

Frozen Star 131

Chapter 131: In the Stillness Before Dawn

[POV Liselotte]

The silence of the night felt heavier than usual.

I had grown up in these northern lands; I knew the sound of the wind hitting the windows, the creaking of branches weighed down with frost, and the distant howl of the mountain wolves.

But that night... everything was far too still.

As if even winter itself was holding its breath.

After everything my father had told us, I couldn't stay inside the house.

I couldn't simply sleep or pretend everything was fine.

Too many pieces had clicked together at once.

Too many truths buried for years had surfaced all at once.

So I stepped out onto the porch, wrapping myself in a blanket and letting the icy air sting my cheeks. The sky was clear, sprinkled with stars that seemed sharper than ever. The kind of sky that only appears when the whole world is bracing for something big.

Something it doesn't fully understand... but fears deeply.

I heard soft footsteps behind me.

Leah.

"Can't sleep?" she asked, leaning against the railing beside me.

"No," I admitted without hesitation. "You?"

"Me neither."

We stayed like that for a while. Staring at the sky, listening to the weight of our breaths settle over the snow.

Finally, Leah spoke, her voice so gentle it almost blended into the wind:

"What your father said... it's still echoing in my head."

I nodded.

"Mine too."

Leah pressed her lips together.

"I didn't know my kidnapping caused so much chaos. I didn't know the demons moved... because they took me."

I placed a hand on her shoulder.

"It wasn't your fault."

She looked at me, her eyes shining with a mix of pain and a quiet recognition.

"Maybe not. But... I was the cause. Even if I didn't choose it, even if I had no control, my existence... shifted the balance."

I didn't know what to say.

Because it was a bitter truth: she had been used as a catalyst, a spark, a target.

The world had trembled around Leah without her being able to stop it.

So I held her a little tighter.

"The balance was already broken," I finally said. "Demons don't act without reason. Something else is happening. Something big. You were part of it, yes, but not the source. Just..."

"A piece on the board?" Leah whispered.

"No," I said firmly. "A piece doesn't think. It doesn't feel. It doesn't suffer. You do. And that makes you more than an object in a prophecy. It makes you someone with the right to choose what to do with all of this."

Leah took a deep breath. The frozen air turned into a white sigh that dissolved among the stars.

"Choose..." she repeated. "Sometimes I feel like all my paths are already written."

"Then let's walk them together," I said without thinking too much.

She blinked, surprised.

I surprised myself too. But I didn't take the words back.

I couldn't.

They were true.

We went back inside quietly. Chloé was asleep by the fireplace, one paw twitching as if chasing a rabbit in her dreams. Claire was on the couch, hugging a blanket Mom had knitted years ago.

But neither of them woke up.

Leah took my hand without saying anything. It was a soft gesture, almost timid, as if she were asking for permission without using words. I squeezed her hand in return. I didn't know whether she sought comfort or strength. Maybe both.

We climbed to my room and closed the door gently. Moonlight spilled through the window, covering the floor in a cold bluish glow.

We sat on the edge of the bed, silent.

"Lotte..." Leah said, looking straight at me, "do you think the ritual is truly necessary?"

A question with too many layers.

Too many implications.

Too much history behind it.

"If they do it..." she continued, "they'll bring people from another world. People who didn't ask to come. People who might not know how to fight. People who could die... before they understand why they're here."

Her words made my chest ache.

Because I had thought the same.

"If they were in danger..." I murmured, "wouldn't you do the same? Wouldn't you try to get help from wherever you could?"

"Yes," she whispered.

Then she understood.

It wasn't a desire.

It was a necessity.

The world was changing too fast to stand still.

Leah held her head in her hands.

"I feel like everything is moving... too much. Too fast. Like we're being pulled toward something inevitable."

"We are," I replied. "But that doesn't mean we can't move forward with our eyes open."

I watched her.

Leah's gaze was distant, as if she were reliving every memory, every scar, every shadow.

"When Kaelen trained me," she said suddenly, "he always said the world isn't divided between those who are prepared and those who aren't... but between those who take one more step, even while shaking. I think I finally understand what he meant."

I moved closer.

"And you? Are you shaking now?"

"Yes," she murmured. "But I'm not alone."

Her honesty cut straight through me.

Her vulnerability, her strength, her fear... all of it was real.

And I couldn't let her carry it alone.

I stood slowly and walked to the window. Snow was still falling, soft and lazy. A calm snowfall... the kind that announces a change of season.

Leah joined me.

"Do you know what scares me the most?" she asked.

I looked at her. She kept her gaze on the snow, as if searching for answers in the pale reflection of the moon.

"I'm afraid something will drag me away from all of you," she whispered. "From you. From Chloé. From this house. From the life that... I'm only just starting to feel as mine."

A strong heartbeat thudded in my chest.

"I won't let that happen," I said, not hesitating for a second.

Leah smiled, but her smile was laced with sadness.

"I know. But there are things not even you can stop alone."

"Then I won't do it alone," I replied. "That's why I'm here."

She looked at me with an intensity that made me forget the cold outside.

"Lotte..." she whispered.

"Yes?"

"Thank you."

No "thank you" had ever carried so much weight, or meant so much.

We stayed there for a while, watching the snow fall. The silence was warm, intimate. We didn't need words. We had said too many already tonight.

And yet... there was something I needed to say.

Something I had felt from the beginning, but never had the courage to admit.

I took a deep breath.

"Leah..."

She turned to me.

I gathered all the strength I had.

"No matter what comes. No matter the ritual, the demons, the prophecies, or the king. No matter if the world falls apart or changes forever. No matter if heroes from another world arrive... or never do.

I'm going to stay with you."

Leah looked at me with an expression I'll never forget. A mix of surprise, relief, fear, and a brightness that seemed to melt even the harsh winter frost.

"I know," she whispered.

And she let out a small sigh, as if she had been holding it in for years.

She rested her head on my shoulder.

And I let the weight of the world settle between us.

After a while, Leah fell asleep leaning on me. Her warm breath mingled with the cold air of the room.

I helped her lie down and sat beside her.

I watched her sleep, seeing the tension slowly fade from her face.

And I thought about everything that had happened.

The demon my father saw.

The attacks of thousands of troops.

The ritual that would change history.

The prophecy announcing the end of an era.

I thought about all that...

And still, for the first time in a long time, I didn't feel fear.

I felt something different.

Something stronger.

Something that burned like a small fire... but one impossible to extinguish.

Determination.

The world was a year and a half away from breaking.

But we weren't going to break.

Not while we were together.

Not while our steps moved as one.

Not while the snow kept falling over the house that still held warmth.

Dawn was still far away.

But its promise already lingered in the air.

And I was ready to face it.