

# FROM LONDONER TO LORD

## 1. Prologue

Map of Southern Reslinor:

"Wake up, my lord."

"We have to leave soon, my lord. Please wake up!"

Darkness pressed against Steven's eyelids. A creaking sound filled his ears, punctuated by the distant whinny of a horse. Disoriented, he cracked open an eye. Instead of the familiar white ceiling of his London apartment, he saw rough-hewn wood and a dimly lit interior.

He sat up, drowsily looking around while his head throbbed with pain. He realized that he wasn't in his home. He was inside a wooden carriage with some small bags and a few empty glass bottles lying around him. He looked around and from the partially open flap of the carriage, he could see that it was nearly dark outside. There was a middle-aged man standing right outside the carriage, and he was the person who had been calling him to wake up. The person was wearing a tunic of some kind, and unless Steven was still drunk, he did not seem to be speaking in English. Despite that, Steven could understand him perfectly, even though he didn't even know which language it was! The tunic did seem to be out of a medieval period drama though. He finally thought that he was still dreaming and began to lie down again.

"No, no, my lord, you can't go to sleep again! We need to leave soon," the man urgently reminded him again.

"Alright, alright. I'm up. Just give me a minute," grumbled Steven.

The last thing that he remembered was going to sleep after a night spent binge drinking with his friends in London, to celebrate his long-awaited promotion. He did expect to have a mighty hangover in the morning, but not this, whatever this situation was. For a moment, he thought his friends might have somehow placed him inside a medieval movie set as a prank. But in that case, how did he even understand what this man was saying? Steven didn't know any language other than English, apart from a semester in college which was mostly wasted trying to learn how to pronounce unpronounceable French words. But it was neither of those languages. And apart from the last night, his memories were very cluttered, and he couldn't remember much else.

Taking a moment to steady his mind, he sat up again on the mat with his back resting on one of the side benches and noticed that he was wearing a similar-looking tunic himself as well. However, it seemed to be of a much better quality than the one that the other man was wearing. Perhaps it was related to how the man kept referring to him as 'my lord'. His hands also didn't have any of the calluses he had gathered all over his hands while working in his job as an engineer. It felt as though he inhabited someone else's body entirely! He shook his head in disbelief, attempting to dispel the weird thoughts, and scolded himself for overindulging, attributing these bizarre notions to his excessive drinking last night. The idea of body-switching seemed utterly ludicrous!

Noticing that the man was starting to speak again, he said, "It's okay, I'm awake now. I just need a moment to gather my thoughts. Would you mind waiting outside the carriage for me?"

The other man looked surprised for some reason. "Are you feeling better now, my lord? You appear... improved. More composed, perhaps."

"Really? I've got this pounding headache that won't stop, and I have no idea where I am. Somehow, I'm talking in a language I've never heard before, and to top it off, someone keeps addressing me as a lord! So, no, I'm far from okay. Could you please leave me alone for a while? I need some time to clear my head," Steven grumbled, his head still throbbing as he spoke.

Surprise was etched on the other man's face. "As you wish, my lord. I will be nearby, so please call for me if you need anything." He bowed to Steven and gently closed the carriage's flap. Soon, Steven could hear the man's footsteps as he walked away.

Steven was still trying to get a grasp of the situation he had found himself in when a throbbing pain seized his head. He instinctively reached up, pressing both hands to his temples in a futile attempt to ward off the ache. Cursing his forgetfulness, he patted the pockets of his tunic, searching for the familiar relief of ibuprofen. But a search of his tunic pockets yielded only a handful of yellowish coins mocking his misery.

A fresh wave of agony, worse than anything he'd experienced before, tore through Steven's skull. His vision blurred as a pounding throb threatened to burst his skull. Instinctively, he reached for the carriage bench, but his legs buckled, sending him crashing to the floor. A wave of memories slammed into his mind, forcing a groan from his lips.

He remembered growing up as Kivamus, the third son of the Duke of Ulriga, unending childhood torment from his two older brothers, the solace from his sister, and the ever-present ache of his mother's absence. His once intimidating father, the Duke, had retreated into a shell of grief after his mother's death, leaving the Duchy at the mercy of Kivamus's manipulative and power-hungry brothers.

Eventually, on his twenty-first birthday, Kivamus was exiled in all but name, and given the meager title of Baron of a backwater village called Tiranat. Although the proclamation to grant the title of Baron of Tiranat to him was signed by his father, he was quite sure that the actual idea of sending him away from Ulriga was from one of his brothers. They must have wanted to send the third son of the duke away from the capital so he couldn't become a thorn in their side to become the rulers of the duchy. It was a bitter birthday gift, which he had celebrated, or rather, drowned, with alcohol.

The next day, he and Gorsazo, his long-time mentor and teacher, had to leave on a horse-drawn carriage along with some money that Gorsazo had managed to save for him in the past. From then onwards, he couldn't live again in the palace he had called home all his life. Long ago, when he had become old enough to know that he would never inherit the duchy, being the third son, it had all seemed irrelevant, and something which was far away in the future. But finally leaving the palace the day after his birthday had been too much and he had barely managed to hold back his tears while leaving. That his father hadn't even come to see him off, had been mostly expected, but it still stung a lot.

