

FROM LONDONER TO LORD

3. Approaching Cinran

Gorsazo explained, "The thing is, my lord, that he has never been a big fan of the ruling family of Ulriga. Being the most powerful count in the duchy of Ulriga means he is the main rival to the duke's power. At some point, the news got out that your brothers would inherit the duchy and the fort both, and you would be made a baron in a far-off village, instead of being kept as a spare heir in Ulriga, as is the norm. Since then, the other nobles would probably have started thinking that there was no point in currying favor with you anymore since the duke himself had seemingly abandoned and even exiled you." Gorsazo looked at the scenery outside the carriage for a moment, seemingly lost in thought.

He continued after a while, "And as for the Count of Cinran himself, I believe he would prefer to ignore or even scorn you, to humiliate the duke's family in front of the other nobles in his court, knowing that he will get away with it since you seem to have lost the favor of the duke now."

"Hmm... my brothers must have had something to do with all of this as well. Perhaps they thought their positions would be more secure if I was far away

from Ulriga." Kivamus breathed a sigh of relief. "It could be much worse though." At least they didn't just murder him to secure their titles. Kivamus shuddered thinking about the literal cut-throat politics of the medieval era. Still, he would have to learn to survive in this, even as a baron of a remote village.

"Perhaps, my lord. Maybe it's better this way since you will have far more freedom to live your life as you want in Tiranat than you would have had in Ulriga. I know you have never been interested in politics, and living in Ulriga would have meant being a part of the court and the duchy's politics, whether you wanted to or not. At least in Tiranat, you won't have your brothers watching your every step to check if you are going to become a thorn in their paths in the future."

"That's true enough," said Kivamus. "Earlier you mentioned that I'm short on money. How much do I have?"

"As you know, my lord, for the past few years, you had told me to manage your money, so even though your recent drinking took a big share of it, I managed to save something regularly from the small monthly allowance you got from the duke. Right now, you have around twenty-three hundred Reslinor crowns, which are the gold coins, in case you don't recall, my lord," Gorsazo said with a slight smirk, which was quickly hidden.

He continued, "That is a small fortune for any common person, including me. Still, it's a very small amount if you are going to live in Tiranat for the rest of your life at anything resembling the luxury of the Duke's Palace in Ulriga. You or your brothers would easily squander a similar amount in a few months in Ulriga." He hesitated for a moment. "I also don't think you are going to get any more of an allowance from now on, my lord."

"Hmm... that's quite likely. It's also certainly true that I never thought of saving money for the future, since I never had to think about managing my day-to-day expenses before," at least not on this planet, thought Kivamus. "You know I never believed that I'd really be living in Tiranat in the future. But I simply can't afford to live in luxury, like I did in the past, if I'm going to make the money last longer." After thinking about it for a minute, he continued, "I will let you hold my money as earlier until I learn more about life in Tiranat. I don't even know the regular prices of anything in the markets and would likely be overcharged without even realizing it. But I do want to know about what the money is being spent on, from now on."

It wasn't as if Kivamus thought that Gorsazo might be pilfering from his money since he was the only person who had really seemed to care about Kivamus in the past. But he had to know more about this world if he was going to survive in it.

"Of course, my lord. That would be wise."

There was a comfortable silence in the carriage afterward as they watched the scenery rolling by them while the carriage was pulled by the horses. They continued their journey towards Cinran with thoughts of all kinds rolling through the mind of Kivamus, the former engineer from Earth.

It was their second day on the road since Steven had inexplicably found himself in the body of Kivamus, the recently exiled third son of the Duke of Ulriga. After a stop yesterday night on the banks of the Kal River, where they ate some meat jerky and hardtack biscuits once more, they were again on the move since the morning. They passed a branching of the road, going towards the east soon after starting. Gorsazo told him that it went towards the southeastern border of the Reslinor kingdom and the contested region of Tolasi Hills.

They kept moving most of the day with only a few breaks to relieve themselves or stretch their legs. Kivamus could readily attest that relieving himself in the open with only some bushes to hide behind and no piped water supply was one thing that he already disliked about this world. It was a stark contrast to the modern conveniences he took for granted for all his life and a constant reminder of how much he missed his old life. But it wasn't something that he could do anything about for now.

