

Steel 39

Chapter 39: Religious Ambitions

A few days passed, and it was now Sunday. The day in which the people of Kufstein, both high and low, would gather for mass, or liturgy as it was known in this era. Currently, Adela stood outside Berengar's door with little hope in her heart as she prepared to knock upon it and ask Berengar the same question she had inquired about ever since she first arrived in Kufstein. Unlike Berengar, who was secretly an atheist, Adela was a true believer in the gospel and held the church in high regard. However, every time she approached her fiance to attend the Sunday service together, he always had an excuse as to why he could not go. Thus she was beginning to fear that he was, in fact, a heathen or an apostate which was a condition she could not accept. Today she had fierce determination to drag the man she loved to church and save his potentially damned soul. As such, she sighed heavily before knocking heavily on the door to Berengar's room in which he was currently exercising.

"Berengar, will you attend Liturgy with me? It has been quite lonesome without your presence..."

To her surprise, the door swung open, and Berengar had a smile on his face. He completely forgot that he was currently dressed in only his undergarments while his upper body glistened with sweat, the sight of which caused Adela's face to flush with embarrassment. It took him a moment to realize why she was acting in such a sheepish manner before he realized that her eyes were fixated on his developing abs. He quickly put up a single finger and shut the door while saying.

"One moment"

by the time he returned, the young lord was dressed in a white linen undershirt that clung to his sweaty body. This was slightly better, and as such, Adela regained her composure before asking the question on her mind for a second time.

"Berengar, will you attend the Sunday service with me?"

She had no intention of letting him play hooky now that he had opened the door. However, what truly shocked her was Berengar's immediate acceptance of his request.

"Of Course! Today I am quite free, and I would love to attend the liturgy with you."

This was quite shocking to her; since she arrived, he had never once accepted her request to go to church together, but now all of a sudden, he agreed as if it were an ordinary thing for him to do. Was he really just swamped with managing his secular activities this entire time? She only felt foolish for doubting the religious views of her betrothed, whom she held in high regard.

Berengar sniffed himself before requesting the young girl, who seemed incredibly excited about the fact that he would finally be attending the service with her.

"Just let me clean myself up a bit, and I will meet you at the Castle's gates in a quarter of an hour, okay?"

Adela quickly agreed to his request before chastising him as if she expected him to run away the moment she left his sight.

"Don't be late!"

Berengar nodded and smiled; shortly thereafter, Adela departed, and Berengar's dropped his facade. Before muttering under his breath

"I suppose she's lucky I have plans for the Church."

Afterward, he grabbed ahold of his attire and headed to the bath, as promised. He would arrive at the Castle's gates fully clothed in fashionable attire within a fifteen-minute time frame. All the while, Adela had been waiting for him at the entrance with a bright smile on her face. Berengar quickly grabbed ahold of the little girl's hand and led her to the Church within the village where the rest of his family was already gathered.

By the time he arrived, he had noticed that Lambert was there alongside Linde, and Henrietta was grouped up with their parents. Linde had a shocked expression as she saw Berengar attend church for the first time since she had arrived. She was not particularly religious, but she at least pretended like she was. Berengar was usually silent about the topic and avoided the church as if it had been the epicenter of a plague. Still, the heavenly beauty felt quite perturbed as she saw her lover attending church alongside his fiancée. After greeting his family and lover, Berengar walked into the chapel with Adela before standing at attention while the priest went over his sermon. There were not many pews in medieval times, and as such, unless one was old or feeble, they usually stood in the center throughout the entire service.

As Berengar gazed upon the luxurious trappings of the Chapel he found himself in; he could not help but scoff at the sight. Evidently, the church here was quite wealthy, yet he never saw them out in the field aiding the villagers in any charitable way. He would not doubt it if the head priest himself was embezzling funds to fill his own pockets; after all, the church was mighty, wealthy, and most importantly, corrupt, especially in this timeline. When he scoffed at the sight of how embellished this single church was, it did not go unnoticed by the Deacon, who was a young man currently on the last phase of the path to priesthood. Though the priest himself did not notice Berengar's reaction, the Deacon could not help but do so.

