

Frozen Star 157

Chapter 157: The Heart That Must Break

[POV Liselotte]

The air vibrated as if it were made of crystals about to shatter. The elemental—reduced, but still enormous—writhed in pain between the shadows that imprisoned it. Its ethereal body shone with frantic flashes of fire, lightning, and an impossible blue light, as if a dying sky inside it were trying to escape.

In front of it, Chloe—in her human form—kept her arm extended, and from her fingers grew black cords that embedded themselves into the elemental’s body like living roots. Her white hair floated as if a wind surrounded her, though the air there was dead, burned by what the elemental had unleashed.

“Lotte!” Chloe shouted without turning. “I need you to freeze the core. No matter how long it takes. I’ll hold it still.”

The core.

My breath caught.

It was a split sphere, full of cracks that pulsed like open wounds. A mix between crystal, living fire, and a shard of the artifact we’d activated. Each crack glowed in patterns that looked like pulses—like a heart unsure whether it should keep beating or explode.

"I'll try," I said, swallowing hard. "But I don't know if I can break it. I don't even know if I can get close."

Chloe let out a tired but steady laugh.

"I can hold it. Trust me."

I trusted her. I trusted her too much. And yet, my legs trembled as I took my first step toward the core.

The elemental roared.

The shadows holding it tightened, screeching like bending metal. For a moment, I thought it would break free of Chloe's prison. But then she acted: her human skin darkened around her arms, covered by a mantle of shadow that erased the glow of the fire nearby.

The roar choked.

"Go, Lotte. Now!"

I ran. The heat was so intense it stung my skin even from a distance. My magic reacted on its own, a thin layer of frost coating my arms for protection. But when I was three meters away from the core, a blast of heat exploded toward me.

I stepped back instinctively.

“Don’t stop!” Chloe yelled. “Its attacks don’t follow reason anymore. If you hesitate, it’ll burn you.”

“I know!” I shouted back, forcing myself forward. “But I need to get closer or I won’t be able to freeze it.”

The core trembled.

A beam of blue light shot directly at me. I screamed, raising an ice barrier instinctively. The barrier melted instantly, but the blow didn’t hit me fully.

Ice was my refuge.

And also my weapon.

I raised my hands.

Took a deep breath.

Gathered mana.

A circle of ice began to form under my feet, expanding like a flower blooming on scorched ground.

“First... stop the heat,” I murmured to myself.

I froze the air around us. Forced the space to cool, making the core react. The elemental’s heat began to wane, but it was still overwhelming.

“Just a little more...” I murmured.

Another beam. And another. And another.

I dodged. Blocked. Created pillars of ice that melted the moment they appeared.

But I kept pushing forward.

The core called to me as if it somehow knew I was its natural enemy.

When I was a meter and a half away, I tried for the first time.

I lifted both hands and released all my mana forward.

“Fracture of Frost!”

A burst of ice struck the core. The inner shield of the elemental coated with white crystals that spread cracks across the shining surface.

But then—

Crack.

The ice shattered, evaporating into steam.

“Again!” Chloe shouted.

She remained firm. Though I could see her trembling. The elemental... was no ordinary creature. It had absorbed Marcus. Absorbed Leah’s power. Absorbed part of the artifact.

It... should not exist.

And that’s why we had to destroy it.

I stepped closer.

At one meter from the core, the air was so hot that the ice crystals covering my arms melted constantly, forcing me to regenerate them over and over.

My legs hurt. My muscles trembled.

But I took another step.

Raised my hands again.

And tried for the second time.

Magic burst forward, freezing the space in front of me so intensely I heard my own mana shriek inside my body. The wave of frost reached the core and coated it entirely.

For a moment, it seemed enough.

For a moment, I thought I saw it stop.

But then—

Crack.

The ice layer exploded into fragments.

I fell to my knees.

“It won’t...!” I gasped. “It’s like it’s resisting on purpose.”

Chloe growled.

