

說唱文學，杭州評話，
第一回 透瓶居文康賣酒 景陽崗武松打虎
52a Performance literature, Hangzhou Storytelling

Chapter One: Wen Kang sells wine in the tavern of Flavour through the Bottle, Wu Song fights a tiger on Jingyang Ridge Translation HY, VB 4 Sept 2008

Chapter One

Wen Kang sells wine in the tavern of Flavour Through the Bottle Wu Song fights a tiger on Jingyang Ridge

The story goes that in the Northern Song Dynasty, during the Zheng He and Xuan He periods of the reign of Emperor Hui Zong, who was named Zhao Ji and bore the title of Taoist Sovereign, state affairs were ignored and laws and social values were undermined. The imperial government and local governments were crammed with corrupt officials, such as the gang of Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu and Yang Jian. They monopolized power like wolves and tigers to plunder wealth from common people illegally. Local tyrants from rich and powerful families relied on the power of corrupt officials and went on the rampage, forcing the common people to live in deep water and scorching fire. Misgovernment drove the people to revolt, and angry heroes in the land banded together in mountain forests to fight against the government.

Let's perform first what happened to a certain man, who was from Qinghe County, Dongping Prefecture, Shandong Province named Wu Song, and was the second son in his family. Wu Song was big, tall, broad and muscular. He was also very handsome with thick eyebrows as if brushed black, big eyes like bright stars, the high bridge of the nose like a hanging gall, and teeth like a row of white jade. Highly skilled in military drill, Wu Song was a man of soldierly bearing, so in the fraternity of the rivers and lakes, all compared him to the God Erlang and addressed him as Wu the Second of Guanjiangkou.

Wu Song's parents died when he was a little boy. He lived in poverty and suffered a lot of cold treatment and humiliation. Wu Song had only one elder brother named Zhi and he was brought up by this brother. Wu the Elder made a living by peddling buns. Every day he shouldered a load of buns that he carried from Wujia village to Qinghe County. Because there was no one to take care of Wu Song at home, Wu the Elder shouldered a pole with buns at the one end and Wu the Second at the other end, and sometimes he begged milk, water and porridge from some kind people to feed Wu Song. So their brotherly affection was deep and sincere.

When Wu Song was eighteen, he grew into a big and tall young man with an upright and unyielding temperament, unlike his elder brother, who looked wretched and normally behaved like a coward, sticking to his own business and avoiding trouble. Once in

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Qinghe County, Wu Song noticed an injustice and got into a brawl with the keeper of confidential documents in the local government office. With one blow of the fist Wu Song knocked him senseless to the ground. Wu the Elder was informed of the incident and asked him to hide away. So Wu Song ran away from home and drifted here and there. Thereafter he took refuge in Lord Chai's manor in Cangzhou, Hebei, and became a guest there. Thanks to Lord Chai, Wu Song was treated very cordially, and he stayed there for one year. Later on Wu Song made the acquaintance of Song Jiang, the Timely Rain, and Song Qing, the Iron Fan. Wu Song found favor in Song Jiang's eyes and they pledged each other blood brothers. Then Song Jiang helped him with his reading.

Wu Song missed his brother, and one day he bade goodbye to Chai Jin and Song Jiang and returned home along the winding road—from Cangzhou, Hebei Province to Qinghe County, Shandong. Wu Song was wearing a new red silk robe and a broad-brimmed hat of white felt. He shouldered his pack, took up his cudgel, and headed for Jingyang Ridge. The area of Jingyang Ridge was covered with lofty mountains and winding streams and valleys. The range wound from the north to the south for more than one hundred *li*. On the west of the ridge was Qinghe County, and to the south was Yanggu County. Wu Song was on his way for many days, stopping at night and traveling on again at dawn. One afternoon he arrived at one place. Wu Song looked into the distance from a high slope and found as if there were some houses in the woods. Wu Song thought this place looked so familiar. 'I wonder if this isn't Jingyang Town at the foot of Jingyang Ridge?' At this thought, Wu Song was overjoyed and expected a reunion with his elder brother soon.

Wu Song got to the gate of the town, looked up and saw a black rock inlaid above a brick arch. On the rock three characters were engraved: Jingyang Town. Wu Song said to himself, "That's it." A palisade door around three meters high blocked the way into the arch. Peering through the palisade door, Wu Song could scarcely see any people in the cold and cheerless street.

Wu Song felt puzzled at the scene: Jingyang Town used to be bustling with noise and excitement; how come it became so desolate? Was it because of bandits? Wu Song pushed the palisade door a crack, moved sideways into it and turned round to close the palisade door. He took his cudgel and stepped forward while he saw stores in twos and threes with their doors half open. Wu Song could not understand it.

