

## Londoner 83

### Chapter 83. Unconventional Ideas - Part II

Duvas, who had always seemed quite religious to him, looked even more angry now and started to retort back, but Kivamus raised his voice and spoke over him, "Well, what do you propose then? Should we keep those watchtowers empty? Or should we not make those watchtowers at all? Because as you very well know, we need all the able-bodied men to keep working as laborers to finish those longhouses and the village walls soon, and then we'd need them to work as farmers from the next year, so we can't afford to recruit any more men to work as guards."

He tilted his head as he stared at Duvas. "Or, you know... we can just put the guards on twenty-hour shifts or something! Although we might not be able to properly man all the gates and the watchtowers even when using insanely long shifts, which still wouldn't work anyway - since that will make the guards so tired that they wouldn't be able to fight any bandits in the first place!"

Duvas crossed his arms, and looked away. "I don't know the solution, or I would have suggested it myself! But that doesn't mean that we should force women to fight against bandits and risk their lives!"

Kivamus nodded. "Exactly. Neither of us wants the women to risk their lives. But what do you think will happen if the bandits come on another raid here? I have no idea how many bandits are in these forests, but the news would certainly get around that we lost many guards in that ambush on the previous baron, and we also couldn't defend the village in the previous raid. That leaves the door wide open for many more raids in the village. There will certainly be bandit attacks here in the future, you can be sure of that!"

He added with sarcasm, "There is always an option to hire a few dozen more men as guards, which would mean the longhouses would be finished even later, leaving a few people to freeze in the winter. And in that case, the village walls might not be finished for months - and without village walls, the bandits would easily be able to raid us again and burn half the village while they run away. Is that what you prefer?"

Duvas gazed away again and didn't give an answer.

"No, don't just look away now!" Kivamus asked the majordomo again, "Tell me, what do you think will happen if the bandits raid again? Since we do not have enough guards, we cannot possibly protect the whole village as it stands right now. So if the bandits do come here, and we keep the remaining guards just to protect the manor like the last time, what would happen to those women?"

He added heatedly, "By now, the bandits would also know that we can't afford to go out of the manor to fight them - based on their wonderful experience last time when they raided the village without any repercussions at all. So do you think this time those bandits would politely ask the women in the village to hand over their coins and stored grain and then they'd leave with a thank you? Or would they kidnap those women and children and take them away to sell them as slaves in Cinran, or maybe some fate even worse? Tell me which is the more likely outcome."

Duvas gave a deep sigh. "I don't know, my Lord, I don't know! I do realize that we can't protect the whole village if we are raided by bandits right now. And I know just as well what would happen to any women who are kidnapped by them. But... but to ask the women to fight for us...? It is completely unheard of... Even Gorsazo has never heard of women being forced to fight as guards anywhere. How am I supposed to agree to such a bizarre thing?"

"I understand where you are coming from," Kivamus said after taking a deep breath to calm himself, "but desperate times call for desperate measures. I wouldn't suggest this if we had any other option, but we cannot keep half the workforce idle just because they are women - especially when doing that risks their lives just as much as not asking them to fight, in case a bandit raid does happen soon in the future."

"I do understand our situation... my lord," Duvas muttered after a while. "And like I have told you in the past, I will follow your decisions and orders, even if they go against what I stand for." He sighed. "But I still have to say... I don't like it one bit."

"That's alright, Duvas," Kivamus said, with his expression hardened. "Sometimes, there are things in life that we might not prefer to do... but we still need to do them if they are necessary enough."

Gorsazo still wasn't saying anything, so he didn't ask him again, knowing by now that he wouldn't get any support from him in this matter. He gave some time to Duvas to come around to the idea, while he looked at the guard captain. "What do you think, Hudan? You have been very quiet so far."

Hudan grunted, "I know just as well as others here that women don't work as guards or in armies anywhere, and for good reason. And if you had asked me this question before I met Feroy, I would have given you the same answer as others. But talking with him in the past few years has opened my eyes to what happens to those women who are kidnapped by bandits or mercenaries. I would rather not speak of such things here, but it is usually a fate much worse than death, let me say that much," he answered

with a grimace. "That was the kind of behavior which made Feroy start to loathe those mercenaries and forced him to leave that life behind."

