

Steel 34

Chapter 34: There is Something Else...

Throughout the day, Berengar entertained his guests with his fiancée well nearby to make him look good. She was cordial and graceful in every regard, a proper partner to Berengar's natural charm. The two built quite the lasting impression on the nobles who visited the von Kufstein family's estate. He had begun to make progress in forming alliances with the capable youth of the younger generation. He had no use for an ally who could not pull his own weight as such; Berengar would not waste his time with the indolent and frivolous young lords and ladies who could not even count to ten. Sadly it appeared like they were the majority of the noble offspring throughout the realm. He, too, had once been like them, spoiled rotten and never using his brain.

Most of the people Berengar entertained were either the offspring of Barons or Viscounts from throughout the Counties of Steiermark and Tyrol. They were roughly in the same position as he himself and could provide sufficient support to his plans if he were to build an alliance with them. Sadly there were not too many exceptional members of the lower nobility in this generation, and they mostly clung to the corner forming a small social clique among themselves. Most Barons who were not their direct liege would not give them the time of day due to their low status, let alone Viscounts or Counts and their families.

Currently, Berengar did not have time to oversee his projects personally; as such, he left them in the capable commands of administrators he placed in charge of them. Ludwig, as per usual, was in charge of his burgeoning industrial sector, Gunther was tasked with implementing his many agricultural innovations, and Eckhard took personal command of the matters that pertained to the militia. As for the militia, their activities were suspended during the duration of the visitor's stay. Berengar could not very well have information leaked about the effectiveness of his weapons. Such a thing could prove disastrous to his plans. As such, the militia was given a slight reprieve from the arduous task of basic training.

Though they had been victorious in a single battle, it was against mostly poorly equipped levies, who foolishly rushed a well-entrenched position, the troops in Berengar's battalion still had to complete basic and specialized training if they were to become an army fully capable of annihilating their

enemies in the fields. Though they were far more accepting of their training and its methods after personally witnessing the results they had yielded during that fateful day when they slaughtered Ulrich's forces and rescued their Commander. It was a story many of them would be telling their grandkids someday in the distant future.

The next few days, he would be busy socializing with the nobility visiting for the massive party he was celebrating for Adela. He had a large surprise in mind for the young girl. He decided it was about time to introduce some renaissance era culture, particularly ballroom culture, which would not come about naturally for at least another century. Of course, Berengar only knew one dance from his previous life, the waltz, so it might be fairer to say he would be implementing an aspect of early modern culture.

Berengar did not have time or permission to extend the castle to contain a ballroom; as such, he built a public platform in the town square for the occasion. Eventually, he would like to construct a more modern palace that would obviously contain such a necessity and do away with the Castles altogether. After all, once his weapons spread across Europe's great powers, the mighty stone walls of the medieval era would become obsolete.

Though he had no plans to sell his weapons to others, it was only a matter of time before they were recovered and reverse-engineered, at least to some extent. It might take years or even decades at the current pace of things, but muskets and cannons would rule the battlefields of Europe far earlier in this timeline than in his old life, and when they did, large castles would become a thing of the past.

Lately, Berengar had been drafting plans in his spare time to turn Kufstein into a functioning city; it was a distant dream at this point, but one he intended to make a reality within his lifetime. If he were to achieve his aspirations, he would need a grand city to be his seat of power, and he refused to leave behind his family's lands just because other areas were more developed.

At the moment, Berengar found himself working on the layout for the proposed City of Kufstein. It was late at night, and his guests had retired for the evening. He had even sent Adela to her room who was exhausted after socializing with the noble families who had arrived early. Currently, an oil lamp illuminated the large stone room in which he resided. It was just about

midnight, and any moment now, he could expect a knock on his door and a particularly jealous Linde to appear and demand her share of attention for the day. After all, she had to sit in Lambert's corner and could not converse with her lover throughout the time, all while watching him act lovingly towards Adela.

Sure enough, the knock came on the door, and when Berengar opened it, he found Linde with an adorable pouting expression as she forced her way into his room and jumped into his embrace. However, before she could kiss Berengar's lips, he raised a hand and blocked her attempt before sitting down upon the bed and motioning for her to sit next to him. Their nightly fun could wait; he had important matters to discuss with his spymaster. Linde, never one to refuse one of Berengar's orders, sat down next to him and latched onto his arm, and buried it into her bosom while wearing a wide smile on her face.

