

Frozen Star 56

Chapter 56: The River of Frost

[POV Liselotte]

Dawn did not arrive with light, but with a promise of cold that announced itself long before the sun peeked over the horizon. I woke with stiff, numb fingers, not from the winter air seeping through the cracks of my cell window, but from something deeper, more internal. It was the lingering echo of a sensation that was already becoming familiar: the frozen river beneath my skin, stirring in my dreams like a restless beast behind the bars of my consciousness.

I had spent the night in a restless half-sleep, haunted by the vivid memory of ice bursting from my hands, of that power that was at once mine and not mine, wondrous and terrifying. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw crystals forming on my fingers, felt that glacial energy flowing through my veins like an uncontrollable torrent.

Chloé was already awake when I opened my eyes, her lupine silhouette outlined against the dim light of dawn spilling through the window. Her blue eyes gleamed in the gloom like twin beacons of calm amidst my inner storm. “Today will be different,” her voice whispered in my mind, a balm against the knot of nerves in my stomach. “Today we won’t fight against it. We’ll fight against ourselves. Against what we carry within.”

I didn’t need to ask what she meant. I knew with a certainty that froze me more than the morning chill. I felt it in the unrest of the air, in the weight of the responsibility I had accepted, in the echo of the power that I now knew slumbered beneath my skin, waiting for its moment to emerge.

The training yard seemed both sacred and grim at that hour. Shadows still clung to the corners, refusing to yield to the timid light of dawn. Master Kaelen was already there, as if he had spent the night standing immobile, carved from the same gray stone of the place. At his feet, drawn with a geometric

precision that was almost terrifying, lay a series of interwoven circles traced in white chalk and arcane symbols my mind could not decipher, but which my instinct recognized as ancient and powerful. Each line seemed to vibrate with latent energy, promising as much pain as revelation.

Leah arrived shortly after, walking with that trembling determination that made her seem both fragile and indestructible. Her dark cloak, far too large for her thin frame, enveloped her like a funeral shroud, yet her gaze was fully awake, alert, openly defying the weakness of her body with the raw strength of her will.

Kaelen gave us no time for doubt or mental preparation. His voice, deep and sharp like the edge of a war axe, fell upon us like a slab of granite.

"Today we begin the real thing." His eyes, dark as bottomless wells that seemed to drink in the meager light of dawn, fixed on me first, and I felt the cold in my veins respond to his gaze as if to a tamer. "Yesterday shadows and ice merely peeked out, like frightened cubs poking their noses from their den. Today you will learn to face them. To accept them. To fear them and, with luck, to tame them."

He walked toward me, and each of his steps resounded with an authority that seemed to come from the earth itself, as if the stones of the yard acknowledged his right to be there, to command.

"Liselotte." My name sounded like a sentence on his tongue. "Your ice is an underground river seeking an outlet through you. If you contain it out of fear, it will drown you from within, freezing your heart and lungs until nothing remains but an ice statue where once a life beat. If you force it with anger, you will shatter into a thousand shards, sowing the yard with deadly splinters of your own essence. Today you will learn to listen to it. To understand its current. To swim in its waters without drowning in them."

He pointed to the central circle, where the symbols seemed more complex, more intricate, like a labyrinth meant to lose or find oneself. "Step in."

My legs felt like lead, heavy and unwilling, but I obeyed. As I crossed the circle's boundary, the air changed immediately. It became colder, denser, as if I had stepped into some ancient ice chamber where winter had never relinquished its throne. The stones beneath my feet seemed to hold the cold of a thousand winters, transmitting their glacial essence through the soles of my boots.

"Close your eyes," ordered Kaelen, his voice now a whisper that nonetheless filled the circle, as if the very air bent to carry his words to me.

I obeyed. The darkness behind my eyelids was not reassuring or peaceful. It was active, expectant, full of terrifying possibilities. I took a deep breath, trying to calm the frantic beating of my heart that seemed intent on escaping my chest.

"Now listen," his voice said, floating in the cold air like a snowflake dancing in the wind. "Not with your ears, but with your blood. With your bones. With the marrow of your being. The ice that erupted from you yesterday did not come from my blows or your fear of pain. It came from a place deep within, from a primordial spring that has been flowing silently all your life. Find it. Feel it. Don't judge it. Don't fear it. Simply watch it, as you would watch a river from the shore, studying its currents, its eddies, its flow."

I focused, shutting out the external sounds: the sigh of the wind playing with the guild's emblems, Chloé's restless shifting outside the circle, Leah's ragged breath. I delved inward, into that inner stillness where only my heartbeat and breath existed, a personal sanctuary that now felt vulnerable before the intrusion of this new power.

