

## Londoner 56

### Chapter 56. Losuvil Vines

"No, my Lord. Any planks in those houses would already be damaged enough in the fires that we can't use them again," Duvas replied.

"No, that's not what I meant," Kivamus said. "We already have more than enough wood here. But what about iron nails? Those should have survived the burning of the houses."

"They would only have survived if iron nails were used there in the first place," Duvas told him. "Since there was no hurry when those houses were being built in the past, only wooden joints were used in all of the houses outside the manor. Iron is quite costly for most of the villagers, and other than the baron himself, people in Tiranat can hardly afford to spend coins on such a thing, if there is a cheaper alternative."

"That's true enough. I thought we might be able to get a head start on stocking up on the nails." Kivamus turned back and walked towards the manor hall, and his gaze fell on the barns which held their fast shrinking reserves of grain. "Feroy and others should reach Cinran by this evening, right?"

Duvas nodded. "If everything went well, then yes."

"Let's hope they are successful," Kivamus said. "We really need that grain."

Soon, he saw Madam Helga walking towards him. As she reached him, she said, "I wanted to talk to you my Lord."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Clarisa had been complaining again about some pain in her stomach, so in the morning I went for a walk to the places where the workers are cutting the trees, to see if there were any herbs which I could use." Helga added, "While I didn't find anything of use there, I did find a vine of losuvil towards the eastern hills."

Seeing Kivamus' confused look, she explained, "It's a plant whose leaves can be crushed and given to people to reduce pain. It even reduces the fever, as long as the fever is not too high."

"That's very interesting," Kivamus said. In his free time, he had been thinking about many things from his life on Earth for which he could find something similar in this world, and this certainly seemed like such a thing. While he was hardly a chemist, he remembered that it sounded similar to how aspirin was used by people on earth before it was isolated as a compound.

"Have you never heard about it, my lord?" Helga asked curiously.

"Well... I rarely got sick back in Ulriga," Kivamus said, thinking about the past memories of this life, "so I never really thought about it." He asked, "Well, how do you use it?"

Helga replied, "We crush the leaves of losuvil vines in a mortar and pestle along with some water to make a paste, and give it to the person while it is still fresh. Preferably the leaves should have been plucked within the past few hours, or it starts to lose its effect quite fast." She stared at Duvas. "Did you not know that a losuvil vine was there? You should have told me so I could give it to Clarisa earlier."

"I had seen a few vines of losuvil there in the past, but you must already know that it is rarely found. The few vines which we had found in the past had already been used up by the villagers." Duvas added indignantly, "If I had known that there was still a losuvil vine there, I would have been the first to tell you about it!"

"Of course you would have." Helga sighed. "I shouldn't have said that. It's just that seeing a child in pain makes me want to do everything to help them."

"I understand that," Duvas said hotly. "But you shouldn't be so quick to blame others. I don't want to see Clarisa in pain any more than you do!"

"Didn't I apologize for that already?" Helga retorted. Hearing their raised voices, Sryne and Gorsazo, who had been passing nearby, walked towards them as well.

"It's okay, calm down both of you," Kivamus tried to placate them. "At least it's good that you found something like that here." He asked, "How costly is that plant?"

"Usually I had to spend a lot of money to buy it from Cinran in the past to give to Lucem when he got sick," Helga replied. "In Cinran, it used to cost above six silvers for a single use, which consists of around a dozen full-sized leaves of losuvil."

"That's... quite high," Kivamus said. It was nearly a week's worth of wages for a laborer. "Is it not commonly found?"

Helga shook her head. "Losuvil vine grows in relatively cold places, under the shade of bigger trees. But it is not common at all. In Cinran, there are a few herbalists who cultivate it there to provide for the people living there, otherwise you only see it by chance in the wild."

"Hmm..." It seemed that the availability of those leaves was already low but the demand for such a fever and pain-reducing plant would certainly be high in this world where hygiene and sanitation were non-existent. Thus the prices were surely going to be high.

He remembered Gorsazo telling him that his wife had died from fever in the past. He asked him, "Were losuvil leaves not available for your wife, Gorsazo?"

Gorsazo got a far away look in his eyes. He replied after a moment, "They were not found in the village in the north of Ulriga where my family lived, my Lord. It was before the time I started working in the Ulriga Palace and the prices for losuvil leaves were high enough that I could barely afford it." He gazed at the ground. "I did send my eldest son to buy more of it from Ulriga itself after borrowing more money from my neighbors, but my wife passed away before he returned."

Kivamus didn't know what to say to that. Without an easy availability of losuvil extract, and at a cheap enough price to be affordable to even the common people, many lives would have been lost in this world, and would still be lost in the future.

After a while, he asked Helga, "Would that vine be enough for Clarisa?"

Helga nodded. "It was a small vine, and I had to pluck nearly half of its leaves to give to her today. I will have to use the remaining leaves again tomorrow, but we won't be getting any more leaves from that plant after that for a long time."

