

Tyranny of Steel

Chapter 15

Chapter 15: Unimaginable Wealth

When the light of dawn rose upon the fertile valley, once more Berengar had awoken to begin his daily exercise. Just because he was now a healthy young man did not mean he did not have to maintain said health. He began his routine with a series of pushups, situps, squats, and pull-ups. The exercise equipment he had specially ordered had arrived long ago and was kept firmly in the corner of his large stone room. As such, he could accomplish most of his objectives without leaving the comfort and safety of his own personal space. Nowadays, only his daily run was outside the confines of his bedroom. It was a truly efficient use of time and space.

Once Berengar had finished his daily exercise, the first course of action he took was that of his morning bath; the young lord refused to spend the day covered in his own sweat. Though by now, everyone in the castle was aware of his bathing habits. It could practically be said that during the thirty minutes before breakfast, the bathroom was reserved for Berengar.

The young lord was especially excited about today's bath. For you see, almost a month ago, after Berengar had convinced the family to begin bathing regularly, he realized the need for a more refined bathing area. As such, he successfully managed to convince his father to break ground on a grand project. During this past month, constant construction had been going on in the corner of the Castle, where a private bathhouse was constructed within the castle walls. Today was the first day after its completion.

As Berengar entered the new bathroom, he noticed there were three separate chambers for the large room. The first area was the dressing room, where the occupant would dress and undress. The second room was the lavatory, in case one needed to use it during bath time; the third area was the actual room where the bathing occurred. A large circular stone bath was fitted in the center of the room and was heated to nearly 100 degrees Fahrenheit. This was not just a bath; it was practically a hot tub. Berengar spent a good fifteen minutes soaking his stress away in the large bath in which he could practically swim before finally getting out. Afterward, he dried himself off with a towel and went to the dressing room, where he properly dressed. It was only after he was fully clothed that he decided to style his hair the way he preferred it.

After confirming his appearance in the mirror, he left the newly designed bathhouse and headed for the dining room, where he met his family and fiancée for breakfast. As he snacked on his favorite breakfast sandwich, he looked over at Adela, who had another ecstatic smile on her face; it would appear that she had fallen in love with the food in this small Barony. When she noticed Berengar's gaze, she covered her mouth with her napkin as her cheeks flushed. Though before she could speak, Berengar had shifted his attention to his parents.

"Father, Mother, I must say the new bathhouse is excellent; it was truly a worthy investment."

When Sieghard heard the word investment, he nearly had a heart attack, that bathhouse cost him a fortune; how would he ever recover from such an expensive luxury. He could not believe he allowed his son to convince him to purchase it. It would take some time for the family to recover from the amount they had spent on the commission. Or so he thought, the old Baron was completely unaware how much steel had been amassed within the past twenty-four hours. Practically all the iron ore that had been stockpiled in the Barony was converted to steel ingots overnight. Berengar only had plans to sell a few tonnes of it. The rest would be used as the basis for his industrial vision.

When Berengar saw the painful expression his father made, he was quite concerned.

"Father, you look ill. Are you alright?"

After recovering, Sieghard glared at his son; he swore he would never forgive the boy for the financial loss he took commissioning that thing.

"I'm fine; it's just that the bath you so thoroughly enjoyed this morning cost us a fortune to build. I don't know how we will recover"

Berengar did not even take note of his father's words. At first, he merely bit into a slice of his breakfast sausage nonchalantly. It was only after he realized what his father had said that he began to laugh. Which only caused Sieghard's enraged gaze to intensify; the man's face was practically boiling in rage.

"Is poverty a laughing matter to you, Berengar?"

Adela had not heard the conversation; she was too busy enjoying her food. However, what Berengar said next immediately grabbed her attention.

"Oh, father, if you knew how many pure steel ingots were sitting in our warehouse right now, you would never say such a thing. At this point, we are sitting on enough wealth to buy the County!"

Though Berengar's claims might have been a slight exaggeration, it was by no means a lie. They had significant wealth in terms of raw steel. There were currently two counts trying to marry into the von Kufstein family and place their potential sons-in-law on the seat of power explicitly because they were aware of how much iron ore the region had available.

Hell, Adela's father was willing to sacrifice his daughter's happiness and marry her to a lazy, petty, sickly wastrel to get a claim to those resources. If the two Counts had known that Berengar had turned the Barony's current stockpile of iron ore into pure steel ingots

overnight, they would be tempted to invade the Barony and seize the wealth for themselves.

Sieghard's jaw practically dropped to the floor as he heard this news. He had not been following his son's industrial and agricultural ventures too carefully. In his opinion, Berengar's claims were too wild to believe. However, he did have experts confirm there would be no downside in adopting the various ideas. So he decided to take a gamble and see if anything would come of it. If what Berengar had said was true, then there were dozens of tonnes of steel sitting in his warehouse right now waiting to be sold or processed. The old Baron could hardly believe his ears.

Adela was equally shocked; she knew her father wanted the iron mines of Kufstein. She was well aware of her father's intentions to use her to get Berengar, the son and heir, to hand them over to her family when he became Baron, but now her fiancée claimed he had turned a warehouse full of iron ore into steel ingots overnight. She was equally in disbelief as Sieghard. If this were true, she would have to write to her father and convince him to change his plans for the future.

Only Henrietta had a calm expression as she had no idea what any of this information meant for her or her family. Instead, she was excited to hear the new bath was finally complete. The little girl had an urge to run away from the table and take a bath this instant, though she refrained herself from such unladylike behavior.

