

Steel 261

Chapter 261: The War in Bohemia Begins

Three months had passed since Adela's fourteenth birthday, while Berengar was within Kufstein overseeing the reconstruction of Austria after the devastation wrought upon it by Bavarian occupation. The war for Bohemia had finally begun.

After months of being supplied and trained by Austria and its industrial might, the Hussite forces had begun their attack on the Bohemian crown, which had fervently rejected their demands. Currently, the Hussites were split between two major factions, the moderates and the radicals.

During Berengar's past life, the moderates had betrayed the radicals and ended the Hussite wars, causing the Catholic Church to achieve victory. In this timeline, Berengar had no intentions of supplying the moderates or sending advisors to them.

A Hussite Bohemia would be a decent ally to have in his back pocket. Thus Berengar intended to aid them in any way he could short of full-scale military intervention. That is unless it was completely necessary. Eckhard and a group of Berengar's officers were standing alongside the sub-faction of the Radicals known as the Ka?parians.

The Ka?parians did not exist in Berengar's previous life. Still, in this timeline, they had become a powerful force with Berengar's aid and had already won a total of three battles since the war had begun. The leader of the Ka?parian Sect was a nobleman by the name of Alexej Ka?par.

The man was young, a few years older than Berengar but not by many. He was also handsome and charismatic, and it was these qualities that helped him gain the favor of so many other noblemen and knights to support his cause.

Currently, the man was dressed in a complete set of plate armor, with the Ka?parian banner draped over his torso in the form of a tabard. He was pointing at a map stretched out upon the table. Tiny figures were in place to represent the various armies of the ongoing conflict.

Eckhard was standing nearby; he was dressed in a set of brigandine and plate armor. The reason for this was simple, to avoid a diplomatic crisis, Berengar had openly taken a neutral stance in the Hussite Wars; due to how noticeable his nation's arms and armor were, it would be unwise for his military advisors to walk around in the equipment of the Grand Army of Austria.

Thus they wore the attire afforded to average Hussite men at arms. Only the officers of the armies they supported knew that these men were a means of Austrian support. As Alexej spoke about his battle plan, Eckhard slowly watched while scratching his grey beard.

"We will use our wagon forts to block the pass of the Catholic troops in this narrow valley. As they march upon our hand gunners protected within the wagons, Our cannons will rain fire upon them from above.

A spear wall will protect the wagon forts. Once the enemy has engaged our defensive line, we will encircle them with our cavalry and clash against them on both sides, ensuring our victory."

Though the Hussites had been victorious so far, the reality was that Berengar fully intended for this war to take years. The reason for this was two-fold; for starters, the conflict in Bohemia diverted the Church's attention from Austria, buying Berengar time to not only expand his Grand Army but establish a Grand Navy as well.

Secondly, the longer the Hussites fought, the more in debt they would be to Berengar. When the war was finally over, Berengar wanted the Hussites to be so indebted to him that they would be forced to cede the Sudetenland to Austria as payment.

Thus Eckhard did not offer any advice to the current plan, as it was good enough to ensure victory against the Catholic armies. Instead, he merely observed the map of Bohemia, which had been divided up into Hussite-controlled territories, and Catholic-occupied regions.

The Sudetenland was under Hussite control; the reason for this was quite simple. These lands were predominantly German in linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Because they were so close to Austria and were

German themselves, they had been influenced by the German Reformation that Berengar and Ludolf had started.

Thus when the war broke out, they immediately threw in their support to the Hussite factions, as the Hussites were in many ways similar to the teachings of the German Reformation. As for the rest of the Bohemian lands, they were still largely under the control of the Bohemian Crown and their Catholic supporters.

Noticing that Ludolf was quietly observing the map, Alexej quickly voiced his concerns to the Austrian Field Marshal.

"Marshal von Hallstatt, what do you think of the strategy as it has been presented?"

To this, Eckhard looked around at the various Hussite knights and noblemen who had gathered and gave a nod of approval.

"It should work just fine. I have nothing to add at the moment."

Though Eckhard and his officers had assisted in training, tactics, and strategy, lately, they had taken a more background role and allowed the Hussites to proceed on their own. Alexej thought it meant that they would soon no longer be needed; he had no way of knowing that it was part of Berengar's plan to extend the conflict.

As such, the young commander smiled and nodded his head. Hearing Eckhard's approval of the plan brought him great joy. If Eckhard was appointed as the highest commander of Berengar's forces, then Alexej believed he must be a capable man, and thus he highly valued the man's opinion.

After observing the map for a while, Eckhard finally spotted an area that the Hussites were likely to lose, and as such, he walked over to the map and pointed his finger at the location.

"If the enemy is allowed to move unchecked in this region, they will conquer the lands held by the Taborites. It is necessary to send reinforcements to

secure the region. I suggest sending a contingent of 2,500 men to assist our allies."

Hearing this, Alexej nodded his head in agreement; losing ground at this stage in the war would be detrimental to the cause. He moved two figures that represented 2,500 men into the region that Eckhard had pointed out.

This left a finite number of men that the Ka?parians could field to win the upcoming battle, but even then, the commander was confident in his ability to achieve victory. As such, Alexej asked for the opinion of men gathered at his strategy meeting.

"Does anybody else have any suggestions?"

After several moments of silence, Alexej sighed before giving his command.

"Dismissed."

With that, everyone began to leave the command tent; as Eckhard departed, Alexej called out to him.

"If you don't mind, Marshal, I would like to have a word with you in private."

Upon hearing this Eckhard stopped in his tracks before turning around and facing the young commander with a stern expression on his lips. After glaring at the commander for a few moments, he asked the question on his mind.

"What can I help you with, Commander?"

Alexej poured two chalices of wine before he responded; he handed one of them to Eckhard before taking a drink from his goblet.

"Could you relay my request for further material support from his Grace, Duke Berengar von Kufstein? If we are to win this war, we will need more hand cannons and armor than are currently fielded."

Hearing this, Eckhard smiled slightly before nodding his head

"Of course, I am sure that his Grace will have no problems transporting more supplies into Ka?parian lands. I will send a letter to him with haste. Is there anything else I can help you with?"

Alexej once more drank from his chalice before responding to Eckhard's question.

"An opinion would be nice."

Upon hearing this Eckhard decided to partake of the wine and took a small sip as he did so before responding.

"On what exactly?"

A solemn gaze filled Alexej's eyes as he spoke the thoughts on his mind.

"What are our chances of winning this war?"

Eckhard pondered for a few moments before expressing his opinion on the matter.

"With his Grace Berengar's support, 75% though it will likely be a long and brutal conflict. Without such backing, your odds are significantly lower. If necessary Berengar is likely to intervene in the war with his own Army, establishing a friendly state on his Eastern Border is critical for long-term stability.

However, he would only do so if you and your allies fall into a state of total collapse. So I would not count on overt military support any time soon. You can rest assured knowing that you are very likely to win this war with the help of our advisors and the supplies we give you. My advice is to be patient; wars are not won overnight."

Alexej reflected on this significantly and ultimately decided he would need some more time to consider his future. Thus he dismissed Eckhard with a single statement.

"I thank you for your advice; you can leave now."

After hearing that, Eckhard saluted the man before departing from his tent. He still had plenty of things to do, and Austria's request for further support was at the top of his list. As such, He wrote a letter to Berengar on behalf of the Ka?parians asking for additional material aid.

This would be just one of many times the Hussites came begging Berengar for more support in their war. With each shipment of arms, Berengar gave them, they would become indebted to Austria, and in doing so, fall further into Berengar's trap.

Chapter 262: Battle at the Eastern Border

Months had passed and while wars waged in Bohemia, and North Africa, Eastern Europe was far from peaceful. Seeing that the Rus and the Golden Horde had begun to invade the Teutonic State, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth decided to avenge their loss at Grunwald and had joined the fray.

After their defeat in Grunwald and the increase in the Teutonic State's power, the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had unified into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth decades earlier than in Berengar's previous life.

The reason for this was simple, the Teutonic State was a growing threat, and by uniting their two countries they could gain an advantage against their common foe. As such the Teutonic State found itself surrounded by hostile forces, all of them held considerable power.

At the moment, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was considered one of the great powers of Eastern Europe. With the coalition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Golden Horde, and the various Rus states, the Teutonic Order was now facing an overwhelming threat.

The Order had already lost all of the territory gained from its war with the Grand Duchy of Moscow and had been forced back to their initial borders where they were currently holding the line against overwhelming odds.

The choice to withdraw from the newly conquered regions and defend the heartland was not taken lightly by the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order. He

knew that his forces would be unable to keep ahold of the lands they had previously gained and thus opted to make a strategic withdrawal.

He hoped to sue for peace with the other powers by giving up their gains in their previous war. Instead, Poland-Lithuania joined the war and was hellbent on the Teutonic State's destruction. At the moment, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order was standing on a castle's ramparts on the State's eastern border.

In the field below was a coalition of forces waving the banners of their nations and individual feudal lands. The army was well over 50,000 strong, compared to the 10,000 defenders the Teutonic Order had managed to scramble together to defend the gateway into their territory.

The man instantly cursed under his breath as he gazed upon the massive horde that had gathered outside the Castle.

"Damn that fool, Simeon! If he were not obsessed with getting revenge on Berengar the Accursed, I wouldn't have lost so many troops in Oberstdorf! With those 10,000 men, this could have been prevented!"

The Teutonic State was on the precipice and besieged on all sides. Whether they would continue to survive as an independent State or face complete and total collapse was up to him. To this, the Grand Master merely sighed as he voiced the thoughts on his mind.

"The last Grand Master of the Teutonic Order? I don't know whether to laugh or cry."

