

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 68.

Last time, Grandpa Wang the porridge peddler had the misfortune of being the first to discover the lifeless bodies of the monk Pei Ruhai and his accomplice Friar Hu lying in a pool of blood in the early morning. That promptly got Grandpa Wang dragged off to the prefectural courthouse, where he faced the possibility being saddled with murder charges. The prefect took testimony from him and the neighbors who saw him with the dead bodies, and then dispatched some cops to inspect the crime scene.

The inspectors returned and reported: "The slain monk is Pei Ruhai from the Grateful Retribution Monastery, and the friar next to him is a Friar Hu that lived behind the monastery. The monk was buck naked, and died from three or four stab wounds. We found a dagger next to Friar Hu's body, and he died of a cut across his throat. It looks like Friar Hu killed the monk, and then killed himself out of fear of punishment for his crime."

The prefect then summoned other monks from the monastery and questioned them, but none of them had any explanation for what happened. Left with a dead-end case, the prefect looked to the clerk, and the clerk offered this suggestion:

"Since that monk was buck naked, he must have been involved in some dirty business with that friar and they killed each other. This doesn't appear to have anything to do with Grandpa Wang. The neighbors should be released on bond to await further instruction. Turn the bodies over to the monastery so they can be put in coffins. And we'll just write it up as they killed each other, and that'll be the end of that."

"Sounds good to me," the prefect said, and so it was done. Well, at least Grandpa Wang survived his brush with the law.

Now, news of a murder-suicide involving two naked men of religion doesn't stay contained for long. Some idlers around town made up a little ditty making fun of how the monk was engaging in shameful deeds, and then it got picked up by a few young scholars, who were inspired to pen a poem about it. And before you knew it, this thing had gone viral, Northern Song Dynasty style. Everybody in town was talking about it, and the monk's lover, Pan Qiaoyun, also heard about it, and she was stunned. Of course, she did not dare to say anything and only lamented her deceased booty call in silence.

As for her husband Yang Xiong, when he heard the news, he had a pretty good inkling what happened and who was responsible.

"This must be Shi Xiu's doing," he thought to himself. "I must have wrongfully blamed him. I'm free today, so let me go find him and get the truth."

As he was walking past the bridge, he heard someone call out to him from behind. It was none other than Shi Xiu.

"Brother, I was just looking for you," Yang Xiong said.

"Brother, come with me; we need to talk," Shi Xiu told him.

So they went back to the inn where Shi Xiu had been staying since he left Yang Xiong's home. Once they were alone in Shi Xiu's room, Shi Xiu asked Yang Xiong, "Brother, was I telling the truth or what?"

"Brother, forgive me," Yang Xiong apologized. "I was a fool in the moment. I misspoke after I got drunk, and then I got deceived by that woman, and she drove a wedge between us. I've come to find you today to beg your forgiveness."

"Brother, I may be untalented, but I am an upstanding man," Shi Xiu said. "How could I ever do whatever it is she accused me of? I was afraid that you would be done in by her wicked schemes, so I came to look for you to show you proof."

As he spoke, he took out two sets of clothing and showed them to Yang Xiong. They belonged to the monk and the friar. Now, it may be just me, but the only thing that seemed to prove was that Shi Xiu

indeed killed them. It didn't really prove anything about the monk's affair with Yang Xiong's wife. But it was enough for Yang Xiong, as he flew into a rage.

"Brother, please forgive me," he said. "Tonight, I'm going to cut that whore to pieces to sooth my anger."

But Shi Xiu chuckled and said, "Here you go again. You work for the government, so how can you not know the law? You didn't catch her in the act, so how can you justify killing her? What if I am lying? Won't you be killing an innocent?"

"Well then, what?" Yang Xiong asked.

"Just do what I tell you, and I'll help you act like a real man."

"How?"

"Outside the east gate, there is a Jade Screen Mountain," Shi Xiu said. "It's a very secluded place. Tomorrow, just say that you haven't gone out to offer incense to the spirits in a while and want to go with your wife. Lure that woman out and bring her and her maid to that mountain. I will be waiting there. She and I can compare our stories and sort out everything. Then, you can write a divorce paper and dump her. Won't that be a better plan?"

"Brother, there's no need to debate this with her," Yang Xiong said. "I know you are innocent and that woman is lying."

"No no. I want you to know exactly what she's been doing."

