

## Steel 221

### *Chapter 221: Setting a Trap*

While the Brigand Act was ongoing in the southern counties of Austria, Berengar began to make a move against the rebellious Counts and their villainous vassals. At the moment, Liutbert was sitting on the seat of his power in Innsbruck, reading a letter. The letter was addressed to him by his devious little sister, who just so happened to be the lover of Count Berengar.

The contents of the letters were a villainous plot devised to eliminate the potential enemies of Berengar while securing the legitimacy needed to ascend to the position of Duke. Liutbert held a unique position in the feudal hierarchy of Austria; with the main Habsburg line destroyed, he was the closest living male heir to the title of Duke. As such, he presented a unique obstacle in Berengar's rise to power.

Liutbert was deathly afraid of Berengar; after all, he had witnessed the impeccable might of the man's army and knew he had no chance contending for the Ducal Throne. On top of that, he was pretty confident his sister would poison him if he dared to act rebelliously against the upstart from Kufstein. Thus he had taken a largely obedient position in regards to Berengar and his rule over Tyrol.

The hope was that the man could gain some benefits for himself and his family by being loyal. So far, it had proven to be a lucrative course of action with Innsbruck becoming the second industrial city of Tyrol; the wealth generated from such a massive business essentially went into his pocket. In contrast, the remainder was paid in tax to Berengar.

Not only that, but the man had been appointed as Chancellor, essentially making him the second ruler over the region, at least in theory. Most of his work was just being delegated tasks Berengar felt he was capable of performing competently. Considering all of these things, Liutbert let out a large sigh before voicing his concerns aloud.

"This is going to be exceptionally difficult to pull off."

After reading his sister's letter, he lit it aflame by using a candle; after doing so, he blew the candle out before getting to work on the task he had been

instructed with. Liutbert immediately began to write letters to the noblemen of Austria who were more likely to rebel against Berengar; this included the ones in Tyrol who were upset with Berengar's reforms.

The letters were a request for a meeting in Innsbruck to discuss the future of the realm. These letters contained sensitive information leaked to the Liutbert by his sister Linde to persuade the disgruntled noblemen to appear in the city.

The letter asserted Berengar was a murderer and a usurper who conspired to seize the Ducal Throne of Austria and that with Conrad's passing, Liutbert was the legitimate successor. For the other noblemen, especially the ones upset by Berengar's rapid rise to power and his political reforms, which limited their feudal powers, Liutbert was a far better alternative for the position of Duke.

After sending out the letters, Liutbert waited for the response, and within a matter of weeks, a date was settled for a meeting of the disgruntled noblemen, where they would arrive in Innsbruck. During this time, Berengar's armies successfully occupied the rebellious regions with his armies under the guise of the Brigand Act.

Thus preventing them from rising in rebellion, their only path forward to war would be gathering in Innsbruck and using the forces seemingly designated to the Chancellor's control to resist Berengar's Tyranny. In reality, these were just mercenaries that Liutbert had purchased with Berengar's backing. The actual Garrison of the region would never dare to fight against Berengar's rule as they had been thoroughly indoctrinated by the time they graduated from basic training.

As the weeks passed, the extraordinary meeting was held within Innsbruck, and Liutbert was sitting in his great hall surrounded by the lords and ladies who were naturally resilient to Berengar's ascension and the reforms that came with it. Most of the noblemen and women were of the older generation, as the young Lords and Ladies of Austria were more inclined to believe in Berengar's reforms.

An elderly Count who presided over the County of Kustenland was the first to voice his concerns. He was obese, bald, and had a puffy white beard. He instantly began to speak as he strutted around the great hall floor with a cane in his hand.

"If the news is accurate, and Conrad is dead, then that means that Berengar has already stationed his troops in our lands to prevent a rebellion! Such a devious plot could only be devised by such a low-born member of the nobility.

What is worse, he has seized control of the land on my coastal regions so that he may begin the construction of his shipyards! Does he seek to challenge the Venetians and Genoans at sea? Bah, he is merely asking for trouble.

It has become increasingly apparent that if we do not stand against Berengar now when his armies are stretched thin, then we will never have a chance to remove him from power! I do not know about all of you, but I refuse to go quietly into the night! There must be war!"

Hearing the old count's speech, many other noblemen nodded their heads in agreement; Berengar was a threat to their power. If Conrad was genuinely dead, and the man was making a ploy to become Duke, it was better to fight against him now before he indeed secured his reign.

Liutbert played the part of a puppet perfectly and began to stoke the ire of noblemen and divert attention away from his loyalties.

"Berengar has seized my rightful position as Count of Tyrol; in doing so, he has enacted many reforms throughout the region which have consistently eaten away at the powers and rights of the nobility. If left unchecked, who is to say when there is nothing to distinguish our noble bloodlines from the filthy commoners!

I have been given authority over the forces here in Innsbruck; Berengar has foolishly placed his trust in me, believing myself to be a whipped dog at his command. We will use these forces to march on Kufstein, and in doing so, force his armies that occupy your lands to withdraw, allowing us to raise our forces in rebellion further! The question is, who here will pledge their loyalty to me and take up arms against Berengar the Usurper?"

With this said, the hall immediately resounded in uproar as the rebellious nobleman stumbled over one another to proclaim their loyalty to the man they considered the rightful Duke of Austria. The old fat man was the loudest of the noblemen who were gathered.

"I, Count Berhtolf von Trieste, hereby declare my support and loyalty to the one true Duke of Austria, Liutbert von Habsburg!"

What followed were the cries of several other essential noblemen.

"I Count Edelstein von Klagenfurt hereby pledge my life and loyalty to Liutbert von Habsburg, the Duke of Austria!"

"I Count Fridebraht von Laibach hereby offer my support to the Duke of Austria, Liutbert von Habsburg!"

With the three Counts of the south declaring their open support for Liutbert, the other Lords who had gathered quickly pledged their loyalty to Liutbert and his rebellion. In doing so, they had sealed their fates, for they never expected that this gathering was nothing more than a ruse set up by Berengar and his lover to gather his political rivals into one location.

After the Lords gathered in Innsbruck declared their loyalty to Liutbert and their intent to rebel against Berengar and his regency. Liutbert made a proclamation.

"I accept all of your loyalty, and upon my honor, I promise to lead a force together with the rest of you onto Kufstein! We will strike while Berengar the Usurper is unprepared and quickly put an end to his illegitimate reign!"

With this said, cheers began to erupt in the crowd. The nobles who had gathered swore that they would follow Liutbert into battle, with the forces stationed in Innsbruck, they felt that they would be fully capable of deposing Berengar and his tyranny, utterly unaware that they were walking into a trap.

As such, the following days were spent preparing for war, with Innsbruck's industrial output focused to a small degree on creating arms and armor for the nobles who had gathered, considering they were unable to bring their equipment with them.

Of course, they were delighted with the advanced designs of the full plate armor that Innsbruck's factories were capable of producing, and while equipped with such fierce armor, felt as if they were invincible in their quest to overthrow a tyrant.

Thus all of the plans were in place for a decisive showdown that would eliminate Berengar's enemies and make it appear as if the transfer of power was legitimate. Soon enough, the two armies would clash in the fields outside Kufstein, the result of which was yet to be seen.

### *Chapter 222: Running Away from Home*

While Berengar was preparing for war in an attempt to crush the rebellious nobles of Austria and solidify his power, the Byzantine Emperor was throwing a banquet; the feast had been prepared for the French Prince.

The latter had elected to stay within the borders of the Empire for the time being. It was now his seventeenth birthday, and as such, Emperor Vetranis had prepared a massive celebration for his future son-in-law.

Despite Honoria's protests, she had been dragged from her room and forced to sit beside her effeminate fiance. However, she refused to interact with the young man and pouted silently as she dug into her meal with a distressed expression.

Despite Aubry's best efforts to win Honoria's favor, the young woman refused to associate with him remotely. This had begun to make things complicated for the Byzantine Emperor and the French Host. After all, this young couple was set to wed in a few months, and they were not even on speaking terms.

Ultimately Aubry had given up on being friendly to Honoria and had begun to flirt with one of her brothers, the man in question he was trying to get on more familiar terms with was roughly Berengar's age. Like Berengar, he had proven himself a capable commander despite his young age and was an officer in Arethas' army.

The man's name was Decentius; he had short chocolate hair and deep emerald eyes. Unlike Honoria, his skin had an olive complexion. He was also reasonably tall, at least according to the standards of his people, and had an athletic frame, which was stacked with muscles. One could see the outline of his muscle from his purple and gold tunic that wrapped itself around his torso.

His exceptionally masculine appearance was something that Aubry greatly admired, and as such, he was more than happy to charm the man or attempt

to do so. Thus while Honoria ignored her fiance, the boy flirted with another man in the middle of her presence.

"What's your name, handsome?"

At the moment, Aubry was resting his feminine face on his dainty hand while wearing a pretty smile, one that should not usually belong to a young man such as himself. The sight immediately made Decentius uncomfortable; as such, he looked away from the pretty boy before responding.

"Decentius..."

Immediately a look of joy appeared on Aubry's face as he tried to advance the conversation further.

"That is a strong name, truly worthy of a sturdy man such as yourself. Tell me, Decentius, are you a soldier?"

Hearing this compliment, Decentius began to have a look of pride on his face as he boldly declared his feats.

"I am not just a mere soldier, but Tourmarches, second only to the great Strategos Arethas Maniakes!"

Aubry had no idea what a Tourmarches was, but he knew it was some form of a high-ranking officer. In the army of a Strategos, the Tourmarches was the next level of command directly below the position of Strategos. Thus Decentius had quite the position and had served extensively in the war for Egypt, which had made its way to Alexandria at this point.

