

Steel 38

Chapter 38: A Formal Declaration

Berengar awoke next to the arms of his beautiful lover and with a splitting headache. He had drunk far too much with the boys the night before, but it was a victory celebration, and thus he felt his actions were justified. As such, he rose from the bed and decided to take things easy today. A day off from extensive exercise would not hurt him in the slightest, though he would never allow such inactivity to become a regular occurrence.

Linde awoke shortly after him and placed her arms around his body as she nibbled on his neck, giving the young man a love bite. It was her way of marking her territory and warding off potential predators of her man. In other words, it was a gift for Adela. Berengar laughed at how possessive the girl was this morning and shrugged it off as nonsense. He eventually pushed her down on the bed, thoroughly excited by her actions. He returned the favor and gave Linde a hickey on her graceful and slender neck. As long as she covered it up properly, it would not be a concern.

The two engaged in some physical intimacy before parting ways for the morning. Now that Linde had a proper excuse to visit Berengar in the day, she would no longer need to avoid him openly. As long as she approached him under the guise of managing her father's transaction, she could spend time by his side at any point in the day instead of just secretly during the night. Finally, she would have more time with the father of her child. Something she desperately wanted to rub in Adela's face. Though she knew there was a limit as to the degree to which she could flaunt her relationship with Berengar to the little girl, else others might become too suspicious. She had already declared war on Adela and would not back down. Linde knew the little girl was too proud to release the details about their little dispute to the world. As such, she felt confident that she could contain any information regarding this love triangle between the three of them.

Berengar, on the other hand, was blissfully unaware of the conflict brewing between his future wife and his lover. Thus he was dumbfounded by the malevolent gazes the two girls gave each other at the breakfast table. He began to think that something may have happened between the young ladies that may have soured their relationship, and he was not the only one to come to this conclusion. Lambert witnessed their intense rivalry as they gracefully

consumed their breakfast, sitting across from one another with fierce gazes. Of course, Lambert did not really care for the reason, as he was sure it was just the trivial matters of women and did not concern himself in the slightest.

As the two girls feud over Berengar without anyone else's knowledge, Sieghard decided to break the awkward silence.

"I am formally requesting the presence of my family and Councilors in the great hall after we finish dining. There is an important announcement I would like to make that regards the safety and prosperity of our family and our realm."

after saying that, everyone's attention was shifted to the Baron as he spoke in an authoritative voice; noticing the presence of his future daughters-in-law, he decided to address them personally

"My Ladies, your presence is not required, but if you would like to attend it, you are more than welcome to."

Berengar sighed in relief when he noticed the two women nod at one another with stern expressions. He did not know why the girls were fighting, but he was certain he would find out soon enough. At least for now, the tension was released. Lambert, on the other, appeared visually nervous; if his father was making a formal declaration, it must be something important; he began to fear that the favor his father had shown him was beginning to wane and instead be shifted upon his older brother and rival. Whatever this announcement was about, it surely pertained to Berengar's recent rise in power, which was not good news for him.

Berengar sat in silence and continued his meal; now that his women were not fighting one another, he felt much more at ease and could finally enjoy his breakfast. However, internally he was quite excited, there was only one thing that he could think of that Sieghard would announce after they finished eating, and if it pertained to his thoughts, then it would be great news for the young lord's aspirations.

Shortly after the meal was completed, the family gathered in the Great Hall; Linde and Adela were still obviously feuding with each other about something. However, their attention was currently drawn to Sieghard, who sat on his seat

of power, where his councilors flanked him. They were men of great importance who advised the Baron on matters about the realm, even they were not privy to the contents of Sieghard's announcement.

After everyone had arrived, Sieghard cleared his voice and spoke in a stern tone.

"I Sieghard von Kufstein first of my name, Baron of Kufstein hereby declare my firstborn son, and heir Regent. If I must travel from these lands, he is given full authority derived from me to act as Baron in my stead!"

A wide smile appeared on Berengar's face as he heard the news, he had been waiting for this declaration for a long time, and he had finally proven himself in the eyes of his father as a capable leader. Lambert of course was horrified; this was terrible news for him and his allies. When war finally broke out and Berengar took up his position as Regent, he would have the full judicial authority to launch an investigation into Lambert's attempts on his life and gather the evidence he needed to execute him. This meant only one thing, Lambert had at most a year to end his brother's life before the old King croaked, and he was placed into an exceptionally vulnerable position.

