

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 52.

Last time, while the outlaws from Clear Winds Mountain joined the gang at Liangshan, Song Jiang rushed home after receiving a letter from his brother saying their father had died. Much to his surprise, though, when he got home he found the old squire alive and well. Turns out the letter was a trick, concocted by the old squire to lure Song Jiang home so he won't be led astray by his bandit friends.

But before the night had passed, a huge ruckus broke out outside the Song family estate. When the old squire climbed up a ladder and took a peek over the wall, he saw about 100 soldiers, led by the two newly appointed constables from the county office. These two guys were brothers with the last name Zhao (4).

"Old squire," the Zhao brothers called out, "if you're smart, then send out your son Song Jiang, and we'll go easy on him. But if you don't turn him in, then we'll arrest you as well."

"What? When did Song Jiang come back?" the old squire asked.

"Stop playing dumb! Someone saw him at Ward Chief Zhang's tavern at the entrance to the village, and someone else followed him here. How can you deny it?"

Song Jiang now walked to the ladder and said to the old squire, "Father, don't waste your breath with them. I don't mind turning myself in. Everyone at the county office knows me, and with the amnesty, my offense will be reduced. We don't need to be asking favors of these two. The Zhao brothers are a couple of rogues. They may have suddenly become constables, but they know nothing about gallantry. And they have no connections with me, so there's no use in begging them."

The old squire wept and said, "It's all my fault. I brought this on you."

"Don't trouble yourself, father. It's actually a good thing. If I were still hiding on the jianghu scene and got mixed up with a group of outlaw friends and then got caught with them, how could I see you again? Even if I am exiled to somewhere, it'd only be for a time. I will come back one day, and then I can tend to you for the rest of your life."

“In that case, I’ll spend some money and make sure you get sent somewhere nice,” the old squire said.

So Song Jiang now climbed up the ladder and called out to the constables, “No need for you to make all this noise. My offense has already been reduced by the amnesty, so it’s not a capital crime. Please come in and have a few cups of wine, and then tomorrow I’ll go with you to the courthouse.”

“Don’t even think about tricking us into going inside,” the Zhao brothers shouted back.

“How could I do anything that would bring trouble for my father and brother? Just c’mon in,” Song Jiang reassured them. He then climbed down, opened the gates, and invited the constables into the thatched parlor. The family then prepared a feast for the constables and their men, replete with gifts and money, of course. The two constables got 20 taels of silver for their trouble, and they even slept at the estate that night.

The next morning around 5 a.m., they headed back to the county office with Song Jiang. They arrived as the sky became light. The county magistrate had just opened his session in court when he saw the constables come in with Song Jiang. The magistrate was delighted and instructed Song Jiang to write a confession. So Song Jiang wrote the following:

“Last fall, I unwittingly took Yan Poxi for a mistress. Because she was unpious, we got into a fight after drinking, and I accidentally killed her and then fled. Today, I’ve been captured and brought before the court. I set forth these details and willingly accept whatever sentence the court decrees.”

The magistrate read the confession and then had Song Jiang taken into custody. And of course, given how beloved he was in the county, everybody went to the magistrate to put in a good word for him. And the magistrate was already leaning toward going easy on him, so after taking Song Jiang’s confession, the magistrate didn’t even put him in any restraints and just let him hang out in jail.

Meanwhile, Old Squire Song came by to put silver in the right hands. And by this time, the dead girl's mother, Mrs. Yan (2), had also been dead for half a year, so there was no plaintiff anymore. As for Yan Poxi's booty call, Zhang Wen Yuan (2,3), with things the way they were, he didn't much feel like making a stink about this anymore. So everything worked out just fine. The paperwork was filed, and once the mandatory 60-day incarceration was over, Song Jiang was sent to Jizhou (4,1) Prefecture for sentencing.

