

Londoner 67

Chapter 67. Safety In Anonymity

Feroy gave a shrug. "It wouldn't really make a difference, I'd say. We are also using the three wagons from Pydas along with the horses to pull them. If we decided to do everything ourselves, we would need to rent at least three more wagons from Cinran. And that is unlikely - believe me, I asked around a lot in the town. And even if we were able to get enough wagons, we'd have to pay for them and their horses which would also raise our cost. And like I told earlier, the grain prices are rising as well. So even if we buy everything ourselves, the cost would be similar, if not a little higher than what Pydas promised us."

"Let it be for now," Kivamus said. "Winter is coming soon, and we don't have time to take any risk here. With Pydas, at least we are assured of getting the grain in a week, otherwise we might not even be able to hire more wagons in time anyway." He added, "And there is another reason I was thinking about earlier, for us to buy the grain through a merchant instead of doing it ourselves - even if we had to pay a little more for it."

Seeing the curious looks of others, he explained, "We are buying a very large quantity of grain, and from what Feroy reported, Pydas even had to buy the grain from a few different shops, because no single shop had that big an amount ready to sell. That kind of purchase is quite noticeable and if we bought it in the name of Tiranat, or even in my name, the news would travel around. With Pydas, it is different because he is a known merchant in Cinran, and it is normal and perhaps even expected for him to buy wagon loads of grain just before winter - to sell wherever he wants to make a quick profit before he returns home towards Ulriga for the winter. That wouldn't be very unusual for any onlookers - and they would forget about it soon enough." He gave a smirk, "After all, it's just a merchant trying to make profit."

He looked at Feroy. "You made a good decision there to enter the town with only a single guard per wagon. This way any onlookers or scouts there wouldn't consider it to be very noticeable - every wagon needs a driver after all. So, all they would see is that a merchant hired a few extra wagons and bought a lot of grain to make a quick profit before winter."

He continued, "We still don't know who it was that tried to kill me twice, and while they would eventually realize that they were unsuccessful - even if the news would travel slowly in the winter - they might just give up after a failed attempt. But if a small, poor village like Tiranat makes such a big purchase itself, that kind of news could easily reach the ears of such dangerous people. That's why we shouldn't buy such a big amount ourselves. Purchasing everything through a middleman like Pydas gives us some anonymity here - and that anonymity would go a long way to keep the village safe in these dangerous times."

"That does make sense," Gorsazo said after a moment.

Kivamus nodded. "You know well enough that it's not a good idea for us to be noticed by such people any time soon. As it stands right now, the village is basically indefensible - we don't even have a village wall right now! And of the barely two dozen guards we have - half of them had probably never picked up a sword before this week."

"True enough, my Lord," Hudan said. "While I'm doing everything to get them up to shape, it will still take time. The village lost most of its stored grain and a third of its houses in a small attack by less than a dozen bandits. As it stands, the village is completely unprepared to defend against another attack right now, so we really cannot afford to make any new enemies right now."

"Certainly. That's why we will continue to buy everything through Pydas for now," Kivamus said.

An inner door opened, and Syryne returned with a mug of ale. After giving it to Feroy, who gave a nod of thanks, she returned to sit at the long dining table with Lucem and Clarisa, who seemed to be playing a word game amongst themselves verbally.

Feroy took a long sip of the ale, and swirled the mug in his hands for a while. "There is also another thing, milord. We need spears, and quickly." He explained, "We had an attack by two wild boars on the way. Thankfully the boars were younglings, otherwise it could have ended badly. But without any spear with us, we were barely able to deal with them, especially with half of our guards being newbies. Would it be possible for the blacksmith to make some spears for us before we leave? If we are attacked by such wild beasts again, having some spears with us would be very helpful."

"Why didn't you take any spears with you on the first trip?" Kivamus asked.

Duvas gave the reply in Feroy's place. "We don't have any more of them in the manor, my Lord. We lost a lot of our weapons in that ambush on the previous baron. And until now, with only a dozen guards in the manor before you arrived here, along with a serious shortage of money, I didn't see the need to have more spears made."

"That's alright, we can do it now," Kivamus said. He looked at Feroy. "How many spears do you need? Tell me the minimum number that you absolutely need."

