

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 89.

Last time, the magnate Lu Junyi was captured by the bandits, who wanted him to be their leader. But he steadfastly refused. So, Song Jiang and company said ok, fine, but since you're already here, how about you just stay a few more days with us since it's SUCH an honor to meet you. A few days turned into a few weeks, which turned into almost three months before Lu Junyi was finally allowed to go home.

But when he got home, he discovered that his steward Li Gu (4) had shacked up with his wife Lady Jia (3), and they turned him in to the authorities as an outlaw. Lu Junyi insisted that "No, I didn't become an outlaw. I just stayed at their stronghold for 3 months being wined and dined every day and then being allowed to go on my way." And everybody was like, umm, yeah sure. A few rounds of torture later, Lu Junyi had been forced to confess to being a bandit and got thrown in the dungeon.

As we rejoin the narrative, the superintendent of the prison, Cai (4) Fu (2) the Iron Arm, had just been invited to a clandestine meeting in a tea shop with the treacherous steward Li Gu.

"Steward Li, what do you want?" Cai Fu asked after they greeted each other.

"One does not conceal the good or the bad," Li Gu said. "You must know about my affairs. Tonight, I want you to finish him off. I don't have much to offer you, but here are 50 taels of gold. As for your superiors, I will go take care of them."

Cai Fu chuckled and replied, "Do you not see what's carved on the tablet in front of the courthouse? It says, 'It may be easy to oppress the common people, but you cannot deceive heaven.' Of course I know about your crooked dealings. You've taken over his property, hooked up with his wife, and now, you want me to take his life for 50 taels of gold? If the inspector general comes down here to ask about this, I cannot take the fall for it."

Li Gu knew what Cai Fu was getting at, so he said, "If this is not enough, then I will add another 50 taels of gold."

“Li Gu, you are trying to feed a cat its own tail!” Cai Fu scoffed. “Magnate Lu is an A-list celebrity in this city. How can he be worth just 100 taels of gold? I’m not kidding around. If you want me to kill him, then bring me 500 taels of gold.”

“I have it,” Li Gu said. “I’ll deliver it to you tomorrow, but you must get it done tonight.”

Satisfied with the negotiations, Cai Fu stashed away the 50 taels of gold as down payment and told Li Gu as he got up to go, “Come collect the body tomorrow.” Li Gu was delighted and took his leave.

When Cai Fu got home, he had barely set foot inside when someone lifted up the reed curtain on the door and followed him in.

“Superintendent Cai, my respects,” this visitor said.

Cai Fu looked him over, and saw that this man was very neatly dressed. As the visitor bowed to him, Cai Fu quickly returned the courtesy and asked for his name.

“Please, let’s talk inside,” the man said.

Cai Fu led him into a private room and they sat down as host and guest. The visitor then immediately got to the point.

“Superintendent, please do not be alarmed. My name is Chai (2) Jin (4). I hail from Cangzhou Prefecture and I am a descendant of the last emperor of the previous dynasty. My nickname is the Little Whirlwind. Because I love meeting heroes of the land, I ran afoul of the law and ended up seeking refuge on Liangshan. Right now, my brother Song Jiang has ordered me to come here and gather intel on Magnate Lu. Who knew that he would be framed by that adulterous couple and end up in the dungeon? His life hangs by a thread and he is at your mercy. So, I have risked my life to come tell you this: If you can keep Mr. Lu alive, you would be as compassionate as the Buddha, and we will never forget your kindness. If, on the other hand, anything should happen to him in the slightest, then when we sack the city, none will be spared, good or bad, old or young. I have long heard that you are an honorable and loyal hero. I

have no good presents for you, except these 1,000 taels of gold. If you want to arrest me, then please tie me up. I will not so much as furrow one eyebrow.”

When Cai Fu heard what Chai Jin had to say, he broke out into a cold sweat and could not answer for a good while. Chai Jin now got up and said, “A hero must not dilly and dally. Please decide what you will do.”

“Hero,” Cai Fu said, “please go back. I will act appropriately.”

