

## Frozen Star 68

### Chapter 68: Promise Beneath the Stars

[POV Liselotte]

The Guild's celebration stretched long past midnight, yet even when we finally returned to our room, the echoes of revelry seemed to linger in the air like an intoxicating perfume. The sound of laughter, the clatter of mugs, and the melodies of the musicians still danced in my ears, blending with the gentle creak of the wood beneath our steps.

Closing the door behind us, the contrast was almost jarring. Silence enveloped the room like a soft cloak, broken only by the crackle of the single candle we had lit to cast its glow. Shadows caressed the familiar outlines of the beds, the wardrobes, and our packs already lined against the wall like soldiers awaiting the order to march.

Leah dropped onto her bed with a sigh that seemed to carry the weight of the entire night. Her blond hair, usually tied with military precision, now spilled across the pillow in messy golden strands that caught the candlelight.

"I don't think I've ever been offered so many drinks in my life," she murmured, covering her eyes with her forearm. "If someone else offers me another cup of blackberry juice, I swear I'll scream."

Chloé, who had sprawled near the door, let out a low grunt that suspiciously resembled a stifled laugh. Her tail thumped the wooden floor a couple of times in what I recognized as her version of amusement. Then she rose and padded to Leah's bed, gently nudging the arm covering her face with her snout.

Leah lowered her arm and looked at Chloé, a tired but genuine smile tugging at her lips. “Yeah, yeah, I know—you never drink anything stronger than water, miss perfect.”

Chloé tilted her head and gave a soft huff, as though feigning offense, before lying down beside the bed, her silvery fur shimmering faintly in the candlelight.

I sat on the edge of my own bed, warmth blooming in my chest as I watched the scene. For a fleeting moment, everything felt ordinary, everyday, as if we weren’t on the verge of embarking on a journey that would change our lives forever.

But reality soon pressed in as my gaze returned to the packs—straps tightened, pockets bulging with carefully chosen provisions. Maps jutting from their sides, the gleam of weapons resting against them—everything spoke of our imminent departure.

“The Master was right,” I said softly, breaking the comfortable silence we had built. “Our time here really has ended. What lies ahead... will be something completely different.”

Leah slowly sat up, settling on the edge of her bed and following my gaze toward the packs. In her eyes, the candle’s flame danced over a storm of conflicting emotions: excitement, fear, anticipation, and a flicker of nostalgia.

“I don’t know exactly what’s waiting for us out there, Lotte,” she admitted, her fingers fidgeting with the edge of her blanket. “I don’t know if we’re truly ready for everything that might come. But there’s one thing I do know...”

She paused, drawing a breath as though gathering courage. “I know I never want to be alone again. I don’t want to return to a cage—neither one made of iron, nor one made of my own fears. And I know that with you two... I feel stronger than I ever have.”

Chloé rose then, stepping closer to us, her amber eyes shifting between Leah and me. She gave a low growl, deep and resonant in the emotion-heavy air. Then, with deliberate slowness, she lifted a forepaw and placed it gently on Leah’s bed, fixing us both with an intense gaze.

Leah and I exchanged a look, trying to decipher the meaning behind the gesture. Chloé insisted, moving her paw toward the center space between us and letting out another sound, this one more insistent.

Was she suggesting...?

“A pact?” I asked, beginning to understand.

Chloé dipped her head in a nod—an unusually human gesture for her lupine form. Her tail swayed slowly, and her eyes glimmered with an intensity that left no doubt.

Leah looked at me, and in her eyes I saw the same understanding mirrored in mine. She extended her hand into the space between our beds. “Let’s promise that no matter what happens, we’ll never leave one another behind. Not in battle, not on the road, not in times of fear.”

I laid my hand over hers, feeling the warmth of her skin against mine. “That if one falls, the other two will be there to lift her up.”

Chloé looked at our stacked hands and then, with deliberate grace, rested her paw atop them. The weight was surprisingly light, almost symbolic, but the meaning of the act pierced both of us like an arrow.

“Together,” I whispered, feeling the promise seal itself not only between us but within us.

“Until the end,” Leah replied, her fingers gently tightening around mine.

Chloé lifted her head back and released a soft howl, so low it barely carried past the walls of our room, yet it resonated in our hearts with the force of an ancestral oath.

We remained like that for what felt like an eternity—our hands and paw joined under the flickering candle that was slowly burning out. In that moment, surrounded by the fleeting safety of these four walls that had sheltered us, I knew this pact would be stronger than any wall, more enduring than any promise written on parchment.

At last, the candle sputtered and died, plunging the room into darkness broken only by the pale moonlight seeping through the window. We readied ourselves for sleep in silence, each of us lost in thought but bound by the vow we had just made.

I lay down, listening to the steady rhythm of Leah’s breathing and the soft snuffle of Chloé already dozing on the floor between us. And so, between the certainty of our promise and the fleeting peace of the night, I finally surrendered to sleep.

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Dawn found us not with alarms or urgent calls, but with the natural certainty of the sun breaking through the dark. The first rays of morning light streamed through the window, painting golden stripes across the wooden floor and illuminating our packs, waiting patiently.

We rose almost in unison, as if stirred by the same inner clock. No words were needed; our movements were coordinated, efficient, each of us preparing for the day ahead. We donned travel clothes—practical yet sturdy—checked the contents of our packs one last time, secured weapons and supplies.

Leah braided her hair with quick, practiced motions, her fingers flying with a precision born of years. Chloé stretched like a cat, each muscle in her lupine body tensing and relaxing in a flawless sequence before giving a little shake.

When we were ready, we looked at one another in silence. There was nothing left to say; everything that needed saying had already been spoken the night before, sealed with a promise and a quiet howl.

Chloé padded to the door and scratched softly with a paw, glancing back at us over her shoulder. I nodded and opened it, letting her slip out first as our silent vanguard.

The Guild's hallways were unusually quiet at this hour, though not empty. A few early risers greeted us with nods or knowing smiles as we passed. The smell of fresh bread and brewed coffee guided us toward the main hall, where the Guild's daily bustle was just beginning to stir.

We approached the main counter, where Naele was already at her post, immaculate as always despite the revelry of the night before. She was poring over scrolls with her usual efficiency, but she looked up as we neared. Her gaze swept over us, from our travel-worn boots to our well-packed bags.

“So, you’re ready,” she said. And for the first time since I’d known her, I thought I heard a trace of emotion in her voice—a note of genuine feeling beyond her usual professionalism.

Chloé stepped up to the counter and rested her head on the wood, gazing at Naele with eyes that seemed to see straight through to her soul. To my surprise, Naele extended her hand and stroked her head between the ears—a gesture I had never seen her make before.

“Take care of yourselves out there,” she murmured, her voice now unmistakably warm. “Remember what I told you. And don’t forget—you’ll always have a place here.”

We nodded, and for a moment no one spoke further. There was no need.

At last, Naele handed us a rolled parchment sealed with the Guild’s emblem. “Your travel documents, and a letter of introduction for any Guild outpost you might come across. Don’t lose it.”

I accepted the parchment and carefully tucked it into my pack. “Thank you, Naele. For everything.”

She inclined her head, and for an instant I thought I glimpsed unshed tears in her eyes before she lowered them back to her papers, her professional mask restored.

Without further words, we turned and walked toward the Guild's great main doors. Morning sunlight spilled through the threshold, painting a golden rectangle across the stone floor—a line marking the boundary between our past and our future.

We looked at one another one last time—three pairs of eyes reflecting the same mixture of fear and determination. Leah drew a deep breath and nodded. Chloé nudged my hand with her snout, urging us onward.

And together, we crossed the threshold into the world awaiting us.