It was evening now on the second day. After another full day on the road, while sitting on a constantly jumping carriage bench with no suspensions and barely any cushioning to speak of, Kivamus knew what a luxury even his decade-old car was, back on Earth. At this rate, it seemed like he would keel over once again if they had to continue traveling like this on such bumpy dirt roads. It certainly reinforced the idea that the original Kivamus had lived a life of luxury till now without any thought towards remaining healthy or keeping fit, Kivamus thought while moving his hand over the slightly protruding belly of his newfound body. He realized that it would take a lot of work to get this new body in shape, but it was something that he promised himself to prioritize once he was settled in Tiranat. He just couldn't afford to stay as he was right now if his new life consisted of traveling for days in such poor conditions.

Throughout the day as they moved southwards, the Arakin mountain range became visible further in the south. There was some sparse snow visible near the top of the mountains, but not much. Gorsazo had told him earlier that it would have snowed already in the northern towns of the Reslinor kingdom. However Tiranat was near the southern border of the kingdom, so Kivamus didn't know about the climate there.

"Gorsazo, how cold is it in Tiranat? I know Ulriga gets some snow nearly every year, but what about places further south, like Cinran or Tiranat? You know I don't like the cold very much." Kivamus said the last part before realizing that his own preferences and those of the original Kivamus might not

be the same at all. Still, he couldn't do anything about it now, other than to hope that Gorsazo didn't notice the last sentence much.

"As you know my lord, it's late autumn right now. I have visited Cinran a few times to meet a friend who lives there, and I heard from her that the climate of Cinran is quite similar to Ulriga. It was starting to get chilly in Ulriga in the nights when we left, so it should be like that in Cinran too, I think. Although it shouldn't snow until the middle of the winter, since it is located southwards from Ulriga." He paused to think about something for a moment and continued, "However, I haven't ever been to Tiranat before, so I can't say for sure about it. It is located further south than Cinran, so it might actually be warmer there, at least in the summers, considering that the cold winds in Cilaria Island, in which the kingdom of Reslinor is located, come from the northeast. However, the coal mines around which Tiranat village exists, are located close to the Arakin mountain range, so it might still get much colder there in the winter as well. I can't say for sure, my lord."

"I guess we will find out when we get there," Kivamus said while being thankful that Gorsazo didn't notice his slip earlier. Or maybe the preferences of the original Kivamus and him were similar, at least regarding the cold. He didn't know how to feel about that.

Their carriage continued moving and soon enough the driver told them that they were getting close to Cinran now.

As they approached the town of Cinran, which was situated on the other side of the Kal River, they saw more wagons, carriages, and some carts on the road coming from and going towards the Cinran town. Some were empty, while others were covered with oilcloth to protect their goods from dirt and rain. Occasionally, a rider on a horse would pass close to their carriage while kicking up a plume of dust on the road. The Kal River itself had much more traffic this close to Cinran, as various canoes and boats slowly oared towards the docks which were now becoming visible on the other shore of the river. There were a few small ships with sails on them as well, and those looked much bigger than the row boats. They were either loading or unloading their goods or waiting for their turn on the small riverside docks.

Slowly their carriage approached the narrow wooden bridge on the Kal River and they joined the haphazardly formed line while waiting for their turn to enter the town. It seemed like a fairly long line to Kivamus. There were maybe around a dozen wagons and carts in front of them as well as some of their owners who had also stepped out to look around. There were also quite a few other people who were carrying goods on their backs or heads. Most of the people seemed to be wearing patched and heavily repaired tunics, although some of them were dressed in newer clothes and looked like merchants of some kind. However, the haphazard line of wagons and people going into the town seemed to be moving quite slowly.

To learn more about the situation, he and Gorsazo stepped out of their carriage. It was evening time and the sun had dipped below the stone walls of Cinran on the other shore of the river. The rickety wooden bridge on which they were now standing didn't seem very wide or sturdy to Kivamus. He just hoped that it wouldn't give way suddenly, even though the other people didn't seem bothered about it. A few small water mills were also visible on some buildings on the other shore of the Kal River. There was a drawbridge on the other side of the wooden bridge, just before the gates of the Cinran town. It reminded Kivamus that now he was indeed in a medieval world, where armies attacked and laid siege to towns and drawbridges were ready to be raised at a moment's notice.

