

Londoner 36

Chapter 36. Tesyb's Father

A murmur of agreement rippled through the crowd. The forest, though technically the Baron's domain, had always been a source of sustenance for the villagers, even if they had lived under fear of reprisal for hunting without getting any permission for it.

"Therefore," Hudan continued, his voice ringing with authority, "Lord Kivamus is granting permission for any skilled hunters among you to freely hunt within the forest!" A cheer erupted from the crowd again, this time laced with a newfound sense of empowerment.

"Now, we all know the dangers that lurk within those woods," Hudan added. "Dangerous beasts roam these forests, along with the ruthless bandits hiding there. To address this, Lord Kivamus has decided to establish organized hunting parties."

He continued, "We will make small groups of experienced hunters from the village, alongside some of our armed guards. This way, the hunters will have the protection of numbers while bringing back much-needed provisions. There will be more details about these hunting parties announced in the coming weeks."

The villagers exchanged excited glances. This new Baron, it seemed, wasn't just offering freedom, he was offering support. Men who had risked venturing into the nearby forest to hunt for rabbits or deer, a practice previously deemed unlawful, now thumped their chests in approval. Working together, with the added protection of guards, they could secure a steady source of meat without succumbing to the dangers that lurked within the woods.

Tesyb's gaze drifted towards the fringes of the crowd, where a cluster of older villagers huddled together, their faces etched with quiet despair. He spotted many younger faces as well amidst the crowd - orphans, many of them not even teenagers, their eyes dull with hopelessness that tugged at his heart. These were the marginalized, the forgotten souls of Tiranat. Even amidst the rising tide of optimism, Tesyb knew they would be left behind. The promise of work, of earning grain and coal, did little for those who were too frail or too young to contribute manual labor for food.

Lord Kivamus' pronouncements, however generous, seemed to have an invisible fence, one that left these unfortunate souls excluded, as always. If he died while working as a guard in the future, his parents might be sitting amongst them as well. Looking at their faces was even making him have second thoughts about working as a guard.

But Tesyb forced himself to tear his gaze away, a necessary act of self-preservation. He had his own family to worry about, and his own future to secure. In the future, if he could manage to save enough coin from the higher wages of a guard, he might be able to leave enough savings for his parents for them to survive a little longer, in case he did lose his life while fighting. But Hudan's next announcement snagged his attention, yanking him back to the present.

The guard captain raised his hand once more, silencing the enthusiastic chatter of the packed village square.

"Now, for our final announcement," he declared. "Lord Kivamus understands that not everyone here will be able to answer the call to manual labor tomorrow. The elderly, the children, especially the orphans with no one to care for them - they wouldn't be able to handle the physical demands of working as a laborer." He paused, letting his words sink in.

A murmur of agreement rippled through the crowd. Even the most able-bodied among them acknowledged the plight of the weak.

"However," Hudan continued, his voice firm but filled with a hint of compassion, "Lord Kivamus will leave no one behind. That's right. Every single villager, regardless of age or ability, will be looked after."

A collective gasp rippled through the crowd. Was the Baron truly considering everyone? Even those who couldn't work? This was a promise unlike any they had ever heard from a noble. A promise of compassion, of a society that valued all its members, was unheard of.

Hudan's next words brought the square to life. "This announcement," he boomed, his voice ringing with authority, "is for those very villagers. Starting this evening," he elaborated, "a warm meal of porridge or soup will be offered at the manor gates for every child and elder who needs it. In the coming weeks, when we can manage it, we'll include bread and some meat in the meals as well. We'll begin with two meals a day, and once our grain stores are replenished in a week, we'll increase it to three!"

The announcement was met with a deafening eruption of cheers and shouts that echoed throughout the village. The joy on the faces of the elderly and the orphans was a sight that warmed even the most hardened hearts. The very air vibrated with the villagers' jubilation as the cheers continued, soon reaching a fever pitch.

Even the birds perched on the thatched roofs squawked in startled protest before taking flight. A few infants, startled by the sudden uproar, let out wails, but Tesyb barely registered the noise. His heart overflowed with a happiness he hadn't felt in years. These children, oblivious to the hardships they had just escaped, were truly fortunate to be born under the rule of this new Baron.

It took a while for the joyous pandemonium to subside, and for the wave of euphoria to recede. Finally, when a semblance of order was restored, Hudan raised a hand for silence.

"Now, I must be clear," he finally spoke, his voice cutting through the lingering excitement. "Providing for so many mouths is no small feat, especially when there's no coin coming in to pay for it." He continued, his voice turning serious. "To prevent any misuse of this kindness, these free meals will only be provided to the young children, the elderly who can no longer work, and those with disabilities that prevent them from contributing through manual labor."

A murmur of understanding rippled through the crowd. The villagers, though basking in the afterglow of Lord Kivamus's generosity, were also practical. They understood the need for some limitations.

"So, the rest of you," Hudan boomed, his voice regaining its authoritative edge, "will have to earn your meals. There's a lot of work to be done in the village, so there will be enough opportunities for everyone in Tiranat to go to sleep on a full belly. Remember, Tiranat's future hinges on your efforts now." He roared, "Are you ready to rise to the challenge?"

The air crackled with a newfound energy as a thunderous roar of affirmation echoed through the square. The villagers, their hearts brimming with hope and full of anticipation, were ready. They were ready to work, to fight for a better tomorrow, for themselves, for their families, and for the new future Lord Kivamus had promised them.

