

# THE RISE OF A FROZEN STAR

## Chapter 17: Days of Calm Beneath the Leaves

[POV Liselotte]

Life in the forest was not easy. It never was. But in its own way, it became bearable. And after a while... it was beautiful.

With Chloé by my side, every sunrise was more than just a transition from the cold of night to the warmth of day. It was living proof that we had survived. A gift. A whisper from fate saying, "Today, you're still here."

The day began before the sun even touched the tall treetops. I opened my eyes slowly, feeling the warmth of her fur against my back, the calm rhythm of her breathing. She was my guardian, my only comfort.

I never thought the forest routine would make me feel alive. And yet, I clung to it with every cell in my body.

Gathering water from the stream became a daily ceremony. I would lean down, submerge my hands, and look at my reflection. A girl with sad eyes and deep circles, with small hands and fingers covered in scars. But little by little, I began to see something else. A strength born of hunger, fear, and loss. A new version of myself... a survivor.

Finding food was a constant challenge. I learned to distinguish edible roots from the ones that would make me vomit blood. To tell the buzz of a nearby hive from the hiss of a hidden snake. I learned everything with Chloé, who sometimes gently pushed me away from danger before I even saw it coming.

We hunted together. She was the soul of the forest, a silver ghost gliding through branches and bushes. Sometimes I wondered if the gods had brought her back just to guide me. Her presence was too perfect, her instincts too precise.

There were days we returned with a rabbit, or a bird I would pluck carefully before roasting over hot stones. Forest leaves were my plates, sharpened sticks my utensils. The first time I cooked something without burning it was a small victory, and Chloé looked at me with pride. I swear. There was tenderness in her eyes.

After eating, we lay in the sun. We didn't talk, but we didn't need to. Sometimes I sang to her. Old songs, from my other world. My voice trembled, but she would stay still, as if she understood every word. I told her stories I half-remembered, with improvised endings. She tilted her head and rested her muzzle on my legs. That gesture... was her way of saying, "I'm here."

Rainy days were the most intimate. Our cave filled with the sound of water hitting the stone, and the air became dense and humid. I lit a fire and we curled up against each other. We played. We rolled around. I forgot, for a moment, everything I had lost.

Not everything was perfect.

There were nights of true terror. When noises among the trees kept us awake until dawn. When predators passed too close. When hunger squeezed and cold hurt.

One day, I drank from a stagnant puddle. The next morning, the fever made me delirious. I vomited until it felt like my soul was leaving my body. Chloé licked my forehead, howled when she thought I was fainting. She left and returned with bitter plants I would have never touched. She made me drink them, and little by little, I got better.

I cried. So much that I ran out of tears.

And Chloé licked my cheek. Lay on top of me. Wrapped me in her body. She didn't let me sink.

One afternoon, while exploring, I found a clearing full of blue flowers. It was so beautiful it hurt. I picked a few. Braided a crown. Placed it on her head. And I laughed. I laughed as if I wasn't alone, as if everything was a game. She didn't shake it off. She wore it like a queen.

Another day, I carved our names into an oak tree. "Lotte & Chloé." A promise, yes, but also a plea. That the world wouldn't forget us. That if we died there, someone would know we existed. That we were happy. For a while.

Seasons passed. Days grew longer, winters more bearable. My body changed. I was no longer the weak, scrawny girl who arrived crying. I was agile. I had muscles. I had scars. I knew how to defend myself. I knew how to think before acting.

Chloé changed too. Her fur shone even more. Her fangs were larger. But her eyes... always the same. Deep. Wise. Unbreakable.

Sometimes, at night, I spoke softly. I didn't know if she understood everything, but I spoke anyway.

"I miss you, Mom..." I whispered. "Claire, you don't know how much I wish I could hug you. Dad... I'm sorry, I'm sorry I still can't come back..."

And then, in that hidden corner of the world, Chloé would come close, touch me with her muzzle. As if to say, "They'll find you. Hold on. I'll protect you until then."

And she did.

The seasons passed. Two years. Then three. Then four.

My hair now reached my waist. My hands were marked. I had forgotten how human voices sounded. But I didn't care.

Because in every fallen leaf, in every lit fire, in every shared piece of meat... I was alive.

I was safe.

And deep down inside... I was happy.

But then, one ordinary morning... I felt something new.

In the wind. In the birdsong. In Chloé's restless gaze.

Something was about to change.