

Steel 241

Chapter 241: Salt and Glass

Now that Berengar had complete control of Austria, he had access to the Mediterranean via Istria. This presented a valuable opportunity to expand his business into two major areas. Glass and Salt production.

The man was hard at work drafting factory blueprints to create facilities in Istria to mass-produce such materials. The first object on his list of designs was what was once called the glass cone in his previous life. An invention used in England during the 18th Century for making glass.

Due to technological limitations, such as a lack of electricity Berengar was incapable of using modern techniques like float glass to manufacture ample glass supplies. Thus he had to dig back further into his memory to make a glass industry from scratch.

If Berengar wanted to out-compete the Venetians in the glass trade, who at this point were the major Glass producers of the world, then he needed a superior product. Luckily he knew of an invention from the late 17th Century that made England the world's top glass merchant.

This invention was known as Lead Glass in the modern era, also known as Crystal Glass due to its superb clarity. This glass was invented by adding a

minimum of 24 percent lead(II) oxide to the mixture. With this technique, Berengar could create a superior glass quality compared to the Venetians and slowly take over the market.

However, drinking from lead glass could be harmful, and lead was a valuable resource in the production of munitions. Thus Berengar had opted to replace the Lead(II) oxide with Zinc Oxide instead. This created a similar level of clarity within the glass, but it was lighter weight and safe to drink from.

Berengar had an overabundance of Zinc due to its content within his mines and those of the Lords underneath his rule. Thus he was more than happy to make glass this way. Berengar intended to produce such materials in glass cone factories, where after its production, it would be manufactured into various objects.

A glass cone furnace was powered by coal and had a large central furnace surrounded by smaller furnaces to ensure that the glass did not cool off quickly. Within the center of this formation was a work area for the glassblowers to shape the glass into the final product.

He intended to build a large factory containing several of these glass cone furnaces where he could produce a sufficient amount of glass. By doing this

Berengar planned to dominate the glass trade and add another industry to his portfolio.

On the other hand, the saltworks would be much easier; all he needed to do was create a large salt evaporation pond, also known as a salt pan.

Essentially, all that was required was to create a shallow area where seawater is trapped and left to evaporate in the sun.

After the water was evaporated and the salt remained laborers could quickly gather it, where it would then be treated and purified into proper edible salt.

The Byproducts left over would be valuable chemicals that can be used elsewhere in Berengar's industry.

If he could set up several of these saltworks across Istria, he could gain access to a large amount of salt and thus help him gain access to the salt trade. Though he would not be able to dominate the industry like the others he had entered into, it would still add another means of revenue to his pockets which would aid him in the long run.

After spending half a day designing these things, Berengar ventured to the Parliamentary building that contained the House of Lords. Though it was merely a formal procedure, he needed their approval to begin the production of the two trades he had in mind.

The moment he entered the House of Lords, the various men he had assigned to the task or were voted in by other members of the nobility all stood up from their seats as a sign of respect. It was not every day Berengar ventured into Parliament; usually, it was over something important that he wanted voted upon right away when he did so.

Thus when Bernegar stood at the podium, all of the men gathered were waiting patiently for the words he began to speak. After getting his files in order, Berengar cleared his throat before addressing the members of the nobility.

"My Lords, I have come here today to introduce a set of the legislature that needs your approval. In essence, I will be entering our Duchy into the glass and salt trades. I require your consent to construct various facilities within the province of Istria that will provide us with a large amount of the two materials.

"With my production methods, we can enter the glass trade and eventually dominate the market due to the clarity and quality of the glass produced. The wealth that is afforded to the Venetians via their stranglehold over the market shall shift to us!"

When the Lords heard this, they began to debate among themselves. One of them raised a serious concern over the matter of getting into the Glass trade, especially after hearing Berengar's ambitions to dominate the market.

"With all due respect, your Grace, do you think it is wise to steal the glass market from the Venetians? It will surely invoke their ire; we might even potentially be faced with war because of this!"

Berengar was calm and collected when he heard this information; the Venetians were not a threat to him. In this timeline, the Republic of Venice, much like the one in Genoa, were vassals of Italy's Kingdom and, by extension, the Holy Roman Empire. They maintained a significant degree of autonomy, much like other larger states within the Empire, such as Austria.

Thus Berengar boldly declared his stance on the issue.

"If the Venetians are bold enough to declare war on us over a bit of competition in the glass trade, then I will march on their capital with the full force of my army and force them into subjugation. As for their Navy, when I have constructed my fleet, I will lay it to waste!"

However, I doubt they have the gall to declare war on us so rapidly. By the time they realize they have lost the market, we will already be in a dominant position. Thus we have nothing to fear from angering the Venetians!"

Berengar was not afraid of war or making enemies; after all, he had spit in the face of the Vatican and caused a Reformation in Germany, which had made all of his neighbors except for Bohemia hostile towards him.

The only thing keeping his enemies from invading Austria was the fear of a defeat; after Berengar crushed the Teutonic Order and the Bavarian Army, few were bold enough to venture in to Austria until they could figure out countermeasures to his terrifying weapons.

Hearing his bold stance on the issue, the other Lords mainly were persuaded; after all, many of them had marched to war alongside Berengar and knew though boastful, he was not arrogant. They did have the means to defeat Venice, as for his claims about the Naval power they were creating? Well, in their eyes, it was yet to be seen how effective Berengar's fleet would be.

Thus after some deliberation, the House of Lords unanimously approved of the measures. Gaining dominance in the glass market would bring an absurd degree of wealth to Austria, and thus the potential gains far outweighed the potential risks.

With his plans approved, Berengar stayed around and discussed some of the other topics of interest. Though many minor things were discussed, ultimately,

it was all relatively insignificant, and thus, Berengar returned to the Castle in Kufstein after some time.

Legislating laws was up to the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and Berengar would for the most part not get involved in such affairs until it was placed on his desk where he could either sign it into law, revise the bill and send it back to the House of Lords for approval, or veto it. A fairly streamlined process gave him significant control over the Duchy while still taking the weight off of his shoulders of micromanaging every detail.

After returning to his home, Berengar had a meal with his family and then took a bath with Linde before returning to his room. After closing the door, Linde quickly latched onto Berengar and began to kiss him passionately while the two began to undress.

After doing so, Linde made a request of Berengar that he was not expecting.

"Would it be too much to ask, to give Hans a little brother or sister?"

Hearing this, a wide smirk filled Berengar's immaculate visage as he responded by pressing Linde down on the bed and having his way with her. Initially, he planned to wait a while to produce more children, but he would not

refuse his lover since she was asking for it. As such, Berengar spent a large portion of the night trying to impregnate his lover once more.

Thus Berengar ended the day with a wide grin on his face. Whatever future troubles may appear, he would answer them with firm resolve.

Chapter 242: The Princess Arrives I

Nearly a month had passed since Honoria first entered the Danube, and with it, she had finally arrived in Kufstein. Since her adventure in Hungary, she had spent much time on the ship learning to sail and going over the German language with the translator that Agnellus had brought with him. When she was not on the boat learning to sail, sleeping, or learning the German language, she was venturing through the villages they passed through, talking to locals, and experiencing life.

By now she was fairly proficient in the use of the German Language, though she would still have a tough time holding an extended conversation without the translator. Despite this, she was fairly certain she could still communicate with Berengar when she arrived, after all the two of them were nobility, and thus should know Latin.

Now that she had finally arrived in Kufstein, she made sure to dress in her prestigious apparel before venturing towards the castle with Agnellus in tow. Over the past month, she had devised a plan to get on Berengar's good side and had discussed it at length with Agnellus. Her goal was simple; she would approach Berengar under the guise of being a noblewoman from Antioch named Valeria Zonara, seeking to establish trade with Berengar regarding jewelry.

After all, Austrian jewelry was starting to become popular in the market due to its high quality and new materials such as white gold. It had become highly desirable for the nobility among the Danube river to purchase. This has initially been Agnellus' reason for coming to Kufstein. Thus this little scheme of hers did not require anything extra of Agnellus other than for him to play along with her little ruse.

The galley pulled into the river Inn, which separated Kufstein's city and parked at a port designed for river merchants. The moment the ship came to a stop, Heraclius flew off from Honoria's shoulder and into the sky above. Where he was headed to, Honoria did not know. Regardless he would sure to be back soon enough. Thus Agnellus and Honoria followed suit and stepped off the vessel, where Agnellus gave Honoria a stern warning.

"Alright, I am going to go register with the dockworker, stay here, and don't get yourself into any trouble."

The moment Agnellus said this, Honoria rolled her eyes before back-sassing him.

"I know the drill; we have done this a dozen times already!"

Agnellus merely laughed at Honoria's attitude before departing to do as he said he would. As for Heraclius, he had flown high into the sky well above the river where he landed on the pane of an open window. This window belonged to Berengar and was the window to his study within his castle where he was currently sitting.

The moment the bird landed on his window, Berengar looked over and was shocked. He knew this bird to be an eastern imperial eagle, yet they were not found in Austria. Kufstein was well out of the bird's range. He could understand if it was a golden eagle, but this bird from the eastern Mediterranean should not be here in the Alps.

As such, Berengar's natural curiosity came over him, and he slowly approached the majestic eagle, where he lifted out his hand for it to sniff. In doing so, Heraclius gave Berengar a curious sight as he began to talk to the bird.

"Hey there, little fellow, what are you doing here so far from home?"

