

## **Ghost 229**

Chapter 229: emperor refused to believe

White silk banners fluttered across every corridor of the imperial palace.

The vibrant red decorations that once symbolized prosperity had been removed overnight. In their place hung long sheets of mourning cloth that swayed gently in the cold wind.

The palace looked unfamiliar.

Quiet.

Heavy.

Broken.

Servants walked with lowered heads.

Even the guards spoke in whispers.

The words had spread faster than wildfire.

"The Empress is dead."

But grief did not fall equally across the palace.

Some mourned sincerely.

Some whispered rumors.

Some felt guilt.

And some felt something far more dangerous.

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The Empress's Courtyard

Inside the Empress's courtyard, the air felt suffocating.

No one spoke loudly.

No one dared to.

The Empress lay on the bed, her body pale and motionless.

Her hair had been gently arranged by the maids.

A thin blanket covered her fragile frame.

Her breathing was so faint that most people could not even see it.

But the Emperor could.

He sat beside her bed, gripping her cold hand tightly.

His eyes were red.

But they were not the eyes of a man who accepted loss.

They were the eyes of someone refusing reality.

"Stop crying."

His voice suddenly cut through the room.

Everyone froze.

Princess Zhi looked up in shock.

The Duchess wiped her tears.

Even the healer lifted his head slowly.

The Emperor's gaze remained fixed on the Empress's face.

"She is not dead."

His voice trembled but remained stubborn.

"Look carefully."

The healer hesitated.

He had checked her pulse countless times.

The heartbeat was barely there.

But it existed.

Weak.

Dying.

Yet still there.

"She still breathes," the Emperor continued.

"Very slowly."

His fingers tightened around her hand.

"So no one will speak of death again."

The command echoed through the room like thunder.

The Duke's clenched fists loosened slightly.

The Duchess looked at her daughter again with desperate hope.

Princess Zhi crawled closer to the bed.

"She... she is still alive?"

The healer bowed his head.

"Her pulse has not completely stopped."

Hope spread like a fragile spark.

But fear remained stronger.

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Princess Zhi's Tears

Princess Zhi knelt beside the bed.

Her hands trembled as she gently touched the Empress's arm.

"You hear that?" she whispered through tears.

"You are not allowed to leave."

Her voice cracked.

"You promised you would cook for me again."

Memories flooded her mind.

The first bowl of soup the Empress made for her.

The quiet conversations.

The cats curled beside them.

The laughter that had slowly healed her loneliness.

Princess Zhi's shoulders shook.

"You said we would face everything together."

Her tears fell onto the Empress's blanket.

"Please wake up."

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The Duke's Fury

The Duke stood near the doorway.

His eyes were cold and sharp.

He stared directly at the Emperor.

"If she dies," he said slowly, "the entire palace will answer for it."

The room froze again.

The Emperor did not look away.

"Then pray that she does not."

Their gazes locked.

Two powerful men.

Bound together by the fragile life of the woman on the bed.

The Duchess stepped forward quickly.

"Enough."

Her voice was soft but firm.

"This is not the time."

She knelt beside her daughter and gently stroked her hair.

"My child... you must wake up."

Tears streamed down her face.

"You promised to come home for your cousin's wedding."

Her voice broke.

"You promised."

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Outside the Chamber

Beyond the doors, whispers continued spreading.

Servants gathered quietly.

"Is it true?"

"They say the Emperor refuses to accept her death."

"They say she still breathes."

One maid wiped her eyes.

"She always treated us kindly."

Another whispered,

"I heard she cooked food for the entire kitchen once."

Even the palace guards felt uneasy.

The palace had never felt like this before.

Like something sacred had been broken.

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The Three Ghosts

Invisible to everyone else, three ghostly figures hovered near the ceiling.

Fen Yu cried openly.

"She cannot leave us!"

The General clenched his fists angrily.

"That damn force pulled her soul away!"

The Scholar remained silent, sensing the spiritual threads surrounding the Empress.

Something was wrong.

Very wrong.

Her soul had not completely departed.

But it had gone very far.

Too far.

"We must call her back," Fen Yu sobbed.

The Scholar shook his head slowly.

"We cannot."

"The barrier is too strong."

The General growled.

"Then we break it!"

But the Scholar's voice remained calm.

"If we interfere recklessly... her soul may shatter."

Silence fell among them.

They could only watch.

And pray.

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The Emperor's Vigil

Hours passed.

The Emperor refused to move.

He had not eaten.

He had not slept.

He simply sat there holding her hand.

The healer approached cautiously.

"Your Majesty... you should rest."

The Emperor ignored him.

"She likes warm sunlight."

His voice was soft.

"Open the curtains."

The maids hurried to obey.

Golden light filled the chamber.

It touched the Empress's pale face.

The Emperor leaned closer.

"You once said you hated darkness."

His thumb brushed her knuckles gently.

"So come back."

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The Palace in Mourning

Despite the Emperor's refusal to accept her death, the palace mourning had already begun.

White lanterns were lit.

Temple bells rang slowly.

Officials lowered their heads.

The entire imperial residence seemed to breathe grief.

But inside the Empress's chamber—

Hope still flickered.

Fragile.

Fading.

Yet alive.

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A Tiny Movement

Late in the afternoon, the room had grown quiet.

Most people were exhausted from crying.

Princess Zhi leaned against the bedframe.

The Duchess prayed softly.

The Duke stood silently.

The Emperor still held her hand.

Then—

Something moved.

Very slightly.

At first, he thought he imagined it.

But then he felt it again.

A faint twitch.

His breath caught.

"Wait."

