

Londoner 24

Chapter 24. Two Meals A Day

Pydas nodded in agreement. "Very well, my Lord. Including the three wagons you've provided, I can haul a total of six wagonloads of coal back to Cinran on this trip. Of course, while we'll be taking the damaged wagon with us as well for repairs, it won't be able to carry anything for now."

"Indeed." Kivamus leaned forward, his voice tinged with curiosity. "And how much are you willing to offer for each wagonload of coal?"

Pydas sighed, his brow furrowed in contemplation. "Under normal circumstances, my Lord," he began, his voice laced with a hint of regret, "I would offer twelve gold crowns per wagonload. However, with the rising food costs plaguing the land, the common people, as well as the blacksmiths and the like, are tightening their belts and have less money to spare for coal. That means a decrease in demand, I'm afraid."

He grimaced slightly. "Considering the current market conditions, the best I can offer you this time is eleven gold crowns per wagonload."

The offered price fell far short of Kivamus' expectations. It barely made a dent in their financial woes. "Eleven crowns, hmm...?" he muttered, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "That's a significant drop. Well, at least it's something..."

He forced a smile, masking his disappointment. While the coal sales wouldn't significantly boost their coffers, Pydas would be returning in a week, offering them another chance to sell more coal. He did a quick mental calculation and said, "So, that means you'll be able to transport sixty-six gold crowns worth of coal in your six wagons."

Duvas chimed in with a sly smile. "But Pydas," he pointed out, his tone laced with a hint of challenge, "that price applies when you have to shoulder the cost of hiring guards and renting the wagons yourself. This time around, we're providing both of those services, which translates to more savings for you."

"Wouldn't you agree," he continued, his gaze unwavering, "that this reduction in your costs justifies an increase in the price per wagonload?"

A considering look crossed Pydas's face. "You have a point," he conceded reluctantly. "At most," he finally proposed, "I can increase my offer by three silvers per wagonload of coal."

Duvas nodded in satisfaction. "That's certainly a step in the right direction," he acknowledged. He stroked his beard thoughtfully. "But consider this, Pydas," he continued. "Usually, you'd have several traders competing for the available coal. With fewer buyers this time, you'll be able to purchase a much larger quantity than usual, thus raising your profit."

"Taking all that into account," Duvas concluded, "how about we settle on eleven gold crowns and five silver coins per wagonload of coal? I believe that strikes a fair balance for both parties."

Pydas let out a chuckle. "You drive a hard bargain, Duvas," he admitted with a shake of his head. "Very well, it seems we have a deal. I'll pay eleven gold crowns and five silver coins for each wagonload of coal I take with me."

Duvas, a satisfied smile gracing his lips, looked towards Kivamus, who gave a small nod. "Excellent!" Duvas declared. He reached for his ever-present quill and parchment. "With that settled, let's factor in the cost of the grain you brought with you. Since we'll be filling your wagons with coal after unloading the grain, we'll owe you the difference."

He scribbled some figures on the parchment. "Subtracting the sixty-nine gold crowns you'll be paying for the coal, from the one hundred and one gold crowns we owe you for the grain," he muttered to himself as he calculated, "leaves us with a remainder of... thirty-two gold crowns to pay you, in addition to filling the six wagons with coal after we unload the grain."

Duvas then shifted his focus to the larger grain deal. "Now, as per our agreement," he explained, "you'll be bringing back between sixty and eighty sacks of grain on your first return trip, depending on whether you manage to secure those extra wagons in Cinran." He paused for a moment to scribble on the parchment. "The total cost for that grain, at a rate of four gold crowns and five silver coins per sack of grain, will range between... two hundred seventy gold crowns and three hundred sixty gold crowns."

"Since you asked for half of that in advance," he concluded, "we're prepared to offer you an advance payment of one hundred and fifty gold crowns. How does that sound?"

Pydas drummed his fingers on the table, his brow furrowed in thought. "One hundred and fifty gold crowns, is it?" he muttered to himself. After a minute of consideration, he finally spoke. "That will do," he conceded.

Kivamus, relieved to have reached an agreement, offered a reassuring nod. "Excellent!" he declared. "Dugas will ensure you receive the full amount before you depart from the manor with the wagons."

