

## Londoner 15

### Chapter 15. Revelations

The world seemed to slow down as others rushed to her aid, their faces etched with a mixture of fear and determination. Helga forced the girl's mouth open and immediately made her vomit to remove any more poison from her frail body.

Kivamus, being unable to think about how to help, watched helplessly as minutes stretched into an eternity. At some point, the convulsions subsided, leaving the girl pale and trembling, but she was still alive. Helga's quick thinking, forcing the girl to vomit, brought a hint of relief to Kivamus' heart, as she might have just saved the poor girl's life.

Relief flooded the room, punctuated by Helga's questions to the girl. Clarisa managed to speak a little through gasps and tears. "Please forgive me, my lord."

Kivamus couldn't hide the surprise from showing on his face. "Why are you apologizing, Clarisa?"

Sobs prevented her from speaking for a moment, before Helga managed to calm her, telling her to continue. "It must be the Goddess punishing me, my lord!" She hiccuped. "But I was so hungry... Madam Nerida says there isn't enough grain anymore for us to eat twice, but I hadn't eaten anything since morning, my lord!" She couldn't stop her tears. "I only took a single sip from your soup, my lord! It was just one sip only!"

"What did you just say...?" Kivamus said to the still sobbing girl, surprised again.

It only took a moment for a chilling realization to dawn on him. He looked back towards the fireplace where he had kept that unassuming bowl of soup on the table. The soup, which was meant for him. The

warm, inviting meal that promised respite after a long journey, had poison mixed in it. Poison. Here, in his own manor house, on his first night as Baron.

He shuddered, thinking about the implications. This wasn't a world of fairytales and noble deeds. This was real, and a stark reminder of the treacherous nature of medieval politics. Here, power was a deadly game, where even his own brothers sent bandits to kill him. And just to be sure that he died, they had a backup option to poison him if he managed to reach Tiranat somehow. At least he thought that his brothers were behind this. But what if there was someone else who wanted him dead too? What if it was someone already living in this manor?

Fear, cold and primal, coiled in his gut. Somehow, he was still alive even after two attempts to kill him, but he didn't know if this was the end of it or if there was another nasty surprise waiting for him in the future. How could he navigate this treacherous landscape when he didn't even know the players? He took a deep breath, trying to slow down his racing heart. He hadn't anticipated this. He'd arrived here wide-eyed, filled with a naive hope of helping his people. The memory of the desperate villagers flashed in his mind, with their gaunt faces and threadbare clothes. He was their only hope, and now, someone already wanted him dead before he even tried to do something to help them.

The poor girl looked scared by now. "Please don't beat me, my lord, I won't do it again! I promise!"

Kivamus' mind was brought to a sudden halt after hearing that. "What...? I'm not going to hit you, Clarisa! Why did you even think that?" he couldn't help but ask her.

"You won't my lord?" She asked with hopeful eyes. "But I drank from your bowl of soup..."

Kivamus took a deep breath to calm himself. "No one is going to hit you, Clarisa, I promise you," he spoke with a gentle voice. "Now can you tell me why you thought that I was going to beat you? Do

others in the manor hit you? You can tell me, Clarisa, I won't be angry at you, I promise." The fearful look in the poor girl's eyes anguished his heart.

Clarisa looked at Helga for support, who was still holding the girl in her lap. Helga smiled at her while running a hand soothingly over her head, and nodded to her. Clarisa looked like she was trying to gather her courage before she spoke. "It was the previous baron, my lord. He always used to beat others when he wanted to punish them or even if he was angry. But it was only him, my lord, who beat the servants and maids." Her tear-streaked face had a mixture of fear and hope. "I thought you would be like that too, my lord. Would I really not be punished for drinking from your soup?"

The poor girl who was so hungry that she couldn't stop herself from taking a sip from his soup bowl had unintentionally saved his life, nearly dying herself in the process. If she had drunk any more of it, she truly might have died. And she was still scared that he would punish or beat her for that... What the hell is wrong with the people of this world, he thought with anger. Helga, who was still holding Clarisa, had a similar pain in her eyes after hearing about the young maid's past.

Kivamus knew this world was a harsh place to live, especially for the poor people. The memory of the villagers huddling in the burnt doorways, their eyes filled with a mixture of fear and hope was fresh in his mind. And the previous baron who should have been taking care of them, used to beat twelve-year-old girls. A wave of anger washed over him. He had never been a violent person in his life, but every new day here brought a revelation that made him want to strangle those who enjoyed the suffering of others. He had to force himself to take a few deep breaths once more, to calm his mind.

