

Londoner 68

Chapter 68. The Icy Breath Of Winter

Hudan looked surprised for a moment, before he said, "There is nothing to worry about, my lord. He never drinks when on duty - you can trust Feroy about that. I have known him for years now, and he is a responsible person - at least when he needs to be. Yesterday's drinking was more of an exception, after a week of abstinence."

"That's good to hear," Kivamus said. "I was worried that he'd be like that even when we were entrusting him with the safety of the caravan."

"Don't worry, my lord." Hudan continued, "Like he told us yesterday, Feroy didn't have a drop of ale while on the journey, so he needed a few drinks yesterday to uh... catch up, but he will be fine to leave tomorrow. He's not even a big drinker, and while he is a few years older than me, he can hold his ale better than anyone else I've known."

"Of course he can, he used to be a mercenary, after all," Duvas derided. "Drinking is all they do, if they are not out plundering and killing people. I still can't bring myself to trust him."

Hudan frowned at the majordomo. "He is not like that, Mr Duvas, not anymore. I will gladly trust him with my life any time." He continued, "It is difficult for him to trust anyone after half his life spent between cutthroat mercenaries, so it is very rare for him to drink that much. In the past few years when we lived at Madam Helga's Inn, there were only the two of us to ensure the safety of the inn and Madam Helga's family, so we had to be alert all the time."

He added, "I don't think he has ever lived in a place like this." Hudan gestured with his hands around the manor, "Within the safety of the manor, with palisade walls around us, I think he feels like he can finally let go a little and relax once in a while. And unlike the rest of us, he was sent out to escort the caravan the very next day after we arrived at Tiranat, and he's been out for the whole week since then. So yesterday was the first time he must have felt that he could ease up a little. Don't count just a single night of drinking against him, Mr Duvas."

Duvas harrumphed and was going to say something again, but Kivamus interrupted him. "Let it go, Duvas. If Hudan says we can trust him, then I believe him. We can talk about it in the future if Feroy does it again. Until then, we have other things to worry about."

"As you say, my Lord," Duvas acknowledged.

They walked further and saw that the wagons, which had been moved to a wooden shed near the stables on the left side of the manor, perhaps yesterday itself, were already abuzz with activity. A group of servants were hard at work there to unload the precious sacks of grain from the wagon to smaller carts, which could only carry two sacks at a time. A couple of them were hauling a full cart towards the grain barn on the right side of the manor. A guard with an iron gray mane of hair was there to oversee the process.

Noticing Kivamus' gaze, Duvas said, "Yesterday, I told the servants to start unloading the wagons from the early morning itself. Kerel is there to keep an eye on everything." He added, "The unloading should be completed in a few hours, and after that they will start filling the wagons with coal from the barns, to finish it before evening."

As Kivamus watched the process with quiet satisfaction, he remembered the dwindling finances of the manor. Buying even this much grain had cost a lot, and he was already dreading the coming conversation with Pydas to settle the prices with him, as well as to provide him the advance for the next trip. However, as he walked closer, he noticed something else as well. While the servants looked quite happy to see that much grain in the manor, which was probably for the first time in months, they seemed to be shivering in the chill of the early morning air. Their clothing didn't seem warm enough for this weather either.

"Duvas," he began, "the servants have to work in such cold weather here. Why haven't you done something to make the place warmer? Putting a couple of coal braziers under the wagon-shed would keep the place warm enough for the servants. Don't we have any of those here?"

Duvas looked at him in surprise for a moment, before he shook his head. "I apologize, my Lord, it was my fault. I should have anticipated your request." He explained, "The previous baron did not like to waste coal unless it was really necessary. So while he allowed the servants and maids to use coal for heating inside the servants hall - at least when it was snowing outside, he didn't like it when they burned coal outside, saying that it was a waste to try to heat the air outside."

Kivamus just grimaced thinking about that miserly bastard. "No need to apologize, Duvas. But from now on, tell the servants that they are allowed to use as much coal as they need for heating. We can always dig more coal from the mines, but we can't replace a life! It'd be ridiculous if we allow someone to get sick or even die from the cold when our barns are overflowing with coal! Do we have any braziers or not?"

Duvas nodded apologetically. "We do have a few of them kept in storage to use inside the buildings. I will tell someone to bring them out and light them up wherever needed." Then he walked towards the servants and started giving them orders.

As the servants understood what the new orders were, they couldn't help but look at Kivamus in surprise. There was an undeniable happiness on their faces, and after Duvas turned back, they seemed to start working with renewed enthusiasm.

Soon, Duvas returned towards Kivamus and others, and said with a smile, "I have ordered them to bring the braziers here. They told me to thank you for this kindness as well."