Please wait and let me, the storyteller, give a brief explanation. Jingyang Town had been a busy and prosperous thoroughfare, but people dared not live here or even pass it

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since there was a fierce tiger on the ridge. The wealthy residents ran away to the city, while as for the families of limited means and without powerful connections, they could neither afford to live away from home nor tolerate the fright, so wives and children were sent to the city and husbands hid themselves in the rooms and never came out when there was no necessity.

Three kinds of families suffered the most. One was the local peasants. Since a tiger came to the ridge, there had been only four to six hours for them to work in the fields and they had to go there in groups. Thus a lot of crops were left uncultivated. The second kind was storekeepers. Hearing of the fierce tiger, travelling merchants would rather take the trouble to have a longer journey and go in a roundabout way. As a result, the business in town was depressed. The third one was hunters. Most of the hunters were actually peasants without much skill in hunting. They could only trap some small wild animals to sell in the city for some pocket money. Even though a few were living on hunting, they were only able to hunt such small wild animals as roe, hares, foxes or wolves, and they had no way to deal with such a fierce tiger with slanting eyes and a white forehead

Talking of this fierce tiger, it did a lot of evil there. It dragged away ten pigs and ate eight sheep. Besides, even three or four children were killed by the tiger, and two travelling merchants were also swallowed alive. Once a man pushed a cart uphill and the tiger appeared. He was bold and cast aside the cart and ran away. Fortunately, the cart also rolled down the hill and scared the tiger; otherwise this man would have lost his life.

The tiger was so fearful that hunters were having bad luck. Magistrate of Yanggu County pretended to be benevolent to the common people, and without considering the actual situation, he arbitrarily ordered hunters to catch the beast within a short time. If they could not report on the fulfilment of their duty, hunters would be taken to the court and cruelly flogged with rods until the skin was torn and the flesh gaped open. To avoid the beating, they had to spend money and present gifts to the officials in the government, so that the time limit would be extended. However, how much money did poor hunters have? Soon although no money was left at home, and their bottoms were seriously wounded by repeated beating, the terrible tiger was still at large and did a lot of harm to local residents.

Looking at the desolate street, Wu Song felt puzzled. He looked up and saw a wine-banner hanging on an old locust tree, under which a thatched cottage was sheltered. The wooden door to the cottage was half hatched and half open. A half-table was placed in the doorway, on which there was a chopstick container and a blue and white porcelain wine

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jar. Wu Song was very delighted: Good! I can drink some wine here. He went in big strides. When he looked back at the wine-banner, he saw on it several big characters “Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge”.

Wu Song ignored it and walked straight into the tavern. Looking around, he found the cottage had two wings and to the left of the entrance there was a counter with a row of blue and white porcelain wine jars on display. Next to the wine ladle was a big china plate with a chunk of salty beef, weighing something like five to seven *jin*. In front there hung a wooden tablet with four big golden characters on it “Style of Li Taibo”. The tablet had been smoked half black.

Inside the counter a young man bent over the accountant’s desk, soundly asleep. He was wearing a black tunic fastened with a black girdle and a four-arras cap. He looked like the young innkeeper. Looking further inside, the central room was furnished with several white-wood square tables and on each of them there was a chopstick container. All the chairs and benches were rubbed very clean.

Wu Song stepped into the tavern without disturbing anyone. He found himself a seat and laid his cudgel against the wall. He pushed aside the chopstick container, put down his pack, and took a seat. Then he noticed that the painting hanging in the middle of the room was not a picture of the God of Wealth, immortal officials in heaven, or a landscape painting, but it illustrated “Bian Zhuang¹ Fights a Tiger in the Deep Mountains.” The mountain was lofty and precipitous; the tiger was gigantic and ferocious. Bian Zhuang was leaping into mid-air, daring and full of strength like a lion splitting heaven and a Pixiu-demon² causing an earthquake, with his mighty fist he was just about to attack.

Wu Song was lost in the painting, and “Ha-ha!” he laughed out loud. Wu Song was not aware of his own laughter, but two other men were frightened to death. One was the young innkeeper who was soundly asleep. Suddenly he heard such a tremendous explosion like a thunder in his ear that he thought the cottage had collapsed and hurriedly hid under the accountant’s desk. The other one was the waiter, Xiao’er,³ of the tavern whom Wu Song didn’t see. Because the business was slack and they couldn’t pay

¹ A hero of the Spring and Autumn period of ancient China.

² A supernatural beast that can protect human beings.

³ In this text the name Xiao'er (Little Number Two) seems to be used as a synonym of 'waiter', while in Yangzhou storytelling Xiao'er is explained explicitly as the proper name of the waiter. In several of the texts of the core material the function of this name is unclear, whether it is considered a common name for 'waiter' or it is considered a proper name for this particular person, the waiter of the inn at Jingyang Ridge.