Berengar could not stop chuckling. Did his father seriously think that he would coerce him into spending the family's life savings on a private bathhouse with no plan to recuperate their losses? What they would gain from selling a fraction of the steel would be enough to fill their coffers and invest in the mining industry. What steel remained would be used to start a new age of industry.

After all, steel was an important component of his plans for Barony-wide irrigation. Let alone the innovations to other fields of agriculture like the steel plow, combine harvester, the grain elevator, etc. These were all inventions he had planned to make in due time, but they needed a large amount of steel to implement on a Realm-wide scale.

The young lord estimated that the Barony's fields would be filled with early forms of mechanized agriculture within a year or two. Which would allow for far fewer farmers, and in turn, create more tradesmen who would be used to fuel his fledgling industry. For now, his focus was on creating steel pipes for irrigation. As long as he had the four-field system, irrigation, and phosphate fertilizer used on every farm, this year's harvest was sure to be massive.

Sieghard could hardly believe what he was hearing; he decided to excuse himself from the breakfast and immediately check with Ludwig about the details. He had to see the stockpile of steel with his own eyes to believe it.

"Apologies, my loving family, but it appears I have some serious business I must attend to. I will see you all at dinner."

Afterward, the Baron left the dining hall and rushed to the storehouse, keeping the iron ore. Sieghard would spend the rest of the day having Ludwig walk him through the process and explain Berengar's ideas for how best to make use of such a vast quantity of steel.

As Sieghard left the dining hall, Adela recovered from her shock and decided to ask Berengar a question of dire importance to her family's plans.

"Berengar... What exactly is it that you plan to do with so much steel?"

Berengar smiled at the young girl sitting next to him and patted her head affectionately. He knew why her father had proposed their marriage, and he was not about to give away the key to his family's success.

"First, I intend to sell a portion of the ingots, and use the profits to fill our coffers, and invest in the mining industry to increase industrial productivity. As for the steel that remains afterward, I intend to use it to implement a system of realm-wide irrigation to improve the efficiency of our agricultural production."

The young lady had no idea what irrigation was or how it affected agriculture, but it appeared Berengar's ambitions were purely domestic. He had no desire to build a large army and conquer other regions. He merely wanted to increase profits and crop yields. After listening to the Count's ambitions of becoming the Duke of Austria her entire life, she felt greatly relieved that her future husband was not a power-hungry madman like her father.

Instead, everything Berengar desired was to increase the quality of life and economic productivity of the people he would one day rule over. She had never before met a single nobleman who was content with his lot in life; everyone she had ever met, including the men in her family, all desired more than what they currently had. Berengar was different; he was fine with being a lowly Baron, as long as his Barony was the most advanced region in the world and could defend their sovereignty.

She knew now it was best to convince her father to abandon the idea of taking over the mineral rights of the region, as Berengar would put the resources to far better use than her father would. She needed to convince her father to negotiate with Berengar, and Sieghard for that matter, on a fair price for the steel they have already produced. After all, her father would not be satisfied without the iron or steel required to equip his armies.

Though the matter was of great importance, she felt like spending the rest of the afternoon with Berengar, who had his schedule open due to his father taking up Ludwig's time. As such, the two took a walk across the town and conversed with the

common folk. The second time around, Adela was far more social with the villagers, who began to recognize her as their future Baroness. It was not until dinner when the two had returned from their second date and entered the Castle's gates.

Though Berengar was anxious about getting his designs to Ludwig and introduce irrigation as soon as possible, he felt as if a day or two of rest was needed every now and then. After all, he never expected his time with Adela to be so delightful. Adela also treasured the time she spent with Berengar. She felt as if she was dreaming, for the last two days had been so peaceful and filled with joy—something she was not accustomed to under the yoke of her father's tyranny. After dining with her soon-to-be in-laws, she retired to the new bathhouse, where she finally understood Berengar's habit of bathing twice a day. As the day's accumulation washed away from her flawless skin, she sat in the bath thinking about her recent date with Berengar.

It was not until a half-hour later when she came out of the bath and saw Berengar at the doorway entrance. Though she was fully dressed in her nightgown, her hair was let down and still wet, and for some reason, this caused her great embarrassment. Thus she fled back to the room she currently occupied, avoiding Berengar's gaze the entire time. It was only after the door was safely latched behind her that she calmed down and realized she still needed to write the letter to her father.

She spent the remainder of her waking hours writing the letter. What was initially planned to be a request to purchase the steel at a fair price turned into a letter from a young girl gushing about her crush. Only the very end of the letter remotely resembled her initial intentions. As if she hastily added it on after she had written everything on her mind about Berengar. Shortly after its completion, she handed it off to one of her knights and ordered him to deliver the letter to her father as soon as possible. As soon as the task was complete, she returned to her bed-chamber, where she fell asleep with a satisfied smile on her face.

Berengar, on the other hand, had spent the remainder of his time bathing and drafting up blueprints for some of his agricultural designs. Though it would be a while before they could be fully implemented, it was best to have the designs drafted as soon as possible. His only regret about today was that he had failed to deliver his designs on irrigation to Ludwig. It did not matter, for he could always do so tomorrow. After all, at least Adela was happy. After finishing his work for the day, Berengar snuffed out the light of his oil lamp and crawled into bed, where he rested comfortably on his feather mattress for the rest of the night. Tomorrow was an important day in his plans for agricultural advancement.