

FROM LONDONER TO LORD

13. Meeting The Residents

As they passed through the manor gates, Kivamus took a moment to gaze at the view in front of him. To their left, a sizable shed offered shelter for weary beasts of burden. Further ahead on the left, there was a larger barn with a sloped roof, its sturdy wooden frame promising ample storage space for hay and grain.

To their right, a small well stood near the gates, its bucket creaking rhythmically as a young maid drew water from it. Just beyond, near the corner of the manor, a small two-story wooden building identified itself as the servants' hall, a place for them and the guards to gather and rest. A plume of smoke was rising from its chimney promising a warm kitchen with a fireplace within. Further along the palisade walls on the right, another wooden building stood, which was perhaps a second barn.

In the center of this bustling courtyard stood the heart of the manor, the Baron's manor house itself. Constructed entirely of wood, the two-story manor boasted a multitude of rooms, with its sloping roof forming a picturesque silhouette against the twilight sky. Torches mounted on wooden poles around

the courtyard cast a warm, flickering glow, chasing away the encroaching darkness. And unlike the muddy road outside the manor, the interior had a gravel path connecting the various structures.

As they entered the courtyard, a flurry of activity surrounded them. Servants, maids, and a few guards, alerted by the approaching figures, abandoned their tasks, gathering around the newcomers with curious gazes. Their clothes were well patched, and the guards' leather armor looked like it had seen much better days.

Duvas stepped forward and cleared his throat. "People of the manor," he boomed, his voice carrying across the courtyard despite his age, "lend me your ears! I present to you, the new Baron of Tiranat, Lord Kivamus Ralokaar!"

A beat of surprised silence followed, then a collective gasp rippled through the crowd. Immediately, a wave of bows and curtseys rippled through the onlookers. Kivamus, unused to such a display of deference, raised a hand awkwardly, unsure how to respond to this sudden surge of attention. He had never considered himself a man of power, and being the focus of attention was slightly overwhelming to him.

"Welcome, my lord," the oldest maid, her face etched with wrinkles that spoke of years of service, said in a respectful voice. A chorus of similar greetings echoed around him.

Regaining his composure quickly, Kivamus raised his hands in a calming gesture. "Please, everyone, rise. There's no need for such formality," he said, his tone warm and friendly. "I am grateful for your welcome."

A hesitant smile spread across the faces of the manor residents. The arrival of a new Baron was a significant event, one that could bring either prosperity or hardship. Kivamus' genuine humility seemed to put them at ease.

Kivamus let them return to their tasks, while he took a moment to look around the manor he was going to be living in from now on.

As the servants and guards returned to their previous tasks, a flurry of activity commenced. Strong arms unhitched the tired horses from the wagons, leading them towards the welcoming shade of the animal shed, a place of fodder and a well-deserved rest for them. The clatter of wooden buckets and the excited whinnies of the horses filled the air as the grooms went about their work. Pydas, along with the older wagon driver walked back towards the gates, while the younger driver stayed inside to help with the horses.

Hudan and Feroy handed over the horses pulling the wagon of Helga's family as well as their own rides to the grooms, while Helga and Sryne climbed out of the wagon as well, joining Lucem.

With a final nod to the gathered crowd, Kivamus turned towards the doors of the manor house, following Duvas. Gorsazo fell into step beside him.

Helga, looking unsure for a moment, called out to Kivamus. "My lord! What about us?"

Kivamus turned to Duvas, a question already forming on his lips. "Duvas," he began, "these are my companions, and therefore, our guests. Do you have any available living quarters for them?"

Duvas stroked his beard thoughtfully. "The manor house itself has been essentially empty since the previous Baron and his family left on that ill-fated journey, my lord," he explained. "We've kept it clean and maintained, of course. And currently, I'm the only one occupying a room in it." He gestured towards the two-story building on the right. "There's also the servants' hall. It has a large hall on both floors, which offers enough space to house all the manor's servants and the off-duty guards. Traditionally, the women take the upper floor, and the men reside on the ground floor. It is your decision, my lord."

Kivamus considered both options for a moment before a smile played on his lips. "In that case," he declared, "they can all stay in the manor house with us. The rooms are empty after all, and it wouldn't do for our guests to feel relegated to the servants' quarters."

Helga hesitated. "My lord," she interjected, "are you sure about that? Staying in the actual manor house might be... well, a bit much for us. It is not necessary for you to house us there, my lord."

Kivamus smiled reassuringly. "Think nothing of it, madam Helga. The rooms are empty, as Duvas said, and there's no reason for them to stay unused."

Helga exchanged a glance with Syryne and Lucem, who both seemed to perk up at the idea. A small smile tugged at the corner of her own lips. "Very well, my lord," she conceded. "We will gratefully accept your hospitality, but only until we get back on our feet and find a place in the village itself."

"Of course," Kivamus replied, nodding. "It's entirely up to you, and I respect your wishes. In the meantime, please consider yourselves welcome in the manor house for as long as you need to stay."

He turned his gaze towards Hudan and Feroy, who were still standing nearby. Before he could speak, Feroy spoke up with a determined tone.

