

Ghost 135

Chapter 135: the camp of shadow

Morning mist clung to the treetops like a white veil as the undercover group stepped into the dense forest outside the capital. Dew sparkled on the leaves, and the winding trail grew narrower with every step.

The Empress walked in front, fake belly strapped tightly around her waist. Every few minutes she adjusted the pillow, grumbling under her breath.

"If this falls out, I'm blaming him," she muttered.

Fen Yu floated above her head dramatically.

"You look so pregnant you could give birth to twins today."

Li Shen sighed.

"Your acting must be perfect. They will test us."

Wei Rong only scanned the trees silently.

Behind her walked the Emperor, disguised in rough villager clothes — hair messy, robe patched, dirt on his cheek. But even like this, he carried an aura of command no one could hide.

And still — every time the Empress stumbled, his hand shot forward by reflex to hold her elbow.

"Careful," he murmured.

She jerked her arm away.

"I am pregnant, not blind."

He corrected flatly, "Fake pregnant."

Fen Yu cackled in the air.

"Real attitude though."

The Empress looked ready to punch her ghost.

THE UNDERCOVER FAMILY

Behind them walked:

General Xie, disguised as her "uncle," carrying bags.

Four soldiers, looking convincingly miserable.

Four soldiers' wives, acting timid and hungry.

Together, they looked exactly like a group of displaced villagers — tired, frightened, and desperate.

Just as planned.

The forest thickened, sunlight barely touching the ground. The air grew colder. A strange silence fell over the group.

Wei Rong finally said it aloud.

"They are near."

Li Shen nodded.

"The barbaric scouts are fast. They've already seen us."

Fen Yu whispered,

"Someone is watching from the trees."

The Empress stiffened.

She could feel it too — that faint prickle at the back of her neck.

The Emperor subtly stepped closer to her side.

THE FIRST BARBARIC SCOUT APPEARS

A rustle.

A shadow dropped from the branches with inhuman speed.

Another appeared behind them.

Then a third to the right.

All masked, their skin tattooed with harsh symbols, their eyes cold like hunters.

The soldiers' wives gasped softly.

One scout stepped forward, voice low and sharp.

"Who are you?"

The Emperor spoke before anyone else could panic.

"We are refugees from the north," he said in a rough villager tone.

"Our homes burned... bandits attacked... no one would take us in."

He gestured at the Empress' belly.

"My wife is with child. We have nowhere to go."

The scouts exchanged looks.

One stepped closer to examine the Empress.

She forced a trembling smile, hands resting protectively over her fake stomach.

"I only want my baby safe," she whispered.

The scout grunted.

"You came to join the clan? Or seek shelter?"

"Both," the Emperor answered calmly.

"We can work. Fight if needed. But we need a place to live."

The scout circled the group like a wolf.

His gaze sharp — too sharp — assessing strength, lies, fear.

Fen Yu whispered,

"Creepy. If he touches your belly I'm biting his ghost."

Li Shen murmured,

"He is sensing spiritual energy. Careful."

The scout's eyes landed on the Emperor.

"You look strong."

"I work hard," the Emperor said humbly.

"Your wife looks fragile."

"She is carrying my child," he replied.

"And she has walked for days. Let her rest."

There was something dangerous in his tone — a subtle warning under the villager voice.

The scout's eyes narrowed.

For the first time, he seemed unsure.

THE SURPRISE ENTRANCE OF THE TAG-ALONGS

Just when things were settling—

A scream echoed through the forest.

"AAAAHHHH! WAIT FOR US!!"

The scouts jerked around, startled.

The Empress' eyes widened in horror.

From behind the trees burst—

Yao Qing

Twin Brother

Twin Sister

New Man Wei Jie

All dressed like beggars.

All covered in fake dirt.

All running full speed.

Yao Qing waved wildly.

"Sister Lian!! We finally found you!"

The Empress nearly fainted on the spot.

Fen Yu covered her ghost eyes.

"Oh heavens, we're dead."

Li Shen groaned.

"They followed us. Of course."

Wei Rong muttered,

"Why must our life be chaos?"

The Emperor's face twitched — the closest he ever got to screaming.

But they had no choice.

The scouts turned cold eyes on the newcomers.

"Who are THEY?"

Twin Sister ran to hug the Empress' arm dramatically.

"We are her cousins! We escaped too!"

