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Chapter 105. Another Machine

"As you wish, milord," the servant replied. He dubiously positioned himself between the handles, and using all his might, he tried to lift the handles up. It seemed a little difficult at first, but as the wheelbarrow lifted further upwards, all of a sudden the servant lost his balance as the handles moved up too fast. He had to immediately leave the handles to prevent the wheelbarrow from toppling over, making it fall on the ground with a thud.

Looking thoroughly surprised, he looked at Kivamus with confusion, who just grinned and gestured to him to try again. Giving a firm nod, the servant took that same position again and this time he lifted the handles much more carefully. Once the iron stands had left the ground, the servant confirmed that he was well balanced, and holding the handles tightly, he pulled the wheelbarrow forward, which started moving ahead easily.

"Well I'll be damned!" Duvas exclaimed. "It really works! A single person is easily doing the work of a horse!"

"What did I tell you?" Kivamus replied with a grin. And at the onset of winter in the approaching night, another machine was born in the village of Tiranat. There was a long way ahead on the path to progress, but this was a good step in that direction.

Hudan gave an appreciating nod as well. "It will certainly be very helpful for us in the future, since it will allow us to use our limited number of horses where they are really needed - to pull the really heavy loads."

The observing servants and maids were looking very surprised by now, after seeing that a single man was easily pulling the amount of coal which would have needed a horse to pull it earlier. After that servant pulled the wheelbarrow ahead for around a dozen meters without any problems, he turned it around and pulled it back towards them with a grin.

After he reached close to the waiting people, he put down the handles slowly, and walked towards others. Looking at Kivamus with wonder, he said, "It really works milord! It does! It still took some effort, but I never thought I'd be able to pull that much coal just by myself!" He grinned at the other servants and maids, as he bragged, "Didn't you know? I'm as strong as a horse!"

The other servants were still looking surprised, while one of the observing maids quipped, "No, you're not!" and a few other maids burst into sniggers.

Kivamus was still gazing fondly at the wheelbarrow when another maid started to clap in celebration, and immediately, all the other servants, maids and even a few off-duty guards who had walked there seeing the commotion started to clap and cheer as well.

Before long, another servant said to the first one, "Let me try too!" And without waiting for a response, he took a position between the handles of the wheelbarrow which was still full of coal, and started pulling it forward like he was going for a joy ride in a luxury sports car. Looking at the ear to ear grin of that servant, a few other servants started to draw lots using a bunch of sticks to be the next one to try pulling the wheelbarrow.

Laying eyes at the wheelbarrow which had somehow become a rare source of enjoyment for the residents of the manor, Cedoron remarked with wonder, "I had tested the wheelbarrow before bringing it here to see if the supports were strong enough, but seeing that it works so well is still surprising to me. How did you even think of such an idea, milord? It's so simple, and yet I never thought of it!"

Before Kivamus could give a reply, Gorsazo said with a grin, "This is what happens when a well-read noble uses his brain productively for the help of his people. I already know that Lord Kivamus' mind holds a lot of such creative ideas. This is just a small example of it!"

Kivamus grinned as well, knowing that Gorsazo was covering for him, since his mentor knew that the real reason for his knowledge couldn't possibly be told to others here.

After a while, when a few of the servants had taken their turns in pulling the wheelbarrow, he called them closer and asked, "Now that you all have seen that it does work like it should, I want to ask if you all found any problems in using it. Is there anything which you all think would be improved?" Getting feedback from the real users of the wheelbarrow was just as important as him thinking of making this machine in the village.

Most of the servants just shrugged and said that it was fine but a young servant said, "Milord, can I say something?" At Kivamus' nod, he continued, "I think the handles should be a little lower than they are right now. For those of us who are tall enough, it wouldn't be any problem, but for most of us, it would be a lot easier if the handles were just a few inches lower." After hearing that, the other servant started to nod as well.

Looking closely at the height of the handles, Kivamus realized that it was true enough. He said, "Cedoron, that's one improvement that you should keep in mind when you make more wheelbarrows. You can just make the iron supports below the tray a little shorter. That will make the handles lower and easier for everyone to pull it."

"Of course, milord," Cedoron said with a nod. "That was my mistake I think. I am quite tall, and when I was making those iron supports, I took my own height as a reference when deciding how high to make them. I will change it for the other wheelbarrows, and if you don't need this wheelbarrow immediately, then tomorrow morning I can make the change for this one as well. It wouldn't take too long."

Kivamus nodded. "In that case, you should do it." He continued, "Apart from that, I don't see any other obvious problems, so you should keep the same design for now. The iron tray also looks sturdy enough. But you should send someone to tell Taniok's apprentice to make more wooden wheels and the supporting bars with handles."

"I'll do that, milord." Cedoron asked, "So you want me to make five more of them?"