"Is it always this crowded here? That's a lot of people going into Cinran at the same time," Kivamus said.

"They seem like farmers and laborers from nearby areas, my lord. Usually, there would only be a wagon or two at a time, especially this close to the night. However, the harvest season has ended recently and the farmers are coming in droves now to sell their produce and grains. And soon it will be dark anyway, my lord, and nobody wants to be caught outside the town walls in the night. Bandits are quite rampant in the forests, especially this far south in Reslinor."

"Bandits?" Kivamus exclaimed. "But we stopped next to the road for each of our stops at night! You mean we could have been ambushed anytime and you didn't even mention it?" He had realized that this world would be more dangerous than Earth in many ways, but knowing that bandits were so prevalent that it was dangerous to stay out in the dark or you might easily be kidnapped or murdered was quite different from his modern London sensibilities of safety and security.

"No, no, my lord, if the danger was that high on our journey, I would have told you. Bandits are indeed quite common in the forests and in the areas away from any major cities or towns. But we traveled from Ulriga to Cinran right next to the well-traveled Kal River and passed Fort Aragosa on our way, you remember?" Gorsazo replied. "This particular road is quite safe, my lord, at least till Cinran. The duke maintains regular patrols from Ulriga to the fort and there are some patrols further to Cinran as well, although the bandits won't dare to attack people near the fort anyway. Forgive me for mentioning this, my lord, but you were in such a drunken haze at the beginning of the journey that you might not have noticed the patrols by Duke's horsemen on the road. Even in the past two days since you stopped drinking, my lord, you have slept so soundly that you must have missed the horse-mounted knights patrolling the road."

"That's true enough." Kivamus was indeed so tired yesterday that once he went to sleep he had only woken up in the morning without any disruption to his sleep. This journey on a carriage was so uncomfortable to someone like him who was unused to traveling on wooden carriages on a bumpy dirt road, that he had taken a nap many times, even during the day. Although he did

recall seeing a pair of mounted horsemen in plate armor rushing past them once or twice, he had thought that they were just knights going alone to fulfill a task given to them. "But what about after Cinran? We still have a few days' journey ahead of us, don't we?"

"That's the difficult part, my lord. You see, the road from Cinran going further south to Tiranat goes right through the middle of the forests. And that is indeed a dangerous journey, especially for those traveling alone. That's why merchants and travelers usually join a caravan going south, instead of traveling alone. So far we haven't needed any guards, but it might be better to hire a few trusted men for our journey further south. Even though I'm not sure how much we can trust mercenary guards anyway." He seemed to hesitate for a second, but made up his mind and continued in a somber tone in a low voice, "You would have found this out sooner or later anyway my lord, so I'm telling you about this now before we start our journey through the forests. Do you remember why you were sent to the barony of Tiranat and not to some other place?"

"Uh... I'm not sure, Gorsazo. I thought that's what the Duke, I mean, my father wanted?"

"Well yes, my lord. But still, your destination was the barony of Tiranat, because the barony had conveniently been without a baron for the past few months. So, instead of removing a baron from his lands and giving them to you, which would have caused resentment among the nobles if the Duke

started taking away their titles on his whims, he sent you to Tiranat, which doesn't have a baron right now. It's a different matter that coincidentally, it was probably the most dangerous barony in the duchy of Ulriga which happened to be without a baron. To add to it, it was not a natural event that made Tiranat leaderless. The previous baron and his family were killed a few months ago in a bandit attack while traveling on the road from Tiranat to Cinran."

"I didn't know that."

Kivamus had thought that at least the nobles would be safe from the bandits in this world. One way after another, this world continued to seem more and more dangerous to him. He missed his previous life on Earth every new day, not that there was anything he could do about it, other than trying to survive in this world for now.

Then a thought came to his mind, but it was not something he wanted to discuss out in the open. He saw that their carriage driver had also stepped off his seat in the front of the carriage and was now standing a little distance away from it, probably trying to see what the delay was. Although there was nobody else near them, he gestured to Gorsazo to climb inside the carriage and then followed him inside as well. He closed the flaps of the carriage after taking a look around that nobody nearby was trying to listen to them.