

Ghost 273

Chapter 273: promises and silence

Chapter — The Dead Who Returned

The palace court had rarely seen such tension.

Morning sunlight filtered through the tall pillars, but instead of bringing warmth—

It revealed unease.

Whispers.

Fear.

—

News had spread through the kingdom overnight.

Fast.

Uncontrolled.

Unstoppable.

—

Five people.

Dead.

Rotten.

Their bodies discovered in a condition no one could explain.

—

And worse—

All five had one thing in common.

—

They were said to have died before.

—

And returned.

—

The Court Assembles

The grand court was filled.

Officials lined both sides.

Ministers stood in silence.

Even the guards seemed more alert than usual.

—

At the center—

Kneeling—

Was a merchant family.

Clothes neat.

But faces pale.

Eyes red from crying.

—

The Emperor entered.

—

"Your Majesty!"

—

Everyone bowed.

—

He took his seat slowly.

But his expression—

Cold.

Sharp.

Focused.

—

"Begin."

—

The chief minister stepped forward.

"Your Majesty... the matter concerns five deaths reported across the capital."

—

The Emperor nodded.

"I am aware."

—

His gaze shifted to the kneeling family.

"...Speak."

—

The merchant father trembled slightly.

But forced himself to speak.

—

"Your Majesty..."

"My son..."

"...died twice."

—

A ripple moved through the court.

—

The Emperor didn't react.

"...Explain clearly."

—

The man swallowed.

—

"My son went to the northern region..."

"For wool trade."

—

"Two months later..."

"We received news—"

"...that he had died."

—

His voice broke slightly.

—

"My family went there..."

"To retrieve his body."

—

The court remained silent.

—

"They gave us a corpse."

—

"...We couldn't recognize his face."

—

Gasps.

—

"His body..."

"...was decomposed."

—

"...We only knew it was him—"

"...because of his clothes..."

"...and jewelry."

—

The Emperor's eyes narrowed slightly.

—

"We brought him back..."

"And buried him."

—

A pause.

—

The man's hands shook.

—

"But..."

—

"Days ago..."

—

"...he returned."

—

Shock rippled through the court.

—

"What?"

"That's impossible—"

—

The Emperor raised his hand.

Silence returned instantly.

—

"...Continue."

—

The man's voice dropped.

—

"He came home..."

"Alive."

—

"But..."

—

"...something was wrong."

—

His wife began crying softly beside him.

—

"He didn't speak properly..."

"He didn't recognize us clearly..."

—

"He stared..."

"...like he wasn't there."

—

The court grew colder.

—

"And then—"

—

"...he died again."

—

This time—

The silence was suffocating.

—

"...And this time—"

"...we saw his face clearly."

—

"It was him."

—

The Emperor leaned slightly forward.

—

"...Then whose body did you bury before?"

—

No one had an answer.

—

The Court Reacts

Murmurs broke out.

—

"This is unnatural..."

"Impossible..."

"Witchcraft—?"

—

The ministers looked uneasy.

Even the older officials—

Who had seen war, famine, rebellion—

Looked shaken.

—

One minister stepped forward.

"Your Majesty..."

"This could be a coincidence—"

—

The Emperor's gaze cut through him.

"...Five coincidences?"

—

The minister fell silent.

—

Another spoke,

"If the body was decomposed..."

"...identification could be mistaken."

—

The Emperor didn't respond immediately.

—

Instead—

He asked,

"...And the other four?"

—

The chief minister stepped forward.

"They show similar patterns, Your Majesty."

—

"All declared dead previously."

—

"All returned briefly."

—

"And all—"

"...died again."

—

A chill passed through the court.

—

The Unspoken Fear

No one dared say it aloud.

—

But everyone thought the same thing.

—

This wasn't normal.

—

This wasn't human.

—

This was something else.

—

Something dark.

—

The Emperor's fingers tapped lightly on the armrest.

A slow rhythm.

—

His mind moved rapidly.

—

Ghost breeding.

Strange energy.

The lake.

The ambush.

—

Now—

This.

—

"...They were not suicides."

—

His voice cut through the court.

Firm.

Certain.

—

"They were killed."

—

A heavy silence followed.

—

The merchant father looked up suddenly.

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

—

"My son was fine before leaving!"

—

"He had no illness!"

"No reason to die!"

—

The Emperor nodded slightly.

—

Then—

"...When he returned..."

"...did you notice anything unusual?"

—

The man hesitated.

—

"...He avoided sunlight."

—

"He didn't eat properly."

—

"And..."

—

"He whispered sometimes."

—

"...To himself."

—

The Emperor's eyes darkened.

—

"What did he say?"

—

The man shook his head.

"I couldn't understand..."

—

"But..."

—

"...he kept saying one thing."

—

The entire court leaned forward.

—

"...North."

—

Silence.

—

The Realization

The Emperor slowly stood.

—

His voice lowered.

—

"...All of them..."

"...went north."

—

The chief minister nodded.

"Yes."

—

A pattern.

—

Clear.

—

Deliberate.

—

The Emperor's gaze turned cold.

—

"...Something is happening in the northern region."

—

A minister stepped forward.

"Your Majesty, should we investigate immediately?"

—

"Yes."

—

Without hesitation.

—

"I will send a special unit."

—

"Gather information."

"Trace every case."

—

"Find out—"

—

"...what brought them back."

—

"And what killed them."

—

The court remained silent.

—

Because now—

This was no longer rumor.

—

It was real.

—

The Hidden Truth

But inside—

The Emperor knew something more.

—

This wasn't just death.

—

This was connected.

—

To something he hadn't revealed.

—

Ghost breeding.

—

His jaw tightened.

—

"...If this is related..."