After the ceremony was over, Berengar had initially intended to speak with the priest; after all, he wanted to establish some ties with the church. In particular, he was looking for an open-minded priest who may become useful in the future. However, before he could, he was approached by the Deacon, who was quite cordial in his manners.

"My Lord Berengar, that is your name, correct? I hear many great things from the mouths of the parish about your many deeds. Do you have a minute to talk?"

Berengar was quite curious why the Deacon would approach him; as such, he took the time out of his busy schedule to see what this supposed holy man had to say. Berengar followed the man to a secluded area, where they began to chat.

The Deacon was a young man, quite possibly even younger than Berengar. The man had short dirty blonde hair and emerald eyes. he was the third son of a Saxon Count and opted to join the church rather than vie with his siblings to inherit his father's land. This decision turned out to be a wise choice, considering most of his five brothers met with terrible accidents after the young Deacon had left his family behind. As such, he was a man who was not only aware of Berengar's precarious position but was actively supportive of him; in fact, he was currently a member of Berengar's vast spy network throughout his family's lands. Even Berengar did not know the identities of all the little birds who reported to his lover about the activities of his enemies.

The young man was eager to greet the Baron's son and heir whom he had already aided with great effort in countering Lambert's schemes. As such, he bowed before Berengar respectfully and said his piece.

"My Lord, I doubt you are aware of who I am, but I am one of the many members of your web of intrigue, and I know why you are here. You seek to establish ties with the church, is that correct?"

Berengar was shocked that a deacon would belong to his network of agents, and as such, he proceeded with caution. Testing the young Deacon with a question only someone directly reporting to his spymaster would know the answer to.

"Hmmm, I'm afraid Adela has never mentioned you to me."

The Deacon was a bright man and knew instantly he was being tested by Berengar; if he were fake, he would most likely nod his head and recognize Adela as his spymaster. Yet, that was not the case. Instead, the young man grinned and gave the correct answer.

"Funny, I remember speaking to a young woman with strawberry blonde hair and sky blue eyes, not to mention her magnificent bust."

Berengar's expression was indifferent, but he was really excited he already had a member of the church working for him in the shadows. As such, he clasped the man's shoulder and apologized for his test.

"I apologize for my rudeness; it appears you really are a supporter of mine. One can never be too careful these days. What is your name?"

The man smiled greatly after hearing Berengar apologize for testing him; he truly was a man of character as he had heard.

"I am Ludolf, a Deacon of this church."

Berengar walked around the area with Ludolf and picked up a golden chalice; once more, he decided to test the youthful deacon and see if he could be fit into his plans for the future.

"Tell me, Ludolf, what are your thoughts of the garish embellishment we see around us. Gold crosses, chalices, chandeliers, and even rosaries. Is this not a waste of the church's funds?"

Ludolf smiled once more upon hearing Berengar's views of the Church's wasteful spending.

"I could not agree more, my Lord. Unfortunately, the Priest of this chapel and the Bishop of Innsbruck care more about appearances than helping the common folk. Something I have heard that you accomplished quite well in our stead. I'm afraid no matter where I go, that seems to be the current status quo of the church. Sucking money away from the people like leeches with promises of salvation in return for their hard-earned coinage. Using it to build lavish chapels like this one. Such wasteful spending if you were to ask me..."

Berengar's lips began to curve into a smile. Though this young man may not seem like much, he had the potential to become the Martin Luther of this world. With the right guidance, and support he may very well break the Papacy's stranglehold over the Kingdoms of Europe. Something which Berengar greatly desired. If his aspirations were to become a reality, then he could not have the Church wield unrestricted power throughout Europe as it currently did. He would need to start a revolution from within, and it just so happened this young Deacon named Ludolf already had some revolutionary ideas. If pushed in the right direction, he could prove to be a powerful ally against the authority of the Church. Thus Berengar decided to act like the devil on the young man's shoulder and guide him in causing a major schism within Christianity.

