

Steel 43

Chapter 43: Expanding Influence

While Berengar was conversing with Adela and going over his drafts for establishing a Demi-Lancer Company, Linde was hard at work as the master of Berengar's intricate spy network. What started as a small group of peasants watching and listening to potential threats and reporting them to Berengar turned into a massive spiderweb that infiltrated every noble house within the Barony of Kufstein under Linde's management. Say what you want against Berengar's lover, but she had a brain for intrigue and had been crucial in the war against Lambert and his allies.

The beautiful young woman divided the network into various cells located in every major inhabited region of the Barony. Through combined use of couriers, carrier pigeons, direct interaction, smoke signals, and other methods of communication, Linde was able to understand everything that was transpiring within the region of Kufstein. A complex hierarchy was established to allow the freedom of local cells to engage in espionage, propaganda, and assassination at will, without it ever being traced back to Berengar's doorstep.

The Hierarchy was as follows, at the top of the organization was Berengar; he was referred to by those who knew of his existence as the Sovereign. Beneath the Sovereign was the Listener, this was Linde's job. She would listen to Berengar's orders, if he had any, and relay them to the Speakers, who were the leaders of every cell. The Speakers would then relay these jobs to the Eyes, Ears, Mouths, and Hands. Each was tasked with a different specialty in Intrigue. Eyes and Ears were generally used for Espionage and gathering intelligence. Mouths were used to disseminate misinformation and engage in propaganda efforts, and the Hands were used for practical jobs, primarily being assassination and sabotage. Below all of these were Associates. They were not official members of the organization but were essentially pawns who unwittingly aided Berengar's spy network. The only members who knew that Berengar was the sovereign were the Listener and the Speakers. The rest were merely led to believe they were acting in the interest of the realm, and as such, if caught and interrogated, could not pin the blame on Berengar.

Currently, Linde was expanding the network throughout the entirety of Tyrol, starting with establishing a cell within Innsbruck. She knew just the person to

fill the speaker's position, someone who could be trusted and was completely loyal to her. When she wrote the letter to her personal maid informing her of the duties she would be responsible for, the young woman took extra precaution and wrote the letter in a code that only the two would understand. Linde's maid was actually her little half-sister, a bastard of the family, and her name was Adelheid. If anything, Adelheid was the closest thing Linde had to a friend growing up; after all, Linde's cold, sadistic, and domineering attitude had kept many people away from her. Those who stuck around were generally guys entranced by her physical beauty, like Lambert. Unfortunately for them, they were never able to win her favor.

Thus Linde wrote the letter honestly to Adelheid, informing her of everything she had been through in Kufstein and her change in character. The only reason she risked doing so is that she knew Adelheid would support her no matter what she did or who she became. The letter contained some deeply personal information, including that she was currently pregnant with Berengar's child and had framed Lambert into being perceived as the father. After writing about past events, she concluded the letter asking for Adelheid's help forming a spy network throughout Innsbruck. There was sufficient pay offered, which was obviously kept off the ledgers, but more importantly, it was a personal request from Adelheid's big sister and best friend.

After sending the letter with a confidant to her home in Innsbruck, Linde sat back and sighed as she drank from a glass of purified water in which Berengar had made sure to make plenty of for her consumption. After all, she could not drink alcohol during her pregnancy, and Berengar would never allow her to drink unfiltered water. Linde rubbed her belly as she thought about the child growing inside of her. Every day she prayed it was a son so that he could inherit Berengar's position one day. Having full confidence that he would become a King, she wanted her son to be legitimized and succeed his father more than anything. Of course, if she knew that Berengar had already planned a wide degree of political reforms for the future, one of which was critical to succession laws, then she would not care so much about whether or not her first child is a boy.

She figured that Berengar was in his room eating snacks with Adela and talking about his plans right now. She scoffed at the little girl's sweet tooth and figured that one day it would come back to bite her. Nevertheless, she wished it was her with Berengar right now. However, she could not very well intrude

on their private time; after all, she would have plenty of it for herself later, and though she was competing with Adela for Berengar's affection, she had no plans to monopolize him for herself. She had become quite accepting of her role as his lover.

