

## Frozen Star 35

### Chapter 35: Memories of the Heroes

[POV Liselotte]

The candles were dying, their flames reduced to blue tongues desperately licking the last of the wax. The silence of the underground library had acquired a physical density, as if centuries of dust had solidified in the air.

Only the occasional creak of the old wooden table and the whisper of icy wind scraping the stone through some hidden crack broke it.

Beside me, Chloé slept, her side rising and falling with a comforting rhythm, a living metronome in the dead stillness.

I remained motionless, the book open like a wound on the table.

"The Victory of the Chosen Heroes."

But the title felt like a cruel mockery, a golden tombstone over a mass grave.

I found no epics. No triumphant songs.

I found ashes. A chronicle written in dry black ink, the trembling handwriting of someone recording a final defeat. A lament carved into parchment.

The book seemed to have been stored for hundreds of years.

"More than sixty winters ago, the skies tore open without a sound. Over the plains of Irell, the White Flash fell: a silent lightning bolt that heralded not a storm, but a fracture. From its blinding light, they emerged. Thirty figures. Disoriented. Soaked not with rain, but with a cold sweat foreign to our climate. Thirty souls torn from another firmament, another reality. Ignorant of our language. Blind to our perpetual war. But in their eyes... burned a strange flame. The sages named it the 'Echo of the Origin.' A spark from where they came, not from where they were."

I turned the page with fingers that felt the cold of the parchment like a perpetual shiver. The air at the mouth of the basement seemed to thicken, made heavy by the weight of revelation.

"The Crown welcomed them. With fear. With poisonous hope. They were taught the language, the mana, the paths of channelling... the rudiments to not die immediately. Some learned with the speed of fear. Others, with the clumsiness of disbelief. And five... never understood. They believed they were living a vivid dream. They mocked the warnings. Laughed at the edge of danger. They died in the first advanced training, in the Grey Mountains. Devoured by a Living Mist that fed on their disdain. Their screams... were the first broken vow, the first gutted innocence."

Five. Erased for not believing in the reality of the blade. My throat closed. How many had arrived before, thinking they could return as if nothing had happened?

"Twenty-five continued the forced march. Scattered like cursed seeds across forgotten battlefronts. Villages besieged by nightmares with teeth. Mountain passes guarded by tribes of shadow and

resentment. With each encounter, they fractured a little more. One fell embracing the body of a child in Trevan, his sword broken. Two burst from within when a spell turned against their trembling hearts. Another three fell in a night ambush, their names erased before dawn. Thus, one by one... their flames went out. Silently. Like candles in a basement."

The pages were worn, the edges charred as if the fire of the truth they held had tried to consume them. But the words survived, ghosts tattooed on dead skin.

"Ten reached the Final Siege. Ten names my memory rejects, but whose ghostly silhouettes still populate my nights. They rode toward the throat of the Demon King's Fortress, carrying the rotting weight of a world's hope. The sky that day held no sun. It bled. Dark red, thick. The world held a poisoned breath."

I turned the page.

The account broke. Literally. The next page was torn, the ink smudged and blurry like nightmare tears. Someone had tried to tear it out, ripping it in half, leaving only shreds of phrases, echoes of a catastrophe:

"...the roar that extinguished the stars..."

"...too late... the blood had already fused with the stones..."

"...he was alone. Only him. At the peak of horror..."

And at the bottom, scratched in desperation, nearly illegible:

"Only one came back alive."

My heart pounded against my ribs like a prisoner. I turned to the last page, my hand trembling.

"The last hero returned... walking. He did not ride. He did not fly. He stepped onto the cursed earth with the gait of a sleepwalker. Alone. He did not speak. He shed no tear. He refused bread, water, the comfort of a bed. He entered the ghost city... crossed the plaza of specters... and dissolved. Like mist at dawn. As if his body was only a tired echo. No one remembers his face. No bard sings his name. Only the void he left behind remains."

I closed the book with a dull thud that echoed through the stone entrails of the basement. But on the inside back cover, one final note awaited, written in different ink, darker, firmer. An epilogue added with the coldness of an executioner:

"The only thing that endures, branded into the collective memory, are the words the Demon King spat before being struck down, not by a hero, but by the silence that followed:"

"This will happen again. Maybe in ten years. Or twenty. Or a hundred. Or in millennia. For those who send their pawns here... for those who rip souls and sow them into our mud... THIS IS ONLY A GAME."

Silence.

The phrase lodged in my chest like a stalactite of pure ice. Deep. Burning in its coldness. Impossible to dislodge.

A game? For whom? For those thirty, torn away, confused, sacrificed? For the entity, the mechanism, the cosmic cruelty that threw them here, into this world of magic and swords, without a manual, without a way back?

My fingers clenched around the book's cover with white-knuckled force. I needed its tangible weight, its leather-and-dust reality, to anchor the vertigo threatening to consume me.

Thirty souls. A world used as a board. A story erased, reduced to a whisper of warning in a forgotten book. And now...? Was I another piece? Another pawn in a perverse cycle of abduction and sacrifice? Another who would be reduced to a "No one remembers her face," save for the final contempt of a defeated monster?

Chloé whimpered softly in her sleep, a sound of unease vibrating in her chest. She felt the glacial jolt running down my spine, the tremor of the inner storm.

I slid off the chair, the stone floor cold under my bare feet. I knelt beside her, burying my forehead in the warm fur of her neck. I breathed in her scent of earth, of loyalty, of reality.

"No" I whispered, my voice a thread of steel in the darkness, aimed at the book, the past, the destiny written in ink of despair. "I will not be part of a game."

I didn't know the rules. I didn't know the players. I didn't have the board laid out before me.

But if this world, if this hidden machinery, intended to repeat its bloody history, its cycle of use and discard... It would have to write my name into its chronicle in ink of will. And that ink would be as indestructible as the ice in my core.