

## Londoner 50

### Chapter 50. Yeden

Emerging from the last cluster of houses, they reached the edge of the village, and saw the sprawling expanse of towering trees that stretched as far as the eye could see. The tree line itself was not far away from the houses. Most of the leaves had turned red and orange, making the ground seem colorful with the fallen leaves, while the trees themselves only had a small number of leaves still remaining.

This was where the group of villagers sent to the north were working, their axes biting into the dense wood with rhythmic precision. Some had already scaled the trees, their silhouettes stark against the bright sky, as they cut the branches of those trees which could get tangled with another tree when felled. Others, working on the ground, swung their axes with all their might, chipping away at the base of trees which were ready to be felled. At the same time, the lack of sufficient tools was easily noticeable, as more than a dozen men sat idle, waiting for their turns with an axe.

As he watched, a large tree which was on the brink of collapsing, finally snapped with a final hit of an axe, and started to bend towards the ground with a loud tearing sound. Slowly, what remained of its trunk couldn't support the weight of the tree anymore, and it fell with a thunderous crash echoing through the morning air. Immediately, a bald man, above forty years old - whose authoritative stance and the way the other workers responded to his commands made him stand out from the crowd, barked new orders and sent the waiting workers towards the fallen giant. They jogged towards the felled tree and took over the axes from those who had been cutting the tree, giving them a moment to rest, and started cutting off the branches of the fallen tree.

Noticing his gaze, Gorsazo said, "The process will speed up in the coming days, once Cedoron provides us more axes. Until then, this is the best they can do."

Kivamus gave a nod but didn't say anything.

Soon, two manor servants, their faces flushed with exertion, arrived at the clearing, leading a pair of sturdy horses. The animals were saddled and bridled, with thick ropes coiled at their sides. They took the horses to the older man, who greeted them with a nod of appreciation, and after taking the reins of the horses from them, he sent the servants back. He also ordered the workers who had been cutting the branches of the felled tree, to start cutting another standing tree, instead of trimming the branches from the cut trees. Making logs from the felled trees would have to wait until they had more axes.

"Who is that?" Kivamus asked, his gaze fixed on the man who seemed to be directing the efforts of the loggers.

Hudan shrugged. "I can't say, my Lord. I don't yet recognise most of the villagers."

Hearing their conversation, one of the guards who had come with them, spoke up. "That's Yeden, milord," he informed them. "He used to be a foreman in the coal mines as well."

Kivamus nodded, his attention drawn back to the man in question. Yeden was overseeing the process where a few workers attached the trunk of the fallen tree to thick ropes, and then tied the ropes to the horses. Once it was done, Yeden gave a sharp command, and the workers started to lead the horses towards the right side, likely to clear the space there. It wasn't easy to drag the logs on the forest floor, but they didn't have a better option until Taniok came through on his promises to build the log mover. The workers led the straining horses to move the tree to an empty place on the right, to a slowly growing stockpile of felled trees. Yeden then ordered the horses to be tied away from the danger of the falling trees, until they were needed again to move another felled tree.

"He seems to know his work," Kivamus observed. "Dugas chose a good foreman here."

"Indeed," Gorsazo replied. "He has a natural authority about him."

Right at that moment, Yeden looked in their direction and with recognition in his eyes, he started walking towards them. "Milord," he greeted with a respectful bow, his voice carrying a hint of surprise. "I didn't expect to see you here."

"I wanted to get a firsthand look at the operation," Kivamus replied. "How's it going?"

Yeden hesitated for a moment, then scratching his bald pate, he spoke bluntly. "We could use more axes, my lord," he admitted. "There are twice as many workers as there are tools, so the work is going much slower than I wanted."

Kivamus said, "I have already given an order to Cedoron to make two dozen more axes, and he will start providing them from this evening itself." He added, "I have also told him to make some machetes, which

are like much bigger knives. They will be useful to cut the smaller branches from the trees, instead of using the much heavier axes for it, which could be better used for cutting more trees."

Yeden looked satisfied on hearing that. "Getting that many new axes would make a world of difference. I haven't heard of any machetes in my life, but anything that can be used to cut, will help us right now."

Kivamus continued, "I have also told the carpenter to make something which would make moving the logs much easier. You'll see it tomorrow."

