

Steel 98

Chapter 98: Adela's Birthday III

After finishing the meal, the guests for Adela's birthday all sat around for a while and discussed things with one another. Shockingly the Duke of Austria had shown up to the occasion, alongside several of his children. This greatly showed how favorable Count Otto was in the eyes of the Duke. Duke Wilmar von Habsburg was the current head of the Habsburg Dynasty and the ruler over the entirety of the Duchy of Austria; he was relatively young for a man of his position, being in his mid-thirties, despite this, he already had several children in their teens.

One of his children who were attending the ceremony was a boy named Conrad, who was slightly younger than Adela and had been friends with her since childhood, where he held a crush on her for the longest period of time. Unfortunately, the girl had been sold off to her cousin by her wretched father for whatever reason. As such, he had to endure the humiliation of seeing the girl he most desired handed over to another man. One who he believed to be quite inferior to himself. Conrad was entirely unaware of Berengar's recent rise to power and his bold defiance of the Church. He never really kept up with the politics of the realm and instead enjoyed his time with frivolities.

As such, the boy decided it was time to approach the woman of his desires and see if he could win her over to his side. After all, who would want to marry a sickly fool like Berengar, I mean, there was clearly nobody at the party who remotely resembled the youth's description, and that meant that the scoundrel had not even bothered to show up to his fiancée's birthday celebration. Clearly, that must be a point of contention for Adela, which Conrad could use to win her favor.

"Adela, it has been a long time since we last met! I must say you have grown ever more beautiful since then. I heard you were betrothed to your pathetic and sickly cousin; surely you must disagree with such a decision? I mean, after all, a lowly Baron's son who does not even have the gall to visit his fiancée on the night of her thirteenth birthday is clearly not a match for a woman of your caliber."

Berengar, on the other hand, watched the display of the boy slandering him peacefully as he sipped from the wine contained within the golden chalice in

his hand and narrowed his gaze upon this little rat who sought to steal his bride from him. Any man who coveted what belonged to him and made a move on it would surely suffer his wrath, no matter what their position may be in life. As such, he became quite hostile to the hyena who sought to steal his lioness and approached the boy with his hand extended in "friendship" as he introduced himself.

"I am Berengar, Viscount of Kufstein and Adela's fiance; who might you be?"

Conrad was shocked when the tall and strong man in front of him introduced himself as Berengar and as a Viscount. Clearly there had to be some sort of mistake? As such, he looked over to his father for support, who merely stared at his own son as if he were looking at an imbecile. Seeing his father was not going to support him in this matter, Conrad decided to take the word of this man claiming to be Berengar and reached out his hand to accept the gesture. When he did so, the boy felt as if a vice grip had squeezed his hand; Conrad nearly yelped in pain as Berengar kept a friendly expression on his face while sending a clear message to the little rogue who sought to abscond with his woman. Luckily Conrad had managed to contain himself and responded politely to Berengar, hoping that his background would save him from further pain.

"I am Conrad von Habsburg, son of Duke Wilmar von Habsburg, and an old friend of Adela's"

However, much to the boy's shock, Berengar did not let go of his vice grip and continued to shake his hand for another few seconds before releasing it. The sheer audacity to continue to threaten the boy after he had already made his superior position clear was something he could not fathom in his naive little brain. Fear instantly filled the boy's mind as he saw the sinister smile on Berengar's face and the authoritative look in his eye; despite being in a much lower position than himself, Berengar exuded an aura of domination that did not go unnoticed by the other lords, even Duke Wilmar gazed in curiosity at the foolish display his son was putting on. As if by the simple fact that Conrad was his son, the boy could steal this man's fiancée.

The Duke did not even take Berengar's actions as a sign of disrespect to himself, merely that the young man was confident in his ability to protect what was his. This was not an act of arrogance but overwhelming conviction. The

more he observed Berengar, the more he desired him as a member of his council; despite his young age, Berengar was clearly competent, to say the least.

Ultimately Berengar's little display of authority was broken up by Adela who noticed that Conrad had been trembling in fright and thus glared at Berengar while tugging on his sleeves and pleading with a pouting expression.

"Berengar, he is just a boy, there is no reason to go this far to intimidate the kid!"

Adela's words wounded Conrad's pride more than anything else could have. At this moment, He finally realized that Adela had never viewed him as a potential partner. With her confirmation, he also realized that the man beside Adela really was Berengar, and he foolishly had attempted to swipe his fiancée away right before his eyes. After realizing the looks, he was receiving, Berengar retracted his tyrannical expression and put on a facade that made him seem like he was joking the whole time, as he tried to justify his actions to Adela, who was still pouting.

"I was just teasing the kid; there is nothing to worry about, right Conrad?"

The kid was grasping onto his own hand, which was now sore from Berengar's tight grip, and stammered as he tried to come back to his senses.

"Y... Yes, it was all good fun! I have to go now Adela, I will see you later."

With that, the boy returned to his father to lick his wounds only after suffering a humiliating defeat in front of all the lords and ladies of Steiermark. When Conrad finally reached his father, he was chastised for his behavior in the cold and monotone voice that he was so familiar with.

"You overstepped your bounds, Conrad, that man is formidable, and you openly coveted his future wife. You are lucky he showed you respect for your position."

Conrad began to throw a tantrum after being scolded by his father, which luckily went unnoticed by the surrounding nobles who were too busy conversing with Berengar and Adela.

"Showed respect for my position? He hurt my hand!"

Wilmar merely drank from his chalice with a stoic expression as he continued to lecture his errant son.

"The fact that he did not break your hand after your pathetic attempt to steal his woman was more than enough respect."

With these words, Conrad was instantly shut up by his father and sat in the corner in silence, rubbing his sore hands and reflecting upon his actions. Not only was he ever so slightly injured by Berengar, but the girl of his dreams so ruthlessly rejected him, and his father had chastised him for his actions. This was the most degrading day of his life.

As for Berengar and Adela they did not think twice about the occurrence after it had been dealt with. Even if the Duke wanted to pick a fight with him over teaching his son a valuable lesson, he would welcome it. Luckily for everyone, the Duke only felt respect for Berengar's actions; if the young Viscount had groveled when Conrad mentioned that he was the Duke's son, his estimation of Berengar truly would have plummeted.