

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 46.

Last time, Wu Song had assumed the disguise of a pilgrim monk and was making his way to Qingzhou (1,1) Prefecture to join the bandits on Double Dragon Mountain. Along the way, he stopped at a village tavern that had nothing for him except some simple home-brewed wine. But then, when another and his companions came in, the tavern owner brought them a jug of fragrant wine, a pair of chickens, and a big plate of meat. Seeing and smelling all this, Wu Song darn near smashed his table with his fist.

“Tavern keeper, come here!” he shouted angrily. “How can you disrespect a customer like this?!”

The tavern owner rushed over and said, “Sir, don’t get worked up. If you want more wine, it’s no problem.”

Glowing with both eyes wide open, Wu Song shouted, “You are so damn unreasonable! Why did you not sell me that fine wine and chickens and such? My silver is just as good as theirs!”

“But they brought those things themselves,” the tavern owner tried to explain. “They’re just borrowing my tavern to eat and drink.”

Well, that may be a perfectly reasonable explanation, but Wu Song was already itching for a sip of that wine and a few mouthfuls of that meat, so he was determined to be unreasonable.

“Bullcrap! Bullcrap!” he kept yelling.

“I’ve never seen a monk as unreasonable as you!” the tavern owner said, starting to lose his own patience.

But Wu Song was like, oh, you haven’t seen me unreasonable yet.

“How am I unreasonable? I’ve paid for everything you’ve served me!”

“I’ve never seen a monk behave like you,” the tavern owner shot back.

Wu Song was looking for a reason, and that comeback was as good as any. He leaped to his feet and smacked the tavern owner across his face, sending the guy falling backward to the ground. One side of the tavern owner's face was swollen, and he was struggling to get back to his feet.

The big man sitting at the next table saw this and flew into a rage. He leaped up from his seat, pointed at Wu Song, and said, "You frackin' monk! Where's your sense of propriety?! How can you get so violent? Haven't you heard the saying, 'He who renounces the material world must leave passions behind?' "

"I'll kick his ass if I want! Mind your damn business!" Wu Song scowled.

That only angered the man further. "I was trying to talk some sense into you for your own good," he said. "How dare you curse me?!"

And after a few more choice words were exchanged, along with the usual, "No you shut up!" and "Well why don't you make me?!", Wu Song and the big man were stomping outside to settle this like a couple walking cliches of toxic masculinity.

The big guy went outside first, and when he saw Wu Song charging out behind him, he struck a fighting stance and waited. When Wu Song charged forward, the man took a swing at him. Wu Song grabbed his arm to stop the blow, and the man tried with all his might to lift Wu Song and throw him. But yeah, good luck with that, buddy. Strain as he might, the guy could not even budge Wu Song. Instead, with one light tug, Wu Song pulled the man into his chest, and with a thrust flipped him to the ground as easily as turning over a child. The big guy couldn't even fight back. His companions were paralyzed with fear when they saw this and did not dare to come help him.

So, Wu Song now stepped on the guy with one foot and started pummeling him with his fists, landing 20 or 30 solid punches. He then lifted the guy off the ground, raised him above his head, turned toward the stream in front of the tavern, and with one heave, tossed the guy into the frigid water. The man's companions went ah crap and rushed into the stream to help him. They fished him out of the

stream and propped him up as they staggered off toward the south. Meanwhile, the tavern owner, still smarting from Wu Song's slap, had fled into the backroom to hide.

"Perfect, go hide, all of you!" Wu Song shouted. "I'll go eat and drink!"

With no one to interrupt him, Wu Song helped himself to the wine and meat that were left behind. In fact, the guys had not even touched the chickens and the plate of meat on their table yet, so Wu Song was like, don't mind if I do. Tearing into the chicken and meat with his bare hands, he devoured most of the food and wine within an hour.

