

Frozen Star 109

Chapter 109: North

[POV Leah]

The northern sky had always held a different color. Even when the sun shone, the light seemed to pass through a veil of frozen glass. From the carriage, I watched the white landscape stretch until it vanished among the mountain peaks.

Lotte remained silent beside me. We had been traveling for hours under the cutting wind. She had barely spoken since lunch. Her gaze was fixed on the horizon, but I knew she wasn't truly seeing it. I could tell by her slow breathing, the tension in her hands, the way the air around her always seemed colder.

It wasn't simple worry that I felt. It was something deeper. I knew her mind was still trapped in that dream she told us about—the blonde woman frozen in ice, whispering her name.

We arrived in Veltram at dusk. The small town bustled with life despite the cold. Chimneys sent columns of smoke over the frozen lake, and the scent of bread floated in the air like a welcome.

We decided to stay the night. The horses needed rest, and Lotte needed peace of mind more than anything else.

"We can stay at that inn," I pointed toward The Silver Elk, its lights already glowing in the twilight.

She nodded absently, her gaze lost on the frozen lake. There was a deep sadness in her expression.

Chloé jumped off the carriage. “I’ll go to the stables. Don’t do anything stupid,” she said mentally before walking away.

Once we were alone, I made a decision.

“Come,” I said, gently touching her arm. “Let’s distract ourselves before night falls.”

“Distract ourselves?” she asked, as if returning from far away.

“Yes. A walk or a hot dinner. There’s a restaurant by the square. I promise not to talk about dreams or ice. Just a normal moment.”

A faint but genuine smile touched her lips. “Alright.”

The restaurant was small but cozy. The warmth of the central fire wrapped around us as we entered. We sat by a fogged-up window, watching the snow fall over the lit square.

Lotte removed her gloves and held her hands near the fire. For a moment, the tension in her eyes seemed to fade.

We ordered hot soup and mead. After a quiet, uneasy silence, I spoke.

"You know... it still feels unbelievable," I said.

"What does?" she asked, curious.

"That we're so close to Whirikai. After all this journey."

A different spark flickered in her eyes. "Yes. I never thought I'd return home."

I nodded slowly. "I've been thinking about what it'll be like getting there. How your family will react when they see you after so long."

She lowered her gaze. "I don't know. Everything feels so distant. When I left, I was just a child. My parents, Carl and Andrea, ran the inn, and my sister Claire never left my side." Her voice trembled slightly. "Sometimes I wonder if they'll even recognize me."

"They'll recognize you," I said firmly. "No one could forget someone like you."

She smiled, and for a moment the weight of the last days seemed to lift. "You're very kind."

“It’s the truth.”

We ate in silence for a while. Finally, I gathered the courage to say what weighed on my heart.

“Lotte,” I murmured. “I know you don’t want us to worry, but seeing you like this makes me feel helpless. I don’t just mean your magic or your dreams... I mean you.”

She looked at me, surprised.

“Ever since I met you, you’ve always carried everything alone. As if you were afraid we would fall apart with you. But you don’t have to anymore.”

“Leah, I—” she began.

“Let me finish,” I took a deep breath. “It might sound silly, but I’m scared. Not just of what might happen in Whirikai, but because I don’t want to lose you. Not you, not Chloé.”

A silence heavy with emotion settled between us.

Lotte set her spoon down and looked straight at me. Her eyes, clear like ice, softened with unexpected warmth.

“You don’t have to worry,” she said, her voice calm but firm. “I don’t plan on leaving you behind. We’ve been through too much together to part ways now.”

I smiled, and she smiled back.

“You know?” I said. “If someone had told me a year ago that I’d end up sharing soup with an innkeeper’s daughter and a talking wolf in the north, I would’ve laughed.”

Lotte laughed. “And if someone had told me I’d be traveling with a strong-willed princess with a soft heart, I would’ve laughed too.”

“Strong-willed?” I protested, feigning offense.

“You admitted it yourself during our journey,” she replied teasingly.

We both laughed, and the weight on my chest lightened. Maybe I didn’t fully understand what was happening to her, but seeing her smile was enough for now.

When we stepped outside, the snow was falling heavily. Lotte walked beside me, no longer with that distant gaze. There was determination in her posture, like a flame burning beneath the ice.

And as we returned to the inn, I knew that no matter what awakened within her, I would be by her side to face it—together.