

Frozen Star 141

Chapter 141: The Night Shows Its Teeth

[POV Liselotte]

Night fell like a heavy curtain, without moon, without stars, without even a breath of light to soften the edges of our fear. The entire forest seemed to hold its breath, as if waiting... as if eager to witness what was about to unfold. Our torches were nothing but small hearts of fire beating in the thickest darkness I had ever seen.

Orlan remained on his knees, breathing in sharp bursts, but his eyes never left the edge where the forest began. It was as if he feared the darkness itself would slide forward and rip the voice from his throat.

“They’re getting closer,” Chloé murmured in my mind, her low growl freezing the blood in my veins.

I unsheathed my sword.

Beside me, Leah trembled, but she kept her staff steady. She wasn’t crying, she wasn’t backing away... but she was terrified.

A crack.

Another.

One more—this time so close that several soldiers raised their spears at once.

Commander Alistair shouted:

“Defensive formation! Shields up, mages behind!”

But the sound that followed erased any illusion of control.

A whisper.

A murmur.

A laugh.

A laugh that belonged to no creature of this world.

My skin bristled instantly.

From between the trees, shadows emerged first. Not bodies. Not figures. Shadows. Something twisting like living smoke, growing and stretching, taking shape... or pretending to have one.

One of the soldiers cried out:

“There! On the right!”

And a shadow darted out, moving impossibly fast, as if slipping through cracks in the air. The soldier’s spear pierced it completely... and did nothing. The shadow wrapped around him with a serpentine motion.

The man screamed only once.

When the creature dispersed, nothing remained but his body collapsing onto the ground—empty of life.

“They don’t take physical damage!” shouted one of the mages.

“Mages, fire and light—now!” Alistair commanded.

The first burst of magic illuminated the forest with a white flash. Two shadows writhed and shrieked, evaporating into dark smoke.

But for every one that fell... five emerged from the forest.

I stepped back. The air was icy, heavy, clinging to my skin as if trying to drain the heat from my body.

“Lotte!” Chloé shouted in my mind as she leaped, teeth bared, snapping at a shadow and catching it. But the creature didn’t bleed, didn’t cry out... it simply moved like smoke, trying to coil around her head. I rushed to her and slashed, diverting it.

“Back!” I shouted.

My sword did nothing. It only pushed the darkness aside.

“Magic! We need more magic!” an adventurer yelled as one of his companions was dragged backward, screaming while a shadow clung to his face.

Leah stepped forward.

“Luminaris!”

A beam shot from her staff, cutting through the darkness in a narrow line. One shadow was pierced and burst into black ash.

Leah trembled.

“This won’t be enough...”

But the assault had already begun.

From the forest emerged more corporeal shapes: humanoid figures with gray skin, empty eyes, mouths stretched far too wide. Their limbs were long, nearly scraping the ground, and their fingers ended in razor-like points. Each moved as though its body were built from death notices.

A soldier tried to cut one with his sword.

The demon didn’t bleed. Didn’t recoil.

It simply drove its hand into the soldier’s chest and pulled.

The sound of bone snapping mixed with the man’s choked scream. The demon dropped him like a broken doll.

The adventurers reacted.

“Piro raptus!”

“Lux sagitta!”

“Voltic blast!”

Explosions of light and fire lit the camp. Some demons recoiled, melting like black wax under a flame. But others... simply kept advancing even with their wounds burning.

“Hold the line!” Alistair shouted. “Don’t let them break through!”

But they already had.

I moved with the speed my parents taught me back in the inn—when wielding a sword was a game and not a necessity. I cut, spun, pushed, deflected. It was useless... but diverting them for even a heartbeat gave the mages time.

“Lotte, to your left!” Leah cried.

I turned just in time to see a shadow lunging at me. I felt the cold pierce under my skin like a needle. Chloé leaped, her entire body tense, knocking it away, growling as a dark line burned into her fur.

“Chloé!” I shouted.

“It’s nothing. Watch the front!”

A demon lunged with a sudden jerk. Its mouth opened, showing rows of sharp teeth. I threw myself back, dodging by a hair. My legs shook, my breath a storm. It wasn’t fear. It was pure survival.

An adventurer’s scream tore through the air.

“I can’t—! Help, please—!”

