

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 31.

Last time, Song Jiang had just left his cheating mistress's house in a huff after she gave him the cold shoulder all night. That, plus the rumors about her having an affair with his assistant Zhang Wenyan, put Song Jiang in a foul mood as he left. After getting a bowl of hangover juice from an old street vendor, he remembered that he had once promised the guy some money for his coffin. Song Jiang wanted to give him the gold bar he had gotten from his outlaw buddies on Liangshan earlier that day. He reached for the bar in his documents bag and that was when he realized that the bag wasn't on him.

"Crap! I must've left it hanging by that whore's bed!" Song Jiang thought to himself. "I left in a huff and forgot to take it. The gold is not a big deal, but it was wrapped in Chao Gai's letter. I was going to burn that letter in the tavern while talking to Liu Tang, but if he saw that and relayed it to Chao Gai, they might think I don't care about them. I was going to burn it after I left the tavern, but then I got snared by Mrs. Yan. I couldn't burn it in the lamp last night, or that whore would've seen it. But I left in a hurry this morning and forgot about it. I've often seen that girl read song books, so she knows how to read a little bit. If she finds that letter, there's gonna be hell to pay."

So he got up and told the broth vender, "Sorry, I wasn't lying about the gold. I thought it was in my documents bag, but I left home in a hurry and forgot to bring it. I'll go get it right now."

"No need," the vendor said. "You can wait till tomorrow."

"You don't understand; I have another important item that's also in that bag, so I need to go get that, too," Song Jiang said he rushed off back toward the home of Yan Poxi, his mistress.

Meanwhile, back at her house, Yan Poxi was grumbling after Song Jiang left. "That bastard made me lose sleep all night. He's so shameless; he thinks I'm going to put on a smile for him? I just care about Zhang Wenyan. Who the hell has time for you? It would suit me just fine if you don't come."

As she muttered, she took off her robe and shirt and started getting ready to take a real nap. In the glow of the lamp, she noticed a purple sash draped over the bed railing.

“Ha, that black-faced bastard drank too much and left his sash here,” she said with a laugh. “I’m going to take this and give it to Zhang Wenyan.”

Now, attached to the sash were Song Jiang’s documents bag and dagger. And when she grabbed the sash, the bag felt kind of weighty. So she emptied its contents onto the table, which of course included the gold bar and the letter it was wrapped in. She grabbed the shiny gold bar and laughed.

“Heaven must want me to buy my honey something good to eat. I’ve noticed him looking thinner the last few days and was going to get him some nice food.”

Then, she turned her attention to the letter. There were some words she didn’t know, but she could read enough of it, including the name Chao Gai.

“Well, well,” she said to herself. “I’ve always just heard that the bucket falls into the well, but who knew the well can fall into the bucket, too. I want to be with Zhang Wenyan, but you, Song Jiang, are in the way. But now I’ve got you in the palm of my hand. Turns out you’re in cahoots with the bandits of Liangshan and they gave you 100 taels of gold. I’ll fix you nice and slow.”

So she wrapped the gold bar back up in the letter and stuck them back into the bag. Just then, she heard the front door creak open downstairs, followed by the sound of her mother’s voice.

“Who is there?” Mrs. Yan asked.

“It’s me,” Song Jiang replied.

“I told you it was too early but you didn’t believe me, and now you’re back again. Go sleep with your woman until it’s light out.”

Song Jiang gave no answer and just hurried upstairs. When he stormed into Yan Poxi’s bedroom, he found her lying in bed, facing the wall, and fast asleep. He looked at the bed railing but did not see his sash there. His heart immediately sank.

Swallowing hard, he tapped Yan Poxi and said, "On account of what I've done for you, give me back my documents bag."

But she just pretended to be asleep.

"Look, don't pout," Song Jiang continued. "I'll apologize to you tomorrow."

"I am sleeping; who is it?"

"You know it's me. Stop pretending."

"Oh black-face. What do you want?"

"Give me back my documents bag."

"When the hell did you give it to me? Why are you asking me for it?"

"I left it on the railing by your feet. And no one else has been here, so you must have taken it."

"Bullcrap!"

"Look, I was in the wrong last night. I'll apologize to you tomorrow. Just give me back the bag. Stop playing around, ok?"

