

Londoner 54

Chapter 54. Axes

Kivamus nodded. "Bring him here."

Soon, Cedoron walked towards them. After a quick bow, he said, "I have brought the axes I have made today." When Kivamus gazed at his empty hands, he explained, "I can't show them to you because I was asked to give the axes to another servant here. The guards refused to allow me to approach you with an axe in my hands."

"That's alright," Kivamus said. "So how many axes did you manage to make today?"

"I brought five axes, my Lord," Cedoron replied.

Kivamus raised his eyebrows. "That's more than I expected. Didn't you say you'd only be able to make three or four in a day?"

Cedoron shrugged. "I knew I would be able to make more of them than I promised. But I have learnt the hard way, that when a noble asks you for something, it is better to underpromise and overdeliver, than the other way. My father, when he was alive, still had the scars to show for it."

"What do you mean?" Kivamus couldn't help but ask.

Cedoron gazed at Kivamus carefully for a moment before he replied. "The previous baron didn't like it when people couldn't deliver on what they promised. The baron had my father whipped on many occasions in the past, when he couldn't deliver something which the baron had ordered, even if the reason was out of his hands. So my father made me learn this lesson as well."

Kivamus look at Duvas for confirmation, who just gave a nod in reply. He sighed. Just what kind of a person was that baron? Or perhaps that was the usual behavior for nobles?

He shook his head slowly before speaking. "Cedoron, I am not the previous baron. As unusual as it might feel to you to hear this, I will never punish anyone for something that is out of their hands. You can be frank with me about what you can deliver and what you cannot."

Cedoron looked uncertain, but he gave a slow nod.

Kivamus asked, "Does that mean you gave lower numbers for everything else as well?"

Cedoron nodded again. "More or less, my Lord. Although not by too much."

Kivamus gave a smile. "Well, it's still good to hear that we will get more tools than we expected. Well, you can return now."

Cedoron hesitated. "Uh... my Lord, about my payment..."

"Oh right." Kivamus said to Duvas, "Give him what he deserves for his work. Are you also using grain as payment for him?"

"Grain and coal are a part of his payment, my Lord, but the wages for a skilled craftsman are much higher than a laborer's." Duvas replied. "So I had to pay him in coins, to cover his wages, as well as a payment for his materials. It is the same arrangement with Taniok as well."

Cedoron gave his input as well. "Mr Duvas did promise me to pay me more grain to cover my wages, but I just don't have a use for that much grain."

"That's okay," Kivamus said after a moment's thought. They could still afford to pay a few craftsmen in coin, and he needed them to give their best effort, which wouldn't happen if they paid them a half wage like the other laborers. He looked at the blacksmith. "Well, go with Duvas then. You did good work today!"

Cedoron looked surprised for a moment, before he accepted the praise with a smile, and walked with the majordomo towards the manor house.

~ Kigeir ~

Kigeir was once again walking to the baron's manor in the evening, hoping to get the promised grain for taking in the two homeless children. The evening air was a little chilly, but it wasn't so bad walking on the dirt path between the houses, with the wooden walls taking the brunt of the cold wind. He looked at the clear skies above. At least he was thankful to the Goddess that it wasn't going to rain any time soon, because that always managed to make him feel miserable, with his knee ache getting much worse in such weather.

Yesterday, when he had made the decision to take in the two orphan siblings into his home, it was purely out of self-serving reasons. Just by providing a shelter to them, the baron would give them grain and coal for free, after all, and that free grain would go a long way to bolster their food reserves for the winter. But on the way to his home yesterday, he had been continuously thinking about the positives and negatives of his decision, like he always did when he made a deal with a new merchant.

Even his wife had initially been reluctant to house two more children, when they barely had enough to feed their own children. Although when he told her that they only had to give shelter to the children without worrying about feeding them, and they would even get free grain for it, she had come around to the idea quickly enough.

Their house, albeit a wooden one instead of a mud-shack like many of the villagers' homes, was still barely big enough to house the five members of his own family. But with two of his own children quickly becoming friends with Maisy and Timmy, who were the same ages as them, somehow they had managed enough sleeping spaces for everyone. He still couldn't forget the fond smile his wife had given him once she realized that the two orphans were as well behaved as any children they had seen, if not better.

