

Londoner 32

Chapter 32. Hoarding The Grain

Hudan offered a curt nod. "Consider it done, my Lord," he replied with unwavering resolve.

Gorsazo suggested, "Since many villagers will be gathered there anyway, it would be a good idea to make other announcements at the same time as well. Since we are looking for skilled carpenters and any experienced farmers in Tiranat, announcing this in the gathering would spread this news faster, and we will be able to meet with them before the evening."

Kivamus nodded. "Indeed. Their knowledge will be helpful to make a list of the necessary tools we require. Saws, shovels, axes, and anything else that might be needed for preparing the land for farming. We can then give this list to Pydas and have him purchase them for us in Cinran."

Duvas chimed in, "My Lord, once we have a clearer picture of what tools we actually need, we should also consider the tools Pydas already brought with him. Although he brought them with coal mining in mind, many of those tools could be repurposed for our current needs."

Kivamus's eyes widened in realization. "Of course!" he exclaimed. "That completely slipped my mind. We should definitely ask what Pydas has brought and see if anything can be used for our requirements."

Syryne, who had been a silent observer until this point, spoke up, her voice laced with concern. "My Lord," she began, "shouldn't we also consider the situation of the orphans in the village? From what you've said, you will only be providing the grain to those who can contribute by doing manual labor. But what about those who are unable to work, like the children, or the elderly? They can't work as guards or chop down trees!"

Her question caused a moment of silence to descend upon them, forcing Kivamus to confront a blind spot in his plan. A grimace flickered across his face as he confessed, "The orphans... I hadn't thought about them..."

He vividly recalled the sight of the ragged children he'd encountered upon his arrival yesterday. They were too young to contribute manual labor in exchange for food, and without families to support them, they were the most vulnerable. The same likely held true for many of the older villagers, their bodies weakened by years of toil, rendering them unfit for strenuous labor.

A pang of guilt washed over him. How could he have overlooked such a crucial aspect? Leading a village wasn't just about grand plans and resource management; it was about ensuring the well-being of all its inhabitants. He chastised himself silently. He couldn't leave their survival to chance. He may have been a stranger to this land just yesterday, but he was no longer an outsider. He was the Baron of Tiranat, and the well-being of his people, including every last one of them, now rested on his shoulders.

He certainly realized that he was far from an expert in managing and leading a whole village. He was still learning the ins and outs of this, and it was inevitable that he would overlook certain things. He glanced at the faces surrounding him, a newfound appreciation blooming in his chest for the people who had slowly become his advisors. These were the people who would help him navigate the complexities of his new role. He was still a novice leader, and their willingness to point out his oversights was invaluable.

Taking a deep breath, Kivamus forced himself to focus on solutions. Blaming himself wouldn't feed the hungry children. "Thank you for reminding me, Sryne," he conceded, his voice heavy with newfound understanding. "I was overly focused on the immediate challenges and neglected to consider the most vulnerable members of our village." He looked at others. "We need to come up with a plan to ensure that the orphans and the elderly are also fed."

He inquired, his gaze settling on each of his advisors in turn, "While the adults might be able to scrape by for another week until Pydas returns with more grain, children are far more vulnerable. So, what options do we have for them?"

Gorsazo offered a preliminary solution. "Distributing a portion of the grain to the orphans, or perhaps to all the children in the village, seems like a reasonable starting point," he suggested. "We could even extend this list to the elderly and those who are physically unable to work."

"While providing grain to the children seems compassionate, my Lord," Duvas pointed out, "it could lead to unintended consequences. If we simply announce that children can come and collect grain, many families might exploit this system by sending their children too, to collect the free grain. This would include even those families with adults who will already receive their weekly grain quota when they start to work from tomorrow."

He continued, "In the worst-case scenario, it could lead to people hoarding the grain by firstly sending each of their children, and then the elderly members of their households one by one, to claim their share of free grain, creating a situation where those who truly need it are left empty-handed. With winter not far away now, fear can be a powerful motivator for people to do such things. Especially after they have spent the past few months without having enough to eat."

A shadow of worry crossed Kivamus' face. "You're right, Duvas," he conceded. "It could very well happen."

He continued after a moment, his voice grim, "In around two weeks we will have enough grain to feed the whole village for the winter, but that will only work if everyone receives their fair share. If people start hoarding the grain, the most vulnerable will be the ones to suffer, and that's not acceptable."

"Apart from that," Syryne pointed out, "simply providing raw grain to them wouldn't be a good enough solution, my Lord. The orphans and the homeless people don't have a place to stay. How would they even cook the raw grain? I am not sure if some of the young children we saw yesterday would even know how to cook a proper meal."

A spark of inspiration ignited in Kivamus's eyes as he contemplated Syryne's words. "That's it!" he exclaimed, a triumphant smile replacing his frown.

"They may be able to hoard grain," he elaborated, "but they can't hoard cooked meals! Here's what we'll do. Starting today, we'll offer a bowl of hot porridge or soup to every child and elderly villager who comes to the manor gates for food. We can start with twice-daily meals, and then we can increase it to three meals a day once we have more grain after a week."

