

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 30.

Last time, Song Jiang, the magisterial clerk at Yuncheng County, had run into an unexpected visitor on the streets. It was Liu Tang, the Red-Haired Devil, one of the outlaws who helped Chao Gai hijack the birthday gifts and then killed a bunch of government troops sent to arrest them. Liu Tang had been sent to convey his sworn brothers' gratitude to Song Jiang, who had saved their lives by alerting them that the authorities were after them.

After the two men ducked into a quiet tavern, Song Jiang inquired about Chao Gai and company, and Liu Tang recounted how they ended up in control of the stronghold on Liangshan.

"Right now we have 700-some men and countless grain," Liu Tang said. "We have no way to repay your immense kindness, so I was sent here with a letter and 100 taels of gold to thank you and the constables Zhu Tong and Lei Heng."

He then opened his bundle and handed the letter to Song Jiang. Song Jiang read it and then stashed it into his documents bag. Liu Tang then took out the 100 taels of gold and put them on the table with a thud. Song Jiang took one single gold bar, wrapped it in the letter, and stashed them both into his documents bag. He told Liu Tang to wrap up the rest of the gold, and then ordered wine and a big platter of meat, as well as some fruit and vegetables.

It was now getting dark. After Liu Tang finished eating, he once again opened the bundle of gold bars and was about to give them to Song Jiang, but Song Jiang quickly stopped him.

"Brother, listen to me," Song Jiang said. "You and your brothers have just arrived on Liangshan, so you need money right now. I still have enough money to get by, so why don't you guys keep the rest of this gold at your fortress for me for the time being. When I need money, I'll send my younger brother Song Qing (1) to go get it from you. I'm not trying to refuse you. As you can see, I've already taken a bar of gold. As for Zhu Tong, he also has some means, so you don't need to give him anything. I'll just relay your good intentions. As for Lei Heng, he doesn't know that I leaked word to Brother Chao. Besides, he's

addicted to gambling. If he takes some of this money to the gambling house, it might lead to trouble. It's not safe, so don't give him any gold. Also, I do not dare to invite you to stay at my home. It's no joke if someone recognizes you. The moon will be bright tonight, so you can start heading back to Liangshan right away. Don't stay here. Please convey my respects to the chieftains. Ask them to forgive me for not being able to go congratulate them in person."

"Brother, we have no way of repaying your immense kindness," Liu Tang said. "That's why they sent me to deliver this small gift as a token of our respect. Right now, Brother Chao Gai is the leader of the stronghold, and Professor Wu Yong is the military strategist. We follow strict orders; it's not like before. So how can I go back without completing the mission? I would be punished for sure."

"In that case, I'll write a letter for you to take back," Song Jiang said.

Liu Tang begged Song Jiang time and again to accept the gold, but Song Jiang absolutely refused. He then fetched a piece of paper and borrowed brush and ink from the tavern owner and wrote a letter for Liu Tang. That Liu Tang was a straightforward man. Since Song Jiang steadfastly refused, he was not going to keep insisting. So he wrapped the gold bars back up.

"Brother, now that I have your letter, I'll head back tonight," Liu Tang said.

"I will not keep you, brother," Song Jiang said. "You understand why."

Liu Tang now knelt again and kowtowed four times to Song Jiang. Song Jiang then summoned the waiter and said, "This gentleman is leaving a tael of silver here for the tab, and I'll come settle the bill tomorrow."

Liu Tang then strapped on his bundle, grabbed his broadsword, and followed Song Jiang back downstairs. It was dusk when they reached the end of the street. It was the middle of August, and a bright moon was climbing into the night sky.

Taking Liu Tang by the hand, Song Jiang said, "Brother, take care. Do not come here again! There are too many cops here; it's no joke. I will not escort you any further. Let's part ways here."

And so Liu Tang strode off toward the west, heading back to Liangshan under the light of the moon.

After he parted ways with Liu Tang, Song Jiang slowly walked back toward his home. As he walked, he couldn't help but think about what a close call that was and how fortunate no cops saw them. Then he got to thinking, "That Chao Gai has turned brigand. He's a big deal now."

Before he had gone far, he suddenly heard someone call to him from behind, "Sir, where are you going? Long time no see!"

He turned around to see who it was, and let out a silent groan. It was Mrs. Yan (2), the mother of Yan Poxi, his cheating mistress.

"I've sent one person after another to invite you over to our place," Mrs. Yan said. "You're such an important person that it's hard to get to see you. If that no-good girl of mine offended you with her words, please forgive her for my sake. I'll make sure she apologizes to you. I must be blessed tonight to run into you. Come back to our place with me."

