

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 45.

Last time, Wu Song avenged himself on those who had wronged him, and then some. He slaughtered the guilty and innocent alike at General Zhang's residence, and then fled Mengzhou Prefecture. But soon he fell into the hands of a few men who tied him up and took him to a hut where they butchered people for food. As he awaited his fate, Wu Song was lamenting how he should have just turned himself in. To him, the executioner's blade was preferable to being turned into double-cooked pork.

Meanwhile, the four guys who captured him took his belongings and shouted toward the back of the hut, "Big brother, sister-in-law, come quickly! We got a nice piece of merchandise here!"

"Coming! Don't do anything yet. I'll do the cutting myself," a voice replied from the back.

A moment later, two figures entered the room. Wu Song saw that the one in the front was a woman, followed by a big man. The two of them went over to the column where Wu Song was tied up and examined their merchandise.

"Wait! Isn't this Constable Wu?" the woman exclaimed.

"Quick, release my brother!" the man said.

Wu Song looked up and saw that these two were none other than his sworn brother and sister, Zhang Qing the Gardener and Sun Erniang, the Female Yaksha. Remember that Wu Song had encountered them at their black tavern at Crossroads Rise when he was first being exiled to Mengzhou Prefecture. They became fast friends after Sun Erniang unsuccessfully tried to drug Wu Song. As it turns out, their, umm, business was a regional chain, as they had several locations in the area, and Wu Song had just narrowly escaped becoming a special combo meal at one of the franchise's other locations.

The men who had captured him were shocked at this turn of events. They quickly untied him and gave him back his clothes. His headscarf had been torn to shreds when they captured him, so for now

they gave him a broad-brimmed felt hat to keep his hair out of his face. Then, Zhang Qing invited him to the guest parlor out front and asked him what the hell happened.

Wu Song recapped the last couple episodes for Zhang Qing and company, all the way up to his capture by Zhang Qing's men. The four of them now kneeled and kowtowed to Wu Song, saying, "We are all Brother Zhang's employees. We've been losing at the gambling house the last few days, so we went into the woods to look for some business. We saw you coming down a backroad, covered in blood, and resting in the temple. We didn't know who you were. Brother Zhang had reminded us several times before that he wants the merchandise alive. So we only used hooks to capture you. Otherwise, we would've killed you. We did not recognize greatness and offended you. Please forgive us, brother!"

Zhang Qing and Sun Erniang laughed and said, "We were worried, so we told them to bring the merchandise to us alive. Of course, they had no idea what we were thinking." They then turned to their men and said, "If our brother here wasn't exhausted, even 40 of you would not be able to get near him, much less you four rascals."

The four men kowtowed time and again, begging Wu Song to forgive them and not, you know, do to them what he had been doing to people all night. He told them to get up and said, "Since you've got no money for gambling, I'll give you some." He took out 10 taels of silver and let the four of them split it. They bowed and thanked him. Zhang Qing now also gave them a few taels of silver as a reward and sent them away.

After the guys left, Zhang Qing said to Wu Song, "Brother, you don't know how concerned I've been. After you left us, I was worried you would run into trouble and that sooner or later you would be coming back. So I told those rascals that whenever they procured merchandise, they had to keep them alive. If they came across easy prey, they would keep them alive. But if they came across someone they couldn't subdue, they used to kill them. So I told them they couldn't go out with knives and such and only

allowed them to use hooks. When I heard them just now, I got suspicious, so I told them to wait for me. Who knew it would really turn out to be you!”

Zhang Qing’s wife, Sun Erniang, cut in and said, “We had heard that you beat up Jiang Menshen in a drunken brawl. Everyone who came through these parts were stunned. But the merchants from the Pleasure Forest didn’t have any information about what happened after that. Brother, you’re tired. Go rest, and then we’ll worry about it.”

So Zhang Qing showed Wu Song to a guest room, and then he and Sun Erniang got to work cooking up a big meal for when Wu Song woke up, presumably using meat that did not come from humans.

