

Frozen Star 160

Chapter 160: Voices in the Darkness

[POV Liselotte]

The exhaustion didn't disappear when I closed my eyes.

It was still there—heavy, like a damp blanket weighing down my body. And yet, the shelter of the cave was the closest thing to peace we had known in days. The distant murmur of the wounded, the low sound of someone tending the fire, and the constant drip of water from the cracks in the ceiling created a slow rhythm, almost hypnotic.

Leah slept leaning against the wall, wrapped in a blanket far too large for her. Her breathing was deep, though uneven. Every so often, she frowned, as if even in sleep she were still fighting.

Chloe was sitting a few steps away from us.

In her new human form, with white hair falling over her shoulders, wolf ears upright and her tail resting to one side, she looked... different. Not dangerous. Not threatening. But more complete, as if she had finally settled into a place that had always been waiting for her.

I couldn't stop looking at her.

Eventually, Leah opened her eyes.

“Lotte...” she murmured. “Are you awake?”

“Yes.”

She carefully sat up and looked at Chloe, who was still watching the cave entrance.

“Chloe...” she said softly. “Earlier... during the battle...”

Chloe turned her head toward us.

“I knew you’d ask.”

I sat up straighter, resting my back against the rock.

“We’re not going to demand anything from you,” I said. “But... we want to understand.”

Chloe remained silent for a few seconds. Her ears shifted slightly backward—a gesture I knew well. She was thinking about how to begin.

“For several days now...” she finally said, her voice calm. “I’ve felt strange.”

Leah tilted her head.

“Strange how?”

Chloe looked at her own hands, slowly opening and closing them.

“My senses were changing. Not all at once... little by little. I started hearing things I couldn’t hear before. Smelling presences that weren’t close. Sensing intentions before they manifested.”

I swallowed.

“You were always sensitive,” I said. “But this sounds different.”

“It was,” she nodded. “And so was my mind. My reasoning... it became deeper. Broader. I began to understand connections I had only ever sensed before.”

Leah frowned.

“That sounds like an awakening.”

Chloe lifted her gaze to her.

“Yes. But I didn’t understand it until that day.”

She paused for a moment before continuing.

“When we headed toward the village to activate the artifact... I felt something inside me speeding up. Like an invisible limit was breaking.”

Her tail moved slowly.

“My instincts screamed at me to get away. To seek darkness. Not fear... but true darkness.”

“That’s why you left?” I asked.

“Yes.”

I remembered her disappearing among the trees without looking back.

"I ran," she continued. "Deeper and deeper into the forest. Where the light barely reached. Where even animals avoided going."

Leah listened in absolute silence.

"When I crossed a certain point..." Chloe closed her eyes for an instant. "Everything turned black. Not normal darkness. It was as if the world had been shut off."

A shiver ran through me.

"And there..." she went on. "My power changed completely. It didn't expand... it organized itself."

She opened her eyes again.

"And I wasn't alone."

I leaned forward.

“What did you see?”

Chloe slowly shook her head.

“I couldn’t see with my eyes. But I could feel it. Beside me... there was a quadrupedal figure. Large. Ancient.”

Leah held her breath.

“I didn’t know what it was. But I didn’t feel danger.”

Chloe lowered her voice.

“That figure spoke to me.”

The silence that followed was absolute.

“What did it say?” I finally asked.

Chloe hesitated for a second.

“It spoke to me about my power. About its origin.”

Leah tensed.

“And?”

“It told me it didn’t come from me alone,” Chloe replied. “That it was part of an ancient source. As ancient as the first pacts of the world.”

My fingers clenched tightly.

“Like...?” I murmured.

Chloe looked straight at me.

“Like yours, Lotte.”

For a moment, I felt the air leave my lungs.

“Mine...?”

“Yes.”

Leah looked at both of us, stunned.

“The figure said that some souls are born touched by forces that precede kingdoms, gods, and demons,” Chloe continued. “Forces that don’t seek to dominate... but to preserve balance.”

My chest tightened.

“Did it say what that figure was exactly?” I asked.

Chloe shook her head.

“It didn’t give a name. It only said it was a guardian... and that it had been waiting.”

“Waiting for what?”

“For me to be ready.”

Leah slowly closed her eyes.

“That explains many things...”

Chloe nodded.

“When I returned to you and felt the chaos of the elemental... I didn’t hesitate anymore. I knew what to do. I knew how to use the shadows. Not as something external, but as an extension of myself.”

I looked at her hands again, remembering how she had stopped the elemental, how she had summoned that shadow wolf.

“And your form...?” I asked carefully.

Chloe smiled faintly.

“That figure gave me a choice. To remain as I always was... or to accept a form that reflected what I am now.”

Leah opened her eyes.

“And you chose both.”

“Exactly.”

Her tail moved gently.

“I can be a wolf. I can be human. Neither is a mask.”

A knot formed in my throat.

“Chloe...” I said softly. “Are you afraid?”

She thought for a few seconds before answering.

“No. But I do feel respect.”

Leah moved a little closer.

“Do you think that power will change you?”

Chloe looked at her calmly.

“It will only make me more aware of what I already was.”

Silence fell again, but this time it wasn't uncomfortable.

I rested my head against the rock.

“I suppose the world is bigger than we thought.”

Chloe smiled.

“It always was.”

Leah sighed, letting the weight drop from her shoulders.

“Then... we're not alone.”

“No,” Chloe replied firmly. “We never were.”

I closed my eyes.

For the first time since everything had begun, I didn’t feel fear when thinking about what would come next.

Only uncertainty.

And strangely...

That was enough.