Luckily for him, none of the men beneath his command were around to hear his doubts. It would indeed harm morale if the word were to spread how doomed the Grand Master felt inside.

The siege had yet to begin truly. Instead, the army had gathered outside the gates with the intent to intimidate the defenders behind its mighty walls. Of course, to an army of Catholic Fanatics like the Teutonic Order, such a thing would never occur.

Even if they had begun to fill their ranks with criminals to compensate for their losses, the indoctrination that occurred during initiation had completely brainwashed these criminals into soldiers of Christ, who feared no death.

Thus the intimidation tactics had not achieved the effect desired by the besieging forces. At the moment, the besieging troops were in the middle of constructing trebuchets in the field. These weapons would be used to bombard the Castle for the foreseeable future.

Of course, trebuchets were constructed below the walls by the Teutonic Order, and upon seeing the enemy siege weapons being constructed, the Grand Master yelled at his men below the ramparts.

"Prepare to fire into the enemy formation! I want those trebuchets knocked out before they can do some real damage!"

With this command, the siege had finally begun, and as such, the Teutonic Order instantly began loading the trebuchets with jars filled with pitch; these jars would be lighted before being tossed at the enemy trebuchets which were under construction. The hope was they could eliminate the enemy's siege weapons before they could be built appropriately.

The numerous trebuchets within the Castle began to toss their burning pitch jars over the walls and enemy formations. The first volley fired utterly missed their targets and instead landed on soldiers in the field, lighting them aflame and spreading the tar-like substance across their ranks.

With this, the Grand Master lowered the visor on his helmet and ordered the archers to fire upon the enemy infantry.

"Knock! Draw! Loose!"

With these commands, a volley of thousands of arrows began to fill the sky and rain down on the opponents below, blocking out the sun as it did so, at least to some degree. Despite this, the attackers did not move their position, most of them raised their shields, and others were directly affected by the volley.

Arrows and Bolts made their way into the bodies of dozens of men; some of them died on the spot, others slowly fell to the ground and began to bleed out. Many were utterly unaffected as their armor had blocked the projectiles from achieving their goals.

As arrows and bolts were launched on the coalition forces below, the attackers returned fire upon the Teutonic Order's soldiers and loosed their arrows upon the men stationed on the ramparts. It was significantly more difficult to hit an archer hiding behind a merlon than it was to rain arrows on opponents standing in the field.

As such, the defenders were primarily protected by the Castle's mighty walls as they continued to reap the lives of the enemy forces with their volley fire. While the arrows fell upon the attackers, the Teutonic Order had finished reloading the trebuchets and launched another volley at their targets.

This time one of the pitch jars had landed on its target, and its flame instantly began to engulf the enemy trebuchet, which was nearing completion. Slowly but surely, the burning pitch began to turn the wooden siege device into ash.

The engineers nearby who were unlucky enough to be covered in the flaming tar-like substance screamed in agony as the flames engulfed their bodies. Despite this, nobody moved to help them, and soon they fell to their deaths.

Under the missile fire of the Teutonic Order, the General of the Golden Horde gave his Order from atop his horse.

"Raise the ladders!"

With that, men from all coalition nations began to rush towards the wall while carrying ladders with them. The intent was to scale the walls and fight the defenders atop the ramparts. While these ladders were moving into position, the Polish-Lithuanian commander gave his decree.

"Release the battering ram!"

Upon hearing this, the Polish-Lithuanian Forces in the vanguard immediately began pushing the battering ram into formation. The ram was wheeled and covered with fortifications to protect against missile fire. The heavily armored

infantry used to push the device was relatively safe from the Defender's actions.

However, when the Battering ram finally got into position, the Defenders immediately unleashed a cauldron of burning pitch onto the enemy below; though the men operating the battering ram were directly protected from the substance, it slowly began to eat away at their covering.

Eventually, the coalition soldiers were left without protection from the missile fire. More importantly, the next wave of the burning pitch left them roasted alive in their armor as the enflamed viscous substance coated them.

When the Teutonic Grand Master gazed upon the sight of the enemy battering ram being destroyed, he smiled beneath his visor and yelled at the enemy, who could neither hear him nor understand him.

"Enemies of God! I Swear to the heavens that you will break your army taking this Castle! Though I may die, I will enter the Kingdom of Heaven smiling knowing that the Teutonic State survives!"

When the defenders heard these words from their Grand Master, they were overtaken with zeal and roared the battle cry of all crusaders into the air as they fought for their very survival.

"God wills it!"

The chant of the Crusaders while they desperately defended their Castle on their Eastern Border echoed into the air as the coalition forces attempted to break through the Teutonic Order's defenses. In doing so, the enemy forces fully understood the determination of the enemy they were facing and knew full well that this war would be a long and bloody one.

This was merely the first day of the siege at the Eastern Border, and it would last for many more. The brave German soldiers of Christ held onto their territory, fighting and dying for their belief against an army they deemed to be heathens.

The results of this battle would not be known to the world at large for some time. Ultimately the Teutonic Order would be defeated, and their Grand

Master killed in battle. The loss the Teutonic Order suffered at the Eastern Border would open the flood gates for the coalition to invade their lands. Within a year's time, the Teutonic State would find itself in shambles, barely holding on to what little land they had left.

Chapter 263: Requesting Artillery

Months had passed since the Teutonic Order began its battle at the Eastern Border. On the other side of the world in Egypt, Arethas had pushed the Mamlukes back to Alexandria, seizing the city of Alexandria was of significant cultural importance to the Byzantine Empire. After losing it, the Emperor had personally sent his most excellent General to reclaim it. The rest of the territory would have to follow the recapture of the ancient city.

Arethas and his army were currently stuck outside the city of Alexandria, the siege had been going on for two weeks by now, and Arethas was starting to become impatient. What he needed was superior artillery.

However, he was armed with a few small bronze cannons. Because of this, he could not regularly bombard the city; instead, he had to maintain these cannons in fear that they might rupture from overload.

Because of this, the siege was going much slower than it usually would. After his first battle with the Mamluke's Arethas realized the need for field artillery; after all, Berengar's forces had been largely successful because of this. As such, he desired to get his hands on some field guns and use them to bring down these walls.

Since the first battle to recapture Egypt after centuries of being in the hands of other Empires, Arethas had sent word back to Andronikos, who was living in Constantinople, ordering the man to travel to Kufstein and negotiate with Berengar for the purchase of cannons.

Today Andronikos finally arrived within Kufstein, and as Berengar was eating breakfast with his family and guests, a servant approached him and whispered in his ear. After doing so, the man placed down his silverware and wiped his mouth with his napkin.

Afterward, he stood up from the table abruptly and alerted Linde and Honoria as to the presence of the Byzantine envoy.

"It would appear that Andronikos is here to discuss business. Lady Valeria, I do not want any confusion to occur from your presence, so I would humbly request that you sequester yourself in your room for the time being."

Honorina quickly understood Berengar's intent, she had started to suspect that Berengar knew her identity, and as such, she nodded and smiled before departing.

"Of course, anything for you, your grace."

With this, Honorina fled to her chambers and hid from the Byzantine Envoy, though she did not know who Andronikos was, as she had never come into contact with Arethas' subordinates. She was aware of the difficulties if the envoy from the Empire learned that she was hiding in Kufstein under a false identity.

After Honorina had vanished without a trace, Berengar ordered one of his servants to take her plate away and clean up the table.

"Get rid of Valeria's dishes, and make it seem like she was never here, and quickly!"

Hearing this, the servants immediately busied Honorina's spot while Berengar entered the Great Hall, where the man named Andronikos was waiting patiently. As for Linde, she stayed in the Dining Hall with Henrietta and continued her meal. The moment Berengar saw the man, he opened his arms wide and approached the man giving him a friendly hug.

"Andronikos, my friend, it has been some time since I last saw you. Tell me, what is so important that you must travel all this way to Kufstein?"

Andronikos accepted the friendly embrace before the two men distanced themselves from one another. After doing so, he informed Berengar of his reason for visiting.

"My friend, the last time we saw each other, you were merely a Count, now you are a mighty Duke. I am genuinely impressed with your growth. As for why I am here, The reason is strictly business.? the Strategos wishes for me to negotiate the purchase of artillery. I know you won't sell us the magnificent

guns you use in warfare, but indeed you can create something fitting for our Empire to use against our enemies?"

Hearing this, Berengar scratched his chin for a few moments; if he wanted a powerful ally in the East, he would need to arm them with some form of artillery that was better than what was currently wielded by the feudal world.

After thinking about it for a few moments, he got a brilliant idea, and as such, he clasped Andronikos' shoulder with a friendly smile on his face.

"I have a design in mind, but it has yet to be put into production. I promise you it will be more advanced than anything used by your enemies. However, these things are not easy to produce. I will need to set up an entirely new production line. For rapid transportation, I will need to establish it within a city closer to the Empire. It will take me some time to accomplish this."

The design Berengar had in mind was none other than the Falconet, an early cannon design from the renaissance that was used extensively by the European powers. It was slim, relatively lightweight, made of cast iron, and fired a one-pound projectile. It was also capable of firing grapeshot if necessary, grapeshot being a far more primitive version of the canister shot that Berengar fired from his artillery.

This would be an enormous benefit in field battles against the Empire's enemies. Still, if Berengar went to war with the Byzantines, it would prove to be entirely ineffective against his 12 lb cannons. With this, Berengar could advance his allies to the East and curry their favor.

Andronikos was incredibly excited when he heard this news, and as such, he bowed respectfully to the young Duke of Austria.

"You have my gratitude; tell me how much such weapons would cost?"

To this, Berengar began to act casually as he swiped his hand to the side.

