

Frozen Star 97

Chapter 97: Shadows of a Reflection

[POV Liselotte]

The rest of the matches unfolded under a tension thick enough to taste. The crowd kept cheering, but with a different kind of energy. There was no longer euphoria in their cries—it was a desperate attempt to feel excitement again after witnessing what the White Veil had done. Fear always changes the tone of applause.

The battles continued one after another. The Steel Minstrels eliminated the Daughters of Lightning after a fierce fight of flashes and impossible acrobatics. Then, Midnight Thorns defeated Crimson Wing in a brief yet ferocious clash. However, not even the most dazzling spells or the most brilliant strategies could erase the cold unease left by that thirty-second battle.

By the time the last gong of the day echoed, the sun had already begun to descend. The guild's mages started sealing the arena with containment barriers. The golden tones of sunset fell upon Kreston, dyeing the coliseum walls with a warm, melancholic glow.

The three of us waited in the side corridor, alongside the other finalists. The air smelled of old stone, sweat, and magical dust. Leah, standing beside me, drank water slowly. Her expression was calm, but her eyes darted restlessly, studying everyone around us.

Chloé was lying at our feet. Her ears twitched in every direction, like antennas catching every sound.

“Too quiet,” she said mentally. “Even for a coliseum at the end of the day. Something’s off.”

I barely nodded. She was right. There was an echo that didn't belong there—a faint vibration slipping through the walls.

"Maybe it's just fatigue," said Leah, forcing a smile. "Or nerves before the semifinals."

But deep down, I knew it wasn't that. It was something else. A presence. A subtle pull, like an invisible thread calling me toward some point down the corridor.

"I'm going for a walk," I murmured, trying to sound casual.

"Alone?" Leah raised an eyebrow.

"Just a moment."

Chloé lifted her head. Her golden eyes gleamed under the dim corridor light.

"If something touches you, I'll bite it," she said dryly.

I smiled. "I'll keep that in mind."

I ventured into the coliseum's corridors. The magical torches flickered, casting dancing shadows across the rough stone walls. The echo of workers' and healers' footsteps faded as I moved away from the main bustle.

The sensation grew clearer, more insistent as I advanced. It wasn't a voice, nor a sound. It was a diffuse familiarity—a silent call that vibrated behind my chest.

And then I saw her.

Standing at the end of the corridor, lit by a tall window, was the white-haired woman from the Guild of Sorcery—the same one who had directed the projection show during the ceremony. Her blue and gold robe fell to the floor, and the orange glow of dusk surrounded her like a halo.

Her golden eyes, serene and ancient, lifted toward me as soon as she saw me approach. She didn't look surprised.

"Liselotte," she said calmly. Her voice carried a clarity that rang through the air like a bell. "I knew you would come."

I stopped a few steps away. "Do we know each other?"

A faint smile crossed her lips. "Not in this life."

Her words froze me more than any spell could.

She studied me closely, as if searching for something invisible around me. “Your energy isn’t like the others’. It’s not merely magic. It’s as if something ancient, asleep for centuries, has awakened inside you.”

I didn’t answer. I couldn’t. Her words were too much like the ones I’d heard in my dreams.

She walked toward me slowly. Her steps made no echo.

“When I saw your reaction during the show, I knew you felt it too.”

“That figure...” I murmured. “The woman of light.”

She nodded. “The First Weaver. The echo of the original magic—the one that weaves the threads between creation and ice. Not everyone can perceive her. Only those bound to her.”

My throat tightened. “Bound?”

“Yes.” Her eyes gleamed, golden and intense. “You and I share that thread. I felt it the moment your mana touched the air. We are reflections of the same root, though in different times. That’s why, when I saw you, something within me awoke.”

A shiver ran down my spine. “What exactly does that mean?”

The woman raised a hand. With a gentle motion, she drew a circle of light in the air. Within it, blue lines intertwined like a living embroidery. Two luminous threads approached, brushing against each other before continuing their paths.

“There are patterns that time does not erase,” she said softly. “Cycles that repeat. The magic within you—the one that responds to ice and dormant mana—did not begin with you. It is an inheritance. A call the world repeats until someone can finally hear it.”

“Then...” I swallowed hard. “You hear it too?”

“For years,” she admitted. “But my bond is incomplete. Yours, on the other hand, grows every time you use that power. Every time the ice answers.”

The air between us grew colder. The light of dusk seemed to fade.

“Be careful, Liselotte,” she said then. The seriousness in her tone pierced my soul. “What awakens in you does not only create. It remembers. And the memory of creation is dangerous.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because if you don’t understand it soon,” she replied. Her voice carried a sorrowful weight. “Others will. And they don’t seek balance—they seek control.”

For an instant, the air trembled. I saw a faint white flash behind her. It was as if her silhouette split into a second image—the same woman, but younger, wearing garments from another age.

I blinked, and the vision vanished.

She smiled again, as though she knew exactly what I’d seen.

“The semifinals will be a breaking point,” she said. “After that, nothing will be the same. Not for you, nor for those beside you.”

Before I could reply, a current of air swirled around her. The hem of her robe lifted, and in the blink of an eye, she was gone.

Only the cold breeze remained. The faint scent of ozone that always lingers after powerful magic hung in the air.

Behind me, I heard footsteps. Leah turned the corner, with Chloé close behind.

“Lotte,” said Leah, breathing fast. “We were looking for you. Who were you talking to?”

I turned around. The corridor was empty. Only the flickering torchlight and the cold air remained.

“No one,” I said, though the word tasted bitter. “Just a shadow.”

Chloé approached, sniffing the air. Her fur bristled.

“That wasn’t an ordinary shadow. It smells of ancient magic. The same energy that radiated from you that night in the village.”

Leah frowned. “Lotte?”

“I’m fine,” I said, sounding firmer than I felt. “Just... something familiar.”

But as we walked back together toward the main hallway, my mind kept circling around her words.

The memory of creation.

And deep within me, something answered the echo of her warning—a cold, living spark.

It wasn't fear. It was recognition.

As if something inside me—something very old—had just opened its eyes.