The bird instantly recognized Berengar's status by the extravagant attire and the fact that he was in the castle's study. Thus he knew this man was likely Honoria's target and decided to provide some assistance to his master.

The bird was quite surprised to see the man while taking a routine flight and had thus approached Berengar of his own free will to gauge his character. Seeing that Berengar did not shoo him away, and was instead friendly, left a good impression on the eagle.

However, Berengar's words that came next greatly shocked it. Berengar had been staring in the eagle's eyes this entire time; while he was observing Heraclius, he recognized that the eagle was also sizing him up, and thus he laughed at this.

"My my, aren't you quite the intelligent bird. Tell me have I gained your trust yet?"

Very few humans ever spoke to Heraclius as if he could understand them, only Honoria did so, and Berengar had quickly found out the bird's intellect. Thus Heraclius was just as curious with Berengar as he was with him.

"Tell me, my feathered friend, are you here on your own? Or did someone bring you here? I find it hard to believe a mighty eagle like you would venture this far into the alps on your own accord."

Hearing this, Heraclius merely cawed before flying out the window and down towards the docks. Seeing where the bird was headed Berengar chuckled, and shook his head before saying his thoughts aloud.

"Alright... I'll bite!"

Thus Berengar quickly gathered his medallion cape and slung it over his right side before placing his cavalier hat upon his head. Afterward, he promptly departed from the castle and followed the bird down to the Docks. Heraclius had made sure to hover in the air and guide Berengar towards Honoria, who was waiting patiently by the ship she had arrived on.

After a short journey through the streets of Kufstein, Berengar found his way down to the docks, where he saw Heraclius land upon the shoulder of a gorgeous young woman. This woman had white hair, brows, and lashes. While having pale skin and mint green eyes, she appeared to be a beautiful albino at first glance, and this immediately caught Berengar's interest as he gulped the saliva down his throat.

When Heraclius landed upon Honoria's shoulder, an elegant and pretty smile spread across her perfect face as she petted the eagle on the head while addressing him.

"Heraclius? Where have you been? We have only just arrived, and you already wandered off!"

Heraclius cawed in response to this and pointed his head toward Berengar, who had just arrived in front of the beautiful princess. It was not until this moment that Honoria had noticed Berengar's presence and was taken back by his handsome demeanor.

There could only be one man in Kufstein dressed so lavishly and having such a perfect appearance in her mind. While dressed in his black and gold Elizabethan attire, with a Cavalier hat, the embellished eyepatch added to his striking figure, rather than take away from it. As such, Honoria was attracted to Berengar to the same degree he was to her.

Berengar put on a charming facade before creating a subject to talk about with the attractive young woman standing in front of him. He decided to speak in Latin for one simple reason. He could tell by the woman's attire that she was from the Byzantine Empire, and though Greek had replaced Latin as the primary language of the Empire, she would surely know Latin as a noblewoman.

Berengar's Latin was a little rusty, but as a nobleman in the Holy Roman Empire, he spoke it to a degree. Thus, he was able to communicate with the woman effectively.

"Heraclius, huh? A fitting name for a majestic creature like the eastern imperial eagle! Emperor Heraclius was a great man to depose the despot Phocas and lead his armies to victory against the Sassanids to the East."

As Berengar said this, he prayed that his knowledge of Byzantine history in his previous life was the same as it was in this timeline. Luckily for him, he appeared correct because the girl covered her mouth in shock as she heard this. She had no idea that the Count from Kufstein would be so well educated in her own people's history.

Honorio was also surprised that Berengar's Latin was fluent. Though he spoke in the Church's dialect, it was still surprising to see a German nobleman pronounce the tongue that she and her ancestors spoke with such proficiency. The girl was greatly enamored by her first impression of the man in front of her. Having seen that Honorio was thoroughly ensnared by his charms Berengar took the time to introduce himself.

"Apologies, my lady, I should have introduced myself first. I am Berengar von Kufstein, Duke of Austria. Might I have the honor of knowing your name?"

It took Honorio a few moments to process her thoughts; when the princess heard Berengar refer to himself as a Duke, her heart fluttered for a moment. However, eventually, she managed to calm her beating heart before responding with what she had planned to say for some time now.

"I am Valeria Zonara; I am but a minor noblewoman from Antioch here to engage in the jewelry trade with Kufstein, your gems are legendary, and I would very much like to sell them in the Empire!"

Hearing this, Berengar sighed heavily within his mind while thinking to himself.

'If only she were a princess...'

After hearing Honorio was a minor noblewoman and not a princess, he had lost interest; despite her exceptional beauty that was on par with Linde's and Adela's, Berengar had told himself he would not take in another girl unless there were significant benefits tied to it, like an alliance with a foreign Kingdom.

Thus Honorio had unknowingly shot her initial chances into wooing Berengar in the foot without realizing it. Instead, Berengar controlled his animal instincts and shifted Honorio to the back of his mind into the category known as "strictly business."

Thus he no longer gazed at her lustfully and instead put on a friendly smile as he addressed her business concerns.

"Well, you are not wrong; we have the finest gems and jewelry here in Kufstein. I would be more than happy to negotiate with you about a trading

agreement. How about you come back with me to the castle, and we can have a discussion about this over a hot meal?"

Honorio noticed the shift in Berengar's gaze as she stated her identity and felt as if she had somehow said something that displeased him, but she could not tell what. Ever being the wise bird, Heraclius realized that Honorio had ruined Berengar's initial impression of her and lightly pecked at her cheek, trying to warn her that she was friend-zoning herself.

Unfortunately, he could not speak the human tongue and could not inform the princess of her mistake. Thus Honorio merely shrugged the eagle off of her as she proceeded to bow gracefully to Berengar.

"It would be my pleasure!"

Hearing this, Berengar smiled and led her back to his castle. He had no idea that this Lady Valeria was Princess Honorio in disguise, and by now, he had mostly lost interest in trying to snatch her for himself.

On the other hand, Honorio had other plans; she fully intended to win Berengar's favor, especially now that she had seen him in person and was intensely infatuated with him. Thus an awkward Lunch was about to occur between Berengar, Linde, and Honorio, as the trio introduced themselves over a meal.

Of course, Honorio had utterly forgotten that she had promised to wait for Agnellus behind at the dock, and thus this would greatly outrage the man when he found out he had been left behind so that the princess could dine with the Duke. However, he was registering the boat with the dockmaster for the time being and was unaware that Honorio had left with Berengar.

Chapter 243: The Princess Arrives II

After arriving in the castle with a new, young, beautiful woman tied around his arm, Linde was unhappy, to say the least; she could not take her eyes off of Berengar for a single moment without him chasing after the next prettiest girl in the room.

Before Berengar even explained the situation to her, he had himself, Honorio, and Linde sit down at the dining table, where the best food in Kufstein was

prepared for them. While they waited, Linde stared furiously at Berengar, and this did not go unnoticed by Honoria.

However, Honoria saw Linde as competition in the war for Berengar's affection; the only question on her mind was whether or not Linde was Berengar's fiancée or his mistress. As such, she casually approached the conversation by complimenting Linde to Berengar.

"Your Grace, your wife is lovely; you must be quite proud."

Linde was no fool; she immediately understood Honoria intended to inquire about her identity, and thus she responded on Berengar's behalf, like a lioness protecting her alpha from an unknown stray.

"Our marriage is a happy one; we even have a child together, a beautiful baby boy named Hans!"

After hearing about Hans, Honoria instantly knew Linde's identity; she was the lover Arethas had told her about. However, she was confused about why she lied and said they were married when they weren't. As such, she posed the question to Berengar.

"I am sorry, I heard you were engaged, but I did not know you were married; when did you two get married?"

Knowing that Linde was the lover and not the fiancée, Honoria felt she had a greater chance of securing a spot in Berengar's heart and quickly shot back at Linde's bluff. Which caused Linde to be visibly outraged. She thought to herself

'Whoever this bitch is, she has done her homework.'

Berengar instantly knew that the two girls were fighting, but there was not a whole lot he could do to stop it, and thus the best thing a man should do in this scenario was clarify the issue at hand before it spiraled further out of control, while at the same time placating his lover with affection.

"Linde is not officially my wife, but if I could have two wives, she would be one of them. She is my lover, the mother of my child, and my partner. We consider

ourselves bound by our souls, so in a way, you could say that we are married right honey?"

Linde instantly rolled her eyes at Berengar; he was not usually the diplomatic type, the fact that he was approaching this little feud as a mediator meant he had some interest in the girl, or so she thought.

Honorio, on the other hand, acted as if she was shocked about the news. Though she knew Berengar had two women in his life, she felt the need to criticize him; if his fiancée was as beautiful as Linde, wasn't he just being a bit too selfish? As such, she let her jabs fly. Of course, it was all dealt with a sultry smile and a seducing voice.

"Why Berengar? I did not know you were that kind of man? Tell me, if you already have two women, then why not three? or four?"

To this, Berengar scoffed as he quickly drank from his skull chalice. He was well aware of the glares he was receiving from Linde at this moment, and thus he decided to approach this landmine without setting it off.

"My love life is already complicated enough... The only way I would entertain adding a third woman into my life would be if she was a Princess of a powerful foreign Kingdom. That way, I could gain something from the massive headache I would receive, such as a political alliance."

With this, Honorio instantly realized why Berengar stopped looking at her with passion when she told him she wasn't a princess. She could only imagine the trouble he must have by making two women happy. A third would be a nightmare, but she was undeterred; after all, she was, in fact, a princess.

