

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 102.

Last time, Song Jiang and a few chieftains were enjoying themselves incognito at the Lantern Festival celebrations in the capital. They had made the acquaintance of Li Shishi, a high-class courtesan who was having a hot affair with the emperor. As we rejoin the narrative, Song Jiang, Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind, and Yan Qing the Prodigy were in Li Shishi's home as her guests, having a few cups of wine.

Just then, word came that Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, who had been left to wait outside, was cursing up a storm. So Song Jiang called him and Dai Zong the Magic Traveler into the room. As soon as Li Kui saw Song Jiang and Chai Jin sitting there drinking in the company of a beautiful woman, he was already half-pissed and just glared at them.

"Who is this man? He looks like the little demon idol in the temple to the local god," Li Shishi quipped.

Everyone laughed, but Li Kui didn't catch her meaning.

"He is the son of a servant from my household," Song Jiang said. "His last name is Li. He has good fighting skills. He is strong enough to lift loads weighing 300 catties, and he can beat up 50 people by himself."

Li Shishi now asked her maid to fetch a big ingot of silver as a gift for Li Kui to show her esteem for his strength. And then she offered him and Dai Zong three cups of wine each. Now, you know how Li Kui gets after a few cups, so Yan Qing the Prodigy quickly hustled him and Dai Zong back outside. So now, it was just Song Jiang and Chai Jin sitting in the room with Li Shishi.

"When a real man drinks, he should not use small cups," said Song Jiang, who was already buzzing. So he switched to a large cup and downed a few more servings of wine, while Li Shishi sang the words of the poem "The Great River Flows East" by the famous scholar Su (1) Dongpo (1,1).

Song Jiang was feeling the wine now, and as we know, when he got buzzy, he liked to compose poetry. So he asked for brush, ink, and paper, and said to Li Shishi, "I am untalented, but allow me to compose a few mediocre lines to express the sadness in my heart. Please hear me."

And so he wrote these lines:

North and South,

Where under heaven is there a place for this wild traveler?

Temporarily residing in a misty Shandong mountain stronghold

I have come to enjoy the spring beauty in the capital .

Jade sleeves and swirling incense,

Red brocades and snow-white cuffs ...

One smile from you is worth

A thousand ounces of gold.

Fairy maid, your beauty

Is more than I can bear!

I think of the reed-covered beach,

And the banks of luxuriant flowers,

With a pale moon hanging in the blue-ish sky.

Fish swimming in the water,

While geese fly overhead,

Waiting only for news

From the Golden Herald.

Heaven-embracing is our chivalry.

Earth-shaking be our loyalty,

Yet recognized by none

Within the Four Seas.

Morose and sad at separation,

I drink,

And in a single night

My hair turns white.

After he finished writing, Song Jiang handed the poem to Li Shishi. She read it but did not understand his meaning. He was waiting for her to ask so that he may tell her his true identity and wish, but just then the madam of the establishment rushed in and said, "His majesty has come to our backdoor via his underground tunnel."

Well, when the emperor calls, everybody had to make way. So Li Shishi said a quick goodbye to her guests and went to welcome the emperor, while the madam and the maid busied themselves with cleaning up the cups and dishes and resetting the table.

Song Jiang, Chai Jin, and Yan Qing, however, did not leave. Instead, they just hid in a dark corner. They saw Li Shishi kneel to the emperor and greet him. The emperor was wearing a silk gauze headscarf and an imperial dragon robe.

"I just came back from the Upper Purity Temple," he told her. "I instructed my son the prince to distribute wine to the people at the Pavilion of Declaring Virtue, and my younger brother to attend the fair at the Corridor of A Thousand Paces. I was supposed to meet Marshal Yang, but he hasn't shown up, so I just came here by myself. Darling, come here and let's talk."

As he watched from his hiding spot, Song Jiang whispered to Chai Jin, "If we miss this opportunity, we might never get another. Why don't the three of us ask him to grant us a decree of clemency?"

But Chai Jin objected, "How can we do that? Even if he agrees now, he will surely change his mind later."

