

## Frozen Star 95

### Chapter 95: Echoes in the Arena

[POV Liselotte]

The roar of the crowd filled the air long before we stepped out of the stone tunnel. It was an immense, vibrant sound that felt almost physical. The Kreston arena had been transformed once again. The ground gleamed with freshly scattered golden dust. Across the packed stands, thousands of bright-colored flags waved. It was the most anticipated day of the tournament—the official presentation of the eight remaining teams.

The announcer, a tall man in a crimson robe with a voice amplified by an echo crystal, raised his arms toward the sky. His voice boomed like clean thunder across the coliseum.

“Citizens of Kreston! Brave adventurers, noble mages, and warriors from every land! Today marks the final stretch of the Golden Lion Tournament! Only eight teams remain standing!”

A wave of cheers and applause rose like a living tide. I found myself breathing faster without meaning to. The collective excitement was contagious.

Beside me, Leah watched the stage with intense focus, her fingers intertwined at chest level. Chloé remained still as a statue, her golden eyes scanning the arena with an attitude more alert than enthusiastic.

The announcer lifted a polished crystal tablet that began to shine with pure white light. One by one, names appeared in the air, floating like glowing runes for all to see.

“In eighth place, the hunting squad Midnight Thorns! Hailing from the eastern frontiers, masters of shadow and steel magic!”

A column of thick, dark smoke rose near the northern gate. From it emerged four figures dressed entirely in black. They moved with an unsettling synchrony. The crowd roared in admiration—and a little fear.

“In seventh place, the Daughters of Lightning! A trio of mages from the realm of Vael, whose speed and electric control left their rivals speechless!”

A sudden burst of blue and white sparks crossed the arena sky. Leah whistled softly, genuinely impressed by the display.

“In sixth place... Silver Pack.”

Our name appeared in the air, written with a white stroke of light that seemed to shine a second longer than the others. And the roar that followed was absolutely deafening.

I was surprised to feel my chest tighten strangely as I heard so many people shouting our name at once. Leah nudged me playfully with her elbow, a wide, proud grin on her face.

“They like us.”

“They’re curious about us,” I corrected, though I couldn’t stop a smile from forming on my lips.

Chloé let out a clearly amused mental snort.

“If they like us or fear us, I don’t care. What matters is that when they see us enter, they fall silent.”

The announcer continued without pause.

“In fifth place, the Crimson Wings. Fourth, Northern Fang. Third, the Steel Minstrels.”

The list went on at a steady pace, each announcement followed by thunderous cheers. Until finally, the air in the stands grew thick and heavy. We all knew what was coming. Everyone in the arena—from the last spectator to the most seasoned warrior—knew it too.

“And finally,” the announcer’s voice dropped a tone, adopting a more solemn cadence, “the group no one expected to advance this far... The Bearers of the White Veil—or, as they’re popularly known... the Faceless.”

A heavy, uncomfortable silence spread, stretching into what felt like an eternity. Then came a few low murmurs, like the whisper of dry leaves.

From the southern gate, the same masked individuals we had seen fighting days ago emerged. Four spectral figures, covered head to toe in pristine white robes. Their smooth, featureless masks reflected the sunlight like blind mirrors, showing no hint of humanity.

Wherever they passed, the crowd did not cheer or shout. People subtly stepped aside. The murmurs were fearful, superstitious whispers. Even some adventurers among the other finalist teams took an involuntary step back.

I could feel the atmosphere shift palpably, as if a sudden, cold wind had swept through the sunlit arena.

“They smell of something old,” murmured Chloé in the link of our minds, her tone laced with deep distrust. “Not common magic... something deeper and stale. Like the earth holding its breath before a collapse.”

I nodded silently, not taking my eyes off them. There was something in their very presence that made every hair on my body stand on end—a sense of absolute emptiness. It wasn’t exactly fear, but rather the visceral certainty that something in their essence did not belong to this world.

The master of ceremonies, with a wide, forced smile, bowed deeply to mask the palpable tension.

“And so, we have our eight finalists! But before the next round begins, the Kreston Guild of Sorcery will offer a unique spectacle in honor of these brave warriors!”