Heraclius heard this and started cawing in a manner that resembled laughter. He did this while giving Honorio a gaze that displayed his thoughts for everyone to see. Those being something along the lines of

'See! You should have been honest from the start!'

However, Honorio would not so quickly reveal her status as a princess. Instead, she inquired about Berengar's intentions and thus asked him another question.

"I have a hypothetical question for you. If you don't mind answering?"

To this, Berengar merely nodded his head before replying.

"Go ahead, as long as it is not something too personal, I do not mind answering your questions, Valeria."

With this, Honoria put on a pretty smile and rested her gorgeous face in the palm of her hand while staring at Berengar with a longing gaze.

"Suppose a Princess runs away from her marriage and shows up on your doorstep because she had heard legends about you and was fascinated with the idea of being with you instead of her pillow-biter of a fiance. What would you do?"

To this, Berengar chuckled and responded with a sly response of his own

"This pillow-biter wouldn't happen to be the Crown Prince of France, would he?"

Honoria's surprised expression told Berengar all he needed to know about the identity of this girl. After all, he had a conversation with Arethas about Honoria being upset because she had a gay fiancée.

Now Berengar had not suspected Honoria until the moment she brought up this hypothetical. The reason it so quickly clicked in his mind was twofold. One, he seriously doubted there were more than a single openly homosexual prince in all of Europe.

Secondly, he had heard from Arethas that Honoria was a beauty no less gorgeous than Linde. Considering Linde was in the top one percent of women he had seen in the entirety of his two lives, he felt it was improbable that this woman would bring up a hypothetical that so perfectly described Honoria's situation while being as beautiful as the princess was said to be.

At the moment, it was only a suspicion, and Berengar had no definitive proof that the young girl in front of him was Princess Honoria, but all signs pointed

to it. She was roughly the same age as Honoria; she came from the Byzantine Empire, she was as beautiful as Honoria was said to be, and she just so happened to describe a so-called hypothetical that matched Honoria's situation perfectly.

Then again, as far as Berengar knew, Honoria was still within the Empire, thus unless he could confirm her disappearance, he would not be able to say with certainty that the woman before him was Princess Honoria.

So rather than out the girl, he merely responded with a non-answer. As such, he put a sly smile on his face before answering Honoria's question.

"That would depend."

Honoria was still recovering from her shock that Berengar knew about her engagement, so it took her a few moments to adequately address Berengar's statement.

"Depend on what?"

To this question, Berengar took a drink from his skull chalice before responding.

"It depends on whether or not I live up to the hype. So let me ask you a hypothetical question of my own. Let's say you are this hypothetical princess who has run away from her marriage and her home to come to visit me to see if I am her dearest Prince-Charming. From what you have observed about me until now, do I match the image you had in your head?"

In response to this question, Honoria quickly drank from her chalice before answering Berengar's question.

"It is too early to tell..."

To this, Berengar merely chuckled while Linde eyed Berengar and Honoria's actions closely. She could easily tell what mind games Berengar was playing with this so-called Valeria Zonara. After all, Linde had a mind for intrigue, and if Berengar could guess her identity so too could Linde; she was also privy to

the conversation with Arethas about Honoria's dissatisfaction with her betrothal.

This created a deep sense of worry in Linde's heart, not because Berengar might fall for the princess, she was already willing to share with Adela, and a third girl wouldn't hurt. It was because if this girl was Princess Honoria, then she had just brought trouble to their doorstep. The kind of trouble that Berengar might not be able to get out of, and nothing worried Linde more than her lover and her son's safety.

Linde knew she would have to investigate the real identity of this young woman who presented herself as Valeria Zonara, though it would be difficult. After all, Her intelligence network did not reach the Byzantine Empire, and if Honoria indeed ran away from home, it would be a tight-lipped secret.

The damage such a scandal would cause to the prestige of the Emperor, and his Dynasty was no laughing matter. If the Emperor could not properly control his own family, how could he possibly control an Empire with any degree of competency?

Of course, Honoria had no way of knowing that Berengar and Linde would dig into her background, it might take some time and effort, but with enough elbow grease, they could very well find out the truth of the matter, and when they did; hopefully Honoria had entrenched herself into Berengar's heart by then. Else she would be shipped back to the Empire to await her fate.

Thus the conversation at Lunch would continue for some time; after all, they had only just begun to break the ice with one another.

Chapter 244: The Princess Arrives III

While Honoria was visiting Bernegar for lunch at his Castle, Agnellus eventually returned from the dockworker with whom he registered his arrival. Of course, he had to pay a fee for using the dock, but that was not an issue for the veteran merchant.

What was an enormous issue was that the moment he returned to his galley, the Princess he had been tasked with protecting by his sister was nowhere to be seen. This caused an immediate sense of panic to fill in the man's gut.

Though he technically said he would help her until she arrived in Kufstein, he had at least wanted to make sure the young woman made it to the Castle okay. After all, if she was going to be meeting with Berengar, he too wanted to meet with the man so that he could negotiate access to Berengar's jewelry trade.

Both he and Honoria agreed beforehand that he would accompany her and pretend to be her servant, which would allow him to negotiate with Berengar for the jewelry business while maintaining the girl's cover.

Yet before he had the opportunity to take advantage of that, the girl just up and disappeared on him. Thus Agnellus began to search around the city of Kufstein for Honoria quite frantically. He would never forgive himself if something happened to her on his watch.

As for Honoria, she was currently eating lunch with Berengar and Linde. It was utterly unknown to her that her cover was already blown, at least enough to warrant a full-scale investigation into her identity.

As such, she was enjoying her time getting to know Berengar, who was more than happy to oblige the girl he thought may very well be the Byzantine Princess. To Berengar, it was better to keep the girl he suspected to be the Princess of the Empire by his side and provide her safety and security in his lands until he could verify her identity.

The reason for this was simple. If Valeria turned out to be Honoria, and he turned her away on the suspicion that she was the Princess. The Byzantine Empire could blame him for any misfortune that might befall her after he had kicked her out of his domain.

After all, the more Berengar talked to Honoria, the more he realized she was just a naive girl who had only recently come to know the cruelties of the world. For example, at this moment, Honoria did the unthinkable. She asked Berengar about a serious matter that a person would typically avoid discussing in their first meeting with someone who had a noticeable disability.

"So tell me, Berengar, how is it that you got yourself that fashionable eyepatch."

The food had yet to arrive when Honoria asked this question, which meant that they had been speaking to one another for less than half an hour; hearing this question Berengar put on a bitter smile as he tried to deflect the painful memories of how he nearly lost his life in battle.

"Let's just say I was wounded in battle, and we should leave it at that."

Though Berengar often reflected on his mistakes, as that was the only way to learn from them. He did not enjoy others learning of them; as such, his propaganda network had spun quite the tale about how Berengar found himself surrounded by multiple Teutonic Knights and, through sheer force of will, and overwhelming skill managed to overcome the odds, losing his eye in the process.

In truth, in a moment of recklessness, Berengar charged beyond his lines and into the fray where he lost his trusty steed and suffered a grievous injury in single combat against his brother before blowing the kid away with a pistol.

Despite this unflattering truth, the battle at Oberstdorf was too chaotic for anyone to witness how Berengar was indeed injured, so he used his injury to paint a picture of invincibility in the face of immeasurable odds. After all, if anyone could pull off such a feat, it was surely Berengar.

Despite having made up such a story to conceal his costly mistake, Berengar did not feel like lying to the girl about how he was injured and thus tried to kick the can down the road to inform her at a later date. That is, Should they ever grow close enough for him to reveal the humiliating truth of his injury.

However, Honoria didn't seem to take the hint and continued to press about the issue.

"You lost it in battle? That is fascinating! Who were you fighting? Do you still have the eye, or is it completely removed? Can I see it?"

Meanwhile, Heraclius merely shook his head at Honoria's response and looked at her as if she were an idiot. If an eagle like him could tell Berengar did not want to talk about the issue, why could this girl not see it?

As such, the mighty eagle began to peck at Honoria's face lightly, it was not enough to break her skin, but it was his way of saying that she was making a mistake. Honoria reacted by shoving Heraclius to the side, and the eagle rolled his eyes in response. With an expression on his face that said

"It is your funeral."

Luckily for Berengar, a distraction came in the form of food, and as such, an excited expression appeared on his face as he announced its arrival.

"I am afraid we will have to discuss this some other time. The food has arrived; I hope it is to your liking!"

Honoria took one look at the food on her plate and thought it was relatively simple, at least when considering the fine byzantine cuisine she was used to. However, the moment she bit into the pork schnitzel, she felt as if her tastebuds had entered heaven, and she could not help but moan in pleasure.

After eating a few bites of the food in front of her, Honoria exclaimed her thoughts aloud having already completely forgotten about her question.

"I had no idea Austrian cuisine was so delicious!"

To this, Berengar smiled proudly before responding to her comment.

"Well, I am glad you enjoy it; my chefs work very hard to prepare the best cuisine for myself and my guests to dine on."

At this point, Honoria had begun digging into her food, completely forgetting the reason she was officially in Kufstein, to begin with. That is until Berengar brought it to her attention.

"I suppose we should get down to business now that the food has arrived. How much of my jewelry can I expect you to purchase, and what is the price you offer for it?"

The moment she heard this, Honoria dropped her fork in shock and began to panic as she voiced her thoughts aloud.

"Agnellus!"

