

## Ghost 163

Chapter 163: the palace forget of breath

Night settled over the imperial palace like a heavy curtain, thick with silence and shadows. Lanterns flickered softly along the corridors, guards changed shifts, and nobles slept behind carved doors—unaware that the palace, once again, was about to descend into chaos of a very unusual kind.

Only one person sensed it first.

Empress Lian An paused mid-step in her chamber, a familiar chill brushing the back of her neck.

"...They're at it again," she muttered.

From behind her, three figures slowly materialized.

Wei Rong, the general ghost, arms crossed and expression dark.

Li Shen, the scholar ghost, already rubbing his temples as if anticipating trouble.

And Fen Yu—who looked far too pleased for someone who was supposed to be cultivating calmly.

"You felt it too?" Fen Yu asked brightly.

"Yes," Lian An replied flatly. "And judging by your face, you already know what happened."

Fen Yu clasped her hands. "Other palace ghosts are gossiping again."

Wei Rong sighed deeply. "I told you not to interact with them."

"But they started it!" Fen Yu protested. "They were talking nonsense about Princess Zhi and the baby—saying it was fate, karma, celestial punishment—"

Lian An's eyes sharpened. "What?"

Li Shen nodded grimly. "It spread fast. Ghosts from the Dowager's courtyard, the eastern halls, even the ancestral shrine. They're twisting the story."

Fen Yu's expression darkened for once. "I may have... corrected them."

Wei Rong: "You threatened them, didn't you."

Fen Yu smiled innocently. "I enlightened them."

The palace chose that moment to erupt.

Somewhere down the corridor, a vase shattered.

A scream followed.

Then another.

Lian An groaned. "Tell me you didn't start a ghost fight."

Fen Yu winced. "Define fight."

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The First Disturbance

In the Dowager's courtyard, incense suddenly burned black.

A senior maid bolted upright from her bed, heart pounding, convinced she heard whispering directly into her ear.

"LIAR—"

She screamed and fainted.

Nearby, a decorative screen tipped over with a loud crash, startling guards into drawing swords at empty air.

In the eastern palace hall, a ghost tripped a night guard down the stairs—not enough to seriously injure him, but enough to send him rolling while his lantern flew into a bush.

"WHO'S THERE?!" the guard shouted.

Silence answered him.

Meanwhile, laughter echoed faintly above the roof tiles.

Fen Yu floated cross-legged in the air, clapping slowly.

"They shouldn't spread rumors," she said smugly.

Wei Rong grabbed her by the collar—despite being incorporeal, he somehow managed.

"STOP. THIS. NOW."

"But they insulted the Empress," Fen Yu snapped. "They said she attracts death. That she's cursed. That anyone close to her suffers."

Lian An's expression went cold.

Li Shen looked at her carefully. "They believe it because the palace believes in patterns. And right now... fear is louder than reason."

That was when the ancestral hall bells rang.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Every ghost in the palace froze.

"That's bad," Fen Yu whispered.

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The Other Ghosts Arrive

From the direction of the ancestral hall, figures began to appear.

Old ghosts.

Palace ghosts.

Servants who died decades ago.

Concubines who never left.

They drifted through walls, pillars, and courtyards, drawn by unrest and curiosity.

A tall, thin ghost with a scholar's cap sneered. "So this is the one who disrupted the balance?"

A noblewoman ghost tilted her head. "The living Empress who walks with spirits."

Whispers spread.

"She commands ghosts." "She survived the plague." "She interferes with fate." "She changes destinies."

Fen Yu bristled. "Say that again and I'll pull your hair like last time."

Wei Rong stepped forward, aura flaring.

"Enough," he thundered.

The palace shook.

Tiles rattled. Lanterns swayed.

Even the other ghosts recoiled instinctively.

Wei Rong's voice echoed with ancient authority. "You forget your place. The living Empress is under protection."

A murmur rippled through the spirits.

Li Shen adjusted his sleeves calmly. "If you're here to gossip, leave. If you're here to stir chaos, you'll regret it."

One ghost scoffed. "And who will stop us? You?"

Fen Yu cracked her knuckles.

"Yes.

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Chaos, Palace-Style

What followed was... not dignified.

A ghost chase erupted across rooftops.

Fen Yu hurled a ghost into a lotus pond (it passed through the water but the splash still startled guards).

Wei Rong pinned two aggressive spirits to a wall using sheer spiritual pressure.

Li Shen used talismans—stolen from the ancestral hall—to bind whispering ghosts mid-sentence.

Guards ran back and forth, convinced assassins were hiding everywhere.

A eunuch fainted after his broom began sweeping on its own.

Somewhere, Princess Zhi's cat hissed at empty air and bolted under a table.

Lian An stood in the center of it all, hands on her temples.

"This," she said calmly, "is why I said no unnecessary chaos."

Fen Yu floated down, sheepish. "They started it..."

"I don't care who started it," Lian An replied. "I care who finishes it."

Her spiritual aura flared—subtle, controlled, powerful.

Every ghost felt it.

Silence fell like a blade.

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The Empress Speaks

Lian An stepped forward, gaze steady.

"Listen carefully," she said, her voice carrying across both worlds.

"The child Princess Zhi lost was innocent. What happened was not fate. It was not karma. And it was not punishment."

Her eyes glowed faintly.

"Anyone spreading lies, feeding fear, or using tragedy for entertainment—whether living or dead—will answer to me."

The ancestral hall bells rang once more.

A warning.

The older ghosts exchanged uneasy looks.

Fen Yu leaned toward Li Shen and whispered, "She's scary when she's calm."

Li Shen nodded. "Yes. That's when she's serious."

One by one, the ghosts retreated.

Walls swallowed them. Roofs emptied. Courtyards stilled.

The palace exhaled.

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Aftermath

Guards slowly lowered their weapons.

Servants whispered about bad dreams and strange winds.

By morning, the palace would blame it on exhaustion, fear, or omens.

Only Lian An and her ghosts knew the truth.

Fen Yu hovered beside her, subdued now. "I'm sorry. I just... couldn't stand hearing them blame her."

Lian An's expression softened slightly. She reached out and rested a hand where Fen Yu's shoulder would be.

"I know," she said quietly. "But justice doesn't need noise. It needs patience."

Wei Rong bowed his head. "We will restrain ourselves."

Li Shen smiled faintly. "At least... the message is clear now."

Lian An looked toward Princess Zhi's courtyard, where the lights were still on.

"No more rumors," she said softly. "No more ghosts feeding on grief."

Above them, the moon slipped free of clouds.

And for the first time that night, the palace slept—

unaware how close it had come to being haunted by something far worse than spirits.