Twin Brother clung to the Emperor's sleeve like a lost puppy.

"We are starving! Please let us join!"

Wei Jie bowed deeply, acting perfectly pitiful.

"We came from far. We have no home. No food. Please accept us."

Yao Qing acted BEST of all — crying on command, wailing loudly.

"We lost EVERYTHING! Even my chickens!!"

Fen Yu whispered,

"She deserves an award."

The Empress forced a weak smile, sweat running down her back.

"They are my relatives... we separated during the escape."

The scouts stared.

Long.

Silent.

Suspicious.

Then the lead scout finally grunted.

"Fine. You will all come."

Everyone exhaled.

"We will take you to our camp," the scout finished.

"But if any of you lie..."

He dragged a finger across his throat.

Fen Yu swallowed ghostly air.

Li Shen whispered,

"Don't worry. We are stronger now."

Wei Rong placed one ghostly hand on his sword handle.

"We will protect her."

The Emperor stepped in front of the Empress slightly — subtle, but clear.

And just like that—

The undercover mission became ten times bigger, ten times riskier, and ten times more insane.

Their group walked deeper into the forest, following the barbaric scouts...

Straight into the unknown.

The closer they walked to the barbaric clan's territory, the heavier the air became.

Not cold.

Not warm.

Just... wrong.

It felt thick, sticky, pressing against their skin as if the forest itself was holding its breath.

Even the birds had fallen silent.

Only the crunch of leaves under their feet echoed through the woods.

Fen Yu drifted closer to the Empress' shoulder, whispering,

"I don't like this. This place feels cursed."

Li Shen rubbed his ghostly arms.

"The spiritual energy here is twisted. Like something unnatural is growing."

Wei Rong's eyes narrowed at the trees.

"The barbaric people are hiding something."

The Emperor sensed it too.

His hand hovered near the Empress' elbow — not touching, but ready the moment she stumbled over roots with her fake pregnant belly.

The Empress glared at him anyway.

She hated this pillow.

She hated acting pregnant.

She hated being dragged into crazy schemes.

But she hated being exiled more.

So here she was — pretending to be 6 months pregnant, waddling slowly while her husband walked like a protective wolf beside her.

The First Sight of the Barbaric Camp

The forest suddenly opened into a clearing.

The camp was enormous — far larger than any of them expected.

Tall wooden walls formed a rough circle around dozens of tents. Smoke rose from huge fire pits. Men sharpened blades thicker than the Empress' arm. Women melted metal in cauldrons. Children ran barefoot, wild, with hair braided in strange patterns.

And everywhere...

Symbols.

Painted on trees.

Carved on stones.

Tattooed onto their skin.

Symbols that pulsed faintly with spiritual energy.

Fen Yu whispered, horrified,

"These symbols... they feel alive."

Li Shen agreed.

"Something is feeding them."

Wei Rong's voice was low.

"This is not normal barbaric energy. This is... corrupted."

The Emperor tightened his jaw.

Whatever these people were hiding — it was dangerous.

The Undercover Refugees Are Inspected

The scouts led them to the center of the camp, where a massive fire pit burned.

Around it sat the leaders — three men and one woman, all covered in inked symbols.

The leader, a man with bone bracelets rattling on his wrist, stood up.

"Newcomers," he said.

"Refugees?"

The Emperor bowed slightly, keeping his voice rough.

"Yes. We came from the north. We lost everything."

The leader's eyes moved to the Empress' belly.

"And she is with child."

"Yes," the Emperor answered quietly.

"We need protection."

The Empress even moaned softly and rubbed her stomach, acting exhausted.

Fen Yu whispered,

"Wow. Oscar-level performance."

The leader nodded.

"Pregnant women are treated differently. She will be taken to the women's tent."

The Emperor immediately stepped forward, voice hardening.

"No. She stays with me."

The leader's men stiffened.

The Empress grabbed his sleeve to hide the tension building around them.

"Husband... it's fine," she whispered for the audience.

The Emperor gave her a look — sharp, warning, unwilling — but stepped back.

The leader smirked faintly.

"You are weak if you cannot let a woman go."

The Emperor smiled politely.

"Weak, maybe. But I love her."

Fen Yu choked in the air.

Li Shen slapped his own ghost forehead.

Wei Rong rolled his eyes.

The Empress elbowed him in the ribs.