Kivamus looked towards the trees being cut and his attention was drawn to two workers who seemed to be taking a break. With their axes casually propped against a nearby tree, they seemed to be engaged in idle conversation. Following his gaze, Yeden noticed them as well, and growled. "By your leave milord, I need to get back there," he said, his voice sharp, "or they will start slacking off. We can't afford to have any axes idle right now."

With a quick bow to Kivamus, Yeden strode towards the idle workers, his voice carrying across the clearing. "Get back to work!" he bellowed, his words sharp and commanding. "We don't have time for slacking!"

Kivamus nodded approvingly. "He's a natural leader," he murmured.

As they continued their inspection, he pondered about this area. The initial focus was on clearing the land, but the construction of the longhouses would require careful planning. Looking at the clearing, he tried to visualize in his mind about where the longhouses might be constructed, but right now, the cutting of trees had barely started and there was just not enough space between the houses of the village and the tree line. For now, he would have to wait until more axes and machetes had been built by Cedoron to address the bottleneck of tools, which was slowing down everything.

"We'll need to return in a few days to reassess the location," he said to Hudan. "Once enough area has been cleared, we can start planning the layout of the longhouses. It'll be better to start building them only after we know exactly where they will be located."

Gorsazo suggested, "We should also establish a central storage area for the felled trees," he said aloud. "A place where the workers can cut them into manageable lengths and prepare them for construction."

"We are clearing trees for at least five hundred yards on every side of the village," Kivamus replied. "So instead of dragging the logs to a single location - which is not going to be easy right now, we can keep the logs from each direction in separate stockpiles." He added, "As of now, we don't even have enough axes to put all the workers to cut trees in every direction, but when we start cutting trees in other areas, you can tell Duvas to let the local foremen know about that. For now, Yeden seems to be managing everything here well enough."

Kivamus asked Hudan, "What about the security of the workers here?"

"These laborers are certainly not trained guards, but most of them are physically fit young men, and are armed with axes, and in the coming days, they'll have machetes as well." Hudan explained, "A bandit attack is unlikely on a group of forty-fifty young men in the middle of the day, unless they have superior numbers, which is highly unlikely. Still, these men should be able to hold on long enough in case of an attack, even if it's by a wild beast, to send a man on horse to call for guards from the manor - they already have horses here, and we'll send one to the southern group as well."

He added with a grimace, "It's true that even with most of the men armed with axes and machetes, they are no match for a determined group of bandits who might attack while riding on horses. However, we are already short on guards, so we simply can't maintain a constant guard presence in every place we have sent the workers, especially since we'll have to keep a particular number of guards at the manor at all times." He continued, "For now, I've already started training the new guards. It's slow going, but they're making progress."

Kivamus asked, "What about training these laborers in the basics?"

Hudan replied, "Kerel and I can't personally train more than a dozen men properly, and we're already doing that with the current guards. And even though their new profession leads them to risk their lives in any attack - which means they would be highly determined to learn, it still takes time to train a man to hold his own against a trained fighter." He added, "As for the laborers, they will be working during most of the daylight hours so they wouldn't have the time or energy to learn much, and even if I showed them the basics after they returned in the evening, their skill would only increase if they get actual experience in fighting, like the way we are training the new guards. Just explaining to these workers about how to fight wouldn't increase their skill even a little bit from what they could do right now with an axe."

Kivamus gave a slow nod. "That makes sense. For now, let them focus on working on their given tasks." He continued, "But when all the guards are back from Cinran after the final trip, you should have enough

guards to put a few of them to patrol around the village on horses, so that they can keep an eye on everything. They'll also be able to inform the manor more quickly as well, in case of an attack."

"I'll do that, my Lord," Hudan replied. "I was already planning something like that."

"That's good," Kivamus said. "Now let's take a look at the south of the village as well."

Hudan nodded, and they started walking back on the same path they had taken to come here.

As they approached the manor gates, he saw that Duvas was waiting for them, accompanied by a middle aged man with thinning, almost white hair, who was standing with a humble posture. The man's frail appearance was a stark reminder of the harsh conditions the villagers endured.

"This is Pinoto," Duvas explained, "He's the father of Tesyb, who's a new guard we hired. He is here to discuss matters about farming with you."