Aubry pretended to care about his exploits and covered his mouth, gaping in feigned shock before complimenting Decentius further.

"I had no idea you were such a strong and capable commander! Do you mind giving me some advice later, in private perhaps?"

Honoria was forced to witness the sight of her elder brother openly flirting with another man, and it made her stomach churn. It was pretty obvious to her what Aubry wanted. However, men often fell for a pretty face, even if it was

attached to a boy, and thus Decentius was foolishly walking right into a trap. Honoria could no longer withstand the sight and instantly began to chastise Decentius.

"Brother, please restrain yourself. It is okay if you want to flirt with men in private, but this is a public occasion, and I am quite embarrassed to be your sister at this moment."

The moment Honoria made her comment, Decentius realized what angle Aubry was playing and immediately freed himself from the boy's charm; in doing so, he coughed before saying.

"It is not like that, Honoria, right Aubry?"

Aubry glared at Honoria as he pouted; the girl just had to ruin his fun. He was beginning to understand why the previous men he had been in a relationship with preferred his company over their wives. As such, he immediately began to respond to Honoria, now that he believed he had her attention.

"Are you perhaps jealous that I am giving your brother more attention than you?"

However, Honoria merely scoffed and began to ignore the boy once more.

The sight of Aubrey with his second-oldest son and Honoria blatantly pointing it out greatly enraged Emperor Vetransis. Truthfully he did not want to engage his daughter with a young man like Aubry, but at this point, he had little choice, France would prove to be a powerful ally, and it was not like there was a man; his little princess would approve of.

She was far too picky when choosing a man, and Vetransis was well aware of her extensive criteria. In his eyes, it was unrealistic to find a man who met the conditions of being ambitious, strong, and domineering while still being kind, compassionate, and gentle. Let alone the standards for physical appearance the girl had.

If such a man existed where he could bridge the duality of overwhelming strength and benevolence, Vetrans believed he most certainly wouldn't be single. Thus he felt Honoria was living in a fantasy if she thought she could find such a man to marry.

As such, Vetrans decided to put his foot down and instantly began to bark at Honoria's improper behavior.

"Honoria! If you can't behave yourself at this banquet, then why don't you remove yourself and go back to your room where you can reflect on your actions! As punishment for your unbecoming attitude, you will go hungry for the night!"

Honoria immediately began to protest this decision; in her mind, she had done nothing wrong. As such, she pounded her dainty fists on the table with a furious expression on her face.

"But father-"

However, before she could finish her train of thought, Vetrans stood up from his chair and pointed towards the exit.

"No buts! Go to your room, and stay in there until you can decide to stop acting like a spoiled brat and behave in a manner of a woman fitting of your position!"

Getting scolded so harshly, especially while in public, immediately made Honoria's mint green eyes fill with tears, and as such, she rushed to her room. She could not comprehend why she was being punished in such a manner. She merely pointed out the illicit behavior between her foolish brother and her queer fiance. Why was she the bad guy?

As such, she quickly entered her room and slammed the door behind her before latching it shut. She spent half an hour crying in her bed before wiping the tears from her eyes and gritting her teeth. If this is what her future entailed, to the point where she would be wed off to a feminine boy who engaged in carnal relations with other men while she had to watch from the side in disgust, then she would prefer to run away from it all.



But where would she go? She had no money, no supplies, and no allies to speak of. Hell, she had never even been outside the palace before. The girl quickly tossed aside the scrolls on her desk in a fit of fury, and in doing so, a map rolled itself across the surface, revealing the contents within. The map of Europe was remarkably detailed, showing the duchies and the individual counties that comprised them.

The moment the map sprawled open, it caught her attention, looking at the Duchy of Austria on the map in front of her instantly reminded the young woman of the image of Berengar that she had conjured in her head some time ago, giving her a brief bit of hope amid the despair that had consumed her heart. This suddenly gave her an idea, maybe, just maybe, if she traveled to Austria and met with Count Berengar, she could prevent her horrible fate.

However, she only had a vague idea of where Berengar lived, as Arethas had not explicitly stated where Berengar was Count. Luckily for her, there was a hint in his full name. She quickly placed her finger on the map of Austria before speaking her thoughts aloud.

"If I remember correctly, the surnames of German nobles are named after the area their rule originated from; if so, that means Berengar is from Kufstein? But where is such a location?"

Curiosity had overwhelmed the young woman at this point, and she quickly went to her unique bookcases, where she promptly retrieved her atlas. It contained a variety of maps comprising of the known world, and as such, she scoured through her resources to find the location of Kufstein.

Though the information in the atlas was largely outdated, it was enough to give her a rough estimate of the journey she had in mind. One thing was sure; if she stayed in Constantinople, she would indeed be forced to marry Aubry. After all, her sixteenth birthday was just around the corner, and as such, she had very little time before she was sold off like a common mule.

After mapping out her journey, Honoria decided her route. She would hire a ship to take her from the Bosphorus to the black sea, where she would then take a riverboat across the Danube and into the borders of Austria.

She would continue her journey across the Danube and into the river Inn where she would enter Kufstein. It was a long journey, and she knew it would be dangerous. However, she refused to stay in Constantinople and awaited her miserable fate.

The only concern she had was what she would use for payment; however, after searching around for something of value, she noticed her jewelry bin which contained many precious stones and metals. As such, she grabbed ahold of her jewelry box and stuffed it into a sack where she placed spare clothes and other necessities.

Heraclius, her pet eagle, noticed her actions and quickly approached the girl with a curious expression. Seeing the curious gaze of her best and only friend, Honoria quickly announced the decision she had come to.

"We are running away, Heraclius; I can't stay in this palace any longer. I would rather die than marry a twink like Aubry!"

The eagle was smart enough to understand her words and nodded his head in response, climbing atop the girl's shoulder. The eagle would watch over her throughout her voyage like a guardian angel, ensuring no harm came to her throughout the perilous journey she was about to embark upon.

After seeing the eagle follow her, Honoria smiled and petted its head with a single finger.

"I can always count on you, Heraclius."

After saying that, the eagle screeched in response, and Honoria finished packing her luggage; after doing so, she decided to make a rope out of her bedsheets and curtains. She proceeded to tie the rope from her bed frame, where she carefully climbed out of her window.

Before climbing out of the window Honoria had managed to toss her luggage into the bushes below. After finding solid footing, she dashed off out of the palace's grounds and towards the harbor of the city. Hopefully, the young princess could charter a voyage before her family found out about her disappearance.

### *Chapter 223: Crushing the Rebellion*

Weeks had passed since the meeting in Innsbruck and the establishment of the rebellion against Berengear's regency. Letters had been constructed and sent across the realm making accusations of Conrad's death and Berengear's attempt to usurp the position of Duke from the rightful claimant Liutbert.

As Berengear had anticipated, his allies immediately began to back his claims; as for the regions of Upper and Lower Austria, one was technically the crownland ruled by Conrad, who was deceased and thus under Berengear's control. The other was led by a Count who was smart enough not to get involved in this conflict; his realm had already bled too much under Bavarian occupation.

Thus Austria was officially at war once more; however, despite the advance of the rebellion's army into Kufstein Berengear did not pull his forces from the rebellious territories. Instead, he used the troops there to establish control over the region and take hold of the successors of the rebellious noblemen.

When the Rebel Army finally made its way into Kufstein, Berengear met it in the field with his own. The mercenaries used to fight Berengear were roughly 5,000 in total and had been a substantial expense for Liutbert; most came from the Swiss Confederacy and were battle-hardened warriors. They did not fear the fabled might of the Tyrolean Army, mainly due to their ignorance of the weapons and tactics employed by Berengear's forces.

As for Berengear, he brought a force of 5,000 men of his own. As far as the enemy could see, there was no cavalry in sight. Instead, it was comprised of various infantry and artillery units. The artillery was a mixture of his 1417 12 lb Cannons and his Schmidt Guns. Enough of the new weapons had been built since their invention that Berengear could field an entire battery with such weapons.

This would be the first major battle that demonstrated the effectiveness of his Schmidt guns and the quick loading tubes that his forces were now equipped with. The moment the Rebellious armies entered the fray, Berengear ordered his artillery to fire off a few light barrages and for his infantry to wait to fire their muskets until the enemy was within the hundred-yard range.

The reason for this was simple, he wanted an overwhelming victory, and the best way to achieve this was to allow his six puckle guns to fire their canister shot at the enemy and quickly wipe the floor with the army, for that they needed to be within the 75-yard range in order to be most effective.

As such, his cannons fired shells into the mix of the enemy, but they had great resolve and discipline. Thus, they marched through the artillery fire and towards Berengar's army, who had held their position near the puckle guns placed between their ranks.

Despite the explosive shells ravaging the enemy's ranks, they were few. Thus the Swiss mercenaries Liutbert had paid for prayed to God above as they marched within formation directly into the oncoming fire.

When the archers finally reached engagement distance, they began to fire a volley of arrows upon the Tyrolean soldiers, and yet despite this, the Tyroleans stood firm, their superior armor deflected many of the oncoming blows, there were no mortal wounds inflicted upon them as they merely stood still with determination.

While the Swiss mercenaries marched, the old and fat Count of Kustenland twirled his beard between his fingers as he laughed at the sight of the battlefield.

"It appears the effectiveness of Berengar's weapons has been greatly exaggerated! I feel confident that the armies of Innsbruck will be fully capable of defeating the armies of that Tyrant Berengar."

Hearing this, several of the nearby lords agreed with the Count's comments. As for Liutbert, he merely smiled bitterly while thinking to himself.

'these fools have no idea what they have gotten themselves into...'

