

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 37.

Last time, local rich man and playboy Ximen Qing, with the help of neighborhood meddler Mrs. Wang, seduced Pan Jinlian, and the two began carrying on a torrid affair that soon became common knowledge to everyone except Pan Jinlian's husband, Wu Song's brother Wu Dalang. But that was about to change soon, as a local teenager, Yunge (4,1), was on his way to tell Wu Dalang. Now, Yunge wasn't doing this out of the goodness of his heart, mind you. Instead, he was after revenge. He had gone to Mrs. Wang's teahouse, hoping to track down Ximen Qing there to sell some fruit, but Mrs. Wang refused to let Yunge into the teahouse and instead beat him up, so Yunge was gonna get even.

A couple streets away, Wu Dalang was walking with his load of steamed buns on his shoulders when suddenly, he saw Yunge calling out to him from the side of the road.

"I haven't seen you in a few days," the boy said. "What have you been eating that's made you so fat?"

"This is just how I've always looked," Wu Dalang said as he put down his load. "What do you mean fat?"

"I tried to buy some wheat husk the other day, but I couldn't find it anywhere," Yunge continued. "Everyone said you had some in your house."

"I'm not raising ducks or geese, so why would I have wheat husk?"

"Well then how is it that you're stuffed so fat that you don't even steam when you're trussed by the heels and cooked in the pot?" the boy asked.

So, if you're scratching your head at what the hell is going on here, just know all these things that the boy was saying were basically slang references to being a cuckold. Wu Dalang finally got the message, but he said, "You little monkey! Why are you mocking me? My wife hasn't been sleeping with other men, so why are you calling me a cuckold?"

“Oh sure, your wife isn’t sleeping with other men. She’s just sleeping with ANOTHER man.”

“Who is he?” Wu Dalang asked as he grabbed hold of the kid.

The boy laughed and said, “All you can do is grab me. Do you dare to bite off his pecker?”

“Good brother, tell me who it is, and I’ll give you 10 steamed buns.”

“I don’t want buns. Treat me to three cups of wine, and I’ll tell you.”

“Wait, you drink?” Wu Dalang asked with surprise. “Alright, come with me then.”

So the two of them went to a small tavern. Wu Dalang treated Yunge to a few of his buns, some meat, and a bottle of wine.

“I’m good on wine, but get me some more meat,” the boy said after he ate.

“Good brother, tell me who it is first,” Wu Dalang pressed.

“Don’t you panic. Wait until I finish eating, and then I’ll tell you. And no need to get worked up; I’ll help you catch them.”

So Wu Dalang sat and watched the boy eat and drink, and when he was finally done, Wu Dalang asked again, “Now can you tell me?”

“If you want to know, then feel my head first.”

“Why do you have two lumps?” Wu Dalang asked he touched the boy’s head.

“It’s like this. I got a basket of pears today and I wanted to sell them to Mr. Ximen, but I couldn’t find him. Then someone on the street said, ‘He’s hooking up with Wu Dalang’s wife at Mrs. Wang’s teahouse. He’s there every day.’ So I went there hoping to make some money. But that old dog Mrs. Wang refused to let me look for him in her room, and she beat me up. So I came looking for you. But if I hadn’t provoked you with my words earlier, you would’ve never asked.”

“Are you for real?” Wu Dalang asked, still in disbelief.

“Look at you! What kind of man are you?” Yunge scoffed. “As soon as you leave home, those two are making merry in Mrs. Wang’s house. And you’re here asking, ‘Are you for real?’ ”

Wu Dalang now said, "To tell you the truth, my wife has been going over to Mrs. Wang's home to make clothes for her every day, and every day she comes home looking flushed. I was already a little suspicious. So that's what it is! I'm going to stow my stuff here and go catch them in the act. What do you think?"

"How can you be so old and yet so dumb?" Yunge said. "That Mrs. Wang is a tough old dog. How can you get the better of her? The three of them must have some kind of signal. So by the time you get inside, your wife would already be hidden away, and Ximen Qing would beat you up. Not only would you not catch them in the act, you're going to get roughed up. And he's rich and well-connected, so he could even sue you and no one would get your back. And that'll be the end of you."

"Everything you said is right, but how can I get back at them?" Wu Dalang asked.

