

Londoner 22

Chapter 22. Grain Deal - Part I

Pydas, who had been observing the gathering from a distance, approached Kivamus with a respectful bow.

"Good morning, my lord," he greeted, his voice warm and genuine. "I couldn't help but overhear your proclamation."

"Morning, Pydas." Kivamus asked, "What do you think about it?"

"Initially," Pydas replied, "I admit, I shared the surprise and hesitation everyone else felt. Such a significant change is bound to raise questions. However, I firmly believe this is a noble act. I can only imagine the weight of this decision, but know this, my lord, you have my full support."

Kivamus offered a curt nod. "Thank you, Pydas."

Pydas' voice dipped into a somber tone. "A long time ago," he reminisced, "when after a drought damaged the harvest badly in the village my family lives in, many of my neighbors, along with their children were sold into slavery by the debt collectors. My own family and I could have easily met the same fate on that day, my Lord, when I tried to evade them by hiding in a nearby thicket along with my scared children. Thankfully, the Goddess smiled upon us that day, and we remained free." He shook his head slowly. "Although I managed to pay back my debts later on, the scars of that experience, and the way my children, who were very young at the time clutched me with fear, have never truly faded. Slavery is an abhorrent practice, my lord, and I wholeheartedly support your decision to abolish it in Tiranat."

Pydas leaned forward, a question lingering in his voice. "Yet, if I may be so bold, my lord, what caused you to make such a decision?"

"Perhaps," Kivamus admitted, thinking about the time when the original Kivamus inhabited this body, "in the past, I might have simply accepted slavery as an unfortunate fact of life."

Gorsazo, who had been a silent observer throughout the exchange, leaned in, clearly interested in the conversation. "Indeed, my lord," he chimed in. "Your actions... they differ from what I expected of you. And I'm not sure if this will go down very well with other nobles when they learn about it."

"Gorsazo," Kivamus continued with a hint of amusement in his voice, recalling the drunken days of the original Kivamus, "you, more than anyone else, should understand what I'm talking about. As you know, recent events have been... transformative. Being sent to this remote village at the edge of the kingdom, after practically being exiled from Ulriga, has undoubtedly been a life-altering experience." Not to mention somehow being transported from Earth to this place, he added in his mind.

"And just a few days ago, I saw something eye-opening. On my journey here," he added, his voice dropping to a low growl, "I witnessed a group of people being transported for sale outside Cinran like they were cattle!"

Thinking about it, he added, "I realize that many of the servants and maids working in the Ulriga Palace must have been slaves, when I used to live there," or at least, the original Kivamus did. "But they never looked any different from the other servants. They were well fed and clothed there, and it would have been impossible to tell that they were actually slaves and not free men and women, without actually asking them about it," he recalled from the hazy memories of the original Kivamus. "For all it matters, slavery could be said to be just another form of employment, inside the Ulriga Palace."

Taking a deep breath, he continued, "But when I saw that line of slaves outside Cinran, bound and cuffed with chains like animals, it was eye-opening to realize that that was the real situation in this kingdom, outside the walls of the Ulriga Palace. That is when I decided that it was not an acceptable thing to allow people to be reduced to an animal-like existence. I felt utterly helpless at the time seeing their miserable conditions and yet being unable to intervene and help those poor souls. But here in Tiranat, I refuse to tolerate the things I cannot abide by. This is where I draw the line."

He continued, "Of course, most of the nobles would love to have the common people serving them as slaves, without paying them a single coin! Hah! Those bastards!"

Kivamus added after a moment, "But I refuse to be like them, Gorsazo. Not anymore. And it's not like I'm forcing them to accept it in their own lands."

"I understand where you're coming from, my Lord," Gorsazo added, "but they still aren't going to like this decision when they hear about it, and it might cause problems for us in the future. The majority of

people are usually opposed to anything which challenges the status quo, not to mention those who benefit from the current situation."

"I have no desire to be liked by those cut-throat bastards anyway!" Kivamus snorted. "It's not like many of them aren't already trying to kill me..."

He sighed. "We'll deal with it when we have to, Gorsazo. But I just refuse to own people like they are animals. They are human beings and will be treated like humans, if not everywhere, then at least in my domain."

Pydas' face creased into a relieved smile. "I'm glad to hear it, my Lord," he said, his voice heavy with sincerity. "The people of Tiranat have been yearning for a leader who has their best interests at heart. They haven't had that for a very long time."

