

## **Ghost 133**

Chapter 133: preparing for departure

The morning sun spilled through the Whisper Bowl's windows, lighting up the half-renovated hall. Sawdust floated in the air. Hammers clinked rhythmically. The smell of fresh broth simmering in the kitchen drifted outside.

But inside the small room behind the kitchen, chaos had already begun.

Empress Preparing for Her "Pregnancy Mission"

Empress Lian An stood in front of the bed, folding clothes with the expression of a woman preparing for a war she NEVER signed up for.

Three neatly folded sets of commoner dresses.

A wool shawl.

A pair of travel boots.

A pouch of medicine.

A rolled blanket.

And...

One large, soft pillow.

She stared at the pillow as if it were her sworn enemy.

"Six months pregnant..." she muttered. "Why did that stupid man choose six months? Why not two? Why not one? Why do I have to look like a watermelon?"

Behind her floated three ghosts—Fen Yu, Wei Rong, and Li Shen—watching her pack with dramatic dead faces.

Ghosts Complaining Loudly

Fen Yu put a ghostly hand on her forehead.

"Empress... we really don't want to go. Why must we follow THAT man?"

Wei Rong nodded aggressively.

"Exactly. It's useless to go with the emperor. He is NOT investigating barbarics. He is creating chaos so he can squeeze more money from the treasury. That's all."

Li Shen crossed his arms.

"And now he's making excuses just to spend time near you. So shameless."

Fen Yu huffed.

"I refuse to watch him flirt with you."

Lian An froze in mid-packing and slowly turned to them.

"You three... ARE coming."

All three ghosts yelled at the same time: "WHY?!"

She stuffed the pillow into the bag with force.

"Because I don't trust any of you after the ring incident!"

Fen Yu looked away, ashamed.

Wei Rong coughed lightly.

"That was... not our fault."

Lian An glared.

"You were BLIND for ten hours, beaten by a fake ghost husband, and locked in a dungeon."

Li Shen raised a finger.

"In my defense—"

"No defense!" she cut him off. "I refuse to leave you unsupervised. Who knows what new disaster you'll cause? I'm going undercover, and so are you. You can meditate and cultivate while I'm miserable pretending to be pregnant."

Fen Yu deflated like a punctured balloon.

Wei Rong muttered,

"Fine... but I'm not sitting near the emperor."

"He won't see you anyway," Lian An said.

Li Shen nodded.

"Yes, but that won't stop me from glaring at him."

She ignored them and zipped up the bag.

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Meanwhile — The Human Team Also Packing

In the next room, Yao Qing, the twins, and the new man were in equal chaos.

Twin girl:

"Are we really going?"

Twin boy:

"We are REALLY going!"

The new man was tying bundles of clothes together.

Yao Qing paced back and forth like a general before a battle.

"We follow Lian An from behind. From far. Very far. Emperor must never find us or he'll kill me first!"

The twins nodded like obedient chicks.

Yao Qing then grabbed the scholar—who levitated down from the ceiling with a sigh of suffering.

Scholar Gets Appointed as Manager

"Li Shen!" she snapped, pointing at his nose.

"You are in charge of the restaurant while we are away."

He blinked.

"...I'm a scholar."

"Yes," she said, "but a RESPONSIBLE ghost."

He blinked harder.

"You can write, you can read, you can scold. Perfect manager."

He was dazed.

Yao Qing continued,

"Watch the labourers, the renovation team, the trainees, and the slaves. Make sure they don't burn the building or stab each other. And for food—I told the old chef lady to cook three meals a day. You just supervise."

Li Shen looked like he was going to faint.

Then she added casually—

"And your payment is 100 silver tales per month."

Li Shen's jaw dropped to the ground.

Being PAID.

100 tales.

"I... I accept!!!"

He saluted like a loyal soldier.

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Preparing the Restaurant

Yao Qing then gathered pen and paper, wrote a letter to Merchant Yu Mian:

"We will be temporarily away. Renovation continues. Training continues. Return before completion. Handle outlets as discussed."

She blew it dry and handed it to a delivery boy.

The twins packed a smaller bag each, excited that they would "secretly follow from far," imagining adventure.

The new man tightened his boots, quietly ready to protect the Empress.

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Back With the Empress

Lian An strapped the fake pregnancy pillow under her dress, tied a sash over it, and stared at the mirror.

"...I look ridiculous."

Fen Yu tilted her head.

"Honestly, you look like a cute dumpling."

Wei Rong snorted.

"More like a stubborn steamed bun."

Li Shen coughed.

"Round. Very round."

She threw a hairpin at them.

Then she grabbed the final bags.

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Why She's Really Doing It

While tying her outer cloak, her expression softened slightly.

"Ghosts... this mission is dangerous. Barbarics are strange. Even powerful experts cannot kill them. There is something wrong."

Wei Rong nodded seriously.

"That part is true."

"I won't leave you behind," she said quietly.

"I know you have cultivation powers now. You can help me. And meditate on the way."

Fen Yu sighed dramatically.

"If we die, bury me with jewels."

"You're already dead," Lian An reminded her.

Fen Yu pouted.

"Then put jewels near my ghost ashes."

Li Shen rolled his eyes.

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Friend Finds Her

Yao Qing ran in breathless.

"Lian An! The emperor sent his general to inform the palace he will disguise as a refugee with soldiers. He didn't tell them YOU are going too."

Lian An scoffed.

"Of course. He wants to control everything."

Yao Qing grabbed her shoulders.

