

Frozen Star 139

Chapter 139: Under a New Shared Step

[POV Liselotte]

Returning to the camp after our reconciliation felt like stepping into a different world... even though everything was exactly the same. The same campfires lighting tired faces, the same long shadows stretching over the snow, the same hushed whispers hidden among adventurers and soldiers.

But something had changed inside us.

The noise no longer touched us the same way.

The stares no longer felt as heavy.

Other people's words no longer carried a blade.

Because now we were walking together.

The camp's light flickered in the distance. The smell of damp pine and cold metal mixed with the smoke from the fires. Leah kept her hand intertwined with mine—not tightly, but calmly. As if that touch were a silent reminder that there was nothing left unsettled between us.

And in a way, that was true.

As we walked past the first groups of soldiers, some looked us up and down with suspicion. Others quickly turned away, as if afraid our presence might rub off on them. And a few—the minority—simply watched with a mix of discomfort and curiosity.

But this time, for the first time since this mission began...

We didn't look away.

We didn't slow down.

We didn't shrink back.

Leah kept her head high, her cloak drifting behind her like a piece of living snow. I kept my posture firm as well, feeling my chest fill with a determination I didn't have the night before.

We didn't need to speak to understand each other.

We didn't need to explain ourselves to anyone.

We knew our purpose.

When we reached the area where the campfires were closer together, a pair of B-rank adventurers looked at us as we passed. One of them opened his mouth, clearly ready to spit out some insult.

But Leah didn't even turn her head.

And neither did I.

His words died in his throat.

And that simple indifference hurt him more than any angry reply.

A bit farther ahead, Chloé waited for us, sitting on a rock with her tail barely moving and her ears alert. The moment she saw us, she stood up at once and ran toward us.

"At last," she said mentally, her tail wagging faster. "I was this close to biting one of you so you'd finally talk."

Leah let out a small, soft, sincere laugh.

I smiled too.

“Thanks, Chloé,” I said, scratching behind her ears.

“I’m glad you came back together,” the wolf added. “Watching you walk around like the world was about to collapse was unbearable.”

“I’m sorry for that,” Leah murmured. “It wasn’t our intention.”

“Intent doesn’t matter. What matters is that you fixed it.”

Chloé tilted her head.

“And that now... you both look much stronger.”

Warmth bloomed in my chest.

“We are,” I replied.

“Yes,” Leah said beside me, her voice firm. “We are.”

The sound of heavy footsteps interrupted the moment.

The steps of someone used to imposing himself—used to being noticed.

Alistair appeared from the right side of the camp, the army’s cloak moving behind him like a dark shadow. He stopped in front of us with his arms crossed. His eyes swept over Leah first, then me, then Chloé.

A faint smile—too faint to be friendly—lifted his lips.

“Well, well,” he said in a deep voice. “The master Ronan’s little stars finally returned.”

We didn’t answer.

He raised an eyebrow, amused.

“How interesting. This morning you were burning hotter than a bonfire... and now you look like you’ve achieved enlightenment in the middle of the forest.”

Leah squeezed my hand slightly. Not out of tension.

A warning.

A reminder.

“Captain Alistair,” I said simply, giving a small nod.

“Mm.” His gaze shifted to Leah.

“I heard the lost princess put on quite the show earlier today.”

“And I heard you were too busy watching from afar,” Leah replied without raising her voice.

Alistair’s smile widened.

But it wasn’t pleasant—more like someone calculating, testing, prodding to find your limits.

“Was that a critique... or a greeting?” he asked with fake innocence.

Leah didn't fall for it.

"An observation," she said. "Nothing more."

I could feel everyone nearby holding their breath, waiting for one of us to respond badly, to snap, to fall right into his game.

But we didn't.

Not this time.

Alistair tilted his head, as if entertained.

"Such discipline," he murmured. "Seems like that little nighttime walk worked miracles."

"The only thing it did," I said, meeting his eyes without faltering, "was make our priorities clearer."

"And those priorities are...?"

“To complete the mission.”

Leah added:

“With or without your approval.”

A few nearby soldiers coughed awkwardly to hide their surprise.

A C-rank adventurer stared with his mouth open.

And the hammer-wielding man—the same who mocked us the first day—mumbled under his breath:

“These girls don’t know when to shut up.”

Alistair didn’t get angry, though.

He simply smiled... like someone who just found something interesting in a place he expected nothing.

“Good,” he finally said. “I’m glad to see you no longer crumble with a breeze.”

His eyes fixed on Leah with deliberate intensity.

“That’ll be useful in the coming days.”

Then, without waiting for a reply, he turned and walked away, leaving a trail of silence behind him.

Chloé snorted.

“That man enjoys messing with people way too much.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I said. “He won’t steer us off our path.”

Leah took a long breath and nodded.

“Not anymore,” she murmured.

We sat together around an unlit fire, letting the glow of a nearby flame warm us a little. Nobody approached us. Nobody dared stare for more than a moment.

We were no longer easy targets.

We were no longer broken or scattered.

Chloé curled up beside our legs, her ears lowered in a peaceful gesture.

“I’m glad to have you both back,” she said mentally.

“And we’re glad to have you,” Leah replied.

I looked at both of them.

At my friend.

At my companion.

At my family.

And for the first time since this mission began, I felt that nothing—not the rumors, not the soldiers, not the demons, not the forest trailing us—could break what we had rebuilt.

I exhaled softly.

“Tomorrow we start a new stretch,” I murmured.

Leah gently leaned her shoulder against mine.

“And we’ll be ready.”

Always. Together