

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 39.

Last time, Wu Song came home from his business trip to find that his brother Wu Dalang had died under suspicious circumstances, so he started digging. First, the coroner who examined Wu Dalang's body showed Wu Song two pieces of blackened bones retrieved from his brother's cremation and told him how Ximen Qing had tried to bribe the coroner. Then, they tracked down Yunge (4,1), the teenager who had helped Wu Dalang catch his unfaithful wife and Ximen Qing in the act.

Wu Song gave Yunge a few taels of silver for his father, and then took him and the coroner, Mr. He, to a restaurant. Wu Song ordered some food and told Yunge, "You may be young, but you show a filial heart in taking care of your father. Keep the money I just gave you for living expenses. I require your services. When we're done, I'll give you another 15 taels of silver. Now, tell me everything. How did you help my brother catch the adulterers?"

"Ok, I'll tell you, but don't get too angry," Yunge said. He then proceeded to recount the entire story of how he told Wu Dalang about his cheating wife and how they concocted a plan to catch her in the act, all the way up to the point where Ximen Qing kicked Wu Dalang in the chest.

"I saw his wife trying to help him up but couldn't, so I ran off in a panic," Yunge said. "And then five or six days later, I heard that he was dead. But I don't know how he died."

"Are you telling the truth? Don't lie to me," Wu Song pressed him.

"Even if we're in court, that would be my story."

"That's what I want to hear," Wu Song said.

They then ate the food and Wu Song paid the bill. When the three of them left the restaurant, Mr. He said, "I will take my leave of you now."

Oh no you don't. Wu Song was like, I'm not done with you yet, and he brought the two of them to the county courthouse. The magistrate was holding court and asked Wu Song what he was up to.

“Your honor,” Wu Song said, “My brother Wu Dalang was poisoned by his wife, who was having an affair with Ximen Qing. These two are witnesses. Your honor, please give me justice!”

So the magistrate took testimonies from Mr. He and Yunge and then went to discuss the matter with his clerk. Now, remember how we said a couple episodes back that Ximen Qing was wealthy and well-connected? Well, guess who were among his connections. That’s right, the magistrate and the clerk. So that was a real short discussion.

The magistrate told Wu Song, “You are a constable here, so you must understand the law. As the old saying goes, ‘For adultery catch the pair, for robbery find the loot, for murder produce the body.’ Your brother’s body is no more, and you didn’t catch his wife and Ximen Qing in the act. How can you accuse them of murder just based on the words of these two people? You don’t have a case. Think about it carefully. Don’t act rashly.”

Wu Song pulled out the two pieces of blackened bones, the 10 taels of silver that Ximen Qing gave to the coroner, and the piece of paper that had the names of all the funeral attendees. “Your honor, surely I didn’t make these up.”

Seeing this new evidence, the magistrate said, “Alright, get up. Let me think it through. If it’s doable, then I’ll bring them in for questioning.”

After court adjourned, Wu Song kept his two witnesses in his quarters to make sure they didn’t try to slip away. Meanwhile, word of this had already reached Ximen Qing, and he sent a confidant to the courthouse to deliver to the magistrate and the clerk the silver needed to make this case go away.

The next morning, Wu Song once again came into court to ask the magistrate to arrest the murderers. But the magistrate just gave him back the bones and silver and told him, “People are just trying to make you and Ximen Qing go at each other. Don’t listen to them. This case is not clear at all, very hard to investigate. As the sages said, ‘Even what you see with your own eyes may not be the truth, so how can you believe what is said behind people’s backs?’ Don’t be so rash.”

The clerk chimed in and said, "Constable, in murder cases, you must have the body, the wound, the ailment, the instrument, and evidence that the accused was present before you can investigate."

Hearing this, Wu Song said, "Since your honor would not receive my complaint, I'll just have to deal with it."

Now, maybe the magistrate thought Wu Song meant ok, I guess I'll have to deal. But no, Wu Song meant, I'm going to deal WITH IT.

Wu Song took the bones and silver and gave them back to Mr. He the coroner for safekeeping. He went back to his quarters and told an orderly to prepare food for the two witnesses. He then told them, "Stay here. I'll be back in a bit."

