

Ghost 131

Chapter 131: signing contract

When Lian An stepped into the whisper-quiet hall, the sunlight behind her drew a faint halo around her form. Yao Qing walked beside her proudly, muttering under her breath about how "a certain cheap man" didn't deserve someone so flawless.

But inside the training courtyard, all eyes were fixated on the Empress.

Yu Mian, the merchant, rushed forward holding two thick scrolls against his chest.

"Miss Lian," he greeted with deep respect, "thank heavens you are here. The renewal contract is prepared exactly as you instructed."

Lian An nodded.

"Let's review."

They walked toward the upstairs office. The twins and the new man Wei Jie followed behind, nervous and excited.

Fen Yu's voice echoed faintly from above the beams,

"Don't sign without reading properly!"

Lian An sent her a warning glare.

Fen Yu zipped behind Li Shen like a scolded rabbit.

The Contract Room — A Different Atmosphere

The door closed and Yu Mian laid out the scroll on the low table. The parchment glowed lightly under the afternoon sun.

Written with precise calligraphy were the shares of the Whisper Bowl Empire:

45% — Lian An

40% — Yu Mian

10% — Yao Qing

2% — Wei Jie (new man)

3% — Twins (1.5% each)

The Empress spoke calmly:

"This is the final distribution. They have worked day and night. They deserve a stake in our future."

The twins lowered their heads, their eyes red.

Wei Jie clenched his fists, trembling.

Yu Mian nodded fully.

"I agree. They are loyal and skilled. Giving them a portion ties them to this brand for life."

Yao Qing smiled softly, "And people work harder when they feel ownership."

The Empress gestured.

"Yu Mian, read it aloud."

He read every line—the profit split, the role of partners, responsibilities, outlet expansions, franchise clauses, penalties for leaking recipes, and the rule that TWB must have identical menu, training, uniforms, and hygiene.

When he finished, the room was silent.

The Empress picked up her brush and signed first.

Her name was smooth, powerful.

Then Yu Mian signed.

Then Yao Qing.

Finally, Wei Jie stepped forward, knees trembling.

He picked up the brush like it was a sacred weapon.

"I... I have never signed a contract with my name before," he whispered.

"Then today," the Empress said softly, "start your new life properly."

He wrote slowly, carefully, and when he finished, tears rolled down his cheeks.

The twins signed together—one holding ink stone, the other the brush.

When they finished, the three of them knelt.

"Miss Lian," Wei Jie said, voice shaking, "thank you for believing in people like us."

"We will make the Whisper Bowl grow beyond anything the world has seen," the girl twin declared fiercely.

"And stay loyal to you till death," the boy twin added.

The Empress only said,

"Stand. We walk the road together. No one kneels."

Yu Mian smiled wide.

"The Whisper Bowl has officially become a true partnership."

Downstairs — The Training Hall Shock

They stepped down the stairs to inspect progress. The Empress expected chaos... but instead—

A stone-solid line of workers stood poised with straight backs.

Forty freed slaves, fifteen laborers, all transformed.

Their posture was straight.

Their clothes neat.

They held boards and brushes like scholars.

When the scholar Li Wen taught, they answered in unison:

"Yes, Teacher!"

When the twins demonstrated how to greet customers—

"Welcome to the Whisper Bowl!"

Their voices were in perfect harmony.

Workers practiced placing dishes:

Right hand forward, left hand supporting.

Back straight.

Eyes down politely.

The freed slaves who once trembled before speaking now introduced themselves clearly:

"My name is Wen Si. I am twenty-six. I can cook six dishes."

"My name is Bao Er. I can read five hundred characters now."

"I learned arithmetic. I can calculate bills."

One woman even lifted her chin proudly.

"I can write my own name!"

The Empress's chest warmed.

Five days... only five days... and these people, once broken, had regained dignity.

The workers noticed her presence and bowed deeply.

"Miss Lian!"

"You're back!"

"We practiced hard!"

"We will not disappoint you!"

Yao Qing whispered to the Empress,

"See? In five days they behave like palace servants."

The Empress nodded proudly.

Yu Mian stroked his beard, stunned.

"At this rate," he said, "we will build the best-trained food army in the entire continent."

Inspecting the Kitchen

The group moved into the kitchen where ten trainees practiced cutting vegetables.

Lian An watched as one trainee held a knife with correct pressure, slicing potatoes with even thickness.

Before, they sliced like they were fighting a war.

Now—

Swift. Precise. Clean.

Another trainee stirred broth, repeating:

"Low flame... consistency thick... stir clockwise..."

The Empress hid a smile.

They were improving faster than she imagined.

Next Door — The Renovation Site

The sound of wooden hammers echoed next door.

The Empress stepped in with her partners. The smell of fresh timber, lime plaster, and new bricks filled the air.

Twenty laborers worked in harmony:

One group tiled the floor.

Another painted walls pale cream.

A third polished wooden beams.

The master carpenter bowed.

"Miss Lian, the new extension will be completed in three days.

We built stronger shelves, added storage cupboards, and expanded the dining hall."

Yu Mian walked around, impressed.

"The new outlet will be twice the size of the old one."

Yao Qing stretched proudly,

"Good. We need space for customers queuing from morning till night."

The Empress nodded with satisfaction.

This was becoming a real empire.

Unexpected Pause — People Stare at the Empress

As they walked back through the courtyard, the workers went silent again.

Some inhaled sharply.

Some whispered.

Some stared openly.

Today, her beauty was different.

Sharper. Heavenly. Bright.

