

Double Dare

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Double Dare

by [malkinmalkout](#)

Summary

For a prank Jiang Cheng dares Nie Huaisang to pretend he has a crush on Lan Wangji. This results in Wei Wuxian having a few realisations about his own feelings.

Notes

This is set during WWXs time as a guest disciple at the Cloud Recesses.

If it isn't obvious the first and last part of this story are in NHS's POV and the rest is in WWX's POV – sort of like a sandwich. There is also a tiny hint of Jiang Cheng/Nie Huaisang, but nothing overt.

Spanish translation by Melany_Yiling: [AO3](#) or [Wattpad](#)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

It all starts when Wei Wuxian cuts himself off in the middle of a sentence because he spies Lan Wangji in the distance.

Jiang Cheng grinds his teeth until his jaw clicks as he watches Wei Wuxian sprint across the building's hallway and scream Lan Wangji's name in pure glee, heedless of the dead fish eyes he gets in reply for seamlessly breaking two sect rules in a row.

"Do you see this shit?" he asks Nie Huaisang, aggressively waving his hand in the direction of Wei Wuxian and the unfortunate soul he's decided to unleash all his unwanted attention on.

Nie Huaisang waves his fan a little faster at the question. "I don't know..." He demurs, unsure what exactly Jiang Cheng is trying to ask.

"It's been months. I can't believe he's still bothering Lan Wangji after all this time," Jiang Chang says, confusion seamlessly blending into frustration as he watches Wei Wuxian make an even bigger fool of himself than normal.

"Ah," Nie Huaisang agrees.

Both of them stand riveted, watching as Wei Wuxian invades Lan Wangji's personal space. His bright laughter echoes out through the hall despite the fact Lan Wangji has no sense of humour to prompt such happiness. Anticipation for future retribution grows as dark clouds gather across Lan Wangji's blank face while Wei Wuxian continues to chatter away.

"If Lan Wangji kills him it will be his own fault, I refuse to avenge him."

Nie Huaisang reluctantly looks away from the scene that is just as entertaining as any play and gives Jiang Cheng the attention he so often misses out on.

"But he's your brother," he says blinking up at the other teen. If it was him he would always seek revenge for his brother, regardless of who was at fault. It would be the least he can do after Nie Mingjue raised him after their father's death.

Jiang Cheng grumbles under his breath but doesn't dispute the statement. "He's still annoying though," he points out and gives a rare smile when Nie Huaisang nods in agreement. Seeing he still has his friend's attention he continues his rant, "it feels like all he talks about since we got to the Cloud Recesses is hunting, Emperor's Smile, porn, and Lan Wangji. He even talks about him more than girls!"

A divot appears between Nie Huaisang's brow as he thinks over Jiang Cheng's words before his mouth falls open in a little O.

Seeing the surprised expression Jiang Cheng asks, "what is it?"

Nie Huaisang avoids eye-contact, waving his fan in dismissal. "Ah, it's not important. Don't worry."

His eyes flicker back to Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji noting how immersed they are in each other's presence, with Wei Wuxian swaying back and forth like a kite while Lan Wangji's unrelenting gaze is the string that keeps him tethered. They don't look away from each other, even as other disciples creep past on their way to class, their fluttering white uniforms grazing in teasing swipes at Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji's legs.

"Stop looking, you'll only encourage him," Jiang Cheng orders like he's already a sect leader. "Tell me what you thought earlier."

With shifty eyes Nie Huaisang ums and ahs, trying to think of an excuse of why he needs to be anywhere but here, until Jiang Cheng loses patience and stomps his foot.

Nie Huaisang eeps and finally confesses, "I just thought it's pretty suspicious that he talks about Lan Wangji so much, maybe he has, um, a-a crush."

"What, a crush? On who?"

Nie Huaisang stares at him, wondering if he's pretending to be stupid on purpose. When he only sees confusion in Jiang Cheng's curious expression he explains further, "on Lan Wangji."

"You think he has a crush on Lan Wangji!?" Jiang Cheng splutters. "But he flirts with women all the time."

"But you said he talks about Lan Wangji more than girls," Nie Huaisang mutters under his breath, huffing a little at his idea being so easily dismissed. He doesn't even bother telling him it's possible to like both girls and boys.

They're pulled from their conversation when Wei Wuxian's laughter gains a more annoying pitch and he yells after a retreating Lan Wangji. Further proving he has no self-preservation Wei Wuxian quickly dogs at his footsteps as he strides out the door and across the courtyard stone path, abandoning his other friends without a backwards glance.

Jiang Cheng tsks in annoyance, violently reminding Nie Huaisang of the one time he was introduced to Madame Yu at a discussion conference. How scary - even their scowls are the same.

"He left us behind again."

"At least Lan Wangji isn't paying Wei-xiong any mind," Nie Huaisang says in consolidation, patting Jiang Cheng's arm.

Fortunately this clears up Jiang Cheng's sour expression, making him snort. "Yeah, it would serve him right to have a crush on someone so unattainable."

His eyes narrow as something occurs to him.

"I've decided to cash in the favour you owe me," Jiang Cheng announces ominously, his eyes staring blankly at the archway where Wei Wuxian was last seen.

Nie Huaisang shivers.

His fears are realized when Jiang Cheng says, “I want you to tell Wei Ying you have a crush on Lan Wangji.”

Tears prink at Nie Huaisang's eyes. Just how cruel is this man?

“But why?” He wails, reaching a pitch he would normally only manage when his brother forces him to practice with his saber.

“Because I said so,” Jiang Cheng says maturely but backs down when he sees Nie Huaisang pout. “It’s a prank, to give Wei Ying a taste of his own medicine. Just act completely infatuated with Lan Wangji while my idiot brother’s around, egging him on when he starts ranting about Lan Wangji’s jade skin and funny expressions. Eventually we’ll tell him what you’re doing and point out how similar he acts to a love-struck boy who likes to pull his crushes’ pigtaileds.”

“But why me?” Nie Huaisang rephrases.

“Because Wei Ying knows me too well for it to be me and if you don’t I won’t help you study anymore.”

Nie Huaisang doesn’t even get to open his mouth before Jiang Cheng disputes his next complaint.

“Don’t even bother asking Wei Ying for help. You both already failed at cheating. And does it look like he knows how to study? All he does is sleep on his cultivation manuals and absorb their information by osmosis.”

“For how long?”

Jiang Cheng’s nose scrunches cutely despite his evil intentions. “Um, for about a week.”

Nie Huaisang slumps in defeat and mutters, “okay.”

Hopefully he will have enough time to write letters to be delivered to his friends and family upon his death.

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The fading light of dusk brushes along Gusu’s streets, provoking business owners to light their gas lamps and stoke their fires higher. The smell of burning wood and frying food tantalizingly tickles at Wei Wuxian’s nose as he wanders down the busy street in a daze. His eyes distant as he remembers the life-changing information Nie Huaisang confessed before Wei Wuxian snuck out.

Nie Huaisang has a crush on Lan Wangji.

At first he didn’t believe it. Nie Huaisang has never indicated any interest in Lan Wangji before now, always cringing away from his authoritative presence and gossiping about how scary he is.

But apparently Nie Huaisang likes “shy guys”.

Since when is Lan Wangji shy!? He doesn't blush and stutter like all the shy girls Wei Wuxian flirts with. Instead he acts like a jade statue until Wei Wuxian manages to trigger him into a morally offended rage.

His disbelief at the confession had prompted Nie Huaisang to nervously ask if he was mad at him for having cut-sleeve tendencies. Of course Wei Wuxian said it didn't matter, teasing him that by hanging around someone as handsome as himself it isn't surprising he likes boys. He had gotten a spluttering reply from Nie Huaisang that knew he liked men long before he met Wei Wuxian.

