

Londoner 92

Chapter 92. Bilona Nuts

Hudan gave a shrug. "I'm not completely sure. But now that I notice it, it does look a little different to me as well."

"Oh, that's a Bilona tree," Taniok answered as he reached there. "It is one of the few fruit trees found near the village. You surely must have eaten bilona nuts in the past, my Lord?"

"So that's what it was!" Hudan exclaimed. "I knew it looked a little familiar."

Searching his memories for it, Kivamus realized that he, or at least the original Kivamus had indeed eaten them in the past. It was a delicacy for the nobles - who liked to snack on them while they drank their precious wines. It was kind of similar to cashew nuts in taste - though it was curved on only one side and was brownish in color. "I do remember eating the nuts, but I didn't know what their trees looked like." Pointing at the empty branches of the tree, he asked, "But I don't see any fruits on the tree right now."

"Oh, it gives fruits in the summer," Taniok replied. "They sell for quite a lot of money too, so in the summers, some of the younger villagers usually went into the forests - not too deep of course, and brought those nuts to sell to the manor to the previous Baron or any visiting merchants."

He continued, "When I realized that the longhouses were going to be built in this area, I made sure to tell the workers not to cut this tree, even though it is quite close to one of the inner walls of the block." Taniok added while moving his hand over his balding head, "I hope that was okay, my Lord..."

"Of course, it's fine," Kivamus reassured him. "It seems like you needed a tree in the middle of the block anyway for help in putting up the walls."

"That's true enough," Taniok replied with a satisfied smile. "Since bilona trees have many branches, their wide leaves give good shade in the summer as well. That was another reason to keep a tree in the middle of the longhouse blocks. I have thought of keeping a tree in the middle of the other blocks as well, wherever it is feasible."

"That's a good idea." Kivamus asked, "But are there other bilona trees nearby?"

"Not here in the north," Taniok replied. "I'm not completely sure about it, but I think there are another few in the west of the village."

Kivamus nodded. "Tell Yeden to make sure that they are not cut at any cost. If something gives us food in this place - no matter how small in quantity, we need to take good care of that source."

"I'll let Yeden know about it," Taniok agreed. Pointing at the first longhouse block, he said, "Now that we are using the logs as the walls instead of planks, these buildings will be made much faster." He added, "Looking at the current weather there is no way we can finish even the first longhouse block before the snow starts falling, but that decision will still save a lot of time."

"That is true." Kivamus added, "While there is still some time before the walls and roof are completed, I want to remind you that you have to make a wooden floor with planks as well, since it would get quite cold on the ground otherwise."

"I remember that, my Lord," Taniok replied.

"What about heating the longhouse blocks?" Hudan asked. "Shouldn't we also plan for a stone fireplace inside them?"

"No, no, there is no need for that," Kivamus immediately said. "We simply don't have the time to make a permanent stone fireplace inside them - especially since these longhouses will only last a few years at most. These walls are not being made from seasoned wood after all." He continued, "But when the first longhouse is close to completion, I will ask the blacksmith to make a few new braziers for use here."

Taniok looked surprised. "I can't deny that those will work well enough, but can you even spare that much iron, milord? Usually the previous baron even prohibited me to use any iron nails in any houses of the villagers outside the manor. But do you really want to provide so many iron braziers to the villagers? We will need at least five or six to heat each longhouse block properly, or nearly twenty braziers for all three of them - whenever we are able to complete them."

"Don't worry about that," Kivamus reassured him. "We were able to buy a decent stock of iron ingots from Cinran, since the demand for non-essential goods has fallen quite a bit there because of the high grain prices. That includes iron ingots. So I've told Pydaso to buy more of it on the second trip. It still

doesn't come cheap, but it was a very good deal so I have decided to stock up on a good amount of iron ingots for use later. There wouldn't be any problem in making more braziers."

"I understand that, my lord," Taniok said. "But that's not what I meant. Whether the price is a little lower or higher, you can certainly afford it. You are the baron of the village after all. I know that you have already provided a few braziers for use here and in the marketplace, and I am very thankful for it. But do you really want to spend so much iron for the villagers?"