Chai Jin bowed and said, “Since you have thus promised, we will repay your great kindness.”

He then stepped outside and called for his companion to bring over the 1,000 taels of gold. That companion was Dai Zong the Magic Traveler. They handed the gold to Cai Fu and took their leave.

So despite having people shove gold in his face all afternoon, Cai Fu was in quite the conundrum. He thought about it for a long time and could not decide how to proceed. He went back to the prison and looped in his younger brother Cai Qing (4).

Cai Qing said, “Brother, you are usually so decisive, so why are you stuck on this simple matter? As the saying goes, ‘Whatever you do, do it thoroughly.’ Since we have 1,000 taels of gold here, let’s use it for bribes. Governor Liang and Clerk Zhang are both the greedy type. Once they get their bribes, they will no doubt spare Lu Junyi’s life. Once he’s out of the prison, whether or not he gets rescued is up to the bandits. It has nothing to do with us.”

“Brother, your suggestion agrees with my thoughts exactly,” Cai Fu said. “You go move Mr. Lu to a good place, give him some good food and wine, and let him know about this.”

And so, the two brothers got to work greasing the wheels of justice with all that gold from Liangshan.

The next day, the steward Li Gu still had not gotten word about Lu Junyi's fate, so he went to see Cai Fu to ask what's up.

"We were going to kill him, but then Governor Liang won't let us," Cai Fu told him. "Seems that somebody had already arranged to spare his life. If you want to go bribe my superiors and have them send word down to me to do it, then it would be easy enough."

So Li Gu sent someone to go grease the wheels of justice as well. But word came back from Governor Liang's office that, "Look, this is the kind of the thing for the clerk of the court to handle. I'm the governor for crying out loud. You can't expect me to dirty my hands with this. Just give it a couple days, and it'll be done."

So you had the governor of the prefecture and the superintendent of the prison both trying to pawn off responsibility for making the call on each other. Meanwhile, Clerk Zhang had gotten his share of gold from Li Gu, so he kept trying to postpone a final decision on the case so as to keep Lu Junyi in prison, where it would be much easier for him to meet with an unfortunate accident, if somebody finally decided that such an accident should befall him. But Cai Fu then came to the clerk and asked hey where do you want me to park this cart full of gold, and that convinced Clerk Zhang to get the sentence finalized sooner rather than later. So, he brought the recommended sentence to the governor.

"In my opinion," Clerk Zhang told Governor Liang, "even though Lu Junyi stands accused, there is no firm evidence. Even though he stayed on Liangshan for a long time, he was tricked into it, so it's really hard to nail down his exact crime. Let's give him a caning of 40 strokes and exile him to 1,000 miles away. What do you think?"

Governor Liang wholeheartedly agreed that such a sentence was the most just, ethical, moral, and profitable thing to do, so they had Cai Fu bring Lu Junyi out of his cell, read him the sentence, gave him the caning, and then switched his heavy cangue for a lighter cangue for the road. They then dispatched two guards to escort Lu Junyi to the dreaded penal colony on Shamen (1,2) Island.

Now, we've met these two guards before. They were Dong (3) Chao (1) and Xue (1) Ba (4), the two guys who escorted Lin Chong the Panther Head to Cangzhou Prefecture when he was exiled there. Remember that the wicked marshal Gao Qiu had bribed these two guys to finish off Lin Chong on the way, but thanks to intervention by Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk, they were not able to complete that mission. So when they reported back to Marshal Gao, he punished them by exiling them here to Daming Prefecture. But Governor Liang took a liking to them and kept them at his office. And now, he figured who better to take on this escort mission than two guys who were apparently old hands at it?

Once they got their orders, Dong Chao (1) and Xue (1) Ba (4) packed their bags and prepared to depart. But word of the sentencing soon reached the steward Li Gu, who was most displeased, but then a lightbulb went on his head. Soon, Dong Chao and Xue Ba had been invited to a private dining room in a tavern, where Li Gu greeted them and offered them food and wine.