"Hmm... But if the conditions are right for that vine to grow near the eastern hills, there might still be more of those losuvil plants there," Kivamus said. He asked Duvas, "Have you ever sent a few men to search those hills for that plant?"

"Not really," Duvas replied. "We usually looked for that vine only when we needed it in the past, and often we found a vine in the east."

Kivamus thought that it was possible that losuvil was not very common, but if they searched well enough in the eastern hills, they might still find more of it. He asked Helga, "What about storing it? Can't you dry it after crushing the leaves, to use it in the future?"

"No, my Lord. It doesn't work if we store it like that," Helga replied, "so we have to use the leaves soon after plucking them. I had to give them to Lucem many times in the past when he got sick, so I did try to store them after drying. But it has nearly no effect if used after around a day or two of plucking the leaves."

Kivamus nodded. It was possible that the losuvil plant contained a precursor compound to acetylsalicylic acid, which was aspirin. But there had to be a way to isolate that compound from the leaves, which would prevent the medicine from going bad within two days. He asked Helga, "Did you try mixing it with something before drying it, or maybe even after that?"

Helga looked surprised. "Why would I do that, my Lord?"

Kivamus sighed internally. The local people here must have never heard of the word experiment. He tried to explain, "When we mix two things, many of their properties change from what they were earlier. While I can't say what we might need to do for this, but that's why you need to experiment with it. That means trying new things again and again based on an assumption, until you either prove or disprove it. And if it doesn't work, then you come up with a new assumption, and try it again."

He continued, "For example, you could try mixing the crushed leaves of losuvil with some other liquid like alcohol, before drying it. Or you can try boiling it until the water dries a little and only a dry paste is left, and then maybe you can add something else in it and repeat the process. You can even try adding some other leaves or plants in it at any step of the process, to discover a way to keep the herbs effective after those two days."

Helga seemed lost by this point. "Uh..."

However, Syryne spoke up, "I'll do it, my Lord. I have enough free time that I can try doing such... experiments. But we don't have enough losuvil leaves to try it."

"That's true," he said. "When the guards have returned from Cinran, we will try to send a few of them to scout in the eastern hills for this plant. It would be a good idea to locate a decent source for this vine, in case we need it again in the future."

After thinking for a moment, he asked Helga, "Did you also find any edible berries, nuts or fruits there? Or any other herbs which we can use?"

Helga shook her head. "I didn't go that far away from the manor. I didn't think it was safe enough to go inside the forest yet."

Duvas said, "We have already scoured the nearby areas of the village in the past few months for anything which we can eat. However, it is true that because of the constant danger of bandits and wild beasts, we never really went too deep inside the forests."

Kivamus gave a sigh. The past few months were difficult enough for the villagers, that they would have already searched for any edible things found nearby. He looked at Helga. "Even so, you should go with a few other maids to where the villagers are working every day to look for any such plants. As long as you don't go too far from them, it should be safe enough in the daylight. Then as they keep cutting new areas of the forest, you can keep going further as well. If we can find some berries, mushrooms or even some edible roots to add to our diets, it wouldn't just fill our stomachs, it would also keep our diets varied and healthier. And it would be a good idea to locate such shrubs in advance, so we can tell the workers not to cut them."

Helga nodded. "I'll do that, my Lord." She added, "I have to give another spoonful of losuvil extract to Clarisa, so I should leave now." With that, she and Syryne returned back.

In the evening Cedoron met Kivamus again near the gates of the manor. This time he had brought four machetes with him.

Hudan, who had been talking with a guard nearby, picked up one of the machetes, testing its weight. He tried to swing it around a few times as well, trying to use it as a makeshift sword. He looked at Kivamus after he was done with it. "These are heavier than swords, but not unwieldy at all."

Cedoron gave a smile. "I do have experience in making swords, so I kept that in my mind while forging these, even though I have made the machetes a lot more top-heavy than a sword would be, based on what they will be used for."

Hudan continued with a nod, "While I wouldn't want to use these as a sword, but in a pinch, the workers can still use it as an improvised weapon once they get a hang of using them."

"That's true," Kivamus said. "In that case, it would be better to let a few particular workers use it regularly, instead of all of them using it whenever they need it. This way they would become habitual of using it, and if you give them a few tips about the basics of fighting, they can act as a first line of defense in case a wild beast attacks the workers."

Hudan nodded. "That's a good idea, my Lord! Tomorrow, I will go myself to where the workers are cutting trees to tell all of them to give it a try, and once I have found a few people who can use it easily, I will tell Yeden to give all the work of using machetes to only those workers. While I won't have time to train them regularly, I can still give them a few suggestions for the basics."

Soon, he saw Yeden, the foreman of the northern forest clearing, walking inside the gates as well. When he noticed Kivamus and others, he came towards them. "Today's work is done, milord." Looking at the blades in the hands of Hudan, he asked, "Is that the machete you were talking about?"