

Londoner 29

Chapter 29. Borders Of The Barony

Gorsazo offered his insights. "My Lord," he began, his voice steady and reassuring, "the decision to keep slaves rests entirely with the individual noble. It's a matter of personal choice." He elaborated further, drawing on his knowledge. "I have heard of some places in the northern parts of the kingdom, where many nobles have chosen to forgo slaves altogether. However, these nobles usually allow others, like wealthy merchants or landowners, to own slaves if they so desire, for fears of a rebellion against them."

A pause settled between them before he continued. "Now," he continued, his voice laced with caution, "your earlier declaration about abolishing slavery entirely within your barony," he clarified, "that's a far more radical step than just freeing the slaves which you owned yourself. It essentially forbids anyone under your domain from owning slaves. This," he warned, "could incite rebellion amongst any current slaveholders in your domain."

"Imagine this, my Lord," he added, his voice dropping to a low murmur. "Any slaveholders within your barony would likely rise up in protest, lodging formal complaints with Count Cinran. Should you refuse to back down," Gorsazo continued, his voice grave, "the Count holds the authority to strip you of your lands and title entirely."

A wry smile played on Gorsazo's lips. "However, slaves don't come cheap," he added, casting a glance around the meager surroundings, "and considering the state of Tiranat, it's unlikely anyone here possesses the means to purchase a slave in the first place, wouldn't you agree, Duvas?"

Duvas chimed in with a confirmatory nod. "Indeed," he agreed. "The previous baron was the only one in Tiranat who ever kept slaves. As of now, there aren't any other slaveholders here. So the chances of anyone filing an official complaint with the Count are negligible." He added, "These days, most of the people here are more worried about where their next meal will come from, instead of thinking about ways to criticize or complain about the new baron."

"At least there's that," Kivamus sighed in relief. A contemplative silence descended upon the group as they mulled over it.

"However," Duvas cautioned, "news of your actions will undoubtedly reach Count Cinran eventually. And how he reacts to this news remains to be seen. Although without a formal complaint lodged against you from someone within this barony," he pointed out, "the Count would be hard-pressed to impose

any charges based solely on hearsay. But the ripples of your decision will certainly be felt amongst the nobility."

Gorsazo offered a final thought. "There's also the somewhat unusual circumstance of your appointment," he said. "While the Count holds a position of authority over Tiranat, it wasn't Count Cinran who bestowed the barony upon you, it was the Duke himself. I believe being a son of the Duke should afford you at least some degree of leeway in this matter. But as Duvas mentioned, the other nobles, particularly in the south of the Kingdom, where Count Cinran's domain lies, are sure to take a negative view of your actions."

"Indeed." Kivamus acknowledged the complexities they faced with a slow nod.

"Well," he declared, "let's address those issues when the time comes. We have more pressing matters to attend to at the moment."

The weight of their current predicament - securing the much-needed grain shipment and bolstering the manor's defenses, settled heavily upon them. For now, their focus had to be on the immediate challenges that threatened the very survival of Tiranat.

Hudan, the newly appointed captain of the guard, strode back towards them, his movements purposeful. "My Lord," he announced, his voice carrying a hint of pride, "I've dispatched a few guards to the village square. They'll spread the word that we're actively recruiting a dozen new guards."

Kivamus offered a nod of approval. "Hopefully, by the afternoon or even this evening, we'll have a good number of men interested in becoming a guard."

He turned to Duvas. "Once we have a decent pool of potential recruits," he continued, outlining the next steps, "you and Hudan can then conduct a proper selection process and pick the most capable and trustable men for the job as we planned earlier."

"However," he added, his voice turning serious, "we need to devise a solution for feeding the rest of the villagers as well. Hiring new guards and offering them grain and coal as their wages is only a start."

He cast a thoughtful glance towards the servants, their movements imbued with a newfound sense of purpose as they transferred the precious grain sacks. Their renewed energy, a stark contrast to the listlessness that had gripped them before, served as a reminder of the positive impact that having enough food could have on people.

He elaborated on his concerns. "We need to create more opportunities for work in the village," he continued, his gaze connecting with others. "That way, we can provide the villagers with the means to earn their keep and ensure they have enough grain to survive. So," he inquired, "where were we in our discussion before Leah's arrival?"

