

Steel 76

Chapter 76: Endorsement of Theft

Over the course of the next couple of weeks, Berengar was tasked with incorporating Kitzbühel into his family's domain and going through the necessary procedures to declare his father Sieghard as the Viscount of Kufstein. Word quickly spread of Berengar's rapid conquest of the neighboring Barony, and the other feudal lords were left scratching their heads wondering how Berengar had managed to effectively force the Baron of Kitzbühel to surrender in under a week. Of course, as per the terms of surrender, Baron Guntrum and his surviving men were incapable of leaking information regarding Berengar's advanced weapons and tactics to anyone. As such, numerous theories came to be on how Berengar had achieved such a feat.

Count Lothar, who was Berengar's liege, was unhappy with the news; with Berengar's conquest, he had lost a direct Vassal. However, there was not much he could do about the situation as he was aware of his daughter's relationship with the young Viscount and had no way to punish him without gaining her disapproval. As a man tightly controlled by his desires to please his daughters, he dreaded such an outcome. As such, Count Lothar quickly recognized the results of the war and recognized Sieghard as the Viscount of Kufstein, even if he was currently still officially secluded in penance.

Berengar was swamped with work; not only did he have to provide proper compensation to the families who were affected by his men's war crimes, but he also had to incorporate many of his agricultural technologies into the new land. On top of this, he was spreading his propaganda to the people of Kitzbühel who already had a fairly positive image of him after he executed the criminals in his ranks.

While Berengar was managing the affairs of two whole Baronies now, Linde was hard at work expanding the spy network. She did not idly laze about while Berengar was off at war; she had made quite some progress in establishing new cells throughout the nearby Counties. She refused to be a pretty face for her man to make love to and instead supported Berengar in the best way she could.

Currently, she was at the tea shop where she normally conducted business with the local speaker, who just so happened to be Ludolf, the Deacon of the

local Church. The man was close to becoming a fully ordained priest and was beginning his path to the reformation of the church.

"So, how is the sovereign?"

Linde drank from the tea in her cup as she entertained her subordinate's small talk.

"He's doing quite well. However, he is currently swamped overseeing the incorporation of the new territory, and as such, I have been rather lonesome."

Though Ludolf suspected Berengar and Linde's relationship, he really did not inquire about it, as he did not wish to know the personal life of Berengar, who he viewed as a complicated man, one who was blessed by God and destined to lead the German people to a bright future but had a fair share of vices that he felt uncomfortable with. One thing was certain, Berengar was no saint.

Ludolf passed over a letter on the table he had copied from the head Priest's files before speaking in a hushed tone.

"The Church is officially condemning Berengar's actions to invade and annex Kitzbühel. They are calling upon the local lords to form a defensive pact; if he makes another move, he will be beset upon from all sides by his enemies."

Linde scoffed as she placed down her teacup and looked at the letter in his hands. After reading it, she placed it down with disgust. The Church truly wanted to make things difficult for Berengar. In this letter, the Church openly demanded that the assets seized by Guntrum be handed over to the Church as they had already been promised as such by Guntrum, and as far as they were concerned, legally seized.

This created an area of conflict with Berengar's trade routes, as they were encouraging other regions to do the same; it is not as if Berengar had the power to go to war with every region that stole the product of his people's labor. Linde sighed heavily as she came to an unwanted conclusion about how to resolve these troublesome matters.

"I suppose I will have to contact that little girl..."

Ludolf looked at Linde with a gaze of confusion as he heard the irritation in her voice. Though he felt like he should not pry into her business, his curiosity got the better of him.

"What little girl?"

Linde snorted in displeasure; she felt uneasy just thinking about it, but now that the Church was instigating theft of Berengar's supplies, she had no option but to get her father and the father of her rival to work together to counteract the church's influence.

"Berengar's adorable little fiancée... If I can get Adela to convince her father to condemn the church's actions, two Counts will publicly oppose the Vatican and their open endorsement of theft. The threat of the armies of two counts will be more than enough to dissuade anyone foolish enough to try to seize Berengar's resources."

Ludolf nodded in agreement; what she said made sense; he could tell by Linde's frustrations that she was not particularly fond of Adela, and as such, he felt that his suspicions were confirmed. Nevertheless, he decided to try to mediate their conflict and suggested an alternative option.

"Why not get Berengar to ask for assistance? That way, she is more likely to comply."

Linde shook her head as she expressed her concerns.

"Berengar will never ask Adela for help; he's too proud to ask for her father's assistance in the matter. This is something that I will have to do personally. I only hope she's willing to read my letter instead of burning it the moment she sees my family's seal upon it."

Ludolf decided to steer away from this conflict among maidens after all and merely drank from his tea; he could tell by that statement alone that the two girls would likely never see eye to eye. Of course, in his eyes, it was obviously Berengar's fault for being greedy and wanting two beautiful young women by his side. Nevertheless, he somewhat envied Berengar, but as a man dedicated to God, he quickly squashed such notions before getting up from his seat.

"I will leave the remainder of the task to you. I have to get back to the Church..."

With that, Ludolf disappeared into the crowd, leaving Linde by her lonesome as she contemplated the best words to plead for Adela's assistance.