

Frozen Star 152

Chapter 152: Ash, Ice, and Trust

[POV Liselotte]

The shelter still smelled of old smoke and damp wood when Leah and I rushed inside.

We had left behind the trembling creature, the reddened sky, and the distant screams of the battle, but the echo of it all clung to my ears like a lingering threat.

Leah moved ahead toward the boxes and backpacks the soldiers had abandoned during their retreat.

I remained by the entrance for a few seconds, trying to catch my breath.

I felt my blood rushing too fast, mixing with the cold vibrating beneath my skin.

"We need to find something useful before that monster grows even more," Leah murmured without lifting her gaze.

I nodded and started digging through torn bandages, empty vials, and the broken remains of amulets.

My fingers moved automatically, but my mind was tied to another image: Marcus standing beside the elemental, looking at us as if all this had been inevitable.

I breathed deeply, trying to push those thoughts aside.

"Leah... do you think Marcus really chose his side?"

She tensed.

The pause was brief, but I felt it clearly.

"I don't know," she replied. "But if he's still there... I will face him."

Before I could answer, my fingers brushed against something cold.

A different cold.

A magical cold.

I carefully pulled the object out: an oval stone, pale blue, with inner filaments that pulsed as if it had a beating heart. I recognized it instantly.

A mana stone.

Concentrated.

Powerful.

"Leah," I whispered. "Look at this."

She turned, eyes widening.

"A mana stone...? Here?"

"Someone didn't have time to use it. Or left it behind in the rush. Take it. It'll help."

Leah hesitated.

"If I absorb it now and something goes wrong..."

"It won't go wrong," I said.

It was a leap of faith.

But she needed it.

Leah cupped the stone with both hands.

She pressed it to her chest, inhaled deeply... and the stone reacted.

A blue pulse lit up the entire room.

Her hair floated slightly, as if stirred by an inner breeze.

Magical dust wrapped around her arms and, slowly, the stone dissolved between her fingers, becoming a luminous trail that vanished inside her chest.

When she opened her eyes, her magic had returned.

Alive.

Powerful.

"Lotte... I can fight."

I smiled. I couldn't help it.

But just as we turned toward the door, a soft sound made us stop.

A low growl.

Familiar.

Comforting.

Chloé appeared in the doorway.

The white wolf.

Her fur glowed even under the shelter's dim light, stained with dirt and ash, but her golden eyes were full of determination. Her breathing was fast, as if she had run nonstop from the far end of the village.

"Chloé," I said, approaching her. "Are you okay?"

The wolf stepped closer, touching my hand with her snout before letting out a quiet whine.

Her body was tense, alert.

But then she lifted her head toward Leah, then toward me.

And she shook it softly.

She wanted to tell us something.

"What is it?" Leah asked.

Chloé took one step toward the exit.

Then another.

Then stopped.

She looked back—straight into my eyes.

And I understood.

Not with words, but with that silent communication only she and I shared.

"You want us to wait...?" I murmured.

Chloé pressed her forehead against my knee.

Her way of saying "trust me."

"Lotte..." Leah said, noticing my expression.

I took a slow breath and stroked the wolf's head.

"Alright. We'll catch up. Do what you need to do."

Chloé let out a low approving rumble.

Then she turned and ran out of the shelter, disappearing into the smoke and rubble of the village.

Leah and I followed, heading toward the epicenter of the battle.

The center of the village looked like an open hell.

The air vibrated.

The heat stabbed at the skin.

The sky burned in shades of orange and deep red.

And the elemental...

It was enormous.

It had grown to a monstrous size: its arms were pillars of fire and lightning, its torso looked like a storm trapped inside a body, and each step made the ground tremble beneath us.

But what froze my blood wasn't its appearance.

It was Marcus standing at its side.

Standing.

Calm.

As if he had been waiting for us.

"Marcus," I whispered in disbelief.

Leah advanced with barely contained fury.

"Stop this!" she shouted. "You have no idea what you're doing!"

Marcus tilted his head slightly, and his empty smile unsettled my stomach.

"You're late," he said with terrifying serenity. "The ritual is already underway. Nothing can stop it."

"I'll stop it," Leah replied, her voice firmer than I had ever heard it.

Marcus raised his hand.

Leah did the same.

Magic ignited between them—blue against dark red.

And with no more words, the battle began.

I barely had time to move before the air scorched around me.

The elemental turned its massive body toward me.

Its eyes—two living embers—focused sharply.

"Alright," I murmured, raising my hands. "Come at me, then."

The monster unleashed a tongue of fire slicing through the air like a whip. Instinctively, I raised an ice barrier.

The impact was brutal: steam exploded around us, flooding the air with a hiss.

A second burst.

A third.

I responded with walls of ice, spears, frozen gusts that chilled the air around me.

The elemental roared, angered that I was still standing.

Alive.

The temperature surged.

But so did my power.

A lightning bolt crashed down from its right arm.

I leapt aside; the bolt shattered the ground where I had been a second earlier.

I answered with an icy pillar erupting beneath its feet, freezing part of its leg.

The monster thrashed violently, breaking through some of the ice, but it staggered back.

"Come on..." I murmured. "I'm not letting you move forward."

Behind me, explosions shook the battlefield.

Leah's spells collided with Marcus's in a fierce duel.

"Lotte!" Leah shouted.

I couldn't turn.

The elemental raised both arms, gathering fire and lightning at once.

The air vibrated with crushing force.

I breathed in.

Felt my magic glide down my arms like icy water.

The cold gathered in my chest.

My hands glowed.

The temperature plummeted.

"Come on. Come at me."

The monster roared and unleashed its attack.

An explosion of white fire and lightning.

I crossed my arms, releasing my power in a frozen wave that clashed against the raging storm.

The world shook.

The ground split.

Steam swallowed everything.

I don't know how long it lasted.

Seconds.

Minutes.

An eternity.

When the steam finally thinned, I was still on my feet.

Kneeling.

Shaking.

But alive.

The elemental had been stopped.

Temporarily.

But stopped.

Leah screamed my name.

Marcus laughed again.

The monster began gathering energy once more.

And Chloé...

Chloé still hadn't returned.

I rose slowly, frozen to the bone but unwilling to move an inch.

Because if I failed...

everyone would fall.

"Come on," I whispered. "I'm not done with you."

And I hurled myself at the elemental once again.