

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 11.

A couple of quick notes before we pick up where we left off: The podcast episodes are now available on YouTube. So if you prefer getting your fix of the three kingdoms podcast that way, now you can. The link to the YouTube channel is on the Subscribe page of our website, 3kingdomspodcast.com, spelled with the number 3.

Also, my two-month honeymoon period with iTunes is up, which means the show is no longer positioned near the top of the podcast listings by default. So if it's going to show up on anybody's radar in the iTunes store, it has to earn its way there, and getting more ratings and reviews will definitely help that. So if you enjoy the show, please consider rating and reviewing it on iTunes. Thanks!

Alright, at the end of the last episode, Wang (2) Yun (3), the minister of the interior, had concocted a scheme to sow discord between Dong Zhuo and Lü Bu by promising the same girl, Diao Chan, to both of them separately and unbeknownst to each other. Wang Yun had just delivered Diao Chan to Dong Zhuo's residence when he ran into Lü Bu, who had caught wind that his concubine-to-be had just been sent to his adopted father's home, and Lu Bu wasn't too pleased about it.

"Are you trying to play me?" he asked Wang Yun sternly as they stood on the street.

Wang Yun quickly cut him off.

"This is no place to talk. Please come to my humble abode."

Lu Bu acquiesced and followed him. After they went into the private quarters in the back of the residence, Wang Yun asked:

"General, why are you angry with me?"

"Someone told me that you delivered Diao Chan to the prime minister's residence. What is the meaning of that?"

"Ah, so you haven't heard. Yesterday at court, his excellency said to me, 'I have some business to

discuss with you at your home tomorrow.’ So I prepared a modest feast for the occasion. While we were drinking, his excellency said, ‘I heard you have a daughter named Diao Chan, whom you have betrothed to my son Lu Bu. I was worried you might have second thoughts, so I have come to secure your permission on his behalf and to request to be allowed to meet your daughter.’

“Well, since his excellency asked, how could I dare to refuse? So I summoned Diao Chan to come meet his excellency. He then said, ‘Today is an auspicious date. I shall bring her back with me immediately and have her marry my son.’

“General, think about it: His excellency came in person to make the request. How dare I say no?”

This explanation managed to calm Lu Bu down.

“Minister Wang, please forgive me,” he said. “I was mistaken. I will come beg for your forgiveness another day.”

Wang Yun now acted the part of the magnanimous father-in-law-to-be.

“My daughter has some modest dowry. Once you two are married, I will have that delivered to you,” he said.

Satisfied, Lu Bu thanked him and took his leave. The next day, Lu Bu went to Dong Zhuo’s residence to check on the wedding plans, but surprise, surprise, there was absolutely no mention of any wedding among any of the servants. Lu Bu went to Dong Zhuo’s private quarters and asked his maids.

“The prime minister spent last night with a new companion and hasn’t gotten out of bed yet,” one of the maids told him.

Uh ... new companion, you say. Well, it didn’t take Lu Bu long to figure out what’s going on here, and you can imagine his reaction. He sneaked into Dong Zhuo’s sleeping quarters to steal a peek, just to make sure. At that time, Diao Chan had gotten out of bed after what must have been a vomit-inducing night of ickiness and was brushing her hair by the window. Suddenly, she noticed the reflection of a tall man in the pond outside the window. She recognized the headdress. She stole a glance and saw that it

was indeed Lu Bu.

This was Diao Chan's cue to do her thing. She furrowed her eyebrows, put on a sad face, and wiped away a few tears with her delicate handkerchief, with Lu Bu standing there watching all the while. After staring for a long time, he turned and walked out, but a moment later, he returned.

By now, Dong Zhuo had gotten up and was sitting in his room. When he saw Lu Bu come in, he asked if there was anything new.

"Everything is fine," Lu Bu muttered and then stood next to Dong Zhuo. As Dong Zhuo ate breakfast, Lu Bu kept stealing sideways glances. Behind a screen he saw a woman showing half a face every now and then, throwing amorous looks at him each time. Lu Bu knew it was Diao Chan, and his mind began to wander.

The fact that Lu Bu was standing there in a daze and staring off to the side did not escape Dong Zhuo's notice, and he got suspicious.