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expenses, the young innkeeper made him grow vegetables in the backyard. He hadn't had a good sleep for days, so his waist was painful and his legs felt weak. The sudden sound made him dizzy, and he slipped and fell on his bottom. It was a long time before he could rise to his feet.

When Xiao'er heard the voice in the front, he wiped his eyes and hurried out to receive the customer. When Wu Song saw the approaching man was wearing an old felt hat, cotton clothes, cotton socks and cloth shoes, with a cotton apron tied around the waist and a cloth hanging over the shoulder, he knew this must be the waiter, Xiao'er.

Seeing the waiter was almost scared, Wu Song realized that his laughter had been very loud, so he felt abashed and said in a softer voice, "Bring me wine!"

Xiao'er just came in from in the sun and became even more surprised. He could not discern the big fellow in red sitting in the room until after a while. The fellow as he sat there was even taller than people standing upright, so the waiter thought: No wonder his laughter was so loud. But where is this big fellow from? What does he intend to do here?

Xiao'er whisked the soil from his apron with the cloth, carried a basin of water over, and said to Wu Song, "Please wash your face, good guest. What would you like? I'm at your service!"

Wu Song could see that Xiao'er was a hard-working type and he smiled, "Well, pour me some wine!"

The young innkeeper was a coward, but very greedy for money. He became even more cowardly after a tiger came to the ridge. In the daytime, he dared not go out to shit or piss. At night, he would bolt the front door and double-lock the back door; furthermore, he asked Xiao'er to keep watch for him. He was so worried that he didn't get much sleep at night, so he dozed off in the daytime. Since the business was slack and he had Xiao'er to take care of it, the young innkeeper could have gone to sleep in his bedroom, but he couldn't set his mind at rest for fear that when customers came, Xiao'er would seize the opportunity to steal money. So he had to hold his money pot and bend over the accountant's desk. Wu Song's laughter just now shook the cottage and scared him into hiding under the table, shivering all over. He felt it dark all around, not a single ray of light from sun or moon. He said to himself: This time I'm completely finished. So he clasped the money pot in his arms as if he would never let it go.

When the waiter Xiao'er came over, he found the young innkeeper frightened out of his wits. As he tried to pull him up, the innkeeper seized his money pot and screamed

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with all his strength, “Dear me, dear me!”

“Come out and ladle out some wine. Our guest has been waiting for a long time,”
Xiao’er explained to him.

The young innkeeper didn’t release his hold of the pot and come out until he turned
about and made sure it was Xiao’er. “Where’s the customer?” he asked.

“Over there!” Xiao’er pointed at Wu Song and answered.

The young innkeeper looked up and dimly saw a pagoda standing there tall and
upright. He was taken aback: Where is this big fellow from! Then he ladled a bowl of
wine and handed it to Xiao’er.

Wu Song looked at the young keeper. He was all skin and bones, and the little eyes
on the sallow face told that he was still drowsy. Wu Song felt like laughing, but he
refrained on second thoughts. Wu Song held the bowl in both hands and smelt the wine,
but it didn’t have any flavour; Wu Song tasted it, but it didn’t have any strength at all. His
dissatisfaction showed clearly on his face. When Xiao’er noticed this, he was scared and
hurried back to change the wine into that called "Three bowls of wine". Then he placed a
bowl on a red-lacquered tray and carried over, offering it with both hands to Wu Song.

This time the wine was really fine. Wu Song could smell the fine bouquet at a
distance. When Wu Song lifted a bowl in his hand, he saw the dark green wine was just
like water dripping from bamboo leaves and it was so limpid that the bottom of the bowl
was clear.

“Good!” Wu Song faced upward to drink the wine in one gulp. He felt the rich
fragrance and said appreciating to Xiao’er, “That is a good wine!”

Seeing Wu Song was fond of the wine, the waiter also cheered up. He put his feet in
T-shape with his left arm akimbo and right thumb up, and recited:

“The wine is like jade nectar and rosy clouds.

Its sweet bouquet and wonderful taste are worth boasting about.

When a wine jar is opened, the flavour will make people three houses away tipsy.

Passers-by will pull up their carriages and rein in their horses.

Lü Dongbin once paid with his precious sword.

Li Taibai even pawned his black gauze hat.

The immortals all loved the wine so much that they forgot to go home...”

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“Where did they go then?” Wu Song asked.

“Drunk they tumbled about in Jingyang Town.” Xiao'er finished his recitation.

“Dear guest, do you like this wine?”