Just as the three of them were discussing in the dark, they suddenly heard a ruckus out front. So, Li Kui was still stewing over the fact that he and Dai Zong were left outside to stand guard while the other three guys in their traveling party were living it up with a famous courtesan. Just then, a man walked in from outside. As soon as he saw Li Kui, this guy barked at him, "Hey, who the hell are you?! How dare you hang around here?!"

So, this was the Marshal Yang that the emperor was supposed to meet. But Li Kui didn't really care who he was. The tone of his question was all the reason Li Kui needed to hulk out. He picked up an armchair and swung it toward Marshal Yang's face. The marshal was caught off guard and got smacked down to the floor. Dai Zong tried his best to restrain Li Kui, but good luck with that. Within seconds, Li Kui had ripped down one of the paintings by famous artists from the wall, set it on fire over a candle, and used it to set the front parlor ablaze while smashing all the tables and chairs to bits.

When Song Jiang and the other chieftains heard the noise, they rushed out and saw that Li Kui was already stripped to the waist and laying waste to everything in sight. It took the four men to drag him out the front door, but as soon as he stepped outside, Li Kui grabbed a wooden staff and started beating everything and everyone in his way as he charged out from the alley.

Watching the Black Whirlwind take off, Song Jiang was like, "Oh no, not again!" Realizing the chaos that had just been unleashed, he, Chai Jin, and Dai Zong quickly rushed out of the city before the guards closed the gates, but they told Yan Qing the Prodigy to stay behind and watch Li Kui, which umm, thanks guys.

Inside the house of the courtesan, as soon as the emperor saw that the place was going up in flames, he disappeared like smoke. The neighbors rushed over to help put out the fire and to help poor Marshal Yang to his feet.

Meanwhile, the sound of fighting rose up from within the city, loud enough to make heaven and earth tremble. Marshal Gao Qiu was patrolling the north gate at the time, and as soon as he heard about this, he rushed over with his troops.

On the streets, Yan Qing was helping Li Kui fend off the incoming soldiers when suddenly, they ran into a couple other chieftains — Mu Hong the Unrestrained and Shi Jin the Nine-Tattooed Dragons. The four men wielded spears and staffs and fought their way to the edge of the city. The guards were just about to close the gates, but they were interrupted by four guys crashing in from outside. These were the chieftains Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk, Wu Song the Pilgrim, Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard, and Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil. They fought their way into the city, rescued the four guys inside, and then scampered back out through the gate.

Just then, Marshal Gao and his forces arrived on the scene. The eight chieftains didn't know where Song Jiang, Chai Jin, and Dai Zong had gone, so they were panicking. But just then, more help arrived.

As it turns out, Wu Yong the strategist had figured that things were going to blow up one way or another on this little expedition, so he had dispatched 1,000 men to come render aid on the night of the festival, led by the Five Tiger Generals — Guan Sheng the Great Saber, Lin Chong the Panther Head, Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt, Huiyuan Zhuo the Twin Staffs, and Dong Ping the General of Double Spears.

As that group headed toward the capital, they ran into Song Jiang, Chai Jin, and Dai Zong on the outskirts of the city. So together, they rode back toward the capital to find Li Kui, and that's when they ran into Marshal Gao Qiu.

The Five Tiger Generals galloped to the edge of the moat and shouted, "The Liangshan heroes are here in full force! Surrender the city now, and we will spare your life!"

Hearing this, Marshal Gao decided there was no way he was going outside to tangle with these guys. He hurriedly ordered his men to pull up the drawbridge and reinforce the defenses along the wall.

Song Jiang said to Yan Qing the Prodigy, "You are Li Kui's best friend. Wait a bit for him to show, and then come back to Liangshan with him. I will lead the troops and the other chieftains back to Liangshan right away, lest there be any more trouble along the way."

Umm, you know, I think actually YOU are Li Kui's best friend, but ok whatever. Not long after Song Jiang and the bandit forces left, Li Kui rushed back to the inn where they had stayed, retrieved his belongings, grabbed his twin axes, and leaped out onto the street with a loud roar. He was all ready to go smash open the gates and wreak more havoc in the capital.

