

Wilderqueen

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The boy carried the baby princess through the moonlit woods, cautious not to be seen. If anyone saw him, he would be killed, or worse. He was on orders from Jajari herself, but even that wouldn't save him if the villagers knew his plans. He found the Rokali nest that he sought and placed the baby girl inside. If his plan went well, the Rokali would kill her, keeping the Princess Jajari on her throne... But they didn't, for the young princess was the Wilderqueen.

Leyrea stood on the smooth rocky peak, looking over her domain. Her bare feet, tough from running in the woods, kicked at the scrubby grass impatiently. The bushes behind her rustled, and a Rokali stepped out of the brush. Rokali were small winged people with deadly fangs and a brave heart. Their names were spoken in fear and awe throughout the land. Leyrea, instead of running from the threatening sight, smiled in welcome. The Rokali was a female called Yikee, who had raised Leyrea as her own and taught her the ways of the woods. Leyrea stepped off the rock and headed home. As the sun set, Leyrea heard something that no one else ever could. She heard the music of the stars. Leyrea had always been able to speak with nature and the elements. She was never truly alone when she had the wind, the sun, and the stars as friends. Her dark hair blew back as she leaped over streams and bushes. Her eyes glowed a mysterious, silvery blue, like the hue of the spring at the creek's end. She danced through the darkening woods like a bird in the sky, pure and free and innocent, with no cares.

Leyrea entered her nest by way of a vine ladder. Her Rokali family would fly, but Leyrea was human, with no wings. Inside the nest, a surprise waited - a young girl of about seven years old. She backed away as Leyrea approached, and her eyes glinted stormy gray. She hid in the corner, and her eyes anxiously searched the nest.

“Don’t hurt me. I came up to hide. I am Kayel.” The girl whispered fearfully and closed her eyes.

“I won’t harm you. I am Leyrea of the woods, and you are welcome in my home.”

Leyrea brought Kayel something to eat and drink. After she ate, Kayel opened up and told her story. She was a slave of the Queen Jajari. When Jajari killed Kayel’s parents, she ran away to the woodlands, fearing she would die next. Kayel had seen the ladder to Leyrea’s nest and used it as an escape route to evade the soldiers.

Leyrea took in Kayel, treating her as the sister she never had. One night, Leyrea left her nest to go to her watching rock. As she wandered through the forest near the rock, she sang to the stars. On her way back, she heard crashing near her nest. She snuck close, staying well hidden. What she saw was horrifying! Two soldiers had tied Kayel to a pole, and they were busy shooting the Rokali in their nests, mercilessly putting arrow after arrow in the warrior people’s bodies. Leyrea ran from her hiding place and jumped the first soldier from behind. There were more though, and Leyrea was quickly seized and tied to a second pole near Kayel. The two were carried out through the woods. Listening to the soldiers’ conversation, they realized that they were to be sold to Jajari, as she had promised them a reward for Kayel. Once out of the woods, the soldiers set up camp. As the sun went down, so did the soldiers, snoring like foghorns. Kayel looked at Leyrea and began to whisper.

“I need to tell you the story of the Wilderqueen. Jajari is not our rightful queen. Her sister the Wilderqueen was our true ruler. The Wilderqueen was born with the special star-shaped birthmark and unique powers which made her the Crown Princess. One day, the baby Wilderqueen disappeared. Everyone suspected Jajari had done it, as she had always wanted to rule and deeply resented the birth of the Wilderqueen, but nothing was ever proven. It is rumored that the Wilderqueen lived and was raised by Rokali and will one day return for revenge. You live with the Rokali. I am afraid that Jajari may think you are the Wilderqueen and have you killed.”

Leyrea was scared now, although she hid it. She felt as if she had been wrongly accused, but worse, she was afraid Jajari was right. She touched the small, star-shaped mark on her neck. Time passed. Kayel fell asleep. Leyrea heard a rustling in the brush. Two familiar gold eyes met Leyrea's silvery blue ones. Out stepped Yikee of the Rokali. Yikee silently untied Leyrea's bindings and handed her a golden sword. As Yikee disappeared back into the woods, Leyrea cut Kayel free. Putting a finger to her lips, she gently shook Kayel awake. They ran off in the early light of the dawning sun, and as the great star rose in the sky, it bathed the two in golden light. After they had been running a while, Leyrea stopped to rest.

"Kayel, what powers did the Wilderqueen have, exactly?"

"The Wilderqueen could ask the stars to sing, make the earth move, and send flame and water wherever she wished. She commands nature."

"Kayel, look." Leyrea knelt and showed Kayel her star mark. Kayel gasped. "This is why I need to face Jajari. It's my destiny."

"To the Castle," Kayel cried.

Near noon, they reached the plains near the castle. Leyrea stood tall as she called her challenge to the world.

"Jajari hunted my friend, aiming to kill. Her soldiers tried to hurt me. I am the Wilderqueen, true heir to the throne. I don't wish to make war, but justice must be served. I challenge Jajari to fight me for the throne. Prove yourself and face me."

Jajari's army streamed out of the palace. The Princess led them, holding a long saber and wearing her crown. Seeing her disadvantage, Leyrea sounded a call as wild and free as the beings that made it, truly powerful. In response came hordes of Rokali, their numbers blocking the sun in their enormity. They surrounded Leyrea and Jajari, ensuring a fair fight. Jajari thrust her saber at Leyrea, who effortlessly blocked it. Leyrea's golden sword and Jajari's steel one glinted and shimmered as they locked and parried in a dancing battle. Finally Jajari used her size to knock Leyrea to the ground. As Jajari thrust at her, Leyrea looked to Kayel.

“You are Wilderqueen.” Kayel’s desperate call gave Leyrea an idea. Summoning all her strength, Leyrea cried, “Fire, Water, Wind, Earth, and Stars, lend me your strength!” Infused with celestial power, Leyrea rose and thrust out both hands. The sheer wall of force emanating from Leyrea knocked a terrified Jajari on her back. Leyrea flicked her sword to Jajari’s neck.

“It’s over, Jajari. I am once again the Queen.” Leyrea took the crown from Jajari’s head and smiled as applause broke out all around. And in the heavens above the sun, a new star was made.