Berengar, who was used to the vixen's antics by now, did not react in the slightest and merely continued with his train of thought.

"So your father appears to be displeased with my brother..."

Linde could not help but chuckle at the statement; it was true that her father was currently furious with Lambert. Not only had he failed once again to assassinate Berengar, but he also managed to cost Lothar a serious amount of raw materials. After all, Ulrich had been digging up more iron than he had reported to his Liege and was selling it on the side to Lothar at a lowered price. It was part of the alliance they had reached. Now that Ulrich was dead and his mines confiscated by Sieghard, he was no longer getting a regular shipment of iron from Kufstein. Thus his plans to equip his armies with the best weapons and armor around had begun to come to a halt. Though the Count could acquire iron from other regions, he had already invested heavily in his alliance with Lambert and wanted a return soon.

Linde was aware of all of this and could not help but laugh at the fact that her lover's enemies would never be able to accomplish their objectives.

"Father is furious with your little brother. However, that also means he is going to be pressuring Lambert into acting against you again. This time try not to get caught in their trap... I don't know what I would do without you."

Berengar noticed the distressed look on the girl's face and began to pat her head to comfort her.

"I admit that I was careless last time. I promise you I will not make such a mistake again."

Linde could not help but smile at the promise he made; there was a fierce look of determination in Berengar's eyes, which she took as a sign that he would stay true to his words. Afterward, Linde spoke her greatest concern that had been bothering her all day, but she had no way to inform Berengar until now.

"There is something else..."

Berengar raised his brow; by the way the beautiful young woman was acting, it was something serious. As such, he poured himself a glass of wine while offering one to the heavenly beauty next to him. However, to his surprise, she refused. Instead of accepting the wine, she glanced up at him with an unyielding gaze while resting her hand on her abdomen.

"I am pregnant..."

It took a moment for those words to register in Berengar's brain. As he nonchalantly took a sip of wine, however, while in the middle of drinking the red wine, he realized what she had said and nearly choked upon it. He stared at her in disbelief as he struggled to understand her words.

"You are what?"

Linde turned back to a pouting expression as she saw that Berengar was not as excited as she was; in fact, he was deeply concerned about the whole situation.

"You heard me! I am pregnant. You are going to be a father."

Berengar did his best to maintain his composure as he slowly drank his wine while maintaining a dignified appearance. This was not something he expected; of course, with the way those two had been going at it every night for the past month and a half, it was something he seriously should have anticipated. His brain rapidly thought of a solution; after all, she was not even

married to her fiancée yet; that alone would be a scandal, but the truth of the matter was her fiancée was not the father. If anyone found out about that, her reputation would be ruined for life. Berengar had to prevent that from happening for multiple reasons; chiefly among them is that it would seriously hamper his diplomatic relations if people found out he had been fooling around with his little brother's betrothed. After several moments of intense thought, he finally came to the best conclusion he could think of.

"Say it is Lambert's!"

He said sternly as he ordered his lover like a domineering master. She was shocked; deep down, she hoped Berengar would officially recognize the child and make it a legitimate bastard. That way, it would have a claim to his titles, and she would not have to marry Lambert. Instead, he said something which sounded asinine, and she immediately voiced her concerns.

"Lambert? Even if I said it was his, he would never believe me. I have never slept with him!"

Berengar glared at the girl menacingly. The thought of his brother touching his lover enraged him to the core; his voice was slightly raised as he chastised her.

"And you never will!"

Realizing that he had raised his voice, Berengar calmed himself down and exhaled deeply before putting on a wide smile and touched Linde's frightened face with his firm but loving palm.

"You don't need him to sleep with you to make him think it is his; get him really drunk, strip his clothes off and lie down next to him. When he wakes up in the morning, tell him that the two of you slept together. Make it look convincing, spill some blood on the sheets, so he doesn't suspect anything."

Afterward, he kissed his lover for several moments before apologizing.

"I'm sorry, I know your desires for the future of our child, but I'm in a precarious situation right now. I don't have the luxury to take responsibility for this at the moment. Maybe one day I can proclaim to the world that this child

is mine and the love we have for each other, but for now, it is not in the cards. Please understand..."

Linde wiped away a tear that had been forming in her beautiful sky blue eyes. Before nodding in acceptance to Berengar's request.

"I understand, and I will do what you have asked."

Afterward, the couple spent the night together in each other's embrace, celebrating the conception of new life. Completely unaware of the troubles that would follow because of the birth of this child. After all, who could know the distant future?