

Londoner 109

Chapter 109. Isomi and Savomi

Seeing Pydaso's curious gaze, Kivamus continued, "I would like to buy a map of the region around Tiranat, and one for the whole of Southern Reslinor as well if you can find it. Duvas has told me that such a map wouldn't be available even in Cinran, but there is a good possibility of getting those maps from Ulriga. And you have mentioned that your home is in a village close to Ulriga as well.

At the merchant's nod, he continued, "So before you return back here after the winter, I want you to buy those maps from Ulriga if you can manage it at all. I don't mind paying a high price for it, as long as it is not a ludicrous amount."

Pydaso nodded slowly. "I cannot guarantee that I will be able to buy them, but I will try my best." Giving a quick look at the majordomo, he added with a smirk, "I know that Mr Duvas wouldn't pay me even a copper more than a reasonable amount for a map, as rare and pricey as good maps are."

Kivamus and others gave a good natured laugh at that, while Duvas just snorted and shook his head in amusement.

"That's why I trust Duvas with my money," Kivamus said with a smile.

Pydaso nodded. "So don't worry, milord, I will only buy them if I can find them at an acceptable price." He added, "I will leave my wagons here for tonight as well, and then I will come back tomorrow morning before dawn. Please make sure that the guards are ready to leave by then. I really don't want to risk the wagons getting stuck on the road."

"Of course, Pydaso," Kivamus said with a nod. "Don't worry about it."

And with a final bow of gratitude, the merchant left the manor hall.

Kivamus turned to the guard captain and said, "Take care of that today. Make sure to send only experienced guards this time. We need them to be able to hold their own in case a wild beast attacks them on the road."

Hudan nodded in reply. "I already have two men in my mind whom I plan to send, and with the extra income in the form of, uh... hazard pay... that they will get, I believe they will readily agree to it. And since there will be just two of them when returning, they should hopefully be able to move quickly through the forest without any problems."

"Good." Kivamus looked at Duvas. "Now that we have bought everything we are going to buy before the winter, tell me just how much gold we have spent by now." He added with a grimace, "Although I am already scared to even think about it."

Duvas nodded and took a minute to scribble a few things on the parchment he was holding in his hands. After a while, he replied with a surprised look, "After including our income from selling coal to him, we have spent a net amount of nine hundred and fifty three gold crowns!" He explained, "That amount was spent to buy the food grain, iron ingots, as well as other things from Pydaso. Apart from that, we have spent around twenty-eight gold as the wages for people with specialized skills whom we still pay in cash. That includes the blacksmith, the carpenter and his apprentice, as well as the two foremen."

He added with a sigh, "But at least we are supplying all the materials to them - including iron which we purchased for cheap from cinran. If we were buying the forged tools directly from the blacksmith it would have been even more costly. Apart from that, Hudan is also entitled to a regular wage, with him being the guard captain, but he has told me that he wouldn't take any wages until we are able to pay the regular wages in coins to the other guards as well."

Giving a nod of thanks to the guard captain, Duvas continued, "Normally, we would also be giving wages to our guards and the coal miners, or in our current condition, to the villagers working as laborers, but providing them grain and coal directly means that we haven't had to spend any coin on them. So that's our total expense for now, since we aren't paying anyone else in coins right now. Everyone else in the manor is also being provided with only food and lodging for now."

"But that still means we have spent nearly a thousand gold crowns already!" Gorsazo exclaimed. "That's close to half of what we had in the treasury!" He shook his head at the thoroughly unwelcome news. "We still have to pay the taxes to the Count whenever his men come asking for it, apart from what we will need to spend after the winter to buy more grain for the summer months. Not to mention our coal mines are still flooded!"

"All that's true enough," Kivamus said, "but this was a necessary expense. If there are no other problems, we will be able to ensure that no one dies from the cold this winter, not to mention we are ensuring that nobody in the village goes to sleep on an empty stomach."

"That's true," Duvas sighed, "but ensuring all of that still takes a lot of cold hard cash. And we don't even have a source of income right now..." He took a few deep breaths before adding, "No, you are right. Nothing is more important than ensuring the survival of everyone in the village."