"I'm swamped with work today," Song Jiang said. "I can't get away. I'll go see you another day."

"That won't do," Mrs. Yan insisted. "My daughter has been sitting at home eagerly waiting for you. Just come offer her a little comfort. Don't be like this."

"I'm really busy. I'll come tomorrow, for sure."

"I want you to come tonight," said Mrs. Yan as she grabbed Song Jiang by the sleeve. She then continued. "Who's been whispering lies to you? My daughter and I are wholly dependent on you for the rest of our lives. Don't listen to whatever nonsense outsiders are spewing. You come and decide for yourself. Whatever my daughter has done wrong, blame me. Just come with me."

"Stop bothering me; I really can't get away from work."

“Even if you fall down on the job a little bit, it’s not like the magistrate is going to punish you. If I let this chance meeting go to waste, when will I run into you again? Just come with me. I have things to tell you when we get home.”

Song Jiang was no match for Mrs. Yan’s persistence, so he caved. “Fine, just let go of me and I’ll come with you,” he said.

“Ok, but don’t try to run away. I’m too old to keep up with you,” Mrs. Yan joked.

“Listen to you,” Song Jiang sighed as they headed toward Mrs. Yan’s home, the home that Song Jiang was paying for.

But when they got to the front of the house, Song Jiang was having second thoughts and stopped. But Mrs. Yan was not letting him get away. She blocked his escape route and said, “You’re here; you can’t not go in.”

So Song Jiang sucked it up, went inside and sat down by the table on the first floor. Mrs. Yan was still afraid he would try to slip out, so she plopped herself down right next to him, and then shouted toward the upstairs, “My dear, your beloved is here.”

Upstairs, her daughter Yan Poxi was lying on her bed, staring at the lamp, being bored while waiting for her booty call Zhang Wenyuan to show up. When she heard “Your beloved is here,” she thought that was Zhang Wenyuan, so she quickly got to her feet, straightened up her bun for a second, and flew downstairs while muttering, “You rogue. You’ve kept me waiting long enough. I’m going to box your ears first!”

But lo and behold, sitting right there by the candlelight was not Zhang Wenyuan, but Song Jiang. Disappointed, she turned around and stormed back upstairs in a huff and plopped back down on the bed.

Back downstairs, Mrs. Yan heard her daughter’s footsteps coming down at first but then going back up again, so she called, “My dear, your man is here. Why did you go back up?”

“How big is this house?” Yan Poxi shot back from her bed. “Can’t he come to me? He’s not blind, so why doesn’t he come up instead of waiting for me to go greet him? So much nonsense.”

Mrs. Yan smiled at Song Jiang and said, “That useless girl must be bitter about you having stayed away for so long. I guess you deserved some of that. Here, I’ll go up with you.”

Well, Song Jiang was feeling rather uncomfortable after that rude welcome, but Mrs. Yan was so insistent that he had no choice but to drag himself upstairs.

The upstairs portion of the house was a pretty large space. In the outer half, there was a dressing table and bench. The inner half of the space served as the bedroom. On one side was a carved bed with railings at the head and foot of the bed, with a red silk canopy hanging over it. A clothing rack and a towel sat at one end of the bed, and at the other end was a washbasin. A pewter lampstand sat on a gold lacquered table flanked by two matching stools. In the center of the middle wall hung a painting of a beautiful girl, and a row of four wooden armchairs sat against the wall across from the bed.

When Song Jiang got upstairs, Mrs. Yan dragged him into the bedroom, and he sat down on one of the stools facing the bed. Mrs. Yan then pulled her daughter up from the bed and said, “Mr. Song is here. My child, you have a bad temper and are always insulting him, so he got annoyed and stopped coming. And yet you’re always thinking about him. It took a lot of doing to get him here tonight, and yet you won’t even get up and apologize to him. You’re such a brat!”

“What are you getting all worked up for?” Yan Poxi said as she pushed her mother away. “It’s not like I’ve done anything wrong. If he doesn’t come here, how can I apologize to him?”

Song Jiang did not say a word as he listened. Mrs. Yan now put an armchair next to Song Jiang and tried to force her daughter into it, saying, “Here, keep your man company for a while. Even if you don’t want to apologize, at least don’t act up. You two haven’t seen each other for a long time. I’m sure you have a few tender words for each other.”

