

Tyranny of Steel

Chapter 31 -32

Chapter 31: The Aftermath

After the battle had occurred, there was much cause for celebrating the overwhelming victory gained by the militia forces. Having gotten their first battle out of the way with the new weapons, the men comprised of Berengar's forces were entirely confident of defending their territory from any invading force, and more importantly, in Berengar's command. The fact that the young Lord stood at the frontlines facing down wave after wave of enemies alongside his troops would be spoken throughout the villagers of Kufstein for months to come.

Berengar, on the other hand, promised a great celebration after they cleaned up the battlefield; they could not very well allow hundreds of corpses to lie on the fields to rot. As such, after much effort, the Militia had dug a series of mass graves where they buried Ulrich and his forces. Berengar would have difficulty explaining his overwhelming victory to his father if he told the whole truth. Despite the desire to brag about his feats, he decided to lie about the battle and completely downsize the results. Because the men at arms and knights had by now fled the confines of the Barony of Kufstein, and the peasants who fought against them were round up, lined against the wall, and executed, there were no witnesses to the events that transpired aside from the forces loyal to Berengar, and as long as he gave the order to keep keep the telling of their war stories to what he had instructed there should be no problems with the leaking of how effective his firearms were.

The story Berengar told to his father about the attempt on his life by Ulrich, the mustering of his forces, how they built the defenses and defended the position from a few hundred peasant levies. The Lord's professional forces were very different from reality. Berengar spun the events, making it seem like Ulrich was unaware of hand cannons, and foolishly attacked the hill with a few men. The missing peasants were explained by running away from their homes and families in fear of reprisal from the Baron. It was a stretch, but judging by the fact that the knights and men at arms also fled the region, Sieghard had no choice but to believe it. After all, hand cannons were extremely effective against the peasant levies' light armor or lack thereof and frightening to those who were not accustomed to the sound.

As for the death of Ulrich, Berengar made it seem like a stray shot had pierced his skull when the visor to his helmet was open; with the Lord's death, his forces collapsed and routed. Sieghard sent a team to investigate the fields to confirm this information was true but found no traces of the mass graves and only the small ones Berengar had used to mislead the Baron and his brother Lambert. As far as anyone was aware, the battle was quite small and was set between 200 of Berengar's militia dug in at the mining town and armed with hand cannons against 300 of Ulrich's men who fled with the accidental death their Lord. After all, in this feudal world, it was considered unacceptable to kill a nobleman outright if it could at all be avoided. Men of higher birth were afforded the

privilege of ransom. There was no mention of the use of cannons; due to Berengar's previous misinformation, the cannons were considered to be static weapons and largely immobile by the uninitiated. Thus he did not want to reveal how effective they really were.

After Ulrich's untimely demise, his son and heir, who was only a small child, was named Lord of Wildsch?nau; as he was so young, he needed a regent, which Sieghard placed from a dedicated member of his own court to ensure the loyalty of the young Lord who was now his vassal. He would not allow the grieving widow of the boy's traitorous father to skew the future Lord's allegiance to his liege.

As for the foreman who was captured, he was Berengar's only viable witness in Lambert's schemes against him; however, unfortunately, as the man was led to the dungeons of the Castle of Kufstein, he was shortly thereafter found dead from asphyxiation, it was ruled a suicide as the man had supposedly choked himself to death with the chains that bound him. Berengar, however, knew that this was clearly the work of Lambert and his allies cleaning up their mess. The only witness he had to his brother's ploy was Linde, and Berengar refused to play that card; she was a valuable spy not only against Lambert but her father as well. He would not expose such a precious asset against his enemies in a rash attempt to expose Lambert's machinations. It became apparent that his father's army and the guard had been compromised. Clearly, there was a faction loyal to Lambert among them, and such a force would need to be purged when Berengar finally came to power.

It took a long time for Berengar to explain the volatile situation that had occurred to his father. By the time he was finally able to wash the dirt and grime off of his filthy body, it was late into the night. His paranoia that he had developed from being trapped in the darkness of the mine shaft for days began to take hold as he sat alone in the bath during the twilight hours. As he heard the door creak open and the light taps of footsteps approach his location, he felt like another assassin was nearing by. When the footsteps finally reached his vicinity, Berengar launched a surprise attack on the would-be assassin, dragging them into the pool of water and pressing their head beneath its surface.