Sufficiently fortified, Wu Song now tied the sleeves of his robe behind his back and left the tavern, walking along the stream. But soon he was staggering against the howling north winds and the influence of alcohol. After stumbling for another mile or so, suddenly a yellow dog ran out from behind an earthen wall and started barking at Wu Song.

Obviously not thinking clearly, Wu Song decided to teach this dog a lesson. So he pulled out one of his knives and stomped toward the dog, which was still barking at him from the bank of the stream. Wu Song approached the dog and took a mighty swing with the blade in his left hand. But in his drunken state, he missed everything, and the momentum of his swing threw him off balance and sent him face-planting into the stream.

It was winter, so the water in the stream wasn't that deep, but it was freezing. When Wu Song struggled to his feet, he was soaked through. He saw his knife lying in the stream, so he bent down to pick it up. But as he did so, he once again face-planted and just rolled around in the frigid water.

Meanwhile, a gang of men appeared from behind the earthen wall on the bank. At their head was a big man wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat and a yellow silk robe. He wielded a wooden staff and was followed by a dozen or so men, who were also wielding staffs. One of the men pointed and said, "That crooked monk in the stream is the one who beat up the young master. The young master couldn't find

you, big brother, so he took about 30 workhands and went to catch this guy at the tavern. But turns out he's here."

Before this man finished talking, the guy that Wu Song had roughed up rushed onto the scene. He had changed into some dry clothes and had a long-handled broadsword in his hand and 20-some workmen behind him. Among these there were about a dozen who were his best men, and the rest were all rough-and-tumble types from the village, and they all wielded spears and staffs. When they approached and saw Wu Song, the guy pointed and said to the man in the yellow robe, "That's him, brother! That's the one who beat me up!"

"Let's take him back to the manor, give him a good beating, and interrogate him closely," the man in yellow said.

So about 40 men rushed into the stream. Their numerical advantage, plus Wu Song's severely inebriated state, gave Wu Song no chance at resisting. They tied him up, dragged him out of the water, and hustled him off. They went around the earthen wall, and there stood a large estate, surrounded by tall white walls, drooping willows, and towering pines. The men dragged Wu Song inside, stripped away his clothes, took his knives and bundle, and tied him to a large willow tree. Then, they took out a whip and started lashing him.

After just a few lashes, though, a man came out from the house and asked, "Who are you two brothers beating now?"

The two guys in charge greeted this man, and the one in yellow said, "Master, please let us explain. My younger brother was sharing a few cups of wine with some acquaintances and neighbors at the small tavern up the road, but this crooked monk came looking for trouble and beat up my brother and threw him into the stream. His head and face were all scratched up, and he nearly froze to death. Good thing his acquaintances rescued him. Once he changed clothes, we set out with men to look for this monk.

Turns out this bastard ate our meat and drank our wine, and passed out drunk in the stream. So we caught him and are interrogating him. Judging by his looks, he's no monk. His face has two convict's tattoos. He had covered them with his hair. He must be a fugitive. Once we find out his backstory, we'll take him to the authorities and let them deal with him."

The guy that Wu Song had beaten up now said, "Why even question him?! This crook roughed me up so bad that I won't be able to move for a month or two. Why don't we just beat him to death and then burn his body. Now, THAT would relieve my anger."

As he spoke, the guy raised his whip again to resume the beating. But the man who came out from the house stopped him, saying, "Brother, hold on. Let me take a look first. This guy looks like a man of valor."

By now, Wu Song was starting to sober up, and he had shut his eyes and said nothing during the whipping. The man from the house now took a closer look. First, he examined the wounds on Wu Song's back, which were from the caning he had endured a few days earlier when he was sentenced to exile.

"Hmm, this is strange," the man said. "These wounds look like they're from a recent caning."

He then circled to the front and lifted up Wu Song's hair to study his face. Suddenly, the man cried out, "Isn't this my brother, Wu Song?!"

That made Wu Song open his eyes, and as soon as he realized who this man was, he shouted, "Brother! It's you!"

