

Steel 331

Chapter 331: Cat Fight IV Part I

With the remainder of the Imperial fleet demolished at the Battle of the Adriatic, privateers, and pirates had free reign of attacking Imperial shipping. Honoria and her crew of salty wenches had made quite the fortune in attacking Imperial vessels and pirate ships.

Currently, several large wooden chests were lying about within the master bedroom of the Castle in Kufstein. These wooden chests displayed the vast wealth that Honoria had personally accumulated during her travels.

These chests were filled with Austrian Thalers and Guldens, and a large amount of them had spilled onto the bed where two beautiful young women lie naked, cuddling up to one another surrounded by wealth. These women were Linde and Honoria.

The two girls had long since gotten used to the feel of each other's bodies due to the many nights they had spent engaging in nightly debauchery with Berengar. The King of Austria had more than once joked about how he would kill them if they cheated on him with another man, but entertaining each other was acceptable.

After months without the touch of their man, the two had finally given in to their base instincts and entertained the idea that had been embedded in their brains by Berengar's sick sense of humor. The two women had just finished their fun and were now relaxing on the bed together.

Eventually, Honoria got up and began to dress; she could not stay in Kufstein forever, there was plenty of other loot to be had, and she was too embarrassed to look at Linde in the eye at the moment. However, Linde had no problem staring at the princess's voluptuous body, as he did so Linde immediately noticed that Honoria was having difficulty dressing in her undergarments, especially the bra.

Eventually, Honoria ripped the straps on her brassiere as she tried to force it on. She was immediately cursing as she did so.

"Goddammit!"

When Linde saw this she placed her hand over her mouth and giggled as she teased the young princess.

"Honorina, have you grown recently? I thought I noticed a difference in size earlier, but looking at you now, I think my suspicions have been confirmed."

Honorina glanced over at Linde, who still lay naked on the bed, where her cheeks immediately began to flush with embarrassment as Linde stared herein the eyes with an amorous gaze; rather than admit she needed to purchase new undergarments, she instead lashed out at her rival.

"Oh, like you're one to talk, Linde, what size are those cow udders of yours now? There's no way those things are still Ds!"

Linde crossed her arms under her breasts and showed them off to Honorina as if they were her crown jewels. With a sultry smile on her face, she responded to the young princess.

"I'll have you know they are now Es! Why are you so flushed? Do you desire to have a taste of mommy's milk?"

Honorina's face went from embarrassed to disgusted as she heard Linde say this, partially because she knew that just a few minutes prior, she had been sucking the milk from Linde's chest as if she were her babe. Apparently, Berengar was not the only one who enjoyed the taste of Linde's milk. Reflecting upon this, Honorina looked away and deflected the question.

"I need new underwear. Do you want to go shopping with me?"

Linde immediately got up from her seat and approached Honorina with a wicked smile on her face; the young spymaster had just thought of a brilliant idea. As such, she nodded her head while grabbing ahold of Honorina and dragging her into her embrace before whispering in her ear.

"I think the little wife has also grown a bit. Wouldn't it be fun to show the main wife just what she's competing with?"

It was no secret that Adela and Linde's relationship was tumultuous, to say the least; Linde much preferred the company of Honorina, and as such, she

desired to create an alliance with her against their biggest competition which was little Adela.

Honorina instantly understood Linde's intention; she responded with an equally malicious grin carved upon her immaculate lips.

"I think that's a splendid idea!"

As such, the two women began to kiss like Berengar had encouraged them to do many times while he shared his bed with the two girls. After breaking apart, Linde started to get dressed alongside Honorina. After they were fully clothed in the luxurious dresses that Berengar had purchased for them the two ladies gathered a pouch filled with coins that were spread about and walked down the staircase in an attempt to find Adela.

As per usual, the little Queen-to-be was playing the harp-like a flawless little angel. The very sight of her innocent appearance caused both Linde and Honorina to seethe internally. However, they masked their displeasure with friendly facades as they both approached Adela.

The moment the girl saw her two rivals approach with friendly smiles on their faces, she knew they were up to no good. As such, she ceased playing the harp and immediately scowled at the two wenches while she inquired about their reason for bothering her.

"What do you two want?"

Adela had recently turned sixteen, and she was counting down the days for Berengar to return from his war so that they could get married. Even though she tolerated Berengar's sexual activities with the two vixens before her, she was not exactly on the best terms with either Linde or Honorina.

She had some history with Linde, and as such, she was friendlier to her than she was to the Byzantine princess who showed up in Berengar's life and stole his heart out of nowhere. The unholy alliance between spymaster and pirate queen was something Adela had come to dread.

Though she did not know what Linde and Honoria got up to while Berengar was away, she knew at the very least they were close enough to service the young King together. Something Adela greatly disapproved of.

Seeing the young fiancée glaring at the two of them brought a sadistic grin to Linde and Honoria's pretty faces as they made their request to Adela. Linde was the first to speak as she had a better relationship with the girl.

"It is nothing much, Adela; we seemed to have outgrown our undergarments and intend to go shopping; we were wondering if you wanted to join us? After all, as Berengar's women, it is our duty to bond together!"

These words caused Adela to grit her teeth, she had recently bumped up to a C cup and felt that she could now compete with Honoria and Linde, but apparently, the two women were also growing still. She immediately lashed out to Linde about her massive breasts to cover her own insecurities.

"What are you, some kind of milk cow? How the hell are you still growing?"

Honoria began to giggle; she had asked a similar question just a few minutes prior. On the other hand, Linde feigned offense to Adela's comments; as if she were a perfect actress, Linde began to break out in tears as she manipulated Adela into coming along with them.

"There's no reason to say such mean words, little Adela, I just wanted to spend some quality time with you, and here you are making fun of my appearance. Do you have any idea how that feels?"

Adela sighed heavily as she heard this; she knew for a fact that Linde was pretending to hurt; after all, the woman had a hide as tough as steel, and yet, she still found herself swayed by Linde's charade.

"Fine, against my better judgment, I will go with you two. However, you better not play any tricks on me!"

In response, Linde quickly grabbed ahold of the girl and stuffed her into her bust as she petted her head.

"You mean it! Yay!"

After doing so, she released Adela and grabbed ahold of her hand before leading her to out of the castle and into the City below. The trio of beautiful young women was headed to a local clothing store that catered specifically to the upper-class women of Austria. It was a shop owned and operated entirely by women.

There they could get a proper measurement of their bodies without fearing Berengar doing something drastic like outright executing the tailor for touching them. As Linde and Honoria escorted the little Queen into town, Adela could not help but regret her decision.

She knew that someday, somehow, these two bitches were going to mess with her; she just did not know what exactly they had up their sleeves. Meanwhile, Linde and Honoria were grinning at one another; they could not wait to see the look on Adela's face when the two of them came out from the dressing room clothed in nothing but wedding lingerie.

They hoped it would show the little Queen just what she was going up against in their future polygamous marriage with Berengar. Whether their plan would work or backfire spectacularly had yet to be seen. Thus while Berengar was waging war against his enemies for the sake of independence, his future wives were having a war of their own.

Chapter 332: Cat Fight IV Part II

Linde and Honoria held onto Adela's hand as they dragged her through the entrance of the store embedded within the wealthiest area of Kufstein's trade district. The closer one got to the Upper-Class neighborhoods near the trade district; the more luxurious the shops became and the higher their prices.

At the top of the trade district, just a stone's throw away from the city's wealthiest neighborhood, was a relatively large clothing shop. This shop catered exclusively to the upper-class women of Austria, more commonly than not noblewomen. It was run by the younger sister of the previous Duke of Austria, and as such, the store was named "The Habsburg's Boutique."

As one of the last surviving members of the main Habsburg line, Duke Wilmar's younger sister Lyse had moved to Kufstein after the fall of Vienna during the Bavarian Occupation. She was a middle-aged woman who was quite beautiful despite her age.

Lyse was a widow without any children and had only managed to survive the von Wittelsbach's attack because she lived at her family's original residence in Habsburg, Switzerland, at the time of Duke Wilmar's invasion of Austria.

When she heard of her family's demise, she nearly died of grief, however news reached her of Conrad's survival, and thus she made her way to Kufstein to look after her young nephew. Unfortunately, by the time she arrived, Berengar had killed the little brat by pushing him out a window.

However, Lyse had no clue about the true origins of Conrad's death. Instead, she believed the stories that the boy had killed himself. Choosing to believe that the new Duke and current King of Austria was not the kind of man his enemies painted him as.

While in Kufstein, Lyse fell in love with the fashion designs that Berengar had come up with and used what little wealth remained of her family's assets to buy a shop. She exclusively dealt with products created by Berengar's garment factories.

Since opening her shop, she had amassed quite a small fortune and saw many young beautiful women buy her products. However, none were as beautiful as the three women who entered her store on this day.

While Linde and Honoria had visited this shop in the past, Adela, who lived in Graz until recently, had never entered the store. As such, Lyse, who was sipping out of a cup of coffee and gazing at the returning guests, was quite shocked to see a living angel such as Adela enter her shop. Among the other two women next to her, Lyse knew that the young blonde girl with twintails would one day be the most beautiful of them all.

Being well acquainted with both Linde, and Honoria the mature beauty graciously approached Berengar's lovers with the intent to inquire about who this little angel was.

"Linde, Honoria, it has been some time. I am glad to see you have returned to my humble shop. Tell me, who is this gorgeous young woman alongside you?"

The moment Linde and Honoria heard the old women refer to Adela in such a manner, they felt their stomachs churn; this was not exactly what they had in mind when they brought the girl here. Nevertheless, Linde put on a friendly facade as she introduced Adela to the shopkeeper.

"This is Lady Adela von Graz; she is King Berengar's fiancée; they will soon be getting married; as such, we have come to help her pick out some bridal lingerie!"

