

Londoner 37

Chapter 37. Taniok

The late afternoon sun cast long shadows across the manor hall as Kivamus Ralokaar, the new Baron of Tiranat, sat deep in conversation with Gorsazo and Duvas. Clarisa, having declared herself fully recovered earlier, had returned to the servant's hall, while Lucem perched nearby as a silent observer of the discussions. Hudan, having ushered the new guard recruits inside the manor, had come there earlier to report that he was going to begin the final selection process for a dozen new guards in the training grounds located in the southeastern part of the manor, with the help of Feroy.

A sound of chairs being dragged drew Kivamus' attention. Sryrne and Madam Helga, their previous conversation concluded, rose from their seats. Madam Helga, her voice carrying a hint of purpose, addressed the Baron. "My Lord," she began, "we are going to speak with Madam Nerida about the vegetable patches she and the other maids have been tending here. During our recent years living at the inn, Sryrne and I had also cultivated a vegetable garden there to add variety to our otherwise monotonous meals. Since we have experience in it as well, we were thinking about further expanding the vegetable garden within the manor walls."

A thoughtful smile touched Kivamus's lips. "That's a good idea. In these times, any effort that increases our food supply is most welcome."

Helga inclined her head in acknowledgment. "Indeed, my Lord. While the grain stores will likely be replenished in the coming weeks, incorporating a variety of vegetables into our diet is essential for good health. However," she continued, her voice taking on a thoughtful tone, "from what I've gathered, while the snowfall here isn't as prolonged as in Reslinor's northern regions, it can be quite heavy during that one month. Any attempt at cultivating vegetables during that time would be wasted."

Helga pressed on. "That being said, I want to begin planning and preparing the most suitable locations within the manor walls - those spots which get the most sunlight and aren't under the shadow of any buildings here. This way, we can begin planting as soon as the snow melts and the ground thaws."

Kivamus listened intently to Madam Helga's proposal, the mention of winter vegetable production sparking a memory from his past life on Earth. Greenhouses. Those ingenious structures that defied the seasons, creating pockets of warmth where even the most delicate plants could thrive. It was a tempting solution, yet it was utterly impractical in their current situation. Plastic, the cornerstone of modern greenhouses, was an alien concept in this place.

And even glass, from what he recalled from the original Kivamus's memories, was a luxury reserved for the nobility. While the Ulriga Palace boasted glass bottles and window panes, such extravagance was rarely seen outside the confines of noble houses. He winced as a memory surfaced - the original Kivamus' unrestrained wine consumption in the exorbitantly priced glass bottles on his journey here. The cost of those bottles, far higher than the commoner's ale stored in wooden barrels, had eaten away at his savings. Even the other refined liquors were kept in ceramic containers, which also acted as a symbol of status for the wealthy landowners, merchants, and even minor nobles.

And even if they could purchase enough glass for a greenhouse, its quality wouldn't be good enough. The glass found here was cloudy and riddled with imperfections, filtering out precious sunlight and diminishing the greenhouse's effectiveness. Kivamus shook his head, dispelling the daydream. Dwelling on it wouldn't solve their current problem.

He turned his attention back to Madam Helga. "It's a good idea. We must take advantage of every available resource to survive in this place. And we have more than enough space within the manor walls for that." He continued, "Once you've concluded your discussion with Madam Nerida, tell her that I want to talk to her."

Helga nodded. "Of course, my Lord." She and Syryne then exited the hall, leaving Kivamus with Gorsazo and Duvas.

The silence was broken by the creaking of the heavy oak door as a guard entered. After a swift bow, he announced, "My Lord, Taniok, the carpenter, has arrived as requested."

Kivamus gave a curt nod. "Show him in."

The guard gestured for the carpenter to enter. Taniok, a balding man with a weathered face that spoke of nearly four decades of life, stepped into the room. He wore a simple, worn tunic, the fabric a mixture of fading brown and gray. He bowed low, his face etched with a mixture of nervousness and curiosity.

"You called for me, my Lord?" he rasped, his voice roughened by years of labor.

Kivamus gestured towards a nearby chair. "Indeed, Taniok. Take a seat."

Taniok shifted uncomfortably, looking surprised by the Baron's insistence on offering him a chair. "There is no need for such courtesy, my Lord," he said. "I am fine standing here."

Kivamus stifled a sigh. The ingrained social hierarchy of this world was proving to be a headache at times. He understood that commoners weren't accustomed to sitting in the presence of nobility, and yet, the idea of conversing with the carpenter while craning his neck upwards the whole time felt impractical as well.

"Just take a seat, Taniok," he insisted. "It will be a much easier conversation that way."

Taniok hesitated for a moment, his calloused fingers nervously twisting the hem of his tunic. Finally, with a hesitant nod, he lowered himself onto the chair near Kivamus and the others gathered by the fireplace. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, the unaccustomed plushness making him feel even more out of place. Despite the Baron's insistence, it seemed sitting in the presence of nobility still felt wrong to him.

He cleared his throat. "So, my Lord," he began, "what can I do for you?"

Kivamus leaned forward, his brows furrowed. "Firstly," he began, "tell me, are you the only carpenter in Tiranat?"

Taniok nodded. "Aye, my Lord. There simply isn't enough work here to sustain more than one carpenter. There's a young lad, around twenty years old, who helps me out sometimes as an apprentice when the workload gets heavy. But for the most part, it's just me."

Kivamus nodded thoughtfully. "I see," he murmured. "Now, as you know," he continued, his voice turning serious, "a lot of the villagers currently lack a proper shelter. My goal is to provide them with a roof over their heads before the harsh winter sets in."