"Think nothing of it; I understand you are in a bitter campaign to reclaim your lost territory. I will gift the first batch of cannons to you as a token of my friendship, and if you require more, I will provide as many as you need."

As for their cost, you do not need to worry about such a thing; I am sure the wealth you gain from Egypt and Cyrene will be more than enough to cover the matter of debt you will owe me after your campaign is finished.

If you so desire, we can outfit your troops with as many arkebuses, pikes, and armor they need to accomplish this objective as well, under the same conditions, of course."

To the Empire, this could be considered an enormous favor. Though the Empire was wealthy, affording to outfit an army with new and modern equipment was a hefty price, something they could not easily do while engaged in a war with the Mamluke sultanate.

At most, they could buy a few batches at a time, but Berengar was offering to fully equip their army with modern equipment effectively for free, at least for the time being. When they finally won the campaign and gained the territories of Egypt and Cyrene, the Empire would be basking in more wealth than they had in the past 800 years.

By then, they could quickly repay the debt they owed Berengar in one giant payment. It was an attractive offer, but Andronikos did not have the power to negotiate such a monumental decision. As such, he quickly began to address Berengar's recommendation.

"I will have to ask the higher-ups about this. I do not have the power to make such a decision."

Berengar merely smiled and nodded as he heard this and responded in a friendly tone.

"I understand, do convey my message to your superiors with haste. In the meantime, I will begin the construction of the production line and begin to produce the weapons. If you do refuse my kindness, we can always sell the cannons and equipment to you upfront!"

Berengar's kind words held a hidden meaning; by saying they would be refusing his kindness, he was implying that it would harm diplomatic relations with Austria; after all, it would be seen as an insult by Berengar. This minor

threat was laced into his otherwise kind words, and though Andronikos did not realize it, the Emperor surely will when he heard these words.

Though Berengar would make a vast sum trading these weapons to the Byzantines, he could care less about this, if the Byzantines were to accept his offer, there was only one thing Berengar would ask for as payment for their massive debt that would accumulate throughout their war with the Mamluke Sultanate, and that was Princess Honoria's hand in marriage.

The desire for a swift victory in North Africa after decades of battling a stalemate with their enemies would hopefully be enough for Andronikos and Arethas to convince the Emperor to agree to Berengar's terms, and in doing so, they would fall straight into his trap.

Berengar could consider the weapons and armor he provided to the Byzantine Empire's massive army as the dowry for Honoria, and the debt would be squared the moment they got married. To him, this was the perfect way to establish a long-term alliance with the Byzantine Empire while also cementing his Dynasty's claim to the Empire as a whole.

More importantly, this would break the alliance between France and the Byzantine Empire. This was Berengar's true objective with his plans regarding Honoria. France was a neighbor that a united Germany was destined to clash with in the future.

If Berengar did not wish to fight a two-front war, he would need to break the alliance the French had with the Byzantines; this was critical to his plans for the future. Germany had always suffered due to its geographical position as the center of Europe in his past life. Many wars had been lost because they were forced to fight on two fronts.

By establishing an alliance with the great power in the East, Berengar could ensure his flank was secured to focus on his future enemies in the west. Thus while Andronikos left the Castle of Kufstein and began the long journey back to the Empire, Berengar was smiling. If all went as planned, he would have dealt a significant blow to his future enemies without anyone even realizing it.

Chapter 264: The Holy Maiden of France

Time flew by once more; throughout the months, while Berengar was using the period of peace he had established in Austria to turn his Duchy into a significant power, France found itself engulfed in war. For decades the English had been attempting to invade the Kingdom of France in a bid for control of the French Throne.

England has seized considerable gains within the past year, and with each passing day, more French land fell to the English invaders. When Aubry returned from the Byzantine Empire, he was sent off to war against the English by his father, King Gilles de Valois.

At the moment, the effeminate Prince was clad from head to toe in steel plate armor, unlike in Austria where steel was a shared resource, in France, it was a rare commodity, and to outfit a man in a full suit of armor comprised of the material was a great expense.

Due to his tabard being sullied earlier in the day, Aubry lacked the colors that distinguished him as a member of the Royal Family. If anything, he looked like a common man-at-arms. As such, few men in either Army were aware of his identity.

Aubry was taking part in his first battle. Though a legendary swordsman, he was by no means an experienced soldier, and as such, was quite nervous about the conflict. Currently, He was acting under the command of the Duke of Burgundy while the French forces fought against the English in a field within the Duchy of Burgundy.

In Berengar's previous life, the Duchy of Burgundy would betray the French Throne and side with the English in the next year. Of course, this had happened after the French royal Heir assassinated the Duke. In this timeline, such a thing may not occur; after all, Aubry was the Heir and was an entirely different person from the Crown Prince during Berengar's previous life.

Aubry fought fiercely beside the Duke of Burgundy as the man advanced his forces against the English lines. As a petite and effeminate young man, Aubry lacked physical strength, especially compared to the veteran English Knights he was facing. Thus he had to make up for his lack of power with his sword skills.

He was currently protected by a great bascinet, which blocked his pretty face; his honey blonde hair flowed out the back of the helmet, creating the image in the minds of the English and French alike that he was a female warrior leading the charge against their enemies. His dainty feminine figure, clad in the slim armor, did not help resolve this confusion.

The English longbowman fired upon the French Knights as they charged into the fray, atop their mounts. At the moment, Aubry was equipped with a lance and couched it under his arm as he rammed the tip of the weapon into the breastplate of an English knight, skewering the man upon impact.

The heavily armored cavalry of both forces clashed into one another, sending Knights and Lords to their deaths. Perhaps it was God's will, but the effeminate Prince managed to survive the charge, and so too did the Duke of Burgundy.

As both armies struggled in a battle of life and Death, Aubry was unseated from his horse by a lance, and though it did not kill him, it surely dented his breastplate and broke one or more of his ribs.

Gasping for breath, a tear formed in the young Prince's eyes beneath the visor of his great bascinet as he struggled to breathe. The pain was unbearable, yet despite this, he slowly rose to his feet, where he unleashed his longsword from his sheath and used it to dodge an oncoming blow from an English man-at-arms.

After deflecting the blow, Aubry spun his blade around, gripping the cold steel by the hand and using the pommel to strike his opponent's iron helmet, caving it in and crushing the man's skull as he did so.

A sharp pain, like a knife digging into his abdomen, dug its way through Aubry's ribcage; with each movement, he felt as if he were going to pass out. Despite this, the young Prince continued to struggle on the battlefield.

If he did not fight, he would surely die this day; thus, he twisted his sword around so that he was once more wielding it by the hilt and pierced through the gambeson armor of a nearby English soldier.

With the young Prince surrounded by the chaos of war, the Duke of Burgundy led the Army and began to encircle his position; he could not allow the Crown Prince to die on his watch. Slowly, but surely the tides of battle began to change in favor of the French Army, and eventually, Aubry was relieved by the courageous Knights and Men At Arms of France who had caught up to him and allowed him a short reprieve from the battle.

Aubry winced in pain as he clutched the dented portion of his breastplate; afterward, he was slowly led away from the battlefield by some nearby Knights who were concerned for his safety. Aubry was forced to retreat to the encampment while his soldiers fought without him.

The field physician stripped Aubry of his armor and clothes before examining the rib cage, where he shared the news with the boy.

"Three of your ribs are fractured; you will recover in time. However, for now, I advise you to stay clear of the battlefield. One wrong move, and you could get yourself killed."

After hearing this, Aubry nodded before covering himself with a silk robe. The material was rare in France, but due to trade from some traveling Austrian merchants, the boy could get such a luxury, and he wore it whenever he got the chance.

The Prince clutched his side and winced in pain as he moved around. Shortly after that, the flaps to the tent opened to reveal the Duke of Burgundy with a grave expression on his face, the man was covered in the blood of his enemies, but he did not appear to be harmed in the slightest.

When the physician had begun to examine him, the young Duke, who was no older than twenty-six, pushed him aside before barging over to Aubry while wrapping the young Prince in his bloodstained embrace.

"Thank God you are alright! I don't know what I would do without you!"

After saying this, the man began to violate the Prince's tongue with his own; despite this act of passion, the Prince did not turn away and instead accepted the gift. It was a little-known secret that the Duke of Burgundy and the French Prince were in an illicit relationship.

Though the Duke was married and had three children, the moment he first laid eyes on Aubry, he fell in love, and thus for the past three years, Aubry had been in a relationship with the Duke of Burgundy.

Of course, the Duke of Burgundy was just one of Aubry's many lovers, he was a rather promiscuous young man, and thus he had more than one man by his side. He was even in a scandalous affair with several of his Knights.

The Duke of Burgundy had no way of knowing this. Thus he thought that Prince Aubry was loyal only to him. After their little intimate display, Aubry wiped the blood from the Duke's face before putting on a gentle smile and asking the question on his mind.

"Did we win?"

To this, the Duke chuckled lightly before nodding his head.

"Would I be here if we hadn't?"

Though this was good news, it was far too early to celebrate; the English invasion was not something to be taken lightly. The French had been fighting the English for decades, and yet the war was still entirely unresolved.

With this said, the couple maintained silence for some time. Eventually, the Duke of Burgundy spoke his views on the conflict that embroiled the Kingdom of France.

"This war is far from over. However, this victory is a good start. With our Holy Maiden leading the charge, the morale of our forces is stronger than ever!"

Aubry was confused when he heard these words and spoke softly, as he was attempting to limit the amount of pain he felt from his broken ribs.

"Holy Maiden?"

The Duke of Burgundy removed the gauntlet from his hand and wiped the bangs out of Aubry's eyes. In doing so, he whispered into the young man's ear.