"Alright, since you have this great plan, then it will work for sure. I will bring that whore tomorrow; just don't be late."

"If I am not there, then everything I have said is a lie," Shi Xiu reassured him.

When Yang Xiong got up the next morning, he said to Pan Qiaoyun, "Last night I dreamed that a god came to me and said that I have an unfulfilled promise. I had promised to offer incense at the temple

outside the east gate, but haven't done so yet. I have some free time today, so I want to go take care of that. You should come, too."

"If you want to go, then go by yourself. Why do you need me to come along?" Pan Qiaoyun asked.

"I made that promise when I was proposing our marriage, so of course you have to come."

"In that case, let's eat a vegetarian meal, take a bath, and then go."

"I'm going to buy some sacrificial money and hire a sedan chair," Yang Xiong said. "You go bathe, do your hair, and get dressed, and then wait for me. Tell the maid to come along, too."

Yang Xiong then left home and went to see Shi Xiu at the inn to tell him that everything was set up. Shi Xiu told him to leave the sedan chair midway up the mountain and go on foot to the top, where he'd be waiting.

After that, Yang Xiong completed his errands and went home for breakfast. By now, Pan Qiaoyun had dressed up quite neatly, and the maid did likewise. The sedan chair arrived, and Yang Xiong told his father-in-law, "My wife and I are going to the mountain to burn some incense. We'll be back."

"Sounds good. Burn some good incense and hurry home," Mr. Pan said.

Pan Qiaoyun got into the sedan chair, and Yang Xiong and the maid followed on foot. The party left the town through the east gate, and Yang Xiong whispered to the sedan chair carriers, "Take us to Jade Screen Mountain, and I'll pay you extra."

About three hours later, they arrived at the mountain. This Jade Screen Mountain sat about six or seven miles outside of town, and it was dotted with graves. It was covered with grass and trees, and there were no monasteries or temples.

The party went halfway up the mountain, and Yang Xiong told the men to stop. He lifted up the curtain of the chair and told Pan Qiaoyun to get out.

"What are we doing on this mountain?" she asked as she stepped out.

"Just go on up," Yang Xiong told her. And then he turned to the sedan chair carriers and said, "You guys just wait here. When we come back down, I will tip you."

So Yang Xiong, Pan Qiaoyun, and the maid walked up the rest of the way. After scaling several hills, Yang Xiong spotted Shi Xiu sitting on a rock up ahead.

"Hey, why didn't we bring the incense and the sacrificial money?" Pan Qiaoyun suddenly asked.

"I already had someone bring them to the top," Yang Xiong said.

He then led her up to an ancient grave, and there, Shi Xiu sat waiting, with his bundle, broadsword, and wooden staff all in tow. When he saw them approach, he went over and said, "Sister-in-law, how are you?"

"What are you doing here?" a startled Pan Qiaoyun asked, trying to hide her surprise.

"I've been waiting here for quite a while," Shi Xiu replied.

Yang Xiong stared at his wife and said, "A few days ago you told me that he had teased you many times and even touched your chest and asked you if you were pregnant yet. Today, there's no one else here, so the two of you can come clean and sort it all out."

"Oh that's all in the past; why bring it up again?" Pan Qiaoyun said.

But Shi Xiu glared at her and said, "Sister-in-law, how can you say that? This is no idle chitchat. We must sort it out in front of my brother."

"Brother-in-law, why do you insist on bringing up your shame?"

"Sister-in-law, there's no point in denying it. Let me show you something."

As he spoke, Shi Xiu opened a bundle and took out the clothes that belonged to Pei Ruhai and Friar Hu.

"Do you recognize these?" he said as he threw them to the ground.

Pan Qiaoyun stood in silence, her face flushed. Suddenly, Shi Xiu unsheathed his broadsword and said to Yang Xiong, "Ask the maid; she knows."

Yang Xiong dragged the maid over, made her kneel on the ground, and scowled, "You little harlot! Tell me the truth! How did that monk arrange the affair? How did you use the incense stand as a signal? How did the friar serve as the lookout? Tell me the truth, and I'll spare you. But if you utter so much as a single false word, I'll turn you into meat paste first!"

"Master, it has nothing to do with me, don't kill me! I'll tell you!" the maid pleaded. She then fessed up everything, starting from the day she and Pan Qiaoyun went to the monastery all the way to how the affair went down night after night.