Summoning a few soldiers, Wu Song left the county offices. They fetched ink, brush, and inkstone, and he also bought a few sheets of paper. He told two of the soldiers to go buy a pig's head, a goose, a chicken, two casks of wine, and some fruit, and bring them to his brother's home.

Around mid-morning, Wu Song and his men showed up at Pan Jinlian's house, and he called out, "Sister-in-law, please come down. I have something to say."

Now Pan Jinlian had already heard that the magistrate had refused to pursue Wu Song's case, so she was feeling pretty confident and figured, yeah, let's see what you're gonna do now. So she slowly descended the stairs and asked, "What do you want to say?"

"Tomorrow will be the 49th day since my brother's passing, the last day of the mourning period. The neighbors have gone to a lot of trouble for you, so I want to treat them to wine and thank them on your behalf."

"Why the hell would you want to thank them?" Pan Jinlian scoffed.

"We must observe proper courtesy," Wu Song said. He then told his soldiers to light two candles and a pot of incense on the altar, hang up fake paper money, and set up all the sacrificial dishes they had

purchased. Next, he sent one soldier to the back to warm up the wine, two soldiers to set up tables and benches in the outer room, and two other soldiers to watch the front and back doors.

All this done, Wu Song told Pan Jinlian, "Sister-in-law, I'll go invite our guests. You stay here and entertain them."

First up on the list was Mrs. Wang. When Wu Song went to invite her, she was all smiles and said, "Oh you shouldn't have. There's nothing to thank me for."

"We have imposed on you greatly, so it's only fitting," Wu Song said. "I have prepared just a little bit of wine and food. Please don't refuse."

So Mrs. Wang closed up her teahouse and came over. Wu Song asked Pan Jinlian to sit at the head of the table and Mrs. Wang to sit across from her. Now Mrs. Wang also was already aware of what transpired at the courthouse, so she wasn't afraid of Wu Song either. Both she and Pan Jinlian were just thinking, "Yeah, I'd like to see what he can do now."

Next, Wu Song went to the neighbor on the other side of the house, the silversmith, Yao (2) the Second.

"Oh I'm too busy, and I don't want to trouble you," Mr. Yao said.

"It's just a cup of wine. It won't take long. Please come over," Wu Song insisted.

When the guy who beat a tiger to death with his fist insists, you really don't want to say no, so Mr. Yao relented and came over. Once he sat down next to Mrs. Wang, Wu Song went across the street and invited two more people. One was Zhao (4) the Fourth, who sold paper horses, which were a sacrificial item you burned at funerals. The other was a Mr. Hu (2), who sold chilled wine. Both tried to beg off, but Wu Song would not take no for an answer, so both soon found themselves seated at the table next to Pan Jinlian.

Wu Song then asked Mrs. Wang, "Who's your next-door neighbor?"

“Grandpa Zhang (1). He sells noodles.”

A minute later, Grandpa Zhang was alarmed to see Wu Song stomp into his house.

“Constable, what’s on your mind?” he asked.

“My family has caused much inconvenience for our neighbors, so I am inviting you all over for wine.”

“Oh I’ve never done anything for your family. Why would you invite me?”

“It’s a trifle of a thing. Please come over.”

So now, Wu Song had six people with him around the table: Pan Jinlian, Mrs. Wang, and four other neighbors, all of whom wanted to slip out while he was off inviting the others, but none could, thanks to the soldiers watching the doors. Wu Song now sat down at the end of the table and told his soldiers to shut the doors.

One of the soldiers then served everyone wine, and Wu Song made a deep bow and said, “Honored neighbors, please pardon my crude manners and drink a few cups with me.”

Everyone said, “We never gave you a feast to welcome you home, and yet you have gone to so much trouble for us.”

“It’s nothing,” Wu Song said with a smile. “Please don’t laugh at this humble offering.”

While the soldiers continued to pour wine, all the neighbors were on pins and needles. They all had a sense that something wasn’t quite right here. After three rounds of wine, Mr. Hu (2) tried to get up and leave on account of ... umm ... being busy.

“You cannot leave,” Wu Song said. “Since you have come, you must stay awhile, even if you ARE busy.”

Uhh, what kind of a feast is this that you won’t let your guests leave? Mr. Hu’s heart was pounding, but he had no choice but to sit back down.

"Bring more wine," Wu Song said, and the soldiers resumed pouring. By the time they had downed seven cups, all the neighbors were on edge.

