

Steel 35

Chapter 35: A Night to Remember

Several days had passed since Berengar initially found out that he would soon be a father, and so far, the couple had not told a soul. Currently, Berengar was having breakfast and entertaining his guests alongside Adela. It was the day of his Engagement Ceremony, and all of the invited nobles had safely arrived in Kufstein. During these past few days, Berengar had schemed with Linde to set up her fiance as the official father to her child. The plan would go into effect tonight. Lambert's 16th birthday was nearly a month away, and she would push for a wedding as quickly as possible to conceal the fact that the pregnancy was out of wedlock. Something in which her father would go through great lengths to hide. If successful the only people who would be aware of the child's true lineage were the parents themselves.

Berengar had become quite the expert in maintaining his social grace among the elites of Austria who were gathered at his family's estate. By now, all of the undesirable rumors about him had begun to fade in the minds of those at the party; they had become well accustomed to the new and improved Berengar. During this time, Berengar did not stand idly by and merely entertain his guests. He had set in place several transactions for steel and textiles. Which would bring in quite a fair degree of wealth for his family. These trade agreements would eventually blossom into friendships and perhaps even alliances one day. With each passing day, his father looked more favorably upon him; Berengar was certain that the day until he has officially declared regent of his family's lands was near.

Currently, he was engaged in discussion with his future father-in-law about the state of affairs of his steel-making industry.

"Rest assured, Count Otto, we are working on improving the production rate of steel. We have already begun to implement a second production line in our industrial district. Before long, we will be able to produce twice the amount of steel that we are currently able to manage."

Essentially what Berengar meant was that more beehive ovens, blast furnaces, and Bessemer converters were currently undergoing production. With the decrease in needed farmhands, many unemployed farmers were actively transitioning to factory work or skilled trades. With each passing day,

the Town of Kufstein was transforming from a small agricultural town to an actual city, filled with a wide degree of diversity in professions.

The count smiled as he heard the news; he would continue to purchase steel from Berengar; after all, the quality and quantity of the steel, Berengar produced far outmatched anyone else he knew of. Though Berengar had plans to use the steel in many aspects, he still sold off the surplus to those interested, and there were plenty who wanted a piece of the pie. The Count now decided to switch to a more personal topic to make sure Berengar was a good match for his youngest daughter.

"Are you attracted to my daughter?"

Berengar did not expect such a question. Nevertheless, he could not honestly say that she was too young for him to get excited over. Otherwise, Adela might take it the wrong way, and she was carefully observing his reaction. For some time now, she had been suspecting that Berengar thought of her as a little kid, or even worse, a little sister. He never gazed at her the way she saw him stare at Linde during the night of their first encounter, and that bothered her.

"She is quite the beautiful young lady, with many years ahead of her to mature into her body."

Berengar's response to Count Otto's question was satisfactory for the old nobleman, but to Adela, she could tell what he really meant and pouted at the answer as she muttered under her breath.

"Stupid Berengar..."

Though nobody had heard her dissatisfied statement, Berengar could tell by the expression on the young girl's face that she was sulking. It became apparent to him that she had understood his hidden meaning in the statement. Count Otto, on the other hand, nodded his head slowly and accepted his words.

"Good, it is important for a couple to be attracted to one another. I know I certainly would have never married my wife if she was a dog-faced woman."

Berengar nearly laughed at the statement and the look upon his wife's face, who was sitting next to the Count as she heard her husband's words. Count Otto was a slim man well into his forties; he had short golden blonde hair and a clean-shaven face. However, unlike his daughter, he had emerald green eyes. It was the Countess whom Adela had inherited her deep sapphire eyes from. A trait in which was commonly shared between Berengar and the two of them. After all, Adela's mother was Berengar's aunt and had thus come from the same gene pool as Berengar and his family.

Berengar's aunt was named Wanda and had married the count many years ago, much like her daughter, she was also quite young when she was betrothed to her husband, and he was considerably older than her. Thus she was in the middle of her thirties, and like all members of Berengar's family, was quite attractive.

The family would enjoy their meal and entertain the guests until the mid of the day. Afterward, Berengar successfully slipped away from the endless number of guests who were at Kufstein with the sole purpose of visiting him. He tried to decompress from the stress of talking to so many unknown people for so many hours. It was not until the start of the feast that Berengar finally re-emerged from his solitude. The feast was held outside in the center of the town, it was a fine spring evening, and a gentle breeze in the air enhanced the wholesome atmosphere.

There was a gated area that contained a variety of tables and dishes atop them. Many noblemen and women were enjoying their food, wine, and beer as they engaged in conversation. It was not until Berengar stood up from his chair and led Adela over to the large dance floor erected under his orders. He was dressed in a particularly dazzling outfit for the evening, and standing beside him was Adela, who was equally lavishly dressed. Berengar held onto the girl's hand and asked her a question she was not expecting. In front of the audience, which caused her to become slightly embarrassed.

