

Lotus Seeds

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Lotus Seeds

by [Brieze01](#)

Summary

Jiang Cheng sat at his dressing table in the light of a single candle. It was so early in the morning the twilight of dawn had yet to brush the tips of the flowers outside his window. He sat there in silence pulling his hair up into its sharp style and thought of nothing as he did the same motions he had done a thousand times before. He felt hollow and almost numb as he sat there.

He leaned forward to grab his hairpiece and settled it neatly at the base of his knot, pausing to glance at his own eyes in the mirror and for a moment he stared at the pale blue eyes that looked back at him and that quiet emptiness faded as a rush of emotions roared up inside him crashing through his heart; anger, devastation, insecurity, betrayal, love, regret, guilt, hatred and oh how he hated.

He hated so much sometimes he thought he'd die with all the hate in his veins. He hated the Wens, he hated the world and he hated Wei WuXian. He hated him with crippling intensity, a hate so profound it matched the devastating love he still had for his brother. And he hated that too. He laid a trembling hand on his abdomen where that pulsing core sat, that awful, powerful, stolen core and what he would give to not know it was Wei WuXian's.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

EDIT X2 lol

I have to repost this so you see the amazing comm @fengshouzai did for us AgAiN?!
Look at it please! It's on the last chapter ☺

EDIT***

I'm reposting this because I have to show you this amazing comm @fengshouzai did for us. It's on chapter 5 so pls check it out! It's so beautiful!!!
@brieze01 on twt if u cant wait lol

Jiang Cheng is such a deep, complex character and it always bothered me how his part in mdzs ended. This story is about him coming to terms with his heartache, healing from his wounds and finding peace (and love too). I just wanted to show that he's not just some angry man and he deserved better.

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

Jiang Cheng sat at his dressing table in the light of a single candle. It was so early in the morning the twilight of dawn had yet to brush the tips of the flowers that trembled in the cool breeze outside his window. He sat there in silence pulling his hair up into its sharp knot. He braided the right side then the left before he caught the full mane of his long hair and twisted it up into the severe style he had worn it in since childhood.

His hands moved mechanically in long lines through his hair as he smoothed it down. The thick black locks were so long they fluttered at the small of his back with little ripples as he prepared himself for the day. He thought of nothing in this moment as he did the same motions he had done a thousand times before. He felt hollow, an empty, almost numb feeling sitting in his chest as he sat there.

He leaned forward to grab his hairpiece and settled it neatly at the base of his knot before he paused. He looked down as he met his own eyes in the mirror and for a moment he stared at the pale blue eyes that looked back at him and that quiet emptiness faded as a rush of emotions roared up inside him crashing through his heart; anger, devastation, insecurity, betrayal, love, regret, guilt, hatred and oh how he hated.

He hated so much sometimes he thought he'd die with all the hate in his veins. He hated the Wens, he hated the world that had stolen so much from him and he hated Wei WuXian. He hated him with crippling intensity, a hate so profound it matched the devastating love he had for his brother.

And he hated that too. He hated how he still loved him, hated how much it hurt to still love Wei WuXian. After a moment that torrent of emotion faded back going cold and distant. His hate was old, so very old and it settled at the back of his mind as he considered his own gaze. That wave of emotion ebbed and all that sat in his heart was pain.

A violent pain that was almost physical as he laid a trembling hand on his abdomen where that pulsing core sat, that awful, powerful, stolen core.

Wen Ning's voice was even harsher, almost hoarse with feeling as he stared at him with those black eyes, those black eyes that looked so dark as if cut from the void itself, "Because the golden core that is revolving inside you right now is his!"

"Nonsense! That's fucking enough! Then why was my core mended?!"

Wen Ning roared back with a fierce voice, and it hit him like a punch to the gut, "your core was never mended in the first place. It'd long since been completely melted by Wen ZhuLiu! The reason you thought it was mended was that my sister Wen Qing, the best medic of the QishanWen Sect, cut out Young Master Wei's golden core and replaced yours with it!"

Those words struck his heart like a hammer, shattering it in his chest.

Jiang Cheng stared into his own eyes as those awful words echoed around and around in his head, what had Wei WuXian done? How could he have done that? No one could do that, it was impossible, no doctor on earth could do that and no one else would sacrifice his core to become a common man for the sake of another. Why didn't he tell him? Why didn't he ask him? Why did he give of himself when he was so, so unworthy of it?

'Attempt the impossible' Right? Ha!

And that hatred swelled within him again, it was so profound he thought he'd choke on it and he snapped his fist out smashing into the mirror with strength. It shattered into pieces. The broken cracks and shards falling across his dressing table and cutting into his knuckles. But he didn't feel it. He couldn't feel it.

Wen Ning spoke again with a cold, hard voice, "you take this sword and go to the banquet hall, to the training field, to anywhere you want and ask every single person you see to pull the sword out. See if any one of them can pull it out! And then you'll know if I'm lying or not! Sect Leader Jiang—you, so driven of a person, have been comparing yourself to others your whole life, but you have to know that you never should've been able to equal him!"

Jiang Cheng turned his head to stare at the glow of the candle in its stand; the flame fluttering and flickering in the air. Was Wen Ning right? Probably. He had never measured up to Wei WuXian in his past life or this one, not in strength, not in spiritual energy, not in courage, not in skill, not in honor, not in bravery, not in sacrifice. Never in his entire life had he bested Wei WuXian.

And that suffocating hatred ebbed again and that horrible love pooled in his chest. How could Wei WuXian do that to him? And a small part conceded that for all the hatred he had for that spinning core in his belly, he was oddly grateful for it and that made him nauseous. He wasn't

grateful for its power though. He hated it just as much as he hated Wei WuXian. He didn't care about strength, he didn't care about Zidian or Sandu.

That small part of his heart acknowledged that without that sacrifice, his home would be no more, his sect would be nothing but ashes and then he hated Wei WuXian even more. Was it even his home anymore? Or did it all belong to Wei WuXian?

Bah

Jiang Cheng tried to push that heat from his heart but it was relentless, that hatred was like poison in his veins and he had a sudden clarity of thought, he would probably be festering in hate even if he had never gotten his core back, even if he lived out his days as a common man his hatred for the massacre of his family, for the Wens, for the devastation of his world would suffocate him just as surely as his hatred for Wei WuXian did now. Perhaps he was just a miserable man. A miserable man who was fated to wander the world with anger and pain in his veins.

But at least as a common man he would have had his brother for he knew with another sudden thought that Wei Ying would never have left him behind and another powerful surge of regret swirled up in him. He had never intended to abandon his brother but what could he have done?

He had had the weight of hundreds of people on his shoulders, his sect had just been rebuilt, the paint still drying on the walls of Lotus Pier. What should he have done? Could he have saved Wei Ying from himself back then? The YiLing Laozu had snatched his brother from him heart and soul and he had watched it.

He had watched that carefree light drift from his eyes, seen the cloud of resentful energy that had trailed around him when he had come back from the Burial Mounds. Should he have sacrificed the people of his sect to save his brother? And that horrible core pulsed in his belly again.

That horrible, horrible sacrifice that Wei WuXian had made for him and guilt washed over him. Should he be grateful for that? Should he bow down and worship him for it? He didn't want it. He hated it, he would rather have his core ripped out a thousand times than be the cause of his brother's descent into madness.

But what could he have done?

Wei WuXian had given so much to save him from his own devastating grief, to save his people, to save his sect and he had done nothing but *what could he have done?* He had spoken for him time and time again at conferences and war meetings, he had held back the waves of bloodlust that had craved his head when he could. He had fought for him and defended him until he simply could no longer. He had pushed the others back when they wanted to march on the Burial Mounds and slaughter the Wens; even at the Siege of LuanZang Hill with YanLi's blood still on his robes he had intended to talk to him, to confront him, to know his heart. But what faced him at the Burial Mounds that day was not Wei Ying; was not the brother he still loved, rather the madman that had faced them on that godforsaken mountain was the YiLing Laozu, terrifying in his grief and horrific in his power.

He had watched him play death with his black flute and he had seen the very moment those red eyes gave in, succumbing to his broken heart. He would never forget that devastated look in those hazy red eyes the moment he had let go, the very second he released his hold on all those ghouls and ghosts and ferocious corpses. He didn't kill Wei Ying that day. Wei WuXian had killed himself right in front of his eyes. He had let all that horrible energy destroy him and Jiang Cheng had lost his brother, body and soul to his own madness.

And he had spent hours and hours despairing; despairing at how powerless he had been that day in the face of Wei Ying's terrible darkness. In the face of his terrible nobility but he couldn't sacrifice over a thousand lives just to save him. He was just as bound by honor as Wei Ying had been.

He didn't deserve that core and the energy it filled him with sat at the back of his tongue like a bad taste. What he would have given to not know; to not know his achievements and victories were not his own, to not know that he was not the reason the YunmengJiang Sect stood proud and strong once more, to not know that he was the root of his brother's chaos. And that horrible hateful love faded away again leaving him with that cold, hollow emptiness that defined his life now.

He didn't know how to live, didn't understand how to exist anymore with that stolen core. Oh what he would give to shove it back into him. What he would give to have Wei Ying as his brother again. But he didn't know how. He didn't know what to do with the broken fragments of his heart. Wei Ying was happy now. He deserved it after the life of sacrifice he had lived but he was more distant than he had ever been before. Wei WuXian was a light whereas he was darkness. He was vibrant with love whereas he was cold with the shackles of hate.

Wei WuXian spoke softly across Guanyin Temple, "uh, I think it's best if you... stop keeping it on your mind. I know you'll definitely always keep it on your mind, but, how should I say it..." he clenched Lan Wangji's hand, saying to Jiang Cheng, "right now, I do really think... it's all in the past. It's been too long. There's no need to struggle with it any longer."

HA!

He would bear the weight of those words for the rest of his life. Not a single day would pass without him tasting that stolen energy in his belly. How could Wei WuXian say that? How could he just wipe it all away with such a handful of words? But he had always been that way. He could face down thousands of enemies, wrestle with tremendous amounts of resentful energy but he could never handle the weight of his own heart. It was selfish of him to say those words. It was impossibly selfish of him to leave with HanGuang-Jun that day with not even a backwards glance. But Wei Ying had always been selfish with his heart.

With the heart Jiang Cheng had always wanted to know. He had always wanted to understand his brother, to share the burden of their grief, to share the victories of their triumphs. He craved his brother's companionship, had always craved it. Despite the chaos he had wreaked across every corner of his life, he still loved that man.

And he acknowledged dimly that all he had ever wanted was his brother, wanted his best friend, his closest person, his family. But Wei Ying didn't care about him anymore. How clear he had been when he had left Guanyin Temple that day. He cared no longer for what

they had once had. He cared no longer about the trials and suffering they had weathered together. He had always been second to everything, even to Wei WuXian.

He wondered dimly if he was part Lan with a sardonic smile. It was said they love fully and unconditionally; loved devastatingly, a profound emotion that surpassed the weight of the real world. A Lan's love was impossible and irrevocable and that was what Jiang Cheng felt for his brother. Despite everything even now he missed him, even now in the dim grey wash the twilight cast across his silent room, he knew he would always love his brother and he hated that. Oh how he hated that.

He shoved himself away from his dressing table stepping across the glass that littered the floor. It cut his feet but he didn't feel it. He couldn't feel anything anymore.

~*~

"Higher! Raise your hand, what are you going to do if your opponent cuts you down because of your height?" Jiang Cheng snapped at his disciple as he walked down the line. His juniors were standing in their sword stances with their blades stretched out in a strike in the large open training grounds of the YunmengJiang Sect and he trailed up and down the lines pushing and nudging and snapping at them to fix their forms.

He didn't care that some of them trembled in fear when he approached. He didn't care that some of them looked at him with pride and adoration. He didn't care much one way or the other what they thought. He didn't care what anyone thought.

He was fierce and unforgiving, he was powerful with that stolen core and he had no patience for the regards of others. What did it matter? What did anything matter?

"Kun Wu Jian next," he called as he stepped over to the side to watch the 300 junior disciples practice. He watched them with cold clear blue eyes as they spun and twisted into blocks and strikes. They were good, as they should be under the SanDu ShengShou. He was rigid and disciplined, demanding the perfection of them he demanded of himself.

His mother's disappointment or his father's apathy didn't bother him anymore. They were dead and gone, nothing but ghosts, ghosts that haunted Lotus Pier in the darkness of the night turning his sleep chaotic and unrestful. He didn't really sleep much anymore, he didn't care to, his ever present dreams and nightmares suffocating him as the days dragged on in Yunmeng.

Day after day of bursts of emotion followed by endless emptiness and over and over again. It had been 3 months since Guanyin Temple, since that night that spoke too many truths and shook too many hearts; 3 months since Wei Ying had abandoned him yet again but he pushed that away as he called out,

"Yang Hao, what was that? Straighten your legs properly, your opponent will slice your arm off with a strike like that. Again!"

"Lin Jun?! Block like that again and I'll break your legs."

“Y...Yes Sect Leader!” Lin Jun quailed as he did the block again. The disciple next to him hissed quietly, “don’t worry,” he spoke to the new junior, “SanDu ShengShou says that all that time, he doesn’t mean it,” the boy grinned at him before twisting into a strike with a graceful arc of his arm.

“Silence Kuo RuShan! Or I’ll have you eat those words!”

“Yes! Sect Leader!” RuShan winked at Lin Jun again as they both lunged into their blocks.

“Again!” Jiang Cheng called coolly as he watched his disciples train. There was the Qinghe Sword Competitions next month and he would like to show a good face. The Nie Sect hosted it every year and Nie HuaiSang had sent letters to all the sects inviting them to come compete.

Nie HuaiSang, the mouse with tiger stripes. Nie HuaiSang had shown his true colors back at Guanyin Temple and in the half a month following that fateful night had turned the Nie Sect into a pristine well-oiled machine. He had sent concise letters to the major sects thanking them for their support in bringing justice to his brother assuring them of his competence and cordially inviting them to the Sword Competitions at the end of the spring.

Jiang Cheng had stared long and hard at that letter, it almost seemed like another man had penned it and not the snivelling, cowardly Nie ‘I don’t know’ HuaiSang. Well for better or for worse, who was he to judge what HuaiSang had done for his brother. But the fact remained that the youngest Nie had proven himself to be quite frankly terrifying to have bested the silver tongued Jin GuangYao and Jiang Cheng had decided that very day as he read over those neat flowing words, that he would definitely have to keep the YunmengJiang Sect out of his sights.

“Sect Leader Jiang?” A low voice spoke to his left and he barked out, “Hou Zian, if I see that strike again, I’ll break that arm and you’ll be practicing left handed for the rest of the night!”

He turned to look at his second in command, Li Kang. Li Kang was a loyal, steadfast man a little younger than him with grey streaks in his brown hair that was far too old for him. He had come to serve under Jiang Cheng within the first few weeks he had been rebuilding Lotus Pier so many years ago and he had remained ever since, a constant grounding presence. Li Kang had been a lifeline for him in more ways than one even though he’d never tell him that.

“Li Kang,” Jiang Cheng nodded in greeting as he waited for him to speak.

“Sect Leader a letter has arrived for you from Sect Leader Jin,” he replied with a calm, low voice that had characterized him since the very first day they met. Li Kang was an ocean of peace, patient and soft with his words that would lead anyone to underestimate him and he used that on a number occasions, his opponents reading his softly spoken countenance as weakness only to be blown away by the two swords he wielded. He came from a common family from Shahe, a small village in the south of Yunmeng. That little town had been one of the first to burn to the ground when the Wens had torn through Jiang Cheng’s beautiful home and the little Li Kang would drag his fractured ankle and broken arm two hours north to collapse at his feet with rage and pain and white hot determination in his young eyes.

Jiang Cheng had welcomed him with open arms. He had a soft spot deep in his heart for orphans, their pain almost a mirror to his own and even if Li Kang had never been able to cultivate he would have kept that boy regardless so profound was his desire to save someone, anyone after the devastation of his sect and he was proud of the boy, proud of the man he had become. He wasn't very tall, just a few inches passed his shoulder and he was lean and wiry with narrow shoulders. If you didn't know him you would think him weak or soft but he was deadly with the two swords he carried strapped across his back.

"Would you care to read it in your study?" Li Kang spoke with that same, deep voice and Jiang Cheng felt calmer just for having heard it.

"Here will do, the juniors are about to finish for the day, they have their classes to attend to."

"Shall I bring you some tea then Sect Leader Jiang?"

"Stop doing that Li Kang," Jiang Cheng fixed him with a look, his eyebrows snapping together with irritation, Li Kang's penchant for trying to wait on him hand and foot was a deep, sore thorn in his side. It annoyed him to no end.

"You are not a servant. Even our own servants don't fetch tea so no you may not." He finished off with a glare for good measure but the other man was unfazed, a tiny quirk to his eyes showing his laughter as he countered, "if I do not Sect Leader Jiang you would drink your soup with chopsticks and wear your shoes on wrong feet. Have you even eaten today?"

"Hmph, that's none of your concern..." Jiang Cheng held out his hand for the letter but Li Kang held it back, "promise you will eat the dumplings I left for you in your office?"

He fixed the normally ferocious SanDu ShengShou with his own look, his dark eyes brooking no argument and Jiang Cheng conceded. He had never before met anyone in his life as stubborn as his capable lieutenant.

"Very well, now give me that letter..." He glared again refusing to acknowledge the answering grin curling up on Li Kang's face that painted him younger and far more approachable than before.

Jiang Cheng was just about to read it when he caught sight of the worst move he had seen all day, "Lin Jun! What the hell are you doing?! Catching flies?! If you block like that the force of a strike will shatter your hand. I swear on my ancestors if you do that again I'll break your hand myself!"

Jiang Cheng tucked his letter in his robes as he marched back onto the training field. His junior would just have to be late to his class because he simply would not stand for a block like that. He dismissed the rest of the disciples before pulling the shy little Lin Jun over and said, "now pay attention," he pulled Sandu out with an elegant arc as he raised it up above his head. He held the pose for a moment before slashing down and canting his hilt back up into a vertical block.

"See how I hold the hilt? You have to evenly spread the hand to take the force of your opponent's strike. If you fold your fingers over like that you will break them in a battle."

Come I will practice with you,” he gestured to the space in front of him and the junior jumped to comply. He was startled and a little wary of Jiang Cheng but his heart was also soaring that the great SanDu ShengShou would actually spar with him.

“Remember the hold, I will strike slowly, see that you block it properly”

“Yes Sect Leader!”

Li Kang watched from the edge of the field as the ferocious SanDu ShengShou squared up with one of his youngest juniors. For all his venomous words, he was a patient teacher with gentle hands that showed the shape of his heart and he had a deep, endless, fragile heart.

He had seen it so many times over the years. Seen it in the way he led his people, seen it in the way he sheltered orphan after orphan, seen it in the way he mourned his family, seen it in the way he loved his nephew, seen it in the bittersweet smiles when he played with the Jiang dogs, seen it in how he cherished the old people of Yunmeng, seen it in how he protected those he cared about.

And Jiang Cheng cared. He cared so much with his deep heart. For all his scathing remarks and sharp eyes, his shoulders were broad enough and strong enough to carry his people and carry them he did. He had raised this sect up from ashes, brought life back into the burned out husk of Yunmeng City. No matter who came to him, no matter what problem large or small, he accepted it. He took on silly hauntings like the Fa Family’s possessed orchard or the hoard of screaming ghouls that had terrorized the entire city Wupu. He was always there, always there to fight, to protect, to lighten the weight for his people.

But for all that he eased the burdens of others, his own heart seemed so heavy in his blue eyes, that blue so pale it seemed grey sometimes and Li Kang had seen that too. He had seen how his fearless SanDu ShengShou walked the pier at night. For hours and hours he walked along the edge of the great Yunmeng Lake that surrounded Lotus Pier until the twilight of dawn would come to kiss the water.

In the lonely hours of the night, the moon would catch on his white sleeping robe and his pale face casting him like a ghost, like a wraith that haunted the lake. He seemed almost a spirit then, intangible and transient under the stars.

He seemed so weak then, his broad shoulders curved forward under the impossible weight of his vast heart and it was in those moments that Li Kang would feel his breath catch in his lungs and a maddening desire would seize him. He wanted nothing more than to grab this proud, brave man who seemed so fragile in the silver of the moonlight and hug him tight with some small hope that he could somehow ease that weight that dragged him down but it wasn’t his place.

Jiang Cheng would never forgive him for having seen his weakness. And Li Kang felt his heart grow heavy in his chest as he watched the man he loved like a father train a boy in the YunmengJiang practice grounds. And though he taught with clear concise instructions, you would have to be blind not to see the distance in those faraway eyes.

Jiang Cheng had always been fiery and fierce, strong with Sandu and Zidian and the pride of his people. It was like a fire had burned inside him, bright and glowing and though that flame had wavered sometimes with his grief or his heartache, it would flare up again with responsibility and love and dedication to his people but something had happened to him. Some horror had happened that snuffed that fire right out and the man who walked the halls of Lotus Pier now was withdrawn, thin and cold as though what sat in his chest was not a heart but a pile of ashes and Li Kang despaired. It hurt him so much to see SanDu ShengShou like this, his heart empty and hollow.

He was brave and proud in front of others but as soon as the door would close behind him, he would wilt, curling into himself, his broad shoulders bowing forward and his eyes growing tired and distant.

There was something very wrong with Jiang Cheng and Li Kang did not know what to do about it. What could he do about it? He wished for some guidance, wished for a moment that there was someone in this world who could lift him up, someone in this world who would light that flame again and bring life back to those cold, empty blue eyes.

Chapter End Notes

.....I hated, with a fiery passion how Jiang Cheng was left kind of hanging at the end of mdzs and kind of idk made out to be like a low key bad guy so I wrote him a story lol. Hes so much more than a side character imo and I ♥ him. I will be posting chapters ever 3/4 days. I hope you enjoy Lotus Seeds and I'd love to know your thoughts, critiques, kudos or whatever~

Chapter 2

“Pardon me brother?” Lan WangJi stood at the door of the hanshi, the crispy spring breeze blowing through the late morning in the Cloud Recesses, rich with the smell of budding flowers. He waited for a long time, waited and waited for his brother to acknowledge him.

Lan XiChen, the righteous and noble leader of the GusuLan Sect was in seclusion. He closed himself off from the world with one brief announcement at breakfast one morning 3 months ago and since then no one had seen him or that sweet smile that had always seemed to light up the room around him.

Lan Zhan sighed softly as he stood there. He considered sitting down since he had no idea when his brother would come out. He knew he was there, he could feel the gentle brush of his spiritual power and so he would wait.

And as he stood there in the early morning light with the spring breeze playing through his long hair, he felt a wave of melancholy settle around him. He loved his brother most dearly and he hated the profound change that had come over him with the devastation Jin GuangYao had wrought. That silver tongued snake had destroyed his brother wrapping him so tight in his coils, his clear, honest heart so wide open had fallen deeply into that web of lies.

Then to add another layer of heartache, Nie HuaiSang had played with him some more, sliding him cleverly across the board of the game he played with Jin GuangYao. How the ones he loved betrayed and used him coldly had broken that vast heart and Lan Zhan did not know what to do to help his brother.

Lan XiChen had always been a source of strength and comfort to him especially during those long dark days when his grief had consumed him. He could remember clearly the soft lilting notes of the xiao that had sung him to sleep so many nights when he laid trapped in the years of pain and despair of the whip lashes he had taken for Wei Ying. How long he had laid there in the darkness with nothing but that crippling agony across his back, sorrow in his heart and the gentle songs of his brother’s flute in his ear.

He could never repay the love and support, the endless kindness and comfort his brother had given him then. He had been the only soul on earth who had looked at him without censor, without judgement as he held his hand and wiped his tears.

Lan Zhan sighed heavily as he looked across the flowering walkway and he wished deeply for something, anything to end his brother’s heartache and still he waited outside the hanshi. It was close to an hour later when he heard the soft slide of the door and he turned his head immediately seeking the tall, strong form of his brother. He had only seen him in bits and pieces a handful of times since he had secluded himself away.

“WangJi?” Lan XiChen spoke up into the late morning air and his voice was so soft, so hoarse as if he had just woken up and Lan Zhan blinked as he took in the disheveled, haggard appearance of his older brother.

Lan XiChen looked awful as he stood there blinking in the sunlight. He was so pale his skin was almost translucent, his big brown eyes dim and foggy under his long lashes. His hair was a loose mess around his body, his forehead ribbon wrinkled up in kinks as though he had slept in it as he leaned into the doorframe barefoot and still in his night clothes at 11 in the morning.

Lan WangJi swallowed down his heavy heart and all the tumbling words in his chest that wanted to jump out of his mouth.

Are you ok?! Can I help you? What do you need? How can I help you? Let me help you?!

Instead he schooled his features into that expressionless mask he wore. He didn't want to startle his brother who looked like a strong wind would knock him down flat and he spoke quietly.

"I'm sorry to bother you brother. I have a letter from Sect Leader Jin, he was insistent that you receive it."

"Ah, Jin Ling? Right, right...Sect Leader Jin...." Lan XiChen spoke a little hazily, a little disconnected and Lan Zhan leaned in ever so slightly and the earthy smell of alcohol drifted under his nose. It was a rich scent, a scent he knew well since Wei Ying drank it often and his heart dropped like lead into his stomach with the weight of his sadness. He could only imagine the state his brother was in to drink like this. How much must his heart hurt for him to drown himself in wine and break the rigid rules of his sect? And for a moment Lan Zhan tumbled back in time, he saw himself almost superimposed over the sad man in front of him.

He had done the same once upon a time. He had drunk jar after jar of Emperor's Smile in a desperate attempt to run from that crushing, suffocating grief in his veins and instead of relief, all that wine had just magnified his sorrow until he was almost choking on it, until he drove the white hot tip of the Wen branding iron into his chest as though to carve his heart from his body.

"Brother...." Lan WangJi took a firm step towards XiChen and caught him around the shoulders when he stepped back unsteadily as though to escape him somehow.

"Shh....it's.....it's ok brother," he spoke softly as he pulled him back into the shadowy gloom of the hanshi. The glow from the sun behind the shutters painting long, arching shadows through that dim, dark room. He settled his brother down on his bed for a moment and he went to draw a bath.

He did it quickly, almost a little nervously, worried that his brother wouldn't be there when he was done, that the thin, frail wraith of his brother would just disappear into the shadows that curved along the floor of the hanshi.

But his fears were unfounded when he returned and Lan XiChen was sitting in the same place he had left him. He softly tugged his wrinkled ribbon off and slid him gently into the hot bath water. He glanced at him for a moment and in a fit of despair he met those foggy brown eyes. They were distant with the haze of alcohol and dim with pain. There was so much pain in his

eyes and Lan Zhan swallowed his heart back down. He didn't know what to say. He couldn't think of a single thing that would bear the weight of that sorrow.

Instead he settled himself down behind those broad shoulders that looked so small, so fragile in the dim light of the hanshi and he started to comb his long, tangled hair. He sat behind his brother dragging a fine toothed comb through all the snarls and knots with delicate pulls and he despaired again. He was not good with words, he didn't know how to string the right things together to help Lan XiChen somehow so he busied himself with those long black locks until he could run his hands through it.

Then he did it again caressing his brother's head softly as though his fingertips could convey how much he loved him, how much he was here for him, would always be here for him, how he would take that weight if he could.

For a long time he ran his fingers through Lan XiChen's hair over and over as he sat there in the bath, trying to express himself through his actions since words failed him and after a while he saw a shiver shake those shoulders and then another one and another and he leaned forward to wrap his arms around his brother. He held him tight as sob after sob shook those broad shoulders.

And though Lan XiChen cried quietly, he cried with his whole heart, with all the weight of his sorrow, his guilt, his pain; tears trailing down his cheeks in long lines as he sat there in his brother's arms. His grief seemed endless. How could he ever come to terms with the murder of his sworn brothers? He had killed Jin GuangYao himself and Nie MingJue he might just as well have killed for it was he who taught Jin GuangYao that song.

