

Frozen Star 116

Chapter 116: The Voice of Silence

[POV ???]

I have served House Whirikai for as long as I can remember. My mother held this very same position before me, and her mother before her. We were born within these marble walls, breathing the air always perfumed with blue incense, learning to walk upon floors that eternally reflect the light of dawn.

But in all my years of service within this castle, I had never experienced a silence as oppressive as the one that fell over the kingdom the day Princess Leah disappeared.

I remember that dawn with a clarity that still hurts.

The bells of the east wing remained mute. The air, normally filled with the bustle of the royal guard changing shifts, had turned profoundly still. We ran through the corridors with our skirts gathered, carrying urgent orders, coded messages, and silent prayers.

Rumors said it had been an attack in the border forest — a superior-class demon with such an abominable form that even the surviving knights could not describe it without their voices trembling.

For three entire days, the king dispatched entire battalions toward the mountains of Lysandria, to the south of the Kingdom of Brivane, even to the coldest reaches of the north. The mages of the Royal Council tried to trace the princess's mana flow, but her essence had vanished without leaving the slightest trace.

It was as if the winter wind itself had carried her away.

The queen wept in utter silence for endless weeks.

She never showed her sorrow before the palace staff, but the castle walls are ancient and porous, and the deepest sighs can pierce even the thickest stone. I would listen, from the gallery where we meticulously polished the crystal lamps, to her fragmented prayers:

“May the heavens protect her... may she find her way home... may the cold not consume her heart.”

The king, for his part, changed in a different way.

At first, it was pure contained fury — abrupt orders, endless meetings, impossible demands. No soldier slept more than four consecutive hours. No messenger could fail their delivery. It was said in the corridors that even the carrier hawks collapsed exhausted upon the stone walls.

But as months passed, something within him began to fade.

He began to speak less.

To eat in complete solitude.

To gaze for hours at the windows overlooking the frozen horizon, where sunlight fractured into a thousand shards upon the eternal snow.

At that time, I was the head attendant of his private office.

I vividly remember the day I saw, for the first time, his hands tremble as he held a crucial military report.

He did not shed tears. He never did. But the ink spilled over the official parchment, and he simply let it fall to the floor — as if nothing held meaning anymore.

The years passed inexorably, and the outside world showed no mercy to Whirikai.

The demons began to press from the eastern borders — small incursions at first, but soon entire hordes came.

The northern villages were razed by demonic purple fire, and the kingdom's walls held only at the cost of thousands of precious lives.

It was then that the full Royal Council persuaded the king:

“Your Majesty, we can no longer spend resources searching for a person lost years ago. The kingdom needs every sword, every spell, every coin available.”

I was present when he heard those fateful words.

And I will never forget his expression at that moment.

He did not raise his voice. He did not argue.

He simply nodded with a somber gesture and rose from the ancestral throne with a weariness that seemed to belong not to a single man, but to an entire dynasty.

That very night, the queen waited for him in the private gardens of the north wing — the only place where crystal lilies still bloom during the harshest winter.

I followed them discreetly, carrying a blue mana lantern that cast dancing shadows.

There, at the very heart of the garden, stood Leah’s memorial altar — a small white stone shrine built in her honor the same year of her birth.

Upon its surface rested her childhood portrait, an ancestral family jewel, and a frozen mana flower that, mysteriously, never withered.

The queen knelt before the altar and placed both hands on the cold marble.

“Leah, my little star,” she whispered in a broken voice, “wherever you are, may the snow embrace you as my arms would.”

The king stood beside her, motionless as a statue.

His eyes, usually hard as tempered steel, softened with something that could barely be called hope.

“If the ancient gods still hold any mercy,” he said in a tone so low it was nearly carried away by the wind, “they will return her to us.”

And from that crucial moment onward, every year, on the exact date of her disappearance, both of them would go to that altar.

They held no lavish ceremonies, no royal escorts.

Only the two of them, united in their grief.

They would light three ceremonial candles — one for their lost daughter, one for their suffering kingdom, and one for the forgiveness they never dared to speak aloud.

I always watched them from a respectful distance, my heart heavy.

The king grew noticeably colder as the years passed — more distant, more calculating in every movement.

His decisions in the Council became ruthless. Some courtiers whispered that he had finally renounced his humanity, that the unending war had hardened him into stone.

But I knew the hidden truth.

He had not turned to stone — he had simply emptied himself slowly from within.

Until this transcendent day.

Just a few hours ago, the rumor spread through the castle halls like lightning in a storm.

“Princess Leah has returned to the kingdom.”

At first, I thought it was another cruelty from the idle nobility, a malicious rumor meant to disturb the queen's fragile balance. But when I heard the bells of the east wing toll after ten long years of silence, I knew with absolute certainty it was true.

The entire castle plunged into a frenzy of activity — royal banners were dusted off, ceremonial halls reopened, torches lit that had remained extinguished since the day of her disappearance.

I was in the main corridor when I saw her return.

She advanced among the royal guard like a figure born directly from ancient legend — her golden hair meticulously braided, her royal blue cloak billowing with every confident step, the same intense gaze that once illuminated the winter gardens when she was but a child.

At her side walked two unusual companions — a young woman with a noble bearing reminiscent of the heroines of old, and a silver wolf who looked at me with an intelligence that seemed capable of reading souls. Yet neither of them could outshine the life force now emanating from the princess reborn.

For an instant that felt eternal, my eyes filled with tears held back for a decade.

I could not help but remember every candle I personally lit at her altar, every prayer I whispered in secret, every endless winter night when the wind battered the palace windows as if Leah's own spirit were trying to find her way home.

Now she was here.

Alive.

Palpably real.

And as they ceremoniously escorted her toward the ancestral throne room, I understood that the silent prayers of so many years, the restrained sighs of loyal servants, the queen's hidden weeping, and the king's icy silence had finally been heard by fate.

I instinctively looked once more through the corridor window, toward the snow-covered garden where the memorial shrine rested.

An unusually warm gust of wind swept through the glass, and for the first time in an entire decade, the shrine's candles ignited on their own.

Princess Leah had finally returned to Whirikai.

And the ice that had covered the kingdom for so long was at last beginning to melt.