

Ghost 241

Chapter 241: preparing to leave the palace

Morning light filtered softly into the Empress's courtyard, painting the white stone paths with warm golden colors. The air was cool, carrying the scent of blooming plum blossoms from the garden outside.

Inside the chamber, Lian An sat beside the window finishing her breakfast when her maid hurried inside.

"Your Majesty," the maid said with excitement, bowing slightly. "The dresses you selected have been completed."

Lian An looked up with interest.

"So quickly?"

The maid smiled and gestured toward the door.

A group of palace servants entered carefully, each carrying long lacquered boxes decorated with gold patterns. They placed the boxes on the table and respectfully stepped back.

The maid opened the first box.

Inside lay the red silk dress Lian An had chosen earlier. The fabric was now perfectly tailored, its sleeves embroidered with delicate golden plum blossoms. The hem shimmered with fine threadwork that caught the morning light.

Beside it were the matching accessories.

A delicate jade hairpin, carved with phoenix wings.

Pearl earrings with tiny golden chains.

A light silk cloak lined with fur to protect against the cold wind.

Another servant opened a second box.

Inside were embroidered silk shoes, perfectly matched to the dress.

The maid smiled proudly.

"The dressmakers worked through the night to finish everything."

Lian An touched the fabric gently.

"They did beautiful work."

Then the maid opened a third box.

Inside lay more items—carefully wrapped bundles of gifts.

"His Majesty sent these for your family," the maid explained.

Lian An looked surprised.

"For my family?"

The maid nodded.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

She began listing the items.

"Fine silk for the Duchess."

"A jade ornament for the Duke."

"Hair ornaments for Lady Lian Hua."

"And ceremonial gifts for the wedding couple."

Lian An stared at the boxes for a moment.

The Emperor had prepared everything carefully.

She sighed softly.

"That man really prepares too much."

The maid smiled.

"His Majesty said the wedding of your cousin is an important event."

Lian An did not answer immediately, but a small smile appeared on her face.

After breakfast, the maids helped her dress.

The red silk gown fit perfectly. The golden embroidery glowed softly under the sunlight.

Her hair was arranged in an elegant bun, decorated with the jade hairpin and a few small pearl ornaments.

When everything was finished, the maid stepped back with admiration.

"Your Majesty looks beautiful."

Lian An laughed softly.

"I'm only attending a family wedding."

"But you are still the Empress," the maid replied gently.

Lian An adjusted her sleeve and then suddenly remembered something.

"Before leaving, I want to go to the market."

The maid blinked.

"To the market?"

Lian An nodded.

"I want to buy gifts for my cousin and his bride."

The maid hesitated.

"But Your Majesty... His Majesty already sent many gifts."

Lian An shook her head.

"Those are official gifts from the palace."

She smiled lightly.

"I want to buy something myself."

The maid understood.

"From your own money?"

"Yes."

Lian An stood up slowly.

"They are my family."

"I should prepare something personally."

The maid nodded but then looked uncertain.

"However... you may need permission from His Majesty to leave the palace."

Lian An sighed.

"I thought so."

Leaving the palace, even for family matters, required the Emperor's approval.

She thought for a moment before saying,

"Send a message to the Emperor."

The maid bowed.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Soon a palace servant was sent to the Emperor's courtyard to inform him that the Empress wished to leave the palace for the Duke residence and stop by the market on the way.

While waiting for the reply, Lian An walked slowly into the courtyard garden.

The winter sun warmed the stone paths beneath her feet.

Her three ghost companions floated nearby, invisible to everyone else.

Fen Yu hovered excitedly beside her.

"So you're going to the market?"

The scholar ghost Li Shen adjusted his sleeves.

"The market in the capital has excellent snack stalls."

General Wei Rong crossed his arms.

"I only care about roasted meat."

Lian An rolled her eyes.

"You three are not coming to eat."

Fen Yu pouted.

"That's unfair."

"You buy gifts for your cousin but nothing for us."

Lian An laughed.

"You're ghosts."

"What would you even do with gifts?"

Wei Rong shrugged.

"We can admire them."

Li Shen nodded seriously.

"Or haunt them."

Fen Yu giggled.

Lian An shook her head helplessly.

"You three are impossible."

Just then the palace messenger returned.

He bowed respectfully.

"Your Majesty, His Majesty has approved your request."

Lian An raised an eyebrow.

"That quickly?"

The messenger nodded.

"His Majesty said you may go freely."

"He has also ordered guards to accompany you."

Lian An smiled faintly.

"That man really worries too much."

But she didn't complain.

Instead she looked toward the palace gate beyond the courtyard walls.

Soon she would return to the Duke residence.

Her childhood home.

And before that—

She would walk through the lively capital market, choosing gifts with her own hands for the wedding.

For the first time in many days, Lian An felt genuinely excited.

The palace had been filled with tension and strange dangers lately.

But today—

She simply wanted to enjoy a peaceful day as a daughter and cousin returning home.

Morning sunlight spread gently across the Empress's courtyard, warming the stone paths and the blooming plum trees.

Inside the chamber, Lian An stood before the large mirror while the maids carefully adjusted the sleeves of the red silk dress she had chosen for her cousin's wedding.

The dress had been completed overnight.

Its golden embroidery shimmered softly, and the jade hairpin in her hair matched the delicate bracelet around her wrist.