After three rounds of wine, Li Gu said, "To tell you the truth, Lu Junyi is my nemesis. Shamen Island is so far away. At the very least, it would take three or four months. And he doesn't have a coin to his name, so you two won't make any money on this trip. I don't have much to give you, just these two big ingots of silver as down payment. You don't have to go far, just find some quiet spot and finish him off. Bring back the criminal's tattoo on his face as proof, and I will give you each 50 taels of gold. You'll just need to file some paperwork with the governor's office, and I will take care of the rest."

When they heard this, Dong Chao and Xue Ba sat in silence for a long while. On the one hand, the last time we did this, it almost killed us. On the other hand, two giant ingots of silver, and all that gold to come!

Eventually, Dong Chao muttered, "It might not be possible ..."

But Xue Ba spoke up and said to him, "Brother, this Mr. Li is a real man. If we can earn a friend in him by doing this, then in the future when we have some urgent need, he can help us, too."

Li Gu chimed in and said, "I am not one to forget those who have helped me. I will repay you in due time."

So it was settled. Dong Chao and Xue Ba took the silver and went home to finish packing. They then collected Lu Junyi and wanted to hit the road that evening.

"I received my caning today and the wounds are still hurting," Lu Junyi said. "Please allow me to wait until tomorrow to get underway."

But Xue Ba cursed him, "Shut your damn mouth! It's just my rotten luck to have to deal with you! It's more than 2,000 miles to Shamen Island and back. It's an expensive trip, and you don't have a single coin. So we'll have to eat the cost!"

"Sirs, I was framed. Please cut me a little slack," Lu Junyi pleaded.

But that just earned him an earful from Dong Chao. "You damn rich folks are always so stingy. Well, you're getting your comeuppance now. Don't complain, and we'll help you walk."

Lu Junyi had no choice but to take this abuse and move out. They left the city through the east gate, and once they got on the road, the two guards hung their bundles and umbrellas on Lu Junyi's cangue, making him carry them. This was, of course, all new territory for Lu Junyi, who grew up in luxury, but he could do nothing about it.

As they traveled in the dying light, the two guards were up to their usual shenanigans, heaping all sorts of abuse on Lu Junyi. After about five miles, it was getting dark, so they stopped at a village inn for the night. Once they put down their stuff, Xue Ba said to Lu Junyi, "We are cops after all, so how can we be asked to serve you, the criminal? If you want food, then hurry up and go light the fire!"

Dragging his cangue, Lu Junyi went and asked the clerk at the inn for kindling and went to the stove to light the fire, while the clerk washed the rice and dishes for him. Of course, Lu Junyi had never had to cook for himself, so he had no idea how to light a fire. And the kindling got wet, so it won't light. When

he gave it a good blow, all he did was blow ash from the stove into his own eyes, which earned him another sound scolding from Dong Chao.

When the rice was cooked, the two guards took it all for themselves, and Lu Junyi did not dare to ask them for some. After they had finished eating, they threw him a few table scraps, along with more verbal abuse.

After dinner, they ordered Lu Junyi to go heat up water for them to wash their feet. Only when the water had boiled and the two guards were washing did Lu Junyi dare to sit down for a breather on the floor in their room.

Just then, the two guards came in with a basin of water and offered to help Lu Junyi wash his feet. Now, if you remember how these two guys did Lin Chong way back when, then you know what's coming.

No sooner had Lu Junyi removed his hemp sandals did Xue Ba grab his feet and plunge them into the basin, and Lu Junyi felt the burn immediately as the boiling water did its damage. Lu Junyi yelled in pain and jerked his feet out, and was immediately pelted with a string of expletives from Xue Ba about daring to put on airs even though he, the criminal, was getting his feet washed by them, the cops. The two guards then chained him to the back of the door while they went to bed.

Around 3 a.m., the two guards got up, asked the clerk to make breakfast, and ate their fill. They then prepared to hit the road again. Lu Junyi's feet, however, were covered with blisters so painful that he could barely touch the ground. And to add to his misery, it rained all day, making the road slippery. As Lu Junyi slid and staggered with every step, Xue Ba hit him across the back with a wooden staff, telling him to pick up the pace. Meanwhile, Dong Chao was doing the good cop routine, pretending to intervene on Lu Junyi's behalf, but also bemoaning their rotten luck the whole way.