"That's what our troops are calling you! They saw your honey hair and petite figure as you bravely charged the English Knights. Without your tabard, the men have begun to think that you are a woman. This is why they are calling you the Holy Maiden.

Rumors have already spread of your feat in battle, and the men are speculating about your origins. Some are even saying that you are a young woman of low birth chosen by God to lead the French to victory in our hour of need. If you ask me, it is a nickname fitting of your divine beauty!"

Upon hearing this, Aubry began to blush as he looked to the side, not willing to gaze into the eyes of his lover. He was far from pious; in fact, one could call him the personification of lust. Despite this, he had been given such a beautiful nickname.

After a while, the effeminate Prince began to giggle like a girl; to him, it was the greatest joke he had ever heard. However, for the sake of morale, he would continue to present the image of a pious young woman; after all, what France needed now more than ever was a symbol to rally behind.

Thus the lustful trap that was the Crown Prince of France had become the Joan of Arc of this world, while in reality behaving far more similar to the ancient Roman Emperor Elagabalus. Of course, the promiscuous character of the so-called "Holy Maiden" would never be revealed to the public at large, nor would his identity as the Prince of France.

The war would continue to wage for some time; who would win the Hundred Years War in this timeline had yet to be determined. Though with Berengar's intervention in this world's affairs, anything was possible. For now, the French would continue to fight against the English, as they had for decades.

Chapter 265: The Holy Roman Emperor Joins the Fray

Within the Kingdom of Italy, in the city of Florence, there lies the Holy Roman Emperor, who was also the King of Italy. Sitting upon his mighty throne, within his palace, the middle-aged man of Italian descent gazed upon his ministers who reported the situation across the Empire.

One of the ministers was a tall and lanky man with a narrow face and a large hooked nose; he had a dark, unkempt beard that made him look particularly

hideous. The man was dressed in silk robes imported from the Byzantine Empire. Currently, He held a document in his hands that he read from to the Emperor.

"The German-Speaking regions are embroiled in a war for the title "King of Germany," so far Duke Wilmar and the main Habsburg line has been eradicated, and with their deaths, so too has their claim ended.

The man who seized power in Austria is a young upstart by the name of Berengar von Kufstein. As you may be aware, he is commonly referred to as Berengar, "the Accursed." The man is a kinslayer, womanizer, heretic and has been excommunicated by the previous Pope Simeon II.

With his rise to power, the German Reformation spread from Southern Germany into the neighboring German Duchies. Saxony and the Rhineland, in particular, are being converted at a rapid rate."

Upon hearing this information, the Holy Roman Emperor, a man by the name of Balsamo Corsini, began to frown. As a devout Catholic, and a man with close ties to the current Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor, dreaded the idea of the Berengar heresy spreading throughout the realm.? However, the man contained his rage and spurred the minister to continue reporting.

"Go on..."

Noticing the Emperor's fury, the minister gulped down the saliva accumulated in his throat before continuing his report.

"The other two claimants for the title, as you know, are Duke Dietger of Bavaria and the legitimized bastard nephew of the previous King's brother. His name is Manfred von Luxembourg, if I am not mistaken. Manfred is the head of the Duchy of Luxembourg; he and his allies have begun to invade Southern Germany.

With the losses the Bavarians suffered in Austria, Dietger's forces are significantly weakened, and he is currently relying on his allies in Saxony and Wuttermurg to press his claims. Duke Berengar seems to be biding his time; he is either disinterested in the title or is amassing an army and waiting for the

perfect opportunity to strike. Intelligence supports the latter of these two outcomes as the most likely possibility.

The Venetians have reported that Berengar is constructing three large shipyards; they speculate he intends to create a powerful navy to project strength across the Mediterranean. Though at this time, it is unknown whether these shipyards are designed for the construction of a trade fleet or an Armada."

Upon hearing the last part of this news, The Emperor's frowning face worsened to an ugly state. It was becoming apparent that if Berengar was left to his own devices, he could prove to be a troublesome opponent in the future.

Still, there was not much he could do about such a thing, short of trying to revoke Berengar's title of Duke, which would force him into a war with the Austrians; there was no way for the Emperor to enforce his will on Berengar, and the Austrian people.

Despite the Holy Roman Empire being more streamlined within its political structure in this timeline, it still suffered from the same faults of feudalism when it came to the centralization of power. The fact that there were limited lands within the crown's direct control meant that Balsamo would have a difficult time raising the forces necessary to invade Austria.

Though he could rely on armies from Italy to answer his call to arms, the Germans were in the middle of a civil war, and so was Bohemia. The only other vassals he could call upon with any large force was the leader of the Swiss Confederation, and he was a man known for minding his own business.

The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire was left with a headache, as he had no idea how to stem the growing tide that was the Duchy of Austria. Seeing that the Emperor was silent for an extended time, the minister began to speak of his reports again.

"The armies of Luxembourg and their allies have marched into Bavaria; after several battles back and forth between the von Wittelsbachs and the von Luxembourgs, it has turned into a stalemate, with the northeastern border of Bavaria under Luxembourg occupation.

Only time will tell how long this conflict will last, and who will become victorious is still unknown. The war will likely continue for years without a clear victor. Unless we want to personally get involved, and declare the next King of Germany of our choosing, then I suggest we leave it be, and let the Germans settle their disputes by themselves."

The Holy Roman Emperor nodded in agreement to this stance; he had no desire to waste his armies on the infighting of the German people. Instead, he was more interested in suppressing Berengar and Austria as best as possible. As such, he asked the question on his mind.

"What is the status of the Pope's attempts to rally enough forces for a new Crusade against Berengar and his heresy?"

As he was asked this question, the minister began to frown and spoke gently, knowing that his following words would greatly upset the Emperor.

"The Pope has his attention divided to Bohemia at the moment. The outbreak of the Hussite Heresy and their war to overthrow the Bohemian Crown is a more immediate threat when compared to that of Berengar and his Heresy.

As such, the timeline established to prepare an army to invade Austria has been delayed; instead, what few forces the Vatican has gathered will be marching on Bohemia first. Though Berengar has taken a neutral stance in the war, our spies report seeing a large number of hand cannons and cannons in the arms of the Hussite forces.

The number that they wield is far more than they should generally be equipped with. Thus it is believed these weapons are manufactured in Vienna and transported into Hussite lands. However, none of this can be proven, as Berengar's agents are highly effective at counter-espionage. As such, whatever is occurring in Austrian lands is unknown to us at the moment."

This news was enough to get the Emperor to grind his teeth; it seemed as if this entire report presented to him was nothing but bad news. As such, the Emperor began to lash out at his ministers.

"Is there any good news at all! Do any of you have a single idea on how to suppress Berengar and his rapid growth? Before long, that boy will be

challenging my authority as Emperor! Something needs to be done about this, and until the Crusade is called, military conflict is not an option!"

The various ministers who were gathered all began to glance at one another in awkward silence. That is until one of the ministers began to speak up.

"We could impose taxes and tariffs upon Austria and their goods. This way, the Austrian economy will suffer, and Berengar "the Accursed" will have a difficult time funding the expansion of his military?"

When the Emperor heard this, he began to smile; this was a good idea, however just as he was about to give the decree to place unfair taxes on Austria, another one of his ministers spoke up.

"Are you an idiot? First off, if we were to impose taxes strictly on Austrian goods, it would come across as the Emperor bullying one of his vassals, which Berengar could use to breed conflict among the other Vassals.

That is the best-case scenario; the worst-case scenario is Berengar could outright refuse to pay such taxes, forcing us with two options, lower our heads in humiliation, or invade Austria and fight a war that we are not prepared for!"

The moment the Emperor heard this, all the joy that had momentarily filled his heart dissipated, as the minister who rained on his parade had made a valid counter-argument against such an option. Thus once more, Balsamo and his ministers were scratching their heads trying to figure out a course of action.

Ultimately, the ugly minister with the unkempt beard spoke up with the best option that the Imperial Crown had at the moment.

"If we wish to suppress Berengar's growth without giving him a *Cassus Belli*, there is only one option. We must sabotage his industry; in doing so, we can maintain plausible deniability while still crippling his means to arm himself.

The difficulty lies with getting our agents into Austria without being detected by Berengar's robust spy network. For starters, he is only accepting immigrants of German descent into Austria, leaving our options of spies solely from the Swiss Confederation.

We will have to actively wage a war of intrigue against Austria and build up enough of a network to infiltrate into his industrial cities. Doing so could take months, if not years, to accomplish any results and would surely be costly. However, it is the best option available to us at the moment, aside from outright war."

After hearing this, the gathered ministers began to mutter among themselves before agreeing to this proposition unanimously; as such, the Emperor grinned from ear to ear, showing off his sickly yellow teeth as he did so. Afterward, he began to bellow in laughter before calming himself to a degree necessary to give his decree.

"So be it! Berengar, I would like to see how you prevent my agents from sabotaging your industry and crippling your economy!"

Thus the Italian Kingdom and the Imperial Dynasty had begun to throw their weight into the fray; by sabotaging Berengar's factories, he would not only cripple Berengar's economy but also weaken the Byzantine Empire to the East who the Emperor had long since had a rivalry over with in regards to who was the true successor of Rome.

Of course, getting past Linde's inquisitive gaze and that of Austria's intelligence agency is much easier said than done. After all, they had begun to rapidly expand across Germany and into Northern Italy since they had started their reforms. What would follow would be a long and bloody shadow conflict between the Duke of Austria and the Holy Roman Emperor.

Chapter 266: A Year Goes By

A year had passed since Adela's birthday, and while the world changed around him Berengar had been living in Kufstein, overseeing the reconstruction of the Duchy of Austria. The war with the Bavarians had left much of the land ravaged, and it was through great effort that the fields began to be restored, and the people returned to rebuild their homes with assistance from the State that Berengar had been establishing.

