

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 67.

Last time, the lusty monk Pei (2) Ruhai (2,3) got it on with Yang Xiong's unfaithful wife Pan Qiaoyun while the latter was visiting the monastery. While her father and maid were downstairs, the two of them got busy upstairs in Pei Ruhai's bedroom. When they were done, though, he started lamenting that he won't get to have her again, but she was like, "Actually ..."

"My husband is working the nightshift at the jail about 20 days each month," Pan Qiaoyun told her lover as they were lying in bed. "I'll bribe my maid and tell her to wait for you by the back door. Whenever my husband is not home at night, she will put a stand outside with some burning incense as the signal, and then you can come in. If you are worried about oversleeping, then go bribe a friar and have him come by the backdoor around 5 a.m., beating his block and chanting scripture out loud. That'll be your signal to leave. Between my maid and your friar, you can sleep easy."

"Great plan!" a delighted Pei Ruhai raved. "Let's do that. There is a Friar Hu (2) here. I'll tell him to be my lookout."

"Ok. But I can't stay right now, or the others might get suspicious," she said. "I'll hurry back, and you better show up on time."

Pan Qiaoyun then tidied up her hair, reapplied her makeup, and went downstairs. She told the maid to wake up her father, and they left. The sedan chair carriers were already waiting outside the monastery. Pei Ruhai saw her all the way out, she hopped back into the sedan chair, and went home with her father and maid.

After his guests left, Pei Ruhai summoned the Friar Hu (2) he had mentioned. This Friar Hu used to work in the monks' quarters but had retired to a small temple behind the monastery. He got up at 5 a.m. each day and went around beating his wooden block to let people know what time it was. That wooden block, by the way, is called a wooden fish. It's a small percussion instrument that's used by Buddhist

monks while conducting rituals and chanting scripture. So each day, this Friar Hu would go around beating this wooden fish, encouraging people to read their scripture, and then he would stop when it became light out.

Pei Ruhai called Friar Hu to his room, treated him to three cups of fine wine and some silver, which prompted Friar Hu to stand up and say, "I haven't done anything for you, master. How could I dare to receive your reward?"

"I can tell you are an honest man," Pei Ruhai told him. "I'll spend some money and purchase an ordination certificate for you so that you can become a monk. As for this silver, you just hang on to it for now and buy yourself some clothes."

Now, remember from our supplemental episode on Buddhism that during the Song Dynasty, you could not become a monk without an ordination certificate, and those things were not cheap or easy to come by, so this was a BIG deal. Also, even before this, Pei Ruhai had regularly treated this Friar Hu to lunch and various other little favors, so Friar Hu was already indebted to him.

The friar now thought to himself, "He must have need of my services, for him to be doing this and giving me silver too. Let me ask him so he doesn't have to bring it up first."

"Master, if you need me to do anything for you, I will do my utmost," he said.

"Friar, since you are so sincere, I'll be honest with you," Pei Ruhai told him. "Mr. Pan's daughter wants to ... have interactions with me. She has told me to go to her whenever I see a stand with burning incense outside her backdoor. But I can't be seen always going there to check, so I need you to go scout out the situation, and then I can go. Also, I need you to come by her backdoor at 5 a.m. on your morning rounds. If no one is around, beat your wooden fish and chant out loud. That'll be my signal to leave."

"Oh that's easy enough," Friar Hu said, and he immediately agreed to be Pei Ruhai's eyes and ears.

The next day, Friar Hu went to Mr. Pan's home, knocked on the back door, and begged for food, which was a normal thing for monks to do. The maid came out and said, "If you are begging, why didn't you come to the front door?"

Friar Hu now started chanting scripture. Inside the house, Pan Qiaoyun heard him and figured that was her lover's accomplice. She came out and asked, "Are you the friar who always goes around at 5 a.m. announcing the time?"

"Indeed, I am the friar who goes around to announce the time so that people will not sleep in. At night I burn incense and say prayers to wish everyone good fortune."

Pan Qiaoyun was delighted and told her maid to go get a string of coins for the friar. While the maid was gone, Friar Hu whispered to Pan Qiaoyun, "I am Pei Ruhai's confidant. He sent me to conduct recon."

