

Ghost 148

Chapter 148: when unseen refused to behave

The Whisper Bowl had never been this lively.

The reopening was only a day away, yet the place already buzzed like a festival ground. Chairs scraped, bowls clinked, steam rose from pots, and voices overlapped in cheerful disorder.

The Duke rolled up his sleeves and carried wooden benches as if he had done this his whole life.

The Duchess sat near the counter, calmly folding napkins, correcting Lian Hua every time she folded one crookedly.

Lian Rou stood near the entrance, helping direct workers and customers alike with quiet authority.

Yao Qing ran back and forth with a ledger, calling out, "Careful with that pot! That's the new soup base—no spilling!"

Everything should have gone smoothly.

It didn't.

Because the ghosts were bored.

Very bored.

Fen Yu floated upside down near the ceiling beam, legs crossed, pouting.

"So many people. So many rules. And we're not even allowed to scare anyone."

Wei Rong crossed his arms.

"This is discipline. You lack it."

"I lack fun," Fen Yu shot back.

Li Shen adjusted his sleeves thoughtfully.

"Statistically speaking, chaos increases when Fen Yu is silent for more than ten minutes."

The Empress, chopping vegetables, felt a familiar chill crawl up her spine.

"...Fen Yu," she said without looking up. "Don't."

Fen Yu grinned.

"I haven't done anything yet."

That was always the worst sign.

Yao Qing lifted a ladle to taste the soup.

The ladle suddenly leapt out of her hand.

The soup splashed neatly back into the pot, but the ladle flew across the room and landed perfectly on a hook.

The entire kitchen froze.

"...Did I throw that?" Yao Qing muttered.

Lian Hua blinked.

"Second Sister, your arm didn't even move."

The Duke cleared his throat.

"Perhaps... a draft?"

Fen Yu giggled so hard she rolled in the air.

Wei Rong sighed.

"I warned you."

The Empress shot Fen Yu a sharp look.

Fen Yu zipped away, hands raised.

"Fine, fine! I'll behave!"

She didn't.

Outside, workers were arranging tables.

One man placed a chair down.

It scooted back.

He frowned and pushed it forward again.

It scooted away faster.

"...Is this chair alive?" he whispered.

Another chair slowly turned on its own.

Lian Rou stared at the scene, expression unreadable.

The Duchess calmly sipped tea.

"Interesting craftsmanship."

Fen Yu lay flat on the floor, pushing chairs with both hands, laughing silently.

Li Shen rubbed his temples.

"She's turning the Whisper Bowl into a haunted teahouse."

The Empress pressed her lips together.

"Fen. Yu."

Fen Yu froze mid-push and looked innocent.

"What? I'm just helping with spacing."

The Emperor had arrived earlier to "check progress" and was currently tying banners with Lian Rou.

As he reached up, his sleeve suddenly tied itself into a knot.

He frowned and tried to shake it loose.

It tightened.

The general, watching from afar, nearly choked.

"...Your Majesty?"

The Emperor stared at his sleeve, then calmly untied it.

"Strange," he said. "This place has... spirit."

Fen Yu clapped silently.

Wei Rong grabbed her by the collar and dragged her upward.

"Enough."

She struggled.

"I didn't even trip him yet!"

The Empress turned her back and counted to five.

The new wooden sign — THE WHISPER BOWL — was being lifted into place.

Just as it aligned perfectly—

It tilted.

Everyone gasped.

Before panic could spread, the sign gently lowered itself... straight and flawless.

Silence followed.

Yao Qing stared.

"...I swear no one touched it."

Li Shen smiled faintly.

"Acceptable intervention."

Fen Yu puffed her cheeks.

"That one was nice."

The Empress exhaled slowly.

"...At least you didn't drop it."

Fen Yu beamed.

"See? Helpful."

The Empress Loses Patience

When a stack of bowls started vibrating on its own, the Empress finally snapped.

She stepped into the storage room and hissed,

"If any bowl breaks, I will personally assign you one hundred hours of silent meditation."

Fen Yu gasped.

"That's cruel!"

Wei Rong nodded approvingly.

"Effective."

Li Shen added,

"Scientifically proven."

Fen Yu deflated instantly.

"I'll stop," she muttered. "Maybe."