Over the past year, Berengar had focused on four critical areas of development; agriculture, industry, infrastructure, and the Military. In regards to agriculture, over the past year, the fields were reseeded, much to the help of

the mechanized seeders that Berengar had begun to employ across the realm.

The use of the steel plow and the mechanical seeder had greatly aided in the amount of farmland that could be utilized while the fields were worked by significantly less population than was needed before. The four-field system was implemented throughout the realm, semi-modern irrigation was constructed across the fields, advanced fertilizers had begun to be employed, and selective breeding was introduced to livestock.

Due to the massive amount of animal power needed to utilize combine harvesters, Berengar had spent a significant sum acquiring farm horses and mules to power these devices. In the end, he felt that this would be an essential investment as the combine harvester combined the critical components of grain harvest such as reaping, threshing, gathering, and winnowing into a single process.

With this invention, the work of thousands of farmers could be done by a handful of men. The only downside was that each combined harvester required 20 or more beasts of burden. To Berengar, it was well worth the price; the thousands of farmers who would typically be working in the fields doing all of these functions were now replaced by a single machine and a few men to operate it.

The men who were previously employed in the fields could be put to work in industry, construction, mining, the Military, or any other number of jobs needed in a semi-modern society. They could also undergo public education and further add to Berengar's scientific network.

The Agriculture of Austria had made a significant process towards the early 19th century from Berengar's previous life. Within a decade, every field of Austria would be fully mechanized while utilizing advanced irrigation and fertilizers.

The towns and cities destroyed or damaged during the Bavarian Occupation had undergone reconstruction under Berengar's infrastructure initiative. It was a process that might take a decade, or possibly two. Still, in the future, every city and central town of Austria would be made to a similar degree of security and sanitation that Kufstein now found itself in.

Roads were being constructed across Austria to connect the major cities and towns of the realm. Roads were an essential feature for commerce, and Berengar intended to make sure that his roads stretched across the entire Duchy.

As for the industry, several critical industrial cities had begun to pop up aside from Kufstein. Innsbruck had long since been established as an Industrial city; within it, the arms and armor Berengar manufactured for the Byzantine Empire were mass-produced.

Arkubuses, pikes, falconets, and mirror pattern armor were mass-produced there and supplied to the Byzantine Empire under the agreement to be paid for in the future, after their conquests. The Emperor had agreed to Berengar's terms and unknowingly fallen into a debt trap.

As for Vienna, it had begun the production of even earlier arms and armor, which could be sold to any medieval army Berengar chose. They focused on the production of brigandine armor, hand cannons, primitive medieval cannons, and any number of other medieval weaponry. Most of which was being given as military aid to the Hussites, under the terms that they would pay for it in the future, creating a sizable debt among the Hussite forces.

Within Istria, the glass and salt industries had greatly expanded over the past year, and Berengar had stolen a large portion of the market from the Venetians, much to their ire. Berengar had more than once received an unfriendly letter from the Venetian Doge demanding he cease production of his superior glass.

Of course, being the terrible aggressive, and arrogant man that he was, Berengar's response to the Venetian's outrage was to politely tell them to go pound sand. This had worsened the relations between Venice and Austria to the point of a Naval Arms race.

As for Berengar's Cathedral, and Grand Palace, he had decided not to go with concrete and steel construction; as such, he had the buildings entirely rebuilt from scratch in the form of more traditional materials such as granite and mortar.

In particular, Berengar had used his chemistry department to formulate modern type M mortar, the most robust and most durable type of mortar in existence within Berengar's previous life. It was also much quicker to set into stone, and as such, despite the traditional materials, the production rate of these structures was still more significant than that of the era.

He would prefer that his cultural monuments last the test of time. Thus, it would be many years before he moved into a Palace befitting an Emperor; then again, it would be many years before he became an Emperor, or so he thought.

During this era of peace, Berengar had also begun to reconstruct the City Walls of Kufstein with Granite and type M mortar. Though the reinforced concrete walls allowed a greater level of protection against threats such as cannons, Berengar wanted his city walls to last the test of time, like that of the Theodosian walls of Constantinople.

One day when people looked back upon the City of Kufstein, Berengar wanted these walls to be in place as a sign of his wealth and power during his reign. Thus construction efforts across the realm were being made with more traditional materials, and the fortifications that Berengar had built with concrete and steel were being replaced and recycled. Austria held more than enough wealth to undertake such ventures, and Berengar knew it.

However, out of all of Berengar's exploits over the past year, the most important was finished, and that was the construction of the shipyards. Berengar had poured an enormous amount of manpower and resources into the rapid construction of his three shipyards, and since then, they had been completed.

Two of his ports in Trieste and Pola were currently producing Berengar-Class Frigates at an unprecedented rate. Due to the prefabricated parts that Berengar had made during the last year, he had enough stockpiled in warehouses near those shipyards to construct dozens of vessels. With the assembly lines in place, Berengar had already built five frigates to comprise his First fleet.

As for Fiume, the shipyard in that region had dedicated its production to manufacturing Berengar's merchant fleet, comprised of clippers. Though they

had yet to set sail and bring his goods across the Mediterranean, it was only a matter of time before Austrians goods were sold around the sea.

The Grand Army of Austria had expanded to 50,000 men at this point, half of which were volunteers. The Army paid well, and conscription would be mandatory the moment they went to war again. As such, many young men joined its ranks to prove their loyalty to the new Regime, which had already begun to lift the peasants out of poverty.

Berengar's forces were equipped with the 1417/18 Rifled Musket, triangular bayonets, and quick loading tubes. The artillery comprised 1417 12 lb Cannons, but they were also equipped with 1418 Schmidt Guns. There was no need for a dedicated howitzer since the 1417 12 lb Cannon could act as a field gun and a howitzer.

As for the Cavalry, they were split into Cuirassiers, Lancers, Dragoons, and Hussars. Out of all the units of Berengar's Army, he had the least amount of Cavalry. Horses were expensive to purchase and maintain, and frankly, he did not need a massive amount of Cavalry; his infantry was already so effective that Cavalry was overkill.

A year's worth of progress had been achieved, and it was no small amount. If things continued to progress in such a manner, Berengar would soon be able to proclaim himself King of Austria and stand on his own.

Though he still desired to expand his wealth, influence, and power before that happened. After all, the moment he did so, there was a potential for war to break out; and Berengar was rather enjoying the progress he was making at the moment.

Thus, for now, he would continue to develop his land until no army could challenge him. Border forts were still being constructed, and they would need to be finished before he ever thought about fighting a war for independence against the Holy Roman Empire.

Thus at the moment, Berengar was sitting in his study, enjoying a sip of fortified wine as he gazed at the documents in his hands that described all of the progress that had been made in a single year. Money kept flowing into his treasury, and he spent a great deal of it to invest in his country.

Now that his First Fleet and his merchant fleet were constructed, he would begin his expansion into the Mediterranean and its trade. If he could sell his goods to every Kingdom with a shoreline, he would be sure to make a vast fortune. Thus his immediate plan for the future was to expand his trade network, even if it angered those around him.

Chapter 267: Honoria's Diary

The giant oak doors of the bedroom shut behind the white-haired Princess, where she proceeded to latch them. Honoria had a broad smile on her pretty face, she had just returned home after a long journey, and she had big plans for tomorrow. The young woman held her chest as she thought about tomorrow; she could feel butterflies within her heart.

After taking a few moments to calm herself, Honoria pulled out a large, leatherbound book from within her pouch. This book was chestnut in color and had a strap around it that was secured with a lock. After reaching further into her bag and finding the key, she unlocked it before placing it down upon her desk that had gathered dust in her absence.

After unbuckling the book, the Princess gazed upon its contents. Since her arrival in Kufstein over a year ago, she had begun to keep a diary that contained her daily events. As such, she began to flip through the pages reading through her past experiences while living under Berengar's roof.

Some of these made her smile, and others made her frown; it had been quite the emotional journey while staying in Kufstein. After flipping through the initial pages, she found herself reading about her experience shortly after Adela's fourteenth birthday party. The journal entry read as follows.

September 10th, 1418. I awoke in the morning to find myself with a splitting headache. I had far too much wine to drink last night. I don't remember my actions from the night prior, but Berengar began glaring at me since the moment he first saw me.

I had a relaxed breakfast alongside Berengar and the other guests who stayed within the Castle of Graz, which I vomited up shortly after; note to self greasy food does not settle well with a hungover stomach.

Later in the afternoon, Berengar visited me and chastised me for my behavior the night before. Though I do not remember behaving in such a manner, I was slightly violent with him out of jealousy towards the attention he showed to the other girls. It serves him right; he doesn't notice me enough! Am I not worthy of his praise?

Upon reading this entry, Honoria smiled bitterly, to think even back then, she was having problems with her relationship with Berengar. Not wanting to dwell on the topic, she quickly flipped through her pages to find the following passage of interest.

October 5th, 1418. I have been learning to sail for some time now and have gotten quite good at it! Berengar has even promised to take me to Istria in the summer so that I can learn to sail on the sea! I am so excited I can hardly wait!

After going through my daily sailing training, Berengar has given me a new task; he wants me to learn how to shoot and wield a sword to defend myself properly. I am not sure how good I will be at the task, but it makes sense. After all, some of the sailors have been eying me with ill intent.

If not for fear of what Berengar might do to them, I dread the idea of what might happen to me. Luckily Berengar wields enough respect that they seem to contain their lecherous nature. Then again, is it respect or fear that drives these men to behave themselves? I suppose I should ask around and see what the people under Berengar's rule think of him.

