

## Frozen Star 113

### Chapter 113: The Name Beneath the Snow

[POV Liselotte]

The northern wind blew with growing intensity as we approached the capital. The main road widened between ice-covered hills, and the first outer walls of Whirikai rose against the horizon. A towering structure of white stone and polished steel gleamed beneath the diffused midday light. The border towers stood like enormous spears driven into the frozen earth, and the royal banners flapped stiffly under the gray sky.

We had spent weeks longing for this moment, yet the feeling that took hold of me as I beheld those walls was nothing like what I'd imagined. It wasn't just excitement. It was a deep, quiet fear. Something in my chest tightened violently—a silent warning I couldn't quite understand.

Chloé trotted beside the wagon, snow clinging to her silvery fur.

"There it is," she said mentally, her voice resonating clearly in my mind. "Whirikai. It smells exactly as I remember... iron, magic, and ancient pride."

Leah held the reins firmly, but her posture was unnaturally stiff. She hadn't spoken a word for an hour. Her gaze was lost on the horizon, fixed on the distant towers that stood like eternal sentinels.

The silence broke when we spotted the checkpoint halfway to the outer wall. It was a solid structure of stone and dark wood, with a reinforced gate and six guards wearing the blue cloaks of the royal army. A

banner bearing Whirikal's emblem—a white sun surrounded by icy spirals—hung above the entrance, fluttering solemnly in the freezing wind.

"We'll pass through the control point and enter the lower city," Leah finally declared, forcing her voice to sound calm. "After that, we'll find lodging before presenting ourselves at the royal castle."

I nodded, though I could hear the almost imperceptible tremor in her voice.

When the wagon stopped before the gate, one of the guards raised his hand to signal us to halt. He was a tall man, with a weathered face and a gray beard, holding a spear etched with silver runes. His eyes were cold and methodical.

"Stop, travelers," he ordered in a deep voice. "Show your documents and declare your place of origin."

Leah climbed down slowly, composed. She handed him the documents obtained from the Veltram adventurers' guild. The guard took them, examined them closely, and frowned.

"These seals are invalid for entry into the capital," he said sharply. "The northern guild's records have been temporarily suspended."

Leah blinked, visibly surprised.

“Suspended? We were not informed of such a measure. We have missions registered in the main guild of Wynthal, under code C-47.”

“Whatever you have in Wynthal is irrelevant,” the guard replied curtly. “In Whirikai, all foreign authorizations must be validated directly by the security council. And you possess no such approval.”

Chloé let out a low growl—barely audible—but her mind linked with mine, filled with discomfort.

“I don’t like the way he’s looking at us. He’s searching for something more than an administrative error.”

The guard lifted his eyes toward us, scrutinizing carefully.

“Where exactly do you come from?” he asked.

“From Veltram,” I replied firmly, trying to remain calm.

“And before that?”

I hesitated for a moment.

“From the west... we traveled through several settlements.”

The man narrowed his eyes.

“I didn’t ask your route, miss. I asked your birthplace.”

His words froze the blood in my veins. For a moment, the air itself seemed to thicken. Leah and I exchanged a quick glance. If I told the truth—if I mentioned that I’d been born on the outskirts of Whirikai but vanished years ago when the princess was kidnapped and I fell into the teleportation trap meant for her—the situation could become far more complicated.

“I was born in...” I began, but my voice faltered.

“And you?” the guard interrupted, eyeing Leah with special scrutiny. “Where are you from? What brings you to the kingdom?”

Leah inclined her head slightly, hiding her face beneath her hood.

“We’re independent adventurers. We came to offer our services to the local guild.”

The guard examined the papers again, then studied each of us.

“You don’t look like mere adventurers.” His tone sharpened dangerously. “And your companion...” his gaze moved to Chloé, who showed her fangs with a calm that was too controlled, “since when do talking wolves have free access to the capital?”

Another, younger guard stepped forward, his hand resting on his sword’s hilt.

“Commander, shall we take them to the main post for verification?”

Leah drew a deep breath. I saw her fists clench beneath her cloak. She was trying to maintain her composure, but the trembling of her hands betrayed her.

I felt the overwhelming urge to intervene.

I could say it. I could solve everything with a single phrase. All it would take was revealing her true identity—

The missing princess of Whirikai.

The guards would kneel instantly, the gates would swing open, and we would pass without question.

But... what if they didn’t believe her?

What if they thought she was an impostor?

What if everything ended even worse?

The silence grew so heavy I could hear the crunch of snow beneath our boots. The captain frowned, visibly impatient.

“Speak,” he ordered sternly. “No one crosses Whirikal’s border without fully declaring their identity.”

I looked at Leah. She looked back, and I knew we were thinking the same thing.

We didn’t want to do it. Not here. Not like this.

But then, before I could react, Leah stepped forward.

“My full name,” she declared in a clear, steady voice, “is Leah Alba Whirikal.”

The silence that followed was absolute.

The guards froze. The gray-bearded man's eyes widened in disbelief. The young soldier's hand visibly trembled on his sword.

Leah slowly pulled back her hood. The pale sunlight illuminated her face, revealing unmistakable features—the serene, noble gaze, the golden hair braided with blue ribbons, the silver insignia of her royal amulet gleaming against her chest.

"I am the rightful heir to House Whirikai," she continued solemnly. "I disappeared years ago during a journey, ambushed when a demon slaughtered my entire escort. And today, I return to my kingdom."

The younger guard dropped to his knees at once, his armor clattering against the frozen ground.

"By the heavens... Your Highness!"

The others followed one by one, bowing their heads in reverent respect. Only the commander remained standing for a few more seconds, still in disbelief.

"That's impossible," he muttered. "You were declared dead years ago..."

Leah met his eyes directly.

“And yet, here I stand.”

The man finally lowered his gaze and knelt stiffly, bowing his head until it touched the snow.

“Forgive us, Your Highness. We were completely unaware of your return.”

“There is nothing to forgive,” she replied calmly. Then she raised her voice with authority. “Allow my entourage to pass. No word of this is to be spoken until I address the Royal Council myself.”

The commander nodded, signaling quickly. The checkpoint gate opened with a metallic groan, and the spears withdrew from our path.

I watched in silence. Leah had transformed in a matter of seconds. The morning’s uncertainty had vanished entirely. In its place stood a firmness only a true leader could possess.

Chloé approached me and murmured mentally,

“And there she is... the princess who slept beneath the skin of a wandering sorceress.”

I didn’t know what to say. I could only watch as Leah moved to the front of the wagon, head held high, the wind tossing her royal blue cloak.



The name Whirikai now hung in the cold air with a new and final weight.

We had crossed the border.

The journey had reached its end.

And the fate of the three of us had just changed forever.