

Ghost 143

Chapter 143: before reopening

Morning sunlight spilled over the Whisper Bowl like a blessing...

but inside the restaurant, blessings were nowhere to be found.

Instead, the building shook with the kind of chaos only new cultivators and panicked trainees could create.

The Empress rubbed her temples.

Two days left before reopening.

Two days until the world walked into her restaurant expecting perfection.

Two days to turn this battlefield into a respectable business.

She regretted everything.

1. Ghost Trouble at Dawn

Fen Yu was sulking on the ceiling like a wet cat.

A faint silver glow surrounded her, swirling in chaotic spirals.

"Fen Yu," the Empress warned, "stop glowing. Someone will see."

"I can't stop!" Fen Yu wailed. "My beauty is too powerful now! Men will fall at my feet! Ghost men already did!"

Li Shen, floating calmly nearby, corrected her gently,

"No. They ran away because they thought you were exploding."

Fen Yu gasped.

"I was exploding! Spirit energy comes out of me like fireworks!"

Wei Rong grunted. "Then stop breathing."

Fen Yu shrieked. "You want me dead twice?!"

The Empress put down her ladle.

"Enough. All of you — aura suppression practice. Now."

The three ghosts obediently descended.

And immediately created disaster.

Wei Rong's aura cracked a wooden beam.

Fen Yu burst into silver sparks.

Li Shen faded in and out like a malfunctioning lantern.

"STOP!" the Empress shouted.

Everyone froze.

Fen Yu raised her hand timidly.

"Sister Lian... I think we broke the floor."

The floor had cracked.

The Empress inhaled deeply.

"This is going to be a long two days."

2. Renovation Inspection — and A Beautiful Accident

After forcibly stuffing Fen Yu's aura back into her soul, the Empress led her group to the newly renovated three-shop extension.

The workers had done an incredible job:

polished wooden floors

private booths

fresh paper lanterns

spacious kitchen

upstairs cabin seating

cozy staff rooms

a garden in the back where seeds were already planted

"It looks beautiful," Yao Qing whispered.

"It will look even better when customers arrive," the Empress replied.

It would have been a perfect moment.

If Fen Yu hadn't flown directly into the new chandelier.

CRASH.

The sparkling glass rained across the floor.

Everyone stared.

Fen Yu froze mid-air, tangled in beads.

"I... can explain..."

The Empress forced a smile at the bewildered carpenter.

"It was... the wind."

Inside she whispered to Fen Yu,

"If you break one more thing, I will bury you in the supply closet."

Fen Yu nodded rapidly.

"Yes sister...!!"

3. Menu Test: Kitchen Turns Into Battlefield

Preparing the reopening menu should have been simple.

It was war instead.

The Empress moved like flowing water across the kitchen:

slicing beef

simmering broth

glazing pork

frying lotus root

tossing vegetables

kneading dumpling dough

Steam rose in soft clouds, filling the air with mouthwatering fragrance.

Twin Ran clung to the counter.

"I think I'm in heaven..."

Twin Lin clutched his stomach.

"I think I'm dying of hunger..."

Fen Yu drifted toward the dumplings with longing eyes.

Wei Rong stopped her with a hand on her face.

"Do not. Touch. Anything."

Li Shen's gaze followed the desserts with scholarly greed.

"I believe I understand the meaning of enlightenment now..."

The Empress set out the dishes for tasting.

Fen Yu lunged.

Wei Rong grabbed her ankle.

They spun together, knocking over three bowls.

Twin Lin tripped trying to stop them.

Twin Ran tripped trying to catch Lin.

New Man fainted from the aroma alone.

The Empress exhaled very slowly.

"Tomorrow, we practice self-control."

4. Staff Practice — A Disaster in Uniform

The 15 hired workers and 40 freed slaves lined up nervously for practice.

"Welcome to training," the Empress said.

They bowed.

Then everything fell apart.

Worker A bowed to a broom.

Worker B repeated "Welcome TWB welcome TWB" like a prayer.

Worker C forgot where to face and bowed at the wall.

Worker D tripped carrying an empty tray.

Elder worker E kept shouting "YES CHEF!" even when no one spoke.

The Empress blinked.

Yao Qing sighed.

"This is worse than I expected."

Fen Yu floated above them like a drill sergeant.

"You! Walk with grace! You! Bow properly! You! Do not shake like jelly!"

Wei Rong demonstrated posture like a general in court.

Li Shen wrote corrections on wooden planks:

"DO NOT PANIC."

"CUSTOMERS ARE HUMANS, NOT GODS."

"WALK STRAIGHT."

Twin Lin tried tray practice—

and sent the tray flying.

Twin Ran screamed.

"LIN NO—"

It hit New Man.

He fainted again.

The Empress pinched the bridge of her nose.

"We... open... in two days..."

Everyone nodded silently with grave determination.

Even the ghosts saluted.

5. Nightfall — No Peace, Only Complaints

By evening, everyone sat collapsed on the floor.

