

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 13.

Last time, we were introduced to Lin Chong, a drill instructor in the Imperial Guards who had befriended the monk Lu Zhishen. Then we were introduced to Lin Chong's nemesis, a no-good little punk named Gao Yanei who kept harassing his wife. Normally, a dog like that would have been introduced to Lin Chong's fist and that would be the end of that. But Gao Yanei just so happened to be the adopted son of Marshal Gao Qiu, the former riffraff turned commander of the Imperial Guards, aka Lin Chong's boss. So Lin Chong was caught in a quandary. He was going to let the whole thing go, but Gao Yanei just would not let up and even got Lin Chong's best friend Lu (4) Qian (1) to go in on a scheme to lure Lin Chong's wife into a trap for Gao Yanei to seduce her. Lin Chong showed up just in time to foil the scheme, but he was understandably pissed. In fact, he went looking for Lu Qian with a knife, but couldn't find the bastard.

When Lin Chong came home, his wife tried to calm him down.

"I was not violated," she told him, "So don't do anything reckless."

"But that beast Lu Qian. I treated him like a brother, and yet even he lied to me. Even if I can't catch that Gao Yanei, I will not let Lu Qian off the hook!"

Meanwhile, that rat Lu Qian was hiding in Marshal Gao's residence the whole time and did not dare to go home. Lin Chong waited outside Gao Qiu's residence for three straight days but saw no sign of either Lu Qian or Gao Yanei. The servants standing outside the residence noticed the menacing look on his face, but no one dared to ask him what was wrong.

On the fourth day, around lunch time, Lu Zhishen came to pay Lin Chong a visit at his home.

"Why haven't I seen you in days?" Lu Zhishen asked.

“I’ve been too busy to pay you a visit,” Lin Chong said. “Since you have come to my humble abode, we should have a few cups of wine. But I don’t have anything prepared. How about we go out for some wine and diversion?”

So the two men went out and drank all day. And then they arranged to meet up again the next day, and the next day, and the next day. Every day, Lu Zhishen would come to take Lin Chong out to drink, and gradually, Lin Chong put his stabby urges on the backburner.

Now, let’s go check on that no-good Gao Yanei. He suffered quite a scare from his narrow escape the other day, and he became bedridden. But he dared not tell his adopted father, Gao Qiu, so he just holed up in his room. When Lu Qian and Fu (4) An (1), the guy who came up with the plot to seduce Lin Chong’s wife, went to check on him, they saw that he was not looking well at all.

“Young master, why are you looking so dispirited?” Lu Qian asked.

“To be honest, it’s all because of Lin Chong’s wife,” Gao Yanei told them. “Twice now she got away from me, and I even suffered a terrible fright. My condition is getting worse. I’ll be dead before long.”

“Don’t worry,” the two sycophants told him. “We’ll see to it that you get that woman. Her only way out would be if she hanged herself.”

While they were talking, the old steward also came in to check on Gao Yanei and saw how pitiful he looked. Lu Qian and Fu An now withdrew. When the old steward came back out, they called him over to a quiet corner and said, “The only way to make the young master better is to tell Marshal Gao and have him kill Lin Chong so that the young master can have his wife. Otherwise, the young master is dead for sure.”

“That’s easy enough,” the old steward said. “I’ll let the marshal know tonight.”

“We already have a plan,” the two men said. “We’re just waiting on word from you.”

So that night, the old steward went to see Gao Qiu and said, "Lin Chong's wife is the cause of the young master's ailment."

"When did he see Lin Chong's wife?" Gao Qiu asked.

"He saw her at the temple on the 28th day of last month; it's been a month since then," said the old steward, who then mentioned Lu Qian's suggestion for making Gao Yanei feel better.

"How can I kill the man just so my son can have his wife?" Gao Qiu said. "But then again, how can I lose my son on account of a mere Lin Chong? What should I do?"

"Captain Lu and Fu An have an idea," the old steward told him.

So Gao Qiu had the steward summon the two men and told them, "If you two have an idea that can save my son, I'll promote you."

Lu Qian stepped forward and told Gao Qiu of his plan, and as the screen faded to black, Gao Qiu was marveling at what a great idea it was.