Shortly after the Count's remarks, the swiss mercenaries advanced into engagement distance, and this is where Berengar's armies displayed their full might. The moment the Rebels ranks moved beyond the 100-yard point, the Tyrolean infantry formed ranks and began to fire a volley into the formations of the Swiss mercenaries.

The moment they did so, thousands of minie balls flew forth and pierced through the mighty brigandine and plate armor of the swiss mercenaries and tore apart their flesh beneath it. Blood splattered into the field, and limbs were scattered from the impact. Blood-curdling screams immediately filled the air, and the Swiss began to fear the results of these strange thunderous weapons.

However, before they could even think of retreating, a second volley had been fired by the Tyrolean infantrymen, who had rapidly reloaded their rifled muskets with their quick loading tubes. Yet that was not the worst of it; the first round of shots fired from the six Schmidt guns instantly found their way through the iron and steel armor of the Swiss Mercenaries and into their torsos and limbs, further adding to the carnage.

A total of 96 musket balls were fired from the first volley of the Schmidt guns alongside the thousands of mine balls fired from the muskets. Yet that was not the end of it, as the Muskets were rapidly reloaded, and the Schmidt guns had quickly fired their next round of shot into the enemy lines.

Over 20,000 rounds had been fired downrange within a matter of minutes. This was the result of the combined use of the rifled muskets, quick tubes, and the Schmidt guns—thoroughly shredding the lines of the Swiss mercenaries and the archers behind them. Not a single man had survived the onslaught of the Tyrolean forces. Before the enemy could even reach melee distance, they had been thoroughly shredded by Berengar's armies.

Even Berengar himself was surprised by the slaughter that had unfolded; the bodies of the Swiss Mercenaries looked as if they were steel sieves filled with blood. Each body contained multiple projectiles. It was an absolute massacre, the likes that even Berengar had not expected.

As for the Rebel lord, they gazed at the carnage inflicted upon their forces in such a short period with overwhelming dread. Just like this, their army had been so thoroughly defeated! They could not imagine what would happen to their troops if they could unite with the forces in their lands!

The fat Count dropped his riding crop before instantly screaming in terror, "Retreat! We can't allow Berengar's forces to capture us!"

However, before any of the Lords could do so, they noticed Cavalry appear from within the tree line that surrounded the battlefield; Berengar had kept a company of cuirassiers nearby to quickly encircle the rebellious Lords moment the battle had turned in Berengar's favor. As such, the enemy Lords promptly found themselves surrounded.

The fat Count immediately tried to negotiate with the Cavalry

"We surren-"

However, before he could finish the words, the cuirassiers raised their pistols and fired them into the formation of encircled Lords shredding every last rebel in the act. Their bodies quickly fell off their horses, turned into the same bloody sieves as the mercenaries in the fields below. As for Liutbert, he had silently moved out of the way and merged into the ranks of the Cuirassiers without the other lords being aware. Thus he was spared their fate.

Shortly after, Berengar's forces began to mop up the battlefield, and Liutbert was brought to Berengar; as the official leader of this rebellion, he had to surrender, and as such, he quickly found himself kneeling before Berengar, who gazed at him with a degree of arrogance in his sapphire eye. Liutbert promptly tossed out the words he was expected to say.

"I Viscount Liutbert von Habsburg, hereby declare my unconditional surrender to Count Berengar von Kufstein, in doing so I relinquish my claims to the title of Duke of Austria in favor of his Grace Berengar von Kufstein, long may he reign!"

With this said, Berengar smiled before tapping Liutbert on the shoulder; in doing so, he voiced his first command as the official Duke of Austria.

"Rise..."

With this, Liutbert rose to his feet, where Berengar quickly reprimanded him.

"Viscount Liutbert von Habsburg, as Chancellor of my Realm, you have incited a rebellion against me, and for that, there is a strict punishment. I hereby relieve you of your position as Chancellor and order you to return to Innsbruck, where you will continue to rule over the area as Viscount."

From the start of this plot, Liutbert was aware that he would lose his position as Chancellor, but to be honest, he was pretty relieved. The job comprised entirely of him being delegated a massive amount of work from Berengar; it had begun to stockpile to an unreasonable degree.

Now that Berengar was the Duke of Austria, he could not imagine the sheer amount of paperwork he would be forced to do. Thus retiring to Innsbruck and living out the rest of his days as a pampered noble was a far better option to him. As such, he responded with a warm smile on his face.

"Yes, your Grace."

With this, the most rebellious of the Lords of Austria was defeated in a single battle; their deaths allowed their successors to take charge, who would be strongarmed by Berengar's forces that occupied their lands into obeying his rule. Berengar was now the undisputed Duke of Austria, and with it, had gained a considerable amount of power and prestige. Yet to an ambitious man like Berengar, this was not enough.

As for his immediate concerns, his goal was to consolidate his power and work through diplomacy to elevate the status of Austria from a Duchy into a Kingdom, allowing Berengar to proclaim himself King. This would take a while to accomplish, and Berengar was in no hurry. Thus after defeating the rebellious Lords in battle, Berengar returned to Kufstein to stabilize Austria and, by extension, his rule.

#### *Chapter 224: Honoria's Journey Part I*

After absconding into the night, Honoria quickly proceeded towards the harbor with the intent to charter a ship through the Bosphorus and into the black sea. However, as she walked through the streets, it became increasingly apparent that all kinds of eyes were drawn to her figure. She failed to remain inconspicuous despite her best efforts to cover up her identity by wearing a mint green face veil that had golden embroidery.

There were four reasons for this, for starters she was an exceptional beauty, and the mystique of the veil only added to that. Secondly, she wore extraordinarily lavish mint green clothing that was embroidered in gold. Such attire was uncommon even among the aristocracy. Thirdly she had an eastern imperial eagle perched on her shoulder, and lastly, she gazed upon every

sight with a sense of wonder, as if she had been locked up her entire life, never being able to see the city herself.

Because of these factors, she attracted a great deal of attention, so much so that it would be easy to discover her whereabouts when her family noticed her absence. However, Honoria seemed blissfully unaware of the attention she was gathering and thus continued to prance about throughout the city of Constantinople.

As Honoria was walking through the city, the girl quickly got lost and found herself in a dark alley, where a group of street rats approached her. These men were impoverished and wore lustful gazes as they saw the beautiful noblewoman approach them. Seeing a group of strangers in front of her, with hostile glances, Honoria tried to evade them, but as she passed by, one of them grabbed ahold of her arm and forced her to stop.

"Hey, pretty lady, how about you stay here with us? I promise that we will show you a good time..."

Honoria's first instinct was to call the guards, but as she was about to do so, she realized that such an action would only reveal her identity. Surely once the guards realized she was the princess they would force her to return to the palace, which was a result she could not allow. As such, she began to pull her arm away, in doing so alerting Heraclius to the danger.

Before she could make a sound, Heraclius jumped off of her shoulder and dug his talons into the eyes of the man who held onto her wrist. The majestic eagle could quickly tell these men meant to do his master harm and thus leapt to her defense.

Talons instantly sunk into the thug's eyes, blinding him in the act. The man screamed in pain as he tried to wrestle the eagle off of his head, but that only made it worse. Eventually, the man's eyeballs were ripped entirely out of his head. His comrades immediately took off in fear; after all, the eagle had given them a glance that stated its intentions. If they stayed around, they too would be maimed.

After pecking the man's skull a few times with his mighty beak, Heraclius left the man to wallow in pain on the ground, forever blinded due to his actions.



Seeing Heraclius leap to her defense in such a heroic manner, Honoria praised her pet.

"Good boy Heraclius!"

Upon hearing this, the eagle merely screeched and cleaned off his talons with his tongue before hopping back onto her shoulder. Afterward, Honoria and Heraclius quickly fled the scene, eventually finding their way down the streets. She was truly lost within the confines of the city of Constantinople. Her escape was not going as brilliantly as she had planned.

After walking around in circles for a while Honoria noticed a rundown building in front of her that had a lot of people surrounding it. Realizing she needed to ask for directions the princess quickly approach the building, and when Honoria entered the building she quickly found it filled with women and men dressed in skimpy attire. One of the nearly half-naked women approached Honoria and quickly greeted her. She was rather average-looking, but due to her excessive makeup, she could pass as attractive.

"Welcome to the Jewel of Constantinople, where all your fantasies can come true for a price! Tell me, do you prefer men or women?"

Honoria had no idea that she had just walked into a brothel and was greatly confused by the question; as such, she attempted to figure out where she was.

"I am sorry, I don't quite understand. I'm looking for the harbor. Can you help point me in the right direction?"

The prostitute gazed at Honoria up and down for a few moments while examining the strange girl before her. The woman had a sharp sense of intuition and could almost immediately tell that Honoria was an aristocratic girl who had run away from home. Thus the prostitute took pity and gave her some advice.

"Girl, you should return home. The City of Constantinople can be a dangerous place at night. I suggest running back to your villa before your parents send a search party for you."

Honorina was shocked, she could not fathom how this woman had known she ran away from home, but she instantly began to plead with her to keep it a secret.

"Please don't tell anyone! If father finds out I ran away from home; I will never be able to escape from the palace again!"

The prostitute was greatly shocked when she heard this. She had assumed that Honorina was just a regular noblewoman, but using the word Palace meant there was only one identity of the young woman before her; as such, she blurted out in great surprise.

"Princess Honorina!?!"

The moment she did so, the attention of everyone within earshot quickly gathered towards Honorina's direction. Honorina, of course, acted out of instinct and covered the prostitutes' mouth with her hands.

"Shhh! Quiet!"

After a few moments, Honorina released her hands, and the woman made an awkward laugh.

"Oh, of course, you aren't Princess Honorina! How could the princess leave the palace? Everyone knows the Emperor keeps her locked up for protection."

