

Ghost 108

Chapter 108: the escape of sick empress

The palace had turned into a hive of whispers.

Servants spoke behind their sleeves, eyes wide with fear. Every time a door creaked open, someone flinched.

"The Empress is ill," they murmured.

"Plague... they say it's the gods' punishment."

"Will she survive?"

From the highest maid hall to the lowest kitchen corridor, rumor spread faster than wind. No one dared go near her courtyard. Even the guards stationed outside stood several paces away, afraid to breathe too close to the forbidden door.

Inside the sealed chamber, the air was still — so still that even the flicker of the lamp seemed too loud.

The Empress lay on the bed, wrapped in sheets, her face pale and spotted with false rashes. Sweat glistened on her forehead, her breathing faint and uneven.

Her maid, Xiaoyu, had stayed beside her until the Emperor's orders were fulfilled — boiling linens, burning incense, sealing the courtyard. But now that it was quiet, she finally stepped out to fetch fresh water.

The moment the door closed, the silence broke.

A faint shimmer rippled through the air, and three shapes appeared like mist.

Fen Yu's voice came first, soft and amused. "They're gone, Your Majesty. You can stop dying now."

The Empress opened one eye, then another, and sighed in relief. "Finally."

Wei Rong chuckled, his tall shadow drifting closer. "Your performance was flawless. I almost believed you were dying myself."

Li Shen floated near the writing table, his scholar's face full of calm pride. "If acting were warfare, Your Majesty would have conquered three kingdoms by now."

Lian An sat up slowly, brushing her damp hair from her face. "Enough of your flattery. I need to send a letter."

Her voice was calm, but her fingers trembled. The lingering effect of the false poison still made her muscles weak and unsteady.

"Paper and brush," she said quietly.

Fen Yu spun once and disappeared into the air — reappearing a heartbeat later with a roll of paper and a brush in her hands. "Here!"

The Empress smiled faintly. "Thank you."

She dipped the brush into ink, but as she tried to write, the strokes wavered and broke. Her hand shook too much to draw a proper line. The characters blurred, half-written.

Li Shen watched her for a moment, then stepped forward, his translucent form bending beside her. "Allow me."

She hesitated. "You'll write for me?"

"I am a scholar even in death," he said simply, taking the brush. "Tell me what you wish to say."

The Empress leaned back slightly, tired but still sharp-eyed. "Write to my parents — the Duke and Duchess. Tell them I'm well. That I only pretended illness to rest for a few days, because the neighboring kingdom's visit left me exhausted. Tell them no one would let me rest otherwise, so I had to make an excuse."

Li Shen's hand moved gracefully across the page, ink forming perfect, elegant characters.

"Add," she said softly, "that I'll visit them in a few days — ten to twelve at most. And that no one in the palace must know of this letter."

"Understood," the ghost replied.

When the final character was written, he blew gently across the ink and handed it to her.

The Empress folded it neatly, sealing it with her own small emblem — a phoenix pressed in wax.

"Good," she said quietly. "Now, I'll need to leave before sunrise"

She rose from bed, still dizzy, and moved behind the screen to change. The ghosts turned politely away — except Fen Yu, who peeked and was instantly dragged back by her hair by Wei Rong.

"Do you mind?" the general snapped.

"I wasn't looking!" she protested, giggling. "Just checking if she needs help with buttons."

"Help yourself to discipline," Wei Rong muttered, turning her around.

When the Empress emerged, dressed again in her gray guard uniform, hair tied high in a bun beneath the cap, her face looked serene and determined.

She reached for the letter just as the door creaked open.

Xiaoyu stepped inside carrying a small basin of warm water. Her eyes widened slightly when she saw her mistress standing, fully dressed. "Your Majesty! You—"

The Empress raised a finger to her lips. "Quiet."

Then she handed her the sealed letter. "Send this to my parents' estate. Make sure no one reads it or follows the courier. It's important."

The maid nodded, lowering her gaze. "Yes, Your Majesty."