He leaned forward, his voice laced with a hint of curiosity. "Now, Pydas, before you head off," he inquired, "tell me, what other goods did you bring with you on this trip?"

Pydas shrugged. "Just the usual goods, my Lord," he replied. "A good portion of it is salt, a necessity for any household. And the rest of it are tools - picks and shovels for mining, mostly. I also have a selection of smaller tools - nails, hammers, that sort of thing."

A shadow of concern crossed his face. "However," he continued, his voice dropping to a low murmur, "I heard rumors that the recent heavy rains had caused flooding in the coal mines. With that in mind, I wasn't sure if you'd still be interested in purchasing it."

"Before we discuss anything else," Kivamus interjected, "tell me, when do you plan to set off for Cinran?"

Pydas scratched his chin thoughtfully. "There are still a few tasks I need to attend to before I can leave, my lord," he explained. "Unloading the grain sacks here will take time, and I also have deliveries to make to merchants who purchased from me yesterday. Since my wagons were kept here overnight, I couldn't make those deliveries yesterday as planned."

He chuckled ruefully. "Then, of course, I have to load the wagons with coal. By the time I finish all that, it will likely be well into the afternoon. That would make it too late to depart today. So I plan to make an early start tomorrow morning."

Kivamus nodded in understanding. "Since you'll be here until tomorrow," he continued, "you should meet with me once this evening before you head back to the alehouse for the night. We can discuss those tools you mentioned, and if there's anything else that I want you to bring back from Cinran, we can talk about that as well."

Pydas readily agreed. "I'll be sure to meet with you this evening, my lord."

A wave of satisfaction washed over everyone. The successful negotiation with Pydas, coupled with the prospect of securing enough grain for the winter, brought a much-needed sense of optimism. With a resolute nod, Kivamus rose from his chair and extended a hand towards Pydas. Pydas returned the handshake with a respectful bow. It was a gesture of not only gratitude but also a symbol of a tentative partnership forged in a time of hardship. Together, they exited the manor hall, ready to oversee the next steps, while Helga stayed behind to check on Clarisa and to get started on the afternoon meal.

Outside, a flurry of activity began as Duvas started barking out orders to a group of servants. They moved with practiced ease and started to unload the precious sacks of grain from the wagons, which were kept under a wooden shed near the stables on the left side. Pydas, with a final bow directed towards Kivamus, made his way towards the shed to oversee the unloading process.

Soon, the once-quiet courtyard buzzed with activity as the sacks were carefully transferred from the wagons, loaded onto smaller carts, and then hauled to the grain barn located near the servants' hall, on the right side of the manor. The servants moved with a purposeful movement, a testament to the collective effort required to secure Tiranat's survival through the coming harsh winter.

Kivamus watched the scene unfold with a feeling of quiet satisfaction. As the servants and maid continued their tasks, it was easy to see the relief they were feeling, as the worry lines on their faces eased slowly. The sight of the slowly filling grain barns foretold a future where hunger wouldn't be a constant threat to their survival. The harsh winter may be approaching, but with careful planning and resourcefulness, they might just emerge from it stronger than before.

Gorsazo stood beside Kivamus, a hint of a smile playing on his lips as he observed the activity. Duvas, meanwhile, his voice booming with authority, directed the servants with practiced efficiency. Not far from them, on the left side of the manor grounds, one of the coal barns creaked open on its rusty hinges on Duvas' order. Here, another group of servants prepared to load the coal into the three empty wagons they already had. Seeing the sight of the fully stocked coal barns, brought a sense of relief to Kivamus. Though not their primary concern at the moment, it would still be essential for keeping warm during the cold winter months.

Duvas, catching his breath after issuing a final instruction, approached Kivamus. "My Lord," he began, "I have told them to start loading coal in the two wagons that were used for transporting coal earlier, as well as in the wagon that Madam Helga brought with her."

"Good work, Duvas," Kivamus commended, his voice carrying a hint of appreciation. "The unloading seems to be progressing smoothly. Try to ensure that the servants take breaks when needed. We don't want anyone falling ill due to exhaustion just as we've secured these supplies."