After making such a laughable excuse, the nearby gazes lost interest and drifted away, leaving the woman to sigh in relief. She made sure nobody was paying attention to the two of them before she grabbed ahold of Honorina's wrist and led her to a secluded area.

"Come with me!"

After arriving in a room reserved for illicit activities, the prostitute shut the door and began to question Honorina instantly.

"Are you really princess Honorina?"

Though Honorina's expression could not be seen beneath her veil, it was apparent she was in a rather depressed state. Eventually, she nodded her

head in agreement. As such, the prostitute sighed before asking another question that was on her mind

"What on God's green earth possessed you into running away from home?"

Honorina shuffled around for a few moments with an embarrassed expression before explaining her situation. After nearly half an hour of telling her story, the prostitute sighed once more before scolding her.

"So let me get this straight... You are engaged to the French crown prince. Still, because he is queer, you want to run away from home, and flee to Austria so that you can hide in the region hoping that this Count Berengar, who you have never met before, and who has two women by his side already, is enough of a playboy that he would not mind insulting the Byzantine and French royal families by taking you into his little harem? Do you have any idea how insane that is?!"

Honorina merely pouted when the prostitute chastised her; she did not expect the woman to question her sanity. Thus Honorina began to pout like a small child who had been caught with her hand in the cookie jar before muttering under her breath.

"It is the best option I could think of..."

The prostitute began to sigh once more as she tried to understand Honorina's thoughts, apparently being locked up in your home with no contact with the outside world was enough to rid one of their common sense. After thinking about it for a few moments, she felt sympathy for the foolish girl and decided to give her a helping hand.

"Are you sure you would rather kill yourself than marry that Prince?"

Honorina had not left out the lengths she would go to to avoid marrying Aubry when she spun her tale; as such, she nodded her head with firm determination in her eyes, which caused the prostitute to further feel pity for the girl. It was as if she were a caged bird finally figuring out she could fly, and as such, something compelled the woman to help Honorina.

"I am probably going to regret this, but my brother owns a merchant's vessel; he has been bringing goods through the black sea and into the Danube for some time now. Though he has never gone as far as Austria, he will take you to your destination for the right price.

We haven't talked in a while; you could say he disapproves of my line of work. However, I can lead you to him and help you secure passage. Come with me; I will make sure you make it to the harbor safely."

After saying that, Honoria felt tears stream down her eyes, this was the first time someone had helped her without wanting anything in return, and as such, she thanked the woman from the bottom of her heart.

"Thank you! You have no idea how much this means to me!"

The prostitute merely shook her head and patted Honoria on her shoulder.

"Just pray that this Count Berengar is foolish enough to take you in. If he has even the slightest amount of common sense, he will ship you back to Constantinople the moment you arrive in his court."

Hearing this, Honoria's heart nearly faltered; however, she quickly got ahold of her resolve; she had already come this far; she might as well see this through. She prayed in her heart that Berengar was the man she believed him to be.

Thus the prostitute and the princess left the brothel and headed towards the harbor where they would meet up with a merchant's vessel and the Captain of it in the hopes that the princess could escape the cage her family had built for her.

### *Chapter 225: Balancing the Budget*

With the rebellion crushed, Berengar had secured his rise to power. As the official Duke of Austria, Berengar now set his armies to protect the borders from possible incursion, and of course, assist with internal security. With this, Berengar had established an era of peace and stability in Austria where he could successfully implement his reforms with little resistance.

As such, the young Duke was currently sitting in his office reviewing expense reports drafted by his House of Lords. At the moment the greatest matter of his military expenses was the expansion of the Navy. As for the Army, Berengar had halted its conscription and maintained its current size. In a time of peace, he allowed for voluntary recruitment only. As such, it required far fewer funds than it previously had.

As for the expenses that were delegated to conscription in the army, they were now set to fuel his Agricultural reforms across all of Austria. At the moment, the Agricultural and Educational sectors were the two most significant portions of his newly established peace-time budget.

By focusing on creating a self-sustaining, mechanized agricultural system across the land and increasing the education of the standard population, Berengar would theoretically be able to drastically improve his workforce and the draftable portion of his society.

At the moment, Berengar's focus was to implement the four-field system, irrigation piping, and phosphate fertilizer across the realm. Though Tyrol had begun to develop such strategies to a wide margin, the rest of Austria undoubtedly lacked agricultural reform. Thus Berengar started with the most

simple focus. Mass implementation of mechanization would have to wait a few years for the system to catch up.

While Berengar was hard at work, he heard a knock on his door, and as such, he quickly responded.

"Come in"

to nobody's surprise, the person who had visited Berengar during his work was none other than Linde. As usual, she was ravishing, and at the moment, she was wearing a sky blue dress with white embroidery. This dress was in the typical fashion style that Berengar had introduced to the realm. It was primarily based on Tudor and Elizabethan-style dresses from his previous life.

However, the curious part about all of this was Linde's extravagant jewelry; it was white-gold with sky blue diamonds embellished within it. White gold was not a naturally occurring material; it had to be created by mixing yellow gold and other materials like nickel, silver, or palladium. As such Berengar had introduced the lavish substance into his jewelry industry as a way to replace silver and increase the demand. After all, such luxuries could only be found in Austria at the moment.

As for the magnificent jewels, they were the exceptionally rare blue diamonds and Berengar had paid a significant expense to import these precious gemstones from India via his Byzantine trade contacts in order to provide Linde with a set of Jewels fitting for an Empress.

The dress and the gems paired with her sky blue eyes and strawberry blonde hair perfectly. As such, Berengar was quite shocked at her appearance when she arrived in his room, so much so that his jaw dropped.

This was the first time she had shown the new set of jewels since she had received them, and Berengar was more than impressed. He had every desire to get out of his seat and make love to the woman then and there, but he was not an animal who lived on pure base instinct, and thus he calmed himself before putting such notions aside.

"Love, is there something on your mind?"

Linde did not answer. Instead, she slowly approached the desk where she sat upon it. After enticing Berengar by showing off her mighty cleavage, she slapped his head with a file in her hands that he had not noticed before teasing him.

"Darling, where are you looking? My eyes are up here!"

Seeing that the girl was toying with him, Berengar began to chuckle before grabbing ahold of the file and reading into it. The document requested an increase in funding towards Foreign Aid. However, both Berengar and Linde knew what this request was really for.

Foreign Aid was the expenditure report that Berengar filed for all of his Intelligence expenditures. The reason for this was simple; his spy network officially did not exist, even though everyone knew he had one. To fund this network, he needed a front. Otherwise, there would be a giant gap in the accounting of his government spending which would immediately draw suspicion by any potential onlookers.

Thus Berengar opted to allocate a particular portion of the national budget into "Foreign Aid." Of course, all of these resources went to funding the recruitment, training, deployment, and other resources Berengar's intelligence Agents needed. Berengar quickly signed the request for funds before handing it back to Linde with a smile on his face; after doing so, he made a request of his beautiful young lover while giving her a document of his own.

"Sweetheart, I need you to do something for me. It is time to reform the crude spy network we have developed into a full-scale intelligence department. This



is a list of the basic structure that shall be established, and you can make any changes to it that you see fit."

The structure was loosely based on a diagram he had once seen online of the CIA's basic system in his previous life. Linde's official rank and title would be Director of Intelligence, and she could fill the ranks with anyone she saw fit for the positions available. The other important feature of this structural overhaul was the establishment of a training facility for new agents.

Linde looked at the design and nodded her head before agreeing to Berengar's request.

"It might take a while, but I assure you, it will be done in at most two years."

Berengar smiled and nodded at this; the overhaul he was asking for was to create a semi-modern intelligence agency in the medieval era; it was not an easy task to accomplish. However, he trusted Linde was competent enough to fulfill the mission and merely pet her head before responding.

"I know you can do it!"

Linde immediately had ideas to modify the structure to allow for two sub-departments, internal and external intelligence, and adjust the system so these two groups can regularly communicate.

Linde was a prodigy when it came to intrigue, and thus Berengar left the complete product to her imagination. After all, this area of governance was not Berengar's strong point, he had an outline from his previous life, and that was it.

With that said, Linde was about to leave the room and get to work when Berengar held her up.

"Oh, by the way, I have a present for you!"

Linde quickly turned around and looked at Berengar with a hint of suspicion in her eyes. However, when she saw Berengar grab the present from beneath the table, her sky blue eyes grew wide with excitement, and tears instantly began to form within them.

In Berengar's hand was a tiny black kitten with golden eyes. It was precious, and Berengar brought it over to Linde before placing it in her hands.

"I found this little girl on the streetside and figured it was about time you got yourself another pet. I hope you don't mind. I promise this time I will allow no harm to come to it!"

Linde immediately began to pet the little kitten with tears flooding down her cheeks and a broad smile on her face as she hugged it dearly before speaking to it in a soft tone.

"Hey, there little pretty kitty! What should I name you?"

Berengar thought about it for a moment before coming up with a name he felt was appropriate.

"How about Nightshade?"

Linde gave him a stern look before commenting on his naming proclivities

"After the poison? Seriously? You are terrible at picking out names!"

After gazing at the cat with affection and rubbing its chin, Linde came up with a name.

"I am going to call you Midnight after your beautiful dark coat!"

Seeing that Linde was happy, Berengar smiled, and after doing so, his lover hugged him with the kitten placed on her shoulder. As Linde hugged Berengar tightly, she thanked him from the bottom of her heart.

"Thank you!"

Berengar began to pet her glossy strawberry-blonde hair as she thanked him and nodded his head.

"Anything for you..."

After saying that, Linde released Berengar and took her new kitten out of his office. She had much work to get to; aside from looking after Hans and her new pet, she also had to work on overhauling and expanding the intelligence network, and thus she had little time to spare. She would properly thank Berengar for this gift later at night when the couple had finished their daily work.