Whatever games HuaiSang played didn't matter anymore because the one who had murdered his sworn brothers was him and no one could deny it, no one could refute it. He was the one with their blood on his hands and he didn't know what to do. What could he do? How could he fix this? How could he make this better?

There was no way. There was nothing that could undo what's been done. He was the reason the two men he had loved like family were dead and gone and nothing and no one could change that.

For minutes, hours he sat there and not even the warm weight of his brother offered him relief from the unending pain in his heart. He thought he'd die this way. He would simply die under this crushing guilt and regret.

But Lan Zhan was patient and so gentle. He held his brother until those heartbreaking shivers died down and the bath had grown cold. Then he washed his long, still body with the same tenderness that Lan XiChen had used to wash him and care for the wounds on his back all those years ago.

He tugged and pulled and pushed delicately to dress him in fresh clothes before he laid him down again with a fresh pot of tea and a jug of water by his bedside and just like his brother had done for him so many times before he settled himself on the floor leaning back against the bedframe and played him a song. He played a soft melody full of peace and tranquility as though he could weave a dream of happiness for his desolate, heartbroken brother.

Long after he had fallen asleep, Lan Zhan finally set his guqin aside and laid Jin Ling's letter by his hand. Whatever the young sect leader wanted could wait, it had to wait until XiChen could breathe again and it was with deep sadness that Lan WangJi left the hanshi that day. What he would have given to take that sorrow with him.

Chapter 3

Dear Jiujiu,

How is Yunmeng? Lanling is alright. I'm studying hard I promise. Shifu is very demanding but his lessons are clear and concise. I'm studying history at the moment. Fairy learned a new trick yesterday, I taught her to smell poisons after the fiasco last month. The LanlingJin Sect is kind of a mess honestly. I dismissed Jin GuangYao's staff like you advised and I was wondering if you would come to Lanling soon. I know you're busy as well but I'm not too sure how to handle the elders. They say they were here before GuangYao and they will be here after him too but I think several of them were his allies. I don't really want to just get rid of them all. A lot of them were my teachers but I don't want to keep them either if they had such little regard for their sect. I was firm just like you said but no one budges. I guess they don't take an 18 year old seriously. Anyway I invited ZeWu-Jun as well so hopefully the elders will listen to you since no one listens to me. Thank you for your help and I do miss you.

*Sincerely,
Jin Ling*

Jiang Cheng set his letter aside as he stood up from his desk pausing as an elegant porcelain plate caught his attention, on it sat 4 fat dumplings and a handful of shelled lotus seeds and Jiang Cheng felt fondness tug at his chest. Li Kang was always worrying about him.

And well he did promise so he plopped himself back down to eat. He snagged the lotus seeds first. Those had always been and probably would always be his favorite. He ate them slowly enjoying the crispy, slightly sweet taste as he sat there and bittersweet memories danced across his mind.

How many times had A-jie peeled the little white seeds for him? How many times had she snuck him handfuls over dinner avoiding the sharp, stern glare of their mother and her constant barrage of belittlement; *you are not a servant A-Li, you are a mistress of this house, stop peeling lotus seeds!*

But Jiang YanLi had just smiled her sweet smile and passed him some more as soon as she looked away.

It seemed that no matter how much time passed, lotus seeds would always remind him of memories best forgotten but what could he do? He couldn't bear to push YanLi from his thoughts. He honestly acknowledged that he would never love anyone as much as he loved his sister. She had been a ray of sunshine so sweet and soft and loving. Her delicate arms strong around him when she would hug him tight, her beautiful eyes sparkling with her happiness.

He was cursed to remember her, sentenced to see her laughing and sweet in his mind's eye or radiant and glowing in her elegant wedding dress or bleeding and pale as she died in his arms. He had seen her die so, so many times. He could remember the exact moment the light

had left those bright yellow eyes, remember the last breath she took in his arms and he remembered too how even in her final moments she had reached out for Wei WuXian.

Even then he was still second place but he didn't begrudge her. He couldn't. YanLi was a delicate, caring flower, she couldn't help wanting to save Wei Ying too just like he couldn't help the horrible love in his chest that he felt for that chaotic man who had been the root cause of all his suffering. How he hated it and those lotus seeds turned to ash in his mouth.

He was older now and in some ways wiser. He knew Lotus Pier had not fallen because of Wei WuXian. He knew the second he had laid eyes on those Wen warships that Wen Chao had come with an army that had been long in the making. And even if Wei WuXian had been the perfect excuse, he did not have the blood of his family on his hands.

And he hated how that truth hurt. It hurt to have even more reasons to love that man and he conceded that though YanLi had died in the chaos of Nightless City, her blood wasn't on his hands either. Yes he had orchestrated that nightmare of a night but Wei WuXian didn't swing the blade that had taken her life even though he had been the crux that sealed her fate.

It was like he had said at Guanyin Temple *"Wei WuXian, who was the one who broke his promise and betrayed the Jiang Sect first? Tell me. That I'd be the sect leader and you'd be my subordinate, that you'd help me your whole life, that so long as the GusuLan Sect had its Two Jades, the YunmengJiang Sect would have its Two Prides, that you'd never betray me or betray the Jiang Sect—who was the one that said these?!"*

He got more agitated as he ranted on, "And in the end? You go and protect outsiders, haha! The Wen Sect's people, even. How much of their rice did you eat?! Defecting with such resolution! What did you take our sect to be?! You did all the best things, yet every time you do the worst ones, it's involuntary! Forced! With some unspeakable grievances! Grievances?! You told me nothing, you played me for a fool!!!"

"Just how much do you owe the Jiang Sect? Am I not supposed to hate you? Can I not hate you?! Why is it that now it's like I'm supposed to have wronged you?! Why do I have to feel like I'm a fucking clown all these years?! What am I? Do I deserve to be blinded by all your dazzling splendor?! Am I not supposed to hate you?!"

As memories rushed over him, Jiang Cheng thought again, Wei WuXian did do all the best things and the worst and that aching hate rose up in him again. *Why can't I hate you Wei WuXian?! Why do I have to feel so awful because of your stupid nobility? Why have you always done whatever you please?*

He choked as he stared across Guanyin Temple, "... You said I'd be the sect leader and you'd be my subordinate, you said you'd help me your whole life, you said you'd never betray the YunmengJiang Sect... You said so yourself."

"..." After a moment of silence, Wei WuXian replied with a soft, almost hoarse voice, "I'm sorry. I broke my promise."

Jiang Cheng shook his head, burying his face deep into his palms. A second later, he suddenly burst out with a laugh. His muffled voice mocked, "It's such a time already, and I

still need you to say sorry to me. What a fragile person I am."

He really was a fragile, weak person in the face of Wei WuXian and his fucking dazzling nobility. What the hell was he supposed to do now? He could never repay Wei Ying and he hated that he owed everything to that impossible sacrifice. Why in all the hells had he done that? Why couldn't he have just stayed by his side as his brother? As his family? Jiang Cheng had never wanted anything more than that. Why didn't he *fucking tell him? Fucking ask him what he wanted?* He didn't want this stupid core, he wanted his brother and despite everything that suffocating love welled up in him again. To give one's life for another was a noble cause but what was it to give up one's strength? To sacrifice years of training and dedication to become a common man for another? What the hell was that? Damn Wei WuXian, damn him to hell for being so, so, so *fucking great*.

Attempt the impossible indeed.

He would never measure up, he would never equal him and his heart hurt and ached and weighed in his chest as he sat there in his office, the dumplings long cold. What had possessed his shixiong to do that? Was it guilt? Was it debt? Responsibility? It couldn't be love, there was no way Wei WuXian loved him. You didn't do that to someone you loved. You didn't shove your stupid core into their body and disappear for 3 months if you truly cared.

Wei WuXian...I hate you so much

But even as he thought that he could feel the love in his heart still and he hated that even more.

~*~

"Welcome ZeWu-Jun," Jin Ling spoke brightly as the elegant, regal form of Lan XiChen stepped up the last stone step of the Lanling Palace. He looked so tired there and pale as Jin Ling considered him.

He had lost weight and his robes hung on his frame loosely, and though he stood there immaculately dressed, his imposing aura had faded. He looked just like a simple man and not the leader of one the four great sects.

"Thank you Sect Leader Jin," he greeted politely as he met Jin Ling's brown eyes. The young new head of Lanling was too much for him. He was too bright, too young, too happy and Lan XiChen felt a wave of exhaustion overtake him. He was so, so tired. He wanted nothing more than to crawl back into the darkness of his hanshi and drink until he passed out too exhausted to dream but Jin Ling had sent him a letter asking for his help and for a moment he had cursed himself for being too weak at heart to reject the request.

Apparently the elders of LanlingJin were being difficult and he had agreed to help though how much good he could do in the state he was in was debatable but he would do right by his words and help as much as he was able to.

“This way ZeWu-Jun, Jiu---Sect Leader Jiang is already there, he called for a meeting with the elders as soon as he got here. I bet they’re shaking in their boots,” Jin Ling spoke smugly and Lan XiChen answered his brilliant smile with a dim one of his own.

“”What do you recommend ZeWu-Jun? Like I told Jiujiu, I don’t really want to dismiss them all but I really can’t trust them. I mean I’m taking lessons from shifu now because they make my skin crawl...” Jin Ling spoke conversationally as they walked the long corridor of Lanling Palace, their boots echoing on the white stone.

“Shifu is a GusuLan grandmaster, no one would judge you for taking lessons from him,” Lan XiChen answered and Jin Ling almost paused mid step at the soft, almost hoarse voice. He glanced over at the sect leader feeling his heart tug in his chest. ZeWu-Jun looked almost frail for a moment like a strong wind would lay him out flat but he dragged his eyes away.

Poor ZeWu-Jun, Guanyin Temple had really taken a toll on him and Jin Ling felt righteous anger bubble up in his belly. Damn Jin GuangYao and Nie HuaiSang for that matter. Lan XiChen had always been a bright ray of sunshine with his sunny smiles and his warm eyes. It was unfair of them to use him up and throw him out like trash. He was worth so much more than that but Jin Ling didn’t know how to help the sect leader. In fact he still didn’t really understand what had happened that night at Guanyin Temple but it would take a fool not to see how much the deaths of his sworn brothers had hurt him.

Suddenly they paused in shock as a fiery voice cut through the hallway from the closed door to the meeting room.

“-----I DON’T CARE WHO THE FUCK YOU THINK YOU ARE! YOU BELONG TO LANLINGJIN AND SECT LEADER JIN IS YOU SUPERIOR! DON’T YOU DARE STAND ON CEREMONY WITH YOUR FLOWERY WORDS. WHO GIVES A FLYING FUCK IF YOU WERE HERE BEFORE GUANGYAO! IF SECT LEADER JIN CAN’T TRUST YOU, YOU WON’T BE HERE MUCH LONGER!”

“Se....Sec.....Sect Leader Jiang....we.....we support Jin Ling completely and yes we had supported Jin GuangYao but he was our sect leader, what would you have had us do?”

Jiang Cheng roared across the room, he was so mad, how dare these pompous fools think they would play sweet words with him, he was no Jin GuangYao and these puffed up old men and women needed to learn their place.

“THAT’S SECT LEADER JIN TO YOU! HOW DARE YOU PLAY THE VICTIM ELDER FAN! I SWEAR ON MY ANCESTORS I’LL SNAP YOU IN TWO FOR THOSE EMPTY WORDS. YOU WILL ALL BE PLACED UNDER SUPERVISION UNTIL SECT LEADER JIN IS SATISFIED BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE YOU PUT ONE TOE OUT OF LINE AND YOU WILL ANSWER TO ME!”

“Sect Leader Jiang that is enough! Why would we answer to you?! You are not a Jin, do not presume to overstep your bounds....”

Lan XiChen blinked in surprise as he paused before the door. When he had arrived in Lanling he had never expected to be greeted by the ferocious SanDu ShengShou. He stepped quickly

into the room pulling himself up to attention. He could feel sorry for himself later, right now he had a fiery Sect Leader Jiang and a room full of terrified, angry elders and they seemed to be at an impasse.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he spoke smoothly as he stepped forward with a nod at Sect Leader Jiang.

“I understand that things are a little tense right now after the previous sect leader’s actions and we understand your feelings. Of course you were bound to obey him. He was your leader however we expect that same loyalty to Sect Leader Jin now.”

Lan XiChen drew himself up to his full height pulling his shoulders back as he looked across the room meeting their eyes one by one. They shifted uncomfortably, suddenly unprepared for the eloquent and imposing GusuLan Sect Leader.

“I will make it clear to you here and now. Sect Leader Jin has the full support of GusuLan and YunmengJiang,” Lan XiChen nodded at the fierce Jiang Cheng who nodded back at him deferring to the excellent arbitration skills of the respected ZeWu-Jun. He stepped back for a moment fixing that room full of puffed up seniors with a steely glare as he waited for what Lan XiChen would say next.

“I understand your feelings, you have spent years dedicating yourself to LanlingJin but you will be placed under supervision. Sect Leader Jin may be young in age but he is wise and he will prove to be a great leader to this sect.”

“Sect Leader Lan.....we support Sect Leader Jin completely but how can we trust him? He won’t take counsel from us, he won’t even attend his lessons, how can we have faith in such a young leader who won’t even attend classes?” An older woman spoke from the back of the room with an arrogant tilt to her head.

She knew how much GusuLan valued hard work and she was sure ZeWu-Jun would turn his attentions to Jin Ling and his lack of discipline. She had a small smile across her lips as though she had played the best hand.

“Elder Zhang, I completely understand but your worries are unfounded. Sect Leader Jin has been taking personal lessons from our Grandmaster Lan QiRen. They have been in constant correspondence for 3 months now. Surely you would not begrudge Sect Leader Jin an excellent teacher? I am sure you would like nothing more than to share your knowledge with him yourself, but he needs to be able to trust you or he will not listen to your guidance. I am sure you have much wisdom with your years of study and dedication and it would be a shame if no one listened to you.” Lan XiChen finished calmly with a smile that didn’t quite touch his eyes.

He was absolutely exhausted and deeply offended that yet another person tried to play games with him.

“As Sect Leader Jiang mentioned, YunmengJiang and GusuLan will monitor your actions for the near future and should any of you decide that Jin GuangYao’s way was better, we will see

to it that you enjoy the comfort of the Lanling cells. You may however leave anytime you choose.”

“That’s all well and good Sect Leader Lan but who’s to say GusuLan or YunmengJiang doesn’t plan to take over our sect?! Our leader takes his counsel from you, he takes his lessons from *your* Grandmaster! And you walk in here to make demands! Even Sect Leader Jiang thought it his place to threaten us! How can we trust that you won’t take advantage of Jin Ling?!”

“Elder Yu,” Jin Ling spoke up for the first time, drawing himself up to his full height as he tilted his chin up looking every inch the proud Sect Leader he was trying to be.

“With all due respect senior, the sect leaders who have agreed to assist in rebuilding LanlingJin will never do as you suggest and it is an insult to their honor and their character. They would be well within their bounds to call for a duel over such accusations. I *will* be monitoring your behavior and actions until I see fit and you would do well to understand that this is not a negotiation. I am the superior here and you are in fact the inferior. You will abide by my rules if you want to stay here or you can leave. I respect Sect Leader Jiang and Sect Leader Lan and I will not stand for your words. Do you understand Elder Yu?”

Jin Ling fixed him with a powerful look, a look so reminiscent of his grandmother with all her proud bearing and Jiang Cheng felt pride well up in his chest. Jin Ling looked strong and determined in the face of the petty bureaucracy that elders always liked to play and he glanced at Lan XiChen. They shared a laughing gaze when the elder started to sputter up empty apologies.

“I trust you understand the purpose of today’s meeting. You will still be asked to teach the disciples and I do look forward to hearing your guidance in the future. You have always been respected seniors in my sect and I would hate to lose the wealth of knowledge you possess but I *will* straighten out this sect. I will not abide treachery, pettiness or any of the clever games you seek to play. I hope this is clear to you.”

Jin Ling looked them over again before he turned on his heel and walked right out. He could not defer to his jiujiu or Lan XiChen under the circumstances and his neck itched with the disrespect of walking out on them but the imposing heads of YunmengJiang and GusuLan followed him quickly as they held in their smiles. They almost wanted to laugh at the blush across Jin Ling’s neck as he acted his part.

“Good for you Jin Ling,” his uncle threw his arm around his nephew’s neck and gave him an affectionate noogie messing up his hair as soon as they were out of earshot.

Jin Ling squeaked, “JIUJIU?! STOP!” as he tried to pull out of the hold trying his best to wiggle free pausing when Lan XiChen spoke up next to him.

“That was well done Jin Ling, elders are the same no matter what sect you’re from, you need to be firm.”

“Th...thank you ZeWu-Jun, it felt pretty great to see their faces,” he laughed, finally tugging free from Jiang Cheng’s hold.

“You will need to be just as firm in the future but keep your heart open as well. For all their arrogance I feel like they do mean well even if they did turn a blind eye to the corruption in their sect.”

“Hmph, those puffed up old geezers would know a good thing if it bit them in the ass,” Jiang Cheng muttered glancing at Jin Ling but he balked quickly when his nephew looked at him with big watery eyes, “JIUJIU! YOU DO CARE?!”

“Of course I care, you little pest, now let’s go see your juniors.”

Chapter 4

Lan XiChen smiled despite himself, the Jiangs were certainly a lively bunch and it was a welcome change to see them bursting with energy when he had become so used to the monotone, serene world of GusuLan.

He followed them around for the rest of the day coaching Jin Ling on his training techniques for a few hours as they observed the junior sparring sessions carefully shoving all his bittersweet memories away. Memories of walking these very same halls and advising another young sect leader dragging him down. Every memory was tainted black as he was forced to confront Jin GuangYao yet again. Had anything he said been genuine? Had any single part of their time together meant anything at all?

Or did Jin GuangYao just wear those sweet words and demure smiles as a mask to hide the cold, bitter man he truly was? Memory after memory assaulted him as he walked with the Jiangs, and he couldn't help the despair that pooled in his chest.

For how long had Jin GuangYao used him? Since when had he started those sick games? What if he had been playing him from the very start? What if all the worries and insecurities he had shared to deepen their bond had been nothing but lies? It must have been. Meng Yao had no love in his heart. Nie MingJue had acknowledged him, promoted him to his lieutenant, saw value in his sharp mind and Meng Yao had conspired for years to kill him. His ambition knew no bounds and there was simply no room for things like love in his carefully laid plans.

Even at Guanyin Temple he was playing him, determined to kill him too so they could die together and rot in his twisted fantasy. What had he meant when he had pushed him back? Could that have been real sentiment? Could he have meant to save him after all that? Or was that just another kind of manipulation meant to haunt him long after Jin GuangYao was dead and gone? Lan XiChen felt so profoundly awful. How could he have been so blind? How could he have been so naive? He believed every word on that silver tongue, drank it up like an idiot, his heart full of understanding for the misunderstood Meng Yao.

Ha! Misunderstood....

No one misunderstood him, they all thought exactly what he wanted them to think, they danced when he wanted them to dance and sang the songs he wanted them to sing. How could he not have seen that treacherous snake for what he was? Was he just too trusting? Should he never trust again? Who could he trust? Why should he trust?

“----Wu-Jun?”

“Oh my apologies Sect Leader Jiang? I'm afraid I didn't catch that.”

Jiang Cheng considered him for a moment as Lan XiChen looked over. They were walking the long stone corridor after dinner as the sun dipped below the horizon casting Lanling in the

shades of the evening, the sky a wash in purples and pinks and blues as night descended on the cultivators.

Jiang Cheng spoke again, “if you have no plans ZeWu-Jun would you care to take tea with me? There’s a nice flower pavilion this way.” He gestured ahead of them.

“It’s nothing extravagant, in fact I doubt you’ve even seen it before but my.....my sister had discovered it when she lived here.”

Jiang Cheng swallowed his heart back down. It had really been too long for him to get choked up over her but like it or not, he had a sinking feeling that he would ache every time YanLi crossed his mind.

“Oh? Sure Sect Leader Jiang, I have no plans,” Lan XiChen nodded despite himself. He truly felt awful and he would have preferred to crawl back into bed and never come out again but something about the blunt and imposing Jiang Cheng made for a welcome distraction and he considered the man walking next to him.

Jiang Cheng was bold, loud, fierce, everything he had shied away from before, everything he had considered with mild disapproval since his brash behavior was aggressive and energetic but now, now in the wake of Jin GuangYao’s silver tongue and his polite, carefully constructed words he found an odd sort of comfort in knowing the man next to him had no such abilities.

Jiang Cheng was much like his brother in that sense, both he and Wei WuXian were straightforward with their words and clear in their intentions. They had no need to play games or weave clever words with double meanings because they simply didn’t think like that. The YunmengJiangs were confident in their strength to back up their words and they would charge straight through their obstacles and not prance and tiptoe around them like master strategists.

Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian would tell you bluntly exactly what they thought when they thought it even if it fell over the line of courtesy more often than not. Their emotions were fiery and obvious. One always knew where one stood with a Jiang whether they liked it or not and Lan XiChen was dimly grateful to accompany such a person. He may not like Jiang Cheng very much but he did respect the man and his weary heart appreciated his honest face and his blunt words.

Jiang Cheng led them deep into the palace to the far edge of the southern side and down another long hallway and Lan XiChen looked around with interest. He had never seen this side of the palace, he had never had cause to and Jin GuangYao had never brought him here and that was a welcome thought.

“Here we are,” Jiang Cheng paused as he gestured to an elegant pavilion. It was fairly small but beautiful all the same. The sturdy white stone pillars were bracketed by layers and layers of gauze curtains that fluttered gently in the spring breeze.

Lan XiChen walked up the steps glancing behind as Jiang Cheng spoke to a servant girl he had found walking the hallway.

He turned back and settled himself gracefully on the plush golden cushion of the seat that ran the perimeter of the pavilion and looked out at the view pausing for a moment stunned as miles and miles of blooming flowers swayed in the night wind in front of him, the moonlight drifting down to caress those shy petals.

The air was full of the sweet, mellow scent of budding flowers and Lan XiChen felt almost moved by such a beautiful scene. It was as if they sat in front of an ocean of vibrant blooms in every shade and color imaginable made even more lovely because of the season.

“Nice isn’t it?” Jiang Cheng spoke, settling himself down next to the regal GusuLan Sect Leader.

“My.....my sister brought me here once, she loved this place because you can see all the flowers.”

“It is a very beautiful view, indeed.”

“I always wondered where LanlingJin got all the flowers for their famous Flower Banquets,” he chuckled pouring a cup of tea for his companion and a cup of wine for himself, the servant girl he had found had been quick on her feet and Jiang Cheng appreciated her for it and for the four jars of wine she had brought him.

“You know I had never thought about that,” Lan XiChen chuckled, accepting his tea gracefully.

This was nice, the night was cool, the view beautiful and Jiang Cheng was calm and it was a side of the Jiang Sect Leader he had never seen before and for the first time in a long, long time he felt a small moment of peace there among the flowers.

They were quiet then sitting together under the moon, neither one had anything to say; they were far too old to fill the silence with idle chatter and neither one of them felt the need to, the sheer curtains drifting around them with the breeze.

It was later in the night when Lan XiChen spoke up glancing at his companion, “How have you been Sect Leader Jiang?”

“As well as can be expected, ZeWu-Jun,” Jiang Cheng replied, his voice mellow but the weight behind those words was unmistakable as Guanyin Temple fell into the space between them.

They hadn’t seen each other since that horrible night and Lan XiChen looked away to stare at the flowers. He didn’t know what to say. What did you say to someone after a night like that? Jiang Cheng had poured his heart out and left it there on the floor at Wei WuXian’s feet and Lan XiChen had watched it all. He watched the physical manifestation of his grief, of his sorrow, of his guilt and he had felt at the time like an intruder, an unwelcome witness to the SanDu ShengShou’s weaknesses and he sighed into the night seeking some words of comfort to say but none came. He was just as dry and hollow. If he couldn’t manage his own heart, who was he to try and lighten someone else’s?

And the weight of ChiFeng-Zun and LianFang-Zun settled over him again. That never ending guilt dragging him down and suffocating him with memories.

Jin GuangYao sat still on his knees, his eyes wild with pain, Shuoyue protruding from his chest as blood soaked his golden robes. He easily read what Lan XiChen's eyes meant with their sorrow and steel and he laughed out of anger, "Lan XiChen! In this life, I've lied countless times, killed countless times. Like you said, I killed my father, my brother, my wife, my son, my teacher, my friend—of all the evil in the world, what haven't I done?!"

He took in a breath, rasping, "But I've never even thought of harming you!"

Lan XiChen was astonished.

Jin GuangYao panted harder, gripping the sword as he spoke through clenched teeth, "... Back then, when the Cloud Recesses was burned down and you fled outside, who was the one that saved you from all the danger? And when the GusuLan Sect was rebuilding the Cloud Recesses, who was the one that helped with everything he had? In all these years, when have I ever cracked down on the GusuLan Sect, when have I responded with anything but support?! Apart from this time, when I've only temporarily staunched your spiritual powers, when have I ever wronged you or your sect? When have I ever demanded gratitude?!"

Hearing these questions, Lan XiChen could no longer persuade himself to silence him again and he felt his heart tremble in his chest, Jin GuangYao continued, "Su MinShan could repay me in such a way just because I remembered his name back then. You, on the other hand, ZeWu-Jun, Sect Leader Lan, are as intolerant of me as Nie MingJue—you refuse to spare me even a single breath of life!"

What should he have done? Those words were true and he felt his heart dim in his chest. Was that just another manipulation to spare him his life? Were his affections real? Had he ever been real? He said so many things, did so many things, what was true anymore, what could he trust from that man who swore himself as his brother with nothing but lie after lie?

"ZeWu-Jun?"

Lan XiChen drifted out of his thoughts as he looked over at Jiang Cheng again trying to pull himself out of the mire of his mind and his hurting heart. He looked at the sect leader next to him and he couldn't for the life of him shut that pain down.

Jiang Cheng met those brown eyes for a moment and he stilled, his breath catching in his throat. They were so dark and full to bursting with wild pain. It was there in every corner of those eyes that gazed back at him from under his long lashes and for the span of a breath he saw himself reflected in those heavy brown eyes.

His hand moved by itself holding out the jar of Lanling wine. He had no words to ease Lan XiChen's heartache but he did have alcohol and that had been his friend many times. He knew dimly that it was against the GusuLan rules and that he really shouldn't be offering it to their Sect Leader, but one look into those dark eyes and he had the odd urge to hug those broad shoulders, to wrap his arms around him to temper that awful pain.

Lan XiChen had always seemed so strong, so reliable and it was a shock to see him look so....so small, so broken, his long frame curled inwards in the silver of the moonlight that drifted across them.

Jiang Cheng offered him a drink since he certainly couldn't just up and hug the man no matter how sad he seemed and Lan XiChen gazed at him quietly in contemplation.

"No offense Sect Leader Lan, I can't promise that it will do much good but it might help..." Jiang Cheng spoke gruffly to hide the care in his words and Lan XiChen held out his cup wordlessly.

They drank in silence for a long time after that staring out at the swaying flowers, the silence heavy and at the same time not as they drowned their sorrows in the fine wine of Lanling.

It was a while after they had finished all four jars that Lan XiChen spoke up quietly, "how....how do you deal with this?" His voice was low and almost hoarse and he glanced over to Jiang Cheng with a wealth of desperate emotions in his eyes.

The Jiang Sect Leader considered him and his question for a moment but he answered him honestly just the same, "you don't. Sect Leader Lan, you can't. It will come and go, there will be days when you feel better and there will be days when you feel worse. I still mourn even now..."

Jiang Cheng gazed quietly at Lan XiChen as he fell silent again and for a moment he was struck by the beauty of the GusuLan leader. He looked incomparably beautiful in the shimmery light of the moon, his pale skin flushed with alcohol that dusted his cheeks pink, those long lashes casting shadows across his blush. He was handsome and beautiful at the same time, both broad and strong and yet graceful, long and willowy as though a god had sculpted him from jade for an example of perfection.

