

Frozen Star 77

Chapter 77: Fire Against the Darkness

[POV Liselotte]

The tense silence that had filled the chamber shattered violently under the pressure of the first demonic roar. The sound filled the cavern completely, reverberating through every stone wall, shaking the very air to its core. The two demons advanced with slow movements, almost theatrical in their deliberation, but charged with a latent and threatening strength that made my skin crawl and every hair on my body stand on end.

The first of them raised its black membranous wings, so wide they scraped the cave's stone ceiling, tearing off pieces of rock and dust as they folded and unfolded with a dry, cracking sound. The second flexed its long, curved claws, gleaming with an unnatural metallic shine as they caught the flickering light of the flame Leah held. The shadows danced around their massive bodies, distorting their silhouettes until they looked even more monstrous and terrifying than they already were.

I already had my sword firmly unsheathed, the familiar cold of the metal in my hands the only thing keeping me anchored to reality in the middle of the horror unfolding before us. Leah, at my side, held her fiery circle with both hands, utterly focused, magic crackling around her fingers like fire contained and ready to erupt in an explosion of purifying power. Chloé, standing ahead in attack stance, her fur bristling and fangs bared and gleaming, let out a low continuous growl that resonated in my mind with a mixture of restrained fury and promise of violence.

The first to move was the demon with the largest wings. With a jump impossible for its size in such a confined space, it launched forward, its body leaning with animal violence to ram into us like a maddened bull. I barely had time to throw myself aside; the force of its movement struck me like a physical blow, slamming me into the rocky wall with an impact that knocked the air from my lungs and left my head spinning. I managed to roll instinctively to avoid the claw strike that split the ground exactly where my head had been a heartbeat earlier, leaving deep marks in the stone.

Leah reacted immediately, hurling the concentrated sphere of fire she had been building between her hands. The fiery orb struck the demon's side and exploded in a blinding flare that lit the entire chamber like an improvised, furious sun. The monster roared in rage and pain, its black-scaled skin resisting part of the attack, but the fire left searing marks that smoked and hissed, filling the air with the stench of burnt flesh and sulfur.

The second demon, slower in its movements but no less lethal in intent, turned its grotesque head toward Leah with a twisted, cruel grin that revealed teeth stained with old blood and rotting scraps of flesh. It advanced on her with heavy steps that made the ground vibrate under our feet, each step a hammer striking the earth's guts, a reminder of the brutal strength it carried.

"Leah, move!" I shouted, rushing forward with my sword raised, though knowing I wouldn't make it in time.

It was Chloé who intercepted. With a prodigious leap that defied gravity, she pounced onto the creature's back, sinking her sharp fangs into the tough, leathery flesh of the demon. The beast roared in pain and outrage, thrashing violently to shake her off, but Chloé clung with impossible strength, tearing flesh and tendons with every shake. Thick, dark blood gushed like a viscous spring, filling the air with a foul metallic stench that churned my stomach and forced me to swallow back bile.

The demon beat its wings in blind fury, raising a storm of dust, bone fragments, and scraps from the bloody ground, trying to throw off the silver wolf hurting it so badly. Chloé was slammed against one of the side walls, her body hitting with a dull, worrying thud that made me shiver with terror, but she miraculously landed on her feet, barely staggering, fury and determination burning in her golden eyes like beacons in the dark.

I lunged at the wounded demon, seizing its distraction. My sword traced a clean, precise arc that struck against its hard scales, and though the blade bounced at first, I found a softer spot at its shoulder joint, driving the steel in until I felt the resistance of bone and cartilage. The monster shrieked, a high, piercing

scream that rang in my head like a nail driven into my skull, and swung a massive claw down at me. I rolled across the ground, guild training guiding my reflexes, barely escaping as the tips of its talons grazed my shoulder and shredded part of my cloak instead of flesh.

The air was suffocating, every movement raising clouds of dust mixed with rot, blood, and fear. My lungs burned with each ragged breath, my heart pounded like a war drum in my ears, drowning out almost every other sound.

The winged demon turned fully toward me, its incandescent gaze locked on me with a blood-freezing intensity. I felt its threat like pressure in my chest, so heavy my body reacted on pure instinct. I raised my sword defensively, though deep down I knew a single well-placed strike from it could split me in two like dry wood.

Leah saved me at the last possible moment.

"Lotte, down!" she shouted, her voice cutting through the chaos of battle.

I obeyed without thought, trusting her with the blind faith only forged in shared combat, and a second later a spear of pure fire whistled over my head, piercing straight through the demon's chest with deadly precision. The beast staggered back, its roar of rage twisting into an agonized, desperate shriek, the stench of burnt flesh and cooked organs flooding the chamber. It staggered like a tree about to fall, but still didn't collapse, its unnatural resilience holding it upright despite the mortal wound.

