

Frozen Star 67

Chapter 67: The Farewell Party

[POV Liselotte]

The news of our feat spread through the Guild's halls with the speed of lightning on a stormy night. In less than an hour, the austere main hall had transformed into a boiling cauldron of celebration that bore little resemblance to the training ground we knew. Massive oak tables, which normally held maps and documents, now bent under the weight of trays overflowing with food: smoked hams, aged cheeses, freshly baked breads that gave off a tempting aroma, and fruits gleaming like jewels arranged in elaborate displays.

Jugs of foamy beer and glasses of red wine passed from hand to hand, circulating among adventurers of all races and origins who now surrounded us with a mixture of respect and genuine admiration. The atmosphere vibrated with a nearly tangible energy, charged with laughter, exaggerated tales, and the metallic clinking of mugs colliding in consecutive toasts.

"Three against the Master, and not only did you survive but you made him bleed!" roared one of the adventurers, his chestnut beard woven with several intricate braids threaded with gold strands. He raised his mug toward us with a grin that nearly disappeared within his thick beard. "That deserves a celebration worthy of the deed!"

"Alive, victorious, and promoted!" added a young woman in leather armor, sparking a new ovation that turned Leah's face an intense shade of scarlet.

I found myself immersed in a sea of congratulations, backslaps, and offers of drinks I could barely refuse politely. Leah, visibly overwhelmed by the attention, accepted with trembling hands the third cup of blackberry juice someone handed her, her eyes darting to mine with an expression somewhere between amused and terrified. Chloé, on the other hand, seemed to have found her natural place among the

hall's shadows, observing the scene with a subtle smile while letting others pour their effusiveness on us.

It was then that the Guild Master's voice rose above the clamor, cutting through the ruckus with the authority only years of leadership could bestow.

"Silence."

The word, spoken in a calm yet unstoppable tone, had an immediate effect. The entire hall fell into expectant silence, as though the very air had decided to hold its breath. The Master rose from the main table, where he had been surrounded by high-ranking veterans, a carved crystal goblet in his hand. His gray eyes, as piercing as ever, swept across those present before settling directly on us.

"Today we have witnessed something that transcends the unusual," he began, his deep voice resonating in the silence. "These three young women not only displayed skill in combat, but they also grasped the very essence of what it means to belong to this Guild: the indomitable strength of bonds forged in adversity."

He paused, letting his words settle in the minds of everyone present. "For this reason, and after deliberation by the council, as of this day, Liselotte, Leah, and Chloé are officially promoted to Rank C within our organization."

A murmur of surprise and approval rippled through the hall, followed by an explosion of applause that seemed to shake the very walls. The Master raised his goblet, and hundreds of glasses and mugs rose in answer. "May your journey be full of glory, may your steel not bend before any shadow, and may your union remain unbreakable in the face of the challenges ahead."

The toast was met with a thunder of clashing glass and metal, followed by cheers and exclamations of good fortune.

I felt the weight of that promotion like an invisible armor resting on my shoulders. Rank C. It wasn't just recognition—it was a threshold that opened the continent's doors to us, letting us travel without the restrictions of apprentices, accept larger missions, and, most importantly, move through the world without being treated as mere novices.

The celebration resumed with renewed energy. Musicians who seemed to appear out of nowhere began playing lively melodies with flutes and drums, filling the air with contagious rhythms that soon had several adventurers dancing between the tables. The scent of roasted meats and exotic spices mingled with the smell of aged wood and the smoke of torches.

For a moment, we allowed ourselves to truly relax, to forget the tension of the past weeks, and simply enjoy the camaraderie we had earned with such effort. We laughed with those who once looked at us with disdain or skepticism, shared exaggerated stories, and toasted to future feats still unwritten.

It was in the midst of that overflowing joy that a familiar figure cut her way through the crowd with unstoppable determination.

Naele, the Guild's receptionist, advanced with her brown leather folder clutched firmly to her chest as though it were a shield. Her face, usually unshakable, wore a stern expression that reminded me of a mother about to scold her daughters for coming home late. She deftly sidestepped a group of adventurers dancing a traditional dance, dodged a tray of drinks passing overhead, and finally planted herself before our table with her hands on her hips.

“Oh no,” murmured Chloé directly into my mind, amused. “The dreaded farewell lecture. Get ready for the sermon.”

Naelle looked at each of us in turn, her eyes narrowed in a gesture we knew all too well.

“Listen closely, and listen carefully,” she began, her voice cutting through the bustle like a sharp knife. “I know you’re celebrating your promotion and victory, and you have every right to do so. But tomorrow at dawn your real journey begins, and you had better have absolutely clear what that means.”

Leah gulped audibly, as though she had been caught in the middle of some mischief.

Naelle continued, relentless. “First and foremost: don’t trust anyone who approaches you offering miracle shortcuts or privileged information at a low price. If it sounds too good to be true, it’s probably a trap.”

She paused dramatically before continuing. “Second: guard your provisions as if every crumb of bread were a gold coin, because in the middle of nowhere, it will be. Check your supplies every morning and every night.”

“Third,” she said, raising an accusatory finger, “never, ever, under any circumstance, separate in unknown or potentially hostile territory. What happens to adventurers who ignore this rule rarely makes it into the bards’ songs.”

Several nearby adventurers turned to listen, some hiding smiles behind their mugs, others nodding solemnly as though hearing sacred words.

I nodded with equal solemnity, but Chloé whispered in my mind, mocking: “She sounds like she took lessons from Kaelen, doesn’t she? She even has his same facial expression.”

Leah, meanwhile, seemed like she wanted to sink into her seat, her face red as a poppy, nodding vehemently at each recommendation as though they were divine commandments.

Naele concluded with a sigh that seemed to carry the weight of all the adventurers she had seen depart and never return. “And fourth—” she pointed at us with that same accusatory finger “—rest well before taking on any long-term mission! Sleep in real beds while you can, eat hot meals, and don’t underestimate the value of a good night’s sleep. I don’t want to hear that you were found half-dead from exhaustion because you insisted on playing tireless heroines.”

The intensity of her last words made even the veteran adventurers nod with respect.

For an instant, I thought I saw a spark of genuine concern beneath the severity in her eyes.

“Is that clear?” she asked, eyebrows raised.

“Yes, Naele,” we answered in unison, like three diligent students in a crucial lesson.

The receptionist nodded, satisfied, turned on her heel, and began making her way back through the crowd, leaving behind muffled comments and stifled chuckles.

When she disappeared through the hall's main door, Leah let out the breath she seemed to have been holding since Naele appeared.

"By the gods," she murmured, pressing a hand to her chest. "I thought I was going to faint."

Chloé emerged from the shadow of our table, trying to stifle a laugh.

"She gave us more recommendations than my mother did the first time I went into the forest with my sister. Are you sure you didn't secretly adopt her as your tutor?"

Laughter burst out of me spontaneously, and soon the three of us were laughing uncontrollably, unable to hold it in, as though all the tension built up during the trial and celebration released in that instant of pure complicity.

The bustle of the party continued around us, but for me, that moment—that shared sound of genuine laughter with my companions, this bond strengthened with every challenge overcome—was the true beginning of our journey.

And with my heart lighter than it had been in a long time, I knew that no matter what awaited us out there in the dusty roads and unknown lands, we would not face it alone.