Another shadow wrapped around him. Three more fell upon his collapsed body. I couldn’t see his face when he fell. I saw only blood on the snow.

One of the mages shouted:

“My spells are weakening! Something is absorbing the energy!”

“Maintain your focus! Don’t break!” Alistair roared.

But even he was being pushed back.

Leah breathed raggedly beside me. Her face was pale, hair stuck to her forehead with sweat. Every spell she cast lit the forest, but each one drained her further.

“Lotte!” she said, voice quivering. “I can’t keep this up... there are too many...”

“Then don’t stop,” I said, even as my arms burned. “We’ll cover you.”

A shadow leaped at me. Another at Leah. Chloé hurled herself at the second, ramming it with all her strength. I blocked the first with a sideways strike—not harming it, but deflecting it enough to keep it from reaching Leah.

“Back!” Chloé growled.

The shadows responded to her voice. As if they had been waiting for a signal.

They all stopped for a heartbeat.

One horrific heartbeat.

Then—all at once—they turned toward the mages.

And we understood.

They were learning.

They were analyzing.

They now knew who could kill them—and who couldn't.

"Protect them!" Alistair yelled.

But it was already too late for many.

Three mages were overwhelmed by shadows that lunged together. Their screams lasted only seconds. Their bodies fell limp, dry—drained in a single pull.

"No—!" Leah's voice broke.

“Focus!” I shouted. “Don’t get distracted!”

She swallowed hard, trembling. Tears gathered in her eyes, but her staff stayed raised.

“I know... I know... Lotte, I’m trying...”

Another surge of demons came. The soldiers formed a wall, but there were too many. They struck, slashed, shoved, but nothing worked. I saw a captain drive his sword into a demon’s chest... and the demon merely tilted its head and tore out the captain’s throat with one bite.

The snow quickly turned red.

A group of adventurers cast a combined spell: a burst of blue light that illuminated the entire forest. Four demons exploded, but ten more took their place.

“They don’t end!” someone shouted.

“Fall back!” yelled another.

“There’s nowhere to fall back to!” a third replied.

A larger shadow emerged from the trees. A mass of twisting dark mist, with red eyes fixed on the mages.

“There! The leader!” an adventurer shouted. “Take it down!”

Three soldiers rushed forward with spears.

They didn’t last a second.

The creature glided forward, wrapped around them, and their bodies dropped instantly. No screams. No struggle. Nothing.

Just silence.

The demon leader turned its eyes to Leah.

She stepped back. I stepped forward.

Chloé growled, putting herself between us.

“Don’t you dare,” she said in my mind, though her voice trembled.

The demons surged like a dark wave. The mages staggered back—some wounded, some drained, some barely standing. Soldiers collapsed one by one.

The forest burned with bursts of magic... but darkness always closed the wound left behind.

I was gasping, my arm numb from blocking blows I couldn’t truly feel. But I kept moving. Kept deflecting, striking, protecting.

For my parents.

For Claire.

For Leah.

For Chloé.

For everyone.

A demon leaped at Leah, but I intercepted it, pushing it aside even though I knew I couldn't harm it. At least it bought time.

"Lotte! Chloé!" Leah shouted. "I need... a few minutes!"

"What? For what?" I yelled, slashing another shadow aside.

"A wide-area spell... very wide... I can't cast it while they're attacking this hard!"

Chloé growled, back arched.

"How long do you need?" I asked.

"Two or three minutes..."

"We'll give you that time."

Leah shook her head, desperate.

“You don’t understand... if they interrupt me even once—just once—the spell breaks. I need full focus. I need... I need someone who can stop them physically.”

“That doesn’t exist,” I said, blocking another blow.

“I know!” Leah cried. “But you two... you’re the only ones who always find a way. Please! Protect me!”

The demon leader advanced.

The others resumed their assault.

Screams blended with the sound of bones cracking.

Half the soldiers were already dead. I saw their bodies sprawled across the snow, staining the last remaining light. The adventurers kept fighting—some with weak spells, others with mere daggers, knowing they were useless.

But they kept fighting. Out of instinct. Out of fear. For their lives.

Leah closed her eyes.

Light began to rise from her staff.

“Protect me,” she whispered. “Just... don’t leave me alone...”

I tightened my grip on the sword.

Chloé moved to my side.

The entire forest roared as shadows surged at us.

And the night opened its jaws to devour us.