"Mistress knew that she couldn't hide this from me, so she told me the truth and gave me some jewelry and a set of clothes," the maid said. "So I had to do as she said. They had spent dozens of nights together before the monk was killed. Later, she gave me some more jewelry and told me to tell you that Mr. Shi was teasing her. But I didn't see that happen with my own eyes, so I did not dare to repeat it to you. That's the truth, every word of it!"

"There you go, brother," Shi Xiu said. "I didn't tell her to say any of that. Why don't you go ask your wife for the details?"

Yang Xiong pulled Pan Qiaoyun over and shouted, "Damn whore! The maid has already confessed, so don't try to lie. Tell me the whole truth, and I'll spare you!"

"I was wrong," Pan Qiaoyun said. "On account of our marriage, please spare me this one time."

"Brother, don't let her gloss over this," Shi Xiu said. "You must make her tell you all the details."

"You damn whore! Hurry up and tell me!" Yang Xiong scowled again.

So Pan Qiaoyun had no choice but to confess, recounting everything that happened, starting with the night of the prayer service at her house.

"And why did you tell my brother that I was harassing you?!" Shi Xiu pressed her, still not content.

"A few days ago he got drunk and cursed me," she said. "By his words I could guess that you were on to me and had told him. When he woke up, he asked about you, so I made up a lie to cover. You never did any of those things I said."

Now finally satisfied, Shi Xiu turned to Yang Xiong and said, "You have heard the whole truth from the three of us. I'll let you decide how to proceed."

"Brother, take off that whore's jewelry and clothing; I'll take care of her personally," Yang Xiong said.

So Shi Xiu removed Pan Qiaoyun's jewelry and clothes, and Yang Xiong cut off a couple ribbons from her skirt and tied her to a tree. Meanwhile, Shi Xiu removed the maid's jewelry as well. He then handed his broadsword to Yang Xiong and said, "What's the point of leaving this little harlot? Get rid of the weeds, roots and all."

"Quite right, brother," Yang Xiong said. "Give me the knife; I'll do it myself."

The maid was just about to scream, but Yang Xiong had already brought the blade down, slicing her in half.

Seeing this, Pan Qiaoyun pleaded to Shi Xiu to intervene and spare her. But she was barking up the wrong tree. Shi Xiu turned to her and said, "Sister-in-law, my brother is going to tend to you himself."

Yang Xiong now walked up to her, forced her mouth open, pulled out her tongue, and cut it off with a dagger so that she couldn't talk anymore. Next, he pointed at her and cursed, "You damn whore! I was muddleheaded for a moment and you almost pulled one over on me. Not only did you damage the bond between me and my brother, but you would have no doubt killed me down the road. So I'm going to make a preemptive strike today. I want to see what your wicked innards look like."

As he spoke, he thrust the dagger into her chest and ran it all the way down to her belly, slicing her open. He removed her innards and hung them on a pine tree. He then carved her into seven pieces.

So, I guess by this point we really shouldn't be surprised at how this turned out. I mean, we all still remember Wu Song's little killing spree when he brought his unfaithful sister-in-law and her adulterous lover to justice. But at least there, they had actually killed his brother, so you could argue that his actions, however bloody, were maybe justified in an eye-for-an-eye kind of way. But in this case, what was the worst thing that Yang Xiong's wife did? Hook up with another man while her husband was perpetually working or busy hanging out with his new sworn brother that he had just picked up off the streets a month earlier? Actually, it seems like the worst thing she did, from Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu's perspective, might be lying about Shi Xiu. And for driving a wedge between him and his hetero life mate, Yang Xiong deemed himself justified in slicing her open, pulling out her guts, and carving her into pieces. And oh yeah, he killed the maid, too. So, just a little bit of an overreaction.

When he was done with this grisly justice, Yang Xiong packed her clothes and jewelry into a bundle and said to Shi Xiu, "Brother, let's talk about next steps. We've killed the scoundrel and the harlot, but where can we find refuge now?"

"I've already thought about it," Shi Xiu said. "I have a place. Let's go at once."

"Where?"

"Brother, you've committed murder, and so have I. If we don't go join the bandits on Liangshan, where else could we go?"

"Wait!" Yang Xiong said. "We don't know anybody there. How could they be willing to take us in?"

"Brother, you're mistaken," Shi Xiu said. "Right now who on the jianghu scene doesn't know that Song Jiang the Timely Rain is recruiting men of talent and the heroes of the land? With our skills, how can they not take us in?"