The man from the house now said to the other two, "Quick, untie him. It IS my brother!"

Both of the other guys were taken aback and asked, "Master, how could this pilgrim monk be your brother?"

"He's that Wu Song that I'm always telling you about, the guy who killed the tiger on Jingyang (3,2) Ridge. But I don't know how he ended up as a pilgrim monk."

The other two guys now hurriedly untied Wu Song and gave him some dry clothes and then helped him into the thatched parlor. Wu Song tried to kneel and kowtow to the guy who had saved him, but that man held him up and said with delight and surprise, "Brother, you're not quite sober yet. Sit down and talk."

But Wu Song was so thrilled to see this guy that he was already half sober. He washed up and ate a little something to help him sober up completely, and then he kowtowed to the guy and they started catching up.

So who was this guy that had saved him? Well, it turns out that this was none other than Song Jiang, the Timely Rain. Remember that after he killed his mistress, Song Jiang had fled to the estate of Chai Jin, where he met Wu Song and the two became sworn brothers. The last we saw him, Song Jiang had just bid goodbye to Wu Song and returned to Chai Jin's estate, while Wu Song went on his way to his meeting with the tiger on Jingyang Ridge. Wu Song now asked Song Jiang how he ended up here, and exactly where "here" was.

Song Jiang said, "After we parted ways at Lord Chai's estate, I stayed there for half a year. I didn't know what was happening at home and worried about my father, so I sent my brother Song Qing back home first. Later, I received a letter from home saying that thanks to the constables Zhu Tong and Lei Heng, my family was not ensnared by my legal troubles, and that the authorities were just after me and had put out a proclamation and a bounty for my arrest. So that situation has cooled down. Meanwhile, the Old Squire Kong (2) who lives at this manor had sent one messenger after another to my home to ask about me. When my brother went home, he told Old Squire Kong that I was at Lord Chai's estate, so the old squire sent his men there to invite me to come stay with him.

"This is White Tiger Mountain, and we are at the estate of Old Squire Kong. The man who exchanged blows with you earlier was his younger son, Kong Liang (4). Because of his short temper and propensity

for getting into arguments and fights, everyone calls him the Lonely Fiery Star. This man in the yellow tunic is the squire's eldest son, Kong Ming (2), and everyone calls him the Hairy Star. They both love to play with weapons, and I gave them a few pointers, so they call me master.

"I've been living here for about half a year now and was just preparing to go visit Fort Clear Winds in the next couple days. When I was at Lord Chai's estate, I heard people say that you had killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge and become a constable in Yanggu (2,3) County. Later I heard you had killed Ximen Qing (4), but I didn't know where you were exiled to after that. How did you become a pilgrim monk?"

Wu Song answered, "After I took my leave of you at Lord Chai's estate, I killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge, and then the magistrate at Yanggu County made me a constable, and then ... oh you know what? Just listen to the last 15 episodes of this podcast, and then we'll talk."

When the Kong brothers had finished listening to Wu Song's story, they were so stunned that they ripped out their earbuds and fell to their knees, kowtowing to Wu Song to show their respect. Wu Song quickly returned the gesture and said, "I offended you just now. Please forgive me!"

"We were blind! Please forgive US!" Kong Ming and Kong Liang said.

"Since you hold me in such high regard," Wu Song said, "then please help me dry off my identification papers, my letter, and my clothes. Also, please don't misplace those two knives and this rosary."

"No need to worry," Kong Ming said. "I'll have my men take care of it and return them to you in good condition."

Wu Song thanked them, and Song Jiang then introduced him to Old Squire Kong, and they threw a welcome banquet for Wu Song. That night, Song Jiang invited Wu Song to sleep in the same bed, and the two caught up on the events of the past year-plus, and Song Jiang was delighted to be reunited with his sworn brother.

