

Frozen Star 22

Chapter 22: Preparing the Storm

[POV Liselotte]

Seven days.

That was the deadline.

Seven days before the fire returned to swallow everything we had rebuilt. Not flames on rooftops or wood... but with steel, blood, and the hatred of men who fed on fear.

From the hilltop, the village looked calm. But beneath that peace—under every repaired tile, every cleaned street—beat a frightened heart.

And I, who had crossed worlds, who had slept under the rain with a knife in my hands, feared I wasn't ready to protect it.

"Do you think they'll come through with it?" I asked softly.

Chloé sat beside me, watchful. Her fur shimmered in the moonlight. She wasn't looking at the village. She watched the forest.

"They don't ask. They act. That's how men like them operate."

"Do you think they'll come in full force?"

"No. But enough will come to try and wipe this place off the map."

I nodded in silence. My hand gripped the hilt of my sword. Not as a threat... but as a reminder. An anchor. A promise.

"Then we have six days to prepare" I said. "Let's give it our all, Chloé."

[POV Uren]

I had seen war. Not as a soldier. As the one who sweeps up after it.

I was young when the homes where I lived with my parents fell. I saw men burn bakeries over a folded uniform. I saw women sell their dignity for a night of protection. Pain wasn't foreign to me.

But seeing a girl rebuild a village and fight against grown men...

That was new.

She wasn't a commander. She didn't give orders like a queen. But everyone followed her. Because of the way she looked at them. Because of the way she asked for nothing for herself.

And that wolf... by all the gods...

[POV Liselotte]

The first day we used to scout the terrain.

The streets were narrow. That could play in our favor. The rooftops could be used as elevated paths. The collapsed southern wall had to be reinforced or turned into a trap.

"We need barricades. Old oil. Ropes. Big rocks. Anything that can hurt without exposing us" I said.

A group of women offered to gather materials.

Everyone participated. The elders braided roots into ropes. The youths raised stakes. The children watched the horizon.

No one was expendable.

Chloé took to the forest.

In the following days, she tracked every sign, every broken branch. She didn't need sleep. Just to run. To scent. To sense.

And a few days later, she found signs. Few. But clear.

They were approaching. Not like an army. Like hunters. In groups of three or four. Analyzing. Measuring.

They didn't dare enter. Not yet.

But they would.

I knew it when I found a skinned rabbit hanging by a string at the edge of the woods. A message. Not to scare. To mock.

I'll destroy them, I thought.

And my body trembled with a rage I had never known.

On the fourth night, we made a bonfire.

Not to cook.

To remember.

"Anyone who wants to leave, can" I announced. "There'll be no judgment. No punishment. Fear doesn't make you lesser."

No one moved.

A woman took my hand.

"You came when we had nothing left" she said. "We're not leaving you now."

Old Uren stepped forward. He held a rusty sword.

"I forged it when I was young. I haven't used it in decades. But if I'm going to die, I'll do it with this in my hand."

One by one, we shared something: a promise, a laugh, a memory.

Chloé remained at the edge. Silent. But I knew... she felt every word.

The sixth day came with a crimson dawn.

The village was ready.

Taut ropes in the alleys. Stakes hidden under leaves. Hunters on rooftops with makeshift spears.
Women at the windows with pots of boiling oil.

And me... with my heart pounding like a war drum.

My sword gleamed in the sunlight. Chloé walked beside me, her fur ruffled by the wind.

"Do you think they'll strike immediately?"

She shook her head.

"First, they'll lurk. Try to sow fear. Make noise. Then they'll come with force."

"And you?"

"I'll be wherever you are."

I nodded.

Then, the horn sounded. Deep. Prolonged. From within the forest.

And I knew the seventh day had arrived.

The storm...

Had begun.

[POV Chloé]

Sometimes I wonder what I am now.

I'm not just a wolf. Nor a spirit. Something woke in me when I died beside her in that world of fire.

And now, every time Liselotte smiles... I feel like I am more.

More than a memory.

More than a promise.

I am her strength when she trembles. Her shadow when the sun burns her.

And if this is the last place we'll see together, then I'll burn the entire forest down before I let them lay a finger on her.