The moment Linde said this, Adela gazed at her with a shocked expression; she was not informed of such a thing; she thought they were simply there to buy regular underwear; as such, her ivory cheeks began to flush red with embarrassment.

Lyse was a wise, cunning old fox, and she could immediately tell that Adela was surrounded by two wolves who wanted to eat her up. Linde and Honoria may think they were good actors, but compared to Lyse, who had grown up in the Habsburg royal court, they were simply greenhorns when it came to such affairs.

Seeing that the future Queen of her country was in a rivalry with two formidable beauties, Lyse decided to give the little angel a helping hand. As such, she grabbed ahold of Adela and dragged her away from the other two girls while putting on a comforting smile.

"Come, child, let us find something that will bring out your inner beauty. By the time I am done with you, your husband will be happy to call you his bride!"

Adela could not resist and was instantly whisked away to a changing booth, the moment she and Lyse were gone from sight, Linde scowled, and Honoria bit her lip; the Byzantine princess was the first to protest the result of the plan.

"I didn't think the old hag would screw us over like this!"

Linde, on the other hand, simply snorted in response.

"Hmph, it doesn't matter how much help she gets from Lyse; that little girl still can't compete with us in terms of physique..."

While Linde and Honoria were waiting their turn, Adela was stripped naked and covered up in embarrassment. As for Lyse, she closely observed the girl's flawless skin and perky pink nipples. Though she was perfectly straight, even she felt the desire to gobble the young bride up.

However, she was a professional, so she quickly pulled out a measuring tape before getting down Adela's details.

"32C-21-32, you, my dear, are an absolute angel. Your fiance is one lucky man; you are perfect in every way!"

Adela immediately began to pout in response to the results. She was the smallest member of her family and the smallest among Berengar's wives; she did not care what the older woman had to say; nothing could make her feel worse about her physique.

The mature beauty noticed Adela's crumbling self-image and immediately decided to repair it, as such, the woman took matters into her own hands and spanked Adela on her soft bottom, snapping the girl out of her daze. Adela gazed at Lyse's eyes with fury embedded in her own; however, what the woman said next shook her to her core.

"You think just because those bitches out there are bigger than you, that you are somehow lesser than them? Trust me, sweetheart, bigger is not always better; when your man sees you on his wedding night, I promise you the only thing he will be thinking about is you. Those two whores are his mistresses, and nothing more, you are the Queen, and you need to show them their place!"

Adela was shocked to hear the woman speak to her in such a way, so much so that she gritted her teeth before expressing her thoughts.

"They're not just his mistresses; Berengar is going to enact polygamy; he will take them as his second and third wives..."

Lyse was quite shocked to hear this. However, she knew that Berengar was not an ordinary man, and as such, she chuckled lightly before responding to Adela's concerns.

"Has he told you that you will be his first wife? His Queen?"

Adela gazed up at the woman and nodded her head slowly; in response to this Lyse grabbed onto her shoulder and gave her a thumbs up.

"That's good, it means you're his number one, and those bitches know it. That's why they dragged you here, to make you feel bad about yourself. How about we show them who's really in charge?"

Adela tilted her head in confusion before asking for clarification.

"What did you have in mind?"

The mature beauty whispered her plan in Adela's ear, causing the little Queen-to-be to flush in embarrassment, however despite this reaction, she still nodded her head with firm resolve.

"Okay, let's do it!"

With this said, Lyse left the changing room and handed a slip of paper off to one of her subordinates. After doing so, she approached Linde and Honoria before asking the two girls.

"Who is next?"

Linde stepped forward before Honoria could jump at the opportunity and was dragged to the next changing room. Honoria began to pout. However, she instantly became furious when Linde looked behind and stuck out her tongue at the young princess.

Linde was quickly stuffed into the dressing room and disrobed; Lyse was shocked to see how much Linde had grown since her last visit and could not contain her thoughts.

"Good God, woman! What the hell are you eating to grow so much at your age?"

Linde had a smug expression on her face as she asked the mature shopkeeper the thought on her mind.

"What are my measurements?"

Though Linde had guessed that she probably had E-cup-sized breasts by now, she wanted to know precisely how splendid her figure was. Lyse did not hold back the information and quickly replied to Linde's requests; even if she lied to the young vixen, it was only a matter of time before she found out. The Director of Austrian Intelligence's web of information was no joke.

"34E-22-34"

a smug grin appeared on Linde's face as she quickly commanded the mature beauty to get her something to wear

"Fetch me some bridal lingerie; it won't be long before I have my own wedding, you know!"

Though Lyse wanted to say something to Linde, she chose not to and instead walked out of the changing room before handing another subordinate a slip of paper. After doing so, she grabbed ahold of Honoria and dragged her into yet another changing room before going through the same routine.

"33D-22-33, you're the same as Linde was a year ago. You three girls, I swear to God. Your man is either blessed by the Lord to snag up you three beauties, or the devil curses him. Only time will tell."

Honoria was far more pleasant than Linde and made a polite request of the old shopkeeper.

"Can you please fetch me some bridal lingerie?"

After hearing this, Lyse sighed and nodded her head. Afterward, she left the changing room and handed a slip of paper off to yet another subordinate. Before long, her three aides arrived with three sets of bridal lingerie from the store, two of them were the same design, but one was slightly different in nature.

The three sets consisted of a lacey bra, lacey panties, lacey garter belt, and lacey stockings. However, the one reserved for Adela was far more attractive than the other two; if angels were to wear lingerie, they would wear what the woman had prepared for the future Queen. As such, the woman handed the three sets to the three girls through their changing rooms, and eventually, they all walked out simultaneously.

Linde and Honoria were feeling pretty confident with themselves, and as such, they strutted out with style. Meanwhile, Adela was covering herself up as she walked out with red cheeks. Seeing the other two girls dressed in their beautiful attire made Adela want to die on the spot. She lost confidence after seeing Linde's massive bust heaving out of her pure white lacey push-up bra, with her perfectly toned plump ass displayed through her enticing g-string, which was covered by a lacey garter belt.

Honoria was dressed in a similar set of attire. Though her measurements were slightly smaller, her porcelain skin and white hair blended perfectly with the outfit, creating an exceptionally breathtaking scene.

Almost ready to admit defeat at the two succubi standing before her, Adela had a downcast expression with a small tear forming in her eye. However, at the next moment, she looked over and saw Lyse with an encouraging gaze, the moment she saw this, she remembered what the woman said.

She was the Queen and the primary wife and as such, she had to hold her head high; thus, her meek posture swiftly turned into one of majestic authority, and when she showed off her assets, the other two girls were shocked to see just how beautiful Adela was.

The primary difference between the lingerie worn by Adela and that worn by the other two girls was that Adela's was translucent, showing off her perfect ivory skin, her flawless pastel pink nipples, and pristine pastel pink slit. The moment Linde saw this, she knew she was defeated; while she and Honoria shared a similar skin tone to Adela, the girl simply looked like a living angel when combined with her golden blonde hair and sapphire eyes.

As such, Linde and Honoria struggled to contain their rising anger, they had never expected their plan to crush Adela's self-image to backfire so spectacularly. With a little beauty like her as the main wife, Berengar would

surely lose interest in them, at least to some extent. The two women would no longer have a monopoly over the man they loved, and they knew Adela was too much of a prude to share the wealth so to speak.

Given a few years when Adela fully matured, she was likely to be the most beautiful out of all of them, and that stung. Seeing the expressions on Linde and Honoria's faces, as if they had just witnessed their pet being murdered in front of them, filled Adela with pride; she had finally beaten these two harlots at their own game!

With this in mind, the girls quickly got changed back into their old attire and did not speak a word to one another as they scrambled to buy enough new underwear to last the test of time. Their shopping spree quickly became a battle to acquire the sexiest wardrobe to appease their man and his tastes. While the War for Austrian Independence was soon coming to its climax, the war for Berengar's heart was far from over.

Chapter 333: Are you interested now?

Linde was sitting within her favorite tea shop, which had begun to sell the remarkable substance of coffee; sitting across from her was a man from the East that she knew pretty well. A downcast expression was on the man's face as he shifted his eyes to his surroundings, making sure that he had not been followed.

After realizing that the place Linde had chosen to discuss critical matters was secure, he let out a heavy sigh of relief. Following this, Andronikos took a sip from his coffee mug before revealing the thoughts that had plagued his mind over the past few weeks.

"Arethas is dead..."

Linde, who was about to take a sip from her coffee, immediately paused as she heard this; she was well aware of the tragic fate of the once-mighty Strategos of Ionia; after all, her intelligence network had sprawled across the Mediterranean and into the heart of Constantinople.? She wore a compassionate expression on her stunning face as she began to speak to the man across from her.

"I am sorry for your loss, but these things happen in warfare; it is because of this that I pray for the safety of my husband every day."

Andronikos was aware that Linde and Berengar were not married, and as such, he rolled his eyes at Linde's words before leaning in close and explaining his suspicions.

"He didn't die on the battlefield like your agents have reported; he was murdered in cold blood by his troops!"

Linde had already taken a sip of her drink when Andronikos said this; the moment she heard such a shocking revelation, she began to choke on the creamy brown liquid. It took a few moments for the stunning beauty to recover her composure; as she did so, she whispered to the man across from her in a hushed tone.

"Do you have proof of this?"

Andronikos sighed and shook his head before revealing his cards.

"No, only the word from a loyal soldier who claims to have witnessed the event, however before I could get my hands on him and find out the truth of the matter, he disappeared. Whoever killed Arethas is someone with great power in the Empire and does not want the truth of his death to be revealed."

Linde sighed heavily as she heard this; if what Andronikos said was true, there would be some difficulties with their relations to the East in the upcoming future, as such, she took a bite out of the pfeffernusse cookie that was sitting on her napkin before washing it down with coffee. After doing so, she began to inquire about Andronikos' reason for visiting.

