

THE RISE OF A FROZEN STAR

Chapter 18: Wordless Voices, Strength Without Magic

[POV Liselotte]

Four years had passed since I arrived in this forest.

Four winters of relentless cold. Four springs of budding leaves and green promises. Four summers of scorching sun and unexpected rain. Four autumns where life seemed to bid farewell, only to begin again.

And through it all, she was with me.

Chloé.

She was no longer just my companion. She was my guardian, my family, my other half.

Something had changed between us. It wasn't just the closeness since our reunion. Not just the warmth in the cave or the food we hunted together.

It was deeper.

It happened on a full moon night, just a few days ago. I was cleaning my sword while she stared at the sky. Suddenly, I felt something. A whisper, a presence... not from outside, but from within.

"Lotte."

I froze. Looked around. No one. Only her.

"Lotte, it's me" I heard again.

But not with my ears. With my mind.

"Chloé?" I whispered, my heart pounding.

She approached slowly. Her gaze glowed differently. Wiser. More human.

"I've been practicing for years" her voice in my mind was soft, warm, like a blanket over my soul. "Watching the mages among the bandits, sensing mana... I finally learned to channel it."

I didn't know what to say. I threw myself onto her and hugged her tightly.

"I can hear you... I can finally hear you!"

[POV Chloé]

I never stopped trying.

Since waking in this world with awareness, I knew claws and fangs weren't enough to protect her. I needed to talk to her. Share. Remember. Warn her.

For years, I tried everything.

Channeling the mana of the forest, observing the wandering sages who passed through now and then. Mimicking the songs of magical birds. Feeling how energy flowed in stones, in water, in my chest.

And then, one day, it happened. My soul's voice joined with hers.

And she answered.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" Lotte asked, tears in her eyes.

"I didn't want to scare you... I wasn't ready. I wanted the first message to be clear. True."

"It always was."

We stayed like that, silent, under the moon. Two souls bound by something beyond the physical.

The next day, we made a decision.

[POV Liselotte]

"It's time to go back" I said. "To find a village. A clue. Something that leads to mom, dad... Claire."

"I'll support you, Lotte. But be prepared. This world is different from what we're used to."

"So am I."

And she was right.

I was no longer the frightened girl who had fallen here. I had no magic, but I had a sword. I had instincts, and now I had experience.

Half a day into our walk, the first monster appeared. A Corrupted One. As tall as a horse, covered in black thorns, eyes glowing like embers.

"Careful" warned Chloé. "It's not a common beast."

"Doesn't matter" I said, unsheathing my sword.

The monster roared. It hurled a huge rock. I rolled to the side. Ran at it. Jumped. My sword sank beneath its jaw.

A clean cut. Precise.

The Corrupted One collapsed, groaning.

"You didn't hesitate..." Chloé said, impressed.

"I can't. If I hesitate, I die. If I die, I'll never see them again.x

We continued. Two more ambushed us crossing a bridge. One leapt from the trees, the other from the water. I cut down the first midair. The second screeched. Chloé finished it off with a bite to the neck.

"We're being followed" she said, looking into the woods. "Not just beasts."

"Snother bandit group?"

"Worse. Humans who use beasts. Dark mages, perhaps."

"Then we can't stop."

And we didn't.

They seemed like a scouting party, so we couldn't let our guard down.

We slept in trees, surrounded by traps. Ate what little we had left. And walked.

Finally, after weeks... we saw smoke in the distance.

"A village" I whispered.

"Yes. But something's wrong. Smell it?"

It smelled like iron. Like blood. And it came from the village.

"Are we too late?"

Chloé growled.

"Or just in time."

We looked at each other.

And ran toward the smoke, our hearts pounding with every step.

The smell grew stronger. Not just burnt wood... but blood.

As the forest began to open, we saw it.

A wooden wall stood before us, tall and cracked by time. Or something worse.

Part of the wall... was gone.

As if something had torn it out, leaving a jagged, splintered wound in the village's side.

We stopped just before crossing the threshold, hidden in the bushes. My legs trembled. Not with fear. With anticipation.

"Lotte..." Chloé whispered in my mind. "Get ready."

Through the breach, the village revealed itself like a nightmare frozen in time.

Bodies.

Men. Women. Even children. Scattered between collapsed houses. Some torn in half. Others... unrecognizable.

And at the center, the beasts.

Not one. Not two.

A whole pack of monstrous, four-legged creatures. Massive. Crimson eyes. Black hooves. Backs covered in spikes. Devouring what remained. One dragged a body like a rag doll. Another, still dripping blood from its jaws, growled with satisfaction.

The silence was painful. Flames still crackled in a few houses. A bell swayed lightly in the wind. And in the distance, more screams echoed.

"What do we do?" I asked, sword in hand.

Chloé didn't answer immediately.

Then, with a voice low but clear, she said:

"We make sure... not a single one leaves alive."

And we stepped into hell.