The crowd erupted into spontaneous, relieved applause.

We, the fighters, were guided by attendants to temporarily take seats in the upper stands to watch. It felt strange to be on the other side—among the audience—but deep down, I welcomed the brief reprieve.

We settled near a polished stone railing. From that privileged vantage point, the entire arena could be seen with perfect clarity.

The guild mages—about a dozen—entered the center in flawless formation. Their blue and gold robes billowed elegantly in the wind. Each carried a staff of carved crystal that caught the morning sunlight like a prism.

One of them—a woman with snow-white hair and eyes of intense gold—raised her hands with a serene gesture, and the entire arena seemed to hold its collective breath.

“May the spirits of creation answer the call,” she said in a calm voice that somehow reached every corner.

Then the air suddenly lit up.

Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of sparks of pure light floated above the arena like fireflies freed from an invisible cage.

They began to spin, intertwine, and dance in a cosmic ballet. And from that ethereal dance emerged recognizable shapes—translucent figures formed from pure magic and the will of the sorcerers.

First, a colossal crystal stag rose on its hind legs, casting small rainbow reflections in every direction. Then, a flock of ethereal birds crossed the sky in perfect formation, their wings leaving luminous trails that slowly faded. A golden dragon made of floating runes coiled above the arena, roaring in majestic, soundless splendor.

The audience erupted in sincere cheers and applause.

Leah stared wide-eyed, momentarily forgetting all tension. “It’s beautiful.”

“It’s art,” I replied, not taking my eyes off the display. “Magic without a warlike purpose—just to show what can be done when power is used with harmony and grace.”

My eyes followed the fluid motion of the sorcerers. Every gesture, every circle traced in the air, carried a precision that bordered on divine.

But what caught my attention most wasn’t the imposing dragon or the graceful crystal stag. It was the last figure that materialized.

A woman.

Her silhouette formed slowly, outlined by a bright, blinding white light.

She wore a long, simple robe that floated around her body as if she were underwater. Her face was blurred, undefined—but her expression... I recognized it instantly. It was serene. Steady. Terribly familiar.

A cold wave ran through me from head to toe.

“Lotte,” said Leah beside me, immediately noticing my frozen expression, “what’s wrong? What is it?”

“That figure...” I murmured, my eyes locked on the projection. “I’ve seen her before.”

“Where?” she asked, her voice heavy with concern.

“In my dreams.”

The words slipped from my lips on their own, barely a trembling whisper.

I couldn’t look away. The figure extended a delicate, open hand—and from the ground of the arena sprouted a single perfect ice flower, transparent and eerily alive, which dissolved a moment later into a thousand shards of light that fell like liquid diamonds.

The spell ended with one final flash, and the crowd erupted into deafening applause, standing ovations all around.

But I barely heard any of it. I kept staring at the empty spot where the projection had been, my heart pounding like a war drum.

Leah placed a firm hand on my shoulder, her warmth a stark contrast to the cold that gripped me.

“Do you think it was her? The one from the dream?”

I didn’t answer. I couldn’t.

I only knew one thing with absolute certainty—that figure had not been part of the ordinary performance.

It had been a projection, yes, but not just any projection. And deep within my mind, an ancient, forgotten voice—the same I’d heard in the dream of endless ice—whispered something that froze me to the core.

“Remember, Liselotte. Creation and winter are but two faces of the same truth.”



Chloé suddenly tensed at my feet, her whole body alert.

“Lotte—the White Veil ones. They’re watching us.”

I turned my head toward where she indicated. Indeed, from the far end of the stands, the masked figures had turned their hollow faces directly toward me. Not toward Leah. Not toward Chloé. Toward me.

Their faceless masks reflected the sunlight like dead, opaque mirrors.

And though we were separated by a sea of people, I knew with unbearable clarity—like cold water through the veins—that they knew.

They knew what I had seen.

They knew what I had felt.

The crowd’s roar rose again as the spectacle officially ended, but for me, all external sound faded into a distant murmur.

Only the lingering echo of the vision remained—and that growing, undeniable feeling that the ancient ice within me had just recognized something that had slept for far too long.

Something that, at last, was awakening.