

Frozen Star 69

Chapter 69 The Road Opens

[POV Liselotte]

The great door of the Guild closed behind us with a deep, final sound that echoed in the silence of the morning. The creak of the hinges seemed to mark the end of one stage and the beginning of something completely new. We stopped for a moment, the three of us, breathing the fresh morning air that smelled of damp earth and possibilities.

It was then that a familiar voice stopped us in our tracks.

"Wait a moment."

We turned almost in unison, and there he was, the Guild Master, descending the stone steps with that solemnity that seemed inherent to his being. His imposing figure was silhouetted against the façade of the building that had been our home for so many weeks. His gray eyes, always piercing, settled on us, and for the first time since I had known him, I did not see the usual hardness in them, but a glimmer of something that looked very much like respect.

"You have passed your final test and have shown that you possess something more valuable than brute strength or individual talent, true unity." He approached, stopping at a distance that allowed for an intimate conversation despite the open space. His voice dropped a tone, becoming almost confidential. "But remember this, the world out there will not stop to congratulate you. Enemies will show no mercy when you bleed. And loneliness will try to become your most persistent rival. Only by staying united will you be able to withstand what is to come."

Leah nodded firmly, though I noticed the slight tremor of her jaw, the contained emotion shining in her eyes. Chloé stepped forward half a step, placing herself between us and the Master, not as a gesture of defiance, but as a silent confirmation that his words had been heard and kept in the depths of her being.

The Master then placed his hand on my shoulder. His touch was firm, heavy, as if in that seemingly simple gesture he was transferring to me an invisible but tangible legacy. "Lead with your heart, Liselotte, not only with your sword. The sharp blade may win battles, but it is the clear heart that guides toward victories that transcend the battlefield."

His words were engraved in me, not as just another instruction, but as a fundamental truth that would resonate in every decision I made from then on.

At that moment, Naele appeared at the main entrance, holding a package carefully wrapped in raw linen cloth. Her expression showed that familiar mix of severity and concern that we had learned to decipher over time.

"Don't look at me like that" she said, avoiding our direct eye contact as she handed us the package. "They are extra travel rations and a selection of medicinal herbs. I have included detailed instructions for their use. And no," she added, anticipating our response, "it is not negotiable. You never know when you might need them."

"Naele..." Leah began, but the words seemed to get stuck in her throat, choked by the emotion of the moment.

The receptionist clicked her tongue softly, trying to maintain her façade of unshakable authority. "I don't want dramatic tears or excessive thanks. I only want you to promise me one thing, that you will return to tell me everything you will see out there. All the stories, all the landscapes, all the people you meet."

"We promise you" I said, and my voice sounded firmer than I expected.

The Master nodded, an almost smiling expression briefly touching his lips. Together, they accompanied us to where the carriage awaited to take us far from the city, toward the roads that opened before us.

The vehicle was made of dark, solid wood, with wrought iron details that shone under the morning light. The horse pulling it was an impressive animal with dark chestnut coat and black mane, with eyes that reflected an uncommon intelligence in draft animals.

Chloé stepped forward with fluid movements and placed herself beside the horse, her silver fur contrasting with the animal's dark coat. I expected some sign of nervousness or discomfort from the horse, but instead, the animal turned its head and snorted softly, as if recognizing Chloé as an acceptable traveling companion. Chloé responded with a gentle flick of her tail, establishing a silent communication that only animals can understand.

We climbed into the carriage, Leah and I settling into the wooden seats lined with thick wool cushions. We placed our backpacks in the space at our feet, making sure everything was well secured for the trip. Chloé remained outside, vigilant, her eyes constantly scanning the surroundings as if she had already fully assumed her role as guardian of our small caravan.

The coachman, an older man with a weathered face and scarce smile, nodded toward the Master before softly snapping the reins. The carriage began to move with the familiar creak of wheels on cobblestone, and thus our journey began.

The city gradually faded behind us, its gray stone walls, the red-tiled rooftops, and the towers rising into the sky like fingers of stone. With every meter we moved away, I felt how the weight of the farewell

slowly transformed into a mix of nostalgia and vibrant expectation. We were seeds carried by the wind, ready to find our place in the vastness of the world.

Three days later, the world revealed itself to us in all its splendor.

We had left behind the cultivated plains surrounding the city, and the road now wound through a completely different landscape. Hills covered in emerald grass stretched in all directions, swaying gently beneath the open sky. The afternoon sun bathed everything in golden tones, and the wind caressed the land with a softness that felt almost like an ancient song.

In the distance, blue mountains rose on the horizon, their peaks crowned with eternal snow that sparkled like diamonds under the sunlight. Between the hills, small streams meandered whimsically, their crystalline waters reflecting the sky like mirrors in perpetual motion.

Entire meadows of wildflowers spread out on either side of the road, painting the land with explosions of color, intense yellows of lupins, deep violets of wild lavender, and whites so pure of daisies that they looked like pieces of cloud fallen upon the grass. From time to time, a stronger gust of wind shook the fields, and the flowers seemed to dance in unison, as if celebrating our passage with fleeting choreographies.

The carriage moved at a leisurely pace, allowing us to absorb every detail of the landscape. The rhythmic sound of the horse's hooves on the compacted earth blended harmoniously with the song of the birds nesting in the hedges and scattered trees. High above, hawks and eagles soared in elegant circles, their shadows fleetingly crossing the carriage interior. At the edge of a nearby forest, a group of deer watched us with shy curiosity before silently disappearing among the trees.

Leah leaned toward the open carriage window, her golden hair shining under the sun. Her eyes, which I had so often seen clouded with pain or concentration, now reflected pure wonder.

"I had forgotten..." she murmured, her voice almost drowned by the whisper of the wind. "I had forgotten how beautiful the world can be when you don't look at it from behind bars."

I nodded silently, letting the fresh breeze caress my face, carrying away the last traces of the tension we had borne for weeks. The air smelled of damp earth, wildflowers, and freedom.

Chloé, who was running beside the carriage with that lupine grace that always amazed me, turned her head toward me at that moment. Our eyes met, and although we no longer shared words through thought as before, I felt a deep understanding pass between us. This was only the beginning, her gaze seemed to tell me. The best was yet to come.

As the carriage continued along that road lined with life and beauty, I knew with a certainty that reached down to my bones that we were right. The world unfolded before us in all its vastness, beautiful and dangerous, kind and merciless, ever-changing and eternally ancient.

And together, as we had promised under candlelight on our last night in the Guild, we would face it. Not as three separate individuals, but as one single force united by something stronger than steel and more enduring than memory, the conscious choice to walk together, no matter what.