Wu Song was even more pleased after hearing it. “Waiter, I have no precious sword or black gauze hat, and I have only this,” Wu Song jogged his pack. “Look! Let me drink to my full content and I'll pay you with this!”

Now the young innkeeper's eyes shone with excitement: I haven't come across such a generous customer for long, and I must make money from him. So he shouted, “Xiao'er, you are so stupid! Don't just wait on this kind man with wine!”

Xiao'er readily took the hint—he was asked to take advantage of this opportunity to sell this customer stale corned beef that had been spiced for several days. So he talked to Wu Song, “Good guest, isn't it dull without some dishes to go with the wine?”

“Do you have any delicious dishes?”

“Beef, steamed twisted rolls, eggs, pancakes. If you want, I can cook lightly fried dumplings and boiled dumplings for you right away,” Xiao'er answered.

“Then slice me a large plate of beef.” Wu Song said, and drained another bowl of wine, and then the third one.

Xiao'er came out with a large plate of beef. Wu Song picked up one chunk and stuffed into his mouth. The beef had been sliced for several times, and the flavour was absorbed into the beef. So it was thoroughly cooked and very tasty and Wu Song felt it pretty good. Wu Song felt like drinking more wine with delicious beef. Just now it was wine without a dish; now it was a dish without wine.

Wu Song called Xiao'er to pour him another three bowls of wine. Xiao'er looked at him and thought of the strong after-effect of the wine, so he smiled, “Sir, we have steamed buns and big cakes, but we don't serve wine now.”

“I'll have steamed buns and big cakes, but wine is also wanted.”

“No wine is served,” Xiao'er shook his head.

“You don't sell wine?”

“I'm sorry, Sir,” Xiao'er smiled. “Good guest, please don't blame me, the wine is too strong so I can't sell you more. Other people can only drink one bowl. And Your Honour has drained three bowls, more than two *jin*, so you can't drink any more!”

While speaking, he raised his hand and pointed out of the cottage. “Good guest,

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didn't you see the wine-banner in front of the tavern?"

"Humph! I don't eat that wine-banner!" Wu Song was becoming restless.

Xiao'er felt that Wu Song was getting angry, so he explained immediately. "Sir, it's not like this. I'd like you to read the words on the wine-banner, 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge'. The wine in this tavern is called 'Flavor through the Bottle'. The surname of our young boss is Wen. Because he admires the wine brewed by Du Kang⁴, his given name is Kang, and he is called Wen Kang. The way of brewing the wine was passed down from his ancestors, and now the wine is even better than before. So, simple and crude as the tavern is, its wine is strong. Da Qu in Sichuan, Mao Tai in Guizhou, and Fen Wine in Shanxi, none of them can match this wine. Customers can usually drink one or two bowls, and they are sure to get drunk when downing a third bowl. If they are drunk, they will not be able to cross the ridge here."

Having heard the miraculous story, Wu Song patted his chest and said, "I've had three bowls. Why am I not drunk?"

"You don't know, Good guest," Xiao'er smiled. "It's not the time. This wine is also called 'Falling at the Door' because of its strong after-effect. That is, you don't feel anything wrong now, but you will collapse a little later."

Wu Song felt it hard to understand. *As the saying goes*, "Restaurant owners don't fear big bellies." I don't eat without paying, why don't they sell me wine? Wu Song was greedy for the wine. "Wine, quickly," he yelled.

The young innkeeper had heard their argument, and he thought the big fellow was not drunk yet. He decided to sell two more bowls to make more money. So he called Xiao'er and ordered him to serve more wine.

Xiao'er had no choice but to pour another two bowls of wine and hand to Wu Song. "Good guest, it's the last time. I'm afraid this will end with 'upside-down accounts'."

Wu Song wondered about the meaning of "upside-down accounts", and he wanted to chat with Xiao'er it.

Xiao'er explained smiling:

"Some customers have no money but are fond of drinking. They have bad conduct, and when drunk, they will rely on the power of wine to go amok. They not only refuse to pay, but also unreasonably say that we owe them money. It's really 'putting the blame on the victim', and also called 'doing upside-down accounts'. Whenever such things happen, the boss will blame me for not being able to look through the customers and wait on them

⁴ The ancestor of wine brewing, according to Chinese legend.

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according to circumstances.”

“Ha-ha!” Wu Song laughed out. “In this case, you have suffered such losses?”

“Surely! When they have broken things, the boss has forced me to make up half the price.”

“Don’t worry. Bring me three more bowls, and I won’t have you suffer losses of ‘upside-down accounts’.”

Wu Song took out a piece of silver weighing about one tael and eight or nine ounces and handed it to Xiao’er. “Take it, all for wine!”

While Xiao’er was hesitating, the young innkeeper saw the white silver with his eyeballs out and shouted, “Fill his bowls!”