Yao Qing flopped on her back.

"I don't want to move..."

Twin Ran groaned.

"My arms are jelly..."

Twin Lin whined.

"My soul has left my body..."

Fen Yu lay dramatically on the table.

"My beauty... has suffered unreparable damage..."

Wei Rong cleaned his sword, unmoved.

"My patience has suffered."

Li Shen wrote in his book.

"Today's progress: Negative fifty."

The Empress sat among them, feeling equal parts exhausted and proud.

They were chaotic.

They were loud.

They were disasters.

But they were hers.

She rose slowly.

"Listen carefully. Tomorrow—"

Everyone looked up at her like tired puppies.

"You suppress your aura.

You move like normal humans.

You do NOT glow, float, explode, faint, or break anything.

Understand?"

"Yes!" they chorused.

Fen Yu added, "I will glow in my heart only!"

The Empress smiled despite everything.

"Good. Two days left. Let's survive them."

And for the first time since returning from the barbaric lands...

Whisper Bowl felt alive again.

Chaotic.

Noisy.

Unpredictable.

But alive.

The morning sun filtered into Whisper Bowl like warm honey, casting soft gold over the tables, bowls, and training mats. The workers were still asleep, sprawled in odd positions after their exhausting training. Even the ghosts were unusually quiet.

The Empress stood by the window, lost in thought.

Two days before reopening.

Five days before she must return to the palace to end her "plague seclusion."

Too many matters. Too many lies carefully balanced like bowls stacked on a high shelf.

But today, there was something far more important than the restaurant.

Her parents.

Her only real family in this world.

Even though she had secretly told them she was faking the plague...

Even though she explained she was safe...

Even though she warned them not to visit the palace...

They must still be worried.

The Duke household loved her deeply.

Their only daughter disappearing without a word would break their hearts.

She tightened her grip on her cloak.

"It's time," she whispered to herself. "I must visit them."

Behind her, a familiar voice groaned theatrically.

1. Fen Yu the Ghost Drama Queen

Fen Yu floated upside down from the rafters, hair hanging like a black waterfall.

"You're leaving us?" she cried dramatically. "Again? Without warning? Without emotional preparation?!"

The Empress rolled her eyes.

"Fen Yu... it's my parents. I have to visit them."

Wei Rong appeared beside Fen Yu and flicked her forehead.

"Control yourself."

"Ow!!" Fen Yu rubbed her head, glaring.

"Toxic masculinity! I will file a spiritual complaint!"

Li Shen calmly adjusted his scholar robe and floated closer.

"The Empress returning to her parental house is proper. A daughter must reassure her family."

Fen Yu's eyes widened.

"But she told them she was faking the plague!"

"And you think they believed such a lie?" Li Shen raised an eyebrow. "Parents worry even if their child sneezes once."

The Empress sighed.

Exactly.

That's why she had to go.

2. Yao Qing and the Twins Join the Drama

As soon as she stepped downstairs, Yao Qing rushed toward her with a half-tied ribbon in her hair and a dumpling in her mouth.

"Where are you going??" she asked, words muffled.

The Empress fixed her cloak.

"To the Duke household."

Twin Ran gasped loudly.

"Your parents?? This soon?!"

Twin Lin immediately panicked.

"Does the Emperor know??"

"No," the Empress said firmly. "And he doesn't need to."

Yao Qing spat out the dumpling.

"Are you crazy?! What if he catches you outside again?! He stalks you like a shadow!"

The Empress froze.

That... was unfortunately true.

"Still," she said, voice steady, "my parents would be suffering. They tried to send letters, but palace rules prevented any from reaching me. I must show them I'm alive."

Ran nodded.

"Duke and Duchess raised you since childhood... they must be worrying themselves sick."

Lin added softly,

"And you always say they never scolded you, never pressured you... you owe them peace of mind."

The Empress swallowed hard.

She rarely showed weakness.

But the thought of her parents losing sleep, thinking their daughter was wasting away alone...

Her chest tightened.

"I will go today," she said quietly. "Just for a short visit."

3. Preparing for the Visit

The Empress changed into a simple but elegant light-blue dress, tied her hair with a jade pin, and wore a cloak that hid her figure. She looked more like a noble daughter than a business owner of TWB.

Fen Yu circled her in admiration.

"Sister... you look like a fairy bride going home for blessings!"

Wei Rong snorted.

"She looks like a noblewoman, which she is."

Li Shen nodded approvingly.

"When you meet your parents, don't mention ghosts, barbaric clans, or cultivation. Humans of this world cannot comprehend such things."

Fen Yu pouted.

"So she must hide her brilliance? Unfair!"

The Empress smiled slightly.

"It's not that. I just don't want them to worry more."

Yao Qing placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Go. We will handle the restaurant training today."

Ran and Lin saluted dramatically.

"We will protect the place from disaster!"

The Empress stared at them.

"You two caused most of the disaster yesterday."

They coughed and looked away.