

Rise 104

Chapter 104: The Shocking News of the Japanese Slaves

Striking while the iron is hot, Zhu Pingan, after the old fisherman left, sat by Taihu Lake, leaning against a stone, carefully flipping through the calligraphy manual that the old man had gifted him.

As soon as the book was opened, just one glance was enough to feel as if a solitary boat in the vast ocean was sailing against the waves. Every character seemed to come alive like a vivid mirror image. Zhu Pingan leaned against the stone, studying carefully, while also using his finger to ponder the structure of the strokes...

Before he knew it, the sky had brightened, and the fishermen's shouts from the lake could be heard from afar.

Zhu Pingan looked up at the sun, which had risen to the halfway point in the sky, and his stomach let out a timely growl. Reluctantly, he put the manual away, stood up, packed it into his bag, and gathered his belongings, taking the black wooden board and heading toward the inn.

As he passed by a street vendor selling "Mi Cha Rou" (a local meat dish), he was drawn in by the delicious smell. He walked into the shop, ordered a portion of Mi Cha Rou and a bowl of rice porridge, paid, and sat down to wait patiently.

It didn't take long before the shopkeeper brought over a steaming plate of Mi Cha Rou. Zhu Pingan took a bite, not caring that it was hot, and eagerly started eating. The meat was tender and flavorful, the rice powder absorbed the grease and had a unique fragrance, savory without being greasy.

"Shopkeeper, please make another one to go," Zhu Pingan called to the shopkeeper and paid again.

"Sure, I'll wait until you've eaten most of your meal, then I'll pack it up for you. That way, it'll still be hot when you take it home," the shopkeeper said, taking the money and thoughtfully adding.

"Thanks, I'll be in your care," Zhu Pingan nodded in satisfaction.

"You're too kind, sir," the shopkeeper smiled and went to attend to the other customers.

Zhu Pingan sat at the table, savoring the Mi Cha Rou and occasionally sipping the hot porridge, truly feeling like he had no care in the world.

While he was enjoying his breakfast, a few merchant-dressed customers entered the shop, their faces filled with anger. They each ordered a portion of Mi Cha Rou and some seasonal side dishes, then began to speak heatedly.

"Those damn Japanese slaves are invading the coast again!"

"Tell me about it! The last time was just a few years ago, and this time I received a message by carrier pigeon early this morning. Two carts of raw silk were stolen, and two shop assistants nearly lost their lives!"

"I had it a little better. I was sick for two days on the way and managed to avoid them. Ugh, these tiny countries, they really need the king's army to wipe them out..."

The customers at the neighboring table, overhearing this, inquired with concern about which area had been affected by the Japanese pirates.

"This time it's Suzhou. It's also in the Southern Capital region. Our Anqing is farther from the coast, so it's still a good place to be. Let me tell you, those Japanese slaves, they're all bald-headed, barefoot, walking on wooden planks, speaking that strange language. They're vicious, cannibals who especially love eating human hearts and livers..."

"Although the Japanese slaves aren't many, they are ruthless and leave nothing behind, scraping the earth clean. It's really terrible..."

The nearby diners couldn't help but take a deep breath and silently thank their good fortune for being in Anqing. If they were in Suzhou, it seemed like they'd be in serious trouble.

Upon hearing this, Zhu Pingan could no longer eat. A wave of depression surged in his heart, lingering and hard to dispel.

Japanese pirates, those devils, how could I have almost forgotten about them! Scum!

The Japanese pirate disturbances during the Ming Dynasty were only second to the Japanese invasion of China in modern times, one of the greatest crimes committed by this tiny island nation on the vast land of China.

The rise of the Japanese pirates in the Ming Dynasty had its domestic reasons. Japan was in the middle of its Warring States period, with military warlords fighting each other. In this tiny island nation, even a small village could claim to have a lord, and conflicts were rampant. Having lost their families, land, and lords, Japanese refugees, outcasts, and fallen samurai turned their greedy eyes toward the distant land of China, setting sail on pirate ships, risking everything to come here! Of course, there were also pirates and smugglers from China's southeast coast who colluded with the Japanese pirates, launching large-scale invasions of the Chinese mainland. They burned, killed, and looted without mercy, continuing for decades.

Zhu Pingan's hatred for the Japanese pirates far exceeds that of people from this era. They merely experienced the Wokou, and no one knows the immense crimes committed by that small, insignificant country hundreds of years later on the vast land of the Central Plains. Even using beasts to describe them would be an insult to the beasts.

Now, upon hearing the news of the Japanese pirates ravaging the coast, Zhu Pingan could hardly suppress his indignation. He almost felt an impulse to abandon his pen and take up arms. But then, he thought to himself that he was just a weak scholar, with no strength to tie up a chicken. Even if he abandoned his pen to take up arms, it would likely only add one more bloodstain from a Japanese pirates blade. Thus, he extinguished this thought.

But then, he reconsidered. What of being a scholar? He could still strategize from the shadows, wielding his pen like a blade and his strategies like swords. Furthermore, with his millennium of accumulated knowledge, he had at his disposal the experiences and wisdom of heroic figures like Qi Jiguang, Yu Dayou, and the countless others who, over a hundred years later, had shed blood to defend their nation.

A platform, that's what he needed. Right now, he was just a nobody from a mountain village. No matter how many ambitions or lessons he had, there was no place to put them to use.

Thus, his thoughts on the imperial examination grew even stronger. To be listed on the gold list (official list of successful candidates), to wear the black hat, to govern a coastal region—perhaps even a single county—he would strive with all his might to exterminate the invading Japanese pirates and protect the hardworking and good-hearted people of his country. If the platform were bigger, all the better. He wouldn't mind a "Black Ship Incident" right now. It's said that the island nation produced a lot of silver, and the women seemed quite pleasant. Okay, that was a bit too much, a bit unrealistic. It was better to focus on solidifying his foundation with poetry and books.

After hastily finishing his meal and taking the rice and meat packed by the shopkeeper, Zhu Pingan quickly left. Arriving early at the inn would give him more time to read and study, which would give him more confidence for the imperial examination.

As he walked down the street, he overheard several people discussing affairs in Suzhou Prefecture. Nearing the inn, Zhu Pingan met people such as Xia Luoming from Tongcheng and Feng Shanshui from Susong. They were all dressed extravagantly, holding folding fans, each appearing elegant and refined.

"Gentlemen, good morning," Zhu Pingan greeted them from a distance.

Xia Luoming from Tongcheng only nodded slightly, not saying anything.

"Oh, it's Zhu Xian-di," Feng Shanshui from Susong responded, returning the greeting. His sharp eyes noticed the rice and meat Zhu Pingan was holding, and he couldn't help but comment with a smile on his lips.

Those accompanying them naturally remembered Zhu Pingan's nickname "food bucket" and someone couldn't help but laugh.

"Since the exams ended yesterday, it's rare to have some relaxation. How about joining us at the Jingxian Tower for a few drinks?" Feng Shanshui invited.

"I won't disturb you. I still have food," Zhu Pingan shook the rice and meat in his hand and grinned.

"In that case, we will take our leave," Feng Shanshui and the others cupped their hands in farewell.

Zhu Pingan made a gesture inviting them to go, watching as Xia Luoming, Feng Shanshui, and the others chatted and laughed, heading toward the Jingxian Tower. It seemed they hadn't heard the rumors about the Japanese pirates invading Suzhou Prefecture.

Returning to the inn, Zhu Pingan saw his uncle, Zhu Shouren, and others drinking and talking at a table in the lobby. He didn't disturb them, walking through the lobby with his rice and meat in hand and heading toward his room.