"Look, that old dog beat me up, so I'm pissed too," Yunge said. "Listen to me. Tonight when you get home, don't say or do anything different. Just act normal. Tomorrow, make fewer buns. When you come out to sell buns, I'll be waiting for you at the end of the street. If I see Ximen Qing going into Mrs. Wang's teahouse, I'll come get you, and you can stick close to me. I'll go harass that old dog first, and she'll try to hit me again. When you see my throw my basket out onto the street, that's your cue to storm in. I'll pin down that hag, and you crash into the room and start yelling that you've been wronged. How's that?"

"Ok then, but it's going to be rough on you," Wu Dalang said. "I have a few strings of money. Take it and buy some rice for yourself. Tomorrow morning, come wait for me at the entrance to Purple Stone Lane."

So Yunge took the money and a few steamed buns and went on his way. Wu Dalang paid the bill and then resumed doing business on the streets, trying to act normal.

Now, whereas Pan Jinlian used to take out all her frustrations on her husband, lately she's actually been a little nicer to him on account of her guilt about the whole cheating-on-him thing. That night, when he got home, he just pretended like everything was fine.

"Have you been drinking?" she asked him.

"Oh I just had a few bowls with another peddler."

She then prepared dinner for him, and the rest of the night passed without incident.

The next morning, after breakfast, Wu Dalang just made a couple trays of buns. Now you might think Pan Jinlian would get suspicious, but her mind was on steamy hot treats of a different sort, so she didn't even notice. She was just waiting for her husband to leave so she could go see her lover. And sure enough, as soon as Wu Dalang headed out, she slipped out the backdoor and headed over to Mrs. Wang's home.

When Wu Dalang got to the entrance to his street, he saw Yunge standing there with basket in hand, looking around.

"Well?" Wu Dalang asked.

"It's still too early. Go sell some buns first. I'm guessing he's already here, so just stay close."

Wu Dalang rushed off and did a quick round of business and then rushed back. Yunge now told him, "Alright, watch for my basket. When it's thrown out onto the street, you storm in."

Inside the teahouse, Mrs. Wang was doing her usual lookout thing when she suddenly saw Yunge marching in and cursing, "You old dog! Why did you hit me yesterday?!"

Mrs. Wang was like, "Oh back for more, eh?" She jumped up and cursed back, "You little monkey! I have no business with you! What the hell are you doing back here cursing me?!"

"I'm calling you a whore-monger, you old dog! What are you gonna do about it?!"

Mrs. Wang got pissed again, and she grabbed the boy and started pummeling him again. Yunge now shouted, "Hey, you're hitting me!" and tossed his basket onto the street. As he did so, he lowered his head and rammed into her stomach so hard that he almost knocked her over. As Mrs. Wang stumbled backward, Yunge pinned her against the wall. In that moment, she saw Wu Dalang stomping into the teahouse. She tried to block his way, but she was still pinned down by the kid, so all she could do was scream, "Wu Dalang is here! Wu Dalang is here!"

Inside her backroom, Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing were mid-coitus when they heard Mrs. Wang screaming. They both fell into a panic. Pan Jinlian ran over to the door to block it. Meanwhile, Ximen Qing hid under the bed.

When Wu Dalang got to the door, he tried to push them open, but found it blocked. As he pounded on the door, he kept shouting, "So this is what you've been up to!"

As she blocked the door from the other side, a frantic Pan Jinlian saw where her lover was hiding, and she scolded him. "You're always bragging about how good a fighter you are. And now, when I need you, you're useless. He's a paper tiger. How can you be afraid of HIM?!"

Those words, of course, were telling Ximen Qing to go beat up Wu Dalang and fight his way out. When he heard this, Ximen Qing crawled out from under the bed and said, "It's not that I don't have any skills. I just lost my head for a second."

On the other side of the wall, Wu Dalang was still pounding on the door when suddenly it flew open in his face and out stomped Ximen Qing.

"Stop pounding!" Ximen Qing barked.

Wu Dalang was just about to grab him, but Ximen Qing's right foot was already flying through the air. Wu Dalang was short in stature, so the kick caught him right in the chest and sent him flying backward. As Wu Dalang lay crumpled on the ground, Ximen Qing stomped out. Meanwhile, the boy

Yunge saw the plan go south, so he quickly let go of Mrs. Wang and scampered off. As for all the neighbors, they all knew that Ximen Qing was not someone they wanted as an enemy, so nobody dared to come over.

Mrs. Wang, of all people, now helped Wu Dalang up. He was coughing up blood, and his face was turning yellow. Mrs. Wang told Pan Jinlian to get some water, and they brought Wu Dalang around and they helped him back to his home, carried him upstairs, and put him down on his bed.