But Yan Poxi refused to be coerced into that chair. Instead, she sat down across from Song Jiang. Song Jiang just stared at the floor and did not make a sound, while the girl sat with her face turned away from him. Well, this certainly did not look like a romantic evening in the making.

“Of course, we need wine!” Mrs. Yan said. “I have a bottle of good wine here. I’ll go buy some food to go with it. Daughter, keep Mr. Song company. Don’t be shy. I’ll be back soon.”

Hearing this, Song Jiang thought to himself, “That old woman has me nailed down tight. When she goes downstairs, I’ll leave.”

Yeah, you go ahead and think that. Mrs. Yan was a crafty one. She could tell what Song Jiang was planning, so when she left the bedroom, she locked the door from the outside.

“Ah crap. That woman is one step ahead of me,” Song Jiang thought when he heard the lock click.

Mrs. Yan now went downstairs, lit the lamp by the stove. There was already a pot of hot water in the stove, and she added more wood to the fire. Then, she gathered up some loose change and went out to buy some seasonal fruit, fresh fish, tender chicken, and such. When she came back, she plated the food, poured the wine into a jug, and ladled some into a kettle and warmed it on the stove before pouring the warm wine into a bottle. She then gathered up all the food, along with three wine cups and three sets of chopsticks, and brought them all upstairs on a tray. She unlocked the bedroom door, brought the food in and set it on the lacquered table. She then took a look at the ... umm ... lovebirds, and saw that Song Jiang was still staring at the floor, and her daughter was still looking away.

“Come child. Pour the wine,” Mrs. Yan said to her daughter. But Yan Poxi said, “You guys eat. I’m too annoyed.”

“Child, your father and I spoiled you rotten, but you can’t act like this in front of others.”

“So what if I don’t pour wine? Is he going to cut off my head with a flying sword?!”

“Fine, fine, it’s my fault again,” Mrs. Yan said with a chuckle. “Mr. Song is a gentleman. He knows better than you. If you don’t want to pour the wine, fine. Just turn your face this way and drink some wine.”

But the girl refused to do even that, so Mrs. Yan poured wine for Song Jiang, who downed a cup just to satisfy her. Mrs. Yan smiled and said, “Mr. Song, please don’t take offense. I know there are rumors flying around. I’ll explain everything tomorrow. Outsiders are jealous of seeing you here. It just burns them up, so they’ll say anything. It’s all just empty farts. Don’t listen to them; just drink.”

She then filled up all three cups and said, “Daughter, don’t act like a child. Just come drink a cup.”

“Stop pestering me,” her daughter said. “I’m not hungry. I can’t eat.”

“Even so, you should drink a cup of wine with your man.”

Yan Poxi was thinking to herself, “I’ve given my heart to Zhang Wenyuan, so who the hell has the time for this bastard? But if I don’t get him drunk, he would just keep bothering me.”

So she forced herself to pick up a cup and drank about half of it. Her mother now smiled and said, “My girl was just upset. Relax, have a few drinks, and go to bed. Sir, you have a few cups, too.”

Song Jiang could not withstand her relentless assault, so he downed another three or four cups, and Mrs. Yan also drank a few cups and then went downstairs to heat up more wine.

Now, Mrs. Yan was unhappy at first when her daughter refused to drink. But then, when Yan Poxi started drinking a little bit, Mrs. Yan’s mood improved. While she was downstairs, she thought to herself, “If I can get that Song Jiang to stay here tonight, then he’s going to forget about being upset. Let me hang on to him for a while longer and then we’ll see.”

While she was thinking that, Mrs. Yan downed three big cups of wine in front of the stove, and soon she was buzzing a bit. Yet, she filled another bowl and drank that, too. Then, she poured half a kettle of heated wine into the bottle and climbed back up the stairs, where the mood was just as unpleasant as

before. Song Jiang was still sitting there, staring at the floor, and not saying a word, while Yan Poxi was turned the other way, playing with her skirt.

Trying to lighten the mood, Mrs. Yan laughed and said, "You two aren't made of clay; why aren't you saying anything? Mr. Song, you're a man, so it's up to you to show a little tenderness and whisper a few sweet nothings."

Song Jiang still said nothing, and he wasn't sure if he should stay or go. Meanwhile, Yan Poxi was thinking, "Well, if you won't say anything, good luck expecting me to come talk to you and joke with you like before." And all the while, Mrs. Yan, with her lips loosened by the wine, kept on rambling about all sorts of nonsense, slandering this, gossiping about that, and on and on and on.