Honoria fondly gazed upon this specific entry; it was one of the many moments Berengar had shown that he cared for the girl. However, the good times had lasted for such a short period. The beautiful young Princess shook her head of such thoughts before flipping the page and moving on to the following central point in her diary.

October 15th, 1418. Today is Linde's birthday, and Berengar has spent the entire day with Linde and their son Hans. The little tyke is so adorable; I wonder if I can have a son as cute as him one day. Wouldn't it be great if he looked like Berengar? What am I saying?

It is now past noon, and Berengar has barely spoken to me; instead, he and Linde have spent the last few hours locked away in their room. I think they are having sex; I don't know why but that makes me so jealous! I know I shouldn't be thinking such things, but every time I walk by their room and hear Linde's pleasurable moans, I can't help but think what it would be like if I were in her position!

Evening came, and at dinner, Linde announced she was pregnant, not only to Berengar but all of the guests who came to visit. Her birthday is a big deal since she is Berengar's lover; even Adela and her family arrived. I am certain that his little fiancee appeared just as envious as I was when she heard the news. Berengar seemed so happy that it made me bitter. I wonder how he would react if I were to carry his child?

After reading this, Honoria began to smile bitterly as she quickly flipped the page, looking for another entry to read. The more she read, the more she had come to regret her actions that had led to her current predicament. As such, she read the next entry with tears in her eyes as she struggled to prevent them from dropping onto the diary and staining the page and its contents.

November 23rd, 1418. Today is my birthday, and I celebrated it alone. I don't know why I did not tell anyone about it. Maybe because I feared that such information could lead to Berengar figuring out my identity.

If he learned that I am the Princess of the Byzantine Empire would he send me home? I don't know if I would be able to live without the support he has given me. To go back home and marry that gay prince, I think I would rather die.

Honoria quickly flipped the page after reading that; she was delighted that she was still in Kufstein, despite everything that had happened; as such, there was no point dwelling on the past. The following few pages contained nothing of significance, and as such, the girl flipped to another entry of interest.

December 25th, 1418. Today is Christmas; a few days ago was Berengar's birthday, and though there was a large celebration, nothing of interest happened. Even though the House comprises nothing more than Berengar, Henrietta, Linde, Hans, and Myself, I had a wonderful time.

I even managed to spend some alone time with Berengar; it seems that the days where he interacts with me are starting to become less frequent. I think he is trying to distance himself from me but I don't know why. What have I done to upset him to such a degree? For this new year, I will give even more effort to gain his affection!

After reading this, Honoria began to skip a lot of entries before landing upon one filled with tears and ink smudges. She was pretty emotional when she wrote this; as such, she took a deep breath before reading the contents, fully aware of what it contained.

February 2nd, 1419. I had a massive fight with Berengar today; I don't even know why we were arguing. He has been so distant lately that it is breaking my heart. I tried to tell him how I felt, but it just came out wrong.

I ended up saying some profoundly personal and hurtful things. At the end of it, he simply glared at me with eyes of fury that I did not know he possessed. Afterward, he sent me to my room to think over my actions. Where did it all go wrong? Is this my fault for not being honest with him?

After reading this, Honoria sighed and skipped through multiple entries. The relationship between her and Berengar only seemed to get worse as she flipped through the pages until she landed on yet another tear-stained entry.

June 6th, 1419. Berengar has canceled our trip to Istria, and by canceled, I mean he has chosen not to go with me. Instead, he is tasking my protection to his guards. It seems he wants little to do with me at the moment. I don't know what is causing this rift, but I suspect it is my fault.

I need some fresh air and a new perspective. Being cooped up in Kufstein all this time is starting to get to my head. This trip will be good for me; even if Berengar is not coming, it should give me some time to think about everything that has gone wrong this past year.

After reading this, Honoria smiled for a moment reflecting on the beautiful memories she made on the journey she had taken; she flipped the page and found her smile continuing to grow as she wrote about her trip abroad.

July 27th, 1419. It has been almost a month since I last saw Berengar, and I have made it to the shores of Aragon. The freedom of the sea and the experience I have gained by interacting with various cultures have given me time to understand myself and why my relationship with Berengar is so toxic.

Berengar doesn't trust me, I have been lying about my identity for some time, and he knows. There is no other explanation. However, this is not his fault; it is mine, and mine alone. My insecurities, jealousy, and lies are what have created this rift between us.

I do not doubt that Berengar's child with Linde is already born, and he is probably delighted right now. It would be rude of me to barge in at such a time of happiness. So I have decided to write him a few letters, informing him of my journey and progress. Even though I know the guards he has tasked to protect me have been already notifying him, I feel it would be best if he heard from me directly.

What we need now is space, so I will continue to write to him, and I will stay on my journey across the Mediterranean until I am ready to tell him the truth. Who knows what I might find!

The following entry that Honoria flipped to was stained with her blood. After reading through it, a smile formed on her face, and she reflected upon that fateful day that had filled her with dreams and determination.

September 3rd, 1419. Pirates have attacked my ship; luckily, the guards assigned to me could defend our vessel. So much so that we managed to board the pirate's ship and wipe them out! I was forced to take up arms during the conflict and have sustained minor injuries.

I have never felt so alive before! We plundered the pirate's cargo and stole the Caravel they used! It is mine now; I have my own ship! Maybe I will form a crew of my own and sail across the sea, targeting pirates and brigands for their ill-gotten gains!

I must thank Berengar for all the training he provided to me; I likely would have died in the conflict if not for him. I think I am ready to return home. Home? Is Kufstein my home now? I don't even know the answer to that

anymore; all I understand is that I have matured on this journey and now know what I want in this life.

After reading this, Honoria turned the page; this entry was blank; she had not journaled since the moment she decided to return home. Now that she was in Kufstein, she felt it was the perfect time to get her thoughts into place. As such she dipped her quill into ink before writing the newest passage to her diary.

September 15th, 1419. Over a year has passed since I first arrived in Kufstein; I can honestly say that even though there were times where I was miserable, it was a far better experience than being locked up in Constantinople.

I did not have the chance to meet with Berengar long enough to express my thoughts to him upon my return. However, he seemed to be generally happy that I was back. Considering we left on such bad terms, I was slightly afraid he would still be mad at me.

A little break is all that we needed, and some time to clear our heads. However, I am ready now; I will tell him everything there is to know about me tomorrow. I will be frank about who I am, where I come from, what I have become under his tutelage, and what it is I desire in life.

To be honest, I am quite frightened, but I will no longer live in fear of rejection; if Berengar accepts me, it will be for who I am! I am no longer that scared little Princess locked away in her father's palace. I am a sailor, an adventurer, and if Berengar thinks he can keep me locked up in his castle, like an obedient little princess, he is dead wrong.

The worst thing that could happen is Berengar rejects me; if he does, I will pay him back for his kindness with the wealth I have gained from the pirates and set sail for unknown destinations. I have no idea what crew I will form or how I will go about it, yet I know in my heart that adventure and glory wait for me!

After writing this, Honoria allowed the ink to settle before closing the diary and locking it shut. After doing so, she placed it within her underwear drawer and lay down on her bed. She would need a good night's rest if she were to talk

with Berengar tomorrow about everything she had come to realize over these past few months.

Chapter 268: Honoria's Confession

Berengar was within his study, it had been a year since Adela's birthday, and he had made significant progress in this time. At the moment, he was drafting a new form of Naval Law, one that would prove vital to the upcoming war with the Venetians.

There was no doubt about it, relations with the Republic of Venice had deteriorated to the point where war was inevitable, and frankly, Berengar did not have enough ships built yet to combat the threat of the Venetian Navy.

Thus he had a peculiar idea from his previous life in mind to combat the Venetian menace. As he drafted this legislation, he began to think about a particular candidate on his mind to fulfill the role. A bitter smile formed on his face as he reflected on his poor relationship with Honoria.

The past year his relationship with the girl had been strained. A year ago, she claimed she would tell him her identity, but the day never came, and the more he waited for the girl to be honest with him, the more his patience wore thin.

If not for the trip Honoria had taken, Berengar probably would have done something reckless. However, when she returned after several months of

absence, he felt as if the thing that had been missing from his life was finally fulfilled.

He knew now that he had feelings for the girl, even if their relationship was by no means healthy; he just wished the girl would reveal what he had long since found out about her. Though it was difficult, Berengar used his spies to procure the intel that the Princess had run away and was presumed dead.

Throughout the past year, Berengar's spies worked hard to track Honoria's previous journey through the Black Sea and the Danube to Kufstein. Despite knowing the truth, Berengar had still waited for the young Princess to reveal her past on her own terms.

The constant lies and the insecure jealousy she had shown when Berengar was with other women were part of why they had drifted so far apart. As Berengar thought about this, he drank from his skull chalice.

Shortly after taking a sip of the fortified wine, he heard a knock on his door, and as such, he got up and opened it to find Honoria standing in his doorway with a flustered expression. Before Berengar could say a word, she grabbed ahold of him and kissed him on the lips passionately.

Though startled, Berengar accepted the gift and instead took charge as he showed the inexperienced Princess how the art of kissing was done correctly. After a few moments of intimacy, Honoria broke apart from Berengar; she was fully blushing at this point and muttered beneath her breath in embarrassment.

"I love you..."

Though Berengar wanted to tease the girl, he decided not to and instead led her into his study, where the two sat down across from each other. He could tell that this was a much-needed conversation and decided to be serious about it.

Berengar poured Honoria a glass filled with the fortified wine and handed it to her before sipping on his own. The two of them drank in silence for some time before Berengar broke it.

"I suppose you have something you want to say?"

To this, Honoria responded; she took a deep breath before uttering the first thought on her mind.

"I haven't been entirely honest with you. My name is not Valeria, it is Honoria, and I am the Princess of the Byzantine Empire."

