

Ghost 212

Chapter 212: two women poison

Chen Guowei stood under the burning sun of the Dowager Empress's courtyard.

One hour passed.

Then another half hour.

Sweat soaked through his inner robes. The stone tiles beneath his feet were scorching. His legs trembled, but he did not dare move.

Every maid passing by glanced at him with hidden mockery.

He was an important minister.

But here—

He was being punished without words.

Finally, the curtain of the Dowager Empress's hall lifted.

A maid announced coldly,

"Minister Chen, enter."

Chen Guowei straightened his back and stepped inside, bowing deeply.

"Your Majesty."

The Dowager Empress sat on her high couch, her eyes sharp as knives.

Before he could raise his head—

A porcelain teacup flew toward his face.

He flinched.

The cup shattered against the pillar beside him, tea splashing across his sleeve.

The Dowager Empress slammed her palm on the armrest.

"You traitorous dog!" she roared.

"How dare you betray the Chen clan?!"

Chen Guowei knelt instantly.

"Your Majesty, I—"

"Shut up!"

Her voice cracked with fury.

"You dare marry your daughter to the Duke's nephew?"

The very house that stands against us politically?

Have you forgotten who raised your family?

Who lifted you from dust to silk?"

Her eyes burned.

"Do you think I will allow the Chen bloodline to mix with the enemy?!"

Chen Guowei lowered his head until his forehead touched the floor.

"I did not intend betrayal, Your Majesty."

The Dowager laughed coldly.

"Then what do you call this?"

He clenched his fists.

"I... was forced."

The Dowager's gaze sharpened.

"Forced by whom?"

Chen Guowei hesitated.

Fear flickered in his eyes.

"I cannot reveal it yet."

Her lips curved into a cruel smile.

"You think I am blind?"

"Someone threatened you, and you dared to bow to that threat instead of bowing to me?"

She stood.

"If you think hiding behind 'fatherly love' will protect you—

You are a fool."

At that moment—

Soft footsteps echoed.

Lady Chen entered.

She bowed gracefully.

"Greetings, Your Majesty."

The Dowager gestured for her to rise.

Lady Chen glanced at her father kneeling on the floor.

Her expression flickered—just once.

But inside—

She was smiling.

Good.

At least my sister will not enter the palace now.

At least I remain the only Chen daughter close to the throne.

The Dowager turned to her.

"Your father has disappointed me."

Lady Chen sighed softly.

"Father... how could you make such a decision without consulting the palace?"

Her voice was gentle.

But her eyes were cold.

Chen Guowei closed his eyes.

"I did this for your sister's future."

Lady Chen's lips curved faintly.

"And what about the Chen clan's future?"

The Dowager slammed the table again.

"Exactly! Your daughter belongs in the palace—not in the Duke's residence!"

Chen Guowei lifted his head slightly.

"My younger daughter is innocent.

She does not belong in palace schemes."

The Dowager laughed sharply.

"Innocent?"

"In this palace, innocence is fertilizer."

Lady Chen remained silent outwardly.

But inside—

Good.

At least Ruyi stays far from the Emperor.

She will never replace me.

Her gaze darkened.

But why does she get to marry Lian Rou?

The Duke's nephew.

The man who could strengthen the Empress's house.

That part burned.

Her nails dug into her palm beneath her sleeves.

Empress's family grows stronger.

That cannot be allowed.

Her thoughts drifted to Shin Gu.

Shin Gu will act.

That woman is useful.

Ruthless.

Hidden.

She lifted her head and spoke softly.

"Your Majesty, perhaps Father acted out of fear.

We should... forgive him."

The Dowager sneered.

"You are too kind."

Lady Chen bowed.

"But I agree... this marriage strengthens the Empress's family."

The Dowager's eyes darkened.

"I will not allow the Empress's roots to spread further."

Lady Chen lowered her gaze respectfully.

Inside—

Good.

Let the Dowager target the Empress.

As for Shin Gu—

She will handle the rest.

Chen Guowei knelt in silence, knowing—

The palace had now officially turned against him.

And his daughters were standing on two different sides of blood and power.

Chen Guowei knelt beneath the carved beams of the Dowager Empress's hall, but his mind was no longer there.

The heat of the courtyard stones still burned through his knees.

The shattered teacup lay in pieces beside him.

Yet his thoughts were elsewhere.

With his younger daughter.