"I....I can't breathe sometimes," Lan XiChen spoke softly as he looked away again casting his gaze over the flowers as though to hide the pain in his eyes.

Jiang Cheng considered him again, pulling his eyes from all that beauty as he searched for his words and perhaps it was the alcohol caressing his skin or perhaps it was the stillness of the night or maybe it was the comfort of a man just a broken as he was but he spoke softly, "neither can I....I feel like I'll choke on this stolen core.....everytime I use it, everytime I feel it...."

He fell silent and for another long while they sat there staring unseeing out at the field of flowers. The dim light of the moon rippling across those swaying petals with the night breeze, filling the air with that soft mellow scent.

"Sect Leader Jiang," Lan XiChen spoke up after another moment, "you did not steal it, it was a gift," he turned to look at him feeling certain in his words despite the haze in his head.

"What gift?!" Jiang Cheng barked with a cynical laugh, "what gift is it to know all your efforts and all your work is meaningless? What gift is it to know YunmengJiang stands today

because of Wei WuXian?! What gift is it to have power that is not mine? Tell me Sect Leader Lan what gift is this shit core?!”

Lan XiChen turned fully to face him meeting those hot angry eyes as the fiery SanDu ShengShou reared his head.

“It was the gift of a tool, Sect Leader Jiang, that core is nothing but a tool to wield as you see fit. You rebuilt Lotus Pier, not Wei WuXian. You trained hundreds of disciples yourself, you built YunmengJiang up from ashes with that tool. And maybe Wei WuXian could have done the same but he didn’t. He chose to give you the tool you needed to do what needed to be done. It is not meaningless, Sect Leader Jiang. Do not mock your accomplishments, you have achieved great things. *You* have worked hard for your people, not Wei WuXian.” Lan XiChen spoke clearly and succinctly as he stared into the maelstrom of emotion that swirled in Jiang Cheng’s eyes and he noticed something odd in that moment as they stared at each other.

He noticed for the very first time that Jiang Cheng had the most beautiful eyes he had ever seen, a blue so pale it caught the edge of grey. Those beautiful eyes almost seemed to glitter in the silver shafts of the moonlight that drifted in through the long, flowing curtains of the pavilion. It was a color he had never seen before, never took the time to notice. Those eyes widened in shock and his black lashes trembled for a moment as he blinked a couple of times struck speechless from Lan XiChen’s words.

Was that really how the esteemed GusuLan Sect Leader thought of him? Did Lan XiChen really think, he of all people, had achieved great things? How was that possible? No one thought he could achieve anything?!

“B....but.....it’s not my core?” He muttered a little unsteadily from those words or the wine, he couldn’t tell. No one had ever acknowledged him like that, not his mother, not his father, not his sister, not his brother, not even his disciples or his steadfast lieutenant had ever spoken that way to him before and for a heart stopping moment Jiang Cheng thought he might actually cry, so touched with the words he had ached to hear for so long, had so desperately needed to hear but that could have been the wine too.

“Sect Leader Jiang, a core is nothing but a tool, it’s a tool we hone and sharpen and train. It feels personal to us because after all it is part of our spiritual pathways but at the end of the day it is a tool and nothing more. You cannot take the measure of a man by how strong his core is. Greatness comes from action and accomplishment from discipline. Even a man with no core can be great and so too can a man with a strong core be mediocre. Do not define yourself by the tools you use,” Lan XiChen stared back into those eyes for a moment before he scoffed at himself, his voice dripping with irony.

“Ha...listen to me.... who am I to judge the greatness of a man,” Lan XiChen trailed off with a mocking lilt to his voice and those cool brown eyes drifted away from him again. That laugh had been so jarring, so dark that it didn’t match the sunlight that always hung around Lan XiChen and his soft smiles.

And the truth was, it had been sometime since Jiang Cheng had seen that smile, and he blurted out the first thing that popped up in his hazy, drunk mind, the warmth of the wine tingling under his skin.

“ZeWu-Jun, come to Yunmeng with me!”

“What?” Lan XiChen turned back to him with surprise in those big brown eyes and Jiang Cheng stumbled over his words again wondering dimly what possessed him to say that but he continued; he wanted a chance to lighten that awful burden that dragged him down if only to repay him for the kindness of those words that had eased just a little of the crushing weight of his own heart.

“You have stepped back from your position for a while right? You have time, come spend a few weeks in Yunmeng, we will plant the lotuses soon and I would like to show you the Kun Wu Jian my juniors are practicing. I think the sun would do you a world of good.”

Lan XiChen looked at him with wide, curious eyes as he considered the proposition. He had never spent much time in Yunmeng before and maybe it would be nice to be away from the hanshi for a while. It’s not like he had anything to do other than drink himself to sleep in the gloom of his room. It could be nice to spend time with the Jiangs, to spend time with Jiang Cheng and his glittering pale blue eyes.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Wah!!! TYSM @fengshouzai for this amazing comm for Lotus Seeds! Its gorgeous and perfect and I love it so much!! Please see the end note for the link!!!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Good morning ZeWu-Jun!” a cheerful disciple called out as he spied the Sect Leader walking down the hallway of Lotus Pier.

“You are just in time for breakfast,” Kuo RuShan spoke amicable. Lan XiChen nodded in greeting at the YunmengJiang head disciple and they walked together towards the sword hall, the main hall where the sect took its meals.

“How are you enjoying your stay?” Kuo RuShan asked again, he was bright and energetic much like all of the Yunmeng people he had met so far. He wondered for a moment if there was something in the water because he had yet to find someone calm and serene, well perhaps the quiet Li Kang.

Li Kang was firm and kind and he spoke with a soft, deep voice that caught your attention. At first glance he seemed fairly weak, his body was slight, long and graceful with narrow shoulders but Lan XiChen had seen him in the training grounds. He was incredible with the two swords he wielded and Lan XiChen had asked Jiang Cheng with no small amount of curiosity if that was common for Yunmeng disciples. Jiang Cheng had paused for a moment replying with easy words that it wasn't really an issue. If a disciple wanted to train with two all they had to do was ask, one of his cousins had chosen a long battle spear instead of a sword all together. He had been pretty good before the Wen War.

And Lan XiChen had marveled at that, he marveled at how relaxed everything seemed. Of course there were rules but no one awoke before 8, their meals were full of talking and laughing, they stayed up late playing in the lakes and drank wine whenever and wherever. But for all their rowdiness, they were strict and disciplined in the training fields and that had been another interesting thing to watch.

The YunmengJiang Sect had 500 disciples and Jiang Cheng trained every one of them himself from his young energetic juniors to the powerful seniors instead of deferring to a grandmaster or his lieutenant and it inspired no small amount of hero worship in his disciples who were excited at all hours of the day or night. Even more interesting was just how skilled they were. They would run practice drills for 5 hours alternating swordsmanship with archery

before attending to the 4 hours of classes after lunch and then spend the rest of the evening boating or swimming in lakes and ponds that were already warm despite the season.

And Lan XiChen had asked with real curiosity why Yunmeng disciples didn't meditate and Jiang Cheng's answer had been so very Jiang of him.

"We don't meditate because it's kind of boring and most of us can't sit still for very long so instead we just funnel our energy into practice. Yunmeng disciples cultivate with their swords, more like Nie Sect than Gusu. I think I tried to meditate once and fell asleep, I fell right off the rock into the mud and A-jie had laughed at me for hours."

Lan XiChen had felt a tiny smile curl up on his lips at that and it felt odd to smile a real smile after so long. The other thing refreshing about Lotus Pier was all the sunshine. All day every day the sun was big in the blue sky with great fluffy white clouds. Gusu had sunshine too obviously but it was a different kind of sun, it felt almost paler somehow, gentler.

The sun in Yunmeng was as fiery and hot as its disciples and Lan XiChen had smiled some more despite himself. The haunting pain still lingered in his heart and turned his dreams to nightmares most nights but the whirlwind days with the Jiangs were an amazing distraction and slowly Lan XiChen found himself falling into their routines. He always awoke at 5am but he would curl back up in his bed content to wait for the sect to wake up. He would sleep with them too, often staying up to talk sword techniques or cultivation practices with Jiang Cheng as they shared tea in the late hours of the night.

Lan XiChen lost track of how many rules he broke during the first few weeks he spent with the Jiangs and he long stopped caring. He was continuously blown away by the ferocious SanDu ShengShou. He was loud with his scathing words but his hands were gentle as he taught the people of his sect how to thread a bow, how to shoot an arrow, how to ride a horse. He taught everything himself and though he was demanding on the practice fields, he never asked of them what he didn't ask of himself and Lan XiChen was surprised at all the new sides of Jiang Cheng.

Contrary to what he had expected of the fiery sect leader, Jiang Cheng was not always loud and abrasive, he was not always yelling obscenities and whipping people left and right. In fact the longer Lan XiChen stayed with them the more he doubted all those rumors that had painted him as someone terrible, cold and cruel who would snatch cultivators out of their beds to whip them into confessions.

In the days that followed his stay in Yunmeng, Lan XiChen was also continuously surprised. He was surprised at how sincere of a leader Jiang Cheng was, how thoroughly he protected the huge, sprawling land YunmengJiang called home. He turned no report away, deferred to no elder or senior more often than not leading night hunts himself which was quite honestly unheard of for sect leaders. Most sect leaders would assign disciples to handle problems both as experience for them and because it was beneath a sect leader to do so but not for Jiang Cheng. He led his juniors to ferret out small little poltergeists that had haunted only bakers in the northernmost village of Yitang and the wraiths that plagued the entire city of Wuluo in the south and on and on and on.

YunmengJiang tackled night hunts every 4 or 5 days which was also unheard of. Most cultivators only handled large scale or violent problems and those did not come up very often but not the Jiangs. Their motto, 'Attempt the Impossible' seemed to hold true for Jiang Cheng since he refused to let anything in to hurt his people or mess with their livelihoods and that inspired an extraordinary loyalty from the people of Yunmeng.

Everywhere Lan XiChen turned, people sung Jiang Cheng's praises even if they were all wary of his explosive temper; they treated him more like a dog with a bark worse than his bite. Even Lan XiChen had felt a little uncomfortable that first day he had watched the disciples train under Jiang Cheng's sharp tongue and merciless words but soon enough he caught the giggles of the juniors and the grins of the seniors and he realized that Jiang Cheng's bark was indeed worse than his bite and he had felt another small smile tug at his lips again.

There was an odd fondness growing in his heart that he couldn't quite describe as he followed Jiang Cheng around watching him lead his sect and he found himself more often than not smiling more and more of those tiny little smiles in the warm halls of Lotus Pier that echoed with energy and laughter at all times of the day and night.

It was morning 3 days later in the Yunmeng sword hall that he heard something else interesting as the disciples talked back and forth over breakfast.

"It's almost time to plant the lotuses!" Lin Jun spoke excitedly over his morning soup as he elbowed a boy next to him.

"Aw Yes!! We're planting them in Dongting Lake this year right? Old Man Bai must be smug as hell," Hou Zian laughed as he bit a huge mouthful of his dumpling.

"Haha! He's probably thinking serves us damn kids right," Kuo RuShan grinned across from them.

Lan XiChen listened curiously as he glanced next to him at Jiang Cheng who sat there drinking his tea. He didn't eat much and that had left a sour note in Lan XiChen's mouth. With the way he trained and the amount of night hunts he did, he should eat twice or even three times what he did but he had an odd sense that despite the fiery personality and energy he showed to others there were some deep wounds in his heart.

He could still remember that night back at Lanling palace with the smell of flowers in his nose, drunk though he may have been, he remembered the chaotic torrent of emotions that had glittered in those pale blue eyes that night and he suspected that had something to do with his appetite and the fact that he didn't seem to sleep much either.

Lan XiChen pulled his gaze away from the uneaten breakfast in front of Jiang Cheng and asked him conversational, "so what are they talking about?" He nodded down to the bantering disciples as every one of them seemed to be talking about lotuses.

"Ah," Jiang Cheng glanced over, "we have a tradition here. Once a year in the spring we choose a lake to help plant lotuses in. It's been a tradition since my great, great grandfather's time. We go out as a sect and plant for an entire day then at night we host a feast for the

villagers. It was originally intended to help the people of Yunmeng with their work and also for them to get to know the sect they rely on but the disciples just get excited because it's one of the few days of the year they don't have to train."

He grinned lightly as he looked down fondly on his sect, "we're going out tomorrow, would you like to come Sect Leader Lan? It's pretty boring work."

"I would be delighted Sect Leader Jiang"

~*~

The morning of the lotus planting was the first time since he had arrived where the whole sect was bustling with activity at 6 in the morning though they did it with huge, sleepy yawns and Lan XiChen had found yet another interesting thing to consider.

Every one of the 500 disciples stood ready in the training grounds dressed in commoner clothes. They wore one simple short robe over a pair of brown pants that cut off just below their knees and no one had their hair properly arranged. Instead they all had their hair pulled up in high knots with no kind of ribbon or ornamentation. Their ever present swords were also absent. It was odd but Lan XiChen copied them just the same tying his long hair up as he too wore the plain outfit Jiang Cheng had given him the night before.

"Alright, line up and grab some dumplings," Jiang Cheng spoke up as he stepped into the practice area with his ever present lieutenant, both were also similarly dressed, "we're going to plant Dongting Lake this year and Old Man Bai is expecting us within the hour. Once you have your breakfast join your group, your seniors will man the boats. I'll meet you there, understand?"

"Yes Sect Leader!" They all chorused back to him and Jiang Cheng nodded at his lieutenant who would stay behind to make sure all the disciples left properly before he too would join them. He looked to Lan XiChen right after.

"ZeWu-Jun shall we go?"

And the two of them left hopping onto their swords as they flew the short distance to the impressive Dongting Lake. It was huge, easily twice the size of Lotus Pier surrounded on all sides by tall trees and at the far end was a humble cottage near the shore.

Lan XiChen was marveling over its size and its rich, green waters as he glanced next to him at Jiang Cheng with a question, "why do you not have your disciples fly?"

"It's part of the tradition, today is a day to work with the earth and the mud to plant life into the lakes, so they go by boat and normally we would too but Old Man Bai is a fussy old bat, I don't want to be late"

"Really? Wouldn't he be happy for the help?"

"Usually people are but that cranky old man has the best plants all year round and idiot disciples steal his lotus seeds all the time so he's always mad about one thing or another."

Jiang Cheng grinned at him with a mischievous smile and the question fell out of his mouth before he could stop it.

“Did you used to steal them too?”

Jiang Cheng laughed at that, “definitely and got hit on the head too with his long oar. He’s a menace that old man.”

Lan XiChen smiled at that. Jiang Cheng was bright today, that ever present melancholy that took him when he thought no one was looking was gone and Lan XiChen stared for a moment, his eyes catching that grin and for an odd reason it filled him with warmth, with an unfamiliar comfort that tickled his chest.

He pulled his gaze away as they landed on the banks of the huge lake near that modest cottage.

“Good morning Old Man Bai,” Jiang Cheng called out to a stooped old figure that sat down on a bench outside the house.

“Ah? Young Jiang Cheng I see, here to pay back all those seeds you stole?” An old, old man answered him with a hoarse gravelly voice. He had a head full of white hair that curled out from under his wide brimmed hat and he stood just a handful of inches taller than a child. He fixed them with a sharp eye that was much younger than the man himself.

“I paid back those seeds years ago,” Jiang Cheng replied and Lan XiChen blinked at the warmth in his tone, for all that he griped it seemed that he had a fond place in his heart for this grumpy, weathered old man.

“Hmph, only because I caught you!”

“Old man let it rest, I’m bringing the whole sect today, we’re going to fill your lake with so many lotuses you’ll never have to plant again,” Jiang Cheng spoke as he grinned at Old Man Bai.

“You had better!”

Jiang Cheng laughed at that and he tugged Lan XiChen over to a huge group of woven baskets. They were large and barrel shaped with thatched lids full to bursting with thousands and thousands of green seeds.

“Psst!” Jiang Cheng hissed as he glanced over making sure Old Man Bai was looking out at the fleet of little boats that rowed in at the mouth of the lake.

Lan XiChen looked over curiously.

“You ever eat a lotus seed before?”

He shook his head glancing back to Old Man Bai too, for some odd reason he felt like he was a little boy again trying not to get caught when he snuck candies from shifu’s office.

“Here,” Jiang Cheng snatched a seed out of the basket and peeled it lightning fast glancing up to make sure that old man was busy with the disciples who were starting to land on the shore.

“Should we-mph?!” Jiang Cheng shoved the little seed into his mouth quickly before he stepped away to deal with the growing crowd of disciples who looked happy and excited to get started leaving Lan XiChen blinking in shock.

Wha.....t?!

Jiang Cheng just fed him a lotus seed. For a long moment he stood there too stunned to move, his lips almost tingling from those light fingertips that had brushed his mouth, his ears positively burning with a blush that ran down the back of his neck and he really did not know what to make of that. He glanced at Jiang Cheng again as he separated his disciples into groups and instructed them to grab one of the heavy baskets. Each group was directed to a different part of the lake where they would work until every seed had been planted deep in the mud.

He shook some sense into his head for a moment and bit down on that little seed. It had a crispy, clean, almost sweet taste that filled his mouth and he blinked again.

“ZeWu-Jun,” Jiang Cheng’s voice startled him into motion as he walked back over, “come on, you and I will share a basket with the disciples over there,” then he grabbed his arm and hauled him over and Lan XiChen was struck again with that odd flush when he felt those warm fingers curl over his wrist and wondered dimly to himself, *what in the world is going on?*

~*~

“Ok ZeWu-Jun look it’s really simple, just bite off the tip of the shell til you can see the little white part then stick it in the mud,” Jiang Cheng spoke next to him as he plucked a seed, nipped the edge of the green shell and bent over planting it quickly.

They were standing knee deep in the lake close to the shore, one hand holding up the edge of their shirts to hold the pile of little seeds and then Jiang Cheng did it again. He snagged a seed, bit off the tip and shoved it into the mud then he took a small step to the right and did it again.

“When you bite the tip it lets the water in better and the lotuses will sprout sooner. You will have to come back closer to the end of summer to see the blossoms, this lake will be flowering by then,” Jiang Cheng spoke up between planting and Lan XiChen blinked as he fished out his own seed. He eyed it curiously before he bit the tip off and stuck it in the mud.

He looked down at it for a moment watching the little ripples on the surface of the water. It felt good to plant something, felt good to work with the lake and he wondered if that was what Jiang Cheng had been talking about earlier on their flight over.

Hmm.... a day to work with the earth and the mud to plant life into the lakes

He liked that very much and he did it again, snipping the tip of the seed with his teeth quickly before he bent at the waist to push it into the lake bed.

“Not too deep ok? Like half a finger deep so when it sprouts it can reach the sunlight faster,” Jiang Cheng called over already a few steps away from him and Lan XiChen nodded and planted another seed as a smile touched the corners of his eyes.

Life...huh

It was nice to work with life, to do something good, to work with the earth under the morning sun and he dug his toes into the mud enjoying all the *life* around him. There were people up and down the shores of the lake as boys and girls and men and women laughed and smiled and dug their toes into the mud just like him, planting life into this lake. Life that would bloom with huge green leaves and bright flowers with those sweet little seeds he had tasted for the first time when Jiang Cheng had touched his mouth with those callused fingertips and he licked his lips almost as if remembering the feel of it.

He glanced over at him again, watching as he bent down to plant another lotus seed, his face was bright and open in a way he hadn't seen before. The sharp angles of his eyes were soft, the tilt of his mouth happy surrounded by the people he cared about as they worked the earth together. He looked...beautiful in this moment. The sun pulling deep highlights from his hair and warming up his pale skin. He looked vibrant and full of life, and he had never seen that before either.

And Lan XiChen plucked another seed, nipped the tip and planted that one too.

For the rest of the day the YunmengJiang Sect planted the lotuses pausing around midday for a light lunch. Most of them weren't very hungry since every single one of them had eaten those sweet seeds much to the cranky yelling of Old Man Bai but even he seemed happy with so much life and energy around him.

The planting of the lotuses was simple and yet for all its simplicity it created something so much more for the people there in that lake that day. It wove an energy, a current of happiness, of tranquility around them that soothed their hearts and Lan XiChen took a deep, deep breath of clean air, the smell of the lake, of the forest filling his senses and he felt something odd in chest; it felt like something dead, deep within him, had finally stopped bleeding. He was no fool to think everything would be suddenly better but for the whole day he planted lotuses with Jiang Cheng, he felt a peace in his heart that he hadn't felt in a long, long time.

~*~

“ZeWu-Jun, do you need more?” Jiang Cheng spoke right next to his ear as he headed back to the seed basket startling Lan XiChen who's thoughts had drifted away under the heat of the sun.

“I'm going to--WOAH!?” Jiang Cheng yelped as Lan XiChen turned around quickly surprised out of his planting in mid motion, his arm with all that Lan arm strength swinging out and knocking Jiang Cheng flat on his back in the lake with a splash.

Jiang Cheng sputtered sitting back up quickly as he shook his wet bangs out of his face. He stared up at Lan XiChen astonished for a moment as he blinked those blue eyes at him.

“Oh?! No!!!! I’m so sorry Sect L---”

Lan XiChen had only a second to see that mischievous grin curl up over those pale pink lips when Jiang Cheng snapped his foot out catching the esteemed GusuLan Sect Leader’s ankle and dropping him right on his butt in the lake with a big splash.

“Wha?!”

“HAHAHA!” Jiang Cheng busted out with laughter as he stared at the soaking wet Lan XiChen in front of him.

“Serves you right!” He laughed again, his smile so full and bold on his face, his gaze so bright, so vibrant as the sun called the blue in those beautiful eyes out. He was almost glittering with all the water droplets on his skin and Lan XiChen felt his breath catch in his chest. He stared and stared at this Jiang Cheng. This Jiang Cheng who looked so beautiful as he sat there in the warm water of the lake.

“You ok ZeWu-Jun? You look like a wet cat, haha” Jiang Cheng grinned at him, his lips curling up with mirth and Lan XiChen’s heart pounded in his chest. He couldn’t seem to think passed how incredibly beautiful Jiang Cheng looked in his happiness, how bright those gorgeous eyes were, how soft his pink lips looked.

“Hello ZeWu-Jun? Anyone home?” Jiang Cheng chuckled and another mischievous grin tugged at his lips and he snapped his hand splashing water at the stunned Lan XiChen. His eyes widened in shock for a moment as a wave of water drenched him from his head to his toes pulling him out of his head. He felt a grin tug at his own lips and he sent a splash right back.

“WOAH!?” Jiang Cheng gasped as all that Lan arm strength sent out a huge wave at him and he jumped to his feet, challenge accepted.

“Ha! Take that!” He called as he sent a large slash back in retaliation, skipping out of the way as Lan XiChen hopped up on his feet again. He ducked down sending another wave of water at Jiang Cheng who was laughing and jumping around the lake to avoid it.

“Can’t catch me ZeWu-Jun! I was born in a lake!” Jiang Cheng leapt over the next splash and threw his arms in the water to send it right back before he lunged to the side, water soaking his back as Lan XiChen’s big splash hit him, the force was enough to loosen his knot and his long mane of black hair fell loose cascading around his shoulders in a messy wave.

Lan XiChen felt a real smile bloom on his lips as he jumped forward intent on catching the laughing man ducking and dodging his splashes, his long hair rippling in the air as he danced out of range.

The sunlight pulled impossibly deep, almost blue highlights from those black locks that caressed his back as he laughed again throwing a surge of water right in his face and Lan

XiChen tried to duck but it was a big splash. He grinned, wiping the water out of his eyes before he caught sight of Jiang Cheng again and his heart sped up in his chest. He was so incredibly beautiful, happiness easing the stern lines of his face and his eyes almost sparkling with laughter.

He lunged forward turning minutely as Jiang Cheng made to jump passed him and he caught that grinning man; he wrapped his arms around his slim waist and fell back into the water with a tremendous splash, that wild laughter rich in his ear.

“ARGH!!! ZEWU-JUN!” He gasped as he surfaced again, shaking his wet hair out of his face as he glanced down at the man laying under him. Lan XiChen smiled brightly back with a playful grin on his lips and it was Jiang Cheng’s turn to catch his run away heart.

Damn Lans....how are they always so fucking beautiful?!

Lan XiChen was breathtakingly beautiful with that sweet smile and those big brown eyes. Jiang Cheng huffed for a second trying to catch his breath as he laid there in the water too excited from their little battle to notice the compromising position they were in. His entire body was flat on top of Lan XiChen’s as they laid there in the lake, those strong arms wrapped around his waist as they panted a little from their match.

And Jiang Cheng really couldn’t help it when he caught those eyes again, those bright brown eyes that glowed a warm amber under the sunlight and for a moment they stared at each other and something odd bloomed in his chest. He felt his heart race and his breath catch in his throat as he stared into the eyes that stared back at him.

Lan XiChen was captivated, mesmerized, pinned to the spot as those blue eyes gazed at him from under those long wet lashes that sent shadows across his cheeks, his loose messy hair framing his face and Lan XiChen could no more control himself then he could stop his breath as he lifted his hand up. He slid his knuckles across the SanDu ShengShou’s cheek gently as he whispered into the space between them.

“You.....are.....so beautiful Jiang Cheng...”

~*~

The YunmengJiang Sect was large, it boasted over 500 disciples, elders and grandmasters and that day in the lake every single junior and senior disciple stopped mid motion in their planting when a bright, loud laugh cut through the air.

They turned almost as one staring in absolute fascination at their ferocious leader jumping and splashing around the lake with the esteemed head of GusuLan. They threw water back and forth as they played around like children and every single disciple froze in shock.

No one had ever heard the SanDu ShengShou laugh before, no one had ever seen him smile that way before either as he ducked and dodged the other sect leader splashing each other in their game and the disciples had felt their mouths drop open in sheer surprise. They couldn’t stop staring, something about Jiang Cheng’s happiness was amazing to see and they were amazed to see it and it was in that moment that every one of those YunmengJiang disciples

grew immediately and deeply fond of Lan XiChen for anyone who could make their fiery sect leader laugh like that had to be someone special.

And they watched the leaders laugh and toss the water back and forth until with a great splash ZeWu-Jun grabbed him about the waist and toppled back into the lake. They all grinned watching the pair who seemed oblivious to the world around them and when he blushed they all did too though no one had heard what Lan XiChen said to him to blow that wildfire flush across his cheeks.

And they wondered for a moment if perhaps the real reason Lan XiChen had come to spend a month with them was something far more basic than they had originally thought. Perhaps the great GusuLan Sect Leader was here with them because he just liked their SanDu ShengShou and it really was something as simple as that.

Chapter End Notes

Urgh I love this so much!!! Please look at it!!!

<https://twitter.com/brieze01/status/1358873965024976904?s=19>

Btw guys I have a twitter if anyone wants to come say hi lol I love geeking out about mdzs and yoi :)

Check out Brie (@brieze01): <https://twitter.com/brieze01?s=09>

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Jiang Cheng was a mess as he stood up from his bath, shaking out his wet hair. He grabbed his towel almost stumbling as he tried to sort himself out.

What in the high hell did Lan XiChen mean I'm beautiful?! I'm not beautiful?! Did he hit his head or something? Maybe he drank too much lake water?!

Jiang Cheng grabbed his regular robes dressing himself distractedly as he tried to put himself in order. He had the Lotus Feast to attend later that evening but he couldn't for the life of him get his heart rate back under control. He could still feel those soft fingers on his cheek, still see those warm amber eyes staring up at him.

Oh fuck....get it together Jiang Cheng...he was clearly hallucinating, there is no way he meant to call me beautiful?!

Jiang Cheng tripped over his feet as he stomped across the floor of his room, his cheeks burning with that damnable blush that would not go away. After Lan XiChen had said those ridiculous words, he had popped up off the sect leader in profound embarrassment and threw himself heart and soul into his planting to keep his mind off of Lan XiChen and those honey brown eyes.