Xiao’er had no choice but to fill another three bowls. Now Wu Song had had eight bowls in all.

The young innkeeper took the silver. He examined it carefully and found it was pure silver, weighing two taels minus two coppers. There was a big surplus of silver after deducting the bill of the food and wine already served. So the innkeeper chuckled to himself and had long forgotten about the fierce man-slaughtering tiger.

The waiter Xiao’er was very surprised: that big fellow surely eats like a horse and drinks like a fish. He has eaten up the large plate of beef and almost downed another three bowls of wine.

This time Xiao’er brought three bowls on his own initiative before Wu Song shouted for him. “Good guest, take care that you don’t get drunk, for here is no medicine to bring you around!” he warned Wu Song again.

Wu Song didn’t care about it and opened his eyes wide. “Nonsense! Even if you doped it, I don’t fear. Bring me beef quickly!”

“There’s no beef left. We have about two dozen of spiced eggs. Would you like some?”

“Bring them along!”

Xiao’er filled a big plate with spiced eggs and steamed buns—about a dozen and each bun weighed four ounces—and placed them on the table in front of Wu Song.

“Where is the wine?” Wu Song saw the dishes and asked.

“Why? Good guest, do you still want to drink?” Xiao’er was astonished.

“I...I...I still want to! I’ve co...co...come to drink.” Wu Song couldn’t get his tongue round.

“There’s only five or six bowls of wine left.”

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“B..b..b...bring all of it to me! Today I wi...will drink my fill; I’ll drink up all the wine of your tavern!”

“Good guest, please, don’t! You’re a big hulking fellow. If you fall, who can pick you up?”

“If so, I’m no...no...no real man!” Wu Song pointed at his own nose.

Seeing his face looked like red silk and his eyeballs were fixed in a blank look, Xiao’er thought: This fellow is drunk and I have to keep myself away from him.

Xiao’er leant against the counter with his arms crossed and repeated, “You can’t drink any more!” No matter how Wu Song shouted for him, he did not come back to serve him more wine.

Wu Song saw Xiao’er standing there without moving and grew irritated. He glared at Xiao’er and pointed at him with his fist. Xiao’er was scared of Wu Song’s eyes and fists, and the young innkeeper was even more frightened. He thought: Don’t make him mad. Look at his fists. If he is provoked, he will beat me to pieces. I am a bag of bones, and my arm is thinner than his finger. So he secretly poked Xiao’er in the ribs and murmured, “Mandarin duck! Heaven and earth! Let him drink and get on his way!”

Listeners, do you understand the meanings of “Mandarin duck” and “Heaven and earth” said by the young innkeeper? They are secret signals of the innkeeper, meaning mingling water with wine half-and-half.

“It won’t do. It will be terrible if the fellow discovers it!” Xiao’er said.

“Take it easy. I have a way.”

First, the waiter carefully held to Wu Song two bowls of wine with seventy percent wine and thirty percent water. Wu Song took the bowls and drained the wine at one gulp without taking a look. Then, the waiter brought two bowls of wine with half wine and half water. The last two bowls were almost all water.

Wu Song felt very well. He was completely absorbed in his drinking and soon drained another four bowls. He had eighteen bowls in all.

“Excellent! Very good wine, good wine!” Wu Song constantly commended. “Do you still have any?”

“We have no wine now, really,” The young innkeeper replied, trembling with fear. “You’ve spent all the silver you gave me. And you’ve drunk eighteen bowls. Look! So many bowls piled up on the table.”

Wu Song cast a sidelong glance at the bowls and smiled, “But I’m not a bit dr...dr... drunk.” With these words, he took his pack, carelessly shouldered it, found his staff,

kicked the bench aside, and headed out of the tavern.

Xiao'er saw Wu Song had the intention of leaving, and he quickly made way for him. The young innkeeper fixed his eyes on Wu Song, and when he saw Wu Song fumble for the staff, he anxiously exclaimed "Good grief!" and brought himself into security behind the desk.

Wu Song stopped at the doorway and turned round, "You...you laughed at me for having no drinking capacity. You were afraid I'd get dr...dr...drunk and do upside-down accounts! I...I...I'm not drunk. Qui...qui...quickly t...t...tear the banner of 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge'.. If you do...do...don't tear, and I see...see it a...again, I'll b...break your wine j...jar, and burn down your h...h...house."

The waiter Xiao'er made a bow with hands folded in front and saw him out. Wu Song marched out of the tavern, stumbling and staggering, and the waiter didn't notice where he was off to.

As soon as the "devil" left, the young innkeeper crawled out from under the desk. For fear that the drunken fellow would come staggering back, he shouted at Xiao'er: "Shut the door quickly!"

