

Frozen Star 53

Chapter 53: The princess's determination

[POV Liselotte]

The room was silent.

It was Leah who broke the spell of silent horror, her voice lashing out not as a whisper but as a whip, seething with such icy contempt it dropped the room's temperature by several degrees:

"And this? This is the grand strategy? She will be my guardian? A girl with no magic to wield? And a wolf, noble and strong though it may be? Is that all the great Adventurers' Guild can offer for a princess's protection?"

The Master did not flinch. Not a single muscle in his face tensed. His calm was an ocean before her crashing waves.

"Not as they are now," he declared, his words falling like slabs of granite, each one carving the future into stone. "That is why you have six months. Not of leisure, nor of light preparation. In that time, I myself will oversee Liselotte's and Chloé's training. I will forge them on the anvil of necessity. Make them stronger than tempered steel, swifter than fear's thought, craftier than the most elaborate traps. I will shape them until they are hardened and capable enough to protect you on the most dangerous road imaginable, and to fulfill the mission entrusted to them."

The declaration slammed into my chest like a battering ram. It was both a sentence and an honor. Surprise and the overwhelming weight of responsibility clashed inside me, an armor of lead being forced onto my still-fragile shoulders.

But before my mouth could form a response—acceptance or protest—Leah struck her fists against the blankets, a dull explosion of sound. She rose in bed with a fury that seemed to erupt from the depths of her being, defying the weakness of her body.

“No!” Her cry, laden with ancient bitterness, thundered through the room like a bolt of lightning across a clear sky. “I will not allow it! I will not allow others to once again bear the weight of a life that by right and duty should be mine! Not again!”

I saw her trembling, not with fevered weakness, but with pure, fierce indignation. Her gray-blue eyes now burned with an inner fire, shining with a light unlike the cold, distant anger of before: it was a wrenching determination, born from the ashes of a helplessness endured too long.

“You think I will stay here, swaddled in cotton and good intentions? Wait like a broken doll needing repair, while they bleed, suffer, and die dragging my useless body to safety like some precious burden?” Her voice cracked at a point of raw pain that made me shudder, and she clenched her fists so hard her knuckles turned white. “I have spent too much time in a cage, watching the world through bars, powerless, cursing my weakness! I will not be a burden again! I will not accept it!”

The silence that followed her outburst was absolute, crushing. My heart pounded so hard I felt its echo in my temples, a personal war drum announcing a point of no return. The Master observed her without blinking, unmoving, letting the last echo of her passion die against the stone walls, absorbed by the gravity of the moment.

“Princess,” he said at last, and his tone was not condescension, but solemn, newly earned respect, “your will is as fierce as it is admirable. A fire that did not extinguish even in the deepest darkness. But will alone is not enough. Your body, after years of confinement and deprivation, is still recovering. Your physical strength has withered to the bone. Your innate magic, the legacy of your lineage... lies dormant, perhaps atrophied, beneath layers of trauma and neglect.”

“Then wake it!” Leah shot back instantly, her voice ringing with unbreakable steel. She lifted her chin with the pride of another lifetime, defying the evident fragility of her thin, pale arms protruding from beneath the blanket. “Wake it! Teach me. Train me as you mean to train them. Don’t give me privileges, give me tools. If my destiny is to return to Whirikai, it will not be as some rescued relic, a trophy to be escorted. It will be standing. With my head held high. As someone who can, and will, fight for what belongs to her. For her people.”

The Master remained still, a statue of authority and experience. His eyes gleamed with something hard to decipher: respect, undoubtedly, but also deep concern—the concern of a general who sees the valor of a soldier but also her potential to fall.

I, on the other hand, found myself looking at her with a completely new kind of awe. The cold, distant Leah, wounded beyond imagining, was shedding those layers like a chrysalis, revealing a core of steel tempered in the fire of her own suffering. She was not just a broken girl in need of saving. She was a living flame, fierce, refusing to be extinguished, demanding not pity but the chance to burn again.

“Master...” I heard myself say, the words rising almost without my consent, driven by the visceral certainty born of witnessing that glint of iron in her soul, “she’s right.” All eyes turned to me. “We cannot ask her to blindly trust us, nor to endure being treated like a hidden treasure, a passive object in her own story. If we are to do this... if we are to be her shield... then she must also be given the chance to forge her own sword. Let her train with us. Let her journey back begin not in six months... but today. Here.”

The Master's dark eyes, those endless wells of strategy, shifted from my face to Leah's, then briefly to Chloé, who until then had silently observed from a corner, tail rigid, wolf ears pricked, catching every nuance, every shift in the room's emotional current.

"Tsk..." The sound slipped from the Master's lips, a long, deep sigh that seemed to carry the weight of a hundred battles and a thousand hard choices. He rubbed a hand down his face, and when he lowered it, his lips curved in a grimace that was not a smile, but neither was it rejection. It was the expression of a man yielding not to weakness, but to a willpower even he could neither bend nor ignore. "Very well."

Leah tensed, her whole body alert, as if the shock of victory struck harder than the anticipation of struggle.

"But," he continued, his voice regaining the firmness of granite, "it will be under my conditions. Strict and unyielding. Within these walls, during these six months, you will not be treated as a princess. You will be another apprentice. The rawest novice. The weakest. Your scars, however deep, will not grant you privileges. Your lost years will not grant you excuses. If you say you want to fight, then you will learn to fight from the bottom, from the mud, with nails and teeth if need be, as every warrior of worth has done. Is that clear?"

A flash of pure, hard pride burned in Leah's gray-blue eyes, a beacon lit in the night of her fragility. She nodded with a firmness that froze the air around her.

"I accept," she said, and the word rang like an oath, a sacred pact, the first true decision of her own she had made in years.

The sentence etched itself into the silence of the room, as tangible as if it had been carved in fire upon the stone walls. An unbreakable pact between a princess who refused to be rescued, an adventurer

learning to see beyond her own wound, and a master witnessing the birth of a new and dangerous hope.

I looked at them both, my heart pounding with a frenetic, unfamiliar rhythm. A future of absolute uncertainty stretched before me: six months of brutal training, of sweat and blood, of learning to trust and be worthy of trust. And then... the road. The long, treacherous, dark road to Whirikai.

My lost home. The kingdom of gray stone and misty skies that had birthed me, and from which I fled.

And now, the fate I would share—not by imposition, but by choice—with a princess who was at once more fragile and stronger than anyone could have imagined, and with the wolf companion who had always been my anchor in the storm.

The journey was no longer a distant possibility or a far-off dream.

It was a certainty. And it began now.