And now, onto this awkward scene came a visitor, greatly unwelcomed by Mrs. Yan but immensely appreciated by Song Jiang. There was a guy in town who went by the name Tang (2) the Ox. He was a peddler of pickled meats and vegetables, and he also did various odd jobs on the streets. Song Jiang would often give him some money, and Tang the Ox also served as sort of Song Jiang's eyes and ears, passing along little bits of intel that he would pick up about this case or that litigant, for which Song Jiang would also reward him with some loose change. So whenever Song Jiang needed him, Tang the Ox would go all out to help.

That night, Tang had a bad run at the gambling house and was cleaned out. So he went around looking for Song Jiang in hopes of bumming a little change off of him. But Song Jiang was nowhere to be found. The neighbors saw Tang the Ox rushing to and fro and asked what he was doing.

"I'm looking for my patron, but can't find him," he told them.

"Who's your patron?"

"Mr. Song."

"Oh, we just saw him go by with Mrs. Yan."



“Of course,” Tang the Ox said. “That Yan Poxi is a dirty tramp. She and Zhang Wenyuan got quite a flame going; Mr. Song is the only one still in the dark. But I think he’s also heard something, because he hasn’t gone to her place for a while. That old hag must’ve tricked him into going over there tonight. I’m all out of cash. Let me go over there and bum a few strings so I can buy a couple bowls of wine.”

So he made a beeline for Mrs. Yan’s house. When he got there, he saw that the lamps were lit inside, and the front door was open, so he let himself in. Standing by the staircase, he could hear Mrs. Yan laughing upstairs, so he tiptoed up the steps and peeked through a seam in the wall. He saw Song Jiang and Yan Poxi both looking down, while Mrs. Yan was prattling on and on with her gossip.

Tang the Ox now stomped into the room and bowed three times to the people inside.

“Perfect,” Song Jiang thought to himself, sensing a possible escape.

He gave Tang the Ox a look, and Tang caught his meaning.

“Mr. Song, I’ve looked everywhere for you,” Tang the Ox said. “Turns out you’re here, drinking and having a good time.”

“Is there important business at the courthouse?” Song Jiang asked.

“Mr. Song, don’t tell me you forgot! Remember that thing from earlier today? The magistrate is having a fit right now and has sent four or five people out to look for you. But they couldn’t find you, so the magistrate is all in a tizzy right now.”

“Sounds urgent. I guess I have to go,” Song Jiang said as he got up and started walking toward the staircase.

Not so fast, buddy. Mrs. Yan was way too seasoned to fall for that. She blocked Song Jiang’s path and said, “Sir, don’t pull that trick. I know he’s just putting on an act.” She then whirled around and said to Tang the Ox, “You scoundrel. You’re trying to trick me? You’re out of your league. At this hour, the magistrate is already home, drinking and making merry with his wife. What business could he have? You can’t fool me with your cheap tricks.”

“But the magistrate really does have urgent business; I won’t lie,” Tang the Ox said.

“Dog farts!” Mrs. Yan shot back. “My old eyes are as clear as crystal. I saw just now how Mr. Song gave you a look and signaled you to make up something. Instead of telling him to stay, you’re trying to lure him away. As the old saying goes, ‘Killing can be forgiven, but never deception.’ ”

As she spoke, Mrs. Yan jumped up, grabbed Tang the Ox by the neck with both hands, and dragged him down the stairs.

“Hey, why are you choking me?!” Tang protested.

“You’re trying to ruin our livelihood, cut off our lifeline. Make any more noise, and I’ll beat you!”

“Oh yeah? C’mon then!”

Well, Mrs. Yan was not messing around, and she was also feeling the wine. So in the heat of the moment, she slapped Tang twice across his face. She smacked him so hard that he stumbled out backwards, crashing through the bamboo door curtain. Mrs. Yan then took down the curtain, stashed it behind the door, and shut and barred the doors, cursing all the while.

Feeling the sting of the two literal slaps to the face, Tang the Ox stood outside and shouted, “You damn whoremonger! If it weren’t for Mr. Song, I would smash your house to pieces! Just you wait! I’ll get back at you soon enough, or my last name isn’t Tang!”

Mrs. Yan now returned upstairs and said to Song Jiang, “Sir, don’t pay that beggar no mind. He’s just trying to bum some wine. All he does is stir up trouble. That stinking wretch will die in the streets. How dare he come here with his crap?!”