"Let me guess; you want my agents to investigate the death of Arethas?"

Andronikos nodded his head in silence; as usual, this beautiful young woman was two steps ahead of him; when Linde saw his response, she put on a stoic expression as she began to negotiate with the man.

"What does the Austrian Crown have to gain from such an action? If what you say is true, then somebody powerful, somebody with close ties to the Imperial Family, is responsible for Arethas' death.

As outsiders, if our investigation is discovered, we could easily be framed for his death; at the very least, whoever is behind this horrendous act would make sure that relations between Austria and Byzantium weaken because of this. Do you even have a suspect in mind?"

Andronikos struggled to come up with a response to this question. Eventually, he only said one word, the man's identity, who he believed to be the perpetrator.

"Decentius..."

When Linde heard this, she was pretty surprised; after all, as far as the intelligence she received showed, all of the Emperor's children were extremely close with Arethas, especially Decentius. If the second prince was responsible for the Strategos' death, that meant something serious had to have occurred. With this in mind, Linde naturally began to investigate Andronikos' claims.

"Why would Decentius betray Arethas? As far as I know, the man was practically a father to the Second Prince."

When Andronikos heard this, he immediately began to back up his claims with his reasoning.

"Decentius was tasked with finding the missing Princess; after he failed to do so, he fell from the good graces of his father, and by extension, those who were backing him in his attempt to gain the throne.

If he could not locate a simple runaway, then how could he properly run the Empire? Or so was the thought of the people backing him. He needed a grand achievement to recover the losses that Honoria had caused him, and as such, he took credit for the North African Campaign; the only way to do so was to kill off Arethas, take Cairo for himself, and rewrite the narrative!"

When Linde heard this, she stared at Andronikos with disbelief; such a plan was quite foolish, after all, there would undoubtedly be witnesses to

Decentius' betrayal, but then again, when she took into account all of the foolishness that Lambert had engaged in with his attempt to depose Berengar she began to realize that maybe second sons were simply idiotic by nature.? She contemplated these words for some time before revealing her thoughts on the matter.

"Let's say that all of this is true, and Decentius is as big as a fuckup as Lambert; you still haven't answered the most important question of all."

Andronikos looked at Linde with confusion as the woman calmly took a sip from her coffee cup. When Linde saw this, she sighed before repeating her question from earlier.

"What does Austria stand to gain from investigating Arethas' death?"

When Andronikos heard this question repeated, he felt quite wounded; he had always thought of Linde and Berengar as friends of Arethas and his household. He never expected the woman before him to act so coldly in response to the news he had brought her. As such, he sighed heavily before once more checking his surroundings to see if anyone was listening in on them; after confirming that nobody could hear them, he leaned over and whispered in Linde's ear.

"I know you are harboring the Princess. I also know that Berengar has taken quite a liking to her. Tell me, is she pregnant yet?"

When Linde heard this, she was shocked to the core. After all, she and her Intelligence Agency had gone through great lengths to cover up any information regarding Honoria's identity. However, Linde was a professional, and as such, she maintained a calm facade as she responded, despite her heart beating rapidly.

"I have no idea what you are talking about..."

In response to this, Andronikos leaned back in his chair with a broad smile on his face. Though Linde was convincing, to the point that he almost believed it

himself, he was on good authority that the Byzantine Princess was one of Berengar's lovers. As such, he demonstrated his knowledge thoroughly.

"White hair, pale skin, mint green eyes, gorgeous appearance. She's going by the name Valeria Zonara now. Or is it Valeria Melodia? After all, maintaining the appearance of a pirate queen and a Byzantine noblewoman is not something that can be done with a single identity."

When Linde heard this, she knew that Andronikos was not simply bluffing; as such, she inquired about his source of knowledge.

"How did you know?"

Andronikos chuckled as he heard this before responding to Linde's question.

"You are not the only one with an extensive spy network, Sweetheart. I'll admit you covered your tracks well; I almost didn't believe it at first, if it weren't for the fact that Arethas had written me a letter about his regrets regarding the Princess, informing me of the conversation he had with her the last time he saw her, then I would have never suspected you, and Berengar to be involved."

When Linde heard this, she sighed heavily before admitting defeat; as such, she inquired about Andronikos' intentions.

"So you intend to blackmail us into supporting your cause?"

When Andronikos heard this, he was genuinely offended; as such, he put down his coffee and sat up straight as he revealed his offer to Linde.

"The thought honestly never crossed my mind; I am not your enemy Linde, you should know that by now. What I offer you is something mutually beneficial to our two realms. There are men in the Empire, powerful men, who are not fond of either Decentius or his older brother Alexius.

Don't even get me started on the youngest of the Emperor's sons. In the simplest terms, he is a lustful drunk who is more interested in hedonism than ruling the Empire. He would turn the palace into his personal brothel and bring

an era of decline upon Byzantium. With this in mind, my supporters seek an alternative option for the succession crisis we currently face. "

When Linde heard this, she scoffed at Andronikos' statement.

"So what? They want to put Honoria on the throne?"

In response to this, Andronikos shook his head and revealed his true intentions.

"Not even close, but the son of the King of Austria and the only Byzantine Princess? That is an appealing concept to my new master. You may not realize it, but your so-called husband has caught the attention of the entire world.

Annexing the Swiss Confederation? Allying with Granada? Creating a bunch of proxy wars so that the Church has its hands full? Those are some bold moves. We have been watching the West's wars for some time now; the dominance Austria displays under Berengar's rule is unreal. If left unchecked, I would not be surprised if a new Empire forms in the West, rivaling that of Rome.

What your husband does in Europe is of no concern to our Empire, and my backers want to make a lasting alliance with your man. After all, we are sure that our two realms are better off as partners than as enemies. Of course, the faction backing the other two Candidates views Austria as a threat, especially now that it has a powerful navy; they will stop at nothing to prevent your rapid growth.

With the help of the men behind me, we can convince the Emperor to make Honoria one of Berengar's wives; after all, his intentions of legalizing Polygamy have become quite apparent. When she gives birth to a son, he will rule the East one day, while Berengar's heir will rule the West.

By helping us investigate Arethas' death, you also help your husband create a powerful ally. As for what you personally gain from this, isn't it obvious? You gain the upper hand in the war for your husband's affection. What do you say? Are you interested now?

Linde thought about it for several moments in silence as she gracefully sipped down the rest of her coffee. After careful consideration, she made a decision, as such a pretty smile formed on her face as she declared her intentions.

"Alright, I'll play along..."

Chapter 334: Papal Woes

Deep within the halls of the Vatican, Pope Julius was sitting upon his papal throne. As he did so, he held his head within his hands. The man was so thoroughly enraged that he felt like he was about to suffer an aneurysm. The war between the Holy Roman Empire and the newfound Kingdom of Austria had turned into an enormous disaster.

To calm his nerves, Julius breathed in and exhaled a few times; as he did so, he made a snarky comment about his current condition.

"So this is how Valentinian felt right before he died?"

This was a reference to the ancient Roman Emperor who had gotten so irritated that he suffered a stroke and thus quite literally died of anger. No matter how much the Pope tried to calm his nerves, he could not help but think of the setbacks that the Church was currently facing due to Berengar's rapid rise to power.

The Italians were swiftly being pushed back to Florence, which was the seat of Imperial Power, and the Swiss Confederation had surrendered, becoming annexed by the Austrians in the process. Due to this fact, between ten and twenty thousand Austrians would be heading to the Italian theater of war to crush the Italian Army thoroughly.

The pillar of Papal military power was the might that the Holy Roman Empire possessed. Only now did the Pope realize the mistakes that he had made when the Hussite Wars broke out. He should have sent the Catholic Armies into Austria the moment he was able to do so and route out the avatar of Satan that was King Berengar von Kufstein.

King? What gave him the right to call himself that the Pope did not crown him, and as such, Julius did not recognize the legitimacy of Berengar's newfound

title. Regardless of this alleged illegitimacy, Julius could not deny that Berengar had truly outplayed him.

Berengar had done the unthinkable and used his neighbors and allies as a proxy to hamper the Catholic Kingdoms and their military might. In doing so, he had pretended to be at peace but instead was preparing an Army the likes the world had never seen before.

Not just an Army, but a powerful enough Navy to challenge the Holy Roman Empire and its vassal states on the Mediterranean. Before the Italians could even respond to Berengar's Navy, the demon had sent his Armada to eradicate the majority of their fleet. This attack was launched without warning as the vessels were docked in their two most important port cities, crippling the massive fleet they had built up in preparation for the war.

All of these things made the Vicar of Christ, of all people, question his faith in the Lord God almighty. Was Berengar not the serpent in the flesh? Was he actually an envoy of God's will sent to deliver Christendom from the corruption that had consumed the Roman Catholic Church?

If not, then how could Berengar triumph against his enemies over and over again without suffering? Such thoughts plagued the mind of the new Pope, who had to inherit the mess his predecessor created.

"Damn you, Simeon! Damn you to the depths of hell! What kind of monster have you provoked against our faith!"

Julius could not help but curse the previous Pope who was forced to vacate his position after the disaster he had caused in the German Realm. While the Germans slaughtered one another for a meaningless title, Bohemia was in an even worse state.

With each passing day, the Hussites gained further ground within Bohemia. Somehow, recently captured Hussite arms had made their way into the hands of murderers and thieves, causing the Bohemian people to lose faith in their King.

"Radek, what the hell are you doing!?! King of Bohemia, and yet you can't prevent your soldiers from selling captured rebel arms to a bunch of brigands! Bah, you don't deserve your title."

Despite being alone, Julius could not prevent himself from venting his frustrations in the darkness surrounding him. If one were to enter the chambers, they would see a lonely old Pope sitting on his throne in the dark, cursing at people who were hundreds or even thousands of miles away.