"Who's playing with you? I don't have it."

"You went to bed in your clothes earlier, and now you're under the sheets. You must have taken it when you got undressed."

And now, Yan Poxi's eyes got big and mean, and she stared at Song Jiang said, "That's right. I did take it. But I'm not giving it back! Why don't you have the authorities arrest me for being a crook?"

"I haven't accused you of being a crook."

"That's right. You would know who's a crook."

Those words were making Song Jiang worried now.

"Look, I haven't mistreated you or your mother. So just give it back to me. I have business to tend to."

“You’re always mumbling that I’m carrying on with Zhang Wenyan. He may not be your equal in some areas, but he’s also not a capital offender, not in cahoots with bandits like you are.”

“Darling, not so loud! It’s no laughing matter if the neighbors hear you!”

“If you’re afraid of outsiders hearing about it, then you shouldn’t have done it. I’m going to hang on tight to this letter. If you want me to spare you, then you must agree to three things.”

“I’ll agree to 30 things, much less three.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

“Fine, fine, fine. Just tell me what three things.”

“First, you must immediately return my contract of sale to you. Then, write another document, stating that I am allowed to marry Zhang Wenyan and that you will not contest it.”

“I can do that.”

“Second, all my jewelry, all my clothes, and all the stuff in this house. Even though you bought them all, you must also write a letter stating that you will not ask for them back.”

“That’s fine, too.”

“As for the third thing, I don’t think you’ll agree to it.”

“I’ve already agreed to the first two, so why not this?”

“That Chao Gai from Liangshan gave you 100 taels of gold. Give it to me, and I’ll spare you your capital crime and return your bag to you.”

“Look, I can do the first two things. But as for the 100 taels of gold, it’s true they tried to give it to me, but I didn’t accept it. I told them to take it back. If I had it, I’d gladly offer it to you.”

“Yeah right! As the saying goes, ‘Money to an official is like blood to a fly.’ If he sent someone to deliver gold to you, how could you have declined it? What a fart! Among government officials, which cat doesn’t eat meat? Does the king of hell let condemned souls go? Who do you think you’re kidding?! Give

me the gold! What's it worth to you? If you're worried about it being traceable, then melt it down first and then give it to me."

"Look, you know I'm an honest man and won't lie," Song Jiang said. "If you don't believe me, then give me three days. I'll sell my property and gather 100 taels of gold for you. But give me back my document bag first."

But Yan Poxi scoffed. "Ok, Black-Face. You think I'm a kid? If I returned your bag and your letter first and then ask you for the gold three days from now, it would be like a funeral singer asking to get paid AFTER the coffin is buried. I'll give you the merchandise at the same time you give me the money. Make it quick and get it over with."

"But I really don't have that gold!"

"Is that going to be your story in court tomorrow?"

So, first of all, I just love that metaphor she used about the funeral singer asking to get paid after the coffin is buried. It really illustrates the lack of social trust in Chinese society back then and, really, even now. Also, Yan Poxi had Song Jiang eating out of her hands for a while there, but then she overplayed her hand, because as soon as Song Jiang heard the words "in court," his temper flared.

"Are you going to give that back to me or not?!" he glowered.

"Oh look, you're so ferocious. Ooh, I guess I'll have to give it back to you," she shot back sarcastically.

"You really won't give it back?"

"No! No no no no no no no! Maybe I'll give it back to you at the courthouse."

Song Jiang was done talking. He now ripped away her covers. Turns out, Yan Poxi had the sash next to her the whole time, and now, she clutched it tightly in front of her with both hands. As soon as he pulled away the covers, Song Jiang spotted the sash.

“There it is!” he exclaimed as he tried to tear it away. But she refused to let go. As they engaged in a tug of war, Yan Poxi let out a scream.

“Black-face is trying to kill me!”

That turned out to be the wrong thing to scream, because it planted a panicked thought in Song Jiang’s head that wasn’t there before. And he had been stewing on his rage all night, with nowhere to vent. When she screamed for a second time, Song Jiang held her down with his left hand. With the right hand, he pulled out the dagger from his sash and ran it across her throat. Blood spurted everywhere, and the girl was now struggling for breath. And just to make sure, Song Jiang ran the dagger across her neck again, severing her head.