With Chen Ruyi's gentle eyes.

She was too soft for this palace.

Too clean.

Too easily hurt.

Chen Guowei had entered court politics young. He had learned long ago that the palace did not eat people whole—it peeled them layer by layer until only bones remained.

And Chen Ruyi had no armor.

She smiled easily.

Trusted easily.

Loved deeply.

If she entered the palace...

She would not survive.

A Father's Decision

He bowed his head again before the Dowager Empress.

"I will not bring my younger daughter into palace politics," he said slowly, firmly.

"She is not suited for it."

The Dowager laughed coldly.

"You dare defy me?"

Chen Guowei raised his eyes.

"For once... yes."

The Dowager narrowed her gaze.

"You were not this brave when you sent your elder daughter."

His jaw tightened.

Because he had believed Lady Chen was suited for it.

And now—

He saw the mistake clearly.

His Two Daughters

Chen Guowei's eyes drifted toward Lady Chen.

She stood beside the Dowager Empress, smiling softly, posture perfect, voice sweet.

A picture of palace elegance.

But Chen Guowei had raised her.

He knew what lay beneath that smile.

Shrewdness.

Calculation.

Ambition.

She belonged in this palace.

But she was losing ground.

He could see it.

The Emperor's attention had shifted.

Not fully—but noticeably.

Lady Chen smiled more.

Spoke more.

Hovered more.

And still...

She was losing control.

Worse—

She was becoming impatient.

And impatience in the palace was fatal.

Chen Guowei felt disappointment settle in his chest like cold stone.

So many years of training her.

So many careful lessons in restraint, timing, submission, and control.

And yet—

She was allowing jealousy to show.

Allowing emotion to cloud strategy.

Useless, he thought bitterly.

If you cannot hold the Emperor's heart after all this time, what was the point of sending you here?

His eyes hardened.

He would not sacrifice his second daughter to fix the elder one's failure.

Choosing Lian Rou

Chen Guowei thought of Lian Rou.

The Duke's nephew.

A young man with backbone.

A man who stood openly by the Empress's side.

A man with growing influence, future potential, and—most importantly—clear morals.

Chen Guowei had watched Lian Rou from afar for years.

He had admired his discipline.

His intelligence.

His loyalty to family.

He had also seen how Lian Rou treated other person

Gentle.

Respectful.

Protective.

This was not palace love.

This was real love.

Chen Guowei clenched his fist beneath his sleeve.

If my daughter must marry,

Let her marry a man who will shield her from wolves—not push her into their den.

And politically—

Aligning with the Empress's family was no longer foolish.

The Empress was rising.

Her influence was growing.

The Emperor was changing.

Chen Guowei could see it.

Power was shifting.

The wind in the palace was no longer blowing solely from the Dowager Empress's direction.

Being on the Empress's side now...

Was the safer choice.

Dowager's Fury, Daughter's Smile

The Dowager Empress stared at him.

"So you choose the Duke's side."

Chen Guowei bowed.

"I choose my daughter's life."

Her lips curved cruelly.

"Do not regret this."

Chen Guowei remained silent.

Regret?

He only regretted one thing.

That he had ever sent his elder daughter into this palace.

He glanced at Lady Chen again.

She was smiling.

Agreeing with the Dowager.

Playing her role perfectly.

But Chen Guowei saw the tightness in her eyes.

The forced politeness.

The hidden resentment.

She is losing ground, he realized.

And instead of strengthening herself... she is panicking.

A panicking woman in the palace was more dangerous than a defeated one.

Not because she was strong—

But because she would do something stupid.

Chen Guowei's heart sank.

He suddenly feared what his elder daughter might do next.

A Quiet Resolve

As he was dismissed from the Dowager Empress's presence, Chen Guowei walked out with his spine straight.

His reputation might take a hit.

His position might weaken.

But his daughter would live.

He clenched his jaw.

I will protect Ruyi even if the palace burns behind me.

And if standing beside the Empress keeps my family alive—

Then so be it.

Lady Chen's Shadowed Thoughts

From inside the hall, Lady Chen watched her father leave.

Her smile never faded.

But her heart darkened.

So Father chose her over me.

She lowered her gaze.

He does not understand.

If my sister marries Lian Rou,

The Empress's influence grows.

That threatens me.

And Shin Gu...

Her lips tightened.

Shin Gu must act soon.

Because the board is shifting.

And I refuse to lose.