

Londoner 101

Chapter 101. Scheming

None of the other bandits said anything in reply to that question.

The bandit chief stroked his long beard for a moment. "Actually, never mind that. It's a fact that a poor village like Tiranat couldn't possibly have that much money - not after that raid by Torhan's group - which means they must have been the village guards in the caravan, however many there are. And that means it was the village which sent the whole caravan this time, and it's not a merchant who is visiting there with his wagons." He grinned. "So we have been lucky after all, since the caravan has to return back to the village again! And we'll still get a chance to ambush them!"

As the fatso and the runt started to say something in protest, Nokozal made them shut up with a glare. "Be quiet for now! I already know the caravan couldn't have even half that many guards! But we'll find out for sure in a day or two. And if the actual number of guards is even one man lower than what you reported, then be ready to work as a stonecutter for the whole winter."

The other bandits grimaced at that, and nobody said anything in response.

The next morning, snow had finally started falling here, and it had become freezing cold, especially since they couldn't even light a fire here, or the caravan would become aware of an ambush if they noticed the fire.

Nokozal had gathered everyone in the forest a little further from the bluff to finalize his plans for the ambush, with one man still keeping watch on the road. Calubo was also with the others, with his hands still being tied to a rope. As the fatso pulled him with his rope towards others, Calubo looked wistfully at the dried meat the bandits had brought with them and hoped that they gave him something to eat as well. This continuous snow had made him feel even more hungry than usual.

Soon, the bandit chief began, "As you can see, snowfall has started here already." He pointed at the runt and added, "And from what he said, this road would likely get blocked within a few days from the start of the snowfall, so the village cannot send any caravans again before winter. That means this is our one and only chance to get enough grain to survive the winter comfortably. So we have to make this work!"

The other bandits nodded seriously, before Nokozal continued, "I can accept that there might be other civilians or merchants in that caravan - whom you might have mistaken as guards, but the village couldn't possibly have sent more than one swordsman for each wagon. That means a total of eight guards, unless you idiots couldn't even count the number of wagons properly!"

"No, milord, we counted correctly..." the fatso mumbled.

Nokozal just snorted in response. He spoke again, "Those eight guards - who also have to try to protect any merchants as well as the wagons - against the ten of us. It won't be easy, but with good preparation, we should be able to kill or disable most, if not all of the guards - since they aren't likely to surrender willingly into our hands."

He continued, "We will leave the merchants alone in the attack, since they wouldn't be any threat to us, so our priority will be to target the guards only. But if there are still any survivors amongst them, we will take them in as slaves along with the civilians."

The runt who was rubbing his hands together to keep them warm in this bone-chillingly cold weather, pointed at Calubo. "What about him? Where will he be during the attack?"

Nokozal stared at him for a moment. "Don't know what I was thinking when I sent him here." He gestured towards the forest vaguely. "Just tie him properly to a tree and gag him so he can't run away or warn the caravan." He smirked, "Actually, you know what, tie him in a place so that he can see the guards falling to the might of Lord Nokozal!"

The other bandits grinned before giving nods of anticipation, as Calubo simmered in anger.

Nokozal glared directly at Calubo. "But if you still try to warn them somehow, I will kill you where you are standing, and then I will kill that girl you like back at the quarry. And it will be your fault that many other stonecutters will die as well, because if we can't get enough grain here, then whatever we catch in the forest will go to us first, even if the slaves are starving. So unless you want that to happen you will stay quiet."

Calubo was seething at his treatment. If only he had a chance to put a knife in this bastard's neck... But holding his tongue, he just gave a nod in reply. At least he had the consolation that this bastard would be up for a big surprise when he saw that there really were that many guards in the caravan!

The bandit chief pointed at the nearby bluff. "I looked around this place earlier, and it seems that you idiots at least found a good place to ambush them. From what I have been told, any caravan traveling southwards on this road would reach this place around evening, so that will help us as well, since the sun will be on our back. Now we don't know if the caravan will return by this evening or tomorrow, so we will be ready with the ambush by afternoon today, just in case."

Seeing others nod, he continued, "We have two archers with us, so the both of you will stay on the top of that bluff, since it's a high point and you can easily target the guards from there." After two of the bandits who were armed with bows and arrows gave understanding nods, Nokozal looked back at the remaining bandits. "Our strategy will be to attack the caravan from both sides simultaneously, while the archers will keep raining arrows on them."

He pointed at the fatso, "You will take four swordsmen including yourself to the other side of the road. Don't stay too close to the road, but you should still be in a position so that you can attack immediately on my signal."

"Of course, milord," the fatso replied. "I will go along with you to take a look at good hiding positions on the other side of the road later."

Nokozal nodded. "I will keep the remaining three swordsmen with me on this side, near the bottom of the bluff. This way we can attack the caravan with four men from each side, along with the archers' support from the top. That should be more than enough to take out three or even four guards in the initial surprise attack. And after that, we will likely have double the number of men on our side compared to the guards who are still standing, so it will be easy to take out the rest of them - assuming they don't run away after that."

The bandit chief continued, "We cannot let the caravan get any hint that there is anyone else in the forest before we start the actual attack. So before my signal to charge at them, nobody will move a muscle!" After others nodded in acceptance, he said, "Now the signal will be me making the sounds of a bird whistling in the forest. It will be two short whistles, then a long one, and then another short whistle. And immediately at the last whistle, the two archers will shoot their arrows to take out the guards in the last wagon. And then the rest of us will fall upon them like devils from hell!"

The bandits roared in anticipation before Nokozal added, "My target is to make the signal when more than half of the caravan is ahead of our position, and then we will attack them from behind. Our main

target will be the last wagon, and if the archers have taken down the guards on that wagon in the initial attack, we will target the second last wagon."

He continued, while giving a harsh stare at the fatso, "Since we will have numbers on our side over the two guards in the last two wagons, we should be able to kill them easily. And if we are successful in that, then we will target another wagon immediately after that. By that time the rest of the guards in the caravan should be heavily outnumbered, so they will likely be running away with their remaining wagons and horses. If all goes well, we should be able to get at least two wagon-loads of grain, which will last us for quite a long time."

As others nodded in understanding, Nokozal said, "But remember, even if they have only eight guards, we are also just ten men. So unless we take out a few of them quickly in the first attempt, it will become very difficult for us. So we all have to attack at the same time. That means nobody will make any move unless I make that full signal!"

The group of bandits nodded in acceptance with a chorus of 'of course, milord'.

Finally, Nokozal gave a satisfied nod. "That is all for now. Let's get something to eat first and then we will take our positions before noon. If the caravan doesn't pass this evening, we will assemble again once night has fallen, and then we will take the same positions tomorrow as well." He balled his hands into fist, and raised them upwards before bellowing, "Let's hope that the goddess allows us to get a good bounty this time! For food! For freedom! And for Lord Nokozal!"

Immediately the other bandits gave a roar as well, and the bandit's plan to ambush the caravan had begun.

As they dispersed to their tasks, Calubo just hoped that Tiranat's elaborate ruse of presenting the caravan as well-defended wasn't found out by the bandits. He prayed to the goddess that she would bless his friends amongst the guards and his cousin to keep living. He also prayed that these bastards would die at the hands of the Count's knights soon and he could be a free man once more. But he also knew that right now, he was only a deadweight for the bandits at best, and a possible enemy at worst - in case Nokozal thought that he might join the caravan guards to attack the bandits too.

Only time would tell if he was going to survive even one more day between the bandits.