If there was one good thing that had happened during this time, it was the fact that the Emirate of Granada had recently been suffering setbacks in their war with the Iberian Union, that, and the fact that various designs of the so-called Arkebuse and Musket had been captured by the Papacy's allies, and thus brought to them for reverse-engineering.

Indeed God was testing his patience, but it would all be worth it when they finally managed to figure out how Berengar's weapons worked. Once they did, they could gather together a grand army of Crusaders the likes the world had never seen before and march on Austria with the weapons that Berengar had created.

It was not just matchlocks and flintlocks that the Church had acquired, but Falconets too. Compared to Berengar's defenses, such cannons were severely obsolete; it did not change the fact that they finally had access to more sophisticated artillery. Maybe they could even produce a gun based upon the one-pounder falconet that was scaled up in size?

Undoubtedly Berengar had received the visions of such designs from Satan himself! Despite the demonic origins of these devices, the Church had no choice but to employ them against their greatest enemy, for if they continued to attack Austria in the same manner that they had been conducting warfare, there was only one outcome; utter defeat!

Like it or not, Berengar was right when he said the era of Knights and Chivalry had come to an end. If only they could get their hands on one of Berengar's vessels, maybe they could figure out how such things functioned and then be able to reproduce it. Unfortunately, such an outcome was unlikely to occur.

As the Pope was dwelling upon such possibilities, a Cardinal entered the great hall, where he immediately approached Julius with a letter in his hand.

"Your holiness, we have received word from the Patriarch of Constantinople!"

When Julius heard this, he looked up from the ground where he had been staring at and into the eyes of the Cardinal. As he did so, he scoffed before insulting his equal to the East.

"So that coward finally responds to our demands! It took him long enough; tell me what exactly is the response that Petrus has given us?"

The Cardinal shifted his feet in anxiety while gazing down at the stone floor; after a few moments of silence, Julius raised his voice before giving him a command.

"Speak!"

Upon hearing the anger in the Pope's voice, the Cardinal instantly blurted out the words contained in the letter.

"The Patriarch of Constantinople has declared that the Orthodox Church will not be sending us aid in our efforts to crush the Berengar Heresy and has openly declared the so-called German Reformation as a legitimate branch of Christianity. By decree of Emperor Vetranis, the Byzantine Empire expresses support for the Kingdom of Austria and recognizes its legitimacy..."

The moment the Holy Father heard this, he felt as if his brain were about to explode; he stood there in silence for a few moments as his face twitched with wrath. Never in a million years did he think that his allies in the east would stab him in the back like this.? After well over a minute had passed, the Pope broke out into a fit of rage as he cursed the Patriarch of Constantinople.

"Excommunicated! That damn bastard and the entire Orthodox Church is henceforth excommunicated and damned to the depths of hell for all eternity! Fucking Apostates! If you side with Heretics, then you shall be treated as such!"

The Cardinal was surprised by this response, and he quite honestly felt it was unjustifiable. However, he held his tongue. Knowing the stress that the Pope had been going through with the difficulties the Church was facing at the moment was enough to convince the Cardinal from invoking the Holy Father's ire any further.? As such, he bowed his head and responded obediently to the Vicar of Christ

"I will prepare a public announcement. If you are going through with this, then a schism between our two Churches is unavoidable. I hope you have thought this through..."

With this said, the Cardinal swiftly left the room fearing retaliation for his words, leaving the Pope Alone in the dark, who once more sat upon his throne. After the Cardinal had left and silence prevailed within the Great Hall of the Vatican, the Pope began to grind his teeth before cursing once more.

"Berengar von Kufstein, if you had known your place and submitted to the Church, you may have been spared, however for what you have done and what you will do, you can never be forgiven. Even if it is the death of me, I will bring you to your knees and restore the authority of the Vatican over Christendom!"

Chapter 335: Ghost Town

Nearly a month had passed since the swift victory in Milan, and Berengar's army had waited for reinforcement and resupply before marching on the City of Parma. At the moment, the Jaeger Corps had a few hundred men issued with the new Schmidt Needle Rifle, though the ratio of men armed with the Needle Rifle and the traditional muzzleloading Jaeger Rifle was roughly 1:3

As for the rest of Berengar's army, they were still outfitted with the 1417/18 Rifled Muskets. However, compared to the enemy they were facing, such weapons were more than enough to massacre any army they would encounter.

The Jaeger Corps had done their jobs and led the way to Parma; in doing so, they encountered little resistance. It became increasingly apparent that the Italian soldiers still in the field had begun to disobey their orders and flee from the lost cause that was their war with Austria.

At the moment, the City of Parma could be seen in the distance. However, something was noticeably lacking in Berengar's mind as he gazed through his binoculars into the distance. Upon the city walls, as far as he could tell, there were no defenders stationed on the ramparts.

This was quite shocking, as every City was supposed to have a garrison defending it, especially in times of war. Yet, the more he observed the walls, the more he found them vacant of any form of military presence. With this in mind, Berengar gave an order to his Colonel Dietrich of the Jaeger Corps.

"Send a few of your men to scale the walls and see what they can find out about the current situation within the City. Have your other men cover them from the tree line!"

With this said, Dietrich nodded his head before giving his most elite troops the orders. Some might consider this a suicide mission, but Berengar did not want to walk into a trap. As for the rest of his army, they immediately became alert and fixed their bayonets in preparation for the event of an ambush.

Corporal Lach and his squad were the ones deployed to scale the wall; despite having the assurance that they were being protected by the elite marksmen of the Jaeger Corps, they still felt a sense of gut-wrenching anxiety as they rapidly approached the walls.

However, by the time they arrived at the base of the City's defenses, they had not been fired upon by the defenders or the lack thereof. Therefore, they quickly pulled out their grappling hooks tied to hemp rope and tossed them onto the ramparts above.

After checking to see if the rope was secure, the men slung their rifles over their backs before climbing up the rope and onto the ramparts above. The moment they did so, they quickly equipped their weapons and searched for any sign of hostility; however, they were utterly and genuinely alone atop these walls, which greatly confused the small squad of Jaegers. As such, the squad leader immediately gave the order to his soldiers.

"Pull out your binoculars and survey the city; see what you can find!"

With this command given, the squad of Jaeger's did as instructed; however, when they looked down at the City below, they were shocked at what they saw. There was not the slightest sight of occupation within the City. Throughout the entirety of Parma, there was not a living soul to be found.

It was as if the residents of the City had just abandoned it overnight, which was shocking to the soldiers. After inspecting the town within the walls for some time, the Squad Leader issued another command.

"We will repel down the walls and open the gates, be cautious; this might be a trap!"

The various soldiers beneath the Squad Leader's command, including Corporal Lach, nodded their heads before doing as instructed. After reaching the ground, they unslung their rifles once more and performed a proper sweep of the street leading to the gate.

Despite this, they indeed found nobody within the City's walls. As such, they suffered no resistance when they finally opened the Gates. When the gates opened and the Jaeger soldiers within waved the flag of Austria, Berengar was deeply concerned.

Not a single gunshot had echoed in the distance as the men entered the City. Despite this, the city gates were opened effortlessly, and his Jaegers appeared utterly unharmed. Berengar could not fathom what game the Italians were playing, but considering this, he decided to investigate. With this in mind, he gave a command to his officers, who relayed his orders throughout his massive army.

"We will enter the City's gates, but be on alert; this may very well be a trap!"

After hearing their orders, the Austrian Host advanced into the abandoned City in an attempt to thoroughly investigate just what was going on. After approaching the City Gates, Berengar began to speak with his Jaegers, who were the first to enter the scene.

"Status report!"

Immediately the Squad leader saluted the King before reporting what he knew about the current situation.

"Your Majesty, we have observed the city for some time with our binoculars to find not a single trace of habitation, either everyone is quietly hiding within the walls of the city, or it has been completely abandoned!"

Upon hearing this, Berengar was shocked; even for a small city like this, it would take some time and effort to withdraw every living being from within and relocate them entirely. Though they had waited roughly a month for reinforcements to arrive, it still seemed unlikely that every citizen had fled the City in such a period of time as such Berengar gave his decree to the army.

"Tear this city apart; I want to find out what has happened here; remember, this still might be a trap!"

With this in mind, the Austrian soldiers began to kick down every door in the City where they searched for people, wealth, or clues as to what had transpired. Because the City had been rapidly evacuated, many things of value were left behind, and as such, Berengar and his army could acquire some degree of wealth to bring back to Austria.

However, the most crucial form of intelligence came from a letter left within a house. Berengar's spies occupied this small structure. In doing so, they were forced to vacate the City with the rest of the civilians. Before they did so, they left a letter to inform the Royal Austrian Army when they arrived as to what had transpired within the City and others like it across Northern Italy.

The Emperor had made a decree that all cities and villages on the path to Florence must be evacuated, where its people would seek refuge within the capital's mighty walls. The reality behind this decree was that Emperor Balsamo Corsini intended to arm every citizen capable of bearing arms to fight against the Austrian invaders.

A wicked smile curved itself upon Berengar's lips as he read the contents of the letter. He could not help but voice his thoughts aloud in a voice so low that only he could hear it.

"So, you seek to follow the fate of Carthage? Do you desire for me to exhaust my army as I spend months or years at a time trying to force my way through every corner of your capital in an attempt to route you out and secure victory?"

Sadly you have made a grave error... No, my dear Emperor! I have much grander plans in mind for the City of Florence. If God truly exists, then I do not doubt that he will judge me severely for what I am about to do.

Unfortunately, you have left me no choice. I will not send my army into a meaningless death. However, I assure you, your City will be the grave of every soul contained within! You have brought this upon yourself!"

