

Tyranny of Steel

Chapter 10-11

Chapter 10: A Verbal Thrashing

As the light of dawn shone upon Berengar's regal face, he awoke peacefully. Though his body was sore all over from his previous day's activities, he still managed to drag himself out of bed. If he kept pushing himself like this, his body might give out on him before he can cure himself of his natural infirmity. Thus he decided to take a day off from excessive exercise. Instead, he spent the early morning converting the jar of lard he received from Gunther into the pomade he had so dearly desired.

Using a homemade recipe, which he utilized extensively in his previous life, Berengar had finally succeeded in his endeavor. His next course of action was taking his morning bath which was a bit earlier than usual. Afterward, he placed his fingers into the wax-like substance and slicked his hair back with it. After carefully styling his hair, he gazed at himself in the bathroom mirror. Aside from his thin and frail body, he looked very majestic with the new hairstyle.

His previous attempt using grease residue from the bath to style his hair ended disastrously; it smelled bad, it kept falling out of place, and it did not meet Berengar's excessive conditions in the slightest. However, after successfully inventing pomade, his already exquisite appearance improved further. He was amazed at how much better-looking his current body was than in his previous life. The Golden-Blonde hair, which now shimmered in the light of dawn, the deep sapphire eyes, which appeared as if they had been chiseled out of gemstone, and the milky white skin which every girl dreamed of having combined perfectly into a princely appearance suiting his noble heritage.

The only advantage his previous appearance had over his current one was that it had a strong and fit body. However, these things could naturally be improved over time, and he was in no hurry to impress the women of this era. He had many things to accomplish before even thinking of getting married, besides the only members of the opposite sex he was remotely close to were his little sister and his mother, at the very least, he would have to be introduced to a proper woman before he could even attempt to woo her.

After styling his appearance and gazing at himself in the mirror, Berengar had taken the time to get dressed in an opulent black doublet, with gilded lining, as well as an equally luxurious set of hose, and a pair of black leather shoes. He sighed heavily as he looked

at himself in the mirror one last time; his family truly wasted too much money on maintaining appearances.

After donning his attire, he left the bath and instinctively headed to the dining room. He was quite early by the standards of his recent routine; as such, he caught his family off guard when he arrived at the dining room, where they were all seated, having a polite conversation as they waited for him to arrive.

Upon entering the dining room, his family glanced over at him with shocked expressions; they were not expecting him to have such a refined appearance. Even Lambert gazed upon Berengar with envy. Sometimes it took a change in hairstyle to reveal the full potential of one's appearance. Henrietta blushed at her brother's striking demeanor and looked away; even his mother, Gisela's mouth, hung agape, which she quickly covered with her hand. Sieghard looked upon his son and heir with a gaze of fatherly approval. Finally, the boy he had raised appreciated his taste of the finer things in life. However, he wondered how the little bugger had managed to style his hair in such an imposing manner.

Seeing his family's odd expressions, Berengar touched his face with his right hand.

"What is it? Do I have something on my face?"

In unison, his family members shook their heads in silence, with various emotions in their awkward gazes. After confirming his appearance was tidy, Berengar sat down at the table across from Lambert and lifted his hands as he prepared for the morning grace. However, his family was too busy examining the change in appearance to notice his posture.

After a few moments of silence, Berengar looked up at his father

"Father? Do you not wish to say grace this morning?"

Having the memories of Julian, Berengar was now a closet atheist. Nevertheless, he still put on the appearance of a devout Catholic because he knew the consequences a man of science would endure in this primitive era. It would take decades, but maybe he could usher in the scientific revolution a bit earlier than in his own timeline if he worked hard at it.

After snapping out of their trance, his father began to speak his prayer as the family listened. Afterward, the family began to dig into their meal. While cutting apart his pork sausage with his utensils, Berengar overheard Lambert reporting his previous day's activities to their father.

"Father, did you know that Berengar spent the whole day plowing the fields with a peasant yesterday?"

Their father, who was just about to bite into his sausage, gazed over at Berengar with a confused look on his face.

"You plowed a field?"

Berengar would not resort to disparaging the friend he had made the previous day to save face among the nobility; as such, he had no shame in his voice as he admitted to his day's venture.

"Yes, father, I suppose that's why I took the day off from my morning exercise; overexerting oneself will have negative effects on the body."

This confused his father further; why would he take time out of his exercise schedule to plow a field? He could not help but inquire about the details.

"Any reason in particular?"

Lambert sneered at Berengar as if he had caused a loss of favor for Berengar with their father. However, the words that came next astounded him.