Pydas delved into the reason for his visit. "As you know, my lord, I brought with me three wagons laden with grain, hoping to sell it here in Tiranat. However, yesterday I could only manage to sell eight sacks in total, six to Kigeir and a meager two to others. I had brought thirty sacks with me, my lord." He shook his head, his brow furrowed in concern. "The situation here is far worse than I anticipated if they could only buy such a small amount."

Kivamus offered a reassuring nod. "I understand Pydas. I saw it firsthand when we arrived here. But rest assured, I'm committed to helping the people of Tiranat in any way I can." He gestured towards the manor house. "Let's return inside for now," he suggested. "We can discuss this further in the comfort of the hall."

Pydas dipped his head in agreement. With a heavy silence hanging in the air, the group turned and began their walk back toward the manor house. Kivamus, deep in thought, led the way, with Pydas and Duvas trailing closely behind. Gorsazo and Helga followed, their faces etched with concern mirroring the weight of the situation. As they entered the manor house, Lucem ran off somewhere, to whatever had caught his fancy now.

Inside, the warmth of the fire greeted them as they entered the familiar surroundings of the manor hall. They settled into the armchairs around the crackling fire, the warmth a welcome contrast to the chill that had settled over them outside.

The fire cast dancing shadows on the walls as Kivamus surveyed the faces around him. Here, in this room, surrounded by his newfound advisors, the negotiations for securing Tiranat's future were about to begin.

"Alright, Pydas," Kivamus began, a hint of a smile playing on his lips. "Let's turn this situation into something positive. We can start by striking a good deal, wouldn't you agree?"

Pydas straightened in his chair. "A good deal, my lord?" he echoed, raising an eyebrow in question.

"Indeed," Kivamus confirmed. "Tell me, you still have... twenty-two sacks of grain unsold, right?"

Pydas leaned forward with a newfound interest. "I have, my lord," he confirmed, nodding eagerly.

"Excellent," Kivamus declared with a decisive edge to his voice. "I propose to buy your entire stock of grain."

Pydas's eyebrows shot up in astonishment. "All of it, my lord?" he echoed.

"Indeed," Kivamus affirmed with a nod. "Now, let's discuss the price. From what I was told of last year's prices, a single sack of grain cost around three gold crowns and eight silver coins, including the cost of transporting it here from Cinran." He paused, tapping his chin thoughtfully. "So, for twenty-two sacks, that would come to..."

Before Kivamus could finish his calculation, Pydas interjected, his voice laced with a hint of urgency. "My lord," he began, "with all due respect, the situation has changed considerably since last year. As you might be aware, this year's harvest proved to be rather disappointing, much like the one before it. And so the grain prices have soared everywhere. In Cinran, a single sack of grain now commands a price tag of at least four gold crowns and two silver coins."

Noticing the surprised expressions of others at the higher price, he continued, his voice taking on a pleading tone, "And that's not all, my lord. The cost of transporting goods from Cinran to Tiranat has increased significantly after the previous Baron's murder, due to the increased risk of bandits. So I also have to pay much higher wages for the wagon drivers and the rental fees for the wagons and horses than I did last year. To make a profit and ensure my family has enough to eat, I simply can't sell them for

less than four gold crowns, six silver coins, and five coppers per sack after taking everything into account."

Duvas inhaled sharply, a grimace twisting his features. "That's a very steep increase, Pydas," he remarked, clearly taken aback by the inflated price. "Far more than I anticipated."

Pydas nodded, his expression filled with helplessness. "I understand, Mr Duvas," he replied. "But after two consecutive bad harvests, prices have risen everywhere. I have a family to feed, and I can't afford to sell at a loss."

Duvas wasn't ready to give in so easily. "We understand the circumstances, Pydas. However, we are offering to purchase a significant quantity at once. Surely, there's room for a bulk discount?" he countered.

Pydas pondered for a moment, his brow furrowed in thought. Finally, he spoke, his voice measured. "Very well," he conceded. "However, the most I can offer is a discount of half a silver coin per sack. That would bring the price down to four gold crowns and six silver coins per sack."

Duvas grimaced slightly. "That's... still much higher than I anticipated," he grumbled, clearly disappointed.

Pydas spread his hands helplessly and looked at Kivamus. "I truly cannot go any lower, my lord," he pleaded. "As a traveling merchant, I only manage to secure one or two good trades a month, at best. I have to ensure my family has enough to survive during lean times."