"My son, if there's nothing to report, you may go," he said.

Lu Bu had no choice but to slink away, and Diao Chan had sowed the first seeds of conflict between father and son.

So after he got Diao Chan, Dong Zhuo became totally infatuated with her, and he neglected all affairs for more than a month. One time, he came down with some minor bug. It was a trifle of an illness, but it was an opportunity that Diao Chan wasn't about to miss. She tended to Dong Zhuo constantly, never leaving his bedside, not even to change. This made Dong Zhuo as happy as could be, nevermind the illness.

One day, Lu Bu came by to see how Dong Zhuo was feeling. Dong Zhuo was asleep at the time, and Diao Chan was standing by the foot of his bed. She leaned forward to look at Lu Bu, then pointed at her heart, then pointed at Dong Zhuo, and then turned loose the tears. The sight of this broke Lu Bu's heart.

While this was going on, a drowsy Dong Zhuo opened his eyes. In his groggy state, he saw Lu Bu staring at the other end of the bed without blinking. Dong Zhuo turned to see what his son was looking at. When he saw that Diao Chan was standing at the other end, he flew into a rage.

“How dare you try to flirt with my woman?!” he scolded, and then told his attendants to kick Lu Bu out and to bar him from entering the sleeping quarters from now on.

Lu Bu walked away seething with hatred. On the way home, he bumped into Li (3) Ru (2), Dong Zhuo’s adviser and son-in-law, and told him what happened. Now, Li Ru was a pretty smart guy, and he knew trouble when he saw it, so he hurried over to see Dong Zhuo.

“If your excellency intends to seize the empire, why would you scold the general for such a minor offense? If his loyalty turns, then everything would be lost.”

“So what do you think I should do?” Dong Zhuo asked.

“Summon him tomorrow. Bestow riches upon him and console him with some kind words. Then everything will be fine.”

Dong Zhuo agreed, and the next day he summoned Lu Bu to his quarters and tried to console him.

“I was sick yesterday and was in a bad mood. That’s why I misspoke and wronged you. Forgive me.”

He then gave Lu Bu 300 ounces of gold and 20 rolls of silk. Lu Bu thanked him and took his leave, but as you can imagine, this was not something that a little gold and fabric could make up for. From this point on, even though Lu Bu still stood by Dong Zhuo’s side, his mind was always on Diao Chan.

After recovering from his illness, Dong Zhuo, probably quite reluctantly, returned to court to handle state affairs, and Lu Bu, as he always did, accompanied him with halberd in hand. When Dong Zhuo began to discuss with the emperor, Lu Bu took the opportunity to slip away, hop on his horse, and go to Dong Zhuo’s residence. He hitched the horse in front of the residence and carried his halberd with him into the private apartment as he searched for Diao Chan.

When he found her, she quickly told him, "Go wait for me at the Phoenix Pavilion in the rear garden."

Lu Bu did as she said and went to the pavilion. There, he leaned his halberd up against the railing and waited. After a long while, Diao Chan appeared, walking with the graceful sway of a moon goddess. When she came near, she wept.

"Even though I'm not Minister Wang's daughter by birth, he has always treated me as such. When I met you and was betrothed to you, my life's wish had been fulfilled. But who would have thought that the prime minister would harbor such wicked intentions and steal my flower. All I wish for now is a quick death. The only reason I haven't killed myself is because I haven't bid you farewell yet. Now that I have had the good fortune to do so, my one wish has been fulfilled. I have been tainted and I cannot serve you, so I would rather die in front of you to prove my loyalty."

Upon this, Diao Chan put her hands on the railing and prepared to throw herself into the lotus pond.

After a performance like that, what man can remain unmoved? Well, certainly not Lu Bu. He quickly pulled her back from the railing and said, with tears in his eyes, "I've long known your heart. It's just that we haven't had a chance to talk."

Diao Chan kept pouring it on. She put her arms around Lu Bu and said, "Since I cannot be your wife in this life, may my wish come true in the next."

"If I cannot have you as my wife in this life, then I am no hero," Lu Bu said.

"Every day feels like an eternity to me. Please have pity and save me," said the damsel in distress.