One day, Lu Zhishen and Lin Chong went out drinking again. By now, Lin Chong had pretty much let the whole beef with Gao Yanei and Lu Qian fall by the wayside. He and Lu Zhishen were walking down a street when they passed a big man. This guy wore a headscarf and a faded officer's robe. He carried in his hand a nice-looking broadsword that had a piece of straw tied to it, which was basically the Song Dynasty version of a For Sale sign.

This man stood on the street and muttered to himself, "No one here recognizes a treasure. Pity my precious sword."

Lin Chong paid the guy no mind. After all, peddlers of one kind or another walked the streets all the time. But as Lin Chong and Lu Zhishen kept on walking and talking, the man fell in behind them and said, a little louder this time, "What a good sword, but pity no one recognizes its true worth."

Lin Chong and Lu Zhishen kept on walking and turned into an alley. The man followed them and said, even louder this time, "There's not a single man in the capital who knows weapons."

Now, THAT caught Lin Chong's attention. He turned around, and in that moment, the man unsheathed the broadsword, which glimmered in the daylight.

"Let me see that," Lin Chong said.

The man handed it over, and Lin Chong held it in his hand and looked it over with Lu Zhishen. It was indeed a superior weapon. In fact, it was so good that Lin Chong couldn't help but say, "What a great sword! How much do you want?"

Now, if nothing else, that was a horrible way of opening a haggling session. The man told Lin Chong, "I'm asking for 3,000 strings of coins, but will settle for 2,000."

"It is worth 2,000," Lin Chong said, "But you haven't found any takers. If you'll do 1,000, I'll take it."

"I need money for an emergency," the man said. "If you are serious about buying, then I'll take 500 off and let you have it for 1,500 strings of coins."

"I'll only take it for 1,000," Lin Chong countered.

"[Sigh] I'm selling gold as scrap metal here," the man sighed. "Fine, fine. But don't shortchange me."

Deal struck, Lin Chong told the man to follow him home for payment, since nobody carries 1,000 strings of coins around.

"Brother," Lin Chong said to Lu Zhishen, "Wait for me at the teahouse. I'll be back soon."

"I'll go home for now, and meet up with you tomorrow," Lu Zhishen said.

So Lin Chong led the seller back to his home and gave him money. Now, they may have haggled in units of strings of coins, but Lin Chong didn't actually pull out 1,000 strings of copper coins. That would actually be kind of ludicrous. Who would lug that around? Instead, he counted out the equivalent of the sale price in ounces of silver.

As he paid the man, Lin Chong asked him, "Where did you get this sword?"

“It’s a family heirloom,” the man said. “But my house has fallen on hard times, so I had no choice but to sell it.”

“Who are your ancestors?” Lin Chong asked.

“I’m too embarrassed to mention their names,” the man replied. So Lin Chong did not press him further, and the guy took his money and left.

Lin Chong was now like a kid with a new toy, a new deadly toy. He looked the sword over again and again and kept saying, “What a splendid sword! Marshal Gao has a precious sword in his residence, but he doesn’t let others see it lightly. I have asked to see it several times, but he kept refusing. Now that I have this great sword, I should compare it with his to see whose is better.”

That night, he couldn’t bare to let the sword out of his hand until he went to bed. The next morning, before dawn even cracked, he was up again and admiring his new acquisition.

The next day, around mid-morning, two lieutenants came to his home and called out to him from the door, “Instructor Lin, we come bearing a message from Marshal Gao. He heard you bought a good sword, and he wants to see it and compare it with his. He’s waiting for you at his home.”

“Which loose-lipped gossip told him?” Lin Chong muttered. But an order was an order. So he changed clothes, grabbed his new sword, and followed the two lieutenants. As they walked, he said to them, “I don’t think I’ve seen you at the marshal’s residence before.”

“We’re new,” they told him.

So yeah, I think we can all tell something wasn’t quite right here, but Lin Chong did not have the benefit of a narrator telling him that there was a plot against him, so he just kept walking. Soon, they arrived at Gao Qiu’s residence. When they entered the reception room, Lin Chong stopped.

“The marshal is waiting in the rear hall,” the two lieutenants told him.

So they walked on past a screen and entered the rear hall, but there was no sign of Gao Qiu. Lin Chong now paused again.

“The marshal is waiting for you in the courtyard in the back,” the lieutenants said. “He told us to take you to him.”

