

Steel 55

Chapter 55: A Solemn Vow

After The Castle guards had dragged away Lambert, he was placed in a prison wagon and shortly thereafter hauled off to the Teutonic Order, where he would spend the rest of his days redeeming himself in the eyes of the Lord and men. The boy had committed heinous deeds and was not only forced to join the Teutonic Order but was thoroughly disowned. This result was mercy considering the plans Berengar had for the treacherous scoundrel. Yet to Lambert, it was a cruel punishment he felt he was undeserving of. As he sat in the back of the wagon looking through the iron bars which caged him. He made a solemn vow to himself and the Lord.

"I swear to God that one day I will rise through the ranks of the Teutonic Order and one day return to this land with an army at my back! I will not rest until those who have betrayed me have paid the price with their blood!"

Those were the last words Lambert spoke within the confines of his family's lands, shortly after the Carriage faded into the distance and continued on its journey to the Teutonic State in the East.

As for the family, they dealt with the aftermath in different ways. Henrietta grieved for the loss of her brother and refused to leave her room for weeks on end. She spent her time crying under her covers and managed to survive by having her servants look after her. She could not accept that Lambert had committed such crimes and blamed Linde for her brother's fate.

Gisela spent this time mostly in the church praying for the Lord's forgiveness of her son's misdeeds. To deal with her grief, she had turned to religion, as so many do in times of desperation. The loving mother had always doted on her two sons and could not understand why things had turned out the way they had.

In his suffering, Sieghard had turned to the bottle as a way to comfort himself for the mistakes he made as a father; with the rise of distilled spirits coming from Berengar's distillery, it was far easier to spend the day drinking your sorrows away. He truly blamed himself for the way things had turned out. As such, he left the governance of the Barony almost entirely in Berengar's hands; after all, the boy was a far more capable leader than he could ever be.

Though he had not abdicated his position, at this point, the aging man was Baron in name only.

On the other hand, Linde wrote about the news to her father, informing him that Berengar had won the war of intrigue and there was no longer a point to conspire against him. She came clean to her father about her illicit relationship with the man he had plotted against and demanded that she stay in Kufstein to act as his mistress. After all, what kind of man would want to marry her now that she was pregnant with someone else's child? The Count was furious, but there was nothing he could do at this point; ultimately, Linde convinced her father to agree to these terms by playing to his greed. If she maintained her affair with Berengar, then the profitable relationship between the two houses could continue as it always had, and potentially increase.

Though Berengar would never forgive his enemies for plotting against him, now was not the time for vengeance. As such, he consolidated his forces and the newfound security he found himself in. He spent the following days improving his militia, implementing agricultural technology, and always expanding his businesses, which had begun to become extremely profitable. With Count Lothar and his allies no longer conspiring against Berengar, he was able to open up the trade of excess materials and products to the men who were once his enemies. Regardless of whether or not their troops were equipped with fine steel armor and weapons, it did not matter to Berengar as such equipment was useless against the power of the musket.

Besides, they lacked the means of production and the knowledge to mass-produce plate armor; as such, at most, his enemy's forces would be mass equipped with brigandine and mail. While effective against swords, arrows, bolts, and lances, it would be useless against a musket ball at a proper distance. Berengar's greatest advantage was the technological advancement of his forces which increased by the day. He estimated that within a year, he would have the ability to rebore all of his troop's muskets so that they were rifled and thus far more effective. By then, he would have the capacity to engage the enemy at roughly 300 yards, potentially more considering the barrels on his muskets were 6 inches longer than the Springfield 1861 Rifled Musket in which he had derived the estimated effective range from.

Adela had become suspicious of Berengar's potential relationship with Linde, but she had not investigated it. Instead, she spent her remaining days

peacefully with Berengar, trusting that he was not a womanizer like she thought he might be. Soon she would have to return to her family's lands. After all, she did not have an excuse to stay here for so long after the engagement ceremony, and her father was pressuring for her to return. Unlike Linde, who had her father wrapped around her finger, Adela held no authority in that regard, and once she returned, it would be quite some time before she could see the man she loved again.

Currently, Berengar sat next to Adela in his father's study, which he had claimed to be his own during these past few days, and where he spent most of his waking hours. The girl was accompanying him once more while chatting about the future while snacking on cookies and milk.

"It's hard to believe it will be 4 years before we are married... Will you visit me for my birthday?"

Berengar, who was neck-deep in paperwork, overlooked her question and merely nodded as he grunted the phrase, "Uhuh," which instantly got on the little Girl's nerves. She was acting so adorable and discussing their future as a couple, and all he could think of was paperwork? Thus she decided to test him to see if he was really listening.

"Now that Lambert is gone, Linde has no father for her child. Would you be willing to take that role?"

Berengar continued writing and merely replied as if he were on autopilot, completely unaware of what he had just been asked.

"Sure, why not?"

At this point, Adela began to pout. Clearly, Berengar was not paying attention to what she was saying; either that or he was serious about her question, which only provoked her further. As such, the adolescent girl flicked his ear, which managed to gain the young man's attention.

"Adela, what the hell?"

When Berengar noticed the look on his face, he realized he had been caught and felt it was better to apologize for ignoring her than to continue to act like he was listening.

"I am sorry, truly I am, but I am currently swamped with paperwork. What was it you were saying?"

Adela merely snorted and walked out of the office while throwing a temper tantrum.

"Forget it! Clearly, you're too busy to listen to what I have to say!"

Berengar felt embarrassed as she strutted out of his room but had too much work to do. As such, he got back to his paperwork. Hopefully, he could finish it by dinner time. At this point, his greatest concern was the arrival of the Inquisition, who would be within Kufstein in a matter of days. If he could not settle things peacefully with the Church's emissaries, there was only one solution.... War!