Suddenly, someone wrapped him up by the waist, and with one move, sent him tumbling flat onto his back. This was none other than Yan Qing. He then pulled Li Kui back to his feet and told him to follow, and Li Kui, surprisingly, did. The reason was that Yan Qing was a masterful wrestler, and Li Kui always lost to him when they sparred, so Li Kui wasn't eager to fight or argue with him and just followed him.

The two of them stayed off the main road so as to avoid pursuing armies. Instead, they took a side road toward Chenliu (2,2) County. Li Kui, having calmed down, now put his shirt back on and hid his axes under his shirt. He lost his headscarf in the chaos, so he just parted his hair and tied them into two small buns on either side of his head. They traveled until dawn, at which point they stopped and bought some food and wine at a country tavern before resuming their journey.

Back at the capital, once morning came, Marshal Gao finally mustered the courage to lead an army out of the city to give chase, but obviously it was way too late, so they returned empty-handed. The courtesan Li Shishi just said, "I dunno how a fire started in my house or who could've possibly done it." Marshal Yang went back home to recover from his unfortunate run-in with the Black Whirlwind. As for the civilians, about 500 were wounded in the chaos, and countless others got nicks and scrapes from tripping and getting trampled. Marshal Gao now convened with Tong (2) Guan (3), the Chancellor of Military Affairs, about mounting yet another retaliatory strike to apprehend the bandits.

Let's get back to Yan Qing and Li Kui on the road. They were walking along and passed a place called the Village of Four Willows. It was starting to get late, so they went to a large manor house, knocked, and were led into the thatched parlor. There, the lord of the manor, Old Squire Di (2), came to greet them. He took one look at Li Kui and wasn't so sure about that guy. Li Kui had two buns on his head like a Daoist, but he was wearing an ugly countenance and no Daoist robes. So Old Squire Di (2) turned to the much more respectable looking Yan Qing and asked, "Where did this master come from?"

"Oh he's a strange one," Yan Qing said with a smile. "None of you have ever heard of him. Please give us a bite to eat and a place to spend the night. We will leave first thing tomorrow."

While Yan Qing did all the talking, Li Kui just kept his mouth shut. But suddenly, Old Squire Di prostrated on the ground and kowtowed to Li Kui, saying, "Master, please help me!"

"What do you need help with? Tell me the truth," Li Kui said.

"There are 100-some people in my household," the old squire said. "But my wife and I only have a daughter, who is in her 20s. Half a year ago, she was possessed by an evil spirit. She just stays in her room and refuses to come out, not even for food. Whenever we send someone in to get her, she would pelt them with bricks. All the people in our household have been injured by her. We have hired numerous exorcists, but they couldn't catch the spirit."

Upon hearing this, Li Kui told the old squire, "Sir, I am a disciple of Priest Luo (2) from Jizhou (4,1) Prefecture. I can ride clouds and catch ghosts. If you are willing to part with the necessary items, then I will catch your ghost tonight. Right now, I need a pig and a sheep as sacrifices to divine warriors."

"I have plenty of pigs and sheep, not to mention lots of wine," the old squire said.

"Then pick a couple fat ones and slaughter and cook them. Also bring a few bottles of good wine, and I can set up to catch your ghost at midnight."

"I also have paper for written prayers," the old squire added.

"My magic doesn't require any paper. I'll just walk into the room and grab the ghost," Li Kui said.

As he watched all this, Yan Qing could barely muffle his laughter. The old squire, meanwhile, believed Li Kui and spent half the night preparing the pig and sheep. Once they were cooked and laid out in the parlor, Li Kui asked for 10 big bowls and 10 bottles of warm wine. He lined them up, lit two candles, and burned a pot of good incense. He then sat down in the middle on a bench, said nothing, and just took out one of his axes and started cutting off big pieces of mutton and pork and feasted.

“Brother, you have some, too,” he said to Yan Qing. But Yan Qing just chuckled and declined. So Li Kui helped himself to a full meal and five or six bowls of wine. His appetite left the old squire stunned.

Satisfied with his meal, Li Kui now said to the workhands of the estate, “Y’all come share in this feast.”

