

Londoner 98

Chapter 98. Roofing

The next morning Kivamus and others were standing near the gates of the manor, watching the caravan get ready for departure. The weather had cleared up further, and while the sun had just risen at this time, there were only sparse clouds in the sky, despite the chill in the air. The wagons had already been loaded with coal to the brim, before being covered with an oilcloth.

Earlier in the morning, after looking at the clear weather, Duvas had said that the goddess had smiled on them after all. They had quickly sent a runner to Pydaso in the village alehouse, but they had found that the merchant was already on his way to the manor with a grin on his face. It wouldn't just be the village which would be benefiting from another trip, after all. They had provided Pydaso with half the expected expenses for this trip in advance, so that there wouldn't be any delay in purchasing anything. Since then he had been going over everything in the caravan to make sure that it was ready to leave.

Hudan had also provided fourteen manor guards to escort the caravan this time - only half of whom were experienced ones - not including the merchant and his own guard. And finally, the caravan looked ready to go with two men on each wagon. Soon, he saw Pydaso and Feroy walking towards him.

"We are ready to leave, milord," the merchant reported.

"Good! Make sure that everything goes well."

Feroy nodded with a grin. "Don't worry about that, milord. With this many guards, we could even take on an adzee, you know?"

Kivamus seriously doubted that, since by now he knew how dangerous those beasts could be, but he didn't say anything. However, Hudan raised his eyebrows in response.

Noticing that, Feroy quickly added, "You know what I mean!"

"I didn't say anything," Hudan grinned.

"I know what you were going to say..." the ex-mercenary snorted. "Forget it, I don't care." Then he gave a grin as well. "By your leave, milord, we should set out now. I'll make sure that the trip goes well. This time, the caravan will be carrying ale after all!"

Kivamus just laughed in reply, and waved them away.

Before long, the guards climbed to their seats, and with the creaking of axles, the caravan rumbled ahead.

As Kivamus watched the wagons leave the gates of the manor one by one, he thought that only the future will tell how the trip will go, but they had done everything in their hands to make sure of the caravan's safety.

Duvas looked at the sky, praying to the goddess. "I just hope that there are no problems on the road this time. May the goddess let us have just one more successful trip, then I wouldn't wish for any more blessings this winter."

Kivamus just watched the wagons leaving silently but didn't say anything. After two attempts to kill him, it had been far too quiet after that. Although it was true that any news traveled really slowly in this medieval world, and the coming winter would slow down everything further, he just had a bad feeling about this trip. However, shaking his head, he chided himself for thinking like that. He had to hope for the best. Negative thoughts wouldn't help them here anyway.

In the afternoon, he was sitting inside the manor hall waiting for lunch, while talking about the progress of the longhouse blocks with the others. The fireplace was providing a good amount of heat to the manor hall, keeping the room warm enough, otherwise it was way too cold these days.

Soon, Madam Helga brought a warm pot of vegetable stew to the long dining table, and began ladling out generous helpings of the stew into various bowls with Syryne's help. Until now, they had only been eating meals which had been prepared using wheat, whether it was bread or porridge, apart from the one time that they had eaten the stew made from Rizako mushrooms. While they were still given a couple of eggs sometimes, it was rare enough that it rarely counted as a variety in food.

However, with Pydaso bringing potatoes, carrots and even onions this time, Madam Helga had started making different types of meals now, instead of providing the same old food every day. While the quantity of vegetables was still not that much, he had told Madam Nerida to use those vegetables when making the free meals for the children and the elderly. They were the weakest part of society, and they needed good nutrition. Of course, once the caravan returned this time with more vegetables and grain, he had decided to allow those vegetables to be provided to the rest of the villagers as well, when they were given their weekly quota of grain rations.

Duvas began, "Yesterday, one of the workers was asking me why aren't we making the longhouse blocks to be two floors high, since that would mean even more people could be provided housing within a single longhouse block."

"What did you tell him?" Kivamus asked, while taking a sip of the warm broth with a wooden spoon. It was certainly much better than the bland meals they had been having till now. With Madam Helga's experience in cooking food in an inn, she certainly knew how to bring life to the meals, as long as she was provided with enough ingredients.