Everyone froze.

He leaned closer.

Her fingers trembled.

Barely.

Almost invisible.

But real.

The Emperor's voice shook.

"She moved."

The healer rushed forward instantly.

He grabbed her wrist.

His eyes widened.

"The pulse..."

It was still weak.

Still fragile.

But stronger than before.

Hope exploded in the room like lightning.

"She is fighting," the healer whispered.

The Duchess collapsed into tears again.

Princess Zhi laughed through sobs.

The Duke exhaled deeply for the first time.

And the Emperor—

For the first time in days—

Smiled.

A broken, desperate smile.

"See?" he whispered to her.

"I told them."

"You are not allowed to die."

The palace was drowning in silence.

White mourning banners swayed gently in the wind like ghosts of grief drifting through the corridors.

From every corner of the imperial residence came quiet whispers.

"The Empress has passed..."

"Such a young life..."

"What a tragic fate..."

Servants wiped their eyes as they worked.

Guards stood with lowered heads.

Even the birds that usually filled the palace gardens with song seemed strangely quiet.

But inside the Empress's chamber, one man refused to accept what the entire palace believed.

The Emperor had not moved from her bedside for hours.

His robe was wrinkled.

His hair slightly disordered.

His usually sharp and dignified posture had collapsed into something fragile.

His fingers were tightly wrapped around the Empress's cold hand.

He watched her face without blinking.

As if the moment he looked away, she might disappear forever.

Around him, the room was filled with people.

The Duke.

The Duchess.

Princess Zhi.

The Empress's cousin.

Her friends.

All of them carried the same expression.

Grief.

Helplessness.

And fear.

The healer stood quietly near the foot of the bed.

His expression was heavy.

He knew the truth.

The Empress's pulse was barely there.

Her breathing so faint it almost seemed imaginary.

No matter how much medicine he applied...

No matter how many herbs he burned...

Her body was slowly slipping away.

But he did not dare say those words aloud.

Not while the Emperor sat there.

Holding her like a man clinging to the last thread of hope.

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The Dowager Arrives

Outside the chamber, footsteps approached.

Steady.

Slow.

Commanding.

The maids immediately bowed.

"The Dowager Empress has arrived."

The room parted.

The Dowager entered quietly.

For the first time in many years, her face looked tired.

Not stern.

Not cold.

Just tired.

Her gaze moved across the room.

She saw the Duchess crying softly.

Princess Zhi kneeling beside the bed.

The Duke standing like a statue carved from stone.

And finally—

Her eyes landed on her son.

The Emperor.

Still sitting there.

Still gripping the Empress's hand.

Still whispering quietly to her.

As if she could hear him.

The Dowager walked closer.

Her footsteps were soft.

But each one felt heavy.

When she reached the bed, she looked down at the Empress.

The girl looked so young.

So fragile.

The pale color of her face made her seem almost translucent beneath the lantern light.

The Dowager's throat tightened slightly.

She had never admitted it.

But the Empress had changed the palace.

The kitchens smelled warmer.

Servants laughed more.

Even Princess Zhi had started smiling again.

But now—

The room smelled of medicine and death.

The Dowager slowly turned to her son.

He had not even noticed her arrival.

His entire world had shrunk to the woman lying on the bed.

"Xiao Han."

Her voice was quiet.

The Emperor did not respond.

The Dowager stepped closer.

She placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Xiao Han."

Still nothing.

His eyes remained fixed on the Empress's face.

"She is alive," he whispered softly.

The Dowager closed her eyes briefly.

Pain flickered across her expression.

Then she reached forward.

She grabbed his shoulders firmly and shook him.

"Wake up."

The Emperor's head jerked slightly.

His gaze finally shifted.

He looked at his mother.

But his eyes were hollow.

"She is not dead," he said stubbornly.

"She just needs time."

The Dowager's voice trembled.

"Look at her."

He shook his head.

"No."

"She will wake up."

"Soon."

The Dowager felt her chest tighten painfully.

Her fingers gripped his robe.

"Xiao Han..."

Her voice softened.

"She is gone."

The Emperor's expression darkened instantly.

"No."

The Dowager swallowed.

Her next words were the hardest she had spoken in years.

"Let her go."

The room fell silent.

The Duke clenched his fists.

Princess Zhi covered her mouth again.

The Duchess began crying softly.

But the Emperor's reaction was something none of them expected.

He suddenly stood.

The chair behind him crashed to the floor.

His voice echoed through the chamber.

"No!"

The sound startled everyone.

Even the Dowager stepped back.

The Emperor's chest rose and fell heavily.

"She is not dead."

His hand tightened around the Empress's fingers.

"Her heart is still beating."

The healer looked down.

Because the Emperor was not entirely wrong.

The pulse still existed.

Barely.

But it existed.

The Dowager stared at him for a long moment.

Then she sighed.

For the first time, she saw something clearly.

Her son was not being stubborn.

He was terrified.

Terrified of losing someone he had only just begun to understand.

The Dowager's voice softened.

"If she lives, then heaven has shown mercy."

Her gaze returned to the Empress.

"But if she does not..."

Her hand rested briefly on the Emperor's shoulder again.

"You must be strong enough to accept it."

The Emperor looked down at the Empress again.

His thumb brushed her cold knuckles gently.

"No."

His voice was quiet now.

Broken.

"She promised me she would stay."

Silence filled the chamber again.

Outside, the wind stirred the white mourning banners.

Inside, time itself seemed to pause.

Everyone watched the still body on the bed.

Waiting.

Praying.

Hoping.

That the Emperor would not be forced to let go.