

Londoner 106

Chapter 106. Missed Opportunity

"It's already been snowing heavily on that road for the past few days, you know?" Feroy replied. "Even then we should have returned back on time but yesterday morning, a wagon wheel became loose after a big jolt from a pothole on the road, and nearly came out from the wagon. Usually it wouldn't have happened, but we had overloaded the wagons for this last journey to carry as much grain and other things as we could."

The ex-mercenary added, "However, even with an overloaded wagon, we would have just steered the wagons around such potholes on the road, but it just wasn't possible to see the road surface for the past two days because of the snow which is already gathering on the road."

"So the snowfall has started after all," Kivamus said while looking at the overcast sky.

Feroy continued with a nod, "We certainly couldn't afford to leave that wagon back, so we had to spend the whole day yesterday trying to fix it. That's why we lost another day on the road."

He winced as he added, "It felt really risky at that time as well - especially during the night spent on the middle of the road, since the caravan was just like a sitting duck during that time, not to mention how cold it was spending the nights in the open. We couldn't even afford to light a fire there, or we would have become an even bigger target - for wild beasts if not for bandits. But I made sure to send a few guards to patrol around that area every hour or so, and thankfully we didn't see any recent sign of other people being there."

Kivamus grimaced as he thought about the situation. If any bandits had been nearby at that time, and if they had realized that one of the wagons was stuck on the road, it would have been a golden opportunity for them to try to capture at least that damaged wagon as long as they had enough numbers for it.

He asked Feroy, "How did you fix the wagon then?"

Feroy replied with a shake of his head. "We got really lucky there. One of the new guards had some experience with woodworking since he had worked for some time as an apprentice to the village carpenter in the past. He was able to make a temporary fix to secure the wheel, which allowed the wagon to start moving again. But we still had to move slowly after that, you know? Otherwise that

wheel could have come out from the axle completely, but thankfully it didn't happen. That being said, that wagon wheel really should be repaired properly by the carpenter before using it again."

Kivamus looked at Duvas. "Would Taniok even be able to fix it? We had to send our damaged wagon to Cinran for repairs after all."

Duvas gave a shrug. "We'll have to see, my Lord. It depends on how bad the damage is. In the wagon we had sent for repairs, one of its axles and the support of the wheel was damaged, which is why it couldn't carry any load even though the horses were still able to pull it to Cinran. This time it only seems like one of the wheels came loose, so it might just be a simple fix. I will ask Taniok about it tomorrow."

Hudan remarked, "It does seem like we have used up more than our fair share of luck by now. The caravan was able to go on a third trip before the winter, and they weren't ambushed on the road when the caravan was stuck there."

"The goddess has really been kind to us in the last few weeks..." Duvas muttered while looking at the sky. "Let's just hope our good luck lasts for a while."

"That's true enough..." Feroy muttered. "But we shouldn't jinx it by speaking about it, you know?"

While others gave nods in reply, Kivamus watched the servants move the wagons under the shed for the night. The unloading would only be done tomorrow in daylight.

Looking at Feroy who was nearly shivering, he said, "Let's return back to the manor hall now. Hudan, tell the guards who have returned to take some good rest in the night after they get their evening meal. Madam Nerida should be able to whip up something hot for them quickly. They look like they are freezing."

With a nod, Hudan walked towards the guards, and the others returned back to the manor hall.

~ Calubo ~

~ Walking southwards on the road to Tiranat ~

They had been walking continuously for the whole day yesterday, with the snow falling continuously, then after a stop in the night for rest, they had been walking for the whole day today as well. And with barely enough food given to him, he didn't have words to describe how tired he was feeling. It was nearly dark now, and he couldn't wait for Nokozal to order everyone to stop for the night.

Soon, Nokozal told them all to move a little deep into the forest, and after finding an empty clearing, they tied their horses to the trees for them to graze, and all the bandits laid down on the ground wherever they could find some flat space. From Calubo's own estimate, it would take another two days of walking before they reached Tiranat, and he wasn't looking forward to that long walk at all.

After a while, when the bandits had cooked a meal out of a couple of rabbits they had caught there, he heard the sound of the hooves of a horse on the road nearby. Immediately, all of the bandits got up with alarm and started to draw their swords in anticipation of an attack. However, the bandit who had been left next to the road to keep an eye there, walked inside along with another person and it turned out that it was the runt on that horse. Calubo was surprised to see him back since he had gone to scout the road and the village.

Looking at the runt, Nokozal barked, "Why are you back again! I told you to go and scout the village, or did you not hear me clearly?"

Walking close to Nokozal, the runt said, "Milord, there was a very good opportunity for an ambush on the caravan, so I had to get this news to you. But it took me so long to find you all that the opportunity would certainly have passed by now."

"How?" Nokozal growled. "What do you mean by that?"