For whatever reason, it never occurred to him that Linde was entering his bath to be with the man she loved. After all, she had been beside herself the past few days as she waited for news of Berengar's situation. Every day that Berengar was trapped, she was overcome with anxiety and despair, to the point where she could barely maintain the facade of Lambert's ally. It took a few moments for Berengar to realize he was in the process of drowning his own lover. When he finally came to his senses, he quickly released his hands and allowed the divine beauty to resurface from the filthy bathwater, where she struggled to breathe. Berengar looked upon her with shock and terror, as he had acted upon instinct, and did not recognize what he was doing until after he had harmed Linde.

The girl's sky blue eyes were filled with tears as she stared at Berengar in fear; she could not help but ask why she was so severely punished.

"What the hell! Why would you do that?"

Berengar, who was in the middle of a panic attack because of his actions, struggled to breathe, which was incredibly painful due to his fractured rib. As such, he grabbed ahold of his side and winced in pain as he struggled to give the girl an explanation.

"I'm... I'm sorry, I... thought you were an assassin."

Linde gazed upon the deep sense of dread that was spread across Berengar's immaculate visage and instantly forgave him; she could not imagine the sense of distress and agony that Berengar had suffered while being trapped in the darkness of the mines by his lonesome for days on end, wondering when he would finally enter death's embrace. As such, she approached him cautiously and wrapped her warm body around his, placing her head on his shoulder.

"I'm here for you if you want to talk about it..."

It was only after he felt the warmth and love of Linde's heavenly body that he began to calm himself down and realize that he was not still in the cavern waiting for death. He was finally home, and though there were enemies in his midst, those who loved and cared for him far outnumbered them. Quickly, the sense of paranoia and dread was changed to one of intense wrath as he gained control of his emotions and began to plot his brother's downfall. At the moment, he still did not have enough evidence to bring charges against the treasonous little brat. He had been on the defensive for too long against Lambert, and now he would conspire against his own little brother and bring the little bastard to justice. Yes, justice, not vengeance. He could not very well kill his own brother and be labeled a kinslayer for the rest of his days.

If Berengar so desired, he could easily have his little brother assassinated by Linde, though that would not be good for his conscience. Berengar would not stoop so low as to engage in fratricide, at least at the moment. If Lambert truly crossed the line, there was nothing Berengar would not attempt if it meant achieving his goals. Instead, he would target his brother's allies and cut off Lambert's support one by one. Aside from the Count of Tyrol, Lambert's allies were largely among his father's vassals and the armies that supported them. If he could identify them, he would have a much easier time dispatching them to the afterlife. As such, he began to share his scheme with Linde, who was Berengar's most valuable asset in the shadow war with his brother.

"My dear Linde, I have a task for you..."

Linde had sparkles in her eyes, though she had yet to be rewarded for her previous actions; she knew it was only a matter of time, and with a new task meant an even greater reward. As such, she instantly replied obediently.

"Yes, master?"

Berengar narrowed his eyes; within them contained a great sense of wrath and a desire for retribution. He was a man who would show no mercy to his enemies, and this recent attempt on his life had made him particularly vengeful, even if he told himself it was a desire for justice.

"I want a list of names of every single person who has ever aided my brother in his attempts to gain the inheritance. Who they are, where they live, their weaknesses, and the extent to which they aided him. If someone so much as entertained the idea of taking my life, I want to know about it in exact detail! I trust this is something you can handle?"

Linde nodded with a deep smile on her face as she cuddled up against Berengar.

"Anything you require, Master."

Berengar gazed down at the peerless figure of the gorgeous young woman next to him and smiled deviously.

"By the way, I need to reward you for saving my life. Do you have any particular desires that I may fulfill?"