That night passed without further ruckus. But guess what happened the next morning. Once Ximen Qing got word that all was “fine,” he came back again and just like before, he and Pan Jinlian got back down to business in Mrs. Wang’s home, and they were just pining for Wu Dalang to hurry up and die already.

Now, so far, the novel has no doubt painted Pan Jinlian in a very uncharitable light. But from this point forward, it REALLY casts her as a villainess beyond redemption. For the next five days, Wu Dalang was laid up in bed, unable to move, with no one to tend to his needs. When he called out for help, his wife did not answer, because she was, well, occupied. Each day he saw her going out all dressed up and coming back all flushed. It made him so angry that he became lightheaded, and still no one tended to him.

Finally, Wu Dalang summoned Pan Jinlian to his bedside and told her, “I caught you in the act, and that philanderer kicked me in the chest at your instigation. And now, I’m half dead, while you two are having a good time! Fine, I can’t fight the two of you, so I might as well die! But my brother Wu Song, you know his temper. When he comes back, what do you think he’ll do? If you take pity on me and take good care of me, then I won’t mention any of this when he comes home. But if you don’t look after me, he’ll come settle the score with you when he gets back.”

When she heard this, Pan Jinlian gave no reply. Instead, she went next door and told Mrs. Wang and Ximen Qing what Wu Dalang had said. When Ximen Qing heard this, his blood ran cold and he groaned.

“Ah crap! I’ve heard about Constable Wu, the guy who killed the tiger on Jingyang (3,2) Ridge. He’s the No. 1 hero in this county. My body and mind have been so occupied with you lately that I forgot all about that. But now what do we do? Ah crap!”

Oh right. How the hell do you draw up a 10-step plan to seduce a woman but just FORGET that you’re making a cuckold of the brother of the guy who killed a tiger with his bare fist?!

Mrs. Wang, however, just chuckled and scoffed. “I’ve never seen anything like this,” she said to Ximen Qing. “You’re the helmsman, while I’m just a passenger. And yet, you’re panicking before I am.”

“I’m ashamed to admit it,” Ximen Qing said. “I may be a man, but I have no idea how to get out of this situation. Do you have any ideas on how to cover for us?”

“That depends,” Mrs. Wang said. “Do you guys want to be long-term lovers or short-term lovers?”

“What do you mean?”

“If you want to be short-term lovers, then you guys split up right now. When Wu Dalang has recovered, apologize to him, so that he won’t tell his brother. Then, whenever Wu Song gets sent away on business again, you two can pick it back up. Now, if you want to be long-term lovers and be together all the time and not have to live in fear, then I do have an ingenious idea, but you might not be able to bring yourself to do it.”

“We want to be long-term lovers,” Ximen Qing said. “Please help us.”

“This plan requires a certain special something,” Mrs. Wang said to him. “Most people don’t have it, but as fate would have it, you do.”

“Even if it’s my eyes, I’ll cut them out for you. What is it?” Ximen Qing asked.

“Right now that wretch is in bad shape, so take advantage of his misery and do him in,” Mrs. Wang explained. “Mr. Ximen, you go get some arsenic from your medicine shop, and have her go fill a prescription for chest pain. Mix the arsenic into the medicine, and finish off that dwarf. Then, burn away all the evidence with a cremation. Even when Wu Song gets back, what can he do at that point? You

know the old sayings: 'Your sister-in-law's affairs are none of your business.' And 'Parents pick the first husband, but widows choose the second.' Brothers-in-law have no say. So you two can keep going in secret for another half year. Once her requisite mourning period is over, you can formally take her as your wife and you two will live happily ever after. What do you think?"

"That's a brilliant plan!" Ximen Qing said. "As the old saying goes, 'If you want to live happily, you've got to go all the way.' Fine. Let's go all the way!"

"Now THAT'S what I'm talking about," Mrs. Wang spurred him on. "Pull the grass out by the root, and it will never sprout again. Leave the root, and it will spring back up. You go get the arsenic, and I'll tell her how to carry it out. When it's done, make sure to thank me."

"Of course, of course. That goes without saying."