In the end Wei Wuxian had promised to support Nie Huaisang, rushing out of their dormitory to go get some Emperor's Smile at Gusu to celebrate, leaving behind Nie Huaisang stuttering his thanks.

Wei Wuxian sends a rock flying into a nearby building wall with an echoing crack and turns down a narrow street towards the shadier part of Gusu.

To be honest he ran off because he needed to gather his thoughts.

Even with all his assurances that it's okay something about Nie Huaisang having a crush on Lan Wangji makes his stomach ache. It's like someone is grabbing all the organs between his ribs in a crushing grip, making Wei Wuxian feel concerningly nauseous.

Could he actually be prejudiced against cut-sleeves?

Wei Wuxian likes to think he's pretty open minded about a lot of things, believing that as long as the people he loves aren't getting hurt there's no reason to put up a fuss. But maybe his ignorance of cut-sleeves has unwittingly made him intolerant towards something he doesn't understand and has only ever heard negative things about.

He hums in thought as he reaches the outskirts of the red-light district of Gusu – not that anyone actually calls it that while living so close to the Righteous Lan Sect. Everything is underground. To get anything here you have to know someone who has a cousin whose brother has a girlfriend whose friend works at a certain illegal business.

Luckily Wei Wuxian makes friends wherever he goes and knows a business that will sell him high-quality pornography for a discount if he drops Nie Huaisang's name.

Slapping away a wandering pick-pocket's hand he strides confidently towards a small shabby house promoting itself as a calligraphy and ink painting store.

He needs to get over his sudden strange emotional hang-up about cut-sleeves. And the best way to fight ignorance is to seek knowledge.

So tonight Wei Wuxian is buying his first ever cut-sleeve book.

Wei Wuxian heart makes a strong attempt to leap out of his chest as he sneaks through the disciple barracks window and lands quietly on the moonlit wooden floor. He freezes in place, waiting for the blood pounding in his ears to die down so he can hear if anyone has been awoken by his entrance.

Luckily the only sounds he hears are the chirps of crickets and the groaning of ancient buildings settling, drowned out by the snores of his roommates.

He's safe.

Wei Wuxian quickly undresses, pulls out his hair ribbon, and stashes his Emperor's Smile under Jiang Cheng's bed before burrowing down into his own thin mattress, in one hand he clutches the novel he risked his life for.

It had been a very close call when he snuck back into Cloud Recesses after his visit to Gusu. The cut-sleeve booklet hidden in his robe made him extra cautious, giving him the necessary awareness to spot Lan Wangji's shining white robes at a distance as he made his way over the rooftops for his nightly patrol.

After thirty minutes of hiding behind a convenient shrub Lan Wangji had disappeared into the darkness, giving Wei Wuxian the change to leave himself over the wall and sprint back to his room.

He hopes all the trouble he went to will be worth it.

Despite it being a mild spring night he pulling his thick blanket over his head, hoping it will smother the glow of his light talisman. Activating it leaves blinding stars dancing in his stinging eyes before his night vision adapts. He makes an internal note to try and see if he can invent a better light talisman, one that he can control the levels of brightness with.

Wei Wuxian settles the talisman on his crossed knee and balances the cut-sleeve book on the other.

He opens it up in the middle and is instantly blown away with the image of a tied up slender man kneeling in front of a well dress man. Judging by the wealthy man's open robes and the position of the kneeling man's face in his crotch it's obvious what's happening.

The image itself is interesting enough that Wei Wuxian flips back a few pages to read the short story about the two men. It's about an Emperor's son whose favoured general gets caught up in court rumors to the extent that his powerful enemy publicly shames the general by tying him up and falsely accusing him of committing treason. Unable to dismiss his friend's punishment without losing honour the Prince comes to an accord that the general will receive his punishment by humiliating himself by servicing the Prince like a concubine.

Wei Wuxian can't find any fault in the novel. It certainly doesn't provoke any negative feelings, although his stomach does flutter as he reads about the secret pining between the general and his Prince as they use the punishment as an excuse to be intimate with one another.

It's only when he imposes Nie Huaisang and Lan Wangji in the place of the general and Prince that he begins to feel that clenching nausea.

While Lan Wangji is a good fit for the noble and handsome Prince Nie Huaisang really doesn't match the outspoken and courageous temperament of the general.

Wei Wuxian can't imagine Nie Huaisang getting tied up and shamelessly agreeing to give sexual favours, instead the other boy would be too busy crying himself into a dehydrated coma to suck anyone's dick.

If anyone is like the general it's Wei Wuxian.

He can almost imagine Lan Wangji punishing him by tying him up, putting Wei Wuxian on his knees in front of him. His white silk sleeve would flutter against Wei Wuxian's cheek like a chaste kiss as he reaches out, tilting Wei Wuxian's head up to look him dead in the eye as he explains that from now on he will be demoted to Lan Wangji's bed warmer. The punishment wouldn't be revealed gently like the fictional Prince to his general - it would be an order.

Next Lan Wangji would undo his leather belt, his slender fingers efficiently undoing the intricate strings and latches until...

Wei Wuxian pushes out a shuttering breath and shakes his head like he's denying an accusation. His fingernails dig into the bunched up muscle on his thigh before slowly releasing, the sting left by his grip lingering in a twitching pulse.

His high pitched laugh at his foolish imagination is loud in the peaceful room.

It's hard to keep the fantasy going after that. Even if he has a good idea of what Lan Wangji looks like partially naked from that time in the cold springs, it's hard to picture his actual dick. Mainly because he finds it hard to believe Lan Wangji is interested in using it for that sort of stuff. He's too much of a monk, sustaining himself on rules and flavourless food. There seems to be no time for romance in Lan Wangji's life.

Which is unfortunate for Nie Huaisang.

And yet his nerves linger, pricking at the knobs of his spine like ant bites, making his shudder.

He bites at his bottom lip hard enough that it almost bleeds, the squeezing ache acting as a temporary distraction from how hard it is to breath. He swallows, pushing past the feelings lodged in his throat. Even though he's still confused he can't find a good reason why he should oppose the surprising match.

As a good friend and disciple of YunmengJiang he should support Nie Huaisang in achieving the impossible – seducing Lan Wangji.

And maybe if Lan Wangji gets a lover he might be less stuck-up about Wei Wuxian's attempts at friendship. He can even get Nie Huaisang to put in a good word for him, telling Lan Wangji all of his good qualities since he is so determined to judge Wei Wuxian by his worst.

He cuts off his spiritual energy from the talisman and secures the booklet underneath his pillow. With tightly shut eyes he immerses himself in the familiar sounds of Jiang Cheng's snuffling and Nie Huaisang's soft snoring, willing himself into an uneasy sleep. The entire time reminding himself of the positives - this is not only a chance to become closer to Lan Wangji, it will likely lead to his and Nie Huaisang's happiness.

He needs to live up to his name - to have no envies. Especially when there is no good reason for him to be jealous.

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Fortunately for Nie Huaisang over the next week Wei Wuxian throws himself into becoming the matchmaker he was always destined to be. He completely dedicates himself to getting Nie Huaisang and Lan Wangji alone so they can bond, coming up with ice-breakers to win Lan Wangji over.

It doesn't go well.

After a few days of failed seducing Nie Huaisang gets the same harassed look he'd wear after Lan Qiren has an exam. Surprisingly Jiang Cheng is always the one to pull him aside and offer some moral support, afterwards Nie Huaisang would return to Wei Wuxian's side looking much more determined and, for some reason, a little scared.

The problem is that each time Wei Wuxian lures Lan Wangji close to Nie Huaisang and then leaves them alone neither teen manages to have a decent conversation. Often Lan Wangji's adopts his normal frosty demeanor and dismisses himself after a few seconds or Nie Huaisang shyly splutters an incomprehensible excuse and flees.