He continued, "Since we arrived in Tiranat and I saw the state of the village, I started to think of ways to protect the manor and the village better. And knowing all that Feroy has told me, the concept of asking women to fight as guards had certainly come to my mind in the recent weeks. So I do believe that as unusual as it may be, it is a better fate for women to die fighting with bandits while trying to protect their families and home than to be captured by them."

The guard captain continued, "But I still never mentioned hiring women as guards to you, because the practical reasons which prevent them from working as warriors in the first place still stand true. The fact remains that even a moderately trained bandit can simply overpower women with brute force, so the vast majority of women cannot work as swordsmen or even spearmen. The same stands for bows. While I have seen a woman I knew shoot an arrow accurately enough in the past, but most often, women don't have the immense physical power needed to pull the string of a warbow - especially the poorly fed women in this village."

Kivamus nodded. "I do realize that, but that doesn't mean that they would be completely useless in the defense of the village. That's why I even thought of making watchtowers - so that we could employ women as guards. They wouldn't have to fight face-to-face with any bandits if they are standing on top of the watchtowers. And I am not asking you to start training them in swordsmanship, since that is not what we need right now anyway. But if we could make something which allows women to shoot just as well as any man, and then place them on those watchtowers, then we could easily increase our guard force without slowing down the construction of longhouses and the walls."

The first thing that came in his mind after that was guns - which could be operated by women just as well as any man, but he realized that making such advanced things in Tiranat wouldn't be feasible anytime soon. However, if they could get even a few crossbows made in the village, those would still work just as well for them. However, an even more important outcome would be to get the villagers into the mindset that women can work just as well as men in basically everything. And that mindset would be very, very important for any future progress of this village.

Hudan looked at him curiously. "What do you mean by that, my Lord? How could the women in this village suddenly become as strong as men to pull the string of those warbows? It's a different fact that while we have around half a dozen lighter hunting bows, we only have two heavy warbows - which we have provided to the caravan. Even so, I can't see any way that it would be possible for women to use them here." He continued, "But more importantly, even if we had some incredible way to do that, the families of the women here wouldn't allow them to fight and risk their lives in the first place."

"That's... very concerning..." Kivamus muttered. "But don't the villagers realize the risks if the bandits come and we are not able to fight them off? What if they kidnap the women? No family would prefer that, would they?"

Duvas answered this time with a sigh. "The thing is, my Lord, that the locals here are not habitual of raids. Before the grain prices rose so high over the past two years, we didn't have that big of a bandit problem here. But in the past year, a lot of people have lost their livelihood in the whole duchy of Ulriga, and not knowing of any other way to feed themselves, many have turned to banditry. There is also the fact that while the villagers did lose a lot of coins and stored grains in the recent raid, nobody was kidnapped or killed, since the bandits probably didn't realize how short on trained guards we were at that time."

He continued, "Thankfully, you arrived here soon after that raid, and now we are actively trying to do our best to protect the village, because as you said earlier, the next raid wouldn't be so forgiving for the villagers. But from the villagers' perspective, they likely would not realize the danger of people being kidnapped or killed, until it has already happened here."

"That does make sense," Kivamus said. "But we cannot take the risk of letting people die or women getting kidnapped before the villagers come to their senses."

Duvas added with a grimace, "Truthfully, even I hadn't thought about it that much before you opened my eyes to the risks. But now I do think that it would be better to do our best to protect the village, even if we have to ask women to fight, instead of letting the bandits kidnap them. However it would take some really good convincing to the villagers for them to allow the women in their families to work as guards."

Kivamus nodded, feeling glad that the majordomo was coming around to the idea. "I understand that. But even so, there would still be a few women in the village who would be willing to become guards so that they could earn good wages by themselves - maybe those who don't have anyone else in their family, or those whose male family members are injured or sick - where the women would be the only bread earners in that family. You should ask them first, and see if they are willing to join as guards."

Duvas gave a slow nod, as if he had to swallow a bitter pill - something necessary but completely unpalatable. "I will try to make them understand the risks of not doing that. It won't be easy, but they already know that I try my best to help the villagers - even when the previous baron was here, so if such

an unusual idea is coming from me - instead of from Hudan or other guards, it would lend it some more weight. Hopefully, we would be able to get some good candidates for Hudan to recruit."

He asked after a moment, "We are only paying the workers and guards in grain right now, which costs only around half of their usual wages, but when we do return to paying them in coins, it would be very costly if we recruit too many guards. So how many women do you plan to recruit?"