In the meantime, she was trying on dresses that Berengar had made for her; they were all in the colors of his house, which she took as a sign that he truly thought of her as family. If anyone asked where she acquired them from, she would say she purchased them from Berengar. Nobody needed to know that the Baron's son and heir showered her with gifts, everything from fine jewelry to exquisite dresses and shoes. Berengar made sure that both his girls were basking the most luxurious of clothing and accessories available.

She looked in the mirror gauging her appearance and knew that Berengar would be delighted by her stunning beauty. She could not wait to show him how she appeared in the attire he had made for her. However, that would have to wait. For now, she passed the time mixing and matching her outfits and accessories until she found the perfect looks for each of them.

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Berengar was sitting in his room eating snacks with Adela; for whatever reason, the young girl decided to feed him the treats herself. He found the idea to be a bit ridiculous, but thankfully nobody was nearby to see the embarrassing scene. As such, he closed his sapphire eyes and accepted the treats his young fiancée fed him. For some reason, he could not help but feel like he had reached the pinnacle of life at this moment. Of course, a moment later, he quickly realized such a thought was absurd, and his fiery ambitions took hold of his mind once more. Nevertheless, he enjoyed the time spent with Adela. Eventually, he had to stop the girl's actions; unlike her, he could not eat so many sweets without feeling sick to his stomach. Adela pouted after seeing him resist the treats she was trying to force-feed him, but eventually, she accepted that he was too old to eat nothing but desert. Berengar, on the other hand, finally had to express his concerns about the young girl's eating habits.

"You know it is terrible for your health if you continue eating such a large amount of sweets as you do. You should really eat more meat and grains."

Once more, the adolescent girl began to pout as she heard his words; the expression on her face was too cute. Berengar could not help but tease her.

"What if I fed it to you? Would you eat some then?"

Adela could not help but become flustered by his statement as her cheeks became as red as apples. Eventually, she nodded, and Berengar could not stop himself from chuckling.

"Wait, right here, I will go get some of my favorite foods, and we will share them, okay?"

It was not as if Adela did not like the myriad of recipes Berengar had introduced to the world. She preferred the deserts, which as a responsible adult, Berengar could no longer allow her to snack upon them constantly throughout the day. As such, he walked to the kitchen, where he found the chefs hard at work. Upon seeing the young lord approach, they all greeted him.

"Milord! What brings you to the kitchen?"

Berengar smiled at the cooks as he saw their eager expressions; he came here with a purpose in mind and soon expressed it.

"Do you guys have any Pork Rouladen lying around that I can snack on?"

A particularly young chef walked over with a plate filled with the fabled dish and brought it to him.

"I had just finished cooking this; it would be an honor for you to taste it."

Berengar smiled, took a juicy piece from the plate, and stuffed it in his mouth, a wide grin spreading across his face.

"Excellent, it has turned out great! Do you mind if I take the whole plate from you?"

The cook shook his head with an eager smile on his face.

"Not at all Milord, all of this belongs to you and your family!"

Berengar quickly accepted the plate. The only other thing he stopped by for was a flagon of beer to wash it down with. Afterward, he walked off toward his personal room after leaving behind a message.

"You guys are doing an excellent job; keep up the good work!"

With that, he disappeared into the hallway while the Cooks looked at him with excited expressions. They were just complimented by the man who came up with all these recipes! Clearly, they were doing their jobs correctly.

Berengar returned to his quarters with a plate full of pork roulade and a flagon of beer in his hands. He proceeded to sit down next to Adela as he picked up a piece with his finger and stuffed it into the little girl's face.

"Say ahh!"

Adela's face became flushed with embarrassment, but eventually, she closed her eyes and did as she was told.