After traveling for four or five miles, they approached a large forest, and Lu Junyi said, "I really can't walk anymore. Please take pity and let me rest briefly."

So the two guards took him into the woods. At that point, the first light of morning was still just creeping up from the eastern horizon, and no one else was passing this way.

“We got up early, so we’re pretty tired,” Dong Chao said. “We want to take a nap in the woods, but you might run away.”

“I won’t fly away even if I had wings,” Lu Junyi assured them.

“Who would believe you?” Xue Ba scoffed. “I need to tie you up first.”

And so he took out a rope, ran it around Lu Junyi’s belly, tied him to the trunk of a pine tree, and then wrapped the rope around tied up his legs as well. Yeah, you know where this is going.

Xue Ba now said to Dong Chao, “Brother, you go stand watch outside the woods. If anyone comes this way, signal me with a cough.”

“Make it quick,” Dong Chao said as he walked off.

“No worries; just go keep watch outside,” Xue Ba reassured him.

Once Dong Chao had walked off, Xue Ba turned to Lu Junyi with staff in hand and said, “Don’t blame us. Your steward Li Gu told us to kill you on the way. Even if you got to Shamen Island, you would still end up dead, so we might as well dispatch you sooner than later. Don’t hold a grudge against us when you reach the underworld. Remember that a year from today will be the anniversary of your death.”

As he heard those words, Lu Junyi could only weep and lower his head to await his fate. Xue Ba now gripped his staff with both hands, raised it high in the air, and brought it down toward Lu Junyi’s head with all his might.

Standing watch outside the woods, the other guard Dong Chao heard a loud thud, and then nothing. The job was done, so he hurried back into the forest. But in the woods, he was greeted with a strange sight.

There, tied up against the tree was Lu Junyi, still very much alive. On the ground next to him lay Xue Ba, and his staff lay next to him.



“Well this is strange,” Dong Chao muttered. “Did he swing too hard and miss and make himself fall?”

He walked over to check on Xue Ba but found him motionless. He took a closer look and suddenly noticed a trickle of blood dripping from the corner of Xue Ba’s mouth. Dong Chao looked down, and discovered a short shaft of about three or four inches protruding from Xue Ba’s chest.

Before Dong Chao could even gasp, a voice rang out from a tree to the northeast, shouting, “Bullseye!” In the next second, Dong Chao felt a sharp pain in his neck. He lost his balance, and then, everything went black.

Now, a man leaped down from that tree to the northeast, pulled out a dagger, cut the rope binding Lu Junyi, and smashed open his cangue. This man then held Lu Junyi and wept aloud. Only now did Lu Junyi open his eyes, and he saw his trusted servant Yan Qing.

“Are we meeting in the afterlife?!” Lu Junyi exclaimed in disbelief.

Yan Qing explained, “I had been following these two knaves since they left the governor’s office. I saw that Li Gu had invited them to a tavern. I guessed that they were going to kill you, so I followed you through the night. When you were at the village inn, I was lying in wait outside. When they got up this morning, I went on ahead and came here to wait for them. I figured they would try to do it in this forest. I’ve killed them with two shots from my crossbow. You see that?”

“Even though you have rescued me, by killing these two guards, you have increased my crime,” Lu Junyi said. “Where can we go now?”

“Master, it was Song Jiang who got you into this trouble. There’s nowhere else for us to go except Liangshan.”

“But the wounds from my caning are hurting, and my feet are so blistered that I can barely touch the ground.”

“We cannot delay; I will carry you.”

So Yan Qing went and retrieved the silver the dead guards had been carrying. He stashed his crossbow, a short broadsword, and a wooden staff. And then, he hoisted Lu Junyi onto his back and walked off toward the east. But they had gone just a few miles before Yan Qing ran out of gas. So, they found a small village inn, got a room, and bought some food and wine as they recharged.