As for Berengar, he returned to his desk, where he continued to approve the national budget. For the time being, he had many reforms to enact. While signing documents all he could think of was how happy he was to be reincarnated into this alternate world. If he had not died in Afghanistan in his

previous life, he likely would have spent the rest of his life alone and in the military.

Yet now he had everything he could ever ask for, and yet it was not enough. The fires of his ambitions had been stoked, and there was no rest for a man such as himself. Thus he would work tirelessly in the upcoming days to advance the Duchy of Austria into a new era.

The age of industry was on the horizon, and he had only just begun to breach its surface. However, before the Industrial Revolution could occur within his lands, the Agricultural revolution had to take shape. Thus, for the time being, he was once more focused on Agriculture.

### *Chapter 226: Honoria's Journey Part II*

During the night that Honoria had escaped, she had stumbled across a prostitute who had taken pity on her. Despite taking an enormous risk, the woman promised to lead Honoria to the harbor and help her fulfill her wish. That wish was to escape her marriage to the effeminate prince of France and visit Austria, where she might finally get a chance to meet the man who could potentially be her destined partner.

With the prostitute's guidance, it did not take long for the two to arrive at the harbor where a merchant's galley was docked. It was a decent size ship and was fully capable of crossing through rivers like the Danube. After boarding onto the vessel, the duo noticed a man resting on its bow, where he had a book placed over his head and a large jug of wine near his feet.

However, as soon as Honoria and the prostitute saw the man sleeping on his ship beneath the starry sky above, the woman who had accompanied Honoria kicked the man in the shin and chastised him as she did so.

"Agnellus, wake the fuck up!"

After receiving the impact from the woman's kick and hearing her shrill voice as she screamed at him, the man was instantly startled; as he awoke, the book fell from his face and onto the deck of the ship. The moment he looked over, he could see his little sister, whom he had not spoken to for some time, glaring at him as if he was some form of scum for simply resting during the night.

The man struggled to break free from his intoxicated state and began to rub his temples before he fully realized what was going on.

"Melissa? It has been some time... To what do I owe the displeasure?"

At this moment, the man noticed the beautiful young girl next to Melissa, and a lecherous grin appeared on his face. However, after seeing the look on his face, Melissa snapped at him.

"Wipe that disgusting expression off your ugly mug; she isn't some piece of street meat you can buy for the night! This is a noblewoman seeking passage to Austria, and you should show her some respect!"

When Agnellus heard that Honoria was a noblewoman, he quickly cleaned up his act and bowed his head while apologizing.

"Apologies, my Lady, it is just that with the company that Melissa tends to keep; I assumed you were in the same profession..."

Agnellus was smart enough to realize what would happen if he dared to lay his hands on a noblewoman and quickly got his act together. He might be a drunk and a lecher, but he wasn't a fool. Honoria merely nodded in response without saying anything. She was warned on the way over by Melissa that the less she said, the better.

Agnellus just realized that Melissa said this young girl wanted to travel to Austria and immediately became suspicious. As such, he voiced his concerns.

"Austria? That is a long journey; even if you paid me to take you there, I would first have to know why. There is no way a noblewoman like yourself would hire

a mere jewelry merchant like me to take you to a foreign country, especially without an escort. Just what kind of trouble have you brought to my doorstep, Melissa?"

Melissa folded her arms before criticizing Agnellus once more; she knew the man would never risk smuggling the princess out of the Empire; the risk was far too significant. Thus, she made up a half-truth about her identity.

"She comes from a minor noble household, and they want to marry her off to some queer. So she's running away; if you know what is good for you, you will keep your mouth shut!"

Hearing this, Agnellus began to scratch his bare chin. This was a complicated situation he found himself in. However, when Honoria reached into her satchel and pulled out a large gold bracelet encrusted with diamonds, the man's natural greed instantly took hold.

Honoria struggled to find her voice amid her anxious state before speaking.

"I... I don't have any money, but I can pay you in fine Jewelry, is this enough?"

Seeing such a high-quality piece of Jewelry, the merchant immediately gazed back and forth between Honoria and his sister with a glance of suspicion before questioning Melissa's statement.

"A minor noble household, huh? There is more going on here..."

Honoria had a worried look in her eyes as she stared at Melissa with a pleading gaze. After seeing how desperate the girl was, the merchant known as Agnellus sighed heavily before deciding.

"Fine... I'll take her, but it is only because I am headed in that direction anyway. There is a lot of business to be had in that part of the world nowadays. Supposedly there is a booming jewelry market in Kufstein with designs that people have never seen before. Come aboard; you can stay in the captain's quarters; I guess I will live with the crew for the next couple of months."

Honoria quickly thanked the man before stepping aboard

"Thank you!"

afterward, she began to walk towards the captain's cabin. However, before she could do so, she ran back and grabbed ahold of Melissa where she hugged her as if she were a dear friend while thanking her.

"Thank you, truly from the bottom of my heart; I thank you for everything you have done for me. I promise never to forget your kindness so long as I draw breath!"

Melissa's cheeks began to flush as she heard such appreciation, and she immediately pried the princess off of her before responding.

"I am just helping out a kindred spirit; go, get on the ship and make yourself ready for the voyage. One last piece of advice is to try to hide in the captain's quarters for as long as possible. The crew members are not to be trusted."

Honorio looked at Melissa with a questioning gaze; she did not know what the woman meant by that. However, she quickly nodded and smiled before saying her farewells.

"Goodbye Melissa, I hope one day we may meet again!"

after doing so, Honorio entered the Captains' cabin, where she laid down on the bed while Heraclius perched on the desk, keeping a watchful eye over his master. Outside of the house, Agnellus began to interrogate his sister for the truth. He had many suspicions and needed to know the level of risk he was taking by smuggling the girl out of the Empire.

"Who is she? What kind of shit have you gotten yourself into?"

Melissa immediately tried to dodge the question.

"I told you she is a minor noble-"

However, before she could finish her sentence, Agnellus cut her off.

"Bullshit! Did you forget that I am a merchant who specializes in trading fine Jewelry? The bracelet that she showed me is worth a fortune! At the very least, she would have to be the daughter of a very wealthy Strategos to afford



such a thing. Tell me what I am dealing with and the level of risk I am taking for smuggling her out of the Empire!"

After thinking about it for a few moments, Melissa sighed before revealing the truth.

"She's Princess Honoria, and she is trying to escape a marriage. That part was genuine; she has told me she would rather die than marry that pillow-biter of a prince she is engaged to. You have to protect her, Agnellus! At least so long as she is on your ship..."

She has no idea how the real world works! She ran away from home to flee to Austria, hoping to meet with the Count of Tyrol because she had heard a few good stories about him and thinks he is some kind of prince charming! She has never even met the man!"

Agnellus could instantly feel a headache forming in his head, and as such, he placed his forehead in the palm of his hands before quietly scolding his sister.

" Jesus fucking Christ! You want me to smuggle the fucking princess of the Empire out of its borders? Have you gone mad!?! Do you have any idea what the palace guard will do to you when they find out you helped her escape? You will be lucky if all you get is a quick beheading! Why the hell would you help her?"

Melissa began to pout for a few moments before revealing her reasoning.

"Part of it is because I feel pity for her..."

Agnellus eyed his sister carefully before asking her for the remainder of her reasoning.

"And the other part?"

Melissa immediately stamped her feet in protest before blurting out her actual reason for helping Honoria.

"Just once, I would like to see a girl not get screwed over by her family. Is that too much to ask?"

Agnellus was conflicted when he heard this; He was well aware of the reasoning for why Melissa worked as a prostitute, and it essentially had to do with their parents. He rarely spoke to his sister, not because of her profession but because he could not very well look her in the eye after knowing that he had done nothing to stop her fate. As such, he sighed heavily before acquiescing to the request of his little sister.

"Fine, I will take her to Kufstein, and as long as she is on my ship, you have my word I will protect her. However, once she is in Kufstein, she is on her own. I suggest you get the hell out of the city before people realize she is missing! She is not exactly inconspicuous; she has bound to have left a trail to your doorstep!"

Melissa nearly jumped for joy as she latched onto her elder brother and hugged him dearly. Shortly after realizing what she had done, she let go and coughed to avoid the awkward atmosphere that had taken place.

"Thanks! I'll owe you one!"

Agnellus, on the other hand, merely scoffed as he responded to her statement.

"You can repay me by staying safe, seriously get out of town! Go to Athens! or Antioch, but whatever you do, do not stay in Constantinople!"

Melissa nodded her head and smiled before departing. After she left, Agnellus sighed before thinking to himself.

"Fuck me; I am too kindhearted in my old age..."

By the standards of the medieval era, he was, in fact, reasonably old; he was currently in his mid-thirties, and he had seen too much in this life to be considered young. Despite this, he still had a good nature and thus agreed to help Honoria. Partly because of the wealth he would gain from doing so, but more importantly, he too felt bad for the girl.

As such, Agnellus quickly got to work rounding up his crew and preparing to set sail. After realizing who he was smuggling out of the city, he had no desire to stay within its borders longer than necessary. After an hour of preparation,

the ship cast off, and for the time being, the crew was unaware that a beautiful young girl was staying in the captain's quarters.

It would be a long journey to Kufstein, with many stops on the way. During this time, Honoria was bound to have some adventures of her own; when she finally reached Kufstein, she would be shocked to find out that Berengar had risen from the position of a Count to that of a Duke in such a short time. Perhaps Berengar would have elevated his title to a King by then; the future was uncertain.

