

## Frozen Star 41

### Chapter 41: Attack Plan

[POV Liselotte]

The map of Glarien was spread out over the guild's central table like an open body under the scalpel of war. The borders drawn in sepia ink were veins, the rivers blue arteries, the forests green blotches that now hid a mortal infection.

On top, river stones marked positions, unsheathed daggers pointed to attack routes, and empty cups of sour beer outlined danger zones.

The room, crowded with veterans whose scars seemed to gleam under the torchlight, vibrated with a low murmur.

It was a funeral choir, a symphony of restless boots, armor brushing, and sighs laden with memories of past battles. The air smelled of damp leather, iron, and an ancient fear.

Naelle struck the board with the tip of her hawk feather quill. The sound, dry and sharp, cut off the murmur like a knife severing a taut string.

"The camp is here," she declared, pinning a steel tack into the heart of the Eastern Forest. The tip pierced the parchment with a sinister crackle. "Orcs confirmed. Fifteen visible, maybe twenty. And they're carrying something chained under tarps."

A glacial silence descended over the hall, so dense one could hear the crackle of the torches. Glances crossed, heavy with unspoken questions. A battering ram? War beasts? Something worse? Nobody wanted to voice the horror lurking beneath those stained canvases.

“C and B ranks,” Naele continued, her voice turned into an anvil upon which fate was forged, “will lead the direct assault at dawn. Divided into two squads, vanguard to break their defenses, rearguard to seal the wound. The goal is not annihilation, but dispersion. Let fear be their executioner.”

A calloused hand, missing two fingers—mute witnesses of an encounter with trolls—struck the table.

“And if they don’t run? What if they stand their ground like they did in the Bloody Mountains?”

A woman at his side, her face crossed by a scar that ran from her temple to the corner of her lips, answered before Naele. Her voice was harsh, like stones clashing beneath a river.

“Then we’ll make that forest their grave. Not a single green shadow escapes from between the trees.”

Naele nodded once, a precise movement like the edge of a guillotine.

“Exactly.” Her gaze swept across the hall, pausing on the younger faces. “D and E ranks will take positions on the perimeter. Escape routes, hidden passes, watchful cliffs. Your eyes will be ours. Your discretion, our shield. No one enters. No one leaves without us knowing.”

My stomach clenched like a frozen fist. Rank E. The silver insignia that now weighed on my chest, once a shining dream, became a shackle of responsibility.

I felt Chloé brush against my leg, her voice a buzzing alert in my mind.

“You knew it, Lotte. Silver is not just reflected light. It is the edge of the sword you now wield. The promotion put you on the front line of the abyss.”

I did not reply. I pressed the insignia through the leather of my glove, feeling its metallic chill seep into my skin like a slow poison, a sentence written in metal.

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The meeting ended in an outburst of urgency. Boots struck the wooden floor like war drums, swords clashed against scabbards with the sound of grinding teeth, thick woolen cloaks stirred like banners in the wind.

Outside, the night had covered Glarien with a mantle of fresh snow. Heavy, slow flakes danced in the darkness like frozen tears from the sky, intent on burying in pure white the green stain growing in the forest.

We returned to the temple much later, my steps dragging the weight of exhaustion and the shadow of what was to come. The sacred silence of the high stone vaults was a balm after the feverish clamor of the guild. The walls, carved with saints of serene gazes, absorbed the echo of my boots.

The air smelled of cold wax, aged incense, and peace accumulated over centuries. I let myself fall onto a stone bench, cold under my thighs even through wool and leather.

Chloé walked behind, her silver fur faintly glowing in the dimness, and settled by my side, pressing her warm, living flank against mine. An anchor in a sea of uncertainty.

For a time that felt both eternal and fleeting, we simply breathed. The wind howled outside, slipping through the cracks of the stained glass with a ghostly moan, but here, among the shadows of deserted altars and the stone gazes of saints, there was a deep, ancient calm. As if the very temple was holding its breath.

“Do you remember... what it was like?” I broke the silence, my voice a thin thread of vapor in the cold air, barely trembling.

Chloé tilted her noble head, her moonlit eyes fixed on me. “Remember what, Lotte?”

“Back there. Earth. The winter mornings...” I closed my eyes, letting the scents flood me. “...when the cold cut your nose but the kitchen smelled of freshly toasted bread and hot chocolate. The noise of buses on the street, like coughing beasts of metal. The classrooms... endless, with the buzzing of fluorescents and the teacher’s voice like a distant purr...”

A deep rumble, more memory than sound, vibrated in Chloé’s chest. “I remember... the wind in my hair while running. I remember the parks. The barking of dogs... real dogs, of flesh and bone, not specters like me. The sound of a ball bouncing on asphalt.”

The air in my lungs turned to ice. The insignia in my hand seemed to burn with a deadly cold.

“The day that... they disappeared. My classmates.” My voice broke, like thin ice under weight. “They were there. In that classroom. Taking notes, passing slips, yawning... And suddenly... emptiness. Absolute silence. As if a giant hand had ripped away the air, the sounds, the lives at once. They... vanished. Like smoke.”

I opened my eyes, staring at the extinguished altar candles, their wicks black like tiny craters.

“I... don’t know why I was left behind. Nor what became of them. If they’re... in some corner of this world or another. If they died instantly. Or...” the words burned my tongue.

“...or if someone summoned them, as that forbidden book in the guild library suggested.”

Chloé did not answer with words. She only rested her mighty head on my knees, a solid, real, comforting weight. Her fur was soft and warm against my cold skin. Her silence was understanding.

Then, her voice, soft as the snow falling outside, filled the void.

“Whatever their fate, Lotte, here we are, you and I. And the answers, like the paths in this world, are walked step by step. Today’s matter... the orcs... is only another crossroads on the path we seek.”

I looked toward the high altar. The statues of the saints seemed to watch me with a compassion carved in stone. In one hand, I clutched the silver insignia until its engraved edges marked my palm through the glove—cold, relentless, symbol of the duty that bound me to Glarien, to this war I had not sought.

In the other, I felt the vital, fiercely loyal warmth of Chloé, my bond to a lost past, my anchor in the chaos. Two forces pulling me in opposite directions: the abyss of duty and the precipice of nostalgia. The war resonating like a drum on the horizon, and the silent longing of an erased home.

Outside, the snow kept falling, silent and relentless, trying to cover everything. But beneath its white mantle, in the black heart of the Eastern Forest, the war drums had already begun to beat.

A dull, primal pulse filtering through the miles and the snow, pounding against Glarien's walls. And I, who dreamed of tracking innocent footprints, knew there was no escape.

Only the road forward, to the rhythm of those drums that marked the beginning of something dark. The cold of the insignia and the warmth of Chloé were the only cardinal points in my broken compass.

Tomorrow the attack on the orc settlement would begin, in which I would participate, and it would be my first great mission.