

Ghost 248

Chapter 248: Shadows in the Quiet Road

The market lights slowly faded behind them as the carriage rolled forward.

The laughter.

The warmth.

The noise—

All of it softened into distant echoes.

Inside the carriage, a calm silence settled.

For the first time since they stepped out—

Everything felt still.

—

Lian Hua leaned back against the cushioned seat, holding a small bag of snacks.

"I'm tired..."

"You ate too much," Lian Rou replied flatly.

"I needed energy."

"For what?"

"For walking."

"...Unbelievable."

Chen Ruyi covered her mouth, laughing softly.

"You two are always like this?"

Lian An smiled faintly.

"Yes."

"Since childhood."

Lian Hua turned toward Chen Ruyi.

"You'll get used to it."

Chen Ruyi nodded gently.

"I think I already am."

—

Outside—

The streets became quieter.

Shops thinned out.

Lanterns grew fewer.

Soon, the carriage moved into a more isolated road.

The air felt colder.

The soft rhythm of hooves echoed more clearly now.

Lian An's gaze shifted slightly.

Something—

Felt off.

She didn't speak immediately.

But her senses sharpened.

Her fingers tightened subtly against her sleeve.

—

Outside the carriage—

The coachman slowed slightly.

A faint unease crept into the air.

Even the wind felt heavier.

—

Inside—

Lian Rou's expression changed.

"...Did you feel that?"

Lian An nodded slightly.

"Yes."

Lian Hua blinked.

"Feel what?"

Chen Ruyi looked around quietly.

"...It suddenly feels very quiet."

Too quiet.

—

Then—

The carriage stopped.

Abruptly.

The sudden halt made Lian Hua lean forward.

"What happened?"

No answer.

Lian Rou immediately moved.

"Stay inside."

He pushed the curtain aside—

—

And froze.

—

The road ahead—

Was blocked.

Figures stood in the darkness.

Five.

No—

Seven.

Their faces covered.

Their presence—

Heavy.

Hostile.

—

Before Lian Rou could react—

A voice cut through the silence.

"Leave the girl."

"Or none of you leave alive."

—

Inside the carriage—

Lian Hua gasped softly.

"Who are they?"

Chen Ruyi's fingers tightened slightly.

Lian An's eyes narrowed.

Her mind moved quickly.

Not random.

Not coincidence.

Targeted.

—

Lian Rou stepped down from the carriage.

His voice was calm.

But sharp.

"Who sent you?"

No answer.

Instead—

One of the masked men stepped forward.

Sword drawn.

"You don't need to know."

—

That was enough.

Lian Rou's gaze hardened.

"...Then you don't need to live."

—

The first attack came fast.

A flash of steel—

A direct strike.

But Lian Rou moved faster.

Clang—

The sound of metal echoed in the empty road.

—

Inside—

Lian Hua grabbed Chen Ruyi's hand.

"Stay close."

Chen Ruyi nodded, though her heart pounded.

Lian An remained still.

Watching.

Calculating.

—

Outside—

Two more attackers rushed forward.

Their movements—

Disciplined.

Not ordinary thugs.

Trained.

Lian Rou deflected one strike—

Then turned—

Kicked another back.

But there were too many.

—

"Get down!" he shouted.

—

Before anyone could react—

An arrow shot toward the carriage.

Lian An's eyes sharpened.

She moved instantly—

Pulled Lian Hua down.

The arrow pierced the wooden frame with a sharp crack.

Chen Ruyi's breath caught.

—

"They're aiming inside," Lian An said calmly.

Lian Hua whispered,

"...What do we do?"

Lian An's gaze turned cold.

"We don't panic."

—

Outside—

The fight intensified.

Three against one.

Then four.

Lian Rou was skilled—

But even he couldn't ignore the numbers.

One attacker slipped past him—

Rushing toward the carriage.

—

Chen Ruyi's eyes widened.

"No—!"

—

The curtain was pulled aside.

A masked figure lunged forward—

—

But before he could enter—

A sharp object struck his wrist.

He staggered back.

—

Lian An stood at the carriage entrance.

Her expression—

Completely different.

Cold.

Controlled.

In her hand—

A small hidden blade.

"You chose the wrong target," she said quietly.

—

The attacker hesitated.

Just for a second.

That was enough.

Lian Rou moved.

One clean strike—

The man fell.

—

But the others didn't retreat.

Instead—

Their movements grew more aggressive.

Desperate.

—

"They're trying to finish quickly," Lian Rou said.

Lian An stepped down from the carriage.

"No."

"They're trying to take her."

Her eyes moved toward Chen Ruyi.

Target confirmed.

—

Another arrow flew—

Lian An turned—

Barely dodged.

Her sleeve tore slightly.

Lian Hua gasped.

"Jiejie!"

"I'm fine."

—

Then—

Something shifted.

—

The air.

The energy.

A strange heaviness spread across the area.

Even Lian Rou felt it.

"...This isn't normal."

—

The attackers moved again—

But this time—

Their movements felt... unnatural.

Faster.

Stronger.

—

Lian An's eyes narrowed.

"...Something is wrong."

—

Behind her—

Unseen by others—

Three figures appeared.

The ghosts.

Their expressions—

Serious.

For the first time—

No jokes.

No teasing.

Only tension.

—

"Something is interfering," the scholar ghost muttered.

"This isn't normal human strength," the general ghost added.

Fen Yu frowned.

"I don't like this."

—

Lian An understood immediately.

This wasn't just an attack.

This—

Was connected.

—

The attackers rushed again.

But this time—

The fight changed.

Lian Rou struggled slightly—

Even he could feel it.