Now, Wu Song told his soldiers to take away the plates and cups, and he started wiping off the table. Oh good, the party is over. Thank god. All the neighbors let out a sigh of relief and got up to go ... but ... not so fast.

"Stop! I have something to say," Wu Song ordered.

All the neighbors froze in their tracks and listened.

"Honorable neighbors, which one among you know how to write?" Wu Song asked.

Mr. Yao quickly said, "Oh Mr. Hu has the best handwriting." And I can only imagine the dirty look Mr. Hu flashed Mr. Yao at that moment.

"I must trouble you then," Wu Song said to Mr. Hu.

Then, in the blink of an eye, he rolled up his sleeves and pulled out from under his shirt a razor-sharp knife. Clutching the knife with four fingers and pointing at his own chest with his thumb, Wu Song glared with round and fierce eyes.

"Honorable neighbors," he said, "I understand that every grievance should be taken up with the culprit, and every debt with the debtor. I only ask that you be witnesses!"

Then, as the neighbors watched on with mouth agape, Wu Song seized Pan Jinlian with his left hand and pointed at Mrs. Wang with his right.

"Neighbors, don't be alarmed," he said to the onlookers. "I may be a crude man who does not fear death, but my motto is 'An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth!' No harm will come to you! I only ask that you serve as witnesses. But if any of you try to leave, then don't blame me if I put a few holes in you. If I kill you, then so be it; I'll pay for it with my own life."

Ok then. I guess we're all staying and doing the witness-me thing. With all the neighbors now glued to the spot where they were standing, Wu Song turned to Mrs. Wang and roared, "Listen up, you old dog! You were responsible for my brother's death! Answer my questions!"

He then turned and glowered at Pan Jinlian. "You whore! You killed my brother! How did you do it? Confess, and I'll spare your life!"

"Brother-in-law, you're being ridiculous!" Pan Jinlian protested. "Your brother died of chest pains. What did it have to do with me?!"

But before she could finish, Wu Song stuck his knife on the table, grabbed her hair with his left hand and her chest with his right, kicked over the table, and lifted her up across it and put her on her back in front of the altar. He then put a foot on her to keep her down, yanked the knife from the table, and pointed back at Mrs. Wang.

"You old dog! Tell me the truth!"

Cornered, Mrs. Wang pleaded, "Constable, no need for you to get mad. I'll tell you. I'll tell you."

Wu Song then ordered his soldiers to bring over paper, brush, and ink, and he told Mr. Hu, he who was cursed with having the best handwriting, "May I trouble you to write down every word she says?"

"Yes, yes. I'll write it all down," Mr. Hu said, trembling as he mixed the ink and picked up the brush. He unrolled a sheet of paper and said to Mrs. Wang, "Tell the truth."

"It has nothing to do with me. What do you want me to say?" Mrs. Wang protested, apparently having a sudden change of heart.

"You old dog! I already know everything! How are you going to deny it?!" Wu Song roared. "Fine, you won't talk?! Then let me cut open this whore first, and then I'll kill you!"

He picked up his knife and flashed it in Pan Jinlian's face. That was enough to make her start begging, "Brother-in-law, please spare me! Let me up and I'll tell you."

With one hand, Wu Song lifted her up off the floor and forced her to kneel in front of the altar.

“Talk! You whore!”

Scared out of her senses, Pan Jinlian fessed up and told them everything, from how she accidentally hit Ximen Qing with her curtain pole to how she poisoned her husband, on Mrs. Wang’s instructions. Wu Song told Mr. Hu to write down every sentence.

Seeing the truth coming out, Mrs. Wang lamented to Pan Jinlian, “You snake! You’ve already confessed, so how can I deny anything? Oh you’ve ruined me!”

So Mrs. Wang had no choice but to confess too, and Mr. Hu wrote it all down as well. Wu Song then made the two women put their thumbprints on the confessions as a signature, and also had the neighbors sign their names as witnesses. Next, Wu Song told his soldiers to tie up Mrs. Wang with a sash, while he rolled up the confessions and stuffed them in his shirt pocket.

Next, he ordered one of his men to bring a bowl of wine and put it on the altar. He then dragged Pan Jinlian over and forced her to kneel in front of the altar, and made Mrs. Wang do the same.

