

Londoner 96

Chapter 96. Shopping List

~ Kivamus ~

~ Baron's Manor, Tiranat ~

Around noon, Kivamus was sitting in the manor hall with others, as they waited for Pydaso to arrive. While the weather was still very cold, the sun had shone for nearly an hour before the clouds had covered it again. Until the morning, it had still seemed like it would start snowing any time, but somehow the weather had started clearing a little by now.

"If the weather stays like this, couldn't we try to send the caravan again?" Gorsazo asked. "While it is true that by now we have enough grain that the villagers shouldn't starve over the winter, we will still be short on grain by the end of winter, not to mention the grain we need to start planting seeds after the winter ends."

Duvas replied, "Although Feroy told us that it still hasn't been snowing on that road, it won't be long before snow starts here too you know. And what if the wagon gets stuck in the snow on the road? We wouldn't get any grain in that case, and we might even lose a few horses and guards on the road!"

"That's true, but the weather has surprisingly been clearing up for a day now," Gorsazo mentioned.

"Don't jinx it, Mr Gorsazo!" Hudan chided with a smile.

Kivamus said, "We don't know how the condition will be on that road after a week, but if the weather improves further by evening, we will try to persuade Pydaso for another trip. He is the one who has traveled on this road the most times out of any of us, so his opinion will be the most important in this. So let's wait for him before we talk about that further." He continued, "It depends on whether he is willing to brave the road for another trip. While we could still try to send our own wagons even if he doesn't want to return here again - assuming the weather does get better, it might still not be worth it to risk the wagons getting stuck in the snow, when we will only be getting four wagon-loads of grain in return."

Thinking about the shortage of grain everywhere, he asked, "There is something I was curious about. Even if the weather does get clear and we are able to send the caravan for another trip, would Cinran even have enough grain for us to buy again? We have been buying a big amount after all, so what if the caravan doesn't even get enough grain to buy in the markets of Cinran?"

Duvas gave the answer. "Don't worry about that, my lord. There is no risk of that. The quantity of our purchases would certainly be noticeable in the markets there, but the harvest was only around a month ago, so the grain stores of the merchants there would still be quite full at this time."

He explained, "From a very rough estimate, I'd say Cinran needs something like five to six thousand sacks of grain every year to feed the people who live there, and even with the third trip we would still be buying around two hundred sacks only. More importantly, since we don't have any farms here, we buy all our grain from there every year. So in a way, you can say that the local merchants there would already have factored in our regular demand as well, when deciding how much grain to buy from the local farmers."

He added, "It is still true that because of the bad harvest, they will have a shortage of grains for sure, but even so, they do have more than enough grain to sell to us."

Kivamus nodded. "Alright, that removes another worry from my mind."

Before long, a servant announced the arrival of Pydaso.

The merchant entered the manor hall, and with a quick bow to the baron, he took an empty seat near the fireplace.

After giving a minute for Pydaso to soak in the heat from the fireplace, Kivamus asked, "So were you able to buy everything this time?"

Pydaso nodded. "Indeed, milord. We were lucky that we were able to hire another wagon, so we returned with eight wagons in total. I have brought sixty-six sacks of grain this time, along with twelve sacks of vegetables, including potatoes, carrots, onions and some salt as well. The rest of the space was taken by iron ingots and the ropes you had wanted me to buy."

"Oh! You were able to buy vegetables too!" Kivamus replied with surprise. "That is very nice to hear." He added, "We had estimated that your total cost this time would be around three hundred and thirty gold crowns - half of which we had paid you in advance before you left for this trip. Duvas will pay you the remainder today after calculating the exact amount."

"Thank you for that, milord," Pydaso said with a smile.

With the amount of grain the merchant had brought this time, including the vegetables - which still counted as food, they had purchased a total of a hundred and fifty seven sacks of edible grain and vegetables. That still left them short of the one hundred and seventy-five sacks of grain that they needed to feed the village for the four months, not to mention what they needed for use as seeds.