"Say nonsense again and I'll expose you," she whispered.

Ritual of Acceptance

The leader clapped his hands.

Drums began to beat — slow, heavy, rhythmic.

Women lit torches.

Children threw powdered herbs into the fire, turning the flames green.

It was a ritual.

A ritual to welcome new members.

Except...

The Empress sensed something else.

That green fire...

It carried spiritual energy.

Dark, thick, strange spiritual energy that made her unborn fake belly feel real for one dizzying second.

Wei Rong's voice was tense.

"This ritual feeds off the people in it."

Li Shen added,

"They are pulling spiritual energy from everyone's core. Very faintly. Very slow... but enough to weaken outsiders."

Fen Yu whimpered,

"I don't like this place. I miss the restaurant."

The Empress remained still, eyes lowered, but inside she felt a shiver.

Then the leader approached her with a bowl of green smoke.

"When we accept someone," he said,

"We check the spirit inside their body."

She froze.

The Emperor's aura turned sharp as a blade.

"It's harmless," the leader said.

"It tells us whether the child carries strong fortune."

The Empress forced a weak smile and placed her hands on her fake belly.

The leader moved the bowl closer.

The green smoke curled toward her like a living snake—

Then suddenly recoiled.

As if burned.

The leader stumbled back.

The drums stopped.

Everyone stared.

"Your spirit..." he whispered.

"...is very strong. Too strong."

Fen Yu whispered,

"She will faint—"

Li Shen said,

"The energy inside her is from the sigil training. It rejects corrupted energy."

Wei Rong stepped closer protectively, hand on sword.

The Emperor placed a hand over the Empress' shoulder, pretending to support her, but really hiding a warning in his grip:

Stay calm.

The leader stared at her belly again.

"That child..."

He touched the air in front of her stomach.

"...is either a blessing..."

The Empress held her breath.

"Or a curse."

Rules of the Camp

A woman approached with a list carved on wood.

She recited:

1. Every morning, all newcomers must line up for inspection.
2. No one leaves the camp after sundown.
3. Food is shared — but loyalty is demanded in return.
4. No one may keep secrets from the clan.
5. If the clan senses betrayal... the punishment is death.

Fen Yu hid behind the Emperor's head.

Li Shen muttered,

"We are definitely dying here."

Wei Rong whispered,

"Stay alert."

The Emperor nodded respectfully.

"We will obey."

The leader narrowed his eyes.

"You will start work tomorrow. The men help in hunting. The women assist in preparation tents."

He pointed at the Empress.

"For her — she will not work. Pregnant women help with spiritual tasks."

The Empress' heart stopped.

Spiritual tasks?

Fen Yu squeaked.

"NO. NO SPIRITUAL TASKS. I vote we run."

Li Shen pulled her back.

"We can't leave yet."

Wei Rong nodded.

"We need to find what they're hiding."

Suspicious Night Ritual

Just when the Empress thought it was over...

A horn blew.

People gathered around the fire pit again.

The flames turned red this time.

Then violet.

Then black.

The Empress felt a tug — not at her body, but at her soul.

As if someone was pulling at her energy thread.

Li Shen hissed,

"This is not a ritual. This is harvesting spiritual energy."

Fen Yu clutched her hair.

"They're stealing life!"

Wei Rong looked at the Emperor.

"They are draining the camp to feed something."

The Emperor's eyes locked onto the leader.

The leader raised his hands, chanting in a language none of them recognized.

From the darkness...

A low, trembling cry echoed.

Not human.

Not animal.

Something in-between.

Something alive.

Something suffering.

The Empress' breath caught.

The ghosts all stared in horror.

Li Shen whispered the words they all feared—

"It's a ghost-breeding creature. They are feeding it."

Ending Scene: The Empress Feels Her Fake Belly Warm

As the ritual intensified, the Empress suddenly felt warmth under the pillow strapped to her stomach.

Warmth that wasn't fake.

It pulsed—

Once.

Twice.

Like a heartbeat.

She froze.

Fen Yu screamed silently.

Li Shen grabbed Wei Rong's arm.

The Emperor looked down sharply.

Something inside the camp...

Something being fed energy...

Was reacting to her.

The leader stared into her eyes.

"That unborn child of yours," he whispered,

"...is going to change everything."

The Empress swallowed hard.

Her fake pregnancy had just become the most dangerous lie she had ever told.