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

—

But he didn't say it aloud.

—

Not yet.

—

The End of Court

The Emperor raised his hand.

—

"This matter is now under imperial investigation."

—

"No one is to spread rumors."

—

"Anyone interfering—will be punished."

—

The ministers bowed.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

—

The merchant family broke down.

Tears.

Relief.

Fear.

—

At least—

Someone believed them.

—

The Emperor turned to leave.

—

But before stepping out—

He paused.

—

His gaze distant.

—

"...The dead..."

"...should not return."

—

"And if they do—"

—

"...something is terribly wrong."

—

Outside the Court

As the Emperor walked out—

The palace felt heavier.

—

The air—

Colder.

—

Unseen—

Unspoken—

—

A storm was forming.

—

And somewhere—

Far in the north—

—

Something was waking.

—

Not fully alive.

—

Not fully dead.

—

But waiting.

—

For its next step.

—

And this time—

The entire kingdom would feel it.

Promises and Silence

The morning sun filtered softly into the Duke residence, painting the courtyard in warm light.

Inside her chamber—

The Empress sat quietly.

Dressed.

Ready.

—

Her hair was neatly tied.

Her clothes carefully chosen.

Everything prepared.

—

Because today—

She was supposed to return.

—

"...He said he would come," she murmured softly.

—

Near her—

The three ghosts hovered restlessly.

Fen Yu crossed her arms.

"That dog emperor."

—

"He made a promise," the scholar ghost added.

"And didn't keep it."

—

The general ghost snorted.

"Typical."

—

The Empress didn't reply.

Her gaze remained on the door.

—

Waiting.

—

But hours passed.

—

Then a day.

—

Then—

Two.

—

Still—

No sign of him.

—

The excitement of the wedding preparation faded slightly for her.

Though she smiled for her family—

Though she stayed present—

—

Inside—

A small disappointment grew.

—

"He said he would come..." Fen Yu muttered again.

—

"Forget him," the general ghost said.

"We should have thrown him in the lake."

—

The scholar ghost nodded.

"Agreed."

—

The Empress sighed softly.

"...Maybe he's busy."

—

"Busy forgetting you," Fen Yu snapped.

—

But even she fell silent after seeing the Empress's expression.

—

On the third day—

The Empress finally stood.

"...I'll go back."

—

The ghosts immediately reacted.

"Finally!"

—

"Let's leave this place."

—

The Empress turned to her maid.

"Prepare the carriage."

—

She didn't say anything more.

Didn't complain.

Didn't question.

—

But her silence—

Spoke enough.

—

Return to the Palace

The journey back felt quieter.

—

Less lively.

—

The Empress looked outside the carriage.

Lost in thought.

—

"...He must be busy with court..."

"...And the recent matters..."

—

She tried to justify.

—

But the feeling—

Remained.

—

When she reached the palace—

Everything looked the same.

—

Unchanged.

—

Her courtyard welcomed her back.

Familiar.

Still.

—

She stepped inside.

Paused.

—

Then—

"...I should greet him."

—

Her tone was calm.

As if nothing was wrong.

—

A Quiet Gesture

Before going—

She went to the kitchen.

—

Cooked.

—

Simple dishes.

But warm.

Carefully prepared.

—

The ghosts watched.

Silent this time.

—

"...You still care," Fen Yu said softly.

—

The Empress didn't answer.

—

Once done—

She carried the tray.

—

And walked—

Toward the Emperor's courtyard.

—

What She Saw

The guards didn't stop her.

—

She entered.

—

And then—

She stopped.

—

Inside—

The Emperor sat.

—

With Lady Chen.

—

They were close.

Talking.

Laughing.

—

Relaxed.

—

The same way he had been—

With her family.

—

The tray in her hand—

Felt heavier.

—

Her steps halted.

—

"...I see."

—

The words didn't leave her lips.

But they formed in her mind.

—

No one noticed her.

—

No one looked up.

—

So quietly—

She turned.

—

And walked away.

—

Back to Her Courtyard

The food remained untouched.

—

She placed it on the table.

Sat down slowly.

—

The ghosts appeared immediately.

—

Fen Yu's face darkened.

"I knew it."

—

"That dog emperor," the general ghost growled.

—

The scholar ghost shook his head.

"...Unreliable."

—

The Empress smiled faintly.

—

But it didn't reach her eyes.

—

"I was foolish."

—

Silence.

—

"He doesn't love me."

—

Her voice was calm.

Almost detached.

—

"He loves Lady Chen."

—

The memory of his words echoed faintly—

"I'll come for you."

—

She let out a small breath.

—

"...He just didn't like that I stopped caring."

—

"So he tried to pull me back."

—

Fen Yu stepped closer.

"You're not foolish."

—

"Yes, I am."

—

She looked at the food.

—

"...I believed him."

—

The room grew quiet.

—

Then the general ghost spoke bluntly,

"Forget him."

—

Fen Yu nodded.

"Yes."

—

The scholar ghost added calmly,

"...He doesn't deserve you."

—

The Empress stayed silent for a moment.

—

Then—

She picked up a dish.

—

"...Let's eat."

—

The ghosts blinked.

—

"That's it?" Fen Yu asked.

—

"Yes."

—

She took a bite.

—

"...Food shouldn't go to waste."

—

The ghosts slowly smiled.

—

"Right," Fen Yu said.

—

"Let's eat everything," the general ghost added.

—

"Especially his share," the scholar ghost said.

—

A faint smile finally appeared on the Empress's face.

—

Small.

But real.

—

Outside—

The palace remained unchanged.

—

But inside her—

Something shifted again.

—

Not heartbreak.

—

Not anger.

—

But clarity.

—

And this time—

She wouldn't expect anything.

—

From him.