This new Baron was unlike any other they'd ever encountered. The promises made by Lord Kivamus, while not a complete solution to their problems, offered a glimmer of light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. With the opportunity to work, grow their own food, and hunt safely, the people of Tiranat began to believe in the possibility of a better tomorrow. They would face the challenges ahead, not as individuals, but as a united community, their spirits bolstered by a newfound sense of purpose and a Baron who, for the first time in their memory, seemed to genuinely care about their well-being.

The cheers that continued to roar in the marketplace were no longer just a release of tension, but a genuine expression of hope.

Tesyb scanned the faces around him, and as expected, he didn't find any of them discouraged at the news of free meals being limited to children and the elderly. These were proud people, their spirits unbroken despite the hardships of recent months. Their eyes, though weary, held a spark of fierce determination - those able to work would undoubtedly pour their hearts into it.

This unexpected compassion from the new lord in the last announcement instilled a fierce sense of loyalty in the chosen recruits, including Tesyb himself. Free meals to those who couldn't work meant that the Baron would ensure the well-being of the families of any guards who fell in the line of duty, ensuring they wouldn't have to resort to begging or stealing to survive. Any lingering doubts in his mind about risking his life as a guard vanished into thin air, and he resolved to do everything in his power to protect Lord Kivamus and his ideals. The new baron didn't just view the villagers as human beings, he seemed to actually care for them.

Tesyb wouldn't be fighting for just himself anymore, he was fighting for the well-being of his loved ones, and for a comfortable future for his family, where the new lord of Tiranat would ensure they wouldn't go hungry again.

Finally, Hudan raised his hands, signaling for quiet. "Alright, those were all the major announcements for now," he boomed. "And those of you who'll be coming for the meals in the evening, don't forget to bring a bowl if you have it." However, before he could dismiss them, Mr. Duvas, the Baron's majordomo, leaned in and murmured something to him. Hudan nodded thoughtfully and addressed the crowd once more.

"There's one last thing before we depart with the new recruits," he announced. "To start our farming initiative properly, we require a few experienced farmers to guide the process. I understand that most of you have spent your lives toiling in the mines, as farming has never been done here since the village's founding. However, some of you, particularly the older villagers, might have experience in tending to crops before they moved to Tiranat."

"Lord Kivamus," Hudan continued, "wishes to meet any villager who has prior farming experience. Once you all return home, spread the word about this. Also, let the village carpenter and the blacksmith know that they are needed at the manor by this evening."

Hudan surveyed the crowd with a satisfied nod. "Alright, that's all for today. Remember to spread the word about the free meals for the elderly and children. Let them know they can come to the manor gates in a few hours to receive their evening meals." With a final nod, Hudan stepped off the bench he had been standing on.

Tesyb's heart pounded in his chest. He couldn't let this opportunity slip away. Interrupting Hudan, he blurted out, "Wait, Sir Hudan!"

Hudan chuckled. "Easy there, I'm not a sir," he said, his gruff voice laced with a hint of amusement. "Call me Hudan."

Tesyb nodded. He explained, his voice filled with nervous urgency, "You mentioned a need for experienced farmers..."

Hudan nodded in confirmation. "We need all the expertise we can get to get these farms up and running by springtime."

Tesyb took a deep breath. This was it. "Well, sir... I mean, Hudan," he stammered, correcting himself, "my father, Pinoto, used to work on a farm before he moved here to work in the coal mines. I was just a young child then, but I remember him talking about it often. He has decades of experience in farming, easy." He continued, "He wouldn't be able to handle farm work anymore, but he could certainly assist Lord Kivamus with his past knowledge."

A slow smile spread across Duvas' face. "That's right! In fact, I think I remember Pinoto telling me about that, many years ago." He looked at Tesyb. "The Baron is eager to meet anyone with experience like his. Why don't you run home right quick and tell your father about this? You can ask him to come to the manor by evening."

"And you," Hudan said, "don't worry about being late. We won't begin the final selection of the guards until you return."

Tesyb's heart swelled with gratitude. "Thank you!" he exclaimed, a wide grin splitting his face. "I won't be long."

Turning to the newly selected recruits, Hudan bellowed, "The rest of you, follow me to the manor now!"

A wave of nervous excitement washed over the chosen men. Today marked a turning point not just for their village, but for their own lives. They straightened their backs, and with a heart brimming with loyalty, they followed Hudan, eager to face the final test and claim their places among the protectors of this village.

The crowd began to disperse as well, a hive of activity buzzing with renewed purpose. The prospect of work, food security, and a caring new Baron filled the air with a tangible sense of optimism as they turned to walk to their homes.

Tesyb darted through the dispersing crowd, his legs pumping with renewed energy. But the image of his parents, gaunt and dejected, haunted him. He couldn't bear to see them wasting away any longer. It wasn't just about the food, it was about giving his father a sense of purpose, a way to reclaim a part of his lost life and feel useful again. His father's knowledge of farming, gleaned from years of toil on the land, could be his saving grace. He yearned to see the spark return to his parents eyes, to replace the dejection that had settled there in recent months.

Tesyb vividly recalled the stories his father used to tell him and his sister when they were young, stories of life on a farming estate in the north - of their life before the land owner said he couldn't afford to pay them anymore, forcing them to move to Tiranat. Now, perhaps, his father could relive those memories, not just through stories, but through active participation. He couldn't wait to share this news, to see a flicker of hope rekindle in their eyes.

He also harbored a secret hope - that his father's experience might pave the way for a better life for their whole family. Perhaps, with his father's guidance and the Baron's support, they could even own a small plot of land someday, a place of their own to cultivate and call home. He quickened his pace, his heart brimming with a newfound determination to seize this opportunity and carve a brighter future for himself and his loved ones.