“Brother,” Wu Song declared as he faced the altar. “Your spirit still lingers. Watch me avenge you!”

He then told the soldiers to burn the fake paper money. Pan Jinlian could see where this was headed and she was just about to scream, but Wu Song grabbed her by the head and pulled her backward, planted a foot on each of her arms, and tore open her bodice. Before you could blink, he had plunged his knife into her chest. Then, clenching the blade between his teeth, he ripped out her heart, lungs, and other organs with his bare hands and placed them on the altar. That was followed by a quick swing of the blade that cut off Pan Jinlian’s head, spilling blood all over the floor. The neighbors were stunned and appalled as they covered their faces, while their fear kept them glued to the spot they were standing on.

Wu Song now told a soldier to go upstairs and fetch a blanket, and he used it to wrap up Pan Jinlian’s head. He wiped off the knife and stashed it in his boot. He then washed his hands and said to the onlookers, “Honorable neighbors, please pardon me and have a seat upstairs. I’ll be back soon.”



The neighbors looked at each other like, I'm not going to say no to the raging maniac who just ripped out someone's heart. Are you going to say no? Yeah didn't think so. So they all went upstairs. Wu Song told his men to take Mrs. Wang upstairs as well and shut the door at the top of the staircase. He then left two soldiers to stand guard downstairs.

Now, Wu Song took the bundle with the freshly severed head and headed alone to Ximen Qing's medicine shop. He greeted the manager and asked, "Is Mr. Ximen here?"

"Oh he just went out," the manager said.

"Please, let's step aside for a quick word."

Now, this manager knew who Wu Song was, so he did not dare to say no, and he followed Wu Song outside to a quiet back alley. As soon as they entered the alley, Wu Song's face turned dark and he asked the manager, "Do you want to die, or live?"

"Constable, I've never done anything to you."

"If you want to die, then don't tell me where Ximen Qing went. If you want to live, then tell me where he is!"

"He ... he ... he just went out with a friend ... to the tavern by Lion Bridge."

Wu Song turned and stomped off, leaving the manager dazed and frozen in place.

Upstairs at the Lion Bridge tavern, Ximen Qing was having a grand ol' time with one of his wealthy drinking buddies as they sat around a table with a couple singing girls for company. They were having such a blast that they didn't hear the footsteps coming up the stairs. Suddenly, the doors to their private dining room flew open and in stormed a man clutching a bloody head in his left hand and a sharp blade in his right. As he charged in, he flung the head at Ximen Qing's face.

"Oh shit!" Ximen Qing exclaimed, recognizing Wu Song. He quickly leaped onto a bench and started to climb out the window, hoping for an escape route. But remember that they were upstairs, and down

below was nothing but hard, cobblestone street -- not exactly the soft landing he was looking for. Just as Ximen Qing was panicking, Wu Song had leaped onto the table and kicked off all the plates and bowls. The two singing girls and Ximen Qing's drinking buddy were so shocked that they were frozen stiff as they looked on.

Denied an escape through the window, Ximen Qing turned and saw Wu Song charging toward him with a full head of steam. So Ximen Qing faked a punch and kicked up his right leg, trying to catch Wu Song. Wu Song saw his leg swinging through the air and quickly leaned to one side to dodge the attack. The kick missed his body but caught his right hand, sending his blade flying out the window to the street below.

Now that Wu Song was unarmed, Ximen Qing was feeling pretty bold. He feigned a blow with his right hand, followed by a real left jab toward Wu Song's chest. But Wu Song easily ducked out of the way and charged in under Ximen Qing. His left hand gripped Ximen Qing between the head and shoulder, and his right hand grabbed Ximen Qing by the right leg, and with seemingly no effort at all, he lifted his foe above his head, turned toward the window, and roared, "Down you go!"

On the street below, everybody was just going about their business when suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a man fell out of the sky and landed head first with a thud. Everyone was startled. But before they could recover, another man came flying down from above. But this one landed on his feet, clutching a woman's head in one hand and a sharp knife in the other.

By now, Ximen Qing was more dead than alive as he lay on the ground, unable to move part of his body except his eyes. Wu Song stomped over and swiftly chopped off his head. He then tied the two heads together and made his way back to Purple Stone Lane. He went inside the house, placed the two heads on the altar, warmed up the bowl of wine that had turned cold by now, and said while weeping,

“Brother, if your spirit is still near, then please ascend to heaven. I have avenged you and killed the adulterers. Now, I will burn your memorial tablet!”

