

Frozen Star 105

Chapter 105: Echoes of Marble and Wind.

[POV Liselotte]

The world shattered into a thousand fragments of white and bluish light.

For a few seconds that felt eternal, there was no solid ground beneath our feet, no familiar air in our lungs. Everything had become a blinding whirlpool of pure energy — an invisible, powerful current dragging us weightlessly through an indescribable void.

The sensation was an impossible mixture of glacial cold and scorching heat, as if every cell in our bodies were being deconstructed and rebuilt at the same time while we traveled through spaces the human mind could never comprehend.

Then, with a dull explosion that resonated in our bones, everything ended as abruptly as it had begun.

My knees hit a hard, impossibly smooth surface. A final flash of electric blue enveloped us for an instant before fading into the air like the sigh of exhausted magic.

I coughed softly, tasting metal in my mouth, and forced my eyes open.

We stood—or tried to stand—inside an immense circular chamber built entirely of pale gray stone and large embedded blue crystals that glowed with a soft, inner light.

The towering walls were covered in arcane carvings I didn't recognize from any grimoire or temple—fluid, geometric lines that seemed to move and breathe faintly under the ghostly light.

It was an architecture completely unlike anything we had seen in the kingdom of Kreston.

More austere, colder, infinitely older.

Leah was breathing heavily beside me, still visibly dizzy and pale. She held her head with one hand.

“Do all teleportations feel like that—like you've just been shaken in a blender—or was it just this one in particular?”

“All of them,” I answered with a deep sigh, trying to stretch my numb limbs. “But this one was particularly intense. Like being ripped out of one world and stitched back into another.”

Chloé shook the arcane dust from her silvery fur, visibly irritated.

“If this is what humans call comfort and efficient magical transportation, I'd rather walk a whole year through swamps and mountains than ever submit to such an atrocity again.”

A tired, faint laugh escaped my lips—but it died the moment my eyes adjusted to the dim light and caught something beyond the chamber's ornate arches.

At the far end, where the runes on the floor dimmed like dying embers, a series of tall, narrow windows opened to the outside.

The light coming through them was paler and colder than Kreston's golden hue.

And then I heard it—the distant, unmistakable sound of a massive crowd, drifting in from outside, mingled with the deep, rhythmic tolling of metal bells.

“Where are we?” Leah whispered. Her question bounced off the smooth stone walls, amplified by the chamber's natural echo.

Without another word, we moved cautiously toward a massive double door carved with intricate reliefs of outstretched wings and endless spirals that seemed to tell a forgotten story.

I pressed my shoulder against the heavy wood and pushed. The door opened outward with a deep, resonant groan that spoke of centuries.

Then daylight struck us like a physical blow.

Before us, spreading out like a living tapestry, lay a completely unknown city.

Tall towers of immaculate white stone rose into the sky in perfect architectural choreography, connected by slender bridges of polished metal that gleamed like living silver under the pale sun.

Wide streets paved with dark, mirror-smooth blocks flowed with strange, streamlined carriages—longer and more elegant than the heavy wagons we had seen in Kreston.

Banners of deep emerald green waved from every tower and balcony, each embroidered in gold thread with the same symbol: a stylized eight-pointed sun enclosed within a perfect circle.

The air itself smelled different—a clean mix of charcoal smoke, freshly forged iron, and the sweet scent of mountain flowers I couldn't name.

"We're definitely not in Kreston," Leah said quietly, her voice filled with awe and a growing unease as she studied the cityscape.

"Not even close," I added, scanning the banners. "I don't recognize any of these emblems. This isn't any ally of Kreston's crown."

A tall figure in dark, functional armor approached us with steady steps from the grand marble staircase ahead.

He was an imperial guard, cloaked in deep green, his elongated visor gleaming like a mirror in the sun.

He carried a long runic steel spear and radiated a disciplined, martial aura that commanded immediate respect.

“Welcome, travelers,” he said in a firm but courteous tone, free of hostility.

“The Teleportation Circle of the Tower of Dawn rarely receives outsiders without prior notice from the Council. May I know from which domain you come?”

Leah stepped forward, exuding her usual natural grace and authority—the kind she always adopted when diplomacy was required.

“We come from the Kingdom of Kreston. We were participating in the Golden Lion Tournament and used a circle authorized and verified by the local mages’ guild. We have passage seals.”

The guard nodded slowly, his eyes hidden behind the visor as he examined the faintly glowing seals on our leather bracelets.

