

Ghost 141

Chapter 141: returning to the whisper bowl

The dawn sky was still pale blue when the Emperor called the undercover group together.

A thin layer of fog curled between the tents, carrying the scent of burnt ashes from the night's battle.

The barbaric camp was silent now.

Bound raiders lay unconscious.

The threat — for the moment — was gone.

The Emperor stood tall in commoner attire, yet no disguise could hide the authority in him.

Beside him stood the Empress, still wearing her thick cloak and the annoying fake pregnancy pillow. Her expression was pure irritation, but she hid it well.

The twins, Yao Qing, the new man, and the three ghosts (visible only to her) waited quietly behind her.

Fen Yu sulked.

Wei Rong crossed his arms.

Li Shen floated above like a calm scholar cloud.

The Emperor's gaze lingered on his wife longer than usual.

Finally, he spoke.

"You may return to Whisper Bowl."

His tone was neutral, but the Empress could hear the hidden meaning:

I don't want you in danger anymore.

She bowed slightly.

"Good. I have work."

That answer stabbed him again.

Work.

Always work.

Never him.

But he didn't let it show.

"You must return to the palace in five days," he said.

"Your fake plague has already lasted nine days. You cannot disappear for too long."

The Empress exhaled slowly.

Five days.

Five days to train her workers.

Five days to complete renovations.

Five days before she had to step back into that suffocating palace.

"Fine," she agreed.

Tokens of Entry

The Emperor turned to the twins, the new man, and Yao Qing.

He removed four small bronze tokens from his sleeve. Each bore the royal dragon.

"This," he said, "will allow you entry into the palace without inspection."

The twins' eyes widened.

"W-We can enter?!"

"Yes," he said firmly.

"You will come often. Now that your cultivation has risen, you may be needed in investigations."

Yao Qing blinked in shock.

"You want us to help the palace?"

"Undercover work," the Emperor said.

"You will not be recognized as officials. But you will be useful."

The new man cupped the token with trembling hands.

"I... I have never even been near the palace gate..."

The Emperor nodded once.

"You are chosen now. Do not embarrass her."

All four bowed deeply.

"We will not fail!"

Behind the Empress, Fen Yu clicked her tongue.

"How lucky—humans get shiny coins just for following along."

Wei Rong elbowed her ghostly shoulder.

"Quiet."

Li Shen nodded thoughtfully.

"With more humans involved, our speed increases. The mission becomes manageable."

The Empress, hearing all this chaos only she could hear, pressed her temple.

Final Words Before Separation

The Emperor took a step closer to her.

Close enough that she could smell the faint sandalwood scent on him.

"Five days," he repeated quietly.

She narrowed her eyes.

"Yes, I heard you the first time."

He ignored the sharpness in her tone.

"There is more to investigate. More to uncover. The barbaric were only pawns."

She knew.

The northern ghost-breeding cult.

The hidden leader.

The blood moon.

The world was shifting, and only they had power to see it.

The Emperor's voice dropped lower, for her ears only:

"You will come back. You promised to obey for lying about the plague."

Her jaw clenched.

He smirked slightly — the infuriating victorious smirk she hated.

"I expect nightly meals," he added.

She glared at him.

"I hope you choke."

He laughed.

And for a fleeting moment, the cold Emperor looked almost human.

Then she turned sharply on her heel.

"Let's go."

The Journey Back to Whisper Bowl

Yao Qing hooked her arm through the Empress's.

"Ugh, finally! I thought I would die pretending to be a refugee."

Twin Lin hopped in excitement.

"When are we going to use our swords again?!"

Twin Ran punched him lightly.

"Idiot, we must hide our power!"

The new man walked behind them, holding his pack.

"I still can't believe... we have palace tokens..."

Fen Yu floated dramatically above them.

"We ghosts did everything, and yet humans get tokens. Where is justice?"

Li Shen sighed.

"Human society is flawed."

Wei Rong marched silently, annoyed but protective.

The Empress ignored all of them as they walked out of the forest and onto the dirt road leading back to the city.

The morning sun peeked over the mountains.

Her heart relaxed the moment she saw the distant rooftops of Whisper Bowl's neighborhood.

Home.

Well, not home...

But the closest thing she had.

Arrival at Whisper Bowl

By the time they reached the restaurant street, people were sweeping the ground, boiling morning broth, and preparing ingredients.

Renovation workers hammered inside the new branch space.

Workers practicing reading and writing sat under the shade.

The whole street was lively.

When the Empress stepped into view—

Half the workers gasped.

"She's back!"

"She looks even more beautiful today!"

"Maybe her husband gave her another flower?"

"Maybe they reconciled!"

Yao Qing rolled her eyes so hard she almost fell backward.

"People are so stupid," she muttered.

Twin Lin whispered loudly,

"If they knew she was threatening the Emperor earlier—"

The Empress stomped on his foot before he could finish.

Fen Yu giggled.

"Humans worship love stories. So silly."

Wei Rong sighed.

"You are literally in love with your own reflection; you don't get to judge."

Li Shen began floating upward.

"I must check the new formation lines..."

Everyone ignored him.

Inside Whisper Bowl

The moment the Empress entered the courtyard, the familiar scent of broth and wood soot washed over her.

She finally breathed normally.

Her ghosts spread out, whispering among themselves, complaining about humans, or meditating quietly.

Yao Qing plopped onto a bench.

"I swear, if your husband shows up again with flowers or baskets of nonsense—"

"He won't," the Empress said flatly.

"He has work."

Fen Yu tugged her sleeve.

"But you do need to go back in five days."

She groaned, collapsing her head onto the table.

"Don't remind me."

Wei Rong crossed his arms.

"At least the Emperor is trustworthy in battle."

Yao Qing snorted.

"He is only trustworthy in annoying my friend!"

Twin Ran laughed.

"He makes her cook, fake pregnancy, obey palace rules—"

The Empress threw a spoon at him.