The problem was Berengar had solidified his position in the hearts of many of the surrounding nobles, those who were benefiting from his steel monopoly, and the burgeoning textile trade would obviously back Berengar if he requested their aid. It was now more difficult than ever to plot against Berengar.

On the other hand, the girls both reacted to the news with satisfied smiles on their faces. This was good news not only for the man they loved but also for themselves, whose positions would become more favorable when Berengar became Regent. Although when they realized that they both had the same satisfied expression on their faces, they immediately shifted back to a feuding state.

The reactions of the councilors to this monumental announcement were varied. They were all aware of Berengar's recent transformation and his formidable capability of presiding over the realm. Thus, many of the councilors were excited by the news, as they could not think of a better man to take up the position. However, a quarter of the councilors were backers of Lambert's

attempt to gain power, and thus they were quite miserable at the announcement. If they allowed Berengar to come to power, it would only mean their removal from office at best and their deaths at the worst.

Henrietta and Gisela were both delighted by the news, and Sieghard had a satisfied smile on his face. Though they did not know it, battle lines were immediately drawn when this news was announced, and his two sons would increase the brutality of their war of intrigue. Berengar made sure to keep note of the expressions of the councilors who were either indifferent to the news or outright dismayed. It became immediately apparent that they were either on the fence about the issue or outright supporters of his brother. Thus Berengar figured he would get rid of his Brother's most immediate backers before taking out any of the other local nobility who supported him. After all, these noblemen who advised his father held significantly more power than those who would answer his call to arms once every blue moon.

Later that night, Berengar would get his spy network to acquire the materials he would need to manufacture a particular poison that was virtually undetectable in this medieval world. The target of his new ploy would be the Marshal of his father's forces. The man was clearly the most disturbed by the news and even eyed Lambert for his reaction. Berengar did not doubt within his mind that the Marshal was in bed with Lambert. As the commander of his father's forces, he presented the biggest threat to the security of his Regency and needed to be removed before Berengar seized power.

However, that was a task for later; after the declaration was made, Berengar was congratulated by many people, including his future wife and lover. Even Lambert was shocked when Linde approached Berengar immediately after the announcement and fought with Adela over who would pay their respects first. At this moment, Berengar instantly realized what was going on between his two women, and he knew that Linde had said something to Adela to antagonize her. Now her words from the previous night began to make sense, and internally he was furious.

When the two were in the middle of bickering, Berengar raised his hand, and the two immediately became silent.

"Adela, you are my fiancée; you may tell me what you wish to say first."

Linde immediately became flustered as she was denied the right to speak with her lover first. Still, she understood his reasoning and let it slide.

"Congratulations Berengar! I know you will do your family proud."

the little girl then eyed Linde with displeasure and whispered in Berengar's ear

"I need to talk to you about something later."

Judging by the look on her cute little face, Berengar was certain that she was unaware of the extent of his relationship with Linde, which was a good thing, but he definitely needed to figure out what had been said between the two.

He nodded and smiled at his future wife as he held on to her hands

"Thank you! That means a lot coming from my fiancée."

While saying that phrase, he eyed Linde with an expression that said

"I know what you did, and I'm not happy!"

Linde immediately flinched when she was the vicious gaze Berengar had given her; she began to think that maybe she should not have openly declared war on Adela so soon. She was definitely going to be punished far worse tonight, which made her dreadfully excited. Of course, she was skilled enough at acting to mask her desire with a look of indifference.

After Berengar had accepted Adela's respects, he moved on to Linde, who bowed respectfully and said formally.

"Lord Berengar, I would like to congratulate you on your latest title. I trust you will be a benevolent and efficient regent in the future."

Lambert was extremely agitated by the sight of his fiancée paying respects to her older brother, but judging by the lack of informality in her tone, it was merely her fulfilling her social obligations; as such, he never suspected she was romantically involved with Berengar. Instead, he felt even more sure of his previous thoughts that she was bickering with Adela over something frivolous and thus did not pay any more attention to her actions.