Kivamus just gave a nod. "It's the least we can do for them if they are out working in the cold without even proper clothing. Do we have any extra fur coats?"

Duvas shook his head. "No, my Lord. The ones we did have are already being used by those living in the manor house."

"Okay. We will think of what we can do to provide proper clothing to them in the future," Kivamus added. "Now that it is already getting cold, the situation must be the same in the village, isn't it? It may be fine when the sun is up, but at least in the mornings and evenings, we need to provide some braziers for the villagers working in the northern and the southern areas. Maybe a brazier for the market square in the village as well. We need to prevent anyone from getting sick, if we want them to keep working."

Gorsazo looked at him quietly for a moment. "That... is a good idea. It would further delay the construction of everything if the workers fall sick in this weather."

"I have to say, my Lord, I'm really glad that you are thinking about everyone in the village," Duvas said with a smile. He recalled, "In the previous winters, it wasn't unusual to hear the news of someone dying because of the cold every few days. Those were people I had known for years, but I couldn't go against the Baron's orders myself to provide coal to them for heating... or he would have..." he trailed off and shook his head with a grimace.

Kivamus scowled after hearing about the previous baron's penny-pinching. He couldn't imagine how a person could be so cold-blooded to let the villagers who depended on him freeze to death, when the

barns were overflowing with coal. This was a coal mining village, dammit! How could the previous baron be greedy about coal in a coal mining village, especially when people's lives depended on it? At least he could take solace in the fact that the world was rid of such a person now! Hah! Thank the bandits, or whoever it was who killed the greedy bastard.

He began, "We can't do anything about the past, but I won't let anyone freeze in the village from now on if there is anything I can do about it! Now that we have managed to provide temporary housing for every homeless person, along with enough grain and coal for them, people freezing to death shouldn't be a problem this year. But we still need to do something for the villagers who are working in this cold."

"We only have a few braziers here though," Duvass said, "and I have told the servants to put those at both the gates of the manor, as well as at this wooden shed. We don't have more of them to provide to the villagers."

"Braziers are a necessary thing in this weather if we want the villagers to keep working in this cold." Kivamus added, "Cedoron should be busy making spearheads for today, but once he's done with that, let him know that I want half a dozen braziers from him. Nothing elaborate, just a simple iron stand which does the task. Now that Pydas is back, he will have more than enough iron for it. He should be able to make them within a day, so it shouldn't push back the production of tools too much."

"I'll let him know, my Lord," Duvass replied with a nod.

"Good. That reminds me, what about the second log mover?" Kivamus asked. "When will it be finished?"

"Oh," Duvass exclaimed, "I forgot to tell you in the hustle and bustle of the return of the caravan. The second log mover was completed yesterday evening as well."

"That's great to hear," Kivamus said with a smile. "Send it to the southern area, since the workers have started cutting trees there as well. Once enough narrow trenches for the village walls have been dug up, we will send one of the log movers to move the stakes there. Although our focus has to remain on digging as much of those trenches as we can, before the ground freezes over."

Hudan said, "The workers know about that, milord. I had a conversation with the foreman Yeden regarding that earlier."

"That's good," Kivamus commended.

Soon, they started to return towards the warmth of the manor hall, but the gates of the manor opened, and a young servant came running inside towards them.

Reaching there, the servant took a moment to catch his breath, and said, "Milord! I had been sent to let the blacksmith know about the new orders for today. Cedoron told me to tell you that if he is provided with the shafts, he should be able to make seven or eight spears by evening, but that would mean no new axes or other tools for today. He also apologized that he couldn't come here himself, since making the spears needed to be done today itself, so he didn't want to waste his time going back and forth to the manor."

"That's okay," Kivamus reassured the servant. "Hudan, would making more than six spears be any helpful right now? If not, we can just let Cedoron finish the six spears, and he can use the remaining time to work on something else."

Hudan took a moment to think about it, and said, "I'd say that since we are only sending six experienced guards with the caravan, and only those would be able to use those spears properly, so just making six spears should have been enough, like Feroy told us yesterday. However, since he is working on making spearheads anyway for today, I'd like him to make a few more spears if possible, so I can use them to start training the remaining recruits who'll remain in the manor in the usage of spears."

Kivamus nodded. "That's a good idea." He looked at the servant, "Let Cedoron know that he should make as many spears as he can for today, and then from tomorrow he can start working to make braziers. Duvas will tell you the details about it." Before dismissing the servant, he asked, "Was that all he said?"

The servant thought for a moment. "Oh... there was another thing that Cedoron mentioned, milord!"