With that said, Berengar pulled out his lighter and lit the letter aflame. After doing so, he waited for his army to gather the wealth left within the City of Parma's walls. Once they were finished, he sent a small convoy to deliver the goods to Austria's treasury.

As for the rest of his Army, Berengar had chosen a course of action and decided to march directly onto Florence. The war was coming to an end, and Berengar chose to waste no further time sacking the cities within his path; after all, the fortune of the Medicis was far greater than anything he could gain from within the walls Bologna.

As for how he would choose to deal with the City of Florence, only time would tell. However, one thing was sure; he would not allow his soldiers to march into the Capital of the Empire and engage in a brutal struggle to take every corner of the City from the fierce resistance of the Italians.

Chapter 336: Siege of Florence Part I

Since Berengar and his Army had departed from Parma, over a month had passed, various siege camps were set up encircling the City of Florence where the Emperor and the Medicis resided. The Austrian's encampment greatly resembled an elaborate trench line straight out of the pictures from the Great War during Berengar's previous life.

During this time, nobody was allowed to enter the city. However, Berengar had successfully exfiltrated his agents trapped in the town. It took some effort, but they were retrieved from their position without incident before the Austrian bombardment had begun.

After retrieving his agents, The Royal Austrian Army's cannons fired off shells at an arc, landing over the city walls and into the city, bombarding the inhabitants within. With the hundreds of thousands of people who had evacuated to the town of Florence, Berengar knew it was a matter of months before their food supply dwindled and the people began to starve.

While the siege of Florence continued; back in Kufstein, the war industry had spent day and night producing as many Needle Rifles and their paper cartridges as possible to supply the Austrian war effort, as such thousands of these rifles were now in the hands of the frontline soldiers who rested in the mud as their extravagant blackened steel armor was coated with the substance, covering their armor and attire in an earthly brown.

For the past three days, it had been raining non-stop; for the rear echelon soldiers who were still issued the flintlock rifles, they could only keep their weapons dry under the thatched coverings of the vast trench line. As for the men with Needle Rifles, they stayed in the front lines, ready to fire on any potential targets that might sally forth and attack their ranks.

Despite the weeks of constant bombardment, the city still stood, resisting Berengar's armies until the bitter end. As such, Berengar had taken a relaxed approach and had begun writing letters back home to his loved ones. It was a way to entertain himself during this protracted siege.

The echoes of hundreds of cannons continued to go off as Berengar wrote with his ink and quill to his beloved Adela, who he knew to be staying in Kufstein. The years had gone by since he was first engaged to the girl, and she was now of the proper age to marry.

With this in mind, Berengar wrote to his little fiancée, expressing his desire to return home from the field and finally take her hand in marriage. She was his fiancée, his Queen, and the first among his wives, and nothing could change that fact.

While he was writing a love letter to his woman, a knock on the roof of his in-ground quarters resounded throughout the room. Berengar looked over to see one of his officers, clad in the renaissance style attire, standing at attention.

Berengar, dressed in an equally garish fashion, albeit covered in dried mud, stood from his seat and returned the salute to the soldier. The moment he did so, the Officer began giving his report.

"Your Majesty, the bombardments are continuing as planned; by now, half of the city should be in ruin. I believe it is only a matter of time before they surrender!"

Despite this report, Berengar did not seem optimistic; on three separate occasions, the enemy army had rushed their trench line over the past month. The result was a complete and utter slaughter of the Italian forces.

With the relatively rapid-firing Needle rifles capable of functioning even in adverse conditions, the one advantage that the Italians would typically have over the Flintlock firearms have was now moot. However, the number of needle rifles among his ranks was still significantly less than his entire infantry. As such, the Italians had at times inflicted casualties upon Berengar's ranks by the sheer volume of bodies they were able to field.

Generally speaking, they would attack during days like this. Days where the weather prevented the bulk of Berengar's forces from firing their weapons. They would appear in the tens of thousands and overwhelm Berengar's ranks through reckless charges.

While the man was giving his report, a bell rang throughout the trench line; this bell signaled the enemy attack. As such, Berengar quickly grabbed ahold of his helmet before placing it upon his head. After doing so, he grabbed his needle rifle and loaded a cartridge in its chamber.

Once he was complete with his actions, he gave a smug look to the Officer who had moments ago predicted the Italians surrender before making a wise-ass remark.

"You were saying, Colonel?"

The expression on the man's face turned sour as he heard Berengar's words; he truly believed the Italians would realize that the cause was lost and would surrender. Unfortunately for him, that was not the case, and now they were being thrust headfirst into another battle.

With this in mind, Berengar exited his quarters and climbed up into the muddy trench, where he began to rush towards the area of conflict. For Berengar, this was most likely the last opportunity he had to fight a battle with relative safety.

After all, the Austrian weapons were so advanced that Berengar could fight on the frontlines with mitigated risk to his safety. As such, he decided to spend one last hurrah on the battlefield before becoming a commander who forever sat at the rear of battle.

Having arrived at the frontlines, Berengar and the soldiers around him lowered their weapons and aimed at the oncoming Italians. Like last time, there were well over twenty thousand men and adolescent boys charging at the Austrian trench, utterly devoid of armor and at most held a spear in their hands.

Berengar did not know what propaganda the Emperor had filled in the heads of his people to have them fight without regard to their lives. However, it truly did not matter. At the end of the day, these men and boys alike were enemies, and they had to be dealt with. The Italian attacks always came in the form of waves, targeting specific trench lines; as such, the thousands of Austrians capable of firing in the raining weather were spread out and vastly outnumbered.

The moment Berengar spotted an Italian man at a distance of roughly a thousand yards, he squeezed the trigger on his needle rifle, sending a projectile downrange and into his bare chest, blasting it apart.

The men gazed in horror as he was shot at such a distance before falling to the ground lifeless. Before the body had even hit the ground, Berengar reloaded his needle rifle by pulling the bolt up and back, where he instantly placed a paper cartridge within the chamber before slamming the bolt home.

While he was doing this, several other of his soldiers fired their weapons into the ranks of the oncoming enemy. If it were not for the barbed wire in the field halting the Italian Advance, they would have reached the front lines by now.

Thousands of guns echoed at the front line as hundreds of Austrian soldiers from the other trench positions rushed towards Berengar and his troops for reinforcement. While reinforcements struggled to arrive, Berengar once more

fired his rifle towards the enemy as the .451 caliber projectile pierced through the skull of a boy no older than fourteen.

Berengar rapidly chambered his next round; however, when he pulled the trigger, all that could be heard was an audible click. With paper cartridges, the malfunction rate was roughly one out of every fourteen rounds; as such, he pulled back the bolt before reaching for his clearing rod, which was attached beneath the barre. After getting ahold of the device, he stuck it down the bore of the rifle and knocked the faulty cartridge loose.

Having done so, Berengar put the clearing rod back in its place before reaching into his web gear, where he retrieved another paper cartridge and chambered it into the rifle, where he pushed the bolt forward. After doing so, he aimed and fired another round, only to miss his target by a mere inch.

The lead alloy projectile embedded itself in the man's shoulder rather than his torso. Though painful, it was not a mortal blow. Before long, the Italian Army had suffered massive casualties, as half of their forces were gunned down during their suicidal charge, but this did not deter their actions. Instead, they ran into the trench line where the Austrian soldiers unleashed their bayonets onto the enemy.

Luckily for the Austrian soldiers, these enemies were mere peasant levies quickly drafted into combat at a moment's notice, they had no armor, and thus the Austrian blade-style bayonets easily pierced through their torsos, sending them to the afterlife.

Berengar himself quickly caught an oncoming spear and redirected it with his rifle before lunging forward and piercing his bayonet through the man's heart. After seeing the life fade from the man's eyes, the young King ruthlessly ripped it out and attacked the next hostile.

This battle continued until eventually the Italian Army of nearly 20,000 men was repelled; as the survivors ran back towards the relative safety of the city's walls, they were gunned down by Berengar's men who fired upon their retreat, claiming the lives of nearly all of the men who attempted the suicidal charge.

Seeing that they were victorious, Berengar let out a sigh of relief before clearing his rifle and taking off his helmet, resting his slicked-backed golden

hair against the muddy wall of the trench. Combat was truly and utterly exhausting. Despite being victorious in this large skirmish, the Siege of Florence was far from over.

As Berengar rested against the wall of the trench line, with rain falling heavily upon his handsome face, he could not help but think of his plans for the future after this war was over. When he had finally defeated the Empire and gained his independence, he would usher in the early stages of the age of Steam. He had honestly waited long enough.

Chapter 337: Siege of Florence Part II

After that day where Berengar and his Army had fought off the Italian Charge, things went back to their usual pacing. The rain finally dispersed, and soon the muddied trenches dried up, allowing the Austrian soldiers still issued flintlock rifles to use their weapons properly.

Rain was replaced with snow as winter soon fell upon the city of Florence, and thus the Austrian Army was now dressed in its winter clothing, who were struggling with each day to endure the cold and harsh life of sustaining a large term siege while living in a trench.

Another month had passed, and during this time frame, the Italians had seldom made an advance; despite this, the Austrian Army continued to shell the city every day for several hours at a time. If not for Berengar's established supply routes, and the empty cities behind him, he would have had a hard time maintaining the number of shells needed to bombard the town.

The thunder of the guns echoed off as the hundreds of cannons alternated fire, ensuring that a battery was fired nearly every second during the time frame Berengar had set for bombardments. Seeing how the artillery pieces were elevated at varying degrees, the projectiles flew over the walls and into the city below. The citizens within Florence found their homes destroyed, and their lives were taken during this process.

In fact, by now, Berengars army had fired hundreds of thousands of shells into the city. He was beginning to wonder if there was anyone left alive within Florence. After all, it had been some time since the Italians had rushed his position. If not for the roughly three years spent preparing for this war, Berengar likely would have run out of munitions ages ago.

