

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 74.

Last time, the Liangshan bandits finally sacked the Zhu Family Manor and killed everyone inside. While they were at it, Li Kui also sacked the neighboring Hu Family Manor and killed everyone inside, even though they had already offered to make peace with the bandits days earlier. After giving Li Kui a stern, don't-ever-do-that-again lecture, Song Jiang and company returned to Liangshan victorious and loaded down with booty and new recruits, willing or otherwise.

Once on Liangshan, they celebrated deep into the night. The next day, they feasted again, and during the feast, Song Jiang called over the chieftain Wang Ying (1) the Stumpy Tiger and told him, "Back when we were at Clear Winds Mountain, I promised to find you a wife someday. I haven't made good on that promise yet, but today, my father has a daughter and wants to take you as his son-in-law."

Wait, you might be asking, how come we never heard about Song Jiang having a sister before? Well, Song Jiang now invited his father to join them, and Old Squire Song came out with his new daughter, who was none other than Hu Sanniang, aka Ten Feet of Steel, aka the daughter of the freshly slaughtered Hu Family, aka the former fiancée of one of the brothers in the newly vanquished Zhu family. After the bandits captured her in an earlier battle, Song Jiang immediately sent her back to the stronghold to be looked after by his father. The other chieftains just thought Song Jiang was keeping her for himself, but it turns out that Song Jiang had other ideas.

Song Jiang now said to Hu Sanniang, "Even though my brother Wang Ying has some fighting skills, he is not a match for you. But I once promised to find him a wife and had not done so yet. Since you have accepted my father as your father, let's have all the chieftains here serve as matchmakers, and on this auspicious day, you and Wang Ying can get married."

Now, by just about any stretch of the imagination, this would be a ludicrous proposition from Hu Sanniang's perspective. First, hey, remember we were mortal enemies like a week ago? And it's not like we had a whole reconciliation scene or anything. You guys just captured me and took me here. Second,

you guys just killed my fiance and his entire family. Third, you guys just killed MY entire family except for my brother, and burned my home to the ground. And finally, are you seriously asking me to marry this horny toad of a midget who, one, was getting his butt kicked by me on the battlefield, and two, was sexually harassing me the whole time. Also, if you were Wang Ying, how keen are YOU on climbing into bed with a woman who, by all logic, is here against her will, is likely in deep mourning over the death of her family at your buddies' hands, is probably still pissed at you for the shenanigans you pulled the first and only time you guys met, and oh by the way is nicknamed Ten Feet of Steel for the twin blades that she's quite handy with.

Well, they apparently found some rather high rafters from which to suspend disbelief, because according to the novel, Hu Sanniang could not refuse on account of how honorable Song Jiang was, so she and Wang Ying bowed and thanked him for the match. Everyone else was excited and proclaimed Song Jiang to be a true man of honor and virtue because ... reasons. Yeah, I know. This is on par with that scene where Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt agreed to join the gang seconds after finding out they had caused the death of his family. It makes absolutely no sense, but that's the way the story goes, so let's just roll with it.

Anyway, everyone now resumed feasting to celebrate the match. As they were drinking, a lackey from the tavern run by Zhu Gui the Dryland Crocodile came and reported that they had a visitor. Turns out a group of travelers were passing through, and the Liangshan lackeys stopped them and tried to conduct their usual transactions. But one of the travelers turned out to be a familiar acquaintance of the leaders of Liangshan. It was the constable Lei Heng from Yuncheng County. Remember that he and his fellow constable Zhu Tong were good friends with both Chao Gai and Song Jiang and were instrumental in helping both flee from the law. When Zhu Gui found out who he was, he kept Lei Heng at the tavern and sent word up to the stronghold.

Chao Gai and Song Jiang were delighted, and they went down the mountain with the strategist Wu Yong. By now, Zhu Gui had already dispatched a boat to row Lei Heng over to Golden Sand Beach. Song Jiang immediately fell to his knees and said, "It's been too long since I've seen you, and I have often thought of you. What brings you past our humble abode today?"

Lei Heng quickly returned the greeting and said, "The magistrate sent me on an assignment, and I was on my way back. We were passing through when your men tried to rob us. I mentioned my unworthy name, so Brother Zhu Gui asked me to stay for a bit."