"Ahh...."

eventually, the food entered her mouth, and she could not help but exclaim in excitement; it was so much tastier when being fed to her by the man she loved.

Eventually, she devoured the whole thing, and before she knew it, Berengar said something to her, which she didn't register because he had moved too quickly.

"You have something on your face, silly girl."

With that said, Berengar reached out with his index finger and wiped the excess sauce off the roulade off her pretty pink lips, and stuck it into his own mouth; after licking his finger for a few moments, one word escaped his lips.

"Tasty"

Afterward, he began snacking on a piece himself while Adela nearly passed out from embarrassment. Berengar could not help but laugh at her sheepish expression. He decided to tease her a bit more.

"You want more?"

Despite her awkwardness, Adela nodded her head while her face was practically the color of a tomato. As such, Berengar repeated the process with the girl, after which she asked him a question that shocked him.

"Is that beer?"

Berengar could not help but nod his head; he was quite proud of the beer produced by the village and practically drank it full time. With his alcohol tolerance, he did not need water. Besides, he needed the calories since he was still trying to bulk up. He eventually asked her the question on his mind.

"Why do you ask?"

Adela shifted her eyes left and right before speaking her thoughts.

"Can I have some?"

Berengar was in a moral dilemma, though it was common for children to drink in this time period, as there was no drinking age. Berengar could not help but have a nagging voice in the back of his head from his 21st-century memories telling him it was illegal to supply minors with alcohol. However, his medieval mindset eventually won the debate, and he extended the flagon for Adela to drink from.

After taking a large gulp of the beer, the more the girl drank, the more her face began to become red with intoxication. She was not used to consuming alcohol, and thus rapidly became drunk. Eventually, Berengar cut her off, but by that point, her small head had begun to bob as she rested it on Berengar's shoulder. Eventually, she looked up at him with a drunken gaze filled with desire and pressed her lips against his, which startled the young lord. Though it was another childish peck on the lips, the expression on her face led Berengar to believe that he had allowed her to drink too much. Thus he retreated from her grasp. The moment he did so, tears began to form in the adolescent girl's eyes as she asked the question which concerned her.

"Do you not like me?" she stated in her drunken state.

Berengar sat next to her and hugged Adela tightly as he calmed her down.

"It is not like that; you are just too young right now. In a few years when we are married, I promise we can spend more time together... But for now, I think you should get some sleep." As such, despite the girl's intoxicated protests, Berengar picked Adela up into a princess carry and dragged her off to her room. After placing her in her bed, the girl quickly passed out, and Berengar could not help but think to himself as he looked upon Adela, who was sprawled out on her bed in a drunken stupor.

"This girl is too cute..."

With that being said, he left Adela's room and returned to his own, where he got back to work on his plans for the Demi-Lancer equipment and tactics; before long, he heard a knock on his door, and he could already guess who it was. When he finally opened the door, he saw Linde wearing one of the many dresses he gave her; she was adorned with the lavish jewelry he gifted her and wore a pair of black leather slippers. She looked at him with a slightly flustered expression and asked him the question that had been on her mind for the last hour and a half.

"How do I look?"

Berengar could not help but smile as he pulled her into his arms, shut the door, and kissed her passionately. After over a minute of making out, Berengar broke away and gave her the answer she was hoping for.

"You're the most beautiful woman I have ever met in my life!"

Her heart nearly jumped out of her chest from the compliment her lover had given her. Berengar was honest when he said that, in the entirety of his two lives, the only woman he had ever met who came close to her natural beauty was Adela, and she was still a child. Maybe one day she could rival Linde, but for now, the young woman before him was the only woman on his mind.

After spending an ungodly amount of time undressing Linde, Berengar finally got her onto his bed, where the two spent the night together, enjoying each other's warm embrace. Despite being already pregnant, Berengar tried his best to give her another child that night. After a night filled with passionate

lovemaking, the two finally fell asleep early in the morning. It would not be for several hours before they awoke once more and began their daily routines.