By the time the imperial family of the Byzantine Empire realized that Honoria was missing, she would be long gone, and their only clue which was Melissa would have long since disappeared. Where she ended up, nobody knew. However one thing was sure, she would be better off there than if she had stayed in the confines of Constantinople.

#### *Chapter 227: Introducing Women's Undergarments*

The sun shone through the windows of Berengar's castle and into the dining room where Berengar, Linde, and Henrietta had gathered for breakfast. After sitting in their chairs and waiting for the food to arrive, Berengar noticed that Linde was rubbing her back, and out of concern for her health, he began to ask about it.

"Are you alright?"

Linde gazed up at Berengar and immediately responded with a forced smile on her face.

"I am fine; it is just sometimes I get backaches. I wonder why..."

Berengar immediately noticed the two bulbous mounds protruding from her chest and the cleavage they presented in the dress she wore. It did not take long for him to understand his lover's plight, and as he did so, he slapped himself on the forehead before exclaiming.

"Of course! I don't know why I didn't think of it before! Linde, you just gave me a wonderful idea!"

As such, Berengar immediately got up from the table and took off towards his study. Linde knew better than to interrupt her man when he had acquired inspiration. She smiled as Berengar ran away and rested her exquisite face in the palm of her hand as she gazed at Berengar from afar.

Several hours passed since then, and despite not having Breakfast, Berengar was fully satisfied with himself. In this time, he had devised an entire sketchbook filled with various designs for women's undergarments. He did not know why he had not thought of such a thing earlier.

Not only did modern underwear provide ample support to women's breasts, but it also looked incredibly sexy, and Berengar had greatly desired to see Linde in his new designs. Of course, there was also profit to be made, but deep down, all Berengar cared about was seeing Linde dressed in modern underwear.

After completing his designs, he rushed them down to the garment district, where he presented the schematics to the head of his women's fashion sector. As per most decent fashion designers, the director of development for women's fashion in Kufstein was a man. After flipping through the sketchbook with a stoic expression, the man finally placed the book down and gazed at Berengar with a curious expression.

Seeing this, Berengar thought he might have gone a little too far with some of the designs and asked nervously.

"Well, what do you think?"

The man finally broke out into a wide smile before complimenting Berengar.

"Your Grace, you are a genius!"

Hearing the man compliment him in such a manner made Berengar far more confident in the designs he had construed. Because he was a virgin in his past life, Berengar had not seen too many women in their underwear, at least not in person. He was mainly going off of his knowledge from hentai, pornography, and of course, internet searches from pure curiosity.

However, now that he had been reincarnated into a new world with a gorgeous lover by his side, he could finally realize his dreams of having a beautiful girl wear such erotic finery for his pleasure. In the end, is that not what all men desired?

By now, his mind had long since given up on the idea of these creations being created for the sole purpose of helping women and instead had embraced its inner pervert. Of course, he would never let this show on his face, and instead, he smiled at the man he had tasked to create women's clothing.

"I see that you are a man of culture as well..."

The man instantly laughed at Berengar's comment. Despite being a fashion designer, he was one hundred percent heterosexual and a bit of a playboy. He could not wait until he could get every woman in the city dressed in such undergarments.

However, he quickly got to the task at hand.

"So I am guessing you will need some of these for the voluptuous lover of yours, and you will want them quickly, am I right?"

Berengar had felt a sense of kinship with this man since he first introduced his takes on Berengar's initial designs of Tudor and Elizabethan style clothing. The man had a penchant for aesthetics just like himself and knew what made women look good as such; Berengar nodded with a smile on his face.

That was all the signal the fashion designer needed before flipping through Berengar's sketchbook, where he landed on a particular design. It was a pushup bra made of black silk and had a golden floral lace pattern; the panties matched in style and color. After placing his finger above the design, he exclaimed his honest opinion out loud.

"I believe your woman will look fantastic in these; just give me her measurements, and I will have them made by the end of the day!"

Berengar smiled as he boldly proclaimed Linde's measurements with a hint of pride on his face.

"33D-22-33"

The man's draw nearly dropped when he heard this; the only thing he was capable of saying in response to such a thing was the phrase.

"God damn..."

After daydreaming for a bit, he snapped out of it and gave Berengar a quick salute.

"I will have it done in a few hours where I will deliver it to your castle!"

Hearing this, Berengar smiled and began to chat with the man about the finer points of fashion for some time. It was not until evening where the garments were entirely crafted, and he was able to return to the castle with his new gift for Linde in hand. As such, he returned to the court, eager to see what Linde would look like in elegant underwear.

After arriving in the Castle, Berengar immediately began to search for Linde. It took him a while due to the size of the place; he began to wonder how difficult it would be to locate his family when they finally moved into his Grand Palace.

Linde was currently breastfeeding Hans, and when Berengar witnesses the sight, he gazed at her with an envious expression. Seeing Berengar standing in the doorway looking at her with a jealous gaze, Linde began to giggle before taunting the father of her child.

"When he is finished, you can have your fill if you want!"

Hearing such a bold suggestion, even Berengar felt embarrassed, and as such, his cheeks began to flush, and Linde noticed it. However, he quickly calmed himself and fired back at her shameless suggestion with a naughty retort.

"If you are offering, then don't blame me for partaking!"

Hearing Bernegar's response caused Linde to flush with embarrassment; every time she played these word games with Berengar, it usually resulted in

her being defeated. She was quick-witted, bold, and sometimes shameless. However, when compared to Berengar and his dirty mind, she could never compete. After a few moments, she finished up what she was doing and put Hans back in his crib before walking over to Berengar with a sultry smile on her face.

"So tell me, what has gotten you so riled up today?"

Berengar had a smile on his face as he pulled out a paper bag that contained his gift to Linde. He dangled it in front of her as bait before whispering in her ear.

"Let's go back to our room; I have a gift for you."

Linde could tell that it was something personal, and as such, she quietly nodded before holding onto Berengar's hand and following him back to the bedroom. After the door was shut and the curtains were closed, he revealed the contents of the bag.

Linde stared at it for a few moments with a vague idea of what it was for, but she had never seen such flashy undergarments before. As such, Berengar sat back on the side of the bed with his legs crossed and his head is resting on his fist while smiling.

"Go ahead, try them on!"

Linde blushed but considering they were in private and this was a command from her master; she had no choice but to obey. As such, she slowly began to strip off her clothing until only her bare skin remained. Seeing how excited Berengar was, she showed off her divine physique in all its glory before slowly putting on the new panties made of the softest silk.

After dressing in the bottoms, she tried to attach the bra but had difficulty with the hooks on the back. As such, she swiped her hair to the side before asking Berengar to assist her.

"A little help?"

Berengar never thought he would be able to do such a thing, and as such, he leaped at the opportunity; unfortunately for him, he struggled a little bit before he finally got them in place. After Linde's undergarments were fully attached, he asked her the question on his mind.

"So? How does it feel?"

Linde moved around a little bit to get a feel for the design before smiling.

"Much better!"

As such, she walked over to Berengar and began to kiss him passionately, which only further increased his arousal. However, before they got down to business, he moved her over to the bedroom mirror and displayed her beauty to herself.

"You truly are the most beautiful woman I have ever met; you know that?"

Hearing such sweet words, Linde could no longer hold herself back and pushed Berengar on the bed where the two began to make love. By the time they had finished, it was late into the night. Thus this was the ending to the day that Berengar introduced modern women's undergarments to the population of Austria.

### *Chapter 228: Developing the Hand Cannon*

While Berengar was taking advantage of this era of peace and stability that he had established to implement his agricultural and educational reforms, his enemies were on the move. In the county of Caernarfonshire within Wales, a group of Knights was gathered.

They were covered head to toe in Churburg pattern plate armor and wore a white and green tabard with a red maltese cross emblazoned upon it. These



Knights were recently established as one of the new military orders of the Catholic Church. They were known as the Order of the Red Dragon.

The Order of the red dragon made Caernarfonshire their home and began constructing a mighty castle near the coastline. With near-unlimited funding by the Catholic church to raise their forces, the Order of the Red Dragon had spared no expense in building their fortress.

Currently, an exceptionally tall man who stood well over six feet and six inches was standing next to a man of average height; in doing so, he appeared to dwarf him. This tall man was clad in iron plate armor from head to toe, in the style that was popular in the region.

This man was none other than the Grand Master Gwythyr Bowell, he was standing next to a relatively talented blacksmith who was introducing him to the progress he had made to the task he was assigned.

The blacksmith was eager to show off what he had accomplished and led the tall knight into his workshop, where he had two long poles, each of which had a long metal tube at the end. This tube acted as the barrel of the weapon.

It was an exceptionally crude and primitive firearm, but it was a firearm nonetheless. As such, the Grand Master picked up one of the weapons and observed it for a few moments before asking the question on his mind.

"This is the legendary hand cannon?"

The blacksmith nodded his head with an excited expression on his face.

"I purchased one from a trader who claimed he acquired it from a group in Bohemia. Afterward, I reverse engineered it and manufactured a few of them on my own. Would you like to see how it functions?"

The Grand Master had a stoic expression on his sturdy and scarred face. He merely nodded silently, indicating to the blacksmith to present the weapon.

After doing so the man grabbed a spare sheet of iron that had the same thickness as a common breastplate and dragged it out to the courtyard.

The blacksmith placed the iron sheet in front of a hay bale before walking away ten steps, where he began the loading procedure of the hand cannon. The loading of a hand cannon was similar to any other muzzleloading firearm.

Albeit far less streamlined.

One would load the powder into the small tube at the end of the stick that acted as a barrel with their powder flask, where they would then add the

projectile followed by some form of cloth wadding. After doing so they would pack it down with a stick. Yes, a stick, not a ramrod, these weapons had yet to develop a self-contained ramrod, so they used a separate stick to pack down the powder and projectile.