"This is heaven-sent!" Song Jiang exclaimed. He then invited Lei Heng up to the stronghold to meet all the chieftains and to partake in their feast. Lei Heng ended up staying for five days, spending each day shooting the breeze with Song Jiang. Chao Gai asked about the other constable, Zhu Tong, and Lei Heng said that Zhu Tong had been promoted to the warden of the county jail and that the new magistrate adored him.

As they were talking, Song Jiang tried to nudge the conversation toward a recruitment pitch, but Lei Heng declined on account of his mother getting up there in age. "Once she has departed, then I will come join you," he told Song Jiang. And with that, he took his leave, despite Song Jiang's best efforts to keep him. All the chieftains presented Lei Heng with some going-away money, and he ended up leaving Liangshan with a giant bundle of gold and silver.

After Lei Heng left, Song Jiang and company turned their attention to once again rearranging the duty roster to incorporate the newcomers. The husband-and-wife team of Sun Xin and Gu Dasao used to be tavern keepers, so they were sent to oversee one of the taverns. The other three taverns also each received a second chieftain to help. They then assigned everyone else to oversee various camps and mountain passes all around Liangshan. The novel lists all this out in detail, but I'll just skip it because it's literally just a duty roster. Go check out the book if you want to see who got the plum assignments and who was stuck with banquet duty.

Anyway, let's leave Liangshan for now and go catch up with Lei Heng. He had an uneventful journey the rest of the way back to Yuncheng County. Once he got home, he paid his respects to his mother, went to report to the magistrate, and then came home to rest before resuming his usual daily duties at the magistrate's office.

One day, as he was at the east end of the magistrate's office compound, someone called out from behind, "Hey constable. When did you get back?"

He turned and saw that it was Little Li (3), a guy who hung out on the streets and did odd jobs.

"I just got home the day before yesterday," Lei Heng said.

"Constable, you've been gone for a while, so you haven't heard yet. Recently a traveling singer from the capital arrived in town. She is pretty and talented. Her name is Bai (2) Xiuying (4,1). That wench came to pay her respects to you, but you were away on assignment. Right now she's performing at the theater, singing little ditties and telling stories. They put on a variety show every day, dancing, music, and singing. The place is packed. Why don't you go check her out. She's quite a delicious little thing."

Well, who could say no to that? Lei Heng was not above some eye candy, and he was bored, so he followed Little Li to the theater. By the door hung placards with golden letters, and on a pole hung a banner that almost reached the ground. Once they went inside, Lei Heng sat down in the first seat on the left, basically the VIP seating. On the stage was a comedian warming up the crowd. As Lei Heng watched, Little Li left him and went off to find a bowl of wine.

After a few minutes, the warm-up act finished, and on to the stage came an old man wearing a headscarf, dressed in a tea-colored silk gown tied at the waist with a black sash, and carrying a fan. He greeted the crowd and said, "I am from the capital. My name is Bai (2) Yuqiao (4,2). In my old age, my livelihood depends on my daughter Xiuying (4,1) singing, dancing, and playing instruments for your entertainment."

A gong then sounded, and his daughter Bai (2) Xiuying (4,1) walked on stage. She bowed to the audience on all four sides and then started striking her small gong at such a fast pace that it sounded like scattering peas. Then, she cut it short with one sharp blow and recited the following verse:

Twitter fledglings soar as old birds return,
Gaunt grow the old sheep while lambkins wax fat,
Men struggle a lifetime for clothing and food,
But lovebirds fly freely to where pleasure is at.

That drew a shout of approval from Lei Heng. Bai Xiuying then said, "Next on my program is a romantic story called Love Pursuit at Yuzhang (4,1) City." She then proceeded to tell the story, interspersing narrative and songs. The crowd cheered and applauded nonstop. This girl was indeed both talented and pretty.

As she approached the climax, her father suddenly cut in and shouted, "Though not such a skill as earns horses and gold, it moves men of intelligence. You gentlemen have made your approval known. My child, come down here for a moment. The next act is rattling the drum with money."