"I know," Pan Qiaoyun said. "Come back tonight. If there is an incense stand outside, then you can tell him to come."

Friar Hu nodded, and now the maid came back with the coins, which he accepted and took his leave. Once he was gone, Pan Qiaoyun looped her maid into her scheme and bought her cooperation and silence. And the author decided to insert a little commentary here that said, "As the old saying goes, 'A female servant is an obsequious slave. Give her a little reward, and she will do anything. That's why female servants can be ordered about but not trusted, and yet you can't do without them.' ... Anyway, let's move on.

That day happened to be one of the days when Yang Xiong was working the nightshift at the prison. So as evening approached, he left home with his quilt. The maid, with some little new bribe in her pocket, was anxiously waiting for dusk to come. When it finally arrived, she set the incense stand outside the backdoor, and Pan Qiaoyun waited inside.

When 7 p.m. rolled around, a man wearing a bandana suddenly slipped in through the backdoor.

“Who is it?” the maid asked in a low voice.

But the man did not answer. Instead, he removed his bandana and revealed a bald scalp.

Recognizing her lover, Pan Qiaoyun gave him a little joshing. “You wicked baldy. You’re pretty damn clever.”

The two of them then quietly slipped upstairs to her room, while the maid put away the incense stand, shut the backdoor, and went to bed.

That night, the two lovers were as close as glue and turpentine, sugar and honey, marrow and bone juice, and fish and water. As the old saying goes, “When you’re having fun, the night seems short, and all you want is for the rooster to hold off its morning call.” Well, we don’t have a rooster, but we do have a friar who was in on the scheme. As the two lovers laid in bed while dawn approached, they suddenly heard the rapping of a wooden fish coming through the window, accompanied by loud chants of Buddhist scripture. That immediately brought them to their feet. Pei Ruhai threw his clothes back on and said to Pan Qiaoyun, “I have to go, but I’ll see you tonight.”

“From now on, whenever there is an incense stand outside the backdoor, you have to show up,” she told him. “But if there is no incense stand, you must not come.”

Pei Ruhai then put his bandana back on, the maid opened the backdoor for him, and he slipped right out.

From that night forth, whenever Yang Xiong was working the nightshift, Pei Ruhai would sneak in for a rendezvous. Old Mr. Pan always went to bed early, and the maid was already in Pan Qiaoyun’s pocket. So the only one they had to worry about was Shi Xiu, but Pan Qiaoyun was so blinded by lust that she barely even worried about that anymore. And after getting a taste of the honey, Pei Ruhai was acting

like his soul had been snatched away. Whenever Friar Hu reported back that the incense stand was out, Pei Ruhai would hurry over, the maid would let him in, and he and Pan Qiaoyun would be in for a night of carnal pleasure. Over the next month or so, this happened more than a dozen times.

Now, Shi Xiu had never forgotten what he heard between those two on the night of the prayer service, and after he closed up shop every day, he would lie in his bed thinking about that. But he had no proof, and he hadn't seen the monk come by since then. It bugged him so much that he would often wake up around 5 a.m. thinking about this. After a month or so, he noticed something: Every other day or so, when he woke up at 5 a.m., he would hear the sound of a friar walking down this back alley, beating his wooden fish and chanting scripture. Shi Xiu was a sharp one, and he got suspicious.

"This is a dead-end lane, so why would a friar come down here day after day beating his wooden fish and chanting scripture?" he thought to himself. "There's something fishy about this."

It was now the 11th month of the year, and on the 15th day of the month, Shi Xiu once again woke up at 5 a.m., and once again, he heard the friar beating the wooden fish and walking down the back alley. As the friar approached the backdoor, Shi Xiu could hear him chanting out loud, "May the gods save all living things from misery and hardship."

Shi Xiu jumped to his feet and peeked out from a crack in the door. Suddenly, he spotted a figure wearing a bandana flash out from the shadows, slip out the backdoor, and walk off with the friar. Once they were gone, the maid came out and shut the backdoor.

NOW all the pieces fell into place for Shi Xiu, and he was pissed.

"My brother is such a hero; what a shame that he ended up with a whore for a wife!" he said to himself. "That woman has pulled the wool over his eyes and is playing him for a cuckold!"

