

In the face of a hostile constituent, I tried to use rhetoric to settle his nerves. Owen stormed past us and down the steps, leading us around the dirt path to the back of the building. I followed him and tried to explain to him how we selected the location.

“You have my personal assurance that the ground here is as fertile as any of the other farmer’s. This is the best spot for farming in the entire county. That’s why we earmarked these plots for you.”

I wasn’t lying. The ground here was the most fertile of the lands we’d acquired. There may have been small, minute differences, but the prospect of him seeing it without the power of my eye was nil. Owen wasn’t hearing any of it. He motioned to the fields in apparent disbelief at the yield of his crops. To my untrained eye, it looked like they were doing just fine. Rows and rows of healthy, well-grown wheat plants that stretched off into the distance.

Anton shrugged, “I don’t see the problem. You’ve got a full haul of wheat right there.”

Owen sputtered, “And the fellas’ to my left and right are doing even better than I am! Where’s the equality in that?”

I crossed my arms, “There are a lot of reasons why that might be the case. Luck, how many crops you’ve lost to pests, the way you planted them. Why is it suddenly such a problem now? I’ve no doubt that you’ve been working as a farmer for long enough to know that.”

“It’s the soil lad, the soil! I know bad soil when I bloody well see it!” To illustrate his point, he knelt down on the embankment and took a handful of the dirt into his hands, showing it to us as if we had the ability to determine its fertility just by looking at it. I mean, *I* could do that, but I was pretending I couldn’t.

I sighed, “Owen, unless you’re willing to pack everything up and move further down the road, there isn’t much we can do about it. This is the most fertile ground in the county.”

“And how do ‘you know that?”

“Because all the other guys said it is. This is prime farmland right here, there’s no other spot we’ve surveyed that comes close.”

“...Can’t you give me another patch to make up for it?”

Oh, for god’s sake. Or Goddess’ sake, in my case. He was angling for some more land from us.

“Owen.”

“W-What?”

“That wouldn’t be very fair, would it? We gave everyone the exact same amount of land for a reason. So they have just enough for a single family to handle, and to stop arguments from breaking out over who gets what.”

“Ugh.”

“I know that from your perspective that it doesn’t seem fair – but what will all the other families think if we hand out another patch to you? Would you even be able to work all of it on your own?”

“No...”

I didn't *like* doing this to people – but as the guy in charge I needed to put my foot down now and again to keep things in order. I was really busting his balls, so I decided to back off a little and stop treating him like a kid.

“You know farming better than I do, but even if this soil is less fertile than the soil next door – I can't do anything about it. That's just the way things have panned out, or from your perspective they have. It looks like you've got a good haul there to me. What are you planning to do with it?”

Owen crossed his arms, “I'm keeping most of it here. Not planning on shipping it out to the Black Cove just yet. One of the guys is talking about building a mill out here somewhere too so I'm saving up for when it happens.”

“A mill?”

“Yeah, so we can really start making a lot of flour out of our wheat. Right now, we have to do it by hand and the people down at the bakery are in a serious mood about it. He said we could all use it if there was enough capacity.”

I hadn't considered that before. Upgrading our production chains and creating our own secondary and tertiary products would increase the people's quality of life, and provide more valuable exports. I already had a big, automatically updating list of things that we were growing and making – a brainstorming session to figure out what to turn them into sounded ideal.

He sighed, “Alright Mayor. I'll zip my lips for now, hopefully I don't go broke trying to grow here.”

Passive aggressive for sure, but in the end, it seemed that Owen was going to keep quiet and deal with it. He accepted that beyond packing up and moving again there wasn't anything I could do. And he'd already put a good few month's effort into building the house and tilling the fields. Doing that all over again was liable to kill the poor man.

“Thanks Shane,” Anton said as we walked back onto the main dirt road. The area had developed very quickly, with wooden fences erected next to the roadside ditches to protect their land. We were surrounded on all sides by fields and ranches growing various flora and fauna for future consumption. I was glad to see it.

“I didn't do much of anything,” I chuckled. He'd be back later to complain all over again.

Anton didn't seem to mind, “As long as he isn't chewing my ear off about it...”

“I gotta' get back to the office. Drop by if you need me again.”

“Sure thing buddy. Catch you later.”

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My legs were aching something fierce by the time I returned to my office and sat back down. There was still work to be done. Our food supply was secured, exports were going, money was coming in. We had reached our first real period of stability since we arrived here. I was very glad to reach that conclusion after months of having people live from day to day on handouts and stored supplies.