"We were discussing the surrounding lands, my Lord," Duvas clarified.

Kivamus, his mind buzzing with possibilities, stood silent for a moment, his gaze sweeping across the dense forest that encircled the manor and the village. The servants, diligently working nearby, seemed to fade from his vision as he contemplated the vastness of his domain.

As if struck by a sudden realization, Kivamus turned back to Duvas, a question forming on his lips. "Duvas," he began, his voice filled with curiosity, "how far do the borders of this barony actually extend?"

Duvas chuckled softly, a hint of amusement playing on his lips. "That, my Lord," he replied, "is where things are a little peculiar. As you well know, baronies typically encompass a relatively small area of land. However, Tiranat finds itself in a rather... unique situation."

He elaborated, "While being nestled within these vast, dense forests undoubtedly poses significant dangers, it also presents a unique opportunity. These sprawling woodlands remain entirely unclaimed."

"Technically," he clarified, "these forests still fall under the domain of Count Cinran. However, in all of my experience here since the barony was founded, as long as the baron of Tiranat fulfills his obligation to pay the taxes owed by him," he added, "Count Cinran has never shown any interest in exerting control over these treacherous lands."

"So," he added with a sly grin, "there are no other barons in the vicinity to challenge your claim if you were to, shall we say, expand your territory, my Lord."

Kivamus's mind reeled as he processed this new information. "So, you're saying..." he began, a hint of awe creeping into his voice, "that all these lands, as far as the eye can see, could easily be mine?"

Duvas, still grinning, only gave a nod in reply, while Gorsazo and Hudan had satisfied smirks on their faces.

The reality of the situation took a moment to sink in. Back on Earth, the mere notion of buying the apartment he was renting, seemed like a distant dream, with the astronomical housing prices. But here, in this strange new world, he found himself the owner of a vast expanse of land, the likes of which he couldn't even have imagined on Earth.

However, he reminded himself, this was not Earth, and Tiranat was not a nice and cozy nature resort where people went for vacations. All kinds of dangers surrounded them in the middle of these uncharted forests, from ferocious beasts to ruthless bandits. And who knows what other threats lay hidden within these vast forests...

Yet, amidst the dangers, a seed of hope bloomed within Kivamus. These vast, unclaimed lands held the potential to not only secure his own future but also build a brighter destiny for the entire barony. He already had the knowledge of a technologically advanced world, the likes of which these people couldn't even dream of...

Perhaps, with careful planning and hard work, he could transform Tiranat from a struggling barony into a thriving domain. And if he could harness the full potential of these lands, cultivate them, or exploit their resources strategically, it could be the key to their survival and eventual prosperity. The possibilities were endless...

~ Cedoron ~

Cedoron grunted with exertion as he struck repeatedly against the red-hot metal with a rhythmic clang of his hammer, the bulging muscles in his arms flexing and rippling beneath his tanned skin. With a final, resounding blow, he brought his hammer down upon the glowing metal kept on the anvil, shaping the sword with practiced ease.

He reached over with a pair of tongs, gingerly gripping the glowing blade, examining it from all angles. A grunt of approval escaped his lips. It wasn't perfect, but it was close enough. Satisfied with its form, he

plunged the metal into a waiting barrel of water, a hiss of steam erupting as the hot metal met the cool liquid.

He sank back onto his workbench with a sigh, wiping his brow with a sweat-soaked sleeve. Though the midday sun hung high in the sky, a persistent chill lingered in the air, a constant reminder of the approaching winter. But despite the chill, sweat beaded on his forehead, a result of the intense heat generated by his glowing forge. He reached for a wooden mug resting on the workbench and took a long, satisfying gulp of cool water, the refreshing liquid easing the dryness in his throat.

As he drank the water, he thought about his current circumstances. Work had been slow for a while now, but the past few months had been particularly bleak. Usually, a steady stream of miners came to his shop, bringing broken tools - shovels, pickaxes, and the like, for repair. But ever since the flooding of the coal mines, work had become scarce. With the mines closed, there were no miners, and without miners, there were no broken tools to repair. Now his days were often spent in quiet solitude, punctuated only by the sound of his hammer against metal. He wasn't one to sit idle, though. Each day, he forced himself to find some task, no matter how trivial, to keep his skills sharp.

