

Rise 110

Chapter 110: Another Storm Brews

A silent night passed, and at the break of dawn, Zhu Ping'an woke up on time. After a quick wash, he, as usual, took his things and headed towards the shores of Taihu Lake.

His uncle and the others had not returned all night and had not yet come back this morning. Even if they did, it would only be to catch up on sleep. So, Zhu Ping'an decided to follow his usual routine, practicing calligraphy and reading by Taihu Lake, and he would discuss things with his uncle and the others once they returned.

Arriving at the lakeside, Zhu Ping'an found a spot along the Taihu embankment, laid down some dry grass, and sat facing the rolling waves of the lake. He placed the black wooden board on his lap, using it while the waves crashed against the embankment, dipping his brush in the waves and writing on the board. Although writing on his lap wasn't as comfortable as writing on a large stone, it was still a form of practice. Life never goes according to the path you've planned, and plans are often overtaken by events. At such times, one should not be disheartened but face it bravely.

Watching the rolling waters of Taihu Lake and listening to the waves crashing against the embankment, Zhu Ping'an's writing gained a bit more vigor.

Generous Taihu Lake, just before he left, had given him another gift.

Zhu Ping'an practiced his calligraphy for quite a while, but he hadn't seen the sun rise. When he looked to the east, his instinct told him the sky was clouded, and it seemed like a change in the weather was coming today.

Although the sun was absent, the visibility gradually improved, so Zhu Ping'an packed away his wooden board and brush, leaned against a tree trunk, and began reading his book. Zhu Xi's annotations on the Four Books were not as difficult to understand once you grasped his perspective. In fact, since he began his early education, Zhu Ping'an had read many versions of the Four Books and Five Classics, annotated by others, but it was Zhu Xi's annotations that felt the most resonant. Considering his character, reading them became even more interesting. The old man who constantly shouted about upholding heavenly principles and eliminating human desires was eventually impeached for scandalous affairs, including taking a nun as his concubine and engaging in improper behavior with his daughter-in-law. It was quite amusing—just thinking about it made it even more entertaining. A nun, ha, Zhu Xi had quite the control issues.

So, the more Zhu Ping'an read Zhu Xi's annotations on the Four Books and Five Classics, the more interesting it became.

As he sat by the lakeside, absorbed in reading, he suddenly felt a chill on his forehead. Looking up, he saw that the sky had already turned overcast.

It seemed like it was going to rain.

Taking advantage of the rain being light, Zhu Ping'an quickly packed up his book and black wooden board and headed back to the inn.

In the inn's lobby, he ordered a small dish, a plate of braised beef, two steamed buns, and a bowl of rice porridge, then found a seat by the window, waiting for the waiter to bring his breakfast. Outside, the rain had gradually gotten heavier, mixed with wind, and the wind occasionally blew raindrops against the paper window. The inn's lobby felt a bit stuffy, so Zhu Ping'an opened a corner of the window to let the wind and rain come inside.

"Young Master, would you like to change seats?" The waiter asked as he brought the breakfast and noticed the rain was blowing onto the table.

"No need to trouble yourself, this is fine," Zhu Ping'an shook his head, not minding the rain on the table, as it helped alleviate the stuffiness in the lobby.

"Please enjoy your meal, Young Master."

Seeing that Zhu Ping'an insisted, the waiter said no more and placed the meal a little farther inside, away from the rain.

While Zhu Ping'an was enjoying his meal, he suddenly heard a chaotic sound of footsteps outside. He looked up and saw a villager stumbling into the hall. Upon seeing Zhu Ping'an eating in the dining area, the villager seemed to see a savior and immediately rushed over.

"An Ge'er, quick, come with me to Zui Jun Lou!" The villager didn't explain and directly grabbed the mouthful of steamed bun from Zhu Ping'an and began pulling him outside.

"Uncle Wang, what's going on?" Zhu Ping'an was momentarily caught off guard.

"You'll know when you come with me. Hurry, hurry!" The villager continued pulling Zhu Pingan toward the inn's exit.

"Wait, I haven't paid yet." Zhu Pingan said, pulling out a handful of copper coins from his pocket and waving in the direction of the shop assistant.

"An Ge'er, hurry up, don't count it!" The villager urged repeatedly. Seeing that Zhu Pingan was still trying to count and hand over the money to the assistant, the villager unceremoniously took all the money from Zhu Pingan's hands and handed it to the assistant. Without caring about how much it was, the villager dragged Zhu Pingan out of the inn and into the wind and rain, heading in a particular direction.

"Uncle Wang, what's going on?" Zhu Pingan, being dragged through the rain, couldn't help but ask again. What was so urgent that they couldn't even go back for an umbrella? He was about to get drenched.

"No time to explain, you'll see when we get to Zui Jun Lou. Hurry, your uncle is waiting!" The villager, out of breath, didn't pause to explain and continued pulling Zhu Pingan forward.

Could it be that his uncle got into trouble at Zui Jun Lou? That name, Zui Jun Lou, sounded so strange. Could it be a brothel or something?

Under the villager's urging, Zhu Pingan had no choice but to carry his bag across his body, clutching the black wooden board, and ran along. His clothes were already soaked by the rain, sticking to his skin uncomfortably. The temperature was a bit low, making the wetness even more miserable.

Why did it feel like the place was far away, and it seemed to be in a rather secluded area? The more he thought about it, the more certain he became that Zui Jun Lou wasn't a decent place. His uncle, really, didn't take their family's hard-earned money seriously. Always rushing to take the exams, but instead of focusing on reviewing for the exams, he got distracted by others, chasing after poetry, wine, and women.

After passing through an alley, he finally saw, ahead in the rain, rows of high eaves and low walls appearing in his sight. The area in front of these buildings was unusually lively, with people coming and going even in the rain, and sedan chairs constantly moving.

The closer they got, the stronger the pungent fragrance in the air became. The sound of women's soft and clear laughter was carried by the wind and rain. The villager, who had been dragging Zhu Pingan, finally let out a sigh of relief.

Although it was raining, several women stood in front of the high eaves and low walls, holding old-fashioned paper umbrellas, laughing and greeting every guest. Their loose and flowing dresses, endless giggles, and seductive, flirtatious expressions confirmed Zhu Pingan's suspicion—this place was definitely some kind of brothel.

Zui Jun Lou, it was truly a place lost in the softness of beauty!

Seeing the villager walk into Zui Jun Lou with familiarity, it was clear that they were regulars here.

Preparing for the imperial exams?

Joking around with the exams like this, no wonder you guys keep failing.