How can he think I'm beautiful?! He's the ones who fucking beautiful...

And Jiang Cheng huffed as he settled himself down at his dressing table in front of a new mirror the maids had brought in. He braided his hair and pulled it up into his regular knot pausing as he caught sight of his pink cheeks.

What the hell are you blushing about?! Are you some fucking innocent little maiden?!

He glared accusingly at his reflection, he was clearly not a maiden but he had to admit that he was definitely innocent. He had never flirted or kissed or touched anyone else and no one seemed to want to do that with him anyway. The matchmakers of Yunmeng had all given up on him since the ladies they paired him with all left in a huff or in tears or in fury but Jiang Cheng couldn't help it.

He wasn't some suave, dashing man, he was bold and loud and direct, his mouth getting him into trouble more often than not but what was he supposed to do? Sit there like a mute and let the ladies talk his ears off? If they were boring he told them so, if they asked about their dresses and he didn't like it he told them that too. It wasn't like matchmaking dates came with instructions.

And the only example he had ever seen was the abrasive, angry love his parents had. As an adult now he knew they had loved each other in their own way, his mother never would have

matched Zidian to his father if she didn't care for him but the wealth of old pain and insecurities between them had characterized their relationship his entire life and unfortunately he was more his mother's son than his father's. He had her same fiery temper, her same bluntness, her same scathing demeanor and there was no way on earth someone so refined, so elegant, so poised and perfect like Lan XiChen would be interested in him, especially not for something of a more romantic nature.

But then why the hell did he call me beautiful? You don't just go around telling people they're beautiful for no reason?!

What the hell ZeWu-Jun?!

He shoved his feet into his boots with feeling as he pursed his lips. Did he want something romantic with Lan XiChen? He paused for a moment as he let that thought sink in. He had never even considered it before. He had never even considered a lover of any kind before mostly because he was sure no one would ever *want* to be his lover but now that there was a breathtakingly gorgeous man in front of him telling him he was beautiful he reconsidered the idea.

Lan XiChen was an amazing leader, a steadfast and honorable man with incredible cultivation skills. He was as sweet as he was powerful and Jiang Cheng had considered it an honor when the GusuLan Sect Leader had agreed to spend time with him in Yunmeng.

He had been shocked at the invitation but truth be told, Jiang Cheng had been shocked too. Honestly though the only thing that had crossed his mind that night in the Lanling Flower Pavilion was just how much his words had moved him and how he wanted a chance to repay the GusuLan leader for it. To consider the core inside him as a tool, as separate from himself had been something he had never thought of before.

And to hear that such an incredible cultivator thought him accomplished, thought he had achieved great things, told him not to belittle himself had felt like a spark in his chest. It had been such a handful of words but to be acknowledged by one of the greatest cultivators of his lifetime had done something amazing to his heart.

It still hurt, that old hate was still there with that awful love and he still missed his brother but something about the constant presence of Lan XiChen made it a little more bearable. Something about having someone see him for who he was was amazing and it had soothed his sore heart in so many ways.

Lan XiChen was a breath of fresh air in his crippled lungs and even though he floundered in his own pain he was still like a ray of sunshine across the grey wash of Jiang Cheng's life. He looked forward to seeing him at breakfast, to showing him the disciples he was proud of, to teaching him the ways of the sect he loved, to sharing his life with this noble man and he hoped in some small way it would be at the very least a distraction for him.

Something to take his mind off the pain in his heart because nothing could really heal it. Death didn't just stop hurting; even days later, months later, years later it would rear its head and drag you down and Jiang Cheng knew that feeling intimately. What he said to Lan

XiChen that night at the pavilion had been truth. He mourned even now. He mourned his parents, he mourned his sister and he mourned the brother he loved who didn't love him.

Jiang Cheng glanced at his reflection once more as he met his own eyes in the mirror. He really didn't know what to make of Lan XiChen and those words he had whispered to him at the lake but he did know that he liked the smile that had taken him in the afternoon with lotus seeds in his hands and the Yunmeng sun on his face.

He had looked transformed, as though a breath of life had filled his lungs and Jiang Cheng wondered for a moment if that was the true power of the lotuses. Perhaps it was so much more than just a tradition, perhaps it was a way to connect with the earth, to connect with people, to remember that life was all around them no matter how much death and pain and despair they weathered.

The lotus planting had been good for Lan XiChen and Jiang Cheng had been rewarded with his bright eyes and that soft smile he had missed, missed more than he had originally thought.

Maybe Lan XiChen had been honest, maybe he meant what he had said, maybe he really did think *he* was beautiful and Jiang Cheng really did not know what to do with that. He pulled his eyes from the mirror and walked out of his room with something fond and soft in his heart. If he had accomplished nothing else that month, he would consider it a victory to have seen that sunny smile once more.

~*~

"Welcome Sect Leader!" An elder called out as Jiang Cheng stepped into the sword hall. There were people everywhere, villagers and disciples helping themselves to the long tables of food and sharing the rich lotus wine Yunmeng was famous for. Everywhere he looked people were happy and loud, laughing and smiling and Jiang Cheng liked that. He liked knowing his people were content with their life, that they were happy and prosperous and he was proud to say he had laid the foundations for that even if he had used Wei WuXian's core to do it.

That core didn't crush his heart as much as it did before, Lan XiChen's words echoing around and around in his ear. It was such a simple idea and it had been such a small handful of words but it turned his entire mind upside down. It felt good to be able to look upon his accomplishments again and know they were his, so what if he used that core, it was no different than using Zidian or Sandu.

He nodded his greetings as he settled himself down into his chair on the dais. He watched his people enjoy their feast with fondness in his heart. Lan XiChen had no idea how much comfort he had given him, how much peace. The night after the pavilion he had dreamed of nothing for the first time in a long, long time. No nightmare had pulled him from his sleep, no dream had left him tossing and turning.

He wasn't instantly healed, that old ache still there in his chest but it was faded a little around the edges. Lan XiChen had given him a way to understand how to live with this burden he carried and Jiang Cheng needed to help him through his own darkness in the hopes of offering some small measure of peace that paled in comparison to the one he had given him.

“Good evening Sect Leader Jiang,” the man in question spoke up next to him as he settled himself down in the place of honor next to the SanDu ShengShou.

Jiang Cheng turned to him with a greeting on his lips as he paused for a second.

“You.....are.....so beautiful Jiang Cheng...”

He gasped with a stilted breath as his voice caught in his mouth. He coughed quickly to clear his throat abruptly as he forced the pleasantries out, his cheeks flaring up as he remembered those whispering words.

Damn it..... He seethed quietly to himself as he wrestled with his emotions but that infernal blush stayed and bless Lan XiChen for ignoring it as he poured them both some tea.

“I enjoyed today Sect Leader Jiang thank you for inviting me,” Lan XiChen spoke cordially as he lifted the steaming cup of tea to his lips and Jiang Cheng kick started his mind.

“I am glad you enjoyed it ZeWu-Jun, you need to come back close to the end of summer, those lotuses will be in bloom then and it will be a sight to see Dongting Lake flowering. I think we planted over a hundred thousand seeds today,” he smiled as he grabbed his cup of hot tea. He carefully pushed the memory of their afternoon away willing his blush to die down.

“I have never planted so much before in my entire life,” Lan XiChen chuckled as he glanced over to catch Jiang Cheng’s eyes but the sect leader was looking away from him with a fetching blush on his cheeks and the Gusu leader paused, swallowing for a moment.

He could still remember that moment in the lake with Jiang Cheng’s body laying on his, his hair wild around his face with those brilliant blue eyes. He had meant every word he had said. Jiang Cheng had looked beautiful there in the Yunmeng sun and he looked beautiful now with a light flush on his cheeks as he looked away shyly and Lan XiChen just really did not know what to do with himself. He wanted to tug him closer but that felt strange, he wanted to wrap his arms around his slim waist again but that thought was odd, he wanted to be close to the fiery SanDu ShengShou and for the life of him, he couldn’t tell you why.

Something special had happened to him that afternoon at the lake when he had seen Jiang Cheng so carefree with happiness and life and it had both filled him with comfort and set his heart to racing. He had never before felt like this caught between the urge to run and the urge to pull this man closer. It felt a little wild, a little scary and Lan XiChen did not know what to do so he drank his tea trying in vain to drag his eyes from the pink flush that dusted that cute nose.

They sat there side by side in this odd place they found themselves in, neither one quite able to look the other one in the eye as the people of the village came up in long lines with their greeting and their gratitudes and the ferocious SanDu ShengShou was pleasant and friendly and Lan XiChen watched him. He watched every graceful nod of his head remembering the mess his wild hair had been around his face. He watched every tilt of his lips that had looked so pale and pink in the sunshine. He caressed the soft skin of his cheek with his eyes as though it were his knuckles again. He could still feel it beneath his hand.

He watched those blue eyes and those long lashes as Jiang Cheng entertained his people and he was content. Lan XiChen found himself remarkably content to just sit there and watch Jiang Cheng handle his duties.

After another hour, Jiang Cheng could take it no longer. His skin itched under the weight of Lan XiChen's eyes and he feared his cheeks would catch fire. He had blamed the wine for his blush, the wine he hadn't drunk at all as well wishers asked about his flush and he nodded and spoke pleasantries to hundreds of people who stopped by the dais and after a couple of hours he was exhausted. His skin was tingling from ZeWu-Jun's stare and if he didn't get out from under it he would surely melt into a puddle. Those little words from the afternoon swirling around and around in his head.

"ZeWu-Jun," He glanced over meeting those big brown eyes by accident and his cheeks flared up in response which he carefully ignored.

"Would you care to walk with me? The night is nice and I think I've been here long enough," he nodded to the sword hall still bustling with people and he was summarily unprepared for the gentle smile Lan XiChen gave him.

He resisted the hand that wanted to fly up over his heart as Lan XiChen favored him with a brilliant smile that set his heart racing in his chest and he wondered morosely if the beautiful GusuLan Leader could stop being so breathtaking for a moment since he wasn't sure how much he could take of all that flawless beauty.

"I would be delighted Sect Leader Jiang," he spoke with his smooth baritone and Jiang Cheng sighed softly as his heart beat even faster. Apparently it had just lost its mind and he willed himself to ignore it as they walked out into the evening.

They walked along the pier for a while in an aimless pattern, the air between them comfortable and yet odd with some nameless tension. Neither one spoke and neither one saw the need to; the thin sliver of the moon drifting over them as they accompanied each other in the cool night that came with the Yunmeng spring.

After a while, Jiang Cheng led them to a far away pavilion. It was small and felt personal. It was made up of beautiful arches that supported long fluttering curtains and it sat at the east edge of Lotus Pier far away from the bustling main hall. It was quiet there, the pavilion overlooking the lake and the water flowers that grew up along the structure. Creeping vines curled around the wooden beams and they were dotted with blossoms that were just waiting for the heat of the summer sun.

"Would you care to drink with me tonight Sect Leader Lan? I mean no offense but the lotus wine of Yunmeng is sort of a tradition on the day of our traditions. I am more than willing to get you a pot of tea instead if you would prefer that."

Lan XiChen stepped into the elegant pavilion settling himself down gracefully on the plush purple cushion that ran the full length of the pavilion in a circle as he considered that question and something wild caught in his heart. He wondered perhaps if he could see that smile again, see that blush once more under the affections of the lotus wine and he found

himself very much willing to join in if he could get just one more look at the real Jiang Cheng that hid behind the fierce SanDu ShengShou.

“I would like to accompany you Sect Leader Jiang, I have never tried lotus wine before.”

“Excellent I’ll be right back,” he left quickly leaving Lan XiChen with his thoughts and he considered the SanDu ShengShou again. Jiang Cheng was probably the most interesting person he had ever met. He was a walking contradiction. Where his words were harsh, his hands were soft, where his eyes were hard, his gaze was kind and people loved him. Everyone loved him and after only a month Lan XiChen could see why.

Jiang Cheng was easy to love. His heart was so open and pure, you could read his affection for his people and his pride for his sect in every inch of those pale blue eyes. You could see his consideration and his care in every long line of his strong shoulders. He loved with a deep and endless heart and it showed. He ignored no one, he excluded no one and you would have to be blind or your mind clouded with hearsay to miss just how much love Jiang Cheng had in his heart.

How had he been so blind all these years to let the rumors of others cast the image of SanDu ShengShou as all that Jiang Cheng was when the truth was so much more vibrant. The truth of the man behind that title was so much *more*. Jiang Cheng was so much more and Lan XiChen marveled at the warmth in his heart as he glanced over watching the man himself walk back into the pavilion with four light pink jars.

“Here you go ZeWu-Jun, these are made from our Sacred Lotuses, though they’re not really sacred that’s just what they call them,” Jiang Cheng chattered a little nervously as he found himself alone with the man who had filled his mind all afternoon.

“They’re the pink flowers right?”

“Yes, the big pink ones, they will bloom later in the summer and you should come back to see them,” Jiang Cheng almost kicked his stupid mouth. How many times has he invited ZeWu-Jun back? A hundred?! A thousand?! So stupid!

“It smells light and sweet, just like your lotuses,” Lan XiChen smiled back as he pulled the top off the first bottle serving it with an elegant tilt of his hand. He offered the little cup to Jiang Cheng first before he lifted his own up.

“A toast then, Sect Leader Jiang, to an excellent day of planting,”

Jiang Cheng felt a smile tug at his lips in the face of that beautiful man since he really couldn’t do anything else and he drank that cup in one gulp praying he’d survive Lan XiChen and his devastating smiles.

They drank for a while after that, enjoying the cool night as the moon danced across the water lilies that caressed the edges of the pavilion. They sat there together and a warmth wrapped around them. Maybe it was the wine or maybe it was the lotuses they had planted but they felt comfortable and close as though they had done something so much more profound than just plant seeds all day.

Lan XiChen was the first to break that companionable silence, “thank you Sect Leader Jiang, for today. It felt.....special.” He spoke with a soft voice pulling his eyes from the blossoms to glance at the man sitting next to him.

“Oh!....I’m glad you enjoyed it....” He trailed off a little unsure of his words and before he could stop himself he spoke up again, “You know ZeWu-Jun you can just call me Jiang Cheng....like.....like you ddddid.....earlier....”

And Jiang Cheng could have killed himself after he said it. What in the nine hells possessed him to remember that moment in the water? Why the hell would he bring it back up?!

But the bright smile that answered him silenced all the screaming voices in his head as his eyes caught on the gentle bow of Lan XiChen’s curved lips. He was almost spellbound for a moment as he trailed his gaze along it enjoying it for what it was, a beautiful smile on a beautiful face of a beautiful man, a beautiful man he respected and had grown fond of and with two jars of powerful wine in his belly, he decided not to think about why he was so fond of this man he had only really gotten to know in the passed month.

“Thank you Jiang Cheng, then please call me XiChen,” Lan XiChen’s low voice flowed over his ears like satin and Jiang Cheng swallowed dryly. There was something different in his voice, whether it was actually there or his own ears playing tricks on him in the wake of that afternoon’s compliment he couldn’t tell.

And it seemed like tonight he had decided to dig his own grave when his voice jumped out of his mouth with no sense of self preservation.

“Why did you say that.....earlier?”

Lan XiChen paused as he took another sip of his second jar of wine and he considered that question. But the answer came to him easily.

“Because it’s true. You are beautiful.”

“I’m not.....ZeW-----XiChen....I’m not beautiful, I think you need to get your eyes checked or something. I’m like the opposite of beautiful in every possible wa---”

“Jiang Cheng,” Lan XiChen cut him off smoothly, “you are the most beautiful person I have ever seen and I would not lie or ply you with sweet words.”

“But....but why.....?” Jiang Cheng asked a little warily, he didn’t understand what the hell Lan XiChen was looking at because he looked at himself every day in the mirror and there was absolutely nothing beautiful about him.

“Hmm....” XiChen finished his cup of that sweet, mellow wine as he considered the man in front of him and he was struck for another time by his beauty. Jiang Cheng was an elegant man with a strong jaw and sharp features and if one were to take him at face value they would find him strikingly handsome but once that hard shell was peeled back much like the shell of a lotus seed, you would find something soft and sweet inside that would fill your mouth with a crisp, clean taste.

“You are beautiful Jiang Cheng, I find myself struck by the beauty of your body but so much more by the beauty of your heart.”

And he met those wide pale blue eyes with his own and it seemed as if a bolt of lightning jumped between them crackling with energy and Jiang Cheng felt his heart lunge up into his throat as Lan XiChen stared at him with no pretense. His brown eyes were bold, the moonlight casting them in amber and he was at a complete loss for words.

And there under the dim light of the moon and the sweet wine that warmed him up from the inside, Lan XiChen finally understood his own heart. As incredible as it may seem, he understood for the very first time that he loved Jiang Cheng, so struck by the beauty of his heart, so struck by the endless love he had for others. He loved those bright blue eyes and that elusive smile, he loved how honest and straightforward he was but more than any one thing, he loved the man behind the SanDu ShengShou, the man who raised his people up from nothing, the man who had sacrificed so much for others, the man who looked back at him with the most alluring blush across his pale cheeks and Lan XiChen could no more stop himself than stop his heart as he leaned across the space between them. He caressed that pink cheek with his fingertips and he spoke softly staring into those blue grey eyes that stared back at him.

“I am simply unable to avoid just how beautiful you are Jiang Cheng and I must say I find myself very much so in love with you...”

Chapter End Notes

swoon~ XiChen is so smooth..... ^.~

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wh....wh.....WHAT?!

Jiang Cheng froze completely unable to deal with this. He stared at Lan XiChen rooted to the spot as those delicate fingers caressed his flush. He was blushing so bad it was a wonder steam wasn't coming out of his ears.

There was no way he had just heard that. There was no way in heaven or hell that this man, that the First Jade of Lan had just said what.....he had said. It was completely ludicrous. He was clearly drunk or hallucinating there was simply no way....

He gasped suddenly as Lan XiChen slid closer to him across the cushions, his fingers turning to cradle his cheek with that broad hand. His heart was in his throat, his breath trapped in his chest as that gorgeous, impossible man came closer still, his hot breath falling over his lips. It startled him so bad he lunged backwards in panic, his hand flying up to his mouth, his blue eyes wide with shock.

“Wh....wwwwwha.....what?.....” He asked in a rush and his mouth ran away with him.

“There's no way ZeWu-Jun, I think you might have had too much to drink. It's been a long day so we should just call it a night ok? I'm sure you're just confused so don't worry about it. Tomorrow we can---”

“No,” XiChen spoke softly, cutting into his wild rambling, “I am not confused Jiang Cheng.”

“Bu....bbbbbbbuut.....but.....but.....you have to to to be, no one can love.....me”

“Why?”

“Why?” Jiang Cheng echoed, “look at me ZeWu-Jun, I'm loud, I have a bad personality, I swear and drink and yell all the time. I'm angry and aggressive and too violent. I'm a terrible match.”

“Says who?”

“Says everyone! Come on ZeWu-Jun,” Jiang Cheng felt his voice grow a little desperate as the elegant GusuLan Leader scooted just a little closer and he just had to scoot back. He could not handle this beautiful man drifting closer and closer to him. But XiChen just kept moving forward and Jiang Cheng just kept moving backwards until he squeaked when he ended up at the very end of the bench, the wooden arch of the pavilion unyielding at his back and the intimidating man leaning over him with those broad shoulders and those bewitching eyes.

“ZeWu---”

“XiChen, Jiang Cheng, call me XiChen...”

“Xi.....XiChen.....you’re just drunk ok? Let’s sleep it off and tomorrow everything will go back to normal and we’ll forget---”

“No, Jiang Cheng. I am drunk but I am not confused and I will not forget everything tomorrow.”

“Bbb.....but.....you....did you hit your head or something? It’s impossible ok you’re just a little lonely right now but I’ll talk to the matchmaker for you and we can find you a nice----”

“Jiang Cheng,” Lan XiChen spoke softly, his voice firm and steady cutting him off and Jiang Cheng felt his breath stop in his lungs. His heart was hammering in his chest and he felt a little faint. His hands were sweaty and he just didn’t know where to look, Lan XiChen was crowding into his space, those brown eyes staring into his and he looked away simply unable to bear the weight of that heavy gaze.

“Jiang Cheng, I have spent an entire month with you and I learned 2 things. The first was that I had never known you before and the second was that I wanted to know you more. You are a great leader to your sect, you are honorable and resourceful, you are caring and kind to your people. You are so much more than I could have ever imagined and I found it an honor and a pleasure to see the man behind the SanDu ShengShou. I am captivated by your beauty and the depth of your heart. I have never known anyone to give as much as you do, to provide as much as you do. Let me love you Jiang Cheng?”

“N.....no Ze---XiChen....you don’t want to love me, I’m not anything special ok....I am not any of those things you just said. I’m bitter and angry. I don’t care about others. I am not this selfless person you think I am.”

“Why do you say that?”

“It’s true XiChen, I let my family die, I let my sister die, I let my brother die and I did nothing. Even now Wei WuXian would rather die twice then see me again. I would never have given my core to him. It never would have even occurred to me to do something like that. I am not the good person you seem to see. I am shallow, I am hateful and I am angry. I am no match for you Lan XiChen.”

Lan XiChen stared at the man before him for a moment as silence fell around them and he carefully considered and discarded his words. There was more to this moment than self-depreciation. Jiang Cheng wasn’t pulling things out of thin air, he believed in these things he said and it would take more than words to get through to him but XiChen would try. He would not let this incredible man run from him, run from himself.

“You do not have to be Wei WuXian to be selfless. In fact you cannot be him. You will never be him, Jiang Cheng and you should not want to be. You are powerful as you are. You are brave and strong and yes you are selfless. You raised an entire region; not some small city or village. You pulled Yunmeng out of chaos, you saved thousands of people and gave them a reason to live again, gave them a way to live again.”

Lan XiChen slipped his hand under his chin and lifted his face to meet those brilliant blue eyes as he willed him to believe in his words and willed him to believe in the heart that spoke them.

“Even if you cannot see it in yourself, I see it in you. You are good as you are Jiang Cheng. Do not for even a moment seek to be someone else.”

“Nonsense XiChen, I only did those things with someone else’s core. By myself, I could never have done anything, I would never have been enough, I am never enough...”

Jiang Cheng trailed off pulling his eyes away again as he looked down. There was no way those beautiful things Lan XiChen said were true. Without Wei WuXian he would be nothing but a common man festering in hate.

“Jiang Cheng.....you are enough. You are more than enough. Wei WuXian had power. He had limitless power and all he had to show for it at the end of his life was death. He has a good heart, a noble one just like you do but he did not choose his people and you did. You sacrificed your brother for the people of Yunmeng and now thousands and thousands of people have lives, have futures because you made that choice. And I am not blind to miss how that haunts you, to miss how you can’t eat, how you don’t sleep.”

“You regret your choice and your heart aches because of it but even now I sit here in front of you and I cannot say that I could be as selfless as you. I cannot say I could have made that choice to save the lives of thousands of people over the life of my brother. Wei WuXian gave you his core because he knew it would do more good with you than it would with him. He gave it to you because you are his brother and he loved you and his sacrifice was noble and selfish. He saved just you Jiang Cheng, you saved thousands. Do not tell me you are selfish when everywhere I look I see your people thriving not because of your core but because of you.”

He fell quiet for a moment as he gazed at the man in front of him. It was true, Jiang Cheng had made an impossible sacrifice, a sacrifice that haunted him, that polluted his thoughts and dragged his heart down but because of it an entire region was flourishing, thousands and thousands of people were prospering and happy and that was not because of some core. That was because a man, this man, had made sacrifices for them, had made those hard choices over and over again.

Wei WuXian was a noble man, an honorable one who had given his core to his brother because he loved him and he could not bear to see him die from his grief, to see him wither away under the weight of the devastation of his own heart. His sacrifice had been pure and beautiful but he had saved just one man. Jiang Cheng had saved thousands and his soft heart hurt and hurt and hurt with the choice he made to save those lives over his brother. It was a heartbreaking sacrifice he had made and it had left him in shambles, left him in a sea of guilt but Lan XiChen needed him to understand that he truly had never met anyone as selfless, met anyone with as deep a heart as his.

“Look at me?” Lan XiChen spoke softly into the night air. He waited and waited until those blue eyes looked up at him again.

“I am nothing special Jiang Cheng, I am nothing but a man with a selfish heart but I ask you again, let me love you, let me treasure you until you can treasure yourself because what I see is a proud, bold, beautiful man with a vast heart and I want him for my own.”

Jiang Cheng blinked once, his long lashes fluttering as he stared up at those deep, endless eyes. He had no words in that moment. He had nothing to say to all those words Lan XiChen had said. How could someone have seen through him so clearly? How could someone have seen the shape of his heart, the shape of his pain? How could this man see the weight he carried, the weight he had carried for almost 20 years?

“You will regret this.....I’m.....I’m a terrible match....” He muttered a little shakily staring into those bright brown eyes a little nervously.

“I won’t”

“I yell all the time.....” his words were quiet and raw.

“I know....”

“I swear and drink and I really don’t give a fuck about what I say.....” He continued his voice growing a little softer.

“I know that too....” Lan XiChen lifted his hand to touch the blush the lotus wine had left behind. He caressed that cheek gently letting his thumb barely brush those long, long lashes.

“I’m weak and I have a terrible personality....” Jiang Cheng’s voice grew even softer, falling into a hoarse whisper as Lan XiChen leaned into him, his hot breath caressing his mouth as those brown eyes stared into his with warmth and heat and something more.

“You do not.....” He whispered back, their noses almost touching, their breath swirling together in the air between them.

“And I.....I get angry all the time and I-----”

But Lan XiChen didn’t let him finish. He pressed a kiss to those pale pink lips delicately and then he did it again. He laid kiss after soft kiss on Jiang Cheng’s lips, one after the other as his hand cradled that blushing cheek.

Lan XiChen tilted his head lightly and followed his kiss with the tip of his tongue dragging a light line along the seam of Jiang Cheng’s mouth unprepared for the gasp and the shiver that jumped down his spine. The SanDu ShengShou pulled back in a rush, his eyes snapping open in surprise.

“What are you?! What was?! What?” Jiang Cheng was sure his cheeks were on fire, he could feel the heat all the way up to the tips of his ears.

XiChen looked at him noticing his shock and his wide blue eyes and something occurred to him. He spoke testing the waters, his voice sounding deeper with the amazing idea he had just had.

“I’m kissing you...”

“I know that.....what was your.....your.....tongue doing?!”

“Kissing you?”

Was it possible that the beautiful, ferocious SanDu ShengShou had never kissed before? Was he just as shy and innocent as he was acting? Was this gorgeous man untouched and unfamiliar with pleasures like this?

And Lan XiChen swallowed heavily as heat suddenly crawled down his spine, something primal and possessive reared its head in his chest and he decided he had never thought of anything quite so alluring as an innocent SanDu ShengShou.

“I know! I mean I.....”

“Just do what I do, I want to kiss you with my tongue Jiang Cheng....”

And Jiang Cheng thought he’d die on the spot hearing those dirty words coming out of the immaculate First Jade of Lan’s mouth.

“Bbbbut....uhm.....”

“Please?” XiChen almost purred, his voice low and hot on Jiang Cheng’s mouth as he looked at that alluring, innocent blush on his cheeks and he leaned forward again closing the distance between them to press another little kiss to his lips.

“Please....”

Then he pressed another kiss to that seductive mouth before he tried again sliding the barest tip of his tongue across those pale pink lips. They parted slowly, tentatively and the low gasp he released as XiChen slipped into his mouth burned his ears. He was suddenly very, very intent on dragging more of those breathless gasps from the gorgeous man in his arms.

He slid his tongue in gently, careful not to scare his prey away, his hand drifting lower to hold his jaw as he tilted his head and touched their tongues together and Jiang Cheng jumped. He hummed softly, reassuringly and did it again sliding his tongue along his with a wet rub. He caressed his tongue with long, slow glides, tension pulling tight in his shoulders as he shoved the maddening desire to ravish him, to pull wild gasps from those soft lips away.