The next morning, Wu Song washed up and met his hosts in the main hall for breakfast. Kong Ming was there to keep him company, and so was Kong Liang, his injuries notwithstanding. Old Squire Kong had his men slaughter sheep and pigs and held another feast. Later that day, several neighbors and relatives from the village, as well as some retainers of the Kong family, also came to meet the hero, all of which made Song Jiang very happy.

After the feast, Song Jiang asked Wu Song what his plans were for finding a refuge.

"I told you last night, brother," Wu Song said. "Zhang Qing the Gardener has written an introduction letter for me to go join the bandits on Double Dragon Mountain, led by Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk. And Zhang Qing will follow soon thereafter."

"That's good," Song Jiang said. "I don't mind telling you: My family recently sent me a letter, saying that Hua (1) Rong (2), the commandant at Fort Clear Winds, heard that I had killed my mistress and had written to me many times, saying I must go stay with him for a while. Fort Clear Winds is not far from here, so I was preparing to go there these last couple days, but had not set out yet because of the weather. I'm heading that way sooner or later, so why don't you come along?"

"Brother, that might not be a good idea," Wu Song said. "I've killed so many people that even a general amnesty would not clear me. That's why I've decided to go to Double Dragon Mountain and become a bandit. Besides, now that I'm a pilgrim monk, it would be difficult for us to travel together. It might arouse suspicion and cause trouble for you. Even though we would happily face life and death together, it would not be good to ensnare Commandant Hua Rong. Just let me go to Double Dragon Mountain. If heaven takes pity on me and I somehow survive and receive amnesty, then I will come find you."

Hearing this, Song Jiang relented and told Wu Song, "Brother, since you still have the desire to serve the emperor, heaven WILL protect you. If this is what you want, then I dare not try to dissuade you. But stay with me here for a few days before you leave."



So the two of them stayed for another 10 days or so at Old Squire Kong's house. When it was time for both to hit the road, the old squire and his sons refused to let them go, and they were so insistent that Song Jiang and Wu Song had no choice but to stay another four or five days. After that, Song Jiang insisted that they had to go, so the old squire could do nothing but throw them a going-away banquet. After a day of feasting, the next morning, the old squire gave Wu Song a new set of clothes, along with all his original belongings. He also gave Wu Song and Song Jiang 50 taels of silver each for travel expenses. Of course, this latter gift led to a few rounds of "No, I cannot possibly accept this" and "No, you absolutely MUST accept this if you hold any trace of respect for us." In the end, Song Jiang relented and stashed the silver in his bundle. He then packed up his stuff, and Wu Song donned his pilgrim monk outfit again. Song Jiang armed himself with a short broadsword and a long-handle broadsword, and put on a broad-brimmed felt hat. The two of them then took their leave, and the Kong brothers ordered their workhands to carry their luggage while the brothers saw their guests off for a good six or seven miles before parting ways.

Song Jiang and Wu Song then traveled on together, chitchatting along the way. When night fell, they stopped at an inn. The next morning, they ate breakfast and resumed their journey together. After another 15 miles or so, they arrived at a market town, where they came upon a fork in the road. They asked for directions and were told that their respective destinations, Double Dragon Mountain and Fort Clear Winds, lay in opposite directions. The western path went to Double Dragon Mountain, while the eastern path went to Fort Clear Winds.

Upon hearing this, Song Jiang said to Wu Song, "Brother, we must part ways now. Let's have three cups of wine here to say our goodbyes."

"Brother, let me escort you for a stretch before I double back," Wu Song offered.

“No need for that,” Song Jiang said. “As the old saying goes, ‘Even if you see a friend off for a thousand miles, you must part ways eventually.’ Brother, you just worry about your bright future. Go at once to your destination. After you’ve joined up, cut down on your drinking. If the court offers you amnesty, you should convince Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi to accept the offer as well. Then, someday, you might be sent to the borderlands, where you can use your skills to earn a position and leave a good name for posterity, so that you would have lived a worthwhile life. As for me, I have no skills, so despite my loyalty, I cannot do anything. But you, brother, are such a hero. You will do something great for sure; just keep that in mind. Follow your foolish brother’s advice, and we will see each other again.”