Ah crap!

Having done the deed, Song Jiang now quickly grabbed his bag, took out the letter from Chao Gai, and burned it in the flame of the lamp. He then put the sash back on and went downstairs. And that’s when he ran smack dab into Mrs. Yan. She had been sleeping downstairs and had heard the two of them bickering upstairs, though she didn’t really pay it much mind since they were pretty much bickering all night. But then, she heard her daughter scream “Black-face is trying to kill me!” and that DID catch her attention, so she quickly got dressed and went upstairs to see what’s up. And that’s when she ran into Song Jiang rushing down the stairs.

“What are you two arguing about?” Mrs. Yan asked.

“Your daughter was out of line, so I killed her!” Song Jiang said.

“Oh right. Yeah, Mr. Song, you’re so vicious, and such a mean drunk too,” Mrs. Yan said with a laugh.

“You always kill people when you drink. Stop pulling my leg.”

“If you don’t believe me, then go take a look. I really did kill her.”

"Yeah right. Sure I believe you ..." Mrs. Yan laughed as she opened the door, and immediately her laughter turned into a gasp as she beheld the headless corpse of her daughter, lying in a pool of blood.

"Oh my god! Oh my god! What should I do?!" the old woman cried in panic.

"I'm a real man and will never run away. I'll do whatever you want," Song Jiang told her.

"That, that whore really was no good," Mrs. Yan said, catching her breath. "You were right to kill her. But, but now I have no one to take care of me in my old age."

"That's not a problem. Since that's how you feel, there's no need for you to worry. I have plenty of money. I'll see to it that you will want for nothing the rest of your life."

Well, that was a rather quick about-face from "I'm a hero and will never run from the consequences of my actions" to "I'll make sure you get plenty of hush money." Mrs. Yan now said, "That's fine. Thank you Mr. Song. But how should we take care of my daughter's body?"

"That's easy enough. I'll go to Chen the Third and buy a coffin," Song Jiang said. And by now I'm wondering if he's working on commissions for the coffin dealer, considering how many referrals he's been giving. "When the coroner comes, I'll take care of him. And I'll give you 10 taels of silver for the funeral expenses."

"Mr. Song, we should try to get a coffin and dispose of her body before dawn so the neighbors don't see her," Mrs. Yan suggested.

"That sounds good. Get me paper and brush, and I'll write a letter for you to go get the coffin."

"A letter won't do. You need to go in person so that they will dispatch a coffin right away."

Song Jiang agreed, so Mrs. Yan locked the door and the two of them headed in the direction of the coffin dealer. On the way, they passed the courthouse. It was still dark out, and the gate to the courthouse had just opened. As they were passing by, Mrs. Yan suddenly grabbed Song Jiang and screamed, "Murderer! Murderer!"

Song Jiang was scared out of his mind and tried to cover her mouth.

“Shut up!” he told her.

But Mrs. Yan would not be shushed and kept yelling. A few cops from the courthouse walked over to see what’s up. They of course recognized Song Jiang, and they told her, “Woman, shut your mouth. Mr. Song is no murderer. Whatever it is, speak nicely.”

“He’s a murderer, and I caught him and brought him to the courthouse!” she told them.

Now, we’ve already established how Song Jiang was beloved by everyone in the county, on account of his generosity. So the cops refused to lay a hand on him, in part because they didn’t really believe the old woman. While this ruckus was going on, somebody walked by. It was none other than Tang the Ox, the pickle peddler who ran afoul of Mrs. Yan last night. He was on his way to market with a tray of pickled ginger. When he saw Mrs. Yan grabbing Song Jiang and screaming for justice, he remembered how she had him in a chokehold last night. So he was not going to let this go.

He put down his tray of pickles, walked over, and yelled, “Hey you old hag! Why are you grabbing Mr. Song?”

“Don’t you interfere, or you’ll answer for it with your life!” she warned him.

That pissed him off. He grabbed her hand and pulled it away from Song Jiang. Then, without asking any questions, he smacked her across the face so hard that it left her dazed, and she let go. In that moment, Song Jiang got loose and quickly disappeared into a crowd.