After saying this, Berengar merely stared at her with a stoic expression, which got on the Princess's nerves; she began to pout. Honoria had expected that Berengar would have a far greater reaction to such news; however, the way he was looking at her as if he did not care in the slightest irritated her, thus she began to voice her frustrations.

"Well? What do you think?"

Berengar placed his skull chalice on the table before revealing his thoughts to the young Princess.

"I know, In fact, I have known for quite some time. If I am being honest, I have been waiting for you to tell me, but you just never did, even after promising you would do so. I suppose that is one of the reasons why I grew so distant to you; I don't like being lied to by a girl I happen to fancy."

Honoria was slightly shocked, though she had suspected Berengar knew the truth about her identity on more than one occasion. She had always rejected such notions. Instead, she always thought that he was angry about her for lying about other things.

After calming herself down by drinking more of the wine, she eventually began to speak her piece.

"I have feelings for you, Berengar, even if we did not start on the right foot. However, I won't lie to you; I don't intend to stay trapped in Kufstein Castle for the rest of my life. I want to go out and explore the world and go on adventures.

You asked me a year ago what my dreams were, and I have come to realize it. When I was gone, my ship was targeted by pirates; due to your guard's assistance, we were able to repel them and even seize their assets. It was truly exhilarating; for the first time in my life, I felt truly alive!

I want a ship and crew of my own; I want to sail the sea and plunder the vessels of those who deserve it! However, I also want a safe place to call home, and a man to hold me and comfort me after I come back from a long journey at sea. I want that man to be you, but if you are intent on keeping me locked up as you plan for Linde and Adela, I can't see myself agreeing to that."

Hearing this, Berengar's lips curled into a smirk, the look on his face greatly dissatisfied Honoria, that is until the reason for it was revealed. Berengar handed the piece of paper he had been working on earlier in the day to Honoria while remaining completely silent.

When Honoria gazed at the document in her hands she was baffled.

"What is this?"

Berengar leaned back in his seat before explaining the details to the young Princess.

"It is a letter of marque and reprisal. Essentially I am looking for experienced sailors to attack and capture the vessels of the nations that I am at war with. You may not be aware of this, but conflict is brewing with the Venetians, and it won't be long before a fight breaks out.

I am not ready for this war; they have hundreds of Vessels and are cranking out their Caravels at a much faster rate than I can construct my frigates. So I need people like you, sailors who seek adventure and glory to work for me, and take care of my enemy, whether that be their naval or merchant fleets.

It sounds to me like the perfect job for you, do you agree?"

Upon hearing this, Honoria looked at Berengar with a gaze filled with affection and confusion; as such, she wanted to clarify what Berengar had just said.

"You want me to be a pirate?"

Berengar shook his head and corrected her instantly. To him, there was a distinction between a common pirate and what he was asking her to become.

"Privateer, essentially it is the same thing, but you have the protection of the Ducal Crown of Austria. You will fly my flag on your vessel and have the full legal authority to attack my enemies. However, you are forbidden from attacking neutral parties; if you do so, you will be branded a Pirate and suffer the same fate."

Honorina was shocked when she heard this. Such an idea did not exist until now, yet Berengar had essentially legalized piracy, at least to the extent of attacking his enemies. Which was more than enough to earn a fortune; if a war broke out with the Venetians, one could become exceptionally wealthy by attacking their shipping vessels. However, what Berengar said next shocked her even more.

"As for a ship, I wanted it to be a secret, but I have begun the construction of a sloop of war for you as a birthday gift, I know it is still a few months away, but I assure you this 18 gun vessel is far superior to that silly Caravel you have captured from those pirates."

Honorina gazed at Berengar with further astonishment; she instantly wanted to clarify the issue at hand.

"You know about my Caravel?"

To this, Berengar simply smirked as he responded in a haughty tone.

"Of course! Remember, my guards watched you the entire time; nothing on your journey happened that I don't know about. I protect my women, and I can't protect them if I don't know what trouble they might be in. As you can see, I am very supportive of your dreams, you can come and go from Kufstein as you please, and I will be here for you when you desire to see me. However, I have two conditions for all of this..."

The last part of Berengar's statement invoked Honoria's natural curiosity; as such, she asked the question on her mind.

"And that is?"

Berengar began to sip from his chalice, finishing the fortified wine in the process; after wiping his mouth with a napkin, he informed Honoria of his condition.

"As you are probably aware, I am a very jealous lover. As long as you promise to stay loyal to me, I will be more than happy to give you everything you desire. Of course, I would prefer if your crew was entirely comprised of

women. I would not be able to sleep at night worrying about your safety surrounded by a bunch of scoundrels.

As long as you agree to these terms, I will be more than happy to fund your adventures and give you all the support you need to achieve your dreams. So how about it, do you swear to be loyal to me as my woman and take up a crew of only women?"

Upon hearing this, Honoria began to giggle; After a while, she sighed heavily before calming herself down.

"You are such a hypocrite..."

To this, Berengar merely smiled before expressing his views

"Aren't we all?"

Honoria smiled and walked around Berengar's desk before sitting on his lap and kissing him passionately once more. After releasing herself from his grasp, she nodded her head and spoke her mind.

"Consider this my promise to you!"

Afterward, she began to strip Berengar's clothes while he removed her own. Before long, the two were enjoying the warmth of each other's bodies. As

Berengar took Honoria's virginity, he gazed down at sight with a smile on his face before speaking his thoughts.

"It is good to be the Duke!"

Chapter 269: Plans for Independence

After spending the night with Honoria, much to the ire of Linde, Berengar had successfully cemented his relationship with the young Princess of the Byzantine Empire; as for his plans for her identity as a privateer, he decided it would be best for her to keep up the ruse of Valeria Zoanara.

Berengar had even helped her create a convincing persona that others would not look into, the days of Lady Valeria of Antioch were long gone. Now Honoria pretended to be Valeria Zonara, an Orphan from Constantinople who grew up as a captive of pirates.

For the next few days, Berengar had spent much time with Honoria. Now that they were a couple, he wanted to show her some love. As such he spent a great deal of time with the girl, going on dates, and taking her to bed.

After a few days, Berengar got back to work; he had more important things to worry about. Thus while Berengar was working on expanding his navy to compete with the arms race that had appeared with the Venetians, Honoria was set to task recruiting an all-female crew.

She had decided to promise wealth and glory to young women and girls who were down on their luck, orphans, prostitutes, bar wenches, any number of ordinary women who dreamed of a better life than what they currently had.

As for Berengar, he was currently sitting in his study once more; while Linde was sitting in front of him with a scowl on her face. She was well aware of what Berengar and Honoria had gotten up to in the past few days, and she was displeased.

Until now, she had Berengar entirely to herself, and though she knew eventually Berengar would marry Adela and sleep with her, she wanted to hold onto the fact that she was Berengar's only partner for a bit longer.

Seeing that his lover was upset over the lack of attention he had given her over the past few days, Berengar began to tease the young woman.

"You know, dear; you could always join us... Nobody is preventing you from climbing into bed with Honoria and myself..."

By now, Linde thought there was no shameless thing Berengar could say that would make her embarrassed. However, when she thought of such a scenario, her mind went blank, and her porcelain cheeks began to flush red with embarrassment.

Seeing Linde was pondering the decision, Berengar merely chuckled before shifting the topic. Eventually, she would come around to the idea. Out of all of the girls Berengar had by his side, Linde was by far the most open to new ideas.

Even though he had not spent any intimate time with Adela and had just recently gotten to know Honoria in such a sense; he knew enough about their personalities that Linde would be the easiest to coax into group sex.? For now, he placed the document in front of Linde and smiled devilishly.

"Your sister Adelheid has proven exceptional in counter-intelligence. The Emperor's agents have attempted to infiltrate Innsbruck and sabotage the factories. Luckily she caught them before they could do any damage, and they have been interrogated extensively, confessing to their crimes.

I will have them publically speak of their crimes and pin the blame onto the Emperor and thus erode the confidence his vassals have in him. If he is willing to sabotage my factories out of fear of my rapid growth, then it has become apparent that the Emperor is my enemy.? A war for independence is inevitable, and I need to know that our Agents are up to the task."

Linde looked at the report. Briefly, she was already aware of the issue as the Director of Intelligence and thus gave an honest situation report.

"The Department of Intelligence has extended into Northern Italy, including Florence, where the Emperor resides. We can easily strike at him within his home territory. The real question is whether our armies are ready for war. I know you have 50,000 soldiers at the moment, nearly half a dozen vessels, and enough sailors and marines to arm them.

But a war for independence against the Holy Roman Empire would drag the Italians and the Swiss into the conflict. We have no allies; what exactly is the timeframe for this war of yours?"

To this, Berengar rose from his seat and walked over to the window, where he looked out upon the city he had created. After gazing into the distance for a few moments, he made his stance clear.

"It is not as simple as you make it seem. When the war in Bohemia ends, the entire Catholic world will shift its attention onto us regardless of who wins. When they do so we will be beset by all sides by enemies, and few allies to call upon.

To ensure our victory in the upcoming Crusade; My plan is twofold. First and foremost, we can take a preemptive strike against the Italians, and by extension, the Swiss. We can wage war for independence against the Holy

Roman Empire where we will destroy the Venetian and Genoan Navies while crushing the Italian and Swiss armies in battle.

If they are weakened before the Crusade is declared, we will have dealt with our two closest adversaries and have given ourselves a fighting chance..."

After hearing this, Linde straightened her back and put down her wine cup. She provided her earnest attention to Berengar before asking the question on her mind.

"What is the second part?"

Berengar sighed as he heard this and pressed his forehead into his palm.

