

Londoner 102

Chapter 102. Anticipation

~ Kivamus ~

~ Baron's Manor, Tiranat ~

Kivamus was standing outside the manor house looking at the clouds covering the sky, along with the biting wind which was now blowing continuously in Tiranat. Until yesterday, it had still been sunny, although the clouds had started to cover the sun again. But overnight, the clouds had completely covered the sky, and now the weather had again gotten bitterly cold. He had no way to find out what temperature it was right now, but he guessed that it had to be only a few degrees above freezing point. It might probably already be snowing on that road, so it wouldn't be long before the snow started here as well.

Once he returned inside the manor hall, Helga came to talk to him.

"The replanting of mushrooms has been somewhat successful, my Lord," she reported. "In the temporary shed we had made in the south of the manor, less than half of the mushrooms are still standing, while the remaining didn't survive the replanting. It could have been much worse though."

Kivamus nodded with a frown. "Will those remaining mushrooms survive then? What if they perish as well in the coming days?"

"I am fairly sure that they'll survive," Helga replied. "While that shed is far from windproof, the air inside the shed is fairly warm with two braziers burning inside it all the time within that small area. I've also told a maid to refill the water troughs there twice a day, so that the air inside that shed will remain moist. So I believe the rest of the mushrooms will be okay now. However, now that we know it is possible for mushrooms to survive the replanting there, I will transfer the remaining mushrooms from that puddle as well into that shed today. They are much more likely to survive there than in the open."

"Do it," Kivamus said. "It will be some time before we can make another barn in the south for those mushrooms, but at least now there is some hope of getting edible mushrooms regularly in the future."

Helga gave a nod before she exited the hall to go outside.

Duvas, who was sitting near the fireplace, beckoned him over to sit there as well.

Kivamus nodded, before he sat on an armchair near the fire. "The caravan should be in Cinran today, right?"

"I believe so, assuming they didn't have to spend three days on the road this time," Duvas replied.

Kivamus nodded. "Hopefully the snow will hold back for a few more days. We don't need the headache of finding out that the caravan has been stuck on the road." After a moment, he asked, "What is the progress of everything here?"

Duvas began, "Taniok has completed all the walls of the longhouse now, and today he is cutting up the planks into smaller shingles to start making the roof. He told me that he has enough planks that he should be able to make the door, the roof, as well as the floor with them. From the remaining planks he might be able to make around half of the bunks as well, but he doesn't have enough planks to make all the hundred and twenty-four bunks with them. Of course, once he has used up all the planks, he will cut more of them to make the bunks, but that will add another few days to make all the remaining bunks there, before we can call the first longhouse block to be completed."

"That's true, but I am glad to know that it is getting close to completion now. Even that first longhouse block will allow us to shift most of the previously homeless villagers there, which will take off the burden from those who are giving them shelter for now." Kivamus added, "What about the other things?"

Duvas continued, "After cutting the logs into stakes of twenty feet, Yeden has already started putting them into the trenches for the village wall since a few days ago. He told me that he will start the construction of the gates after most of the wall has been put up. By today, he should have put up around a third of the wall in the north."

"Good, good... Then it won't be long before we have a strong village wall around us!" Kivamus added, "Once the walls and the gates have been completed, Yeden and Taniok can start work on the watchtowers. Of course, that will only be done after two longhouse blocks have been completed. Since the third longhouse block is not a big priority for us right now, we will leave it for later, until all the other important things have been completed."

"Certainly," Duvas said. He continued, "In the South, Pinoto has been steadily clearing away the forests, and by now he has cleared up an area around two hundred meters wide and a hundred meters deep. There is still a long way until we have cleared enough of the forest for starting planting in the spring, but at least the work is under progress now. Also, I had told him to put a few workers to start digging the pond in the south a few days ago, so that there will at least be some place where the runoff water can gather when the snow starts to melt after the winter. Otherwise, there would have been no point in completing all the drainage trenches, when the water doesn't even have any place to go. Of course, he will put those workers to cut trees again once a small part of the pond has been dug."