Berengar and Linde were confused by her actions. As such, Berengar tried to figure out what she was talking about.

"I am sorry, who?"

It was at this moment Honoria realized she had made a scene and calmly collected herself before speaking.

"Agnellus... he is erm my subordinate, he handles the business affairs. I accidentally left him at the docks..."

Berengar desperately wanted to facepalm at the girl's remarks. Honoria had spent all this effort to create a cover story, and in the end, she left behind a critical asset at the docks, one that could seemingly verify her identity in the event there were some suspicions. Berengar did not know who this Agnellus was or what his relationship with the girl was, but he figured it could not be anything good.

Now that Honoria was in Berengar's lands, she was under his protection, and as such he wanted to get to the bottom of this. If Agnellus had done anything inappropriate to this girl during their travels, he would be severely punished.

As such, the young Duke clapped his hands, and a couple of guards stationed nearby walked over to him. As they did so, they saluted their liege by pounding their breastplates and standing at attention before Berengar gave them their orders.

"Search for this Agnellus from the Byzantine Empire within the city, and bring him to me. He is probably looking for the girl as we speak, so it should not be too hard to find him."

With that said, the guards yelled in the affirmative.

"Yes, your grace!"

After doing so, they immediately departed from the Castle and formed a search party to find Agnellus. While Berengar, Linde, and Honoria waited, Berengar began to ask a question of his own to the girl.

"So tell me, Valeria, what is Antioch like?"

Honorina had no response to this question; she had never been to Antioch, nor had she ever had anyone describe what the city was like to her. She could probably imagine a fake answer, but it would be easily discovered if Berengar looked into it. As such, she gave a vague answer trying to deflect the question.

"Oh, you know, it is just like any other city in the Empire..."

To this, Berengar smiled and nodded his head politely while saying a typical response.

"Of course"

however, her lack of knowledge of the city she claimed to be from only further convinced Berengar that the girl in front of him was, in fact, Princess Honorina. Only a girl locked up her entire life would use a major city of the Empire as her backstory and not know the first thing about it.

Linde was also cautiously watching the scene, and though Honorina did not realize her lies had been seen through, Heraclius sure noticed it. However, despite being on alert, he did not sense any hostility from Berengar and Linde, only pity.

Heraclius had an excellent judge of human character; something told him that Berengar was not the kind of man that would cause unnecessary harm to Honorina, even if deep down the eagle could tell that Berengar was by no means a kind-hearted man.

As such, the trio began to make pleasant conversation over the meal, waiting for Agnellus to arrive so they could continue this grand charade that everyone in the room was aware was an enormous lie. It would be some time until Agnellus was found, and by the time he arrived, all of the food would have been consumed by the people sitting at the table.

Chapter 245: Getting Down to Business

By the time Agnellus arrived at the Castle, Berengar and the others were long since finished with the meal and had been making small talk. At the moment,

Berengar was sipping tea out of a porcelain teacup that his ceramics industry had created. It was painted with the depiction of the battle at Oberstdorf.

Berengar commonly sold porcelain tea sets that depicted his various deeds, inspired by the old greek vases that showed the legends and myths of their mythology. They were pretty popular among the nobility of Austria due to their high quality and visually appealing aesthetics.

Agnellus was out of breath when he walked in and saw Honoria with a broad smile on her face carelessly chatting away with the Duke of Austria. He had spent the last hour or so searching all over the place for her, only for the town guards to grab him and escort him to the Castle without explanation. As such, he quickly called out to her.

"Lady Valeria, you had me worried sick!"

The man had become accustomed to calling the Princess by her alter ego for some time now and had no trouble doing so. Berengar was not surprised by this in the slightest and merely had his servants open up a place at the table for Agnellus.

"Agnellus, I presume? You must be starving, sit, and I will have some food brought to you as we dine on dessert."

Seeing that the Princess was safe and sound while appearing to get along quite well with the target of her affections, the worry that had built up in Agnellus' heart began to subside. As such, he did as he was instructed and sat down at the table, where a chalice of wine was quickly poured for him.

Only after the man had taken a sip from the chalice did Berengar begin to address business concerns.

"I have heard from Lady Valeria that you are the one in charge of business matters; I am quite curious what is your relationship with the young Lady?"

Agnellus looked over at Honoria and slowly examined her for a moment; he was unaware of what she had said about him towards Berengar, so he decided to play it safe and answer vaguely.

"Your Grace, I am just a humble servant who has a mind for business. The Lady wanted to visit you personally as a show of good faith, and thus I brought her here."

Berengar nodded his head at the man, though behind his warm facade, he was slowly examining Honoria's reaction to his statement. As such, he decided to continue the conversation.

"So tell me, what exactly is your proposal to get involved with my jewelry business."

Hearing that Bernegar had shifted onto the topic of he had been waiting or, a broad smile appeared across Agnellus' face as he made his proposal.

"I can ferry your fine jewelry to a new market throughout the Empire; for this, I would like to split the profits gained from the trade fifty-fifty."

Hearing this, a sly smile formed across Berengar's lips as he began to make a counteroffer.

"If it is merely ferrying my goods to the East and selling them, I believe a fifty-fifty split is a bit unfair for me. After all, I have to incur the costs of acquiring the materials and paying for the labor of the jewelry's construction. Before long, I will have a trade fleet of my own that is capable of sailing across the Mediterranean; tell me why would I need you?"

To this, Agnellus was not discouraged. Instead, he presented his reasoning

"If you wish to trade in the Empire as a foreigner, you will have to pay tariffs. You will also have to go through weaving a trade network in the East from scratch. With me, you can bypass the tariffs and make use of my extensive trade routes that cover the entirety of the Empire!"

After hearing this, Berengar thought about it for a few moments. Tariffs would be a minor problem but trying to access the Empire's trade networks as a foreigner, especially as a German, was not the simplest of tasks.

After all, there was still some prejudice in the Empire towards his kind for destroying the Western Empire centuries ago and claiming to be the legitimate successors of Rome in the form of the Holy Roman Empire.

After careful consideration, Berengar decided to negotiate further

"I will agree that you make a persuasive argument, but fifty-fifty is out of the question, As the producer of the supplies, I will take a seventy-five percent cut, and you will take twenty-five."

Despite the massive profit this could yield for both parties, Agnellus was not content with such terms, and thus he counteroffered with a more balanced offer.

"sixty-forty, that is as low as I can go. I still have to grease the palms of imperial officials to avoid the importation tariff."

Berengar found this acceptable and nodded his head with a smile on his face before reaching out his hands to accept the terms.

"Very well, sixty-forty it is; I will have a contract drafted where we will both sign. Seeing as we both have a witness, you do not have a problem with such a thing, do you?"

Agnellus smiled amicably at the terms Berengar presented and responded to his question.

"Not at all; it sounds fair to me."

At this moment, another thought appeared in his mind, and it pertained to the girl sitting next to him. Thus he quickly hatched another scheme as he made one more request of Berengar.

"By the way, could you help me out with a situation I am in?"

Hearing this, Berengar frowned; he could tell exactly where this was heading, and as such, carefully eyed Honoria with his peripheral vision before responding to Agnellus.

"It would entirely depend on what is requested of me."

Seeing Berengar's expression and tone shift, Agnellus knew to pawn the girl off onto him would be an uphill battle, but he had to do so for Honoria's sake. Thus he mustered the courage to make his demands to the mighty Duke sitting in front of him.

"The Lady Valeria's home life is somewhat volatile at the moment, and for her safety, I would like her to stay here in Kufstein under your protection far from the troubles in the East. Do you think you can keep her here for the time being as a representative of my interests?"

Hearing this, Linde began to scowl, which did not go unnoticed by Honoria. Since her arrival, Linde had been feuding with the runaway Princess over her attempts to get close to Berengar, and Berengar had maintained his distance because of this. Thus Honoria was worried Berengar would send her away; if he did so, she did not have a backup plan.

Berengar was a wise man and immediately pointed out the flaw in Agnellus's request with a snide remark.

"But Agnellus, you stated earlier that you were a mere servant of the Lady Valeria, what gives you the right to appoint a noblewoman such as herself as your representative?"

Hearing Berengar's response Agnellus knew he had overplayed his hand and had to think of an excuse quickly. As such, he made up a lie on the spot hoping Berengar would buy it.

"The truth is that I hold a fairly prestigious position within the Zonara household, and I do have the authority to negotiate such a thing. What do you say? You would be doing me a solid, and in return, I can go sixty-five - thirty-five."

Agnellus lamented the loss he would be taking in profits, but at this point, he had grown too attached to Honoria to allow her to roam the streets of the world like a wayward vagabond. Thus he was willing to take a loss to ensure her safety.

After all, Berengar seemed like he was fully capable of protecting the Princess. Agnellus could see he was interested in Honoria despite the Duke's

hesitation, which was a good sign. Thus he felt like she would be safe in Kufstein and was willing to take a minor cut to ensure the girl's security. Melissa would never forgive him if he put profits over the Princess's safety.

Berengar sighed heavily as he took a sip from his tea. After a long period of silence, he made his decision known.

"Fine... If it is just keeping her safe for a while, I don't see why not. Especially since you are kind enough to increase my share in return."

The moment Berengar said this, Honoria was delighted and filled with excitement, while Linde stared at Berengar with a scornful expression. There were two reasons for this, one she did not yet approve of Honoria as a candidate for one of Berengar's wives. After all, there was a high possibility the girl was lying about her identity and thus could not be trusted.

