

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 34.

Last time, our hero Wu Song boldly, and drunkenly, stumbled upon a tiger in the wild and bludgeoned it to death with his bare fist. As a reward, the magistrate of nearby Yanggu (2,3) County made him a constable in the county police force. Then, Wu Song ran into his older brother Wu Dalang (4,2), whom he had not seen in more than a year. Wu Dalang used to live in the next county over, but he told Wu Song that after Wu Song left, he got married, which invited endless bullying and taunting from the people of that county, eventually forcing him to move to Yanggu County instead.

Now, you might be wondering why getting married would open Wu Dalang to ridicule. So here's the deal. You know how Wu Song was this tall, strapping, handsome hunk? Well, Wu Dalang was the exact opposite. He was not even 4 feet tall, and he had an ugly face and an odd-shaped head. Because of that, people in his old county saddled him with the nickname Three Inches of Mulberry Bark. Yeah, that's some very fine people there.

In Wu Dalang's old county, there was a wealthy family, and in that family's household, there was a maid named Pan (1) Jinlian (1,2), and her name meant Golden Lotus. She was in her early 20s and rather pretty. That turned out to be bad news for her, as her master started making moves on her. Pan Jinlian didn't like that, so she went and told her mistress, and you can imagine the ruckus that followed. Rebuffed by Pan Jinlian and probably chewed out by his wife for messing around with the maid, the master of the house held a grudge against the victim of his sexual harassment. In retaliation, he married Pan Jinlian off to Wu Dalang, the ugliest man in the county. He even paid Wu Dalang a dowry and didn't ask him for a single coin in return for her.

Now, it might seem like a gift had just fallen from heaven into Wu Dalang's lap, but it was not so. After he and Pan Jinlian got married, his home was constantly hounded by a group of philanderers hanging around outside. And as for his new wife, let me quote straight from the novel here: "As it turns

out, that woman saw nothing to like about Wu Dalang, what with his short stature, ugly face, and complete lack of flair in the bedroom. More than anything, she was ready for a lover on the side.”

So yeah, I guess I should do my usual misogyny warning here. If you thought the portrayal of Song Jiang’s mistress a couple episodes back was terrible, well, these next few episodes are going to be even worse. Much worse in fact. So strap yourself in.

Anyway, because Wu Dalang was the meek, timid sort, after he got married, a group of philanderers hounded his house relentlessly. And every so often, there would come a shout of, “How did such a luscious lamb chop end up in a dog’s mouth?!” Yeah, like I said, some very fine people. It got so bad that Wu Dalang just couldn’t stay there anymore, so he packed up and moved to Yanggu County, renting a house on Purple Stone Lane. Every day, he went out and made his living the same way he always did -- selling steamed buns. Fast forward to the present. Wu Dalang was out selling buns on the street that day and he happened to see Wu Song walk by, so he called out to his brother, leading to a tearful reunion.

“Brother,” Wu Dalang said, “The day before last, I heard everyone on the streets say that a hero named Wu killed the tiger on Jingyang (3,2) Ridge and that the magistrate had made him a constable. I was guessing that might be you, and now here you are! I’m calling it a day; let’s go home.”

So Wu Song carried Wu Dalang’s load of steamed buns and followed him as they wound their way to Purple Stone Lane. After a couple turns, they stopped at a building next to a teahouse, and Wu Dalang shouted, “Wife, open up.”

The door curtain lifted, and a woman came out and said, “Husband, why are you back so early?”

“Your brother-in-law is here. Come meet him.”

Wu Dalang took the load of buns from Wu Song and told him to go inside and meet his sister-in-law. Wu Song went in and exchanged greetings with Pan Jinlian, and Wu Dalang said to her, “Turns out the guy who killed the tiger on Jingyang (3,2) Ridge and just got made a constable is my brother!”

“Many blessings to you, brother-in-law,” Pan Jinlian said. Oh and by the way, most of the time, the novel doesn’t even mention her by name. It just calls her “that woman,” so deep was the contempt for her that dripped from the pages of this book.

Wu Song asked Pan Jinlian to sit down and he kneeled and bowed deeply to her, and she quickly helped him up, saying, “Brother-in-law, that’s too much.”

“Sister-in-law, please accept my respects.”