Seeing that her lover was visibly stressed, Linde rose from her seat and approached Berengar's back, where she began to rub his shoulders. While she was doing so, Berengar stated the second part of his plan.

"As for the second portion, I will not lie; it is going to be difficult; as you know I am far from a skilled diplomat, and this plan requires effective diplomacy.

Essentially we would need to secure alliances with the enemies of my enemies.

In particular, I have my eyes on Iberia. Despite the ongoing Reconquista, the Catholic Iberians are a fiercely zealous people and would indeed send an

Army into Austria. To ensure that they are preoccupied, I will have to travel to Granada and gain the support of the Moors who live there.

This has its downsides, as such an action will only further justify the activities of the Vatican when they declare a Crusade against me, at least in the minds of the Catholics. Openly supporting the Moors against Reconquista will indeed invoke the ire of the Iberians.

However, the benefits of this action are not just a matter of keeping the Catholic Iberians occupied; building an alliance with the Emirate of Granada, who is inhabiting the Strait of Gibraltar, is crucial to my plans. As I will have a friendly nation in charge of the access to the Atlantic."

When Linde heard this, she was confused, she had no idea why Berengar would care about access to the Atlantic, but she did not pay more than a second's worth of attention to such a thing. Instead, she nodded her head in agreement.

What Berengar said had made sense to her. Berengar was always a big-picture kind of man; he constantly plotted ten steps ahead of himself. While Linde was thinking of the short-term consequences of a war with the Emperor, Berengar was already planning for the upcoming Crusade, which they both knew loomed over Austria and Southern Germany as a whole.

Linde ceased rubbing Berengar's back as he turned around and faced her, cupping her beautiful face in his hands as he soothed her worries.

"You asked me what the timeframe for my war for independence is? Within a year, I intend to have a Navy large enough to contend with Italy. By then, my Army will have grown significantly more, and I will not have to fear the combined might of the Swiss and Italian forces.

After we have crushed the Emperor and his allies, I will declare myself King of Austria, and in doing so, secure my independence. When that is over, I can hold my head high as I marry you, three girls, knowing that I am the sovereign of my realm."

Hearing Berengar speak of his grand ambitions always made Linde excited; few men would have the courage to stare down the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in a war of intrigue, while preparing for a full-scale military conflict.

Such boldness was attractive to Linde and affirmed her choice of partner. Even if she had to share Berengar with others, she did not mind; after all, Linde was convinced that one-day Berengar would become a figure remembered for all of history. In her eyes, it was better to be one of several

wives that belonged to an extraordinary man than the single wife of a great man.

With that said, Berengar had much to plan for and little time to do it. As such, he dismissed Linde before getting back to work; he would have his fun with her later in the night. As for Honoria, she was free to join the fun, though whether she would do so was another story.

Chapter 270: Preparing for a Journey

The Emirate of Granada, the last Muslim Kingdom in Europe; In Berengar's past life, fell to the Spanish in 1492; with the fall of Granada and having gained access to the Strait of Gibraltar, the Spanish hired explorers to set sail for parts unknown.

The results of this were the fact that a man named Christopher Columbus rediscovered the Americas after such knowledge was lost following Leif Erikson's expedition to Vinland. This discovery resulted in the expansion of European power and plenty of previously unknown resources finding their way into Europe.

However, in this timeline, the year is currently 1419, and the Emirate of Granda is still standing. Compared to its Catholic neighbors, it has been dramatically weakened from centuries of warfare. Despite this, things were about to change for the tiny Muslim Kingdom on the southern edge of Iberia.

Berengar had great plans in place for Granada. To put it simply the mighty Duke of Austria needed allies, and to him, the enemy of his enemy was his friend. Considering how zealous the Iberian Catholics were, it only made sense to make use of their longest-lasting enemy. As such, Berengar had prepared a trade envoy with his new merchant fleets over the past few months, making waves within the Emirate.

His intent was simple, establish diplomatic ties to the Emirate of Granada and arm them with sufficient weaponry. The purpose was to distract the Iberian

Catholics when the time came for the Crusade against the German Reformation.

After months of working hard to get the attention of the Grenada royal family, Berengar had finally caught their interest. At the moment, Berengar was seated on his Ducal Throne, where he read the letter in his hands.

This letter was from Sultan Hasan Al-Fadl, the current Sultan of the Emirate of Granada. This document addressed the desire to meet with Berengar in person, and upon reading its contents, a delighted smile formed on Berengar's lips.

After months of hard work, he had finally gotten the invitation that he craved. As such, he was eager to set sail as quickly as possible. Due to the diplomatic nature of the visit, Berengar would not be taking one of his frigates on his journey to the Emirate of Granada.

Instead, he would employ one of the many full-masted clippers he had designed for his merchant fleet. Such a ship was faster than any warship and would allow Berengar to safely reach the Iberian coastline even if he were pursued by hostile vessels.

After reading the letter Berengar raised from his seat, he knew his faults in regards to diplomacy. He was an incredibly prideful man who did not tolerate ultimatums or threats. To such things his usual response was violence. Due to his lack of ability in regards to diplomacy, he desired to bring someone along with him who could effectively nullify his naturally brazen attitude.

From what he knew, there was only one person he trusted to convey his best intent calmly and effectively. As such, he headed to his study, where he took out a piece of parchment and wrote a letter to a fifteen-year-old girl whom he had been neglecting for far too long.

The letter was addressed to Adela, and for the first time, Berengar planned to use her natural talents. As such, he sent the letter to his young fiancée informing her of the desire to take her with him to the Emirate of Granada to aid him in his diplomatic efforts.

It was also an excuse to spend some time with the woman who would become first among his wives. He quickly sent a letter explaining his circumstances and the desire to meet with her in Trieste, where he planned to sail with her to Granada.

After doing so, he immediately began to prepare for his excursion. The first matter of business was informing his two lovers of his departure. As such, he quickly left to find them; after searching around the castle for some time, Berengar found Honoria and Linde in his newborn daughter's room.

The two young women were playing with Hans and his little sister, who Linde had given birth to a couple of months prior. The little girl had a similar appearance to Hans, in so far that she had pale skin, strawberry blonde hair, and sapphire eyes.

The infant child was no older than two months and was being exceptionally doted upon by both Linde and Honoria; as for Hans, he had begun to act up because he was not getting the attention from his mother that he had previously acquired.

Hans had grown not only in body but in mind throughout this past year, he was over two years old now, and he was already beginning to read and write. He could speak in simple sentences and had displayed exceptional intelligence.

So much so that Berengar was beginning to question whether or not the boy was reincarnated like himself. However, he highly doubted such a thing for one simple reason. Despite the boy's high intelligence, he still behaved like a small child; he showed no sign of maturity and wisdom that a child with the memories of a past life would typically have.

So unless this kid was the reincarnation of an evil mastermind who decided to behave like a small child to blend in, then the likelihood of him being a transmigrator was slim. Still ever being the cautious man, Berengar kept a close eye on Hans and his behavior while he was able to do so.

After standing in the doorway for a few moments in silence, his two beautiful lovers finally noticed Berengar's presence and beckoned him over to their

side. However, the young duke merely shook his head before responding with his intentions.

"I will be journeying to the Emirate of Granada for a diplomatic visit. I will be gone for some time; I just wanted to let you know. "

Linde nodded her head as she heard this; she was aware of Berengar's plan to ally with Granada and was well prepared for his leave of absence. Honoria, on the other hand, stood up from her spot with sparkling eyes.

"When do we set sail?"

She had assumed that she would be tagging along, considering that she was an experienced sailor by now. However, Berengar merely shook his head before responding to Honoria's comments.

"I am not taking you with me. Though you have begun to improve your acting skills, it is far too risky for you to follow me to Granada. If the Sultan were to find out about your identity, it could cause problems. For now, you should focus on finding your crew members. I promise I won't be gone for long."

Upon hearing this, Honoria began to pout in silence. She felt that Berengar was leaving too soon after mending the rift between them; especially after they had finally become an official couple. Nevertheless, she felt pleased knowing that no other woman would be accompanying him, utterly unaware that Berengar intended to drag Adela along with him.

After informing the two young women about his plans, Linde was the one to bring up a critical point of contention.

"So if you are leaving tomorrow, then who will you spend your last night with before your trip?"

Honoria was also curious about this, and both of the girls gazed at Berengar with pleading glances. Upon seeing this, Berengar began to chuckle as he approached the two women and grabbed ahold of them each with one arm before dragging them into his embrace where he made sure to grab ahold of their bountiful breasts.

"Is it too much to ask for both?"

Linde began to blush and cast her glance to the side as she heard this; as for Honoria, she shoved Berengar away and crossed her arms before pouting. It would appear the girl would need more convincing before Berengar could coax her into a threesome. When faced with such difficulties, Berengar gave his decree.

"I guess I will have to go with Linde then; sweetheart, put the kids to bed, and then we can go have our fun."

After saying this, Linde began to do as instructed, and Honoria scurried off in disgust. She was leaving Berengar and Linde behind with their two kids. As Berengar watched Honoria's fine behind pass through the door, he called out to her.

"You know where to find us if you change your mind!"

However, Honoria said nothing in response to this and rushed towards her quarters. As for Berengar and Linde, they put their kids to bed before absconding to the bedroom, where the couple had their usual fun.

The next day, Berengar would travel to Istria to meet with Adela and set sail towards the Iberian coast. He had plenty of work cut out for him if he wanted to succeed in establishing an alliance with the Sultan.

One thing was sure; he could finally spend some quality time with his future wife. He was ashamed that he could not spend as much time with Adela when compared to the degree he spent with his lovers. Thus he looked forward to the upcoming diplomatic visit to the Emirate of Granada and hoped that Adela would too.