

# FROM LONDONER TO LORD

## 12. The Baron's Manor

The caravan of wagons was slowly guided by Pydas towards the manor of the previous Baron on the east end of the village. As they reached closer, the wooden palisade walls of the manor finally came into view. Two guards were standing in front of the gate, clad in weathered leather vests above well-patched tunics, each having a sword behind their shoulder. They straightened their postures as they noticed the approaching caravan. Surprise was visible on their faces, but it was quickly replaced by a practiced alertness as they awaited the newcomers. There was a single burning torch mounted on a wooden pole near the gate for light, while a few people who seemed to have followed the caravan through the village, stood nearby watching the wagons approach the gate.

When they reached closer to the gates, the guard on the left bellowed toward them, "Halt! Who goes there? What business do you have here?"

"I know you." The other guard said, looking carefully at Pydas in the front wagon. "You're that trader who comes here sometimes. Who said you could come towards the Baron's manor?"

"It is not for me that I come here. I bring with me your new lord, the Baron of Tiranat," Pydas replied while getting off the seat of his wagon.

Hudan and Feroy also got down from their horses and held their reins. Kivamus climbed down from Pydas's wagon, followed by Gorsazo, and walked towards the gate guards, while Hudan stayed close to them. The loose gravel crunched under his boots as he walked, but at least it wasn't muddy like the rest of the village.

Gorsazo gestured towards Kivamus and spoke to the guards, "This is the third son of the Duke of Udrig and the new Baron of Tiranat, Lord Kivamus Ralokaar." He took out a scroll from a pocket of his tunic and offered it to the guards. "Here is the duke's proclamation giving the ownership of this barony and all the surrounding lands to Lord Kivamus."

The guards, who looked completely out of their element dealing with a new lord, didn't seem to know what to do for a moment. However, the guard on the left, who was older, gained his wits first and bowed towards Kivamus, with the other, younger guard joining him. He took the offered scroll reverently but didn't open it yet. "Please wait here for a moment, my lord. I can't read so I will have to fetch the majordomo for this. Only Mister Duvass has the authority to admit anyone inside the manor." He looked to the younger guard, "You, run along now and tell Mister Duvass to come here. Go now, fast!"

The other guard opened the wooden gates a little and ran inside, while the first guard bowed apologetically to Kivamus again, "Please forgive me for the delay, my lord."

"No, it's okay. It is a good thing that you don't believe anyone with a tall claim," Kivamus replied. "We'll wait for the majordomo."

While they were waiting, Kivamus couldn't shake the image of the destitute villagers, many of them homeless, facing the harsh evening chill without a roof over their heads. Gorsazo's confirmation that it was still late autumn only intensified his worry. Seeing how close the village of Tiranat was to the Arakin Mountains where it was already snowing, had made it obvious that winter was not far away. And the villagers, in their current state, might not survive the harsh winter months. He didn't know what to do about the situation yet, but the thought of leaving them to face that fate was unbearable. These people depended on him now. He had to help them, somehow.

He looked around the area in the dusk. The walls of the manor were made of wooden logs taller than the people standing there. It extended for a small distance on both sides of the gates, but it was hard to see too much in the approaching darkness. The road that they had followed to come here through the middle of the village, ended at the gates of the manor. It may be too much to call it a road though, since it was just an empty path full of mud, that

meandered between the huts and wooden houses of the village. At least the area near the gates was covered with gravel though.

Soon, the younger guard reappeared, ushering through the gate a harried man who appeared to be around sixty years old. Thinning white hair, along with a small beard framed his face which was etched with lines that spoke of years under the unforgiving sun. He wore a simple tunic, the fabric well-worn and carrying the faint stain of what could have been ink. His gaze swept across the group gathered outside the gate, his squint deepening with concentration until it landed squarely on Kivamus. A flicker of recognition crossed his features when he saw him.

"Oh, it is you, Lord Kivamus!" He exclaimed and bowed to him. "What are you doing here? I didn't expect to ever see you here, my lord."

Kivamus was surprised. "You recognize me?"

"Of course, I do, Lord Kivamus. Forgive me, my lord, for not introducing myself sooner. I am Duvas, the majordomo of this manor. I have been to Ulriga a few times in the past to give a tally of our taxes paid to the Duke. You might not remember me, my lord, but I have seen you and your brothers there in the Ulriga palace." He frowned for a moment. "Are you the new Baron of Tiranat, my lord?"

"I am indeed. We can talk more later." Kivamus gestured to the guard who was still holding the scroll Gorsazo had given to him. "Would you take a look at the Duke's proclamation first? The guards refused to let me enter before you had verified it. All of us are tired and would like to rest soon."

