

Ghost 282

Chapter 282: — The Silence That Should Not Exist

The capital had returned to its usual rhythm.

Markets were lively again.

Tea houses buzzed with gossip.

Noble families resumed banquets, visits, and celebrations as if nothing unusual had ever happened.

And yet—

Something was wrong.

Terribly wrong.

—

Inside the palace, the Emperor stood by the window of his study, staring at the city beyond.

A week ago—

The entire palace had been shaken by the news of a young noble girl's "suicide."

Rumors had spread like wildfire.

Whispers filled every corridor.

Questions had been asked.

Doubts had formed.

—

But now?

Nothing.

—

No one spoke about it anymore.

Not the servants.

Not the nobles.

Not even the families.

—

As if—

It had never happened.

—

"...Impossible."

The Emperor murmured under his breath.

—

A week was not enough time for something like that to disappear.

Not in the capital.

Not among nobles.

—

And yet—

It had.

—

Before he could think further—

A palace guard rushed in.

"Your Majesty!"

—

The Emperor turned sharply.

"What is it?"

—

The guard knelt.

"There has been another incident."

—

The Emperor's eyes narrowed.

"...Speak."

—

"Three noblemen were found dead."

—

Silence.

—

"...How?"

—

The guard hesitated.

"...Suicide, Your Majesty."

—

The Emperor's gaze hardened instantly.

—

"Prepare the carriage."

—

The Scene

The Shin Chan Lu residence was surrounded.

Guards stood at every corner.

Servants whispered in fear.

Family members cried openly.

—

The moment the Emperor arrived—

Everyone dropped to their knees.

"Your Majesty!"

—

He didn't respond.

—

He walked straight inside.

—

The smell hit him first.

—

Rot.

Decay.

—

The bodies—

Had already begun decomposing.

—

Which meant—

They had not died recently.

—

The Emperor's expression darkened.

"...When were they found?"

—

"Just this morning, Your Majesty."

—

"...And no one noticed earlier?"

—

The servant trembled.

"No... no, Your Majesty..."

—

Impossible.

—

These were nobles.

Living in a large household.

—

How could no one notice?

—

The Emperor stepped closer.

—

The bodies—

Were in separate rooms.

—

Each one—

In the same condition.

—

Still.

Expressionless.

—

But the decay—

Didn't match the timeline.

—

It was as if—

Time itself had twisted.

—

"Bring me the notes."

—

A servant hurried forward, holding trembling hands.

—

Three papers.

—

Each written in the same style.

—

The Emperor took one.

Read.

—

"I am tired of living."

"There is nothing left."

"This world has no meaning."

—

His fingers tightened.

—

"...The same."

—

The same tone.

The same structure.

The same emptiness.

—

Just like—

That girl.

—

He read the second.

The third.

—

Identical.

—

Too identical.

—

"...Who found them?"

—

"Their family, Your Majesty..."

—

The Emperor turned.

The family stood nearby.

Crying.

Shaking.

—

One of them spoke through tears,

"He... he was fine..."

—

"He was laughing yesterday..."

—

"He said he was going to travel..."

—

The Emperor froze.

"...Travel?"

—

"Yes..."

"He was happy..."

—

The Emperor's gaze darkened.

—

"...Happy."

—

Just like—

Before.

—

Return to the Palace

The atmosphere in the palace was heavy.

—

Inside a private chamber—

The Emperor sat with:

Prince Liang

Lady Chen

The Dowager Empress

—

The suicide notes lay on the table.

—

Silence filled the room.

—

Prince Liang was the first to speak.

"...This doesn't make sense."

—

The Emperor didn't respond.

—

Prince Liang continued,

"I saw these men yesterday."

—

"They were completely normal."

—

"They even told me about their travel plans."

—

"They were excited."

—

Lady Chen nodded slightly.

"That is strange..."

—

The Dowager frowned.

"...People can hide their feelings."

—

Prince Liang shook his head.

"No."

—

"This is not hidden sadness."

—

"This is..."

He paused.

"...Something else."

—

The Emperor finally spoke.

"...It's the same."

—

All eyes turned to him.

—

"The girl."

—

"The one who 'committed suicide.'"

—

"The note was the same."

—

Lady Chen blinked.

"...What girl?"

—

The Emperor looked at her.

—

Silence.

—

Then—

He realized.

—

She didn't remember.

—

"...You don't recall?"

—

Lady Chen frowned slightly.

"No..."

—

The Dowager spoke,

"There was no such incident."

—

The Emperor's heart dropped.

—

"...There was."

—

"A week ago."

—

"A noble girl."

—

"Same note."

—

Prince Liang's expression changed.

"...I... vaguely remember something..."

—

Then he frowned.

"...Or do I?"

—

Confusion filled his face.

—

Lady Chen shook her head.

"No, Your Majesty."

—

"There was no such news."

—

The Dowager nodded.

"If something like that happened, we would know."

—

The Emperor leaned back slowly.

—

Cold realization creeping in.

—

"...So I am the only one who remembers."

—

Silence.

—

Heavy.

—

Unnatural.

—

He picked up the notes again.

—

"...This is not suicide."

—

Prince Liang nodded.

"Yes."

—

"These men were not depressed."

—

"They were planning their future."

—

Lady Chen spoke softly,

"...Then what is it?"