Pan Jinlian now said, “I had also heard that a tiger-slaying hero was in town. I was going to go have a look, but I got there late and missed him. Turns out it was you. Please come have a seat upstairs.

So the three went upstairs and sat down, and Pan Jinlian said to her husband, “I’ll keep brother-in-law company. Why don’t you go arrange for some food to welcome him?”

“Quite right,” Wu Dalang said. “Brother, have a seat. I’ll be right back.”

Once Wu Dalang went downstairs, Pan Jinlian fixed her eyes on Wu Song and thought to herself, “They were born from the same womb? Look at what a man Wu Song is. If I could have married someone like that, then I won’t have lived in vain. Look at that Three Inch Mulberry Bark of mine. He looks more like a demon than a man. What filthy luck! Wu Song must be so strong that he could kill a tiger. And I hear he’s not married yet, so why don’t I ask him to move in with us. Who could’ve known that opportunity would come knocking here.”

So she put on a big smile and asked Wu Song, “Brother-in-law, how long have you been in town?”

“About a dozen days.”

“And where are you staying?”

“Oh just in some quarters at the county office.”

“Brother-in-law, that won’t do!”

“I’m just one person, easy to take care of. And I have an orderly tending to me.”

“How can he take good care of you? Why don’t you move in with us? Whenever you want something to eat or drink, I can fix it for you. Isn’t that better than some filthy orderly? Even if it’s just some clear broth, you would feel better when you drink it in this house.”

“Thank you so much, sister-in-law.”

“Do you have a wife? I’d like to meet her.”

“I’m not married.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-five.”

“Ah, you’re three years older than me. Where did you come from?”

“I had stayed in Cangzhou Prefecture for more than a year. I thought my brother was living in Qinghe County. I never expected that he would move here.”

“It’s a long story. Ever since I married him, I could see that he’s way too timid. People picked on him so much that we couldn’t stay in Qinghe County anymore, so we moved here. If he were big and strong like you, who would dare to cross us?”

“My brother has always been well-behaved, not a trouble-maker like me.”

Pan Jinlian laughed and said, “I think you’ve got it backwards. As they say, ‘A man without a stiff backbone has no secure home.’ I am decisive by nature. I hate the slow, dawdling types who never give you a straight answer.”

“At least my brother doesn’t get into trouble and make you worry,” Wu Song replied.

As they were chit-chatting, Wu Dalang returned with food and wine. He set them in the kitchen, walked up the stairs, and called, “Wife, come down and get the food ready.”

“Where are your manners?” Pan Jinlian shot back. “Your brother is sitting right here; how can I just ditch him?”

“Sister-in-law, please don’t worry about me,” Wu Song said.

But Pan Jinlian said to her husband, “Why don’t you go get our neighbor Mrs. Wang to help you take care of it? Can’t you manage even a simple thing like that?”

So Wu Dalang went next door and got Mrs. Wang, who came over and helped him prepare the food and bring it upstairs. It’s the typical fare -- fish, meat, fruits, and veggies, along with warmed wine. Wu Dalang asked his wife to sit at the head of the table, and Wu Song to sit across from her, while he himself sat down on the side between them and poured wine.

Raising her cup, Pan Jinlian said to Wu Song, “Brother-in-law, please forgive our simple fare and have a cup of wine.”

“Say no such thing, sister-in-law. Thank you so much!”

As they ate, Wu Dalang just busied himself going up and down the stairs, pouring wine and heating up more wine. Meanwhile, Pan Jinlian had a huge smile on her face and kept putting food in Wu Song’s bowl and imploring him to eat more. Wu Song was a straightforward man and just thought this was his sister-in-law being nice to him. But Pan Jinlian, from her years as a maid, knew all the little ways to please a man, unlike her husband, who knew absolutely nothing about entertaining guests.

After a few cups of wine, Pan Jinlian’s eyes were again squarely fixed on Wu Song, so much so that it was starting to get a little awkward and Wu Song just looked down, avoiding her gaze. After more than 10 cups of wine, Wu Song got up to go.

“Brother, have a few more cups,” Wu Dalang said.

“This is plenty,” Wu Song said. “I’ll come visit you again another day.”

As they went downstairs, Pan Jinlian said, “Brother-in-law, you MUST move here. If you don’t, we would be ridiculed. After all, there’s nothing quite like your own brother. Husband, you should prepare one of the rooms and invite your brother to move in. Or the neighbors would badmouth us.”