"I snuck away to come here to see you today. I need to leave now, or that old scoundrel is going to get suspicious," Lu Bu said.

That gave Diao Chan the opportunity to lay down the "you're so not the man I thought you were" card.

"If you are so afraid of the old scoundrel, then there is no hope for me," she said.

"Let me try to come up with a plan," Lu Bu said as he stood up, grabbed his halberd, and tried to

leave. But Diao Chan wasn't about to let him get away without getting one more dig in.

"Even when I was still living in deep seclusion, I had heard your name. They said that you were unrivaled among men. Who would have thought that you are but a puppet?"

At this, she turned on the waterworks again, and Lu Bu was filled with shame. He put his halberd back down, turned around to pull Diao Chan into his arms and comforted her. The two were locked in an embrace that neither could bear to break.

Meanwhile, back at the palace, Dong Zhuo had noticed that Lu Bu was gone. He immediately got suspicious. So he took his leave of the emperor and rode back to his house. When he got there, he saw Lu Bu's horse hitched out front, and the doorman told him, "The general went into the rear chamber."

Dong Zhuo dismissed his attendants and went into the rear chamber. But there was no sign of Lu Bu. He called for Diao Chan, but there was no sign of her either. When he asked the maids, they told him, "Diao Chan is enjoying the flowers in the rear garden." Well, when Dong Zhuo went into the garden, he saw that Diao Chan was enjoying something other than flowers, as she and Lu Bu were whispering soft words to each other by the Phoenix Pavilion.

Dong Zhuo flew into a rage and let out a big cry. The sight of Dong Zhuo startled Lu Bu, and he turned and ran. He didn't even bother to grab his halberd. Well, Dong Zhuo grabbed the halberd and chased after Lu Bu. But as you can imagine, Dong Zhuo was no match for Lu Bu in a foot race. So he hurled the halberd at Lu Bu. Of course, this was no problem for the greatest warrior of his age. Lu Bu simply turned and swatted the halberd down and kept running. By the time Dong Zhuo picked up the halberd again, Lu Bu had already run far away. But Dong Zhuo still ran after him.

As Dong Zhuo ran out of the garden, however, he ran face first into someone coming the other way. Both crumbled to the ground. When the other man helped Dong Zhuo to his feet, he looked and saw that it was his adviser Li Ru. After Li Ru helped him to his study and helped him sit down, Dong Zhuo asked

what he was doing there.

“I just happened to drop by and heard that you had stormed into the rear garden in a rage looking for Lu Bu, so I came as quickly as I could,” Li Ru said. “I ran into Lu Bu running the other way, and he shouted, “The prime minister is trying to kill me!” So I came to the garden to calm your excellency down but accidentally bumped into you. Please forgive me.”

“That wretched traitor dared to fool around with my woman! I swear I’m going to kill him!” Dong Zhuo said.

“Your excellency, please reconsider,” Li Ru said. “During the Warring States period, the king of Chu did not punish the general who teased his concubine. Later, when the king was besieged by an enemy, that general fought hard to rescue him. Diao Chan is just one girl, while Lu Bu is your excellency’s most trusted and fiercest warrior. If you take this opportunity and give her to Lu Bu, he will be forever grateful and serve you to the last. Please think about it.”

This was a pretty good suggestion by Li Ru, along the lines of when he suggested that Dong Zhuo give the Red Hare stallion to Lu Bu to win him over. Of course, that was a horse, while this was the woman Dong Zhuo was infatuated with. Dong Zhuo contemplated the suggestion for a long time and then told Li Ru that he would think about it some more. After Li Ru took his leave, Dong Zhuo went to his private quarters and summoned Diao Chan.

“Why were you consorting with Lu Bu?” he asked her.

Diao Chan wept and replied,

“I was just looking at flowers in the garden when Lu Bu suddenly appeared. I was startled and tried to leave, but he said, ‘I’m the prime minister’s son. There’s no need to avoid me.’ And then he forced me to the pavilion. I could tell that he had bad intentions and was afraid that he would force himself on me. I tried to jump into the pond to kill myself, but he grabbed me. I was in dire straits, but you showed up just in time to save my life.”

“Hmm. I am thinking about giving you to Lu Bu. What do you think of that?” Dong Zhuo said.

