

## Ghost 124

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### Chapter 124: lunch

Morning sunlight filtered into the Whisper Bowl's courtyard like warm gold dust as steam billowed from the kitchen. Empress Lian An's sleeves were rolled up, hair tied loosely, moving from pot to pot with practiced grace.

Fen Yu hovered beside her, sniffing dramatically, occasionally wiping her nose with her sleeve. Her usually perfect ghostly appearance was ruined—hair dirty, robes torn, face full of tear stains.

She wailed softly, "Empress... I am dying... dying emotionally..."

Lian An didn't look up. "Ghosts cannot die."

Fen Yu cried harder.

From the pantry, Wei Rong's ghostly voice thundered, "STOP your wailing or I'll drown you in the water basin!"

Fen Yu hid behind a bunch of stacked bowls.

Li Shen, floating calmly above the cooking pots, shook his head. "A calamity... she is a calamity in a dress."

Lian An only sighed and continued to stir the simmering pot of bone broth. The aroma filled the hall, pulling workers like magnets.

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Outside — the Emperor Was Still Gardening

While the Empress cooked...

The Emperor, still in commoner clothes, hunched over the soil beds behind the new extension area. Sweat dripped down his temple as he dug neat rows. His fingers were muddy, his robe dusty, but his posture was precise — like someone who had memorized every gardening lesson from his father.

He planted chili seeds with the same discipline he used to command armies.

Workers passing by paused.

A young girl whispered, "He looks... really skilled."

A man corrected, "No, he LOOKS educated. See how he forms straight rows? A noble teaches that."

Another sighed dreamily, "And still he kneels in dirt for his woman... ahhh... Sister Lian is blessed."

Then came a teasing tone from an older worker:

"And he gave her fifty roses! Where do you find such husbands now?"

A group of women nodded enthusiastically.

"And he did a hundred squats saying sorry!"

"A proper man! Handsome too!"

"Look how he plants! Like he is cultivating love!"

Everyone laughed and admired him.

But inside the kitchen...

Yao Qing nearly threw the ladle across the table.

She leaned toward the Empress and muttered under her breath — only low enough for Lian An to hear:

"He is NOT a good man! He is cheap. Cheap! You know, right? He is obsessed with that Lady Chen. Treated you badly. Punished you for every breath. Bah!"

Lian An almost choked on her own spit.

Yao Qing continued muttering viciously:

"He is only acting for benefit. That man is a fox in human skin. A fox! And these fools outside think he's a perfect husband—" she scoffed, "—they will faint if they know he is actually the Emperor."

Only the Empress heard her. Wei Rong snorted. Li Shen rolled his ghostly eyes. Fen Yu nodded rapidly then cried again.

Outside, the courtyard remained blissful with admiration.

Inside, the truth was rotten fruit.

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Serving Lunch — The Chaos of Feeding a Kingdom

When the food was ready, the Empress and Yao Qing carried trays to the courtyard. Wei Jie and the twins helped arrange food along the tables.

The smell made everyone instantly straighten.

Rice. Green pepper stir-fry. Crispy pork. Stewed cabbage. Hot broth. And fluffy buns.

When Lian An placed the first pot, silence fell — then erupted into cheers.

"Eat! Before it gets cold!" she called.

Everyone grabbed bowls eagerly.

The scholar Li Shen floated above the rafters, inhaling deeply although he couldn't eat.

The workers bit into buns like starving wolves.

"This is divine!" "I could live here forever." "She should open a restaurant everywhere!"

Yao Qing puffed her chest proudly. "We WILL. The whole kingdom. Wait and see."

Fen Yu sulked in the corner, still serving trays with exaggerated sadness.

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More Gossip — The Emperor the Perfect Husband

As everyone ate, workers glanced at the Emperor bent over the soil.

"He's still gardening... look how serious he is."

"He must love her deeply."

"He even bathes here after working!"

"What a good-hearted man..."

"Educated, gentle, hardworking..."

"And he gave flowers!"

"Why can't men today be like this?!"

The Empress rubbed her temples.

Yao Qing nearly spat rice.

She leaned closer to Lian An and hissed:

"They don't know he is the Emperor. They don't know he yelled at you, punished you, sided that Lady Chen over you. They think he's a fairy husband. Ugh!!"

Lian An sighed internally.

If only the workers knew the truth... they'd tremble for three generations.

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## The Emperor Finishes Gardening

After nearly two hours, the Emperor stood up, wiping his brow. His garden rows were clean, straight, and beautiful.

People clapped.

He froze, confused at the applause.

One worker shouted:

"Husband of Sister Lian! You are so devoted!"

Another:

"You should teach all husbands in the kingdom!"

Someone else yelled:

"Younger brother! You are very admirable!"

The Emperor blinked.

No one had praised him like this in years.

His ears turned slightly red.

He cleared his throat. "Where... can I wash?"

Lian An pointed at a small side room. "Behind the kitchen."

He nodded stiffly and walked off like a soldier following orders.

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Soldiers Arrive — The Empress Serves Them

As he disappeared, dust clouds rose at the front gate.

A hundred soldiers approached — dressed as commoners, but their posture screamed military training.

General Xie led them, looking exhausted.

They entered cautiously.

The moment they saw the Empress in plain clothes, they froze.

"S—Sister An..." General Xie stuttered.

The soldiers bowed clumsily. They weren't allowed to call her Empress in public, but they couldn't look her directly in the eye either.

She smiled kindly. "Eat. The food is ready."

A soldier whispered:

"The Empress is serving us food... what life is this?"

Another whispered back:

"Pretend she's not Empress! Pretend!"

General Xie hissed, "Sit. Quietly."

They picked up bowls.

One bite—

Shock. Bliss. Tears.

"This is... the best food in the world." "If she was Empress—" "Don't say it!!"

They inhaled food like starving animals.

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The Emperor Returns From Bath

Water dripped from his hair as he stepped out, robe freshly changed, looking strangely gentle in sunlight.

Soldiers instinctively stood at attention.

General Xie grabbed one soldier's tunic — "Sit down!! We're commoners today!"

They all crouched at the same time like broken folding chairs.

The Emperor sat beside Lian An, accepting the bowl she offered. He ate silently, observing the room.

Trainees learning. Workers polishing bowls. Slaves learning letters. Twins teaching numbers. Renovation workers fixing beams. Ghosts hovering.

Something warm flickered in his chest.

This chaotic place made him feel... human.

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Private Talk with General

After lunch, he rose and signaled the general outside.

They walked behind the garden wall.

The Empress didn't eavesdrop. She had learned long ago that his official matters were complicated.

But she saw the soldiers tense the moment he raised his hand.

Something serious had happened.

She continued clearing bowls.

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The Emperor's Last Words to Her

When he returned, his face was calmer — but determined.

He walked up to her, voice low so no one else heard.

"I have some work. I will return tonight."

She didn't even look up. "Fine."

He looked at her a heartbeat longer than normal.

Something unspoken passed through his eyes.

Then he turned and walked away.

Workers whispered:

"He'll come back... so devoted..." "They really love each other..." "A perfect couple..."

Yao Qing rolled her eyes so hard she nearly saw her brain.

Only Lian An understood the reality:

He didn't come back for love.

He came back for control. For answers. For repayment of the lie she told.

But she didn't stop him.

She simply said nothing and let him go.

The sun rose higher.

Training continued.

The Whisper Bowl's future grew.

And somewhere between the garden soil and steaming kitchen—

A very messy love story continued unfolding.