At the moment, Berengar was within the rearmost region of the trench line, where his quarters were built into the ground. He was shaving, as it was now light enough out for him to do so. The straight razor cut at the hairs growing on his face and neck as he began to break out into laughter.

If one were to observe him, it would appear as if he had gone mad. Still, Berengar was currently reminded of an incident from a particular science fiction franchise from his previous life where soldiers bombarded a city for years after everyone inside was long dead.

Having nearly cut his throat while laughing at this prospect, Berengar quickly calmed himself and finished the task at hand; after doing so, he decided he would check to see if anyone was alive within Florence. As such, he cleaned himself up before grabbing ahold of his burgonet, where he placed it upon his head. He then grabbed his needle rifle and exited his quarters, where he entered the trenches.

Within the trenches, it became apparent that the men within had endured quite a bit of difficulty over this past two months of siege warfare. However, it was nothing compared to the poor souls who suffered through the great war from his previous life. After all, Berengar's Army was not subject to bombardment by the city's defenders.

Eventually, Berengar made his way to the mess constructed for his General officers to dine in. Seeing them eating their morning supply of breakfast brought a smile to Berengar's face; the moment they saw the King arrive, they jumped up from their seats and saluted him, where Berengar immediately responded with the command.

"At ease."

After the men relaxed, Berengar approached the General tasked with leading his five artillery Brigades and began to discuss his newest plan.

"I think it is about time to bring down the walls. Have your brigade within our trench line focus their fire on the Northern wall until it crumbles; I'd like to see if there is anyone left alive in the city."

After hearing this order, the General nodded before responding.

"Yes, your majesty! I will relay your orders immediately!"

With that said, Berengar nodded in approval, thus dismissing the man where he ran off to inform the Artillery units of their new orders. Shortly after that, the bombardment had begun once more, as the shells whistled in the air and exploded onto the northern wall. While this Barrage had begun, Berengar had given the infantry Generals new orders as well.

"Prepare our soldiers; we are entering the city. The time has come to conclude this war and secure our independence. For glory and fatherland! God with us!"

After hearing this, the infantry Generals jumped up in response as they saluted Berengar.

"For King and Fatherland!"

Afterward, Berengar dismissed them, where they began to muster the Army that had spent the last two months living in the trenches, waiting for this very moment. After roughly an hour, the northern wall had collapsed, and with it, the city of Florence, or what remained of it, was revealed.

Berengar stood at the front of his Army with his sword drawn as he gave a brief but rousing speech.

"Let today forever be known as the day that Austria gained its independence from the Empire! Whatever difficulties you may face, know that Austria stands behind you! God with us!"

Thousands of men instantly echoed the Austrian battle cry as they began to advance. The sight of tens of thousands of Austrian soldiers emerging from the trenches with their rifles in hand and their bayonets affixed as they charged towards the ruined city was indeed one to behold.

Berengar allowed the Army to pass him by as he took a rear position in the Army; the days of him charging into the front lines of war had long since passed. Though he might take an offensive role in the trenches, he would no longer be the first to storm a city.

Thus he followed the Army from the rear as they breached through the gap between the northern walls only to see a scale of death and destruction he had never witnessed before. After months of bombardment and hundreds of thousands of shells dropped into the city, few buildings were left standing.

Most of Florence had been crumbled into debris, and the people within the city walls were either torn apart by the explosive shells or crushed to death by the collapsed buildings. Month-old corpses littered the streets as they festered and rotted.

Berengar now understood why the Italians had not sent a force to attack his line in weeks. The reason was simple; there was no one left to send. Despite the utter destruction brought upon the city of Florence, Berengar's Army was as always professional. As such, they cautiously cleared the streets while marching upon the Imperial Palace, and more importantly, the Medici bank.

Every so often, the soldiers of the Royal Austrian Army would clear through debris and find a few citizens hiding within their cellars, assuming their house had one. Many of them had long since died of starvation; others had managed to survive, potentially through drastic measures. However, these shell-shocked survivors offered no resistance to the Army that had brought death upon their lands.

Berengar personally led his troops into the now ravaged Medici Bank; not a single soul was left alive within the structure, though it had been hit by shells and collapsed in some areas; by the grace of God, it had mostly survived the massive bombardment that Berengar had unleashed upon the city.

Berengar slowly walked through the halls of the bank with a calm and collected expression on his face. He was flanked by his Grenadiers, who guarded him cautiously. Eventually, he reached the vault where the Medici fortune was contained, where his soldiers used TNT to breach the entrance.

After entering the vault, Berengar gazed upon the massive hoard of gold and silver coins stacked as high as the ceiling. Berengar never imagined the Medici wealth to be so grand; gazing upon such a vast stockpile of gold and silver flipped a switch in Berengar's brain.

Gold was a substance like no other; compared to the material strengths of steel, it was a far less practical metal. However, the effect it had on a man's mind was like no other. Seeing such a massive pile of gold coins gathered in one place that was potentially greater than his fortune made Berengar break out in mad laughter. After nearly a minute of laughter, Berengar began to cough heavily before calming himself down; after doing so, he uttered a few words.

"To think that the Medici wealth was so much more than I was led to believe... Truly, it is a fortune to rival that of Mansa Musa, and now it is all mine! With this wealth, I can transform the Austrian economy into the greatest the world has ever seen!"

Seeing the manic expression on Berengar's face and the words he had spoken filled his guard with a slight sense of trepidation; however, eventually, Berengar recovered before giving out his orders to the Grenadiers.

"Guard this treasure trove; once we have finished securing the city, we will haul it all back to Kufstein, where it will be melted down and reminted into our currency!"

With this said, the vast fortune of the Medici Family had found its way into the hands of the von Kufstein Dynasty, and by extension, the Kingdom of Austria. With this Wealth, Berengar would use it to stimulate his economy and break the stagnation that it had begun to suffer due to the limited quantities of the precious metals that he severely lacked until now.

Though Berengar was unaware of what fate awaited the Medici family, whether they were killed off from the bombardment or fled the city, leaving their fortune behind, it did not matter. One thing was certain The vast wealth of the Medici Bank that had once funded the Catholic Church was now acquired by their greatest enemy. Due to this fact, the church's ability to wage war against Berengar was crippled for years to come, buying him several years of much-needed peace to industrialize his Kingdom and its military.

Chapter 338: The Holy Roman Empire Surrenders

After securing the Medici Bank and its vast fortune, Berengar personally led his troops to the crumbling Imperial Palace, which was Emperor Balsamo Corsini's personal home within the City of Florence. Much like the Medici

Bank, only parts of the building were collapsed; however, it remained intact for the most part.

The Austrian artillery was more trained than Berengar had initially thought; In contrast, he had given them instructions to spare the Medici Bank and the Imperial Palace. He never thought they would manage to achieve it.

Nearly everything within the City had been completely obliterated, with few exceptions. Berengar was quite impressed with how effective his artillery was, despite its primitive nature. He could only imagine the destruction he could cause if he were equipped with more modern equipment like rifled breech-loading cannons.

Berengar thought about this as he strolled through the ruins of Florence. The roads, the houses, the public baths, the cultural icons, everything within the City had been smashed into ruin by the overwhelming bombardment of artillery shells that Berengar had launched onto the City over the past couple of months.

So much so that Berengar felt saddened, not for the loss of life, but the destruction of history that had occurred in such an ancient and magnificent City. Though he was not a historian by trade in his past life, he was highly knowledgeable on the subject and had a passion for it. To see his war cause such devastation to the City that was supposed to play a prominent role in the Renaissance nearly brought a tear to the young Monarch's eye as he marched ever closer to the Palace.

Eventually, Berengar reached the crumbling steps of the dilapidated Imperial Palace; upon closer inspection, it seemed to be in a very fragile state, so much so that he felt it could collapse at any moment. With this in mind, he sent his soldiers in to investigate the building before he entered.

If the Emperor were wise, he would have fled to the wine cellar, as that was his best chance of survival; as such, Berengar's troops quickly advanced through the building, making sure each room was clear of potential hostiles.

They did not find a single living soul within the upper levels, though there were a few corpses of guards and servants that the collapsed parts of the building had crushed. Yet, none resembled the description of the Emperor.

Eventually, Berengar's soldiers found the entrance to the cellar; it was a long staircase that led some ways underground; as such, the unit sent a soldier out to inform Berengar of their discovery. The young soldier was clad in the basic blackened plate armor, with the flashy attire beneath it. However, it had been thoroughly stained with grime from the months of trench warfare that the man had endured, and as such, His uniform looked as if it would blend in with the mud.

"Your Majesty, the building is clear, aside from the cellar. With your permission, we will breach its entrance and see if we can find any sign of the Emperor and his family."

Berengar silently nodded his head as he followed the soldier back inside, where he gave the order to the Veteran Grenadiers who made up his Bodyguard.

"If the Emperor and his family are still breathing, I want them captured Alive. As for any other survivors? Do whatever you feel to be necessary!"

After saying this, an entire squad of grenadiers went down the staircase. Shortly after, Berengar began his descent, where along the way, he heard gunshots resound from the cellar below. With this in mind, he quickly made his way into the basement, where he found the Emperor and his family cowered in the corner, their last bodyguards lying dead on the ground, bleeding from the bullet wounds that tore their chests apart. They were shot dead by the Austrian Grenadiers. As such, Berengar quickly asked for a status report from the squad leader.

"What happened here?"

The Grenadier instantly saluted Berengar before describing the events that had transpired mere moments before.

"We came into the room as we were ordered; immediately upon entering, the guards rushed at us with their blades, so we gunned them down! Do not worry, your majesty the Emperor and his family has been spared."