"Excuse my forgetfulness, my lord." He took the scroll from the guard, who looked shaky now and tried to look at it in the flickering light of the torch. "It does have the Duke's seal, my lord, and I do recognize you already. But my eyes aren't what they used to be, so I'll take another look at it inside the manor in better lighting. But please come inside first, my lord." He gestured towards the gates, then turned to the guards. "And you two! You should have at least brought Lord Kivamus inside! He is the son of the Duke, for Goddess's sake!"

The younger guard, barely a man himself, gulped and stumbled back a step, his face draining of color. The shock was mirrored on the older guard's face, his weathered features paling beneath his grizzled beard. With shaking legs, both guards dropped to their knees before Kivamus.

"Forgive us, my lord!" the younger guard blurted, his voice cracking with fear. "We... we did not recognize you. And the seal... we cannot read, my lord, and with the recent troubles... We beg your forgiveness, my lord! Please, have mercy!"

The older guard, his voice gruff but steady, took over. "We meant no disrespect, my lord. It is our duty to protect the manor, and these are uncertain times since the previous baron was ambushed. We could not, in good conscience, allow anyone inside the gates without proper identification, and neither of us recognized you, my lord."

Kivamus raised a hand, silencing their pleas. His gaze, though calm, held an undeniable weight of authority. He surveyed the scene for a moment, taking in their obvious fear and the sincerity in their apology. The guards were only doing their jobs properly, and even if it still chafed at his modern sensibilities to see others kneeling before him, he was now a baron in a medieval world and had to act like it.

"There's no need for apologies, guardsmen," he said, his voice calm and reassuring. "It's an admirable display of caution and vigilance." Relief washed over the guards' faces, replacing the fear with a mixture of gratitude and curiosity.

"We won't be punished then, my lord?" The younger guard asked with a hopeful face, while the older one still looked uncertain.

"What is wrong with the nobles in this world?" Kivamus muttered under his breath. He replied to the still-kneeling guards, "Get up, both of you! Of course you won't be punished for doing your duty as guards! Now lead us inside."

The older guard, emboldened by Kivamus's forgiving nature, rose to his feet, a sheepish grin breaking out on his face. "Aye, my lord. We wouldn't want to keep our new Baron waiting outside the gates, now would we?"

The younger guard scrambled to his feet as well, his previous fear replaced by a newfound respect and admiration for his new liege.

As the guards began ushering Kivamus and others inside the manor gates, Pydas, the portly merchant, cleared his throat and spoke up. "My lord," he began, "it seems this is where our paths separate. It was a pleasure to have met you, and a most fortunate coincidence that brought us together."

Kivamus turned to Pydas, a thoughtful expression on his face. "Parting ways so soon, Pydas?" he asked. "Why not join us inside? I'm sure there's room for you and the other wagon drivers. Where would you even stay at this late hour?"

Pydas rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, my lord, I need to get down to business, you see. I need to find out if any of the local merchants are

interested in buying my goods before they close shops for the day. And there used to be a small alehouse in the village. The wagon drivers and I can find a room there for the night."

Kivamus nodded in understanding. "That's sensible. I appreciate the lift you provided to us. Speaking of which, are you certain about not accepting any fee for bringing us here?"

Pydas chuckled a warm sound that crinkled the corners of his eyes. "Quite certain, my lord. Consider it a... gesture of goodwill."

A smile tugged at the corner of Kivamus' lips. "Well, I can't let you go hungry after such a journey. At least join us for a meal tonight. It's the least I can do for you and your men."

Pydas hesitated for a moment, considering the offer. "Very well, my Lord," he finally conceded. "We wouldn't want to refuse your hospitality."

"Excellent!" Kivamus said. "As for your wagons, why not bring them inside the manor walls for safekeeping? No need to risk them sitting unattended in the village. Is that fine with you, Duvass?"

"What?" Duvas looked surprised to be asked the question. "Of course it is, my lord. It is your manor, after all!"

Relief washed over Pydas' face. "That would be fantastic, my lord. Much appreciated." He looked back at the two wagon drivers, then continued, "In that case, I'll take one of them along with me to talk to the merchants. Hopefully, some merchants will still be open. I will leave Levalo, the younger one, here to take care of the wagons and horses. We will return in around an hour for the meal you offered so generously," Pydas said with a bow.

"Great! I'll await your return."

With a final nod, Kivamus turned back to follow the guards, leaving Pydas to make arrangements with his men and his goods. The others, including Helga's family, the former inn guards, and Gorsazo followed Kivamus inside into the safety of the manor walls.