

## Londoner 97

### Chapter 97. Soaps

"I'm not sure..." Pydaso muttered. "I have heard that slate is a type of rock, but I don't know how you could write on a cliff... Not that I would be able to transport even small chunks of that rock here. I am not sure where to find chalk either... But can you really use them to write?"

"I don't think it would be very difficult," Gorsazo said. "Isn't chalk a type of limestone? Like the white cliffs found in some places?"

Kivamus nodded. "Indeed." Now that Gorsazo knew more about him, he was glad to see that he was supporting him instead of asking uncomfortable questions in front of others. He said to the merchant, "If it is not found nearby, let's leave that for now. But you should still be able to buy some paper or parchment, along with quills and ink to write on them, right?"

Pydaso gave a firm nod. "Those I can certainly buy, my lord. Paper doesn't come cheap at all, but I will make sure to bring some parchment and ink for you."

Kivamus nodded and began to think about what else they might need over the winter. Remembering the very crude version of soap that they used in the manor, he thought that if the caravan was able to go on a third trip, that would also be something they should stock up on, since they couldn't manufacture it here - not yet anyway. Even that soap - a crudely made harsh soap with a really nasty smell - was a luxury here, but at least it did its task well enough. When he had arrived in the village, he had been gratified to see that at least there was some kind of soap here, otherwise he didn't even want to imagine the kind of diseases which could spread in the blink of an eye.

He began, "There is one last thing that I wanted to add. You should also buy a good amount of soap from Cinran if you are able to go for the third trip." He asked curiously, "How much does soap cost, anyway?"

"Around four to five coppers for each large bar of soap," Pydaso replied, "which lasts around a month for a family - although people usually try to make it last at least twice as long." He added, "Of course, that's the cheaper soap I bring here for the villagers. However, the previous baron preferred the luxury soap, which costs around one gold for each large bar, or around twenty times that of the commoners' soap, so only nobles can afford it."

"Twenty times as much!" Kivamus exclaimed with surprise. He looked at Duvas with raised eyebrows. "Did the previous baron really buy that? Even when the villagers didn't have enough to eat?"

Duvas gave a reluctant nod. "It's true enough, my Lord."

"Wow!" Kivamus just shook his head. What was wrong with the heads of these nobles!

Duvas added, "However, all we had left with us when you arrived was the commoners soap, so we couldn't provide the luxury soap to you."

"No, no, forget about it. We can't possibly afford something which costs that much!" Thinking from the memories of the original Kivamus, he realized that the soap he had been using in the Ulriga Palace must have been the luxury soap, but it wasn't something he had focused on, so he didn't know much about it. He looked at the merchant. "Why is it so costly anyway?"

Pydaso explained, "While the cheaper soap is made in many places, including Cinran itself, but in the whole kingdom of Reslinor, the luxury soap is only produced in Plumron, which is quite a bit far away from here in the north. So although the luxury soap is quite costly even there, transporting that soap so far also adds to its price."

He continued, "The soap guild of Plumron has kept the method of production of that luxury soap a secret, so nobody else can make it in the kingdom anyway, and believe me, people have tried." He added with a shrug, "I can't really say what's the actual difference between them for the luxury soap to cost that much, since I have only ever used the cheaper soap. But I have heard that the luxury soap is much softer on the skin and I can certainly attest that it has a very pleasant smell, so that must be why nobles prefer to use only that soap. Which one do you want me to buy, milord?"

"Only the cheaper soap for now," Kivamus replied with a grimace. As much as he disliked using the harsh soap they had here, he couldn't possibly splurge for something that costly right now. He was quite sure that the actual cost of that luxury soap wouldn't be nearly that high, but medieval guilds were well known to jealously guard their secret techniques, which allowed them to charge a fortune for something that simple.

He added, "We need enough of it to last the village for at least three months. At a rough estimate, if each large bar lasts a month for a family, we will need around two hundred and fifty such bars, which

will cost around a thousand coppers, or ten gold crowns." He nodded to himself. "It's affordable enough, and I don't want a disease outbreak here because of a shortage of soap."

Hudan asked, "But that sounds like it would take a lot of space on the wagons - space in which we could keep more grain."

"No need to worry about that," Pydaso said. "Although that seems like a large amount, it would still take less space than a single sack of grain."

Kivamus nodded. "We can afford to buy one less sack of grain to prevent a disease outbreak here. Make sure to buy it." After a moment of thought, he said, "That is all that I can think of right now to buy from Cinran. The cost of grain should be around three hundred gold crowns this time as well, along with another hundred gold for the remaining items. You will take coal worth around either forty or eighty gold with you, depending on whether you leave with four or eight wagons. So we can adjust that amount from the payment tomorrow morning before you leave."