As the cart rumbled through the markets of Ulriga, he had used his meager savings to buy the strongest alcohol he could find. The vendors had watched him with a mix of sadness and disgust, probably familiar with his drinking problem. The next two days were a blur of travel and Kivamus' relentless drinking. Gorsazo's attempts to intervene were only met with anger and rebuke, and after three days of trying to stop him from drinking, even Gorsazo gave up eventually.

As they stopped near Fort Aragosa on the evening of the third day, Kivamus stepped out of the wagon. However, upon seeing the imposing fort, he was once again struck by the reminder that one of his brothers would inherit that as well. The wounds of the past few days reopened, the weight of it all crushing him completely. Tears streamed down his face as he slumped outside the carriage. His future, a bleak existence as a minor baron in some obscure corner of the kingdom, felt even more miserable when compared to the lives of his privileged brothers. He went back inside the carriage and tried

to drown his sorrows in bottle after bottle, yearning for oblivion. He didn't know how much he drank and when he passed out. That was the last thing he recalled from yesterday.

But wait!

No. That wasn't the last thing that he remembered!

A different memory flickered to life. He remembered his happy childhood with his family and the good memories he made with his friends while working as a mid-level mechanical engineer in London. And then, a flash of the previous night's celebration, the clinking glasses, the warm glow of friendship marking his promotion.

He held his pounding head in his hands and tried to make sense of his jumbled-up memories. Where was he? Near Fort Aragosa or in London? More importantly, who was he? Was he Kivamus, the third son of the Duke of Ulriga, or Steven, the recently promoted engineer? His head was aching so much that he couldn't think clearly.

A guttural groan escaped his lips as he clutched his head in pain. He stayed like that for a while, simply existing, hoping the pounding in his skull would recede.

He lost track of time while sitting in that state, the throbbing in his head slowly giving way to a dull ache, allowing him to regain some clarity of thought. The first thought in his mind was to get out of the confines of the carriage.

He stepped out and saw the sun starting to come up behind the mountains far off to his right. He looked around and while it was still a little dark, he was able to see the silhouette of the walls of the mighty Fort Aragosa standing tall in what had to be the east direction, towards the mountains. The wagon he just came out of, was unhooked from a pair of horses, which were grazing nearby.

He saw Gorsazo standing a little distance away talking to another man next to him. That must be the carriage driver. Or was he called a wagoner? He wasn't sure. The carriage itself had been stopped close to a dirt road, which seemed to be going in a north-to-south direction. It might be too much to call it a road, though, since it was just a narrow track of packed dirt, likely flattened by horses and the wheels of passing wagons. It was following a river running parallel to the road in the west. As the sun rose further, he saw that there was some patchy grass around the area, although the grass didn't grow much where they had parked the carriage. It seemed like it was a regular stopping area for wagons and carriages going on that route. He decided to walk around a little to stretch his legs and think about what had happened to him.

He walked aimlessly without choosing any particular direction, and soon he came to a small cliff that overlooked Fort Aragosa in the east. He sat down near the edge with his legs dangling over the cliffside. It wasn't a particularly tall cliff but it still seemed like a nice place to watch the rising sun over the mountains, with the Fort visible in the distance. He saw a few people who might be soldiers, or maybe knights in this seemingly medieval era, walking near the fort, which was perhaps a kilometer away from him.

He tried to think and find a reason for what had happened to him. He was an engineer, so he had a habit of tackling problems step by step. But no matter how much he tried to think about how he had somehow vanished from the Earth and had seemingly reached another planet, he couldn't find any way to explain how it could have happened. No scientific theory in his mind supported or could have made all this possible. He wasn't ready to believe in the possibility of a supernatural entity or aliens having done this to him. And yet, despite it being contrary to everything he knew about the world and its laws, here he was.

There was also the matter of having the memories of another person in his mind. Indeed, this wasn't his own body at all which he knew from all his life on Earth. It seemed as if his mind was snatched from his body on Earth, and was somehow amalgamated with the mind of the previous owner of this body. Steven was brought up in a decently well-off family, and he had a good career before somehow waking up here, but it was still a far cry from being a noble like the son of a duke, or even a baron. But somehow, Kivamus was dead now, or at least his mind was, and Steven was in the body of a newly minted baron.

He watched the sun rise higher in the east. The clean, fresh alien air scraped his lungs with every breath he took, a harsh contrast to the familiar tang of city pollution he craved. He had no real idea about life in this world, but he could easily guess that life here, in what seemed like the medieval era, was likely much, much harder than it was in modern London. Even surviving here would be a daily battle. Panic gnawed at the edges of his newfound mind. He was adrift in a foreign world, a castaway in a life that wasn't his. How did he end up here, in this ramshackle carriage on a backward planet? He didn't know at all. He had no idea how to get back to Earth, the world that now felt like a distant dream.

He had to get back. Back to the familiar ache of his own body, the comforting hum of his city, the people he...

Regret, a fresh wound, bloomed in his chest. There was so much left unsaid, unfinished.

A choked sob escaped him, a sound that felt alien in this unfamiliar world. He forced a breath in, willing the panic to recede. Maybe it was denial, a desperate attempt to shield himself from the terrifying reality. He was a man of logic, a creature of routine, and this... this was anything but.

Still, somewhere beneath the cold dread, a spark flickered. Hope. A stubborn, defiant ember refusing to be extinguished. He wouldn't accept this twisted fate. He had to find a way home. And until he could, he had to survive.

But for now, a single tear traced a warm path down his cheek, a testament to the life he'd lost and the desperate hope for the one he clung to.