He shook his head slowly with a smile, realizing that it hadn't even been a full day since he took them in, but those adorable children had already started to become a part of his family. While they still had a few weeks until the construction of new longhouses was completed and those orphans had to move there, he didn't know if his children and wife would manage to bear to be separated from them by then.

He sighed, as he reached close to the manor. He would deal with it when he had to. For now, he just hoped that the baron remained true to his words in giving them the promised grain and coal. As he made the final left turn, he saw that the area in front of the manor was already packed. Most of them were the villagers who had chosen to work as laborers, while the rest were people like him, who had taken in the homeless for the next few weeks. The laborers looked tired after working all day, but their eyes still had a hopeful look in them as they waited, since today was the first day when they would get their weekly wages.

He even noticed that in one of the alleys near this now-packed area, a few children and some older villagers were already starting to gather to wait for their evening meals. Kigeir couldn't help but remember the earlier days when this used to be a desolate area, where the villagers only came when they had some business with the manor. Otherwise, everyone had learned to stay clear of the previous baron and his manor, or the consequences might be painful.

However, after the arrival of the new baron, Lord Kivamus, it looked like a completely different place. It wasn't just a much busier place than it used to be, but the people looked happy to be here. Many of them were already starting to see the new baron as the protector and provider for the villagers, instead of someone who just took and took from them, like the previous baron. However it wasn't a hopeful place for everyone in the village.

Dalaar and his friends were scowling near a corner, talking about nothing good, he was sure. There were a few more people he knew about - mainly those who had lost the most in the bandit raid, who still didn't look favorably to the new baron. But as the gates of the manor opened and a few guards came outside while escorting carts full of grain to distribute to the waiting villagers, he thought that even if it wasn't likely that every villager would be satisfied with the new baron, Lord Kivamus was undoubtedly a vast improvement over the previous baron. So, for now, he would accept the new baron and his unusual policies, even if it meant that he couldn't profit by selling more grain to the villagers.

Although he had five kids to take care of from today, somehow he wasn't worried at all about how he'd feed them in the coming winter. As he waited for the manor servants to distribute the grain to him, he found that he had a smile on his face after a long time.

~ Tesyb ~

~ On the road to Helga's Inn ~

They had been traveling north towards Cinran since the early morning, and it was approaching sunset time now.

Earlier, in the morning, Tesyb had been quite worried when the caravan had left the village and they had entered the tree line. While he had gone a small distance into the forest a few times in the past, this was the first time that he would be leaving the village behind. His heart had been beating so fast at that time that he hadn't realized that he had been clenching the scabbard of his sword until his fingers had turned white. However, Nurobo, the other guard on his wagon, who was known as a decent archer despite being fat, had told him to calm down or it would be obvious to any observers that he was a new guard.

It had taken a while, but slowly he had managed to slow down his heart, after he explained to himself that despite half of the guards being untrained ones, the other half still had a lot of experience. It was quite likely that while traveling together with a dozen well armed men who were constantly on the lookout for any dangers to the caravan, he was probably more safe here than he was in his parents' home on the western outskirts of the village, which didn't even have a wooden wall to protect them.

Thankfully, the journey had been uneventful so far. They had kept the resting stops short enough that it hadn't eaten much into their travel time. In their last stop, Feroy, the leader of the guards for this journey, had told them that they had managed to make good time because the dirt road they were traveling on had dried by now after the recent spate of rain a week ago. Feroy had been traveling in the only wagon behind Tesyb's own for the whole day, but after the last stop, as they approached closer to Helga's Inn, he had exchanged seats with the leading wagon.

The sun, which was still visible between the tall trunks of the mostly leafless fedarus trees, was going to set soon in the west. The weather had been decent enough that Tesyb hadn't really felt cold in the warmth of the daylight sun, despite the light wind blowing throughout the day. The ground was littered with reddish-yellow leaves, matching the color of the setting sun. He hadn't seen many animals in the forest on their journey though. Perhaps the creaking sound of the wagon wheels might have scared them away from the road.

Soon, Nurobo, who had kept his quiver and bow below their seat, pulled up the reins of the horses. "Looks like Feroy ordered the wagons to stop."

Slowly, all of the wagons ahead of them came to a stop. Tesyb looked around in curiosity, but only found the same trees surrounding them, and nothing else nearby. There was no wooden building to be seen anywhere. "Why've we pulled up already?" he asked the archer. "Our last stop wasn't that long ago. Shouldn't we keep moving so we can reach there in the daylight?"