Upon hearing this, Berengar remained silent as he nodded in affirmation of the Grenadier's actions; after doing so, he slowly approached the Emperor,

who was kneeling while shivering in fright like a small child. Berengar proceeded to stand in front of the man with a wicked grin on his face. Every word uttered by Berengar came from a position of overwhelming strength as if he were bullying the weak.

"Emperor Balsamo Corsini, I must say, this is the first time meeting you in person, and yet I am dreadfully underwhelmed. I thought for sure a man of your position would have the courage to stand before me, yet here you are kneeling like a cowardly child.

Allow me to make things simple for you, Your armies are broken, your capital is in ruins, and your wealth now belongs to me. You have nothing left! This is the result of your actions and yours alone! My demands are simple, the Kingdom of Austria shall henceforth be an Independent Nation, and the Empire will recognize its legitimacy. You shall also recognize Austria's annexation of the Swiss Confederation.

Everything North of Rome and Sardinia shall henceforth become the Kingdom of Lombardy and will be established as a protectorate beneath the suzerainty of Austria where they will provide a tribute to their new masters in the form of currency and raw materials. They shall be allowed a standing army of no more than 10,000 soldiers to act solely as a means of Defense.

Malta will be ceded to Austria, where all current residents will be evacuated from the island and returned to the Italian Mainland. As for the rest of Italy, it will remain in the hands of you and your Dynasty, and you are free to do as you wish with it, under the stipulation that your Empire refrains from attacking my Kingdom for the next five years.

You are to pay us reparations in the form of Gold and Silver worth a total of 1,000,000 Austrian Guildens. This, of course, is on top of the wealth we have seized from the Medici Bank and the cities we have since plundered. I expect this to be paid to Austria within a hundred years."

The demands that Berengar had made were excessive. For instance, the reparations alone would account for over 30 tons of gold. In Berengar's past life that would be worth over a billion US Dollars, with a limited amount of Gold in Europe in 1421, the sheer volume of payments Berengar was asking from

the Holy Roman Empire was enough to ensure that the Empire was in debt to Austria for a hundred years or more!

However, despite the insane demands that Berengar had forced upon him, the Emperor was in no position to reject them. His army was utterly annihilated, and his capital was in ruins. If he resisted, the only thing that would happen would be his death; one way or another, Berengar would get what he wanted.

As such, the once-mighty Holy Roman Emperor nodded his head in defeat, agreeing to the terms presented. At this moment, the Holy Roman Empire had officially surrendered to the Kingdom of Austria. The War for Austrian Independence was over, and with it, significant changes were about to occur within Europe.

However, at the moment Berengar could not care about such matters; his attention was needed elsewhere. As such, he and his troops departed from the Palace; in a few days, he would sign an official peace treaty with the Emperor where all of his terms would be written in the contract.

Berengar returned to the Medici Bank and watched as his troops began to haul the substantial amount of gold and silver out of the bank and into supply wagons; it would take weeks, possibly even months to transport all of this wealth back to the Austrian National Treasury in Kufstein. As such, Berengar would leave behind an army of 25,000 men within the ruined City of Florence to ensure that the gold and silver were successfully transported back to Austria.

While Berengar's soldiers spent the next few months ensuring the assets gained in the war completed their journey, the young Monarch would depart for Kufstein immediately after the treaty was signed. With the war over, The young King had essential matters of State to attend to.

Austria had gained a sizeable amount of land and wealth from this conflict. Berengar had also crippled the financial backing of his greatest enemy and ensured that his southern rivals could not attack him for a period of five years.

With these gains, Berengar fully intended to utilize the time and resources he had acquired in this war to bring forth the fires of industry. When he finally

returned from Florence, a new age would await the young Monarch. The era of Steam and Steel was about to descend upon the newly found Kingdom of Austria.

Chapter 339: Reunited at Last

The War of Austrian Independence finally ended, and to nobody's surprise, The Kingdom of Austria was overwhelmingly victorious. After the siege of Florence that left hundreds of thousands of Italians dead, Berengar successfully signed a peace treaty in the ruined city.

Those few who were fortunate enough to survive the bombardment would have to deal with Austrian occupation until the total wealth of the Medici Family was transferred back to the Austrian Royal Treasury.

As for Berengar, he returned home immediately after the peace treaty was signed between himself and the Holy Roman Emperor. Today was the day he returned to the city of Kufstein, and when he and his soldiers entered the town, they were shocked to see that a large ceremony had been organized in the streets to welcome the Heroes of Austria back to the Capital.

Berengar waved to the crowd on horseback as he stood at the front of the formation, leading them through the city's gates and into the walls. Women from all walks of life had gathered to toss flowers at the feet of the returning veterans who had given their all for a free and independent Austria.

Eventually, Berengar's army or at least those souls who came from Kufstein reached the city's center, where they broke ranks and returned to their homes. As for Berengar, he approached the walls of the newly constructed Royal Palace of Austria.

After several years of construction and several iterations in designs, the new home for Berengar and his family was finally finished. The result was a massive palace based upon the creation of the Sch?nbrunn Palace from Berengar's previous life.

Over the past few years, Berengar's grand architectural designs had shifted from the style of the renaissance in nature to that of Baroque. This included not only his Palace but also the Grand Cathedral that was nearly complete.

In Berengar's past life, Baroque Architecture was created in the early 17th Century by the Catholic Church in an attempt to combat the growing reformation. Berengar thus decided that in this life, he would use the Catholic Church's tactics against them.

Thus all of his major Architectural feats, such as his Palace and the Grand Cathedral of Kufstein, and Adela's efforts to introduce cultural centers such as concert halls and art galleries were now being constructed in the Baroque style.

After gazing upon his finished mighty Palace, a smile appeared on Berengar's lips as he passed through the gates handled by a unit of his grenadiers and pressed onwards into the Palace Grounds.

After arriving at the fountain in the front of the yard, Berengar noticed Honoria was sitting upon its edge, skimming the surface with her hands; she was not dressed in her usual practical attire. Instead, she was clothed in a mint green and gold dress. She was dolled up in a decent amount of makeup which highlighted her natural beauty.

Heraclius, her pet eagle, was perched upon the Princesses shoulder and glared at Berengar as he entered the scene. When Berengar saw one of his women who he had had not been with for some time, he hopped down from his mount and approached the girl who had not yet noticed his presence.

It was only after Heraclius cawed at Berengar that Honoria shifted her attention from the magnificent fountain to that of her lover, who was standing a few feet away from her. She was well aware that Berengar would be arriving home today and thus had waited for him in the palace gardens for well over an hour.

After seeing her man, clad in his armor, returning home from the war as a conquering hero, Honoria could not contain her pent-up desire and rushed into Berengar's arms, where she immediately planted a kiss upon his lips.

Unlike Linde and Adela, Berengar had worried about Honoria's safety while she was away. However, she was unaware, he had spies embedded on her ship who constantly watched over her, and as such, Berengar was always aware of the battles she had fought and the effect she had on the war effort.

Despite her immense success in the art of privateering, Berengar never stopped worrying about Honoria's safety. With this in mind, he eagerly accepted her embrace as he began groping at her chest, shoving his hand through the exposed portion of her dress and wrapping it around her substantial bosom. Honoria did not resist in the slightest.

Meanwhile, Heraclius hopped off Honoria's shoulder and perched himself upon the fountain, where he shifted his gaze from the passionate display that the couple was engaging in. At this moment, Berengar noticed Honoria's breasts were bigger than they used to be, and as such, he whispered in her ears the following words.

"You have grown since our last encounter; I can't wait to see what you look like under that dress!"

Though Honoria was eager to show off her improved figure, she was unfortunately not able to do so as after Berengar had said these words, the couple who were immersed in each other's presence heard a sound from a mere few feet away.

"Ahem..."

This immediately caused Berengar and Honoria to break up their intimate gestures and search for the origins of the sound. Adela and Linde were standing nearby where Berengar's little fiancée was pouting with her arms crossed, while his other lover smiled with a sultry expression. She, too, wanted to join in on Berengar and Honoria's fun. Unfortunately, Adela was present, so she would not have the ability to do so.

Noticing his two other women standing nearby, Berengar shamelessly walked over to Adela and picked her up in the air, swinging her around before planting a kiss on her luscious pink lips. After placing her down, he said the words he knew she wanted to hear the most.

"Adela! I missed you so much!"

Though Adela was still furious that Honoria was the first to greet Berengar upon his arrival, she was no longer mad at him for allowing himself to be taken advantage of. After seeing the cute expression on Adela's face, he

patted her head before walking over to Linde, who was biting her lip in jealousy.

He immediately grabbed ahold of her and tucked her into his embrace; However, it was far from comfortable due to the massive amount of steel that covered his upper body; still, Linde enjoyed the hug, where Berengar planted one hand on her plump bottom before kissing her as well.

It was only after this that Berengar noticed Henrietta was standing nearby; she was dressed in a pastel pink dress with gold accents and was staring at Berengar with a sheepish expression; despite being nearly fourteen at the moment, the girl was still shy, even around her brother.

As such, Berengar let go of Linde and patted Henrietta's head before hugging her. As he did so, Henrietta flushed with embarrassment before whispering in a voice so low Berengar almost didn't hear it.

"Welcome home, big brother..."

After releasing Henrietta, a broad smile spread upon Berengar's lips as he gazed off into the distance at the massive Palace that had been constructed for himself and his family. As such, he made a suggestion to the four young women around him.

"Shall we head inside? I very much wish to get out of this clunky attire and witness my new home for myself!"

The four girls all nodded their heads silently before they followed Berengar into the house. Heraclius stayed out in the garden as he watched the small party depart for the building; he shook his head as he did so before taking off in flight. Where he would go and what he would do while his master socialized with her lover and rivals would remain unknown.

When Berengar and the girls finally entered the Palace, they reacted with different expressions; However, the girls had been living in the exquisite Palace for a few weeks now; it was Berengar's first time witnessing such a grand display of luxury in person.