So yeah, things are quickly escalating now. Ximen Qing left and returned shortly with a packet of arsenic. Mrs. Wang took it and said to Pan Jinlian, "I'm going to tell you how to administer this. Didn't Wu Dalang tell you to take good care of him? So do some nice little things for him to lull him into complacency. When he asks you to make his medicine, mix this arsenic into it. When he wakes up in the middle of the night, pour the mixture down his throat, and then get out of the way. Once it starts working, it's going to chew up his guts and make him scream. Just muffle his cries with the covers so no one can hear him. Also, prepare a pot of hot water and a washcloth. Once the poison starts working, he's going to be bleeding from every orifice, and he will bite down so hard that there will be bite marks on his lips. Once he's dead, pull off the covers and wipe off the blood with the hot washcloth. Then we put him in a coffin and take him off to get cremated, and that'll be the end of that."

"It sounds good, but what if I get too scared to clean up his body?" Pan Jinlian asked.

"That's easy enough," Mrs. Wang said. "Just knock on the wall, and I'll come help you."

Ximen Qing now told them, "Do it carefully, and I'll come for an update around 5 a.m. tomorrow morning." He then took off, while Mrs. Wang crushed the arsenic granules into powder with her fingers and gave it to Pan Jinlian.

Heading back to her house, Pan Jinlian went upstairs and checked on her husband. He was lying in bed, seemingly just clinging on to life. She sat down by the bed and pretended to weep.

"What are you crying about?" Wu Dalang asked.

Wiping away her nonexistent tears, Pan Jinlian said, "It was my fault. I was momentarily deceived by that rogue. Who knew he would kick you? I asked around and someone recommended a good prescription for your condition. I want to go buy it and prepare it for you, but I was afraid you would not trust me."

"If you can save my life, then everything is forgiven. I won't mention it when my brother gets home. Quick, go get that medicine for me."

So Pan Jinlian got some coins and went over to Mrs. Wang's home. She stayed there and asked Mrs. Wang to go out and get the medicine for her. Then, Pan Jinlian went and showed the medicine to Wu Dalang, telling him, "This is the prescription. The doctor said to drink it in the middle of the night. Once you take it, you'll break a few good sweats, and you'll be able to get up tomorrow."

"That's good," Wu Dalang said. "Please, I have to trouble you to stay up tonight so you can prepare it for me."

"Ok, you just sleep, and I'll take care of you."

When darkness descended that night, Pan Jinlian lit a lamp in the bedroom, then went downstairs and heated up a big pot of water and tossed a washcloth into the pot. When the town's watch drums

sounded to indicate that it was now 11 p.m., she poured the arsenic powder into a cup, then filled a bowl with hot water and brought it upstairs.

“Where’s the medicine?” she asked Wu Dalang.

“It’s under the sleeping mat beside my pillow,” he told her. “You can prepare it.”

Pan Jinlian retrieved the medicine and poured it into the cup that, unbeknownst to Wu Dalang, held the arsenic. She then poured the hot water into the cup and stirred it with a silver hairpin. She helped Wu Dalang sit up with her left arm, and with her right hand, started to tilt the cup into his mouth.

After one sip, Wu Dalang grimaced and said, “This medicine is really bitter!”

“As long as it works, what does it matter how it tastes?” Pan Jinlian said.

As Wu Dalang opened his mouth for a second sip, Pan Jinlian suddenly tilted the cup and emptied its contents into his throat. She then let go of her husband and jumped off the bed.

Wu Dalang let out a groan, “My stomach is hurting! I can’t take it!”

But Pan Jinlian gave no answer. Instead, she was busy pulling two bedsheets from the foot of the bed and throwing them over Wu Dalang’s head.

“I can’t breathe!” he screamed.

“The doctor told me to help you break a sweat so you can recover faster!” she said.

As Wu Dalang screamed again, Pan Jinlian jumped back on to the bed and sat down on top of him, holding down the corners of the bedsheets to make sure they stayed over his head nice and tight. Wu Dalang’s insides were now on fire. He gasped and panted until his intestines split asunder. And then, he stopped moving altogether.

When Pan Jinlian finally pulled the bedsheets off her husband, she recoiled in shock. His teeth had lacerated his lips, and blood dripped from every orifice. Pan Jinlian was so scared that she hopped off

the bed and knocked on the wall between her house and Mrs. Wang's. A moment later, she heard Mrs. Wang cough at the back door, and Pan Jinlian went to let her in.

"Is it done?" Mrs. Wang asked.

"It's done, but my arms and legs have all gone limp. I can't clean up the body."

"That's no problem; I'll help you."

