

Ghost 150

Chapter 150: farewell at dawn

Morning light spilled gently over The Whisper Bowl, soft but busy. Inside the courtyard, bundles were stacked neatly—clothes, recipe scrolls, utensils, and sealed jars of spices. The air carried a strange mix of excitement and reluctance.

Today was the day.

The first group would leave to open a new branch in another city.

The freed slaves, now trained workers, stood in a straight line. Their backs were no longer bent, their eyes no longer empty. They wore clean uniforms, hands folded respectfully, expressions steady but emotional.

For many of them, this was the first time in their lives they were leaving by choice.

Lian An walked slowly in front of them, checking each face.

"You are not going as servants," she said calmly.

"You are going as representatives of The Whisper Bowl. Remember that."

They bowed deeply.

"Thank you, Benefactor."

Some voices trembled.

Yao Qing stepped forward, handing out small cloth pouches.

"Travel money. Use it wisely. Eat properly. Don't skip meals."

The twins adjusted straps, tightening loads, giving instructions like older siblings.

"Write to us once you arrive." "Don't argue with customers." "If there's trouble, close early."

The new man—now officially part of the management—handed each group a sealed document.

"Contracts, authority letters, and branch rules. Protect them with your life."

A carriage arrived, dust rising behind it.

Merchant Yu Mian stepped down, already composed, already calculating—but his eyes softened when he looked at the group.

"I've arranged escorts and guides," he said.

"My people will travel with you until you're settled."

Two capable-looking men bowed.

"We'll make sure everything goes smoothly."

The workers looked relieved. Having support meant safety.

Yu Mian turned to Lian An.

"This is just the beginning. Once these branches stabilize, more cities will follow."

She nodded.

"Send news often."

As the workers climbed into the carriage, emotions finally broke free.

One woman wiped her eyes.

"I never thought I'd leave like this... with dignity."

Another whispered,

"I'll make you proud."

The carriage doors closed.

The horses moved.

Everyone stood watching until the road swallowed them whole.

For a moment, the courtyard was quiet.

Then Yao Qing exhaled sharply.

"...It's really happening."

Lian An smiled faintly.

"Yes. They're no longer trapped."

Above them, unseen, Fen Yu floated upside down.

"They look braver than I was."

Li Shen said softly,

"A new Chapter always starts with departure."

Wei Rong folded his arms.

"And risk."

Lian An didn't look away from the road.

"Worth it," she said.

Behind her, The Whisper Bowl stood tall—

no longer just a restaurant,

but a path leading outward,

city by city.

The second day of reopening arrived like a wave that refused to slow.

From the moment the sun rose, The Whisper Bowl was already awake. Steam curled from the kitchen windows, the scent of broth and spices drifting far down the street, pulling people in before the doors even opened.

Yesterday had been grand.

Today was explosive.

By the time the signboard was lifted, a long queue had already formed. Some were locals who had eaten once and come back again. Others were travelers who had heard the rumors overnight—about the taste, the cleanliness, the strange discipline of the staff, and the warmth of the place.

Inside, everything moved in practiced rhythm.

The trained workers took orders calmly, writing clearly, bowing properly, voices respectful and confident. Plates went out fast, tables were wiped immediately, floors spotless even with constant foot traffic.

People noticed.

"This place is different." "They don't shout." "They don't touch food with bare hands." "Look how clean everything is."

Near the counter, Merchant Yu Mian stood quietly, watching with sharp eyes and an unmistakable smile. This was no longer just a good restaurant—it was proof that his investment was right.

"This model will work anywhere," he murmured.

Behind the serving tables, something even more unbelievable was happening.

The Emperor himself was there—still in commoner clothes—rolling up his sleeves and carrying trays like it was the most natural thing in the world. He moved efficiently, silently blocking chaos before it could happen, stepping in when bowls piled up, redirecting traffic when the hall grew too full.

People whispered.

"That man again..." "He's here from morning?" "He really dotes on his wife."

Nearby, the Duke and Duchess served tea with calm elegance, as if they had done this all their lives. The Duchess smiled gently at customers, while the Duke helped guide older guests to seats, steady and patient.

No one guessed their identities.

They only saw a family working together.

Lian Hua, the Empress's younger sister, ran between tables with bright energy, laughing as she delivered desserts.

Lian Rou, the elder cousin, managed crowd flow at the entrance, his voice firm but polite, earning respect effortlessly.

And at the center of it all—

Lian An.

She moved between kitchen and hall, checking dishes, correcting seasoning, quietly guiding staff when mistakes happened. Her expression was calm, but her eyes shone with focus and satisfaction.