"I'll be gone for ten to twelve days," the Empress continued, voice low. "Keep up the act. Cry if you have to. Let no one enter this courtyard, no matter what happens."

Xiaoyu's eyes filled with worry. "You're leaving now?"

"I must. But I'll return before they start asking too many questions."

The maid set down the basin, kneeling before her. "Then please be careful, Your Majesty. Come back safely. I'll protect this secret."

The Empress smiled gently, touching the girl's shoulder. "I trust you."

By then, the false poison's effect had faded entirely. Her skin was clear again, her pulse strong. She felt light — almost alive in a way the palace never allowed her to be.

Without another word, she walked toward the window, pushed it open, and climbed onto the sill.

The cool morning air rushed in, carrying the faint scent of jasmine and incense.

"Time to go," she whispered.

Fen Yu, Li Shen, and Wei Rong appeared beside her, their shapes half-transparent in the pale dawn.

She jumped — landing soundlessly in the courtyard below.

Together, they moved through the shadowed corridors, avoiding the guards who stood like statues at every turn.

As they neared the outer gate, they could hear muffled voices echoing from beyond the walls.

"Did you hear? The Empress is dying!"

"They say she's burning with fever—"

"Don't go near her courtyard! The plague spreads fast!"

The Empress smirked beneath her cap. Good. Let them believe it.

But when they turned the final corner, they froze.

A group of palace guards stood right at the gate, torches burning bright, checking everyone who passed through.

She ducked behind a pillar. "They're inspecting."

Wei Rong looked over, calculating. "We'll distract them."

Li Shen raised an eyebrow. "How?"

The general's gaze darkened. "The simple way."

Before she could stop them, the sound of wood crashing echoed through the courtyard.

A chair had flown out of nowhere and shattered against the cobblestones near the gate.

"What was that?!" a guard shouted.

"Over there! Check it!"

Half the group rushed toward the sound, weapons drawn.

Then another noise — a second crash — followed by what sounded suspiciously like laughter.

"The ghosts are having fun," the Empress muttered under her breath.

One guard tripped over a loose broom; another slipped on water that had mysteriously spilled from nowhere. In moments, the entire squad was in disarray, chasing shadows and bumping into each other.

"They fight like toddlers," Fen Yu whispered gleefully, hovering beside her. "Look at them fall!"

"Enough," Wei Rong growled, smacking her lightly on the head.

"Why?" she whined. "We're helping!"

Li Shen floated between them with his usual calm. "Let's not alert the whole palace, shall we?"

The Empress used their chaos to her advantage. Moving swiftly along the edge of the courtyard wall, she slipped through the gate just as the last guard stumbled and cursed under his breath.

Once outside, she turned back — only to find Wei Rong holding Fen Yu by the hair.

"Let me go!" the female ghost shrieked. "You brute! I was only spreading love!"

"Love?" he repeated, unimpressed. "You were latching onto that poor guard like a leech. He looked terrified!"

"That's called affection," she protested indignantly, crossing her arms. "You wouldn't understand — you've never been in love."

Li Shen sighed. "Please, not again."

The Empress, trying not to laugh, looked between them. "What happened now?"

Wei Rong pointed at Fen Yu, glaring. "She was kissing a guard on the cheek. While invisible."

Lian An couldn't hold it anymore. She covered her mouth, laughter spilling quietly into the night.

Fen Yu huffed, lifting her chin. "At least I still know what warmth feels like. You wouldn't know, General — you're as cold as your sword."

Wei Rong's eyes narrowed. "If I still had my sword, you'd be running."

"Try me," she teased, floating backward with a grin.

The Empress finally waved a hand, amused. "Enough, both of you. Let's go before the sun rises."

They fell silent — mostly — and followed her down the quiet path beyond the palace wall.

Behind them, the guards continued to argue about "flying chairs" and "ghostly laughter," while one rubbed his cheek, muttering, "I swear someone kissed me."

The dawn wind carried their voices away as the Empress disappeared into the misty morning, her gray uniform blending with the shadows.

Once again, she had outwitted the palace — and this time, she wasn't going to waste her freedom.