

## Londoner 55

### Chapter 55. Journey

Nurobo had stood up on the seat and seemed to be looking around the area carefully. "Doesn't really matter now. We've nearly reached the inn anyway." He pointed ahead, a little towards the right side. "The inn is ahead of us that way, maybe around five hundred yards away."

As they waited, Nurobo picked up his bow, and grabbed a few arrows in his hands as well, while still looking cautiously around them. "Be ready with your sword. There must be a reason Feroy stopped us here."

Before long, Feroy came jogging back, while waiting to talk with each wagon's occupants for a moment. When he reached their wagon, he said, "We'll stop here for now. After confirming that there is no threat nearby," he added, while pointing towards the left of the road, "we will make a camp in a clearing I know there. For now, move the wagons closer to each other, and then gather around."

With a nod, Feroy moved behind them to talk with the last wagon's guards. Nurobo tugged the reins again to slowly move their wagon closer to the one ahead of them, which was itself doing the same. However, it didn't take long for the wagons to stop again, this time much closer to each other.

Feroy, who was walking nearby while keeping an eye on their surroundings, spoke up, "All but those in the leading and trailing wagons, gather here. The rest of you, stay there to keep an eye around us."

Tesyb and Nurobo got down from their wagon seats, and walked towards Feroy. Other guards, as well as the constantly worried merchant, were moving there as well. Once they were all closer, Feroy spoke again. "Mr Pydas, you stay here for now. I'm making three groups of two men each to check around this area." He pointed at Tesyb and another guard. "The two of you will go to check the area east of the road." Pointing at two others, he said, "You both have been to the inn before, so go and check out the inn carefully. Make sure to see if there are any recent tracks of men walking around there, and if there are any signs of the inn being broken in."

He continued, "Nurobo and Yufim, you will stay here with the rest of the guards. Be ready with your bows. I will take one guard with me to the west to check out a good clearing I know about. Assuming everything is fine, we will camp there for the night."

Yufim asked, "Why aren't we staying in the inn itself? Wouldn't that be safer than camping outside?"

"Because we aren't here to stay safe. We are here to protect the caravan," Feroy chastised the new guard. "That inn is the only recognizable place in this area, and if there are any bandits scouting this area they will certainly keep an eye on the inn. That's why it is better to stay in that clearing nearby." He explained, "Even if it is unlikely that there are any bandits in this area right now, since this road is rarely traveled these days, we just can't take any chances here. Tiranat's survival in the coming winter depends on keeping this caravan safe and returning with all the grain we need. Let's move!"

As ordered by Feroy, they all went to check the perimeter in their allotted directions. Tesyb followed behind an experienced guard who walked towards the east.

A shiver ran down his spine as he stepped off the well-trodden path and into the dense forest, with the shadows growing long in the sunset time. The familiar sounds of the talking guards were quickly replaced by the sounds of nature - the crunching of leaves on the ground, the distant call of a bird.

After they had walked a little further ahead, he heard a sound of twigs crunching under something. The other guard immediately held out his hand in front of Tesyb and whispered, "Wait..."

Tesyb stopped walking at once, slowly moving his hands on the pommel of his sword. His heart pounded in his chest, a mix of anticipation and apprehension. Before long, they saw a fully grown wild boar emerging nearby behind the thick trunk of a fedarus tree. It looked towards them for a moment, but then slowly walked ahead on its own path, leaving them alone for now.

The quick encounter highlighted the danger of the forest, this far away from the village he had been living in for most of his life. His heart was still beating wildly, as he tried to look everywhere at once to see where the next danger would come from. However, the guard beside him seemed unfazed, his steady gaze scanning the surroundings, as they started moving again. Perhaps sensing his unease, he said, "It'll be fine, don't worry. Just keep a sharp eye around yourself."

Tesyb nodded, trying to mask his fear with a nonchalant shrug. Every shadow here seemed to conceal a potential threat, every rustle of leaves a sign of danger. But he refused to let fear dictate his actions. He was a warrior now, and it was his duty to overcome adversity. And this dense forest was just another challenge to conquer. Slowly, he forced himself to relax, to focus on the task at hand, and with renewed determination, he pressed on, his eyes scanning the forest for any sign of danger.

Soon, they had completed the check for their allotted direction and turned back towards the caravan. As they reached back, he saw that the other groups had already returned. Spotting them, Feroy spoke up. "You are back as well. Did you see anything?"

The other guard shook his head. "Saw a wild boar there, but other than that, there is nothing much on that side. Didn't find any tracks of any other men being there recently."

Feroy nodded. "Good. Then this area should be safe for tonight. Let's move the caravan to the clearing in the west." Looking at everyone for a moment, he pointed to an experienced guard and said, "You and Yufim go on and try to see if you can find something for our meal tonight. Try to return by the time it's dark."