“Okay, church, graveyard, sewers, docks, roads, and more housing districts...” I ran down the list of items that needed addressing and ticked them off in my mind. Owen's mention of a mill for flour had also sprouted several new project ideas in my head. Taking natural resources and processing them into usable, secondary products would diversify our economy.

The problem was people. We didn't have enough people. Our population had remained steadfast at one-hundred-fifty-six. Of whom around half were active members of the workforce. As far as I could tell, in wider society children from poorer families tended to learn on the job at the family business. This served to preserve the art and increase the force of their labour. That meant that children who weren't included in that stat were also helping out on farms and at other shops.

Though I knew better than that.

Schools were essential. Having a population that can read and write on a basic level would catapult us ahead of most other cities in the Kingdom. Though the issue was their attitude. The farmers would question the need of sending their inheritors to school to learn those skills. All they needed to know was how to farm, after all.

But if I could convince them of how useful basic arithmetic skills were, I could foresee an uptick in the number of people being interested in having their kids attend lessons. A legal mandate would be overstepping my boundaries at the current moment – but perhaps a voluntary arrangement of free teaching for everyone in the town would be more palatable.

That was for later.

Polemarch had been spreading 'suggestions and rumours' in a lot of major towns and cities with Laddite populations who were facing persecution by Lunarmar's primary church. Those suggestions and rumours surrounded a small town on the coast that was primarily built by Laddite followers and was offering good land for people willing to move in...

Of course, there were a lot of factors that affected people's decision making. They may not have suffered first-hand, have homes and business to manage, or they have family and friends they don't want to leave behind. For every person who had those anchors, there were two or three other people who didn't. People who had lost their property and connection to the community via prejudice.

Those were the people that we were targeting. On a basic level people were economic power. They worked, paid taxes, and provided political clout. So long as our infrastructure could handle them – we could rapidly expand our population and turn Celeste's Landing into a major trading hub. I'd struck gold with Polemarch. The circumstances weren't ideal, but he understood my vision for what the town could be.

There was a knock on my door.

"Come in!"

Frederica Sims, the housing minister, peered through the crack with a friendly smile on her face, "Hello Mayor!" She shut it behind her and took the seat in front of my desk. I'd asked Frederica to keep an eye on the progress of our new district. It was a new block of houses attached to the left side of original district. We'd already dug ditches and laid stones to expand the sewer system over there.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Ah, well. I have a report for you from the builders." She reached into her pocket and retrieved a small stack of papers for me. I looked them over as she continued to explain, "They're making very quick progress. If we have some new residents move in, we should be able to handle sixty or seventy of them."

So that translated to around thirty new workers and their families. The report was mostly just procedural. They had no major problems to report. They also included a cost breakdown of all the raw materials and labour we were using. Those numbers were going to be used to ask for payment. They had at least one person who knew how to count down there...

“How are you taking to the job?” I asked.

“Very well! My husband has been taking the time to show me some of the basics about housebuilding to help me. Isn’t he such a dear?”

I chuckled, “Some martial bonding over foundations and timber frames huh? What do they reckon about the proposal for a third district?”

“They say the ground is good, but that they’ve depleted their supplies of timber and stone. It may take them a few weeks to start up again.”

That was fine. As long as we didn’t run out of houses. Some of the people arriving in town would be farmers, we’d planned ahead out there too – pitching new plots of land on the most fertile ground in preparation. The nice thing about the farmers was that they knew how to build their own homes, and would help each other out to do so.

“Oh! And the chapel is nearly finished. That’s going to put a lot of minds at ease – it’ll really feel like home once we have a place to pray.”

“Yeah, nearly everything people need to live happy. But I wouldn’t be a very good mayor if I just left things there. I want people better than happy. I want people to look at this place with real, genuine envy.”

Frederica didn’t quite understand where my drive was coming from, but explaining how collective and economic security worked to a homemaker would take a while. Just then, another person knocked and entered the room without asking for permission – which meant that it had to be Amelie.

“I have some news for you. It looks like a small caravan of immigrants is moving our way.”

“Already?”

She smirked, “According to some of Polemarch’s people in the north; and some of them are community leaders with the Laddites. His strategy is working.”

That was... slightly problematic, the houses weren’t quite finished just yet. It looked like I’d have some new neighbours moving into the building with me again. Frederica was happy to hear the news though.

“Oh, wonderful! Hopefully they decide to stay!”

That was the question of the day. Would they find what they were looking for here?