News of the new Baron's arrival had reached Cedoron yesterday, but he hadn't been able to join the crowd that flocked to watch the caravan. He'd been too engrossed in his work, being unable to leave it in the middle or he would have had to start again from the beginning.

He didn't know what to expect from the new Baron. The future of Tiranat, and by extension, his own livelihood, rested on the decisions this new leader would make. He sighed, wiping the sweat on his face again. All he could hope was that the coal mines would reopen soon, and with that, there would be enough work for him along with a return to normalcy.

Cedoron glanced out towards the street, his gaze falling upon a familiar figure skipping towards his workshop. Leah, his childhood friend, hurried down the street towards his shop, a radiant smile illuminating her face. They had only spoken an hour ago, and Cedoron couldn't imagine what had brought her back so soon.

As Leah drew closer, he noticed a hint of moisture in her eyes which glistened in the afternoon sun. A frown creased his brow. Leah had always been strong, and seeing her so emotional sent a jolt of worry through him. Although they didn't get to meet very often, their friendship had endured through stolen moments between her duties in the manor.

Before he could voice his worry, Leah threw herself into his arms, her sobs muffled against his sturdy chest. Taken aback, Cedoron instinctively wrapped his arms around her trembling form.

"Leah? What happened?" he asked, his voice laced with concern. "You just left here a while ago. What's wrong?"

But instead of replying, Leah's sobs intensified, her body wracked with silent tears. Cedoron, at a loss, could only hold her close, patting her back in a comforting rhythm. Slowly, her sobs subsided, replaced by a shaky sniffle.

Pulling back slightly, Leah looked up at him, smiling with a teary face. "I'm free, Cedoron," she whispered, her voice thick with emotion.

Cedoron furrowed his brow in confusion. "Free?" he echoed. "Well, of course, you must be free," he said with a chuckle, "since you found the time to visit me twice in the same day! Not that I mind it..."

He tilted his head, a playful glint in his eyes. "Did the new Baron decide you weren't cut out for sewing and send you packing?"

Leah giggled and shook her head. "No, silly!" she exclaimed, wiping at her tears with the back of her hand. "I mean, I'm not a slave anymore! I'm free now!"

Leah, the shy girl he had known since they were children, who was easily his best friend now, and perhaps even more, had been a slave nearly all her life. As a slave, she couldn't choose where to live or who to live her life with. At times, they had even talked about running away together to another place, even though continuously hiding from the bounty hunters would have made their lives a living hell. And that would be if they were even successful in running away in the first place. But... could it be true? Could she really be free?

Cedoron's heart hammered against his ribs. He stared at her, his mind struggling to grasp her words, leaving him speechless for a moment. He held Leah at arm's length, his gaze searching her teary face for any hint of a joke. But the raw emotion in her eyes told the truth.

Over the next few minutes, Leah poured out the details of her extraordinary day. As she recounted the events - the proclamation of freedom from the new baron, the disbelief she felt, and the overwhelming sense of liberation - Cedoron felt a lump form in his throat. Tears welled up in his own eyes, tears of joy for his best friend who had finally been released from a life of servitude, and for the possibility of a future that could not have been possible without her freedom.

This time, it was Cedoron who pulled Leah into a crushing hug. The weight of her newfound freedom and the possibilities that lay before them, filled him with a happiness he hadn't felt for a long time.

"And guess what?" Leah exclaimed, pulling back slightly, a mischievous glint returning to her eyes. "I don't even have to live in the manor anymore!"

Cedoron, trying to contain his overflowing emotions, chuckled. "What? Did the baron really throw you out then?" he teased, feigning offense. "Where are you supposed to live now?"

Leah giggled, the sound feeling like music to Cedoron's ears. "I don't know," she teased, her eyes sparkling with playful innocence. "If only I had a childhood friend who might be willing to let me stay with him..."

Cedoron burst out laughing, the sound echoing through the small workshop.

Relief washed over him, warm and comforting. His best friend was free, and a new chapter in their lives was about to begin. He pulled Leah into a tight embrace, his heart swelling with a happiness that rivaled the heat of his forge. It was the beginning of a new future for them, and no matter what it held, at last, they would face it together from now on. And the new baron was to thank for it.