

Ghost 211

Chapter 211: a father's choice

The Chen residence stood quiet under the late afternoon sun.

Golden light spilled over the carved gates, but inside the courtyard, tension thickened the air.

Lady Chen arrived without announcement.

Her silk skirts brushed sharply against the stone floor as she walked, her expression tight with restrained fury.

The servants bowed, startled by her sudden visit.

"Where is my father?" she demanded.

"In... in the study, Young Madam."

She didn't wait.

Confrontation in the Study

Chen Guowei sat behind his desk, reading official documents. His hair had more white strands than before, his eyes shadowed with sleeplessness.

The door burst open.

"Father!"

He looked up sharply.

"Lady Chen, you have forgotten palace manners."

She closed the door behind her with force.

"Why are you allying with the Duke's family?" she snapped.

"Do you know what that means?"

Chen Guowei's gaze hardened.

"Lower your voice."

"Lower my voice?" she laughed bitterly.

"Do you know how many years we planned to secure our family's power? How much I sacrificed to stay in the palace? And now you want to marry Ruyi into the Duke's family — the same family allied with the Empress?"

Her eyes burned.

"They are our enemies."

Chen Guowei stood up.

"You have gone mad."

Lady Chen stepped closer.

"Did someone threaten you?"

"Did someone send you that letter?"

"You're acting out of fear!"

His jaw tightened.

"I told you to stay out of this."

She slammed her hand on the desk.

"Everything in this family is my business!"

Her voice cracked.

"You sent me to the palace.

You raised me to smile while bleeding.

You taught me power is survival.

Now you are throwing everything away because of a letter?!"

The Father's Anger

Chen Guowei's eyes flared.

"Enough."

His voice thundered through the study.

"Shut up!"

The servants outside flinched.

Lady Chen froze.

He pointed at her.

"You speak of sacrifice?

You speak of power?"

His voice trembled with restrained rage.

"You think I don't know what you endure in the palace?

You think I don't see how the Dowager uses you like a chess piece?"

Lady Chen's eyes widened.

"Then why—"

He cut her off.

"Because I will not send my second daughter into that hell."

The room went silent.

"You may endure it," he continued harshly,

"but Ruyi will not."

Lady Chen's lips parted.

"She is innocent," he said coldly.

"She does not know how to scheme.

She does not know how to survive poison behind smiles.

She deserves a life that is clean."

Lady Chen whispered,

"And you think marrying into the Duke family is clean?"

"Yes," Chen Guowei said without hesitation.

Protecting the Younger Daughter

He walked toward the window.

"Lian Rou is not like the palace men.

He is upright.

He is honest.

He treats Ruyi gently."

Lady Chen's nails dug into her palms.

"No one compares to him," her father continued.

"He will protect her.

The Duke family protects their own."

Lady Chen scoffed.

"They are the Empress's family!"

"And?" he snapped.

"She is the Empress because of fate.

Her family raised her well."

Lady Chen stared at him in disbelief.

"You sound like you admire them."

"I admire people who protect their blood," he replied.

"Not people who sell their daughters for power."

The words struck her like a slap.

Her eyes reddened.

"You sent me to the palace," she whispered.

His face hardened.

"And I regret it."

Silence.

The words sank deep.

He turned to face her.

"I will not make the same mistake twice."

The Truth About the Letter

Lady Chen swallowed.

"That letter scared you."

Chen Guowei's eyes darkened.

"Yes."

"Who sent it?" she asked.

"I don't know," he admitted.

"But whoever it is... knows too much."

She stepped closer.

"So you run to the Duke for protection?"

"No," he said.

"I run to safety for my daughter."

She laughed bitterly.

"You always taught me power is safety."

"And I was wrong," he replied quietly.

The words stunned her.

A Daughter's Fear

Lady Chen felt her chest tighten.

"If Ruyi marries Lian Rou..."

"...the Dowager will see us as traitors."

Chen Guowei nodded.

"I know."

Her eyes widened.

"Then you are sacrificing our entire family."

"I am sacrificing my position," he said calmly.

"Not my child."

Tears welled in Lady Chen's eyes.

"Do you know what the Dowager will do to me?"

"I know," he replied softly.

"And still you choose this."

"Yes."

Breaking Point

Lady Chen's voice trembled.

"All those years... you told me to endure.

You told me power is everything."

He walked to her.

"And now I tell you—

power is worthless if it destroys your family."

She looked at him, heart in chaos.

"You're choosing Ruyi over me."

His gaze softened.

"I am choosing both of you to live."

Her lips quivered.

"You are condemning me to the Dowager's wrath."

"You are strong," he said.

"You can survive."

She laughed hollowly.

"I shouldn't have to survive."

For the first time, she sounded like a daughter—not a concubine.

The Father's Final Decision

Chen Guowei straightened.

"The marriage proposal stands."

Lady Chen clenched her fists.

"If the Duke refuses?"

"I will find another honorable family," he said.

"But not the palace."

She shook her head.

"You are destroying our future."

He looked at her steadily.

"No.

I am saving Ruyi's."

Lady Chen Leaves

Lady Chen turned away slowly.

Her back was stiff.

Her heart burned.

As she stepped out of the study, her mind swirled with betrayal, fear, and rage.

Father chose Ruyi.

Not the Chen family's rise.

Not her sacrifice.

Not the palace plan.

Her younger sister's freedom.

And for the first time—

Lady Chen realized she was alone.

The letter arrived sealed with the imperial crest.