Duvas replied, "Of course, my Lord. I've already instructed them to rotate tasks and take short breaks every hour. The process will take some time, though. Loading coal is a laborious task, and I wouldn't expect them to finish until the afternoon."

A brief silence descended upon them for a while, as they watched the servants working with renewed vigor, their spirits lifted by the sight of the grain that had been so scarce in recent months.

"I must say, my Lord," Duvas remarked, "just a single day ago, I couldn't have imagined that we'd have this much grain going to be stored in our barns, not to mention the grain that is still coming. Truthfully, after being unsuccessful in buying the grain even after trying many times, we had all resigned to the fact that we would have to live with a single meal a day for the winter, if that. However, even though it hasn't even been a day since you arrived here, I can already sense that a lot of changes are coming to Tiranat. You are very different from the previous baron, my Lord, and from most of the nobles that I have known in my life."

He paused for a moment before continuing, "I am not sure if it will be easy to accept all of those changes, like what happened with freeing the slaves, my Lord, but you have my word, that I will be with you every step of the way."

"Thank you, Duvas. However, I have to add," Kivamus remarked, "your negotiation skills were impressive today. I am not sure if we'd have been able to get those prices without you here."

Gorsazo added, "Indeed, my Lord. I sensed that Pydas was trying to take advantage of the situation, being the only trader available to us. But Duvas' sharp negotiating skills made sure that we got the best possible deal under the circumstances. We simply can't afford to be wasteful with our limited money."

Duvas nodded with a hint of satisfaction. "Thank you, my Lord," he replied with a grateful smile. "I've been handling negotiations for many years now, and I've learned to recognize a shrewd businessman when I see one. Pydas was certainly trying to raise his profits, but I couldn't let him exploit our situation."

The doors of the servants' hall creaked open and Madam Nerida, the head maid, emerged from there. Stepping out into the crisp morning air, her eyes widened in surprise as she took in the sight of the numerous grain sacks being carted to the grain barn. Her face, usually etched with worry lines, now sported a radiant smile. She hurried towards Kivamus, her steps lighter than they had been in a long time.

"My Lord!" she exclaimed, her voice brimming with joy, "Did we truly manage to acquire that much grain?"

Kivamus offered her a reassuring smile. "Indeed, Madam Nerida," he confirmed. "And this is just the first shipment. More will be arriving in the coming weeks. You can start preparing two meals a day for everyone in the manor, from today itself."

A wave of relief washed over Madam Nerida's features. The news of additional grain deliveries brought a sense of security she hadn't felt in a long time. "This is wonderful news, my Lord," she exclaimed, her voice filled with gratitude. She paused for a moment, uncertainty clouding her eyes. "But are you certain we will have enough grain for the entire winter, my Lord?"

"While I can't guarantee three meals a day for the entire winter just yet," Kivamus added, "two meals are well within our means for now. If the next grain shipment arrives in a week as planned, then we can go to three meals a day."

Madam Nerida's smile faltered slightly, but her gratitude shone through. "Even two meals a day will make a world of difference, my Lord," she assured him. "After surviving on a meager one meal a day, everyone's morale has been at an all-time low. A second meal will undoubtedly lift their spirits and provide them with the energy they need to carry on."

With a deep curtsy, she expressed her heartfelt appreciation. "Thank you, Lord Kivamus. On behalf of all the residents in the manor, I express our deepest gratitude."

Kivamus, humbled by her words, shook his head in dismissal. "There's no need for thanks, Madam Nerida," he insisted. "It is my duty to ensure the well-being of the manor's inhabitants. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. While this grain allows us to survive the winter, we still need to find a long-term solution to our food shortage problem."

Madam Nerida nodded in agreement, a thoughtful frown replacing her earlier smile. "Indeed, my Lord," she conceded. Pointing to a spot near the eastern walls of the manor, behind the manor house, she added, "While I have managed to grow a small vegetable patch here within the manor walls with the help of some maids, it only provides a limited variety to our meals. The quantity is nowhere near enough to sustain everyone."

She cast a wistful glance towards the dense forests that stretched beyond the manor walls. "If only we could cultivate crops here in Tiranat itself..." she mused, a hint of longing in her voice, "then we wouldn't be at the mercy of traders from Cinran for our survival."