

Londoner 51

Chapter 51. Pinoto

Pinoto, a gaunt figure with eyes that held the weariness of a life spent in struggle, bowed deeply. "Forgive me, milord," he began, "I was unable to report to the manor yesterday. Weakness had kept me confined to my home."

Kivamus placed a reassuring hand on the man's shoulder. "Don't worry about it," he replied. "Besides, I was busy with other things yesterday, so I probably would have sent you back anyway if you'd come. How are you feeling now?"

Pinoto's gaunt face relaxed slightly. "Much better, milord," he replied. "It's not a serious illness or something. We just haven't had enough to eat recently, and my body has grown weak. But my son brought home some grain last night, and I can already feel my strength returning."

Kivamus grimaced, a pang of sympathy shooting through him. The villagers' plight was more dire than he had imagined if some of the older people weren't even able to walk because of weakness and not having enough food to eat. But at least the immediate crisis of hunger was being addressed now, even though the underlying issue of long term food security still remained. "I'm glad to hear it," he said. "We need everyone at their best to rebuild this village."

Pinoto bowed again, "I can't thank you enough milord, for accepting Tesyb as a manor guard."

Kivamus looked at Hudan, who replied in his place. "It wasn't a favor to hire him. He got selected on his own merits," said the guard captain with a shrug.

Pinoto stood straight again with a grin and a twinkle in his eyes. "Oh, I am so glad to hear that! Now at least he'll earn a wage as a guard, instead of wasting his fighting talents for breaking up brawls in the alehouse for free."

Kivamus couldn't help but give a small laugh at that. "Don't worry, I'm sure he'll do well as a guard." He added, "I'm going to take a walk to the south of the village, where I want to build the new farms. Walk with me, while we talk."

Pinoto nodded, and said, "Gladly, milord."

Duvas added, "I'll stay back here, my Lord. We already provided the morning meal to the children and the elderly, but I still have to arrange for the grain and coal we have to provide in the evening."

With a final nod to the old majordomo, Kivamus set off southwards, on the dirt path next to the palisade walls of the manor, with Gorsazo and Pinoto walking beside him. Hudan and the other guards took their previous positions as well, to escort him.

As they walked, Kivamus took the opportunity to ask more questions. "So have you worked as a farmer before?" he asked the ex-farmer.

Pinoto paused for a moment, before giving a nod. "Before moving to Tiranat, my family and I used to live on a farm in the northwest of Cinran. I worked as a farmer there for over two decades," he explained, his voice carrying a hint of nostalgia. "It was a simple life, but a fulfilling one. But then, the farm owner fell on hard times and could no longer afford to pay us, so I had to leave with my family."

He continued with a distant look in his eyes. "We ended up in Cinran for a while, where my daughter still works as a seamstress' helper. But when I heard that coal had been found to the south and they needed workers for the mines, I moved here along with my wife and son. That was more than a decade ago." He gestured towards the east. "I worked in those mines for over a decade, until one day I injured my hand badly enough that I couldn't use the pickaxe anymore."

"I'm sorry to hear about your injury," Kivamus said. "It must have been a difficult time for your family."

Pinoto shook his head. "We managed," he said simply. "Tesyb was still young at the time, but he took my place as a miner and we have been living on his mining wages since then."

Kivamus studied the man for a moment. While Pinoto's recent sickness had made him look gaunt and older, but even with his nearly white hair, he didn't seem that old. It was possible that he was lying about how long he'd worked at that farm, to bluff his way into getting a role for advising him. "How old are you, for you to have been working that long?" he asked.

The question seemed to take Pinoto by surprise. He hesitated for a moment, then replied, "I'm not entirely sure, milord. But I think I must have seen around fifty winters by now. My parents died when I

was young, so I had to start working on that farm - which was close to where I was born, when I was nearly fifteen years old, I think. That's where I met my wife as well, in later years."

He continued, "When my family was forced to leave that farm, I remember that Tesyb was only around seven or eight years old, so I think I must have been around thirty-five years old by then. And then I worked as a miner here for nearly a decade, before Tesyb took over around five years ago."