Duvas replied, "I told him that it would require making a strong floor for the second story, which would take much longer than what we are doing now. It would require making a lot of strong beams from the logs to support the weight of the upper floor, which will increase the construction time by a lot."

Hudan asked, "I was curious about that as well. How are we making the roof?"

Kivamus replied, "I had talked with Taniok about that earlier. He will make simple wooden shingles for the roof, which will itself be slanted on both sides to prevent snow from gathering over it. And Duvas is correct in saying that it will take much longer and would be much more difficult to build a single two-story longhouse, instead of making two separate longhouses of one story each. And it's not like we have any shortage of space here that we need to expand vertically instead of horizontally." He added, "But there is another reason for limiting the longhouses to a single story only."

"Unlike the buildings within the manor, we aren't making those longhouses to last for decades after all." He explained, "We all know that we are constructing the longhouses from unseasoned logs, so they are not going to last more than a few years. That is itself a good enough reason to keep the construction simple. But more importantly, while it may be fine to make walls from those logs, because the structure of the building would still be safe enough, it wouldn't be the same if we make a floor for the second story from those unseasoned logs."

He continued, "If we make the floor from them, they will easily warp in a year or two which would create weak points or even gaps in the floor of the second story - and that could lead to a young child falling through that space, or even an adult breaking their foot if it gets stuck there - in case the plank above that empty space gives way. I don't see any reason we need to take such a risk, especially since that building wouldn't even last too long, not to mention it would take even longer to finish a two story building."

"It does make sense," Hudan said with a nod.

Kivamus continued, "The planks on the first floor would still have the ground under them, so there is no such risk if we make a single story longhouse like we are doing now. That's why we decided to keep the longhouses to a single story, and will be using wooden shingles as the roof. By the time we need to tear down those longhouse blocks in a few years, we can decide whether to make a two story building at that time. But for now, single story buildings will be good enough with our hurried pace of construction."

It was evening now, and Kivamus and the others were watching the guards train in the manor, when a servant reported that the blacksmith was there to talk to him.

Soon, he saw Cedoron walking towards him.

"How is it going with you?" Kivamus asked.

"There are no problems, milord," the blacksmith replied. "I found out that the caravan had brought more iron ingots this time, and that they have left for another trip. Are they buying more iron again?"

Kivamus nodded. "The high grain prices have made the prices of non-essential goods much lower, so Pydaso is getting a very good deal on iron ingots. So I've told him to buy more so that we can stock up on them for further use in the winter."

Cedoron said, "That is really nice to know, milord. With the way you are giving me new orders for making something every day, it's good to know that I am not going to be short on iron at least." He added, "Today I came here to tell you that the initial order which you had given me for making two

dozen axes, half a dozen machetes, and a dozen saws is nearly complete now, and I will be able to provide the remaining tools by tomorrow. Of course, I might have been finished with them sooner but making other things like braziers and the iron troughs you wanted for uh... growing mushrooms I think, made me take more time than I thought."

"That's not a problem," Kivamus replied. He continued, "You must have noticed that the construction of longhouse blocks has finally started. We are only putting up the walls right now, but after that Taniok will need quite a few hinges, some hammers, and of course, a lot of iron nails. So you should start working on forging them after you are done with the initial order of tools."

"As you wish, milord," the blacksmith replied.

Kivamus added, "Once you have made enough hinges and hammers, and after training your apprentices in making iron nails, there is another thing that I want you to start working on." Seeing Cedoron give a curious nod, he said, "But before that, I wanted to ask how was your experience with specialization of tool production?"

"Oh! It was a wonderful idea, milord!" Cedoron shook his head slowly before adding, "I don't know why I never thought of something so simple myself. It has really helped me speed up the production of everything. I will use the same method for making iron nails and other things as well."

"That's good to hear," Kivamus said. "Now I want you to make something which is called a wheelbarrow. It is similar to a cart, but instead of four wheels, it only has a single one."

"A cart with only a single wheel!" Duvas exclaimed with surprise. "How will it even balance itself...?"

Seeing the surprise on the faces of the majordomo and Cedoron, as well as the knowing smile of Gorsazo, Kivamus said, "It is nothing complex, but here is a very basic diagram of it."

He bent down and using a sharp stick, he began to make a crude drawing on the ground itself.