With a gentle nod, Kivamus conceded, "Very well, Pydas. We wouldn't want to offer a price that risks your family's well-being." He turned to Duvas, who had been diligently scribbling calculations on a parchment with a quill. "So, Duvas," Kivamus inquired, "based on Pydas' offer, what's the total cost for the grain?"

Duvas, after a quick final calculation, announced, "The total comes to one hundred and one gold crowns and two silver coins, my lord."

Kivamus tapped his chin thoughtfully. "Pydas," he proposed, "how about we round down the total to an even amount of one hundred gold crowns? What do you say?"

Pydas's face remained impassive. "I can't, my lord," he countered politely but firmly. "A hundred gold crowns is simply too low. However, in the spirit of a new partnership, I would be willing to accept one hundred and one gold crowns."

Kivamus chuckled softly, a hint of amusement dancing in his eyes. "A shrewd negotiator, I see," he remarked. "Very well then, Pydas. We have a deal. One hundred and one gold crowns for your twenty-two sacks of grain."

But Kivamus wasn't finished yet. Leaning forward, he addressed the more pressing issue. "However, Pydas," he continued, "our needs extend far beyond your current stock. You mentioned selling eight sacks already, which brings Tiranat's total grain reserves to thirty sacks. Unfortunately, that's nowhere near enough to sustain us through the winter. We estimate we'll require roughly a hundred and seventy-five sacks of grain in total to make it through the harsh months."

He paused, letting the gravity of the situation sink in. "That leaves us with a hundred and forty-five sacks that I still want to buy. Given your established contacts in Cinran, you might be able to acquire such a large quantity of grain faster than we could, and at much better rates." He raised an eyebrow in question. "So, what do you think, Pydas? Can you manage to purchase that much grain from Cinran and transport it here?"

Pydas' brow furrowed in contemplation as he digested Kivamus' words. "One hundred and forty-five sacks," he murmured, the sheer quantity a daunting prospect. "That's indeed a substantial order, my lord. It would require a significant amount of effort to transport such a large amount." A moment of thoughtful silence followed as Pydas calculated the logistics in his head. "I can manage it," he finally declared with a determined glint in his eyes. "But it won't be a simple task."

He launched into a detailed explanation, his voice laced with the pragmatism of a seasoned merchant. "Currently, I only have three wagons at my disposal," he began, "two of my own and an additional one I managed to rent from Cinran for my current visit here. Even if I dedicate all the space to grain sacks, my lord, a single wagon can hold no more than eleven sacks at a time, even if the wagons are filled to the brim. But that would be overloading the wagons and could cause injury to the horses, since they would be pulling the overloaded wagons continuously for weeks to transfer all the grain, particularly on the uneven forest roads. Not to mention, it could lead to a breakdown of the wagon or its axle, which would leave us stranded in the middle of the forest. And being unable to shift a full wagon load of grain to the other wagons, we would have to leave the grain there as well."

Pydas held up a hand, forestalling any interruptions. "That's why," he continued, "I only load ten sacks of grain per wagon, leaving some space for other necessities like tools for mining, some salt for preserving food, and some dried meat and water to sustain the journey. Of course, it also keeps the load on the horses manageable, so that they can pull the wagons even on long journeys without getting injured. That leaves space for thirty sacks of grain that I can manage to transport in one trip on the three wagons I have."

Kivamus nodded and gestured for him to continue.

Pydas leaned forward, his voice dropping to a serious tone. "The travel time is also a significant factor as it takes at least two days to reach here from Cinran. If I need to make another night's stop to rest the horses, when we are traveling with the wagons fully loaded, it can stretch to three days. Then there's the time spent in Cinran itself, where it will take at least a day to acquire and load the grain. And of course, the return trip takes another two to three days."

Pydas sighed, the weight of the timeline pressing down on him. "That translates to a minimum of five days for a round trip, and that's with clear weather without much rain, with an additional day needed to rest the horses before they're fit for another journey. That means it'll take around a week to transport just thirty sacks of grain along with some other necessities you might need, my lord, assuming everything goes smoothly. And that's only until the first snowfall arrives."

A collective grimace spread across the faces gathered in the hall. The harsh reality of the situation was sinking in.

"Winter travel is a different beast altogether," Pydas continued. "Snow will slow the wagons considerably. I estimate a single round trip will take at least ten days after the snowfall." He leaned forward, his gaze fixed on Kivamus. "Realistically, my lord, I can manage two, and at most three trips, each taking a week before the snow arrives. After that, I'd be forced to brave the snow, extending the travel time to ten days per round trip."