

Steel 58

Chapter 58: A Stern Warning

With the death of the inquisition, a gloomy atmosphere had fallen over the Castle of Kufstein. His family was not immediately aware of the fact that Berengar had just slapped the Church in its face and denied its authority in his family's lands. Adela was the first to find out about such a thing; having heard the gunshots from outside, she rushed to the Great Hall, where she checked to see if Berengar was uninjured. When she arrived she witnessed the scene of Berengar grasping onto Father Antonio's shoulder and staring at the priest with a cold and murderous gaze. Adela was unaccustomed with the ruthless expression on Berengar's face, for she had never before witnessed his wrath. This was not the gentle smile and loving eyes he showed to his loved ones. Rather it was the callous gaze of a vengeful tyrant who took pleasure in punishing his enemies. She had never seen such a side of Berengar before and as a deeply devout Catholic, Adela was concerned that Berengar had done something unforgivable.

However, she never would have guessed that Berengar had executed two priests in his courtyard. When she looked out the window to see what had transpired, she was horrified by the bloody mess that remained from the scene of the Inquisitor's execution. She could not contain her terror and shrieked as she gazed upon the merciless display of Berengar's authority. When Berengar heard the screams of his fiancée, he looked over to her in shock; and wondered why was Adela there at this particular moment. This was not something he intended for the young girl to witness. In her dismay, Adela quickly ran over to Berengar and Father Antonio and inquired why such a horrific scene occurred.

"Berengar, what have you done!?!"

Berengar was well aware of Adela's extremely religious nature and had never actually talked to her about his views on the subject. After all, he was afraid she would react poorly to his thoughts about the Church. However, he could not lie his way out of this one; he had just executed two emissaries of the Vatican in his own courtyard. As such, he put on a stern expression and scolded the little girl for recklessly making assumptions.

"The church conspired against me and aided my brother in his attempts to usurp my birthright. These men came here as part of my brother's final ploy to have me convicted as a heretic and executed. They even threatened to raze my family's lands to the ground when I refused to recognize the legitimacy of their so-called investigation. As such, I had them executed. Isn't that right, father Antonio?"

Berengar gave the Inquisitor an oppressive gaze implying that if the Priest did not admit to his crimes, Berengar would have him suffer the same fate as the shredded corpses in the courtyard below. The truth was despite being an excellent torturer, Antonio was a cowardly man who deeply feared death. As such, the inquisitor quickly crumbled and admitted to Adela the crimes of the Church.

"What Berengar says is correct... Lambert, while sponsored by your Local priest, petitioned the Bishop of Innsbruck to request an investigation from the Inquisition into accusations about Berengar's heretical views. We knew the charges were false but were afraid that Berengar would not follow the will of the Church. Thus, we planned to frame and convict him anyway. Which we would have done if he had allowed us to investigate the charges against him."

Adela was shocked to hear this news; all her life, she looked up to the Church as a beacon of hope and viewed them as the arbiters of truth. Yet these men had conspired against Berengar to install a puppet onto the seat of power in Kufstein. It was as if the image she had in her mind about a flawless church came crumbling down around her as she listened to the wicked priest confess to the crimes he had committed. She could tell the man was speaking the truth, even if it was under duress.

Berengar noticed the stunned expression on the girl's face and could tell that she was in the middle of an existential crisis, and as such, he walked over to his little fiancée and hugged her while patting her head and whispered his utopian propaganda into her fine ears.

"My sweet Adela, I know you are faithful, and I respect that, but men rule the Church, and no man is above corruption. As long as you have faith in Christ and follow his teachings, you will be a good Christian woman."

Father Antonio could not help but mutter the word "Blasphemy!" under his breath. However, the moment he did so, Berengar stared fiercely at him, and the man instantly shut his trap. After hearing Berengar's words, Adela wanted to know more of his view of Christianity; however, she realized that he was currently dreadfully busy and decided to contemplate his words while praying to the Lord about which path to follow. After thinking it over for a few moments, she looked up at Berengar with her shining sapphire eyes and thanked him for his comfort.

"Thank you, Berengar; I do not know what I would do without you..."

Afterward, the girl released herself from his embrace and returned to her room. She had many things to think about and prepare for. She knew Berengar's actions would invoke the ire of the Church, and as such, she wanted to protect him to the best of her abilities. Thus she began to write a letter to her father, who was currently in his castle in Graz and inform him about the recent events within Kufstein. She would remind him to honor the terms of their alliance with the von Kufstein family if such actions were needed.

Berengar remained with Father Antonio and continued to exude his authority while in the priest's presence.

"If I see you or any other members of your wicked order entering the confines of my family's lands, I will have you and your ilk shot on sight! Is that understood?"

Father Antonio had nearly soiled himself in fear at this point. He had witnessed the power of the muskets as their volley fire mangled the bodies of his fellow members of the Inquisition. He had no intentions of ever returning to this godless land and would make sure to warn the other members of his order to avoid Kufstein at all costs. With his departure, Berengar had seized absolute authority over this Barony comprised of roughly 20,000 people and now reigned supreme.