

Frozen Star 103

Chapter 103: Beneath the Lights of Triumph

[POV Liselotte]

The coliseum, which only hours before had been a bloody battlefield, had completely transformed before our eyes. The arena where we had fought for our lives was now covered with golden carpets and long oak tables overflowing with exquisite food. Magical torches floated gently in the air, casting a warm, dancing light that reflected on the smiling faces of the guests. The air was thick with the scent of freshly baked bread, roasted meat with spices, and sweet, spiced wine.

The entire city of Kreston celebrated our victory with a fervor that seemed endless.

The official musicians of the guild had taken the improvised stage at the center of the coliseum. Their melody was lively and joyful, yet it still carried a solemn and respectful tone. It was as if they deeply understood that this was no ordinary triumph. Every note, every chord, seemed to give thanks for the simple miracle of being alive after such a trial.

“So this is what they call discretion?” Leah joked beside me, watching in disbelief as a group of drunk adventurers raised their cups in an over-the-top toast. “They promised us a quiet dinner for the finalists, and instead, they threw a continental-sized festival.”

Chloé, resting beside the nearest table, slowly wagged her tail in approval. If the food keeps coming in these quantities, I have no complaints. Her thoughts echoed in my mind with a hint of deep satisfaction as she devoured a smoked meat slab almost the size of her head.

I laughed softly, feeling a lightness I had forgotten. For the first time in many days, I truly laughed—from deep within. The constant tension of the tournament began to fade like morning mist, replaced by a strange and wonderfully warm peace.

“I suppose we’ve earned it,” I said, watching the golden reflections dance across the surface of my crystal cup. “We went from the edge of collapse... to being the undisputed champions.”

Leah looked at me with a mix of genuine pride and disarming tenderness. “You deserve far more than just a banquet, Lotte. You deserve every celebration in the kingdom.”

Her words caught me completely off guard. I didn’t know what to say. There was such deep, vulnerable sincerity in her voice that my chest tightened with an unfamiliar emotion. She lowered her gaze for a moment, perhaps embarrassed by her own honesty, and began nervously playing with the frayed edges of her leather glove.

“Come with me,” she said suddenly, offering me her hand with a shy yet determined smile.

“What...?” I asked, confused by the sudden shift.

“We’re going to dance,” she declared, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

“Dance?” I repeated in disbelief. “Leah, I don’t dance. Especially not after a battle where I was nearly split in half.”

“Yes, dance,” she insisted, that characteristic fire in her eyes making everything else fade into irrelevance. “It’s not every day we save an entire coliseum and win the most important tournament on the continent. Besides, I doubt you’ll ever be this clean and presentable again after a fight.”

A small laugh escaped me as my resistance melted away, and I finally took her outstretched hand. “That last part... I can’t promise for future occasions.”

The touch of our hands was immediately warm and firm. Leah guided me with confidence to the improvised dance floor, where several couples were already spinning elegantly beneath the glow of floating torches. The ground still bore the visible scars of our recent battle—deep cracks and silvery lines of frost that gleamed like crystal under the light. But amidst the melodious chords of the magical violins, all that seemed distant, almost irrelevant.

The music was slow, enveloping, and deeply emotional. It felt as though it had been written specifically for that moment.

“Just... follow me,” Leah whispered, gently placing her hand on my waist and intertwining her other hand with mine. Her tone was unusually soft, almost vulnerable, as if she were sharing a precious secret.

I nodded silently, trying to mimic her steps awkwardly. At first, it was an absolute disaster. My heavy combat boots kept colliding with hers, and we both ended up laughing in embarrassment and amusement. But soon—almost without realizing it—the rhythm began to flow between us, as if it had always been there, waiting patiently to be found.

Her inner fire and my ancestral ice moved in perfect harmony, creating a dance that was uniquely ours.

With each turn, each movement, the heat radiating from Leah contrasted fascinatingly with the cold that perpetually surrounded me. It was a dance of complementary opposites—a balance that seemed impossible, yet felt completely natural in that instant. The air between us vibrated with a silent but palpable electricity.

When I finally dared to lift my gaze, I found her looking directly at me, without a trace of hesitation. Her golden eyes reflected the torchlight, creating tiny sparks in her pupils. In them, I saw a complex mix of pride, genuine affection, and something deeper—something I barely dared to name, even in my most private thoughts.

“When you’re out there fighting,” Leah said in a voice so soft it was almost a whisper, “it feels like the entire world stops just to watch you move.”

“That can’t be true,” I objected weakly, feeling my cheeks heat up.

“Oh, it is,” she insisted, her smile softening into something almost tender. “And it’s not just because of your incredible magic or swordsmanship. It’s you. The way you are. The intensity you radiate.”

Her words hung between us, heavy with meaning that echoed deep within my chest. My heart pounded so hard I could almost hear it. I wanted to respond, to find any proper words, but my throat had closed completely.

She took another step closer, closing the already small distance between us. Only a few centimeters now separated us. I could feel her warm breath against my skin, hear the faint creak of her armor, and catch the scent of smoke and cinnamon that always lingered around her.

“Leah...” I murmured, not knowing what I intended to say next.

“Shh,” she whispered, placing a gentle finger over my lips.

Her forehead rested against mine for an instant that seemed to stretch into eternity. It wasn’t a kiss, nor a dramatic confession—just a shared, intimate silence. Yet in that eloquent quiet, in that simple contact, I felt everything important was said without a single word.

The world beyond disappeared completely. There was no music, no laughter, no cheering crowd. Only us, breathing in the same steady rhythm, hearts beating to the same inner fire.

A sudden wave of applause from the audience pulled us abruptly back to reality. The music shifted to a faster, more cheerful tune, and the adventurers around us began clinking their cups together with renewed enthusiasm. Leah stepped back slowly, laughing softly, a little embarrassed—as if we’d been caught in a private moment.

“Looks like we stole the show again—without even trying.”

“Maybe we should start charging admission for our performances,” I replied, laughing with nervous relief.

We returned to our table, where Chloé watched us with narrowed golden eyes and a clearly teasing mental grin. At least this time, you didn’t destroy half the coliseum during your dance. That’s notable progress.

Leah shot her an amused but mock-offended look. “I could easily change that if you keep talking.”

“I don’t doubt your ability to cause destruction for a second,” the wolf replied, settling comfortably beside the fire. But if you start throwing fireballs in the ballroom, you’re paying for all the drinks this time.

The three of us burst into laughter, and whatever tension remained vanished like magic.

The night went on endlessly—filled with genuine laughter, exaggerated toasts, and songs that rose toward the starry sky. The musicians played with renewed energy until the heavens turned pale blue, heralding the coming dawn. Wine flowed like a river, epic stories intertwined with comedic anecdotes, and for one magical moment, it felt as though there were no warring kingdoms, no looming wars, no ancient demons.

There was only us, in our fragile bubble of fleeting happiness.

At some point in the early morning, Leah fell sound asleep on the table, her head resting near mine, her breathing calm and steady. Chloé snored softly at her feet, perhaps dreaming of open fields and endless runs. I looked at them—my companions, my chosen family—and a serene peace wrapped around me like a gentle cloak.

We had won far more than a mere tournament. We had survived against all odds, grown together through adversity, and found a shared purpose that gave us strength.

And as the first rays of dawn began filtering softly through the high windows of the coliseum, I knew with absolute certainty that this very moment—this small fragment of perfect peace—would be one I'd treasure for the rest of my life.

Because, for one unique night beneath the lights of triumph, winter and fire had danced together in harmony.

And nothing in the world—nothing in all known realms—had ever been more beautiful than that fleeting, eternal instant.