"May I have this dance."

She did not know how to respond and nodded her head in curiosity. As such, Berengar took her up on the dance floor in front of all of the nobles who were watching with inquisitive gazes. Their sight cast upon Berengar and Adela as the couple waltzed together to the music which played in the background.

Though Adela was unaware of the intricacies of the waltz, she quickly caught on as Berengar led her through the paces. As the sun began to set, the two danced together throughout the early night under the illumination of a thousand candles and the full moon above.

Though the men in the audience initially scoffed at the sight of the couple dancing, the women were instantly inspired by the extraordinary sight and quickly became envious of Adela. Soon enough, they asked their partners to take them up to dance as well. Though they did not know the waltz, they still participated in traditional folk dances of the regions they were from. From the sidelines, peasants gazed upon the various feudal powers of the regions as they engaged in a new tradition with various expressions. Some were envious, others were confused, and a few were just downright disinterested. Though one thing was certain to the townsfolk of Kufstein, Berengar was at it again with his crazy ideas.

Adela quickly became entranced by Berengar's wide smile as she danced the night away with him. It was only after a couple of hours of dancing and socializing when the two finally sat down. Many of the couples present continued to dance as the young lord, and his fiancée sat back down at the head table. Lambert had offered to dance with Linde, but she outright refused. If she were going to dance with any man, it would be Berengar; of course, she could not outright say that, so she stated that she thought the whole act was childish.

Berengar, on the other hand, had just begun his ploy to set up his little brother; as such he brought over a couple of mugs of beer and ordered the servants to keep them coming.

"Come, Lambert, let us drink in celebration of the upcoming union of your dearest elder brother."

Lambert's eyes instantly narrowed as he looked at Berengar with a great deal of suspicion. By now, Berengar was fully aware of the plots against him. Yet he was so cheerfully offering to drink with him in public. What was his angle? Nevertheless, Lambert could not refuse and cautiously took a sip from the beer; when he confirmed it was not poisoned, he began to drink more. After all, these last couple of days had been extremely tiresome for him, as Count Lothar was constantly berating him for his failures.

Before long, Lambert finished his drink, as did Berengar, and thus the young lord motioned for two more drinks to be brought to the table as he goaded on his little brother.

"Care for a friendly wager, little brother?"

Lambert's chilling gaze landed on Berengar as he wiped the beer residue from his mouth before asking what Berengar was implying.

"What kind of wager?"

Berengar gulped down the beer in his hand and placed his mug directly next to his first one.

"It's simple; we drink; the first man to drop has to run around the courtyard naked at the crack of dawn."

Lambert scoffed at Berengar's childish behavior, but he knew his brother was not much of a drinker, which would make this a good chance to embarrass him. Thus Lambert foolishly accepted the terms of the gamble and began to compete with his brother in the game of drink. The old Berengar may not have been much of a drinker, but as a soldier in his past life, who was often stuck in the barracks with nothing to do, Berengar had become quite the experienced drinker. He had no doubt he would outlast Lambert, though whether he won or lost really did not matter to him. Berengar's primary goal was to get Lambert so wasted he would have no recollection of the night before. In the worst-case scenario, Berengar would have to strip down and run around the castle courtyard at dawn; what was the old saying? He who dares wins?

As such, the brothers began to drink beer like there was no tomorrow, which did not go unnoticed by the other party-goers who began to cheer them on. As the two engorged themselves on alcohol. Berengar had a calm expression on his face; he was a veteran drinker who could have over a dozen beers and still be able to function properly the next day. Lambert, on the other hand, was far more of a lightweight than he expected. By the time Lambert had reached his sixth beer, he was practically slurring his words. Berengar could not prevent his lips from curling up into a sneer when he saw the sight, which only acted as instigation for Lambert to drink more. By the time they reached 15

beers, Lambert was on the verge of passing out, and Berengar's cognitive faculties were mostly intact.

Seeing the state Lambert was in, Linde finally urged the two boys to stop their contest.

"Let's call it a draw, shall we boys? It's getting late."

Lambert was thoroughly hammered at this point and could barely form a sentence.

"Daz... right... Draw?"

Berengar chuckled lightly before he accepted the terms

"Fine, we will call it a draw. Get some rest, little brother."

With that, he stood up from his chair and left with Adela towards the castle; he trusted Linde to take care of the rest. Linde, of course, instantly helped up her drunk fiancé and dragged him off to his room. Where he quickly passed out, by the time he woke up, he would have a horrible hangover and a complete and total lack of memory of what happened the night before. He would also be facing a serious crisis, as Linde had done exactly as Berengar asked and made it seem like the two of them slept together. When in reality, nothing happened between the couple.

As for the rest of the nobles who enjoyed the celebration to the fullest, this would be a night they would remember for the rest of their lives. One in which they could not thank Berengar enough for providing. After this night two traditions were born in the Duchy of Austria, throwing lavish parties to celebrate one's engagement, and ballroom dancing...