

A COLD CHRISTMAS AND THE DARKEST OF WINTERS

by Cinnabar Moth

EXCERPT

The Sound of Wolves by Gwen Katz.

The two of them pull their blankets tighter around themselves and sink lower into the muddy ditch that will one day be a street, not that it would offer any protection if the beasts decided to attack. Their work crew had to claw out this ditch with their bare hands, which was hell on Ulrik's still-healing arm. If there are any shovels in this worksite, Ulrik hasn't seen them. There are wolves in Sweden, of course, but Ulrik lives in an apartment in Stockholm and has never even seen a wolf. Or rather, that's where he lived once. Before the Army. Before the battle. Before he was captured and press-ganged into building a city for his enemies.

The wind shrieks through the ditch, which, far from sheltering them, seems to funnel its full force directly onto the cluster of workers. There are no buildings here yet. Just ditches and the foundations of a lone fortress. The serfs haven't even had a chance to build shelters for themselves. A fat raindrop splatters against Ulrik's cheek as though God is spitting on him. It's raining. Of course it is.

As the downpour pelts them, Grishka looks up at the sky and shrugs, as if to say that he didn't expect any better.

And the worst part, thinks Ulrik, is that it's summer. It's going to get worse. It's going to get so much worse.