So, where do we start with everything that’s wrong here? I guess we could start with the whole murdering your mistress to cover up your criminal connections thing. Or maybe covering THAT up by saying you killed her because she was out of line, because, yeah, that’s a totally legit reason for murdering a woman in cold blood. Or how about saying you’re a true man and will accept consequences, only to quickly pivot to planning a cover-up and negotiating hush money. Or what just happened now, with the mother of the murder victim being dismissed by the cops because they were friends with the accused, and then getting assaulted by a friend of said accused.



Well, Mrs. Yan now grabbed Tang the Ox and yelled at him. "Song Jiang killed my daughter, and you helped him escape!"

Uhhhh what?! Tang the Ox panicked. "How the hell am I supposed to know that?!" he said.

"Police, help me catch that murderer," Mrs. Yan now shouted at the cops. "Otherwise you will all be implicated."

Now, the cops had not laid hands on Song Jiang because of his status and reputation. But they showed no such deference for the pickle peddler, as they rushed forward to dish out a little selective police brutality. One of them took hold of Mrs. Yan, while the other three or four wrestled Tang the Ox down and dragged him into the courthouse. So hey, strap yourself in for another trip through the ancient Chinese legal system. Let's see what ridiculousness ensues this time.

So the cops dragged Tang the Ox into the courthouse and forced him onto his knees in front of the magistrate, while Mrs. Yan also kneeled on the other side. When the magistrate asked what was going on, Mrs. Yan said, "My last name is Yan. I had a daughter named Poxi. She was sold to your clerk, Mr. Song, as his mistress. Last night, while my daughter was drinking with Song Jiang, that Tang the Ox came to our house to cause trouble and cursed us on his way out. All the neighbors knew about it. This morning, Song Jiang went out for a while, then came back and killed my daughter. I managed to drag him to the front of the courthouse, but then Tang the Ox freed him and let him escape. Your honor, please grant me justice!"

The magistrate then asked Tang, "How dare you free the murderer?"

"Your honor, I didn't know the backstory. Last night I went to look for Song Jiang to bum some money for a bowl of wine, and that hag choked me and kicked me out. This morning, I was on my way to market to sell pickled ginger when I saw her grabbing Mr. Song outside the courthouse. So I went and tried to make peace, and that's when Song Jiang ran away. I don't know why he killed her daughter."

“Bullcrap!” the magistrate shouted. “Song Jiang is an honest gentleman. How could he have committed murder? This affair must be all on you! Where are my men?!”

At that, the assistant clerk stepped forward. This was, of course, none other than Zhang Wenyan, the guy who was carrying on an affair with Yan Poxi, so needless to say, he was extra motivated to get to the bottom of this case. He took testimonies from all the parties present and helped Mrs. Yan write up a petition. He then summoned everyone who worked or lived near her home and went there with them. They examined the corpse and discovered the murder weapon. They checked the body and confirmed that the girl indeed had her throat slit. They then put the body in a coffin and put it in state at a monastery while the whole group returned to the courthouse.

Now, the magistrate just so happened to be good friends with Song Jiang, so he was trying to let Song Jiang off the hook. So it was rather convenient that he had Tang the Ox on hand, and he interrogated Tang time and again. But time and again, Tang just kept insisting that he knew nothing about what happened, which was more or less the truth.

“Why did you go make a ruckus at his home last night?” the magistrate asked. “You MUST have something to do with this.”

“I just went to try to bum a bowl of wine,” Tang pleaded.

“Bullcrap! Men, beat him!”

And a bunch of cops now bound Tang the Ox, threw him to the ground, and caned him. But even after 50 strokes, his story never changed. The magistrate knew full well Tang was innocent of the murder, but hey, he’s got a friend to save, so he just kept questioning Tang, and then put him in a cangue and had him locked up in jail.

Now, normally, that might’ve been enough for the magistrate to BS his way through a murder case, believe it or not. But this time, he had someone on his staff for whom this was very personal. Zhang

Wenyuan now came and said, "Even though you have imprisoned Tang the Ox, the murder weapon belongs to Song Jiang, so we must arrest him and question him."

Zhang Wenyuan kept pressing, and the magistrate had no choice but to relent and send some men to Song Jiang's home in town to arrest him. Of course, by now, Song Jiang had long since disappeared, so the cops followed proper procedures and dragged a few neighbors back to court. The neighbors said that Song Jiang had fled to god knows where.