—

The Emperor didn't answer immediately.

—

Because he already knew.

—

But he had no proof.

—

And without proof—

No one would believe him.

—

The Truth No One Sees

The Emperor stood by the window again later that night.

—

His mind replaying everything.

—

The girl.

The notes.

The forgotten memory.

—

Now—

Three more deaths.

Same pattern.

Same words.

Same disappearance of truth.

—

"...Someone is controlling this."

—

Not just death.

—

But memory.

—

Reality itself.

—

His gaze turned cold.

—

"...And they are inside the palace."

—

Because only someone close—

Could erase something so completely.

—

Outside—

The palace stood silent.

—

Peaceful.

Unaware.

—

But inside—

Something was spreading.

—

Quietly.

—

Erasing truth.

Replacing reality.

—

And the most terrifying part—

—

No one remembered.

—

Except him.

Whisper in the Shrine

The palace shrine stood quiet beneath the soft glow of oil lamps.

Incense smoke curled slowly into the air, carrying a faint, calming fragrance. Outside, the world continued its usual rhythm—but inside this sacred space, time felt slower, heavier... as if something unseen lingered.

—

Lian An (the Empress) stood before the altar, her hands folded calmly.

But her eyes—

Were not at peace.

—

Footsteps echoed softly behind her.

Two figures entered.

Her friends from the north.

Han Wei and Mu Jian.

—

They bowed slightly out of habit.

"hello lian an ."

—

Lian An turned.

"No need for formalities."

Her voice was quiet.

"We are not in court."

—

Han Wei exhaled softly.

"Good."

Mu Jian glanced around the shrine, then spoke in a low voice,

"We heard the news."

—

Lian An didn't ask which news.

She already knew.

—

"The noblemen," Mu Jian continued.

"...They say the bodies were rotten."

—

Han Wei frowned deeply.

"...That part caught our attention."

—

Silence settled between them.

—

Lian An stepped aside, gesturing toward the inner area.

"Come."

—

They moved deeper into the shrine.

Far from wandering ears.

Far from curious eyes.

—

The lamps flickered slightly.

—

Then—

Lian An spoke.

"...This is not the first time."

—

Both men looked at her.

—

"There was a girl."

"A noble family."

—

Han Wei frowned.

"...When?"

—

"...A week ago."

—

Mu Jian exchanged a look with him.

"...We didn't hear about it."

—

Lian An gave a faint, bitter smile.

"No one did."

—

"...Because no one remembers."

—

Silence.

—

Heavy.

Unsettling.

—

Han Wei stepped closer.

"...Explain."

—

Lian An's gaze lowered slightly.

"The girl died the same way."

"Same note."

"Same... emptiness."

—

Mu Jian's expression hardened.

"...And now she's forgotten?"

—

"Yes."

—

Han Wei slowly turned his head, scanning the shrine as if expecting something to appear from the shadows.

"...That's not natural."

—

Mu Jian spoke next, his tone lower,

"In the north..."

—

Both men instinctively glanced around again.

—

"...We've seen something like this."

—

Lian An's eyes lifted slightly.

—

Han Wei continued,

"Villages... where people died suddenly."

"No wounds."

"No illness."

—

Mu Jian finished,

"...But their bodies—"

"...rotted faster than they should."

—

Silence.

—

The same detail.

—

Lian An didn't interrupt.

—

Han Wei's voice dropped further,

"...We were told those cases were linked to something forbidden."

—

Mu Jian's eyes darkened.

"...Black magic."

—

The word seemed to echo unnaturally in the shrine.

—

Even the flames flickered.

—

Lian An didn't react outwardly.

—

But inside—

Her thoughts aligned.

—

The lake.

The sleepwalking.

The invisible force pulling her.

—

Princess Zhi.

Her loss.

Her strange state.

—

And now—

These deaths.

—

She didn't say it aloud.

—

But she knew.

—

"...It's connected."

—

Mu Jian watched her carefully.

"You've experienced something, haven't you?"

—

Lian An remained silent.

—

Han Wei stepped closer.

"...Your accident."

"...That wasn't normal."

—

Still—

She didn't answer.

—

But her silence—

Was enough.

—

Mu Jian exhaled slowly.

"...Then it's here."

—

"In the capital."

—

"In the palace."

—

Han Wei clenched his jaw.

"...That means whoever is doing this..."

"...is powerful."

—

"And close."

—

The shrine felt colder.

—

Lian An finally spoke.

"...Don't say this outside."

—

Both men nodded immediately.

—

"Until we have proof..."

"...no one will believe us."

—

Mu Jian added quietly,

"And worse—"

"...it will alert them."

—

Han Wei's gaze sharpened.

"...Whoever they are."

—

Silence returned.

—

The three of them stood there.

Bound by the same realization.

—

This was no longer isolated.

—

This was spreading.

—

Quietly.

—

Systematically.

—

Lian An turned back toward the altar.

Her expression calm again.

But her eyes—

Determined.

—

"...We watch."

—

"We don't act blindly."

—

Han Wei nodded.

"...Agreed."

—

Mu Jian added,

"...And we prepare."

—

Because whatever was happening—

Was only beginning.

—

Outside the shrine—

The palace remained peaceful.

—

Unaware.

—

That something dark—

Had already taken root within it.