

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 5 : Little Red Riding Hood - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 5 : Little Red Riding Hood

Chapter 5: Little Red Riding Hood

Three days later, early in the morning, at a small diner in Estuary Village of Hamel Town.

“One bread, double fried eggs, tomato soup.” After taking his seat, Leon ordered an ordinary breakfast, his gaze flicking to the side.

At a table three rows away from him, the elderly woman Hannah Weisland was sitting alone, enjoying her breakfast, completely unaware of Leon’s glance.

This was the fourth day Leon had been tailing Mrs. Weisland alone.

Every morning, she ate breakfast at this small diner by the village entrance.

Hannah Weisland’s background was not complicated.

She was a native of Estuary Village.

Her husband had died fifteen years ago.

She had two sons.

During the Empire’s maritime conquest war launched ten years ago, both sons were conscripted.

The elder son died in battle, while the younger was injured and lost one leg.

According to what Leon had learned while asking around the village, the elder son had already been married and left behind a son.

At Mrs. Weisland’s request, the wife had taken the child and remarried the younger son.

Now, because of his disability, Mrs. Weisland’s younger son had limited ability to work and made a living as a leatherworker in the village, earning very little.

The household had long relied on Mrs. Weisland’s support.

Leon flipped through his notebook.

If her goal was to ensure that her son and grandson could have a comfortable life in the future, then Mrs. Weisland's situation certainly required money.

Relying solely on an elderly woman farming and selling vegetables was far from sufficient.

She had motive to profit from dealings in Magical Beasts.

Low-tier Magical Beast materials were not uncommon on the Black Market.

Even now, many hunters still illegally entered labyrinths to hunt and secretly sell Magical Beasts, and some Underworld gangs also raised Magical Beasts for profit.

As long as Mrs. Weisland happened to know the right people, she could have had a chance to handle such goods.

The problem was that test tube of extracted Mana.

Smuggling Mana from outside the borders was not something just anyone could manage.

In fact, among those dealing in Magical Beast materials, fewer than twenty percent ever had the opportunity to handle Mana.

Among those implicated in Mana smuggling, someone with such a simple background as Mrs. Weisland was extremely rare.

This made Leon feel that it was a valuable opportunity.

If he could follow the trail back to her supplier, then with the disposal channels he already controlled, he could start making money from it.

Based on his experience, criminals who had once been caught but had luckily escaped judgment generally fell into two categories.

One type was cautious—becoming extremely alert after being caught, they would avoid all contact with anything related to crime for a short period of time, even disappearing entirely until the heat died down.

The other type was more careless.

Having escaped judgment, they would feel immensely relieved and, right after getting out of danger, would contact their upstream suppliers, downstream buyers, or accomplices to handle the aftermath of their arrest.

Some were so careless that they would even boast everywhere about how they had successfully fooled law enforcement.

If Mrs. Weisland belonged to the latter type, then continuing to tail her for a period of time after she went out would give him a very good chance of figuring out her supply and distribution channels.

In fact, many prisoners of the Inquisition could be deliberately arrested and then released in this way, only to be followed up and have their accomplices and entire supply chains wiped out in one sweep.

But Director Caron Eso would basically never issue such an order.

Even if someone specifically requested it, it would be vetoed.

The reason was not hard to imagine.

By leaving these people who knew the ropes free to continue committing crimes, he could continuously skim money from the criminal trade that existed in Hamel Town.

Some even directly paid him protection money or provided fencing services—like that skinny old man at the junk shop.

If those criminal groups were all eliminated one by one, it would be equivalent to draining the pond dry.

Only by maintaining a certain level of filth and corruption could there be “sustainable development.”

Leon was actually feeling a bit anxious now.

In order to keep tailing Mrs. Weisland, he had taken leave from the Inquisition under the excuse of having a fever.

A black-hearted institution that barely even paid overtime naturally provided no compensation for sick leave.

No work meant no pay, and he would even be docked for insufficient days on duty.

If there were still no leads by tomorrow, he would have to consider stopping.

If Mrs. Weisland acted cautiously, there was no telling how long this kind of surveillance would take to yield results.

He was alone, with no one to rotate shifts with him.

Neither his energy nor his finances could sustain this.

Over the past three days, he had slept only four hours a day, and in the middle of it all had been forced to make a trip to the Holy Healing Monastery to buy medicine.

During that time, it was entirely possible he had already missed something.

Moreover, Mrs. Weisland had not gone into the city to sell vegetables these past few days.

She had only been working her fields and staying active within the village.

Leon was a unfamiliar face here.

If he lingered around Mrs. Weisland for too long, even if the old woman herself did not notice, someone in the village would sooner or later become suspicious of him—especially since he had asked around about her.

