

Londoner 60

Chapter 60. Isuha

The shop owner shook his head immediately. "No, as you can see, I'm the only one who works here. But you might want to ask in the other seamstress' shop, a few doors ahead in the alley."

Nodding his thanks, Tesyb hurried outside, this time with a spring in his steps. Before long, he saw another similar sign on the wooden walls of a two story building. Entering inside, he found a small, cramped shop, with bolts of cloth and unfinished garments kept everywhere. This time he saw an old woman sitting near the store counter, without any customers in the shop, and he asked the same question again.

The old woman gazed at him with beady eyes. "What is it to you, lad?"

"She's my sister," Tesyb replied. "I want to meet with her."

He had to wait until the old woman made up her mind, after staring at him for a while. Then she hollered back towards a set of stairs going to the upper floor, "Isuha!"

A woman shouted back, "What is it, you old hag? Let me work in peace!"

Tesyb couldn't help but smile after hearing Isuha's voice after more than a year.

"That brat!" the old woman muttered, "Young people these days have no respect for their elders..." She shouted again, "Get down here. There is a young lad here saying he is your brother."

Immediately, there was a sound of feet thundering on the floor above, and Isuha came running down the stairs. She had cut her black hair shorter, with it barely reaching her shoulders now. There was also a wooden stick in her hands, probably for measuring cloth. She was still just as beautiful as always, although she did look a little thinner than she was when he had seen her the last time.

"Tesyb!" she shouted while dropping that stick, and jumping into his arms with a huge smile and hugging him.

Tesyb couldn't help but laugh at her enthusiasm as he hugged her back. She was still the same, even if she looked a little different now.

After a while, she took a step back and looked at him. "How are you here? I never thought I'd see you in Cinran!"

"It's a long story, but I'm only here for today."

Isuha looked at the store owner and said, "I am taking my afternoon break now, 'kay? I'll be back soon." Then she held the arm of Tesyb and tugged him outside without waiting for the reply of the old woman.

Tesyb said with a grin, "I can walk myself, you know? I'm not a child anymore."

"Shut up, I'm still older than you!" Isuha retorted, as she pulled him outside the shop.

"Yeah, yeah, I know you're getting old, no need to keep reminding me," Tesyb quipped.

Isuha glared at him as they reached the alley. "Want another beating? It's been a while since the last one, hasn't it?"

"I'd rather not," Tesyb replied with a laugh. "How have you been?"

She looked down for a moment, before speaking, "I'm okay. How are ma and pa? I heard that the baron of the village had been killed in an ambush a while ago. How are things there now?"

Tesyb noticed the pause before she spoke. "They are okay now. And the village has a new baron, who's named Lord Kivamus. He's nearly the same age as me, actually." He looked around them to confirm that there wasn't anyone else nearby, before he said in a low voice, "Don't tell it to anyone but I've heard that he is actually the son of the Duke of Cinran."

"What? Why would the Duke send his own son to such a place?" She whispered, "Is he a bastard child of the Duke?"

Tesyb shrugged. "I wouldn't know about that." He paused for a moment, thinking about the recent past, and said, "The past few months after the previous baron was killed were... difficult. No grain caravans were coming there because of a threat of another ambush. There was even a bandit raid in the village itself, where they burnt a third of the village, including our house there."

Isuha immediately had tears in her eyes. "Are ma and pa really okay?"

"Don't worry," Tesyb reassured her, while holding her shoulders. "They are completely fine now, and nobody was killed in that raid."

"But... I still should have been there..." she said while wiping her eyes with her sleeve.

"No, no, it's fine. The one thing that puts them at ease is that you are safe within the walls of Cinran here."

"Is the situation in Tiranat better now?" she asked.

"It's still not fully normal, but things are improving. One thing I can say for sure is that whatever the reason may have been for Lord Kivamus to be sent to the village, he is certainly a good person, who really wants to take care of the villagers, unlike the previous baron." He continued, "The coal mines were flooded a while ago, so there wasn't any work to be found in the village before he arrived. But now he has arranged a food for work program for the villagers, and for those who can't work, including the orphans and the elders, he is providing them free meals twice a day." He added, "In fact, that is the reason why I am here. I'm escorting a caravan to bring more grain to the village from Cinran."

"Escorting?" Isuha looked surprised. "Don't you work as a coal miner...?"

"Like I said, things are changing there. Now I am a guard in the baron's manor!" he told her proudly.

"What? For real?" Seeing him nod in reply, she hugged him again. Stepping back she looked at him from head to toe. "Wow! My little brother is a manor guard now?"

Tesyb grinned. "I did tell you, I am not a child anymore." He asked, "How are things with you here?"

"Well..." she trailed off. "Things could certainly be better. With the rising grain prices everywhere, people are barely buying any new clothing these days, so we don't get as much work as we did earlier." She looked towards the shop that she worked at with a smile. "But the seamstress who owns this shop is a good person, even if she is a cranky old lady now. She ensures that I have enough to eat, even if the shop's income is much lower now."

