaged in the slightest. Other than a few drops of blood that landed on it, there were no indicators that anything had even touched it recently.

"Damn, this could be more trouble than we thought." Alfonzo said with a frown.

"What do you mean, Fonzie?" Elicia asked even though she had a guess what Alfonzo was thinking.

"Whatever's been attacking the animals is much stronger than we thought." Alfonzo replied in a serious tone. "It's one thing to drag the prey to wherever it's been hiding. But it clearly lifted a dead cow and threw it over the fence before jumping over the fence as well and continuing to drag it away."

Nodding her head in agreement, Alfonzo's analysis confirmed what Elicia was thinking as well.

"Well, since this is just an investigation quest, we don't have to fight it." Elicia said, reminding Alfonzo that combat was not necessary.

"I know." Alfonzo replied. "But still, it would be better if we could get rid of it while we're here. Who knows how long it will take for another quest to eliminate the attacker to be accepted."

After their conversation, Alfonzo and Elicia thanked the pen manager for his time. Then, they went to the pig and sheep pens to repeat the process. Although there were no longer any trails they could follow, they did notice that the fences to the other two pens had not been damaged either.

After looking around all three pens, Alfonzo and Elicia decided to return to the mayor's office and report what they had found. They also intended to let him know when they would head to the castle ruins, that way, if anything happened to them while they were out there, the mayor would be aware, and could contact the guild.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Hargeon.

Around the same time Alfonzo and Elicia finished investigating the last of the livestock pens, a scarlet-haired girl stumbled into the port town of Hargeon. Luckily, there was a sign with the town's name outside the gate she entered the town through, so with the little bit of knowledge she had about the continent, she knew she was in the Kingdom of Fiore. Unfortunately, having not slept in quite a while, she was only walking forward on her willpower, alone.

In the town, most of the people who saw the state the girl was in wanted nothing to do with her. They were too afraid of the trouble that might come along with helping a girl in her condition. So, even though she asked quite a few people how to get to Magnolia, she never received an answer.

Eventually, due to exhaustion and hunger, her will was no longer able to move her body. Luckily, when she fell, she ended up in front of a small orphanage. Then, before too long, she was found by one of the orphanage's staff, Justine, the one who found Alfonzo and Elicia after the first time they exhausted their magic power.

"What in the world?" Justine asked rhetorically. "How does a child end up like this? Girl, are you still alive?"

*Growl~~~!"

Although the scarlet-haired girl did not respond, or rather, she could not respond after falling unconscious, the loud growl that came from her stomach answered Justine's question.

Picking up the girl, who was as light as a feather, Justine hurried into the orphanage.

"Matriarch!" Justine shouted. "We've got an emergency! Someone, bring some light food, water, and medical supplies!"

As Justine shouted, many of the orphanage's residents were alerted and came out to take a look at what had made her so panicked. However, when they saw the state of the girl in Justine's arms, they, too, began to move hurriedly.

Thanks to all the noise, the scarlet-haired girl eventually regained consciousness. Noticing that she was being carried, she was at first scared. However, after hearing the concerned tone the woman who was carrying her spoke in, she calmed down. Then, she did her best to speak.

"I... need... to go to... Fairy Tail." The scarlet-haired girl said in a voice that was raspy from dehydration.

"Girl, that can wait." Justine replied. "Right now, you're in no condition to be traveling. Let us get some food and water in you. We'll do our best to patch up all those wounds, too. After that, we can talk about getting you to Fairy Tail."

For the first time in a long time, the girl felt warmth from an adult other than the man she called Grandpa Rob, bringing a small smile to her face. Then, she simply allowed the adults to tend to her wounds. On top of that, she would not complain about having something to eat and drink, either.