The runt reported, "When I was passing in the forest next to the road, then maybe around half a day back from the village I saw that the caravan had stopped in the middle of the road, even though it was daytime. So I tied my horse there, and observed them for a few hours from a nearby bluff. It turned out that one of the wagons had gotten their wheel loose, and the whole caravan was just sitting in the middle of the road without being able to move further!"

Immediately, Nokoza jumped up to his feet. "Tell me! Where are they? We cannot miss such an opportunity!"

The runt shook his head reluctantly. "It's no use, milord. Like I said, the opportunity would have passed us by now. I had seen them stuck on the road this morning, but based on the guards' setup, it looked like they were stuck there since yesterday at least. It couldn't have been earlier than that since we saw them passing in front of us just two days ago. So I think they would have had enough time to fix it by afternoon today."

He added with a shrug, "And even if they were unable to fix it, it was a big caravan of eight wagons, as you had seen earlier, so they would have just transferred their goods to the other seven wagons before leaving. Either way, they were only around half a day back from the village so they would surely have reached Tiranat by now."

"Damn it!" Nokoza cursed. "Damn it all! Couldn't you have brought this news sooner? Even with our lower numbers, we could have just shot arrows at them from the forest, and we might have taken out half of them without even lifting our swords, since they wouldn't have been able to go far from their caravan! How could we have missed this golden opportunity!" Starting to curse everything again, he started walking back and forth while stroking his graying beard.

Calubo was surprised to find out that the caravan was stuck on the road. For a moment, he thought that the goddess had abandoned the villagers, and the bandits would be able to kill those guards and loot the caravan after all. But a wagon getting a loose wheel was still a common enough occurrence that it could have happened to any caravan traveling on any road - not to mention one traveling on this run-down road in the middle of forests. But at least it seemed like the bandits still wouldn't have it too easy.

Finally, the bandit chief stopped his pacing and said to the runt, "Your information is no good if it gets to me so late. But no matter, you will go back right now to scout the village."

The runt gazed longingly at the roasted rabbit legs in the hands of other bandits.

"What are you dawdling for?" Nokoza growled. "Get back to your horse now!"

"But it's already dark, milord!" The runt protested after another quick look at the food in the hands of others. "I can't ride the horse at night anyway..." He wheedled again to the bandit chief. "Can't I just leave at first light?"

Nokozal snorted, "You young'uns are so fragile! When I was your age, I used to travel all the night when needed!" After a while, he grunted, "Fine. You can stay here for the night, but be off before dawn!"

"Thank you, milord! Thank you so much! You are so kind!" The runt praised the bandit chief and after a quick bow, he immediately walked towards another rabbit which was still being roasted on a small fire with hunger gleaming in his eyes.

~ Kivamus ~

~ Baron's Manor, Tiranat ~

The next day in the morning, Kivamus was sitting in the manor hall while waiting for Pydaso to arrive. Duvas was busy overseeing the unloading of the wagons, while Hudan and Feroy were trying to decide a new watch schedule for the manor as well as the for the rest of the village now that all the guards were back, since it was the first time they had enough guards to properly patrol the village.

Lucem had gone to watch the training of the guards in the morning despite the cold weather, while Clarisa and Sryne were helping madam Helga in the kitchen of the manor house. For the moment it was only Gorsazo who was sitting within the hall.

The weather had kept getting colder today as well, and it seemed that snowfall would start any time now, but they had still been lucky that the caravan had been able to return from the third trip without any incidents. There was also the consolation that they had more than enough coal for now, so there wouldn't be any problem in providing enough heating for the villagers. But he had to wait for the merchant before he found out exactly how much grain he had brought.

However, seeing that other than Gorsazo, the hall was empty, and after making sure that the doors were closed properly, he said, "There is something that has been bugging me for some time now. So I

wanted to ask you about that. I've been thinking of talking about this for a few days now, but it is a sensitive matter and I never got a chance to talk to you alone in the recent days."

Gorsazo nodded. "What is it, my lord? You can talk to me about anything."

Kivamus explained, "It is about the divisions of yards and feet into inches which the carpenter Taniok mentioned a few days ago. As you know, I still have most of the memories of the original Kivamus, but there are still some things about which my memories are hazy, especially in the things where he didn't focus much on, and that includes this topic. I was very curious about it when the carpenter told me about those weird divisions, but this wasn't something I could have asked in front of any other person."

Seeing Gorsazo give an understanding nod, he continued, "But now that you already know everything about my origin, I can be completely frank with you, so I want to ask you if there is any good reason behind it. Those divisions do not make any sense at all!"

He added, "I know that every place has their own customs, but math is math everywhere. It cannot be easy for anyone - especially the common people who are not even educated - to divide things using those measurements. And this is something which nearly everyone would be using every day, so how come nobody ever tried to make more sensible divisions of lengths?"