

Londoner 23

Chapter 23. Grain Deal Part II

Duvas chimed in with a worried expression. "That means it would take five trips to transport all the grain from Cinran," he calculated, his voice tight with concern. "Even if you manage three full trips before the snow, we'd only have ninety sacks after three weeks, with an additional thirty sacks delivered every ten days after that, until the snow makes travel impossible."

He ran a hand through his hair, his voice laced with urgency. "That gives us a timeframe of six to seven weeks, at least, my lord, to transport all the grain we need from Cinran. With the unpredictable winter weather, there's a chance that we might only get three to four weeks before the roads become impassable. It might stretch longer if we're lucky, but we can't count on that."

A tense silence descended upon the room. The gravity of the situation was clear, the very survival of Tiranat through the harsh winter hinged on acquiring enough grain. Kivamus' jaw clenched tight, his expression a mask of grim determination.

"That simply won't do!" he declared, his voice resolute. "We need all that grain, every last sack of it! The village wouldn't survive the winter without it."

Kivamus continued, "We have to find another way." He looked at others around him. "Is there anything else we can do? Perhaps we can buy grain from other places too?"

Gorsazo chimed in, his voice grim. "As Duvas informed us earlier, my lord," he pointed out, "purchasing grain from Kirnos is not really an option. They simply wouldn't have enough of a surplus to provide us with that amount of grain. And with Ulriga, the distance is simply too great, and time is of the essence for us. Cinran truly is our only hope for acquiring the grain in time."

Duvas, his brow furrowed in thought, spoke up. "There's a possibility, my lord," he proposed. "If we could manage to increase the number of wagons per trip, we might stand a chance to buy all the grain we need in time." He turned to Pydas. "From what you mentioned," he continued, "we need fifteen fully loaded wagons to transport all one hundred and forty-five sacks. That means we could either have your three wagons make five trips back and forth, or utilize more wagons for fewer trips."

"True," Kivamus acknowledged, his gaze fixed on the merchant. "Based on your experience, Pydas," he began, "with the limited time remaining before the snow blocks the road, how many trips can you

guarantee that you can make to and from Cinran? I know that if the snowfall starts late this year, you might be able to make more trips, but we can't count on it. And I need to plan in a way that I can be certain that we'll get all the grain we require, even if the snow falls too early and blocks the roads sooner than usual."

Pydas took a minute to think it through before replying. "Even if the snow falls very early this winter, my Lord," he admitted, "I can guarantee two trips from here to Cinran and back. That would allow me to return to my home near Udrigra before the worst of winter sets in. There's a possibility of squeezing in a third trip and an even smaller possibility of a fourth one if the snow is particularly late in arriving, but I wouldn't suggest relying on those options."

Kivamus, his brow furrowed in thought, tapped a finger against the armrest. "We need a guaranteed solution, Pydas" he added. "We need to be absolutely certain that we get all the grain we need." He looked at others' faces for a moment. "So we must plan to transport all the grain we need in just two trips. That means somehow assembling a caravan of eight wagons."

A concerned frown creased Pydas's face. "But my lord," he interjected, his voice laced with helplessness, "I simply don't have eight wagons at my disposal! I only have two of my own wagons and the one I rented in Cinran."

Kivamus turned to Duvas. He addressed the majordomo, his voice carrying a hint of urgency, "Can we do something about this?"

"My lord," Helga interjected, "why not use the wagon my family traveled in from the inn? We've already unloaded our belongings, and it sits empty in the shed right now. Please use that wagon and the horses we brought wherever you need, my lord."

"That's a good idea, Madam Helga." Kivamus dipped his head in acknowledgment. "That's one more wagon at our disposal." He turned back to Duvas. "That brings us to four wagons. Are there any others within the manor grounds that we could use?"

"We do have two wagons in working condition now, my Lord," Duvas reported after a moment's consideration. "There's also a third one, but it's in dire need of repairs before it would be fit for carrying anything on a long journey. Generally, we use those two wagons to transport coal from the mines to the coal barns here. Until now I didn't want to spend our limited funds to send it to Cinran for repair since we don't have a wainwright in Tiranat." He added with a frown, "Of course, we did have an actual carriage and one more wagon earlier, but we lost those in the attack on the previous baron."

Kivamus nodded. "Since coal mining has stopped for now," he declared, "we can use those two available wagons for grain transport. And let's use this opportunity to send that damaged wagon for repair as well. Even if it's not ready in time for the first return journey of Pydas, it might help us in the next one."