"Certainly," Kivamus nodded. "Once the first longhouse block and the village walls have been completed, we will get a lot of free labor, and I will put some of them to start clearing water from the coal mines. By that time the carpenter will also have some free time, so I will try to find a better way to remove the water instead of doing it manually bucket by bucket. Actually, no. Taniok also has to work on making the watchtowers after that, as well as the crossbows - not to mention repairing the damaged wagon, apart from other things..."

"That is certainly a lot of work for one man," Gorsazo muttered. "It's a pity that we only have one trained carpenter in the village..."

"Well he does have an apprentice he is currently training," Duvas said, "but it will be a while until he can do any precision woodworking like Taniok. Anyway, I showed him our damaged wagon earlier in the morning, and he told me that he will be able to fix the wheel, but it will still be time taking." He continued, "But we are not in any hurry to use that wagon right now, since we also have our other three wagons back from Cinran now, so I have postponed repairing it until at least the first longhouse block is completed."

"That was a good idea," Kivamus said.

He looked at the guard captain after a moment. "We still haven't gotten any women joining us as manor guards, have we? After we told them that they would get the same wages as the men, I had thought we would be getting plenty of applicants for it, but so far we haven't even gotten a single woman who wants to be a guard."

"Actually, my lord," Hudan interrupted, "earlier in the morning I did get two young women as applicants for guards. In fact, they are sisters - Isomi and Savomi. But I don't know them, and I have no idea if they are trustworthy, so I was waiting to ask Mr Duvas to meet them once, before I hired them."

Gorsazo asked, "Didn't you select the guards through a test when you were recruiting them last time?"

Hudan shrugged. "It's not like we have enough female applicants that I have to select from them based on their proficiency - like it happened with the men. If Mr Duvass says that they are dependable, then I will recruit them without any questions, especially since we are not selecting them for their expertise in wielding a sword anyway."

"That's true enough," Kivamus said. "But did you ask why they wanted to work as guards, when no other woman in the village wants to do that?"

Hudan nodded. "I certainly asked about it. I found out that they didn't have anyone else in their family to provide for them. When the coal mines were working, they used to work there hauling the coal in baskets from inside the mines to the waiting wagons outside. And even then, they were only hired on the days when the mining foreman didn't have enough men to do that."

He continued, "Since the time we announced that everyone in the village could work as laborers, they have been picking small stones in the newly cleared land in the south of the village to clear the fields for sowing in the spring. When they heard that we were looking for women as guards, they wanted to join us immediately, but it took them this long just to build up the courage to actually come to the manor and ask us to join the other men as guards."

The guard captain added, "They told me that instead of picking stones they would rather do something more to help and protect the village, but before that announcement they had never thought that they could actually become guards in the manor. Not to mention, if they get selected it would be a permanent position for them, and they would get more wages than even the men who work as laborers, since we would be paying them the same wages as other guards, who already earn more than laborers."

"I think I know who you are talking about," Duvass said while stroking his whitening beard. "But I will still go with you later to confirm if they are the same women I'm thinking about. And if they are, I know we can trust them as guards inside the manor, because I have known them for more than a decade since the time they were still children."

He added, "The father of those two sisters, who used to be a coal miner as well, was injured in a small bandit raid three or four years ago, and he died of injuries later that winter. So I can understand why they hate bandits and want to do something more to protect the village."

Kivamus said, "It's a good thing that we got at least two female guards, even though we still need many more of them for all the watchtowers." He added, "Hudan, once Duvass has confirmed them as trustworthy, give them lodging within the servant hall with the other maids, and include them in the

training for other guards. But you should focus more on their physical fitness than actual weapon training in the beginning."

Hudan nodded. "I was already thinking of that. They will need to become a lot more fit for them to work as guards, so I will slowly increase their training until they can keep up with others."

"Good." Kivamus added after a moment, "There is still some time until all the watchtowers and gates are built, but even then it seems like we will still be short on guards at this rate. We have already asked for women to apply as guards, but so far we have only gotten two applicants. Is there anything else we can do about it?"