

## **Frozen Star 154**

### Chapter 154: The Devouring Core

[POV Liselotte]

The world became very small.

Small enough that nothing existed except the frantic beating of the elemental's core, the ice running through my veins, and the thunderous clash of the spells Leah and Marcus hurled behind me.

A beat.

A pulse.

A strange rhythm that seemed to connect with my own.

And without thinking, something inside me shifted.

My breathing steadied.

The noise of the battlefield became distant, as if heard from underwater.

My whole body felt... lighter.

Colder, yes—but also steadier.

“Focus...” I told myself, without really hearing my own voice.

In front of me, the elemental roared, its core glowing intensely, as if it recognized that I was moving with a different intent.

It wasn't fury.

It wasn't desperation.

It was precision.

I dashed forward.

Each step left frozen marks on the blackened ground.

Each breath released a cloud of frost.

I could feel my mana flowing in a way it never had before: continuous, disciplined, focused.

The elemental swung an arm made of incandescent stone, trying to crush me, but I didn't slow. I swept my hand upward, raising a curved wall of ice with a movement so smooth it felt natural.

The impact shattered the ice.

But I was already past it, moving straight toward the core.

"ALMOST...!"

Energy swirled in my hands—cold and alive. I formed a spear denser, sharper, more precise than anything I had ever created.

My body moved on its own.

My mind emptied itself of everything unnecessary.

Only the core.

Only that point.

I leapt.

I screamed.

And I struck.

The ice spear hit the elemental's glowing center directly.

A crack tore through the air.

The core vibrated...

One fracture.

Then two.

Three.

The elemental roared, the sound loaded with pain and fury. Light particles and fragments of stone broke away from its torso.

I'd done it!

I had broken its defense!

But...

The core didn't shatter.

It didn't fade.

It only... cracked.

And then, as if my breath had been ripped away, my body dropped to my knees.

The momentum and concentration vanished, leaving me gasping.

“Almost...” I whispered. “I almost had it...”

A blue flash shot past me, snapping me back to reality. I forced myself to stand and retreated toward Leah.

The battlefield had split into two fronts.

Two scenes.

Two worlds about to collide.

Leah was trembling. Her breath came uneven, her legs barely holding her up. But she still shaped a spell of pure light between her hands—one so large it illuminated her pale face.

Opposite her, Marcus swayed, eyes bulging, veins popping, clothes torn. He held both hands forward, forming a vortex of dark, blood-red magic.

They were both wrecked.

Exhausted.

At their limits.

“Lotte...” Leah murmured, not looking away from her enemy. “Stay... at my side.”

“Always.”

I stood beside her.

My hands still trembled from the strain.

My chest burned.

But I looked at her and nodded.

The elemental, moving with an odd shiver, returned to Marcus. It stood behind him as if responding to his emotions... or as if waiting for something.

I didn't understand.

But my stomach twisted with dread.

Marcus panted, laughing between breaths.

"This... will be the end, Leah..."

His voice was cracked and frantic.

"Only one of us will stand after this."

Leah gritted her teeth.

Her light grew, blazing brighter.

"Then... I'll give everything I have left."

And both unleashed their spells.

White light and crimson magic collided in the air with a brutal explosion.

The ground shook.

Ruins splintered.

The air vibrated as if it were about to split in two.

I raised a wall of ice to shield us from the blast.

The clash of energies formed a brilliant arc between them—a line of pure magical tension that bound the two in a pulse of strength and resistance.

“Y-You... won’t... beat me!” Marcus screamed, pushing with both hands.

Leah’s light wavered.

Her entire body trembled from the effort.

I held her by the shoulder to keep her standing.

And then... Marcus began to laugh.

A broken, wild, desperate laugh.

“HAHAHA! I’M WINNING! YOU CAN’T BEAT ME!”

Leah’s light was pushed back a few inches.

Marcus stepped forward twice.

Everything seemed to tilt in his favor.

Until...

I noticed something behind him.

The elemental—once roaring and attacking without control—was now in complete silence. Its cracked core glowed a dark red, absorbing energy. Its body vibrated as if on the verge of exploding.

“Marcus...” I whispered.

“What... what are you...?”

But he didn’t hear.

He was too focused on crushing Leah.

Too lost in his obsession.

Too blind.

The elemental slowly lifted its arms, almost mechanically.

Incandescent stones began circling its hands.

A sphere of energy formed—blue fire mixed with lightning.

A magic we had never seen it use.

A magic that belonged... to the breach.

“Leah... careful...” I breathed, feeling my heart slam in my chest.

The spell grew.

And Marcus didn’t see it.

Didn’t hear it.

Didn’t sense it.

He was entirely consumed by his hysterical laughter.

“FINALLY! JUSTICE FOR MY PEOPLE! JUST—”

And then it happened.

The elemental fired.

The sphere of fire and lightning pierced Marcus' back before he even had time to turn.

"MARCUUUS!" Leah screamed.

My eyes flew open.

The blast tore through his torso, bursting out his chest in a spray of blood and magical sparks.

Marcus' laughter broke instantly, becoming a choking sound.

He collapsed to his knees.

"W-Wait..." he murmured, voice shattered.

"What... are you... doing...? I... I gave you power..."

The elemental roared.

Not in fury.

Not in obedience.

It was a roar... of hunger.

The elemental's core began pulling Marcus toward it, as if the man's life force, his magic, his essence... were food.

Marcus reached toward Leah.

Then toward me.

Then toward nothing.

"P-Please... no... not like this..."

His eyes filled with terror for the first time.

“No! No! NO! NO!”

Marcus’ body was dragged into the pull of the core.

The elemental’s stones parted like a mouth made of living rock.

They devoured him.

Absorbed him.

His final scream was swallowed inside the core, which glowed with a fierce light.

Leah covered her mouth.

I stepped back, unable to believe what I had witnessed.

“Lotte...” she whispered, shaking. “Did it... did it absorb him?”

I couldn’t answer.

The elemental's core changed color.

The cracks I had made...

They closed.

With a smoothness that froze me in place, the fractures repaired themselves as if the artifact regenerated using Marcus' life.

"Leah..." I managed.

"It didn't just absorb him... it..."

The elemental lifted its head to the sky and roared, the sound shaking the earth.

"...it grew stronger."

And then the unthinkable happened:

Leah's spell—faint but still active—hit the elemental's chest.

But instead of hurting it...

It absorbed that too.

Leah's light dissolved.

The creature shone brighter.

More stable.

More alive.

The repaired core pulsed once.

Twice.

Three times.

As if it were breathing now.

I swallowed hard, heart frozen.

“Leah...”

“Yes...” she whispered, not taking her eyes off it.

“We’re in trouble.”