Well, of course Diao Chan was not going to let that happen. She turned on the tears again -- and you have to figure that her eyes must be bone dry by now with all the fake weeping she’s been doing today.

“I have already become your servant. But now you suddenly want to give me to one of your house slaves. I would rather die than to submit to such humiliation!”

She then turned and grabbed the sword that was hanging on the wall and acted as though she was about to slit her own throat. Dong Zhuo hurriedly stopped her, threw the sword on the floor, and held her in his arms.

“I was just kidding,” he said.

Diao Chan now piled it on some more.

“This must be Li Ru’s idea,” she said. “He and Lu Bu are good friends. That’s why he suggested this. He cares nothing for your excellency’s reputation or your humble servant’s life. I want to eat him alive!”

“How can I bear to actually part with you?” Dong Zhuo said.

“Even though I am blessed with your excellency’s pity and love, we cannot stay here long, or Lu Bu is going to make a move on us.”

“Well then, tomorrow we will go back to Mei (2) Wu (4). There we can enjoy ourselves without worry.”

This finally satisfied Diao Chan, and she turned off the waterworks and thanked Dong Zhuo.

The next day, Li Ru came by again. “Today is an auspicious day, perfect for giving Diao Chan to Lu Bu,” he said to Dong Zhuo.

But Dong Zhuo was not taking his suggestion this time.

“I am Lu Bu’s father; it is not proper for me to give my woman to him,” he said. “I’ll just not punish him for this transgression. You go tell him that and console him.”

“But your excellency, you can’t let a woman blind you to what’s important.”

“Well then, you give your wife to Lu Bu. Do not mention this business about Diao Chan again, or I will have you executed.”

And in case you missed the irony here, remember that Li Ru was not just Dong Zhuo’s adviser, but also his son-in-law. So when Dong Zhuo says “Give your wife to Lu Bu”, he was basically inadvertently saying “Give my daughter to Lu Bu.” Well in any case, the point was made, and Li Ru had no recourse. As he left, he looked up at the sky and sighed, “[sigh] We’re all going to die at the hand of a woman.”

In later times, when a reader got to this part of the story, he wrote the following poem:

Wang Yun staked the empire’s fate
on a gentle maiden’s charm
Spear and shield were set aside,
no soldier came to harm.
In the fray at Hulao Pass
three heroes fought in vain.
Instead the victory song was sung
at Phoenix Pavilion.

So that same day, Dong Zhuo sent out word that he was returning to Mei (2) Wu (4) and that all the officials were to see him off. As they set off, Diao Chan, peeking from the window in her carriage, spotted Lu Bu among the crowd, and he was staring in her direction. So Diao Chan laid it one more time, covering her face and acting as if she was weeping inconsolably. Needless to say, this tugged at Lu Bu’s heartstrings even more. As Dong Zhuo’s traveling party headed off into the distance, Lu Bu stood on a dirt mound, gazed at the trail of dust, and sighed with a combination of sadness and hatred.

Suddenly, someone spoke up behind him.

“General, why are you standing here sighing instead of traveling with his excellency?”

Lu Bu turned and looked, and saw that it was Wang Yun. After they exchanged greetings, Wang Yun continued.

“I’ve been a little bit under the weather lately and haven’t gone out at all, so I haven’t had a chance to see you. But today, with his excellency setting off for Mei (2) Wu (4), I had no choice but to come despite my illness. But I was fortunate to get to see you. So why ARE you sighing?”

“Because of your daughter.”

“What? Are you two still not married after all this time?” Wang Yun said, feigning surprise.

“That old scoundrel has claimed her for himself,” Lu Bu answered.

Wang Yun kept up his surprise face.

“I refuse to believe that,” he said.

When Lu Bu told Wang Yun about what happened, Wang Yun covered his face and stamped his foot. After remaining silent for a long while, he finally said, “I would have never expected such beastly behavior from his excellency.”

Wang Yun then grabbed Lu Bu’s hand and said, “Let’s go talk about this at my house.”

Lu Bu followed, and when they got to Wang Yun’s home, they went to a private room, where Wang Yun laid out some wine. Lu Bu then told Wang Yun about what happened at the Phoenix Pavilion, and Wang Yun took the opportunity to twist the dagger just a little more.