In the blink of an eye, the remainder of the meat had vanished. Li Kui then asked for hot water to wash his hands and feet. Once that was done, he asked for tea. While he sipped tea, Li Kui turned to Yan Qing and asked, “Did you eat?”

“I had enough,” Yan Qing replied.

Li Kui now said to the old squire, “Welp, I’ve drunken the wine and eaten the meat. We have to hit the road tomorrow, so we are going to sleep.”

“Uhh, when are you going to catch the ghost?” the old squire asked.

“If you really want me to catch the ghost, then have someone take me to your daughter’s room.”

“But the ghost is in there. It will hurl bricks at you. Who would dare to go?”

But Li Kui grabbed his axes and told a servant to stay back and hold a torch to light the way, while he strode toward the room. He saw a faint light coming from inside. When he peeked in, he saw a young man holding a woman and talking to her.

While the couple was whispering to each other, the door to the room suddenly burst open and in stomped Li Kui, swinging his axe. Sparks flew as his axe caught the candle stand by the bed. The young man tried to run, but Li Kui let out a huge roar and took another swing. This time, he connected, and the



man fell to the ground while the woman hid under the bed. The next thing you know, Li Kui landed another blow and chopped off the man's head, threw it onto the bed, and banged his axe against the bedframe, shouting, "Woman, get out here right now, or I will smash you and the bed to smithereens!"

"Spare me; I'll come out!" the woman shouted as she crawled out. Her head had barely emerged before Li Kui grabbed her by the hair and dragged her over to the headless corpse on the floor.

"Who is this that I killed?" Li Kui asked, posing a question that MAYBE he should've asked before he started chopping off heads.

"That, that's Wang the Second, my secret lover."

"And where do you get your food and bricks?!"

"I gave him my jewelry to buy those things, and he brought them over the wall in the middle of the night."

"You dirty whore! What's the point of keeping you around?!" Li Kui barked as he brought his axe down again and cut off the woman's head. He then tied both heads together by the hair and put the bodies next to each other.

But just in case you thought he was done delivering ... umm ... justice, he now said to himself, "I have a full stomach and need some exercise to help me digest." As he spoke, he took off his shirt and went to town on the bodies with his twin axes, chopping them into bits.

After a thorough round of chopping, Li Kui chuckled and said, "I guess these two aren't alive anymore." He now tucked away his axes, grabbed the heads, walked back out to the parlor and shouted, "I caught both ghosts!" as he threw the heads to the ground.

Everyone in the house was shocked and rushed over to take a look. They didn't recognize the man, but they all knew the woman: It was the old squire's daughter. After a while, a workhand said, "The man looks a bit like Wang the Second, the bird catcher from the east end of the village."

"Yes, you have sharp eyes," Li Kui complimented that workhand.

“Master, how, how do you know his identity?” the old squire asked.

“Your daughter was hiding under the bed, so I dragged her out and interrogated her. She told me he was Wang the Second, her secret lover. He was bringing her food. I waited until after I questioned her before killing her.”

“Master, you could have spared my daughter!” the old squire wailed.

“You stupid ox! Your daughter was sneaking around behind your back, and yet you want to spare her?! Look at you crying instead of thanking me. I have some words for you come morning!”

Yan Qing now broke up this ... umm ... whatever you would call it and pulled Li Kui off to a room to rest. The old squire had his men light some candles and went into his daughter’s room. There, they saw two headless corpses, cut into pieces on the ground. The old squire and his wife wept bitterly and ordered their men to take the remains outside and cremated them.

The next morning, Li Kui woke up, leaped to his feet, and went to see the squire.

“I caught your ghosts for you last night; why haven’t you thanked me?!” Li Kui asked.

The old squire had no choice but to arrange some food and wine for him. Li Kui and Yan Qing ate and then hit the road, while the old squire tended to the carnage left behind.

Putting the Village of Four Willows behind them, Yan Qing and Li Kui traversed the winter landscape until they were about 20-some miles away from Liangshan. They were near Bramble Door Town when evening fell, so they went to a large manor house and knocked. While they waited, Yan Qing, perhaps thinking about what happened the last time they stopped at a manor, said, “Why don’t we just stay at an inn?”