He could not scare Jiang Cheng, he was so nervous, so skittish and Lan XiChen would rather die than stop this gentle kiss. He leaned into that mouth licking another hot line across that tongue coaxing him, encouraging him and when Jiang Cheng moved against him he almost moaned himself. His mouth was so hot, so sweet with wine and his own subtle taste and Lan XiChen could feel desire almost boiling in his belly.

He wanted to lay him down on those elegantly crafted cushions and lick and bite and suck at his body until he was gasping with those breathless sounds, until he was sobbing in pleasure, until he was moaning and crying and groaning with all the pleasure he wanted to lay into the man under him.

But he tempered himself, he pulled back that wave of possessive desire but he could not help biting that pink lip as he pulled back for a moment, tugging it lightly and Jiang Cheng moaned. It was a soft, heady sound that shocked his spine and left his ears tingling and Lan XiChen moaned back unable to help it.

Jiang Cheng was so alluring, so sexy with all his shy innocence and his hot wet mouth and Lan XiChen kissed him again breathlessly. He could not get enough of this man, he wanted to drink his pants, swallow his heat and when Jiang Cheng slid his arms around his neck to hold him tighter, his hand slipping into his hair, Lan XiChen almost moaned again.

His hands were gentle, tentative and a little skittish like a cat and Lan XiChen deepened that kiss. He slanted his mouth against Jiang Cheng's licking and sucking on his tongue with possessive heat. It was true what he had said, he wanted this beautiful man for his own, he wanted to be the cause of those gasps, wanted to suck hot petals and bite marks all along his pale skin and his hand slid down from his jaw along the smooth column of his neck, over his trembling shoulder to lay possessively on his waist, grabbing it firmly.

He kissed down from those lips, over his chin to lick a scalding line down his throat, pressing hot open mouth kisses into his flushed skin and he wondered briefly how far down that blush would go. Would it dust his shoulders? Would it caress his nipples and turn them red?

He followed through with that curiosity, moving his hands to the collar of his robes, the need to see that flushed skin almost physical and he tugged the heavy purple fabric aside, licking and kissing and sucking at those sharp collar bones before he continued down.

He was careful not to leave marks no matter how much his mouth ached to litter that sweet, satiny skin with his bites. He could not give in to the crushing, possessive need in his chest. Jiang Cheng was so nervous his body was trembling and the last thing Lan XiChen wanted was for him to run.

He licked another hot line down to his right nipple, caressing it with his tongue. He trailed along the curve of it before flicking the tip pausing to collect himself as a heavy moan fell from those wet, red lips. It was so hot, so deep. That such a light touch could pull out such a wild sound showed clearly just how sensitive he was, how innocent he was to pleasures like this. Lan XiChen felt his head turn upside down and he sucked that little bud into his mouth with a strong pull just to hear that voice again.

Jiang Cheng threaded both his hands into all that thick black hair as he tried to hang on. XiChen's mouth was devouring him, eating him alive and his head was swimming with heat. He felt so hot, so possessed under those heavy hands and those sucking kisses and he wondered dimly if he would survive a lover like Lan XiChen.

He moaned as those talented fingers drifted up to rub lightly over his other nipple before he pinched it gently tugging it up and Jiang Cheng groaned again. He couldn't help it, it felt crazy and shocks jumped up and down his spine. He hoped he didn't sound awful, hoped his voice wasn't too loud, hoped XiChen wouldn't realize he was nothing special, realize he was just a simple, bitter man unworthy of all the love in his heart.

He was drifting under those hands and that wet mouth that was tying his head into knots when he jumped, a hot hand falling over his lap to brush lightly at the stiff tent in his pants.

Oh no! No NO NOOOO!

Jiang Cheng yanked his mind back to reality with force as he realized just how far XiChen intended to go and if he really did go any further, Jiang Cheng would lose his mind and that was not ok. There was no way he could sleep with a drunk Lan. No way at all, something like this was sacred to them, profound. They did not just sleep around and Jiang Cheng would be damned if he would dishonor the gift Lan XiChen gave him by having a drunken tryst with him in the middle of the night in some open air pavilion, besides in the sober light of day he would remember that Jiang Cheng was a terrible match. He would remember that he was a bold, brash, violent and petty man and they would brush this alcohol induced madness under the rug and he would try his very best to forget the feeling of those long locks in his hands and that impossible mouth that burned along his skin.

He treasured this man too much to insult him this way, to let alcohol trick his heart into something with the wrong person and he tugged Lan XiChen off of his chest with regret.

“Xi....XiChen,” he whispered hoarsely, his lips were tingling from his kisses, his chest was aching from his mouth and his cock was dripping in his pants but he pushed it away as he looked up into that hot gaze, those eyes amber with desire and lust. He swallowed for a moment trying to find air in his lungs.

“No....ok...not....like this.....we’re drunk.....I know how.....how special this is to you....”

“Yes it is special, *you* are special, I love you Jiang Cheng, let me touch you, let me show you how much I love you,” Lan XiChen answered with his own hoarse voice, lust leaving his words dark and sultry.

“Not like this,” Jiang Cheng spoke a little more firmly. There was no way he was going to do something so special with a drunk Lan. He may be drunk too but he wasn’t insane. He could not bear to fall into this physical love only to wake up in the sober light of day with nothing but more regrets in his heart when XiChen realized he had made a mistake and even more so he could not bear to take advantage of him. No matter how much he craved those lips, craved those sweet words he would not do that to Lan XiChen.

“We’re drunk XiChen....”

“I know.....but that doesn’t change anything, I love you, I want you....” That hot voice rolled down Jiang Cheng’s spine and for a split second he almost threw himself into those strong arms to kiss him breathless again. He was having a hard, hard time pulling away from this moment but he would be damned twice if he let their lust run away with them, let their lust damage what they had.

Jiang Cheng gazed back into those amber eyes and he braced himself as his words fell out of his mouth, “if you....if you still feel the same.....the same way sober....I’ll consider

this.....this,” he gestured vaguely into the small space between them, “doing this with you ok?”

Lan XiChen pulled back with a pout, his eyes disappointed as he leaned back sitting properly on the cushions again and Jiang Cheng took his first full breath since that beautiful man had cornered him. He sighed and all the tension flowed out of him before he squeaked.

Lan XiChen reached over and dragged him into his lap with ease and he was no delicate little flower. He suddenly found himself within those strong arms again, his ass nestled between those long legs sitting firmly on the thick, hard cock in his pants. He gasped again a little hoarse, his breath whooshing out of him with shock.

“Wh...WWWWHAaaaat?!”

“Hush my love, let me cuddle you since I cannot have you panting and moaning.”

Jiang Cheng gaped at him, his mouth falling open in shock, he didn’t know where to put his flaming face as he met those soft brown eyes.

“I know we’re drunk and the only reason I’m not taking you right now is because you asked so sweetly with that hot mouth of yours but make no mistake Jiang Cheng. I will not change my mind tomorrow, or the next day or the next. If you let me, I will love you and make love to you for the rest of my life.” Lan XiChen canted his hips up lightly to rub his hard cock against that sexy ass in his lap, his eyes that molten amber with his lust and his affection.

“Ugh...” Jiang Cheng blushed at the feeling of that hardness under him, the proof of XiChen's attractions. He really couldn’t handle this man, how could he say shit like that?! And his eyes dropped to those swollen red lips and his flush grew brighter before he yanked his gaze away. What is it with this man?! By his ancestors, he would burn to a crisp if he kept spouting off romantic crap like that.

Jiang Cheng stared at the flowers with effort trying to ignore those strong arms around him and that hard cock under his ass and that racing heart in his ear. Lan XiChen’s heart was pounding under his cheek and he didn’t know what to make of that.

They sat there in silence for a while, for a long, long while they cuddled together on that cushion, the moon painting the night silver with a dim light and despite himself, Jiang Cheng started to grow sleepy in those warm arms. He couldn’t even remember the last time he had been cuddled. His mother had never been the type to do that and YanLi had only ever hugged him and there was no reason to even consider his father, Jiang FengMian had been cold and apathetic towards him his whole life. He could barely remember even being carried much less cuddled.

He was just about to fall asleep in those comforting arms when Lan XiChen spoke softly, “I am so..... happy love, I cannot believe that anywhere in this world I could have something so special like you in my arms. After all the evil I have done....I---”

“What evil XiChen?” Jiang Cheng asked him drowsily, he felt so, so warm and loved but he dragged his eyes back open as he heard those almost trembling words.

“I killed my sworn brothers Jiang Cheng. I am not worthy of your heart but I want it regardless. I am a selfish man---”

“Bullshit XiChen,” Jiang Cheng straightened up as he woke up again, the pain in those words impossible to ignore.

“I say this sincerely XiChen but you’re full of shit. You didn’t kill ChiFeng-Zun, Jin GuangYao did. Jin GuangYao used you. He would have used whatever he had to to sate his ambition. You didn’t teach him the Song of Clarity so he could pervert it. You taught it to him to mend their relationship.”

He looked at Lan XiChen’s bowed head and he lifted that chin to look into his eyes, “you killed Jin GuangYao because Nie HuaiSang tricked you into doing it and that does not make you a murderer XiChen.”

Jiang Cheng continued, he was not good with words, he did not have the ability to make his words beautiful and lyrical, he was blunt but he would try to give Lan XiChen a measure of the comfort he had given him.

“XiChen I really believe that what’s important is someone’s heart. What matters is what they meant to do, what they had wanted to do and all you have ever wanted to do was bring peace to your sworn brothers. Your heart is pure and honorable so don’t sit here and tell me you’re a killer because that’s horse shit.”

“In all my life, no one has been more immaculate, more just and righteous than you. They took advantage of you XiChen but that does not make you a murderer. It makes you sweet and a little naive but not a cold blooded killer. Don’t think for one second I will agree with you. You are wrong in this ZeWu-Jun and I know it won’t make it hurt any less but you are also the reason they rest in peace now. ChiFeng-Zun was furious with injustice and Jin GuangYao was a sad, bitter man and *I know* it won’t make it any less painful for you but they both needed to rest and you did that for them.”

“Even if you can’t believe me XiChen, know that I believe in you. I know your heart is good. I know you are no killer.”

Lan XiChen sat there in silence, those words ringing in his ears. He had not known how much he needed someone’s reassurance. How much he had craved those blunt, coarse, caring words. It did not in fact make it hurt any less. It didn’t make the pain disappear but it did comfort him. It pulled his heart up just a little bit and that guilt faded just a hair, just enough that he could breathe again and he cuddled Jiang Cheng closer to his chest.

“You....you have a way with words my love,” he whispered as he buried his nose in those thick black locks in his face, his heart so full in his chest.

Jiang Cheng laughed, “you’re just delusional. Remind me never to give you wine again, it scrambles your brain. You see ugly men as beautiful and you think *I* have a way with words.”

“You are not ugly and I will not stand for it Jiang Cheng!” Lan XiChen grumbled as he nuzzled that silky hair a little more.

“You are--”

“Hush, beautiful yes? I heard you,” he whispered shyly as he tilted his head back a little, the sky growing lighter around them with the coming of dawn and softening those amber eyes to a steady brown again.

“I don’t know what you see in me XiChen....”

“I---”

“Shh” and Jiang Cheng kissed his lips lightly stopping those embarrassing words and then they kissed again. They kissed for a long, long time under the twilight as the dawn drifted in around them painting them in a glow of pinks and purples as the sun rose up behind them, the long gauze curtains fluttering around and hiding them from the world as they lost themselves in each other’s arms, in the warm comfort of each other’s words.

Chapter End Notes

^~ daum XiChen.....be still my maiden heart rofl XD Jiang Cheng never stood a chance~

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Psst! What’s wrong with SanDu ShengShou’s lips?” Hou Zian glanced at the disciple next to him as they stood in their sword forms again in the large practice arena of the YunmengJiang Sect.

“I don’t know, he looks different kind of?” Lin Jun whispered back as he turned in a spin, his blade swinging around him gracefully.

“He’s kind of glowing?” Another junior muttered, “you think he ate something weird?”

“He’s totally out of it too, I’ve been doing wrong strikes for an hour and he hasn’t even noticed,” Yang Hao grumbled.

“Shut up, don’t act like you’re doing it on purpose, you just suck,” Kuo RuShan joked as he pivoted into the next swing.

“I think maybe our dear ZeWu-Jun did something to him...” He muttered glancing at Jiang Cheng again. He was amazingly distracted, his eyes soft and gentle, his cheeks flushing on and off for most of the day. He looked like a love struck maiden and Kuo RuShan had a thought as he glanced at those lips that looked a little swollen like he had eaten a plate of food too spicy for him which was impossible because no culture had food spicier than Yunmeng.

“Maybe our illustrious sect leader got ravished last night....”

“WHAT?!” Hou Zian gasped almost falling out of his strike, “no way?! You think?!” He craned his neck to get another look at those lips again almost dying with curiosity.

“I mean why else would his lips look like that?”

“I don’t know!? Maybe he bit his lip or something?” Lin Jun hissed back.

“Or ZeWu-Jun bit them~” Kuo RuShan laughed, he was almost sure that whatever had happened had to have involved Lan XiChen because as soon as the GusuLan Sect Leader had arrived to observe their sparring session, their ferocious SanDu ShengShou had turned a brilliant shade of red and Kuo RuShan was not one to miss a detail like that.

No matter how he looked at it, Jiang Cheng was acting like a little flower that the esteemed ZeWu-Jun had plucked for himself if his hot eyed stare and Jiang Cheng’s blush could make them anymore obvious.

“We might have to prepare a wedding,” he laughed as Yang Hao choked on air, “shut up! You little shit! You can’t prove that they did anything!”

“Come on Yang Hao, are you blind? ZeWu-Jun looks like he’s ready to pounce on him~”

“How would you know?!”

“Just look at them idiot, ZeWu-Jun’s lips look swollen too...”

The disciples were in an uproar as they tossed theories and conjectures back and forth across their practice lines but it was like Kuo RuShan said, both of their lips were swollen and ZeWu-Jun had a look in his eyes like he would eat their SanDu ShengShou whole and those disciples thought it endlessly mind boggling and funny to see Jiang Cheng blush every shade of red imaginable.

Jiang Cheng finally seemed to notice all the wild whispering and he snapped to attention glaring at them, “if you don’t shut your traps and fix those forms, I’ll have you run laps around the pier until sundown!”

“Yes Sect Leader!” They chorused back at him. The guys were grinning and the girls were beside themselves at the idea that Lan XiChen might have actually ravished their fiery sect leader last night and all they did was lower their voices throwing ideas and suspicions back and forth over their practice lines.

“Do you think they did it?” Chen Biyu hissed to her friend as she canted her blade into a block. She was the top archer of the YunmengJiang Sect and she had won the LanlingJin archery tournament 3 times.

“Oh shit! I hope they did!” Du JiaLi giggled back as a taller girl, Ruan Hua muttered over, “ZeWu-Jun must have blown his mind, look at how he blushes!”

“Haha, what’s to say SanDu ShengShou didn’t do it first...”

“There’s no way,” a boy whispered back, “I mean ZeWu-Jun looks like he’s going to eat him for dinner...”

“How romantic,” Guo HuiFang pretended to swoon flipping her long hair over her shoulder, “can you imagine how well a man like the First Jade of Lan can love?”

“Did you see the size of his hands?” Ruan Hua giggled again, “I mean he must be big right?”

Du JiaLi laughed outright, “I don’t think they did it then, I mean our cute little SanDu ShengShou wouldn’t be standing straight if ZeWu-Jun had---”

Jiang Cheng finally heard the tail end of that whisper and he turned absolutely scarlet, his ears a positively burning red.

“I see you’re just fine if you can talk so much! Laps! NOW! And if I hear another word out of your mouths I will have you run all night until your legs fall off!”

“YES SECT LEADER!” And run those disciples did with grins on their faces and every single time Jiang Cheng saw their little glances he blushed deeper. He almost couldn’t stand

it anymore and he hauled Lan XiChen off around the corner, hiding behind the edge of the door to give him a piece of his mind.

“XICHEN LOOK AT WHAT THE FUCK YOU DI---MMPH” His scathing hiss was cut off as Lan XiChen slammed him into the wall kissing him hard and fast.

“Ha....ahhhmmm!” Jiang Cheng gasped barely able to breath as XiChen plundered his mouth passionately, his hands yanking his hips against him. He kissed him wildly with all the pent up tension from last night, from all the wild whispers he had heard around the arena, from staring at those swollen lips all morning.

He leaned back after a moment, his hot whisper falling on those alluring wet lips, “I’m sober now Jiang Cheng...”

He stared into those eyes with heat as he let the other man read the lust in them, see his invitation and he slid his hands down from those slim hips to his thighs. He was just about to slip under them and haul this gorgeous man up into his arms when they heard loud boots walking down the hall.

Jiang Cheng paled and shoved him off hard, willing his blush down as he glared at XiChen. This man was going to be the death of him, he could feel it. He had just barely managed to get his breath under control when his lieutenant stepped around the corner walking with heavy footsteps and Jiang Cheng blushed again.

Li Kang was a notoriously quiet man, he did not in fact go stomping down hallways and Jiang Cheng glanced away from his bright, knowing eyes, studying the floor with attention.

“Sect Leader Jiang, ZeWu-Jun,” he spoke cordially with a quirk curling his lip. He knew exactly just what the pair had been up to and he fought down the urge to tease his leader at the sight of those burning cheeks. He had underestimated the gentle Lan XiChen but he wouldn’t embarrass him any further in the GusuLan Sect Leader’s presence and he held out a report.

“Honghu City has sent several reports today alone, there’s a demon fish there in the lake destroying the wildlife and killing fishermen by the dozens. They lost 26 lives this morning Sect Leader Jiang. I feel like this matter needs the utmost attention.”

Jiang Cheng centered himself as the weight of his role settled on his shoulders. This was good, a night hunt was exactly what he needed to get away from all this whatever the hell that was going on with Lan XiChen and those blistering lips.

“Very well, I will see to it today”

“How many disciples would you like to take, Sect Leader?”

“None, they’re running their feet off instead of their mouths until sundown, see that they run until then,” he spoke darkly glancing at XiChen again, the invitation falling from his mouth against his better judgement.

“How about it ZeWu-Jun? Would you like fish for dinner?”

~*~

Honghu Lake was vast, though not quite as big as Dongting where Old Man Bai and his lotuses were. The waters were a dark green churning with resentful energy that was so very thick, you could smell that sour tang in the night air as Jiang Cheng hopped off Sandu, sheathing it quickly as Lan XiChen stepped down next to him, the early evening dim as night fell around them. The moon was huge and low in the sky. Evil things like ghosts, ghouls and demons really only came out after dark and Lan XiChen and Jiang Cheng had timed their hunt to meet the creature when it was most active.

“The resentful energy is strong here,” XiChen spoke quietly looking across the empty lake. The woods around them were unnaturally still, no doubt due to the demon in the water. The weight of its evil energy was heavy as they walked closer to the edge considering it.

“The report said it generally hunts in the center of the lake so I guess we just fly across and call it out. It must be a hell of a beast, ate 5 people at once.” Jiang Cheng glanced at Lan XiChen.

“Sounds fair,” he pulled Shuoyue back out and hopped onto it waiting for Jiang Cheng to mount his sword. They flew across to the very center of the lake staring down at the dark churning waters looking for any signs of the monster.

Suddenly Jiang Cheng shouted, “there!” pointing at a huge drifting shadow wandering under the surface of the lake. It was massive, the giant beast was easily over 15 men long if its dark form was any indication as it swam below them. The moon bright enough that they could just make out its hulking shape.

Lan XiChen turned glancing at Jiang Cheng, “I’m going to pull it out, you ready?”

“Do it”

Lan XiChen did a quick motion with his hands and a glowing blue sign appeared in the air, he slammed his hand down and that glittering talisman hit the lake with force, water splashing up as an ear piercing shriek rent the air.

The beast lunged up out of the churning green waters with a giant flap of its massive tail, leaping up at them.

It was a horrific creature, though it had the normal shape of a fish, it was black from head to tail with sickly yellow green fins and a huge gaping mouth with razor sharp fangs. The fangs clustered up in its mouth awkwardly almost like there were too many of them to fit properly and each one was the length of a full grown man. It shrieked again in fury when it fell back into the water below them with a tremendous splash. It’s eerie green eyes rolling up in its head to stare at them with an odd intelligence.

It treaded water for a moment before it flapped it’s huge tail throwing itself up into the air at them again, its massive jaws snapping violently and Jiang Cheng swung down, Zidian

crackling in his hand as he laid a barrage of heavy whip strikes into the creature's head, purple lightning glowing in the night sky with every electric lash.

He snapped his wrist fast, bearing down on the creature but the beast was so evil, so powerful it didn't even register the cuts the whip had left behind. Lan XiChen pulled out his flute lifting it to his lips to play a battle song, long shimmery light blue threads of energy flying down to catch the demon.

They were a little bit at a disadvantage because they couldn't use their swords but Liebing was a powerful weapon and its song slashed into the beast's hide leaving huge gaping wounds along its back that bled smoking black ooze.

The beast howled in pain swinging its tail to lunge up at Jiang Cheng who was closer but the SanDu ShengShou was faster, skidding to the side, his arm whipping out to lash the creature across one of its sickly green eyes.

It roared in fury plunging back into the lake where it disappeared for a moment and Jiang Cheng flew back up to where Lan XiChen was, his white jade flute still at his lips.

"It's kind of weak, huh?"

"Don't be deceived, it's amassed an extraordinary amount of resentful energy." He glanced down at the lake again, thick clouds were rising up like steam from where the beast's black blood lay on top of the waves like oil.

"I'm going to get closer, pull it out again?" Jiang Cheng asked him before zipping down on Sandu to hover over the dark lake.

Lan XiChen made the sign again and slammed the talisman down with strength but this time nothing happened. Jiang Cheng stared at the surface of the water, Zidian crackling in his hand as he waited tense and focused for the monster to rear its head.

A moment passed and then another. He was just about to call out to Lan XiChen when he spied something green and glittering deep in the lake. The beast's head crested the waves and it had a massive ball of evil energy glowing in its fangs. It shot that swirling ball of sickly green power in a straight line right for him.

Jiang Cheng dived to the side to avoid the blast before he turned back again zigzagging in the air to avoid that huge flapping tail. He snapped Zidian out at the beast, Liebing echoing all around them. It writhed for a moment disoriented under the lightning burning its hide and Lan XiChen poured more power into his battle song building it up before he threw that energy down straight for the demon's head.

But the beast was fast and it dived under the surface of the water again. And like this the cultivators battled the fierce beast fighting it when it reared up in the churning water and avoiding its snapping jaws and energy blasts until it would plunge back into the lake again. They fought it for an hour, then three, then four. Well into the fifth hour, Jiang Cheng flew across the lake at a sharp angle before throwing himself back and out of the way of those huge fangs before the beast fell back under again.

“XiChen! When it comes up I’m going to hit it with all I’ve got ok right in its mouth! Zidian will electrify the water and fry it’s ass, you do it too! It can’t survive a strike from both of us!”

“Ok!” Lan XiChen started his song again, the low tones of his xiao growing deeper and louder, bright blue energy swirling around him as he waited for the beast to rear its ugly head.

He flew closer to Jiang Cheng prepared as the SanDu ShengShou started to build his own power. He felt that core revolving faster and faster inside him, huge waves of energy running down his arm and Zidian crackled, glowing brighter and brighter. For the first time since Guanyin Temple, Jiang Cheng was excited to feel his core spin in his belly. He would use Sandu, Zidian and this core to defeat this beast.

They spied the growing shadow on the surface of the lake as the creature crested the waves again, his gaping maw glowing with another ball of energy and Jiang Cheng and Lan XiChen readied themselves, huge billowing winds of spiritual power spinning and swirling around them.

As soon as it made to release its bolt of energy, Jiang Cheng yelled, “NOW!”

And the cultivators plunged their power into that open mouth with everything they had.

A massive shock wave shook the lake with a bright flash of light as the energies collided with a boom; the force throwing them back as they blinked the spots out of their eyes barely managing to stay on their swords when a horrific howl roared in their ears.

It was a terrible sound as the creature crashed back into the lake with a tremendous splash. It lay there weak, floating on the surface of the water, its one good eye swiveling up to glare at them and the cultivators drifted in closer to finish it off. Regardless of whether it was evil or not, they were not going to let the beast suffer. Better to give it a swift death and seal up all that negative energy.

Lan XiChen reached the beast first, his fingers moving fast over his flute as he built up the power that would put an end to the Monster of Honghu Lake. He was so focused on the creature’s dangerous head, he missed its powerful tail pulling back in the water.

Jiang Cheng saw it first, he lunged forward as that massive tail snapped up straight at Lan XiChen. He darted through the air slamming into him and throwing the GusuLan Sect Leader forward with a powerful shove as that tail hit him hard right across the entire length of his body.

It ripped the breath right out of his lungs, leaving his entire body numb; the force of it was so heavy he felt his lashes flutter closed and he lost touch with reality unable to resist the weight of that strike. He plunged into the dark water, his consciousness fading as the black bloody lake dragged him down.

oh hell! :0

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Jiang Cheng lay in unending darkness. Nothing at all but long, endless black as far as he could see. He tried to shift, to move his body but he felt weight down, like his arms and legs were made a lead.

He forced and pushed and pulled to do something, anything to end this profound darkness he found himself in and then there at the very edges of his awareness he heard a sound. It was so faint and he strained his ears to hear it again.

He strained and forced and pulled and tugged to try to hear it and there it was again, a faint, soft, soft sound. It tickled the edge of his consciousness and he gave a mighty heave, he threw everything he had behind it and suddenly his eyes snapped open.

He blinked a little disoriented, the familiar ceiling of his room coming into view and he heard that soft sound again, it sounded off, odd, like someone was crying? He couldn't quite tell. He blinked a couple of times before he shifted pausing suddenly as pain exploded over him. Everything hurt, everything was so sore and he gasped shallowly and that hurt too.

The odd sound suddenly stopped and someone popped up over him. He blinked again completely stunned as Wei WuXian of all people leaned into his face.

“JIANG CHENG?!?” He gasped, “Holy shit! Jiang Cheng are you ok?! How are you feeling?! Does anything hurt?! What do---”

“Wh---” Jiang Cheng's voice croaked out of him, rusty and hoarse and that hurt too. Everything was hurting all over his body and he didn't know what to think. He thought for a second he might actually be hallucinating because there was no way Wei WuXian could be here, should be here when he had his happy little love nest in the Cloud Recesses.

But Wei WuXian was indeed staring at him with big red-rimmed watery eyes and a sniffly pink nose.

“Wha.....t.....the.....h.....hell.....?” Jiang Cheng tried again, his words falling out of him breathily. He didn't know what was going on. He felt like he'd been pummeled with a hammer.

“You got hit by some demon fish, you've been out for 2 weeks now. No one could wake you up,” Wei WuXian sniffed suspiciously, dragging his fist across his nose.

“Why....a.....are.....you here?” Jiang Cheng tried again, he felt foggy and almost disconnected and he paused for a moment trying to ground himself. Wei WuXian looked down for a second before he spoke up again.

“ZeWu-Jun sent Lan Zhan a letter saying he couldn’t come back because you were injured on a night hunt and.....that.....no one could wake you up.....”

“And?” Jiang Cheng finally managed to shake his head a little, his mind growing clearer and clearer and he considered the situation he found himself in. He was lying in his bed, his whole body hurt and Wei fucking WuXian was sitting next to him looking like someone had just kicked his kitten or something else equally weird.

He resisted the urge to rub his temple for a moment waiting for some sort of reasonable explanation for why the brother who hated him was here.

“And what?”

He looked over meeting those grey eyes with a cynical laugh, “and what? What the hell are you doing here?”

Wei WuXian looked away from him, his hands twisting together awkwardly, “I’m.....”

Jiang Cheng stared at him completely confused. His body hurt, his head was starting to hurt, Wei WuXian was being fucking weird and !!!

Lan XiChen!?

