

## Frozen Star 63

### Chapter 63: News from Whirikai

[POV Liselotte]

Several weeks had passed since that afternoon at the lookout, when Leah had shared with me the echoes of her lost world. Training continued with its relentless pace, each day carving new furrows of fatigue and determination into our souls. The autumn air grew sharper with every morning, carrying the scent of withered leaves and damp earth.

That particular morning, the sun struggled against a leaden sky heavy with the threat of rain. We were in the central courtyard, immersed in the elemental control exercises that challenged us both so harshly. Leah concentrated a small flame on her palm, her face twisted in a grimace of effort as she tried to dominate the currents of fire that always seemed eager to escape her control.

“A little more,” I encouraged, watching the sparks dance over her trembling fingers. “Don’t fight the fire—let it flow.”

She nodded with clenched teeth, drops of sweat sliding down her temples. Elemental magic wasn’t her strength, but she refused to give up with a stubbornness that filled me with admiration.

It was then that the courtyard door opened with a familiar creak.

Kaelen appeared at the threshold, his silhouette outlined against the grayish light of the hallway. But something in his posture was different. He did not carry his usual training staff, and in his right hand he held a rolled parchment, sealed with wax of a dark color I did not recognize.

The atmosphere shifted instantly. The air thickened, charged with uncomfortable anticipation. Even the wind seemed to hold its breath.

Our exercises stopped. The flames in Leah's hand died with a soft hiss, as if sensing the gravity of the moment.

Kaelen approached the stone table that stood at the center of the courtyard. His steps echoed ominously over the cobblestones. He placed the parchment on the cold surface, and the crack of the seal breaking sounded like a gunshot in the silence.

"News has arrived from Whirikai." His voice was graver than usual, stripped of its sharp, didactic tone. Each word seemed measured carefully before being spoken.

Leah froze. I saw her hands clench into fists at her sides, her knuckles whitening beneath her skin. Her eyes, pale as winter ice, locked on Kaelen with an intensity painful to witness.

The master unrolled the parchment with deliberately slow movements, as if trying to buy time. His eyes skimmed the lines quickly before lifting his gaze to us.

"A year ago, a border city of Whirikai was attacked by demonic forces."

The silence that followed was so absolute I could hear the pounding of my own heartbeat in my ears. I noticed Leah's body stiffen even further, becoming a statue of nerves and anticipation.

“They managed to repel the assault with minimal losses. But as a result...” Kaelen frowned, and for the first time since I had known him, I saw something akin to unease flicker across his features. “The Council of Whirikai decided to suspend all active searches for missing persons—including you, Princess—Until further notice, we tried to communicate but they rejected our attempts”

The words hung in the air like dead leaves, swirling slowly before sinking into Leah’s raw flesh. There was no explosion of emotion, no cry of anguish or rage. Only an icy silence that spread through the courtyard, so dense it was hard to breathe.

Leah did not blink. She remained still, petrified, as if the words had turned her to salt. Her eyes glazed over, lost somewhere between Kaelen and the parchment lying on the table.

I saw her fingers begin to tremble, how she hid them beneath the folds of her tunic, clutching the fabric as if it were the only thing keeping her anchored to reality.

“So...” Her voice emerged as a torn whisper, so fragile it was nearly carried off by the breeze. “All this time... they simply stopped looking for me.”

Kaelen did not answer. He didn’t need to. The silence was a confirmation crueler than any words.

Leah stepped back, then again, as if trying to physically distance herself from the words she had just heard. She lowered her gaze to the ground, her shadow seeming to lengthen, as though her whole body were caving under the weight of an invisible burden.

I moved toward her, driven by an impulse I could not contain. Each step echoed in the sepulchral silence of the courtyard.

“Leah...”

She lifted her eyes to me, and what I saw in them broke my heart. Something inside her was fractured, something barely held together yet threatening to spill out. It was the look of someone who had just lost everything they loved—for the second time.

“What’s the point of all this, Lotte?” Her words were barely a thread of sound, thick with despair that made my skin prickle. “I’m nothing but a name on a forgotten scroll. They don’t even... they don’t even look for me anymore.”

Her breathing turned uneven, ragged. The mask of serenity she always tried to wear was crumbling before my eyes, revealing the abyss yawning beneath her feet.