“You’re quite right,” Wu Dalang said. “Brother, move here. It’ll make me look good, too.”

“Since you both insist, I’ll bring my stuff over tonight,” Wu Song said.

“Ok, don’t forget,” Pan Jinlian said. “I’ll be waiting.”

Wu Song took his leave and returned to the county offices. The magistrate was holding court, so Wu Song went to him and said, “I have a brother who lives on Purple Stone Lane. I wish to move in with him. I would be here the rest of the time awaiting your orders. But I dare not move without your permission.”

“This is an act of fraternal devotion, so of course I would not stand in your way,” the magistrate said. “Just make sure you are here every morning.”

Wu Song said his thanks and went to pack up his luggage, his new clothing, and the rewards he had received. He told his orderly to carry the load and follow him to his brother’s home. When Pan Jinlian saw him come back with his belongings, her face lit up as if she had stumbled upon a treasure in the dark. Wu Dalang hired a carpenter to partition off a room upstairs. In that room, they set up a bed, a table, two stools, and a charcoal brazier. Wu Song put away his stuff, sent his orderly away, and from that day forth, he became a member of the household.

The next morning, Pan Jinlian got up at the crack of dawn and prepared water for Wu Song to wash up so he could go report for duty at the courthouse. As he was heading out, she told him, “Once you’ve checked in, come home early for lunch. Don’t eat anywhere else.”

“I’ll be back soon,” Wu Song told her.

So he went to the courthouse and reported for duty. After the morning session, he went home and found that Pan Jinlian had washed her hands and done her nails, looking very neat and trim. She served lunch, and the three of them ate. After Wu Song finished his meal, she offered him a cup of tea with both hands.

“Sister-in-law, I’m too much trouble for you,” Wu Song said. “I don’t feel right about it. I’ll get an orderly from the county office to come help.”

But that drew a string of protests from her.

“Brother-in-law! Why do you treat me like an outsider?! We’re family! With a soldier here, the kitchen would never be clean. And I can’t stand having such uncouth men around.”

“Well, in that case, I’ll just have to impose on your kindness,” Wu Song relented.

After he moved in, Wu Song gave his brother money and told him to treat the neighbors to tea and fruits. The neighbors in turn all chipped in to treat Wu Dalang, which then made him feel obligated to return the favor, and so on and so forth.

A few days later, Wu Song gave Pan Jinlian a bolt of colorful silk for making clothes for herself, which brought a huge smile to her face.

“Brother-in-law, you shouldn’t have!” she said. “But since you’ve given it to me, I dare not refuse, so I have to accept it.”

And so Wu Song settled into his new life. Every day, Wu Dalang went to sell steamed buns just like before, while Wu Song went to the courthouse. No matter if he came home early or late, he was always greeted with a ready meal and an elated Pan Jinlian, who took so much delight in serving him that it actually made him feel bad. While she was tending to his every need, though, she would always drop a little hint here and a little tease there. But Wu Song, being, quote, a man of solid virtue, paid it no mind.

The days flew by, and soon, winter was here. It was now the 11th month of the year. The winds blew for days, while the sky became covered with clouds, and soon thick snowflakes were falling. It snowed until about 7 p.m. that evening, turning the town into a realm of silver and jade.

The next morning, Wu Song went to report for duty at the courthouse as usual, and he still hadn’t come back for lunch by midday. Pan Jinlian, meanwhile, had hustled Wu Dalang out the door to sell his steamed buns and then asked her next-door neighbor Mrs. Wang to buy some wine and meat for her.

She then went and lit the brazier in Wu Song's room. As she looked at the fire, she thought to herself, "Let me give him a good tease today. There's no way he can resist me."

She stood alone by the door curtain and watched the snow until she saw Wu Song tramping his way back toward the house. She lifted up the curtain and greeted him with a smile, saying, "You must be cold."

"Thank you for your concern," he said as he entered and removed his hat. She lifted her hands to take the hat from him, but he said, "No need to trouble yourself," as he dusted off the snow and hung up the hat. He then removed his sash from his waist, and took off his parrot-green silk outer tunic and hung it up in his room to dry.

"I've been waiting for you all morning," Pan Jinlian said. "Why didn't you come back for lunch?"