Secondly, if she was really who Linde and Berengar suspected her to be, Berengar was bringing trouble upon their doorstep if he accepted this girl into his care. This was what worried Linde the most. Berengar may be powerful, but to contend with the Byzantine Empire was not something he was fully capable of at this moment.

Could he defend their borders from a possible Byzantine incursion? Quite likely, but the Byzantine navy could make trade exceptionally difficult with Austria, and in doing so, stagnate their economy. Such an outcome would be disastrous for Berengar's restoration efforts.

Berengar could not deploy his troops to the Mediterranean, and thus what was most likely to occur was a complete blockade on Austrian ports in Istria. Of course, this was the worst-case scenario and entirely depended on if the Byzantines found out about Honoria's location and decided to blame Berengar for her disappearance.

To Berengar, on the other hand, he was much more worried about sending the girl away without protection. If she was truly princess Honoria and he dismissed her from his care, and some harm came to her. When the Byzantines found out about such an event, they could blame him for the incident. Thus he decided to keep her under his protection until he could verify her identity.

If she turned out to be the Princess of the Byzantine Empire, he would contact Arethas, informing him of the Princess's location, and tell him to bring a caravan to escort the Princess back home.

Thus, while Honoria was happy she found a place to stay, Berengar was already scheming to find out her real identity and how to defuse the timebomb that her arrival had potentially become.

After agreeing to Agnellus' terms, the man smiled and thanked Berengar from the bottom of his heart.

"You have my eternal gratitude, your Grace!"

Berengar put on a friendly smile and nodded. With this, business was concluded, and for the time being, Honoria was allowed to stay within the Castle of Kufstein.

Chapter 246: Glory to the Empire

Over a month had passed since Honoria's disappearance, and despite the Byzantine imperial family's best efforts, they had completely and utterly failed to locate the girl. They were beginning to fear for the worst.

While the Emperor was struggling to deal with the fallout of his daughter's reckless behavior, Arethas was marching an army into Egypt. They had set sail from Ionia not long ago, and they arrived in Egypt not far from what remained of the territory of the Byzantine's decades-long conflict of invading the region.

Despite the Byzantines' best efforts, the Mamluke sultanate still held control of Egypt, Cyrene, and most of North Africa. Thus leaving the Byzantine Empire

in a never-ending war for reclaiming lost territory. If not for the vast wealth gained from the Levant and the trade routes connected to the Mediterranean, the Byzantines would have had to give up this conflict long ago.

However, today was different; today, Arethas marched with an army of 15,000 men; these men were equipped with matchlock arkebuse firearms and pikes. Through Berengar's intervention in the timeline, the arkebuse, or arquebus, had become a reality far earlier than in his past life, and he had sold them in great numbers to the Byzantines while aiding them in the development of pike and shot formations.

The reason for this was simple, Berengar intended for the Byzantines to be a great power in the East and act not only as a bulwark in defense of the Muslim world but as an Ally he could rely upon to aid him against his enemies.

Berengar had thoroughly outraged the Catholic world with his reformation, and in doing so, created many hostile states surrounding his borders. If he did not foster a powerful alliance with the East, he would undoubtedly be fighting a coalition of the European powers by himself. After spending a lifetime at war, he would surely end up like Napoleon.

Thus in order to ensure that he would have a powerful ally, Berengar intended to restore the lost glory of Rome to fight alongside him against his enemies.

Today was the first day that the Byzantine Empire showed off its newfound military might against the Saracens who sought to destroy her.

Arethas sat on horseback at the rear of his formation, protected by his guards. In the field, the Byzantine army equipped with their mirror pattern armor held their arkebuses and pikes in their hands as the Mamluke forces gathered on the other side of the sands.

Arethas had spent a significant degree of time, effort, and expense arming and training his army in the new weapons and tactics. Initially, he had desired to spend more time getting acquainted with their use, but unfortunately, Alexandria had fallen, and he was forced to move his forces to retake what was lost before their training was complete.

Unlike the Hussites, Berengar had not provided the Byzantines with any primitive form of field artillery. Thus at the moment, they were merely organized into arkebuse, pike, and cavalry units. The Mamluke army was a traditional medieval formation and was quite confused when they saw the formations and weapons wielded by the Byzantines.

Nevertheless, the battle had begun as the Mamlukes began to march into battle; seeing this, Arethas ordered his armies to meet the enemy in battle; soon, the troops would clash in the center of the field, where they would fight

to the death to determine a winner. Eventually, the armies began to close the gap where Arethas shouted his commands, which the officers and NCOs relaid among the rank and file of the soldiers.

"Hold your ground! Hold your ground until you see the whites in their eyes!"

This was a phrase Berengar had given Arethas as the basis of when his troops should fire their weapons. Berengar had long since surpassed the need for such tactics with his rifled muskets. Still, for a smoothbore arkebuse, the effective range was limited, and to gain the most effective use of their weapons, they would have to fire upon their enemies when they were at extremely close range.

The Byzantines held their ground for some time. However, many of the men in their army did not have the discipline and strength of will to hold on until their enemy was mere feet away. Thus when the enemy drew near one by one, they would fire their shots, often missing their targets in the initial charge.

Though Arethas tried to control this, it created a ripple effect; pretty soon, the entire line had fired, and though many of their shots had hit their mark, cutting down the enemy infantry, the impact they had was not as destructive as it could have been.

After the rounds were fired, Arethas was forced to deploy the pikemen to protect his infantry as they reloaded. Thus the Mamluke soldiers quickly found themselves skewered at the end of the 20 foot long weapons.

By the time the Mamluke's had gotten past the pike wall, the Byzantine arkebusiers had fully reloaded and fired a second volley. This time the effect was far more devastating to the enemy line. Seeing his forces being rapidly cut down by the Byzantine firearms, the Mamluke general instantly ordered his cavalry to charge.

Thus the heavily armored Mamluke Cavalry rushed towards the Byzantine lines, and yet as they drew near, the pikes were lowered in their direction, causing the horses to buck wild in fright and flee in the other direction. Many of their riders had been cast from their horses onto the sand below as a result. Others found themselves incapable of controlling their mighty steeds until they had reached a point where they were safe from the enemy pike wall—seeing this, Arethas merely smirked. The battle was beginning to head in his favor.

Though the Mamluke forces outnumbered them, the combined force of pike and shot was well beyond this Medieval era's capabilities. Though it was not as effective as Berengar's tactics, it was more than enough to crush the armies of the Mamluke Sultanate.

Arethas watched the sight of the battlefield with glee as the Mamluke forces began to route; quickly saying a prayer to God, he rallied his cavalry forces and began to charge the frightened Saracens. The Byzantine Cataphracts rushed down the hillside and into the fray, where they collided with the routing enemy while wielding their lances, skewering them upon impact and sending their souls to the afterlife.

The result of this battle was an overwhelming victory in favor of the Byzantine Empire. After cleaning up the battlefield, Arethas stood along with his ranks of men, where he began to chastise them for firing their first volley early.

"All of you are soldiers of the Empire, and yet you have failed in your duty. If not for the overwhelming advantage of our weapons and tactics, we could have lost this battle today.

Why? Because many of you were frightened by the enemy charge and fired your first shot out of fear, missing your targets entirely as you did so! I expect more of the men beneath my command, and thus during the rest of this campaign, I want you all to perform much better than you did today.

If every one of you can get to the point where you follow my commands to the letter, then this campaign will be an overwhelming victory for our armies! Glory to the Empire!"

After hearing Arethas' speech, the men of his army all began to salute him
and yell their battle cry.

"Glory to the Empire!"

In doing so, Arethas looked fondly upon his men. They had suffered very few
casualties this day, and though the Mamluke army had routed in large
numbers, likely to return in the future for further conflict. This battle was an
overwhelming success, one that inspired Arethas. While armed with these
weapons and tactics, maybe, just maybe, the Empire could reclaim its former
glory.

Arethas had one man to thank for this victory, his trading partner and friend to
the West; he did not know what Berengar had planned for the future, but he
was certain that one day the man would surely be a mighty King, and after this
battle, he felt great regret for not trying to convince the Emperor to marry his
only daughter off to such an outstanding young man.

Then again, Berengar was already happily engaged, and Arethas doubted he
could convince him to accept Honoria as his lawful wife and instead turn his
fiancee into another concubine. As for the Emperor, Arethas knew the man
was too stubborn to make his only daughter the concubine of some King from
the West. Thus it was simply not meant to be.

As he thought about this, Arethas began to wonder about what had happened to the Princess. Had she been found during the time he was away? Was she even alive? He would never guess that the girl had run off to Kufstein because of a few good comments he had made about Berengar.

These were the thoughts that plagued Arethas' mind as he campaigned to restore the Empire's borders in North Africa. This was just one battle of many to occur with the Mamluke Sultanate. Only time could tell if the Empire was to restore its former glory.

Chapter 247: Saying Good-bye

Days had passed since Honoria had arrived in Kufstein, and it was now time to say farewell to her friend Agnellus; unlike Honoria, the man could not stay in Kufstein for long. He had a business that he had to conduct, and after settling the deal with Berengar, he had to be on his way.

At the moment, Honoria was at the docks of Kufstein, surrounded by a few of Berengar's guards. She was sending Agnellus off as the man returned to the borders of the Byzantine Empire. In Honoria's hands was the jewelry she had snatched from her room before running away from home; it was the payment she had promised Agnellus for taking her to Kufstein.

