

Londoner 18

Chapter 18. Decisions

Duvas posed the question that hung heavy in the air. "What should we do with him, my lord?"

Hudan spoke first. "Typically, my lord," he rumbled, "the punishment for poisoning a noble would be the gallows. But in this case," he conceded, "Levalo wasn't successful. It was an attempt, nothing more." He scratched his beard. "So, execution wouldn't sit right with me. I think it may be a good opportunity to show the people that you can be merciful, my lord."

The weight of the judgment settled heavily on Kivamus' shoulders. He turned to Gorsazo, seeking his counsel. "What are your thoughts on this, Gorsazo?" he inquired.

Gorsazo stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Both options have merit, my lord," he began. "On one hand, executing Levalo would send a clear message that trying to harm the new Baron will not be tolerated. It would establish your authority with an iron fist."

A trace of unease crossed Kivamus's features. That approach felt barbaric, a far cry from the justice system he was accustomed to on Earth.

"On the other hand," Gorsazo continued, "Levalo did fail in his task. He showed remorse, and it seems clear he was acting out of desperation, not malice. If you show him mercy, it would demonstrate your compassion to your new subjects. It would establish you as a fair and just leader." He concluded, "Ultimately, the decision is yours, my lord."

Kivamus found himself wrestling with a dilemma unlike any he'd ever faced. He didn't have the benefit of legal training, nor the comfort of established procedures to make the right decision. Back on Earth, such a crime would be handled by a proper legal system, a process with checks and balances. Here, in this remote corner of this harsh new world, the law seemed to be a matter of the ruler's will. There were no police, no courts, and no juries here. In this world ruled by "might is right," powerful nobles could order murders or executions with impunity, their power a shield against any form of justice while the innocent suffered in silence.

The weight of this responsibility gnawed at him. Levalo, a young man burdened with the responsibility of his family's survival, had been forced into a terrible choice. The act itself was deplorable, but the root

cause - the crushing weight of serfdom and the cruelty of a distant noble, twisted Kivamus' guts with a strange mix of anger and empathy.

He took a deep breath to calm his mind. He was no judge, no legal scholar, but for now, the mantle of leadership rested on his shoulders. Finally, after a minute of thinking, Kivamus addressed the room, his voice firm. "I've made my decision. Levalo did attempt to poison me, that much is true. However, he failed, and thankfully, Clarisa will be fine as well." He paused, letting his gaze sweep across the faces of others, gauging their reactions.

He continued, "It's clear he acted out of desperation, forced into this situation to save his starving family. And from what I've seen, he seemed genuinely remorseful for his actions, and so I will not put him to death."

Hudan inclined his head in respect. "A wise decision, my lord," he rumbled. Helga, her eyes filled with understanding, gave a subtle nod of agreement.

Feroy, who was silent till now, remarked, "My lord, I don't mean to overstep my boundaries, but I think you are being too lenient. If even someone who tried to murder you isn't put to death, what's to stop others from trying this again?"

Kivamus had never been a violent person in his whole life, and despite everything that happened, could he truly order the death of someone who, in a desperate act, tried to keep his family from starving? He did realize there was a chance that Levalo could try it again if he remained alive, but after seeing his regret, he didn't think it was likely. And how could he, someone who worked in a normal office job all his life, suddenly start ordering people to be executed... He sighed. It hadn't even been a week since he arrived in this world and he already had to make a life-and-death decision.

He looked at the faces of others in the hall for a moment. "I realize that the usual decision would be to put him to death. Another good solution might be to put him in prison for a long time. But there are no jails in Tiranat, and it is already difficult to feed the people in the manor without adding someone we have to feed for years without him doing anything to earn his meals." After thinking for a minute, he concluded, "And I don't want to be a ruler who executes people who are only trying to feed their family."

This last sentence resonated with others, with probably most people in this world having done something against the rules, no matter how small, to ensure their children went to sleep on a full stomach.

Feroy suggested, "Then perhaps we could put him to work in the coal mines, my lord. For trying to kill a noble, he could work there for, let's say... five years. And assuming his behavior is good enough during that time, he can be let go after that."

Kivamus did not want to have a system of forced labor under his rule, but it still seemed like a more acceptable solution compared to executing Levalo. Thinking about it for a moment, he nodded. "That's a good idea. We'll do that." He added, his voice stern, "Keep him locked in the barn for now, until we can find a way to put him to work in the mines."

