

Londoner 104

Chapter 104. New Target

Thinking about how to tell it in a way so that the bandits would leave the village alone, Calubo said, "Of course we had that many guards in the manor! There is no chance that the baron's manor would be breached in any raid. They have tall palisade walls surrounding the manor after all!"

Nokoza! looked at him carefully and said, "You were not lying about the number of guards in the village, so I will believe you for now. Maybe you are finally learning your place as a slave under me. That's good." He continued with raised eyebrows, "So this means that the guards are there just to defend the manor... And they don't give a damn about what happens to the rest of the village..."

Shit! Calubo immediately realized that he had put his foot in his mouth. But he didn't know how he could fix his mistake without letting the bandits know about the ruse - which would be even worse for the village.

Nokoza! started to pace from left to right. After a while, he said to all the bandits, "So what if we couldn't ambush the caravan? This grain is going to that shitty village after all, we can just raid the village itself to get the grain."

What had he just done... Calubo realized with a growing horror. By trying to make it seem that the manor was so well defended, he had made it seem like the rest of the village was completely undefended!

"Uh... Chief Nokoza!..." he began to speak to try to undo what he had done, but Nokoza! immediately put his hand up.

"You shut up. I'm done with you for now," the bandit chief.

Calubo tried to interrupt him again, "But that's not..."

"Quiet!" Nokoza! barked. "I just told you to shut up." Then he gestured to another bandit towards Calubo's face.

Seeing that the other bandit started to put back that piece of cloth over his mouth, Calubo tried once more to undo his mistake, "Please... Lord Nokozal! Listen to m..." and then his mouth was bound firmly again, and he was unable to say anything else after that.

Damn it! Damn his stupid mouth! Calubo castigated himself for the horrible mistake. How could he be so foolish! After it had seemed that it would finally go well for the caravan, was it really going to be his stupid mouth which would be the cause of another raid to the poorly defended village? He kept cursing himself for speaking without thinking, as the other bandits continued the discussion.

Another bandit asked, "But milord, how can we possibly defeat the guards in their own village where they would be even better defended, when we couldn't hope to defeat that many men even on this road in a well planned ambush?"

"Because those guards are cowards and scared of any raids!" Nokozal replied with a huge grin. He tilted his head towards Calubo, while straightening his long beard with a hand. "You heard what he said. Those guards don't give a shit about what happens to the rest of the village. And just like in that last raid by Torhan's group, none of the manor guards would come out to defend the village this time either! It is a golden chance for us!"

Other bandits nodded excitedly in response to it.

Nokozal continued, "We will leave immediately for Tiranat to raid that village!" He kept speaking to the bandits who were now grinning in anticipation. "We know that no sane merchant would trust a noble with his goods! So that means apart from what that manor needs to feed their own cowardly guards, the rest of that grain would go to the village itself. And since the guards wouldn't come out to defend the village - no matter how many there are, it would be much easier to just take that grain from the villagers themselves than trying to ambush a caravan!"

The bandit chief raised his voice and roared, "The goddess has been looking out for us after all! She has given us an even better opportunity to get a lot of grain before the winter instead of making us risk our lives in an ambush! Do you see the brilliance of Lord Nokozal now?"

The bandits roared loudly on hearing that.

"And not just that," Nokozal continued with a grin. "It is also a good opportunity for us to get more workers without spending a copper to buy more slaves. We know that some of our older slaves would die in the winter anyway, but this way we can easily get a replacement for them without spending anything! And that coin will go towards buying more ale for us in the winter!"

Immediately the other bandits started roaring chants of 'All hail Lord Nokozal!' with their drawn swords raised towards the sky - which glinted in the dying light of the sunset amidst the continuously falling snowflakes.

For quite a while, they kept cheering and praising that bastard, while Calubo was seething inside on hearing him talk about people like they were cattle to be owned!

After the chants had died down, Nokozal said, "There are ten of us, so even with our three horses we will have to travel on foot, so it's going to take us at least two days of walking to reach the village. Then we will rest for a few hours before we attack the village around midnight."

The bandit chief gazed at all the bandits for a moment before he pointed at the runt. "You, take one horse and ride south to the village immediately. It's your responsibility to scout Tiranat. Make sure to take a good look around the village and try to find out where that grain is being kept and any other weak points. Don't go too close to the manor, but try to take a look at the village from all sides."

At the runt's nod, Nokozal continued, "Keep in mind that the caravan will be right ahead of you on this road, so you will have to travel through the forests for most of the way. And make sure not to be seen by anyone on the caravan when you are passing them."

"Leave it to me, milord, this is what I do best," the runt said with confidence and walked towards a horse, before untying it and riding south immediately in the falling snow.

Nokozal glared at Calubo while he gestured to another bandit to untie the former guard from the tree. "You are coming with us too - even though you are nothing but a deadweight right now. And don't try to get smart or it won't end well for you!"