"Well, you see, father, I had this brilliant idea about improving crop rotation, however as you know, I am not a farmer, so I sought out a professional's opinion on my theory. The man turned out to know his craft quite well, and as we got to discuss the feasibility of it, we decided to try it out; and I am a man who leads by example, so I picked up a plow and got to work."

Lambert scoffed at this response; how could Berengar develop a new innovation for agriculture all on his lonesome? Clearly, this was a facade his older brother was putting on to turn the situation to his advantage. As such, Lambert immediately questioned Berengar about his so-called innovation. He would catch his older brother in his lie and reveal to everyone that Berengar was a fraud. A wicked sneer curved upon Lambert's lips as he thought to himself.

'Older brother, you are still too naive to play these games with me.'

After which he voiced his concerns aloud

"You say you invented an innovation of crop rotation, and what might that be?"

Berengar stared at Lambert coldly once again, which instinctively caused the teenage boy to shiver. After staring him down, Berengar scoffed at the impertinence of his little brother's statement.

"Even if I described it to you in vast detail, you would not be able to comprehend it. You do not have a mind for agriculture, little brother."

Lambert was infuriated by this response; he had not expected his older brother to attack his weak point. It was true that Lambert did not know the first thing about agriculture, nor did he understand engineering. He had only ever heard the phrase crop rotation before; he hadn't the slightest clue how it functioned. That was not the responsibility of a noble scion like himself.

Before he could respond to Berengar's allegations, Berengar had already seized the initiative and addressed their father with a tone of great respect.

"Father, if you wish to know the details, I won't hide anything from you, but I fear it might be a waste of our time together as a family, as I'm certain I would only bore the children with the intricate details of crop rotation."

Lambert was furious at this point. Did Berengar seriously place him in the same category as Henrietta? As if he was some small child? He was only a few months away from his 16th birthday, which would make him a man in the eyes of God and men. Despite his internal protests, the boy still did not manage to get a word out, as their father, Sieghard, agreed with Berengar's terms.

"You're right, Berengar; there are more important matters to discuss as a family right now; For example, How did you manage to get your hair to look like that?"

Lambert, who at that moment had stuffed his mouth with a slice of sausage, nearly choked upon it after hearing his father's words. Berengar was also surprised at his father's words. The old Baron truly did have a fascination with fashion. Though quickly, a light flashed in Berengar's eyes as he thought of this as an opportunity to coerce his father into engaging in proper hygiene.

"I'm afraid it won't work for you, father..."

Sieghard could practically feel his heartbreak as he heard such words. He could not explain why, but after gazing at his son's dignified appearance that was better suited to royalty, he needed to know how to make himself look so majestic. Of course, he unwittingly fell into Berengar's trap.

"Why not?"

a sound of panic had entered Sieghard's voice as he practically stood up from the head of the table after hearing such dire news. Berengar, on the other hand, had to prevent himself from smiling; sometimes, it was too easy to manipulate his father into doing his bidding.

"Because you don't bathe frequently enough."

After hearing Berengar's words, hope surged in the old Baron's heart. If that were the only problem, then he would bathe just as much as his son if he had to. He didn't care if

people made fun of him for doing so as long as he could have the glistening golden hair of his son. Realizing that his father had thoroughly grabbed onto the bait, Berengar decided to set the hook in and reel in the catch.

"The product I invented to style my hair this way only works on clean hair, though I promise you even if you work up a sweat, with this solution, your hair will stay intact like mine. Though, you do need to clean it off again at night."

This was complete and utter bullshit, but if it meant he could improve the hygiene of another member of his family, so be it. A little white lie like this never hurt anyone. By the time the breakfast had been finished, his entire family, except for Lambert, were convinced of the values of proper hygiene. The Baron had begun to draft plans for the entire servant staff to wash their hands throughout the day regularly. Berengar left the dining room with a giant smile on his face; he was one step closer to introducing a sense of modern hygiene to his family's lands.

Hopefully, this clean lifestyle would catch on soon enough; he could not help but fear an epidemic breaking out because people were uneducated about disease and filth. For the time being, this was sufficient; after all, the people he regularly contacted would be forced to practice some degree of basic hygiene. His next stop was to visit Gunther; as a member of the peasant class, the man was instrumental in Berengar's plans to implement the four-field system across all farms within the Barony of Kufstein.

Chapter 11: An Unwanted Betrothal

Berengar was just about to step out of the Castle when he heard his father's voice calling out for him.

"Berengar, do you mind speaking with me in the study real quick?"

Berengar let out a deep sigh. Apparently, his plans to visit Gunther and use his connections to implement the four-field system would have to wait. Steadily, Berengar strode into his father's study. As he sat down in the chair in front of his father's desk, he could see his father staring at him with a curious gaze.

Berengar knew that look all too well it, however before he could protest, Sieghard let out a heavy sigh much like his own son had done not two minutes prior.