When day broke, Shi Xiu hung up the pig carcasses in the shop and started serving his early-morning customers. After breakfast, he went out to collect on some tabs. While he was out, he decided to go look for Yang Xiong down at the prefectural offices around midday. As Shi Xiu approached the bridge near the offices, he ran into Yang Xiong.

“Brother, where are you coming from?” Yang Xiong asked.

“I was out collecting a tab, and I decided to come find you,” Shi Xiu answered.

“I’ve been so busy with official business lately that we haven’t had a good drink,” Yang Xiong said. “Let’s go grab one right now.”

So Yang Xiong took Shi Xiu to a tavern under the bridge. They sat down in a quiet room and ordered a bottle of good wine and some fresh seafood. After three cups, Yang Xiong noticed that Shi Xiu just kept looking down as if he was lost in thought.

“Brother, you look unhappy,” Yang Xiong said. “Did someone at home say something to offend you?”

“No, no one at home said anything. Brother, I am grateful to you for treating me like family. There’s something I want to say, but I’m not sure if I should.”

“Why are you acting like an outsider today? Whatever it is, just tell me.”

“Brother, you are occupied with official business every day. You have no idea what’s going on behind your back. Your wife ... she’s no good. I’ve seen the signs many times, but I just haven’t said anything. But after what I saw today, I couldn’t bear it anymore, so I came to find you. Please don’t be upset with me.”

“I don’t have eyes behind my back,” Yang Xiong said. “Who are you talking about?”

“When your house hosted the prayer service and invited that scoundrel of a monk Pei Ruhai, your wife was exchanging glances with him. I saw it all. Then, a couple days later she went to his monastery to fulfill a promise of offering prayers. Both she and her father came home looking flushed from wine.

Then, recently I've been hearing a friar coming to our back alley chanting and beating his wooden fish. It seemed really odd, so this morning I got up at 5 a.m. to take a look. And sure enough, I saw that bald scoundrel Pei Ruhai covering his head with a bandana and sneaking out from your house. Why should you keep that harlot around?"

Yang Xiong flew into a rage. "How dare that whore?!" he scowled, but Shi Xiu checked him.

"Brother, calm down. Don't mention this tonight. Just go about your business like normal. Tomorrow, pretend that you're going to work at night. If someone knocks on the door after midnight, that knave will no doubt be sneaking out through the backdoor again. Then I will catch him and let you do with him what you will."

Yang Xiong agreed, and Shi Xiu once again reminded him to not tip off his wife that night. The two then drank a few more cups, paid their bill and left. But as soon as they stepped out of the tavern, Yang Xiong was accosted by four or five of his colleagues.

"Warden, we've been looking everywhere for you!" they shouted. "The prefect is resting in the garden and wants you to show off your fighting skills. C'mon, hurry up!"

Yang Xiong turned to Shi Xiu and said, "The prefect is asking for me, so I have to go. You go on home first."

So Shi Xiu went home and took care of the shop as usual until closing time, at which point he just went back to his room and rested. As for Yang Xiong, he went to the prefect's garden and showed off some moves. The prefect was very impressed and treated him to wine -- 10 big goblets in a row, in fact. And after that, Yang Xiong's colleagues took him out to drink some more. They stayed out into the night, and Yang Xiong got so hammered that the others had to help him home.

Seeing her husband stumbling in drunk, Pan Qiaoyun thanked his colleagues, sent them home, and then together with the maid helped Yang Xiong upstairs. In the flickering candlelight, they sat Yang Xiong down on the bed and helped him disrobe. As he looked at his wife, however, Yang Xiong suddenly felt a

surge of anger. He pointed at her and cursed, "You damn whore! Harlot! I'm going to take care of you one way or another!"

Pan Qiaoyun was taken aback and did not dare to say anything. She just helped Yang Xiong lie down in bed. But as he lay down, he kept mumbling angrily, "You whore! You dirty harlot! And that scoundrel dares to spit in a tiger's mouth? No way I'm going to let you off easy."

The whole time he was cursing, Pan Qiaoyun did not dare to breathe. She sat and watched until Yang Xiong drifted off to sleep.