Linde blushed at the words with embarrassment, though deep down she had been waiting for this moment, as such, sat atop his lap and began to make out with him. The remainder of the bath session was filled with sounds that, if overheard by others, would cause a great scandal. Nevertheless, those who dwelled in the castle noticed not a single noise as the couple enjoyed the time they spent together with great passion. By the time the two left the bathhouse, they returned to Berengar's chambers, where they spent the rest of their waking hours continuing their fun.

On the other hand, Lambert was wide awake and filled with terror as he hid within the confines of his large stone room. The attempt on his brother's life had failed, and the foreman used his name during the act. If Berengar was unaware of his previous endeavors, then he was certainly aware now. Not only that but one of his greatest allies was now dead, all because the fool carelessly had his visor open. Surely if the visor to his bascinet were closed, the rocks fired from the hand cannons would have glanced off, right?

Of course, Lambert had no way of knowing the real way in which Ulrich had perished, nor was he aware that the lead balls fired from the musket would have penetrated the bascinet either way if fired from an appropriate distance. Instead, Lambert felt he caught an unlucky break; his plans were leaked to Berengar, possibly from someone under his command. Still, it could have also come from one of the many workers Berengar brought with him, who were suspicious of the foreman's actions. He had no way of knowing how the militia and rescue force arrived so quickly to Berengar's aid. All of

these things contributed to the overwhelming sense of angst he felt deep in his stomach.

Nevertheless, the worst part was that Lambert now had to fear his brother's reprisals and with how things have been going lately, he could not help but be afraid of divine intervention on Berengar's behalf. Because he was unaware of Berengar's schemes to target his allies, the teenage boy dreaded an attempt on his own life by his elder brother as an act of retribution. Thus while Berengar was enjoying his time with Lambert's fiancée, Lambert did not get a wink of sleep as he was too fearful of what might transpire while he slumbered.

Chapter 32: Recovery

Adela struggled to fall asleep, a lot had happened in the last few days, and she recently only became aware that her fiance had returned from the Lordship of Wildsch?nau after a botched assassination attempt. Yet other than spending many hours explaining the exact situation to his father, Berengar made no attempt to visit her. Instead, he went straight to the bath to cleanse himself of the filth that he had garnered throughout the time in the cavern. Afterward, before she could approach him and check to see how he was feeling, he went to his bed chambers, where he was reportedly resting. The young girl had heard that Berengar was injured and needed rest, but she did not know to what extent; as such, she worried deeply about his health.

The reality of the situation was Berengar's full attention during and after the bath had been captured by Linde, who was secretly bedding Adela's future husband behind the scenes. Nobody was aware of the illicit relationship between Berengar, and Linde, especially not Adela. She was not the type of girl to accept her future husband to be playing around with other women, even if she was too young to take their place.

Eventually, Adela could no longer take the heartache of being incapable of seeing her dearly beloved, who, as far as she was aware, was hospitalized in his room at the moment. As such, she got out of bed and dressed in a white lace nightgown that was appropriate for the time period. It was only after she had tidied her appearance did the young lady depart from her bed chambers and silently make her way to Berengar's room. Her actions, if spotted, would surely cause a misunderstanding, and rumors were bound to flare. Luckily for everyone involved, nobody had witnessed her depart from her quarters. She quickly found herself in front of Berengar's door, where her heart began to beat rapidly. She had never visited his room after hours before; she wondered if he was asleep or not. After taking a few moments to calm herself, she lightly knocked on the door.

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Berengar was in the middle of playing with his favorite toy when he heard a knock on the door; he was in no position to answer it at the moment, as there was a divine beauty "sitting" atop his lap. He could not fathom who would possibly be at his doorstep at this

hour aside from Linde. However, he made sure to motion with his hand to Linde to cease her activity and stay silent. After making sure the girl's lips were sealed, he just about called out to whoever was at the door when he heard a soft feminine voice with which he was all too familiar from behind the door.

"Berengar, are you awake? Are you okay? I didn't get to see you when you returned... Can I come in?"

Berengar quickly unsheathed himself from Linde and whispered in her ear with a voice so low Adela could not hear it from the other side of the door.

"Get under the bed, and take your nightgown with you!"