Whispers spread again:

"She looks like a fairy descended..."

"No wonder her husband loves her so much..."

"It must be blissful to be adored like that..."

"She glows more every day..."

The Empress nearly tripped.

(If they knew it was cultivation... not love...)

Beside her, Yao Qing muttered through gritted teeth:

"If only they knew your husband is cold as ice and obsessed with Lady Chen... tch... cheap man."

Only the Empress heard.

She sighed inwardly.

To the world, she looked blessed.

To her friend, she looked bullied.

To herself... she didn't know what she was yet.

But for the first time—

She felt... powerful.

She felt... alive.

She felt... like she had built something that belonged to her.

And that was enough.

Merchant Yu Mian Seals the Future

Before leaving, Yu Mian lifted the contract scroll.

"With this," he said solemnly, "The Whisper Bowl becomes the first structured franchise of this kingdom."

The Empress nodded.

"Prepare the stamps. Carve more TWB logos. In three days, when renovations end—we begin training the future managers."

The twins bowed.

Wei Jie's eyes shined.

Yao Qing rubbed her hands excitedly.

Yu Mian declared loudly:

"To the future Whisper Bowl Empire!"

The hall erupted with cheers.

Even silent workers smiled.

And above them, unnoticed on the beams, three ghosts held their new swords proudly.

Fen Yu whispered,

"Our Miss is becoming unstoppable."

Li Shen smirked.

"Of course she is."

Wei Rong simply said,

"We will protect her."

When the workers finally dispersed to their quarters and Yu Mian went home with the signed contract tucked under his arm, the Whisper Bowl fell into a gentle, peaceful quiet.

Only the sound of cicadas hummed through the cooling night air.

Lian An closed the ledger and exhaled softly.

Behind her, three familiar lights flickered into form.

Fen Yu floated forward first, hugging her crystal to her chest like a child clutching a pillow.

Li Shen appeared next, his translucent robes fluttering even without wind.

Wei Rong stood slightly behind them, arms crossed, silent but present, eyes sharp.

The Empress looked at them and nodded once.

"Let's meditate."

They all moved toward the small garden at the back of the Whisper Bowl.

The soil the Emperor tilled earlier still smelled fresh and warm, glowing faintly under the moonlight.

The four of them sat in a circle:

Lian An cross-legged on the stone mat,

Fen Yu hovering but folding her hands obediently,

Li Shen adjusting his robe with unnecessary dignity,

Wei Rong sitting stiff, like a general even in meditation.

The moment they settled—

the crystal in each of their hands flickered.

Lian An closed her eyes first.

Her breath deepened, slowing.

One breath

Two breaths

Seven breaths

Ten—

A faint hum spread around them.

Fen Yu gasped softly.

"It's starting..."

Spiritual energy flowed from the crystals, forming tiny threads of glowing orange light.

At first they twitched, unsteady, like newly-born fireflies.

Then they steadied—thin lines connecting each member of the circle.

Fen Yu to Lian An.

Lian An to Li Shen.

Li Shen to Wei Rong.

Wei Rong back to Fen Yu.

A perfect spiritual loop.

The air warmed.

The soil beneath them vibrated.

Lian An felt her pulse slow and deepen.

Her veins tingled.

Her mind softened into a calm haze.

It was like sinking into warm water.

Fen Yu's aura grew brighter, her face softening from her earlier sulking.

Li Shen's brows relaxed, for once not furrowed like an overworked scholar.

Wei Rong's rigid energy melted slightly, his presence becoming warm instead of sharp.

The crystals pulsed.

The Empress felt the energy enter her chest, swirl into her dantian like liquid sunlight.

It rose along her spine, tingled in her fingertips, and settled behind her eyes.

She saw visions—

Mountains

Stars

Old lives

New futures

Flashes of power

Her breath deepened further.

Fen Yu whispered shakily, "Miss... I can feel myself growing stronger..."

Li Shen inhaled, "My spiritual sea is expanding..."

Wei Rong grunted low, "Good. We will need this."

The Empress opened her eyes briefly.

Around their circle, the orange threads thickened, turning into vibrant streams of light that rose like ribbons toward the dark sky.

Their bodies were glowing faintly—

Her skin took on a smooth, pearly radiance.

Fen Yu's hair shimmered like silver mist.

Li Shen's figure sharpened, clarity increasing.

Wei Rong's shadow lengthened, power leaking despite his stillness.

It felt endless.

Timeless.

Perfect.

They remained like that for nearly an hour, the moon rising higher, the night breeze softening around them like a blanket.

When the crystals finally dimmed, the glow receded slowly.

Fen Yu exhaled with awe.

"I feel... reborn."

Li Shen nodded, voice quiet.

"Our cultivation has risen another step."

Wei Rong's eyes glinted.

"This strength will help us protect Miss from all dangers—ghost or human."

The Empress smiled faintly.

The garden, the Whisper Bowl, the night sky—

everything looked sharper, clearer, cleaner.

She felt stronger.

More grounded.

More alive.

Fen Yu floated closer and leaned against her shoulder, whining softly like a spoiled child.

"Miss... let's meditate again tomorrow... I want to become pretty ghost queen..."

Li Shen clicked his tongue. "Cultivate first, dream later."

"We will repeat this nightly," the Empress said gently. "Until our strength is enough."

The ghosts nodded in perfect unison.

Their silhouettes glowed faintly in the moonlight.

Four spirits—

one human,

three ghosts,

bound together by fate and power...

and the strange new destiny waiting for them.