They carried the table in, bolted the door, and took a breather. Then the innkeeper returned to the accountant's office. As Xiao'er was about to clear the table, suddenly, sounding like a hailstorm, "Bang! Bang! Bang!" somebody was knocking at the door.

"Terrible!" The young innkeeper heard it, and grasping the silver, he fled to the rear room with his money pot. Xiao'er was also flurried and about to run away when someone shouted outside, "Why do you close the door so early?" Xiao'er felt the voice was familiar, and sure enough it turned out to be Grandpa Liu from the bean curd store opposite.

The old man had seen Wu Song enter the tavern, and when he left, he was drunk. He had seen him walk unsteadily towards Jingyang Ridge. He thought: Too bad! There's a fierce tiger on the ridge! Why have the people of the tavern not told him? Then he saw the door of the tavern was shut. "Hem, it's too bad. I must go and ask."

The old man was warm-hearted. He laid aside his work and hurried over to knock at the door.

"There's no business, anyway, so we have closed for the night," Xiao'er replied.

"Humph, no business," Grandpa Liu sneered. "Wasn't there a big fellow drinking here a moment ago?"

When the young innkeeper heard it was Grandpa Liu, so he stepped over and

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interrupted, “We haven’t done business for three days. Never heard about a big fellow!”

The old man was even angrier to hear it. “Nonsense! I’m not blind yet. Wasn’t there a big fellow dressed in red leaving your tavern a moment ago?”

“Yes, yes!” Xiao’er replied.

“Why, how can you do business and forget all about conscience?!” Grandpa Liu reproached him.

The young innkeeper heard this and said to himself: Too bad! Probably he saw me mingle wine with water just now. This old guy is always meddling! So he defended himself, “We do fair business. I sell what customers want. I never raise prices, nor do I give short weight. How can you say that I have no conscience?”

Grandpa Liu was offended and extremely irritated. “We have suffered from the dangerous tiger for half a year. You’re deaf and don’t know it? Do you want this drunken man to kill himself? Why not tell him about it and ask him to stay? OK! If anything happens to him and the magistrate of Yanggu County comes to look into the case, I’ll be a witness and report to him that you didn’t try to keep him back!”

“Ah! Too bad!” Xiao’er and the innkeeper cried out in chorus.

“Oh, hell, how could I forget all about the man-slaughtering tiger? Let me run after him quickly!” Xiao’er said, beating his head anxiously.

The innkeeper was like a cat on hot bricks, and he thought about the issue: If the big fellow is really killed by the tiger, and the case is looked into and the offended Grandpa Liu reports us, I’ll certainly be finished and lose all my money!

Xiao’er pulled out the bolt and set off immediately to chase Wu Song.

Suddenly the innkeeper jerked him, “Do you think the drunken fellow will burn down our tavern and tear up the wine-banner when he returns?”

Xiao’er didn’t wait for him to finish, but pushed his hand aside. “Alas, in this situation, why care about all that? This is a matter of life and death!” With these words, Xiao’er pulled the door open and rushed out.

Grandpa Liu saw Xiao’er fly off and returned to his own store.

Meanwhile let’s tell about Wu Song. Now he was really badly drunk, and was dragging his cudgel and staggering out of the town gate. However, he did not miss the direction, but headed straight for Jingyang Ridge. Wu Song’s steps were not as stable and careful as when he had arrived at the town. On this side, there was also a palisade door about three meters high in the town gate. Recklessly Wu Song pulled the door open and stumbled

out. The mountain wind blew right into his face and the warmth of the wine rose in him so that his mind was not clear. His two legs seemed like they didn't belong to him, and there was no strength left in them at all, so he felt he was stepping on soft cotton pads.

As he was walking unsteadily forwards, there seemed to be some voices in his ears, as if someone shouted, "Good guest, stop!" Who is he shouting at Wu Song looked ahead, but nobody was in front of him; when he looked back, he saw a person running while shouting and waving. Looking closer, he thought: he seems to be shouting to me. That's strange. Why does he shout to me? Seeing his head was covered with sweat and he was out of breath, Wu Song slowed down and stopped.

Xiao'er saw Wu Song stop there, and he slowed down and stood about five meters away: "Dear guest, quickly return to the tavern with me!"

Wu Song approached him and found it was Xiao'er "I...I...I do not owe you money. Why do you ask me to re...re...return?"

"I'm running after you for your own sake, for you can't go any further!"

"Wh...why can't I go...go further? Is it that I will b.. bump into a tiger and get sw.. swallowed up?"