"They're stronger—!"

—

The ghost general stepped forward.

"Move aside."

Before Lian An could respond—

He struck.

Invisible force slammed into one attacker.

The man flew back—

Crashing into the ground.

—

Lian Rou froze.

"...What was that?"

—

Another attacker turned—

Then suddenly stumbled—

As if pulled by something unseen.

Fen Yu grinned.

"My turn."

—

Chaos.

Confusion.

The attackers faltered.

Their formation broke.

—

Lian An didn't hesitate.

"Finish it."

—

Lian Rou moved.

Fast.

Precise.

Within moments—

The remaining attackers were down.

Unconscious.

Or worse.

—

Silence returned.

Heavy.

Cold.

—

Lian Hua slowly stood.

"...Is it over?"

Lian Rou exhaled.

"...Yes."

Chen Ruyi stepped out slowly.

Her face pale—

But steady.

"Thank you..."

She looked at Lian Rou.

Then at Lian An.

—

Lian An didn't respond immediately.

Her gaze remained on the fallen attackers.

Something didn't sit right.

—

She stepped forward.

Kneeling beside one.

Pulled back the mask.

A stranger.

No identity.

—

Then—

She noticed something.

A mark.

Faint.

Hidden near the neck.

—

Her expression darkened.

—

Behind her—

The ghosts fell silent.

They saw it too.

—

The general ghost spoke quietly.

"...This isn't over."

—

Lian An stood slowly.

Her voice calm—

But cold.

"No."

"It's just the beginning."

—

Behind them—

The empty road stretched into darkness.

And for the first time—

The night didn't feel peaceful.

It felt—

Watched.

Inside Shin Gu's courtyard, the atmosphere was completely different from the chaos unfolding outside the palace walls.

Soft lantern light flickered against silk curtains.

Incense burned slowly, releasing a faint, calming fragrance.

Everything looked peaceful.

Too peaceful.

—

Lady Chen sat on a carved wooden chair, her fingers tightly gripping the edge of the armrest.

Her usual elegance was still there—

But beneath it—

Restlessness.

Impatience.

A trace of fear she refused to show.

Across from her, Shin Gu poured tea with steady hands.

Her movements were slow.

Controlled.

As if nothing in this world could disturb her calm.

—

"Why hasn't the news come yet?" Lady Chen finally spoke, her voice low but tense.

"They should have done it by now."

Shin Gu didn't answer immediately.

She lifted the teacup, blew lightly, then took a small sip.

Only after setting it down did she look at Lady Chen.

"Because you're thinking like an ordinary person."

Lady Chen frowned.

"What does that mean?"

Shin Gu's lips curved faintly.

"It means you expect things to happen quickly."

"But the more important the prey..."

She leaned slightly forward.

"...the more carefully it must be hunted."

—

Lady Chen exhaled sharply.

"I don't like waiting."

"I've already waited too long."

Her nails pressed into her palm.

"Every day she lives—"

"She takes more from me."

—

Shin Gu watched her quietly.

Then spoke in a calm, almost gentle tone.

"And yet..."

"She's still alive."

Lady Chen's expression darkened.

"...For now."

—

A brief silence filled the room.

Then Shin Gu tapped the table lightly.

"You're focusing on the wrong thing."

Lady Chen looked at her.

"Then what should I focus on?"

—

Shin Gu's eyes gleamed faintly.

"Control."

Lady Chen narrowed her eyes.

"...Explain."

—

Shin Gu leaned back slightly, her posture relaxed.

"The attack today..."

"It's not meant to succeed."

Lady Chen blinked.

"What?"

Shin Gu continued as if stating something obvious.

"It's meant to mislead."

—

Lady Chen's confusion deepened.

"...Mislead who?"

Shin Gu smiled.

"Everyone."

—

She lifted her teacup again.

"When they are attacked outside the palace..."

"They will believe the danger comes from outside."

"They will think the enemy is beyond the palace walls."

—

Lady Chen slowly began to understand.

Her eyes widened slightly.

"...So they'll stop suspecting the palace."

Shin Gu nodded.

"Exactly."

—

A slow, cold realization settled in the room.

Lady Chen leaned forward.

"...And when she returns..."

Shin Gu finished her sentence calmly.

"They will relax."

"They will lower their guard."

"They will believe they are safe inside the palace."

—

Her smile deepened slightly.

"And that..."

"...is when we strike."

—

Lady Chen's heartbeat quickened.

The fear she had been holding—

Turned into excitement.

"Yes..."

"Yes, that makes sense."

She let out a soft breath.

"They'll stop looking at us."

"They'll look outside instead."

—

Shin Gu's eyes darkened slightly.

"They already are."

—

For a moment—

Neither of them spoke.

The silence felt heavier now.

More dangerous.

—

Lady Chen's voice lowered.

"...And this time?"

Shin Gu's gaze turned distant.

Cold.

Precise.

"This time..."

"She won't escape."

—

A faint breeze passed through the room.

The lantern flame flickered.

Shadows shifted along the walls—

Twisting slightly.

Almost unnaturally.

—

Lady Chen didn't notice.

But Shin Gu did.

And for a brief second—

Her smile vanished.

Replaced by something darker.

Something deeper.

—

Then—

It returned.

Calm.

Composed.

Untouchable.

—

"Be patient," she said softly.

"The more they believe they are safe..."

"The easier it will be to destroy them."

—

Lady Chen nodded slowly.

Her earlier frustration gone.

Replaced by quiet anticipation.

—

Outside—

The palace stood silent under the night sky.

Unaware—

That the greatest danger...

Was already within its walls.