I took her hands in mine. They were ice-cold, as if the blood had fled her veins all at once, leaving only the chill of despair.

“Leah, look at me.” I waited for her eyes to focus on mine, still trembling, swimming with tears that refused to fall. “That they stopped searching doesn’t mean you’ve ceased to exist. It means their fear made them forget what truly matters. But we haven’t forgotten. I haven’t forgotten.”

She shook her head, fast, almost convulsive.

“You don’t understand. To them... to my family... all that remains of me is an incomplete memory. Perhaps they already wrote me off as dead. Perhaps my place in Whirikai is already filled. And I... I’m here, alive, but... invisible.”

Her voice cracked completely on the last word, and her body began trembling uncontrollably.

Without a second thought, I pulled her into a firm embrace, not giving her space to flee her own pain. For several seconds she resisted, rigid, as if she didn’t know how to accept such contact, how to receive comfort after so long surviving without it.

But finally, little by little, the tension in her shoulders began to ease. Her forehead rested against my collarbone, and a long, shuddering sigh escaped her lips. I felt her warmth through the fabric of my tunic, the fragility of a body that always seemed so strong.

“You’re alive, Leah.” My voice was low, almost a murmur against her hair. “And as long as you’re alive, nothing you are can disappear. It doesn’t matter if Whirikai forgets for a time—it doesn’t matter if the world is slow to remember. You’re still here. And I’ll remind you as many times as it takes.”

She didn’t respond with words, but her hands clung to my back, searching for an anchor amid the storm that must have been raging inside her. Her breathing slowly began to steady, syncing with mine, as if my closeness reminded her how to keep moving forward.

Chloé then stepped closer, laying a gentle hand on Leah’s shoulder. Through our bond, she projected a calm thought into my mind: “Demons take more than lands—they take hope. But as long as you hold it for her, they cannot take it all.”

I tightened my arms around Leah a little more, as if I could shield her against everything the world wanted to strip away, against the cruelty of a fate determined to tell her she no longer mattered.

The parchment still lay on the table, inert, its fresh ink carrying its cruel message. But at that moment, the only thing that mattered was Leah's fragile warmth against me, the faint tremor that still coursed through her body, and the absolute certainty that I would not let her fall into the abyss of oblivion she so feared.

We remained like that for what felt like an eternity, as the first drops of rain began to fall, mixing with the silence that lingered after the storm of words. The droplets pattered softly against the cobblestones, washing away the heaviness in the air, carrying off part of the pain floating between us.

Kaelen had slipped away discreetly, leaving us alone with the weight of the news and the comfort we gave one another.

Finally, Leah pulled back enough to look into my eyes. Her lashes were damp, but she still hadn't allowed tears to fall.

"And if they never look for me again?" she whispered, and in her voice there was a new note—less desperate, more contemplative.

"Then we'll find them ourselves." The answer spilled from my lips with a certainty I felt in my very bones. "When you're ready, when we've gained enough strength, we'll go to Whirikal ourselves. To remind them who you are."

A spark of something that might have been hope flickered in her eyes. It was faint, hesitant, but it was there.

She nodded slowly, and for the first time since Kaelen had uttered those devastating words, I saw her shoulders straighten, her gaze regaining a fragment of its usual determination.

The rain was falling harder now, soaking our tunics, plastering strands of hair against our cheeks. But none of us moved. It was as if the water could wash away not only the courtyard dust, but also the bitterness of the news, leaving space for something new—the determination to write a different future than the one that parchment had tried to impose on her.

“Let’s go inside,” I suggested at last, taking her hand. “We have much to talk about. And much to plan.”

She nodded, and though the shadow of pain still lingered in her eyes, there was a new gleam in them—a spark of defiance that hadn’t been there before.

The parchment still lay on the table, being soaked by the rain, its ink beginning to smear under the water’s force. It was a poetic image, as if nature itself joined in our rejection of that message of abandonment.

As we walked back inside, leaving behind the empty courtyard and the determined rainfall, I knew something had changed between us forever. The news had not shattered Leah—not completely. Instead, it had forged between us a new bond, a shared determination to defy the oblivion others sought to condemn her to.

And in the deepest part of my being, I knew I would do everything possible to help her reclaim not only her place, but also her right to be remembered.