

Ghost 264

Chapter 264: The Joy of Betrothal Preparations

The morning sun rose gently over the Duke Residence, painting the courtyards in warm golden light.

But today—

The atmosphere was different.

—

Not calm.

Not quiet.

—

Alive.

—

Servants rushed back and forth.

Maids carried trays filled with silk cloth, red ribbons, golden ornaments.

Boxes of sweets were stacked neatly along the corridors.

Ink, brushes, and scrolls were laid out carefully on long wooden tables.

—

Today—

Was the beginning of Gua Da Li preparations.

The formal exchange of betrothal gifts.

—

A symbol of promise.

A declaration to the world.

A union between two families.

—

And inside the residence—

Excitement overflowed.

—

The Courtyard of Preparations

The main courtyard had been transformed.

Red silk draped across pillars.

Lanterns hung neatly in rows.

Long tables were filled with gifts waiting to be arranged.

—

The Duchess stood at the center.

Calm.

Elegant.

But her eyes—

Sharp and focused.

—

"No, no—this box goes with the jewelry set!"

"And align those ribbons properly!"

—

Her voice carried authority.

But also—

Joy.

—

Nearby—

The Aunt was checking the sweets.

Opening boxes.

Inspecting carefully.

—

"These must look perfect!"

"If even one is broken, replace it!"

—

A servant nodded quickly.

"Yes, Madam!"

—

At another side—

The Grandmother sat comfortably, observing everything.

A soft smile on her face.

—

"It has been a long time since this house was this lively..."

—

Her voice was filled with nostalgia.

—

The Younger Generation

On the other side—

Chaos.

—

Pure chaos.

—

Lian Hua held up a red ribbon.

"This one looks prettier!"

—

Lian Rou frowned.

"That's crooked."

—

"It's artistic!"

—

"It's messy."

—

"It's modern style!"

—

"There is no modern in this era."

—

Lian Hua gasped dramatically.

"You're insulting creativity!"

—

Maid stood beside them, covering her mouth as she laughed softly.

—

"You both are the same as always..."

—

Lian Rou crossed his arms.

"I'm not like her."

—

Lian Hua pointed immediately.

"Liar."

—

Lian rou shook her head, smiling.

—

The Empress Joins

At that moment—

The Empress entered the courtyard.

—

Dressed simply.

But gracefully.

—

As soon as she appeared—

The atmosphere brightened further.

—

"Big Sister!"

—

Lian Hua rushed toward her.

—

"You're late!"

—

"I just woke up," the Empress replied calmly.

—

The Duchess turned and smiled.

"Come, help us."

—

The Empress nodded.

—

And without hesitation—

She joined.

—

Arranging gifts.

Tying ribbons.

Sorting items.

—

No hesitation.

No arrogance.

—

Just naturally becoming part of the family.

—

The servants whispered among themselves.

"The Empress is truly different..."

—

"She works like one of us..."

—

"She feels... warm..."

—

Writing Invitation Cards

In another section—

Tables were arranged for writing invitation scrolls.

—

The Duke himself sat there.

Holding a brush.

Writing carefully.

—

Each stroke precise.

Elegant.

—

"These must be perfect."

—

"These invitations represent our family."

—

Beside him—

The Empress sat down.

—

"I'll help."

—

The Duke nodded.

"Good."

—

Soon—

Ink flowed.

Brushes moved.

—

Scroll after scroll—

Written.

—

Names of noble families.

Relatives.

Allies.

—

Each invitation—

Carefully prepared.

—

Lian Hua peeked over.

"Why is your handwriting so neat..."

—

The Empress replied casually,

"I practiced a lot."

—

Lian Hua looked at her own writing.

"...I will not show mine."

—

Everyone laughed.

—

Preparing the Gifts

In the center—

Large trays were laid out.

—

Jewelry sets.

Silk fabrics.

Gold ornaments.

—

Each item symbolized blessings.

—

Prosperity.

Longevity.

Happiness.

—

The Aunt explained carefully,

"These represent sincerity."

—

"The more thoughtful the gifts, the stronger the bond."

—

Everyone listened attentively.

—

Her eyes softened.

—

Because this—

Was not just ceremony.

—

It was love.

—

Sweet Preparations

In the kitchen—

The busiest place of all.

