

Ghost 290

Chapter 290: When Questions Have No Answers

The night deepened over the palace, but no one in the Emperor's chamber felt its quiet.

The air inside was heavy.

Still.

Unsettling.

—

On the bed—

Lady Chen lay motionless.

Her face pale.

Her breathing faint.

So faint that one had to stand close to even notice it.

—

The healer moved around her carefully.

Checking her pulse again.

And again.

As if hoping—

Something would change.

—

But nothing did.

—

The Arrival

Outside—

Hurried footsteps echoed.

Voices.

Urgent.

Panicked.

—

"The Minister has arrived!"

—

The doors opened abruptly.

—

Chen Guowei entered first.

His usual composed demeanor—

Gone.

—

Behind him—

Madam Zhao Lifan rushed in.

Her face already pale with fear.

—

"Ruyi—"

Her voice broke.

—

But the moment she saw the bed—

Her steps faltered.

—

"...No..."

—

She rushed forward.

Falling beside her daughter.

—

"Ruyi!"

—

Her hands trembled as she held her.

"...Wake up..."

—

No response.

—

Chen Guowei stood beside the bed.

Frozen.

—

His eyes scanned her condition.

The unnatural stillness.

The silence.

—

Then slowly—

He turned.

—

Toward the Emperor.

—

"What happened?"

—

His voice—

Controlled.

—

But beneath it—

A storm.

—

The Emperor's Silence

The Emperor stood still.

—

For the first time—

He had no answer.

—

He had seen her.

—

Falling.

Bleeding.

—

But the cause—

—

Nothing.

—

"...I found her like this."

—

The words felt empty.

Even to him.

—

Chen Guowei's brows tightened.

"...Found?"

—

"She collapsed in the courtyard."

—

The Emperor's voice was steady.

But his gaze—

Heavy.

—

Madam Zhao Lifen looked up.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"She was fine this morning..."

—

"She was healthy..."

—

"How can this happen?"

—

No one answered.

—

Because no one knew.

—

The Dowager's Calm

The Dowager Empress stepped forward.

Her expression serious.

But controlled.

—

"Panicking will not help."

—

She looked at the healer.

"Is there any change?"

—

The healer lowered his head.

"...No."

—

A brief silence followed.

—

Then the Dowager spoke again.

"...We wait."

—

Chen Guowei looked at her.

"...Wait?"

—

"Yes."

—

Her voice was firm.

—

"When she wakes—"

"We will know."

—

The words carried quiet authority.

—

But even she—

Could not hide the tension in her eyes.

—

The Healer's Fear

The healer stepped back slightly.

His hands trembling faintly.

—

"...This condition..."

—

He swallowed.

—

"...It is the same as before."

—

Madam Zhao Lifan looked up sharply.

"...Before?"

—

The Dowager answered.

"...The Empress."

—

Silence.

—

A chilling silence.

—

Chen Guowei's expression changed.

"...You mean—"

—

The healer nodded slowly.

—

"...It is identical."

—

The room grew colder.

—

A Fragile Hope

The Dowager turned slightly.

Her gaze distant.

—

"...Then we can only hope."

—

Madam Zhao Lifen's voice trembled.

"...Hope for what?"

—

The Dowager replied quietly—

"...For a miracle."

—

A pause.

—

"...Like before."

—

The memory of the Empress—

Waking from the brink of death—

Hovered in everyone's mind.

—

If it happened once—

—

Could it happen again?

—

The Emperor's Burden

The Emperor stood still.

—

Watching.

—

Listening.

—

But inside—

Something tightened.

—

First—

The Empress.

—

Then—

The nobles.

—

Now—

Lady Chen.

—

One after another.

—

Under his rule.

—

Within his palace.

—

"...I cannot protect them."

—

The thought came uninvited.

—

Sharp.

Heavy.

—

His fists clenched.

—

"...Then what is the use of power?"

—

But he said nothing.

—

Because now—

Was not the time.

—

Princess Zhi's Silent Fear

In the corner of the chamber—

Almost unnoticed—

Princess Zhi stood quietly.

—

Her hands clasped tightly.

—

Her eyes fixed on Lady Chen.

—

"...Again..."

—

Her heart trembled.

—

She remembered.

—

That feeling.

—

The loss of control.

The strange pull.

The darkness.

—

"...It's happening again..."

—

Her breath became uneven.

—

"...What is happening in this palace..."

—

She stepped back slowly.

—

Her lips moved silently.

—

A prayer.

—

"Please..."

—

"Let her be safe..."

—

"Let her wake up..."

—

Her voice did not come out.

—

But her heart spoke.

—

The Night Watches

Time passed.

—

No one left.

—

Madam Zhao Lifen stayed beside her daughter.

Holding her hand.

Whispering softly.

—

Chen Guowei stood silently.

Watching.

Thinking.

—

The Dowager remained seated.

Her expression unreadable.

—

The healer continued his work.

Though he knew—

It was beyond him.

—

And the Emperor—

—

Stood there.

—

Unmoving.

—

Watching.

—

Waiting.

—

As if—

By sheer will—

He could force life to return.

—

The Weight of Silence

The palace that once felt grand—

Now felt suffocating.

—

Every breath—

Heavy.

—

Every second—

Endless.

—

Because no one knew—

What would happen next.

—

And somewhere—

Beyond sight—

The darkness grew stronger.

—

Waiting.