"But we still have the rations we were given for the journey. Why do we need to hunt now?" Yufim asked, looking confused.

Feroy scowled at him. "Did you see the food stores overflowing in the manor? We should try to preserve what we can." He berated the young archer further, "You are not a prince on a leisure trip where attendants will carry loads of food for you. In the future whenever you are on a journey, always remember that it is better to preserve any dried meat and use fresh meat and fruits for your meals. You never know when you might need it if your journey lasts longer than expected, or if you get lost and are separated from others, particularly in these forests. Now go on."

Yufim looked sullen and didn't speak any more. With a nod, he and the other guard left again into the forests. Another two guards were sent to look for any edible fruits or nuts from the area.

The rest of them brought the wagons into the clearing on the west side. It was a fairly large grassy area, with space for all the wagons to be parked in a loose circle. Nurobo told Tesyb that the wagons would act as a barricade in all directions, and they can safely shoot arrows from behind it, in case of an attack. The horses had also been tethered to the nearby trees to graze, although they would be brought back inside the circle of wagons when they went to sleep. The experienced guards were putting some traps around the area to catch any small animals in the night. A thin rope with wooden sticks attached to it was tied around the camp as well to serve as an early warning measure.

As it started to get dark, the wind picked up and it started to become a little chilly. Feroy had sent a few new guards to bring some firewood earlier and soon they started a small fire in the middle of the circle. Before long, Yufim and others were back and they had brought two rabbits, and some fruits with them. It wasn't much, but it would still reduce the amount of dried ration they had to use.

While he waited for the food to be cooked, Tesyb was sitting on the north edge of the camp thinking about the day. Soon, he saw Yufim coming towards him, who came and sat on the log that he was sitting on. "Take this." The archer gave a wooden bowl of rabbit stew to him, with another bowl in his hands for himself. He had also brought some bread with him which they had been given in the morning.

As they ate their meal, Yufim said, "Life as a guard ain't that bad, is it?"

Tesyb drank some of the warm stew and said, "Perhaps." This being the first time he had left his parents since he was a child, he missed them. But at least there was the consolation that he would get to meet his sister in Cinran after a long time.

"Feroy gave us the first watch duty," Yufim said, while he dipped his bread in the stew before taking a bite of it. "Someone will come to relieve us in a few hours."

Tesyb nodded. "Will we be the only ones to keep watch?"

"Nurobo said there will be four guards on watch at all times," Yufim replied. "We have to patrol around the camp as well."

Tesyb gave a nod as reply. He looked at the archer again. "Why do you keep asking such silly questions to Feroy?"

"What?" Yufim raised his eyebrows. "Those were real questions! How was I going to know that he wanted fresh meat?"

Tesyb shook his head with a smile. "You are an idiot. I don't know why Hudan even selected you."

Yufim grinned. "Because I am the best archer there is!"

Tesyb laughed at his new friend. "Of course you are..."

~ Kivamus ~

It was late afternoon on the next day, and Kivamus was sitting inside the manor hall. Duvas entered the hall, and said, "My Lord, Taniok has told me that the log mover is ready."

"That's great!" Kivamus commended. "Where is it?"

"He had built it at his shop," Duvas replied, "but I told a couple of workers to move it to the north of the village. But if you want to see it, the log mover should be passing in front of the manor soon."

Kivamus stood up. "Let's take a look at it."

They left the hall and walked to the gates of the manor. Before long, he saw two horses entering the empty area in front of the manor from the left. They were pulling the first machine of Tiranat behind them.

Two huge wooden wheels were connected by an even thicker axle between them. The axle had been wrapped around with a smooth leather, and looked to be waxed as well to reduce the friction on the loops tied to it, just like they had talked about. Taniok, who was walking next to the log mover, barely reached the height of the wheels themselves.

At first glance it didn't look anything special, when Kivamus thought about the huge machines found on Earth for basically everything. But this was not Earth, and it was still much better than dragging the logs flat on the ground.

When Taniok noticed them, he walked towards him and greeted him with a bow. "It is done, milord. It took longer than I thought, but it should work well enough."

"It certainly looks sturdy enough," Kivamus commented, looking at the log mover which had stopped in front of the gates, so that the servants could load more ropes on the horses. "Well done!"

Taniok looked at him with surprise, but then accepted the praise with a nod. "Thank you, milord." He added, "Now that this is completed, I should get started on making planks."

Kivamus nodded. "Certainly. Go on then."

With another quick bow, Taniok left them to get back to work.

Kivamus turned to Duvas. "Hopefully, Pydas will be able to get enough nails from Cinran. Cutting planks has already been delayed long enough."

Duvas gave a nod in reply.

Kivamus continued, "That reminds me, what about the houses which had been burned? Can we salvage anything from them?"