"Alas! It's true! There is a fierce tiger on the mountain! It has devoured countless pigs, cows and sheep from our place! And it has also eaten a lot of travellers and merchants on the road, and attacked many local peasants. Four days ago, a little boy, Third Brother from East Village, who was mowing grass in the field, was suddenly caught by the tiger and carried away. His mother is still crying! So nobody dares climb the ridge at present. If people absolutely have to cross it, they must gather in groups, armed with swords, spears, clubs and staffs, and only morning, noon and afternoon are allowed to travel. A proclamation from Yanggu County has made it known to all that no one is permitted to travel alone. It's already late, Good guest, please, return to town with me quickly!" said Xiao'er.

Wu Song stared at Xiao'er and sneered, "Ha-ha, I...I'm not drunk, am I? I crossed th...the Jingyang ridge before, and never came across a ti...tiger. To...today, there is a tiger? You...you don't try to scare me! Even if I should bump into a tiger—" Wu Song patted his chest and said, "I...I'm not afraid!"

"Really, there is a fierce tiger!" Xiao'er said in great fright.

Wu Song saw Xiao'er was really scared, but he was unable to think clearly because of the wine, and instead, he became angry. "There is a tiger, is there? Ju...Just now in the tavern, why didn't you tell me? Now I'm on my way and you hurry after me. It is clear

that you plan to rob me of my silver. Leave me alone. I won't return!" Wu Song took his cudgel and headed for Jingyang Ridge without looking back for a moment.

Xiao'er opened his eyes wide and saw the big fellow walking unsteadily straight up the slope. He could do nothing but rub his hands in despair.

*Meanwhile let's tell that from Jingyang Town to the top of the ridge there was about five to six *li*. Halfway there was a mountain stream that one had to cross. After more than one *li* Wu Song got to the stream. There had been a stone bridge over the stream, but it had been ruined by mountain torrents in spring. Now there was a trail ferry in the stream. There was a coil of rope tied to each side of the boat, and the other end of each rope was tied to the trees on both banks. When travellers wanted to cross the stream, all they had to do was to sit down in the boat and pull the rope so that the boat would float to the opposite shore. This scene at the ferry was exactly the same as that depicted in an ancient poem, "At the ferry in the wild, a boat lies crosswise, with no traces of human presence."*

In his drunken state Wu Song went on board and pulled the rope, and the boat floated to the other side of the stream. At the moment the setting sun was only as high as a bamboo pole above the ground, and its last rays fell on some tall white poplars. In Wu Song's eyes, the trees looked like they were growing upside down. Tipsy as Wu Song was, he began to have visions, and started to laugh: "Look, look, how come that tomb is falling down on me? My goodness, those trees are fighting! Why are they getting so entangled?" Wu Song sat in the boat and felt as if he was in the legend of "Eight Immortals cross the Sea". He was in the middle of heaven and earth, and everything was changing into a fairy world.

This was very fortunate, because if Wu Song had walked across a bridge in his present groggy state, he might have tumbled into the stream and drowned, just like Li Zhexian who tried to catch the moon in the water, and the madman Zhang who drowned in a well. Wu Song held the rope between his fingers and pulled it hand over hand. The wine was burning inside him as he pulled the rope, so he pushed the felt hat to the back of his head. As he pushed the hat, he felt the gusts of cold wind, and the effect of the wine was ten per cent relieved. After a while, he unbuttoned his tunic, and with the next gust of wind another ten per cent of his tipsiness was gone.

Wu Song felt thirsty, so he let go of the rope and scooped up some water in both hands to drink. The boat neither went forward nor went back, but swayed in the stream. When he got hold of the rope again, Wu Song felt the scenery before his eyes was not swaying as violently as before. Having crossed the stream, Wu Song landed and went up

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the slope, cudgel in hand.

After another twenty steps, Wu Song suddenly saw a large piece of bark had been peeled from an old locust tree. The white patch caught his eye. He stopped and saw eight big characters were written on the tree: “Tiger on the ridge! Stop here!” Wu Song was still heavily drunk. He was red in his face and his head was dizzy, and he felt restless and hot all over. Wu Song did not care about the inscription, but laughed “Ha-ha!”, swung his arm, pulled the cudgel along beside him, and headed for the top of the ridge without looking back.

The middle of October was like a second spring. The setting sun was shining upon half the sky blood red while the moon had risen from the eastern side of the ridge like an ice plate. The trend of the ridge was from south to north, and the mountain path from west to east. The slope was not steep, but the mountain path was long and the track wide. Because it had not seen any passers-by for long, it was now covered with withered weeds and fallen leaves. The evening breeze was blowing and white poplars were swaying and rustling.