Taking everything into consideration, the prefect ruled that Song Jiang was to receive a caning of 20 strokes and be exiled to the penal colony at Jiangzhou (1,1) Prefecture, which was apparently as cushy an exile destination as you could get. Oh and as for the 20 strokes and the convict tattoo Song Jiang was to get? Well, given that there were no plaintiffs to witness those punishments being doled out and everyone was putting in a good word for him, they just kind of gave him a light tap with the rods and went very easy on the tattoo. They then put a cangue around his neck, issued the appropriate paperwork, and assigned two guards to escort him.

As they prepared to head out, Song Jiang's father and brother were waiting for them in front of the prefectural offices, with the usual wine and silver for the guards. They helped Song Jiang change into a fresh set of clothes, pack a bundle, and put on a pair of hemp sandals.

Then, Old Squire Song pulled Song Jiang over to a quiet corner and whispered, "I know that Jiangzhou (1,1) Prefecture is a good place, a land of fish and rice. That's why I spent money to get you sent there. Just be patient and wait. I will send your brother to check on you and will send you money every so often. But your journey will take you right past Liangshan. If they come down and try to abduct you and get you to join them, you must not agree, or you would be cursed as a disloyal and unfilial man. Remember that. Take your time on the road, and if heaven should take pity on us, then you will be allowed to come back sooner than later and reunite with your father and brother."

With tears in his eyes, Song Jiang bowed and bid his father goodbye. His brother Song Qing then saw him off a ways. When they parted, Song Jiang told his brother, "Don't worry about me. Our father, however, is old, and I have been burdened by legal troubles and had to flee our home. Brother, you just stay home and take care of him; don't come to Jiangzhou Prefecture for my sake, or our father would have no one to look after him. I have many acquaintances on the jianghu scene. Who among them would not help me if they ran into me? Don't worry about money for me. If heaven takes pity on me, then one day I will be able to come back!"

The brothers bid each other a teary goodbye, and Song Qing went home to take care of his father. Song Jiang, meanwhile, set off with his two guards. Now, these two guards respected him for being a hero, and since they also got their share of silver from Song Jiang's family, they naturally took good care of him on the way.

At the end of the first day of their journey, they spent the night at an inn and started preparing dinner. Song Jiang also bought some wine and meat to treat the guards. As they ate, he told them, "I'll be straight with you guys. Our journey is going to go right past Liangshan Marsh. There are some heroes at the stronghold there who know me. I worry that they would try to abduct me and it would frighten you. Tomorrow morning, let's get up a bit earlier and take the backroads. I'd rather walk a little farther."

"Mr. Song, if you hadn't told us, we would've never known," the guards said. "We know the backroads around here. We will be able to slip past your friends."

So the next morning, they got up at 5 a.m., had breakfast, and then set out along some backroads. They had gone about 10 miles when suddenly, they saw a group of 50-some men appear from around a hill up ahead. Song Jiang took one look and went oh crap. The man at the head of the group was none other than Liu Tang, the Red-Haired Devil, and he and his entourage were stomping this way, looking fully intent on dispatching Song Jiang's guards. For their part, the two escorts were already shaking and crumpled to their knees.

"Brother, who are you gonna kill?!" Song Jiang called out to Liu Tang.

"Brother, if we don't kill these two bastards now, what are we waiting for?" Liu Tang answered.

"No need for you to dirty your hands," Song Jiang said. "Give me the knife, and I'll do it myself."

When the two guards heard that, they just went oh crap oh crap oh crap. So Liu Tang handed Song Jiang his knife. Song Jiang took it and asked him, "Why do you want to kill them?"

"Brother Chao Gai ordered us to find out news about you. We heard that you were arrested. We were going to break you out of jail in Yuncheng County, but then we found out that you didn't suffer in jail. Then we heard you were exiled to Jiangzhou Prefecture. Brother Chao was worried we might miss you on the way, so he sent all the chieftains to wait along every route. If we see you, we are to invite you to Liangshan. So how can I not kill these two guards?"

Song Jiang, though, told him, "You would not be helping me if you did this. Instead, you would be making me disloyal and unfilial. If you are going to abduct me like this, then you leave me no choice but to kill myself."