Kivamus nodded slowly. Those numbers added up. It seemed he wasn't lying about working on a farm for two decades, after all. For a moment, it did feel odd to him that Pinoto didn't remember exactly how old he was, before he remembered that most people in this place must be illiterate, and without good enough recordkeeping, it would be difficult anyway.

From losing his parents at a young age, then having to leave the farm he worked on for most his life, and eventually not being able to work as even a miner after that injury, Pinoto had seen more than his fair share of hardships. But he was a man who had weathered life's storms with a stoic determination.

Nobody said anything for a while, as they walked south next to the palisade wall. Eventually, Kivamus asked, changing the subject, "What did you grow on your farm?"

Pinoto's face brightened as he started talking about farming. "Mostly wheat, milord," he replied. "We had a few fields of oats as well, but wheat was the main crop. Oat is a more hardy crop than wheat, so it can be grown in a variety of soil and climate types. But nearly always, people prefer to eat wheat, which tastes better than oat. However, we still grew some oats there to feed the animals."

Kivamus listened intently, his mind already formulating plans for the future. He needed to understand the agricultural potential of the land, to know what crops could be grown successfully and what challenges they might face.

He said, "You have been living here for more than a decade. So you must have noticed the soil around the village. Which of those crops will be better to grow here?" He added, "I would prefer wheat, because soon we'll have a good stock of it to use as seeds, and if needed, buying more of it from Cinran after the winter wouldn't be a problem. However, I don't know if we can get enough seeds for oats at a low enough price."

Pinoto thought for a moment before replying. "Since the forest land around the village hasn't ever been farmed in the past, it is still rich in humus. Also, we have a loamy soil in this region, so wheat can easily be grown here. So, because of the reasons you mentioned and the quality of soil here, I'd suggest sowing wheat in the farms."

Kivamus nodded, satisfied with the assessment. "Okay, that's good. Wheat it is, then." He continued, "Since you've worked in the coal mines in the eastern hills, you must already know that there is a stream there."

"I've seen it, milord," Pinoto replied. He hesitated for a moment, before adding, "I've also fished there in the past, to add to our diets in lean times." He gazed in the distance for a while, then said, "It flows southwards from between those hills in the east, so I'd say you chose well to build the farms in the south. However, it's still too far away from the village to use it for irrigation directly."

Kivamus considered this, trying to visualize the terrain. "That's true. We might have to dig a small canal to bring the water closer to the farms. I will have to check the slope of the ground from the stream to the south of the village, to see whether the water will flow here by itself, or if I'll have to do something else about it. Leave that to me." As they continued walking, he asked, "Now from what I heard about the weather here, we can't plant any wheat for the winter, right?"

Pinoto nodded. "You might already know this milord, but just like the northern part of Reslinor, it snows every year in the winter even in southern regions of Reslinor, even if the snowfall is not very heavy here in the areas away from a mountain range. That's why all the wheat which is planted in Reslinor is sown in spring and harvested in autumn."

He continued, "In our case, in Tiranat, the snow lasts here for around a month and a half, so it's not feasible to plant wheat in the winter. So, we'll also have to do the sowing of wheat in spring, just like the rest of Reslinor."

"That's what I expected," Kivamus said. "So, we have a few months before we can start sowing."

As they reached the designated area for farming, the scale of the task became increasingly apparent. Trees, their trunks thick and imposing, stood like silent sentinels, their branches reaching for the sky. A group of workers were already working to clear the ground there. While the men were using pickaxes to break the rocks which were present in some places, the women were using baskets to move the smaller stones to a growing pile nearby.

"What about just burning the shrubs and small plants here?" Kivamus asked. He remembered the fertilizing acronym NPK, which stood for the three major elements needed to increase the fertility of plants - Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium, although people here wouldn't know anything about elements and atoms. Soil acidity would also be a factor affected by mixing ash, but he didn't have a way to measure it yet. He added, "It would help to improve the soil quality as well, if we mixed the ash into the soil."

"That's true, but we can only do it after the workers have cut all the trees from the area," Pinoto replied. "But even then, since this area has never been used for farming, there are still many stones here, both small and large, which have to be removed manually. After that is done, and the trees have been cut, we can still burn the shrubs anyway, as needed."

Pinoto added, "Give me a moment, milord," before he started walking again towards the laborers working ahead.