

Ghost 121

Chapter 121: forgiveness

Morning sunlight streamed across the golden tiles of the court hall, yet the Emperor's expression was darker than usual. Rows of ministers knelt with urgent scrolls clutched to their chests.

"Your Majesty, the barbarians have destroyed three more shops."

"They extorted grain from the eastern village!"

"They broke the bridge—farmers cannot reach the market!"

Voices overlapped like waves crashing.

But the Emperor, sitting on the Dragon Throne, was hearing none of them clearly.

His mind was stuck somewhere else.

Yesterday.

In the city.

In front of Whisper Bowl.

Her.

His wife — in commoner clothes... laughing, talking, glowing, alive.

Not sick.

Not bedridden.

Not suffering from plague.

Not missing him at all.

And worst —

Talking happily with another man.

A tight, dangerous smile touched the Emperor's lips.

The ministers misread it and flinched.

He finally raised his head.

"Enough."

His voice was calm, but cold.

"I will handle the barbaric problem myself."

The court froze.

He continued,

"Before next month's Lantern Festival, this threat will be removed. The people will celebrate in peace."

A wave of gratitude spread across the hall.

"Long live Your Majesty!"

"The Emperor personally taking charge—Heaven bless the kingdom!"

The Emperor dismissed them, but inside, a different storm brewed.

This time... I will finish my duty.

And then—

I will go to her.

Private Orders

The moment court ended, he signaled General Xu to meet him in the private strategy chamber.

The general entered, bowed deeply.

"Your Majesty?"

"Prepare one hundred elite soldiers," the Emperor said. "No armor. No banners. Commoner clothes only."

The general blinked.

"For undercover movement?"

"Yes."

"And Your Majesty's role?"

"I will investigate personally, separate from your unit."

The general hesitated.

"It is dangerous for you to walk alone—"

"I said," the Emperor repeated, voice sharp, "I go alone."

The general obeyed instantly.

Disguise and Departure

The Emperor changed in his private chamber.

Gone were the golden robes.

In their place: a coarse gray shirt,

simple dark trousers,

dust-worn boots,

a brown cloak with a hood.

To his trusted eunuch he ordered,

"If someone asks where I am, tell them:

The Emperor is praying with monks for the Empress's recovery."

The eunuch bowed.

The Emperor stepped out of the palace — unseen, unnoticed — like a shadow slipping through cracks.

At the City Gate

The general's disguised soldiers gathered quietly beyond the walls.

When the Emperor joined them, he spoke softly:

"You spread out. Ask the villagers about the barbarians. Learn their routes, their habits, their threats."

General Xu bowed.

"And Your Majesty?"

"I go ahead. Alone."

The general bowed again.

"We will meet at Whisper Bowl for lunch."

The Emperor nodded.

Before leaving, he handed them a heavy pouch.

"Use this silver for information. If people need compensation, give it. I want answers."

The soldiers bowed deeply — never had an Emperor given them covert funds directly.

The Flower Stall

As he walked toward the busiest streets of the capital, the disguise made him invisible among the crowd.

But his heart was not calm.

She laughed yesterday.

Laughing... but not for me.

His steps slowed.

A flower stall caught his eye.

Fresh roses — red like fire.

"Good sir!" the vendor beamed. "Flowers for your beloved?"

The Emperor stared at the roses.

He remembered:

He had never given Lian An flowers.

Never bought her a simple gift.

Never stepped into her world.

Yet she had bloomed beautifully outside the palace.

He felt something heavy twist inside.

"Fifty roses," he said quietly.

The vendor gasped.

"So many! You must love her deeply!"

The Emperor only smiled faintly and walked away.

Love... is that what this ache is?

Approaching Whisper Bowl

The closer he came, the louder the noise.

Construction workers hammered beams into place.

Carpenters carried planks.

Slaves-turned-trainees practiced writing on boards.

The scholar lectured them loudly.

The twins patrolled, shouting like tiny generals.

His wife's friend, Yao Qing, gave orders while holding a ledger book.

It looked like organized chaos.

But it was thriving.

He stepped forward, unnoticed.

Until he saw her.

Lian An.

Plain clothes.

Hair tied in a loose ponytail.

Hands stained with flour.

Teaching workers how to knead dough.

She looked... free.

Happier here than in the palace.

An unbearable emotion rose in his chest.

Without thinking —

He walked into the middle of the construction site...

...took a deep breath...

...and shouted:

"LIAN AN!"

Everything froze.

A hammer dropped.

Someone spilled soup.

The scholar stopped mid-sentence.

The Empress turned like she had been struck by lightning.

Her friend whispered, "Oh no. Go. Before he shouts again."

But the Emperor was already walking toward her with determined steps.

The Emperor Makes a Scene

He stopped right in front of her.

In front of workers.

Students.

Carpenters.

Slaves.

Her friends.

The merchant.

Everyone.

And then —

to the shock of the kingdom —

he bowed.

Deeply.

"Husband—what are you—!!" she hissed under her breath.

But he ignored it.

"I am sorry," he said loudly. "I was wrong."