—

Steam filled the air.

Sweet fragrance spread everywhere.

—

Red bean cakes.

Lotus pastries.

Sesame sweets.

—

Rows and rows—

Prepared carefully.

—

The Empress stepped inside.

—

"Let me help."

—

The chefs were shocked.

"No, Your Majesty—!"

—

But she had already begun.

—

Mixing.

Shaping.

Cooking.

—

Her movements were smooth.

Confident.

—

The chefs whispered.

"She is better than us..."

—

Soon—

Perfect sweets were arranged neatly.

—

Even the Aunt was impressed.

"These are beautiful..."

—

The Empress smiled slightly.

"Food is also part of happiness."

—

Laughter and Teasing

Back in the courtyard—

The mood became lighter.

—

Lian Hua suddenly whispered loudly,

"Brother, are you nervous?"

—

Lian Rou glared.

"No."

—

"You're getting married."

—

"I know."

—

"You're nervous."

—

"I'm not."

—

Empress laughed.

"He is."

—

Everyone burst into laughter.

—

Even the Duke smiled slightly.

—

The Grandmother nodded.

"This is how it should be."

—

The Emperor Watching

From a distance—

The Emperor stood silently.

—

Watching everything.

—

Watching her.

—

The Empress—

Moving among the family.

Laughing.

Helping.

Living.

—

His gaze softened.

—

"...This is where she belongs."

—

Not in cold palace politics.

—

But here.

—

Warm.

Alive.

Loved.

—

And for a moment—

He felt something unfamiliar.

—

Jealousy.

—

Not of another man.

—

But of this life.

—

Final Preparations

As the day progressed—

Everything came together.

—

Gift boxes were sealed.

Invitation scrolls tied.

Sweets packed.

—

Servants lined up the trays.

—

The Duchess stepped forward.

—

"Check everything once more."

—

Nothing could go wrong.

—

Because this—

Was a moment of pride.

—

A union between families.

—

A celebration of love.

—

Evening Calm

As the sun began to set—

The work finally slowed.

—

Everyone gathered together.

—

Tired.

But smiling.

—

Lian Hua dropped onto a chair.

"I'm dead."

—

"You didn't do anything," Lian Rou replied again.

—

"I supervised."

—

"You complained."

—

"Same thing."

—

Empress laughed softly.

—

The Empress sat quietly.

Watching them.

—

Her heart—

Warm.

—

This feeling—

She almost lost.

—

But now—

She chose it.

—

And she would protect it.

—

At all costs.

—

The lanterns lit up.

The night settled.

—

But inside the Duke residence—

Happiness continued to glow.

—

Because tomorrow—

The world would witness.

—

A promise.

—

A union.

—

And a family—

Bound not just by blood—

But by love

Invitations of Honor and Joy

That same day, the Duke residence remained filled with movement and purpose.

The preparations did not pause.

They only shifted—

From creation...

To delivery.

—

The handwritten invitation scrolls had dried.

The ink had settled perfectly into the fine parchment.

Each stroke carried dignity.

Each word carried intent.

—

And now—

They were ready to be sent.

—

The Courtyard of Dispatch

The main courtyard had been arranged once again.

But this time—

Not for preparation.

—

For departure.

—

Rows of lacquered boxes were placed neatly on long tables.

Each box wrapped in red silk.

Tied with golden thread.

—

Beside them—

Stacks of rolled invitation scrolls.

—

Servants stood in disciplined lines.

Each waiting for instruction.

—

The Duke stepped forward.

His presence commanding.

—

"These invitations," he said, his voice steady,

"represent our family's honor."

—

"Every noble house, every relative, every ally must receive them properly."

—

The head steward bowed deeply.

"It will be done, Duke."

—

Final Inspection

The Duchess moved from one table to another.

Her fingers adjusting ribbons.

Her eyes sharp.

—

"This knot is loose."

"Fix it."

—

"That seal is crooked."

"Redo it."

—

Nothing was overlooked.

Nothing was rushed.

—

Because this—

Was not just delivery.

—

It was presentation.

—

The Empress stood beside her, quietly assisting.

—

She lifted one box.

Checked the contents.

—

Invitation scroll.

Sweets arranged perfectly.

—

She adjusted a piece slightly.

—

"Symmetry matters," she said softly.