The firing sequence was completely different from later designs, though. Similar to the flintlock and earlier firearm designs, one would put a bit of powder on the pan. However, that is where the similarities ended.

On this weapon, there was no such thing as a trigger, so what the hand-gunner would have to do is hold the stick under their armpit and use their free hand to light the powder with a slow-burning match. That would then ignite the powder in the weapon and send the projectile flying.

As such, this sequence took a significant amount of time, nearly a minute, to do so. The projectile that was used was nothing more than small rock, instead of a lead or iron ball, because of this it did not achieve as much accuracy as the weapon was capable of, not that it was capable of much.

After firing the weapon, the projectile completely missed the target where the blacksmith began to curse under his breath.

"Mother fucker!"

After venting his frustrations, the blacksmith began the reloading process once more, where he missed his target for a second time. It was only after firing a total of three times that the stone projectile hit its target and bust through the iron plate. The moment it did so, the blacksmith began to cheer aloud.

"Haha!"

Witnessing the lackluster performance of the fabled hand cannon that Berengar's forces had used to triumph over the Teutonic Order, the Grand Master immediately felt something was amiss. Even in large numbers, such a pathetic weapon could not possibly turn the tides of war.

Its reload speed was too long, its accuracy was terrible, and its effective range was laughable. As such, he immediately interrogated the blacksmith about his concerns.

"Are you certain that this is a hand cannon?"

The blacksmith could tell the Grand Master was not pleased and as such he nodded his head with a certain expression.

"Yes, this is a hand cannon. Supposedly there are similar designs across all of Europe, but nothing too different. If you field it in large numbers it can be

effective even at close range. The largest problem with such a tactic is acquiring the saltpeter necessary to create gunpowder. The Byzantines are able to get it for cheap from India, but unless you can establish a trade route all the way to the Empire, good luck maintaining a large force of hand-gunners."

Hearing this the man was even more uncertain of how his enemy had acquired so many of these weapons and was able to maintain the necessary gunpowder to supply his armies. He had no way of knowing that a large portion of Berengar's supply of saltpeter came from his own nitraries, as for the rest it was now purchased from the Byzantines with the relationship he had set up with the Empire.

At the behest of the Catholic Church, the various military orders were required to begin experimentation with hand cannons but creating something more effective than the current technology would take years, maybe even decades to achieve.

Reflecting upon his orders, Gwythyr sighed in response to the information he had received. Either the reports of Berengar's weapons were inaccurate, or Berengar had a completely different design of firearms altogether. If it were

not for the Vatican's support there would be no way for the Order of the Red Dragon to field these primitive hand cannons, let alone something greater.

Gwythyr coldly looked into the blacksmith's eyes and spoke in a stern tone, in doing so intimidating the man who began to shake.

"I want at least a hundred of these built as quickly as you are able. As for the gunpowder, we will use the church's influence to procure it."

The blacksmith slowly nodded his head as he responded to the Grand Master's request.

"I promise you that I will have them done in a few months' worth of time!"

If Grand Master Gwythyr knew the amount of Muskets Berengar could produce within a few months, he would genuinely lose all hope of winning the upcoming Crusade that the Catholic Church had planned for the German Reformation, or the Berengar Heresy as they continued to refer to it as.

With that said, the Grand Master quickly got back to work to oversee the construction of their Order's first castle. As for the production of Hand Cannons, it was not only the Catholic Church interested in researching and developing such weapons.

After Berengar's overwhelming victory against the Bavarians who invaded Austria, all of Europe had begun to spend as many resources as possible on the research and development of handheld firearms.

Even to the more stubborn Kingdoms like France, it had become increasingly apparent that the era of Knights was coming to an end. If they could not adapt to the circumstances they found themselves in, they would no longer maintain their power.

Berengar had inadvertently sparked a new arms race among all of the European powers. The notions of who could build the best handheld firearm and who could field the most of them had begun to consume the minds of the European Monarchs and Feudal Lords as they rushed whatever asinine design they could develop into production in an attempt to have the slightest advantage over their competitors.

Even if Berengar were aware of such a thing, it would be centuries before the people of this world were capable of developing anything remotely similar to what his troops currently fielded. Despite the fact that there were exceptional geniuses in every era, Berengar's technology was too advanced for the early 15th century to compete with.

Nevertheless, the rapid development of hand cannons in this timeline as a result of Berengar's interference could prove some difficulty to his armed forces. At the very least, it could make sieges more difficult for Berengar to win with minimal casualties. When he finally learned of this arms race that he had inspired, Berengar would be forced to do something about it.

### *Chapter 229: Advancements in Medicine*

In the Chemistry department of Kufstein, the lead chemist Aldo von Passau had just made a significant discovery. Something that Berengar had previously hinted to but in no way explained in detail. Upon discovering such a thing, the man began to question how Berengar could know this reality. He was starting to believe that God sent Berengar to lead humanity into a new golden age.

This significant discovery was basic Germ Theory. As part of Berengar's chemistry department, which the young Duke had spent a considerable sum to construct, microscopes were included within the facility's tools. In Berengar's past life, he was an engineer, not a biologist, or a chemist.

However, to graduate from university, he had to have a fundamental knowledge of these subjects. Because of this, he had taught the men in his current chemistry department the basic level of knowledge that pertained to chemistry.

However, these men, especially Aldo, were exceptionally brilliant and eager to learn; as such, they quickly adapted to Berengar's teachings and tested them to see themselves if what Berengar had taught them was pure truth. Of course, Berengar had also taught them the basics of science, such as the scientific method.

While Berengar insisted on creating certain chemicals for medical production like disinfectant alcohol and certain antibiotics used in what was considered over-the-counter antibiotic cream in his previous life, he did not explain how these things functioned. Instead, he said with a wry smile on his face.



"You're the chemist; figure it out!"

The arrogant expression on the young Duke's face as if he knew more about the subject than a man who had spent a lifetime studying the mysteries of the world like Aldo so thoroughly outraged the chemist that he sought to prove Berengar wrong by using his methods against him.

In the end, Aldo had made a particular discovery by using a microscope on a sample of blood from an infected cattle, and that was the existence of bacteria and how some bacteria can cause disease. This discovery caused a great deal of shock within Aldo's mind, and he immediately wanted to replicate this infection on some of the field mice he had gathered.

As such, Aldo would spend the next few weeks cultivating harmful bacteria and infected field mice, where he would use the antibacterial cream on one group while not using it on another to see if he had discovered the function of Berengar's so-called "Antibacterial cream."

In the meantime, Aldo would begin to draft a report on his findings, where he would then hand it to Berengar personally and see the reaction on the man's face. Thus Aldo spent hours writing his conclusions into a somewhat scholarly thesis. After finishing it and allowing it to dry, it was late at night, and as such, Aldo waited until morning to report his findings.

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While Aldo was advancing his knowledge on chemistry, and basic germ theory, Ewald, who was Berengar's court physician, was permitted by Berengar to study basic anatomy. As such, he had been granted the ability to conduct research on the corpses of several of the dead enemy soldiers Berengar had brought back from the battlefield.

Every time Ewald cut into a cadaver, and examine not only the anatomy that a human was comprised of but also the cause of death of the enemy soldier the man, he was shocked to find his discoveries.

It was not just anatomy that the physician was allowed to practice; he too experimented with microscopes on the blood of humans, both alive and dead,

and that of animals. Berengar was more than happy to point the man in the direction that he was most needed in.

As such, the man began to make progress in the fields of surgery and blood transfusions. Through the continued experimentation of both life and deceased human blood, and with proper direction from Berengar and his knowledge from his past life, Ewald had also made a breakthrough in one of the fields he was studying.

That breakthrough was the existence of different blood types. He had determined that there were a total of three blood types, A, B, and C, as he labeled them. However, he could not rule out the possibility of a fourth. As such, he would continue in his research endeavors in the future, but for now, he wanted to report his findings to Berengar as quickly as possible.

If the young Duke was impressed by his performance, he might get more funding and staff to continue his research. As such, after cleaning up his laboratory, he headed towards Berengar's office with great haste. Interestingly enough, he would arrive at Berengar's study at the same time as Aldo.

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When Berengar's Court Physician and the head of his Chemistry department burst into his door unannounced, he could tell something significant had happened. When he saw the two men clambering among one another to report their findings first, Berengar raised a hand, signaling them to calm themselves before speaking.

"Aldo, you go first."

With this, the man smugly smirked at Ewald before reporting his findings.

"Your Grace, I believe you will be pleased to know that I finally solved the question I asked you long ago?"

Berengar smiled upon hearing this, as he was well aware of what Aldo had been studying for some time and thus motioned for the man to continue, as he set down his report upon Berengar's desk that pertained to his understanding of basic germ theory, and as Berengar read through it, his smile became even

broader. While Berengar was reading through his report, Aldo began to speak the results of his experiments aloud.

"Your Grace, I do not know how you were aware of this, but it has become clear to me that you know far more than you let on. The more I experimented with the blood of infected beings, the more I found proof of these so-called bacteria and the ability for them to cause sickness in humans and animals.

I am currently experimenting on a few field mice as to the effectiveness of the antibacterial cream you have ordered me to make, and I promise we will see results shortly. However, I have a feeling you already know how the results will turn out. Thus I decided to report my findings before that study was completed."

Berengar merely smiled at Aldo before complimenting the man.

"You truly are a genius, Aldo; I am beyond impressed with your results in so little time. Continue your good work, and I might be able to give you a few new chemical compounds soon for you to work with! I will also reward you for your findings. Name what it is you desire, and so long as it is within my ability, I will grant it to you."