Around 5 a.m., Yang Xiong woke up and asked for water. Pan Qiaoyun got up and fetched a bowl. In the dying flame of the waning candle, Yang Xiong sipped the water and asked his wife, "Why didn't you disrobe before you went to bed last night?"

"You were so drunk that I was afraid you would throw up," she said. "So I just lay down by the foot of the bed all night."

"I didn't say anything bad, did I?" he asked.

"You are a pretty tame drunk. You usually just fall right asleep. I was just a bit worried last night."

Yang Xiong now said, "I haven't had a good drink with brother Shi Xiu lately. You should set up something for him."

But to this, Pan Qiaoyun gave no answer. She just sat on the step of the bed and sighed while her eyes became filled with tears.

"Wife, I was drunk last night but I didn't give you any grief, so what's bothering you?" Yang Xiong asked, oblivious on multiple levels.

Pan Qiaoyun covered her face and gave no answer. As Yang Xiong pressed her time and again, she just kept sobbing. Yang Xiong now pulled her onto the bed and demanded to know what was the matter.



In between sobs, Pan Qiaoyun said, "When my parents married me to Clerk Wang, they were hoping it would be forever, but who knew he would leave me midway. Then, I married you, a true hero. And yet, who knew that even you cannot get my back."

"What? Who's bullying you? How am I not getting your back?"

"I didn't want to tell you, but I'm worried you might fall for his lies. But I'm also afraid that if I told you, you would get mad."

"Tell me what's going on!" Yang Xiong demanded.

"I'll tell you, but don't get mad. That Shi Xiu was fine when you first brought him home as your brother, but then he showed his thorns. When you aren't home, he often looks at me and says, 'My brother is not home again today. Sister-in-law, you must be so lonely sleeping by yourself.' I just ignored him. That's happened more than once, but nevermind that. Yesterday morning, while I was in the kitchen washing my neck, that knave came up from behind, and when he saw no one else was around, he reached out and touched my chest and asked, 'Sister-in-law, are you pregnant yet?' I slapped his hand away and was going to make a ruckus, but then I was afraid the neighbors would find out and laugh at us and make you look bad. I was waiting all day for you to come home, but then you came back and was dead drunk, so I didn't dare to tell you then. I wish I could eat that scoundrel! Why don't you go and ask your dear brother Shi Xiu about it?"

When Yang Xiong heard this, he felt another surge of anger, but this time, it was not directed at his wife.

"A tiger's picture shows its pelt but not its bones; you can know a man's face but not his heart!" he scoffed. "That knave came to me yesterday and accused Pei Ruhai of many misdeeds. Turns out it's all baseless! That bastard must have panicked and came to accuse you first. Well, he's not my blood brother. I'll kick him out, and that'll be that!"

When day broke, Yang Xiong stomped downstairs and said to Mr. Pan, "Salt the pigs that have already been butchered. From this day forth, don't run the butcher shop anymore!" He then flipped over all the counters and tables in the butcher shop to send a not-so-subtle message.

When Shi Xiu saw this mess, he chuckled and said, "Yep. Yang Xiong must have let something slip out while he was drunk and tipped off that woman, so she accused me of misbehaving instead and goaded Yang Xiong into closing the butcher shop. If I have it out with her right now, it'll make Yang Xiong look bad. Fine, I'll take a step back for now, and settle this later."

So Shi Xiu went to his room and packed a bundle for the road. Yang Xiong, not wanting to embarrass him, just left without saying a word. Shi Xiu strapped on his bundle, packed his dagger, and went to take his leave of Mr. Pan, telling him, "I've imposed on you for too long. Since my brother has closed the shop, I'll take my leave. All the accounts have been settled, and if even a single coin is amiss, may heaven and earth strike me dead."

Mr. Pan had already received instructions from Yang Xiong, so he did not dare to keep Shi Xiu and just let him go. After he left the house, Shi Xiu went and got a room at a nearby inn. There, he thought to himself, "Yang Xiong is my sworn brother. If I don't clear this up, it could cost him his life. Even though he's blinded by that woman's lies for now and holds a grudge against me, I still can't bear to just leave him. I must clear this up with him."

Two days later, Yang Xiong was again on the nightshift at the prison. That night, all was quiet, except for a momentary stir at the backdoor to Yang Xiong's residence, and then everything was silent again.