~ Kivamus ~

~ Baron's Manor, Tiranat ~

It was evening right now and he was sitting with others near the fireplace, thankful that they had more than enough coal to burn it continuously. The past few days had been uneventful other than the weather which had been getting worse continuously, with no sign of the sun anywhere. The wind had been blowing heavily as well, making it nearly freezing outside the manor house.

Apart from his morning runs around the walls of the manor with Hudan and other guards, as well as the occasional rounds to take a look at everything in the manor, he tried to stay inside most of the time these days. He had never liked the cold even when he was in the comfort of a modern flat in London, and he didn't like it any more here in the wooden buildings of Tiranat. He spent most of his free time scribbling ideas on a piece of parchment, which could be implemented in the village during and after the winter.

Duvas remarked with a frown, "It's been more than a week since the caravan went out for the third trip. I had thought they would be back by yesterday evening, but there is still no sign of them."

"We can only hope that there weren't any problems on the way," Gorsazo commented. He looked at Kivamus. "Should we send someone on the northern road?"

"Let's wait for today as well, and see whether they return by tonight," Kivamus said, "otherwise we will send a rider tomorrow morning to see if he can find the caravan on the northern road."

At Gorsazo's nod, he asked, "What is the status of the longhouse block?"

Hudan replied, "I had gone there in the morning and saw that all the outer walls of the block were already completed, and most of the inner wall was complete as well. I think all the walls should be completed by tonight itself, and if not, then it'll be done by tomorrow at the most."

"That's really good to hear," Kivamus said with a smile. "That means Taniok should be starting work on the roof tomorrow itself."

As they waited for the caravan's return, he remembered that the wheelbarrow - which would be a simple but very innovative machine in Tiranat - should be completed by today. He had been giving instructions about it to the carpenter's apprentice as well as to Cedoron for the past few days, and it would be very helpful if it was made before the work on the roof started.

After a while, a servant announced the arrival of Cedoron.

The blacksmith came inside the manor hall, and said, "Milord, I have completed the first wheelbarrow. You should take a look at it outside."

"That's wonderful!" Kivamus added, "Let's go then."

Putting his fur-coat tightly around himself to protect himself from the biting cold, he and others exited the manor hall and saw the wheelbarrow kept right outside it. It was getting dark now, but there was still enough light to see the wheelbarrow clearly. A few servants and maids had also gathered nearby in curiosity at the unusual cart with just a single wheel.

Taking a thorough look at the wheelbarrow from all sides, he said, "It seems good to me. Now we just have to test it to see if it works like it should."

Duvas gave a nod, and pointing at a couple of servants who were standing nearby, he ordered, "You both take the wheelbarrow to the coal barns and load it up with coal. Then we'll try to see how well it works." Looking at Kivamus, he muttered in a low voice, "I do trust your opinions, milord, but I just can't see how such an unusual cart can do all that you claimed."

Kivamus just gave a smile in response instead of saying anything for now. They all will find out soon enough anyway.

One of the servants, who was curiously poking at the weird looking cart, looked back at Kivamus with confusion. "But milord, where will we hitch the horses to it? I don't see any hook here to attach any ropes..."

Kivamus smiled and replied, "A wheelbarrow is designed in a way that makes it very easy to move, so you don't even need any horses for this. That's why I even had this wheelbarrow made here, since you all can just pull it by yourselves. Now let's move it to the coal barns."

Giving a puzzled nod, one of the servants walked to the front of the wheelbarrow, and tried to pull it forward by holding the front side of the tray, while another one stood behind it and ignoring the handles, he started to push the tray like a four-wheeled cart. Immediately, the wheelbarrow lifted up on the front, while both the servants got disbalanced and left the wheelbarrow in confusion.

Shaking his head in amusement, Kivamus said while pointing at one of them. "Only one person will be more than enough to move it." Then he pointed at one of the servants and told him to simply pull it forward using the handles, after lifting them a little.

The servant nodded again, and getting into position, he lifted the handles with ease and started pulling the empty wheelbarrow in the direction of the coal barns, while Kivamus and others slowly walked there as well.

Duvas said, "The servants would have to take around half a cart of coal to refill all the braziers for the night soon enough anyway, but now they can use this wheelbarrow for it and we'll soon find out if it is better than a cart or not."

As they reached towards the coal barn, they saw that the servants were already shoveling coal into the tray of the wheelbarrow in the light of a burning brazier nearby, and before long, it was filled to the brim.

"Go on then!" Kivamus said with encouragement. Seeing the confused looks of the servants, he explained, "One of you should just pick it up from the handles and take the wheelbarrow wherever you need to refill the braziers."

The servants still hesitated. One of them said, "But milord, we always hitch the cart to a horse, and it's the horse which pulls its weight. I was able to bring this uh... wheelbarrow... from the front of the manor house to here because it was completely empty earlier, but now it seems way too heavy for that. How can we humans pull such a heavy cart by ourselves?"

Kivamus smiled. "Just give it a try, and you'll be surprised." He pointed between the handles, "Just stand here and lift the handles a little, and try to walk forward."