Meanwhile, all hell was breaking loose back in Mengzhou Prefecture. Despite Wu Song’s best efforts, there WERE some survivors in General Zhang’s residence. They stayed in hiding until around 5 a.m. When they emerged, they started yelling for help. Attendants and guards came running, but all the neighbors stayed as far away as they could, not wanting any piece of whatever just went down.

Folks from the general’s household now went to the prefect to report what happened. The prefect was shocked and immediately sent his inspectors to the crime scene to assess the situation. They scoured the residence and reported back with their findings. Here’s what they found: The killer entered through the stable and killed a stablehand. There were two pieces of old clothing left behind at the stables. He then made his way to the kitchen, where he killed two servant girls. By the backdoor was an abandoned broadsword with a dented blade. On the top floor of the bower, General Zhang and two of his personal attendants were slain, along with two guests -- Commandant Zhang and Jiang Menshen. On the white wall, written in blood, were the words, “The killer was Wu Song the Tiger Slayer.” On the first floor the general’s wife was stabbed to death. Outside the bower the girl Yu Lan and two other maids were killed, as well as three children. In all, 15 people were killed. Oh, and six pieces of gold and silver drinking vessels were stolen.”

After careful examination of all the clues, the prefect rubbed his chin, stroked his beard, and came to the hypothesis that Wu Song might have had something to do with this. So he increased security at the four gates of the town and then sent men to search the town house-by-house for Wu Song.

The next day, the body count ticked up again when officials from Flying-Cloud Ravine reported that they had discovered traces of blood on the bridge there, and four dead bodies in the water below. All four were identified, including the two escorts who worked for the prefect. Pretty soon, the prefectural courthouse was packed with families of the slain, demanding justice. The prefect closed down the town for three days as his men continued to search house-by-house. The prefect also put out an APB on Wu Song, posting decrees everywhere with his hometown, age, likeness, and such, along with a bounty of 3,000 strings of coins. Anyone who can provide information on Wu Song's whereabouts would be rewarded, while anyone who gives him shelter or food would suffer the same punishment as him. Word was also sent to the neighboring prefectures, telling them to help with the man-hunt.

Word of this reached Zhang Qing's home, where Wu Song had been recuperating for about five days. Zhang Qing now told him, "Brother, it's not that I'm too scared to keep you here. But right now the authorities are searching door to door. I just worry that should something go wrong, the blame would lie with my wife and me. But I do have a good place for you to go. I've mentioned it to you before; I just don't know if you are willing to go or not."

Wu Song said, "I've also been thinking these last few days about how this thing would no doubt blow up, and how I can't stay here when it does. I only had one brother, and my wicked sister-in-law killed him. I managed to make it here, but then was framed. My other relatives are all gone. If you have a good place for me, of course I would go. Where is this place?"

"There is a Precious Pearl Monastery on Double Dragon Mountain, which lies within the borders of Qingzhou (1,1) Prefecture," Zhang Qing said. "Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk and Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced

Beast have become bandits there. Even the authorities in Qingzhou do not dare to have any design on them. That is the only place where your safety can be guaranteed. If you go elsewhere, you will be caught eventually. They've often written to us urging us to go join their gang. But I'm very attached to this place, so I haven't gone. I'll write them a letter and tell them about your skills. For my sake, they will no doubt take you in."

"You're quite right, brother," Wu Song said. "I've been thinking about that as well. It's just that the timing hadn't felt right before. But now, I've committed murder and have nowhere to go. That place is perfect. Brother, write me that letter right away, and I'll set out today."

So Zhang Qing wrote the letter, gave it to Wu Song, and laid out food and wine to see him off. But his wife Sun Erniang pointed at Zhang Qing and said, "How can you have our brother go just like that? He's going to be captured for sure."

"Sister-in-law, why do you say I can't go like this or I'd be captured?" Wu Song asked.

"Brother-in-law, right now the authorities have sent decrees everywhere, offering 3,000 strings of coins for your arrest, and your likeness and information are posted everywhere. And you have two criminal's tattoos on your face. How can you deny who you are?"