It went on for some time, but he had to entertain many people paying respects to him; when he was finally done with his noble obligations, he thanked his father for the trust he had placed with him and left the great hall. Adela was in tail following her fiance. When they were finally secluded, he could not prevent himself from asking the little girl what exactly was the nature of her Grievance with Linde.

"So, are you going to tell me what happened?"

Adela tried to fake ignorance, as she did not want to discuss her war with the temptress for his affection.

"I am sure I do not know what you are talking about..."

Berengar laughed at the young girl's cute face as she tried to pretend like she did not understand his question.

"Come on; it is obvious that you are fighting with my brother's fiancee, even my father noticed it, and he isn't exactly the sharpest tool in the shed when it comes social circumstances."

Adela let out a deep sigh and told Berengar the truth of her encounter with Linde and how she felt about it; needless to say; she was not happy. Berengar was an excellent actor and laughed it off as if it was a joke. He really needed to salvage the situation, and he did his best to do so.

"That's it? She's obviously angry with Lambert for his drunken antics and is trying to make him angry by pursuing his older brother. If she really has any intentions to steal me away from you, I'm afraid it's too little too late. You have nothing to worry about."

Adela looked at Berengar with a sheepish expression as she asked him with tears forming in her eyes.

"Really?"

Berengar, of course, instantly felt intense guilt for lying to his fiancee about the true nature of his relationship with Linde, but he could not well afford to reveal it at the moment. Granted, he felt justified in his actions and did not feel the

slightest guilt for the act of having a lover on the side. However, he did not let any of those complex emotions show on his face, as he masked his emotions with a very convincing facade.

"Of course! Do you think I would throw you a lavish Engagement Ceremony like I did if I did not have the intention to marry you?"

His words made sense, and Adela slowly wiped the tears from her eyes. A smile spread across her face before she reached around Berengar's neck and pecked him on the cheek. Afterward, she ran away in embarrassment, though she had kissed his cheek many times, it was still too much for the little girl to face him afterward. Berengar told the truth when he said that last part; he had no intention to marry Linde. He had developed her into the perfect mistress, but that did not mean that she was wife material by any means. That was not something that could be cultivated in a woman past a certain age. By the time she was physically mature, she was either a wife material or she was not; or so Berengar believed. The young lord had personally witnessed too many men's lives ruined in his past life by the full-grown women they tried to change into housewives and the court system which favored the women after they no longer wanted to be married, no matter what atrocious things they may have done during their time of marriage.

Luckily for him, Divorce was a rare occurrence in medieval times; she would essentially need the Pope's approval. Even then, it would require special circumstances. While adultery was grounds for the dissolution of a marriage, it was a costly process and rarely worked in a woman's favor. He figured sooner or later he could convince Adela to share him with Linde; the girl was stubborn and prideful but not entirely closed-minded. Of course, he would first need to marry the girl and show her how much he cared for her before even broaching the subject of his lover. At the very least, it would be many years before he ever admitted to it, and he would do his damndest to make sure she did not find out until then.

Thinking about it now, he should probably do his best to get in the good graces of the church; despite being an atheist, he realized how much power the papacy held in this new world; it was far greater than the timeline of his past life. He decided to speak to his priest at the upcoming Sunday Mass and build a relationship with the clergy. It would be nice if he could find an open-minded priest, but the likelihood of that happening was very slim. Whatever

the case, he would never confess his "sins" to a member of the clergy, especially in an era where the papacy held significant authority.

Before going to bed, Berengar sent a message to his spy network to acquire the means to produce White Arsenic, a tasteless, odorless, and lethal poison that could be used in a powdered form. When he could properly manufacture this deadly poison, he would use it on his first target. Though it would take some time to acquire the means to create it, thus he could only wait until his first assassination attempt.

Before Long, Linde showed up in his room with a guilty expression on her face. She willingly submitted herself for discipline, and Berengar spent the rest of his waking hours punishing the young beauty severely for instigating conflict with Adela. Which she, of course, enjoyed to her heart's content. Though at the moment he had assured Adela he would not pursue Linde, she would only be suspicious from here on out. Nevertheless, Linde had actually been the one to form the love triangle that would one day become the backbone of a great dynasty.