"Berengar, my son, you're twenty years old and still unmarried. I understand your reasons; however, a healthy glow returns to your skin with each passing day. It appears that whatever you've been doing has been good for your well-being. Now that your childhood infirmity seems to be passing, it's time to think about finding a wife."

Berengar repeatedly tapped the armrest on his chair while resting his face on his right fist, a habit which he had developed in his previous life whenever he was sitting down. During these moments, the only sound that could be heard was the clunk of the wooden armrest whenever a finger would strike upon it.

Within Berengar's mind, he attempted to find a way to prolong this discussion. He was not ready to be married yet. After all, he had so much work that needed to be done, and courting a woman would take up much of his time that was currently needed elsewhere. However, he could not tell his father such things, seeing as how the young lord's ambitions were on the borderline of infringing upon his Father's rights as Baron.

His father might have a penchant for fashion and luxury, but he was no fool. He could tell Berengar had lofty plans for the realm, but Berengar was still a young man; he would have plenty of time to enact such policies when he inherited the position of Baron. For now, he should find himself a bride and have children, thus continuing the family line.

Fundamentally Berengar had a 21st-century mindset for this kind of stuff. His plan was to get married in his thirties to a beautiful woman ten years younger than himself after he had made a fortune by beginning the industrialization of his family's land. However, in his estimation, this would take many years to accomplish fully.

One of his biggest concerns was that despite the vast resource-rich lands his family held, the population was sparse, uneducated, and mostly unskilled, seeing as how an overwhelming majority of them were working in the fields. For the time being, he could not take charge of the family's finances without his father's approval; as such, he could not implement policies that required substantial investment like public education, which would be vital in creating a new generation of skilled laborers in a variety of fields which was truly necessary for an industrial society to thrive.

Despite being deep in thought, Berengar needed to answer his father. The man was growing impatient, especially since the only thing the old baron could hear for the last few moments was the tapping noise produced by Berengar's fingers repeatedly pouncing upon the wooden armrest of his chair.

Just when Sieghard was about to scold Berengar, the young lord sighed as he sounded dejected at his father's request.

"Who do you have in mind?"

A small smile spread across Sieghard's lips as he gazed upon his son; the boy was finally growing up.

"You remember your cousin Adela, right? My sister's third daughter and the daughter of the Count of Steiermark."

Berengar was revolted at the thought of marrying his cousin. He had nearly forgotten that it was a fairly common practice in the Medieval period for nobles to marry off their sons and daughters to their siblings' children. Nevertheless, he kept a straight face as he showed respect to his father's wishes.

"Little Adela? I haven't seen her in ages; how old is she now, thirteen?"

Sieghard nodded at his son with a smile on his face.

"She will be turning thirteen this year. I hear she's blossoming into a stunning young woman."

Berengar tried not to frown; he had expected an age gap, but this was far too young for him to feel comfortable courting; though it may be slightly more normal in these times, his 21st-century mindset made him feel like a groomer just thinking about it. Nevertheless, the more he thought about it, the more the idea appealed to him. Not because he was attracted to his twelve-year-old cousin, but this gave him roughly four years to set his plans into motion before he was married. At most, they'd be engaged in name only, and he could probably find some way to weasel his way out of the betrothal before the girl turned sixteen and he was forced to go through with the act.

Berengar began to tap his chair once more as he thought about the monumental decision that would affect his entire life. After another few moments, he broke the silence between the two.

"I would have to meet her first and see what kind of young woman she has become..."

His father was pleased, though slightly disappointed. He did not fully manage to convince his son to accept the betrothal upon request, but Berengar didn't fully decline it either. Maybe there was some hope for the young man after all.

After nodding his head in approval, Sieghard got up from his chair and walked Berengar to the door.

"I will send a letter to your uncle informing him of your request; you should expect a response within a fortnight."

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Berengar nodded; at the very least, this potential betrothal would buy him some time which he desperately needed. He probably would not appear before the girl for another three months. By that time, there should be some significant gains in his muscle mass, and his appearance would improve greatly. He would feel embarrassed trying to court a girl in his current borderline emaciated form.

"I'll leave it up to you, father."

After getting that business out of the way, Berengar was finally able to leave the Castle and meet up with Gunther to see how he and the land he worked was doing. Gunther had been hard at work, not only tending to the fields but spreading the idea of the four-field system to the other farmers. It had only been a day, but he successfully managed to convince three of his friends to implement such a system on the fields they tended to. It would appear Berengar did not have much to do in regards to spreading the system. Gunther was well connected with many of the peasant farmers within the Barony of Kufstein.