"Well he can just cover up the tattoos with a couple bandages," Zhang Qing suggested.

Sun Erniang chuckled. "Aren't you the clever one? How can that stupid idea fool the authorities? Now, I DO have another idea, but our brother might not go along with it."

"I'm trying to flee calamity; I would do anything," Wu Song said.

"Alright then, but don't take offense when I tell you," Sun Erniang laughed out loud.

"Sister-in-law, just tell me."

So Sun Erniang explained: "A couple years ago, a pilgrim monk came through here and I drugged him and got a few days' worth of bun fillings out of him. But he left behind a metal hoop that he used to bound his long hair, a set of monk clothing, a black robe, a multi-colored sash, a monk's certificate, a

rosary made of 108 skull bones, and a shark-skin sheath containing a pair of fine steel knives embossed with a snowflake pattern. The knives often groan at night. You saw them last time. Since you're on the lam, the only way to escape is to cut your hair in long bangs to resemble a pilgrim monk. That way, your hair would cover up the criminal's tattoos on your forehead. You also have the monk's certificate as your identification. His age and appearance resemble yours. This must be pre-destined. You can assume his identity. Who would question you on the road? What do you think?"

Zhang Qing clapped and said, "Wife, you're quite right! I had forgotten all about it." He then asked Wu Song what he thought.

"It could work," Wu Song said. "But I might not look like a man of religion."

"Let us try it and see," Zhang Qing said.

So Sun Erniang took out the pilgrim monk's stuff and had Wu Song put on the clothes.

"They look like they were made for me," Wu Song said as he looked at his wardrobe. He then put on the robe and the sash, let down his hair, folded the ends up, put on the metal hoop to hold his hair in place, and hung the rosary around his neck.

Sizing him up, both Sun Erniang and Zhang Qing said, "This must have been preordained!"

Wu Song looked in a mirror and couldn't help but start laughing out loud.

"Brother, why are you laughing?" Zhang Qing asked.

"I couldn't help but find it hilarious. I've become a pilgrim monk! Brother, go ahead and cut my hair."

So Zhang Qing picked up the scissors and cut Wu Song's hair into the style typical of pilgrim monks. Wu Song then started to pack. Zhang Qing now told him, "Brother, listen. I'm not trying to take advantage of you, but leave the cups you got from General Zhang's home with us. I'll give you some loose silver instead. That is a foolproof plan."

“You’re quite right, brother,” Wu Song said. So they made the swap, and Wu Song strapped his belongings around his waist. He then ate and drank his fill and was ready to go. He hung the two knives around his waist. And Sun Erniang brought out the monk’s certificate, stitched a silk pouch for it, and told Wu Song to always hang it against his chest under his clothes. Wu Song then bowed and expressed his gratitude to his friends.

As Wu Song prepared to hit the road, Zhang Qing again reminded him, “Brother, be careful on the road. Don’t get into any scrapes. Don’t drink too much and don’t quarrel with others. Also, try to act more like a man of religion. Don’t lose your temper, or you might blow your cover. When you get to Double Dragon Mountain, send us a letter. We two can’t stay here long-term. We’ll probably be following you there to join the gang. Take good care, and relay our greetings to Chieftain Lu and Chieftain Yang.”

Wu Song took his leave, hitched up his sleeves, and walked off with a stately pace. Zhang Qing and Sun Erniang watched and shouted their approval: “The very picture of a pilgrim monk!” they said.

It was now the 10th month of the year, and the days were growing short. As evening descended, Wu Song continued to travel by the light of the moon, making his way up a peak. It was now around 7 p.m., and as Wu Song stood atop the peak and looked out, the moon was climbing up from the east and shining its light on the trees on the hillside. As he looked around, Wu Song suddenly heard the sound of laughter coming from some woods up ahead.

“Well that’s strange,” Wu Song said to himself. “This is a desolate peak. Where’s that laughter coming from?”