He continued, "With Helga's wagon added to the mix, that brings us to a total of six wagons for the first trip. But we still need two more to make up the eight-wagon caravan we need. Are there any other wagons readily available in the village itself?"

Duvas shook his head. "Unfortunately, no, my Lord," he replied. "There might be a couple of small carts here and there, but those wouldn't be suitable for such a lengthy journey. They're more for short trips around the village and can barely hold two or three sacks of grain at most."

Kivamus turned his attention back to Pydas. "With six wagons confirmed," he began, his voice firm yet laced with a question, "Pydas, do you think it might be possible to hire two more wagons from Cinran itself? Perhaps speak to some of your contacts there and see if they're willing to rent them out for the journey."

Pydas hesitated for a moment. "I will certainly try, my Lord," he finally responded. "However, renting additional wagons at such short notice would be difficult, especially considering the approaching winter. It wouldn't be easy but I'll ask around, my Lord, to see if some other merchant is willing to rent me his wagon for some time."

A tense silence descended upon the room as everyone absorbed this new information. The fate of Tiranat's survival hung in the balance, resting on the possibility of Pydas' ability to negotiate for those two elusive wagons.

Concern crossed Pydas' face as he continued. "While I am truly grateful, my Lord," he expressed, his voice sincere, "that you've given me this opportunity, there's a reason why traders tend to avoid Tiranat these days."

He paused, his gaze moving towards the windows as if searching for unseen threats. "As you know, my Lord, these forests are a haven for bandits now. And a large caravan like the one we're assembling," he continued with a grave voice, "would be a prime target for the outlaws and a tempting opportunity for plunder."

The weight of his words settled heavily on the room. The idea of their precious grain falling into the hands of bandits was a chilling prospect.

"And that's not all, my Lord," Pydas added. "Even if I manage to find additional wagons in Cinran, securing enough guards or mercenaries to protect the caravan would be another challenge. Not only would it significantly increase the cost of the journey, but with the approaching winter and food shortages plaguing the lands everywhere, those hired guards themselves might be tempted to steal the grain if they think they can get away with it. One can never be sure of the loyalties of those who fight for money, after all."

Kivamus sighed deeply. The challenges seemed to multiply at every turn. "It seems nothing comes easy in these troubled times," he muttered, the weight of his responsibility pressing down on him. But he wasn't one to give up easily.

He leaned forward, "What if I provided you with guards as well? Trained men who could not only drive the wagons but also ensure the caravan's safety. Since their wages would fall on me, you wouldn't have to worry about the additional expense of hiring more drivers or guards in Cinran."

Pydas' eyes widened in surprise. But before he could speak, Duvas interrupted, "But my Lord, we don't..."

Kivamus held up his hand to stop him immediately. "Later, Duvas". Looking back to Pydas, he asked, "What do you think about it?"

"That would be a tremendous help, my Lord," Pydas admitted with relief. "The fewer people we need to hire in Cinran, the better. It would not only reduce costs but also lessen the risk of potential traitors within the group."

"From what I heard earlier, my Lord," he continued, "Levalo ran away from the manor in the morning. Not that I would have wanted to travel with a known poisoner in the first place. So considering the wagon driver I already have, if you could provide six guards, that would give me enough men that we could drive all eight wagons, assuming I manage to secure the two additional ones in Cinran. And the presence of that many trained guards would send a clear message to any bandits who might be scouting near the road that this caravan is not to be trifled with."

"I will make sure of it, Pydas," Kivamus assured him. "Consider it done."

Duvas chimed in, seizing the opportunity. "However, since we're providing the horses for our wagons, as well as three wagons themselves, along with enough drivers who will also act as guards," he pointed out, "wouldn't that entitle us to a discount on the final grain price, Pydas? After all, you'll be saving a considerable amount by not having to hire these yourselves."

Pydas slowly nodded in agreement. "Your point is well made, Mr Duvas. With Tiranat shouldering such a significant portion of the risk, a discount on the grain is certainly merited."

Kivamus boomed, "Excellent! Now, let's finalize the price for the grain and then discuss what you'd be willing to offer for the coal you'll be taking back with you."

Pydas nodded. "Of course, my Lord. Taking into account the guards and wagons you are providing, how about... four gold crowns, five silvers, and four coppers per sack?"