“The prime minister has tainted my daughter and stolen your concubine. The people of the empire are surely having a good laugh over this. But they aren’t laughing at the prime minister, but rather at me and you. Alas, I am a useless old man, so it doesn’t really matter if they laugh at me. But you, general, you are a hero of our times, and yet even you are subject to this indignity.”

Well, between all the gasoline that Wang Yun and Diao Chan have been pouring on the fire, Lu Bu at last exploded. He slapped the table in front of him and cried out in anger. Wang Yun quickly apologized.

"I misspoke. Please calm down, general."

But Lu Bu was not going to calm down.

"I swear I am going to kill that old scoundrel to avenge this embarrassment," he said.

Wang Yun quickly covered Lu Bu's mouth.

"General, quiet. You are going to get me in trouble."

But Lu Bu was not going to be quiet.

"A real man stands between heaven and earth, not under someone else's thumb," he said.

Wang Yun now egged him on.

"With your talent, there is no way you should let the prime minister hold you back," he said.

"I want to kill that old scoundrel," Lu Bu said, "but he is my father. I worry that it will taint my legacy."

Wang Yun smiled and said, "General, your last name is Lu. The prime minister's last name is Dong.

Besides, when he hurled the halberd at you, did he consider you his son?"

This was all the convincing Lu Bu needed.

"Thank you, Minister Wang, for bringing me to my senses," he said.

Seeing that Lu Bu has been swayed, Wang Yun went in to seal the deal.

"General, if you help support the house of Han, that would make you a loyal official, and your name will be praised by posterity. On the other hand, if you help Dong Zhuo, that would make you a traitor, and your name will be cursed forever."

Lu Bu now stood up and kneeled in front of Wang Yun. "My resolve is firm. Please have no doubts," he said.

"But I am worried that if we fail, it will bring disaster," Wang Yun said.

To reassure Wang Yun, Lu Bu now pulled out his knife, slashed his arm, and swore a blood oath.

Satisfied that Lu Bu has been won over, Wang Yun kneeled and thanked him.

"It will be all thanks to you that the house of Han will not fall. Don't let this leak out. When I have a

plan of action, I will inform you.”

Once Lu Bu left, Wang Yun summoned two of his most trusted colleagues at court to discuss how to proceed. One of them put forth an idea.

“The emperor just got over an illness,” he said. “We can send a smooth talker to go lure Dong Zhuo back to the capital. At the same time, have the emperor issue a secret decree to Lu Bu, ordering him to lead a squad of armored soldiers and lie in ambush by the palace gates. When Dong Zhuo comes, they can kill him.”

So who is the smooth talker that they are going to send to lure Dong Zhuo out of his own city? Wang Yun and his friends decided that the best choice would be Li (3) Su (4). We haven’t mentioned this guy in a while, but you might remember that he was from the same hometown as Lu Bu, and he was the one who convinced Lu Bu to kill his last adopted father, Ding Yuan, and join Dong Zhuo. Apparently Li Su has been kind of left out in the cold as far as promotions go, and he’s been holding a grudge against Dong Zhuo because of it.

When Wang Yun pitched the idea to Lu Bu, Lu Bu said, “Li Su was the one who convinced me to kill Ding Yuan. If he refuses to take on this task, I will kill him first.”

So Lu Bu and Wang Yun secretly invited Li Su. Lu Bu said to him, “At one time, you convinced me to kill Ding Yuan and serve Dong Zhuo. But now, Dong Zhuo is bullying the emperor and oppressing the common people. His crimes have drawn the wrath of men and gods alike. Would you be willing to go to Mei (2) Wu (4) and deliver a decree from the emperor to lure him to court so that we can ambush and kill him? That way, we will be loyal officials supporting the house of Han.”

This suited Li Su just fine. “I’ve long been wanting to kill that traitor as well; it’s just that I haven’t found anyone to help me,” he said. “But now, it is a gift from heaven that you share my intention. How can I dare to say no?”

At this, Li Su snapped an arrow in two and swore an oath. To make sure he didn’t go back on his

word, Wang Yun sweetened the deal. "If you succeed, you won't have to worry about getting a high office," he told Li Su.