Aldo bowed respectfully to Berengar before making his request

"If it is not too much trouble, I would like you to send me a fresh batch of young and educated minds so I can help mold them into future Chemists!"

Berengar thought about it for a few moments before responding.

"As soon as I have a group of potential candidates, I will send them your way; you have my word."

With this, Aldo smiled before thanking Berengar

"Thank you, your grace!"

With that, Berengar turned his attention to Ewald, where he began to ask the man what was on his mind.

"Did you have something to report to me as well, Ewald?"

The physician smiled before announcing his results.

"I, too, have made a significant discovery! By experimenting with human blood, I have found several different blood types; they are determined by the presence or lack thereof of specific antigens in the blood. I currently have seen three of these so-called blood types, A, B, and C!

A has the A antigen in the red blood cell and the B antibody in the plasma! B has the B antigen in the red blood cell and the A antibody in the plasma! C has neither A nor B antigens in the blood cells, but both A and B antibodies in the plasma!"

After hearing this, Berengar immediately understood C to be the O blood group from his previous life, and thus he decided to declare it as such.

"Should C be called O because there are zero antigens in the blood cells?"

The man thought about it for a few moments before nodding his head in agreement.

"That makes sense."

As with Aldo, all of these scientific terms that the man used were presented by Berengar when he aided them in their studies; without it, they would have no idea what to look for. Under Berengar's guidance, these two men had made significant breakthroughs in the areas of medicine, and Berengar could not be more proud. As such, Berengar's smile was about as large as it could be when he praised Ewald.

"Well done, Ewald, I too shall grant you a reward for your efforts; tell me what it is you desire?"

The man nodded his head in excitement upon hearing this and made his terms known.

"As with Aldo, I too desire more staffing, but I would also ask for more funding as well."

Berengar nodded his head in agreement when he heard this and accepted the request.

"Done, I will approve of more funding to the scientific fields and split it between your two departments; as for the request for additional staff, I will make the same promise I made with Aldo. As soon as proper candidates present themselves, I will send them your way immediately!"

With this, the two men were exceptionally thankful to Berengar and bowed their heads with respect before departing. After they were long gone from Bernegar's presence, the young Duke pulled out a glass and poured some of the distilled spirits he had been manufacturing into it where he took a sip before sighing heavily, as Berengar did so he expressed the thoughts on his mind aloud.

"Everything is progressing smoothly."

These scientific breakthroughs were just the beginning; he could not wait until the day his people had proper medical care that was not reliant on the backward ways of medieval understanding. This was a significant first step into establishing an era of scientific thinking, especially in medicine!

### *Chapter 230: Selecting a Deputy Director*

Within the city of Kufstein, Linde was currently sitting in her favorite tea shop. This time she was sitting alongside a specific female agent who had been instrumental in the victories of Meran and Vienna during Berengar's past campaigns.

Since Berengar had ordered Linde to restructure the intelligence agency into something more modern instead of the primitive method they had been using, she needed a proper Deputy Director, and there was nobody better in her mind than the young woman sitting before her.

Linde had a brilliant mind and was a natural prodigy when it came to intrigue, but there was one area she severely lacked in regards to, and that was field experience. The woman before her had proven capable in not only the art of assassination but sabotage as well.

She had a quick mind and could think critically even while under stress. She had proven fully capable of escaping volatile situations and establishing a proper replacement without the need to go up the ladder of command.

Without her efforts in the field, Berengar's campaigns might have slowed down. Despite the fact that his army's firepower was overwhelming; the removal of specific vital figures and the sabotage of enemy supplies, equipment, and fortification were needed for a swift victory.

This woman's name was Hemma, and she was a Kufstein native. She had grown up in the area as an orphan roaming the streets. The skills she gained in surviving her childhood allowed her to be a capable field agent. Now she would be tasked with helping Linde preside over an appropriate intelligence agency instead of a meager medieval spy network.

The two young women sitting across from one another was quite the sight to behold. The female field agent was considered beautiful by most men's standards; however, when sitting next to Linde, who was considered one of the three heavenly beauties of Austria, even she felt discouraged in her looks.

While sipping from her tea, Linde noticed that Hemma had a dissatisfied expression on her face, and she was not afraid to inquire about the reasoning. As such, she put on a pretty smile that successfully managed to charm the young woman before asking the question on her mind.

"Is something the matter?"

Hemma was by no means a lesbian, but even she could not help but admire Linde's natural beauty and charming personality. As such, she merely sighed before admitting defeat.

"It is nothing serious; I just realized I can't compete with you..."

It took Linde a moment to realize what the woman was talking about; when she did notice, she merely giggled before responding.

"Oh sweetheart, there is no reason to compare yourself with me. You are beautiful in your own way!"

Hemma instantly began to blush when she heard the compliment; as such, she quickly distracted herself by throwing herself into her work. It was a common habit of hers to do so when she felt uncomfortable.

"So why am I here? Is there something you need from me?"

Seeing that the young woman had broached the subject, Linde pulled out a luxurious purse that she carried along with her. The bag was made out of fine black leather and utilized gold fastenings. The latch itself was gold and studded with diamonds in the shape of a heart, and the strap that it was carried by was a golden chain.

The leather purse had a delicate diamond pattern embossed atop the surface. Seeing such an elegant handbag, Hemma immediately gazed upon it with envy. However, after retrieving a few documents, Linde stashed the purse away below the table before handing the young woman the papers.

The woman quickly glanced at the title, which read as follows.

"Austrian Intelligence Agency"

Seeing such words written on the paper, the woman immediately asked Linde what the documents pertained to.

"What is this?"

Linde merely smiled with a charming appearance before announcing Berengar's plan.

"We are going under a restructure in an attempt to make things more efficient. These documents contain the details; I want you to read through them thoroughly and then burn them. I will be forward with you, Hemma; I need a talented field agent with a quick mind to act as my second in command.

You have proven yourself among the greatest of my field agents, and I think it is about time you receive a promotion worthy of your efforts. What do you say? Will you be my Deputy Director?"

Hemma quickly glanced through the documents, trying to understand the duties of her position. The new job was much more demanding, but it was also far less dangerous and had much higher pay and accommodations. As such, she was quickly enticed by the offer presented to her.

However, she honestly did not believe she was qualified for such a position and, as such, asked the question on her mind.

"Why me? Surely others are more qualified, who have more leadership experience?"

Upon hearing this, Linde raised two fingers before answering the woman's question with a serious expression.

"I have two reasons; first and foremost, I need someone who is acquainted with the field and who can properly direct the field agents in their endeavors; it is an area I am severely lacking. As far as leadership experience goes, others are more qualified in that regard but lack your knowledge of the conditions of the field."

After saying this, Linde allowed Hemma to respond, and as such, the young woman asked the question on her mind.

"And your second reason?"

After hearing this, Linde sighed and rested her pretty face in the palm of her head while staring out the window before answering.

"I needed a woman to fulfill the role; if I spent most of my day in the company of another man Berengar is likely to have him lined up against the wall and shot out of jealousy..."

Hearing this, Hemma assumed Linde was joking and began to giggle; however, the cold gaze Linde gave her before responding sent chills down the woman's spine.

"I'm not joking..."



After saying this, there was a long and awkward silence, that is, of course, until Linde began to stretch her back while yawning; after doing so, she revealed the rest of her thoughts.

"Seeing as how that is the case, you are by far the most qualified to fulfill the position. If anyone has the gall to complain, send them to me, and I will explain why you have the position in full detail. It would be entertaining to see the look on their faces when I ask them how they feel about being executed due to Berengar's jealous nature."

Saying this, Linde immediately began to giggle with a charming smile on her face, to the point where Hemma was concerned about Linde's state of mind considering that she could find something so horrible to be entertaining. After joking around for a few minutes, Linde asked Hemma about her decision.

"So what do you say? Do you want the position or not?"

Hemma thought about it clearly for a few moments, nodding her head in agreement before formally declaring her intent.

"I accept!"

With that said, Linde smiled once more before taking a sip from her tea; after doing so, she responded to Hemma.

"Good, take those documents home and read them thoroughly; after doing so, burn them. I don't want any evidence of our department existing."

As such, Linde began to get up from her seat and grabbed ahold of her luxurious hand bag where she picked out a few silver coins and placed them on the table as compensation for the tea and cookies. After doing so, she closed the purse and slung it around her shoulder.

The black and gold bag matched perfectly with her exquisite dress that was in the same color scheme, so much so that every man in the shop had their eyes on Linde throughout the entirety of her conversation with Hemma.

She was like a goddess to the men of Kufstein, and just like a goddess; she was utterly untouchable; after all, she was the Duke's woman, and everyone

knew it.? Seeing as Linde was about to leave, Hemma called out to her and asked the question on her mind.

"What do you intend to do now?"

Linde thought about it for a few moments before putting on a sultry smile and boldly announcing in front of the entire tea shop.

"I am going to go satisfy my man!"

The moment Hemma heard this, she nearly dropped her jaw; she could not comprehend how Linde could say something so shameless in a public setting like this. Nor could she understand how Linde got so much work done while living in the Castle with Berengar. If this is how they spent their days, it was a wonder that the spy network had grown to its current extent.

It was at this moment she had a sudden realization, was this position she had just gained nothing more than a way to relieve some of the pressure on Linde's so that the young enchantress could spend more time with Berengar? Hemma immediately began to lament her decision, but it was too late now she was unofficially the Deputy Director of the Austrian Intelligence Agency, which officially did not exist.

With that said, Linde returned to the castle where she made good on her promise, immediately distracting Berengar from his ongoing work and dragging him to the bedroom for a little bit of mutual stress relief. As usual, the young couple was going at it like rabbits; by now, Berengar had learned his lesson and was smart enough to play it safe and not knock up Linde for a second time.