"When he comes tonight, be ready. We will follow you from behind. We won't leave you alone."

Lian An softened.

"Thank you."

The twins peeked in.

"We're ready!"

"We have snacks!"

New man nodded calmly with a sword hidden under cloth.

Yao Qing then yelled to the scholar:

"YOU! Protect the restaurant!"

Li Shen puffed his ghostly chest proudly.

"I will protect Whisper Bowl with my life. Afterlife. Both."

The sky had dimmed into shades of purple and gold when the Emperor finally reached the hidden courtyard behind an abandoned warehouse at the edge of the capital.

This was not a place for nobles.

Not a place for knights.

Not a place for the Emperor of the entire kingdom.

But tonight... he stood there, dressed like a poor traveling merchant, face half-covered, hair tied like a commoner.

Waiting.

Footsteps approached—steady, disciplined, heavy.

General Xie arrived first, bowing deeply even in disguise.

Behind him stood four of the most powerful soldiers in the empire, each dressed in loose, patched clothing, worn boots, messy hair—the appearance of people who had suffered hardship.

And beside each soldier stood their wives—strong women chosen for this mission, fully aware that they might risk their lives.

Each wife carried a bundle of clothes and a baby's blanket to complete their disguise as starving refugees.

The Emperor looked at them one by one.

These were not ordinary soldiers.

These were men who had defeated armies.

Women who had survived the hardest lands of the North.

But tonight, they were simply villagers... powerless, desperate, homeless.

He exhaled slowly and spoke with the heavy tone of someone carrying an entire kingdom on his shoulders.

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"You all know why I called you here."

The general stepped forward.

"Yes, Your Majesty. You wish to infiltrate the barbaric camp."

The Emperor nodded, eyes sharp behind the cloth mask.

"The reports say the barbarians are growing stronger," he said quietly. "Too strong. Too organized. Too invisible. Even elite soldiers cannot trace them. They steal from villages without leaving footprints. No one hears them coming."

His voice deepened.

"And even powerful cultivators cannot kill them."

A silence fell over the courtyard.

The wives shivered.

Even the elite soldiers looked uncomfortable.

General Xie finally asked,

"Your Majesty... are they human?"

The Emperor's expression hardened.

"That is what I intend to find out."

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The Emperor Gives Them Their Cover Story

He motioned them closer.

"From this moment," he said, "you are no longer soldiers. You are no longer under my command. You are refugees from a small northern village."

He paused.

"You lost your home. You lost your food. You lost everything."

The wives lowered their heads as if rehearsing sorrow.

He continued:

"You have traveled far, begging for work, and no one takes you in. Even the officials ignore you. Even the Emperor—"

he tapped his chest bitterly,

"—does not give you a listening ear."

The soldiers were startled.

The wives exchanged glances—this level of acting was convincing.

He added slowly,

"So yes... you are desperate. You are angry. You are willing to do anything to survive."

The general nodded.

"That will make the barbarians trust us."

The Emperor's voice became steel.

"You will claim you want to JOIN them. Because you believe they protect their own while the kingdom fails the poor."

The wives stiffened—this was dangerous talk.

If said outside this mission... it was treason.

The Emperor looked at them calmly.

"But this is the only way to learn what they really are."

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The Emperor Prepares Them for Hardship

"You will eat little," he warned.

"You will walk long distances."

"You will act weak even though you are strong."

He turned to the wives gently.

"And you... must act as if you are exhausted, hungry, and hopeless. You must look like women who would cling to any group for safety."

One wife wiped imaginary tears to practice.

Another pulled her shawl tighter as if cold.

They were ready.

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His Final Words Before the Mission

The Emperor lowered his voice to a whisper.

"There is one more thing."

Everyone looked up.

He hesitated only a moment.

"The Empress is coming with us."

Every soldier froze.

Every wife gasped.

The general sputtered,

"Y-Your Majesty... the E-Empress?! In a barbaric camp?!"

"She will be disguised," he said calmly.

"As a six-month pregnant refugee."

The soldiers stared at him as if he had lost his mind.

One wife whispered,

"Pregnant...? Why that?"

He rubbed his forehead.

"It complicates things," he admitted.

"But it will make the barbarians underestimate her. A pregnant woman poses no threat... so they think."

The general gulped.

"Will Her Majesty agree?"

The Emperor smiled darkly.

"She already did. She owes me... a promise."

The soldiers looked like they wanted to pray for her soul.

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He Hands Them Their Props

He opened a crate.

Inside were:

cracked wooden bowls

dirty quilts

two broken lanterns

fake documents saying they came from the northern village

a sack with barley to make it look like they stole food along the way

bundles of old clothing

He gestured.

"These are your belongings. Carry them everywhere. Refugees cannot afford to lose items."

The soldiers picked them up with heavy seriousness.

The wives adjusted their bags.

Everyone was now in their roles.

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The Emperor's Final Instruction

He looked toward the city.

"Tonight," he said quietly, "I will fetch the Empress."

The soldiers and wives all bowed deeply.

"We will be ready, Your Majesty."

He raised a hand.

"And remember—during the mission, I am NOT your Emperor. I am your village elder. You will not bow. You will not address me with titles."

Everyone nodded.

"We understand."

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And then, the Emperor turned away, cloak fluttering in the wind, expression tense, heart heavier than ever.

He had led armies into battle.

He had killed warlords.

He had survived assassination.

But infiltrating the barbarics...

And traveling with his Empress disguised as his pregnant wife...

This might be the craziest mission of his life.

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