Every time she passed, conversations paused for a breath.

"She's so composed..." "No wonder this place runs so smoothly."

At one table, a group of merchants laughed loudly as they finished eating.

"I'm opening a shop near the east gate next month," one said.

"I'll bring my whole family here before leaving," another replied.

Coins clinked into the tip box.

Reviews spread mouth to mouth.

By afternoon, the queue doubled.

Yu Mian leaned closer to Lian An.

"The second branch will open sooner than planned."

She nodded.

"We'll be ready."

Outside, the signboard swayed gently in the breeze.

Inside, laughter, praise, and the clatter of bowls filled the air.

The Whisper Bowl wasn't just open anymore.

It was alive.

Add-on Scene — Ghosts at the Sideline

From the highest beam of the Whisper Bowl, three figures hovered lazily, invisible to every living soul below.

Fen Yu leaned forward first, chin resting in her palms, eyes sparkling as she watched the chaos unfold.

"Look at them," she whispered, half-amused, half-proud. "So many humans lining up just to eat a bowl of soup."

Wei Rong crossed his arms, floating upright like a guard even in death. His sharp gaze swept over the crowd, instinctively alert.

"Hmph. If this many people had gathered when I was alive, I would've assumed an ambush."

Li Shen chuckled, folding his sleeves neatly despite being a ghost.

"This is not an ambush, General. This is reputation. Something far more terrifying."

Below them, servers moved swiftly, laughter rang out, coins clinked, and the Emperor—of all people—carried trays like a seasoned worker.

Fen Yu gasped dramatically.

"Did you see that? The mighty ruler of the kingdom is wiping tables!"

Wei Rong snorted.

"If his soldiers saw this, half of them would faint."

Li Shen's gaze softened as it followed Lian An moving through the hall, calm and radiant.

"She built this," he said quietly. "From nothing. Even fate watches her now."

Fen Yu smiled, her earlier sulk completely forgotten.

"She looks happy," she murmured. "I like this place. It smells warm."

The three ghosts fell silent for a moment, simply watching.

For the first time since their deaths, none of them felt restless.

They were not wandering.

They were witnessing.

End of the Day — A Quiet Celebration

By the time the sun dipped low and painted the sky in shades of gold and amber, the Whisper Bowl finally slowed. The long queue that had stretched across the street thinned at last, leaving behind satisfied laughter, clinking coins, and endless praise whispered by customers as they departed.

Inside, the tables were full again—but this time, not with customers.

This time, it was family.

The Empress sat at the center, sleeves rolled slightly, her face relaxed in a way it rarely was inside palace walls. Beside her sat the Emperor, no crown, no authority—just a man who looked strangely at ease, pouring tea and listening more than he spoke.

Across from them, Yao Qing laughed freely, her exhaustion forgotten as she nudged one of the twins with her elbow.

"I told you it would work," she said proudly. "Did you see their faces today?"

The twins grinned, one already halfway through a bun, the other counting tips with mock seriousness.

"We almost couldn't keep up," one said.

"But no mistakes," the other added proudly. "Not a single complaint."

The new man sat a little straighter than usual, eyes bright with excitement.

"I've never seen anything like this," he admitted. "To think... I'm part of something this big."

At the other side of the table, the Duke and Duchess watched it all with soft smiles. The Duchess reached out to adjust the Empress's sleeve, just as she used to when Lian An was young.

"You've grown so capable," she said quietly, eyes shining.

The Duke nodded, pride clear in his gaze. "This place... it carries your heart."

Lian Hua clapped happily, cheeks flushed from excitement.

"I'm telling everyone at home," she declared. "My sister runs the best restaurant in the kingdom!"

Lian Rou chuckled, lifting his cup.

"To hard work," he said. "And to courage."

Cups were raised. Laughter followed.

Food was passed around—simple dishes this time, made not for customers but for themselves. They ate without hurry, without rules, without titles weighing them down.

Above them, unseen, three ghosts hovered close.

Fen Yu spun happily in the air.

"Look at them celebrating," she whispered. "It feels like a festival."

Wei Rong nodded once.

"She protected them. That is strength."

Li Shen smiled faintly.

"And they protect her, even without knowing."

As night settled in and lanterns flickered to life, the Whisper Bowl glowed warmly from within—filled with voices, shared stories, and the rare peace that comes after victory earned through effort.

For one night, there was no palace, no battlefield, no ghosts to hunt, no secrets to fear.

Only full hearts.

And the quiet certainty that this was just the beginning.