So the next day, Li Su set out with about a dozen riders and headed to Mei (2) Wu (4) to see Dong Zhuo. When they got there, they announced that they were delivering a summon from the emperor. Upon hearing this, Dong Zhuo received Li Su.

"Why is the emperor summoning me?" Dong Zhuo asked.

"His majesty recently recovered from an illness, and now he wants to gather all the officials to discuss abdication and yielding the throne to your excellency. Hence the summon," Li Su said.

"Hmm. What does Wang Yun think of this?"

"Minister Wang has already begun construction on an altar for the ceremony. He's just waiting on you, my lord."

Dong Zhuo was delighted to hear this.

"Last night I dreamt that a dragon was circling me, and now this good news proves that it was a good omen. This is an opportunity I cannot miss," he said. "When I become emperor, you shall be the captain of the imperial guards."

Li Su played along and kneeled to thank him as an official would thank an emperor.

Dong Zhuo then ordered his four generals -- Li (3) Jue (2), Guo (1) Si (4), Zhang (1) Ji (4), and Fan (2) Chou (2) -- to lead 3,000 men to watch over Mei (2) Wu (4), while Dong Zhuo himself set off for the capital that day. Before departing, Dong Zhuo went to bid goodbye to his mother, who was 90-some-years-old.

"Where are you going, my son?" she asked.

"I am going to receive the throne from the emperor. Mother, you will soon be the empress dowager."

“I don’t know. I’ve been feeling uneasy lately, and my heart keeps pounding,” she said. “Could it be a bad omen?”

“Well, you ARE about to become empress dowager. This is only natural.”

With that, Dong Zhuo took leave of his mother. Before he set off, he told Diao Chan, “When I become emperor, you will be an imperial consort.”

Well, Diao Chan knew that this was all part of the plan, so she played along and thanked his majesty for his kindness.

Dong Zhuo then set off for Changan, accompanied by Li Su and a huge entourage. Less than 10 miles into his journey, however, one of the wheels on his carriage broke. So Dong Zhuo got out and mounted a horse to continue the trip. Just a few miles later, however, the horse began acting up. It snorted wildly and snapped its reins. Now, I personally think the horse was just reacting to the load on its back, but of course, a broken wheel and a petulant horse could easily be interpreted as omens. So Dong Zhuo asked Li Su what these signs meant. And here is where Li Su really started to earn the big promotion that’s coming his way.

“Your excellency is about ascend to the throne. These signs are saying that you are leaving behind your old ride for the imperial litter.”

This explanation satisfied Dong Zhuo, and he continued toward the capital. But Li Su’s job was far from done. The next day, as they were traveling, a strong wind whipped up and dark mists blocked out the sky. Dong Zhuo once again asked Li Su to interpret this sign.

“When a new emperor takes the throne, there are always streaks of red light piercing through purple mists as sign of the emperor’s heavenly powers,” Li Su said.

Once again, Dong Zhuo was satisfied with this reply and kept moving. When he approached the capital, all the officials were out there to greet him, with the exception of Li Ru, who had fallen ill and

could not leave his home. This was pretty convenient, since it meant Dong Zhuo did not have the brains of his operation there with him.

When Dong Zhuo got settled in his home in the capital, Lu Bu came to offer his greetings. Dong Zhuo, eager to patch up relations with his adopted son, told Lu Bu, "Once I become emperor, you will be the grand commander of all the troops of the empire." Lu Bu thanked him and spent the night at Dong Zhuo's home.

That night, a bunch of kids were singing out in the suburbs, and their melancholy voices traveled with the wind and reached the ears of Dong Zhuo. He heard the words they were singing:

"A thousand *li* of green green grass,
Beyond the tenth day, one cannot last."

So remember when I said a few episodes back that people in the novel were always invoking children's songs as omens? Well, Dong Zhuo certainly thought this was an omen, but he didn't know what to make of it, so whom else would he ask but Li Su? This time, Li Su merely said, "All it means is that the Liu clan is waning while the Dong clan is rising."

But of course, that's not what these lyrics were foreshadowing. To learn what the kids' song really meant, and to find out Dong Zhuo's fate, tune in next time on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.