Watching his one hope for escape evaporate, Song Jiang was now trapped. Mrs. Yan said, “Sir, don’t hold it against me. We know how good you are to us. Daughter, come drink this cup with Mr. Song. You two haven’t seen each other in a long time, so I’m guessing you guys will be ... going to bed early. I’ll just straighten up a bit and go.”

After haranguing Song Jiang into a couple more cups of wine, Mrs. Yan cleaned up the table and went downstairs. Back upstairs, Song Jiang thought to himself, "I've heard that this girl is carrying on with Zhang Wenyuan. I don't know whether to believe it, and I haven't seen anything to confirm it. If I leave now, she's going to think I'm a rube. And it's getting late anyway. I might as well sleep here and see how she feels about me."

Just then, Mrs. Yan poked her head back upstairs and said, "It's late. You guys should go to bed."

"None of your business; go sleep," her daughter shot back.

Mrs. Yan smirked and walked downstairs, saying, "Mr. Song, rest well. Have fun tonight; sleep in tomorrow." She then cleaned up the stove, washed up, blew out the lamp downstairs, and went to bed.

Song Jiang now sat on the stool, waiting for his mistress to come over and keep him company. But Yan Poxi thought to herself, "I only care about Zhang Wenyuan, and yet Song Jiang is here getting in the way. If he thinks I'm going to be all nice and soft with him like before, he's got another thing coming. As the saying goes, you row the boat to the shore, not move the shore to the boat. If he doesn't want to talk to me, that's just fine by me!"

So the two of them just sat across from each other in the light of the flickering lamp, neither making a peep. It was getting late. Song Jiang sat on his stool, looked at the girl, and sighed repeatedly. When it got to be about 9 p.m., Yan Poxi just went to bed without disrobing. She put her head on the embroidered pillow, rolled over to face the wall, and went to sleep.

Seeing this, Song Jiang thought, "This trollop went to bed without even looking at me. Thanks to her mother's haranguing, I drank a few too many cups tonight. I'm tired, and it's late. I might as well go to bed, too."

So he removed his headscarf, put it on the table. Took off his outer robe and hung it on the clothes rack. He then removed the sash around his waist, along with the dagger and documents bag that were

attached to it, and draped it over the bed railing. He then took off his silk shoes and white socks and lay down in bed with his head toward the girls' feet.

An hour later, he could hear her snickering from the other end of the bed, which made him furious inside and unable to sleep. It was now around midnight, and he was totally sober. When 3 a.m. finally rolled around, he got up, washed his face with some cold water, and put on his outer robe and headscarf. As he did so, he muttered, "What a rude slut."

Well, Yan Poxi had not fallen asleep either. And when she heard that, she threw it right back at Song Jiang and called him shameless. Song Jiang swallowed hard and went downstairs. Mrs. Yan heard his footsteps and said from her bed, "Mr. Song, rest awhile longer. Wait till it's light out. Why are you getting up at 3 a.m.?"

Song Jiang did not answer and instead opened the door.

"Mr. Song, make sure to pull the door shut on your way out," Mrs. Yan said, half asleep.

Song Jiang closed the door after he walked out. Still smoldering from the cold treatment he received, he now set out for his home. As he walked past the magistrate's office, he saw the light of a small lamp on the street. When he took a closer look, he saw that it was Grandpa Wang, a seller of medicinal broth who had come out to catch the morning market.

Grandpa Wang recognized Song Jiang and asked why he was out so early.

"I got drunk last night and miscounted the beat of the watch drum," Song Jiang said.

"You must be hung over," Grandpa Wang said. "Here, have a bowl of broth. It's perfect for that."

So Song Jiang sat down on a bench, and the old man filled a bowl with broth and handed it to him. As he drank, Song Jiang suddenly remembered something.

"He often gives me broth for free. I once promised him money for a coffin, but haven't followed through yet. I have that bar of gold from Chao Gai from yesterday, stashed in my documents bag. Why don't I give that to him for coffin money. That'll make him happy."

So he said, "Grandpa Wang, I once promised you money for a coffin, but hadn't given it to you yet. Today I have some gold. You can take it and go to Chen the Third to order a coffin to keep at home. When you have passed on, I will provide more money for the burial."

"Benefactor, you are so good to me," Grandpa Wang said. "And now you're giving me money for my coffin. I can never repay you in this life. In the next life, I will come back as a donkey or horse to serve you."

"Say no such thing," Song Jiang replied as he reached for his documents bag. But where the bag should be, he felt ... nothing.

Uh oh.

To see where Song Jiang's documents bag is, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, how to get away with murder. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!