And by that he meant it was time for her to make a round through the crowd with a collection plate asking for money from the audience, who were obviously enjoying her performance. So Bai Xiuying picked up a plate and said to the crowd, "I'll go to the rich, halt where there's gain, pass when I'm lucky, and head for prosperity. When I place this before you, don't let it go away empty."

"Walk among them, my child," her father said. "Let's see which gentleman will reward you first."

And first up on her round was Lei Heng, since he was in the first seat. Lei Heng was more than happy to oblige the girl, so he reached into his pocket and ... uh oh. That was when he realized that he did not have a single coin on him.

“I forgot to bring money with me today,” he told the girl. “I’ll reward you double tomorrow.”

But the girl laughed and said, “If the first brew of vinegar isn’t strong, the second is sure to be even flatter. Sir, you are in the VIP seat. You must set a good example.”

His face flushed, Lei Heng mumbled, “It’s not that I can’t bear to part with the money; I forgot to bring any with me.”

“Sir, you were coming to watch a performance. How could you have forgotten?” the girl pressed, refusing to let him off the hook.

“It would be no biggie to give you four or five taels of silver, but I really just forgot to bring any with me today.”

“Sir, you don’t have a single coin today, and yet here you are, talking about four or five taels of silver. You’re just teasing me, like pointing at plums to quench my thirst and drawing a bun to sate my hunger.”

So, let me pause real quick to explain the stories behind those two analogies she just made. They’re both well-known Chinese idioms. The first one, point at sour plums to quench one’s thirst, comes from a legend in the Three Kingdoms era around the year 200. One of the major players of that era, the warlord Cao Cao, was on a military campaign when his men were suffering from thirst and there was no water source around. Thinking quickly, he pointed off into the distance and said, “Hey, there’s a grove of plum trees up ahead.” And as the story goes, just the thought of the tart plums was enough to make his men’s mouths water, and they were not thirsty anymore.

The second idiom, drawing a bun to sate one’s hunger, also comes from the Three Kingdoms era. As the story goes, there were two sworn brothers. One day, the younger brother was going on a trip, and before he departed, he went to take his leave of his older brother. He wanted to bring a gift, but he had little to his name, so he got some wheat stalk and rice and made them look kind of like a chicken.

When he got to his brother's house, his brother was out, and only his brother's wife was at home.

"Sister-in-law," the younger brother said, "I'm going on a trip and came to bid my brother goodbye. I don't have any good gifts for you, and melons aren't very filling, so please accept this chicken."

The sister-in-law took one look and thought, "You have GOT to be kidding me."

"Oh wow! Brother-in-law, you shouldn't have!" she replied. "You always spend so much money on us."

As she accepted the "chicken," she thought for a moment and said, "Brother-in-law, who knows when you'll be back. You must stay for lunch, no matter what. We don't have anything fancy, just the usual fare. Come, sit down!"

As she spoke, she laid out two plates and two sets of chopsticks. She then took out an inkbrush, and drew a steamed bun on a piece of paper.

"Here you go. Eat up while it's hot. Don't let it get cold," she said.

The younger brother didn't even flinch. He picked up the paper with his chopsticks, put it in his mouth, chewed it for a good while, and then said, "I'm stuffed. Thank you so much. I can't wait around for my brother anymore; I have to go."

And so he left. And ... that was pretty much the story.

Anyway, back to our narrative, where Lei Heng was presently turning as red as a tomato as he was being embarrassed by the girl Bai Xiuying for being a cheapskate. Just then, the girl's father called out from the stage, "My child, don't you have eyes? Can't you tell the difference between a city man and a country bumpkin? Why ask HIM for money? Start with someone who has more sense."

"Are you saying I have no sense?!" an annoyed Lei Heng scowled.

"Ha! If you know how a polished scholar should behave, then a dog can sprout horns," the old man shot back.

Aaaaand that was a poor choice of words. Lei Heng flew into a rage and cursed, “You wretch! How dare you humiliate me?!”

“So what if I curse a cowpoke like you?!” the old man again hurled back the insult. He was giving as good as he got.

Now, the audience was watching this whole exchange, and someone chimed in and tried to check the old man, telling him, “Don’t say that. That’s our county’s Constable Lei.”