“Where’s XiChen?!”

Wei WuXian glanced up in shock as Jiang Cheng asked in rush gesturing as though to try and get up and Wei Ying jumped up pressing him back into the bed.

“You can’t move! You broke all 8 of your lower ribs, you’re lucky that piece of shit fish didn’t snap your spine right in half. There’s a paralysis talisman set on you to keep everything in place, ZeWu-Jun is talking with Lan Zhan right now, he’s fine though he’s been worried sick about you.....we.....we’ve.... all been worried sick about you....” Wei WuXian trailed off, glancing away awkwardly and Jiang Cheng took a breath settling back down in the blankets.

And he considered Wei WuXian again.

“So what the fuck are you here for? Want to gloat and tell me what a dumbass I am or something?”

“N....no Jiang Cheng.... look I know I’m like.....the last person you’d ever want to see but I was.....I was worried about you.....ok?! I know I don’t really have the.....the right to be.....but.....” Wei WuXian was shifting awkwardly from foot to foot as he looked at the wall, the floor, anywhere but Jiang Cheng.

“What?” Jiang Cheng was confused and he did lift his hand to his temple after all. He didn’t know what to think, what was he supposed to do with that statement? Wei WuXian was worried about him? Why the fuck would he give a two shits about him?

And a long awkward silence fell over them, neither one knowing exactly what to say. Jiang Cheng sighed loudly after another moment before he fixed Wei WuXian with a look and gave him a piece of his mind.

“What the fuck are you saying Wei WuXian? You don’t give two shits about me one way or the other. You never gave a flying fuck not then and not now. Where were you when I was rebuilding Lotus Pier? Did you care at all? Were you worried then? And where the fuck were you when Nightless City fell and A-jie fucking died in my arms and you up and disappeared? Were you worried then?”

Jiang Cheng was mad, he was boiling with fury, where the fuck did Wei WuXian get off walking in here with his happiness and his true love to have the balls to tell him he was worried?!

“Then you fucking come back and say nothing to me. You fucking ran away from me! Again! Were you worried then Wei WuXian? Did you give a flying fuck?! Did you ever give two shits about me?! YOU TOLD ME TO FORGET ABOUT IT WEI WUXIAN! YOU TOLD ME NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT AND YOU JUST FUCKING LEFT?! WERE YOU FUCKING WORRIED THEN TOO HUH?!

“I.....uhm.....” Wei WuXian shifted nervously almost like he was about to bolt.

Ha run then, you always run

“Just shut the fuck up Wei WuXian. Just leave like you always do.”

“I...”

“I what? I’m worried? Save it, the only reason you’re here is because you followed your HanGuang-Jun who came to see XiChen. That’s why you’re here. Don’t stand there pretending like you actually care.”

Wei WuXian swallowed heavily. He knew this was a bad idea. Jiang Cheng hated him. Jiang Cheng hated the very air he breathed but he was never one to take the blame for things he didn’t do and he braced himself. He braced himself for more vicious, scalding words and he knew he deserved them but that didn’t make it any easier to hear.

The truth was he loved his little brother, had always loved him but he was the root cause of all of his suffering. Lotus Pier had fallen because of him, Madam Yu and Uncle Jiang were dead because of him, shijie was dead because of him, Jin ZiXuan was dead because of him and when Jiang Cheng needed him the most he had left him for the Wens. But what could he have done?

How could he have denied Wen Qing that day when he found her on the pier, haggard and desperate? She had knelt on the wood boards of Lotus Pier and begged and pleaded for him to save her brother the very same way he had knelt on the stone floors of her supervision office, his heart at her feet begging and pleading with those same hoarse words for her to save Jiang Cheng in the wake of his destroyed core.

He didn't save the Wens that day because of some stupid hero complex. He saved them because how could he ignore the debt he owed Wen Qing and Wen Ning? It was impossible. He was completely incapable of turning them down but it didn't change that he had abandoned his brother. It didn't change that he had placed himself on the opposite side of the line.

He had sacrificed his little shidi for that debt he owed but he knew in his heart that he would make the same choice again. He would always choose to save his brother and then he would always have to choose to save the Wens.

And his guilt consumed him because of it. He had never felt worthy enough to stand in front of Jiang Cheng. Never felt like he could properly look him in the eye after all the pain and suffering he had caused him. He had destroyed every single thing in his life. It didn't matter that he had never intended it. It didn't matter that he had never once meant to hurt him. Hopes and wants are the stuff of dreams and he was the grandmaster of nightmares.

He had no right to be here. He had no right to care about his shidi after everything he's done but he braced himself nonetheless and spoke with a soft voice. It was a deep, soft voice full of melancholy, full of a profound sadness.

"Jiang Cheng.... I didn't come here because of Lan Zhan. I mean he's here but I saw the letter myself and I came anyway. I....I have always cared about you. And I know I don't have any right to. I know it's selfish and shameless. I know you hate me and I deserve it. I have done nothing *but* hurt you but if....if it means anything at....at all....I never *ever once* wanted to do that to you....and....and....yeah...I'll.....just leave now..."

Wei WuXian turned to go, his heart tasting like ash in his mouth. Jiang Cheng had no reason to care about him, he had no reason to care about anything that came out of his mouth and it was stupid to think he had any right to stand here in front of him. It was stupid to think Jiang Cheng would have anything but hate in his heart for him but he deserved it.

"You tell me one thing Wei WuXian...why did you give me your core?" Jiang Cheng's cold voice stopped him in his tracks. He felt his shoulders tense up and his stomach turn upside down.

"What? Not going to tell me? I bet you told HanGuang-Jun," Jiang Cheng laughed cynically as he watched Wei WuXian stand there motionless facing the door.

Wei WuXian hated things like this. He couldn't stand talking about feelings, about emotions, about anything related to his heart. He could barely deal with it himself much less share the mess that was the heart in his chest. He didn't share these things. He didn't talk about these deep rooted feelings to anyone, in fact he could barely stand to think about them preferring to push them away and avoid them for as long as he could.

He turned back around slowly dreading every single second of it, his mouth was dry and his hands felt sweaty, his stomach was twisting itself up in knots.

"I didn't tell him....I....." He trailed off looking into those sharp blue eyes that stared hard at him. He couldn't read them very well. He had no idea what was going on in Jiang Cheng's

head. He didn't deal well with conversations like this but if there was one person in the entire world he owed the truth to it was Jiang Cheng.

He sighed heavily trying to ease some of the weight in his chest and he tamped down on the urge to run. He braced himself again and spoke haltingly.

"If you.....if you really want to.....want to know. It's uhm....pretty simple really. I just....back then I....just wanted you to be....to be happy again. I mean I didn't care if you used the core, if you rebuilt Lotus Pier or if you just holed yourself up somewhere and never did anything with it. I just wanted you to stop hurting Jiang Cheng. You were my brother and I loved you. That's all."

Jiang Cheng tilted his head as he met those grey eyes. They spoke truth and they glittered back at him with sadness. He stood there looking at him with those honest eyes and Jiang Cheng spoke before he thought, his words jumping out of his mouth.

"Why didn't you talk to me about it?"

"I knew you'd say no and I was young Jiang Cheng, I was stubborn and I thought I knew what made you happy. I thought there was no other way and I can't talk about things like this, you know that...."

"Why did you tell me to forget it?"

".....I know you will keep thinking about it. I know you will hate me for it and I just didn't want you to feel like shit again...."

"Why did you just leave that day at the temple Wei WuXian....?"

Wei WuXian sighed, he was so tense his shoulders were hurting, he absolutely hated talking about his feelings. He didn't talk about them freely to anyone, not even to Lan Zhan but he knew he owed Jiang Cheng an explanation. If there was anyone in this world he had to face with honesty it was his shidi who had suffered so much because of him.

"I....I don't....I don't have the face to look you properly in the eye Jiang Cheng. I have....I have destroyed everything you love. I'm not....I'm not worthy to be here in front of you. I know that. I know it's shameless of me to show up here. I know it's selfish to say I care. At the temple all I really thought about was getting out of your sight so you didn't have to look at the person who ruined your life. That's why I left."

"Did it ever occur to you that maybe I cared too? Did you ever stop to think that maybe I would still care about you?"

Wei WuXian tilted his head a little confused, he wasn't sure where Jiang Cheng was going with this.

"No, why should you?"

Jiang Cheng considered that question but the answer came easily, "because you're my brother...."

“But I....I hurt you so much Jiang Cheng, there’s no way you can say you don’t hate me and I’m fine with that, I deserve it. Lotus Pier was burned down because of me, shijie died that night because of me. I’m not so shameless to think that you could care about me after all that.”

Jiang Cheng sighed, it was a long, heavy sigh and he dragged the words out of him with effort. Wei WuXian had faced his heart and answered him honestly so he would do the same.

“You know.....I did hate you. And most of the time I still do but I’m older now, Wei WuXian. I’m old enough to admit when I’m wrong. You didn’t destroy Lotus Pier, you were just the perfect excuse. Wen Chao showed up with a fleet of warships, a fucking fleet. He had intended to take Lotus Pier one way or the other that night. And A-jie.....you didn’t kill her either you know...that fucking nightmare of a night was too complicated. Yeah I mean you were basically the cause of it but you didn’t run her through. I... I know you could never do that to her....”

Jiang Cheng paused for a moment and he felt a desire well up in his chest and he spoke one more truth into the air between them, “you know I didn’t....I didn’t just run back to Lotus Pier that day...I wasn’t a fool to think I could do anything to that army of Wens.....I.....I didn’t leave you on purpose....”

Wei WuXian blinked thinking back to that terrible day after the Massacre of Lotus Pier, the sights and sounds of all the corpses of his friends, of his family, of Madam Yu and Uncle Jiang still clear as day in his mind. He could still see Jiang Cheng horrific in his grief, hear his pleading voice in his ear as he begged him for his parents. He would never forget that night or the panic that had overtaken him the next day when he had come back with some food to find Jiang Cheng gone. He had never before felt his blood run as cold in his veins as it had when he realized his brother had gone back to the ruins of Lotus Pier.

“What.....are....you---?”

“There were Wens all over that town and.....and they saw you buying some buns. I wasn’t sure if they recognized you or not but I....I called them away....I.....I had.....I had loved you too back then Wei WuXian.”

Wei WuXian’s eyes grew round with shock as the weight of those words hit him like a bolt of lightning. What was Jiang Cheng saying? What the hell was coming out of his mouth? He hadn’t left to seek revenge? He hadn’t run back to Lotus Pier with fury in his heart?

“W....w.....what? You.....what? Why would you do that?!” Wei WuXian whispered hoarsely, his heart was pounding in his chest. Did Jiang Cheng lose his core because of him? Did the brother he loved most dearly sacrifice himself to save him from the Wens? That wasn’t.....that wasn’t possible....

“I just.....I.....I really just..... could not bear to lose you too that day....” Jiang Cheng muttered looking away. He felt so raw, so impossibly open and it felt uncomfortable but in some ways it felt like relief too, as if he had lanced some poisoned wound open to drain it of its infection.

“But.....but Jiang Cheng....how.....why.....what?”

“I don’t know what you think Wei WuXian but I did care and somewhere in my heart I had already known that none of that was your fault. I was just too young to realize it yet.”

And Jiang Cheng paused for a moment remembering something from that night back at the lotus pavilion.

“XiChen I really believe that what’s important is someone’s heart. What matters is what they meant to do, what they had wanted to do and all you have ever wanted to do was bring peace...”

He laughed abruptly and Wei WuXian blinked; he stood there stunned, rooted to the spot and at a complete loss for words. He didn’t know what to do with the nonsense Jiang Cheng was saying. It was all rattling around in his head, tumbling over and over and over. He almost couldn’t understand it, couldn’t compute it. Had Jiang Cheng always loved him just as much as he loved his little brother?

“I told someone once that I believe what’s important is someone’s heart. What matters is what they meant to do and I think.....I think Wei WuXian....maybe you have always had a good heart...you just fuck up sometimes...”

“Uhm.....” Wei WuXian couldn’t speak, he couldn’t deal with this, deal with this impossible reality that his brother had loved him, had sacrificed himself for him and he felt love well up in his heart again. It was so very true what he had said, he still cared about his shidi and he still loved his little brother and no guilt or pain or heartache could stop him from feeling that way.

Jiang Cheng spoke again, his voice quiet, “I still hate you most of the time though, but.....occasionally....only sometimes.....like maybe once.....I kind of.... miss you too.....” And he met those grey eyes that seemed so similar with their strength and their warmth, so similar and yet so very different from another pair of eyes. Another pair that turned amber in the sunlight.

“Do you want to... I don’t know maybe.....like....visit or something sometimes?” He asked a little hoarsely, the words stiff in his mouth. He was so not good with things like this.

And Wei WuXian stared at him. He stared and stared and stared, his heart was tumbling in his chest. How was it possible that this man he had hurt so much, done so wrong could sit there and love him still? How could someone be so....so selfless? How could someone have such a deep heart? What good had he done in this world to deserve a brother like Jiang Cheng?

“Uhm.....if.....if you want me to.....I would....uhm.....like to see....you again yeah....I would....like that.....very much Jiang Cheng,” Wei WuXian spoke just as roughly. His head was spinning, he didn’t know what the hell was going on. He wondered briefly if Jiang Cheng had been possessed, those crazy words tumbling over and over in his head. It was impossible to think that he of all people could....could forgive him.....could miss him and he felt a little choked up, tears pooling up along his long eyelashes.

“Ugh ok! Enough of that shit, will you help me up. If I stay in this bed one more second I’m going to lose my fucking mind.” Jiang Cheng grumbled and Wei WuXian blinked back that wave of emotion and jumped forward. He laid a glowing hand over his ribs testing them for a second.

“I think you’re almost healed, I mean people have been pouring energy into you everyday for 2 weeks now. Normally ribs take like a month or two.”

Jiang Cheng noticed the strong red glow on his palm as he checked him over and he asked curiously.

“You’re stronger.....?”

“Oh yea.....I’m cultivating again...”

“How? Don’t they just meditate in Gusu? You can’t meditate if your life depends on it.”

Wei WuXian laughed, it sounded just a little too loud, this odd whatever it was that had just happened between them still coloring his voice, “Sword fighting duh.”

“You still know how?” Jiang Cheng scoffed as Wei WuXian eased him up into a sitting position wiping the talisman off so he could move again.

“I’m kind of rusty but I dunno maybe....maybe next time.....we could....like spar or something....?”

“You ready to eat shit?” Jiang Cheng joked as he slid out from the bed, his legs felt a little shaky but otherwise they were firm and he realized he didn’t ache quite as much as he did before. In fact he didn’t really hurt at all, nothing really hurt at all...not even his heart.

“Shut up Jiang Cheng! I’m not fucking scared of you!”

“Ha, I’ll kick your ass in a second!”

“Pshhh as if you could...”

Jiang Cheng laughed, suddenly startled by how easily it came back to him, how easy it was to fall into the back and forth they used to do and it felt good. It felt good to have his brother back.

Nothing was perfect, those old wounds would still hurt and their heartache would still rear its ugly head but for the first time, the very first time things were looking better. Things were healing and that really did feel good. Jiang Cheng felt a grin tug at his lips as he shoved Wei WuXian playfully.

“Bring it, I’ll knock you out so fast you won’t know what hit you.”

“Haha”

~*~

Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi stood leaning against the wall in the hallway outside Jiang Cheng's room. They stood there with small, soft smiles on their faces as they listened to the brothers bantering back and forth.

There was something beautiful about listening to them. You could almost see them healing, could hear it in their voices, taste it in the air and it felt good. It felt good to know just a little of the heartache, of their insurmountable pain was lighter; the weight that took Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian when they thought no one was looking seemed faded in the face of their silly ribbing.

When they had heard Jiang Cheng's angry accusations, Lan XiChen had almost dashed into the room regardless but Lan Zhan had been the voice of reason then. He had held him back shaking his head and something in his golden eyes made him pause.

They needed to talk, they needed to sort things out and it was not the Lan's place to interfere. Lan WangJi had never been very fond of Jiang Cheng; he didn't like his explosive temper or the hate he threw towards Wei WuXian but he was not blind. He was not blind or deaf to the suffering the SanDu ShengShou had weathered because of Wei Ying's choices; suffering that Wei WuXian had also had to endure because of his impossible decisions. He was not so narrow minded as to not acknowledge the chaos Wei Ying had caused in his past life. He was not some petty man who could not understand just how much that man had lost and no matter how much he loved Wei Ying, and how much he disliked Jiang Cheng's treatment of him, he could not bring himself to condemn the man.

Wei Ying's sacrifice had been incredible, amazing, impossible; it was impossible to give someone else your core and Lan Zhan had been moved to tears when he had learned the real reason behind all that resentful energy Wei Ying had wrapped around himself after the Burial Mounds and for a time he had judged Jiang Cheng harshly for his hatred, judged him for his anger and his ingratitude but did a core erase his sins? Did that sacrifice balance the scales? Did it suddenly wash the blood of Jiang Cheng's family off of Wei Ying's hands? No, it did not and Lan Zhan had had to take a step back and he did. He was fair in his judgement, both Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian had weathered many storms together and he had wished sincerely for something to ease the tension between them if only to bring some kind of peace to Wei Ying's heart.

He knew how much guilt Wei WuXian carried, how much pain he hid inside him; he had lost track of how many horrible nightmares had awoken him in the middle of the night, Wei Ying's heartache leaving him shivering and trembling with tears in his beautiful eyes. But Wei WuXian didn't talk about it. He never talked about it. He would just lay there against him through the rest of the night and in the morning he would wash it away with a flirty grin and a wall of laughter, hiding his heart away from anyone who would seek to touch it.

And Lan Zhan let him. He would not force Wei Ying to confront his fears, it was not his place to drag that pain into the light. All he could do was hold him and every once in a while, Wei Ying would let him peer behind that wall, let him in just a little more into his heart and Lan Zhan treasured those moments. He treasured every tiny glimpse into that heart he loved so much.

Wei Ying wasn't lying when he said he couldn't talk about stuff like this, he guarded his heart almost desperately and when Lan Zhan had stood there in that hallway listening to Jiang Cheng's cold words he had willed himself to let it happen.

Whatever bad blood they had between them needed to come out, it was festering in their hearts and if it hurt Wei Ying's feelings, he would be there to hold and comfort him afterwards. He had never heard about the core from Wei Ying before. Wei Ying avoided the subject like lightning and he had leaned into the wall outside Jiang Cheng's room listening with his heart in his hand hoping that something good would come out of whatever was happening between them, hoping that Jiang Cheng would be merciful in his words, that he wouldn't cut too deep.

And the SanDu ShengShou had surprised him, surprised him with his honesty, with the truth in his heart, with the wealth of forgiveness he had and Lan Zhan had felt his own heart growing warmer listening to them; he felt room open up in his heart for his husband's brother and he had to consider the idea that maybe Jiang Cheng was better than he had thought. Maybe he was just as noble, just as selfless, had just as deep of a heart as Wei WuXian and wasn't that an incredible thought.

He glanced over at Lan XiChen who leaned into the wall next to him, he looked completely different. He looked healthy, his skin was no longer that sickly pale white and his shoulders were back and firm once more. Yunmeng had done wonders for him and he considered Jiang Cheng again. Whatever light that seemed to glow inside Wei WuXian seemed to be in him too despite his scathing remarks and his sharp tongue. Whatever the SanDu ShengShou had done for his brother earned him even more space in Lan Zhan's heart.

And he smiled one his private little smiles that were so faint all they did was caress his eyes as the brother he loved most turned to him.

"WangJi, would you like some tea? I think we'll leave them alone for a while longer."

And Lan Zhan followed his brother who was proud and strong once more with a soft heart. Jiang Cheng had worked wonders on the people he loved and he found love in his heart for him.

~*~

"Jiang Cheng! Let me get that for you!" Lan XiChen spoke in a rush as he hurried to grab the stack of scrolls Jiang Cheng was about to lift and the SanDu ShengShou sputtered.

"XICHEN! FUCKING STOP IT!" He seethed as he darted in front of the GusuLan Sect Leader snatching those scrolls before he could unwilling to be coddled for even a second longer.

"I AM FUCKING FINE AND IF YOU DON'T FUCKING STOP WITH THIS SHIT, I SWEAR TO MY ANCESTORS I WILL LAY YOU OUT!"

Jiang Cheng clutched his scrolls to his chest as he stalked past the overprotective XiChen with a scowl on his lips.

Lan XiChen, Lan WangJi, and Wei WuXian were still here in Lotus Pier, a whole week later and it was starting to drive him absolutely mad. Even Jin Ling had shown up nipping at his heels like an overgrown puppy as he steadily refused to let Jiang Cheng do anything on his own. His sect was bending over backwards to assist him, Wei WuXian refused to let him go more than 10 feet by himself and Lan fucking WangJi had appointed himself as his veritable guard dog when XiChen wasn't around which wasn't very often and Jiang Cheng had enough.

He marched into the Sword Hall with all four of them on his heels before he spun around, his ring crackling with his irritation as Zidian started to glow with his annoyance. He turned to face them with glittering blue eyes. This shit had to stop or he would lose his fucking mind.

“Pay attention!” He barked out, “I swear to every fucking ancestor I have ever fucking had, if you don't back the fuck off I will fucking toss your asses right out that front door!”

“But Jiujiu, you have to----”

“Jiang Cheng just relax----”

“We're only worried about----”

“.....”

“SILENCE! I SWEAR I AM FUCKING FINE! THE HEALERS SAID EVERYTHING IS FINE, I FEEL FUCKING FINE SO BACK THE FUCKING FUCK OFF!!!”

“Easy Jiang Cheng,” Wei WuXian lifted his hands up in a placating manner. He didn't really care what the healers said, Jiang Cheng had almost died. He had been in a veritable coma for two weeks. He was lucky he had gotten off with only a handful of broken ribs. That demon fish had almost snapped his spine in half and none of them were quite comfortable with him out of their sights.

“Jiang Cheng, I understand how you feel but we just worry about you that's all,” Lan XiChen spoke soothingly as he took a step closer as if he was going to pull him into his arms and rub his ruffled fur back down in the right direction.

“Don't you use your sweet words on me XiChen, I am really fucking serious, let me do my fucking job, train my fucking disciples and run my damn sect in peace!” Jiang Cheng danced back out of the way before Lan XiChen did something really embarrassing. He couldn't take that, his new.....partner? Lover? Romantic interest? Whatever? Was very affectionate and he tested Jiang Cheng's sanity almost every day as he tried over and over to hug him, kiss him, cuddle him regardless of time or place and Jiang Cheng's heart really couldn't come to terms with that. He could barely deal with one Jade of Lan much less two, add on top of that his overprotective shixiong and his clingy nephew and he was about to lose his mind.

“Sect Leader Jiang, we only care about you, don't be upset...” Lan WangJi spoke up and Jiang Cheng sputtered turning wide eyed to the serene HanGuang-Jun, who had spoken maybe a few hundreds words to him ever.

“You.....what?!” He was completely shocked *What the fuck?!*

“You are family,” Lan Zhan said simply and Wei WuXian piped up, “yeah so just accept it already, we’re going to worry about you...”

“Accept what?! You, you, you?!” He couldn’t even speak properly, what the fuck was happening?!

“Jiujiu you have to come to terms with it, we love you so we’re not going anywhere,” Jin Ling spoke clearly as he took a step towards him looking suspiciously like he was going to hug him and Jiang Cheng took a step back nervously. This was getting ridiculous.

Across the hall, Li Kang smiled a soft smile as he observed this unlikely family. For better or for worse, they loved his sect leader and he loved them for that fact alone. He didn’t care where they came from, he didn’t care if they were male or female, he didn’t care about their history or about any number of other factors. What mattered to him was that these four people stood there in the sword hall with warm eyes and care in their hearts and Jiang Cheng, for all his righteous indignation looked all the better for it.

He looked healthier, his skin warm and tan and he looked stronger, his shoulders back and proud. He looked healed and for the first time in who knows how long, he had eaten 3 meals a day and slept through the night and Li Kang had felt his heart grow so warm and so very soft in his chest. He had wanted nothing but this for a long, long time.

Chapter End Notes

:) yay!!! This chapter was so therapeutic lmfao I hope I did them justice, I really hope everything is as true to their characters as I could be and thanks for sticking it out with me! And srsly don't worries guys, I won't leave XiChen hanging, next chapter our illustrious Sect Leader simply will not be denied any longer so our cute little WanYin better be ready ^.~

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Ah...uhm.....Xi.....XiChen.....I know I.....I said I was fine but this.....uhm...”

Jiang Cheng felt a blush run across his nose burning his cheeks as he looked anywhere and everywhere else. Lan XiChen was standing too close to him, crowding him into the wall of his room; the dim lights of the candles painting them in long arching shadows. It was one week after he had been officially cleared by the healers and it seemed like Lan XiChen would not be denied any longer.

Jiang Cheng tried to take a full breath, his nose filling with the subtle smell of sandalwood which seemed to surround Lan XiChen as the other man leaned into his space, his body far too close to him. He hadn't noticed the scent before when the handsome ZeWu-Jun had cornered him in the lotus pavilion, the smell and taste of wine filling his senses and Lan XiChen's tongue filling his mouth but he smelled it now. The smoky scent of incense clung to his robes and he swallowed heavily as he felt a broad, callused hand lift his chin up and he was forced to meet those bright eyes.

They were heavy with heat and amber with lust and Jiang Cheng almost squeaked as he sucked in a quick breath of air. Lan XiChen was staring into his eyes like he was going to eat him and Jiang Cheng wilted a little. Those eyes were so beautiful, so deep under those long black lashes and he felt a shiver trip down his spine.

“You promised that if I still felt the same way WanYin you would consider doing this with me, I am sober *now* and I do very much still *want* you....”

Lan XiChen purred low in his throat and he caressed that sharp jaw with his fingertips. He leaned in, his breath ghosting over those pale pink lips and Jiang Cheng gasped a little unsteadily. XiChen whispered again, his words sliding off his tongue and onto Jiang Cheng's mouth as if satin dragged across his skin.

“Say you want me too my WanYin, say you will let me love you tonight because I almost cannot bear it any longer...”

Jiang Cheng blushed even darker as he swallowed dryly. Lan XiChen should come with a warning sign, every time he opened his mouth Jiang Cheng lost years of his life. Ever since he had told the other man almost as an afterthought his second name, the GusuLan Sect Leader used it constantly when they were alone, like it gave him some private pleasure to call him something no one else did.

“Please my beautiful WanYin, you are so captivating my love, I want you so badly,” XiChen whispered with that hot, hoarse voice and Jiang Cheng licked his dry lips nervously.

“Xi....XiChen....uhm.....I....I do wa.....want you t...too....but.....but I....uhm.....I’ve never do....done th....this.....b.....be.....before.....”

Jiang Cheng was so cursed nervous, he could barely speak straight with Lan XiChen in his face and that hot voice in his ear. How the hell was he going to survive this? What in the hell was he thinking when he agreed to be lovers with this man? He had no idea what to do, what he should do. And his insecurities reared up in his heart. What if XiChen thought he was too innocent? What if he put the other man off with his magnificently limited understanding of making love.

He couldn’t hope to pleasure him too, he had no clue what he could possibly do. All he had ever done is seek pleasure with his hand when the urge arose and even that was very seldom. He hadn’t the foggiest idea what the fuck Lan XiChen saw in him and he was very concerned that this beautiful man would find him lacking, would leave for someone else who did know what they were doing because really everyone always did.

“Maybe.....maybe uhm.....you.....you should.....I....don’t know.....XiChen...maybe someone else would be better at....at this...I’m not good with----”

“Shh WanYin, you don’t need to do anything love, you are perfect just as you are,” and he kissed him. He pressed a soft kiss to those pale pink lips before he whispered again, “just let me touch you,” then he pressed another little kiss to Jiang Cheng’s mouth before speaking again ever so softly, “and kiss you,” another kiss, “and pleasure you my WanYin, my beautiful, beautiful WanYin.”