—

Watching.

—

For the next moment—

To strike again.

Whispers Within the Shrine

The shrine stood quiet beneath the pale light of dawn.

Hidden at the far edge of the palace grounds, it had always been a place of stillness—of prayer, of reflection, of distance from the world.

But now—

It no longer felt peaceful.

—

Inside, the faint scent of incense lingered in the air.

The soft glow of oil lamps flickered against ancient stone walls.

And at the center—

The Empress knelt silently.

—

Her hands rested gently in her lap.

Her posture calm.

Her breathing steady.

—

But her thoughts—

Were not.

—

News That Broke the Silence

A maid had come earlier.

Hesitant.

Afraid.

—

"...Your Majesty..."

"...Lady Chen..."

—

The words had been incomplete.

Broken.

—

But enough.

—

"She collapsed."

"...Same condition..."

—

The Empress had not reacted immediately.

—

She had simply listened.

—

Then dismissed the maid quietly.

—

And now—

She sat here.

Alone.

—

Processing.

—

"...Again."

—

Her eyes lowered slightly.

—

First—

Her own incident.

—

Then—

The strange occurrences.

—

Now—

Lady Chen.

—

"...This is not coincidence."

—

Her fingers tightened slightly.

—

"...Someone is doing this."

—

The Thought She Could Not Ignore

Her mind began to connect everything.

—

The lake.

The loss of control.

The strange pull.

—

The feeling of something unseen—

Moving her.

—

"...That was not natural."

—

She exhaled slowly.

—

"...And now..."

—

"Lady Chen."

—

Her gaze darkened.

—

"...The pattern is clear."

—

A pause.

—

"...This person..."

—

"...is inside the palace."

—

The thought settled.

Heavy.

Cold.

—

Because only someone inside—

Could know.

Could act.

Could strike without being seen.

—

A Name That Appeared

And then—

A face surfaced in her mind.

—

Shin Gu.

—

The quiet one.

The calm one.

—

The one who rarely spoke.

—

The one who always seemed... distant.

—

The Empress's brows furrowed slightly.

—

"...Could it be her?"

—

A flicker of doubt.

—

But then—

She shook her head slightly.

—

"...No."

—

"She doesn't speak."

"She avoids attention."

—

"She feels..."

—

"...pure."

—

The word came softly.

—

Because that was how Shin Gu appeared.

—

Untouched.

Uninvolved.

—

"...It cannot be her."

—

And yet—

The doubt did not fully disappear.

—

The Ghosts Appear

The air shifted slightly.

—

A familiar presence.

—

Then—

They appeared.

—

The three ghosts.

—

One leaning lazily against a pillar.

One standing with arms crossed.

One hovering quietly nearby.

—

"You heard?" the female ghost asked softly.

—

The Empress nodded.

"...Yes."

—

The general ghost frowned.

"...This is not good."

—

The scholar ghost adjusted his sleeve.

"...The pattern is repeating."

—

The Empress looked at them.

—

"...You feel it too?"

—

They all nodded.

—

"There is something moving," the scholar ghost said.

"Something we cannot see clearly."

—

The general ghost added,

"...But it is close."

—

"Too close."

—

The Truth They All Felt

The Empress's voice lowered.

"...Inside the palace."

—

The ghosts exchanged glances.

—

Then nodded again.

—

"Yes."

—

The female ghost stepped closer.

"...We've felt it before."

—

"A strange sensation."

—

"Like..."

She hesitated.

—

"...something watching."

—

The Empress's gaze sharpened.

"...Watching?"

—

The scholar ghost nodded.

—

"...But never visible."

—

"We searched."

—

"Followed the feeling."

—

"But found nothing."

—

The general ghost clenched his fist.

"...That's what makes it dangerous."

—

"If we could see it—"

—

"We could fight it."

—

"But this..."

—

"...hides."

—

A Growing Unease

The shrine suddenly felt colder.

—

Even the lamps flickered slightly.

—

The Empress's voice softened.

"...Lady Chen..."

—

A pause.

—

"...I hope she wakes up."

—

Not because of affection.

—

But because—

She was a victim.

—

Just like her.

—

The female ghost nodded.

"...She didn't deserve this."

—

The scholar ghost added quietly,

"...None of you do."

—

Silence fell.

—

Heavy.

—

Because all of them understood—

—

This was only the beginning.

—

The Invisible Enemy

The Empress slowly stood.

—

Her eyes lifted.

—

Steady.

Determined.

—

"...We need to find out who it is."

—

The general ghost nodded immediately.

"Yes."

—

The scholar ghost frowned.

"...But without clues..."

—

"...it will be difficult."

—

The female ghost whispered,

"...It could be anyone."

—

"A servant."

—

"A guard."

—

"Someone no one notices."

—

The Empress's expression hardened.

—

"...Or someone we trust."

—

The words lingered.

—

Dangerous.

—

Because sometimes—

The greatest threats—

Were the ones closest.

—

A Silent Resolve

The Empress turned toward the shrine altar.

—

Her hands clasped together.

—

Not in helpless prayer.

—

But in quiet resolve.

—

"...I survived once."

—

"...I will not fall again."

—

Behind her—

The ghosts stood silently.

—

Watching.

—

Protecting.

—

Waiting.

—

Because now—

They all knew.

—

The enemy was not far.

—

The enemy—

Was already here.

—

And somewhere—

Hidden within the palace—