

## Rise 157

Chapter 157: Hmph

"Miss, it's so hot with this late summer heat, we should head back to the room. Even with two basins of ice, it's still not enough."

Baozi, the young maid, kneeled on the soft couch. In front of her was a small basin of half-melted ice cubes. She held a folding fan in her delicate hand, gently fanning a cool breeze toward her mistress, who was lazily half-lying on the couch, reading a book.

The room seemed quite hot. Baozi fanned with one hand and wiped the sweat from her baby-fat cheeks with the other. She couldn't help but puff her cheeks and suggest to her engrossed mistress, her eyes full of expectation.

Li Shu, who was half-lying on the soft couch, wore a pink ru skirt, the folds of the skirt flowing like snow under the moonlight, embroidered with a blue butterfly dancing gracefully. A dark purple wide belt tied in a bow accentuated her slim waist, making her figure appear even more graceful and lively.

At this moment, Li Shu held a scroll in one hand and with the other, picked up a black grape and slowly placed it into her rosy lips. Afterward, she pouted and said:

"Father indulges in elegance, spending money like water. He has decorated the study so beautifully. If I don't stay a little longer, wouldn't it be a waste of such elegance?"

Baozi, upon hearing her mistress' words, immediately wilted like a frostbitten eggplant.

After bidding farewell to Uncle Li at the door, Zhu Ping'an casually made his way to the study. But when he reached the door of the study, he almost couldn't recognize it. The once open area outside the study now had a cluster of green bamboo, with a stubborn rock standing in front. The walls of the study were covered in vines, and many flowers were blooming.

If it weren't for the plaque hanging on the door, unchanged from the past, Zhu Ping'an would have hesitated to enter, as the place looked more like a young lady's boudoir than a study.

"Grandpa Wang, I'm here to borrow books again."

Zhu Ping'an called out as he entered the study, immediately noticing that the interior had also changed dramatically.

Not far from the main door of the study was a bonsai of pine and cypress, with two pots of sword lilies, surrounded by small gravel and green grass, giving the study an increased sense of natural beauty. The room was filled with the vibrant green of the plants. The study also featured decorations like a green silk cabinet, screens, bamboo curtains, and drapes, along with vases, incense burners, and a guqin. It all looked even more aesthetically pleasing, serene, and elegant than before.

The study also had a lively atmosphere, with five or six koi fish swimming in a tank by the window, and even a soft couch...

Zhu Ping'an then found himself staring into the eyes of a pair of master and servant on the soft couch, seemingly interrupting their private moment. They were momentarily stunned by his unexpected arrival.

Of course, there were more people in the room, including an elderly maid taking a nap and two young maids brewing tea, but they were seated further in, so Zhu Ping'an hadn't noticed them at first.

Zhu Ping'an hadn't expected so many people in the study, so he was momentarily stunned.

"What are you staring at, you toad, Zhu Ping'an? Keep looking and I'll have someone dig out your eyes!"

Li Shu, half-lying on the couch, frowned and scolded in a delicate voice when she saw Zhu Ping'an staring at her. She quickly lifted her book to cover her slender neck and collarbone.

Who's looking at you? I was just caught off guard by the number of people in the room and froze for a moment.

Seeing the cunning young lady covering her neck with the book, Zhu Ping'an sneered inwardly. Who cares to look at your neck and collarbone? In his past life, he'd seen plenty of girls and young women in short skirts and backless outfits; who would be interested in yours?

"Eh, it's you, you bad person. I almost didn't recognize you," Baozi, the maid, exclaimed in surprise, her small mouth wide open. "What made you wear new clothes? Oh, I almost forgot, you passed the imperial examination and became a scholar, didn't you?"

Baozi couldn't stop exclaiming as she looked at Zhu Ping'an.

The elderly maid and other young maids in the room also exclaimed in surprise. They had heard that Zhu Ping'an, the young man from Xiahe Village who often came to borrow books and told great stories, had passed the imperial examination and become a scholar. But seeing him in person still amazed them. After all, becoming a scholar was a big deal in their eyes. Scholars were treated with great respect, even by the master.

"Monkey wearing a crown!" The sly girl Li Shu gave Zhu Ping'an a disdainful glare, her lips curling in scorn as she muttered the words.

Zhu Ping'an had long grown immune to the sarcastic remarks from the cunning young lady.

"It was just luck. I came to borrow a book, but where is Master Wang, who usually manages the study?" Zhu Ping'an cupped his hands toward the group of young ladies and asked with a silly smile.

"Master Wang went out with the master," maid Baozi, Hua'er, chattered excitedly. "How did you do in the imperial exam? Was it hard? They say you were first!"

Several other maids quickly followed with a barrage of questions.

Indeed, when girls gossip, they are potential reporters.

Zhu Ping'an looked at the curious group of chatterboxes, the corners of his lips curling up slightly. "Just luck."

"You're being fake!"

As soon as Zhu Ping'an finished speaking, the cynical girl across the room gave him a scornful look, labeling him as insincere.

Zhu Ping'an responded with a faint smile. She was just a spoiled, self-righteous, and arrogant little girl! He then walked over to the bookshelf as usual, searching for a book that interested him.

It seemed that the Li family's collection of books had grown significantly. There were many volumes of the Four Books and Five Classics, with some that he hadn't read before. Interestingly, there were also many more strategy essays, which was just what he needed to study. While the strategy essays weren't given much importance in the township exam, they were a major part of the provincial, imperial, and palace exams.

"Ah, young mistress, wait for me."

While Zhu Ping'an was picking a book, he heard Hua'er's voice from beside him.

"I'm going to change clothes, don't follow me. And you all, make sure you keep an eye on my things, so they aren't stolen by someone with shallow eyelids."

The cynical girl's voice was sharp and pointed, implying something.

Zhu Ping'an paused his search. Could she be talking about him? Why did he suddenly feel the urge to grab this arrogant, self-important girl, pull her onto his lap, and give her a good spanking...

After the cynical girl, Li Shu, left, some elderly maids and young maids surrounded Zhu Ping'an, eagerly asking him to explain about the imperial exams. Their curiosity could no longer be contained. Zhu Ping'an had no choice but to agree to explain after finding the right book.

Zhu Ping'an had just picked out a book on strategy essays when everyone urged him to hurry up and explain.

He had no choice but to casually talk about some of the things related to the township exam, and it caused quite a stir among them.

Not long later, the cynical girl returned. Upon seeing the scene, she snorted, which made all the maids and old maids fall silent for a moment. However, seeing that the cynical girl didn't stop them, they boldly urged Zhu Ping'an to continue.

When Zhu Ping'an saw the cynical girl enter, he couldn't help but think of the yellow flower question from the exam. He then stood up and gave a salute to her.

Perhaps Zhu Ping'an's sudden action startled the cynical girl.

"Almost forgot to thank you, young lady." After cupping his hands, Zhu Ping'an said softly, "This exam was a big help from you."

"Wha... What?" The cynical girl looked a bit distracted, her face slightly flushed.

"The yellow flower question that you researched last time, I was lucky enough to encounter it during the exam," Zhu Ping'an said with a hint of gratitude in his tone. Though this girl was cynical, self-centered, and arrogant, he truly owed this particular question to her.

"Hmph."

Upon hearing this, the cynical girl showed a smug expression. But soon, she adopted a cloud-like, aloof look, as if nothing in the world could touch her. She disdainfully muttered "Hmph" from the corner of her mouth.