All Berengar had to do was sit back and let his competent underlings spread the industrial and agricultural innovations that he had already set in motion. For the remaining month, he would spend his time and energy increasing his fitness and building relations with the locals.

For the remainder of the evening, he would return to the castle, take a bath, and get a good night's rest. That was the plan, of course, but just like the day prior, the moment he entered the Castle's gates, Henrietta ran up and hugged him, inquiring about his whereabouts.

"Big brother, where did you run off to this time?"

A worried expression settled onto the little loli's face. Berengar could not help but smile at her cuteness and patted her head.

"I was just visiting the town and getting to know the locals; it's a Lord's job to understand the conditions of his people."

The little girl smiled as she felt her head patted and eventually let go of her hold over her brother.

"You're finally in time for dinner! Let's go eat!"

She said as he pranced off in the direction of the dining room. Berengar followed after her; as he did so, he noticed the same strange presence he felt the night before. Lambert's spies were getting sloppier. Just like the prior night, Berengar ignored it and continued to the dining room. Still, he kept a keen eye on the area he suspected the spy to be hiding. He did not want to receive a bolt in the back while he was not paying attention.

After reaching the dining room with his little sister, Berengar noticed his family already seated. They had not expected him to come home so soon after all his daily routine as of the last few days kept him busy during this hour. Nevertheless, he had arrived on time for once, his mother and father were pleased to see him, but Lambert was clearly not. After sitting at the seat across from Lambert, Berengar gazed at him briefly with an indifferent expression before returning his gaze to the plate in front of him. When he suddenly heard his mother's loving voice call out to him.

"So, my son, I hear you are finally betrothed?"

Berengar nearly choked on his food when he heard those words; he looked up to his mother with a shocked expression on his face. It had been merely a few hours since he discussed this with his father, and he had not fully accepted the betrothal. How did it suddenly turn into a done deal? Was this a setup from his father all along? Had the old man already negotiated the betrothal by the time they had the discussion?

Henrietta dropped her fork when she heard those words and looked at Berengar with shock. Her big brother was getting married? She had never even thought of it as possible since he was so much older and still single. Though she was very intimate with her big brother, she by no means had any unhealthy ideas towards him; if anything, she was happy that there was finally someone he could spend the rest of his life with. After the shock vanished, she smiled at Berengar and immediately asked him all kinds of questions.

"Who is it?"

"Is she pretty?"

"Do I know her?"

Henrietta sent a barrage of questions towards Berengar while still trying to comprehend what had transpired behind the scenes. Lambert was equally stunned; he did not believe a single nobleman within the region was remotely interested in setting up an engagement with Berengar. Hell, he had gone through great lengths to prevent it; just who was acting without his knowledge, or the knowledge of the Count of Tyrol for that matter! The boy could not believe somebody within the County of Tyrol would risk angering the Count. After all, the two had been plotting together against Berengar for some time. He never expected a Count of another region to personally arrange a betrothal with the wastrel that was his older brother.

Berengar, finally snapping out of his shock, glared at his father menacingly, his fists curling up as he struggled to contain the urge to strike the old Baron for plotting against him. Nevertheless, he was in no position to do so and calmed himself down, gritting his teeth as he chastised his father for his actions.

"Father! What did you do!?!"

Sieghard stared down his errant son; for too long, he had enabled this boy's idle behavior, the fact that he showed interest in the proposed marriage was good enough reason for him to accept it. He knew in his heart that sooner or later, the boy would accept the proposal, so why would he bother wasting time with an introduction between the two cousins.

"You seemed interested, so I expedited the process by accepting the Count's terms."

Berengar was furious, so there really had been terms already laid out, and his father gauged Berengar's level of interest on whether or not he should accept. Berengar was interested, but not for the reasons his father believed. He wanted to meet the girl to know for sure whether or not his plans could succeed. It was too late now, he was already betrothed, and there was nothing he could do about it. No longer in the mood to eat, Berengar ripped the napkin off his doublet and tossed it aside as he stormed out of the dining hall. He was no longer in the mood to dine with his family.

After finishing his bath, he returned to his room, where he fell asleep. He would no longer dwell on things that were out of his control; for now, he had to focus his efforts on getting stronger. It would only take a month or so before his innovations were fully adopted and in place within the Barony of Kufstein.

On the other side of the Castle, an oil lamp was lit on the desk in the room of Lambert; he was quickly writing a letter to the Count of Tyrol, his future father in law requesting his help in scheming against his brother once more. If his brother should marry and have a son before Lambert could get rid of him, it would be disastrous for their plans. Only after the oil had fully burned from his lamp did Lambert put down his quill. Attaching the letter to a carrier pigeon, he sent his wicked schemes into the night sky and towards the Count's residence at Innsbruck.