

## Frozen Star 32

### Chapter 32: Glarien and the Northern Flames

[POV Liselotte]

Three days.

Three days dragging our wounds across a landscape turned to frozen mud and relentless snow. The roads were dark scars on white earth, every step a battle against the bone-biting cold and the exhaustion that weighed more than our packs.

But in that shared suffering, a new skin grew over our fractured group. Silences no longer weighed heavy. Glances held each other without words. Hands reached out before someone could stumble. We had become a creature of many bodies and one weary pulse, moving forward.

On the final day, when our breath froze in pale gasps and our legs trembled like reeds, Glarien appeared. Not as a glorious vision, but as a sigh of relief carved in wood and stone. The temple towers were not slender cathedrals, but sturdy structures of weather-darkened logs, topped with triangular roofs and greenish copper bells that hung like heavy fruit. The palisade around the village was simple, practical, reinforced with stones at its weak points. The thick wooden gate, half-closed, creaked open with a sound that felt like music when the lookouts spotted us and threw it wide.

No spears were raised. No hostile questions asked. We were greeted by a man with sunset eyes on a face carved by winters. The priest. Middle-aged, a white tunic clean but frayed at the edges, a thick mantle with the stylized sun embroidered over the shoulder—the same symbol from the map. He stepped toward our exhausted caravan as Glarien's villagers peeked from half-opened doors and wool-curtained windows, their gazes a mix of curiosity and caution.

"May the Light cover the path you've traveled" he said, his voice calm as a deep river beneath ice, raising a hand in a gesture that was both blessing and welcome. "And may the Fire of the Hearth warm your tired bones."

I tried to speak from the cart, to thank him, to explain. But cold, fatigue, and emotion closed my throat. It was Uren, with his moral weight as a veteran and his awkward but sincere reverence, who stepped forward.

"We come from the south, Father. From a village... erased from the map" he said, his voice rough with dust and sorrow. "Fire and steel took many. We... we survived and came here". His knotted, calloused finger pointed to all of us as he spoke.

The priest—Iram, as I later learned—turned his eyes to me. There was no scrutiny, no fear, not even surprise. Only recognition, as if he saw nothing but a wounded girl on a cart. A deep calm radiated from him.

"Then the Path has brought you here for a reason time will reveal" he declared, then turned to his people with quiet authority. "Open the doors of the Temple of Eternal Light! Take the wounded to the Hall of Dawn! Bring hot water, blankets, fresh bread! These brothers and sisters need Glarial's embrace!"

The village came alive with a stirring efficiency. It wasn't charity—it was community in action. Strong men and women helped lift the gravely wounded from stretchers. Serious children carried jugs of water. Elder women with expert hands wrapped the weakest in thick woolen blankets.

We were led to a stone annex attached to the main temple. As we passed through its door, warm, fragrant air embraced us. Fires burned in low stone ovens, filling the space with the scent of chamomile, thyme, and ginger root. The smell of healing.

Healers with serene faces and steady hands worked with a calm that was a balm itself. Warm compresses on fevered brows. Quick, clean bandages on wounds reopened by the journey. Steaming infusions that brought color back to pale cheeks. Even Chloé, who refused a blanket with a growl, was honored, although at first they were surprised that we had a wolf companion.

I was taken to a small private room at the back. The walls were lined with tapestries depicting the sun embracing fields of wheat and snowy mountains in harmony. An old woman, Nerys, with fingers thin as twigs but holding a gentle strength, examined my splinted leg with meticulous care.

"The bone is searching for its place" she murmured, her eyes as clear as spring water inspecting the inflamed skin. "It will hurt, but it will heal. Your body is strong."

"Yes... thank you" I said simply. She asked nothing more. She continued her work with respectful attention.

That night, for the first time in countless weeks, I slept under a solid roof, wrapped in rough but clean woolen blankets, lulled by the constant crackling of temple fires and the distant murmur of devotional song.

I did not dream of ice or battle.

I dreamed of silence.

And when I woke to the first faint gray light of dawn filtering through a narrow window, the first thing I noticed was the absence. It didn't smell of blood. It smelled of baking bread, damp earth, and peace.