So they went through a few more heavy doors and entered a courtyard lined on all sides by green railings. The lieutenants led Lin Chong to the entrance of a large hall and told him, “Instructor, please wait here for a moment while we go notify the marshal.”

While the two lieutenants went inside, Lin Chong stood alone in front of the eaves of the porch. A long time passed, long enough to drink a cup of tea, and still the lieutenants had not come back out. Lin Chong was getting a little suspicious, so he poked his head into the hall and looked, and he immediately froze.

There, above the door, was a plaque that said “White Tiger Inner Sanctum.”

“This is where the highest military matters are discussed,” Lin Chong thought to himself with alarm. “How can one come in here without reason? It’s a breach of protocol!”

Just as he turned to leave, he heard footsteps as someone entered the hall. It was none other than Gao Qiu. Seeing his boss, Lin Chong quickly greeted him respectfully, holding out the sword with both hands. But he was in for a rude welcome.

“Lin Chong, how dare you come into the White Tiger Inner Sanctum without being summoned?! Don’t you know the law?!” Gao Qiu shouted sternly. “And you are carrying a sword. Are you here to assassinate me?! Someone told me that you were waiting outside my residence with a knife a few days ago. You must be up to no good!”

“Benefactor,” Lin Chong said as he bowed. “Two of your lieutenants summoned me here to show you my sword.”

“So where are they?” Gao Qiu scoffed.

“Benefactor, they had just gone into the hall.”

“Nonsense! What lieutenant would dare to go into my hall? Guards, arrest him!”

As soon as Gao Qiu gave that order, 20-some men rushed in, seized Lin Chong, and forced him to the ground like a tiger devouring helpless lambs.

“You are a drill instructor, so you must know the law!” Gao Qiu said angrily. “How dare you come into a restricted hall with a weapon to assassinate me?!”

Lin Chong cried out that he was innocent, which prompted Gao Qiu to ask, “Then what are you doing here with a sharp sword, if not to kill me?”

“How would I dare to come here without your summon?” Lin Chong pleaded. “The two lieutenants who went into the hall tricked me!”

“Nonsense!” Gao Qiu said. “What lieutenants?! This scoundrel refuses to admit his guilt!”

He then ordered his guards, “Take him to Kaifeng Prefecture. Ask Prefect Teng (2) to interrogate him closely and get to the bottom of this and then execute him. Confiscate the sword as evidence.”

So the guards took Lin Chong to the Kaifeng Prefecture, which was basically the courthouse in the capital, where the prefecture presided over cases as judge and jury. As it so happened, Prefect Teng (2) was still on duty that day, so Gao Qiu’s men brought Lin Chong into the prefect’s hall and forced him to kneel. The prefect’s secretary relayed Gao Qiu’s instructions and placed the confiscated sword in front of Lin Chong.

“Lin Chong,” Prefect Teng said. “You are a drill instructor, so why did you break the law and enter a restricted area with a weapon? That is a capital offense.”

“Your honor,” Lin Chong said, “I have been framed. I may be a crude soldier, but I do know the law, and would never dare to trespass. On the 28th of last month, my wife and I went to a temple to offer incense and ran into Marshal Gao’s son. He harassed my wife and I chased him away. Then, he had

Captain Lu Qian (1) lure me out and then sent Fu (4) An (1) to trick my wife to go to Lu Qian's home for Marshal Gao's son. I also broke that up and smashed up Lu Qian's home. There are people who can attest to both instances. A couple days ago, I bought this sword. Then, today, Marshal Gao sent two lieutenants to summon me, telling me that he wanted to have a look at the sword. So I followed them to the White Tiger Inner Sanctum. The two lieutenants entered the hall and disappeared. But then the marshal came in and framed me. Please grant me justice, your honor."

So, welcome once again to morass that is the ancient Chinese justice system, where occasionally you get justice, if you're lucky, but probably not when you are on the wrong end of a lawsuit brought by a powerful official who plays pickup ball with the emperor. After listening to Lin Chong's testimony, the prefect ordered that he be put in a cangue, which was basically a large wooden board placed around a prisoner's neck, and sometimes the prisoner's hands would also be locked into holes in the board. So it's something like a Chinese version of the pillory. And cangues came in different sizes and weights, and generally, the more severe the crime, the heavier the cangue a prisoner would get.