They were also spending a lot of their limited amount of gold on buying the grain, with the total for these two trips easily rising to above seven hundred gold crowns. While this was certainly a necessary expense, he really had to hope that other traders would start coming to the village after the winter, otherwise it would become difficult to feed the village without selling more coal regularly. Pydaso alone couldn't buy nearly enough coal by himself.

He asked, "Would it be possible for you to go on another trip, Pydaso? You must have seen that the weather has seemed to be clearing up a little since yesterday. And in any case, it still hasn't started snowing on that road."

The merchant didn't give a reply immediately. He seemed to be thinking about it for a while, before he answered, "I do understand that. Even so, it won't be long before the snowfall starts, and there is a big chance of the caravan getting stuck on the return journey here, or when I return back towards home in case it does start snowing soon."

He added after a moment, "However, it is still true that the snowfall hasn't started yet. So that does leave a small possibility of going on another trip before I return back. But I would prefer not to take that risk."

"So... What will it be then?" Kivamus asked. "Can you go for another trip or not?"

Pydaso replied, "Tell you what, let's leave the decision for tomorrow morning, since I can't return back towards Cinran before then in any case. If the weather gets more clear by tomorrow morning, that

should delay the snowfall another few days even on that road, which means we would be able to go on another trip. However, if the weather gets bad again before it is time to leave in the morning, then I will apologize for not being able to help you more, and I will return back to my home."

Kivamus gave a slow nod. "That's understandable." Thinking more about it, he said, "Since you will be taking your four wagons back with you either way, we certainly have to fill them with coal for you. However, let's do this. We will also fill the other four wagons of the manor with coal as well, and depending on your decision tomorrow morning, you can leave with either four wagons to go back to your home, or with eight wagons to buy more grain for us from Cinran. And in case you are unable to go for a third trip for us, we can just unload that coal from our wagons later on, so that wouldn't cause any problems to us."

"Oh, that's a good idea, milord!" Hudan said.

Kivamus continued, looking at the merchant, "So let's also finalize the details right now in case you are able to go on another trip, since we wouldn't want to waste any time tomorrow morning. Depending on your decision tomorrow, we will make another advance payment to you before you leave, instead of right now."

"That works for me," Pydaso replied.

"Alright then." Kivamus continued, "So in case you go for the third trip, I still want you to buy as much grain as you can. And of course, you should buy more vegetables too." Thinking about other edible things which could survive the winter, he said, "Add some butter and cheese to it if you can. Apart from that, buy as much iron as you can fit in the wagons."

"Of course," Pydaso nodded.

"If I may add something, milord," Hudan said with a grin, "Feroy saw how low we are on ale these days, so he was grumbling about how we could survive the winter without ale." He added with a snort, "He was even muttering today that this was why the goddess has held back the snow until now, to allow us to buy more ale!"

Kivamus couldn't help but laugh at that. It was true that while they certainly couldn't afford anything like wine with their dwindling finances, having some ale could be a good moral booster for the guards

and villagers. He said with a nod, "Pydaso, add that to the list as well. Just one barrel would be more than enough."

"Alright, I'll make sure to buy it as well," Pydaso replied with a laugh. "Would that be all then?"

"Let me think," Kivamus muttered. If they really were able to send the caravan on a third trip, it would really help them a lot in feeding everyone over the winter, even though they still might not have enough wheat to use as seeds after the winter. Apart from that, if they were successful in farming mushrooms at large scale, and breeding some fish in the southern pond later, that would also help in their food security. Although digging that pond would be a lot of work by itself.

However, while they still had to clear a big area of the forests and finish a lot of construction over the winter, the villagers would still get some idle time late in the winter, since they couldn't prepare the fields for farming until the ground started to thaw after winter. That would be the perfect time to do something else to help the village in the future. He wasn't yet sure what else they could do, but he would certainly need to make a lot of notes and designs for that, for which he needed a way to write or draw.

He asked the merchant, "Is there any slate or chalk available in Cinran? For writing?"