

Londoner 49

Chapter 49. Excursion

"Cedoron is a hard worker, my Lord." Duvas replied. "He came here soon after the caravan had left the manor, before the villagers had even started gathering outside. I already sent two men and a woman to assist him at his smithy."

"Good," Kivamus said. "Tell the servants to gather all the available shovels - we should have more than enough of them kept for use in the coal mines, along with the ones we bought from Pydas yesterday. We'll divide the workers into two groups for now - one for logging, the other for clearing the land."

He ordered, "Then send around half of the workers with shovels, so they can start clearing shrubs and the undergrowth in the south of the village. And send the remaining men for logging to the north of the village, so they can get a start as well. You can send more workers to any place, as needed, once more villagers have arrived for work."

"We should send some pickaxes as well to the group going south," Hudan added. "The ground might be hard in some places, or they might need to break some stones lodged in the ground."

"That's a good idea," Duvas nodded. He looked at Kivamus. "I'll tell the servants to distribute the tools. And I'll also note down where the workers are sent, so I can ensure that they are actually working here and wouldn't return here in the evening to get the grain and coal without even working, or more likely, while they were working somewhere else."

Kivamus said, "I don't think there are many places willing to hire them in the village right now, but sure, do that as well."

"We need someone to oversee these groups," Gorsazo said, his voice carrying over the growing clamor of the assembled villagers. "A foreman, someone with experience leading men, to ensure the tasks are completed efficiently and to verify that everyone is pulling their weight." He added, "We should send a foreman for each task that we are sending the workers to do. Say, one foreman for the workers who are clearing ground in the south, another for those who will be cutting trees in the north, and so on."

Kivamus nodded in agreement. "That's a good suggestion." He looked at Duvas. "Find some men who command respect - those who can motivate and discipline the workers, to make sure they wouldn't

slack off during work hours. Perhaps some of the older villagers - those who might not be able to climb trees themselves, could take on this role."

"Don't worry, I know a few men who would be perfect for this, particularly those who worked as foremen in the coal mines earlier," Duvas said, while looking at the crowd outside the manor gates. "I'll appoint them as foremen when I send the workers. They can also ensure nobody leaves during work hours, since I can't check it myself."

He called a servant working nearby. "Fetch a parchment and quill from the manor," he ordered, his voice sharp. "Then call a few more servants and bring all the axes, shovels and pickaxes from the barn. Select only those people who'll not be doing anything else for a while, since they'll need to help with the distribution as well." The servant immediately ran off to the manor house to carry out the orders. Duvas turned back to Kivamus. "Let me send off the workers after I note down their names. This will take me a while."

"Wait a moment," Kivamus paused, a thought occurring to him. "How did the villagers respond to the proposal of housing the homeless?"

"Far better than I expected," Duvas replied. "The offer of free grain proved to be a powerful incentive for them. Many villagers who were initially hesitant, quickly changed their minds once they realized they could help those in need while also benefiting themselves. Immediately after the announcement yesterday, there was a scramble among the villagers to take in the homeless orphans and elderly who were there. I believe this continued even after everyone returned from here."

He added with a wide smile, "I even heard some of the villagers outside muttering about not hearing that announcement on time, thus missing the opportunity to get some free grain since they couldn't find any villagers who were still homeless by the time they heard about it."

Kivamus gave a satisfied nod. "That's good to hear. At least we won't have to worry about any children freezing to death on the streets in the coming weeks." He paused for a moment, a thoughtful expression crossing his face. "I'm thinking of taking a walk to the north of the village. I want to get a firsthand look at the area we'll be clearing."

Duvas nodded in understanding. "I'll have to remain here to oversee the distribution of tasks and to send more workers where needed. It will soon be time for the morning meal for the elderly and the children as well."

He added, "I'll also have to write down the names of those who have taken in the homeless villagers and then send guards to verify it, so we can give them the promised supplies after work hours in the evening. Apart from that, I will have to talk with Madam Nerida about the distribution of the weekly grain and coal to all the workers in the evening. While she can determine a good amount for the grain herself, I will need to oversee the same for the coal myself."

"That's alright, you can handle it as you see fit," Kivamus reassured him. "I'll be back soon."

With a final nod, Duvas walked away towards the waiting crowd to send them to their tasks.

"Let's go," Kivamus said to Gorsazo and the guard captain.

Hudan hesitated for a moment, his gaze scanning the crowd. "Wait a moment, my Lord. Let me call a couple of guards as well to accompany you."

"Is that necessary?" Kivamus asked. "You will be there as well."