As he spoke, Song Jiang tossed the knife aside and added, "If you want to take pity on me, then let me go to the penal colony at Jiangzhou, serve my sentence, and then I'll come back to see you guys."

Liu Tang said, "Brother, I dare not make the call on this one. Professor Wu Yong and Commandant Hua Rong are waiting for you just up the road. Allow me to invite them here to discuss this matter."

"You can discuss all you want, but my mind is made up," Song Jiang said.

So Liu Tang dispatched a lackey to send word up the road, and soon, Wu Yong and Hua Rong, along with a few dozen riders, galloped onto the scene, dismounted, and bowed to Song Jiang.

"Why haven't we opened Brother Song's cangue yet," Hua Rong asked.

"Brother, what kind of idea is that?" Song Jiang said. "This is the law of the land. How can anyone touch it?"

Wu Yong chuckled and said, "I understand your meaning, brother. It's easy enough. We won't keep you at our fortress for long. But Brother Chao Gai hasn't seen you in a long time and wants to talk to you. We would like to invite you to our stronghold for a short visit, and then we will see you on your way."

"Professor, only you understand my heart," Song Jiang said. He then helped the two guards to their feet and said to everyone else, "You must give them your assurance. I would rather die than to have them harmed."

The guards thanked him profusely for saving their lives, and then the whole party set out. They veered off the main road and headed to the shore of the marsh, where there were already boats waiting. The boats ferried them across to the beach at the foot of the mountain, where they got on sedan chairs and were carried up to the Unity Pavilion at the halfway point of the mountain. There, they waited while messengers went to invite all the chieftains. They all came to welcome Song Jiang and escorted him up the rest of the way to the Hall of Honor.

Chao Gai now said to Song Jiang, "Ever since you saved our lives and we came here, not a single day passes that we don't think about your immense kindness. And you also sent so many heroes to join us not long ago, shining a bright light on our humble fort. We have no way to repay you."

Song Jiang replied, "After we parted, I killed a harlot and fled around the jianghu scene for half a year. I was going to come pay you a visit, but then I ran into Shi (2) Yong (3) at a tavern. He brought me a letter from home that said my father had died. Turns out my father was worried I would follow heroes into a life of banditry, so he wrote that letter to trick me into going home. Even though I was arrested, I was well taken care of and did not suffer much. And now, I've been exiled to Jiangzhou, a good place. When I received your summon, I dared not refuse to come here. Now, I have paid my respects. But I have a deadline to meet and dare not stay long, so I must take my leave of you now."

"What's the hurry?" Chao Gai said. "Please sit for a while."

So the two of them sat down in the center of the hall, and Song Jiang told his two escorts to sit right behind his chair and not to take half a step away from him. You know, just in case all these honorable heroes got it in their head to press the issue.

Chao Gai now instructed all the chieftains to come up and pay their respects to Song Jiang. Then, they sat down in two rows, and the lackeys started pouring wine. Every chieftain, starting with Chao Gai and going down the line, took turns offering toasts to Song Jiang. After quite a few rounds, Song Jiang got up and said, "Thank you brothers for your affection. But I am a criminal and dare not stay long. I must take my leave."

"Brother, are we really such an annoyance?" Chao Gai said. "If you don't want to harm the two guards, then fine. We'll just give them some money and send them on their way. They can go back and say we abducted you, so that they're not at fault."

But Song Jiang cut him off. "Brother, don't mention that again. This is not helping me. It's harming me. My father is at home and I haven't served him for a single day. How can I dare to disobey his teaching and bring trouble upon him? Before, in a spur of the moment, I was coming to join you. Thank heaven that I ran into Shi Yong at that village tavern and was directed to go home. My father explained his reasoning. He would rather I accept punishment. He helped get the sentence passed quickly and then reminded me time and again to not harm the family for the sake of pleasure. I dare not disobey his crystal clear instructions, or I would be violating the laws of heaven and the teachings of my father, making me a disloyal and unfilial man. Then what reason would I have to live? If you won't let me leave, then I would rather die by your hand right here."

