

Ghost 235

Chapter 235: the truth

The chamber remained quiet after Yao Qing finished speaking.

The soft sound of wind brushing against the curtains was the only movement in the room. Everyone seemed lost in their own thoughts, trying to make sense of what had happened to the Empress and the strange rumors Yao Qing had just mentioned.

The Emperor stood near the window for a moment longer, staring outside at the palace courtyard.

His expression slowly hardened.

There was something he had been hiding.

Something he had not told anyone.

Until now.

He turned around slowly.

"There is something all of you need to know."

His voice immediately caught everyone's attention.

The Duke looked at him seriously.

"What is it?"

The Emperor hesitated for a brief moment, as if weighing whether this secret should truly be revealed.

But the situation had already crossed the point where silence was safe.

"The reason I have been investigating strange incidents in the palace..." he began slowly, "...is because this may be connected to something much more dangerous."

Princess Zhi frowned.

"More dangerous than someone controlling another person's body?"

The Emperor's eyes darkened slightly.

"Yes."

He looked around the room.

"There are rumors... about ghost breeding."

For a moment—

No one spoke.

The words felt so strange that they did not immediately make sense.

The Duchess blinked in confusion.

"Ghost... breeding?"

The Duke leaned forward slightly.

"What do you mean by that?"

The Emperor exhaled slowly.

"Months ago, during an investigation outside the capital, we discovered signs that some cultivators were attempting forbidden experiments."

Princess Zhi looked shocked.

"What kind of experiments?"

The Emperor's voice lowered.

"They were trying to create offspring between ghosts and humans."

The entire room fell silent.

Even the servants standing outside the door seemed to freeze.

The Duke was the first to react.

"That is impossible."

The Emperor shook his head slowly.

"I thought so too."

"But the evidence suggested otherwise."

Princess Zhi pressed her hand to her chest.

"How could something like that even exist?"

Yao Qing looked disturbed.

"That sounds like a nightmare."

The Emperor nodded slightly.

"That is exactly what it is."

He continued speaking carefully.

"These beings would not be fully human... and not fully ghost."

"They would possess unnatural strength, strange spiritual abilities, and powers that ordinary cultivators cannot control."

The Duchess shivered.

"That sounds like a disaster waiting to happen."

The Emperor nodded.

"Which is why such practices were banned centuries ago."

He glanced toward the Empress briefly.

"But recently... there have been signs that someone is trying to revive those forbidden methods again."

Everyone in the room looked uneasy.

The Duke slowly leaned back, processing the information.

"This... explains many strange things."

Princess Zhi looked confused.

"But what does that have to do with what happened to Lian An?"

The Emperor answered quietly.

"Because spiritual techniques used in those rituals often involve soul manipulation."

The room suddenly felt colder.

Princess Zhi looked at the Empress, who sat silently on the bed.

"What happened to you..."

She swallowed.

"...might not have been an accident."

The Duke frowned deeply.

"Someone might have tried to control her soul."

Yao Qing rubbed her arms nervously.

"That is terrifying."

What surprised everyone the most, however, was the Empress herself.

She showed almost no reaction.

She simply listened quietly, her expression calm.

Yao Qing looked at her.

"Lian An... you are not even shocked?"

The Empress blinked slowly.

"I already suspected something like this."

The Emperor glanced at her.

He knew why.

Because she had already encountered strange spiritual matters before.

The Duke sighed heavily.

"If this is true..."

He looked toward the Emperor.

"...then the danger is much greater than we thought."

Princess Zhi spoke softly.

"And the person who attacked Lian An..."

"...could be connected to those forbidden experiments."

Everyone fell silent again.

It was Lian Rou, the Empress's cousin, who finally broke the silence.

He had been standing quietly near the door, listening to everything carefully.

Now he stepped forward.

"If we connect everything together..."

Everyone looked at him.

He spoke slowly, organizing the thoughts in his mind.

"First, the Empress nearly died because her soul was being pulled away."

"Second, strange rumors about unnatural power and revived people exist in different regions."

"And third..."

He looked directly at the Emperor.

"...you discovered experiments involving ghost and human offspring."

The room grew tense.

Lian Rou finished his conclusion calmly.

"Then the attack on the Empress might be part of the same operation."

Princess Zhi's eyes widened.

"You mean..."

He nodded.

"Yes."

"If someone is secretly practicing forbidden ghost cultivation inside the empire..."

His voice grew colder.

"...then the palace itself might already be involved."

A heavy silence fell over everyone.

The Duke slowly clenched his fist.

"If that is true..."

"...then the entire kingdom is in danger."

The Emperor nodded.

"That is exactly my concern."

Princess Zhi suddenly spoke.

"If someone in the palace is connected to these rituals..."

Her eyes moved around the room.

"...then we cannot trust anyone."

Her voice trembled slightly.

"It could be anyone."

The Duchess looked frightened.

"You mean someone within the royal family?"

Princess Zhi shook her head slowly.

"I don't know."

"But whoever it is..."

"...has already tried to kill Lian An once."

The Empress finally spoke.

Her voice was calm but serious.

"Then we must be more careful."

Everyone looked at her.

Princess Zhi nodded firmly.

"Yes."

She looked at everyone in the room.

"From now on, we cannot let our guard down."

Her eyes moved slowly across the faces around her.

"If someone inside the palace is working with forbidden ghost rituals..."

