

Frozen Star 66

Chapter 66: The Final Trial

[POV Liselotte]

The Guild's training yard had been transformed overnight. Where once there had been open spaces, now stood temporary structures of wood and stone that simulated the obstacles of a real battlefield. Stacked barrels formed improvised barricades, ropes hung from elevated beams, and even wet straw had been scattered in some areas to mimic marshy ground. The stone walls, silent witnesses to so many hours of effort and sweat, seemed to watch us expectantly, as if they too knew the importance of what was about to happen.

The morning air was cold and heavy, charged with the promise of a challenge that resonated in our very bones. We stood together, the three of us in formation, breathing in unison as we had learned to do after so many weeks of training. Leah at my left, her hands no longer trembling but steady, her icy eyes fixed ahead. Chloé at my right, turned into an almost intangible presence, blending into and emerging from the shadows as though they were a natural extension of her being.

Before us stood the imposing figure of the Guildmaster. He did not wear his usual leather coat, but functional armor of hardened leather with metal plates at strategic points. In his hands he held not his ceremonial staff, but a black oak rod that seemed to absorb the light around it.

"Your final trial is simple in concept," he announced, his voice cutting through the silence like a sharpened blade. "You must defeat me, or you will fail. Teamwork will be the only thing that gives you a chance, for individually you do not possess the strength required."

His gaze swept over each of us, evaluating, measuring, no doubt finding every one of our weaknesses that still lingered despite all the training.

“Do not expect mercy,” he added, and in his words there was an echo of genuine warning. “Because you will not find it.”

He planted the rod against the ground with a sharp strike that resounded in the yard like a gunshot.

And the trial began.

Chloé was the first to move, vanishing in the blink of an eye into the shadows cast by the barricades. I advanced at the same time, extending both hands and focusing on the cold that now dwelled deep within me. The ground before me instantly coated itself in a thick, slippery frost that spread toward the Guildmaster.

But he merely moved his rod with an almost casual gesture, and the ice shattered into a thousand fragments before reaching his boots.

In that very instant, his figure vanished from our sight to reappear directly before Leah. The rod descended with lightning speed, but Leah was no longer the hesitant apprentice of weeks ago. She reacted at the last possible second, a wall of blue fire bursting between them like a living shield.

The impact thundered through the entire yard, an explosion of heat and force that pushed us backward. I felt the air scorch my skin even from several meters away.

Chloé then emerged from the shadows just behind the Guildmaster, launching herself with bared fangs and outstretched claws. But he spun with supernatural fluidity, his rod tracing a perfect arc that intercepted her attack and sent her crashing against the stone wall with a dull crack that froze my blood.

“Chloé!” I screamed, feeling a momentary panic that nearly paralyzed me.

Her voice reached my mind, ragged but firm. “I’m still here. It’s nothing but a scratch.”

A cold rage coursed through my veins, replacing the fleeting fear. With a cry of effort, I conjured a spear of pure ice and hurled it straight at the Guildmaster. Leah, catching my intent instantly, wrapped the projectile in her blue flames, creating a hybrid weapon of fire and frost that whistled through the air.

The result was a blinding burst as the projectile struck the defense the Guildmaster raised with his rod. Ice and fire mixed in a chaotic explosion that engulfed him in a cloud of vapor and glittering fragments.

I held my breath, waiting to see him struck by the joint attack.

But from the cloud emerged his silhouette, completely unscathed, rod raised, his gray eyes shining with something that might have been approval.

“Better,” he murmured, and in his voice was a hint of genuine surprise. “But still insufficient.”

And then the true trial began.

He moved like a tempest incarnate, each strike of his rod a lesson in humility, each evasion a demonstration of the gap that still lay between us and a master of his caliber. He hurled me backward with a burst of sheer force that sent me rolling across the ground, knocking the breath from me. Leah tried to counterattack with a whip of fire that cracked through the air, but the Guildmaster deflected it with a flick of his wrist that seemed almost disdainful. Chloé tried to bind him with shadows that surged from the ground like dark serpents, but he spun on himself and shattered them with a wave of force that nearly dissipated her entirely.

“You are not three separate entities! You are one, or you are nothing!” he roared, and for the first time I fully understood the nature of this trial.

We were not three warriors fighting individually against a superior opponent. We were a unit, a team, and if we failed to act as such, we wouldn’t stand the slightest chance.

“Lotte!” shouted Leah, her eyes blazing with a determination I had never seen in her before. “Trust me!”

The Guildmaster was lunging toward her with impossible speed.

Acting on pure instinct, I extended my power across the ground, creating a channel of ice that guided his steps straight toward where Leah awaited. She, instead of retreating as she would have weeks ago, planted her feet firmly and raised both hands. The blue fire erupted around her, not as a defensive shield, but as a blazing trap that closed in on the Guildmaster.

For a brief instant, I saw an almost imperceptible smile on the Guildmaster’s face, as if he approved of our audacity.

It was then that Chloé emerged from the shadow cast by the Guildmaster himself. She had waited, held back, for the exact moment. Her fangs did not close on him, but on the rod he wielded—not to tear it away, but to distract him just long enough for our true attack to land.

That second of distraction was all we needed.

I gathered everything I had within me, channeling the glacial current until I felt my veins burn with searing cold. With a cry that rose from the deepest part of my being, I stretched out my hands and the air around the Guildmaster froze instantly. A prison of frost surged from the ground, enclosing him in a translucent dome that shut tight like the fangs of some ancient beast.

Leah's fire joined mine, not to melt the ice, but to reinforce it with controlled layers of heat that made the crystalline structure denser, nearly indestructible.

For the first time, the Guildmaster stopped entirely. He struck the ice wall with his rod, and the prison trembled. A second strike, and cracks appeared. A third, and it was nearly breaking.

"Now, Leah!" I shouted, feeling my strength falter.

She let out a cry that seemed to come from some primal place within her, and all her magic condensed into an incandescent blue ray that struck the weakest point of our ice dome. The structure imploded inward, engulfing the Guildmaster in a blinding eruption of fire and frost that shook the entire yard.

The three of us collapsed to our knees, exhausted, gasping as though each breath might be our last. Chlo   staggered from the shadows, Leah was pale and trembling, and I could barely stay upright.

From the smoke and vapor emerged the silhouette of the Guildmaster.

My heart froze in my chest.

But then we saw clearly. His rod lay on the ground, out of reach, and a shallow wound bled slowly down his right arm—a perfect cut where ice and fire had met.

The Guildmaster smiled, a genuine expression that completely transformed his severe face.

“By the narrowest margin,” he said, his deep voice devoid of its usual harshness. “But you succeeded.”

His gaze swept over each of us, not with sternness, but with a respect I had never seen him show anyone.

“You have passed the trial. Not as three individual warriors... but as a single united force.”

The yard fell silent, broken only by the sound of our ragged breathing. And in that silence, I understood that something within us had changed forever. We were not the same ones who had entered the Guild, nor even the same who had awakened that morning.

We had defeated the Guildmaster.

By the slimmest margin imaginable, yes. But enough.