

THE RISE OF A FROZEN STAR

Chapter 4: Magic

The air smelled different that day.

Fresh, damp, like after a light rain. I felt nervous, but also excited.

Today I would be officially evaluated by the guild, today I would find out if I could use magic—if I had a gift. If... I was normal.

Since I was born in this world, I had heard of the magic test at the Temple of Rikal. For many, it was a simple ceremony, a formality, a moment of laughter among village children. But for me... it meant so much more.

At the age of seven, I understood the nature of mana.

It wasn't just some invisible energy floating in the air, like many in my previous world might have imagined.

Here, in this new world, mana was an essential part of life. I understood it by observing closely, by asking questions that many didn't know how to answer, and by silently listening to conversations between travelers, mages, and elders.

Every living being possessed mana. From humans to the wild animals in the forests, even plants and minerals contained traces of this energy. It was like a primordial breath that connected everything, flowing slowly through the world, renewing itself in a perpetual cycle.

But having mana didn't necessarily mean being able to use it.

To perform magic, it wasn't enough to possess this energy—you had to refine it, shape it, channel it, and finally release it with intention. And to do that, the body had to be “prepared.”

I learned that the method involved circulating mana throughout the body, toward the heart.

The heart, apparently, wasn't just a biological organ in this world—it held a fundamental spiritual role. It acted as a purifier, cleansing impurities and stabilizing the magical flow.

After purification, the mana had to be guided voluntarily to the limbs—usually the hands—where it could finally be released in the form of a spell.

Dad accompanied me in the carriage. His face was calm, but his eyes followed my every move. Mom wanted to come, but Clarice was sick, so she stayed to care for her. She gave me a strong hug before I left, and a small handkerchief embroidered with my name.

I wore the handkerchief tucked into the sleeve of the dress Mom had made for me. It was white, with golden trim.

I still didn't feel comfortable wearing dresses, but I understood it was part of the protocol.

When we arrived at the temple, the stairway seemed endless. The building was old, with stone columns covered in moss and banners bearing magical symbols I barely began to understand.

We entered in silence, the echo of our steps resonating under the high vault.

Two examiners and a crystal sphere resting on an iron pedestal awaited us. There were other children, some younger, others older. All were laughing and nervously shoving each other. I could only stare at the sphere as if it were a verdict.

“Liselotte, daughter of Carl and Andrea,” one of the mages called. “Please, step forward.”

My feet moved on instinct. I walked to the center of the temple. Everything grew quiet. The children fell silent. Dad watched from a side bench, his hand resting on the hilt of his old sword.

I extended my hands to the sphere. It was cold to the touch. I closed my eyes. Took a deep breath. Remembered all the times I tried to focus at home, imagining mana flowing through my veins.

Nothing.

Not a spark. Not a glow.

The sphere remained dull, mute. The examiners exchanged glances. One of them spoke quietly.

“How strange...”

I swallowed hard. Lowered my hands. I heard a few murmurs. A couple of children giggled. My stomach tightened.

The mage approached in silence. His steps echoed softly on the temple tiles, and his robe embroidered with runes swayed with a gentle rustle. He stopped in front of me and looked at me with serene but sharp eyes. Then he reached out and gently placed his hand on my head.

At first, I felt nothing... but then, a surge of foreign energy slid through my body like an icy river snaking through my veins. It was a strange sensation, almost as if something invisible touched me from the inside. Invasive. Uncomfortable. It didn't hurt, but it wasn't pleasant either. My skin prickled and my hands trembled slightly, though I did my best not to show it.

The mage squinted, as if listening to a sound no one else could hear, and his expression changed. His brow furrowed deeply. He stepped back and looked at me as if he didn't quite understand what he had just sensed.

"Liselotte..." he began, his voice low, hesitant at first, then firm. "You possess mana. And not just any amount. Your reserve is immense... honestly, I've never seen anything like it in a girl your age."

My heart skipped a beat. I had mana? Really?

But then he said it.

"In fact," he added, clearly astonished, "it's even greater than what's typically found in legendary heroes... but..."

He stopped. That "but" fell like a stone in a calm pond.

"Your heart isn't purifying the mana."

My mouth went dry. I didn't fully understand what that meant, but his tone left no room for hope.

"Without purification," he continued, "no matter how much energy you have, you can't channel it. Your heart... is inactive in that aspect. As if it were sealed."

I felt a cold emptiness in my chest. The silence in the temple weighed like a wet blanket. The mage lowered his hand gently and gave me a sad smile, full of helplessness.

"Thank you, Liselotte," the senior mage said from the back of the temple. "You may sit."

I nodded silently. I didn't cry. I didn't ask questions. I just returned to my seat, my steps slower than before. Dad looked at me calmly, but I saw how tightly he gripped the hilt of his sword.

My chest didn't hurt because of the evaluation.

It hurt because, for a moment, I truly thought I might be like the others.

We left the temple unhurriedly. The afternoon was fading, and the sky was a deep blue. The carriage awaited.

“Are you okay?” my father asked as he helped me up.

“I’m fine,” I lied.

On the way back, I remained silent, watching the trees pass by the window. I felt something burning inside me. It wasn’t sadness. It was fury. Not at the examiners, or the system, or even fate. It was at myself.

Why had I been reborn in a world where I couldn’t fit in? Why was I given this power I couldn’t use?

My mana was trapped, swirling inside me with no way to escape. I could feel it. Like stagnant heat beneath my skin, like electricity held back by an invisible wall. It was frustrating. Unfair. And also... fascinating.

Because if that power was there, locked inside me... maybe, just maybe, there was another way to use it.

When we got home, Mom hugged me tightly and asked nothing. Clarice, feeling better, showed me a drawing she made: the two of us, surrounded by stars. I cried in silence that night. Not out of sadness. Out of helplessness.

The next day, Dad took me to the fields, far from the village. He brought two training swords.

“If you can’t use magic, you’ll use something else,” he said, tossing me a wooden sword.

I caught it mid-air, and without knowing why, I smiled.

Maybe I wasn’t a mage. Maybe I’d never cast spells or fly through the skies like others.

But I could train. I could learn. To protect myself and those I loved.

And for me, that was enough.