No matter how much Wei Wuxian complains Nie Huaisang whines that every time Lan Wangji looks at him it feels like he can see into Nie Huaisang's soul and is reading all the sins he's ever committed. Apparently he's worried that one day Lan Wangji is going to kick down the disciple barracks door and drag Nie Huaisang off to Lan Qiren's office, where Nie Mingjue will be lying in wait with an incredibly long list of his brother's greatest shames.

Wei Wuxian laughs off the silly fears, boasting that there is no way Lan Wangji can read people's karma because otherwise he would have never gotten into the Cloud Recesses in the first place.

One positive to come out of Nie Huaisang's crush is that their conversations are much more fun. Usually Wei Wuxian's friends change the subject whenever he brings up Lan Wangji but now Nie Huaisang will hang around and let him ramble in a continuous cycle of discussing Lan Wangji's face, to his unfairness, to the fact Wei Wuxian is winning him over, to how boring he is, and then back again to Lan Wangji's exceptional beauty.

The entire time Nie Huaisang makes noises of sympathy and sighs dreamily in agreement about Lan Wangji's more positive qualities or hums in skepticism when he brings up Lan Wangji's flaws.

He does develop a twitchy eye whenever Wei Wuxian retells the story of when he showed Lan Wangji porn in the Library Pavilion. Maybe he's worried about Lan Wangji being so opposed to intimacy.

It gets to the point where it's hard to think of anything else but his seduction plans, distracting him so thoroughly that he misses the fight between Jin Zixuan and Jiang Cheng over an insult towards Shijie. Which unfortunately leads to a visit from Madame Yu, who takes the opportunity to scold Wei Wuxian for ruining Shijie's engagement, even though he wasn't the one at fault this time.

It's only after a week that Nie Huaisang finally makes progress.

Class has just been let out, allowing Wei Wuxian the perfect opportunity to push Nie Huaisang into Lan Wangji and run off to hide in a nearby tree. This time he advised Nie Huaisang to talk about the few things he has in common with Lan Wangji.

It looks like this attempt will be another failure, with Lan Wangji eyeing Wei Wuxian's hiding spot like he's tempted to come over and reprimand him, until Lan Xichen suddenly appears. Nie Huaisang's familiarity with Lan Xichen as Nie Mingjue's friend obviously makes him relax a lot more because he starts to genuinely smile at the byplay between the Twin Jades.

Even after Lan Xichen leaves Nie Huaisang keeps the one-sided conversation going, hesitantly chatting as Lan Wangji hums in agreement at whatever he's saying. The truce lasts about one incense stick before Lan Wangji obviously has enough of socializing, giving Nie Huaisang a nod in acknowledgement and striding off in the same direction Lan Xichen went.

As soon as Lan Wangji is out of sight Wei Wuxian flings himself out of his tree and into a barrel roll, springing up and running over to Nie Huaisang.

"What happened!?" Wei Wuxian yells once he's within grappling distance.

"I don't know, I don't know," Nie Huaisang yelps, leaning away from Wei Wuxian's grasping hands.

"That was the longest I've seen Lan Zhan have a conversation with anyone our age."

"Other than you," Nie Huaisang points out, going limp in Wei Wuxian's friendly chokehold.

Wei Wuxian shrugs while retaining a smug look before his lips purse. "Yeah, but he's usually just listening and waiting for the moment I say something shameless so he can put a silencing spell on me. He actually looked interested in what you were saying."

"That's because you never say anything of sustenance," Jiang Cheng grumbles as he finally appears from the classroom, having stayed behind to clean up as his punishment for fighting Jin Zixuan. "Lan Wangji is constantly surrounded by refined and modest cultivators, to him your outlandish personality and lack of morals is probably like visiting a zoo of Yao."

“I have morals,” Wei Wuxian objects, letting go of Nie Huaisang so he can punch Jiang Cheng’s arm. He turns back to Nie Huaisang, still curious. “How did you get Lan Zhan to stay so long without getting him mad?”

Nie Huaisang fiddles with his fan, flipping it open and shut in an almost hypnotizing fashion. “I-I just talked about our elder brothers being similar, like how they’re very powerful but still enjoy doting on their little brothers. Then I mentioned a funny story about Dage and Xichen-ge from when they were younger.”

Wei Wuxian smiles in glee. So the way to Lan Wangji’s heart is through talking about siblings. It’s a good that there are few things Wei Wuxian loves more than talking about his lovely and kind Shijie and dear baby brother Jiang Cheng.

“You might just have a chance with Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian congratulates Nie Huaisang, slapping him on the back a little harder than he meant to. He hopes neither of his friends notice how stiff his smile is.

Nie Huaisang shoots a suspiciously pleading look at Jiang Cheng who rolls his eyes in response.

“What is it? Why are you two looking at each other like that?”

Jiang Cheng deadpans at him. “Because you’re an idiot.” He nods at Nie Huaisang, “you can tell him.”

“Why do I have to do it?” Nie Huaisang asks, his eyes darting between Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian.

“Fine,” Jiang Cheng huffs and turns to smirk at Wei Wuxian. “We’ve been fooling you this entire time. Nie Huaisang doesn’t really have a crush on Lan Wangji.”

Wei Wuxian raises an eyebrow at the loaded statement. “If Huaisang doesn’t like Lan Zhan...” he trails off, gasping and pointing at them in accusation, “does that mean you two were secretly dating this entire time?”

This makes both of them splutter and avoid eye contact.

“No!” Jiang Cheng squawks, kicking Wei Wuxian’s shin. “This wasn’t some weird set up to reveal we’re a couple, where did you even get that idea? We were pranking *you* to show how obsessed you are with Lan Wangji.”

“Aw okay,” Wei Wuxian says in disappointment and frowns when he processes Jiang Cheng’s last sentence. “I’m not obsessed with Lan Zhan.”

“Um, Wei-xiong you haven’t stopped talking about Lan Wangji for the entire week. I heard the same story about the porn in the Library Pavilion at least eight times.”

“I was just showing my support,” Wei Wuxian protests, “and that story is hilarious, you should thank me for repeating it so many times.”

“No thank you,” Nie Huaisang mutters under his breath.

Ignoring the first word Wei Wuxian chirps, “you’re welcome.”

Nie Huaisang laughs and lightly hits Wei Wuxian’s arm with his fan. “I guess I should really be thankful, you took me being a cut-sleeve really well.”

“Wait are you actually a cut-sleeve, or was that part of the joke?”

“Oh, um,” Nie Huaisang hesitates, his shoulders hunching as he looks at Jiang Cheng frowning in the corner of his eye, “sort of, I like girls as well.”

“Okay, cool.” Wei Wuxian finds that hearing the confession a second time is much less concerning. Maybe he felt so nauseous the first time because his gut was telling him he was being fooled about Nie Huaisang’s crush on Lan Wangji.

Plus it's interesting to hear that it's possible like boys *and* girls. Wei Wuxian had no idea that was an option.

Jiang Cheng scrunches his face up.

“Hey! Stop looking so constipated,” Wei Wuxian berates his brother, looping a protective arm around Nie Huaisang as he attempts to shrink into his robes.

“Don’t get angry at me,” Jiang Cheng snaps. His scowl turns into grimace when he fails to catch Nie Huaisang’s eyes hidden behind his fan. “Sorry I didn’t know you actually liked guys. I wouldn’t have made you pretend like it’s a joke if I knew,” the words are sincere despite Jiang Cheng’s sour expression.

“Oh wow,” Wei Wuxian gasps, snatching up Nie Huaisang’s fan so he can wave it in front of his face like he’s trying not to faint, “I can’t believe you actually said you’re sorry.” He nudges Nie Huaisang with his elbow, “take note of this momentous occasion Huaisang, it probably won’t ever happen again in our life time.”