So Lin Chong was placed in a cangue and then thrown into a jail cell. Once his family found out the bad news, they came to bring food for him, and to participate in the time-honored tradition of trying to grease the wheels of justice with bribes. Yup, even the good guys did not hesitate to resort to bribes. That's how institutionally corrupt this justice system was. Lin Chong's father-in-law, who was himself a drill instructor, also came to push bribes and pull whatever strings he could to try to save his son-in-law.

As it turns out, this was Lin Chong's lucky day, or lucky-ish, I guess. In the prefecture, there was a scribe named Sun (1) Ding (4). Everyone called him Sun the Buddha because he was -- imagine this -- very fair-minded and kind and always trying to help people -- you know, like a public servant ought to be. When he learned of what happened, he went to see the prefect and said, "Lin Chong is innocent; you must help him."



“But Marshal Gao insists he has committed this crime and demands that he be found guilty of trespassing while armed, with the intent to assassinate an official. How can I help him?” Prefect Teng said.

“So this prefecture belongs to Marshal Gao, not the court?” Sun Ding (4) snarked.

“Nonsense!” the prefect shot back, to which Sun Ding replied, “Who doesn’t know that Marshal Gao abuses his power and acts like a bully? There’s nothing he and those in his family won’t do. Whoever offends him in the slightest gets sent here. If he wants a man killed, we kill him. If he wants a man hacked to pieces, we do it for him. So how is this not his prefecture?”

“Well then how do you think we can go easy on Lin Chong?” Prefect Teng asked.

“Judging by Lin Chong’s testimony, he is innocent. It’s just that we can’t find those two lieutenants. Let’s have him confess to accidentally trespassing while carrying a sword. Give him 20 strokes on his back, tattoo his face, and exile him to a distant military district.”

After thinking it over, Prefect Teng agreed this was the way to go, so he went to see Gao Qiu and told him that hey, with Lin Chong’s testimony, it’s gonna be kind of tough to convict him for the crime that you accused him of. And for his part, Gao Qiu knew he was in the wrong and pushing a flimsy case, so he OK’ed the prefect’s suggestion.

So the next day, the prefect held court. They removed the long cangue that Lin Chong was wearing and gave him 20 strokes on his back with a bamboo rod. They then tattooed his face. Now, this was common practice in ancient China. Criminals would often have their punishment tattooed on their face, such as where they were being exiled. The idea was to brand you as a criminal in a very prominent way.

In this case, Lin Chong’s punishment was exile to a distant military penal colony in Cangzhou (1,1). After that was tattooed on his face, they put him in a smaller cangue that weighed seven and a half catties, or just under 10 pounds. The cangue was then sealed with an official piece of paper. The law

decreed that the prisoner must wear the cangue for the entire journey to his exile destination, and the paper seal was there to indicate that no one messed with the cangue along the way. But as we'll see later on, laws on the books and actual practice were two very different things.

All this done, the prefect now issued a deportation order and assigned two guards to escort Lin Chong to his destination. These two guards were named Dong (3) Chao (1) and Xue (1) Ba (4). They received the official paperwork, collected Lin Chong, and headed out.

Outside the prefecture hall, a crowd was waiting. Lin Chong's father-in-law, drill instructor Zhang, was there with some of his neighbors to see him off. They accompanied Lin Chong and his two escorts to a tavern by the foot of a bridge and sat down. This was also a time-honored custom. Sure it was a chance to see an unfortunate loved one off, but more importantly, it was also the setting for buttering up the escorts to help ensure a smoother journey for said loved one.

As they sat, Lin Chong said, "Thanks to scribe Sun Ding (4), they didn't beat me too hard, so I can still walk."

So yes, that is another case where how bad your punishment was could be totally up to whether someone liked you, or in some cases, how much silver you slipped into the right pockets.

Lin Chong's father-in-law now told the waiter to prepare some food and wine for the two guards. After a few cups, he brought out some silver and gave it to them.