On the table beside her lay several lacquered boxes.

They contained the accessories, shoes, and jewelry that had been prepared to match the dress.

Another group of boxes stood nearby.

Those were the gifts the Emperor had sent for the Duke family.

Silk cloth, jade ornaments, wine, and ceremonial wedding items.

Lian An had examined them earlier and could not help sighing.

"That man really prepared everything."

The maid smiled.

"His Majesty said the wedding of your cousin should be celebrated properly."

Lian An did not argue.

But there was still something missing.

She walked toward the table and picked up a small purse.

Inside were her own silver coins.

"I still want to buy gifts myself," she said.

The maid blinked.

"But Your Majesty... His Majesty already sent gifts."

Lian An nodded.

"I know."

"But those are official gifts from the palace."

She closed the purse.

"I want to buy something with my own money."

"For my cousin and his bride."

The maid nodded slowly.

"That is thoughtful."

Then her expression changed slightly.

"However... Your Majesty still needs permission to leave the palace."

Lian An sighed.

"I thought so."

She had already sent a message earlier, but no reply had arrived yet.

The Emperor was probably busy with court matters.

Lian An thought for a moment.

Then a small smile appeared on her lips.

"If the Emperor is busy..."

"Then I will ask the Dowager Empress."

The maid looked slightly nervous.

"Your Majesty will go to the Dowager's courtyard?"

Lian An nodded calmly.

"Yes."

She adjusted her cloak.

"And the Emperor often visits his mother in the morning."

She smiled slightly.

"If he is there, I can ask both of them at the same time."

The maid blinked.

"Killing two birds with one stone."

Lian An laughed softly.

"Exactly."

Her three ghost companions floated nearby, watching the scene.

Fen Yu tilted her head curiously.

"You're going to the Dowager's courtyard willingly?"

Wei Rong crossed his arms.

"That's brave."

Li Shen adjusted his ghostly sleeves thoughtfully.

"Or dangerous."

Lian An rolled her eyes.

"It's just asking permission."

Fen Yu giggled.

"Nothing involving the Dowager is ever simple."

Lian An ignored them.

Soon the maids finished preparing her cloak and accessories.

She stepped out of the chamber and into the courtyard.

The morning breeze brushed lightly against her face.

Guards immediately followed behind her as she walked through the palace paths toward the Dowager Empress's residence.

The palace was lively that morning.

Servants hurried along corridors.

Maids carried trays of tea and documents.

When they saw the Empress approaching, they quickly bowed.

"Greetings, Your Majesty."

Lian An nodded politely as she passed.

Before long, the familiar gates of the Dowager Empress's courtyard came into view.

The guards at the entrance bowed deeply.

"Greetings, Your Majesty."

"I wish to see the Dowager Empress," Lian An said calmly.

One of the maids hurried inside to announce her arrival.

Lian An waited quietly in the courtyard.

Her ghost companions floated around her.

Fen Yu whispered excitedly.

"I bet the Emperor is inside."

Wei Rong shrugged.

"If he is, this will be interesting."

Li Shen chuckled.

"Very interesting."

Lian An ignored their commentary.

A few moments later, the maid returned.

"Her Highness invites you inside."

Lian An stepped into the hall.

The Dowager Empress sat comfortably on her seat, drinking tea.

And just as Lian An expected—

The Emperor was there as well.

He was sitting beside his mother, discussing something quietly.

When he saw Lian An enter, he looked slightly surprised.

"Empress?"

Lian An bowed respectfully.

"Greetings, Mother."

"Greetings, Your Majesty."

The Dowager Empress raised an eyebrow.

"It is rare for you to visit my courtyard so early."

Lian An smiled politely.

"I came to ask for permission."

The Emperor looked curious.

"Permission?"

Lian An nodded.

"My cousin's wedding will take place soon at the Duke residence."

"I wish to return to my family home to attend the ceremony."

The Dowager Empress already knew this, but she still asked calmly,

"And?"

Lian An continued.

"On the way there, I would like to stop at the market."

"I want to buy gifts for my cousin and his bride with my own money."

The Dowager Empress studied her for a moment.

"You are the Empress."

"Why bother with such things?"

Lian An answered honestly.

"Because they are my family."

The Emperor watched her quietly.

A faint smile appeared in his eyes.

The Dowager Empress sighed softly.

"You always do things differently from other noblewomen."

Then she waved her hand.

"You may go."

Lian An bowed.

"Thank you, Mother."

Before she could leave, the Emperor spoke.

"You do not need to worry about security."

"I will arrange guards for you."

Lian An nodded.

"Thank you."

The Dowager Empress picked up her tea again.

"Do not cause trouble in the market."

Lian An laughed softly.

"I will try."

The Emperor watched her as she turned to leave.

Her red dress moved gently with each step.

For some reason, seeing her excited about something as simple as visiting the market made him feel strangely satisfied.

Meanwhile, Lian An stepped out of the hall with a small smile.

Her plan had worked perfectly.

She had received permission from both the Dowager Empress and the Emperor at the same time.

Behind her, the three ghosts floated happily.

Fen Yu clapped.

"That was easier than I expected."

Wei Rong nodded.

"You really did kill two birds with one stone."

Li Shen smiled thoughtfully.

"Now let's go to the market."

Lian An shook her head but couldn't help laughing.

Today would finally be a peaceful day away from the palace.