

Frozen Star 33

Chapter 33: Adventurers' Guild

[POV Liselotte]

The next morning dawned clear—a rare gift. The snowfall had ceased during the night, and the light gray sky seemed to breathe with us, as if Glarien itself was taking a pause.

Chloé walked at my side, silent, alert, her paws barely leaving prints. My leg still hurt, but I could walk with the help of an improvised cane. The temple faded behind us, and before us rose the building that Priest Iram had pointed to the day before: the guild.

It wasn't a fortress. Not even a large inn. It was a sturdy wooden and stone house, two stories tall, with reinforced shutters, columns carved with stylized flames, and a sign hanging over the door:

“ADVENTURERS' GUILD – NORTHERN FLAMES”

"Paths are forged here."

We entered.

The interior smelled of leather, steel, ink, and fresh bread. The lobby was warm, lit by oil lamps and a large brazier in the center. Several adventurers occupied benches and tables—some examining boards full of handwritten quests, others engaged in lively discussions.

Everyone looked at us as we entered, though not with hostility. It was a natural assessing glance. A strange girl and a wolf weren't an everyday sight. But their eyes didn't linger long. This was the kind of place where secrets were common currency.

A dark oak desk awaited us at the back. Behind it, a young woman with brown hair in multiple braids flipped through a notebook. Upon seeing us, she looked up and smiled with a mix of professionalism and curiosity.

"First time at the guild?" she asked, her voice clear like thaw bells.

"Yes" I replied, stepping forward firmly. "I want to know more about magic."

The girl raised an eyebrow.

"Magic, huh? Straight to the point" She straightened up, setting the notebook aside. "I'm Nalle, receptionist at Northern Flames. To access the guild's archives on magic, you need to be a registered adventurer. Do you know what that entails?"

"I suspect it's more than just signing up."

Nalle chuckled softly.

"Good instinct. Name?"

"Liselotte."

"Last name?"

"I don't have one."

"Understood" Naelle didn't ask more. In her world, many arrived without clear pasts. She took a polished wooden tablet with a sheet fastened by iron rings. "Let's see. You'll need to undergo a trial, but seeing your current condition..." Her eyes flicked to my bandaged leg "We can use the alternative method."

"Which is?"

"Skill declaration and magical validation. You state what you can do, and an assessment crystal determines if you're lying. Deal?"

I nodded. Naelle pulled an opaque crystal the size of an apple from a chest beneath the desk. As she set it between us, it emitted a faint vibration, as if sensing the tension in the air.

"Touch the crystal with both hands and concentrate. Think about who you are as a fighter. What drives you?"

I did so. I placed both hands on the crystal's cold surface. I closed my eyes.

I remembered the battle in the village. The days I spent in the forest with Chloé, training and hunting.

The crystal vibrated and took on a bright, glowing white tone.

Naele whistled.

"Looks like you've got a huge amount of mana... But it's not in a usable state" she said, watching the energy swirl violently.

I pulled away, the crystal still humming with energy.

"Well... that's enough. No need to prove more". Noelle rummaged through a drawer and pulled out a small wooden box. "As a registered adventurer, you'll start at rank F, the base level. From there, you can rise: E, D, C, B, A, up to S."

"What determines the rank?"

"Completed missions, time active, periodic evaluations... and of course, reports from your companions or supervisors. Each letter opens up new possibilities: contracts, access, authority."

She opened the box. Inside, polished metal badges: small hexagonal plates with the corresponding letter. She handed me a bronze plate with my name and a giant F, along with a scroll containing the guild's basic guidelines.

"It's provisional" she said. "When you advance, they'll forge you a custom one. By the way, your wolf has to wear this badge with your name on it, so it doesn't get attacked on sight."

I fastened the badges securely with a leather strap they gave me. They felt cold to the touch, but not unpleasant. It was a symbol. Small. But real.

"And now..." I said, unable to hide my impatience. "The library?"

Naelle laughed, but nodded.

"This way. Second door to the right, stairs to the basement. Don't expect anything grand. This isn't the capital's guild. But maybe you'll find what you're looking for."

The guild's library wasn't vast, but it smelled of wisdom.

About six shelves lined two narrow aisles—hand-bound books, rolled scrolls, maps pinned to the wall with wax. A couple of tables with half-burnt candles. An old man half-asleep in a corner—perhaps the librarian, perhaps a statue.

Chloé sat beside me as I walked between the shelves. My fingers brushed over titles like “Cartography of the Northern Snowy Regions”, “Basic Sword Usage”, “Frozen Bestiaries of the Arwen Continent.”

And then I glimpsed one, slightly hidden among the others: “Introduction to Magic.”

My heart pounded.

There was an answer here. Or at least a clue.

Chloé looked at me, tilting her head.

"We're on the path". I whispered to her. "I may not know how to control what I am yet. But I'm not alone now. And now I have a library. A guild. A map. A purpose."

Chloé yawned.

I opened the book.

And the winter inside me, for the first time, listened.