So he headed toward the woods to take a look. There, amid the pine trees, he saw a cemetery temple situated next to a hill. It was a thatched building with about a dozen rooms or so. One of the

windows was open, and through the window, Wu Song could see a Daoist priest holding a woman and laughing as he looked out at the moon.

Now, remember that messing around with women was highly inappropriate behavior for a man of religion, and the sight of this Daoist priest with his arms wrapped around a woman roused the anger in Wu Song's heart.

"How can a man of religion engage in such shenanigans?!" he thought to himself.

And as that thought flashed across his mind, he unsheathed the two steel knives hanging around his waist. He looked at the blades under the pale moonlight and said to himself, "These are fine blades, but I haven't had a chance to use them yet. I should test them out on that wicked priest."

So he sheathed one of the knives and hung the other from his wrist. He slipped his arms out of his robe and tied the sleeves of the robe around his waist to keep it out of the way. He then walked up to the temple and banged on the door.

When the priest heard the banging, he just shut the window. Wu Song then banged on the doors with a rock. After sufficient ruckus, a side door opened with a creak, and a young acolyte came out.

"Who the hell are you?" the acolyte shouted. "How dare you make such ruckus at our door at this hour?!"

Well, this poor acolyte had already chosen poorly when he decided to come out, and now he just made his poor decision even worse with his choice of words. Wu Song glowered and shouted, "I'll dedicate my knife with this damn acolyte first!"

Before he even finished speaking, his hand had already brought his blade down on the acolyte's head. With a thwack and a thud, the poor acolyte's head bid farewell to his neck, and the torso slumped to the ground.

"Who dares to kill my acolyte?!" the priest now shouted as he leaped out from the temple, wielding two fine swords and sprinting toward Wu Song.



“Good thing I don’t keep my skills in a trunk!” Wu Song laughed. “This is gonna scratch my itch!”

So he and the priest fought, each wielding two blades. Under the silver moonlight, their shimmering weapons flashed, encased in swirls of icy vapor. After a dozen bouts or so, Wu Song gave his foe an opening, and the priest fell for it, hacking at him with both swords. But Wu Song dodged the blow and as he whirled around, one of his knives sliced across the priest’s neck, sending his head rolling off to one side while the priest’s body collapsed to the ground.

Having sated his bloodlust, Wu Song now shouted toward the temple, “The woman inside, get out here! I won’t kill you; I just want to ask you some questions!”

Now, as we saw in the last episode, when Wu Song told someone he wasn’t going to kill them, that promise didn’t really carry a whole lot of water these days. But the woman inside had no choice, so she came out, fell to her knees, and started kowtowing to Wu Song.

“Stop kowtowing to me,” he said. “Just tell me: What is this place? What’s your connection to that priest?”

The woman wept and replied, “I am the daughter of an Old Squire Zhang who lived at the foot of this peak. This is my clan’s ancestral cemetery temple. I don’t know where that priest came from, but he stopped at our home one day to seek lodging. He said he was well-versed in fortune-telling and feng shui, and my parents unwittingly invited him to stay so they could have him come assess the layout of this temple. He deceived them into asking him to stay for another few days. One day, he saw me and refused to leave. He ended up staying for three months, and he killed my parents, my brother, and my sister-in-law. He then forced me to stay here with him. That acolyte was also someone he abducted from somewhere. This place is called the Centipede Hill. He liked the feng shui of this place, so he dubbed himself the Flying Centipede.”

“Do you still have any family?” Wu Song asked.

“I have some relatives, but they are all farmers. Who among them would dare to quarrel with him?”

“Did he have some money?”

“He has embezzled a couple hundred taels of gold and silver.”

“In that case, hurry and pack it all up. I’m going to burn down the temple in a minute.”

“Sir, would you like some wine and meat?”

“If you have some, then yes, treat me.”

“Please come inside the temple.”

“Is this a trap?”

“Sir, how many heads do I have that I would dare to trick you?”