So Mrs. Wang rolled up her sleeves and tucked in her shirt. She filled a bucket with hot water, along with the washcloth, and brought them upstairs. She rolled up the covers and began wiping down Wu Dalang's corpse, starting with his lips. Soon, all the blood had been wiped away, and they covered him with his clothes. They then carried his body downstairs and found an old door on which to put him. I guess it's just a common thing to have old doors lying around the house. They then combed his hair and put a headscarf on him, and put his clothes, socks and shoes back on. Finally, they covered his face with a piece of white silk and covered up his body with a clean quilt. They then cleaned up the mess upstairs, and Mrs. Wang slipped back over to her house.

Now, Pan Jinlian started wailing, bemoaning the passing of her husband. Gotta sell it, you know. The book here offers up another oh-so-insightful piece of commentary on women, telling us that women have three types of crying: the first is with tears and sound, the second is with tears but no sound, and the third is with no tears but plenty of sound. And the book said that Pan Jinlian wept without tears for half the night.

Around 5 a.m., Ximen Qing came by for an update, and Mrs. Wang told him everything. He gave her some silver for the coffin, and then they got together with Pan Jinlian to discuss next steps.

"My husband is dead," Pan Jinlian told Ximen Qing. "I have to rely on you now."

"That goes without saying," Ximen Qing said.

Mrs. Wang interrupted. "There's still one important matter to tend to. The local coroner, He the Ninth, is a clever man. I worry he might notice something is wrong and would refuse to sign off."

“That’s not a problem,” Ximen Qing said. “I’ll take care of him. He won’t dare to disobey me.”

“Then you better go take care of him right now; don’t delay,” Mrs. Wang said.

So Ximen Qing went off on his errand. When it became light out, Mrs. Wang went and purchased a coffin, along with candles, incense, and the like, and came back to cook some soup and rice for Pan Jinlian. They lit a mourning lantern and placed it by the body.

All the neighbors now came over to see what’s wrong, and they were greeted with the sight of Pan Jinlian weeping, with her powdered face in her hands. They asked what Wu Dalang died of, and she told them, “His chest pains got worse and worse each day and it wasn’t looking good. And he died around midnight last night.” And then, she went back to weeping and sobbing.

Now, all the neighbors were well aware of her trist with Ximen Qing, so they all had their suspicions, but none of them dared to press her further, so they just consoled her, saying, “The dead is dead, but the living must go on. Please take care of yourself.” She thanked them, and everyone dispersed.

When the coffin was delivered, Mrs. Wang went to fetch Mr. He, the coroner. She also bought all the funeral and mourning supplies. She even hired two monks to keep vigil later.

Mr. He sent a few of his men on ahead to go get everything ready. Around mid-morning, he himself set out. As he approached the entrance to Purple Stone Street, he heard someone calling out to him, “Mr. He, where are you headed?”

He turned and saw Ximen Qing coming up to him.

“I’m going to examine the body of Wu Dalang the steamed bun peddler,” he told Ximen Qing.

“Please, let’s step aside for a quick word,” Ximen Qing said.

So Mr. He followed Ximen Qing to a small tavern around the corner. They sat down in a private room, and Ximen Qing asked Mr. He to take the seat of honor.

“Who am I to share a table with you?” Mr. He said, trying to beg off.

“No need to stand on ceremonies, please sit,” Ximen Qing insisted.

Once they sat down, Ximen Qing ordered a bottle of fine wine and some food. As he sat there, Mr. He thought to himself, "This guy has never shared wine with me. There must be something strange going on."

After eating and drinking for an hour, Ximen Qing reached into his sleeve and pulled out a 10-tael piece of silver. He put it on the table with a thud and said, "Mr. He, please accept this meager gift. I will thank you properly another time."

Mr. He clasped his hands in a gesture of courtesy and said, "Sir, I have not done anything for you. How would I dare to accept your silver? Even if you have a task for me, I would not dare to accept this."

"Please don't stand on ceremonies. Just accept it first," Ximen Qing insisted.

"Sir, you can tell me what's on your mind, and I'll do as you say."

"It's no big deal," Ximen Qing said. "In a little while the family of the deceased will have some money for your labor as well. When you're examining Wu Dalang's body, I would like for you to do everything just right. Let an embroidered quilt cover all. That's all I have to say."

Oh, is that all? Well why didn't you just say so? Nothing suspicious about that request. And oh by the way, I just want to point out that what wicked villain Ximen Qing just did was exactly what our hero Song Jiang offered to do after he committed murder a few episodes back.

To see if Mr. He will keep Ximen Qing's secret, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, hey, when is Wu Song coming home? You think he'll have a thing or two to say about this? Yeeeah, so join us next time. Thanks for listening!