“Wei-xiong,” Nie Huaisang whines cringing away from Wei Wuxian’s elbow and daintily holding out his hand for his fan. Once it’s placed back in his palm he flips it open over his lower face. His eyes turn to crescents when he finally makes eye contact with Jiang Cheng. “It’s okay, thank you for apologizing.”

Wei Wuxian takes the opportunity to pull his friends into a group hug, gleefully ignoring their groans and wiggling. “There, it’s alright now. Let’s all enjoy this peaceful moment of harmony and friendship while it lasts, because once it’s over you two won’t get a moment of rest until I get my revenge.”

He relishes the shiver that goes down both his friend's spines.

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The next time they get time off of classes because Lan Qiren is busy with sect leader duties Wei Wuxian drags Nie Huaisang down to Gusu to help pick out a bribery gift for Lan Wangji.

Leaving Jiang Cheng behind to study like a boring Lan.

Even with the prank officially over Wei Wuxian has caught Nie Huaisang having short chats with Lan Wangji in out of the way alcoves and abandoned halls. When he confronted Nie Huaisang about it his friend got flustered, stating that his brother and Lan Xichen heard that Nie Huaisang was trying to befriend Lan Wangji and were encouraging his supposed efforts.

Not wanting to disappoint either elder brother more than he already has Nie Huaisang gathered together all his courage to acknowledge Lan Wangji and try to instigate a few conversations with the sullen teen.

“It’s mostly me just talking at him while he stares into my soul,” Nie Huaisang says, browsing a table full of sword tassels and not meeting Wei Wuxian’s probing gaze. “He probably doesn’t consider me a friend, more like an acquaintance he has to get along with to make his brother happy.”

Wei Wuxian folds his arms and narrows his eyes, looking Nie Huaisang up and down to read his body for lies. “So you definitely don’t have a crush on him.”

Nie Huaisang throws his head back and groans as if he’s been stabbed, making the sword tassel seller jump in shock at such outlandish behaviour from a cultivator.

Still not finished being overdramatic he huffs a semi-hysterical laugh and begs, “Wei-xiong I promise I don’t have a crush on Lan Wangji, please please please stop asking, I’ll do anything.” He claps his hands together with his fan in the middle and bows.

Wei Wuxian gives his head a pat and pushes his shoulder to force him to stand upright. “Okay okay, I’ll stop asking. And you’re already helping me befriend Lan Zhan by being my spy.”

He motions his head towards another table full of miscellaneous trinkets and drags Nie Huaisang behind him by his wrist. Stumbling in an attempt to keep up with Wei Wuxian’s endless energy and long strides Nie Huaisang hides his grimace behind his fan.

“I really don’t think I’m a good spy,” he mumbles and shakes his head when Wei Wuxian presents a letter opener. “Don’t buy him that, he already has one and won’t get another until it’s worn down to the nub. But it’s a good idea to get him something practical and inexpensive.”

“Well it’s a good thing I only have a little bit of money then,” Wei Wuxian snorts. “What do you mean? You’re a great spy,” he says, bumping his shoulder into Nie Huaisang, “all you need to do is make notes about all the topics Lan Zhan finds interesting so I can talk to him about them as well.”

“Why don’t you just ask him yourself?”

“Because he always judges me by my first impression and thinks I’m only bothering him because I want to drive him mad,” Wei Wuxian whines, fiddling with a jasmine hair clip.

“Well he’s not wrong. Also it’s not like my conversations with him are any better,” Nie Huaisang points out, gesturing with his closed fan, “they usually only last a few sentences and often I’m the only one talking.”

“But he does his ‘mn’ thing right? That means he’s interested,” Wei Wuxian says moving a carved wooden child’s toy out of the way so he can pick up a glass flower pin.

“He only does that when I mention you.”

Nie Huaisang jumps when Wei Wuxian suddenly focuses his complete attention on him, squeaking embarrassingly when Wei Wuxian’s free hand strikes out to grab his arm.

“You talk about me?”

“Y-yes, please don’t hurt me!”

Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes at Nie Huaisang’s cowardly act and loosens his grip enough that blood can once again get through Nie Huaisang’s veins. “What does he say about me? Did he say if he likes me? Are you making sure to mention my best qualities?” He fires off the questions rapidly.

“Um,” Nie Huaisang hesitates, blinking slowly as he processes Wei Wuxian’s questions. “He never says much about you, only agreeing when I bring up certain things and giving me a curious look if he wants me to expand on something I said. I mostly just talk about your non-illegal hobbies of painting and creating talismans and funny things you said or did.”

Wei Wuxian nods and releases his hold on Nie Huaisang completely, turning back to the stall table. “That’s fine. Why are you even talking about me so much though? You would think that’s the last thing Lan Zhan would want to discuss since he really doesn’t like me.”

“I told you, he’s shy,” Nie Huaisang assures him, “he just doesn’t know how to handle someone with such a... strong personality. I think he does like you - it would explain why mentioning you is the best way to get his attention.”

Wei Wuxian doesn’t answer, twirling a hollow decorative bamboo shoot around his fingers like he would with his flute. Maybe Lan Wangji is trying to gather information on him in order to find his weaknesses.

“For your girlfriend Young Master?” The table owner asks, pulling him from his thoughts, the wrinkles at the corner of her eyes bunch like a hand pulling a sheet.

Wei Wuxian’s contemplative mood instantly clears as he grins charmingly, alighting a blush on the older woman’s face. “Ah no Auntie, I’m just looking for a gift for my dear Lan Erge, to show how close we are,” he boasts.

“Oh well, if he’s a strong cultivator like you why don’t you give him this pouch,” she says holding up an intricately decorated sea blue pouch, “I’ve been told they’re good for storing herbs to ward off ghosts and such.”

Wei Wuxian examines the pouch, enquiring about the fabric and the needlework, all the while Nie Huaisang stands quietly invisible by his side.

“What do you think?” He asks holding up the pouch for Nie Huaisang to examine, “will Lan Zhan like it? It matches his robes and it’s practical, I can even go collect some herbs from the woods to put in it.”

He barely waits for Nie Huaisang’s approval, his mind already made up, before he starts bartering with the sales woman over the price. Flirting his way into a bargain.

Once he’s finished paying he stashes the pouch in his sleeve, patting it flat to keep it safe.

“Why did you even need to bring me? I should be back in the Cloud Recesses studying with Jiang Cheng.”

“Because my dear friend,” Wei Wuxian starts, looping an arm around his shoulders and clutching him close to his chest, “someone needs to help me carry back the ludicrous amount of Emperor’s Smile I plan on buying.” He holds up a familiar money pouch, bouncing it to make the money inside jingle.

Nie Huaisang gasps, “isn’t that Jiang Cheng’s?”

Wei Wuxian throws the money pouch up in the air and catches it in a quick swipe. Completely unashamed he chirps, “yep. I told you guys I would get my revenge.”

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“Take them,” Wei Wuxian says in a hushed voice, shoving the bottles of Emperor’s Smile into Nie Huaisang’s flailing arms, hissing when the jars clink threateningly together, “careful, don’t break them.”

“Wei-xiong,” Nie Huaisang cries, heartbroken at Wei Wuxian’s sacrifice.

“Just go,” he says pushing Nie Huaisang away, “I’ll distract him while you sneak around the back.”

Nie Huaisang sniffs and nods, his whole body drooping. “I’ll light an incense for you,” he promises.

“No need, just keep my alcohol safe.”

“Wait!”

Wei Wuxian pauses, looking over his shoulder at where Nie Huaisang is gathering his courage.

“You should watch his ears, that’s how you can tell he’s affected,” Nie Huaisang whispers like he’s sharing a life changing secret.

