

Londoner 110

Chapter 110. Three Meals A Day

"I'm not sure, my Lord," Duvas said. "We really cannot afford to hire more men as guards if we are not getting enough women as applicants, or all the work in the village would slow down a lot."

After a moment, Kivamus said, "What about... what about hiring the elderly villagers or maybe those who are injured or disabled for this?"

"What?" Hudan asked with surprise. "How could elderly villagers do the work of a guard?"

"No, no," Kivamus shook his head. "I don't mean that you should recruit them as regular guards. Let me explain. We all know that it will take some time for the villagers to come around to the fact that they can send the women from their families to work as guards, if it ever happens at all."

He continued, "More importantly, we need to recruit fifteen women as guards for all the village gates and the watchtowers, but at this rate I don't think if we would get even five women for that, especially since it's unlikely for that many women to have enough free time in the first place to work as a guard full-time."

"I do understand that," Hudan said, "but in the current condition of the village there should still be many women free to work - mainly those who used to work in the coal mines in supporting roles. Even so, I understand what you are trying to say. But how could elderly villagers do the work of a guard?"

Kivamus shrugged. "I never said that they would have to do the work of a guard. I meant that we could still ask them to keep watch from the watchtowers. While it's true that they won't be any match for a bandit in a fight, that's not really a factor when they are sitting high up on the watchtowers like the female guards. Even then, I'm not even asking them to shoot crossbows, like we want the female guards to do. What I am proposing is that we could just put those men up there to sit in the towers and watch the surroundings."

He added, "This is something that basically anyone in the village can do. As long as they have sharp enough eyes, it doesn't matter how old they are or if they are already injured. We can just make a list of trustworthy elderly villagers, and we can hire some of them as watchmen for the village. As long as there is a horn on every watchtower which they can use to warn the village in case of a raid, they don't even need to be fit at all."

He looked at the guard captain. "Immediately after the blowing of a horn, you can prepare our guards for immediate battle. And if we eventually do get enough female guards, we can put them up there too while armed with crossbows."

Hudan gave a slow nod. "It is more likely that we are going to get a slow trickle of women who want to become guards, and it will still take time to give them proper training, as well as to build those crossbows in the first place. So until then this idea can certainly work." He added, "And later, when we put women armed with crossbows on our watchtowers, which will be exactly that for now - towers from which the elderly villagers will watch for danger - to become actual offensive towers, which will become a real threat for any attacking bandits!"

"Indeed," Kivamus said.

Duvas said, "There is another benefit apart from that - it would also give the elderly and injured villagers a job to do. I know that most of the villagers are proud people and they would rather work for their meals. So this way they wouldn't feel like they are a burden on the village since right now they are only getting their food as charity from the manor."

"That's a good thing as well," Kivamus said with a nod. "It will help with morale. And it wouldn't even cost us anything for now, since we are already providing them food. We will reconsider what to do about it when we start paying everyone in coins."

He continued while looking at Hudan, "Since physical prowess is not important for this job of a village watchman, all you need to do is to test them about how good their eyes can see what we need them to see. To check that, you can put those elderly villagers who are willing to do this near the tree line, and then you can put one or two guards in the forest who will slowly move towards the elderly men. Then those of them who spot the approaching guards quickly are the ones you need to hire. Repeat that process a few times to make sure that it was not just a lucky guess."

"Of course, that will be a good enough test for them," Hudan said with a nod. "I will start doing it when the construction of the first watchtower starts."

Kivamus continued after a nod, "We can keep those of them who are good with the job even after we get enough female guards, since that would allow us to train the women properly, so they can

eventually work side-by-side with the male guards as crossbow-women, just like archers accompany swordsmen."

Hudan nodded with a smile. "That's a good idea! I like the fact that this way we might get enough guards to properly man every post as well as to patrol the village, without even spending more money to hire more men. I have already started putting two men to patrol around the village at night since yesterday, so I would certainly like us to have more guards. You can never have enough guards, after all!"

Kivamus laughed at that. "You will be a good general for an army! Anyway, we are probably already reaching the limit of how many people we can take out of the workforce to employ them as guards without slowing down other important projects. So you will have to make do with the number of guards that we have planned for."

Soon, the inner door opened and Madam Helga walked inside the hall. "The afternoon meal will be ready soon, milord. Sryne is transferring the food into bowls with Clarisa's help, then we will bring it all here."

"That's good to hear," Kivamus replied with a smile. "I was already getting hungry."

Helga nodded, and added with a sigh, "If only Lucem was helping us instead of running around here and there all day. Have any of you seen him recently? I don't know where he has run off this time."

Hudan replied, "I am not sure. For the last few days he has been coming to watch the training of the guards in the morning. But I am not sure where he went after that..."

Helga shook her head. "Forget it. He will come when he gets hungry anyway."

As she turned back to go towards the kitchen inside the manor house, Kivamus called her back and asked her to take a seat as well.

Feroy wandered inside the hall at that moment, and took a seat near the fireplace place as well.

Looking at others, Kivamus continued, "Talking about morale earlier has reminded me that we should do something more to improve the morale of the villagers, since we have procured enough grain now that nobody will starve over the winter. Maybe we can have something like a feast for everyone in the village."

"That would be something unexpected to the villagers..." Duvas said. "More importantly, that would be something which the villagers of Tiranat have never experienced under the previous baron's rule. So I think they would be overjoyed by something like that."

"But we are already providing food to many villagers, aren't we, milord?" Feroy asked. "Or has that stopped while I was away?"

"We aren't exactly giving food to everyone in the village, you know." Kivamus added, "Only the elderly villagers and the children are included in it. But for tonight's meal, we can prepare a feast outside the gates of the manor for the whole village. Everyone would be welcome here, no matter if they are already getting weekly grain rations from us or not. Also, now that we have a good quantity of vegetables in our stores, we can make something much more tasty for them, rather than just porridge which we generally provide as the free meals."

Madam Helga nodded slowly. "I think that would be a good idea, milord. Earlier today, Madam Nerida and the other maids were already talking about preparing something good for the manor residents in tonight's meal to celebrate getting the caravan back safely. So extending it to all the villagers might not be a bad idea."

Kivamus nodded. "Certainly. And at the beginning of the feast, we can announce to the villagers that from now on, we can afford to provide three meals a day to everyone - that includes our servants, maids and guards who live within the manor, as well as those people to whom we provide free meals. For the rest of the villagers - who earn their meal by working as laborers - we can increase their food quota by a half, which will allow them to have another meal a day as well."

"I can already tell that it would be very welcome by everyone," Duvas said with a nod, "and especially by the laborers, since they need a lot of food to keep working all day."

"That was my intention from the beginning," Kivamus replied, "but until now we weren't sure if we would get more grain in the third trip of the caravan, and it was better to provide two meals to everyone

throughout the winter instead of giving them three meals for a while then telling them that there is no more food. However, that won't be a problem now."

He added, "In that announcement, we will tell them that that increase will mostly come in the form of wheat but it will also include vegetables from now on. Having potatoes, carrots and onions in their meals will provide a more balanced diet to them. Also, we have already bought a lot of soap for the villagers, but until we start paying them their wages in coin, they won't be able to purchase it from us. So we will also include a large bar of soap every month for each family as a part of their wages. This will continue until we start paying them directly in coins instead of grain and coal like we're doing now."

"Oh," Feroy exclaimed, "I can't tell you how happy that would make everyone, milord. When I lived with other mercenaries in the past, their stench annoyed me more than having an empty belly!"

He added with a snort, "The baron giving a free bar of soap to every family after a hard day of work? Nothing would make me happier if I were a laborer's wife!"