

## Rise 329

### Chapter 329: Caught Red-Handed

“Master, I’ve brought you some hangover soup~~”

After Hongjian entered Zhu Ping’an’s room carrying the soup, her voice grew even more coquettish, and her eyes seemed ready to spill tears.

Once inside, she didn’t hear any response from Zhu Ping’an. Puzzled, she lifted her face and glanced around the room—he wasn’t at the desk, nor in the bath bucket. Ah, there he was—lying on the bed.

“Master Zhu~~”

Hongjian softly called out to Zhu Ping’an on the bed, her eyes nervously scanning him.

Hoo~ hoo~

The only response was a faint snore.

Excitement surged through the anxious Hongjian. So Master Zhu had drunk too much and fallen asleep—what a heavenly opportunity! She had been wondering how she might climb into his bed, worried about whether he would even look at her, but now, with him asleep from drink, everything was suddenly possible.

Seeing Zhu Ping'an sleeping on the bed, Hongjian's cheeks flushed with excitement.

If she could just slip under the covers with nothing but her clothing, everything would fall into place. When Master Zhu awoke, she could act pitiful, claiming she'd come to bring him the hangover soup, and how could he have dragged her onto the bed in his drunken state? It would be utterly mortifying, and she could pretend to hit the wall in despair. She'd already found out that Zhu Ping'an had only been engaged to the Fifth Miss—never even held hands. Surely a young man in his prime, educated and passionate, would not resist her bare body...

Even if Zhu Ping'an had self-control, he was a scholar steeped in the Four Books and Five Classics; surely he would not stand by idly as she pretended to dash herself against the wall. If he stopped her, then everything would flow naturally from there.

And if someone found out the next day, that would be even better. If it escalated and she tearfully claimed she had simply come to deliver hangover soup only to be dragged onto the bed by a drunken Master Zhu, with witnesses all around, he couldn't deny it—an irreversible situation.

Once the rice was cooked, she would become a prominent servant in Yuan's household. As long as she tended to Zhu Ping'an in bed, rising in rank would be inevitable. The Fifth Miss, from a noble family, would never have the freedom to imagine as many possibilities in bed as she could. Every path led to the pinnacle of life. Hongjian's excitement made it impossible to keep her legs together.

But what Hongjian didn't know, and not even the Sixth Miss of the Hou residence knew, was that just as Hongjian left the courtyard carrying the hangover soup, another young maid quietly slipped off toward the courtyard where Li Shu resided.

“Fifth Miss, everything I said is true. The mistress called Hongjian over and spoke with her. Soon after, Hongjian left carrying a bowl of hangover soup. The kitchen staff said Hongjian mentioned the Fifth Young Master while serving it.”

The young maid bowed her head and recounted everything she had seen to Li Shu.

Across from her, Li Shu was dressed in a long moonlight-satin gown embroidered to the floor, draped with a purple-black mink cloak embroidered with golden-silver plum blossoms. Her delicate face was flawless. Her hair curled elegantly around her temples, each side adorned with a pair of openwork gold-silken peacock hairpins, each beak holding a string of black pearls—luxurious but understated.

Hearing the maid’s report, Li Shu’s flawless face darkened with cold. Her jet-black eyes seemed bottomless, the corners rising slightly. A faint, icy smile spread across her delicate features.

“Zhuo’er did well. Ten taels of silver as a reward.” Li Shu said, her lips curving slightly.

“Thank you, Fifth Miss! Thank you!” The maid, Zhuo’er, flustered with joy, stammered and bowed repeatedly, as if willing to leap into fire for Li Shu.

“Miss, let’s go quickly. If we’re late, it will be too late.” Hua’er, the bun-faced little maid, was nervous beside her.

Soon, Li Shu led Hua'er and four or five sturdy maids briskly to the guest rooms in the front courtyard. Moving like the wind, they arrived swiftly and then made their way without pause to Zhu Ping'an's guest room.

Inside Zhu Ping'an's room, Hongjian finally awoke from her excited daydream and began to act.

She gently placed the hangover soup on the nearby table, careful not to disturb the sleeping Zhu Ping'an. Then, tiptoeing, she approached his bed, studying him intently as he slept.

"Master Zhu~~"

Hongjian tested her coquettish call.

Zhu Ping'an, deep in drunken slumber, responded only with a faint snore.

Young, accomplished, a gentleman with limitless potential—Hongjian couldn't be more satisfied.

Opportunity waits for no one.

Blushing, she stood by the bed, hands fumbling with her sash, trembling with excitement. As she loosened it, revealing her undergarment, she suddenly heard footsteps.

“Ah?”

A bone-chilling cold swept from the doorway, making her shiver. Raising her head, she saw Fifth Miss Li Shu at the door, a faint, cold smile on her face. Hongjian’s face went pale in terror, and she let out a startled cry.

She hadn’t even reached the bed—how had the Fifth Miss arrived?

Terror-stricken, Hongjian felt powerless, her hands trembling so badly that the sash fell to the floor, her outer garment falling open to reveal her underclothes.

“Shameless,” Hua’er spat angrily.

Zhu Ping’an stirred slightly at the noise but remained asleep, mumbling something about “water” unconsciously.

“Cover her mouth and take her to the back courtyard!” Li Shu’s dark, icy eyes swept Hongjian, her voice commanding.

Four strong maids stepped forward, grabbed a foul-smelling cloth, roughly twisted Hongjian's arms, stuffed the cloth into her mouth, and dragged her away without a word.

"You all leave too. Hua'er, go notify the back courtyard steward, and tell her we caught a little thief." Li Shu instructed softly.

"A thief?" Hua'er was confused.

Hongjian, gagged and held by the maids, widened her eyes in disbelief, silently accusing Li Shu of slander.

"Yes, a little thief."

Li Shu nodded calmly, a faint cold smile on her lips. She removed one of the gold-silken peacock hairpins from her hair and slowly approached Hongjian.

At Hongjian's side, Li Shu smiled faintly, then casually placed the hairpin into Hongjian's hair. The string of black pearls swayed gently before her eyes.

"This girl's hands aren't clean. She stole my gold-silken peacock hairpin. Caught red-handed."

Finishing, Li Shu lightly clapped her hands.

Hua'er and the others belatedly nodded. The maids dragged the struggling Hongjian out, while Hua'er and the others went to the back courtyard as instructed. The room was left with only Li Shu and the sleeping Zhu Ping'an.

Once alone, Li Shu's cold gaze softened. She poured a bowl of water, tested its warmth with her lips, and frowned—it was slightly too hot.

She found a spoon, scooped some water, brought it to Zhu Ping'an, and set the bowl aside. Sitting on the bed, she gently placed his head on her lap. She lifted the bowl, took a spoonful of water, blew on it lightly, and brought it to his lips. The clear liquid slid into his mouth like nectar.

After feeding him most of the bowl, Zhu Ping'an stopped drinking. Li Shu set the bowl aside, repositioned his head comfortably on the pillow, and tucked the covers around him.

"Filthy toad," Li Shu muttered, pouting at the sight of his peaceful sleep before turning and leaving.