As he finished speaking, Song Jiang's tears fell like rain and he prostrated himself on the ground.

Check. Mate.

Chao Gai and company helped him to his feet and said, "Since you are dead set on going to Jiangzhou, then please rest here without worry for one day. Tomorrow, we will see you off."

After much pleading, Song Jiang was convinced to stay for the rest of the day and feast with his friends. But he would not hear of any suggestion that they remove his cangue, and he never took a step away from his two escorts, and they did likewise.

The next morning, Song Jiang again insisted on leaving immediately. Wu Yong told him, "Brother, I have a close friend who is presently the superintendent at the jail in Jiangzhou Prefecture. His name is Dai (4) Zong (4). He knows some Daoist magic and can travel more than 250 miles a day on foot. So everyone calls him the Magic Traveler. He's very honorable and generous. Last night, I wrote a letter for you take to him, so as to introduce you to each other so you can be friends. If you need any help, send word here."

Seeing that it was futile to try to keep him, the chieftains held a going-away banquet for Song Jiang. They brought out a tray of gold and silver for him, and also gave the two guards 20 taels of silver. Then, Song Jiang picked up his bundle and headed down the mountain, saying goodbye to each chieftain individually. Wu Yong and Hua Rong escorted him and the guards across the water and saw him off for another 6 or 7 miles before parting ways.

Song Jiang and his guards now resumed their journey to Jiangzhou. Now, those two escorts were obviously relieved to get away from Liangshan with their heads intact. After seeing the military might of the bandits, and the respect that all the chieftains showed to Song Jiang, they made sure to take extra good care of him on the way. And the 20 taels of silver they got didn't hurt either.

After traveling for a couple weeks, they saw a high peak in the distance.



"Great!" the escorts said. "That's the Sun-Lifting Peak. After we pass it, we'll be at the Sundown River. The rest of the way to Jiangzhou will be all over water. It won't be far."

"It's still pretty early," Song Jiang said. "Let's climb over the peak before we find lodging."

So the three of them picked up the pace and hurried toward the peak. After walking for half a day, they had climbed over the peak. At the foot of the mountain, they saw a tavern, situated with its back to a cliff and surrounded by some thatched huts. Under the canopies of the surrounding trees, they could see a banner with the character for wine.

"This is perfect," Song Jiang said happily. "We're hungry and thirsty, and there's a tavern here. Let's go buy a bowl of wine before going farther."

So the three of them went into the tavern. The guards laid down their luggage and leaned their staffs against the wall. Song Jiang offered them the seat at the head of a table, while he sat across from them. But they sat there for almost an hour and did not see anyone come out to take their orders. Finally, Song Jiang lost his patience.

"Where is the owner?" he called out.

"Coming! Coming!" a voice replied from the back.

A moment later, a big man emerged from the next room. He had red, bristly whiskers and bloodshot tiger eyes. He wore a tattered bandana, a sleeveless vest, and a cloth apron. He bowed and said, "Sirs, how much wine do you want?"

"We're hungry. What kind of meat do you have?" Song Jiang asked.

"Just cooked beef and cloudy grain alcohol."

"Perfect. Bring us two catties of beef and a horn of wine first."

"Sirs, please pardon me, but we require payment before service."

"That's fine by me," Song Jiang said. "Let me get you some silver."

Song Jiang opened up his bundle, took out some loose silver, and handed it to the host, who then went to the back and returned with a bucket of wine and a platter of sliced beef. He set out three big bowls and three pairs of chopsticks and started pouring wine for his patrons.

As they ate, Song Jiang and the guards started chatting. They said to each other, "God knows how many heroes have fallen victim to wicked men on the jianghu scene. They say these men would drug your wine, and once you're out, they'll take your stuff and turn you into bun fillings. Can you believe that? How ridiculous does that sound?"

When he heard that, the host chuckled and said, "In that case, you should stop eating. My wine and beef are both drugged."