And with that cryptic statement Nie Huaisang shuffles away, stealthily moving back into the sparse grove of trees so he can take the long way back to the disciple barracks.

Shaking his head in bafflement Wei Wuxian leaps out from behind the tree and rushes towards where Lan Wangji is surveying the Cloud Recesses wall. He makes sure his greeting is extra loud, drawing Lan Wangji's gaze like a startled predator.

"Wei Ying," he warns, looking Wei Wuxian up and down, probably checking for contraband. "Why are you not using the front entrance?"

Wei Wuxian jumps up onto the wall and perches in a crouch, comfortable enough to talk but also at the ready to spring away if he gets Lan Wangji mad enough to attack him.

"I was practicing," Wei Wuxian says vaguely, flicking his pony-tail and giving Lan Wangji his best innocent grin.

Lan Wangji doesn't bother asking exactly what Wei Wuxian is practicing for – he already knows that the answer will always be something illegal.

"Mn," he hums and moves around Wei Wuxian, towards the direction Nie Huaisang fled.

"Wait!" Wei Wuxian scrambles forward, launching forward onto the nearby rooftop and snagging the edge of Lan Wangji's sleeve.

The sleeve is yanked from his grasp but at least Lan Wangji pauses, turning to see why he's been so impolitely stopped.

"I have a gift for you," he says, shoving his hand inside his robe and presenting the blue pouch he bought. "I haven't put any herbs in it yet but I thought we could go collect them together. You know the woods behind your sect better than me so you can show me all the best places to find herbs and maybe we can even spar afterwards," Wei Wuxian says, his distracting rambling actually sounding like a good idea the longer he talks.

When Lan Wangji doesn't imminently take the pouch Wei Wuxian pouts. "So rude, after I went to all the trouble finding something you would like," he mumbles as he slowly pulls away, acting like he's heartbroken. In truth he is a little put out by Lan Wangji's rejection, he worked really hard to find this gift.

"Why?"

"Huh?"

"Why are you giving me this?" Lan Wangji expands, looking highly suspicious and maybe a little flummoxed.

Wei Wuxian places his hand on his jutting hip and smiles. "Can't I give my friend a present?" He asks rhetorically.

"Not friends."

“Okay,” Wei Wuxian grudgingly acknowledges before he perks up, “which is why you should take my gift, so we can become closer. I swear this isn’t a joke. You’re always so mean, thinking the worst of me. Isn’t that against the Cloud Recesses rules?” He can think of at least two: be easy on others and do not hold grudges.

Lan Wangji’s golden eyes flicker away, probably reviewing many rules he’s broken by being so biased against Wei Wuxian. After a few tense seconds Lan Wangji finally nods and holds out his hand. “I accept.”

Not quite believing his eyes Wei Wuxian automatically places the pouch into Lan Wangji’s waiting palm, his fingertips accidentally brushing against the warm skin, feeling the rough calluses from endless hours of practicing swordsmanship.

Wei Wuxian’s mind is driven to an even high plain as he spots the soft red glow at the tips of Lan Wangji’s ears.

Is Lan Wangji blushing?

He stands frozen under Lan Wangji’s spell as the other teen’s eyelashes rest on his cheeks as he looks down at the pouch in his hand, his thumb rubbing at the swirling cross-stitched patterns. When he looks up Wei Wuxian’s throat audibly clicks at the soft expression on Lan Wangji’s elegant face.

“Thank you,” he says, bowing slightly, storing the pouch inside his robe on his chest. His expression goes deceptively neutral, only giving himself away by his still red ears. “Only return by the proper entrance from now on,” he orders before swooping down to the ground and striding away.

Wei Wuxian lets out a shaky breath once he’s only a white blur in the distance, slumping down onto the layered roof tiles. Once he has recovered he sits up, pulling his knees to his chest and rocking as giggles bubble from his grinning lips.

Lan Wangji took his gift, knowing Wei Wuxian would see it as a sign he’s willing to become closer. At least he hopes Lan Wangji interpreted his action like that.

The fact he did accepted the pouch while Wei Wuxian was being suspicious by sneaking around must mean something important. Especially since he didn’t try to force Wei Wuxian to get go back over the wall and walk all the way over to the main entrance right away.

Either way this turned out better than he could have ever expected. Maybe it’s a sign that he needs to switch his tactics from trying to get Lan Wangji so overwhelmingly angry he drops his normal icy mask to softening him up via gifts.

“Ah,” Wei Wuxian breathes as an idea hits him.

He’d come up with so many ideas for Nie Huaisang to seduce Lan Wangji after they got past their inability to talk to each other. Maybe he should take some of those plans and use them himself, keeping away from the more romantic overtures of course.

It will be like a war of attrition. Wei Wuxian will wear down Lan Wangji's barriers with complements and gifts, seducing him into becoming his friend.

He puts his plan into action by following through on his proposed date in the woods with Lan Wangji.

First he lures Lan Wangji in by chatting with Jiang Cheng and Nie Huaisang after class, claiming he's going hunting in a loud conspiring tone, much to the expiration of his friends.

"Good, don't come back," Jiang Cheng says mercilessly.

Meanwhile Nie Huaisang tilts his head sharply from behind his open fan at where Lan Wangji is staring out into the distance in the middle of the walkway to indicate that he's within hearing distance. Wei Wuxian gives him a cheeky wink in acknowledgment and quickly darts away before Lan Wangji can do some preemptive scolding.

Just as planned it only takes a few minutes of wandering aimlessly through the thick mangrove of redwood trees on the southern side of the Cloud Recesses for Lan Wangji to appear.

"Lan Zhan," Wei Wuxian greets joyously, pretending to be surprised. "Why are you here?"

Lan Wangji's eyes trace up and down Wei Wuxian, his body language going from a harsh straight line to a confused hunch when he's unable to spot any of Wei Wuxian's hunting gear, only seeing a harmless woven basket. Realising he's followed Wei Wuxian for no good reason Lan Wangji remains silent, turning his head away to look into the underbrush when a chattering wood mouse disturbed by their presence scatters through the fallen leaves.

"Since you're here you can fulfill your promise to help me hunt down some herbs for the pouch I gave you," Wei Wuxian says, giving Lan Wangji the chance to save some face. "Unless you want to punish me for something," he can't help but tease.

"Mn," Lan Wangji agrees vaguely and moves deeper into the woods. "Follow me."

Wei Wuxian skips after him, cheerfully twirling his basket as he walks by his side. When the natural sounds of singing birds, the crunch of foliage under foot, and the swish of wind through the tree leaves gets too boring Wei Wuxian starts chatting about his latest attempt to recreate a light talisman.

Sunlight smatters in uneven clumps through the overhanging tree branches, spraying Lan Wangji with dazzling light. The spotlights give him an ethereal aura, his flawless features shining with almost unnatural beauty. His expression remains as neutral as the woods, for the most part unaffected by Wei Wuxian's buzzing presence. Only shooting him an annoyed look when his laughter frightens a group of roosting birds into taking flight.

He leads Wei Wuxian to an open grove spotted with a few thick pine trees and abundant in wild herbs.

“Wow!” Wei Wuxian gasps, “I had no idea this was here. A lot of these herbs can’t be natural, were they introduced by someone from your sect?”

Lan Wangji nods and begins pointing out the best herbs to store. Wei Wuxian gladly follows his directions, pulling up sage, dill, and rue, while Lan Wangji collects oregano, rosemary, and thyme.

As he works he starts rambling again, this time about how his sister is dealing with her brothers being so far away.

“I try to send her letters every few weeks because otherwise she worries that I’ve been kidnapped and forced to join a gang,” Wei Wuxian laughs, only focusing half his attention on the herbs. “Does Gusu even have any gangs? I feel like the Lan sect would be super strict about something like that. Although it doesn’t come under normal cultivation concerns, so maybe it’s the leaders in charge of Gusu who keep track of that sort of thing. But I think the Lan sect owns the land Gusu is on, that must give you some responsibility.”

