

Ghost 219

Chapter 219: the duke restaurant heard

The Duke's residence had always been calm in the mornings.

Servants swept the courtyard stones, birds chirped softly from the carved wooden beams, and the smell of morning tea drifted through the halls.

But that morning—

The calm shattered.

A breathless steward rushed in from the outer gate, face pale as ash.

"D-Duke... Duchess... news from the palace..."

The Duke looked up sharply.

"What news? Speak properly."

The steward swallowed, voice trembling.

"They say... Her Majesty the Empress... tried to take her own life last night."

Shock Like Thunder

The tea cup slipped from the Duchess's hand.

It shattered on the floor.

Her face drained of color.

"W-What did you say?"

The Duke stood up so suddenly his chair fell backward.

"Repeat that."

The steward lowered his head.

"The capital is already in chaos. They say the Empress jumped into the lake. Prince Liang saved her."

The Duchess staggered, clutching her chest.

"My... my child..."

Her knees weakened, and the maids rushed forward to support her.

Lian Hua, the Empress's younger sister, froze where she stood.

Her eyes widened, then filled with tears.

"Sister...? No... she wouldn't... She wouldn't do that!"

The Cousin Brother's Rage

Lian Rou, who had been reading in the corner, stood up slowly.

His hand tightened around the scroll until it crumpled.

"If anything happens to her," he said in a low, dangerous voice,

"I will kill the Emperor with my own hands."

The room went silent.

The servants froze.

The Duke turned sharply.

"Rou'er!"

But Lian Rou's eyes were burning.

"They married her into that cold palace, surrounded by enemies, without family. Now look what happened! If she truly tried to die, it's because she was driven to it!"

Lian Hua nodded fiercely, tears spilling down her cheeks.

"Brother is right! They bullied her! That Dowager Empress never liked Sister. And the Emperor... he never protected her properly!"

The Duchess broke down completely.

"I told you... I told you the palace is no place for our child. Why did we agree to send her there? Why did we let her go alone?"

She covered her face, sobbing.

The Duke stood there, fists clenched.

Regret crushed down on his chest.

He had sent his daughter to become Empress for the family's honor.

But now—

Honor tasted like poison.

The Decision

The Duchess lifted her head suddenly, eyes red but sharp.

"We're going to the palace. Now."

The Duke nodded without hesitation.

"Yes. Prepare the carriage. Immediately."

Lian Hua wiped her tears and grabbed her cloak.

"I'm coming too! I want to see Sister with my own eyes!"

Lian Rou was already moving toward the door.

"If they dare to hurt her again," he said coldly,

"I won't care who sits on the throne."

The Duke stopped him.

"Rou'er. Control yourself."

But even the Duke's own hands were trembling.

Because in his heart, he was thinking the same thing.

The Servants' Grief and Gossip

As the household rushed into chaos, the servants whispered among themselves.

"I always felt sorry for Her Ladyship when she married into the palace..."

"The Dowager Empress treats everyone harshly. How much worse for an outsider?"

"They say the Emperor favors Lady Chen. No wonder the Empress felt lonely."

"So pitiful... to be Empress yet have no one."

Some servants wiped their eyes.

Some clenched their fists.

All of them felt bitterness.

The Duke's residence, once dignified and orderly, buzzed with sorrow and anger.

The servants packed medicine, warm cloaks, nourishing tonics—anything that might help the Empress.

No one trusted the palace to take proper care of her.

The Duke's Silent Guilt

As he walked toward the carriage, the Duke paused.

He stared at the tall gates of his residence.

His daughter had once laughed here.

She had chased her sister through these halls.

She had argued with her cousin brother under these trees.

And now...

She lay injured in a palace lake.

He closed his eyes.

"I failed you as a father," he whispered.

The Whisper Bowl had never been louder.

Steam rose from pots. Knives hit chopping boards in fast rhythm. Trainees shouted orders, workers carried bowls, and the newly renovated walls echoed with life. The smell of dumplings and broth drifted into the street, pulling customers into the long queue outside.

It was a normal, busy day.

Until the news arrived.

A breathless vendor stumbled in from the street, face pale, voice shaking.

"D-Did you hear? Something terrible happened in the palace last night!"

The room quieted slightly.

Yao Qing frowned. "What happened? Speak properly."

The man swallowed.

"They say... the Empress jumped into the lake. Prince Liang saved her. The palace is in chaos."

The ladle slipped from Yao Qing's hand and clattered to the floor.

The twins froze mid-step.

The new man went completely pale.

For a moment, the Whisper Bowl seemed to lose its breath.

Shock Turns to Rage

Yao Qing's eyes reddened instantly.

"I knew it," she said hoarsely.

"I always knew that dog Emperor would push her to the brink one day."

Her voice trembled with fury.

"He pretends to protect her, pretends to care, but in his heart he only has Lady Chen! He lets the Dowager humiliate her, lets the palace eat her alive—how long did he think she could endure that place?"

One of the twins slammed a fist against the table.

"That palace is poison!"

The other twin's jaw tightened.

"She smiled every time she came back here, but we knew she was suffering. She never said much, but her eyes were tired."

The new man clenched his hands.

"She carried everything alone. That place never treated her like a human being. They only see power and status."

Yao Qing wiped her eyes angrily.

"She was so happy here. Running the restaurant, teaching people, building something with her own hands. That palace never deserved her."

Her voice hardened.

"If anything happens to her... I swear I won't forgive that Emperor."

The Restaurant Falls Silent

The workers and trainees had all heard.

No one spoke.

Some had been slaves once.

Some had been starving beggars.

Some had been broken people the Empress had lifted with her own hands.

To them, she wasn't a distant Empress.

She was Sister Lian.

The woman who taught them to read.

The woman who fed them.

The woman who believed they could become more.

One of the laborers wiped his eyes.

"She saved us. If the palace hurt her..."

Another whispered,

"She didn't deserve this..."

Even the scholar, standing near the doorway, felt his chest tighten.

The Whisper Bowl, usually filled with laughter and clatter, was wrapped in heavy silence.

Decision — They Will Go to Her

Yao Qing straightened suddenly.

"We're going to the palace."

The twins looked at her at the same time.

"Now."

The new man nodded firmly.

"We can't just sit here."

Yao Qing turned to the workers.

"The restaurant will close for the day. Hang the sign. Anyone who wants to leave can leave. Anyone who wants to stay, stay. But we are going to see her with our own eyes."

A few workers immediately spoke up.

"We'll manage the kitchen!" "We can handle orders!" "Sister Lian saved us—we'll protect her work!"

Yao Qing's throat tightened.

"Thank you."

She grabbed her cloak.

The twins were already fetching theirs.

The new man tightened his belt.

"If that Emperor truly pushed her to this," he said quietly,

"then he has to face us."

Yao Qing's eyes burned.

"He'll face more than words."

On the Way Out

As they stepped out of the Whisper Bowl, the signboard creaked in the wind.

For the first time since reopening, the doors closed early.

The street was filled with whispers.

"The Empress jumped into the lake..." "They say she couldn't bear the palace life..." "The Emperor favors Lady Chen..." "Poor Empress..."

Yao Qing clenched her fists.

"Let them whisper," she said bitterly.

"When we reach her, we'll know the truth."

The twins walked on either side of her, silent but furious.

The new man walked behind them, eyes dark.

In their hearts, one thought burned:

She is not alone.

Not anymore.