Meanwhile, back at the forest, some passers-by had discovered the bodies of the two dead guards, and the local hamlet chief quickly reported this to the authorities in Daming Prefecture. So the authorities came to investigate the crime scene and realized that these were the guards escorting Lu Junyi. They also recognized the short arrows as most likely the doing of Yan Qing, since everybody in town knew of his skills. Before you knew it, a couple hundred policemen had been dispatched to post wanted posters and scour nearby villages and towns for the refugees.

Later in the day, Yan Qing was walking around the woods near the inn where he and Lu Junyi had been recovering. They had no food, so he took his crossbow and went in search of some small game. As he started to walk back toward the inn, he suddenly heard a whole lot of commotion in the village, so he quickly hid among the trees and peeked out. What he saw made his heart sink.

A couple hundred armed policemen walked past, surrounding a prisoner cart. On the cart was none other than Lu Junyi, all bound up again. As luck would have it, the clerk at the inn heard about all the wanted posters and the manhunt, and he went to the hamlet chief and told him, hey I've got two strangers in my inn. And it wasn't long before the village was swarming with cops, and Lu Junyi was being taken back to Daming Prefecture.

Yan Qing thought about charging out to rescue his master again, but he had no weapons on him at the moment, so all he could do was lament his master's bad fortune as he watched the convoy disappear in the distance. Then, he got to thinking, "The only way I can save my master now is to go to Liangshan and ask Song Jiang to come rescue him."

So he set out right away and traveled through the night. By now, he was starving and penniless. He got a couple hours of sleep in some woods on a hill and woke up at dawn with his mind filled with troubled thoughts. Suddenly, he heard the chirps of a magpie from a nearby tree.

“If I can shoot down that bird, I can get some water from someone in a village and cook it to sate my hunger,” he thought.

So, he walked out of the woods and looked around. He spotted the magpie on a branch and stealthily took out his crossbow. He usually carried three short arrows with his crossbow, but he had used two already to take out the guards. Now, Yan Qing silently prayed to the heavens.

“This is my last shot. If it is heaven’s will that I should save my master, then let this arrow strike its mark. If I miss, then my master is destined to die.”

He loaded his crossbow, took aim, and let fly with a shout of “Don’t fail me!” A split second later, the arrow struck the magpie in its rear, and the magpie took flight with the arrow lodged in its body before plummeting toward the foot of the hill.

Yan Qing stomped off the hill in search of his quarry. As he searched along the roadside, he saw two men walking toward him. They were dressed like travelers, carrying bundles on their backs and holding wooden staffs, and one of them had a short broadsword hanging from his waist.

As the two men walked past Yan Qing, he turned and looked at them, eyeing the bundles on their backs.

“I don’t have any travel money,” he thought to himself. “Why don’t I knock these guys down, take their bundles, and make my way to Liangshan.”

So, he put away his crossbow and caught up to the two men from behind. The two travelers were focused on the road ahead and were not aware of Yan Qing at all. Suddenly, Yan Qing landed a punch in the back of one of the men, knocking him down. He then turned and swung for the other guy, but before he could connect, that other guy’s wooden staff had struck him on his left leg, sending him to the

ground. By now, the first guy had scrambled to his feet. He pulled out the broadsword from his waist and took aim at Yan Qing's head.

As the broadsword sailed toward his face, Yan Qing shouted, "Hero, it's no matter if I die! But then who would deliver the message about my master?!"

The blade came to a screeching halt in mid-air. The next thing he knew, Yan Qing was being helped to his feet by the guy.

"What message are you talking about, you knave?" the man asked.

"Why do you care?" Yan Qing asked back.

The other guy reached out and grabbed Yan Qing's arm. As he did so, Yan Qing's sleeve rolled up, revealing the tattoos on his wrist.

"Are you Yan Qing the Prodigy, from Mr. Lu's household?" the man asked.

So, who were these guys, and how did they know Yan Qing? To find out, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we'll see what further torment fate has in store for Lu Junyi. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!