

Frozen Star 119

Chapter 119: Where Doubt Dawns

[POV Liselotte]

The morning light slipped pale through frost-covered windows. The fire in the hearth was still faintly crackling, leaving a soft scent of burnt wood and dried herbs in the air. I woke slowly, wrapped in warm blankets, with the gentle weight of Claire asleep beside me, clinging to my arm as if she feared I might disappear during the night.

For a second, I didn't know where I was.

Then the familiar sound of the kettle boiling in the kitchen, my mother's quiet voice, and the rough sigh of my father placing more wood in the fireplace brought me back to reality.

Home.

I sat up carefully so as not to wake Claire. The house, though small, was filled with that warm silence that only exists at dawn, before the day decides whether it will be kind or cruel.

That's when I saw her.

Leah was sitting near the window, wrapped in a gray blanket. She didn't look like she had slept. Her blue eyes, swollen from the previous night's tears, were fixed on the gray sky beyond the misted glass.

I approached quietly.

“Did you sleep at all?” I whispered.

She gently shook her head.

“I couldn’t,” she murmured. “Every time I closed my eyes... I saw their faces. My father... my mother... looking at me like I was a stranger. Like I was... a monster.”

She bit her lip. Her hands, hidden beneath the blanket, were trembling.

I took a breath, searching for words that wouldn’t sound empty.

“You’re safe now,” I said softly. “Here, no one thinks that of you.”

She looked at me. And for the first time since last night, I saw relief... but also fear.

“What if they’re right, Lotte?” she whispered. “What if I’m not their daughter anymore? What if I don’t belong to that kingdom... or any other?”

I knelt in front of her and took her cold hands in mine.

“Leah... even if they can’t see it yet, you are their daughter. You are Leah Alba Whirikai. And we’re going to prove it.”

She swallowed.

“How?”

“We’re going to talk to my parents,” I replied. “They’ll know what to do.”

We went down to the kitchen together. My father was serving hot tea. My mother was slicing freshly baked bread, and Chloé was elegantly devouring a piece of cured meat Claire had given her before falling back asleep on the sofa.

When Leah entered, my mother silently offered her a warm cup. Leah took it carefully, whispering a barely audible “thank you.”

My father looked at us with those eyes that saw everything, even what we tried to hide.

"I suppose this conversation won't be easy," he said, crossing his arms.

Leah lowered her gaze, but I stepped forward.

"Dad... we need your help."

He set his cup on the table and nodded slowly.

"I'm listening."

Leah took a deep breath.

"The king and queen... didn't recognize me. They accused me of being a demonic deception. They... they expelled me from the castle. I don't know how to prove I am who I say I am."

Silence filled the kitchen.

My father narrowed his eyes in thought, then leaned back in his chair.

“Then you’ll do what any sensible person would do—prove it not with words... but with evidence.”

“Evidence?” I asked.

He nodded.

“The first is called the Arcane Registry of Identity. In Whirikai, as in all the northern kingdoms, every child at the age of ten undergoes the mana test. Their elemental affinity, their mana flow, their unique magical signature is recorded. It’s like a name... but etched in the soul.”

Leah lifted her head.

“I... remember something like that. A tower of crystal... a magic circle... it was before they taught me royal protocol.”

“Exactly,” my father confirmed. “If we submit you to that test again, and your mana signature matches the one in the palace archives... no one will be able to deny it. A soul’s flow can’t be forged.”

Leah held her cup tighter.

“And... what if the records were erased? It’s been ten years.”

“The royal records are kept in the castle’s underground vaults,” my mother said softly. “Sealed by blood and ice. No one can alter them without committing treason.”

My father nodded.

“And besides... there’s another proof.”

Leah blinked.

“Another?”

“An official letter from the Adventurers’ Guild,” he explained. “Sealed by a guild master. If Kaelen or the guild in Veltram issue a document affirming your identity, detailing your journey, your deeds, and the legitimacy of your name... the Royal Council won’t be able to ignore it.”

I remembered the moment at the guild—the letter Leah sent.

“So... it’s possible,” I whispered.

“Difficult,” my father said seriously. “But possible.”

Leah looked at him. Her eyes still held fear... but also a new spark.

Hope.

“Sir Carl...” she said, her voice trembling only slightly. “Would you help me? Even if... no one believes me... would you help me try?”

My father stared at her for a few seconds that felt eternal.

Then he smiled. Not a big smile. A small one. Real.

“I told you yesterday,” he said. “Thank you for bringing my daughter back home. That’s enough for me.”

Leah’s eyes widened in surprise.

My mother gently touched her arm.

“Here, you’re not a princess,” she said. “You’re a girl who needs a home. And as long as you’re under this roof... you’re family.”

Leah didn’t move.

And for the first time since she’d left the castle... she didn’t cry.

But her eyes shone in a way that made me feel that, perhaps, winter had begun to melt inside her.

Later, when the timid northern sun began to light the snow-covered rooftops, Leah and I stepped into the small backyard.

She breathed in the cold air. Slowly.

“Lotte,” she murmured. “Do you think I can really... recover what I lost?”

I looked at her. The wind lifted her hair as if trying to teach her how to be free again.

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "But you won't try alone."

She looked at me. Her lips curved, just a little.

"Thank you."

We stayed there, watching the white horizon.

Home burned warmly behind us.

And for the first time since we crossed those frozen walls...

The future no longer seemed impossible.