“At Lotus Pier Uncle Jiang put a tribunal in place to deal with civilian issues like that but sometimes if the person is bad enough Madame Yu will be the one to deal out the punishment. One time I was clearing out a water ghouls infestation and I solved a mystery about a civilian serial killer. The murderer ended up being whipped by Zidian before he was put to death because he killed the mother of one of YunmengJiang's disciples.”

He’s so immersed in the tale of the serial killer that he doesn’t hear Lan Wangji coming up behind him.

“Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian startles slightly at his name, turning to beam up at Lan Wangji. “Yes Lan Zhan.”

“Be quiet.”

His smile turns into a pout.

Wei Wuxian really does try to be quiet for a time, dutifully gathering herbs in his basket, but the distant chirping of birds and the scrunch of dirt being his fingers eventually becomes so dull he starts to mumble under his breath.

In his peripheral vision he thinks he sees Lan Wangji sigh, giving in to tuning out Wei Wuxian’s non-stop babbling.

Eventually Lan Wangji declares they’ve collected enough herbs.

“I have a lot here,” Wei Wuxian says patting down the overflowing bushels in his basket.

“Mn, here,” Lan Wangji murmurs, pulling out a black pouch with red beading.

Wei Wuxian tries not to be disappointed. Did Lan Wangji get another pouch because the one Wei Wuxian gave him wasn’t fancy enough? His new one looks so much cooler.

Downtrodden Wei Wuxian asks, "aren't you going to use the pouch I got you? Is this one special, like a qiankun pouch or something?"

Realising there's been a misunderstanding Lan Wangji rephrases, "here, a gift for you."

His mood is instantly revitalised, smiling so big it hurts he takes the pouch from Lan Wangji's hand. "You really got this for me Lan Zhan? Thank you!"

He sways forward, wishing he could hug Lan Wangji. Instead he settles for holding the pouch close to his chest, over the top of his drumming heart.

Lan Wangji's lips twitch, hinting at the start of a smile before they retreat back into a straight line. His gaze refocuses back on the herbs as he begins to sort through them, dividing them into two even piles.

"Ah, wait, I'll help," Wei Wuxian says, storing his pouch up his sleeve and reaching down to grab a handful.

Giddiness bubbles in his throat when he bumps into Lan Wangji's warm hand. His slender fingers are impeccably clean despite spending the last hour digging through the dirt. On the other hand Wei Wuxian's fingernails will probably have dirt in them from this adventure for months. With each teasing brush of skin it takes all his self-control not to twine their fingers together.

"Hey Lan Zhan, do you want to spar?" Wei Wuxian asks after they've stored the herbs away in their matching pouches. He wants to touch Lan Wangji so much, he'll even take hitting him as a source of relief from this desperate ache.

When Lan Wangji hesitates Wei Wuxian continues, "please, I'm beginning to get out of practice with studying only theory. I need something practical to do and no one else challenges me like you do. Plus it'll be a good way to burn up all of the excess energy I normally use to do nefarious deeds."

Lan Wangji must be in a really good mood because he agrees only after a little wheedling.

They move away to a flat grassy area and stand across from each other, preparing to attack. It feels like the forest itself is holding its breath along with Wei Wuxian as the light glint of Lan Wangji's eyes turns him to stone.

Shaking himself out of his frozen state Wei Wuxian shifts his feet into a solid stance, with Lan Wangji mirroring him five metres away.

Like a sudden ferocious storm unleashing itself upon the peaceful woods they rush at each other. The clash of their swords is crashing lightning, with their grunts of effort echoing after like the rumble of thunder.

Fighting Lan Wangji is like having a conversation in code. Words are useless in intense battles like this, instead actions speak louder, allowing Lan Wangji communicate more fluidly than Wei Wuxian is used to. Each strike, parry, and block feels like a lesson.

"Mh," Lan Wangji grunts in satisfaction under his breath as he manages to slice through Wei Wuxian's hanging sleeve.

Heart pumping at the close call Wei Wuxian flips away, adrenaline pulsing through his straining muscles. Has no idea where his answering desperation to Lan Wangji's blows is coming from but he leans into it wholeheartedly, clashing back at each attack with the same amount of strength, speedily dodging and hitting in quick bursts at the rare openings Lan Wangji leaves. He chances glazing blows with spiritually powered fists, his knuckles catching in a stiff slide along Lan Wangji's side.

Neither comes out on top, but the bout ends with both of them bowing, wholly satisfied in the equality of the fight.

Their pants of exhaustion trail after them like aftershocks as they begin walking back to the Cloud Recesses.

Even once he recovers enough to get his breath back Wei Wuxian is too worn out to keep up his normal level of talking, his muscles aching pleasantly from the stretch and harsh workout. Leaving Lan Wangji to enjoy his stroll through the woods in peace.

When they reach civilisation Wei Wuxian does get in the last word, saluting Lan Wangji goodbye and chirping, "thanks for the date, it was really fun. You can choose what we do next time."

With that he runs off, not staying to see the expression of pure shock flutter across Lan Wangji face.

It's only much later when he makes eye contact with Lan Wangji during dinner that he remembers his words and their connotations.

Jiang Cheng pounds at Wei Wuxian's back when he starts to choke on his bland vegetable soup.

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Even with a few personally embarrassing moments Wei Wuxian greatly enjoys befriending Lan Wangji. Especially when he gets flustered, his silence gaining a dumbfounded undertone when Wei Wuxian treats him with sincere kindness or flirts at him.

It's cute.

Lan Wangji is cute.

It's an observation Wei Wuxian never believed he would make, but now he can't stop noticing it. How Lan Wangji's eyelashes flutter when Wei Wuxian gives him a thoughtful gift; the way his normally statutory body sways forward a little when he smiles at Lan Wangji extra brightly; the encouraging note in his 'mns' when Wei Wuxian talks about his siblings; how the corner of his mouth twitches slightly when he thinks Wei Wuxian isn't looking.

Just a taste of this positive feedback is enough to give Wei Wuxian constant cravings for the sweet validation.

He wants more.

He's more nervous than normal when preparing his latest gift but since he's not the type of person to ever hesitate he sets off tracking Lan Wangji down. Which turns out to be more difficult than he first thought, eventually leading him to flag down Lan Xichen, who is sitting by the stream in the public mediation garden.

"Young Master Wei, how can I help?" He asks in the same calm friendly tone he always uses, his smile unwavering as Wei Wuxian bows his greeting.

"Sorry to disturb you ZeWu-Jun, I was hoping you know where Lan Zhan is. I want to give him something," he explains, knelling beside Lan Xichen so he won't be looming over the future sect leader.

"Hmm," Lan Xichen hums in a manner so similar to his brother that Wei Wuxian can't hold back his laugh of delight.

At Lan Xichen's curious expression he explains, "sorry it's just that noise you made reminded me of Lan Zhan. I guess you two are similar in more than your appearance."

Lan Xichen's smile gains a softer edge, his eyes sparkling with happiness.

A gentle breeze flows through the garden, dancing around Wei Wuxian's ponytail and tickling at Lan Xichen's hanging bangs. The sudden gust sends a lounging frog leaping off a lily pad with a spraying splash, drawing Wei Wuxian's attention to the disturbed water until Lan Xichen speaks again.

"I think you have to be the first person who has made that comparison, other than our mother."

Wei Wuxian pulls in a sharp breath, his grin wavering at the information. He chews at the inside of his cheek, biting back the questions balancing at the end of his tongue. He really shouldn't be nosy. Lan Wangji hates gossip and if he knew Wei Wuxian was bothering his brother with questions about their parents he would be so mad.