"It's always better to expect the worst," Yang Xiong cautioned. "And I happen to be a cop. I worry that they would be suspicious and won't take us in."



Shi Xiu laughed and said, "Song Jiang himself was a magisterial clerk. Brother, rest easy. The day you and I first met, the two men who invited me to a tavern were the Liangshan chieftains Dai Zong and Yang Lin. They gave me 10 taels of silver, which I still have right here. We can go seek refuge with them."

"In that case, let me go home and pack up some stuff, and then we'll go," Yang Xiong said.

"Brother, you can't dither like this!" Shi Xiu said. "If you go back into town and get caught, what then? Right now we have all the jewelry, and I have some silver. Even if there were three or four more of us, that'd still be enough. What's the point of going home to get more? If something goes wrong, how would we get away? This thing is going to blow up soon enough. We must not delay. Let's go toward the back of the mountain."

So Shi Xiu strapped on his bundle and grabbed his wooden staff, while Yang Xiong hung the short broadsword around his waist and carried the long-handle broadsword in his hand. They were just about to leave this grisly scene when suddenly, a man flashed out from behind a pine tree and shouted, "I've heard everything. You committed murder in broad daylight, and now you're going to join the bandits on Liangshan."

Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu were just about to panic, but that guy had already bent down and bowed to them. Turns out, Yang Xiong knew this guy. His name was Shi (2) Qian (1), and he was a really shifty character. He was from out of town and had drifted to this area. He scrounged a living as a thief. Once, he was taken to court in the prefecture, but Yang Xiong got him off. This Shi Qian may be a thief, but he was a really talented thief. He was extremely agile and could move so quietly that people called him Flea on a Drum. Basically, he would be the perfect greaseman for your next Ocean's 11 heist.

"What are you doing here?" Yang Xiong asked.

"I haven't had much business lately, so I came here to dig up some graves and raid their contents," Shi Qian said. "I saw what you were doing and didn't dare to interrupt. But then I heard you talk about

going to Liangshan. Right now I'm just doing small-time thieving around here. How can that amount to anything? It would be great if I can come with you to Liangshan. Will you take me with you?"

"Since you're also a hero, and Liangshan is recruiting men of talent, why won't they take you," Shi Xiu said. "If that is your will, then let's go together."

"I know the way," Shi Qian said happily, and our three ... umm ... heroes -- two murderers and a grave-robber -- headed down the backside of the mountain and set off toward Liangshan.

Meanwhile, back on the front side of the mountain, the two sedan chair carriers were still sitting around, waiting. By now the sun was descending in the west, and they still had not seen Yang Xiong and his wife come back. Eventually, they got fed up and walked up the mountainside to see what's taking so long. In the distance, they spotted a flock of crows -- or should we say a murder of crows -- squabbling around an old grave. So they went over to see what the commotion was, and they immediately regretted it.

On the ground, they saw the maid lying in two pieces. On a nearby tree, they found what remained of Pan Qiaoyun, laid out in chunks. Crowding around her remains, the crows were fighting over her entrails. After emptying the contents of their stomachs, the sedan chair carriers rushed back into town to report this. The prefect immediately dispatched men to investigate the scene. They came back and said, "We found the woman Pan Qiaoyun carved up on a pine tree. Her maid was killed near an old grave. Next to the grave, we found a pile of women's clothing, along with clothes that looked like the outfits of a monk and a friar."

Suddenly, all the pieces fell into place for the prefect. He immediately summoned Mr. Pan and asked him about his daughter and the monk, and Mr. Pan recounted how they had visited the monastery and he had fallen asleep drunk for a good while, but surely nothing shady was going on while he was drunk. The nice, handsome monk was just going to show his daughter his Buddha's tooth and ... oh ... I see.

Mr. Pan then told the prefect how Yang Xiong had kicked Shi Xiu out of the house, and everything made sense now.

“Looks like that woman was having an affair with the monk, and the maid and the friar were their accomplices,” the prefect said. “I think that Shi Xiu saw an injustice and decided to kill the monk and the friar. And that Yang Xiong killed his wife and the maid today. That must be it. We just need to catch Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu, and all will be clear.”

After patting himself on the back for that nice bit of deductive reasoning, the prefect put out a decree, along with a reward, for Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu’s arrest. The sedan chair carriers were allowed to go home and await further instructions. Mr. Pan, meanwhile, had to go buy coffins for his dead daughter and maid.