Feroy didn't take long to reply. "While having a spear for each of the dozen guards would be perfect, I know the blacksmith might not be able to make that many of them." He added, "Giving a sword to the new recruits helps our deception to show them as being well-trained guards to any bandit scouts on the roads, but they aren't actually trained at all. So even if we gave all of them new spears, they still wouldn't be able to do anything with those spears in an actual attack with a wild beast, you know? I'd say if we could get just six spears - for the trained guards who already have some experience with it, it should be good enough for now."

Kivamus nodded. "Earlier you said that you weren't able to buy everything. Did you at least get some iron ingots?"

Feroy replied, "We got everything milord, everything but iron-nails. No blacksmith there had enough stock of them on such a short notice. So I told Pydas to buy what little amount of it was available there, and we bought more iron-ingots with the remaining money. That's why I had to reduce the number of grain sacks by three - to accommodate those ingots while remaining within the limits of what the wagons could carry."

Kivamus exhaled. "A shortage of iron nails too, huh? And we are already late in cutting up planks for the longhouses." He shook his head in frustration, "Well, we'll discuss more about that tomorrow after Pydas comes here to tell us how many iron nails he brought. For now," he looked at Duvas, "go and send a servant to the blacksmith right now to tell him about this, so that he'd know that he needs to start working to make six spears first thing in the morning. He has all of tomorrow to finish it, since the caravan will leave the day after tomorrow. Tell him that he just needs to make the spearheads - which shouldn't be that difficult if he has made anything like that in the past, and we will take care of finding six good enough shafts for them."

Duvas got up from his armchair. "I will send a runner to Cedoron immediately, my Lord," he said and exited the manor hall.

Kivamus looked at the guard captain, "Hudan, you must have experience with spears, so it is your responsibility to find enough good shafts for the spears tomorrow. You can use any servants or workers to send them around the village to look for such straight wooden sticks."

Feroy drawled between his sips of ale, while hunched up on his chair, "I could do that as well, milord..."

Kivamus smiled. "You look like you need some rest, Feroy. You can take tomorrow off to get a breather, since you'll have to lead the guards again on the next trip. Of course, I won't stop you if you feel up to it

and want to help Hudan in that, since he also has to train the guards as well. And one of you should visit Cedoron take a look at the design of the spearheads."

As Feroy was going to speak again, Hudan stared at him, making the ex-mercenary shut up. "I'll do that, my Lord." He tilted his head towards Feroy. "This guy doesn't know that he can depend on others sometimes."

"Shut up..." Feroy chided. "I'd like to see you survive for long while living between mercenaries if you have a habit of depending on others."

"You aren't between mercenaries right now, are you?" Hudan asked with raised eyebrows and a smile.

Feroy just stared into his mug of ale, without giving a reply.

The next day, Kivamus was up early, and after his breakfast with others, he left the manor hall to take a look at everything. Coming outside, he saw that the sun was just rising above the Arakin mountains in the east, but it didn't do anything to help the morning chill he felt.

"Damn! It's getting cold now," he muttered after reaching the courtyard, while rubbing his hands together. He could even see his breath in front of him, and he estimated that outside the warmth of the fireplace in the manor house, it must surely be under ten degrees celsius now in Tiranat.

"That it is, my Lord, although today seems to be particularly cold," Duvas said, while tightening up his own fur-coat around himself. "At least it isn't windy these days."

"I have to say, after my whole life spent in or near Ulriga, I am not accustomed to winters this cold," Gorsazo said while blowing onto his hands to warm them up. "And the real winter hasn't even started here."

"This is our home now, Gorsazo, we have to adjust to life in Tiranat now. It should still warm up when the sun rises higher in a few hours, since the weather seems to be clear these days." Kivamus looked at Hudan. "Where is Feroy? He didn't come for breakfast either."

Hudan snorted. "Must be sleeping off yesterday's binge somewhere."

Kivamus frowned. It wasn't a good thing if the guard who was responsible for keeping the whole caravan safe was such a big drinker. "Are you sure we should send him to lead the caravan if he has a habit of getting drunk like that?"