

Frozen Star 150

Chapter 150: The Rift That Devours the World

[POV Liselotte]

The wind in the center of the ruined village had always been cold, but this time it seemed to carry pure electricity, as if the entire air vibrated with a pulse alien to nature. I stood directly behind Leah, watching as Marcus and the other mages traced the last seals around the artifact. It was a strange object, almost like a metallic heart wrapped in crystal filaments that pulsed with a faint glow.

The silence before activation was so dense that even Chloe kept her tail stiff and her ears upright, looking in all directions as if sensing something terrible. The moon, still pale above the ruins, illuminated the collapsed stones and the remains of old houses turned into ghostly shadows.

Then Marcus raised his hand.

And the world changed.

A burst of light erupted from the artifact, rising like a column into the sky. The air trembled, as if being sucked toward a nonexistent point. Energy twisted, opened invisible cracks, and tore the space. The rift appeared before us like a luminous wound in the air, a vortex of violent colors spinning uncontrollably.

“Step back a bit, it’s working!” Marcus shouted, though there was something disturbingly satisfied in his voice.

We all retreated. I grabbed Leah by the arm to help her stay upright; she was still exhausted from the previous ritual.

The rift roared.

And then it began to pull.

The closest stones lifted off the ground, vibrating as they were drawn toward the rift like magnets. First small stones, then medium ones... then entire fragments of walls. Rocks spun around the vortex at high speed, smashing into each other with a deafening sound.

“Look out!” one of the soldiers shouted.

He didn’t have time for anything else. A stone the size of a helmet struck his chest at impossible speed. His body was thrown aside and he didn’t get up again. Another soldier tried to dodge a smaller rock, but it shattered his leg; his scream was lost in the thunder of the rift.

The mages staggered. Two of them fell to their knees, exhausted, unable to keep up the protective seals. A rock flew straight toward them; only one managed to shield himself—

the other didn’t even have time to scream.

I moved on instinct.

A massive shadow passed above me: a boulder nearly as big as a horse had been torn from the village's outskirts by the rift's force. I watched it spin, hissing as it cut through the air straight toward—

“Leah!”

She hadn't even seen it. Her eyes were fixed on the artifact, trying to understand what had gone wrong.

I didn't think, I just acted. I threw myself toward her and pushed her to the ground just as the boulder crashed down. The impact thundered through the earth, dust filled my eyes, and the ground trembled beneath my hands. The boulder bounced, rolled a few meters, and lodged into the remains of a collapsed wall.

Leah trembled beneath my arms.

“Are you okay?” I whispered, unable to control the shake in my own voice.

“Yes... thank you, Lotte...” she breathed, wide-eyed, unable to process how close she had been to dying.

Chloe growled behind us, her fur bristling, eyes locked on the rift. A chill crept down my spine—the kind that had nothing to do with cold.

“Marcus,” Leah said weakly as she pushed herself up, “how do we stop this? The rift isn’t supposed to react like this!”

But Marcus wasn’t listening.

Marcus was laughing.

Not a normal laugh. Not even a desperate one. It was a broken, unhinged cackle that cut through the roar of colliding stones. His whole body shook as he stretched his hands toward the rift as if trying to embrace it.

“How magnificent... how sublime...” he whispered with something like reverence. “At last... at last... the power I’ve been waiting for...”

“Marcus, what are you doing?” Alistair shouted. “Close the rift! Now!”

Marcus didn’t obey.

Instead, he began chanting a spell none of us had ever heard before. The words scraped the air, as if they shouldn’t exist in this world. The wind shifted. The rift pulsed. A line of light shot out from it into Marcus’s hands.

Leah gasped.

“He’s absorbing power from the rift! That’s impossible!”

A blow hit my stomach—

Marcus was extracting raw magic... and the rift was giving it to him.

The earth trembled.

And then everything got worse.

Something began to take shape inside the rift. Not solid. Not human. A bright, fluctuating mass formed—white smoke, sparks, and fragments of light twisting as if alive. A gigantic torso emerged, legless, floating above the ground, with long arms shaped like blades of pure energy.