She quietly handed the jewelry over to Agnellus with a bitter smile on her face; during their journey together, she had grown quite fond of the older merchant, not to the point of romance but strictly as friends. As such, she was sad to see him go.

"Here you go, Agnellus, as promised, this is payment for taking me to Kufstein. You and your sister have my eternal gratitude. I pray that I have not caused you too much trouble in assisting me."

Though Honoria was naive due to being locked away her entire life, she had seen some of the evil of the world and knew if Melissa or Agnellus were caught for their crimes of assisting Honoria in her escape, they would likely be executed, and as such she greatly dreaded this possibility.

However, Agnellus' actions shocked Honoria as he pushed the small box filled with jewelry back into Honoria's hands and returned her bitter smile with a friendly one.

"Keep it... Truly the honor of assisting you in your journey was payment enough. Besides, I was going to go to Kufstein anyway, and thanks to you, I was able to establish a rather favorable trade deal with the Duke."

Hearing this, a small tear began to form in one of Honoria's mint green eyes. Agnellus and Melissa had taken such a huge risk for her, and in the end, they wanted nothing in return. They were truly good people; as such, she ran up and hugged the man and thanked him for his assistance.

"Thank you so much!"

Agnellus blushed in response to this as he eventually broke free from the girls' grasp. After doing so, he gave her some solid advice.

"Be careful around Berengar; he is a very sly and cunning man; his lover also appears to have a sharp wit. They may not be as good as people as you think they are. I am sure they already have begun to suspect that you are lying to them about your identity.

If you genuinely want to make the Duke yours, you will have to settle for being another one of his women. I could tell at first glance that he was not the kind of man to give up his treasures in return for another prize of equal or slightly greater value.

Whatever you do, please do not reveal your identity before you are confident he has fallen for you. If you do, he is liable to inform your family; after all, the moment he finds out who you are, he will be knowingly harboring a runaway princess, which is a severe crime in the eyes of your family."

Hearing this, Honoria began to wipe the tears from her eyes, and a determined expression took over her flawless face as she nodded at Agnellus' advice before responding to it.

"I will take what you have said to heart."

Honoria was impressed with Berengar, but she, too, sensed some form of danger from the man. Thus she was not yet sure if she was the man she wanted to give herself to. Nevertheless, she would use this time to learn more about the man and herself.

It would be quite some time before Berengar found out her true identity. If Berengar disappointed her in any way, she would move along in her life; after all, she did not plan to be a bird in yet another cage.

Hearing Honoria takes his advice to heart, Agnellus pet her glossy white hair before saying his goodbyes.

"Well, I trust you to take care of yourself. I must be going now; not only do I have to unload these jewels, but I also have to search for my sister, who should surely be in hiding right now. I pray that we may meet again, your highness!"

With that, Agnellus bowed before stepping onto his galley. The ship quickly set sail, leaving Honoria in the harbor, watching her friend depart. Heraclius was flying in the sky following the vessel to make sure it had reached the river well enough; he would return in a few hours after he was satisfied with the results.

Honoria was not like Conrad; Berengar had no intentions of leaving her confined in the Castle; she was free to roam the city so long as she had a proper escort. The escort's job was simply there to protect Honoria. As for collecting information on her, there were plenty of spies in Kufstein under Berengar's command who could silently track her movements.

After Honoria's arrival, Linde had quickly set her spies to task with infiltrating the Byzantine Empire and collecting information on two people, Princess Honoria, and the identity she was using while in Kufstein, Valeria Zonara.

However, it would be some time before her spies even arrived in Constantinople and Antioch, let alone began to gather intelligence. Thus, for now, all Berengar and Linde could do was watch the girls' interactions in Kufstein.

With Agnellus' departure, Honoria had some free time on her hands, so she decided to spend it walking around Kufstein and getting acquainted with the locals. The fact that Berengar's guard protected her meant she was essential to the Duke, and as such, nobody threatened to make a move on her as she walked through the city.

The city of Kufstein was beginning to look like an early-modern city; it had small and large shops located in the trade district. Some of these shops were owned by the nobility, others by Bernegar's dynasty, and the growing middle class owned a few. As such, she visited a clothing shop to witness the beautiful Austrian fashion she had seen Linde wearing.

Despite her luxurious silk clothes, she was fascinated with the designs that had appeared in Kufstein and began trying on dresses in the shop; these dresses were made for the common folk, and yet they still had some degree of embroidery on their bodices. The noblewomen typically had their dresses hand-tailored by unique shops dedicated solely to upper-class fashion.

Thus, after getting acquainted with the common folk's fashion, she entered one of the largest noble fashion stores, where she saw exquisite and detailed dresses that were like works of art.

While Berengar had implemented modern women's underwear, he was also a big fan of the corset. They were now commonly worn by women of all statuses with their dresses; when Honoria saw that several of the women in the shop looked abnormally busty, she was surprised; she had no idea what a corset was or how it helped with a woman's figure.

Seeing the beautiful young woman dressed in foreign attire enter the store, the shop clerk quickly came over to Honoria and began to inquire what kind of fashion she was interested in.

"I apologize if this comes off strange, but you are as beautiful as a Princess! I think you would look wondrous in some of the dresses our shop has to offer? I

suggest this lovely mint green and gold dress that is exclusive to our shops; it will go perfect with your eyes."

Honorina was immediately overwhelmed by the shop clerk. Still, before she could respond, she was thrust into the changing room and quickly measured all over her body by the tailor, which she felt significantly violated her privacy. As such, she immediately began to blush.

After doing so, the tailor, who was a woman, formed a smile on her face as she proclaimed Honorina's measurements aloud.

"30C-20-30, not bad! Do not worry; I will have a dress fit for you in no time."

The shop's clerks and tailors did not bother to see if the woman could pay the ridiculous price for the high-end fashion. After all, she was protected by Berengar's guards, and if that were the case, even if she couldn't pay, they could always bill the Castle for the expense. Berengar was known to pay a fair price for his fiancée's and lover's dresses, and because of this, nearly every tailor in the city had desired to make a dress for one of his women.

After some time, Honorina walked out of the stall in a mint green dress with gold embroidery in the Elizabethan fashion style from Berengar's previous life. Due to the corset she was wearing, she felt incredibly uncomfortable at first, and yet it highlighted her already perfect figure, making her look far more desirable.

As she approached the counter with an awkward smile, she informed the clerk that all she could pay with was jewelry.

"erm... I don't have any of the local currency on me; I can only pay with jewelry, is that alright?"

Though Honorina was uncomfortable with being forced into this situation, she loved how the dress looked on her and did not want to leave it behind. However, the clerk merely smiled at her and informed her it was hers to take.

"Do not worry about that; if you are close to Berengar, he will properly compensate us. Just make sure to tell everyone where you got the lovely dress!"

With this, Honoria nodded and departed with her bodyguards. After doing so, she headed back towards the Castle; she did not know why but she wanted to get Berengar's approval of her new dress as quickly as possible.

Chapter 248: Dreams of the Future

Honoria quickly returned to the Castle with a desire to show off her new dress to Berengar. However, she was not familiar with the layout and promptly got lost. By sheer chance, she ended up at Berengar's study, where he was currently working on approving Naval expenses and drafting new ship designs. A powerful Navy was a versatile Navy, and while Berengar's shipyards were being constructed, he would draw many different blueprints for future vessels.

Berengar was drafting a 20 gun Sloop of War based upon the USS Boston, which was commissioned in 1825 during his previous life. It was a fast, and agile single-deck ship armed with twenty 24 lb cannons.

While drafting the blueprints, Berengar heard a knock on the door and assumed it was Linde as she was usually the one who visited him during the day. As such, he said with a smile on his face.

"Babe, you know it's open. Do you need to knock?"

Upon hearing this, Honoria began to flush as she slowly opened the door and revealed her gorgeous figure in her new dazzling dress. Berengar was quite shocked when he saw this and scratched his head with an awkward expression when he saw it was not Linde in his doorway.

"Lady Valeria, I am sorry I mistook you for someone else. Is there something I can help you with?"

Honoria meekly entered the room as she responded to Berengar's comment.

"Not really, I was just curious, is all; I haven't seen your face in a few days and wanted to know what you were up to..."

After doing so, the princess twirled around in her new dress, giving Berengar the hint to comment on it. Berengar had to admit she did look perfect in the dress, but he had a nagging suspicion that he would be the one ending up

paying for it. So instead of complimenting her as she wanted, he merely asked the question on his mind.

"How much did that dress cost me?"

Hearing this, Honoria began to pout; she had not gotten the response that she desired and quietly muttered under her breath.

"I don't know."

Berengar found this to be adorable, and as such, he smiled before giving the girl what she wanted.

"Well, whatever it cost, it was worth it. It looks perfect on you."

After hearing this, Honoria blushed and smiled before she began to sit down in the chair in front of Berengar's desk. As she did so Berengar placed his quill down before covering the ship blueprints with his Naval expense reports. He did not want such sensitive information being leaked, and as such, he began informing the girl of his more boring actions these past few days so that she would lose interest.

"As for what I am up to, I am merely attending to matters of the State; as a Duke, I have a lot of work cut out for me; for the most part, it is rather boring."

Honoria merely nodded her head, disinterested as she heard this. However, she read the bold words at the top of Berengar's paper; her understanding of the German language was rudimentary, but she could still read the word "Naval"; as someone deeply fascinated with sailing, she was curious about this and thus asked.

"Naval expenses? Am I reading that right? I didn't know that Austria had a Navy..."