"Well, if things get any worse, you always have an option to come back home. The baron is building new housing as well for those who lost their houses." He grinned. "And I am a manor guard now, so I get paid more than what I was paid as a miner. I'll look after you. And ma and pa would be happy to see you as well."

She gave a genuine smile. "Well, you have grown up now, I'll accept that much." She grinned and rising on her toes, she bopped him on the head. "But you'll still be a big baby in front of me!"

Tesyb couldn't help but laugh after hearing that.

"What?" Isuha asked with confusion.

"Nothing. There is another new guard, Yufim, who's the same age as me, and acts childishly even now. Hearing you say 'big baby' reminded me of him." He laughed again. "Earlier he was whining that he had to wait outside, while I got to see the town."

Isuha laughed as well after hearing that. "Well, when do you have to leave Cinran?"

"Tomorrow morning, before dawn I think," he replied. "But I have to get back to others now. This marketplace is huge and searching this shop took longer than I thought. I had only gotten permission to leave for half an hour but it has already been longer than that."

"But we only just met..." Isuha spoke, her eyes glistening again.

"I would have liked to stay longer as well, but duty calls." Tesyb added, "But on the bright side, I might be back again after a week, if I'm selected for escort duty again."

"What? Really?" she asked happily.

"Yup! The baron has planned for two trips to Cinran to buy grain, before the route to Tiranat closes due to snow. I can't promise it yet, but I will try to get selected again for escorting the caravan. And if I am indeed chosen, then I'll try to meet you again that day in around a week." He continued regretfully, "I really should return back now."

Isuha gave a reluctant nod, wiping her face with her sleeves again. "Well, go on then. I don't want you to get fired as a guard."

Tesyb didn't want to leave this soon as well, but if Feroy returned to others before he had reached back, he would get a scolding for sure. After another quick hug, he watched as Isuha walked towards the shop and stood near the door, looking at him sadly.

He waved at her again, and turned back, not wanting her to see his own tears. She was already living alone in such a big town, and he didn't want her to worry about him as well. Walking back through the vast marketplace towards the alley where the wagons were parked, he wiped his eyes. Even though it was a short meeting, now he would be able to tell their worried parents that she was doing okay here.

As he made his way back through the crowded market, a small procession caught his attention. A knight, fully clad in iron armor, slowly rode down the market square, his horse's hooves clattering on the cobblestones. Behind him, a trio of liveried guards escorted a group of filthy, manacled prisoners, their faces etched with despair. They must be a group of slaves, probably being taken for an auction. He had only heard tales in the past of such things happening regularly in big towns and cities, but seeing humans being taken to be sold like animals was a sobering experience in person.

He shook his head, and continued walking towards the alley where the grain wagons were parked. He was probably already late, and he couldn't afford to worry about anyone else.

~ Kivamus ~

~ Baron's manor, Tiranat ~

The next day, Kivamus was sitting in the manor hall after breakfast with others.

Gorsazo remarked, "The caravan has been out for four days now."

Hudan nodded. "If everything went well, they would be leaving Cinran today."

The door opened, and a servant walked inside. "Milord, Pinoto is here to talk to you."

"Let him in," Kivamus ordered the servant.

Soon, Pinoto, the ex-farmer, came inside. For a moment, he seemed to be lost in looking around the plush comfort of the manor hall, before he gazed at Kivamus and said, "Milord, I would like to get your permission for something before I proceed."

"What is it?" Kivamus asked him with curiosity.

"Since yesterday," Pinoto began, "the laborers working in the south of the village have been provided new axes, and they have started cutting trees there as well. But the tree-stumps are still standing there, and we need to remove them to clear the area for making new fields for farming there. However, we don't have any horses there to pull out the stumps."

Kivamus looked at Duvas. "We should still have two horses remaining in the manor, right?"

"Indeed, my lord," the majordomo replied. "Would you like me to provide those horses to Pinoto?"

However, before Kivamus could respond, Hudan spoke up. "I would advise against that, my Lord. Those are the last two horses we have here, and I would like at least one of them to remain in the manor, so that a pair of guards could be quickly sent to the location of any beast attack on the villagers."

Kivamus nodded. Until the caravan returned with eight of their horses, they would remain short on them. "What about the two horses in the north? Can we send them to the south to help Pinoto?"

Duvas shook his head. "Those horses are already being used there all day to pull the log-mover, so that they can clear the area for the longhouses. But we could still keep one of the horses in the manor, like Hudan suggested, and send the other one to help Pinoto. A single horse wouldn't be enough to pull out the stumps, but it should still help them in moving the logs, until the second log-mover is built by Taniok."

"Okay, do it then," Kivamus said to Duvas.

"Even a single horse would be helpful, milord," Pinoto remarked with a grateful nod. He continued, "But there is another way to remove the stumps. That is what I wanted to get your permission for."