Clasping his hands in a gesture of respect, Lin Chong said, "Exalted father-in-law, I have been befallen by bad fortune and ran into that Gao Yanei, leading to this wrongful conviction. I have something to tell you. It has been three years since you generously gave me your daughter in marriage. She has never done anything to displease me, and even though we have yet to produce any children, we also have never quarreled. Now, having been struck by this calamity, I'm being exiled to Cangzhou and there's no telling if I'll live or die. I am worried about my wife being left alone at home, because Gao Yanei might try to force her to marry him. She is still young and should not lose her future on my

account. This is my idea; no one is forcing me to do this. With our neighbors here as witnesses, I want to write an annulment of our marriage, which will allow her to remarry, and I promise to not contest it. That way, I can be assured that she would not be harmed by Gao Yanei.”

His father-in-law was aghast upon hearing this. “Lin Chong,” he said, “what kind of talk is that?! You’ve just been unlucky. This calamity was not your doing. You’re going to Cangzhou to dodge this calamity. Sooner or later, heaven will have pity and let you come back and reunite with your wife. I still have some means. Tomorrow I’ll go move my daughter to my house, along with the maid Jin (3) Er. No matter what, I can support her for a few years and will not let her out on the streets. Gao Yanei will not be able to see her even if he wants to. Don’t you worry. I’ll take care of everything. When you get to the penal colony at Cangzhou, I’ll send you letters and clothing. Don’t get any foolish ideas. Just go in peace.”

“I am grateful for your good intentions,” Lin Chong said. “But I just won’t feel right tying her down like this. Please have pity and consent to my wishes. That way, I would die in peace.”

But his father-in-law was not having it, and neither were his neighbors. Still, Lin Chong would not waver.

“If you do not oblige me, then even if I somehow make it back, I swear I will not reunite with my wife,” he said.

“[Sigh] In that case,” his father-in-law said, “I’ll let you write the annulment, but I will not marry my daughter to anyone else.”

So they asked the waiter to send for a scribe and to buy a piece of paper. Lin Chong then dictated the following:

“Lin Chong, a drill instructor in the Imperial Guards, has been saddled with a serious crime and sentenced to exile in Cangzhou. His fate is uncertain. His wife, whose maiden name is Zhang, is still young. Lin Chong therefore wishes to annul their marriage and allow her to remarry, and he will never

contest it. This is totally voluntary and not issued under compulsion. In the event of any doubt, this document shall serve as proof.”

Lin Chong then read the paper before signing his name under the date and adding his thumbprint. He was just about to give the annulment to his father-in-law when his wife rushed in wailing, followed by their maid Jin Er, who was carrying a bundle of clothing.

Lin Chong rose to his feet to take hold of his wife and said, “My wife, I have something to say, and I have already informed your father. I was unlucky to suffer this calamity. With my exile to Cangzhou, my fate is uncertain. I don’t want to hold you back in the flower of your youth, so I have written a few words here. Please do not wait for me. If you find a good man, marry him. Don’t let me hold you down.”

When she heard this, Lady Lin wept even harder. “Husband, I have not been tainted in the least. Why are you divorcing me?!”

“My wife, I do this for you. Otherwise we will only hold each other back and you will be harmed.”

Lady Lin’s father now chimed in and told his daughter, “My child, worry not! Even though Lin Chong wants to do this, I will never marry you to another man. Letting him do this allows him to go in peace. If he doesn’t return, I’ll provide for you for the rest of your life, so that you can remain faithful to him.”

Of course, none of this was helping. Lady Lin wept and wept, until she collapsed and passed out. Lin Chong and her father helped her up and brought her back around, at which point she continued crying as Lin Chong gave the annulment paper to her father. Some of the women among the neighbors present now came forward to console Lady Lin and then escorted her home.

Lin Chong’s father-in-law now reminded him again, “Go, and try to come back. As for your wife, I will move her to my house tomorrow, where she shall wait to be reunited with you upon your return. Go and don’t worry. If you find someone heading this way, be sure to send a letter.”

Lin Chong offered his thanks and bid his father-in-law and his neighbors farewell. He then carried his bundle and followed the two guards while everyone else went home.

The two escorts now locked Lin Chong in a guard house and went home to collect their things for the journey. While one of them, Dong (3) Chao (1), was packing, the waiter from the tavern on his street came by to say that a gentleman was waiting to meet him in the tavern.

“Who is it?” Dong (3) Chao (1) asked.

“I don’t know; he just told me to come invite you,” the waiter answered.

To see who this visitor was and what he wanted, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we find out what Lin Chong’s calm, level-headed friend Lu Zhishen thinks about all this. Thanks for listening!