"Ludolf, I share many of the same sympathies; it is the reason I have not been attending service lately. Would you like to go for a walk? I would very much like to discuss my concerns about the direction the Church is heading in..."

Ludolf, a wide-eyed and faithful young man concerned with the church's misconduct, took this seemingly benevolent young man for his word and followed him on a walk. The two would have an exceptionally long discussion about the difference between secular and spiritual authority and the separation of Church and State. By the time the two had finished talking, several hours had passed, and Ludolf felt as if he had been enlightened by Berengar, who acted as if he were a pious man concerned about ecclesiastical corruption and its effects on the people of Europe. Thus Berengar not only further gained support from Ludolf in his war of intrigue against his brother but also in his future struggle against the Church and their over-reaching power. One thing was certain; this man held great importance for Berengar's plans to bring an end to the era of the Church's influence over the secular authority of the German people.

After sending Ludolf back to the chapel with much to think about, Berengar returned home. Where he dined with his family. Adela was pleased that he went to church with her. Though Linde looked at him strangely; she had many questions about why he went to church and who he spent his afternoon with. Nevertheless, now was not the time for the topic. After sharing a meal with his family, Berengar took a bath and then returned to his quarters, where he further developed the plans for the future City of Kufstein. Shortly thereafter, he heard a knock on his door and opened it to find Linde, who sprung into his arms. Berengar accepted her embrace while kicking the door close. After passionately kissing one another for several moments, Linde broke away and finally asked the father of her child the question on her mind.

"You don't seem like the type of man to take the gospel seriously... Why did you go to Church?"

Berengar could not help but chuckle as he sat on his bed and poured himself and his lover some wine. After taking a swig from the chalice, he answered the question honestly.

"I have plans for the church. I'm not going to lie; I seek to destroy its dominion over these lands and its people by any means necessary. Truly I find the hypocrisy, corruption, and power of the Church in this world to be appalling."

Linde was quite shocked by his ambitions. The church had held significant authority over Europe for centuries, yet the man she loved claimed he wanted to bring that era to a sudden end and implied using force to achieve his goals. Though she was not religious, she understood the church's significant power; it would not be an easy task.

"You know, if word got out about your plans, the church would declare you a heretic..."

Berengar nearly choked on his wine as he laughed at Linde's remark.

"Let them come; I do not rely on the protection of God. Instead, I trust in the thunder of guns and the men who wield them. Soldiers win wars, not faith, and before long, my army will rival the legendary power of the Kingdom of Heaven!"

Though he was exaggerating, it was no lie to say that his armies were becoming quite well equipped and trained, better than any other force in the current world. Even if they only acted as a militia at the moment, they would become the core of his power when he inherited this land. Their numbers swelled by the day, and now that he was producing proper armor alongside their arms, Berengar felt as if his army could easily contend with a force five times their numbers on the field of battle. After all, his weapons were beyond effective against the greatest units of the era, and with the right tactics, he could overcome any foe. With time his weapons would be even more efficient, and by then, nobody could stop him.

Truthfully religion had its purpose of serving in Berengar's many plans, but a Church that refused to bend to his will did not. Berengar would make use of scripture and the concept of divinity in his future efforts of propaganda. Though he personally did not believe in such things, he realized that Religion played an important role in functioning society. As such, he had plans for a reformation of the Church, the extent of which would rely on Ludolf and those who would support his future efforts. As for Catholicism and the pope's authority over secular affairs, he would never recognize such a thing. This

adamant refusal to bend to the will of the church would lead to many conflicts with the papacy in the near future.

Linde did not know what to say after hearing such a speech; either Berengar was a mad man, or he truly had the capability to change the world. Personally, she did not care if the Church's power over these lands collapsed and supported the rising ambitions of the man beside her. After finishing their wine, the two stripped off their lavish attire and embraced each other in the dark of night. For the rest of their waking hours, they intimately enjoyed each other's company.