"An acquaintance at the office took me out to lunch, and just now someone else wanted to go drinking with me, but I wasn't in the mood, so I came straight home."

"Oh ok. Well, go warm yourself by the fire."

So Wu Song took off his boots, changed his socks, put on some warm shoes and pulled up a stool by the brazier.

Meanwhile, Pan Jinlian had latched the front door and shut the backdoor. She then prepared some wine, fruits, and veggies and brought them into Wu Song's room, putting them on his table.

"Where is my brother? Why isn't he back yet?" Wu Song asked.

"Your brother is out selling buns, like he does every day," Pan Jinlian answered. "Here, let me drink three cups with you."

"Let's wait for my brother before we eat."

"Wait for him? Who's got that much time?" Pan Jinlian said as she picked up a bottle of warm wine.

"Sister-in-law, don't trouble yourself. I'll get the wine," Wu Song said.



“Ok, help yourself,” Pan Jinlian said as she also pulled up a stool next to the brazier. Near the brazier, a tray with wine cups sat on the table. She now raised a cup, looked at Wu Song, and said, “Brother-in-law, please drink it down.”

Wu Song took the cup and emptied it in one gulp. She then poured him a second cup and said, “It’s so cold, you better make it a pair.”

“Please help yourself,” Wu Song said as he emptied the second cup. He then returned the courtesy by pouring a cup for her as well, which she promptly drank. Then, she refilled it and put it in front of Wu Song.

With her swelling bosom slightly exposed and her hair hanging down in a soft cloud, Pan Jinlian smiled bewitchingly and said to Wu Song, “I heard someone say that you are keeping a singing girl in the east part of town. Is it true?”

“Don’t listen to such nonsense from outsiders. I am not that kind of person.”

“Well, I don’t believe you. I think you might say one thing and do another.”

“If you don’t believe me, then ask my brother.”

“What the hell does he know? If he knew about such things, he won’t be selling steamed buns. Here, have a cup.”

Pan Jinlian poured Wu Song three or four cups in a row, while she herself also drank three cups. Now, she was buzzing and started to talk more freely. Wu Song got most of what she said, but he just kept his head down.

A moment later, Pan Jinlian went out to heat up more wine, while Wu Song stayed in the room, stoking the fire in the brazier. When she returned, she held the wine bottle in one hand and with the other hand, she squeezed Wu Song on the shoulder and said, “Aren’t you cold in so few layers?”

By now, Wu Song was already annoyed, so he made no answer. Getting no response from him, she took the poker from him and said, "You don't know how to stoke the fire. Here, let me. The idea is to get it nice and HOT."

Frantic with embarrassment, Wu Song remained silent. But Pan Jinlian didn't pick up that he was growing annoyed with her, so she poured a cup of wine, took a sip, and left most of it in the cup. She then stared at Wu Song and said, "Finish this, if you have any feelings for me."

That was too much for Wu Song. He snatched the cup from her and flung its content onto the floor.

"Sister-in-law! Have you no shame?!" he snapped as he gave her a shove, nearly knocking her to the floor.

Glaring at her, Wu Song continued, "I am an upstanding man who holds his head high, not some immoral swine or dog. Drop this indecent act. If I hear any whispers about you, watch out! My eyes may recognize that you're my sister-in-law, but my fist won't! Don't pull this crap again!"

Her face flushed with embarrassment, Pan Jin Lian picked up the cups and trays and muttered, "I was just kidding! Why did you take it so seriously?! Have you no respect?!"

She then cleaned up the utensils and went downstairs to the kitchen, leaving Wu Song stewing in his own room.

When Wu Dalang returned home early that afternoon, he was greeted with the sight of his beloved wife crying her eyes out in the kitchen.

"Who have you been fighting with?" he asked her.

"It's all your fault! You have no backbone, so people push me around!"

"Who's pushing you around?"

"Who else?! That brother of yours! He came home in the snow, so I hurriedly prepared wine for him. He saw that no one else was around, so he tried to get fresh with me."

“My brother is not that kind of person. He’s always been honest. Don’t be so loud; the neighbors would laugh at us!”

Wu Dalang now left his wife in the kitchen and went to Wu Song’s room and said, “Brother, you haven’t eaten yet. Here, let’s have something together.”

But Wu Song made no answer. He thought for a few minutes and then he got dressed and headed outside.

