

## Frozen Star 127

### Chapter 127: The Ice and Flame

[POV Liselotte]

Dawn rose over Whirikai with a glacial gleam.

The sun, still weak, reflected off the training field behind the house, making every snowflake look like a spark suspended in the air. The silence was absolute, broken only by the crunch of our steps on the ice.

In front of me, Leah stretched slowly, her golden hair tied back, her cloak replaced by a light training jacket.

In her right hand gleamed the magic staff Kaelen had given her months ago: a slender rod of white wood, streaked with threads of glowing mana.

"Are you sure about this?" she asked, hiding a faint smile.

I nodded, unsheathing my sword.

"More than sure. I want to see how far I can go now. You defeated me last time. This time, I won't fall so easily."

Chloé sat at the edge of the field, watching us intently.

Her silver fur shimmered under the morning light.

"Remember, this is training. I don't want to have to lick any wounds today," she warned through her mental voice.

Leah laughed softly.

"I promise to hold back."

I smiled.

"I won't."

And in that instant, the air changed.

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The first move was hers.

Leah raised her hand, and a burst of icy wind swept across the field. It wasn't a direct attack, but a distraction—a small whirlwind that lifted the snow, partially blinding my vision.

In the past, I would have charged straight at her... but not now.

I thrust my sword into the ground.

The ice responded instantly.

A thin line of frost spread out from my boots, winding over the snow. Leah moved to dodge it, but it wasn't a trap—yet—it was a channel.

I inhaled.

Cold air filled my lungs.

Then, I activated the link.

At the end of the line, the ice erupted from the ground like a crystalline spear that shattered a few inches from Leah.

She stepped back, startled.

"That's new!"

"I'm just getting started," I said, and the ground shimmered again.

Another line of frost shot off in the opposite direction, splitting halfway through.

Leah lifted her staff and conjured a shield of wind that deflected the first spike, but the second one emerged from a lower angle, catching her off guard. She had to propel herself backward with an air spell to avoid being grazed.

Chloé watched with her tail raised, following every motion.

"Good mana flow, Lotte. Keep your rhythm steady."

"I'm trying," I muttered, focusing.

The terrain was mine now.

I could feel every portion of the ice beneath my feet, as if the ground itself was breathing with me. My channels spread invisibly under the snow, ready to be triggered.

But Leah was not someone who could be easily cornered.

She lifted her staff, her voice calm yet resonant.

"Dawn's Ember."

The air lit up.

A spiral of blue fire formed in front of her and rushed toward me, melting the snow in its path.

"Tsk..." I darted to the side, but the heat brushed my arm, leaving a searing sensation even through my coat.

Leah's blue fire didn't burn like normal flames—it consumed air, breath, and balance.

"How about that?" she asked, her eyes flashing with playful challenge.

I smiled, panting.

"Just lukewarm."

I drove my sword into the ground again and let my mana flow.

This time, the ice lines didn't extend in only one direction—they branched out in three.

I had prepared them in advance, during every dodge.

Hidden channels beneath the ground, ready to be unleashed simultaneously.

"Let's see if you can dodge this."

I activated all three.

The ice burst in unison, raising columns of frost that surrounded Leah in a perfect triangle.

Each one targeted a different blind spot, trapping her among flashes of white light.

But Leah reacted faster than I expected.

"Prismatic Wall!" she shouted.

The air vibrated.

Three magic circles formed around her and expanded outward, blocking two of my attacks and deflecting the third.

Even so, the pressure of the ice was enough to shatter one of the barriers, which exploded into glowing fragments.

Leah stepped back, her gloves steaming faintly from the strain.

"Impressive," she said between breaths. "I didn't think you'd be able to coordinate that many flows at once."

"Neither did I," I admitted. "But I'm not stopping here."

I lunged forward.

My sword clashed against one of her remaining barriers.

The impact made the air tremble, scattering sparks of mana and shards of ice that fell like shining rain between us.

For a second, our eyes met.

In hers, I saw the reflection of flame—and in mine... ice.

She smiled.

"Then come on. Show me more."

And the duel continued.

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For the next few minutes, the field turned into a storm of magic and steel.

My lines of ice spread across the ground in patterns that looked like the roots of trees, while Leah danced between them, hurling gusts of wind and waves of fire, undoing what she could before it spread.

It was a dance between two opposite forces: the fire that liberated, and the ice that claimed.

Each time my attack nearly struck her, Leah found a way to twist, block, or counter.

But this time, I wasn't the same as before.

I didn't grow desperate.

I didn't strike blindly.

I waited... for the moment.

And then, it came.

Leah rose into the air with a wind spell, seeking distance.

Exactly what I needed.

I stretched out my arms, feeling every ice channel respond at once.

The ground lit up in a bright network.

The air turned frigid in an instant.

"Now!"

From the earth, a spiral of crystal erupted, rising like a frozen wave, wrapping the air in a dance of frost. Leah tried to counter with fire, but the ice absorbed part of the heat and closed around her.

The entire field glowed in shades of blue.

For a heartbeat, the world stopped.

Only the sound of ice growing could be heard.

When the light faded, Leah stood, panting, surrounded by a perfect circle of frost.

Her staff still glimmered, but the ground beneath her feet was completely sealed by my magic.

I had won.

For a moment.

Until I noticed a small detail—the blue flame at the tip of her staff hadn't gone out.

She smiled, exhausted.

"Lotte... look down."

The ice beneath my boots began to glow.

Before I could react, a column of warm air lifted me off the ground, breaking my balance. I fell to my knees, laughing, my sword buried in the snow.

"Counterflow trap!" Chloé exclaimed. "She activated it right when you closed the circle!"

Leah exhaled, her breath visible in the freezing air.

"You almost had me. So close."

I stayed silent for a few seconds, panting, then smiled.

"Then it's a draw."

Leah shook her head with that serene calm of hers that could almost hurt.

"No. I won by a second. But you..."

She knelt, touching the still-glimmering ice.

"...you made me feel what it's truly like to fight you."

Chloé approached, looking pleased.

"Both of you improved. But Lotte, this time you dominated the entire field. That's not something you see every day."

I stood up, brushing snow from my sword.

The ice around the field began to melt slowly, reflecting the sunlight in thousands of tiny sparks.

And among them, I felt something in my chest—a quiet, warm calm.

I hadn't won.

But I hadn't lost either.

I had learned.

I had grown.

"Next time," I said with a grin, "I won't hold back."

Leah nodded.

"Neither will I."

The northern wind blew, carrying away the mist from the air, leaving behind only our laughter, the echo of our battle...

and the footprints of two friends who, amid ice and fire, kept growing together.