"...then we are all targets."

The Emperor looked toward the window again.

Outside, the palace grounds were quiet.

Too quiet.

And for the first time—

Everyone in the room realized something deeply unsettling.

The enemy they were looking for...

Might already be living inside the palace walls.

The chamber fell silent again after Lian Rou's conclusion.

The words ghost breeding, soul manipulation, and forbidden rituals still hung heavily in the air. Everyone present understood that the matter was far more dangerous than they had imagined.

If someone within the palace truly practiced such dark arts, then no one was safe.

Princess Zhi tightened her grip on her prayer beads. Her mind immediately went back to the day she lost her child.

The oil on the path.

The strange dizziness.

The sudden fall.

Now everything felt different.

She slowly whispered, "If that person can control souls... then what happened to Lian An... and what happened to me..."

Her voice trembled.

"...may not be accidents."

The room grew colder.

The Emperor's expression hardened.

"Yes."

He spoke quietly but firmly.

"That possibility cannot be ignored."

Yao Qing crossed her arms and frowned.

"Then what are we going to do?"

"We cannot just sit here waiting for that person to attack again."

The Duke nodded.

"This matter concerns the entire kingdom."

"If such forbidden techniques are truly being practiced again, the empire could fall into chaos."

Everyone looked troubled.

But before the tension could grow heavier, the Duchess finally spoke.

Her voice was calm, but there was clear wisdom in her tone.

"Then we must not panic."

Everyone turned to look at her.

The Duchess slowly stood from her seat and walked toward the center of the room.

Her eyes moved carefully from one person to another.

"If someone in the palace truly practices such dark methods..."

She paused.

"...then the worst thing we can do is reveal that we suspect them."

The Emperor understood immediately.

"You mean..."

She nodded.

"We must act as if we know nothing."

Princess Zhi frowned slightly.

"But if we pretend nothing is wrong, that person might attack again."

The Duchess shook her head gently.

"That is exactly why we must pretend."

Her voice became firmer.

"Anyone capable of such magic would be extremely cautious."

"If they realize we are investigating them..."

"...they will hide even deeper."

The Duke slowly nodded.

"My wife is right."

He looked toward the Emperor.

"If the enemy believes we are unaware, they will feel safe."

"And people who feel safe are more likely to make mistakes."

Yao Qing rubbed her chin thoughtfully.

"That actually makes sense."

The Emperor remained silent for a moment, considering the idea.

Then he finally nodded.

"Yes."

"For now, we will keep this information secret."

Princess Zhi looked at him.

"Even from the palace ministers?"

"Yes."

The Emperor replied firmly.

"If rumors about forbidden ghost cultivation spread through the court..."

"...it could cause panic across the empire."

Lian Hua, the Empress's younger sister, looked worried.

"But what about Lian An?"

"She is still weak."

"What if that person tries to harm her again?"

Before the Emperor could answer, the Duchess gently placed a hand on Lian Hua's shoulder.

"We will protect her."

She looked toward the Emperor.

"And His Majesty will increase security around the Empress's courtyard."

The Emperor nodded immediately.

"That has already been arranged."

He turned to the Empress.

"From now on, additional guards will be placed near your residence."

"No one will enter without permission."

The Empress nodded quietly.

"I understand."

For a moment, everyone seemed slightly calmer.

But then the Duchess suddenly smiled.

A soft, knowing smile.

"There is another reason we must act normally."

Everyone looked at her curiously.

"What reason?"

Yao Qing asked.

The Duchess clasped her hands together.

"Because we have something important coming soon."

She turned toward Lian Rou.

"A wedding."

Lian Rou blinked in surprise.

"Mother..."

The Duchess laughed softly.

"Yes, your wedding."

She looked around the room again.

"If we suddenly become secretive or tense, people will notice."

"But if we behave as usual..."

"...preparing for a happy marriage in the family..."

"...no one will suspect anything."

Yao Qing grinned.

"That is actually brilliant."

Princess Zhi also smiled slightly.

"Yes."

"A wedding celebration would make everyone believe the Duke family is focused only on happy matters."

The Duke nodded approvingly.

"My wife's plan is wise."

The Emperor folded his arms thoughtfully.

"A wedding celebration will bring many people together."

He looked at Lian Rou.

"That may even help us observe certain individuals more carefully."

Lian Rou sighed.

"So my marriage is now part of a royal investigation."

Yao Qing laughed.

"Don't complain."

"At least you get the bride you love."

Lian Hua giggled softly.

"Yes, cousin. You should be grateful."

Even the Empress smiled faintly.

The tension in the room slowly eased.

The Duchess clapped her hands lightly.

"Good."

"Then it is settled."

She looked at everyone firmly.

"From this moment onward..."

"...we behave normally."

"No one will speak about ghost breeding."

"No one will mention dark rituals."

"No one will show suspicion."

She paused before finishing her sentence.

"We will simply prepare for Lian Rou's wedding."

The Duke nodded.

"And while everyone celebrates..."

"...we quietly search for the enemy hiding inside the palace."

The Emperor looked toward the Empress again.

His voice softened slightly.

"And this time..."

"...we will not allow that person to harm you again."

Outside the chamber, the palace looked peaceful under the evening sky.

Servants walked through the corridors.

Lanterns flickered softly.

Everything appeared normal.

But inside the palace walls—

A dangerous game had already begun.