Hudan grunted, "Better to have the guards with you and not need them, than the other way. In any case, you are still leaving the safety of the manor walls, and we don't know where the wild beasts might be lurking in those forests."

Kivamus considered this. It felt unusual to him to wait for guards before he went anywhere - like some important politicians were escorted back on Earth. But after the recent attempts on his life, it might be better to err on the side of caution anyway. "Very well," he agreed. "But make it quick."

Hudan nodded and disappeared back into the manor. Soon, he returned with three burly guards in tow, armed with swords on their sides and wooden shields on their backs. Hudan, who was always armed with his longsword on his back, had picked up a shield as well. "I have told Kerel to keep an eye on things here," he reported. "We can leave now."

"Let's go then," Kivamus said, his voice firm. Gorsazo accompanied him as well, as they started walking towards the gates of the manor.

The guards on gate duty saw Kivamus and their guard captain approaching, and stiffened to attention, their postures rigid and alert. Kivamus acknowledged them with a nod, his gaze sweeping over the villagers gathered outside.

As they exited the gates, he saw that only a few villagers were remaining there, with Duvas continuously sending the workers one by one to their tasks, while scribbling on a piece of parchment. The once chaotic scene had transformed into an organized assembly, a testament to Duvas' efficiency. Those who had come later were still waiting to be assigned, their faces a mixture of hope and uncertainty.

As Kivamus and others walked closer, the villagers stood up straighter after recognizing him, with expressions of awe and respect. A few of the bolder ones even bowed, a gesture of deference to the new baron. Kivamus returned their greetings with a warm smile and a wave, until their group moved away from the small crowd.

"A lot of them have already come to respect you, my Lord," Hudan observed, his voice low. "You've done more for them in a matter of days than the previous baron did in his entire reign."

Kivamus acknowledged the compliment with a modest shrug. "I still haven't done anything much, Hudan. There's a lot of work that needs to be carried out."

They turned right and started walking towards the north, next to the palisade walls of the manor. The narrow path they were walking on was just packed dirt, which looked recently dried after a spate of rainfall right before he arrived here. The palisade wall itself seemed undamaged and stood taller than them, probably around three meters high, with the wooden stakes sharpened to a point at the top.

Once they reached the northern corner of the manor walls, the dirt path turned to the left, forcing them to navigate their way through a maze of tightly packed houses. Two of the manor guards led the way ahead of Kivamus and Gorsazo, while Hudan and another guard followed behind them while keeping a sharp eye on their surroundings.

As they walked, Kivamus took in the sights and sounds of the village. With most of the villagers having already gone to work as laborers, he didn't see too many people on these narrow streets. Nevertheless, the crisp morning air was filled with the sounds of life - the chatter of a few children playing somewhere, the barking of dogs, and the voices of a few old people who seemed to be reminiscing about their lives

before they came to the small village of Tiranat. And then, the unmistakable sound of a baby's cry pierced the air, a stark reminder of the new shoots of life amidst all the challenges faced by the villagers.

Since the bandits had not approached close to the manor in the recent raid, none of the houses here were burnt. And all of these houses were actual wooden houses, unlike the shacks and mud huts he had seen farther away from the manor when he arrived at this frontier village. He shook his head slowly, realizing that this would be called the posh residential area of Tiranat - living close to the baron's manor and in real houses made of wood.

However, it was easy to see in the light of the day that most of these houses, which were still standing unlike those in some other parts of the village, still had damaged walls or roofs, and they would hardly do much to protect those who lived inside from the coming winter. The residents of these houses had done their best to patch up the damaged parts, but the fact that even the better houses of the village had patchwork repairs told a lot about the situation of the village.

"We need to plan for the future," he said to Gorsazo, while following the guards walking in front of them. "While it's true that firstly we have to house those villagers who are still homeless, even if they have been taken in temporarily by other villagers, we have to keep the construction of longhouses ongoing throughout the winter. This way, even the other villagers would have an option to move to the new longhouses, instead of living in their own damaged ones which wouldn't do much to protect them from the cold."

"That's true enough," Gorsazo commented while looking at the patched houses. "Having more longhouses would also reduce the overcrowding in the initial ones, which would be inevitable in the beginning."

"Certainly. Overcrowding will lead to its own set of problems," Kivamus nodded. "But more importantly, such construction projects will also create much-needed employment opportunities for the villagers until we reopen the coal mines."

He continued, "I know we will soon have all the grain we need to feed the village through the winter, but I don't want to provide it to the villagers without having them work for it - at least those who are capable of working. Otherwise, it can lead to a lot of problems in the long run. So, we'll put them to work on new projects once something is completed. I can think of many other projects we can implement to improve and secure the village."