Linde did not disobey his commands, albeit she was a bit frustrated she didn't get to finish; she quickly hopped off the bed and grabbed ahold of her nightgown, which was scattered across the stone tile floor. She then crawled under the bed where she barely managed to fit in the crawlspace with her plump behind and buxom chest. Afterward, Berengar quickly put on a pair of trousers and answered the door. Adela was just about to leave when the door swung open. In her hand was an oil lamp that illuminated Berengar's bruised body, which caused Adela to become deeply concerned about his health.

The young lady gasped when she saw the condition he was in and instinctively touched his abdomen to check to see if Berengar was okay. Berengar, who was desperately trying to hide his lower region behind the door, could not help but feel awkward as the little girl touched his bruised abs. Eventually, he could no longer contain it and broke the silence between the couple.

"Ahem... You know you shouldn't be here at this hour."

Upon hearing Berengar's voice, Adela quickly realized what she was doing and retracted her hand away, where she tried to hide her sheepish expression.

"I could not sleep knowing that you were injured... I wanted to check on your condition."

Berengar looked at Adela as if she were a little angel. Unlike the vixen who currently lie under his bed which ran him ragged despite his injuries, this young lady was too stressed to fall asleep knowing that her fiancée may be seriously injured. Luckily for her, he was fine, aside from a cracked rib and a few bruises. Personally, he has had had worse and barely noticed the pain except for when he laughed or breathed heavily, but he would never admit that to a pretty girl who was concerned about him.

Berengar smiled, and he explained his situation to the young girl who was kind enough to check up on his condition even if it ruined her reputation.

"I'm hanging in there; at the very least, it is nothing life-threatening. So you don't have to worry too much."

Adela immediately felt relieved that her future husband was not in any danger and smiled endearingly at him.

"Well, that is good, is there anything I can do to help?"

Berengar did not want to let the opportunity go to waste; it was a way to gain points with the little girl and tease Linde. As such, he invited the girl inside to his room to talk.

"Do you mind coming in? Since you are here, I have some things I want to talk about in regards to our engagement ceremony."

Adela's cheeks became flushed as she heard the offer; it was completely inappropriate for a girl like her to be in a boy's room after dark. Well, it was inappropriate for her to be alone with a boy in his room, period, but she had already done that several times.

On the other hand, Linde heard the words "engagement ceremony" and instantly began to scowl as she thought to herself.

'Ceremony? What ceremony? Is he throwing a party to celebrate his engagement? Why was I not invited? Why don't I get one? Why is master making me listen to this? How cruel!'

Her scowl instantly turned into a pout as she felt left out, she knew she was only his concubine, but it still pained her heart every time she saw Berengar act flirty with his future wife. Luckily for her, Adela refused the offer.

"I'm sorry, Berengar, I don't think that would be appropriate... I'll see you tomorrow!"

with that said, the little girl in twintails ran off back towards her quarters. It was quite an adorable sight; seeing her run off in embarrassment. Despite that Berengar said his thoughts aloud as he shifted his attention to Linde, who was crawling out from under the bed.

"Maybe I teased her a bit too much... What do you think?"

When he saw tears starting to form in the girl's eyes, he could not help but laugh to himself.

"Did I tease you too much too?"

After he said that, he held the girl in his arms and carried her back to his bed, where he spent his waking hours making it up to the young woman.

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Before he knew it, a whole month had passed, and Berengar could no longer feel any pain in his ribs. Though he would still try to take it easy for the next two weeks, he was essentially healed from his injuries. During this time, things went as planned. The mines were overhauled completely and seized by the von Kufstein family in reparations for the attempt on Berengar's life. The von Wildsch?nau family suffered greatly from the loss of the mines, their professional army, and 1500 peasants, which despite the rumors that they had all died at the skirmish at mining town, nobody had ever found any trace of the mass graves. Berengar was truly a master at hiding bodies.