Glancing at the windows of the manor hall, he added, "Assuming the weather stays clear by tomorrow morning and you decide to go for the third trip, Duvas will provide you half of that amount as advance at that time." He continued, "Of course, after we have unloaded everything from the wagons, we will still be filling all the eight wagons with coal today in preparation for the third trip, even if it turns out that you cannot go for another trip."

"That is fine with me, milord." Pydaso stood up from the chair. "I will take my leave then. I do hope that the weather stays clear, since the extra income would be very helpful for my family in the coming winter."

Kivamus gave a nod in reply. "I hope so too." He looked at the majordomo. "Duvas, go and give him the remaining amount for the second trip now."

Duvas nodded. "Of course, my Lord."

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In the evening, Kivamus was walking in the manor with others, happy to see that the weather was clearing further. The sun had been out for over an hour in the afternoon before the clouds covered it again. If it stayed like this by tomorrow, they really would be able to send the caravan for another trip.

As he saw Madam Nerida hurrying towards the servant hall, he remembered that soon it would be time for the free evening meal for the elderly villagers and the children. He asked the majordomo who was walking next to him, "You are also regularly providing the grain to those villagers who have taken in the homeless people, right?"

"Of course, my Lord," Duvas replied. "Every week we give sufficient grain and coal to every worker, as well as to those people who have taken in the homeless villagers, apart from the free meals twice daily. When we had started doing this, our grain stores only consisted of around twenty five sacks of wheat, so I was quite worried about distributing it so freely, but thankfully we have been able to buy above hundred and fifty sacks by now in total. So that helps a lot, even though we will still be short on grain by the end of winter at this rate."

"Let's just hope that the caravan is able to leave again," Gorsazo said. "If that trip is successful, we might even be able to provide three meals a day to the children and elderly."

"That's true," Kivamus said with a nod. "Duvas, make sure to send a guard around the village every few days to check that all the homeless people are still living inside the homes of those people who had taken them in, and they haven't just been thrown out. That will also make sure that nobody is left outside now."

"I've already told Hudan to do that late in the night," Duvas replied, "so that if any of the villagers were trying to be too smart about that, then those guards would easily be able to tell me about them."

"I have been doing it every day," Hudan said, "but that hasn't been a problem so far."

"That's good to hear," Kivamus said.

Hudan added, "I was thinking that if the caravan is able to leave tomorrow, then we should provide two more guards to them, so that every caravan will have two men on it. This time there were eight wagons, but only twelve guards of ours, not including Pydaso and his own guard, and that had led to two wagons having only a single guard with them, which made them a weak link."

"That's a good idea," Kivamus replied, as they reached the training grounds in the south-eastern part of the manor. Kerel was already there practicing with some new guards. He added after a moment, "But wouldn't we be too short on guards here in that case?"

"I realize that," Hudan said. "However, a few of the workers are showing good talent with a machete - the ones I have been giving some basic training to, in the northern area of the village. So I was thinking of getting your permission to hire them as temporary guards. I want to take on four more guards for one week, so that we can send more guards tomorrow in case the caravan is able to leave. I had already made sure with Mr Duvas that those men can be trusted, before I started giving them training, so their loyalty isn't in any question. And once the caravan returns, we can just release those temporary guards so that they can work as laborers again."

"Alright, you should do that," Kivamus replied after a moment of thought. "That third trip would be very important for us, so it is better if we don't take any risk with it by not providing them enough guards."

"That's true, my Lord," Duvas said. "The success of this trip would decide how well we are able to start planting seeds after the winter. So the importance of this trip cannot be overstated."

Hudan added, "In that case, I will take my leave now, so that I can talk to those workers in the north before they return back to their homes, or it would be too difficult to find each of them in the village at night."

Kivamus waved him away. "Go on then. Let them know that while it's temporary, for a week they will still get the higher amount of grain and coal which the manor guards get, which should give them enough of an incentive to join us as guards. Otherwise, they wouldn't want to risk their lives when they can just keep working as laborers."

"I'll make sure to tell them about it," Hudan replied, before he turned back towards the gates of the manor.

Kivamus looked at the partly cloudy sky, and hoped that the weather would stay clear for a few more days. If the weather became worse tomorrow, then it would hurt them a lot if the caravan was unable to leave again.

Well, there was no point worrying about it any more, since it was out of his hands now. He would find out how it goes by tomorrow anyway. He had to be patient till then.