“That explains your unexpected arrival. The main portal of Kreston is linked directly to our northern towers by an ancient trade agreement—though I must say it’s rarely used by travelers without official escort or ambassador insignia.”

“And this place?” I asked, gesturing toward the vast city before us. “Where exactly have we appeared? What realm is this?”

The man smiled faintly—a mix of patriotic pride and strict military courtesy.

“Welcome to the Empire of Polus. This is its capital city, Averis, the very heart of our lands and the seat of the Crystal Throne. You stand at the southern edge of the main continent, beyond the Misty Marches.”

The name hit me like a hammer.

Polus... I’d read that name in ancient grimoires, in faded maps of the great library—accounts of the northern realms and their frozen conquests.

A powerful, isolated empire, protected by towering mountains and impassable magical borders, renowned for unmatched technological advancement and strict military and social discipline.

“So, Polus,” Leah murmured, crossing her arms as she absorbed the revelation. “That puts us very far from home. Light-years away from Kreston.”

“Not as far as you think,” I said, gazing at the horizon where the pale sun rose behind the towers’ spires. “Whirikal—our final destination—is west of here. If the old maps I studied are correct, we’re relatively close. A few weeks’ travel at a good pace—less, if we secure fast mounts.”

The guard still watched us with professional composure, then inclined his head in a formal gesture.

“I wish you safe travels and clear skies, adventurers. Polus can be a good place to rest and resupply—or a dangerous place to make mistakes. That depends entirely on how you choose to move and behave.”

“We’ll keep that in mind,” Leah replied with a perfect diplomatic smile.

We thanked him for his courtesy and information, then carefully descended the broad, polished stone stairs toward the bustling, orderly streets of the unknown city.

Around us, urban life flowed with a rhythm entirely unlike Kreston’s.

The people of Polus wore long woolen cloaks and geometric metal ornaments.

Shops at the bases of towers displayed floating crystals and intricate gear mechanisms operating with astonishing precision—without visible mana.

There was a flawless sense of order in every corner—not a single scrap of paper on the immaculate streets, not a raised voice without cause. Every person, every vehicle moved as part of a greater, perfectly tuned machine.

“This doesn’t look like any kingdom or city-state we’ve ever visited,” Chloé said as we walked down a main avenue, her fur bristling slightly. “Even the air has a different rhythm... another density. It’s colder. Thinner.”

“Yes,” I nodded, feeling the truth in her words. “But also infinitely more controlled. Everything here—from traffic to trade—seems to function under an invisible yet omnipresent rule. It’s impressive... and a little unsettling.”

Leah looked toward an ornamental fountain at the center of a circular plaza.

From its silver surface, bright blue water rose—but instead of falling, the liquid hovered in elegant spirals and arcs, floating weightlessly in the air.

“Control and perfection,” she murmured. “Perhaps too much perfection. It’s... unnerving.”

We stopped for a moment in the cool shadow of a particularly tall tower, where the city’s orderly bustle mingled with the distant toll of bronze bells.

The magical journey had been brief, but the shift in atmosphere and culture was overwhelming.

Everything around us felt new, advanced—and yet steeped in an ancient power that lingered in the air itself.

“Well,” I finally said after a long silence, gazing westward beyond the city’s high white walls, “we’re close now. After all this time, all this distance—Whirikal shouldn’t be far. It almost feels like we could touch it.”

Chloé lifted her head sharply, her golden eyes reflecting the cold white light of the polar sun.

“Home again, huh? After so long... and so many battles.”

“Yes,” I answered, a tight, unexpected knot rising in my chest. “To the kingdom where it all began for me. Where my story first turned.”

Leah watched me quietly for a moment. There was something complex in her green eyes—something between genuine curiosity and deep respect for what this meant to me.

“Then let’s keep going,” she said softly, placing a brief hand on my shoulder. “Let’s not stop now. The real journey is only just beginning.”

The constant northern wind swept between the twin towers of the empire, raising the green and gold ribbons of the banners high above.

And as we walked forward with renewed determination toward the promised horizon, leaving behind the fading blue glow of the portal, I felt—physically, undeniably—that we had crossed more than a border between realms.

We had crossed an invisible, crucial line between the past we left behind and the future opening before us—unpredictable and echoing with promise.

The journey to Whirikal—to the origins—was about to end.

And something new, something vast, was waiting for its turn to begin.