

Rise 331

Chapter 331: Punishment

“My things—don’t touch! Not even a single glance, do you understand?”

Li Shu’s words were heavy with meaning. After speaking, she deliberately—or perhaps unconsciously—cast a glance at the Sixth Miss of the Hou Mansion. At this moment, the ones who could truly understand her words were probably only Hongjian herself and the Sixth Miss.

On the surface, Li Shu was talking about “things,” but in reality, it was still about Zhu Ping’an. “My things—don’t touch; my man—you don’t even dare think about it.”

At hearing this, the Sixth Miss’s face flushed, a mix of red and white. Somehow, it felt as though Fifth Sister had spoken those words just for her...

“Every country has its laws, every family has its rules. Our Hou Mansion has its own regulations—strictly forbidding theft. If anyone is caught, punishment will be severe, regardless of the value of what was stolen. Let’s say, one tael of silver for one lash... hmm, let me calculate... how many lashes should I give you?” Li Shu extended her delicate hand, hooking Hongjian’s chin with her fingernail, adopting an expression of deep contemplation.

Hongjian’s face instantly paled.

“However, considering Brother Zhu is about to take the palace examination, and seeing blood would bring bad luck, I won’t have anyone whip you. We wouldn’t want to ruin Brother Zhu’s chances.” Li Shu pursed her cherry lips, smiling faintly as she looked at the frightened Hongjian, her fingernail still pinching Hongjian’s chin lightly.

Relieved, Hongjian let out a small breath—only to hear Li Shu speak again.

“But I can’t just let you go like this. The fact that you attempted theft shows you have no sense of shame. Fine, I’ll teach you what shame really is—so that you’ll know it from now on.”

Li Shu smiled slightly, then turned to the maids with a cold voice. “Bring her here. Strip this shameless little wretch of all her clothes—leave nothing behind—and make her kneel in the courtyard by the Second Gate. She needs to understand what shame is. Watch her carefully. Tomorrow at noon, report back so Mother can decide her punishment.”

Oh, you like stripping, do you? Well, have at it! Li Shu sneered, looking down on everyone, then added,

“What’s mine is mine. Don’t get any foolish ideas. And remember, if anyone else dares act shamelessly in the future, this will be the lightest punishment!”

As soon as Li Shu finished speaking, the eager maids and housekeepers, who had been waiting for the chance to act, rolled up their sleeves. Within moments, they tore every single layer of Hongjian’s clothing, inside and out, leaving nothing—not even her shoes or socks.

Completely naked, Hongjian was dragged by the maids to the empty courtyard by the Second Gate. Her cries were useless. Once there, several strong housekeepers forced her to kneel on the ground.

No hiding, no shielding—she had to kneel properly.

One daring maid even poured a full bowl of water over Hongjian's head, making her balance it on top while scolding her with every droplet that fell.

News of this punishment spread quickly throughout the mansion.

Even the young footmen in the front yard hurried to the gate to see. They weren't allowed inside the Second Gate, but climbing the wall was fine. Perched atop the wall, a line of them watched with curious grins at the naked girl kneeling below.

Hongjian knelt there, a bowl of water balanced on her head, her mouth stuffed with a rag. In full view of everyone, she was exposed completely, inside and out, burning with shame. She wished she could crawl into an ant's nest or smash herself against a wall to end it all. Though the wall was so close, she didn't have the courage to run into it.

Meanwhile, Zhu Ping'an, who had drunk himself to sleep, was completely unaware of what had occurred in the back courtyard. His tolerance for alcohol was low, and his body had insufficient alcohol dehydrogenase, so he sobered slowly. By the time he awoke, it was already noon the next day.

Opening his eyes, Zhu Ping'an saw Li Shu sitting at his desk, flipping through his previous notes, with the little maid Hua'er standing by her side.

His head still ached slightly, a lingering effect of his hangover. Rubbing his forehead, he pushed himself upright on the bed.

“Miss! Miss! Master has awakened!”

Hua’er’s eyes curved like crescent moons, her chubby face alight with joy at the first sign of life from Zhu Ping’an.

Hearing this, Li Shu turned from her book to look at Zhu Ping’an, nodded slightly, and then instructed Hua’er, “Go fetch a bowl of honey water.”

“If you can’t handle alcohol, don’t show off. You’ll only hurt yourself,” Li Shu teased, tilting her mouth at Zhu Ping’an as Hua’er went to prepare the drink.

“I didn’t want to drink it either,” Zhu Ping’an said sheepishly, giving a faint smile.

Hua’er quickly fetched the honey, scooped two spoonfuls into hot water, stirred, and carried it over.

“I’ll take it myself, thank you.” Zhu Ping’an took the honey water, bowing slightly to Li Shu and Hua’er.

Hangover headaches were the bane of anyone who drank, caused by alcohol’s effects on the body. The honey water Hua’er prepared was the perfect remedy, helping to break down alcohol and ease the headache—a far better solution than tea. Zhu Ping’an knew this well, so he drank it in one go. Perhaps it was psychological, but the headache seemed to vanish almost immediately.

Setting the bowl on the table, he noticed Li Shu watching him with an unusually keen interest, as if his face had something on it.

Could it be that he had drunk enough to vomit like his old roommate once did?

Rubbing his face, he found it dry and clean. The bed was untouched. Nothing seemed wrong. So why was Li Shu staring so intently?

“Ugly!” Li Shu twisted her mouth.

What the—!

After all that buildup, that was all she had to say? Zhu Ping’an was speechless. Clearly, she had taken something this morning...

“So ugly! I can’t believe someone would be blind enough to want to climb into your bed!” Li Shu bared her small canine teeth, giving him a playful glare and rolling her eyes.

Uh... a lot of information there. So some maid tried to sleep with me, and Li Shu caught her?

In ancient times, households didn’t care for maids as they grew up. By a certain age, maids would either be assigned to servants, sold off, or married off, with no say in their future. For some dissatisfied maids, the only way to try to change their fate was to climb into their master’s bed—thus the origin of the first “concubine-maid.”

But wait—the maid tried to sleep with me, why am I the one getting blamed? Zhu Ping’an felt exasperated.

“Guess how I dealt with that shameless little wretch?” Li Shu’s eyes gleamed like a little fox as she watched his confused expression.

“Women’s chests are too thick for me to guess,” Zhu Ping’an replied flatly.

“You lecher!”

Li Shu flustered, her cheeks bright red, glaring at him.

Hua'er froze for a moment, then blushed even more, her chubby face redder than Li Shu's. Poor thing...

Master, you're so bad... how can you talk about a young lady like that...