Aftermath

By evening, the chaos settled.

Workers chalked it up to nerves.

The Duke decided the place had "good fortune."

The Duchess declared the odd events "lively."

Lian Hua was convinced the restaurant was blessed.

Only the Empress knew the truth.

As she wiped her hands and glanced upward, Fen Yu peeked from behind a beam and smiled sheepishly.

"...Tomorrow," Fen Yu whispered, "can I scare just one customer?"

"No," the Empress replied flatly.

Fen Yu sighed.

"Worth asking."

The Whisper Bowl glowed warmly in the twilight — alive, bustling, and just a little haunted.

And for once, that felt perfectly right.

The Whisper Bowl finally fell into a rare moment of calm.

The last worker had left for the night, lanterns glowed softly along the wooden beams, and the smell of cooked broth still lingered in the air. Outside, the city hummed quietly, unaware that half the chaos of the day had not been human at all.

Lian An placed the broom against the wall with a thud.

"Come out," she said coldly.

The air rippled.

Fen Yu slowly drifted down from the ceiling, pretending to stretch. Li Shen appeared near the window, folding his sleeves with scholarly dignity. Wei Rong emerged last, arms crossed, expression unreadable.

The Empress turned, hands on her hips.

"Explain."

Fen Yu blinked. "Explain what?"

"Don't play stupid," Lian An snapped. "Flying ladles. Moving chairs. My sign almost falling. Do you know how close I was to being accused of running a haunted business?"

Fen Yu tilted her head innocently.

"But it didn't fall."

"That's not the point."

Wei Rong spoke calmly. "Discipline was not maintained."

Fen Yu rounded on him. "Oh, please! You pushed a chair too!"

Wei Rong didn't deny it. "Once."

Li Shen sighed. "Statistically speaking, ninety percent of today's disturbances originated from Fen Yu."

Fen Yu gasped. "Betrayal!"

Lian An rubbed her temples. "Do you know how hard it was to convince everyone nothing strange was happening?"

Fen Yu floated closer, circling her teasingly.

"But look at you. Scolding ghosts. Running a business. Training workers. Bossing emperors. Honestly, Your Majesty—are you sure you're not the scary one?"

The Empress shot her a glare sharp enough to cut steel.

"I can still punish you."

Fen Yu stopped mid-air.

"...You wouldn't."

Lian An smiled sweetly.

"I absolutely would."

Wei Rong nodded. "She means it."

Fen Yu shrieked dramatically and flew behind Li Shen.

"Scholar! Protect me!"

Li Shen adjusted his sleeves.

"I recommend apologizing."

Fen Yu peeked out. "Sorry... but admit it—without us, today would've been boring."

The Empress scoffed.

"Boring is good. Boring means no suspicion."

Fen Yu pouted.

"You've changed. Before, you liked chaos."

"I like control," Lian An replied flatly.

Wei Rong chuckled softly. "She's right. We must not draw attention."

Fen Yu sighed exaggeratedly.

"Fine. No more haunting. No more tricks. No more fun."

She floated upside down again.

"...At least until reopening day."

The Empress narrowed her eyes.

"Fen Yu."

Fen Yu zipped upright immediately.

"I was joking! Mostly!"

Li Shen smiled faintly. "Her definition of 'joking' is unreliable."

Lian An crossed her arms. "Listen carefully. We are already walking on thin ice. If anyone senses something unnatural, we'll all have trouble."

Fen Yu nodded solemnly—for about two seconds.

Then she grinned.

"But if someone deserves it—like that rude customer who complained about free soup—"

"No."

"—or the guy who stared too long—"

"No."

"—or the Emperor—"

Lian An pointed at her.

"Especially not him."

Fen Yu burst out laughing.

"Oh, that one's tempting."

Wei Rong coughed. "Very."

The Empress groaned. "You are all impossible."

Fen Yu floated closer, lowering her voice conspiratorially.

"But admit it... you'd miss us if we behaved."

Lian An paused.

Then, reluctantly, she said, "Don't get carried away."

Fen Yu smiled brightly.

"That's a yes."

The lantern flickered gently above them.

Outside, the Whisper Bowl slept peacefully.

Inside, an Empress stood surrounded by ghosts—exasperated, powerful, and very much not alone.