A confident smile replaced his earlier frown. "This way," he explained, "we can ensure that everyone gets enough to eat every day and it also eliminates the possibility of hoarding, as the food will be cooked and ready to consume, which means it can't be stored for weeks, unlike raw grain."

"The able-bodied adults will continue to earn their meals by contributing to the land clearing efforts," he explained, "but for those who are unable to work, we will provide them enough food to ensure that no one in Tiranat will go hungry this winter."

"Of course," he conceded, "even then many families may still send their children to get free meals from the manor, while they preserve the grain they have earned from doing manual labor. But this seems like an acceptable solution for now."

Syryne interrupted, "But my Lord, can we even afford to feed them from the grain we already have in the manor?"

Shaking his head slowly, and chiding himself for acting without thinking again, Kivamus said, "That's a very good question. Did we even consider whether we can afford to provide grains to all the villagers for the next week? It will be fine after Pydas returns in a week, but until then do we even have enough grain in the manor to provide rations to all of the workers from tomorrow?"

He continued, "If we only had to increase the amount of food cooked in the manor for the twelve guards we are hiring, it would not be too difficult. But it's a different matter altogether to feed the whole village until we get more grain. At least one of you should have mentioned this before!"

Duvas, with a hesitant nod, acknowledged, "Forgive me, my Lord, for not mentioning this earlier during our discussion. But I have already made the rough calculations for it earlier. It will be a challenge, but I believe we can manage it."

Kivamus conceded, "That's a start, but elaborate, Duvas! Tell me what you've considered. I need to be sure before making more promises!"

Duvas cleared his throat. "Currently, my Lord, the manor holds a stockpile of twenty-five sacks of grain, including the three we already had in reserve. Earlier, I consulted with Madam Nerida on this very issue. We concluded that even if we were to feed the entire village from our reserves, that's assuming nearly three hundred and fifty souls, it would take roughly one and a half sacks of grain, or perhaps a little less, to sustain them for each day."

He continued, his voice gaining confidence, "That means, even with a ten-day wait for Pydas' return with additional grain, we would only require around fifteen sacks to feed the whole village during that period. Of course, we must factor in the merchants within the village who purchased eight sacks of grain from Pydas. This means at least some villagers will likely purchase their own provisions and won't rely on us, which will reduce the burden on our stores."

"Since we now have twenty-five sacks of grain in the barns," he added, "we can indeed afford to spend fifteen sacks to provide enough grain rations to the workers until Pydas returns with new supplies. This will undoubtedly leave our grain barns nearly empty once more, but it is achievable, my Lord."

Kivamus let out a relieved sigh. "That's a weight off my shoulders."

A thoughtful expression settled on his face. "And before I forget about it, when you make the announcements to the villagers, add this as well. Tell them that from this day forward, I want everyone in the village to know that they have my permission to hunt in the surrounding forests and cultivate vegetable patches behind their houses. You mentioned earlier that some of them already do this out of necessity," he acknowledged, "but they shouldn't have to live in fear of punishment for simply trying to feed their families."

His gaze swept across the manor from his vantage point on the roof. "While we plan to establish proper farms in the spring, ensuring a steady supply of grain will take time. There's no harm in allowing them to cultivate their own vegetables in their free time. It not only supplements their diet but also fosters a sense of self-sufficiency within the community."

He gestured towards the forests, his gaze sweeping over the vast expanse of trees visible beyond the manor walls. "And these forests are vast," he continued. "There's no need to worry about over-hunting, not even if the entire village participated. The bigger concern, as you rightly pointed out earlier, is the danger lurking within - ferocious beasts and those damned bandits."

Hudan suggested, "My Lord, when we have enough trained guards in the coming weeks, we can organize bigger hunting parties. These groups can include experienced hunters from the village, along with some of our armed guards. This way, instead of venturing out alone and risking their lives, the villagers will have some protection in numbers."

"Good idea," Kivamus complimented. "We'll try to do that as well."

He continued, "Duvas also mentioned that the villagers don't own the land they live on." Kivamus paused, his expression turning contemplative. "This is a complex issue that requires a lot of consideration. We'll address it in due time, but for now, let's focus on our immediate priorities."

Duvas offered a curt nod, acknowledging Kivamus' decisions.

With finality in his voice, Kivamus concluded, "Alright everyone, after our meal, Duvas and Hudan, both of you will head to the village square. There, you'll make the necessary announcements and begin recruiting for the guard positions."

He looked at Syryne, who had been listening carefully to the discussion. "Let's go for lunch now. We can't let the food go cold that you and Madam Helga prepared for us."

Hudan and Duvas exchanged a determined look, both men understanding the weight of this responsibility. With a respectful nod, they acknowledged Kivamus' instructions and left the rooftop along with Gorsazo, keen to begin their assigned tasks after the meal. Syryne followed them as well.

Left alone on the rooftop, Kivamus allowed himself a moment of quiet contemplation before leaving. He gazed out at the throng of activity below and the sprawling forests surrounding Tiranat for a while. With a plan taking shape and his advisors by his side, he was determined to succeed. The challenges ahead were undoubtedly daunting, but Kivamus, the unexpected baron of a struggling barony, was prepared to face them head-on. The journey to transform Tiranat from a struggling barony to a thriving domain had begun.