But that still did not satisfy Zhang Wenyuan. He now told the magistrate, "Song Jiang may have fled, but his father and younger brother Song Qing live in Song Family Village. We can arrest them and hold them until Song Jiang has been apprehended and questioned."

The magistrate really didn't want to do this. He had planned to just pin this thing on Tang the Ox for now and then let him go later when things have cooled down. But then Zhang Wenyuan presented the petition from Mrs. Yan and asked her to come up and press her charges. The magistrate knew that he couldn't stop the case from proceeding, so he had no choice but to issue a warrant and dispatch a few cops to go to Song Family Village for Song Jiang's father and brother.

When those cops arrived at the village, Song Jiang's father, old Squire Song, came out and welcomed them into his thatched parlor. The cops then showed him the warrant. When he saw that, Old Squire Song said, "Sirs, please sit and let me explain. My family has been farmers for generations and we have always made our living on the land. But my unfilial son Song Jiang has always been rebellious, even as a child. Instead of accepting his station in life, he insisted on becoming a magisterial clerk despite all my attempts to dissuade him. Because of that, several years ago, I went to the previous county magistrate and disinherited Song Jiang on account of his being unfilial, and had him stricken from my family registry. He lives in town, while I and my son Song Qing live here in this rural village, scratching out a living on the land. I have no connection with Song Jiang. It's precisely because I was afraid he would do

something bad and bring me trouble that I went and disinherited him. I have the documentation here. Let me get it and show you.”

Now, all the cops were friends of Song Jiang’s, and they were smart enough to recognize an escape hatch when they saw one. All this business about Old Squire Song having severed his ties with his son was just a convenient cover, and apparently not an uncommon strategy for the families of low-ranking government officials. Because those guys were the most likely to bear the brunt of the punishment should somebody higher up the food chain get angry about something or another.

None of the cops present wanted to be the bad guy, so they just told Old Squire Song, “Since you have the documentation, please show us. We will make a copy and bring it back to the magistrate.”

Old Squire Song had his men slaughter some chickens and geese and treated the cops to wine and food, not to mention more than a dozen taels of silver. He then brought out the documentation of his disinheritance of Song Jiang. The cops made a copy, thanked him, and returned to the magistrate.

“Old Squire Song had Song Jiang stricken from his family registry three years ago,” they told the magistrate. “He had documentation, and here’s a copy. With that, it’s hard to justify arresting him.”

The magistrate, too, knew what the game was, so he said, “Well, since there’s documentation, and Song Jiang has no other family, then I guess all we can do is put out a reward of 1,000 strings of coin for his arrest and send word out to the surrounding areas.”

But you know who else knew how the game was played? Zhang Wenyuan. He now had Mrs. Yan go back to court, with her hair disheveled for greater effect. She said to the magistrate, “That Song Jiang is obviously hiding in his family’s home. Why does your honor refuse to arrest him and give me justice?”

“His father had disinherited him three years ago on account of his being unfilial,” the magistrate shouted back. “There’s documentation right here, so how can I arrest his father and brother?”

“Your excellency, who does not know that he’s known as the Filial Black-face? This evidence is fake. Please give me justice!”

“Nonsense! It’s an official document carrying the seal of the previous magistrate. How is it fake?”

But Mrs. Yan started moaning and crying, and said to the magistrate in between sobs, “This is a murder case! If you refuse to grant me justice, then all I can do is take this up to the prefecture. Woe is my daughter! What a pitiful death!”

Zhang Wenyuan also chimed in. “Your honor, if you don’t arrest the offender for her, and she goes and tells your superior, it’s going to be trouble. If there are questions from above, it’s going to be hard to explain.”

The magistrate knew that Mrs. Yan had a strong case, so he had no choice but to issue another warrant and summon his two constables, Zhu Tong, aka the Lord of the Beautiful Beard, and Lei Heng, the Winged Tiger. He told them, “You two take a bunch of men and go to Song Jiang’s family’s home in the village. Arrest the offender Song Jiang and bring him here.”

And of course, won’t you know it. Both Zhu Tong and Lei Heng were also good friends with Song Jiang. So how will they administer justice in this case? To find out, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we’ll see where Song Jiang has been hiding himself. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!