It was only now that Kivamus realized that the carpenter wasn't really surprised about how he was able to get so much iron. Taniok seemed more surprised that the baron would do something like that for the villagers. He shook his head in exasperation. The previous baron had certainly set very low standards of administration and for taking care of his people, when the villagers seemed surprised that he would do everything that was possible to prevent his people from freezing to death in the winter.

He replied, "You don't have to worry about that, Taniok. Like I have said in the past, I will do everything in my power to make sure that nobody freezes or starves to death in this village ever again. And I do mean that." He continued, "You just do your best in all the construction work you are given. Leave any worries about procurement of raw materials and their costs to me. I will take care of all that."

Gorsazo gave a knowing smile on hearing that.

"As you wish, my Lord," Taniok said with a genuine smile. "And I have to thank you again for taking care of the villagers so well. It is just surprising for us commoners to be treated like actual human beings."

Kivamus gave a slow nod. "I have certainly seen how nobles like to believe that they are above people of low birth." He scoffed, thinking about how someone - very likely a noble - was trying to murder him for a while now. He muttered... "Like they would be better than even a street thug if they behave like that."

"Uh... what?" Taniok asked. "I couldn't hear you, milord."

"It's nothing, forget about it." Kivamus continued, "We have already talked about the design and the dimensions of the inner part of the longhouse block, including for the communal kitchen and the storage room. I can also see that the walls of the longhouse will be quite strong with those logs as the walls. However, I also want to make sure that the gate is also strong enough. So when you are making that

gate, make sure to consult with Hudan so that he can tell you more about the design of the gate - to make sure that it can withstand some force from outside."

Taniok nodded. "I was thinking about making the gates just from some leftover planks - since the gate wouldn't affect the heating of the inner area of longhouses, but I will do as you say."

Hudan said, "Don't worry about it, my Lord. I will make sure that the gate is built strong enough." He added, "However, one thing that I wanted to add in the design is that I would prefer there to be another gate in each longhouse block - preferably on the opposite side of the main gate. It's fine even if the second gate is a small one, but I just want there to be another way out on the other side of the blocks, so that people have an option to exit from there as well - just in case there is a fire here - either due to any bandits who are attacking the main gate, or even from an accident in the kitchen."

"That's... a very good idea," Kivamus said with a nod. He looked at the carpenter. "Okay, then. You have to add a second gate into each longhouse block as well. It wouldn't change much in the design - since those gates can be just around a meter wide - enough to allow people to exit from there, unlike the main gate which will be nearly three meters wide."

He added, "Also, make sure to attach a few strong hooks on the inner walls on both sides of the second gate, so that the gates can be barred from the inside. Usually, the second gates will be kept closed from the inside, and only the main gate will be used, but in case of an emergency, it will allow people to exit from there as well, without making that gate a weak point in the walls."

Taniok seemed to think about it for a moment. "I'll make sure to do that, my lord. It wouldn't be too difficult anyway."

"Good!" Kivamus continued, "While we do have a well in the marketplace of the village, apart from the one in the manor, I also want to make a well here in the north in the future. That can be built in the area we have left empty for a new marketplace here in the future."

He explained, "That way, if we have to build more longhouse blocks in the future, we can make two more such blocks in the west of the new marketplace - which will make it such that the central twenty-five meter square will be the new marketplace, while there will be five such twenty-five meter blocks surrounding it - where people will be living in the longhouses. That will allow them easy access to the new marketplace as well as to the new well for drawing water. Of course, we will only be able to dig that new well only after the winter."

"That reminds me," Hudan said, "while we will certainly need a couple of buckets for that well, it will be a good idea to provide more such buckets which the villagers can keep inside the blocks after filling them with water. That will allow them to quickly put out any fire without running to the well to draw water - which will waste time and might allow the fire to grow further."

Kivamus nodded. "Of course. That's a good idea." He said to the carpenter, "Once the longhouse blocks have been completed, add that to your list of things that you need to make. Or you can just tell your apprentice to make the buckets - it's a simple thing after all. He can ask the blacksmith to provide any iron strips needed for that. I will take care of any payments for the iron."

With another nod, he turned back to return to the manor with others. The work was progressing well here. Now they just had to hope that the caravan returned back safely.