Kivamus gave a nod again. "For now. We will have to decide if we really need more of them after that." He added, "But before you leave, I also wanted to ask you to make a few more braziers as well. We don't need them immediately, but the first longhouse block is close to completion now, and we will have to start shifting people there within a week. So I want five or six new braziers ready by then. And you don't have to worry about iron, we have plenty of that thankfully."

"As you wish, Milord," Cedoron replied. "Those braziers are simple enough, so I'll put an apprentice on them in a day or two. If that's all, I'll take my leave for now. I need some rest now after working all day to complete this wheelbarrow."

Kivamus waved him away as he watched other servants and even a few guards take a turn in pulling the wheelbarrow. He couldn't help but smile after seeing their innocent pleasure at such a simple thing. However, before long, Duvass had to tell them to stop playing around and get back to work.

The servants grumbled for a moment, then with huge grins on their faces, they immediately started to draw lots again to decide who would get to use the wheelbarrow first, since it would mean getting to spend even more time with the new machine. Picking up that same bunch of sticks they had drawn from earlier, once again they drew the sticks one by one, and after the draw, that young servant was the one

who got the longest stick, and with a whoop of joy, he took his place between the wheelbarrow before taking it to refill the braziers in the manor.

Another servant who had drawn the second longest stick proclaimed that he would be the one to take the wheelbarrow to refill the braziers in the market square of the village as well as outside the manor, since it would be time for the evening meal for children and the elderly soon. The servant with the third longest stick claimed the morning spot for himself to refill the braziers, and on and on it went with other servants claiming the future spots after that until Duvas had to shoo them away to get them to start working.

As Kivamus watched the servants and maids scurry around the manor to complete their tasks before it got colder in the night, he heard a commotion towards the gates of the manor. It sounded like the crowd of villagers waiting for the evening meal was cheering in happiness about something.

Immediately, a servant came running towards him with joy. "Milord!" he reported with a grin, "the caravan is back!"

"Finally!" Hudan exclaimed. "I was getting worried about Feroy and the others by now."

"Thank the goddess!" Duvas prayed while looking at the sky. "She really listened to my prayers of letting this third trip go without any problem after all!"

Gorsazo looked at Kivamus with a smile. "We have been really lucky, my lord. When we arrived at Tiranat there was barely a few weeks of grain remaining in the manor, and after we had gotten the grain from two trips of the caravan, I thought even that was much better. But with the grain from this trip, we'll be really set for the winter!"

Kivamus nodded as well with a satisfied smile, as he saw the first of the wagons entering the gates of the manor. "It's true enough, Gorsazo. We will talk with Pydaso tomorrow in detail, but for now it does seem like we would be able to start planting seeds in the spring. It seems like it might start snowing any day now, but I am thankful that it held back long enough for the caravan to return without any problem."

Slowly, the rest of the caravan came inside the manor and the guards started to climb down from their seats after a long journey. This time the caravan had taken longer to return than it had in the previous trips, but thankfully, it seemed that all the eight wagons were here safely.

Soon, he saw Feroy jogging towards him. With a beaming face, he reported, "Milord, we are back! And as promised, I brought back the caravan safely." He added with a sly grin, "It was carrying our precious ale, after all, you know?"

Kivamus laughed along with others in response. The nearby servants and maids were also whispering with each other happily, likely in anticipation of getting three meals a day from now. It felt really good to see that rare smile on everyone's face after the last few months they had spent near starvation.

Giving a nod, he said, "That's really good to hear." He added with a smirk, "And don't worry, you'll certainly get your ale tonight!"

"That's what I was waiting to hear, milord!" Feroy exclaimed with a huge grin. He added, "Now that this was the last caravan journey before the winter, the guards who returned with the caravan can take some rest as well."

"Indeed," Kivamus said with a nod, "and you can allow a mug of ale to those guards as well, but no more than that. And no ale tonight for the guards who didn't go to escort the caravan this time, since we don't want all the guards drunk at the same time."

"That's certainly true," Feroy replied. "Although the guards will understand the need to have at least half of them alert, this decision still won't be popular."

Kivamus nodded. "They do have to stay alert on duty for tonight, but from tomorrow the pressure on them will still reduce a lot, now that we have all of our guards back, and they wouldn't have to pull double duty so frequently either. That fact will have to be enough to placate them."

"It's alright, milord. I'll make sure there are no problems," Feroy said with a nod.

"Good." Kivamus looked at Hudan, "You should give a day off to the guards who have arrived today. They deserve a night of rest after traveling on those chilly roads for weeks. And you can also tell the

temporary guards we had hired that they can return to work as laborers from tomorrow, but keep them on just for tonight."

"Of course," Hudan nodded, "that's a good idea anyway."

Kivamus looked back at Feroy. "We were expecting the caravan back by yesterday. What caused the delay?"