Taniok's brow furrowed. He interjected before Kivamus could elaborate further. "But my Lord," he said, his voice laced with concern, "with snowfall barely a month away, there simply isn't enough time for that. Building new houses for all of the homeless villagers..." he trailed off. "We'd need at least a dozen new houses at least, and that's just not feasible within this timeframe."

Kivamus held up a placating hand. "I understand that, Taniok. That's precisely why I'm proposing an alternative approach. Instead of building individual houses for each family, I am planning to build a communal dwelling - a longhouse, or perhaps even two of them."

A frown etched itself onto Taniok's face. "A longhouse, my Lord? Forgive my ignorance, but I'm not familiar with that term."

Kivamus smiled patiently. "Ah, it's a type of dwelling, quite common in some cultures. Have you seen the large, rectangular barns located within the manor walls?"

"Indeed, my Lord," Taniok admitted, a hint of pride creeping into his voice. "Most of the manor buildings, including the barns you mentioned, are the work of my hands." He hesitated for a moment, then added, "So, you're suggesting using... barns... to house the villagers?"

Kivamus chuckled. "Not exactly, Taniok. While a longhouse shares many similarities with a barn, it wouldn't be quite as tall. Imagine an elongated version of the barns, perhaps three meters high and stretching out for twenty-five meters or so, with a width of around five or six meters."

Looking at the slightly confused face of the carpenter, Kivamus extended his arms and explained, "A meter is roughly this long. It's just a bit longer than a yard. I tend to think in terms of meters because that is what was used in the books I read."

Taniok leaned forward, his interest piqued. "I see," he murmured, nodding in encouragement for the Baron to continue.

"The walls would be constructed using wooden planks, similar to the barns," Kivamus began, "but the interior layout would be quite different. Here's the key part - we'd build bunk beds along both sides of the longhouse, one stacked on top of the other. This way, each two-meter section would have four bunks, and the entire longhouse, with its twenty-five-meter length, could accommodate twelve bunks on each side. That means forty-eight people would have a place to sleep comfortably in a single longhouse of that size."

Kivamus leaned back in his chair, observing Taniok's expression. "While I am giving a general idea, you are the expert in this. What are your thoughts on this?"

Taniok furrowed his brow, his gaze fixed on a spot in the distance as he processed the idea. After a moment's thought, he offered a slow, deliberate nod. "It's feasible, my Lord," he admitted. "The concept is sound. Building even a single longhouse before the snowfall wouldn't be easy, but with sufficient materials and a team of capable workers assisting me, I believe it's achievable."

He paused, then added, "You mentioned building two of these structures, my Lord?"

Kivamus confirmed his statement with another nod. "According to our estimates," he explained, "close to a hundred villagers currently lack proper shelter. This includes the homeless, orphans, and those who lost their homes during the bandit raid."

"That number sounds about right," Taniok acknowledged. "And where do you want to make these longhouses, my Lord?"

"Regarding that," Kivamus continued, "you might have heard the announcements made in the village earlier today."

Taniok dipped his head in agreement. "Indeed, my Lord. And I must confess, I wasn't expecting half of what I heard. The villagers will be incredibly grateful for your initiatives." He paused for a moment, then continued, "The guard captain also mentioned plans to clear the forest surrounding the village. That would undoubtedly provide a plentiful supply of logs for construction. Does that mean you plan to build the longhouses in these newly cleared areas, instead of within the village?"

Kivamus nodded decisively. "Indeed," he declared. "It would be difficult to find enough empty space within the village right now to build the longhouses. And we'll be clearing a significant area of the forest anyway. My aim is to create enough cleared land to begin farming there in the spring. Also, for added security, we'll be clearing roughly five hundred paces of space encircling the entire village."

He gestured expansively. "This way, we'll have an abundance of space and timber for constructing the longhouses."

"Space certainly won't be an issue, my Lord," Taniok acknowledged. He paused for a moment, a contemplative crease forming on his brow. "However, the eastern side wouldn't be a suitable location for the longhouses. The terrain there becomes quite hilly as you move further in that direction."

Kivamus acknowledged this with a curt nod. "Precisely. And since there's a stream flowing southeast of the village, I am planning to designate the entire southern region for agricultural purposes. That leaves us with the western and northern regions of the village. So, I'm thinking of building longhouses in the north."

Taniok considered it for a moment before replying. "Either of those directions would be fine, my Lord."

Gorsazo, who had been silently following the conversation, interjected. "But wouldn't that delay starting the construction until the forest in those areas has been cleared?"

"That it would," Taniok conceded. "However, preparations for building longhouses will take time as well, since we'll need to saw the logs into planks before we can start the construction. So, once the trees start coming down, and there is a steady supply of logs coming in, I can begin preparing the planks and stockpiling them. That way, as soon as enough space is cleared, we'll have a ready supply of lumber and planks for rapid construction of the longhouses."

Duvas chimed in, "Of course, that means, we'll have to begin clearing the forests in the north before we do it in the other regions. Since winter is not far away now, it means building longhouses has to be a higher priority than the farms, for which we have until spring to prepare the land."

Kivamus nodded. "Certainly." He thought for a moment, before adding, "But if we just had a watermill here, like I saw outside Cinran on the Kal River, it would make sawing the logs much easier and faster as well."

Taniok added, "Indeed, my Lord. But there was never any need for a watermill in Tiranat, since there is a very low demand for new planks here. Mostly I do repair work here in Tiranat, which I can easily do manually. This is the first time since the founding of the village that so many large-scale projects are being started together, including the longhouses, new farms, and clearing the forests."

"Hmm..." Kivamus looked at Duvas. "You mentioned that stream in the southeast, near the hills. How big is it? Can't we make a watermill there?"