Thus reassured, Wu Song followed the woman into the temple. There were indeed wine and meat on a table next to the window. So Wu Song helped himself to a hearty meal while the woman packed up the valuables inside the temple.

Wu Song then started a fire inside the building. As he watched the place burn, the woman presented him with a bundle of gold and silver, begging him to take it and spare her life in return.

“I don’t want your money,” he told her. “Keep it for yourself. Now leave, quickly!”

The woman bowed and thanked him, and then made her way down the peak. Wu Song now threw the two headless corpses into the fire to incinerate the evidence of what had transpired. He then sheathed his knives and resumed his journey, making his way over the peak that night and continuing toward Qingzhou (1,1) Prefecture.

In the blink of an eye, another dozen or so days had passed. At every tavern, inn, town, and village that he came across, Wu Song saw wanted posters for himself. But with his new disguise, no one suspected that he was the one they were looking for. It was now the 11th month, and the weather was getting bitterly cold. One day, it was so cold that Wu Song was freezing despite filling his belly with wine

and meat along the way. He made his way to the top of a ridge, and in front of him, in the distance, lay a tall, treacherous mountain.

Wu Song descended the ridge and traveled for another mile or two before he came upon a small village tavern. In front of the tavern was a clear stream, and behind it lay some jagged, rock-strewn hills. Wu Song hurried into the tavern, sat down, and called out, "Tavern keeper, bring me two horns of wine, and sell me some meat."

The tavern owner told him, "Sir, to tell you the truth, we do have some simple home brew, but we are all out of meat."

"Then bring me the wine so I can warm up," Wu Song said.

The tavern owner fetched two horns of wine and served it to Wu Song in large bowls. He also brought over a plate of warm vegetables. The two horns of wine disappeared pretty quickly, so Wu Song ordered another two horns. Now, Wu Song was already buzzing a bit when he was crossing the ridge. I guess he ran into another one of those "Three Bowls and You Can't Cross the Ridge" places. And now, with an additional four horns of alcohol in him and a cold wind blowing, he was really feeling the wine.

"Tavern keeper, are you really out of food?!" he shouted. "If you have meat that you're saving for yourself, give me some, and I'll pay you just the same."

The tavern owner chuckled and said, "I've never seen a monk like you, with nothing on your mind but wine and meat. Where would I find meat for you? Sir, just give it up."

"I'm not going to eat for free. Why won't you sell me any?" Wu Song pressed.

"I told you: We only have this wine, nothing else."

While they were speaking, a big man walked in from outside, followed by three or four others. He had the look of a stout man of valor. He wore a red headscarf, a green robe, a pair of boots, and a red

sash. He had a round face, large ears, thick lips, and a square mouth. He stood about 5 foot 3 and looked to be about 24 or 25.

When this guy and his entourage entered, the tavern owner bowed deeply and greeted them with a big smile, saying, "Second young master, please have a seat."

"Did you arrange everything I asked for?" the man asked.

"The chicken and the pork are both ready and waiting for you."

"And where's my flowery-jug wine?"

"Right over here."

The man and his companions sat down at a table next to Wu Song's. The tavern owner brought out a flowery jug, uncorked it, and poured out the wine into a big basin. Immediately, Wu Song could smell the fragrance of the wine. It made his throat itch, and it was all he could do to keep himself from reaching over and snatching a bowl.

Next, he watched as the tavern owner went into the kitchen and came back out with a platter that held a pair of chickens and a big plate of lean meat, and set it in front of the man and his companions.

Uhh ... I thought you were all out of meat. What the hell is this? Wu Song stared at the chickens and meat at the next table, then looked back at his own table, on which sat one lonely, pitiful little plate of green veggies. He looked back at the next table, and again back at his own table. Next table: Mountains of meat. His table: Veggies. Next table: Mountains of meat. His table: Veggies. Fueled by the wine that he had just chugged on an empty stomach, Wu Song could feel his blood boiling. Uh oh.

To see how big a blast radius Wu Song's pending eruption will leave, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Wu Song runs into a familiar face in the most unexpected of places. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!