

Frozen Star 133

Chapter 133: Preparations and Unspoken Words

[POV Liselotte]

We returned home under an almost white sky, as if the snow suspended in the air was still debating whether to fall or resist another day. The porch wood creaked as we stepped on it, and before we could open the door, the smell of freshly baked bread wrapped around us like a silent welcome.

"You're back!" Claire exclaimed, rushing toward us the moment we crossed the threshold.

Andrea appeared behind her with a flour-covered apron and a warm smile.

"What did the guild say?" she asked, though her eyes already held a blend of pride and worry.

Leah and I exchanged a glance.

"They accepted the mission," I answered. "We leave in three days."

The silence that followed was heavy... but not sad.

Andrea took a deep breath, as if trying to store that moment away before the world changed.

Then she nodded.

"Alright. Then we'll handle the rest."

"The rest?" Leah asked, confused.

Andrea smiled with that gesture of hers that always made winter feel less harsh.

"Your food, your blankets, basic medicine, utensils, protection seals, and maps. You two are going to rest. We'll prepare everything."

Claire raised her fist as if about to start her own adventure.

"Leave this to us! We don't want you leaving without being properly prepared."

Leah opened her mouth to protest, but Claire covered it with her hand.

"Don't even try. Mom and I already decided."

Andrea laughed.

"Besides, you two need to save your energy for what's coming. Ascending to Rank A won't be easy. Even if you don't say it... I know you're nervous."

I looked away, because she was right.

Leah too.

"Get some rest," Andrea repeated. "This afternoon we'll go buy everything you need. Trust us."

Before we could argue, both of them were already organizing a long list of supplies. Claire grabbed her shopping bag, Andrea took coins from a drawer, and in less than two minutes they were out the door like they were heading on a secret mission.

"Don't touch anything!" Claire shouted from outside. "And don't leave without telling us!"

The door closed.

And the house felt enormous again.

Chloé yawned from her spot near the fire, blinking lazily.

"Well... I guess that answers who's in charge around here," she said in my mind as she stretched.

Leah let out a soft laugh.

"Andrea is always in charge," she replied.

I placed my coat over the back of a chair, feeling the silence gradually settle.

There was peace...

But also a different kind of tension.

Not of danger.

But of things left unsaid.

Chloé walked toward us, tail swaying slowly, and when she reached us, she lifted her gaze toward Leah.

"Leah," she said with a tone she rarely used, "there's something we should do before you leave."

Leah tilted her head.

"What is it?"

"Talk to your parents," Chloé replied naturally. "The king and queen."

The reaction was immediate.

Leah froze.

Not like when she used magic.

Not like when she was afraid.

It was emotional freezing.

A block.

I could almost feel her chest tightening.

"No," she said firmly.

"Leah..." I began.

But she raised her hand to stop me.

"No. I'm not going to the castle."

Chloé lowered her ears.

"I'm not saying you should live there or kneel to anyone. I'm just saying you could try talking to them. Telling them you're alive. That you're here. That—"

"No!" Leah repeated, this time louder.

The sound echoed in the quiet room.

I took a step toward her.

"Leah..."

She clenched her fists. Her eyes darkened, tense, as if a storm was forming inside her.

"When I go back into that castle," she said, taking a deep breath, "it will be to prove my identity. To look them in the eye and show them who I am now. Not a lost child. Not a symbol. Not a mistake who fell into the hands of demons."

Her voice dropped, more fragile. "But an adventurer who survived.

A complete person.

Someone who chose to rise."

Something tightened in my chest.

Leah continued:

"I won't show up now, weak and without answers. I won't give them more doubts or more reasons to protect or imprison me. When I return..." —she raised her chin— "it will be as an equal. Not as a ghost from the past."

Chloé lowered her gaze.

"I just thought... maybe you'd want—"

"I know," Leah interrupted, softer. "I know, Chloé. Really."

She kneeled and gently stroked her head.

"But I'm not ready. Not... yet."

Chloé rested her snout on Leah's knee, accepting the decision even if it hurt.

I sat beside her, placing my hand on her back.

"Then we'll do this your way," I said. "At your pace. When you're ready... I'll be with you."

Leah looked at me, her eyes shining—not with tears, but with something deeper.

Gratitude.

Strength.

Conviction.

"Thank you," she whispered.

The afternoon passed slowly but peacefully.

Leah reviewed her grimoires.

I sharpened my sword.

Chloé slept deeply, as if she needed to store energy for the days ahead.

The house creaked with the wind, but it no longer felt empty.

Because for the first time in a long while, we weren't just preparing for a mission...

We were preparing for an inevitable change.

A change that would define who we were.

What we meant to this kingdom.

And what choices we would make when the war reached us.

When Andrea and Claire returned, carrying bags and packages, the house filled again with noise and warmth.

But inside me...

There was a quiet, steady flame.

An unspoken vow:

When Leah returns to the castle... she will walk at her own pace.

In her own time.

In her own way.

And I will be there.

By her side.

Until the end.