“Did you say constable or constipated?” the old man quipped.

Now, I have to note that this was actually not what the original Chinese line said. Instead, it was making a different play on words, using a homonym of the Chinese characters for Constable Lei. But as far as impossible translations go, this attempt by the translator Sydney Shapiro is not bad. And in any case, the effect was the same. Lei Heng leaped to his feet, stomped onto the stage, grabbed the old man, and started punching and kicking him until his lips were cracked and his teeth had been knocked out. The rest of the crowd now intervened and broke up the fight, and hustled Lei Heng out of the theater.

Now, you might think that with Lei Heng being 1) a man of some means, 2) a local figure of renown, and 3) a cop in a crooked justice system, that he would probably get away with roughing up some poor old traveling performer. And 99 percent of the time, you would be right. BUT, in this case, he poked the wrong hornets’ nest. The old man was a nobody, but his daughter, Bai Xiuying, now, she had connections. When she was in the capital, she had a fling with an official, and that official just so happened to be the current magistrate of Yuncheng County, aka Lei Heng’s boss. You can see where this was going.

Seeing her father bludgeoned, Bai Xiuying hired a sedan chair and made her way to the county courthouse, where she accused Lei Heng of beating her father and messing up her business, all of which

were, incidentally, true. Most times, the magistrate would probably turn a blind eye to stuff like this because who wants to get on the bad side of the constable unions? But in this case, given the special connection he had with the plaintiff, he flew into a rage and told her and her father to write up a petition with the allegations. So the old man wrote the petition, and the magistrate examined his injuries.

As word was trickling out about this, some of Lei Heng's friends in the county tried to intercede on his behalf with the magistrate, but Bai Xiuying was camped out inside the magistrate's office, exercising her feminine wiles to ensure that he would follow through with, you know, doing his job and punish his own man for assault.

Soon, the magistrate dispatched some men to arrest Lei Heng. They brought him into the courthouse, where the magistrate had him caned until he confessed. He was then placed in a cangue, and the magistrate ordered that he be taken outside and put on public display as punishment. And at the girl's insistence, the magistrate ordered that Lei Heng be put on display outside the theater.

The next day, Bai Xiuying personally went to the theater to bask in her revenge. Lei Heng was already kneeling outside in his cangue, but the jailers, being on the same team as Lei Heng, didn't feel like stripping him as they were supposed to do. Bai Xiuying wasn't going to stand for that, so she walked out of the theater, sat down at a teahouse across the way, and said to the jailers, "Y'all have connections with him, so you're letting him off easy. The magistrate told you to strip him. Wait till I go tell the magistrate. What will you do then?"

Hearing that, the jailers said, "Miss, please don't get mad. We'll strip him."

"Do it, and I'll reward you with some money," she said.

The jailers went over to Lei Heng and mumbled, "Brother, we have no choice. Just bear it for a while."

So they stripped him on the street. Just as a throng of people were gathering and gawking, Lei Heng's old mother came by to deliver food for her son. When she saw his sorry appearance, she wept and cursed the jailers, saying, "You guys work in the county office just like my son. Is the money she gave you worth this? Who can say that they will never get into any trouble?"

"Ma'am, listen," the jailers tried to explain. "We tried to cut him some slack, but the plaintiff is watching us like a hawk, so we have to do as we are ordered. Or she'll go tell the magistrate, and then we'll all be in trouble."

"Since when do plaintiffs personally keep watch over the accused?" Lei Heng's mother shouted incredulously.

"Ma'am," the jailers muttered, "she's tight with the magistrate. She can end us with one word. We're stuck between a rock and a hard place."

But Lei Heng's mother had heard enough. She went over to untie her son, and as she did so, she muttered, "That slut is really something. I'm going to undo these ropes. Let's see what she'll do."

She said those words loud enough for them to be heard, and Bai Xiuying sure as hell heard them from her seat in the teahouse. So she stomped over and cursed, "You old hag! What did you just say?!"

Lei Heng's mother pointed at her and shot back, "You bitch! You've been mounted by tens of thousands of men! How dare you curse me?!"

Bai Xiuying glared. "You old beggar woman! How dare you curse ME?!"