Meanwhile, Yang Xiong, Shi Xiu, and Shi Qian had already left the prefecture. After several days, they arrived in neighboring Yunzhou (4,1) Prefecture. They crossed Fragrant Woods Hollow and saw in front of them a tall mountain. It was getting dark by now, and they saw an inn by a stream up ahead, so they went there to seek lodging. The clerk at the inn was just about to lock up when they walked up.

“Sirs, you must have been traveling from afar to have arrived so late,” the clerk said.

“We’ve traveled 30-some miles today, that’s why we’re late,” Shi Qian answered.

The clerk invited them inside and asked, “Have you had dinner yet?”

“We can take care of the cooking ourselves,” Shi Qian said.

“Well, we haven’t had any guests today,” the clerk said, “so there are two clean woks on the stove. Please help yourself.”

“Do you have any wine and meat?” Shi Qian asked.

“We had some pork earlier, but nearby residents bought it all. All we have left is one jug of wine, but no side dishes to go with the rice.”

“Oh well,” Shi Qian said. “Please give us some rice first, and then we’ll worry about it.”

So the clerk gave them the rice, and Shi Qian lit a fire in the stove and started cooking the rice.

Meanwhile, Shi Xiu put away their luggage, while Yang Xiong took out a hairpin and gave it to the clerk as payment for the jug of wine. The clerk accepted the hairpin and brought out the jug of wine, along with a plate of warm vegetables. Shi Qian then brought over a bucket of hot water for his friends to wash hands and soak their feet, while he poured the wine into cups. They asked the clerk to join them, and the four men sat around the table and started drinking.

As they drank, Shi Xiu looked around the inn and noticed that under the eaves stood a weapons rack with a dozen or so fine long-handle broadswords.

“How come you guys have such weapons at the inn?” he asked the clerk.

“Our masters left them here.”

“What sort of men are your masters?”

“Sirs, you all look like well-traveled men; how come you haven’t heard of this place?” the clerk explained. “The peak up ahead is called Lone Dragon Mountain. In front of the mountain is a high ridge called Lone Dragon Ridge. On top of the ridge is my master’s residence. It’s a 10-square-mile property called the Zhu (4) Family Manor. The master of the manor, Old Mr. Zhu (4), has three sons, and they’re known as the Three Zhu Warriors. There are about 700 households that live around their manor, and they’re all tenants. Each household is assigned two long-handle broadswords. My place is called the Zhu Family Inn. Because we often have dozens of people from the Zhu household staying here, they’ve left all these weapons here.”

“Why would they assign weapons to an inn?” Shi Xiu asked.

“We’re not far from Liangshan Marsh,” the clerk said, “so we have to guard against bandit raids.”

“Can I buy one of the broadswords from you?” Shi Xiu asked.

“That I can’t do,” the clerk said. “All the weapons are marked as the Zhu family’s property. My masters are very strict; I can’t risk their punishment.”

“Ah, I was just kidding, no need to panic,” Shi Xiu laughed. “Just drink.”

“I can’t drink anymore. Sirs, help yourselves. I’m going to bed.”

The clerk left, and after Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu drank another round or two, Shi Qian smirked and asked, “Hey brothers, want some meat?”

“But the clerk said they didn’t have any,” Yang Xiong said. “Where did you find some?”

Shi Qian grinned, walked behind the stove, and retrieved a big, cooked rooster.

“Where did that come from?” Yang Xiong asked.

“I was outside taking a pee just now and saw this rooster in a cage,” Shi Qian said. “I figured there wasn’t anything else to go with the wine, so I quietly took it down to the stream and killed it, and then I took a bucket of hot water out back, cleaned it up, and steamed it for you two.”

“You are still the same thief you’ve always been,” Yang Xiong said.

Shi Xiu laughed and chimed in, “Once a thief, always a thief.”

The three had a good laugh as they tore into the chicken.

A little bit later, the clerk came back out to see if everything was alright. As he passed by the kitchen, he noticed some chicken feathers and bones on the table. When he checked the stove, he saw half a wok of grease. He rushed out back to check the rooster cage, and sure enough, the rooster was gone.

Oh boy.

To see how our heroes will react when confronted about the pettiest of petty thefts, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we see how having an act of petty

theft committed against you means you have insulted the honor of the mighty heroes of Liangshan. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!