Everyone gasped.

Some women covered their mouths in excitement.

A man whispered,

"He apologized in public... Heaven, this is love."

The Emperor held out the roses.

"Don't be angry anymore."

Workers swooned.

"This man is perfect!"

"Where can we find a husband like this?"

The Empress felt her soul leave her body.

He is ruining my life.

Then, loudly — acting like a furious wife — she snapped:

"How can I not be angry?! You spend more time with your childhood sweetheart than me!"

Gasps spread again.

The Emperor closed his eyes.

She will kill me with shame.

She continued loudly:

"You ignore your wife but chase after other women! Shouldn't you be ashamed?"

Yu Mian almost swallowed his tongue.

Workers glared at the Emperor.

A carpenter whispered, "So this man is a flirt?"

Another said, "Shameful! His wife is beautiful!"

The Emperor wanted to dig a hole and vanish.

Then she delivered the killing line:

"You want forgiveness? Do one hundred squats right now!"

Everyone nodded sternly.

"Yes! Apologize properly!"

"Show sincerity!"

"A husband must earn his wife's forgiveness!"

Before anyone could process what was happening, the Empress pointed at him and said loudly enough for every worker, trainee, servant, and even the carpenters on ladders to hear:

"If you're truly sorry, do 100 squats!"

The entire courtyard went silent.

Yu Mian choked on his tea.

The scholar dropped his brush.

The twins stared with their mouths open.

The new man froze holding two crates of vegetables.

And the Emperor?

He simply nodded.

Then—

He lowered himself into the first squat.

One.

Two.

Three.

The workers stared like they were witnessing a divine miracle.

"Is that... His Majesty?"

"Doing squats?"

"For his wife?"

"Heaven... such devotion!"

The Emperor's movements were steady and strong — like a trained warrior.

His muscles flexed under the commoner clothes, sweat forming on his forehead.

He didn't complain.

Didn't stop.

Didn't lose balance.

Ten.

Twenty.

Thirty.

People began gathering around like it was the greatest show in the capital.

A group of aunties whispered emotionally:

"Look at him! He must love her so much!"

"Aiyoo, where do we find husbands like this?"

"Doing squats to apologize — this is rare even in storybooks!"

The children who were training stared in admiration.

"He's so strong!"

"And he's doing it for his wife!"

"When I grow up, I want to apologize like that too!"

Even the workers doing renovation stopped hammering.

By fifty squats, the whole Whisper Bowl compound was filled with murmurs.

"He doesn't even look tired!"

"This is true love!"

"He's so guilty he's punishing himself!"

Lian An stood stiffly, wanting to vanish into the ground.

Her friend Yao Qing whispered from behind:

"Your husband... is insane."

"But—everyone is believing it."

By seventy squats, Yu Mian muttered:

"His Majesty really is a martial arts monster... look at his control! Even my guards can't do this."

By ninety squats, even the scholar had placed his hands together like he was watching a sacred ritual.

Then—

One hundred.

The Emperor stood upright, chest rising and falling, sweat on his temples.

Every single person in the restaurant gasped and clapped.

"Such a devoted husband!"

"He knelt AND did squats!"

"Forgive him, Miss Lian! Forgive him!"

"He clearly loves you very dearly!"

Some older women even got teary-eyed.

"Ahh... young love... so touching..."

All eyes turned to the Empress.

The Emperor looked at her with the most dramatic guilty expression ever created.

Lian An had no choice but to act.

She stepped forward, took out her handkerchief, and wiped the sweat off his forehead.

Everyone sighed dramatically.

"Husband..." she said sweetly through clenched teeth,

"don't cheat again. I forgive you."

The entire Whisper Bowl erupted in relieved cheers.

"Finally!"

"Good! No more quarrels!"

"What a perfect couple!"

Only she and the Emperor knew the truth—

It was pure blackmail, chaos, and survival.

But to the whole city?

It looked like the greatest love story of the century.

He looked like a soldier on the training field — strong, steady, disciplined.

People whispered in awe.

"Look! He's doing it!"

"This is true love!"

"This man loves her deeply!"

Everyone cheered.

Then returned to their tasks, giving the "loving couple" privacy.

The Moment Everyone Left

The instant backs were turned...

The Empress pinched his neck sharply.

"What are you doing here? And shouting?! Are you insane?"

He bit back a laugh.

"You fooled me first."

"It was necessary!"

He leaned close, whispering,

"Lian An, you made a fool of the king of the kingdom."

"You ruined my reputation!"

He smiled.

"You ruined mine first."

She glared.

He smirked.

Then his tone shifted — quiet, deep, dangerous.

"If you don't want this... incident... to reach the court," he whispered,

"you will cook dinner for me every night."

She froze.

"And eat with me."

Her eyes widened.

"And follow anything I say."

She stared at him like she might murder him with a spoon.

But many eyes were still watching.

So she pasted a sweet smile.

"Of course, dear husband."

The Emperor exhaled — not in victory, but in relief.

Because for the first time...

She didn't walk away from him.