Although Wu Song felt a little less tipsy, his head was still heavy and his feet light, and staggering and swaying he continued on his way. After walking for a while, a Mountain Spirit Temple suddenly appeared in front. Wu Song felt so sleepy from the wine and he wanted to take a rest in the temple. But when he approached the temple, he found to his dismay that it was badly dilapidated and its walls collapsed. The statue of the mountain spirit was wearing a broad-rimmed bamboo hat, the incense burner was covered with grass, and everything was awfully shabby. With cobwebs hanging under the eaves and heaps of corn stalk piled up inside, Wu Song refrained from entering the temple.

Wu Song passed the temple gate when suddenly a notice pasted on the wall caught his eyes. In the twilight of sunset Wu Song strained his eyes to see what was written there:

On special order from magistrate Sun of Yanggu District in Shandong, we shall hereby make public the following instructions: Hereby it is notified that on Jingyang Ridge east of the district city, that is the main thoroughfare, there has unfortunately last month appeared a fierce tiger. It obstructs the road and kills people. Although township leaders, village leaders and hunters here have been ordered to capture the beast under threat of flogging, they have so far failed. Besides restating the previous order to capture the tiger as soon as possible to ensure the security of travelling, this notice is to make the situation known to all

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the military and civilians of township and countryside. If a bold fellow comes forth who is able to capture or kill the tiger, our magistrate will grant him a handsome reward according to custom. Travelers and merchants are permitted to cross the ridge only morning, noon and afternoon everyday, in groups and armed with cudgels and staffs. If single travelers cross the ridge without permission and are killed by the tiger because innkeepers do not keep them back, or the headman does not prevent them, the magistrate will absolutely never tolerate it and severely punish the parties concerned after finding out the truth. Special warning against violating this edict!

The propitious day of the seventh month, the fifth year of Zheng He, Great Song Dynasty

The paper of the notice had been bleached by the sun and wind. There was a line of small characters in the bottom left-hand corner of the notice, “To issue and paste up at the Mountain Spirit Temple on Jingyang Ridge”. Wu Song read the date on the notice, and saw it was several months old; he examined the red official seal again, and found it was by no means a fake. When Wu Song had first arrived at the tavern and had seen the painting of Bian Zhuang fighting a tiger, he had laughed at it. When he left the tavern drunk and Xiao'er rushed to ask him to return, he thought Xiao'er was cheating him and believed that even if there was a tiger, he would not necessarily run into it, and even if he did run into the tiger, he could probably get away. When he now read the edict with the official seal, he was truly shocked and his tipsiness evaporated considerably.

At the moment Wu Song was quite different from the one who had seen eight characters on the trunk before. Now he understood: That tiger had an insatiable appetite for human beings. To meet that tiger would not be a good idea. Didn't Xiao'er say that the fierce tiger had killed many people? No wonder palisade doors on both sides were barring the entrance to the town when I arrived. It is reasonable, certainly reasonable. From this point of view, only I, Wu the Second, am in the wrong. I had better turn back and go downhill. I mistook their good words for bad words, their good will for evil intentions. I'm certainly unreasonable. I had better go back quickly.

Wu Song hesitated for a while and then he began to walk back. After a few steps, he changed his mind and thought: they will laugh at me if I return. So Wu Song stopped: Let me turn back and search for the tiger. He knew he had some experience in fighting hand to hand with people skilled in the martial arts, but he had never seen a tiger, and how should he attack it? He looked at the cudgel in his hand, but shook his head, thinking this

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was not a handy weapon. If he was not able to manage, his life was at stake: I have travelled so far to my hometown to see my brother, but will fall prey to a tiger before I can see him. At this thought, Wu Song hesitated again.

At this moment, he suddenly heard how gusts of wind carried a wailing sound. The mountain wind blew hard, and the white poplars rustled and rustled. Beside the temple several new tombs could be discerned in the dusk of the evening. Wu Song thought of the days of hardship that he had suffered, and now he realized that if he could kill the tiger, he would rid people of a scourge. At this thought, Wu Song suddenly felt his full strength return. He gritted his iron teeth, grabbed his cudgel and shouted, “Let me take up the fight with this big beast!” and “Da, da, da” he strode up to the top of the ridge. Indeed: Clearly knowing there was a tiger in the mountain, he obstinately climbed that tiger mountain.

Now the moon in the sky was bright and clear, the wind was still wailing incessantly. Wu Song got to the top of the ridge only to find he was surrounded with a wilderness of bushes and withered grass. The weeds were more than three meters high. Wu Song pushed aside the weeds with his cudgel, made his way uphill and looked around to all sides, wondering where the tiger was. *Indeed: Heroic are the good fellows, fearless they go through fire and water. As for how Wu Song would wrestle with the big beast, please listen to the explanation of the next session.*

Translated by Huang Ying and Vibeke Børdahl