Around 5 a.m., the familiar rapping of a wooden fish echoed through the empty streets. Friar Hu approached, and as he reached the entrance to the back alley behind Yang Xiong's house, he ducked in and was just looking around when suddenly, he felt a strong hand grab him from behind, and the next thing he knew, he felt a cold blade pressed against his neck.

“Don’t struggle!” he heard a voice whisper. “Make a sound, and I’ll kill you! Now, tell me, what were Pei Ruhai’s instructions?”

“Hero, spare me and I’ll tell you,” the trembling friar pleaded.

“Tell me right now, and I won’t kill you.”

“That Pei Ruhai is carrying on an affair with Mr. Pan’s daughter and comes here almost every night. He told me to check the backdoor to see if there’s an incense stand. That’s the signal for him to come. And then at 5 a.m., I’m supposed to come beat the wooden fish and chant scripture as a signal for him to leave.”

“Where is he now?” the voice asked.

“He’s still in the house, sleeping. When he hears me beating the wooden fish, he will come out.”

“Let me borrow your clothes and your wooden fish,” the shadowy figure ordered.

So Friar Hu stripped off his clothing and put down his wooden fish. As soon as he put his clothes aside, he felt something cold and sharp slide across his throat. And then all was quiet again in the darkness.

Minutes later, inside the house, Pei Ruhai was lying in bed with his lover when he heard the rapping of the wooden fish, so he quickly got dressed and went downstairs, where the maid opened the back door for him. Pei Ruhai slipped out, and the maid shut the door behind him. He saw the friar, who was still beating the wooden fish.

“Hey you!” Pei Ruhai whisper-shouted. “Enough with that already.”

He started walking toward the entrance to the back alley, with the friar following behind in silence. But they had not gone but a couple steps when suddenly, Pei Ruhai felt a foot tripping him. He fell forward to the ground, and before he could react, the friar was on top of him.

“Don’t make any noise, or I’ll kill you!” the friar said ... except it wasn’t the friar. Pei Ruhai knew that voice; he knew who it was.

“All I want you to do is to take off all your clothes,” the voice ordered.

Shaking with fear, Pei Ruhai quietly obeyed, stripping off all his clothing. No sooner had he taken off his last garment did he feel something icy cold enter his side, get pulled out, and then thrust into another part of his torso, and then another, and another. And then, darkness swallowed up everything.

As the first light of morning was casting down on the neighborhood, a familiar sight appeared. It was a certain Grandpa Wang who sold rice porridge and cakes. Like he did every morning, he was carrying a load of porridge and cakes on a shoulder pole, holding a paper lantern, and accompanied by a little boy. They were on their way to peddle their food to the hungry breakfast-seekers.

Suddenly, Grandpa Wang tripped over something in the fading darkness. As he stumbled, his porridge splattered to the ground.

“Oh no!” the little boy shouted. “There’s a monk passed out drunk right here.”

Grandpa Wang felt around the drunk monk with his hands, and suddenly, he felt something wet. He jerked his hands back and looked, expecting to see them covered with white porridge. Instead, they were red, and he screamed.

Several neighbors heard him and came out to investigate, and they were stunned by what they saw. The ground was covered by a mixture of white porridge and red blood, splattered around two naked bodies and an old man who was kneeling over them, screaming.

The neighbors quickly grabbed hold of Grandpa Wang and dragged him off to the prefectural courthouse.

“This old man was carrying a load of porridge and cakes and spilled them on the ground,” the neighbors told the prefect. “When we looked, we saw two dead bodies on the ground. One was a monk, and the other a friar, and both were buck naked. Next to the friar, we found a dagger.”

Grandpa Wang hurriedly added, “I make my living selling porridge and cakes every day. I come out on the streets at 5 a.m. every morning. Today I got up a little earlier and was trying to keep up with this blind little monkey, so I wasn’t paying attention. I tripped and smashed all my plates and bowls, and then I saw the two bodies on the ground, with blood everywhere. I was startled and screamed. But the neighbors dragged me here. Your honor, please use your great wisdom to investigate and clear this up!”

To see if Grandpa Wang can escape the clutches of the ancient Chinese legal system, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we’ll deal with the fallout from the night’s events. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!