An ethereal elemental.

But not a normal one.

Not a stable one.

A being born of an unstable rift, fed by pure magic.

Marcus lifted his hands and the creature turned its head—if it could be called a head—toward him.

“Obey,” Marcus said, in a voice that no longer sounded human. “Destroy everything.”

The elemental screamed without a mouth. The sound was like metal scraping metal, a shriek that made my ears burn. Then it lunged forward.

Its first strike obliterated two soldiers still standing.

The second tore a stone column that crumbled into dust.

The ground cracked with every blow.

“Retreat! Retreat!” Alistair shouted, though he knew no one could outrun that thing if it kept advancing.

Leah tried to stand, but her legs buckled.

"Lotte... we need to stop it," she whispered.

"First we get you somewhere safe. You can't fight right now."

She tried to protest, but I pulled her up and forced her to walk. Chloe came to her other side, using her body to support her. Her white fur bristled, fangs exposed, but even she knew we didn't stand a chance if we approached now.

We retreated through the ruins, looking for a spot where the flying debris couldn't reach us. Every time the elemental attacked, fragments of stone shot everywhere. A cloud of dust covered the entire village, mixing with the magic-charged air.

"What is Marcus doing...?" I whispered, unable to understand.

Leah struggled to breathe.

"He's using the rift to force a binding. That elemental isn't complete... it shouldn't exist... He's trying to sustain it with his own magic, but if the rift keeps feeding it..."

"It'll grow stronger," I finished, feeling cold in my bones.

Leah nodded.

Up ahead, Marcus stretched his arms again and the elemental turned toward another group of soldiers trying to regroup. One of them barely had time to scream before he was disintegrated by a slash of pure energy.

Chloe growled louder.

"I know, Chloe. I want to stop it too. But if we get close now..."

The wolf lowered her ears but didn't take her eyes off the enemy.

We finally reached a more sheltered area behind the remains of an overturned caravan. I helped Leah sit against a surviving fragment of wall. She pressed a hand to her chest, breathing heavily.

"Can you fight?" I asked.

"In a few minutes... if I can stabilize my mana... and if I don't get too close to the rift."

"Good. Then we'll stay alive until you can move."

She let out a weak laugh.

“That sounds... difficult.”

“It won’t be the first time.”

Chloe sat beside us, tail stiff, observing the elemental as if calculating its every move. The reflection of its glow flickered in her blue eyes.

Marcus kept laughing. With every passing second he looked more consumed by the energy he was drawing. His skin had tightened, his veins glowing faintly. He moved as if he couldn’t feel his own body.

“More! Give me more!” he screamed, extending his hands toward the rift.

The elemental responded, growing even larger.

Leah clenched her teeth.

“This... this isn’t just madness... He knew the rift would react like this. At least part of him did.”

“What are you saying?” I asked.

Leah met my eyes.

“That Marcus never intended to stop the demons. He wanted power. This whole mission... everything... may have been his plan from the start.”

A knot burned in my throat. It was so absurd... so twisted... and yet, looking at him bathed in rift-light, it felt like the only possible explanation.

An explosion near the center of the village forced us to duck. The elemental had unleashed a shockwave that obliterated an entire cart and sent debris flying.

“Lotte...” Leah whispered, “when the moment comes... I’ll need you to help me get close. I can’t face that thing alone.”

“I know.”

Chloe barked once—a sharp sound—as if confirming she understood too.

The situation was hopeless.

Marcus was out of control.

The rift kept growing.

And the elemental advanced, destroying everything.

But I wasn't going to let us die here.

Even if the world was burning around us, even if the sky seemed to tear apart with the rift's light...

I would protect Leah.

And Chloe.

And anyone still left to save.

I breathed deeply, feeling the tremor in my hands as I tried to calm my hammering heart.

“Leah.”

“Yes...?”

“We’re not dying today.”

She looked at me, startled by the certainty in my voice.

Then smiled.

“I trust you, Lotte.”

The ruined village kept trembling.

The rift roared.

The elemental shrieked.

The soldiers fought to survive.

And I knew the real battle was only just beginning.