Chen Guowei stared at it in silence.

The Dowager Empress had summoned him.

His hand tightened around the parchment.

For days now, invisible threads had been pulling his life into chaos—

threatening letters, forced decisions, political storms rising from nowhere.

He crushed the letter slightly in his fist.

"Damn the person behind all this," he muttered under his breath.

"Stirring trouble in my house... now dragging me into the palace."

His expression darkened.

There was no choice.

He had to go.

Chen Guowei Enters the Palace

The Chen family carriage rolled through the palace gates, wheels creaking over the stone path.

Chen Guowei sat upright, his expression stern.

This time, he was not entering the palace as a proud official father of a favored concubine—

But as a man walking into a trap.

At the Same Time — The Duke's Family Arrives

In another courtyard, Empress Lian An had just finished her morning routines when her maid rushed in.

"Your Majesty... the Duke and Duchess have arrived... with Young Miss Lian Hua and Young Master Lian Rou."

Lian An froze.

"They're here?"

"Why so suddenly?"

Before she could gather her thoughts, footsteps echoed in her courtyard.

And then—

Her younger sister ran in.

"Jiejie!"

Lian Hua threw herself into Lian An's arms.

Lian An caught her tightly.

"Little Hua!"

They hugged hard, laughing and crying at the same time.

"You came without telling me!" Lian An scolded gently.

Lian Hua beamed.

"We wanted to surprise you!"

The Duchess smiled warmly.

The Duke bowed slightly.

Lian Rou followed, bowing with a respectful smile.

"It has been long, Your Majesty."

Lian An quickly helped them inside.

"This is too sudden... what happened?"

The Shocking Proposal

The Duke's face turned serious.

"Yesterday... Chen Guowei came to our residence with gifts."

Lian An stiffened.

"Lady Chen's father?"

The Duke nodded.

"He proposed a marriage alliance."

Lian An's eyes widened.

"Marriage?"

"Yes," the Duke continued.

"He asked that Lian Rou marry Chen Ruyi—Lady Chen's younger sister."

Silence fell.

Lian An stared.

Her mind raced.

They hate us.

Why now?

The Duchess sighed.

"We were shocked as well."

Lian Hua blinked.

"Wait... Ruyi is Lady Chen's sister? That Lady Chen?"

"Yes," Lian Rou said quietly.

Lian An's gaze sharpened.

"This is strange. They despise our family. Why would Chen Guowei seek alliance now?"

The Duke shook his head.

"He said it was for his daughter's happiness."

Lian An narrowed her eyes.

Something doesn't add up.

Lian Rou's Sudden Move

Lian Rou suddenly stood.

"uncle... aunt... Your Majesty... may I speak freely?"

The Duke looked at him, surprised.

"What is it?"

Lian Rou walked to the courtyard door and opened it.

He glanced outside.

Then closed it firmly.

Locked it.

The sound echoed sharply.

The Duke startled.

"Rou'er! What are you doing?"

Lian Hua's eyes lit up.

"Oho?"

Lian Rou took a deep breath and turned back.

"I love Chen Ruyi."

Silence slammed into the room.

The Duchess gasped softly.

The Duke stared.

"You... what?"

Lian Rou bowed deeply.

"We love each other.

This proposal was not coincidence.

It was forced."

Lian An's heart skipped.

"So the letter...?"

Lian Rou nodded.

"Someone threatened Chen Guowei.

They forced his hand."

Lian Hua whistled.

"Damn, Cousin... you're bold."

Lian Rou met her gaze.

"He would never have accepted this marriage willingly.

So I made sure he had no choice."

The Duke's voice trembled.

"You threatened an official?"

"No," Lian Rou replied firmly.

"I used the truth of his hidden crimes."

The Duchess paled.

"Rou'er..."

Lian Rou knelt.

"I am sorry.

But I love her."

The Family's Reactions

Lian An closed her eyes briefly.

Then she opened them and walked to Lian Rou.

"Stand up."

He obeyed.

She looked at him long and hard.

"You used dangerous methods."

"I know," he said.

"But if I didn't... Ruyi would be sent to the palace."

Lian An's expression hardened.

"That palace is not a place for innocent girls."

Lian Hua nodded vigorously.

"True. If she came here, she'd be eaten alive."

The Duke sighed deeply.

"You have crossed a line."

Lian Rou lowered his head.

"I crossed it for love."

The Duchess's eyes softened.

"Does the girl love you too?"

Lian Rou nodded.

"She asked me to be brave."

Lian Hua clapped.

"That's romantic."

The Duke shot her a look.

Lian An exhaled slowly.

"You forced Chen Guowei's hand..."

But now the palace will notice this alliance."

Lian Rou's jaw tightened.

"I am ready for consequences."

The Empress's Decision

Lian An placed a hand on his shoulder.

"You are reckless."

Then she added softly,

"But I will not oppose love."

His eyes lifted.

"You support me?"

"I support you protecting an innocent girl from the palace," she replied.

"But I do not support blackmail."

He bowed deeply.

"I accept your scolding."

Lian Hua grinned.

"You're brave, Brother."

The Duke sighed again.

"We will consider the proposal... but carefully."

The Duchess nodded.

"If this is genuine love... we will not break it."

Lian Rou's eyes shone.

"Thank you."

Meanwhile — Chen Guowei Faces the Dowager

Far across the palace...

Chen Guowei stepped into the Dowager Empress's court.

His spine was straight.

But his heart was heavy.

Whatever storm was about to fall—

It had already begun.