"That's right, I'm cursing you! What of it?! It's not like you're the magistrate of this county!"

Bai Xiuying flew into a rage and slapped Lei Heng's mother so hard that she stumbled backward. As the old woman was struggling to get to her feet, Bai Xiuying walked over to her and kept slapping her across the face.

Now, Lei Heng was many things, including a less-than-upstanding cop, but he was also a very filial son. When he saw his mother being slapped around, he couldn't take it anymore. He lifted up his cangue

and swung it toward Bai Xiuying's head with all his might. With a loud thwack, a corner of the cangue struck her squarely in the head, and the girl instantly collapsed to the ground.

The gawking crowd huddled around her and saw that her skull had been smashed in and her eyes had popped out of their sockets, and she was now nothing more than a motionless corpse.

Aah crap.

With manslaughter now added to his crime, Lei Heng was immediately brought back to the courthouse. The magistrate sent his men to take testimony, examine the body, and so forth, and Lei Heng freely admitted everything. His mother was allowed to go home and wait for word, while Lei Heng was sent to jail.

The recently promoted warden of the county jail was none other than Lei Heng's former tag-team buddy Zhu Tong. With things as they were, Zhu Tong couldn't really do anything except to arrange for a clean cell and some food for his friend. Before long, Lei Heng's mother came to see Zhu Tong. As she wept, she begged him, "I am over 60, and my child is all that I have. Please, on account of your friendship, take pity on him and help him."

"Ma'am, go home and don't worry," Zhu Tong told her. "From now on, you don't need to come deliver food for him. I'll take care of him. And if the opportunity arises, I will save him."

"If you can save my child, then you are like my parents reborn!" she said. "But if anything should happen to him, then I might as well be dead, too!"

Lei Heng's mom was basically playing her trump card, because no one can ever say no to an old Chinese woman wailing about how she might as well be dead too if anything should happen to her son. So Zhu Tong told her yeah I got it, don't worry.

After she left, Zhu Tong thought about the matter for a whole day but could not think of any way to save Lei Heng. He asked someone to intercede with the magistrate on his behalf. Now, the magistrate

was very fond of Zhu Tong, but not as fond as he was of his recently deceased booty call, not to mention the fact that the dead girl's father was on his back this whole time, demanding an eye for an eye, or in this case, a head for a head.

After the prerequisite 60 days in jail, Lei Heng was to be sent to the prefectural seat for sentencing. The paperwork was prepped, and the escort was chosen, and it was none other than Zhu Tong. So Zhu Tong took about a dozen jailers and departed the county seat with Lei Heng. After walking for a few miles, they came across a tavern, and Zhu Tong suggested they all go in for a drink.

While his men wet their whistle, Zhu Tong took Lei Heng out back to ... umm ... use the bathroom. Yeah, that's it. When they were out of sight of everyone else, Zhu Tong quickly opened Lei Heng's cangue and told him, "Brother, hurry home, get your mother, and flee. I'll deal with the consequences."

"But if I go, you'll be in trouble," Lei Heng objected.

"You don't understand, brother," Zhu Tong said. "The magistrate despises you for killing his doxy, so he made sure that you would get the death sentence. When you get to the prefectural office, they are going to execute you. As for me, even though I let you get away, it's not a capital offense. Besides, I have no parents, and I have enough money to handle this. You just worry about your own future."

With things as they were, Lei Heng could only thank Zhu Tong and flee down a backroad. He snuck home, packed up some stuff, got his mother, and made his way to Liangshan without incident.

Back at the tavern, after Lei Heng disappeared, Zhu Tong hid the cangue in some deep grass and then went back out into the tavern and told his men, "That Lei Heng got away! What should we do?!"

"Let's hurry to his house and look for him there!" his men said.

But the whole way there, Zhu Tong was finding little excuses to dilly and dally, and by the time they got to Lei Heng's home, he and his mother were long gone. So Zhu Tong now went back to the

magistrate and told him, “Your servant was careless and Lei Heng escaped. We couldn’t catch him. I will accept whatever punishment you hand down.”

To see what punishment Zhu Tong will receive, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, our “heroes” go from morally ambiguous to pretty unambiguously heinous. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!