—

The Duchess smiled faintly.

"You have learned well."

—

The Meaning of the Gifts

Nearby—

The Grandmother spoke gently to a group of younger servants.

—

"These sweets are not just food."

—

"They symbolize happiness."

"Sweet beginnings."

"Blessings for the union."

—

The servants listened carefully.

—

"Deliver them with respect."

"Not carelessness."

—

They nodded.

"Yes, Madam."

—

The Younger Generation

On the other side—

Lian Hua had found another way to make things chaotic.

—

She picked up a box and shook it lightly.

"Do you think they'll like these?"

—

Lian Rou immediately stopped her.

"Put that down."

—

"I'm checking."

—

"You're damaging it."

—

"I'm not!"

—

"You are."

—

She pouted.

"You're too serious."

—

"And you're too careless."

—

Their argument continued—

As always.

—

The Empress watched them.

A small smile forming.

—

Even in responsibility—

They found a way to remain themselves.

—

Assigning the Routes

The Duke signaled to the steward.

—

"Begin assignments."

—

Names were called.

—

"North district—Minister Zhao."

"East quarter—General Lin."

"Southern estates—Relatives of the Duke family."

—

Each servant stepped forward.

Received their assigned trays.

—

Every route planned carefully.

—

No mistake allowed.

—

The First Departure

The large gates of the Duke residence opened.

—

The first group of servants stepped out.

Carrying trays balanced carefully.

—

Red silk fluttered slightly in the wind.

—

The sound of footsteps echoed.

—

One by one—

They departed.

—

The Empress stood still.

Watching.

—

There was something powerful in this moment.

—

Not loud.

Not dramatic.

—

But meaningful.

—

Because these invitations—

Were spreading across the kingdom.

—

Carrying news.

Carrying joy.

Carrying connection.

—

Inside the Noble Houses

As the servants reached their destinations—

The same scene repeated.

—

At the residence of a noble family—

The gates opened.

—

"Invitation from the Duke residence."

—

Servants bowed.

Presented the tray.

—

The noble household accepted with respect.

—

The box was opened.

—

Inside—

The neatly rolled scroll.

The perfectly arranged sweets.

—

The invitation was read aloud.

—

"A banquet to announce the union..."

—

Expressions softened.

—

"A joyous occasion."

—

"We will attend."

—

And so—

Word began to spread.

—

From house to house.

—

From noble to noble.

—

From relative to relative.

—

Return to the Duke Residence

By afternoon—

The courtyard had quieted.

—

Most of the trays had been sent.

—

Only a few remained.

—

The Duchess exhaled softly.

"It is done."

—

The Duke nodded.

"Yes."

—

But his gaze remained thoughtful.

—

"This banquet..."

"It must be perfect."

—

The Empress spoke calmly,

"It will be."

—

A Moment of Reflection

As the work slowed—

The family gathered once more.

—

Lian Hua dropped onto a seat.

"I'm exhausted."

—

"You didn't do much," Lian Rou replied again.

—

"I supervised."

—

"You interfered."

—

"Same thing."

—

The Grandmother laughed softly.

—

The Empress sat quietly.

Looking at her hands.

—

Ink stains remained.

—

But she didn't mind.

—

Because this—

Felt real.

—

Not palace duties.

Not forced roles.

—

But family work.

—

Shared responsibility.

—

The Emperor Observes Again

From the side—

The Emperor stood silently.

—

Watching everything.

—

The departure.

The effort.

The unity.

—

His gaze lingered on the Empress.

—

She looked different here.

—

Lighter.

—

Freer.

—

And he realized—

This world...

—

Was something he had never given her.

—

Evening Calm

As the sun began to set—

The last group of servants returned.

—

"All invitations delivered."

—

The steward bowed.

—

The Duke nodded.

"Well done."

—

The gates closed.

—

The residence settled.

—

Lanterns lit once more.

—

And a quiet satisfaction filled the air.

—

Because today—

A message had been sent.

—

Not just of marriage.

—

But of unity.

—

Of connection.

—

Of a family—

Preparing to welcome a new Chapter.

—

And somewhere—

Across the city—

Noble houses held those red-wrapped boxes.

—

Reading the invitation.

—

Preparing to attend.

—

Waiting—

For the day—

When celebration would begin.