And there, beneath the calm surface of my consciousness, I found it.

It was like a frozen murmur, an underground current flowing through my veins, alien and yet intimately familiar. It was neither static nor passive; it had its own life, a rhythm, a cadence that seemed to respond to my deepest emotions, amplifying and distorting them. I shivered as I touched it, and the cold around me intensified, as if my mere recognition had strengthened this inner presence.

“Good,” Kaelen murmured, and I knew he had perceived my success, that he could see within me what I was only beginning to feel. “Now hold the contact. Don’t force it. Don’t invite it out. Just remain with it, like sentinels on opposite towers watching each other through the fog.”

But it was easier said than done. The frozen river, now aware of my attention, seemed to grow excited, emboldened. It stirred, twisted, as though my consciousness had opened a floodgate I could no longer close. A violent shiver ran through my arms, so intense I instinctively opened my eyes.

My fingers were coated in a fine layer of frost spreading quickly toward my wrists, tracing intricate patterns of ice across my skin. The cold was painful, biting, yet also electrifying, intoxicating. I felt the power flowing through me, and for a moment, it was glorious.

“Too soon,” Kaelen growled, his voice like a hammer blow that shook my concentration. “Do not let yourself be swept away by the ecstasy of power! Contain the current, don’t block it! Direct it!”

I tried to do as he said, to tame the icy torrent with my will, but the cold had already seized me, emboldened by my own emotion. A sharp sound, like thousands of crystals shattering at once, filled the air. Icicles burst from the ground of the circle, shooting in chaotic directions, sharp as daggers and deadly as the cruellest winter.

Leah stumbled back with a strangled cry, covering her mouth with her hands. Chloé growled, instinctively stepping in front of her, her fur bristling, her body tensed like a coiled spring ready to strike.

I collapsed to my knees, my arms numb up to the shoulders, the cold climbing my skin like thousands of tiny blades stabbing into my flesh. I felt the power overflowing me, possessing me, using me as an instrument without will of my own. It was not I who controlled the ice; it was the ice controlling me.

Kaelen walked toward me with calm, measured steps, bent down, and gripped my chin with implacable strength, forcing me to meet his eyes. His touch was surprisingly warm against my frozen skin.

“See?” he said, his voice cold as the ice covering me but without cruelty, only with the bluntness of truth. “This is what happens when you force it, when you fight the current instead of swimming with it. Ice is not your enemy, Liselotte, but neither is it a docile friend. It is a wild ally, an untamed horse that can carry you to glory or hurl you into the abyss. If you don’t learn to understand it, to respect it, it will kill you as easily as it protects you.”

I swallowed, my teeth chattering, the cold freezing me to the bone. “And how... how do I control it?” I asked, my voice a trembling thread of sound.

“It’s not about control,” he corrected, releasing me. “Control implies domination, submission. It’s about understanding. About acceptance. And then, about giving it shape. Channeling it as the riverbed gives shape to the river, guiding it without trying to stop it. Now, again. Stand up.”

He forced me to rise, to begin again. And I did. Over and over and over. Each attempt was a different battle, a new lesson. Once, the ice seized my right arm up to the shoulder, solidifying with terrifying speed, threatening to turn it into an inert ice statue. Kaelen had to strike it with his wooden sword with surgical precision to shatter the layer without harming my arm. The pain was sharp, piercing, but the lesson was clearer than ever: this power was wild, unpredictable, and taming it required as much courage as vulnerability.

Another time, I managed to hold back the first surge, keeping the river at bay through sheer willpower, but the effort left me so exhausted that I collapsed, too drained even to shiver, my body reduced to dead weight on the cold stones.

“Rest,” Kaelen ordered, with no trace of compassion in his voice, but neither with reproach. “But watch. Learn from the others. Sometimes the best way to understand yourself is to watch others wrestle with their own demons.”

I dragged myself to the edge of the circle, where Chloé waited for me, her presence a familiar warmth against the cold that now seemed permanently lodged in my bones. I curled up beside her, trembling, my breath forming fleeting clouds in the frigid air. My body was exhausted, sore, on the verge of collapse.

But my mind was more alert than ever, vibrating with a new and terrifying understanding. I had felt the power, truly felt it, not as an uncontrollable explosion but as a constant presence, dormant, waiting. And though it had defeated me, though it had shown me how insignificant my control over it was, I now knew it was there, waiting. And that I would have to learn to live with it—or die by it.