We stayed for days that turned into a week. Glarien offered more than shelter; it offered pause. Sacred time for bodies to mend and for souls to find space to breathe, through shared glances and firm handshakes rather than grand speeches.

The villagers, once their initial caution passed, welcomed us with practical hospitality. Bowls of thick barley and vegetable soup appeared at our doors at sunrise. Finn learned to repair axes with the local blacksmith. Elara taught the young sentries a few archery tricks. Uren found a quiet corner near the forges, carving wood with his knife, his hammer resting beside him.

Iram, the priest, became a constant, comforting presence. He didn't preach or demand faith. He sat with us during communal meals in the temple's Common Hall, listening with deep attention to the fragmented stories that surfaced, offering understanding silence or the right word at the right time. His bitter herbal tea, which he claimed "cleans the inner path," became a daily ritual.

It was during one of those quiet afternoons, sitting with Iram on a bench of stone polished by time in front of the temple, enjoying the weak warmth of the sun, that the conversation turned personal.

I asked if he knew anything about unrefined mana.

He nodded slowly, as if weighing his words with care.

"Mana... the life force flowing through all... is like a river. In some, it runs slow and deep. In others, swift and turbulent. And in others..." his eyes met mine, and I saw a flicker of ancient knowledge, "it's a stormy sea, held back by fragile shores. That mana... the pure kind, where the body cannot refine it—what some call purification—I don't know much. But I believe I know where to find information."

"Information?" I repeated, leaning in.

"Yes. There's a place where knowledge gathers" Iram continued, his gaze now lost in the snowy horizon.

He said no more of magic. Instead, he unfolded a coarse piece of parchment from his tunic pocket and spread it on the cold stone between us. It was a crude poster, painted in red and black dyes, the letters uneven:

"ADVENTURERS' GUILD

NORTHERN FLAMES – GLARIEN

SEEKING PATH, GLORY, OR REDEMPTION?

YOUR FIRE HAS A PLACE HERE."

Below, a simple drawing of a sword crossed with a staff, wrapped in stylized flames.

"A guild? Here?" I asked, surprised. Glarien felt like a haven, not a mercenary hub.

Iram smiled, an expression that lit his wrinkled face.

"Not everyone who comes to Glarien seeks only to heal the body, Liselotte. Some souls carry deeper scars, or a fire that still burns despite the calm. They seek paths to walk, battles to fight, hidden knowledge... or redemption from a dark past. The Northern Flames give them a banner, a brotherhood... and a cause."

He pointed toward a sturdy two-story building in the village's northwest corner, near the palisade. Smoke rose from its chimney.

"Nothing grand. Just a refuge, a tavern, a mission board, and companions for the road. But for some... it's the beginning of something greater. A shared purpose."

My eyes fixed on the poster. On the words Path, Glory, Redemption. On the Flames that promised warmth amidst the eternal snow. It wasn't just a guild. It was a door.

A door to action, to active protection, to the possibility of learning to control the uncontrollable... and maybe, just maybe, to clues that would lead me home. A path to turn the "stormy sea" into a river that built instead of destroyed.

I said nothing. But deep within me, where winter slept, something stirred. Not with violence—but with awakened attention.

That night, in the temple's Common Hall, bathed in the warm glow of the hearths and the scent of freshly baked rye bread, the air felt different. People spoke of the future. Of helping repair Glarien's damaged granary. Of learning to weave stronger fishing nets. Of staying... maybe a little longer. Then, in a quiet moment, as I broke off a piece of bread, I spoke clearly, without emphasis, but with a determination that hushed the murmurs:

"Tomorrow I'll visit the adventurers' guild."

Chloé said nothing. She simply watched, her golden eyes glowing with a familiar fire.

Elara nodded, meticulously cleaning an already immaculate arrow.

"A place to keep skills sharp. Good."

Finn, mouth full of bread, mumbled:

"D'you think they'll have... y'know... real steel? Properly tempered?"

From his usual spot, half in shadow and already half asleep, Uren's growl rumbled:

"As long as they don't expect me to dance the Sword Waltz for coin... let them come."

A low, warm laugh—our first genuine, shared laughter since before the battle—spread through the hall.  
A fragile sound. Precious. Like the first green sprout after the thaw.

I had taken another step on the road home— and at the same time, a step toward a future full of fire and possibility.