

Steel 86

Chapter 86: Formation of a Wicked Alliance

During Linde's maternity leave, the position of spymaster was temporarily handed over to her bastard half-sister Adelheid, who operated out of Innsbruck. She was the personal maid of Linde, who had since her departure been working at the family estate and directly serving her father, Lothar. She was not exactly fond of her father due to how she had been treated throughout her youth and desperately looked up to Linde as her eldest sister and the only one who seemed to care for her. As such, she was more than eager to spy on her father's domain for her precious big sister.

Of course, she was not happy with Berengar for making Linde his lover; Adelheid thought that Linde's love had blinded her to Berengar's true nature and that in truth he was an absolute scoundrel, much like her father. However, if supporting him was what Linde wanted, then she would comply. Even if she believed Linde was deserving of the position of Berengar's wife and not that little girl from Graz.

Currently, Adelheid was cleaning her father's study, where she came across a variety of letters issued that exchanged the details between the Bishop of Innsbruck and her father. Now that Lambert was exiled from the house of Kufstein and sent to the Teutonic order, Lothar's plans relied entirely on his daughter's illicit relationship with Berengar. As such, a rift had grown between him and the Bishop of Innsbruck, who kept insisting on deposing Berengar for the sake of the church. Seeing literally no benefit from this request, Count Lothar had abandoned the Bishop and the church's pleas. Instead, he sided with Berengar to win his favor and potentially gain an even better deal on the steel trade.

Adelheid read over all of the information she could gather from the Bishop of Innsbruck and her father's correspondence and added it to the web of knowledge she had collected. As she was looking over the information, she heard footsteps and a pair of voices approaching, one of which she recognized to be her father's. Thus she quickly put away the letters in the order she had found them and began to sweep around the office, making herself look busy. By the time her father and the unknown figure arrived in his office, they noticed Lothar's bastard daughter fulfilling her duties of cleaning

the room and felt no suspicion whatsoever. After all, as his personal maid, that was something she ought to be doing.

The Count did not even mind her presence as he began to speak with a man dressed in the attire of a Bishop, who Adelheid recognized as Bishop Ernest of Innsbruck; the man was morbidly obese and was easily in his sixties; he had a particularly troll-like face, and was completely bald with a long mustache that looked like a set of walrus tusks which were as white as snow. This fat bastard looked lustfully at Adelheid as she cleaned the office in the background. Noticing his sinful gaze, Lothar snapped at him.

"Don't even think about it!"

considering the fat old man was here to negotiate with the Count of Tyrol about withdrawing his support for Berengar, the man snarled but ultimately retracted his gaze before speaking to Lothar in an obviously fake polite tone.

"Count Lothar, I'm sure you are aware that by supporting a condemned heretic like Berengar, your very soul is at risk of sharing that same fate as his."

Lothar pulled out a pair of chalices and then filled them with wine, handing one to the fat old bishop before discussing his terms with the man.

"Cut to the chase; I do not want to hear any bullshit from you. If you do not give me something of worth, then I will not think about abandoning the boy in favor of your lot."

The old bishop grimaced as he heard those words; he was well aware of Berengar's miraculous ability to turn iron into steel, he was also aware of Lothar's ambitions to be Duke of Austria, and as such, even with the overwhelming wealth of the church he would have to pay a heavy price in order to convince the Count to join his side.

Adelheid keenly listened to this conversation as she quietly cleaned in the background; neither of the two men was concerned about whether or not she overheard their conversation and the potential conspiracy it may contain. As such, the Bishop quickly spoke his terms he was willing to present to win Lothar's favor.

"Very well, what the Church is willing to offer you is the entire Prince-Bishopric of Chur to add to your domain."

Not only was Count Lothar shocked, but so was Adelheid; this was no small domain owned by the church which bordered the County of Tyrol. It contained many resources and a relatively large population. If Lothar acquired this, he would be able to increase his wealth and military power vastly. He could not believe the Church was willing to go so far to put down a minor Viscount; as such, he had to clarify the issue.

"You will give me the entire region of Chur?"

The bishop nodded his head in approval as his next words confirmed his offer.

"The Holy Father has already approved it; all you have to do is side with us when the time is right and invade Kufstein alongside the Teutonic Order."

Count Lothar thought about it for several moments; the minerals, wealth, and forces he would gain from Chur would be worth more in total than the trade he had with Berengar. As such, he had no reason to decline, especially when he considered the fact that he despised the boy who had knocked up his favorite daughter. As such, Lothar reached out his hand and cemented the alliance with the Church. Though he would still officially remain on Berengar's side for the time being, when the time was right, he would turn on the boy Regent and bring order to his territory once more. He did not care who ruled over Kufstein so long as they submitted to him.

The fat old bishop laughed heartfully as he shook the Count's hand and declared their alliance on the spot.

"I knew you were a man of great Faith; together, we shall destroy this heretic and prevent his views from spreading across Europe! He has already caused more damage to the faithful than you may realize."

The truth of the matter was, with the scandal the Vatican had found itself in over the matter of publically endorsing the seizing of Berengar's assets and the letter of rebuttal the two counts had made against them, Berengar's popularity was rising among the German nobility, and his views were currently being spread in his propaganda. It would not be long before this Heresy in

which the church had officially deemed the Berengar Heresy spread to every corner of the German world. At that time, the church would lose significant power, and as such, they were willing to give up such a huge chunk of land to get rid of Berengar as quickly as possible. After all, they did not want the Teutonic Knights to have to face Count Lothar's forces nor did they wish to engage in an entire crusade just to put down this growing heresy.

Overhearing this grave threat to Berengar, and more importantly, her dearest sister, Adelheid, was more than happy to report this news to Linde at the first opportunity available. As such, after witnessing this despicable alliance being formed, she used the first chance she got to leave the office and write a letter to Linde informing her about the threats that had begun to manifest within Innsbruck.