Kivamus was still fearful of those who kept trying to kill him, no matter who they were. He was a novice in this world of medieval treachery and its cut-throat politics. But he also had a strong will to survive. He might not have chosen to come to this world, but now that he was here anyway, he wouldn't let those people succeed in their tasks.

Slowly, his fear gave way to a steely resolve. He wouldn't just survive these power struggles, he would thrive. He would be a baron worthy of his people's trust. He would become a beacon of hope for those

who depended on him in this harsh world. He would make this place better, where children didn't have to fear that they would be beaten if they tried to eat to prevent themselves from starving.

It took a minute for Kivamus to gather his thoughts. His gaze swept over the room, taking in the worried faces of Helga and Gorsazo, and the confused anxiety of Lucem and Syryne. They were all looking to him for direction, for a sign of strength. He wouldn't let them down.

Clarisa, who was still waiting with anticipation to hear the decision of her new liege, was looking at him with eyes full of hope.

"Lucem, run outside and get Hudan and Feroy here, fast. Tell them it's an emergency and to come prepared," Kivamus said to Lucem, who nodded but looked a little confused. "Just say that to them, and come back. Now go, quickly."

Kivamus then bent down and sat on his knees to get to Clarissa's height, who was still lying in Helga's lap. He spoke to her in a soft voice. "Clarisa I'm really sorry that you were so hungry that you had to steal food. In the future, I'll make sure that you'll never be hungry again. And no one will ever beat you." He smiled at her to ease her mind. "Never again, I promise. Now would you please let Madam Helga take you to a place where you can sleep?"

Clarisa simply nodded at him.

Kivamus stood up again and looked to Duvas. "Is there an empty room nearby where Madam Helga can take her?"

Duvas was surprised. "Here in the manor house, my lord? But she is a maid!"

Kivamus looked at him with an unflinching gaze. "Yes, here in the house itself. Or do you have a problem with it, Duvas?"

"What? No, my lord, of course not. I was just surprised." Duvas pointed to another door inside the hall. "There are a few rooms there, my lord. All but the first one, where I live, are empty as well."

"Good. Madam Helga, can you and Syryne take her there to rest? Please make sure she has everything she needs."

Helga, who had a smile on her face now, managed to get Clarisa to walk slowly, with Syryne and her supporting the young maid from both sides and left the hall through that door.

Soon, Helga returned and told Kivamus that Syryne had stayed back with Clarisa to watch over her. Hudan and Feroy entered the hall from outside, their faces grim and alert. Lucem came inside as well, and on Gorsazo's gesture, locked the hall's door from the inside.

"Hudan, Feroy. Come inside." Kivamus said, his voice surprisingly calm considering the turmoil within. Briefly, Kivamus explained the situation, his gaze sweeping across everyone present.

Kivamus addressed the room. "Everyone here," he declared, his voice cutting through the tension, "except for Duvas, I trust you with my life."

Duvas, his face pale with a mixture of fear and confusion, stammered out a denial. "My lord," he croaked, "I assure you, I had nothing to do with..."

"I believe you," Kivamus interrupted, his gaze unwavering. "Duvas," he continued, his tone softening slightly, "I understand your fear. You are an elder, and at your age, I don't think you'd be doing something like this. Still, until we find the culprit, you will remain inside with us, just to be sure. Hudan, you will keep watch over him."

Duvas' face crumpled with relief. "Thank you, my lord," he stammered, his voice thick with emotion. "I assure you, I had no part in this."

Kivamus just nodded to him. "Hudan, stay close to the door to this hall and don't let anyone else enter, at any cost. We don't know who we can trust here, and it's better to be safe than sorry."

The tension in the room remained palpable. Hudan, with a curt nod, positioned himself near the door, his hand resting discreetly on the hilt of his sword, which he had kept right next to him now, so he could draw the sword at a moment's notice.

"Feroy, you go outside and gather information. Start with the servant's hall. That's where the soup was being prepared. And stop anyone else from drinking it, we don't know if it was just my bowl of soup that was poisoned or the whole pot."

Feroy, who had the look of a seasoned veteran now, nodded. "Trust me, Lord Kivamus, it won't take too long." He gave a quick bow and left the hall.