He slanted his mouth along Jiang Cheng’s kissing and pressing gently until he slid between those alluring lips, willing himself to stay calm, willing himself down to keep from ravishing the innocent, trembling man in his arms when he released a low moan that almost burned XiChen’s ears.

Jiang Cheng was so hot it was tying his head into knots and if he didn’t hold himself back, he would throw him down right there on the floor and that was definitely not the right way to do this. He would be gentle, he would take his time and he would make sure his WanYin enjoyed this.

He wrapped his arms around his waist tugging their bodies flush against each other catching another moan with his mouth. Tension caught on his shoulders and tightened the lines of his arms with his desire, his need to make love to this man but he would control himself. There would be time in the future to try other things but tonight he would be soft, tonight he would give in to his crushing desire to worship this man with his hands, his body and his mouth.

He kissed and teased Jiang Cheng’s tongue with his own licking and flicking and sucking lightly, relishing every sigh and hot moan that fell from their moving mouths. He moved one hand up tugging his elegant headpiece off to release that tight knot. And all that gorgeous black hair tumbled down around him in a messy wave before he fitted his hands to those hips, those hips he had dreamed about. Ever since that night at the lotus pavilion he had thought about this man, desired him, desired to touch him, to kiss him breathless, to turn his world upside with pleasure.

And he kissed that hot mouth with greed, sucking and licking and rubbing in long wet lines as he sought to eat this man whole.

After what felt like an eon of those hot, heavy kisses, XiChen slid his hands down over those sharp hips. He turned slightly and in one smooth motion scooped the SanDu ShengShou up in his arms easily, never breaking their kiss.

Jiang Cheng squeaked, pulling back, “XICHEN!? Ppppput me down!”

“No WanYin, tonight let me treasure you my love, let me show you the shape of my heart so you will never mention someone else to me again. It cannot be anyone else. It will never be anyone else but you.”

“Ugh,” Jiang Cheng wilted again. His cheeks were flaring, his heart was racing and he really couldn’t believe he, with all his height, was being carried like a bride. And with every step XiChen took towards the bed his heart beat even faster. He wondered vaguely if he would last the night, at this rate he would die before dawn.

Lan XiChen laid him gently over the covers before he kicked off his boots and crawled up too moving to straddle Jiang Cheng’s thighs glancing down into those sparkling eyes that were a dark cobalt blue in the dim lights from the hanging candles around them.

He smiled reassuringly before he leaned down and captured that mouth again, his hand cradling his cheek softly and he licked past those alluring lips in a long slow glide and Jiang Cheng whimpered shallowly.

He couldn’t deal with this man, deal with just how hot, how gentle, how loving he was. Every move he made was sweet and considerate but Jiang Cheng would be a fool to miss just how tense he was too. He wondered briefly if he was nervous but it was a passing thought as that mouth scrambled his brain.

He tried to kiss him back, tried to match him, copying his stroking licks and moaning when he couldn’t. He didn’t know what to do but at the very least he could try not to drown under all those wild kisses. He lifted his arms up curling them around XiChen’s neck to slide his fingers into all that thick black hair. It was so soft and silky in his hands.

Lan XiChen shivered lightly as those fingers slid along the nape of his neck and he slanted his mouth kissing his WanYin deeper as that heat in his belly swelled. It was so hot, every move he made, every low moan, every shallow gasp was tingling along his spine and he forced control into his hands as he slipped them down across his chest. He dragged his heavy palms along those thick robes before pulling them open slowly.

He wanted to move faster, he wanted to ravish this man, wanted to overwhelm him with pleasure but he tempered himself. That was not for tonight. He couldn’t do that when WanYin was trembling in his arms so he contented himself with kissing down from that hot mouth.

He kissed a wet line over his chin along that sharp jaw to lick along his neck. He stayed there for a long time just pressing hot open mouthed kisses into that flushed skin. He sucked light

petals up along it enjoying every breathless gasp and hoarse moan in his ear.

He slid his tongue down that satiny skin that seemed to burn his mouth so hot was this man in his arms. He moved lower to the curve in his neck and sucked the base shallowly forcing himself not to bite that sweet skin no matter how badly he wanted to but the urge was too strong and he dragged his words up hoarsely.

“WanYin.....my beautiful, perfect WanYin can I bite you love?”

Jiang Cheng blinked his eyes open foggily as he tried to compute that sentence. He was so hazy with lust, with this seductive tension between them, he just muttered, “XiChen, do whatever you want....”

Lan XiChen purred back before he kissed that neck again. He pressed his teeth in with a sucking bite and Jiang Cheng jerked under him with a loud, stilted moan. XiChen groaned back, licking the mark he made with dark satisfaction.

He continued down to those sharp collar bones where he licked and sucked and bit again while his hands moved further over those robes to tug at his belt, his mouth kissing lower until Jiang Cheng gasped. He paused then looking up since that gasp was a little too odd. It wasn't the sound of pleasure rather it was one of nerves.

“Uhm.....XiChen do....don't it's....I don't look.....”

Jiang Cheng moved his hands to cover his chest, his fingers splaying wide to cover the large arching scars across his upper body self consciously. That night at the lotus pavilion he had been too drunk to care but tonight he was sober and completely aware of how ugly he was. How ugly those whip scars were.

“WanYin, don't hide from me love...”

“But its....its ugly and I....uhm....”

Jiang Cheng wilted again, his insecurities looming in his mind uncomfortably. XiChen would surely be put off by those ugly welts. Those ugly, ugly ridges that crossed his chest and he didn't want that. He didn't want to look even uglier before this breathtakingly beautiful man.

“WanYin, you are beautiful and your scars are just as beautiful,” XiChen spoke softly as he tugged those hands off and up. He lifted them to his lips and kissed his palms affectionately. He slanted a glance into those bright blue eyes.

“Bull.....bullshit XiChen. Don't turn my head with your sweet words. They are ugly, I know that. I see them everyday....”

“Hush WanYin, you are so perfect love, your scars are proof of your sacrifices, proof of the life you have lived. Don't hide them from me. I want all of you, I love all of you.”

And XiChen leaned down to kiss those bold scars. There were 3 of them, long thick welts of raised skin from the Wen discipline whip. He kissed the longest one, dragging his tongue in a wet line across it from tip to tip before he kissed it again.

“AH?! Ahmm, ha....ahhhnnnn” Jiang Cheng’s eyes fluttered closed. The scars on his chest were so sensitive and he shivered despite himself, his fingers curling up in XiChen’s hands. How could this man be so.....so incredible? And his words comforted him, eased some of those insecurities. He still had no earthly idea what the immaculate First Jade of Lan saw in him but with the way that hot mouth dragged along his scars, he was unable to think very deeply about it.

“WanYin, you are mine.....and this is mine,” he kissed the second scar, licking it with a long flick, “all of you belongs to me now and I will show you just how good, just how beautiful, just how perfect you are, *you* are everything I have ever wanted my sweet WanYin...”

He spent a long, long time sucking and licking and kissing along those welts showing him with his body just how much he loved him, revelling in every heavy gasp and hoarse moan that echoed around them.

After a while, once he was satisfied with those scars, once he was satisfied with how swollen and wet they were he kissed a hot line over to one of those cute little nipples he had dreamed about too.

He rolled one into his mouth with a deep groan as those long fingers tugged out of his hands to slide into his hair again clenching up in his locks and he bit it lightly, flicking his tongue across it and pulling breathless gasping moans from the man under him.

“HA?! Ahhh..haaaannnn!”

Lan XiChen was dying, there was no other word for it. He was going to die from need with WanYin’s hands in his hair and his velvety voice in his ear. He was so tense he thought his shoulders would crack. Every muscle he had was taut and pulled tight as he resisted this shivering body under his mouth. It was impossible to understand how hot WanYin was. It was impossible to compute just how alluring and seductive he was with his wet mouth and his flushed chest and XiChen leaned back to look at him, his fingers falling to those little pink buds to tug and roll them as he stared at Jiang Cheng.

Jiang WanYin was quite frankly the single sexiest thing he had ever seen, his wild hair caressing those cheeks dusted red with his flush, his eyes low under his thick lashes, his mouth swollen and open around his panting breaths.

“WanYin....say your mine.....” XiChen asked with a deep, almost hoarse voice as he pinched those little nipples watching those lashes flutter as they opened fully to look up at him. Those brilliant blue eyes meeting and holding his and Lan XiChen felt his breath catch in his throat, his heart beating even faster in his chest.

He was so breathtakingly beautiful and XiChen swallowed down all that lust that was threatening to choke him.

“I.....I’m yours XiChen....if.....if you want me to be.....” Jiang Cheng spoke breathily, his chest lifting up to press into those hands that were driving him mad. It was ridiculous, he had never even noticed his nipples before. They had never felt anything and he had never even thought about them but under those talented hands it was like electricity ran down his spine

with every light tug and every gentle pinch making him harder and harder. He was so hard he was dripping and he arched his hips a little to try and rub some friction along his aching length despite the cloth of his pants.

“Mmmm I want you my WanYin, I want you now and tomorrow and a year from now, even a lifetime from now, my beautiful, beautiful WanYin, you are so perfect love...” Lan XiChen purred slipping those purple robes off. He tossed them distractedly to the side as he moved lower, dragging his eyes across that flushed chest and over that shivering belly. He leaned down to those tight abs with more hot open mouthed kisses, licking and sucking and biting all that pale skin that felt so smooth, like satin under his lips.

He pulled pink and red and purple violets up along the dips and ridges of his muscles moving lower and lower until he came across a little trail of soft hair below his belly button. He mouthed it letting it lead him further until he reached Jiang Cheng’s waistband and he glanced down noticing the hard ridge in his pants.

He laid his whole hand against it, his eyes jumping up to watch the moan that tumbled out of WanYin’s mouth. That sound was so breathy, so heavy it sent lightning down XiChen’s spine and he lowered himself down to kiss that hard ridge over the thin cloth.

He mouthed it before rubbing it with his tongue licking a hot moist line over the fabric, his hands sliding down to grab those hips possessively. And he groaned as those hands curled up into his hair again when he sucked at that hard cock.

“Ah....haaa.....aaaahhh.....hannn”

Jiang Cheng tossed his head to the side with a huff. He was losing his mind. XiChen was teasing him too much, it was way too much but it felt so good and he didn’t know what to do. XiChen hadn’t even touched him directly, he hadn’t done anything much other than kiss and lick and bite him but he felt so overwhelmed with pleasure already. At a complete loss, he just slid his hands deeper into those silky locks as this gorgeous man made a mess out of him. He took a moment to pull the headpiece off releasing that long hair before he buried his fingers into it again.

He arched his hips up, pressing into that hot mouth, grinding into that wet tongue. He was so far gone under this heat between them he didn’t even care if he came in his pants, in fact he had a sinking suspicion that was what XiChen was going for. If this was what lovemaking was supposed to be he wasn’t sure he’d see tomorrow with the way Lan XiChen kept licking him.

“Mmmm WanYin, you’re so perfect....you’re so beautiful, say your mine again love,” he whispered hoarsely and Jiang Cheng gasped out trying to speak, trying to form words.

“I’m.....I’m your’s...ahaaa.....ammm.....Xi....haa...XiChen....”

And his reward was physical when Lan XiChen dragged his tongue up that thick cock over the fabric again and then again in long sucking lines, rubbing and teasing and nipping lightly with his teeth. He almost couldn’t take it anymore but he willed himself to focus. He would

drown his lover, his partner in so much pleasure he wouldn't be able to tell up from down. He *would* have Jiang WanYin lose his mind tonight and he lifted back up to pull those pants off.

He tugged them loose quickly pausing when that thick shaft snapped up to slap his belly. It was so hard, it was twitching, a pearly trail of precum dangling one long thin thread. And Lan XiChen took a deep shuddering breath as he braced himself. It was so hot, so unbelievably hot to think that this beautiful man was so hard he was dripping for him.

He stared at it for a moment, blowing a puff of hot air across it, watching it twitch before he lowered his mouth to those sharp hip bones instead. He licked across the angle, kissing up more red petals along it before he sucked hard right along the cut of it, moaning low again.

“AHH?!.....HAA.....AH.....ANN.....Xi.....XiCh.....AMMM”

Jiang Cheng was almost delirious. He was so hard it hurt and XiChen just kept teasing him, over and over; he kissed and licked and laved those hip bones as though he was tasting some delicacy, nibbling and biting and sucking until WanYin really could not take it anymore.

“XiChen.....XiChen....pl....please....I can't.....mmmm.....tou....touch me.....”

“Mmmm.....whatever you want my love,” and he wrapped his broad hand around that throbbing length tugging up with his fist slowly swallowing heavily when a broken moan cut through the room. He was almost delirious too. And he leaned back up onto his knees slipping his hand into his sleeve quickly snagging a little vial of oil.

Truth be told, he had never done this before though he would be hard pressed to admit it. Jiang Cheng had spoken truth back at the lotus pavilion. This act of pleasure was sacred. It was meant only for your most beloved person and Lan XiChen was a romantic at heart. He was honored that WanYin had recognized that and stopped them from going too far that night because he had been all too willing.

And he was all too willing now. He was so wound up he almost felt like a teenager full of lust and desire. And he could have visited the Caiyi Town courtesans years ago and honestly he almost had a few times back when he was a disciple but the white band around his forehead had offered him the restraint he had needed but tonight, tonight he would lose himself in the body and hands and heart of the man he loved.

He pulled up a couple of images he had found in some of those little yellow books from the street peddlers in Yunmeng. He didn't have the face to buy them outright so he had left a whole tael of silver for each book he had grabbed. Those little books didn't exactly tell you what to do but they were full of pictures of all the different ways men could love. They were detailed and he had desired WanYin more and more with every single page he turned and tonight he was determined.

He yanked his belt and shrugged his robes off setting that little bottle next to them on the bed. He felt so hot, so unbearably hot and he knew dimly he was almost too close to losing control. He paused for a moment trying to collect himself.

Jiang Cheng slitted his eyes open when that amazing hand had left him and he swallowed the whine that wanted to tumble from his lips at the loss but he was immediately greeted with Lan XiChen yanking his clothes off and he stared. He stared hungrily at those broad shoulders, that smooth skin and all those muscles. Lan XiChen was in perfect form and he felt his mouth water at the sight.

He forced his boneless body up reaching out a tentative hand to caress those hard pecs. He laid his whole hand over the left one right over that racing heart as he glanced up into those heavy amber eyes almost gasping when another little shiver ran down his spine.

Lan XiChen watched him like a predator, his eyes almost glittering in the subtle light of the candles. His long black lashes lowered around that hot stare as he sat there patiently under those curious hands.

But his patience was almost gone and he leaned in again pulling that face up to kiss him softly. He kissed him breathless leaning forward to press him back into the bed with his body. He really could not wait any longer.

But he paused for a moment when those delicate fingers touched the satin band around his forehead almost questioningly and XiChen pulled back just a little to observe him. He met those beautiful blue eyes that were bold and heavy and hot with lust and something else. There was something a little off in his gaze.

He grabbed that hand gently pulling it to his mouth to kiss it lightly, “What is it WanYin?”

“Are you....going to leave it on?” Jiang Cheng whispered hoarsely, his voice still breathy and tight from lust. He knew what that ribbon meant and he wondered what Lan XiChen would say. Would he.....would he give him that ribbon? Did he really mean what he said? Was he really certain that he, with all his imperfections, with his fiery temper, with his scathing words and blunt demeanor, was truly what he wanted? Did this perfect, gorgeous man really, truly, actually desire him for more than just pleasure? And he waited on pins and needles to hear his response.

“I didn’t think about it honestly, you are too distracting love, do you want it my beautiful WanYin? You’re the only one I’d ever give it to...”

Jiang WanYin nodded shyly and XiChen pulled off the binding ribbon of his sect, the ribbon he wore every single day of his life, the ribbon that represented restraint and discipline, control and strength of will. The ribbon that a Lan could only give to their most important person, to their beloved.

He held it in his hand for a moment glancing at it before looking up at those gorgeous eyes again. Then he grinned suddenly leaning further up to sit on his heels between those long legs. He slipped that ribbon around Jiang Cheng’s thigh, tying it up high with a little bow before he leaned down and licked a hot line along the skin just above it moving to kiss into the curve, so close to that aching, throbbing cock that jutted straight up from his hips in a lewd display of sex and lust.

“Ah?!” Jiang Cheng shuddered almost violently. His cock twitching as XiChen dug his teeth into the juncture of his thigh.

“You are mine WanYin, and I am yours. No one will ever hold my heart but you.” He sucked a deep purple violet up on that sexy thigh before he followed it with another and another. He littered that pale skin with possessive bites and red petals listening to the hoarse moaning voice above him. He shifted over to the other thigh, letting his mouth leave more trails of hot marks with deep satisfaction.

He loved the way WanYin looked right now with his lust blown eyes and his hard cock, with his wild hair and red lips and those shivering, pale thighs, the white sect ribbon tight up high around the right one with a little bow. He thought it such an incredible view he wondered foggily if he could actually come just from staring at this man. Was that even possible? He looked so amazingly, incredibly sexy like one of those demons of lust that fed on the passions of others.

“WanYin.....who do you belong to, love?”

He trailed his gaze over the seductive creature underneath him, his eye catching on that hard cock with interest and he leaned down again. He blew a little puff of hot air on it watching it twitch before he purred, “WanYin?”

“Y.....you.....XiChen.....I’m....I....belong.....to....to you....please XiChen, please.....ha....please.....”

Jiang Cheng was hazy with need, foggy and a little disoriented. He wasn’t quite sure what he was asking for. His whole body was so hot, every inch of him was flushed, bites and love marks tingling everywhere along his skin. He had never done this before but he knew, almost instinctively that XiChen could help him, could release some of this impossible tension that swirled inside him, could sate this burning lust and he canted his hips up looking through his long lashes, begging for more, begging for this gorgeous man to do something, anything.

“Yes, you’re so good love...so perfect my beautiful WanYin”

XiChen was truly in love with those hazy blue eyes and he ducked his head kissing the swollen tip in front of his face, completely unprepared for the loud moan Jiang Cheng released and he sucked that tip into his mouth almost immediately just to hear that pleasure wrecked voice again. He pressed down swallowing all of that thick, long length, fluttering his tongue along the underside before he lifted up, moaning in his throat as WanYin tossed his head, his hands flexing in his hair.

“HAAA....AAAMMMM.....HAAANNN.....AHHH!”

His hips tried to buck up but Lan XiChen held them down firmly, his fingers pressing into those sharp hip bones as he sucked it deeper before he lifted his head pumping his mouth up and down slowly, enjoying the taste of WanYin’s pleasure.

“AHHH MMMMNNNAHHHH!!”

Jiang Cheng tossed his head wildly as that talented mouth broke him into pieces. He couldn't tell up from down anymore. He was hot, so hard, it was a wonder he didn't come immediately, gasping and panting roughly. XiChen's mouth was sin, there was no other way to describe it and he knew distantly he simply would not last. There was no way he could avoid that pleasure and he moaned hoarsely up at the ceiling, his hands curling tighter in XiChen's hair.

Lan XiChen was losing his mind and he snagged that little vial of oil with his right hand, his other holding those beautiful hips down. He popped the top quickly while he worked his lover with his mouth, up and down and up and down in time to those gasping, wild moans

He quickly coated his fingers with oil before he trailed them down between those thighs to slip one finger between those round cheeks. He pushed in deeper to trail around that tight little hole soaking it and rubbing it slowly. He teased that little rim in gentle circles around and around and around as he continued to move his mouth hollowing out his cheeks to suck it as deep as he could, WanYin's panting voice growing louder around them.

"XiChen...XiChen....haa...ahhhhh.....sto.....stop.....AHHH.....I'm.....
I'm.....ANNNHHA"

Jiang Cheng tugged weakly at his hair as pleasure ran up and down his spine, that swirling pressure growing and growing within him until it pulled tight.

"Get off Xi...HAAA...XiChen, I'm...AANN....gonna...."

Lan XiChen heard him and he bobbed his head ever faster. No force on earth could pull him off that thick cock in his mouth. He was simply incapable of stopping. He had to hear WanYin's cry of pleasure, he had to be the one to drag that sound out of his mouth. And he rubbing his finger a little faster warming WanYin's hole up with friction.

"AHHHHH.....ANNNNGH"

Those hands clenched tight in his hair and Jiang Cheng gave a wild shout, his hips jumping up and plunging his cock down that wet, hot throat. White lights exploded behind his eyes and lightning arced down his back with incredible force.

XiChen felt his eyes water and he took a sharp breath through his nose fighting to stay down on it as WanYin came deep in his mouth; his velvety voice rolling down his back. He was so loud, so husky, so hoarse, so fucking sexy and Lan XiChen pressed the tapered tip of one long finger into that little hole, testing it and teasing it in time to his climax.

He backed off that throbbing, jerking length in his mouth, bobbing a few more times to work him through his release as he pushed his finger in a little deeper into that clutching hole sliding all the way in down to his second knuckle. He slipped it back out before pushing it in slowly again as WanYin panted breathlessly above him,

"F.....f.....fu.....uck.....Xi.....XiChe.....XiChen....what.....the.....f.....fuck.....hol.....
holy.....shit....."

Jiang Cheng was winded, his heart racing in his chest as tension flowed out of him leaving him drained and almost exhausted. That had been the strongest, most intense climax of his entire life and he blinked dimly down at XiChen as he pulled back from his spent cock with a lewd pop.

XiChen looked up meeting those heavy eyes with a powerful look, and he added a second finger moving them steadily in and back out and in and back out in long slow lines as he got WanYin used to the feeling.

Jiang Cheng blinked as he came down from his high, registering those pumping fingers in his ass and he gasped suddenly, his body tightening up nervously as the full scope of lovemaking finally hit him. There was no way?! Was XiChen really thinking of....of.....oh fuck.....oh fuck, oh fuck...

“Xi...XiChen what are you uhm....I don’t think.....that’s.....not right?!.....what.....uhm.....?” he spoke in a rush but XiChen ignored him. He scooted further back slipping his fingers out and sliding his arms under those trembling thighs to lift them onto his shoulders as he ducked his head. He spread those cheeks open and paused for a moment staring at that tight little hole.

It clutched shyly under his gaze and he really, simply could not help it when he leaned in and kissed it.

“AH?! What XICHEN, XICHEN NO!? WHAT ARE YOU...ahhhhh haa?!”

“Mmmmm” XiChen moaned back as he kissed it again before poking his tongue out to lick that pink puckered hole. He laved his whole tongue over it and then he did it again. He licked long hot lines over and over and over it again. It tasted clean from his bath and sweet from the oil his fingers had left behind and the musky scent of skin drifted over him infusing his senses with the sight and scent and taste of WanYin.

He pushed in deeper between those cheeks pressing the tip of his tongue against that hole with firm little nudges before he went back to those long wet licks soaking it in spit. Then he did it again pausing to poke that little hole and like this he continued on and on and on licking and kissing and pushing and pressing into that little hole, teasing it and warming it up.

“Haa.....haa....ammm.....naaa.....ha.....?!”

Jiang Cheng tossed his head unable to come to terms with this. What the hell was XiChen doing?! How could he do that and how could it feel so good? The sensitive skin of his hole was tingling with every pass of that heavy tongue. His legs were trembling under those broad hands wrapped around them and he could feel that satiny headband tied firmly around his thigh.

He didn’t know what to do, what the hell was he supposed to be doing right now? He couldn’t make heads or tails of this situation and he moaned shakily as that tongue pushed hard at his entrance. It pushed and pushed until his body gave and it slid up into him. It was thick and wet and hot and WanYin shuddered.

“ahhhHHHAAA?!” He felt XiChen pull back only to thrust in again and then he did it again and Jiang Cheng just did not know what to do. Was it supposed to be like this? Was it supposed to be this hot? What else was XiChen going to do to him? How was he supposed to survive this, survive making love with this man who turned his head upside down.

He was growing hard again under that thrusting tongue in his ass and he almost couldn't believe it. How in the hell was he hard again? After that release he just had he didn't think it was possible but here they were, XiChen devouring his hole and his cock was curving up again because of it. He couldn't understand this. He couldn't compute what was going on, the only thing registering in his head was that this felt really, really good.

“Mmmmm,” XiChen moaned as that little hole clutched at his tongue again and he tugged it out before plunging back in working that hole open. He pumped in as deep as he could before pulling back and doing it again. And again and again. For what felt like hours he fucked that hole with his mouth over and over until it loosened up fully under his lips. Then he did it a few more times just for his own pleasure before he grabbed that little bottle of oil again.

He sat back up on his knees looking at the panting mess that was WanYin. He was so incredibly beautiful, his face completely wrecked with pleasure, his long hair thrown across the pillows and XiChen grinned despite himself. He loved that look. He loved the mess he had made of his gorgeous WanYin. His blue eyes were blown wide with lust again and his cock stood hard against his belly.

He flicked it lightly, playfully before he yanked his pants off. He was well beyond his limit. He had to have him and he had to have him now.

He soaked his cock in oil, rubbing it erratically before he poured the rest of the bottle over that shy little hole that was open and swollen from his mouth and he shuffled forward. He slid his hands under those impossibly long legs pausing for a moment as he noticed his ribbon tied neatly around his trembling thigh and he leaned in and kissed it fondly. Then he lifted those legs up over his shoulders.

Jiang Cheng glanced up when he felt that hot mouth stop tormenting him and he gasped in shock as his eyes dropped to the thick, dripping cock standing proudly against XiChen's abdomen and he swallowed heavily. It was big, like really big, like scary big but that might just be his innocent virgin heart quailing and Jiang Cheng had a fleeting moment of panic to wonder what the hell XiChen was going to do with it because he didn't know what to do with it. Should he try licking it? Or maybe he should rub it? What did one do when making love with a man, surely they had done everything humanly possible already but he did want to pleasure him too. He wanted XiChen to feel just as good as he did.

He was immediately thrown out of his head when XiChen moved his hand to position that thick length before he pressed gently against his entrance and he tensed up immediately, nervous fear bolting through him like lightning. There was no way?! What the fuck?!

“XiChen...XiChen....no....no.....no way that won't fit.....this can't be right ok? Look let me suck you too, ok? XiChen please....come here.....that's not---”

Lan XiChen leaned over to kiss him again and stop his nervously babbling. He plundered those lips to distract him, kissing and licking and making love to that mouth as his hips moved forward a little more, his cock pressing and pushing against that hot hole until it gave and he popped the thick swollen head inside him.

“MMMMMMAAAAPH?!” Jiang WanYin gasped hoarsely into his mouth, tears springing up in his eyes at the incredible stretch. It was so much bigger than his tongue, than his fingers and so much hotter and he tensed up with pain. There was no way this was going to work. He simply could not do this.

Lan XiChen whispered hoarsely against his mouth between kisses, “Shh WanYin, you’re doing so good love, you’re so perfect, just relax for me ok?”

“Ha?! Ammn Xi...XiChen....What.....”

“Hush my beautiful WanYin, it’ll be ok, I’ll go slow, you’re doing so good, so hot, so perfect my love. Just a little more ok?” Lan XiChen sunk in just a little bit more, another hot throbbing inch and Jiang Chang whined. He couldn’t help it, it hurt so much but he heard that hoarse whisper in his ear.

“Please relax, you’re doing so good, you’re so, so good my WanYin, just breathe love, so good....so perfect”

And Jiang Cheng had an odd moment of clarity, he realized he liked being good for Lan XiChen. He realized he loved hearing those husky, hoarse words and he wanted, he needed to be good for this amazing man. It did something funny to his brain being praised like this, being overwhelmed with these words of love and he forced his body to relax.

He willed himself to take more of this man, to pleasure him like he had been pleased. He could do this, he would do this for his XiChen.

“Yes, love, yes just like that,” XiChen moaned heavily as he pushed deeper just another little inch.

“So perfect, by my ancestors WanYin you feel so amazing, you’re so hot my love, so beautiful, yes.....mmmm”

He pushed in deeper all the way in until he was flush against that ass and he took a shuddering breath, his body trembling with the strength he was using to hold himself back. Jiang Cheng forced his teary eyes open to gaze at the man above him and he moaned back softly. He couldn’t help it, Lan XiChen looked absolutely breathtaking.

