

SHIH

You haven't noticed? Two, three men to every woman on board. More if you don't count the married ones.

XI

Don't tease me. No one could look at me that way.

(PAO enters with two muskets in hand)

PAO

Good morn to you, lovely lady--and sister. The captain is raiding the trade ship. Your duty is to defend the ship, so our target doesn't take hostages.

SHIH

Guard duty. How...fun.

PAO

But a responsible task, nonetheless. Be content.

(turns to XI)

Mistress Xi, may I impose on your vast kindness and visit Ling after the raid?

SHIH

And impose on my sister's presence, as well?

PAO

Found out! So I have permission? Excellent! Good day!
(exits)

SHIH

No one can look at you--?

XI

He's--being friendly. And wants to help with Ling.

SHIH

He's not friendly to ME. In my professional opinion...

XI

Not another word!

SHIH

Does this change how you feel about Cheng Ai?

XI

He and his men are still pirates.

START

SHIH

Pirates with babies.

XI

Captain Cheng may be a good man--

SHIH

And Pao?

XI

But what about the rest? The ones without babies?

SHIH

I said the crew DOES reflect their captain...

(They're interrupted by cannon fire)

XI

They've begun. Should we--?

SHIH

Not yet. And don't change the subject.

XI

Don't change the fact these people live to rob.

SHIH

Better to be the robber than the robbee.

XI

I don't like living with low life like that.

SHIH

Like...Chu the pickpocket and Hsao the leg breaker?

XI

The neighbors were good people!

SHIH

Good people here, too..."Mistress Xi".

XI

These people WANT to fight and be pirates...

SHIH

Because they want to support their families.

XI

But as pirates? They have might; why not do what the emperor should be doing--help the people of China!

SHIH

Why not indeed. That could happen if the right people were in charge. And...don't WE know people? Can't WE become the right people?

XI

Oh.

END

(They are interrupted by an ATTACKER clambering onto the deck. SHIH tries to fire, but her gun jams.)

SHIH

Behind me!

(SHIH uses her blade to dispatch him as XI readies a potion from her robes)

LING

(appearing)

What's happening? Are they all gone?

XI

LING! GET DOWN!

(A second ATTACKER enters. As LING scrambles, XI throws a potion at the ATTACKER's feet As they choke, XI calmly shoots with her musket)

Ling, are you okay?

LING

I-I think so.

(Glances at XI and hugs her)

SHIH

Those shooting drills paid off

(XI shrugs)

It makes you formidable, Xi, not helpless.

(glances at LING)

Pirates respect one who protects their own.