“Lotte, listen. You don’t have to destroy it. Just freeze it. As deep as you can. Even for a few seconds.”

“And what will you do?”

Chloe turned her head just slightly. She smiled.

A dark smile. But warm.

“The rest.”

But before I could answer, the elemental burst into a soundless scream. The prison of shadows stretched, nearly breaking, and Chloe lunged forward.

Her human shape distorted. Shadows coiled around her body. The figure of a white wolf overlapped her for an instant, then vanished, then returned. Chloe shifted forms as if breathing in two worlds were natural for her.

“Lotte, you have to do it now!”

“I’m trying! It won’t freeze!”

“Make it stop!”

I screamed.

I stood up on shaking legs.

And ran toward it.

The heat was unbearable. But I pushed forward. My skin burned. My legs trembled. My breath shortened.

But I didn't stop.

“Stop!” I cast the spell, frost clinging to the air.

“Stop!” I repeated, louder, unleashing magic from my throat as if speaking to the world itself.

“STOP!!”

And then it happened.

I didn’t know if it was my voice, or my will, or the fact that the core was finally reaching its limit.

But the heat dropped.

Just for an instant.

A perfect instant.

Enough.

“Absolute Freeze!” I shouted.

And my magic erupted.

Ice surged from my hands with a force I had never felt before. A white-blue beam, pure as a winter storm, struck the core directly.

The elemental writhed.

The shadows tightened further.

And around the core, frost bloomed like winter flowers, spreading across the cracked surface.

It tried to break it.

But couldn't.

My legs buckled, my arms trembled. Nausea rose. The world tilted. I was using too much power. But I didn't let go.

"Hold it—just a bit more!" Chloe shouted from behind the elemental. "Lotte, almost!"

"It's... it's...!" I gasped. "Freezing!"

The core was covered completely in ice.

A white, crystalline, perfect ice.

My vision flickered.

My body gave out.

But I didn't stop channeling.

And then—

Chloe leaped.

In the air, Chloe became pure shadow.

A giant wolf made of darkness emerged behind her like her reflection. The shadow opened its jaws as Chloe extended her hand, gathering all the surrounding darkness.

She shouted:

“Lotte, now!!”

“IT’S DONE!!”

The core was frozen. Not completely. Not forever. But enough.

Chloe descended upon the elemental.

And her shadow fell with her.

The impact shook the ground.

The wolf of shadows bit into the frozen core with a deep, cavernous roar. The ice cracked. And then shattered. And then—

BOOM!

A dark explosion erupted from inside the elemental, breaking it into a thousand fragments of dead fire and luminous ash.

The elemental's body collapsed, melting like wax before evaporating into thick smoke that faded into the air.

The core split in two.

Then in four.

Then into dust.

And with that, the elemental ceased to exist.

Silence fell all at once.

My heart pounded so hard I could hear it in my ears. My legs buckled.

I fell to my knees.

“Lotte?”

Chloe appeared by my side.

Human again.

Her white hair tousled, the shadows behind her fading like tired smoke.

“Are you... alright?” she asked, her voice soft, worried.

I nodded weakly.

“Yes... just... exhausted.”

She placed a hand on my back.

“You did it. You froze something that shouldn’t even be freezable.”

“And you destroyed it.”

Chloe smiled, and for a second she looked like the white wolf I had met. A mix of fierceness and tenderness impossible to describe.

“We did it together.”

I breathed deeply.

The taste of metal lingered in my mouth from the magical strain.

But I looked at the remains of the monster that almost destroyed everything, and I knew we’d done the right thing.

“Chloe...” I murmured. “Thank you.”

She tilted her head, one wolf ear—still not fully gone—twitching.

“Don’t thank me yet. There may be more coming.”

And though she was telling the truth, for one moment—just one—

I allowed myself to feel relief.

Because we survived.

Because we achieved the impossible.

Because Chloe was there.

And because, for the first time since this started...

I had hope.