He had seen pictures on the internet of various European palaces in his past life but never had he stepped foot inside one of the magnificent abodes himself. Now he had one of his own, and it was indeed everything he expected it to be. The level of detail that went into its construction did not go unnoticed.

As such, he spent some time searching every corner of the mega-structure before finally making his way to his room, where he stripped out of his armor and put on some more comfortable attire. After months of brutal warfare, he was finally reunited with his loved ones, and he fully intended to enjoy the moment. After dressing in some comfortable clothing he spent the rest of the day with his lovers and his sister.

As for what occurred in the night, that was left between Honoria, Linde, and Berengar. Despite being of age, Adela chose to wait for her wedding night until she gave her chastity to the man she loved. To a religious girl like her, some things were sacred.

Chapter 340: Coronation of a King Part I

Nearly a fortnight had passed since Berengar had returned home from the War for Austrian Independence. After securing a complete and total victory over the Empire, Berengar and his armies had completely shocked the European world with their brutal efficiency during the conflict.

Not only did Bernegar secure a flawless victory on Land, but he even managed to annihilate the massive armada that belonged to the Kingdom of Italy and its vassal states on the sea. However, Berengar did not care about the reputation of cruelty he had gained after his immense success during the war.

Instead, he spent the last few weeks preparing for a significant occasion, one that would mark the beginning of a new Age in Austria and its Vassal State. The coronation ceremony of King Berengar von Kufstein was finally at hand, and Berengar had invited every prominent nobleman in the Kingdom of Austria and his allies from the East and West.

As the weeks passed, his visitors had arrived in the hundreds, and now the day for his ceremony had come. At the moment, Berengar was entertaining his guests in the Great Hall of his new Royal Palace. The degree of luxury

within Berengar's new abode put every other Monarch's home in the western world to shame.

Berengar drank from a chalice filled with fortified wine to entertain his friend and ally Sultan Hasan Al-Fadl. They had traveled from Granada to attend the coronation ceremony of his partner to the east.

At the two Monarchs' sides were a string of beautiful young women; Berengar was flanked by his lovers and younger sister. On Hasan's peripheral were his two wives and his older sister Yasmin. They were all dressed in the formal attire of their countries and quite luxurious clothing at that.? Hasan was the first to speak as he introduced his gorgeous older sister to Berengar.

"My friend, it is good to see that you are finally a Monarch in your own right; you are truly deserving of such a position. Allow me to introduce my beautiful older sister Princess Yasmin Al-Fadl. I believe I have mentioned her to you in the past, yes?"

Berengar was stunned when he saw the woman standing before him; she was dressed in a Tyrian purple kaftan embellished with gold embroidery; she also wore a matching face veil that was translucent as such Berengar could roughly see the outlines of the woman's pretty face.

While enamored with the foreign beauty, Berengar did not notice Adela and Linde glaring at him with murderous intent; as such, he grabbed ahold of the woman's hand and kissed it before speaking to the woman.

"Princess, it is an honor to make your acquaintance."

The foreign beauty smiled beneath her veil before Berengar released his grip over her hand. She, too, was quite attracted to the Austrian King. She had heard much from Hasan about his ally to the East, and until now, she had hardly believed her brother's words.

While Adela and Linde were glaring daggers at Berengar from behind, Honoria observed the color of the woman's dress. The young Princess from Byzantium was quite enamored with the Tyrian Purple kaftan; after all, she had acquired and sold an ample supply of the expensive dye for a small fortune.

For some time, she had some difficulties with the hair powder treatment that she had been using to disguise her appearance; to put it simply, it was not the most resilient form of masking when it came to water. However, seeing the beautiful color in front of her, Honoria suddenly got a brilliant idea about dying her hair with such a luxurious substance.

After all, she was in actuality royalty and had garnered the nickname of Pirate Queen by the enemies of Austria during her tenure as a privateer. Would it not make sense for her to dye her naturally chocolate hair to a deep Tyrian purple? Unlike the other girls, she honestly did not care that Berengar's eye had been gazing upon the massive bosom of the foreign beauty who was in their presence.

However, the awkward scene of Berengar's first meeting with the Princess of Granada abruptly came to an end as Emperor Vetranis of the Byzantine Empire made his way through the Great Hall to greet the soon-to-be-crowned King of Austria.

After stepping into the fray, the Emperor of Byzantium boldly approached Berengar as a fellow monarch, but more importantly as a man whose realm was deeply in debt to Berengar. Thus he put on a respectful appearance as he greeted Berengar.

"King Berengar von Kufstein, I have wanted to meet your acquaintance for some time now. Allow me to introduce myself; I am Emperor Vetranis Palaiologos of the Byzantine-"

However, the man's words were instantly cut short as he gazed upon the white hair beauty standing next to Berengar. Though the young woman's hair color was different, and she was more physically mature, there was no mistaking it; this woman was his long-lost daughter, who had until now been believed to be dead. As such, the proud Emperor of the East began to break out into tears as his voice cracked.

"Honoria!?! Is that you?"

This sudden revelation shocked the Court as they gazed over at the white-haired beauty from Byzantium, who they all knew by the moniker of "Valeria Zonara, the Pirate Queen of Austria."

Honorio's angelic face seemed shocked as she saw her father standing before her; the man did not appear to be vengeful in the slightest as he gazed upon his runaway daughter. Instead, he seemed to be filled with disbelief.

As such, she struggled to find the words, fearful that her father would drag her back to Constantinople. Berengar, of course, feigned ignorance to this fact. It was best not to reveal that he knew of Honorio's identity this entire time. As such, he stood by silently with a shocked expression, despite being the architect behind this father-daughter reunion.

Berengar had specifically invited the Byzantine Emperor for two reasons; one was that the appearance of the Eastern Emperor at Berengar's Coronation spoke volumes about the legitimacy of his title. Secondly, it was now time to advance his plans with the Byzantine Empire as a long-term ally.

After all, Berengar had become aware of Linde's agreement with Andronikos and his mysterious backers. Thus he was not afraid of making his play. After several moments of silence, Honorio rushed over to her father and gave him a big hug.

"Father! I did not expect to see you here..."

The entire Great Hall was silent as they heard this news; straight from the Pirate Queen's mouth, she had admitted to the fact that she was the runaway Byzantine Princess. Vetrans struggled to cope with this news as he grasped ahold of his errant daughter. It took him a few moments to come to his senses before he asked the flurry of questions on his mind.

"Are you alright? Why are you here in Kufstein? Did anything happen to you?"

After hearing this, Honorio broke away from her father's grasp, where she put on a friendly smile before assuring him that she was ok.

"I'm alright father, without King Berengar's kindness, I would be dead, or worse by now..."

Hearing this news snapped Vetrans back to reality, and he instantly made his way over to the Austrian King with a look of fury on his face.

"You bastard! You kept my daughter here this entire time, and you did not once notify me that she was alive! Just what are you planning!?!"

However, before Vetrans could take a swing at Berengar, his arm was dragged away by a pleading Honoria. She could instantly tell by the shocked facade that Berengar and the others were putting on that they planned to deny knowing her true identity. As such, she quickly played the part.

"You're wrong, father; King Berengar was ignorant of my true identity. I told him I was a noblewoman from Antioch! All he has done is show me kindness!"

While Honoria played the part well, only one man in the crowd was unconvinced of her charade, and that was a particularly powerful nobleman from the Byzantine Empire. Though Berengar had no way of knowing it, this man was one of the backers of Andronikos. He had journeyed with the Emperor to Kufstein to assure that the scheme to place Berengar and Honoria's son on the Byzantine Throne went smoothly. As such, he quickly came to Honoria's defense as he approached the enraged Emperor.

"Your Majesty, I know you are currently conflicted, but think about this rationally. I mean, just look at King Berengar; he seems just as baffled as you are about this whole situation. I suggest we discuss these matters in private after the Coronation has ended; after all, you are making a scene..."

After hearing the advice from his counsel, Vetrans looked around. Where he saw that the entire attention of the Great Hall had been shifted to him, and his outburst, as such, the Emperor coughed before speaking to Honoria in a more friendly tone.

"I expect a proper response from you about what has happened since you foolishly decided to run away and what exactly the nature of the relationship is between you and this man!"

With that said, the Emperor withdrew from Berengar's presence and left the Great Hall; for now, he needed some time to think things through, and the advice of his counsel would play a role in how he treated this new

information.? The mysterious noblemen who calmed the Emperor's wrath approached Berengar before bowing respectfully.

"I apologize for the Emperor's behavior; since Arethas' untimely death, he has been a bit on edge. I hope you can forgive him for his violent outburst on this special day of yours."

With that said, Berengar nodded his head in silence while observing the man closely. After seeing the King of Austria's reaction, the mysterious nobleman raised his head before departing.

"If you will excuse me, I believe it is my job to counsel the Emperor when he is distressed. I assure you, whatever is the nature of your relationship with our princess, I will ensure that the Emperor accepts it."

After saying this, the man followed after the enraged Emperor of Byzantium, leaving Berengar and Honoria in a confused state. Honoria gazed at Berengar with tears forming in her eyes, that began to stream down her perfect ivory cheeks. It was at this moment Berengar realized that he had not informed her of Arethas' demise.? With this in mind, the girl choked on her words as she attempted to find out for certain.

"Ar... Arethas is dead?"

In response to this Berengar grabbed ahold of Honoria and tucked her head into his chest while stroking her silky white hair. As he did so he apologized to her profusely.

"I am so sorry, I thought you knew..."

As such Honoria spent the next thirty minutes staining Berengar's luxurious attire with her tears. Throughout this entire time, Berengar comforted the princess on the loss of her Godfather. The beginning of the day of his coronation had not gone as planned.