Taking a deep breath to steady himself, he looked at the others. He had made a difficult decision, one that balanced justice with mercy, and it seemed to have found acceptance with most of his new companions. Kivamus looked at Duvas. "Now that we know who was behind the poisoning, you don't have to worry, Duvas. And I hope you don't mind what I said to you earlier."

Duvas nodded, "Thank you, my lord, but it doesn't matter anymore. I understand why you had to say that. I agree that it is always a good idea to be cautious." He continued, "Might I suggest you address everyone outside, my lord? By now the news would have spread to others in the manor and they would be worried and fearful."

Kivamus nodded. "That's a good idea." Standing up, he walked towards the door, others accompanying him.

Hudan and Feroy soon had most of the residents gathered in the courtyard. Nervous faces, a mixture of servants, maids, stablehands, and a few off-duty guards stared back at Kivamus. Taking a deep breath, he addressed them, his voice calm yet firm.

"I've called you all here to explain a recent event," he began, his gaze sweeping across the crowd. He kept his explanation brief, outlining the attempted poisoning, Levalo's capture, and ultimately, his decision.

Relief washed over their faces as they learned of Kivamus' and Clarisa's well-being. Many servants, their faces etched with genuine concern, expressed their joy at his safety. Others, their voices trembling slightly, offered hesitant praise for his decision to show mercy. Here, in this harsh world, a leader who valued life, even that of a would-be assassin, was quite rare.

With the announcement concluded, Kivamus dismissed the gathering and the servants and maids returned to their duties, while whispers of "thank the Goddess" and "a terrible near miss" filled the air.

Madam Nerida, the head maid, approached him, her face etched with worry and a deep sense of responsibility. She bowed deeply and spoke to him, her voice thick with emotion, "I humbly apologize for letting it happen, my lord. Please forgive us all. It won't happen again."

Kivamus offered her a reassuring smile. "It was not your fault, Madam Nerida. Thankfully, no real harm was done."

His stomach rumbled in a reminder of the ordeal. "Now," he began, his voice tinged with exhaustion, "I believe we're all quite famished. Perhaps it's time we all finally had some food and retired for the night. A good night's sleep is exactly what we all need right now."

Madam Nerida nodded in agreement. "Of course, my lord," she said, her voice regaining its usual efficiency. "I shall personally see to it that your supper is delivered immediately." With a determined glint in her eye, she turned and marched back towards the servants' hall.

Kivamus watched her and other lingering servants going back to their duties, a weary smile gracing his lips. Despite the harrowing events of the evening, a strange sense of normality, however fragile, seemed to be returning to the manor. The servants scurried about their duties, the tension slowly dissipating. Perhaps, just perhaps, they could put this episode behind them and focus on rebuilding their lives in this place.

As they waited for their meal in the manor hall, Kivamus, unable to stop thinking about the attempted poisoning, muttered under his breath, "Why can't they just leave me alone? My brothers managed to get me banished to this remote corner of the kingdom, isn't that enough for them? What more do they want?"

He pinched the bridge of his nose, a deep sigh escaping his lips. "And we still have no idea who that man could be. Was it really Baron Zoricus who ordered this? I don't know why he could be trying to murder

me when I don't even know the man!" He added with exhaustion in his voice, "And we can't even say for sure the intermediary was working for Baron Zoricus."

"There are many possibilities, my lord. It could easily be one of your brothers behind this as well," Gorsazo suggested. "Or maybe it's the Count himself, wary of a new, strong baron in Tiranat. You are, after all, a son of the duke, unlike the other barons who can't rival his influence. And Count Cinran is well known to be hostile against the Duke's family. So he may have tried to get rid of you before you were properly established in Tiranat."

Duvas spoke with a cautious note. "We can't rule out the possibility that Baron Zoricus has his own reasons, independent of your brothers or the Count. Without more information, it's difficult to say for certain."

Their conversation was interrupted by a discreet knock on the door. A guard entered, his face stoic. "My lord," he announced, "Pydas has returned."

Kivamus sighed. There was no point in speculating about it without more information. "Let him in," he instructed.