It would not be long before he alerted the wrong people.

In order to match Mrs. Weisland's eating pace, Leon also ate very slowly.

Over more than twenty minutes, aside from the proprietress, two villagers approached Mrs. Weisland one after another.

But they only exchanged greetings and a few pleasantries—no physical contact, no exchange of items, and the conversation was simple, with no discernible code words.

Just as breakfast was about to end, a faint touch of pale red drifted into the corner of Leon's vision.

At the same time, he caught a barely perceptible scent of mint.

He instinctively glanced to the side.

A petite girl wearing a red hooded vest, carrying a food basket, walked briskly past his table and went straight to Mrs. Weisland's table, sitting down across from her.

Leon's attention snapped into focus.

Although the red hood concealed part of her, from that fleeting glimpse he could still tell that the girl had long chestnut hair.

Based on his previous surveillance and inquiries, there had been no such person in Mrs. Weisland's social circle.

After sitting down, the girl looked around.

Leon immediately withdrew his gaze nonchalantly, lowering his head to focus on eating.

Only after a moment did he cautiously glance back over.

Once the girl sat down, Mrs. Weisland began speaking to her with an earnest expression, her voice lowered.

From here, Leon could not hear a single word.

Although he heard nothing, Leon's nerves were already taut.

Mrs. Weisland had always spoken loudly in the village.

Suddenly whispering so furtively with someone was extremely abnormal.

Leon's intuition told him that he might have finally encountered the person he had been waiting for.

After a short while, he saw the red-hooded girl nod, take out a small coin pouch, place it on the table, and push it toward Mrs. Weisland.

Mrs. Weisland nodded repeatedly with an expression of deep gratitude and accepted it.

Leon felt puzzled.

When the pouch was set on the table, there was a faint sound of metal clinking inside.

It should have contained coins.

If she was giving Mrs. Weisland money, could it be that this woman was actually a downstream buyer working under Mrs. Weisland?

But all of Mrs. Weisland's goods had been seized by the Inquisition, including her cart and the vegetables on it.

What reason would her buyer have to pay her now?

From what Leon had investigated, Mrs. Weisland also did not rent out any rooms in her house.

While he was still thinking, the two exchanged a few more quiet words.

Then the red-hooded girl stood up, lifted her basket, and briskly left without ordering anything.

Watching the girl pass by his table again, Leon glanced at Mrs. Weisland, who was still seated, then looked back at the red-hooded girl heading out the diner's door.

He made a split-second decision, stood up, left the breakfast money on the table, and followed that red silhouette outside.

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Late that night, in the back mountain of Estuary Village, Leon sat within a patch of shrubs, staring unblinkingly at a small cabin in the forest by moonlight.

He had been tailing the red-hooded girl for almost an entire day now, but the total time he had actually seen her amounted to less than an hour and a half.

The rest of the time, he had only been watching this cabin.

After meeting Mrs. Weisland at the diner, the red-hooded girl had followed the village path straight into the forested back mountain.

Leon had followed cautiously all the way, and in the end saw her arrive at this cabin.

She went down through a cellar entrance behind the house and did not reappear for a full thirteen hours.

Leon lifted his water flask and carefully took a small sip, holding the water in his mouth before swallowing slowly to moisten his parched throat.

Driven by hunger, his stomach churned again, issuing a protest.

Leon felt somewhat helpless.

That morning, he had not anticipated the sudden need to switch surveillance targets and pursue someone deep into the mountains outside the village, nor that he would be stuck there for most of the day.

He had only brought a small bag of crushed oat cakes as rations.

Beyond hunger, the fatigue brought on by lack of sleep was even harder to endure.

Coupled with the harassment of mosquitoes in the forest, he no longer knew how many bites he had accumulated.

From another perspective, however, the fact that this girl lived alone in a cabin far from the village and stayed in the cellar for over ten hours without coming out was itself highly suspicious.

This location also had significance.

This mountain on the outskirts of Hamel Town had once been the site of a labyrinth.

Labyrinths, also called abysses or dungeons, were the birthplace of Magical Beasts.

According to Church scriptures, the Primordial Witch Moira, out of hatred for humanity, had been sealed underground by the Four Gods of Origin.

Her vengeful fury never ceased, constantly driving her to once again extend her demonic claws toward the surface.

When Moira's power leaked from weak points in the seal, it would cause various underground spaces—such as natural caves or buried ruins—to become labyrinthized.

Within them, all kinds of creatures created by Moira would naturally be born, what the world commonly called Magical Beasts.

Magical Beasts would only be active within labyrinths affected by Moira's power or their surrounding areas.

