

Londoner 88

Chapter 88. Difficult Questions

~ Kivamus ~

~ Baron's Manor, Tiranat ~

The next day, Kivamus was sitting in the manor hall with his arms splayed over the armchair.

The caravan must be in Cinran today, he realized. Hopefully they would be able to buy everything they wanted, without any problems on the way.

Today was also the first day he had joined Hudan and other guards in doing some running around the walls of the manor. He had also done other physical exercises, including some squats, push-ups, and short sprints, and he was feeling the full effects of that now. Not being accustomed to anything like that, especially in this thoroughly sedentary noble's body, he felt completely exhausted right now. He might not have enough time to become as fit as the guards, but he still wanted to do something to get rid of his potbelly. Hopefully, he would soon be able to get to the level of fitness he wanted.

At the moment, there was nobody else in the manor hall other than Lucem and Clarisa playing some word games on the long dining table, while he was the only one sitting near the fire. Looking at them, he couldn't help but smile. With the financial troubles that Madam Helga had while running her inn, mostly because of a shortage of travelers due to the threat of bandits on that road, Lucem had barely been getting enough to eat at that inn. But at least here he got three full meals a day, like all adolescents his age should.

The same went for Clarisa as well. By now, she seemed to have gotten over the horrifying experience of being poisoned, and appeared to be quite cheerful these days, especially since she had gotten a playmate in Lucem, who was maybe only a year older than her. Since that poisoning attempt, she had been spending most of her time here with Lucem and Syryne instead of working in the servants hall. However, Madam Nerida, who was always a stickler for rules, hadn't liked her spending so much time playing instead of working, saying that Clarisa was still a maid of the manor after all. She had even complained to him a few days ago about it, to order Clarisa to work with the other maids in the kitchen in the servants' hall.

But he had immediately denied her. Clarisa had only been poisoned because he had arrived here, and such an experience could easily scar a person for life - especially someone as young as her. He considered himself responsible for that happening to her, so he felt a duty to make sure that she was still okay.

When Madam Nerida had protested again about unfair treatment - since other maids had to work more because Clarisa didn't work there, he had finally relented and said that since Madam Helga still had to make food for half a dozen people here in the kitchen of the manor house itself, she needed some help as well. So he had asked Madam Helga to let Clarisa work in the kitchen here, and she had immediately accepted, since she had also taken a liking to the young girl. That had satisfied Madam Nerida as well, and since then Clarisa had been helping Madam Helga in the kitchen here, even though she still lived with the other maids in the servant hall.

Later on, he had asked Duvas about why Clarisa had been hired as a maid at all, especially since she was still so young. Duvas had told him that Clarisa was actually the daughter of a coal miner who used to live in the village here. However, a few years ago, her father died of a fever in a particularly harsh winter, and Clarisa had become an orphan with nobody to look after her. Duvas had told him that Clarisa must have been around eight years old at that time.

However, when Duvas had found out about it, he had asked Madam Nerida to take Clarisa in, and to let her live with the other maids in the manor. Madam Nerida had immediately protested that they couldn't afford to feed someone else, especially someone who wouldn't even work for their meals. After some discussion they had come to the agreement that Clarisa would be hired as a new maid - even though she was so young at that time. The previous Baron had easily allowed that - he was getting another servant for free after all, since he usually had to buy new slaves from Cinran for that.

Kivamus scoffed. That miserly bastard. If he had provided enough coal to the villagers in the past, Clarisa wouldn't have become an orphan in the first place! Shaking his head slowly, he looked at Lucem and Clarisa, who were still playing that word game, ignorant of anything else going on in the world. He smiled sadly. He certainly couldn't bring back her parents, but the least he could do was to make sure that she was taken care of.

And now, Clarisa had started to do some simple work in the kitchen of the manor house, which had also eased the burden on Madam Helga and Sryne.

For a while, he just gazed at the burning fire, while thinking odd thoughts. This wasn't an easy world to survive in, and Clarisa becoming an orphan at such a young age was only one example of that. He certainly couldn't do anything to help everyone in this world, or even in the kingdom. But he would

certainly make sure that everyone in this village - his village - had enough food to eat and a roof over their head, with sufficient coal to keep their homes warm.

After some time, Gorsazo entered the manor hall with an uncertain expression on his face.

"My Lord, we need to talk," Gorsazo said in a low voice, making sure that the kids didn't hear him. "It's important."

"Sure. What is it?" Kivamus asked.

Gorsazo hesitated for a moment, and looked at the kids sitting nearby. "It's better if we talk alone."

Kivamus was a little confused now. Usually those two kids were sitting there most of the time while playing one thing or another, while Sryne kept an eye on them. However, Gorsazo had never requested to send them outside before. What was so sensitive that they wouldn't let others hear about it? Giving a nod, he called out to the kids, "Hey, Lucem! Clarisa! Why don't you both go and help madam Helga with the lunch? Who knows, maybe she will let you both taste the lunch in advance!" Lucem was always hungry these days, so that should do the trick of sending them away without making him curious enough that he stood to listen to their conversation from outside the door. It certainly wouldn't be the first time that had happened. If Gorsazo thought that the coming conversation was delicate enough that he didn't want any other listeners nearby, then so be it.