Kivamus nodded with satisfaction. "That's good thinking." He was glad to see that everything was going so well now. He was certainly overdue to get some good luck by now, after all.

~ Calubo ~

~ Somewhere on the road between Tiranat and Cinran ~

Yesterday had been a waste - at least for the bandits, since the caravan didn't travel on the road by nightfall. The bandits had been crouching in a position to ambush the caravan for all that time, while he had been tied up to a tree for the whole duration, along with a gag on his mouth, so he was already in a bad mood since then. What had he even done to deserve this?

He gave a deep sigh. There wasn't anything he could do about it without risking Hyola's safety.

The bandits had rested in the night, and today the bandits had taken their positions again - which included his own position of being tied to a tree, along with a cloth tied over his mouth so he wouldn't be able to warn the caravan. However, he had still been tied close to the bandits who were hiding near the bluff - to keep an eye on him just in case he managed to free himself, and in a position from where he could see the road clearly.

The weather had kept getting worse and it had been snowing continuously since yesterday, and by now a small layer of snow had started to pile up on the road, which also meant that it was so damn cold right now, he thought while shivering. The bandits hadn't lit any fire since yesterday morning to avoid the risk of the caravan guards spotting it, and by now he felt like his fingers had already started to freeze over.

It didn't help that he had been tied for most of the last week - including the time he traveled from the quarry to this place, and he hadn't even been able to do any walking or jogging to warm himself up. He scoffed at the thought. It wasn't like the bandits would untie his hands just so he could exercise. And with him barely getting any food these days, he was already feeling weak by now. His hands were continuously aching where they were tied - especially in this freezing weather, and he didn't look forward to another full day of waiting while tied up to a tree - or maybe even longer, in case the caravan didn't come today either.

As he gazed at the desolate road, he couldn't even imagine how much he would hate himself if the bandits really did attack the caravan, and he was unable to help them while still being able to clearly watch his friends die one after another.

No! He tried to reassure himself that it wouldn't happen. Nokozal couldn't be so reckless that he would want to attack a caravan with so many swordsmen, would he?

It was evening now, so all the bandits near him were ready to attack in case the caravan returned back soon. Calubo didn't know why the return of the caravan had been delayed, but he did hope that the caravan had been safe till now.

While he had seen that the caravan had sixteen men when they were going to Cinran - with all but one of them looking like trained swordsmen, what if some of them had to stay back in the town for some reason? What if they couldn't even buy enough grain in Cinran, since there was a grain shortage everywhere after all? And even if the town had enough grain to sell, how much could Tiranat even buy with their nearly empty treasury?

He couldn't help but think of even worse thoughts as the day turned into evening and the shadows started becoming longer, but still without any sign of the caravan.

What if the caravan was already stuck on the road because of snow? What if some of those guards had decided to stay back in Cinran in defiance, because they barely got anything to eat in Tiranat - since that was certainly the case while he was there.

It was true that just a few days ago he had seen that the caravan going to the village with so many wagons - most likely full of grain, but he didn't think that the whole village would get enough to eat just from those eight wagons, especially since the village wouldn't be able to buy any more grain until after the winter. And if even a few of the caravan guards had decided to leave the pitiful life of their village behind, and stayed back in Cinran, the charade of the caravan looking so well-protected would disappear immediately, and Nokozal wouldn't hesitate for a moment before attacking the caravan.

No! It couldn't be! He shook his head forcefully to rid himself of such thoughts. All the signs pointed towards the possibility that there was already a new baron in Tiranat, and from what he had seen so far, the new baron seemed to be doing everything he could to buy enough grain for the village before the snow blocked the road for the next few months. So he had to stay hopeful that the Goddess would keep the caravan safe from these bastards.

After some time, when the sun was close to setting, the runt muttered while looking at the bandit chief, "It seems like today was a waste as well, wasn't it? Should we return back now, milord? I'm already so cold and tired..."

Before Nokozal could give any reply, Calubo heard the familiar sound of the creaking of wagon axles. The caravan was coming.