“Where are you going?” Wu Dalang asked, but his question went unanswered as Wu Song disappeared out the door.

Wu Dalang now returned to the kitchen and said to his wife, “He didn’t answer me and just headed toward the county office. What’s going on?”

“You idiot!” she scolded him. “Is it so hard to figure out?! That bastard is too ashamed to face you, so he left. My guess is that he’s going to send someone to fetch his stuff; he’s moving out.”

“If he moves out, then we’ll be ridiculed,” Wu Dalang fretted.

“Oh god you muddle-headed idiot!” Pan Jinlian raged. “And I suppose we won’t be ridiculed if he makes passes at me?! If you want to live with him, then you go ahead. I won’t subject myself to that. Just give me a marriage annulment paper, and you can have him all to yourself!”

This barrage of insults shut Wu Dalang up. Just then, Wu Song returned with an orderly and a shoulder pole. They went to his room, cleaned out his stuff, and started heading for the door.

“Brother, why are you moving out?” Wu Dalang asked as he chased after them.

“Brother, don’t ask,” Wu Song answered. “It’d be too embarrassing for you if I talked about it. Just let me go.”

Wu Dalang did not dare to press further, so he just stood and watched as his brother vanished into the snow. Behind him, he could hear his wife cursing from the kitchen.

“Good riddance! Everyone thought how nice it was to have a constable for a brother, how he could take care of his brother and sister-in-law. Little do they know what a backstabber he was! Like they say, ‘The prettiest papayas are the emptiest on the inside.’ He’s leaving? Oh thank heaven and earth! At least now we don’t have an enemy right under our noses!”

After Wu Song moved back to the county offices, Wu Dalang continued to sell steamed buns on the streets every day. But the falling out between his wife and his brother, and the unknown reason for it, kept eating at him. He wanted to go talk to Wu Song, but was dissuaded by the fact that Pan Jinlian was constantly on his back, telling him he better not go talk to that no good brother of his.

In the blink of an eye, a couple weeks had passed, and there was a change in the situation. The county magistrate had been in his post for two-and-a-half years now and had accumulated a large hoard of riches, probably through the usual, perfectly legitimate means, i.e., bribery. He wanted to have someone take that stash to a relative in the capital, so that they could use it to buy him a promotion. But he knew as well as anyone that the road to the capital was full of dangers. I mean, did you hear about that business with the date merchants on Yellow Earth Ridge? So he needed a capable man for the job, which, of course, brings us back to Wu Song.

That day, the magistrate summoned Wu Song and told him, “I have a relative in the capital, and I want to send him a load of presents and a letter. But the journey is dangerous, so I need a hero like you for the job. Make this trip for me, and I will reward you handsomely upon your return.”

“Your excellency has raised me up, so how would I dare refuse?” Wu Song said. “Since you have this job for me, I will of course go. I’ve never been to the capital, so I can take in the sights on this trip. I will set off tomorrow once you have everything ready.”

The magistrate was delighted and rewarded Wu Song with three cups of wine, and then went to make preparations. And no, he's not doing the "Hey let's disguise ourselves as merchants" thing, since that, as we saw, fooled absolutely no one.

Meanwhile, after receiving his orders, Wu Song went back to his quarters, got some money, summoned an orderly, and went out. He bought a bottle of wine, plus some fish, meat, fruits, and such, and then he headed to his brother's home on Purple Stone Lane. Shortly thereafter, Wu Dalang returned from selling buns. He saw Wu Song sitting outside his home, while an orderly busied himself in the kitchen.

Meanwhile, Pan Jinlian had still not quite given up her hopes, and when she saw Wu Song come back with wine and food, she thought to herself, "That knave must miss me and came back! He can't resist me. Let me tease the story out of him slowly."

She now went upstairs and dolled herself up, putting on fresh makeup, fixing her hair, and changing into more, umm, alluring clothes. She then came out and greeted Wu Song with a bow, saying, "Brother-in-law, I don't know what we did to offend you. You haven't visited for days. I don't understand it. I told your brother every day to go find you at the county offices and apologize, but he always came back and said he couldn't find you. I'm so happy you came today. But you shouldn't have spent all that money."

To this, Wu Song replied, "I came to say something to you and my brother."

To see what Wu Song had to say, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, when the cat's away, the mice will play. See what kind of rat sneaks into the house while Wu Song is away on business. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!