His hair was a mess around his face, his shoulders dusted with a flush that matched the pink of his cheeks under those long lowered lashes that framed those hot amber eyes. His wicked mouth was open and panting and so red, so swollen from kissing and licking and sucking and Jiang Cheng bit his lip feeling overwhelmed by all of his seductive beauty. This man looked so sexy, so fucking alluring as he held himself back and WanYin liked that. He liked that a whole hell of a lot. That he could bring this incredible man to his knees, see him trembling and tense with desire for him, with his lust for him made him greedy, made him want more.

He wanted XiChen to come undone for him. He wanted him to moan and groan louder, wanted him to lose his mind in his body and he reached up and yanked him down to kiss him hard and fast.

He led the kiss this time, plundering that hot mouth with his lust, with his need to tame this gorgeous, impossible man. He licked and bit those swollen lips wildly before he sucked his tongue into his mouth. He sucked it with a bob of his head almost fucking it with his lips. It was so lewd, so fucking hot and XiChen groaned long and low in his chest.

He tugged his hips back slowly before pushing them in again and then he did it again, long gentle bucks of his hips and WanYin just continued to kiss and suck at that mouth trying to distract himself from that stretch, from that odd pain. It felt like he was being split in two but he would not stop this. He could not stop this. If this was lovemaking, he would willingly do it again, do it as many times as he had to to see XiChen's wrecked face and hear those deep groans.

Lan XiChen was hanging onto his sanity by a thin, thin thread. It was so hard to go slow, it was so incredibly difficult to keep himself from slamming into that tight ass and it was only his love for the man under him that kept him in check. He knew WanYin was in pain and he hated that. He wanted this to feel good for him. He wanted it to blow his mind with pleasure but he couldn't stop. The best he could do was to keep his pace slow and shallow and he panted brokenly into his hot mouth trying desperately to keep control over himself.

Jiang Cheng pulled back from their messy kiss and he glanced up into those eyes. He could read the tension in them, read how hard it was to go slow and he surrendered. He would pleasure this man even if it killed him, which it actually might but he didn't care and he whispered heavily into the space between them.

"XiChen....it's ok....just do it, ok? I can take it."

"N....no....I do.....don't want to hurt.....hurt you love----"

"Shhh, please do it....fuck me XiChen, fuck me hard...." WanYin purred breathily. Whether he could take it or not was debatable but there was no way he could deny XiChen his pleasure, not when he had taken such good care of him, not when he had spent hours loving his body and tying his head up in knots. He could do this, he would do this.

Almost as if WanYin's words flipped a switch in him, XiChen yanked his hips back and slammed in deep, deeper than ever before with a wild punching thrust straight into something soft and spongy and Jiang Cheng saw lights. Sparkling lights exploded across his eyes and his whole body arched backwards as lightning ripped through him.

"HHHHHHHANNNNNN.....HAAAAA.....AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHNNNNNNN YES XICHEN FUCK YES!!!"

He tossed his head back, his bangs falling across the blankets and XiChen did it again. He pumped his hips straight into that spot and Jiang Cheng fell apart. He broke into pieces, pieces of sobbing hoarse cries of absolute pleasure and XiChen ever the fast learner pitched

his hips out and back then swung them in again aiming right for whatever that was that filled the room with WanYin's wild cries.

"YE....S.....HAAA.....ANNNN.....MMMMMNNNAAAA.....AAAAAAMMM.....HA
AAAAN"

He didn't understand exactly what had happened but whatever that spot was it pulled the most incredible, breathless voice from those swollen red lips and XiChen was absolutely determined to do it again. He had to hear it again and he bucked his hips sliding out only to thrust back in hard, faster, over and over his hips throwing WanYin up against the blankets before he used his hands still wrapped around those legs hanging on his shoulders to yank him back into his buck.

He had wanted to make love to him, he had wanted to be soft and slow and gentle but WanYin wouldn't let him and XiChen was completely incapable of slowing down now.

"AHHNNNN...FUCK...HAA.....AHHHHH...
XICHEN.....MMMMM.....AAAAAAAAAANNNNNNHAAAAA YES YES
YES.....HAAAA!!!!!"

"Mmmmm.....yes.....my WanYin, yes love, yes....you are so fucking hot...so fucking perfect...."

Jiang Cheng was done for. He couldn't think, he couldn't focus, he couldn't tell up from down, couldn't tell where he ended and XiChen began. He couldn't compute anything as those pistoning hips drove into him over and over and over again. He moved his hands to tug XiChen down over him between his legs to wrap his arms around that broad back in desperation since he couldn't do anything else under those heavy hips.

XiChen was blowing his mind with that thick, thrusting cock and he wondered dimly why the hell he had never done this before? This was incredible, this was turning his mind upside down and he knew he would never, ever be the same again after this wild night of passion with the esteemed head of GusuLan.

He was absolutely ruined for anyone else. It was like he was made for this, made to take that big cock, made for XiChen's pleasure and he listened to those heavy, groaning moans from the man he loved as he tried to breathe past his own moaning voice. He knew dimly he was too loud. He knew foggily that he probably woke up his whole damn sect but he couldn't help it. He could not deal with this.

Making love to Lan XiChen was way beyond what he had ever expected and he laid there under those pumping hips, pleasure swirling around him and collecting deep in his belly and he knew he was going to come. He was going to come from nothing but XiChen fucking his ass but he really couldn't bring himself to care; his pride had disappeared, his shame had disappeared, nothing existed in this space and time but XiChen and his snapping hips.

"AHHHH...HAAA...XICHEN...XICHEN.....HAAAANNN...XICHEN
IM...IM.....AAAAAANNNN"

“Mmmmm yes my beautiful WanYin, come for me love, I want to see you come while I fuck you...”

Lan XiChen purred even as his hips continued their punishing pounding bucks. He could feel his release gather deep in his belly, swirling and building but he shoved it back as hard as he could. He refused to come before WanYin did. He simply refused. He had to see that wrecked face and hear that hoarse voice once more and he moved his hips even faster determined to rip pleasure from the man under him.

“AAAAAANNNNNNNNGGGGGGHHHHHHAAAA!!!”

Jiang WanYin tensed up like a bow, his fingers dragging deep scratches into that broad back as his whole body arched backwards into the bed and he came with a wild cry of pleasure. XiChen groaned long and loud with him as Jiang Cheng’s clutching ass dragged him over the edge too and he jerked into that tight body. His hips shivering and his back curving forward with the strength of his release. He saw white across his eyes, spots dancing over his vision as his thick cock twitched with every spurt of his release.

He froze there with WanYin’s arms around him, his body trembling as he tried desperately to catch his breath. After a minute or an hour, he couldn’t tell he lifted his head to gaze at Jiang Cheng again. And he stared and stared at that wrecked face. WanYin looked mind blowingly beautiful there under him with his chest heaving wildly, his dark blue eyes almost closed under those long wet lashes as he gazed hazily back up at him.

“W.....wow.....” He huffed with a quirky grin curling his lips up and XiChen nodded. Wow indeed. That had been amazing, mind numbingly amazing. Was it going to be like this every time they made love? If so XiChen didn’t think he would survive a lover like WanYin but honestly he couldn’t bring himself to care and he leaned down to lay a tired kiss against that panting mouth.

“Mmmm,” Jiang Cheng hummed back. He felt weightless, boneless and satisfied. He felt warm and loved and treasured and he wrapped his arms tighter around XiChen and tugged him all the way down into the messy blankets with him. He curled up into that sweaty chest nuzzling those hard pecs affectionately.

“You.....that.....that was fucking amazing.....” he purred, his voice hoarse and breathy still as he cuddled up closer to XiChen. He was languid, almost felt like he was floating in the afterglow, his body weak and warm.

“Mn.....*you* are amazing my beautiful WanYin,” XiChen smiled lazily. He wrapped his arms around the nuzzling, cuddly man against him and he was happy. He was completely and thoroughly content with his life. No matter what hell he had weathered, no matter what ghosts wandered his mind nothing could dim the flames in his heart. Everything paled against this man he had stumbled across almost by accident.

He was rough around the edges and his eyes were sharp and his words sharper still but if you peeled back those layers much like the hard shell of a lotus seed you would find something soft and sweet inside that would fill your mouth with a crisp, clean taste.

Lan XiChen gathered up his little lotus seed in his arms and he buried his nose in his wild hair. He took a deep breath, filling his senses with everything that was WanYin and he felt those strong arms wrap around him too. He pressed a kiss to those thick black locks with tired affection before he settled down to sleep drifting away under this glow that suffused the very air around them.

And as Jiang Cheng laid there wrapped up in XiChen so full of love and peace he wondered dimly again if he was part Lan because he knew deep in his heart that he would love this man, this beautiful, wonderful, amazing man for the rest of his life and into the next. He would love him fully and unconditionally; he would love him with devastating force. It was a profound emotion that filled his heart then, an impossible and irrevocable emotion. He curled tighter up in XiChen's strong arms and whispered into the space between them.

"XiChen.....I.....love you...too....you know....." And that sweet, deep voice he loved whispered back, so full of warmth and affection and peace.

"Mmmm I love you too my beautiful WanYin"

And they drifted away together, the low, soft lights of the candles catching on that satin ribbon tied neatly on his thigh.

~*~

Lan XiChen woke in layers, first his nose full of some soft, sweet smell. He nuzzled into it breathing in deeply. It was a subtle scent, something light and rich sliding across his senses. Then he noticed something long and warm pressed against his chest. He curled his arms tighter around it, his fingers brushing that satiny, smooth skin.

Next his ears picked up the distant trilling of the birds that chirped outside the window and he heard the soft, gentle sounds of someone breathing and he blinked; his long lashes fluttering. He blinked a second time, his brown eyes falling on a mess of black hair under his nose. He noticed dimly the bright sunlight filtering in passed the shutters and he considered it for a moment. It was late in the morning judging by the strength of the light and he wondered a little disconnectedly when was the last time he had awoken so late in the day. Must have been years and years ago; the strict sleep schedule of the Lan Sect had ruled his life for as far back as he could remember. Even when he had drunk himself into a stupor back at the hanshi he had always awoken at 5am on the dot.

He pulled his eyes away from the bright shafts of sunlight and settled again on the thick hair under his chin and last night hit him like a bolt of lightning. WanYin's hoarse cries of pleasure, his sexy arching body, his impossibly long legs, that wildfire blush across his cheeks and those blue eyes that had caught him with the lust and desire that had darkened them into something hot and heavy.

And he felt something stir in his belly, a light flicker of heat rolling up his spine as he considered the sexy creature in his arms. He had been breathtaking last night and now he was even more beautiful with the sunlight casting lines of shadows across his naked body and Lan XiChen could not help the edge of lust that curled over him from his head to his toes.

WanYin had turned away from him in his sleep and now his back was pressed against his chest, his hips flushed to his and those alluring legs threaded through his own. That amazing ass nestled right up against his cock and he felt it twitch, growing with the weight of his memories.

He grinded up a little bit into the soft swells of those cheeks he had kissed and licked and devoured last night and his cock grew even harder. He slipped his hands down along Jiang Cheng's arm and over his slim waist to grab that cheek possessively.

He slowly slid that hot ass open pressing his cock firmly into the cleft. He rubbed there, gliding against it with long, gentle rolls of his hips. He could feel that little hole under his shaft and he bit back a moan. He was completely hard now, memories washing over him of that tight, clutching entrance, so hot and wet around him and he resisted the urge to push into it. He couldn't fuck WanYin while he was asleep. They weren't at that stage yet but he couldn't resist canting his hips up again, rubbing against the warm skin of his ass.

Jiang Cheng shivered for a moment as he woke up, his body remembering that cock almost instinctively and he blinked blearily, a little disconnected. He blinked again foggily as the thick blanket of his bed drifted into view. They had fallen asleep last night spent and exhausted, too tired to get under the covers. The next thing he noticed was that maddening rub against his ass. It was rhythmic and constant; up and down and up and down over his sensitive hole and he moaned low in his throat.

He was so hazy, still sleepy and he lifted his hand to press against XiChen's other hand that still laid against his belly, those fingers long and warm against his skin and he pressed his ass back into that feeling.

"Mmmm....Xi...XiChen?" He whispered softly, his voice hoarse from sleep.

"I'm sorry love, I couldn't help it. You're too sexy," XiChen whispered back, his breath hot on his ear and Jiang Cheng awoke just a little more. He couldn't really tell what was going on, sleep still hovering around the edges of his consciousness but he did know that he liked that husky voice. He liked that thick cock rubbing against his ass and he pushed back into it.

He felt the fingers of that free hand dip down rubbing questioningly against his hole and he relaxed under it, his entrance fluttering invitingly and two long fingers pushed lightly with another question.

WanYin rolled his hips further back letting those fingers press into him and he moaned again, a deep, soft, hoarse sound and XiChen slid in further. He was still loose and open and wet. The proof of XiChen's pleasure still filling his ass and this time it was Lan XiChen's turn to moan as all that oil and cum coated his fingers and dripped down along his hand.

He pumped his fingers in a few times before slipping a third one in making sure it was loose enough for him before he leaned down to lay affectionate kisses along that sexy neck in front of him. He kissed and licked hot trails over it pausing to suck lightly. He couldn't bite this high up, Jiang Cheng still had a professional life to live. He was a sect leader and he couldn't walk around with love bites and bruises above his collar.

“Mmmmm XiChen.....fuck me....” WanYin whispered softly, his voice falling out of him slowly, sleepily.

XiChen groaned, he really could not take it when Jiang Cheng talked like that and he pulled his fingers from that slick, wet ass and pressed the thick, swollen tip of his cock into it instead.

He eased up into it with a long, slow glide, rolling his hips and they both moaned then. He pulled his body back before he did it again setting a gentle rhythm between them. He was still sleepy too, but something about WanYin all hot and warm in his arms and that wet ass clutching around him made him groan and he pumped his hips again.

He fucked him like this for a while, in and out with slow and long strokes, their breathy moans filling the room and he was dimly grateful he had put up a silencing talisman the night before. The sect was clearly awake by now and he never wanted Jiang Cheng’s pleasure on display. That was for him and only him. Only he could hear those hot pants and deep breathy moans. Only he had that right and a swirling pressure started to collect within him.

He pushed it back, he didn’t want to come yet and he realized that gentle hoarse voice was not screaming in pleasure like he did last night. So he rolled them over laying Jiang Cheng flat on his stomach with XiChen straddling the backs of his thighs, his cock still deep inside him. He slipped his hands under those hips to lift them up just enough and he pulled back with another long slide before he snapped his hips in deep wringing a shocked cry from those pale pink lips.

“AHHHMMMM?!”

XiChen grinned and did it again. He sped his thrusts up until he was bucking hard and fast straight into that spot that would leave his WanYin in pieces and he groaned as that little hole started to clutch at him again.

Jiang Cheng gasped and pushed his hips up just a little higher as electric sparks tripped up and down his spine again and he knew dimly he was not going to last. He was going to come and soon, the haze of sleep robbing him of any self control, not that he had had any last night.

“AHH....HAA....ANNN....XI.....XICHEN....IM.....IM
GONNA....HAAAA.....ANNNNGH!”

XiChen pitched his hips faster to match him, he wanted to come together and with a few more slapping thrusts he buried his cock as deep as he could go, a wild groan falling from his lips as his release washed through him in time to WanYin’s hoarse cry.

They came hard, glittering lights rushing around them as they found their pleasures in each other. After another moment XiChen leaned down over WanYin’s back laying tiredly against him pausing to kiss more of that pale skin as they huffed together.

“Mmmmmmm goo....good....morning.....XiChen....”

“Good morning my beautiful WanYin,” XiChen whispered back, sated and satisfied. He tugged out slowly and Jiang Cheng whined a little as he shifted under the heavy, comforting weight of his lover.

WanYin blinked a little tiredly as he suddenly noticed the bright light filtering in to the room passed the shutters.

“FUCK?! XICHEN WHAT THE FUCK TIME IS IT?!” He asked in a rush darting out and jumping to his feet. He wobbled a little as his back protested and his legs trembled but he shook it off hunting around the room for his clothes. He was so distracted he didn't notice the long lines of oil and cum that dripped down his ass, their pleasures trailing along his skin erotically.

Lan XiChen's brown eyes darkened almost immediately as he noticed it, staring at the alluring view of his WanYin with cum creeping down his hot thighs. Jiang Cheng was hurrying around trying to find his pants, oblivious to the hungry gaze that stalked him and he really didn't get very far before XiChen wrapped his arms around his waist and tugged him back into the bed.

“Hush WanYin love, your lieutenant will handle your duties. Today you are all mine,” XiChen purred, dropping his hand to caress the Lan Sect ribbon still tied on his upper thigh.

“But practice and the disciples and I have to...” But Lan XiChen cut him off with a soft, sweet kiss.

“Uh huh...” he whispered low against that hot mouth.

“And.....re...ports?” WanYin sighed breathily between those sultry kisses, each one leaving him weaker and weaker in those strong arms.

“They can wait, my beautiful WanYin...” And Lan XiChen rolled them back into the bed to teach him exactly what it meant to belong to a Lan.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

And they fucked happily ever after ^~ lmfaio so hey guys thank you so much for all your love and support. I'm so happy you enjoyed it :) I love reading your comments and I'm rly, truly happy so many of you stopped by. I really just wanted to show that Jiang Cheng is more than just some angry man and give him a chance to find some closure and peace. He and XiChen both deserve a happy ending. 💜💙 I have a silly little epilogue left and I hope you enjoy it. There's 1 more story in this series which will wrap up all the emotional closure I needed after the novel ended and I hope you check it out. I

will be posting Broken Dreams a few days after the epilogue and it will deal with Jin Ling and Wei Ying's reconciliation. Thx again! ❤️

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

PLEASE LOOK AT WHAT @FENGSHOUZAI DID FOR US!!

<https://twitter.com/brieze01/status/1425179449289580551?s=19>

I LOVE IT SO MUCH!!!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The sun was bright in the sky coloring the leaves of the thick trees in the Cloud Recesses a deep emerald green as Jiang Cheng and Lan XiChen landed down on their swords. They sheathed them smoothly before walking up to the elegant archway of the west entrance.

“This place is so pretty,” Jiang Cheng muttered walking up the stone steps that lead into the GusuLan Sect.

“I think so too but I find myself very fond of Yunmeng. It’s a different sort of beauty,” Lan XiChen spoke over as they headed down the winding white stone path.

“You can always come visit,” Jiang Cheng replied, “I know you still have your duties as sect leader to attend to.”

“WanYin love we talked about this. I am going to step down and I am sure shifu and WangJi will understand.”

“But you can’t just leave it for me XiChen, I can’t handle it if I take your sect from you, you have---”

“WanYin,” XiChen paused, turning to meet Jiang Cheng’s eyes sincerely, “you are not taking anything from me love. I want to do this. I need to do this. And I do want to be with you but that is not the only reason. I have served this sect for 20 years and I wouldn’t trade that for anything. I care very much for GusuLan but it is time. I want to live my life love and I want to live it with you.”

Lan XiChen took a step closer to him, lifting his hand to caress that strong jaw with affection.

“Don’t feel bad, don’t feel like it’s your fault because it’s not. I meant what I said before, I have been thinking long and hard about it for a while now; even before Guanyin Temple. My father served this sect for his entire life. He lived and breathed it and once I had thought to do

the same but now, now I want to live my life WanYin. I want to enjoy it and spend the rest of my days with you in Yunmeng.”

“But...”

“Hush love, this is not a negotiation ok?” He spoke softly, his eyes warm and kind.

“I love you and I enjoy being with you. I like how you manage your sect and I am very fond of your disciples. Please don’t deny me your company my love. Please don’t feel like you’re taking something from me. I cannot bear to think you feel disappointed or upset at my decision...”

“I...I’m not upset XiChen, well I am a little bit but I would never be able to leave my sect for you, like I told you before I am a selfish, petty man...”

“You are not WanYin and I know a lie when I hear one. I know you would, after these 3 months with you I know you would jump through hoops of fire for me, for those you care about and that touches me deeply, love. But I would never ask you to make another sacrifice. You have made enough for a lifetime, enough for 2 lifetimes. I am happy with this choice WanYin, please believe me when I say all I want is to be with you now and live the rest of my life in peace because you have given me that. You have given me the greatest gift of all my beautiful WanYin before you, I was a desperate, sad man content to wallow in misery and drink myself to death but you opened my heart when I thought that impossible. Don’t deny me love because I cannot take it.”

“XiChen....of course I won’t I...I...I...lo...love you too....I just don’t want you to waste your future with me. I am not worth that, I am not better than your sect, your people....”

“You are, you are perfect in every way WanYin, you are everything I have wanted and I ask you to believe me, to trust me, to let me choose you...”

Jiang Cheng looked down from those bright brown eyes, a little uncomfortable. They have been having this circling conversation for a month now and for that entire month, he had balked at this idea. The idea that Lan XiChen, ZeWu-Jun, Sect Leader of GusuLan would step down for him, would choose him over his sect. No one had ever chosen him. No one had ever looked at him like he was precious the way Lan XiChen did. He didn’t know how to feel about it. He had always been second choice, he was always second best to his mother, to his sister, especially to his father and even to his brother. And it was not like he didn’t believe XiChen, he did, what he didn’t believe in was himself. He wasn’t worthy of this sacrifice. He wasn’t worth the weight of XiChen’s people.

Lan XiChen gazed at him watching the play of emotions across his face. He could read all those tumbling feelings and his heart was warm in his chest. Jiang Cheng would never be able to trick him with silvery words. He would never be able to play him like a master musician like Jin GuangYao and Nie HuaiSang and he knew he would never try to. As amazing as it seemed, the person who had given him the will and the desire to trust again was the most unlikely of people, the fiery SanDu ShengShou, the ferocious Jiang Cheng of the YunmengJiang Sect. And it was true what he had said, that ability to trust again, to sleep in

peace, to love another person with his whole heart had been the greatest gift he could have ever received.

He stood there waiting for a reply, hoping Jiang Cheng would let him stay with him. He would step down from his position and he hoped with fierce hope that he could stay with the man who had stolen his heart and he spoke again with a firm, sincere voice reading those lines of worries and that cute frown correctly.

“WanYin love, you are worth it, you are worth that and so much more. I want to choose you love, let me choose you. You are my number one person, my beloved, my partner and I will love you for the rest of my life if you will let me.....so let me, my beautiful WanYin.”

“You.....you will regret this.....I’m.....I’m a terrible match for you XiChen....” He muttered a little hoarsely glancing up into those bright brown eyes, swallowing heavily as a soft smile curled those wicked lips up.

“You are not”

“I swear and drink and I really don’t give a fuck about what I say.....” He continued his voice growing a little softer as he repeated those very same words he had whispered at the lotus pavilion so many months ago.

“I know that but I love you just the same,” Lan XiChen lifted his hands up to cradle his cheeks with both hands and he stepped closer to press a light kiss to his lips uncaring that they were outside, uncaring that anyone could come upon them.

“Will you let me stay with you? Will you let me live with you in Yunmeng? Will you let me love you?”

“Ah.....y.....ye..yes XiChen.....if.....if you really want to....” Jiang Cheng whispered, his voice deep with emotion. He had never before felt so completely loved, so valued, so treasured.

“I do, I really, really do WanYin.”

Lan XiChen kissed him gently one more time before he stepped back again. If he kept kissing Jiang Cheng one thing would lead to another because ever since that wild night they had shared, he simply could not keep his hands to himself. They had made love constantly since then, almost everyday sometimes more than once, sometimes even three or four times. He couldn’t keep his wits about him with WanYin and he had come to understand WangJi. For the first time since Young Master Wei had shown up again he finally understood his brother’s madness and his insatiable lust for his husband for he found himself trapped in that very same madness himself.

“Come love, let’s visit our brothers, I am sure they would be happy to see us,” he spoke with a fond smile, it grew even wider when Jiang Cheng gave him one shy, happy smile of his own.

They walked through the Cloud Recesses hand in hand and Lan XiChen really did not care if someone saw them, so content he was, so happy he was. He knew one day he would marry this man and it was good for others to know that this incredible, beautiful man was his.

They walked down the path enjoying the summer sun as they headed for the jingshi. After the night Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian had mended their relationship the brothers had actually started to send letters to each other falling easily back into their bantering and Lan XiChen had been happy to see that; happy to see his lover healing and growing stronger and stronger as all that guilt and regret fell from around him.

He slept through the night now and ate 3 meals a day, his sharp words just a little softer and his heart just a little warmer.

They turned the corner walking up to the door of the jingshi when they heard an odd muffled sound. They turned curiously to each other before they followed it around the corner when they heard it again just a little louder.

Lan XiChen quirked an eyebrow in confusion as he followed it into the wild bushes that grew around the jingshi. He stepped through the trees with Jiang Cheng as they searched for that odd sound again.

They walked a little deeper, passed a thick copse of trees when XiChen froze. Jiang Cheng, unprepared for him to stop so suddenly walked right into him, he was about to mutter an apology when he froze too.

There in front of them was Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian and that odd sound was immediately and unavoidably obvious when he moaned again long and loud. He was on his knees over Lan Zhan who was laying flat on the ground, his hands wrapped tight around those arching hips as Wei Ying rode him fast and hard. Their bodies slapping together lewdly and XiChen's ears turned bright red, Jiang Cheng's cheeks flaring up too with an answering blush as he looked at the scene, too stunned to move.

Lan XiChen stared in shock for a moment. Wei WuXian was facing away from him as he bounced his body up and down on WangJi's thick cock and XiChen's brown eyes fell to his hands. They were tied behind him with their sacred ribbon and those long, white tails fluttered into the air with every hard buck of his hips.

They were fucking wildly, their voices deep and hoarse, their bodies arching into each other over and over filling the trees with the sounds of their pleasure.

Wei WuXian threw his head back, his long hair dragging down his back and falling across his bound wrists as he tensed up like a bow, Lan Zhan's name tumbling from his lips like a prayer. He came so hard, his release shot across his husband's chest falling in thick white lines along his abs and WangJi groaned heavily in response, his hands digging into those pale hip bones as he came too with a jerking shudder.

That was so lewd to see and XiChen swallowed dryly, his eyes falling back to those bound wrists and he grabbed WanYin's hand again tugging him back from the scene quickly. He did

not have the face to look at his brother after seeing that. They could come back later when the pair was properly situated again.

He stumbled back catching his stride as he pulled his lover with him. He turned the corner of the jingshi again walking fast, Jiang Cheng keeping pace with him.

He may not have ever wished to see his brother's pleasure but WangJi was nothing if not creative with his love life and XiChen walked just a little faster towards the hanshi. He reached the steps quickly since he and his brother's homes were fairly close together before he turned glancing at WanYin again.

Jiang Cheng swallowed a gasp when those hot brown eyes met his with a crack of lightning. Lan XiChen had that look that made his knees go weak and he felt his protests die on his tongue as the illustrious GusuLan Sect Leader tugged at his headband. It fell loose immediately and that gorgeous, beautiful, sexy man grabbed his hands looping that white satin band around his wrists to tie them tight before he pulled WanYin by the ribbon into the hanshi, the door snapping shut behind them. It was a long, long time before they emerged again.

And if anyone heard the sounds that came from the hanshi that day no one would ever admit it.

Chapter End Notes

Yay! its done lol, thank you so much for everyone who stuck around to see Jiang Cheng and XiChen's happy ending. I'm so happy to see everyone! 💜💙 Thank you for so much love and support ❤️ I rly appreciate it and I am low key sad to end their story. I hope you enjoyed their journey and all the emotional closure they (and I) needed. These 2 characters are arguably my favorite. :) I will be posting the final story in this series soon and I hope you will check out Broken Dreams too. It will be a reconciliation piece for Jin Ling and Wei Ying. Also I have a twitter lol if anyone wants to come geek out with me about mdzs and yoi :) <https://twitter.com/brieze01?s=09>

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