"Thank you for your generosity, my Lord," he said, a hint of a smile playing on his lips. "But we'll find a place with the other guards. No need to worry about us." He and Hudan bowed in unison, expressing their gratitude. "We will also talk with the guard captain here, to tell him to add us to the watch schedule for the manor. We do need to earn our keep, after all."

"That will be helpful. You both can certainly hold your own against any enemies." Kivamus looked to Duvas, "Can you let the guard captain know about them?"

Duvas hesitated for a moment. "I'm sorry to say, my lord, but there is no guard captain in the manor anymore. The previous baron had taken the former guard captain with him, along with a majority of the other guards on that journey. As you know, my lord, no one survived that trip, and since then we are already short on trained men. We have barely been able to manage a full watch schedule for the manor with the remaining guards with a few servants helping as well, and we couldn't even help the villagers when bandits attacked the village around a week ago. Although thankfully, there were no killings in that raid, they still looted away a lot of the stored food and money of the villagers. When leaving on their horses, they also set a few houses on fire, so the villagers would be busy putting out the fires instead of pursuing them."

"That explains the burnt houses," Hudan said regretfully. "And the way they looted so much from the village without any opposition from the guards, makes me think that they might get bold enough and raid again, perhaps soon."

The sight of those villagers, their gaunt faces etched with fear, huddling in what remained of their homes was burned in Kivamus' mind. Poverty, he knew, was a cruel reality for most in this world, and it was already a constant struggle to survive each new day. But the looming winter here in Tiranat, so close to the already snowing Arakin Mountains, meant those homeless people wouldn't survive the bitterly cold winter months without help. A pang of guilt pierced him. In his comfortable life in London, thoughts about people living in such hardship had rarely crossed his mind. Now, the contrast twisted his gut. He, an outsider thrust into this medieval world, would be well-provided for as a Baron, even as the villagers faced starvation and freezing temperatures.

Others in his position might choose to accept this disparity, maybe even reveling in their newfound noble status, but Kivamus refused to turn a blind eye. He knew little about this world, but one thing was certain, he wouldn't turn a blind eye to suffering. He wouldn't just sit idly by in his warm manor house while others lived in misery. A gust of wind rattled the manor, making Kivamus pull his cloak tighter, a physical echo of the resolve hardening within him.

"We have to discuss this again later on," Kivamus said with a resolute voice. "Hudan, remind me about this tomorrow, and we'll decide on what protective measures we can take to defend the village. They are my people now and we won't abandon them."

Hearing that, Helga, as well as others, couldn't stop their faces from getting a smile.

"Of course not, my lord." Duvas added, "However, only the baron has the authority to promote someone to a guard captain, so I have been managing the watch schedule by myself since then. It would be very helpful if you chose to promote a guard, my lord." Duvas gave a tired smile. "I have been taking care of too many things by myself, and it hasn't been easy for me."

"Of course, tomorrow we will see what can be done about that as well." Kivamus looked towards Hudan and Feroy. "For tonight though, you both should take a good rest."

"Thank you, my lord," Hudan said and joined Feroy in giving another bow to Kivamus.

The oldest maid, a woman around Helga's age, approached Kivamus. "My lord," she said, her voice carrying a hint of concern, "the previous Baron had taken his cook with him on that tragic journey," she continued apologetically, "so there's no one suitable for preparing a proper noble feast right now. But give us an hour, and we'll have the kitchen in the manor house up and running, and something cooked for you soon."

Kivamus couldn't help but raise an eyebrow. He glanced towards the servants' hall, where a plume of smoke rose from the chimney. "But I see smoke coming from the servant's hall," he pointed out. "I thought you had started preparing food for everyone already."

The woman offered a sheepish smile. "We had, my lord," she admitted. "But it's just simple porridge and some soup, for all of us common folk."

Kivamus considered this for a moment with a thoughtful expression on his face. "That's perfectly fine," he declared. "There's no need to prepare an entire new meal just for me. I'll gladly share what everyone else is having."

The old maid, along with the other curious servants and maids who had gathered nearby, stood speechless. Eventually, the old maid recovered her voice. "But... but my lord," she stammered, "it's just plain porridge! It wouldn't be proper for a noble like you!"

Kivamus waved a dismissive hand. "Nonsense! It's food, and I'm hungry. It's a waste to prepare a meal again just for me anyway. When it's ready, just bring me what everyone else is having."

His words had a profound effect. That simple act of humility caused a wave of relief and a hint of joy to wash over the old maid and the other servants who were standing nearby. Here was a lord who wasn't a tyrant or an oppressor.

The old maid, her initial shock replaced by a hint of warmth, nodded in acceptance. "Very well, my Lord," she said and turned to head back towards the servants' hall to continue cooking.

The other servants, their curiosity satisfied for now, got back to their duties as well, a newfound respect and perhaps even a hint of fondness evident in their smiles.

Lucem and Syryne, who had been watching the exchange with keen interest, couldn't help but smile as well. Even Helga, her initial reservations fading, shared in their sense of relief and hope. Perhaps, just perhaps, their new life in Tiranat wouldn't be so bad after all.