Once they moved far away from a labyrinth, they would gradually lose vitality.

Without regular feeding on plants and animals gathered from labyrinths, they would slowly weaken and die.

Thirty years ago, the natural cave in this mountain on the outskirts of Hamel had undergone labyrinthization.

It was discovered early, after which the Church dispatched a knight order to purge and purify the labyrinth, reinforce the underlying seal, and seal off the cave.

Since then, no Magical Beasts had appeared here.

However, even after a labyrinth was purified, the residual magical power would not completely disappear.

Depending on the scale of the labyrinth, it could persist for years or even decades before gradually dissipating.

So in theory, this mountain still had the conditions necessary to raise Magical Beasts.

But suspicious as it was, merely observing that she stayed in the cellar for over ten hours was still not enough to confirm that this girl was connected to the Mana Mrs. Weisland had sold.

Without sufficient certainty, Leon did not dare to rashly approach her.

Leon hoped to find an opportunity to investigate the cellar, but for now he could only wait patiently.

From sunset onward, the cabin remained completely dark, with no movement at all.

There should not have been anyone else inside.

The girl likely would not sleep in the cellar when she had a perfectly good house.

At that moment, the cellar door finally made a sound.

Leon's spirits lifted.

He saw the girl emerge from the cellar holding a lantern, lock the cellar entrance, and then enter the cabin through the back door.

Leon watched as a light was lit in what seemed to be the bedroom.

The girl's indistinct silhouette swayed behind the oil-paper window covering.

Judging from her movements and the sounds, she seemed to take off her clothes, fetch a basin of water, and do a simple wash before extinguishing the lamp.

After a long time passed and he was certain the cabin was completely quiet, Leon carefully emerged from the shrubs.

Moving stealthily, he crossed the walnut-tree hedge behind the cabin and felt his way toward the cellar entrance by moonlight.

He observed for a short while.

The cellar door was made of thick wooden planks, with a heavy bolt and a large padlock hanging from it.

Whether smashing the lock or chopping through the door, neither would be easy, and both would inevitably produce a loud noise.

He decided to conduct a preliminary investigation.

Not daring to light a fire outside the cabin and create illumination, he carefully examined the area around the cellar by moonlight, while also feeling along the surface and edges of the cellar door.

When his fingers reached the lower edge of the doorframe, an unexpected cold, slick sensation touched his fingertips, making him instinctively retract his hand.

That just now was... moss? No, that did not seem right!

He crouched down for a closer look and tried scraping it with his fingernail, peeling off a small clump of gelatinous substance.

If he had found such a bit of gel in the wild, he might have suspected tree sap or slime mold.

But under these circumstances, a possibility immediately flashed through his mind.

He compared it under moonlight from different angles, then quietly retreated into the forest.

Under the cover of shrubs, he lit his lantern to examine it, faintly making out a bluish sheen from the fingertip-sized clump of gel.

Slime gel!

That woman really was raising Magical Beasts in the cellar!

If the Magical Beasts came from her, then the Mana Mrs. Weisland had handled was likely also provided by her.

Although he had had this suspicion from the start, realizing that he had actually found a Witch in Hamel Town still gave Leon a sense of unreality.

This Witch might have a way to cure his condition.

Even if not, she at least had the ability to produce Mana.

If he could reach an agreement with her and replace Mrs. Weisland—who had already been arrested by the Inquisition—as her intermediary for reselling Mana, he could earn enough money to secure his livelihood!

No—calm down first!

Leon warned himself inwardly.

A Witch was not necessarily easy to deal with, and she would certainly not trust an Inquisitor.

If she discovered that his identity had been exposed, her first reaction might be to find a way to kill him!

Witches blessed by Moira, like the Church's Fully Appointed Knights, were all individuals who possessed extraordinary power.

However, according to case files left by the Inquisition, the vast majority of Witches only had the ability to control low-tier Magical Beasts and extract Mana.

A few might be adept at using poison, but their own combat ability was still no different from that of ordinary people.

These Witches were generally easily captured by low-ranking Inquisitors who lacked special abilities but were well-armed—though there was no guarantee that all those recorded cases involved true Witches.

Only a very small number of Great Witches officially recorded by the Church possessed the powerful ability to transform into Magical Beasts and required special caution.

A rural Witch who raised low-tier Magical Beasts and relied on an unprofessional ordinary person like Mrs.

Weisland to resell contraband hardly looked like that kind of Great Witch.

Leon quickly made his decision.

He had to seize the initiative the very first time he made contact with this Witch!

After a brief consideration, he once again approached the cabin under the cover of night and began his course of action.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.