Wu Song listened to Song Jiang’s advice, and the two of them drank a few cups before settling their bill. They left the tavern and went to the edge of town, where the road split. Wu Song now kowtowed four times to Song Jiang, which brought Song Jiang to tears and unable to say goodbye.

“Brother,” Song Jiang said, “Don’t forget my words. Keep your drinking in check. Take care! Take care!”

And with that, the two finally parted ways, with Wu Song heading west and Song Jiang going east.

And we’ll end any suspense here and just tell you that Wu Song had a surprisingly uneventful journey to Double Dragon Mountain from here on out, and he was welcomed into the gang there by Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi, and that’s where we’ll leave him. Oh, and by the way, you know how every hero has a nickname in this novel? Well, Wu Song’s nickname was the Pilgrim, which strikes me as kind of odd because he only assumed that identity to flee from the law. I mean, sure, Lu Zhishen did the same thing, but he at least spent some time as an actual monk. But Wu Song just wore the monk clothes and donned the monk hairstyle as a disguise. Yet, for some reason, from this point forward, he would apparently

keep wearing this get-up and keep the moniker. I guess the Tiger-Slaying General was already claimed by someone else, even though that guy had never actually killed a tiger, unlike Wu Song.

But anyway, now that we've got Wu Song all settled in on Double Dragon Mountain, let's catch up to Song Jiang on his journey to Fort Clear Winds. As he traveled, he kept thinking about Wu Song. After a few more days, he could see Clear Winds Mountain in the distance. It was an awe-inspiring sight, covered with thick woods and strange-looking trees, all of which delighted Song Jiang. As he walked on, he took in the sights. In fact, he became so absorbed that he overshot the lodging options along the way and soon found himself in the position that all travelers dreaded: alone in the wilderness with darkness descending.

Soon, Song Jiang was starting to worry. "If it were summer, then it's no problem to just spend the night in the woods," he thought to himself. "But it's winter, and the nights are freezing. And what if a wild beast shows up? How could I fend it off? I would be killed!"

As he mulled over these panicked thoughts, he pressed on down a mountain path toward the east. He walked until around 7 p.m., and his situation had not improved, which made him even more worried.

While he was busy worrying, Song Jiang was not looking at the ground in front of him. And suddenly, he felt himself stumble over something. It was a rope, stretched across the path. This was a trip-wire, and it set off a bell in the woods. Before Song Jiang could react, about 15 bandits appeared out of nowhere, shouting as they bum-rushed him, tied him up, and took his stuff. They then lit some torches and made their way up the mountain with their prisoner in tow. Song Jiang could do nothing but lament his bad luck as he was dragged into the bandits' mountain fortress.

In the glow of the torches, Song Jiang saw that the fortress was ringed by wooden planks. In the center sat a thatched parlor, in which were placed three tigerskin-covered command chairs. Behind the parlor were about 100 thatched houses.

The bandit lackeys had bound Song Jiang tightly, and they now tied him to a column in the thatched parlor. A few of the lackeys then said, "The boss just fell asleep. Don't tell him yet. Wait until he wakes up and then invite him here. Then we'll use this guy's innards to make our boss some wake-up soup, and we'll all get to eat some fresh meat."

Oh great. These are the cannibalistic type of bandits. As Song Jiang listened to this chatter, he thought to himself, "What rotten luck! To suffer a fate like this, all because I killed that hussy. Who knew that I would meet my end here?"

The bandit lackeys now lit some candles and lamps, but they offered little relief for Song Jiang, who was now frozen stiff and could not move. All he could do was look around, and then lower his head and sigh.

To see what gourmet recipe Song Jiang will end up in, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, ready to meet ANOTHER wicked female character? Sure you are. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!