Berengar's exploits were advancing wonderfully; by now, the fields within the vicinity of the town of Kufstein were fully irrigated, His chemical laboratory was up and running, and he began to produce various things within it. Though he still lacked a dedicated team of chemists to work full time on chemistry, he managed to work on some small projects when he found the time. His flax farms and textile factory were either fully operational or close to completion. The labor force of Kufstein had grown quite rapidly after the implementation of irrigation, which allowed Berengar to open up a separate production line for agricultural equipment like the steel plow, the combine harvester, seeder etc. On the other hand, After the skirmish at the mining town, the volunteer militia was on a recruiting spree; they barely had enough time to equip their soldiers properly. By now, Berengar's artillery battery was full, and he had a total of 800 infantry. He was getting very close to his goals.

His spy network had produced great results, as Linde was able to uncover a long list of names of those who were in bed with Lambert, and Berengar was currently in the process of figuring out who to conspire against first. Linde had even managed to spread the web that was his informants to the other regions of the Barony of Kufstein. Rumors began to spread of the heroism Berengar showed in the face of death, how he was no longer a sickly lord, and how he was a benevolent lord to his people. This was all due to the network Linde had set up; she wanted to get rid of those filthy rumors regarding her lover as quickly as possible. Though they still prevailed among the nobility, many of whom had met Berengar in the past and had poor first impressions. The common people were more inclined to believe the rumors Linde spread, how he survived an assassination attempt only to lead a volunteer force of peasants armed with hand cannons to defeat the professional forces of Lord Ulrich von Wildsch?nau. Of course, the rumors she spread were greatly under exaggerated at first; over time, they had evolved to a point where they practically mirrored the truth of the battle.

Currently, Berengar was observing himself in the bathroom mirror; it had been a little over three months since he had been reincarnated in this world. He started out as a borderline emaciated, sickly youth. Now he had grown firmly into his body, which was well-toned with muscle, and though lean, he looked extraordinarily fit. He figured with the way this body was designed, he would never be as muscular as his past life, but that was fine, considering his princely face would not look well combined with the hyper-masculine body of a soldier. It would be a damn shame to ruin his regal appearance

with the obsession of becoming a warrior again. He was not a soldier in this life, but a Nobleman, and one day maybe even an Emperor.

His ambitions had grown wildly since the battle with Ulrich's forces. He had no desire to be Holy Roman Emperor. Instead, he had the desire to carve an Empire of his own from the German-Speaking regions. It was still four centuries too early for the German Empire to come into existence, but he would speed up the process in this timeline. As a man of German descent in his previous life, and an Austrian noble in this life, he felt it was his destiny to unite the German people into one cohesive Empire. He was a strong believer in the concept of the nation-state and felt that complex multi-ethnic, multilingual Empires were a lot more difficult to manage and would eventually become unstable. He did not know why, but seeing his peasant forces crush the feudal army of his enemy awoke something in him, he felt it would be a damn shame to squander his knowledge in a small region like a Barony, after all in all of the strategy games he played in his old life, he was never content with being in charge of a minor nation.

For now, those lofty ambitions would have to wait, his engagement ceremony was in a few days, and it would be an exceptional occasion. Not only were his father's vassals and their family's going to arrive in Kufstein, but also the Count of Steiermark and his family, as well as the Count of Tyrol. Linde forced Berengar's hand and thus he invited her father to arrive, not because she particularly cared about respecting the alliance his family had forged with her father, but because she wanted an official invitation, rather than just being present. She no longer cared about her father's ambitions; he was not a man fit to be Duke, let alone King; but in her eyes Berengar was.

By now, some of the families had already arrived and were lodging in Sieghard's estate. He was deeply concerned about a lack of rooms for guests, and as such, during the past month, he had a special lodging area built for the excessive amounts of families who would be arriving. The areas were essentially Chateaus designed by Berengar; they appeared similar to Castles but did not have the defensive structures and were quite luxurious. They could very well afford the expense after the massive sale of steel.

After Berengar had finished admiring his appearance in the mirror and gotten properly dressed in his opulent attire, he slicked back his hair with pomade and left the bathroom. Today was a new day, and he had many guests to greet alongside Adela. There were also many on the list of his enemies that appeared, and he would do his best to come to know their weaknesses in the following days. Not a single soul who plotted against him would escape his fury.