Kivamus started to speak, but Duvas interjected with a shrewd glint in his eyes. "Hold on, my Lord," he interjected, a hint of concern lacing his voice, "the sheer volume of the order is so large, that it surely warrants a more substantial discount." He looked at Pydas. "After all, you will be able to secure a lower price per sack by buying in bulk from Cinran."

Pydas let out a weary sigh. He cast a hesitant glance at Kivamus, silently pleading for understanding.

However, sensing an opportunity to get an even better price, Kivamus readily acknowledged Duvas' point. "Of course, of course." Looking at Pydas, he added, "We are clearly providing the services that you'd otherwise need to hire or rent from Cinran, thus saving you money. And considering the large amount we are ordering..." he trailed off.

Pydas shook his head, a hint of resignation in his eyes. After taking a minute to think, he cleared his throat and continued. "Alright, then," he declared, his voice firm, "but consider this my absolute final offer. Since it's a sizable order, and taking into account everything else, I'm willing to sell you each sack of grain for four gold crowns and five silver coins. It's the very lowest I can go." He added, "Of course, this offer is separate from the agreement we made earlier for you to pay one hundred and one gold crowns for the twenty-two sacks of grain I have already brought here."

He locked eyes with Kivamus, and added, "Honestly, my Lord, even if you choose to order from someone else, I don't think you'll find a better deal in these trying times."

Duvas cast a questioning glance towards him, silently seeking Kivamus' approval. The price, while higher than they'd hoped, was still within reason, especially considering the current conditions of a grain shortage everywhere. And if they continued to push Pydas for an even bigger discount, he was more likely to just leave Tiranat after selling his current stock. The harsh realities of the market meant traders were likely to prioritize larger, more profitable ventures, leaving Tiranat in the precarious position of struggling to find a supplier at all. Kivamus, after a moment of thinking, nodded slowly. The price, while hefty, was necessary to secure the village's survival.

Duvas wasted no time in documenting the agreed-upon price. He scribbled furiously on his parchment with a quill, his brow furrowed in concentration. "At a price of four gold crowns and five silver coins per sack," he muttered to himself as he calculated the total cost, "acquiring one hundred and forty-five sacks comes to..."

He drew in a sharp breath as the final sum appeared on the parchment. "Six hundred and fifty-two gold crowns and five silver coins, my Lord!" he exclaimed, his voice laced with a hint of disbelief. He cast a worried look at Kivamus, leaving the unspoken concern hanging in the air.

Kivamus understood the gravity of their situation. He had brought just twenty-three hundred gold crowns with him from Ulriga, which was everything that Gorsazo had managed to save for the original Kivamus till now. Including the two hundred gold crowns that were remaining in the treasury of the barony, they barely had around twenty-five hundred gold crowns in total. And for buying just four months of grain, they'd have to pay above seven hundred and fifty gold crowns, including the cost of the grain Pydas had already brought here.

Once the coal mines were reopened, they'd have to pay wages to the miners, as well as the looming taxes that Count Cinran was surely going to ask for, if not immediately, then in the next spring for certain. And these were just the immediate expenses that he could think of...

This purchase would leave a significant dent in their treasury, but the alternative, a village starving in the winter, was unthinkable. Taking a deep breath, he turned to the merchant. "Pydas," he began, his tone conciliatory, "given the substantial amount involved, I believe a slight rounding down wouldn't be unreasonable, would it? Let's settle on six hundred and fifty gold crowns."

Pydas, after a moment of hesitation, offered a reluctant nod. "Very well, my Lord," he conceded. "We have a deal. One hundred and forty-five sacks of grain for six hundred and fifty gold crowns. However, with such a large order," he pointed out, "I would require around half of the payment in advance for each trip, to buy the grain swiftly from the suppliers in Cinran. Usually, I would buy it on credit with only a small advance payment that I'd provide myself, but winter is not far away now. So time is of the essence for me to buy and deliver the grain here before the road is blocked with snow, and the advance payment will allow me to secure the grain without any delays."

Kivamus, understanding the logic behind the request, readily agreed. "Of course, Pydas," he confirmed with a nod. "We'll arrange the down payment immediately. Now, with the grain situation settled," he continued, a hint of a smile gracing his lips, "let's discuss what we can offer you in exchange."

A sense of accomplishment, tinged with the lingering worry of the hefty price tag, filled the room. The first hurdle had been cleared. Now, they needed to secure a good deal for the coal Pydas would be transporting back to Cinran.