

## Frozen Star 120

### Chapter 120: Letters on Ice

[POV Liselotte]

The morning smelled of freshly baked bread and cold air.

The sky over Whirikal was a pale grey, barely touched by dawn. Thin columns of smoke rose from chimneys, and the rooftops were covered in a white layer that had fallen during the night. The silence of early morning still hovered over the narrow streets of the southern district, as if the world was holding its breath before it decided whether the day would be kind or cruel.

Leah stood by the door, wrapped in a blue cloak whose edges were still frozen from the day before. Her fingers nervously played with the clasp at her collar. Chloé, beside her, shook her fur, sending tiny shards of frost into the air.

“Ready?” I asked.

Leah nodded, though she didn’t look convinced. My parents watched from the kitchen table. My mother stepped forward to adjust Leah’s cloak, as if she were another daughter. My father, with a serious expression, held out a small leather pouch.

“A few florins and the family seal. It’s not much, but it should help you with the paperwork at the guild.”

“Thank you,” I said, clutching the pouch in my hand.

Leah tried to speak, but only managed a whisper.

“I’ll pay it back... all of it.”

“Don’t return anything,” my mother said with a calm smile. “Just come home.”

Leah lowered her head. She didn’t cry, but her breathing wavered. Then we opened the door. The cold rushed in like a sharp breath of winter.

We stepped out.

The world was white.

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The walk to the Adventurers’ Guild wasn’t long, but the weight on our shoulders made it quieter than usual. Chloé trotted ahead, her paws leaving delicate prints in the snow. Merchants were just beginning to open their stalls, blacksmiths lit their forges, and the smell of hot iron mixed with fresh bread in the air.

Leah didn't speak.

She just looked forward, as if every step was a small battle.

"Whatever happens," I said quietly, "we're not alone."

She turned her head slightly. And nodded.

The guild building came into view soon after: dark stone, slanted roofs, and a large wooden door bearing the symbol of a hammer crossed with a quill. Inside, the murmurs of adventurers, the scent of wet leather and sweat, and the crackling of a central fire wrapped around us.

As we entered, a few gazes turned our way.

Some adventurers whispered upon seeing Leah. Not with contempt... but curiosity. Rumors. Always rumors. They had seen a "strange blonde girl" escorted out of the royal castle by guards the day before. Now she was at the guild.

"Don't mind them," Chloé murmured directly into our minds.

We walked up to the counter.

Mirren was there, the receptionist with chestnut hair and tired grey eyes. When she saw us, she raised an eyebrow.

“Well... you came back sooner than I expected. Everything alright at the castle?”

Leah opened her mouth. Nothing came out.

I took a breath.

“We came to ask for something else. We need to contact Guildmaster Kaelen in Veltram.”

Mirren blinked, surprised.

“Kaelen? The same one who approved your rank C exam months ago?”

“Yes,” I said. “Now... we need an official letter from him. A declaration verifying Leah’s identity.”

Mirren set down her quill on the ledger. She looked at us for a long moment.

“Does this have to do with... what happened at the castle?”

We didn't answer.

She sighed.

“I see. But you can't reach Kaelen by regular mail. He's more than half a year west from here, and the snow blocks the passes. You'll have to use the arcane communication artifact.”

“How long would that take?” Leah asked softly.

Mirren gestured to an assistant, who brought out a wooden box carved with rune seals.

“Connecting this to the guild in Veltram costs a lot of mana and resources. It's only used for official guild matters... not personal messages.”

“It's not personal,” I said firmly. “It's an official request to prove Leah's identity.”

Silence.

Mirren looked into Leah's eyes. She saw something most would ignore: not pride, not royalty... but fear, and hope.

Finally, she nodded.

"I'll send it. But it won't be instant. Kaelen may take two or three days to receive and respond. Maybe longer, if he's on a mission."

Leah took a deep breath.

"We'll wait."

Mirren turned the runes on the box. The wood lit up, exhaling a soft blue glow. A flicker of light, like a winter firefly, danced through the air. And the message was gone.

"It's done," Mirren said, her shoulders relaxing. "Now, what else do you need?"

"A way to prove her identity to the palace," I said. "We heard there's a mana test."

Mirren nodded, though she frowned.

“Yes. There are two ways to get an official magical certification. One is the royal one, in the castle’s underground archives. The other”—she lifted a tablet—“is the guild certification using our own device. A mana flow evaluation crystal.”

“Can we use that?” Leah asked hopefully.

Mirren slowly shook her head.

“It’s only available to rank A adventurers or higher. Someone like you, newly promoted to rank B, can’t have your magical signature officially released unless you ascend or the master guild authorizes it.”

My stomach dropped.

“So...”

“So,” she interrupted, “you need one of two things. One: a direct order from the Veltram guildmaster (Kaelen). Or two: you reach rank A yourselves and take the test.”

Leah clenched her fists beneath her cloak.

“And the palace records?”

“Difficult,” Mirren replied. “The archives are under royal seal. Not just anyone can access them. And now that the king and queen doubt you...”

She stopped.

She didn’t need to finish.

Leah lowered her eyes. For a moment, I thought she would break again. But no. She just breathed.

“Then... we’ll wait for Kaelen’s answer.”

Mirren tilted her head.

“I can also send a request to Whirikal’s historian guild to verify old documents. But that will take time too.”

Chloé, with her gentle mental voice, said:

“Then we’ll spend these days training. We can’t stay still.”

Mirren looked at the three of us. And for the first time in a long while... she faintly smiled.

“You’re stubborn... as always. Alright. Wait for news.”

Leah whispered a “thank you.”

And we left the guild.

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The cold struck our faces again. The city was more awake now; children ran across the snow, guards changed shifts, the temple bells marked the hour.

Leah walked in silence.

Chloé moved closer to her side, brushing her hand with her muzzle.

“Your scent... it’s full of worry,” she said in our minds.

Leah gave a faint, fragile smile.

“I suppose... it smells like fear.”

“And hope,” I said.

We stopped at the stone bridge over the frozen river. From there, the castle could be seen. Majestic. Beautiful. And distant.

“Lotte,” Leah whispered, “if the guild doesn’t answer... if Kaelen doesn’t reply... what will we do?”

I looked at her.

The wind lifted her golden hair. Her eyes reflected the grey sky.

“Then,” I said, “we’ll reach rank A. We’ll do it ourselves.”

She blinked, surprised.

“Rank A? That... could take years.”

“Maybe,” I answered. “But it doesn’t matter how long it takes. I won’t leave you alone.”

Chloé sat beside us, tail curled around her paws.

“Me neither.”

Leah looked at us both.

And for the first time that morning... she smiled. Not a big smile. But one that said: it’s okay, I can keep going.

The ice still covered the walls, the streets, the sky.

But inside me...

Something had begun to burn.