Hearing this, Berengar's pleasant smile turned sour as he tried to conceal what he was up to. The building of a Grand Austrian Navy was crucial to his plans, and at the moment, he was trying to hide his dreams for as long as possible.

As such, he tried to dissuade the girl in front of him from prying into his business.

"Lady Valeria, I know you are naturally curious, but it is not polite to pry into the business of someone else's territory. I will forgive you for the moment, but I hope you do not try to entangle yourself with my affairs any further."

Hearing this, Honoria began to pout as she responded to Berengar's words.

"I am sorry, I am just interested in sailing, is all; I got excited when I saw the word Naval. I promise I won't look at your documents in the future."

Hearing this, Berengar was curious and thus asked Honoria the question on his mind.

"You are interested in sailing, huh? Is that your dream? To sail across the Mediterranean as free as an eagle with nothing but the salty wind of the sea to keep you company?"

Honoria began to contemplate Berengar's words for a few moments, before responding honestly.

"Truthfully, I do not know; I have never had the luxury to think about what my dreams for the future are. I suppose you could say I am still finding that out..."

Hearing this Berengar began to feel pity for the girl, however, the next question she asked him shocked him.

"What about you? What are your dreams?"

This was a question Berengar commonly thought about, and as such, he put on a pleasant smile as he informed Honoria about his ambitions for life.

"At first, I wanted nothing more than to inherit my family's lands and spend a good thirty years or so bettering the lives of my people, and by extension my family and myself, before retiring to some villa near a lake to live the rest of my days in peace."

Hearing this, Honoria was curious; it seemed like a noble goal. However, she noticed he prefaced the statement with the term at first, and as such, she was curious about what he thought; as such, she inquired further about it.

"And now?"

Berengar sighed before his expression turned solemn; as it did so, he revealed the heights of his ambitions.

"The world is a cruel and unforgiving place; I learned that pretty early on in life. If I can do a little evil to achieve great things, then I will do so. I yearn for the unification of my people, and I don't simply mean the Austrians, but all Germans.

Those who speak the German language and have some form of German culture should be united in a single Empire to thrive and determine their destiny free of foreign interference. Everybody else contending for the title of "King of Germany" is doing so in pursuit of their vain glory.

I know I can do better, and in doing so, I can better the lives of all German people, even if it comes at the expense of other cultures and ethnic groups. Thus I will fight trying to achieve this and even die in pursuit of my dream if necessary.

A dream is something you should pursue even if everyone else says it is impossible, something you are willing to kill and die to achieve. When you finally feel such overwhelming passion for something, you know that you have found your purpose in life, or so it is my belief.

History will either remember me as the world's greatest villain or Germany's greatest hero. Either way, I do not care, so long as I can accomplish my dream."

Hearing Berengar speaks so passionately about his dreams inspired Honoria to find what she cared about so deeply. As such, she asked Berengar for guidance on the issue.

"What do you think my purpose is?"

Berengar sighed heavily and shook his head before responding.

"That is for you to find out, but if you are fascinated by sailing, it might be a good place to start. For now, I can hire a few sailors to teach you how to sail a riverboat; if you end up falling in love with it, I can always send you to Istria in the future, where I am establishing a Naval Academy."

Honorina was touched when she heard this and instantly placed her hands on her heart as she listened to Berengar's kind words. She quickly followed up by asking Berengar the thoughts on her mind.

"You would do this for me?"

Berengar smiled and nodded as he said so.

"Sure, why not? You are here under my protection for the time being. You might as well learn a thing or two while you can."

Tears began to form in Honorina's mint eyes, and she could no longer control her overwhelming emotions; she knew it would be no small cost for Berengar to hire sailors to teach her how to sail, and yet despite barely knowing her, he was willing to go so far to help her find out her dreams in life.

She could barely contain her happiness, and as such, she quickly latched onto Berengar and hugged him tightly while whimpering in his chest.

"Thank you!"

Berengar did not know what exactly this girl had been through to be so happy over what to him was such a little favor. However, he decided to let the girl cry herself out into his doublet and merely patted her head as she did so.

Of course, the moment Honorina latched onto him, Berengar could see the sky blue eyes of Linde staring at him with a murderous glare in the doorway. This sight immediately sent shivers down Berengar's spine, and though he tried to jump up from his seat, he was held down by the whimpering princess.

Linde did not bother entering the room, Berengar had already seen her displeased appearance in the doorway, and that alone was enough to send a

message to him. When she finally left, Berengar sighed deeply before thinking in his mind.

'I am going to pay for this later...'

Chapter 249: A Jealous Lover

After having his little discussion with Honoria, Berengar sent her away from his office, claiming that he had work to do. She was happy to oblige and thus left Berengar alone in the room. Not long after Linde arrived and appeared rather upset, the moment she closed the door behind her, Berengar knew he was in trouble.

Linde stood before Berengar's desk while staring him down; after a few moments of awkward silence, she sighed before sitting down and resting her pretty face on the palm of her hand before speaking.

"I can't leave you alone with the girl, can I?"

Berengar had a worried expression on his face, he was well aware of how dangerous Linde could be when she was upset, and though it was a misunderstanding, she would not easily believe him. Thus he tried to explain his innocence to his lover.

"I swear I am innocent, I simply did her a favor, and she latched onto me like a leech; how was I supposed to know she is so clingy?"

Linde's sky blue eyes stared at Berengar with a curious gaze before she asked the question on her mind.

"You did her a favor, huh? What might that be?"

Berengar had nothing to hide, and as such, he explained the conversation he had with Honoria.

"I merely told that since she was interested in sailing, I could hire someone to teach her how to sail a riverboat properly. If she was interested further, I could always send her to the Naval Academy I am building sometime in the future."

Linde had a hard time believing Berengar's words; after all, the girl was clinging to him so tightly, and thus she narrowed her gaze at Berengar to see if he was lying. Though Berengar was nervous, he was innocent of any foul play, and as such, he returned Linde's glare with one of grit.

Seeing how Berengar wasn't lying, Linde sighed before giving him a friendly warning.

"Don't let that little vixen dig her claws into your heart; if she turns out to be the Byzantine Princess, it could only bring trouble..."

Berengar nodded his head in response as if he understood Linde's message. Though in reality, he had begun to reconsider his options regarding this so-called "Lady Valeria." If the girl was Princess Honoria, then several paths presented themselves on how to proceed.

Linde was no fool the moment she saw Berengar nod his head, the look in his eyes flashed from being genuine to being deceitful, and thus she glared at him before demanding answers from him.

"Just what is it that you are thinking in that scheming mind of yours?"

When Berengar heard that Linde had already discovered he was plotting something, he smiled bitterly before revealing this thought.

"I can't hide anything from you, can I? Fine, I will tell you my schemes."

Hearing this, Berengar poured himself and his lover a drink as they began to chat about his plans. He ran a chalice of fortified wine for himself, but since he and Linde aimed to have another child, he poured her a cup filled with water.

"Let's say that the girl is Princess Honoria; aside from appeasing the Byzantines and preventing a diplomatic crisis, what can we possibly gain from shipping her back to the Empire?"

When Linde heard this, she thought about it for a few moments and answered her question.

"We could potentially gain their gratitude, further increasing the amount of trade we have with them? Isn't that enough?"

When Berengar heard this, he wagged his finger and clicked his tongue.

"Tsk tsk tsk... You are thinking too small, my dear. If she is the Princess and has fallen for me, why not take advantage of this and have a son with her? If I do this, my Dynasty gains a claim to the Byzantine Empire, a weak claim sure, but enough to depose the next Emperor if he proves hostile to us."

Linde looked at Berengar as if she were speaking to a madman before expressing the thoughts on her mind.

"That is a little risky. If the Byzantines find out we are harboring their runaway Princess with the intent for you to make her into another one of your consorts, they will surely take action against us!"

To this, Berengar leaned back in his chair and smiled before speaking his opinion on the matter.

"By the time they can take any practical action against us aside from severing trade, our Army and Navy will be greater than theirs. It will take years for them to conquer North Africa, assuming they ever find out that we harbor the Princess.

How many people know what she looks like? How many of them are here in Kufstein? Only Arethas would be able to reveal her identity, but she can easily be hidden from him. Sure there is a significant risk, but there is an even greater reward.

Even if they do paint a picture of her and use it as a bounty for her safe return, let's be honest, how many people will recognize her? The artistic talent of people these days is not exactly lifelike. Not like the artists I have fostered here in Kufstein!

Of course, all of this relies on the fact that she is the Princess. If she is who she claims she is, then I have no interest in the girl, and you can rest easy."

After hearing this, Linde sighed before looking deeply into Berengar's eyes and asking the question on her mind.

"So you don't have feelings for her?"

Berengar smiled with a wide grin on his face while leaning back into his chair; as usual, he was blatantly honest with his lover on how he felt about the other women around him.

"At the moment, no, I am simply planning for the future. However, if she proves to be Princess Honoria and my plans come to fruition, which is to say I do not fall for the girl? After all, her innocence is quite charming, and I have more than enough love to give to three women..."

To this, Linde scoffed; it was hard enough balancing things with Adela; if a third girl entered the picture into their already complex relationship, she knew she would have a headache. Despite this, she also knew that once Berengar had set his mind to something, it was impossible to convince him otherwise.

As such, she took ahold of the chalice she was provided and quickly downed its contents, carefully making sure not to spill a single drop of the water within before responding to Berengar's audacious claims.