The second demon, seeing its companion mortally wounded, redoubled its assault with renewed fury. It lunged at Leah with deceptive speed, its claws extended like butcher's blades ready to rend her apart. I sprinted toward her desperately, legs moving on instinct alone, but once again it was Chloé who intercepted, slamming her full body into the demon to divert its course. The impact rang like

subterranean thunder, and both creatures rolled across the ground littered with remains, raising clouds of dust and debris that darkened the already poor visibility.

"Don't get distracted, Lotte!" Leah shouted between gasps, her face shining with sweat and strain.

Her warning came just in time—the wounded demon lunged again at me, its mouth wide, rows of jagged, irregular teeth ready to tear me apart. Fear raced down my spine like ice, but I transformed it into movement and resolve. Instead of retreating, I lunged forward into its blind spot, driving my sword with all my strength straight into its exposed throat.

Steel pierced flesh, cartilage, and veins with a wet, sickening sound, and a jet of hot black blood sprayed my face and chest, sticky and stinking in a way I knew I would never forget. The demon convulsed violently, its claws tearing the air inches from my body in a last attempt to drag me with it, before finally collapsing with a crash that shook the chamber and made the ground quake beneath my feet.

I gasped for air, heart pounding wildly against my ribs as if it wanted to break free, vision blurred by adrenaline and strain. One down.

Leah, drenched in sweat, her hands still wrapped in residual flames, stared at me wide-eyed, pupils blown wide with fear and effort. "Lotte, the other one!"

I spun on my heels, barely steady, just in time to see the second demon struggling back to its feet, with Chloé still stubbornly clinging to its neck, her fangs sunk deep with lupine fury. The beast flailed its damaged wings, furious and desperate, and with a brutal swipe flung the wolf to the ground with such force that the impact raised a cloud of dust and bone fragments.

"Chloé!" I screamed, heart in my throat, but to my relief she staggered back up, shaking her head clear, clearly ready to strike again no matter the cost.

Leah raised both hands with visible strain, fire dancing furiously between her fingers, flames growing in intensity and heat. "Lotte, cover me for a few seconds, I need to focus!"

I nodded, breathless, and dashed at the remaining demon. It raised a massive claw to strike, and I barely managed to block with my sword, the impact rattling through my entire body like a lightning bolt, forcing me back several steps with my teeth clenched against the strain. But I held, keeping my stance, shielding Leah while she prepared whatever she was about to unleash.

Leah cried out with a voice that didn't sound entirely her own, charged with power and determination, as a complex circle of fiery runes blazed beneath her feet. The cave's temperature spiked abruptly, the air turning scorching and hard to breathe, and from her hands burst a colossal flame that lit the entire chamber as if a miniature sun had been born in the earth's depths.

The fire engulfed the demon completely, burning its membranous wings, its scaled skin, its grotesque face. The creature roared in a blend of pain and outrage, thrashing in desperate, pathetic attempts to douse the flames consuming it, but Leah held the spell with a ferocity and focus I had never seen in her, sweating and trembling from the effort but refusing to yield even an inch.

I seized the opening her attack created, the demon wholly distracted by the flames devouring it.

"Chloé, now!" I shouted, and the silver wolf leapt once more, a bolt of living fury and determination, launching straight at the demon's charred, weakened throat. Her sharp fangs pierced flesh and bone softened by fire, ripping an entire chunk free with a brutal, decisive jerk. The demon let out one last roar that came out more as a grotesque, choking gurgle before collapsing heavily, still burning, until it lay motionless and truly defeated.

The silence that followed was as deafening as the battle's roar, filled only by the crackle of burning bodies and our ragged breathing.

I dropped to my knees, sword still gripped tight in my numb hand, panting as though I'd never breathe again, drenched in dark blood, ash, and sweat. Leah fell seated cross-legged, exhausted to the bone, her face streaked with sweat and soot, but her eyes still burning with the residual fire of the magic she had channeled. Chloé limped toward us, head held high despite her gait, her muzzle and chest stained with dark blood, but her eyes shining with fierce, satisfied pride.

We had won. Against all odds, at terrible cost, we had won.

The two demons lay dead in the dark chamber, their massive bodies twisted in grotesque, unnatural positions, surrounded by smoldering ash and viscous pools of blood. But victory tasted neither sweet nor glorious; the stench was unbearable, and the sight of human corpses mingled with demonic remains churned my stomach and muddied any sense of triumph.

I drew a deep breath, trying to steady my racing pulse and calm my still-shaking hands.

"We did it," I murmured, barely able to believe it, my voice hoarse from effort and smoke.

Leah looked at me, her smile tired but genuinely bright. "Yes. We did it together. But if demons like these were here, this close to the village..."

Chloé finished the thought in my mind, her mental voice grave and mournful like a funeral bell. "Then there are more. Many more. This was only the beginning of something much greater and darker."