Song Jiang laughed and said, "This brother is making fun of us since we were talking about drugged wine."

The two guards then asked the host if he could heat up a bowl of wine for them, and he obliged them immediately, bringing out three bowls of warm wine. Song Jiang and the escorts were thirsty as all, so they quickly chugged it. In fact, the wine and beef were so good that the two guards were drooling out of the corner of their mouths. And that was right before they started wobbling.

"How could you guys be drunk after just one bowl?" Song Jiang said as he rose to his feet to help steady them. But as soon as he stood up, he himself started feeling dizzy, and a second later, all three of them were lying on the ground, staring at each other, unable to move.

Ah crap. It's one of THOSE taverns.

"I haven't done any business for days," the host said to himself. "And now these three delivered themselves to me."

Then, he got to work. First, he dragged Song Jiang into the kitchen and threw him onto the butcher's table. He then dragged the two guards into the kitchen as well. Next, he came back out for the luggage, which he had been eyeing ever since he saw how hefty Song Jiang's bundle looked when Song Jiang was getting out silver to pay for the food. The man brought the luggage into a backroom, opened them, and saw that they were filled with gold and silver.

"In all the years I've been running this tavern, I've never seen a convict like this," he said to himself. "How can a prisoner have so much money? This must be a gift from heaven!"

He then wrapped the stuff back up and went out front to wait for his helpers to return before they get down to the business of making bun fillings.

A long while passed, and none of his helpers had showed up yet. Instead, he saw three men coming up the mountainside. He recognized them and quickly greeted the leader, "Big brother, where are you coming from?"

The leader of the men replied, "We came up to this peak specifically to welcome someone, but we must have gotten his travel schedule wrong. We've been waiting at the foot of the mountain every day but haven't seen him yet. I don't know where we missed him."

"Who are you waiting for?" the host asked.

"A truly remarkable and chivalrous man."

"Who is this remarkable and chivalrous man?"

"You must have heard of him, too. He is Song Jiang, the magisterial clerk from Yuncheng County."

"The one they call Timely Rain on the jianghu scene?"

"The very same."

The host now asked, "Why would Song Jiang be coming through here?"

"I didn't know either," the leader of the group said. "But recently an acquaintance came from Jizhou (4,1) Prefecture and told me that Song Jiang was being exiled to Jiangzhou Prefecture for some reason. I figured he must be coming through here, since there are no other routes. Even when he was in Yuncheng, I had wanted to go meet him. So now that he's coming through here, how can I not make his acquaintance? That's why I've been waiting at the foot of the mountain for four or five days, but I didn't see a single convict come through. Today, I came up the mountain with these brothers to buy a bowl of wine from you and check in on you. How's business?"

"To be honest, it's been dead around here the last few months. But thank heaven I got three pieces of walking merchandise today, and they had a lot of stuff, too."

"What do they look like?" the leader asked.

"Two guards and a prisoner."

"Wait! Is the prisoner kind of short, chunky, and dark?"

"Well, he's not that tall, and he does have a dark complexion."

"You haven't killed them yet, have you?"

"I just dragged them into the kitchen and was waiting for my helpers to get back before I start."

"Then let me take a look to see if it's him."

So the four men rushed into the kitchen, where they found Song Jiang and the two guards draped over the butcher's table with their heads touching the ground. The leader of the group took a look at Song Jiang, but didn't recognize him. He took a look at the convict's tattoo on his face but that didn't give him any clear idea either. But just then, a light bulb went on in his head.

"Quick, bring me the guards' bundle. Their paperwork will tell me what I need to know."

So the host fetched the bundle and opened it. It contained a big chunk of silver and some smaller loose pieces of silver, along with a documents bag. They opened the bag and read the paperwork inside, and all four of them let out an, “Oh crap!”

“Heaven must have made me come up the mountain today,” the leader said. “If I had come any later, my brother’s life would’ve been forfeit.”

So, who are these “brothers” of Song Jiang who have never met him and almost killed him? Find out on the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we see why tipping street performers could be hazardous to your health. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!