

Ghost 87

Chapter 87: the meeting two empire

The golden courtyard gleamed under the high noon sun. Silk banners fluttered in the warm breeze, painted with the emblems of two great empires. The air was thick with incense and anticipation, the murmurs of courtiers fading into reverent silence as the delegation from the Eastern Empire approached.

The visiting Emperor—young, tall, and dressed in flowing white and silver—walked forward with calm authority. His eyes were bright as polished obsidian, his movements graceful, deliberate, and commanding. Even the air around him seemed to bow to his presence.

Lian An stood beside her husband, composed and dignified in her pale blue gown. Her fingers tightened around her fan as the handsome foreign ruler crossed the courtyard. His attendants followed in perfect formation, their armor glinting under the light, their banners swaying with the rhythm of his steps.

As he neared, all eyes were on him—and his eyes were only on one person.

They moved past the nobles, past the ministers, past the lines of soldiers, and came to rest squarely on the woman in blue.

The Empress.

For a moment, he simply looked at her. His expression softened almost imperceptibly, his gaze tracing the delicate calm of her face, the light shimmer of her gown, the quiet confidence in her stillness. Then, in front of the watching crowd, the Emperor of the Eastern Kingdom did something no one expected.

He stopped before her.

And with perfect poise, he extended his gloved hand, took hers gently, and bowed slightly—his lips brushing the back of her hand in greeting.

Gasps echoed through the courtyard.

The ministers froze, the attendants lowered their heads in awkward shock, and even the drums faltered for a breath.

Lian An's entire body went rigid. Her hand trembled slightly in his grasp. Heat rushed to her face until she could feel her ears burning red.

The boldness of the gesture left her speechless.

Her eyes darted briefly to her husband.

Emperor Rong Zhen, who had been standing just behind her, stiffened visibly. His brows twitched, and he coughed sharply—not from discomfort, but from barely restrained irritation.

"Ahem," he said coolly, stepping forward, his expression polite but voice clipped. "Your Majesty, allow me to introduce my wife—Her Majesty, the Empress of this Empire."

The visiting Emperor straightened, amusement flickering in his eyes as he looked between them. "Ah," he said smoothly, his tone rich with warmth. "Your Empress."

He gave a small, apologetic smile and laughed lightly, the sound carrying an easy grace. "Forgive me. I had thought she was your younger sister—her youth and beauty made it difficult to assume otherwise."

A ripple of laughter—polite but cautious—moved through the audience.

Lian An, still flushed, managed a composed bow. "Your Majesty is too kind."

Emperor Rong Zhen's expression didn't change, but the faint twitch at the corner of his jaw betrayed him. He forced a polite smile, gesturing toward the assembled nobles. "Allow me to present members of our royal household."

He stepped aside slightly, indicating toward Lady Chen, who stood a few paces away, and then toward the regal figure of the Empress Dowager seated under the canopy.

"This is Lady Chen of the noble Chen family," he said, "and our revered Empress Dowager."

The visiting Emperor inclined his head respectfully. "It is an honor to meet such distinguished women. The tales of your dynasty's grace and wisdom have reached even my court."

The Dowager smiled, her expression hiding the subtle sharpness behind her eyes. "We welcome you warmly, Your Majesty. May this meeting bring peace and prosperity to both our empires."

"Indeed," the foreign Emperor replied.

The Ritual of the Generals

At the sound of the trumpets, two great generals—one from each empire—stepped forward. Their armor gleamed in the sunlight, their faces solemn as ceremony required.

They drew their swords with a clear metallic ring that sliced through the hum of the crowd. Then, in perfect coordination, they crossed blades in front of the dais.

The foreign general bowed deeply. "For alliance and honor," he declared.

"Our blades meet as brothers, not as enemies," the host general answered, his voice steady.

Following ancient custom, they both began to walk in a circle, swords drawn, encircling one another three times. The movement symbolized mutual respect, the balance of power, and eternal peace between nations.

The crowd watched in reverent silence as the generals completed their third round. Then, in a single fluid motion, they lowered their swords, saluted each other, and stepped back.

The drums thundered again.

The ritual was complete.

Lian An exhaled softly, her gaze shifting toward the banners fluttering in the wind. Around her, the crowd erupted into polite applause.

Beside her, Emperor Rong Zhen remained perfectly still, his expression unreadable. But when he looked at her again, his gaze lingered just a little too long—caught between irritation and something he couldn't name.

The visiting Emperor, meanwhile, smiled once more—this time at her. "I am honored to meet the Empress of such refinement. Your presence makes this alliance shine brighter."

Her cheeks warmed again despite her best efforts to remain composed. She bowed slightly. "Your Majesty flatters me."

Rong Zhen's eyes flicked sharply toward the man, but he said nothing.

The crowd moved, the officials began forming ranks again, and the ceremony continued toward its formal conclusion. Yet, for all its grandeur, the air between the three of them—two emperors and one unwillingly admired empress—was far more charged than any alliance treaty.

Ending Scene

As the final salute ended, the drums quieted, replaced by the soft murmur of the courtiers.

The two emperors turned toward the palace gates, ready to proceed to the banquet hall.

Behind them, whispers filled the air: admiration for the visiting monarch's grace, awe at his looks, envy at his confidence. But one particular pair of ghosts—unseen and untamed—floated somewhere above the scene, whispering gleefully to each other.

Fen Yu snickered, "Did you see that? He kissed her hand!"

Wei Rong chuckled. "And our Emperor almost turned green."

Li Shen sighed dramatically. "Ah, diplomacy—the finest stage for jealousy."

Lian An pretended not to hear them. Her face remained calm, but her ears burned again when she recalled the brief touch of lips on her hand.

The Emperor walked beside her, expression cold but his hand tightening slightly at his side.

And thus, beneath the fluttering banners of peace, two empires smiled for the world—while under the surface, sparks of rivalry, curiosity, and something far more human began to kindle.