

Frozen Star 138

Chapter 138: Where Silence Learns to Speak

[POV Liselotte]

The forest was wrapped in a bluish dimness. That kind of quiet darkness that only appears when the moon is high and the world seems to hold its breath. It wasn't cold... but I was trembling anyway.

I walked between the trees with clumsy steps, letting my magic lantern illuminate only a small circle of light around my feet. The snow crunched beneath my boots as if trying to stop me, as if whispering "think it through" with every step.

But I couldn't think anymore.

I couldn't leave her alone.

Not after everything I'd said. Not after shooting words like arrows into the dark, hoping they wouldn't hit anything... and missing completely.

The forest was silent.

So silent I could hear my own breathing—fast and unsteady.

And in that silence... I finally saw her.

Sitting on a rock, cloak wrapped tightly around her body. The moonlight made her white hair shine like freshly fallen snow. Her knees were drawn up, her staff resting at her side. She wasn't crying. She didn't look broken.

But she looked alone.

And that sight squeezed my heart like an invisible fist.

"Leah..." I whispered.

She didn't move.

I stepped closer. The air seemed to grow heavier between us, thick with all the unsaid words and all the silences that had hurt.

"Leah, I—"

"Don't say anything yet."

Her voice was soft... but not weak. Just tired.

I stopped a couple of meters from her.

The world went still.

After a few seconds, Leah lifted her gaze. Her silver eyes reflected the blueish light of the forest, but there was no anger in them.

There was... pain.

And that was worse.

“Lotte,” she said calmly, “I know you didn’t mean to hurt me. I know you were frustrated. I know you were trying to protect me, in your own way.”

My throat tightened until breathing hurt.

“But it still hurts.”

The words hit like a spear.

Not the kind that kills.

The kind that forces you to look inward.

I swallowed hard.

“I know. And that’s why I came. Because... because I don’t want that pain to stay between us.”

Leah lowered her gaze, twisting the edge of her cloak.

“When you said they see us as dangerous... I felt all the weight of these past five years come back onto my shoulders.”

Her voice trembled. Not with tears—

With memory.

“And when you said they see me as a monster... even if I knew you meant them, I couldn’t help hearing it as if you were saying it too.”

I took a slow, cautious step forward.

“I didn’t say it about you, Leah. I never would.”

I stopped when I was half a meter away.

“I don’t think it, I don’t feel it, and I didn’t mean it for a second.”

She breathed in deeply, her chest rising and falling unevenly.

“I don’t want you to apologize on instinct, Lotte. I don’t want you to say something pretty because you feel guilty. I want you to understand what happened.”

“I’m trying to understand it,” I answered, raw honesty slipping out. “And I want you to understand what happened to me too.”

Leah looked at me at last.

Her gaze... was broken in places no physical wound could ever reach.

"Then tell me."

So I did.

"I got scared."

Her brow furrowed slightly.

"Scared... of what?"

"Of losing you," I admitted before fear could stop the words. "Of watching you walk back toward people who despise you. Of seeing how their stares stabbed into you with things I can't pull out. Of watching you drift away from me because I'm not strong enough to carry you."

Leah blinked, surprised.

"Lotte..."

“I know you’re strong. I know you carry a weight I can’t fully understand. But I want to be there, always, with you.”

I inhaled shakily.

“And when I saw how they looked at you today... and how you just kept moving forward like nothing happened... I felt scared. Scared I wouldn’t be enough to protect you. Scared they would hurt you and I couldn’t stop it. Scared that one day... you’d break in a place I can’t reach.”

The word break echoed between the trees.

Leah pressed a hand to her chest, as if something inside her tightened painfully.

“Lotte... I never asked you to protect me from everything.”

“I know. But that doesn’t mean my heart understands it.”

She let out a trembling sigh.

“That’s why I walked away.”

Something inside me stung sharply.

“Because I didn’t know how to talk through your fear without triggering my own. And because... because it hurt to feel like you thought I didn’t want to face what happened.”

Leah stood from the rock.

The wind shifted her cloak gently, as if the forest were listening.

“Can I come closer?” I asked.

She nodded.

I stepped forward until I stood right in front of her, close enough to feel her breath against mine.

Leah raised a hand to my cheek.

When her fingers brushed my skin—soft as falling snow—the tension of the entire day unraveled.

“I’m not angry at you,” she said gently. “Just... hurt.”

“And I’m sorry.”

Her thumb traced a circle on my cheek.

“I don’t want you to be sorry,” she murmured. “I want us to learn to talk before we explode.”

I nodded with a sigh that came out almost like a sob.

“I’m trying. I really am.”

“I know.”

We stayed like that, breathing together in silence, without need for words, without rush.

“I’m sorry I didn’t listen,” I finally whispered. “Sorry for making you feel that weight alone again. Sorry I didn’t see you were holding yourself together the only way you knew how.”

Leah rested her forehead against mine.

“You didn’t leave me alone. We just... got lost for a moment.”

I closed my eyes. Her closeness was a balm. A warmth no campfire could match.

“Leah... you’re home to me too. You’re not a burden. You’re not a monster. You’re my companion. My friend. My...”

I stopped.

The next word was too big to throw carelessly into the air.

But she didn’t need to hear it.

Because she felt it.

Her hand found mine, intertwining our fingers tightly.

“I need you too,” she whispered. “Even if I don’t always know how to show it.”

The wind shifted. For an instant, it felt warm—

As if the forest exhaled in relief.

“Are we still together?” I asked.

Leah smiled. Not a sad smile. Not a forced one.

A quiet, honest smile.

“Always.”

She pulled me into an embrace.

And without thinking, I held onto her.

The hug was long. One of those that loosen knots, that close invisible wounds, that break you a little so you can be rebuilt properly. Leah hid her face in my neck, her breathing unsteady. I held her tightly, as if letting go would make the world collapse.

"I was scared today too," she confessed softly against my skin. "Scared my words would push you away."

"I could never walk away."

"I know... but I was scared anyway."

I tightened my arms around her.

"I'm sorry," I murmured again, like a prayer.

"Don't apologize anymore, Lotte. You're here. That's enough."

We stayed that way a long time, wind swaying the branches overhead, clouds slowly gathering in the sky. No rush. No danger. Nothing but this moment, and the certainty that we did not want to lose each other.

Eventually, Leah pulled back slightly, just enough to see me.

"We're going to be okay," she said.

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

I took her hand.

“I’m not going back to the camp without you.”

She laughed quietly—a warm, living sound that healed everything the day had broken.

“I’m not letting you go alone.”

“Nor I you.”

Together, we began walking toward the lights of the camp.

The forest no longer felt threatening.

The wind no longer sounded like judgment.

The night stopped being an enemy.

Because now...

we walked together.

And that, to me, was the only path that mattered.