The door creaked open further, and Pydas shuffled into the hall, his brow furrowed with worry. "My lord," he stammered, "I... I come to beg forgiveness for the actions of my wagon driver, Levalo. I had no knowledge of his intentions, and I assure you..."

Kivamus offered a reassuring smile. "It's alright, Pydas, I know everything now. You couldn't have known about Levalo's plan. Thankfully, no real harm was done."

Relief washed over Pydas's face. "I heard you didn't execute him, my lord. You... you've forgiven him?"

"For now," Kivamus confirmed, gesturing towards a chair at the long wooden table. "Please, have a seat. Join us for a meal."

Pydas stammered his thanks, collapsing gratefully into the offered chair. "I... I am truly grateful for your mercy, my lord." He cast a quick, curious glance around the room, likely taking in the unfamiliar surroundings of the manor hall.

The sound of footsteps announced the arrival of Madam Nerida. She was accompanied by another maid, both carrying steaming bowls and wooden plates. A simple yet hearty meal of porridge and soup awaited them.

Kivamus turned to her. "Madam Nerida," he inquired, "is there enough food for everyone tonight?"

Hesitation was visible on her face, but she nodded nonetheless. "Yes, my lord," she confirmed. "I... I increased the amount I was preparing after your caravan arrived. However, I'm afraid it won't last long if we continue feeding this many people."

Kivamus nodded in understanding. "We'll address the food situation tomorrow," he assured her. "For tonight, let everyone eat their fill. No one should go to bed hungry."

The warm expression on Madam Nerida's face conveyed the gratitude she felt. "Thank you, my lord," she breathed, before bowing and leaving the room along with the other maid.

As they scraped the last remnants of porridge from their bowls, Pydas rose from his chair, a mixture of gratitude and worry etched on his face. He bowed deeply. "Thank you once again for your hospitality, my lord."

Kivamus offered him a reassuring smile. "Think nothing of it, Pydas. Now, tell me, do you have a place to stay for the night?"

Pydas nodded. "I have a room arranged above the alehouse, my lord."

"Excellent," Kivamus replied, though his keen eyes detected a hint of unease on Pydas's face. "Tell me, Pydas, is there something else troubling you?"

Pydas shuffled his feet awkwardly, his gaze darting around the room before settling back on Kivamus. With a deep breath, he finally spoke. "Well, my lord," he began hesitantly, "to be honest, I'm quite worried about selling my goods. Since I had heard that traders were rarely coming to Tiranat for the past few months, I brought a considerable amount of grain with me, hoping to sell it here."

Disappointment clouded Pydas's face as he continued, "Unfortunately, Kigeir, the only big merchant in Tiranat who usually buys it from me, told me he couldn't afford to buy more than a few sacks of grain. And without selling my stock of grain, I simply can't afford to buy any coal to take back with me."

Kivamus exchanged a knowing glance with Gorsazo, who offered a silent nod of confirmation.

"Tell you what, Pydas," Kivamus said, a hint of a plan forming in his mind. "Why don't you return here tomorrow, around mid-morning? We might just have a solution to your problem."

A spark of hope ignited in Pydas' eyes. "A solution, my lord?" he echoed, his voice tinged with a newfound optimism. "You mean you might be interested in buying some grain yourself?"

"Something like that," Kivamus replied with a hint of a smile. "Come back tomorrow, and we'll discuss what can be done."

Pydas didn't need to be told twice. A trace of relief was easily visible on his stressed face. "I... I would be most grateful for the opportunity to trade directly with you, my lord. Thank you again for the meal and your kindness. I'll be sure to return tomorrow morning."

With a final bow of gratitude, Pydas exited the hall, his steps lighter than they had been all evening. Kivamus watched him go, a thoughtful expression on his face.

Finally, after a day filled with tension and revelations, Kivamus stood up from his chair and stretched, his muscles protesting. "Well," he announced, his voice tired but firm, "this has been a very long day. I think we can all agree that sleep is a necessity right now. Let's get some rest. We'll need all our strength for whatever tomorrow brings."

One by one, they rose from their chairs, their faces etched with a mixture of exhaustion and anticipation. The attempted poisoning had cast a dark shadow on their arrival to Tiranat, but Kivamus' decision to show mercy, coupled with a potential solution to their grain shortage, offered a fragile sense of hope for a more peaceful future, and a hope for a new beginning, a new dawn for Tiranat.