

Frozen Star 108

Chapter 108: Shadows in the Frost

[POV Liselotte]

Noon found us at the foot of a white and silent hill. The road opened into a wide plain flanked by pines covered in shining frost. The air was clean and dry, with a sharp scent of resin and freshly fallen snow. Leah decided it was a good place to rest and feed the horses before continuing our journey toward the plains of Fractall.

She stopped the wagon beside a rocky formation and jumped lightly to the ground. The sound of the metal harnesses faded slowly into the winter silence. Chloé, just waking from her usual travel nap, stretched her front paws with a loud yawn. Her lazy thought echoed in my mind. “I hope lunch is worth opening my eyes for.”

“I promise you won’t be disappointed this time,” Leah replied with a tired smile. She began unloading one of the bags, pulling out travel bread, cured meat, and a jar of concentrated soup that still held warmth thanks to a magical thermal seal.

I climbed down silently, stretching my legs numb from hours of travel. The icy air burned my lungs as I took a deep breath. That sharp pain kept me anchored to reality—away from the echoes of that dream that refused to leave me.

We sat together on a flat rock. For a moment, everything was simple and peaceful. The sound of snow falling softly, the crackle of the small fire Leah had lit, and the steam rising from our cups of hot soup.

But Leah, as always, was quick to notice the silence surrounding me.

"You still have that distant look," she said bluntly. She handed me a cup and sat beside me, close enough that the warmth of her body countered the icy air. "Ever since we left Averis, you've seemed somewhere else entirely, Lotte. And don't tell me it's just fatigue this time."

I looked up and met her green eyes fixed on mine. There was genuine concern in them, mixed with that familiar stubbornness of hers—the kind that never accepted evasions.

"I was just thinking..." I began, but the sentence fell apart before it could end.

"Thinking about what?" she pressed, her voice soft but firm. "Because I know you well enough to tell it's not something trivial."

Chloé, who had been devouring a strip of meat until then, lifted her head with a faint twitch of her ears. "Don't push her too much," she said in a neutral tone. "But if something's troubling you, we should know. There's no point in carrying secrets through a long journey."

I let out a long sigh. I watched the snow swirl gently over the fire. Part of me wanted to lie, to keep it inside, to pretend it was nothing. But the words crowded in my throat, demanding to be spoken.

"All right..." I murmured finally. "I'll tell you what I saw."

The wind seemed to quiet at that moment, as if the world itself held its breath.

"It was a dream," I said slowly, measuring each word. "Or at least I think it was. Everything was white—frozen. A whole world made of ice. There was no sky, no ground, just a void of endless frost. And they were there."

"They?" Leah asked softly.

I nodded. "Hundreds, maybe thousands of ice statues. Soldiers, warriors frozen mid-battle. Each one different, as if they'd been real people trapped in time. I walked among them. I could feel the cold—it wasn't imaginary. It was real. It crept into my skin, into my bones."

Leah frowned, but didn't interrupt. Chloé, meanwhile, had stopped eating, watching me in silent attention.

"And then I saw a light," I continued. "Far away, but warm. I walked toward it. And there I found her. A woman."

"A woman?" Leah repeated, leaning slightly toward me.

"Yes. She looked about twenty-five, maybe older. Her hair was blonde and long, and her face was covered by a thin layer of ice. She looked asleep—or maybe sealed. On her chest shone a shard of blue crystal, the same color as the ice I use when I release my power."

Silence fell. Only the crackle of the fire broke through my words.

"I tried to speak to her," I went on, my voice lower. "And then, just before everything shattered, she said my name. She called me by my name."

Leah stared at me, unblinking. "Lotte?"

I nodded. "Lotte. She whispered it as if she knew me. And then the ground broke, the light engulfed me, and I woke up. But it felt so real. Not like a dream—more like I was really there."

Chloé was the first to speak after a long silence. "Are you sure it was just a dream? You've had visions before, Lotte. Some tied to your magic—to your connection with ice."

"I thought about that," I admitted. "But this felt different. It wasn't just a vision or someone else's memory. It was familiar. I felt like I knew her, even though I can't remember from where."

Leah rested her elbows on her knees and ran a hand through her hair, thoughtful. "A blonde woman, covered in ice, with a blue crystal shard. Could she be linked to your magic? Maybe to the origin of your power. Perhaps that figure is its embodiment—or a guardian."

"A guardian?" I repeated.

"There are old records in the magic academy," she explained, staring into the fire. "Some sorcerers with extreme elemental affinities saw manifestations of their own mana in human form—spirits of the element. Entities that existed to guide or warn them. But I've never heard of one of ice speaking a human name."

Chloé nodded slowly. "It might not be a spirit, but a real person. Someone who once existed—and your power remembers her. As if your magic carries a memory older than you."

The thought cut through me like a gust of icy wind.

"You mean that power isn't completely mine?" I asked, more to myself than to them.

Leah looked at me with a mix of seriousness and tenderness. "No. I'm saying it might be part of something larger—something we don't yet understand."

For a moment, none of us spoke. The fire burned low, sending orange sparks across the snow. I watched the steam rise from my cup, while the echo of that voice from my dream faintly returned in my mind.

"I don't know who she was," I murmured at last. "But I'm certain she's connected to me somehow. I feel it here." I placed a hand on my chest, right over my heart. "As if part of me were still frozen alongside her."

Leah nodded slowly, her eyes fixed on the fire. "Then we'll find a way to uncover the truth. If that woman is part of your power—or your past—we'll find out, Lotte. You're not alone in this."

Chloé stood with a low growl and moved closer to the fire, shaking snow from her fur. "In fact, if she's tied to you, we'd better find out soon. Dreams like that are never just dreams. And if she called your name, maybe it wasn't from your mind—but from her own world."

A shiver ran down my spine at that thought. The wind seemed to answer, blowing suddenly stronger through the trees. Snow fell heavier, covering our tracks all around us.

Leah rose, extinguished the fire with a motion, and offered me her hand to help me stand. "Whatever it is, we'll face it together. If that dream was a message, we'll search for the answers. And if it was a warning, we'll be ready."

I took her hand firmly. The touch was warm—human—real. The only thing, at that moment, keeping me anchored to the present.

As we packed our things and climbed back onto the wagon, I couldn't help but glance one last time toward the horizon. Among the falling snow, for a fleeting instant, I thought I saw a golden silhouette standing on the distant hill, watching us silently before fading away with the wind.

The cold wrapped around me again—but this time, it wasn't just from the weather.

It was the winter sleeping inside me, slowly awakening.