"I hope you know what you are doing..."

Before Linde could get up and walk away, Berengar spoke again, instantly gluing her attention to the words he spoke.

"Of course, there is another option available. I could always marry the girl and seal an alliance with the Byzantine Empire. Though this would require effective diplomacy, and at the very least, I would have to elevate my status to that of a King, in order to gain the Emperor's approval."

Hearing this, Linde was shocked and immediately began to stare at Berengar as if he were a scoundrel.

"You would break your betrothal to Adela for this woman you barely know!?!"

To this insinuation, Berengar feigned offense as he clarified his thoughts to his lover.

"Why Linde, I am offended that you would suggest such a thing; you know how much I love my little fiancée. Of course not, but who is to say I am limited to one wife? As King, I could easily enact Polygyny.

After all, with my new succession laws, it will not be an issue for the future of the Kingdom, and if the reformists have a problem with it, I can always justify it with the fact that Abraham had multiple wives."

Hearing this, Linde stared at Berengar with shock for a few moments before expressing the thoughts on her mind.

"You have truly thought through everything, haven't you?"

To this, Berengar nodded his head with a smug grin on his face before answering in the most arrogant way possible.

"Someone has to, do they not?"

After hearing this, Linde smiled before departing, though after she left, that smile quickly shifted to a frown. She was not happy about this new arrival or Berengar's plans for her. As such, she quickly got to work writing a letter to Adela to inform her about the appearance of a new rival in their complicated relationship.

Perhaps together, the two girls could convince Berengar not to go through with such a thing. Of course, Berengar had no idea that his two women would begin to scheme behind his back to prevent Honoria from entering his little harem.

After all, he was much too busy overseeing the management of the Duchy of Austria and implementing a series of reforms that would change the political and legal landscape of the realm for the foreseeable future.

Under his guidance, the Industrial Age would soon be forced upon Austria. If he wanted his territory to enter the new era peacefully, significant changes

would have to be drafted to his rudimentary constitution and transitional government.

Chapter 250: More Constitutional Reforms

A new day had arrived, and with it, Berengar had found himself thrust headfirst into work and approving his reforms. The first order of business was redrafting his Constitution so that it could apply to the entirety of the Duchy. As the Duke of Austria who had just put down the rebellion of his most disloyal subjects not long ago. Berengar was in a unique position to overhaul his territory.

As such, he was currently in the process of fixing some of the errors of his Constitution that he had previously established. For example, he was moving away from the House of Commons and House of Lords to implement a more streamlined bicameral legislation partially based upon the early days of the United States Constitution from his past life.

A House of Representatives was established as the lower house of his bicameral legislature. These representatives would be voted in by those people who met the qualifications to vote. Such as German men of upstanding character and proven intellect.

The second department of his legislature was the Senate which was voted in by the County Legislatures. Much like America, the House of Representatives would be determined by the total population, while the Senate would have two individuals per State or in this case, County as Senators.

These representatives and senators had a term limit of four years. If deemed incompetent, corrupt, or any other number of charges could be removed by the executive and replaced with a person of his choosing until the next election.

The House and Senate worked was similar to that of the United States but functioned in a more streamlined manner. Those would first introduce a bill, which would be sent to the Senate for retirement or acceptance when passed by a majority vote.

From there, it would be given to the Duke where he could either sign it into law, revise it to his wishes and then send it back to the Senate for approval once more, or veto it.

Unlike the American Constitution, there was no overriding of a Duke's Veto, though the bill could still be reintroduced through the legislative process. However, a veto was usually considered a firm stance by the Duke that he did not desire such a law.

The so-called House of Lords would be repurposed as the Duke's Council, which essentially acted as a cabinet. Their responsibility would be to help lead Berengar's reforms while serving under him. The Duke's council could be appointed and dismissed at any time according to the reigning Duke's determination.

Part of the Duke's Council's responsibilities were selecting a successor to the Duke in the event that the Duke had passed away without appointing a successor himself. The process to this was voting upon eligible members of the von Kufstein Dynasty for the position. Whoever had the most votes was chosen.

This was a fail-safe, established so that the most competent successor would be chosen in the event that the Duke was to pass away before selecting the best candidate from his Dynasty to replace him. The Duke's Council would only choose the successor in very limited circumstances.

The Executive Branch of government was ruled by the Duke at a federal level, as for a State and Local level, the reigning Noble of the territory would act as governor. They would still need to introduce a localized form of government such as a State Legislature, and Court System, to aid them in their reign.

The nobility who ruled over their territories were allowed to continue to do so as governors, though the succession laws that applied to the Duke were also applied to all Governors. This was to ensure the most competent person was selected as the Governor of their region.

Of course, each Duke had executive powers, which allowed them to pass legislation without the approval of the federal and county legislatures. However, these could just as quickly be repealed by the next Duke. This was

to ensure the political power of Berengar and his descendants so that they did not just become another powerless figurehead.

With the Legislative, and Executive branches refined, the Judicial branch was further elaborated and based upon the American Republic from Berengar's previous life. With a supreme court, which determined what was legal based upon the Constitution.

As with all judges, these supreme court justices were appointed by the Duke and served for life. However, if the Duke determined that they had failed to fulfill their duties according to the law and instead operated on some form of personal agenda, he could have them removed and replaced.

This Constitutional system allowed for some semblance of freedom while still retaining significant control of the government in the hands of Berengar and his Dynasty. In doing so, he created a Semi-Constitutional Monarchy; as in practice, Berengar still had the power to effectively make any decision he pleased and could stack the government in his favor.

He also maintained a strict stance of a small, intelligent electorate comprised of full-blooded law-abiding German males, preventing any foreign influence in his elections as the non-german minority had no voting rights whatsoever. Thus maintaining the idea of a united German fatherland for years to come.

Of course, he once more allowed a transitional period of ten years where he still ruled as an absolute monarch. This transitional period could be further extended by the Duke if deemed necessary. This way, he could slowly assimilate his territory into his new style of government.

After drafting these constitutional reforms, Berengar sighed heavily; he had spent a lot of time and effort revising his Constitution. It would also likely change in the future when he went from Duke to King, to Emperor. For now, this was the best effort he could put forth.

With this, Linde arrived in his room and placed a flagon of beer on Berengar's desk, and in her own hands was a goblet filled with milk. She took a look at the reforms and noticed the exhausted expression on her lover's face. After doing so, she sighed before commenting on Berengar's work.

"You do realize that when word of this gets out, the neighboring Duchies and Kingdoms will be even more upset with you than they currently are. You are single-handedly overhauling centuries of governance into something new which greatly strips away the nobility's power."

To this, Berengar laughed as he grabbed ahold of Linde's perfectly shaped face before expressing his views on the matters at hand.

"Sure, the nobility loses their ability to draft troops, issue their currency, and own all of the lands. However, they will still act as de facto governors of their territory and will have more wealth than before when my reforms go into place.

At the moment most noblemen gain their wealth by taxing poor peasants. With the industrial age upon us, businesses will boom, and goods will be sold. The common people will grow wealthier and afford nice houses, which the currency they use to purchase the land to build those houses upon will go into the hands of the nobility, who currently own that land.

It is not like I am taking all of the lands of nobles away from them. They will still have vast swaths of territory, and they will more than make up the loss of land with shares in the businesses that are bound to sprawl across Austria in the coming years.

The nobles may not hold all of the wealth of the Duchy in their hands, but they will be wealthier than they were before, and that is all that matters. When the neighboring Kingdoms realize that our realm's nobility is more affluent than they are, they will grow envious and spiteful.

They might lash out against us, but we have the power of industry on our side, and their feudal armies have already proven not to be the match of my professional army."

Hearing Berengar's long-winded speech about the forthcoming age, Linde grew wide-eyed as she imagined what it would be like. She greatly admired Berengar's vision for the future and the lengths he was willing to go to to achieve it.

Thus she wrapped her arms around her lover, and gazed at the latest draft of the Constitution, and asked another question that was on her mind.

"In the end, all the power rests in your hands, doesn't it? Everything else is just a ruse to appease the commoners and the nobles. According to this Constitution, you can pretty much replace anyone you don't like in the government with someone who supports you."

To this, Berengar smiled and took a sip from his beer; after doing so, he thought about it deeply for some time before responding.

"The average person can't be trusted with any semblance of political power. Even if I were to make my population fully literate, the masses would never understand the inner workings of government. They inevitably will vote into power people who promise to give them the most benefits at the expense of the Nation.

With that, corruption will take hold of society, and the Nation will slowly decline into total collapse. Only by maintaining an educated and intelligent electorate can a Republican-style government genuinely thrive. However, the more literate people become, the more they will ultimately want representation.

Thus if I try to hold onto all the power like a Despot, there will inevitably be a revolution. Creating a lasting Empire is built upon compromise. With this, I hope to make a long-lasting system where our descendants maintain power, and those intelligent enough to understand how the government works are placated with appropriate representation of their interests."

Hearing this, Linde nodded her head, and a sly smile appeared on her face.

"In other words, the Duke knows best, right?"

To this, Berengar chuckled before responding.

"I suppose you could say that...."

Thus with this, the Constitution of the Duchy of Austria was drafted, in a system that somewhat resembled a limited republic, while still giving significant control to the nobility and the Duke.

Berengar had carefully drafted a constitution that he felt limited the negative effects of constitutional republics, and monarchies alike while still maintaining a significant degree of control for himself, and his Dynasty.