Lan Xichen's chuckle pulls him out of his internal moral dilemma.

"That was mean of me," he begins, his eyes flash just like Lan Wangji's do when he's observing Wei Wuxian closely, "if you are curious you should ask my brother, I heard that you two are much closer lately. Nie Huaisang also informed me that you were the one to originally encourage him to befriend Lan Wangji."

So his spy has betrayed him. Wei Wuxian will have to punish him for his lack of loyalty later, maybe he'll come back and collect a few of those frogs that always make Nie Huaisang scream louder than being attacked by a walking corpse.

“Yes, Lan Zhan always looks so lonely, I thought he could use more friends,” he admits part of the truth. He really had hoped at the time that Nie Huaisang would befriend Lan Wangji and end up realising that a romantic relationship with such a stickler is impossible.

“And the gifts?”

That gives Wei Wuxian a moment’s pause as he thinks over his reply. His breathing unconsciously matches the gentle clunk of the bamboo water fountain, breathing in as it fills and breathing out when it overflows onto the rock underneath.

Really what can he say that won’t give away how desperate he is for Lan Wangji to acknowledge their friendship? He definitely can’t mention how he wants everything Lan Wangji is willing to give and more. For him to hug Wei Wuxian and trust him enough to share his secrets. He wants to be one of the most important people in Lan Wangji’s life, just like he is becoming someone so important to Wei Wuxian.

In the end Wei Wuxian panics and blurts, “I just want to give him a reason to smile.”

It’s the first time he’s seen Lan Xichen look anything but calm, his surprised expression there one second and gone the next. This time his smile shows teeth which gleam in the reflected light from the pond.

“My brother is lucky to have a friend like you Young Master Wei.”

Wei Wuxian shakes his head, “just call me Wei Ying, and I’m the lucky one if Lan Zhan ever comes to view me as a friend.”

“Wei Ying, if I am to call you that there is no need for formalities with my name either, you can call me Xichen-ge like Nie Huaisang does.”

Wei Wuxian will absolutely not be doing that anywhere within hearing distance of Lan Wangji or Lan Qiren, if either heard him talking to Lan Xichen so casually he would instantly be struck down. Although it would be pretty funny to see their reactions. Perhaps something to try out later when he has Jiang Cheng for back-up.

He salutes again, “thank you Xichen-ge.”

“Good,” Lan Xichen nods, the bend of his neck is a graceful curve just like Lan Wangji’s. “I believe my brother already considers you a friend,” he says in a hushed voice, as if Lan Wangji will suddenly appear from over the garden wall and rein down unstoppable justice on Lan Xichen for giving away all his secrets.

“He does?” Wei Wuxian perks up, bouncing in place and hoping Lan Xichen won’t remember that he’s currently breaking one of his sect’s major rules.

“Mn, he is quite fond of you. However, he struggles with conveying his appreciation in an obvious manner,” Lan Xichen explains, “please be patient with him and pay attention to his actions, not his lack of words.”

“I will,” Wei Wuxian grins, unable to hide how thrilled he is to have such useful advice from the person closest to Lan Wangji.

“Now I’ve delayed you long enough,” Lan Xichen claps suddenly, the loud crack echoing through the serene garden. “I will tell you where he is currently hiding, but please promise to keep the spot to yourself.”

Wei Wuxian promises.

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Lan Wangji’s secret meadow is like a dream. It’s the size of a classroom, allowing it to be hidden with ease behind one of the Cloud Recesses many rolling hills. Streams of sunlight beam down between fluffy white clouds onto the healthy green pasture. The grass is thick and soft, the fragrant smell of broken stems drifts up as Wei Wuxian walks towards Lan Wangji’s mediating figure underneath a swaying oak.

The only flaw about the beautiful surroundings are the scattered small dirt mounds created by scavenging rabbits.

He spots the offenders when he draws closer to Lan Wangji, the black and white rabbits jolt from where they’re napping around Lan Wangji’s legs, bouncing off towards their wooden hutch.

Wei Wuxian wills himself not to chase after them, instead sitting in front of Lan Wangji and waiting for him to acknowledge him.

All too soon he runs out of patience and asks, “you kept them?”

Lan Wangji’s eyes slowly open, trailing up from Wei Wuxian’s crossed legs, to his fingers twisting a grass stem into a knot, and up his chest to his smiling face.

“Mn. Wei Ying is not allowed to eat them.”

Wei Wuxian’s laughter bursts from his chest so powerfully that he falls over. “Okay I won’t, but only because you asked so nicely,” he teases, wiping tears of happiness at the corner of his eyes as he sits up.

Lan Wangji nods like it’s his due before staring at him in askance, probably wondering why Wei Wuxian has decided to disturb him.

“I ran into your brother and he told me where to find you,” he says, waving a hand outwards to explain his sudden presence. “I want to give you another present.”

The corner of Lan Wangji’s lips curl a little, his eyes darting away. “No need,” he demurs.

“I know I don’t *need* to, but I *want* to,” Wei Wuxian assures him. “Beside this is my best one yet, I worked really hard on it so if you keep saying you don’t want it I’ll cry and tell Xichen-ge that you’re bullying me.”

Lan Wangji's eyebrows furrow and his lips minutely purse at the casual use of his elder brother's name, shooting Wei Wuxian a look of chiding at his brazen attitude. Ah it's just like Wei Wuxian guessed - hilarious.

"Don't be like that, he said I could call him that," Wei Wuxian says slyly, "but don't worry, you'll always be my favourite Lan Er-gege."

That gets him his favourite Lan Wangji reaction, the tips of his ears burning red hot through the gaps between his dark hair.

His giggling is interrupted when something bumps against his leg. Wei Wuxian looks down at his side and gasps in delight to see the white rabbit chewing at his black robe. With the same quick hands he used to capture the rabbit in the first place he scoops up the bunny around its middle.

"Gentle," Lan Wangji murmurs as he reaches for the black rabbit that is closely watching as Wei Wuxian coos at its wiggling white friend. "Like this," he says, cupping the butt of the bunny and supporting its chest with his other hand.

Wei Wuxian adjusts his grip to match and proudly holds out the now docile rabbit in show, "like this?"

"Mn."

Once he's finished bouncing the bunny like a baby against his chest in an attempt to get Lan Wangji to laugh he settles the rabbit in between his crossed legs.

"My present is actually to do with rabbits, I mean, it's about the Rabbit god," Wei Wuxian says as he scratches between the bunny's long ears. "Do you know much about the Rabbit deity?"

When Lan Wangji shakes his head Wei Wuxian explains that he only learnt about the god recently, not saying that he read his story in his cut-sleeve booklet. He details the story of a soldier named Hu Tianbao who fell in love with a male provincial official and was put to death because of it, but he came back as a rabbit in the dream of a village elder and demanded that he build a temple for the deity's followers so they have somewhere to pray about their own love for other men.

He watches Lan Wangji closely the entire time he details the tale, nerves pricking at his skin, making him flush hot and cold with every twitch of Lan Wangji's body.

When he isn't told to shut up for talking about such a shameless thing he continues. "I found some sheet music for a song about him." He reaches into his sleeve and pulls out his favourite black dizi, spinning it on top of his fingertips. "Do you want to hear it?"

Lan Wangji nods, his eyes riveted on the twirling flute as Wei Wuxian holds it up to his wet lips and blows the first low note.

The melody starts bittersweet, resonating throughout the tranquil meadow. The reedy quality of his dizi makes the sad low notes and even tempo drag out in the languish of the deity's unrequited love and death.

His fingers jump higher on the base of his flute, gradually changing the dynamic as hope returns in the form of Hu Tianbao's rabbit form. His notes gain a commanding tone as he imagines the Rabbit God ordering his temples to be built.

