

Frozen Star 130

Chapter 130: Shadows of That Day

[POV Liselotte]

The night moved slowly, heavily, as if the wind beating against the windows carried with it a memory I still wasn't ready to face.

After hearing the nobles talk about the summoning ritual, a knot had formed in my chest.

A knot only one person could untie.

My father.

I found him in the workshop, putting out the forge. The reddish glow lit up his tired face, and for a moment, I realized just how much he had aged since the day I disappeared.

"Dad..." I said, my voice barely audible.

Carl looked up. And the moment he saw my expression, he set everything aside.

“What’s wrong, Lotte?”

I swallowed slowly.

It was hard to talk about something I had avoided even remembering for so many years.

“I want you to tell me what happened... the day the teleportation circle sent me away. After I disappeared. Everything. What you saw. What really happened.”

Silence fell like a thick blanket.

My father closed his eyes for a moment. Then he nodded.

“All right,” he said, his voice rough. “It’s time you knew.”

We sat at the workshop table. The wind hammered the windows, and the smell of cold metal seemed to intensify the tension in the air.

Carl took a long breath.

“After that circle swallowed you... everything was chaos. We couldn’t stop the spell or track it. And before we could process anything...” —his eyes darkened— “he appeared.”

A shiver crawled down my spine.

“The demon...?” I whispered.

Carl nodded slowly.

“Yes. A demon with such overwhelming power... my knees trembled without me being able to stop it. He was tall, nearly two meters, with horns like black blades and eyes...” —he swallowed hard— “eyes like blue fire. I’d never seen anything like it. And I hope I never do again.”

Leah, who had entered without me hearing her, froze beside me.

I felt her aura shake.

My father continued:

“The royal soldiers were there to guard something. Something important, they said. We didn’t know what.

But that demon... he destroyed them. By himself.”

Carl clenched his fists.

“It wasn’t even a battle. It was an execution. His attacks were impossible to follow. He moved darkness like it was part of his own body. And every soldier who tried to get near him... fell before they could even raise their shields.”

Leah lowered her gaze, her breathing unsteady.

“When your mother tried to help, I... I pulled her back,” Carl continued. “Because I understood that demon was there for something bigger than us. For someone bigger than us.”

The word lingered in the air.

Someone.

Leah trembled.

I placed my hand over hers.

“That ‘someone’ ... was it Leah?” I asked quietly.

Carl looked at me and nodded.

“Yes.

We didn’t know her. We didn’t know her name. But seeing how they protected that carriage, how that demon was searching for them specifically... I understood it wasn’t a simple kidnapping.”

Leah stepped back, as if the weight of the truth was too much.

“So...” she murmured, “they died... because of me.”

“Leah, no,” I said immediately, holding her shoulders.

But my father shook his head.

“They didn’t die for you. They died fulfilling their duty as knights of the kingdom. And trying to stop the demons from taking you. They didn’t do it because of who you were... but because you were a child who needed to live.”

Leah closed her eyes tightly. A silent tear fell.

Carl continued, his voice now dimmer.

“After that attack... the demons began to move differently. More organized. More active. As if capturing Leah had been only the beginning.

The castle sent reports to retired adventurers... and each month, the news grew worse.

My old companions said demon incursions became... massive.”

I swallowed.

“How massive?”

Carl looked straight into my eyes.

“They weren’t 200, or 500... or even a thousand.

Every attack was made up of more than five thousand demons.”

Leah let out a small, strangled sound.

“Five... five thousand...” she repeated.

Carl nodded solemnly.

“Yes. And not simple wild demons. Organized troops. Standardized. Coordinated.

The kingdom’s soldiers can’t keep up, Lotte. Reports say every battle costs hundreds of lives. The kingdom is wearing down... slowly.

And if this continues another year, there may be no one left to fight.”

The silence was devastating.

Something twisted inside me.

Now everything fit.

Everything we heard that night.

Everything Kaelen did in secret.

Everything the king had announced.

“That’s why...” I murmured, “they’re going to do the summoning ritual.”

My father nodded, slowly.

“Yes. The kingdom needs an advantage. A miracle. Something the demons don’t have.

And summoning rituals... can bring beings from beyond this world. Warriors who don’t follow our rules, or our limits.”

Leah gripped my hand tightly, as if afraid she might vanish.

“But... that ritual hasn’t been used in centuries,” she whispered. “It could fail. It could break the magical balance.”

“It could,” Carl said, without softening anything. “But the war is already here. And the king is betting that doing nothing... would cost far more.”

His words seemed to freeze the air.

Now we understood.

Now everything made sense.

Now the darkness showed us its shape.

The circle that teleported me far away.

The demon who annihilated an entire squad.

Leah’s abduction.

The rising movements of demon troops.

The massive attacks.

And now...

The summoning ritual.

Leah exhaled shakily.

“This... this isn’t just a war.

It’s a warning.”

I nodded.

“A warning that something far worse is coming.

And that we’re standing right in the middle of it.”

My father placed a hand on my shoulder.

“Lotte... be prepared.

What you’ll soon face... won’t be a simple rank exam.

It will be the beginning of a war that will define our era.”

I looked at Leah.

She looked back at me with a mixture of fear... and determination.

And in that moment, I understood something:

There would be no return to normal.

Not for us.

Not for the kingdom.

What was coming...

had no turning back.