Lucem looked surprised for a moment at the unusual request, but on the mention of food, he grinned. "As you wish, milord. I was getting hungry anyway!" Getting up from their seats, he and Clarisa went running through an inner door towards the kitchen.

"Hey! Close the door before you leave!" he called out after them but they had already run away.

Gorsazo just sighed and walked towards that door and pulled it close carefully, locking it from inside, and then he checked that the outer door was locked as well. The windows were also closed at this time of the day to keep the hall warm. Finally, he slowly walked back towards the fireplace, and sat on an

armchair next to him. While Kivamus kept waiting for him to speak, Gorsazo seemed to be lost in thought, and kept gazing at the fire for a while.

"What is it, Gorsazo?" Kivamus asked when his long-time teacher and mentor hadn't spoken anything for a few minutes. "You can talk to me, you know. Whatever the problem is, we can find a solution."

Gorsazo sighed, and after a while, he started speaking while still looking at the fire. "Something has been bothering me for a while, my lord. Initially, I wasn't sure and thought it was only in my head, but at this point, I don't have any doubts about it, not anymore."

"What are you even talking about?" Kivamus asked with confusion.

Finally, Gorsazo looked directly at him. "Your behavior has been completely different since that day when you stopped your binge drinking while we were traveling from Ulriga to Tiranat. Again and again, you kept doing something, or saying something which didn't match with the behavior of the boy I have known since he was a toddler. Every time I kept explaining to myself that such a thing wasn't even possible, but again and again, you kept doing things which were completely different from what I would have expected from you in the past. It wasn't just the mention of previously unheard things. Your whole behavior has been different from what I would have expected." He shook his head slowly. "Your behavior is not even like a noble in so many ways, and it is certainly unlike the Kivamus I've known since his childhood."

At this point, Kivamus realized what his childhood teacher was talking about. But instead of saying anything in reply, he kept listening. He had no idea what to say to that in the first place.

Gorsazo continued. "Most of the unfamiliar things you have told everyone, could still be explained away as the obscure knowledge of a well-educated noble. And if it was anyone else other than me, they probably wouldn't even have questioned it. But I have known you for nearly as long as you have been alive. So you can't fool me, not anymore."

Kivamus gave a nervous smile. "What do you even mean, Gorsazo? I'm not trying to fool you, or anyone else for that matter..."

Gorsazo tilted his head. "When you mentioned that metric system for the first time, while you were telling us about those longhouses, that's when I started to have serious doubts about you. I do realize

that there is a restricted section of the library in Ulriga palace, which only the family of the Duke has access to, but even then, I have lived there for long enough that I do have an idea about what kind of books are kept there. Nearly all of them are about the ancestors of the current duke. Some of those books have a list of the birth records of those who have been born in his line, while others tell about the exploits of his ancestors - mainly about the battles they won, and in some cases, about the skirmishes they lost against Binpaaz for control of those damned Tolasi Hills!"

Gorsazo was starting to look quite angry now, as he continued, while still looking at him carefully. "Again, it is possible that there are a few other books there explaining some of the things you have mentioned in the recent past - I haven't even been to that section after all, but I do know that that section of the library is quite small and has barely two dozen books. So it is just not possible that there are enough books there to contain so many completely unheard fields of studies in them!" He continued with outrage, "You might have spent more time in the library than me, but you couldn't possibly have learnt so many things which I haven't even heard of previously! Especially if there aren't enough books in that section of the library in the first place!"

Gorsazo's eyes burned with anger, as he spoke with his fists clenched, "I am also a very well educated person, damn it! And it wasn't like you mentioned just a single unfamiliar topic - somehow you seem to have a whole host of such things in your mind! That so-called metric measurement, the seed drill you mentioned a while ago, the concept of longhouses and many other such things were so extraordinary that even if I didn't know about them in detail, I would have at least known about their existence!"

He glared at him. "And yet, I've never even heard about them! So the only possibility that is left is that those books you mentioned in that restricted section of the library - which supposedly contain all that obscure knowledge - they don't exist in the first place! And that means, you have been lying about them and who knows what else from that very day you stopped trying to drink yourself to death!"

Kivamus didn't know what he could say at this point to explain away everything. His mind felt completely blank, even though he kept trying to think of another excuse. He had been weaving a web of lies since his arrival in this world... He had kept giving fabricated excuses about how he had the knowledge of such extraordinary things - things which were completely unheard of in this place, but he didn't know that it would all come crashing down so soon... In a single conversation, his childhood mentor had unraveled every last thread of that web, one after another, until he knew there was no possible way he could still claim that he was the original Kivamus.

He had no idea how this conversation would end, and whether he would still be the Baron of Tiranat come tomorrow morning. He didn't know what was done to those people in this world who were accused of experimenting with black magic or witchcraft - because that might be the only explanation for his knowledge that would make sense to the people here. He certainly hoped the punishment for it

was not like that in medieval earth, where they burned such people alive, although that might be too much to hope for at this point, since all his lies had been proven to be exactly that - lies. He just kept listening as Gorsazo delivered one punch after another, while continuously trying and failing to keep his mind calm.

Finally, Gorsazo pointed directly at him. "That means you certainly are not the Kivamus that I have known for the past two decades. So the only question that remains is that if you are not Kivamus Ralokaar, then who are you?"