He then asked the neighbors who were still upstairs to come down. With Mrs. Wang still bound and standing in front of everyone, Wu Song gripped his knife and the two heads and told the neighbors, “Sirs, please listen to what I have to say.”

All four neighbors replied, “Constable, just tell us. We will do whatever you command.”

“In order to avenge my brother, I have broken the law. Even if I were to die, I would hold no grudges. I only regret frightening you. My fate is uncertain. I know not if I will live or die, so today, I will burn my brother’s memorial tablet. Whatever is of value in this house, may I trouble you to sell them for me so I have some spending money? I will now go to the courthouse to turn myself in. Don’t worry about what punishment I will receive, just be my witnesses.”

So Wu Song burned his brother’s tablet, along with some fake paper money. He then brought down two trunks from upstairs and gave their contents to the neighbors to go sell. This done, he took Mrs. Wang and the two severed heads and set out for the courthouse.

By now, the gossip network in Yanggu County had done its work, and the streets were packed with people, watching Wu Song as he marched to the courthouse. The magistrate had heard the news as well and went, OH, that’s what he meant by “I’ll have to deal with it.” And so he quickly held court. Wu Song brought Mrs. Wang into the main hall and made her kneel on the ground. He then laid the two heads and the murder weapon on the steps in front of the magistrate’s desk. Wu Song kneeled on the left side, with Mrs. Wang in the center, and the neighbors on the right. He took out the recorded confessions and told the magistrate everything.

The magistrate instructed his clerk to take testimony first from Mrs. Wang, and then from the four neighbors, and finally from the coroner Mr. He and the teenager Yunge. He then sent some men to

Purple Stone Lane to examine Pan Jinlian's body and to Lion Bridge tavern to check out Ximen Qing's body to confirm that yes they were indeed both missing a head. All this done, the men reported back to the magistrate, who then ordered that both Wu Song and Mrs. Wang be placed in long cangues and put in jail, while all the witnesses were given quarters in the county offices for the time being.

So hey, are you ready for another dizzying trip through the ancient Chinese legal system? I hope so, because here we go. So, despite the fact that the county magistrate was kind of corrupt and refused to investigate Wu Song's case earlier because of all the silver Ximen Qing was slipping into his pockets, he actually liked Wu Song. Remember that he was impressed by Wu Song's sense of honor and that was why he made Wu Song a constable. Also, Wu Song had helped safely deliver some of his riches to the capital for safekeeping, which as we know was no small task, what with shady date merchants and wine peddlers seemingly waiting behind every tree. So the magistrate wanted to go easy on Wu Song. But how do you go easy on someone who, as he himself had admitted and multiple eye witnesses had corroborated, clearly committed a premeditated double murder? Well, watch and learn.

The magistrate summoned his clerk and told him, "Since Wu Song is a man of honor, let's change the witnesses' testimonies to say, 'Wu Song wanted to make a sacrifice to his brother's altar, but his sister-in-law won't let him, so they bickered. During the argument, she pushed over the altar, and Wu Song, in an attempt to protect his brother's memory, fought with her and accidentally killed her. Then, Ximen Qing, who was having an affair with Pan Jinlian, came to settle the score with Wu Song. Neither would back down, so they fought all the way to the Lion Bridge, where Wu Song killed Ximen Qing.'"

See, nothing a little falsified testimony won't fix. With those minor edits to the witnesses' accounts, Wu Song's crime became a lot lighter, or at least light enough to maybe save his life. But the county magistrate didn't have the final say on this. A case this serious had to go to the next level up, so the magistrate wrote up the paperwork and sent it to the prefectural offices, along with everyone

implicated. Meanwhile, some of the wealthy, upstanding citizens of the county donated money, food, and wine for Wu Song. And as he prepared to leave, more than half the men under his command gave him meat and wine. To see him off. Wu Song went to his quarters, packed his things and gave them to one of his soldiers. He also sent 15 taels of silver to the boy Yunge, just as he had promised.

So Wu Song had tied up all the loose ends and was now headed off the prefectural court to meet his fate. To see what fate awaited him, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we are in for another adventurous road trip. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!