A smile tugs at Wei Wuxian's pursed lips as he brightens the final bit of the song, his fingers dancing bouncing energy and life into the music as the Deity gains followers just like him. Men who love other men, who pray for happiness together.

The final notes fade into the softly blowing wind, rustling the hanging branches of the Oak tree into a symphony with his song. Until all that's left is a ringing in his ears from the lengthy silence.

He clears his throat, breaking through the charged atmosphere. "Did you like it?" He asks, fiddling with his flute, "the sheet music was originally really short so I re-wrote it so it sounds better on my flute."

"You wrote this for me?" Lan Wangji's voice trembles slightly.

"I mean sort of, I did base it off a few lines," Wei Wuxian mumbles hastily, his words gaining a higher pitch from Lan Wangji's reaction.

The grateful smile that blooms across Lan Wangji's face is incandescent in its gentle beauty. The stretch of his lips emphasizes their fullness, gracefully curving like a pulled bow. Their plush contours lead to a single divot in Lan Wangji's cheek. His face shines with happiness, his eyes becoming crescents from where his cheeks press up.

Wei Wuxian's fingers twitch in the sudden overwhelming need to touch.

"Oh," he breathes, burning realization flaring up from his chest, sending scolding waves of heat down his bloodstream. The battering thump of his heartbeat drowns out everything until his vision goes awash with white. "You're beautiful."

There must have been something in the way he said it because Lan Wangji freezes, his smile falling into shock.

Oh no. Oh shit.

"Ihavetogoby," Wei Wuxian rambles all at once, standing up suddenly. When his sudden movement makes the rabbit in his lap tumble head over heels he moves to catch it, his hands meeting Lan Wangji's half way.

Wei Wuxian's jolts at the touch like he's been hit with Zidian, scrambling backwards and yelling out one last goodbye over his shoulder as he sprints away. Blind and deaf to any calls of his name.

Nie Huaisang instantly knows something monumental has happened when Lan Wangji seeks him out in the disciple barracks.

It's lucky he's completely alone in his room because the other teen is the most distressed that he's ever seen him, a furrow between his brows and his hair windblown like he's been running.

Despite the haste with which Lan Wangji sought out Nie Huaisang, he unhelpfully fails to actually explain what happened. Instead he stands like the jade statue Wei Wuxian loves to describe him as, staring Nie Huaisang down as if he's mortally offended that he hasn't given him all the answers to his unspoken questions yet.

The only explanation Nie Huaisang's frazzled brain can come up with it that is that Lan Wangji caught Wei Wuxian in the act of murdering someone important.

"Um, are you okay?" He asks hesitantly, gesturing for Lan Wangji to sit on the ground at the other side of the short-legged table he's painting his fan on. He shoves his art to the side and places the teapot full of still warm tea in the middle, quickly rushing to his bedside table to grab an extra cup while Lan Wangji sits down.

"Hm," Lan Wangji grunts as he takes a sip of the offered tea.

That could really mean anything. Based on the context he either just indicated he's not okay or he's preparing to tell Nie Huaisang that Dage is waiting in Lan Qiren's office with a detailed record of every crime Nie Huaisang has ever committed.

Both are terrible news.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Nie Huaisang enquires hesitantly, wringing his hands in his lap underneath the table. Where is Wei Wuxian to act as a distraction when you need him?

Lan Wangji gives him the same look he gets whenever Lan Qiren mentions how many times Nie Huaisang has failed to graduate from the Cloud Recesses.

Thank the gods Lan Wangji is a man of few words. He's really not qualified to listen to whatever demons are haunting someone as unflappable as the Second Young Master Lan.

"Okay," he mumbles and starts to paint his fan again, remaining quiet and calm so Lan Wangji isn't distressed any further.

He's carefully writing a poem on his fan when Wei Wuxian kicks open the door, making the brush in Nie Huaisang jump, creating an artfully messy stroke down the middle of the fabric.

"Huaisang, why didn't you tell me I'm in love with Lan Zhan!?"

Nie Huaisang yelp of surprise almost drowns out the choking noise Lan Wangji makes.

Wei Wuxian stops short in the doorway when he sees Lan Wangji staring up at him from the floor, making his own choking sound to match.

“L-Lan Zhan!”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji breathes, standing up into his intimidating height. “Is this a joke?”

Nie Huaisang stays firmly seated, hunching down so neither of them remembers his existence.

“What, no? I really do like you,” Wei Wuxian objects, walking daringly into Lan Wangji’s personal space, “I didn’t mean for it to happen, it’s just you’re so beautiful and thoughtful and good. You make the best faces when I give you things. I can’t stop thinking about you all the time.”

With every sentence Lan Wangji’s fists clench tighter.

Is he going to punch Wei Wuxian?

Unaware of his imminent death Wei Wuxian continues to rant, “and I read a cut-sleeve book and I kept imagining you-”

“Don’t say anything else,” Lan Wangji interrupts, his ears blazing.

Wei Wuxian slumps in defeat.

What? No!

“Tell him you love him!” Nie Huaisang yells, alarmed at the sudden dark atmosphere that has fallen upon the room.

Wei Wuxian scowls at him, tears prinking at his eyes from the supposed rejection. “I just did!” He spits at Nie Huaisang, making his own life flash before his eyes.

“N-no,” he stutters and gulps down his fear. “I was talking to Lan Wangji,” he says gesturing wildly at the teen. “Look at his ears!” He adds hastily.

Thankfully this distracts Wei Wuxian. His grey eyes instantly focusing on Lan Wangji’s red ears, his mouth falling open before transforming into a shining smile.

“Lan Zhan,” he begins shakily, vibrating in his eagerness.

Lan Wangji turns his head away, only making his ears easier to see. His muttered, “ridiculous,” seems weaker than usual.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian repeats, his voice gaining a gentle teasing quality, hoping to coax Lan Wangji into a confession, “look at me.” He reaches forward, his hand curving around Lan Wangji’s jaw.

As if magnetized by the touch Lan Wangji leans into the palm, meeting Wei Wuxian’s eyes in an intense stare.

“You love me?”

Time stops and restarts with a single nod.

Wei Wuxian bursts with happiness, laughing in delight as he flings himself into Lan Wangji's chest, pulling him close.

In the quiet room it's easy for Nie Huaisang to hear the whispered plea for a kiss, Wei Wuxian's mouth brushing against Lan Wangji's ear.

Their lips meet in the middle, chastely pressing against one another like a kiss between an old married couple.

They stay still for a moment, processing their actions before the kiss is taken deeper. Lan Wangji turns his head at an angle, his nose bumping Wei Wuxian's as he fits his lips securely around Wei Wuxian's lower lip.

"Hah," Wei Wuxian moans, opening up wide for Lan Wangji's probing tongue. His hands scramble to clutch at Lan Wangji's arms, encouraging the man to encircle with broad hands around Wei Wuxian's swaying hips.

Spit slides wetly along their slick lips as their tongues twine and swirl together, flashing teasingly from between their teeth before they're pushed back. Lan Wangji seems to get the hang of it first, forcing his way into Wei Wuxian's mouth and licking at the insides of his teeth.

Feeling like he's going to faint from all the blood rushing through his body at such a sensual scene Nie Huaisang abandons his fan and starts to slowly crawl towards the doorway.

At the sound of a growl and the thump of a laughing Wei Wuxian being thrown into a nearby bed Nie Huaisang gives up all subtlety and leavers himself onto his feet so he can throw himself out the door, slamming it firmly shut behind him.

He bows and says a quick blessing of good luck for the new couple before speed walking away, a giant grin on his blushing face.

He can't wait to tell Jiang Cheng.

End Notes

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Hope you enjoyed it. Let me know if you spot any spelling mistakes. Please feed my need for validation by commenting and leaving kudos haha :,)

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