“Nah! This large house is much better than an inn,” Li Kui said.

Just then, a workhand opened the door and said, “Our master is in a bad mood; you all should go elsewhere to find lodging.”

But Li Kui wasn't about to take no for an answer. He stomped right past the workhand and into the parlor, despite Yan Qing's best attempts to hold him back.

"Hey! What's the big deal with letting a passing traveler spend the night?!" Li Kui shouted. "So what if you are in a bad mood? I want to talk to you anyway!"

The old squire of the manor peeked from the back and saw how ferocious Li Kui looked, so he sent someone out to welcome him and set him and Yan Qing up in a guest room and arranged for some food for them. They ate and went to bed.

But they didn't get any wine, and as a result, Li Kui couldn't fall asleep that night and just tossed and turned. As he did so, he heard the old squire and his wife weeping in the next room, which kept him up all night. When morning finally came, he got up and went to ask the old squire what all the crying was about.

"I have a daughter who's 18, and she's been abducted," the old squire said.

"Well that's odd. Who abducted your daughter?" Li Kui asked.

"When I tell you, you'll be so scared that you'll wet your pants. He's not just some nobody. He's Song Jiang, the leader of the 108 chieftains of Liangshan."

Uhh huh. Well, this was ... unexpected.

"Let me ask you this," Li Kui pressed. "How many men did he have with him?"

"Two days ago, he and a young man each came here on a horse," the old squire said.

At that, Li Kui yelled to Yan Qing, "Brother, come listen to this. Turns out Brother Song is a fraud, not a good man."

"Brother, don't be reckless," Yan Qing said. "This must be false."

"But when he was in the capital, he went to that courtesan Li Shishi's house. So why won't he do something like this here?!" Li Kui scoffed. He then turned to the old squire and said, "If you have food,

give us some. I'll be honest with you: I am Li Kui the Black Whirlwind from Liangshan, and this is Yan Qing the Prodigy. Since Song Jiang took your daughter, I will go get her back for you."

Later that day on Liangshan, Song Jiang and company were just chillin' in the Hall of Loyalty and Honor when suddenly they saw Li Kui and Yan Qing coming in.

"Where have y'all been? Did you get lost?" Song Jiang asked.

But Li Kui gave no answer and instead just glowered as he pulled out his axe, ran over to the flag pole from which hung the giant banner that read "Delivering Justice on Heaven's Behalf." With one swing he cut the flag pole down, and the next thing you know, he was tearing the banner to smithereens while everyone looked on aghast and dumbfounded.

"You dark knave! What the hell are you doing now?!" Song Jiang shouted.

But now, Li Kui turned and ran toward Song Jiang while brandishing his twin axes. The Five Tiger Generals hurriedly pounced on him, wrestled the axes from his hands, and dragged him out of the hall.

"What are you doing now?! What did I do wrong? Tell me!" an exasperated and angry Song Jiang demanded.

Li Kui, however, was so angry that he couldn't even speak, so Yan Qing jumped in and recounted everything that happened on their journey home, including what they were told by Old Squire Li (3) at their last stop about his daughter being abducted by someone calling himself Song Jiang.

When he heard the story, Song Jiang protested and claimed his innocence. But Li Kui scoffed, "I used to think you were a hero, but turns out you are an animal! How can you do such a thing?!"

"Shut up and listen!" Song Jiang shouted. "I came back here with a couple thousand troops. How could I and someone else ride away without anyone noticing? And if I abducted a woman, then she must be here in the base. Why don't you go search my room?!"

“Brother, that’s total bullcrap!” Li Kui said. “Everyone here obeys you and covers for you, so you could easily hide her away. I used to think you were a hero unmoved by lust, but turns out you are a scoundrel! You showed your true nature when you killed your mistress, and then even more when you went to patronize that courtesan in the capital. Don’t deny it. Return Old Squire Li’s daughter to him, and we can talk this out. Otherwise, I will kill you sooner or later!”

To see how this mess will get sorted out, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Li Kui finds himself in trouble yet again. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!