

## paper thin plans

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/27863669) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/27863669>.

Rating:	<a href="#">General Audiences</a>
Archive Warnings:	<a href="#">Major Character Death</a> , <a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Categories:	<a href="#">Gen</a> , <a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">陈情令   The Untamed (TV)</a> , <a href="#">魔道祖师 - 墨香铜臭   Módào Zǔshī - Mòxiāng Tóngxiù</a> , <a href="#">魔道祖师   Módào Zǔshī (Cartoon)</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Lan Zhan   Lan Wangji/Wei Ying</a> , <a href="#">Wei Wuxian</a> , <a href="#">Lan Huan</a>   <a href="#">Lan Xichen &amp; Lan Zhan</a>   <a href="#">Lan Wangji</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Hurt No Comfort</a> , <a href="#">well a little bit of comfort</a> , <a href="#">Introspection</a> , <a href="#">Lan wangji centric</a> , <a href="#">Canon Compliant</a> , <a href="#">its compliant but i forgot all the canon details sooooo</a> , <a href="#">Songfic</a> , <a href="#">based on death by a thousand cuts by taylor swift</a> , <a href="#">Angst with a Happy Ending</a> , <a href="#">does this count as a character study? i say yes</a> , <a href="#">Character Study</a> , <a href="#">Lan Wangji's thirteen years of pining</a> , <a href="#">i swore that was a tag</a> , <a href="#">Anyways</a> , <a href="#">Canonical Character Death</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-12-18 Words: 4,272 Chapters: 1/1

# paper thin plans

by [illuchan](#)

## Summary

Wangji tries every meditation technique he's learned in his life, but there's an insistent train of thought that just won't leave. It seems to grow more vicious in the dark, silent, cold of the room.

Wei Ying is dead.

## Notes

helloooo! this is my first cql/mdzs fic and i am very excited this was rlly fun to write. i pretty much think about lwjs thirteen years of pining every day and cry. as far as canon goes it's pretty much solely based on cql canon because that's the one i know best (also i really wanted the falling scene lol) ummmm uhh Oh! title comes from death by a thousand cuts by taylor swift which is like my favorite song right now and the fic is heavily based off of that. ok i think thats it soooo have fun

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

He held on to Wei Ying's arm as long as he could. Wangji could hear the noises of war behind him, swords entering and exiting, battle cries, but it was foggy like his head was underwater. His focus was on Wei Ying, like it often was these past days and weeks. Wangji hears someone arrive, but he doesn't worry as he knows he could take care of them without even letting go of Wei Ying. He sees another flash of pain and terror and regret cross Wei Ying's face, though, and he assumes he knows who's approached them.

"Let me go, Lan Zhan," he starts. "Just let go," Wei Ying tries to smile, but it looks so much more like the grimace he makes when on the verge of tears. Wangji simply gives him a look and calls his name, trying his best to convey every emotion he feels into it. Wangji senses movement behind him again, and turns to see Jiang Wanyin, sword drawn. He was correct.

"Wei Wuxian!" he starts, as he often does. Wangji recognizes this tone, and he knows what's coming. he'll place all the fault on Wei Ying, like he does, and Wei Ying will just take it, as he always does. Wangji usually stays out of their familial matters, but not today. Today is about saving Wei Ying.

"Jiang Wanyin!" Wangji calls, his voice stronger than he thought it would be despite the tears in his throat. Jiang Wanyin barely spares him a glare, however, and turns back to face Wei Ying as he dangles from the cliff.

"You got our parents killed, and now you get my jiejie killed too? They took care of you for years, and this is how you repay them? I will not let you leave here alive today, Wei Wuxian!"

It seems to happen in slow motion, almost, the sword headed right towards Wei Ying's neck, Wangji's free hand reaching for Bichen. But then the sound of metal crashing against rock is heard, and Jiang Wanyin breathes heavily. Wangji is distracted, for just a moment, but its a moment long enough for Wei Ying to do what he's been trying this whole time.

He removes his hand from Wangji's grip.

"Wei Ying!" Wangji screams, possibly louder than he's ever been. There's a thought of what Uncle would think if he heard Wangji's voice at this volume, but it's abandoned in favor of thinking only about Wei Ying. Wei Ying, who is now free falling into a volcano.

"Take care, Lan Zhan," he sees Wei Ying mouth as he falls, and falls, and falls.

Wangji sits straight up in bed, a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead. He can tell by his impeccable internal clock that it isn't five yet, but there's no way he'll be getting back to sleep after such a dream. Nightmare? Flashback? The scene was so vividly painted in Lan Wangji's mind that it truly felt like he was reliving it, over and over again, night after night since Lanling. It is approaching four years since he witnessed Wei Ying fall from the cliff, and four years since Lan Wangji has had his full, Gusu Lan Clan regulated nine hours of sleep. The three years of isolation didn't help in the slightest, though Lan Wangji believes the elders thought it would. No amount of time would be enough to make him forget Wei Ying.

Wangji lays down every night at nine still, but it takes hours to fall asleep. He tries every meditation technique he's learned in his life, but there's an insistent train of thought that just won't leave. It seems to grow more vicious in the dark, silent, cold of the jingshi.

Wei Ying is dead.

Well, he is presumed dead. There is neither body to be found nor soul to be contacted. Most have given up; most with any sense of self-preservation or wish to save face had already given up on Wei Ying long before, but not Wangji. Without confirmation that Wei Ying is really gone, Wangji places his chips on the fact that he is still alive. Wei Ying made it through the cave of Xuanwu, the siege of Lotus Pier, the Burial Mounds, the ambush at Qiongqi Way, and countless other trials Wangji is sure the other failed to mention. Falling from a cliff is just one more near death experience Wei Ying will love to joke about at inappropriate times.

But everyone else seems to think that this was Wei Ying's final straw. Everywhere Wangji goes, there's unknown voices telling the story of how the once-great cultivator Wei Wuxian turned down the demonic path and wound up dead. Wangji doesn't enjoy the stories; he hates how these people portray Wei Ying. He hates how they've made him into a scapegoat, how every evil deed, no matter how slight, can all be traced back to the Yiling Patriarch. But Wangji listens to the stories anyway. He pictures the Wei Ying he knew, when he was fifteen and his greatest ambition was to break as many rules as possible and get on Wangji's last nerve. He also sees an image of the Wei Ying he didn't know, doesn't know, the one who doesn't try to get Nie Huaisang into trouble anymore, and who doesn't tell everyone the story of how Suibian was named. Wangji thinks of the Wei Ying that stood before him in the rain that night, leading Wen Clan remnants; he thinks of the Wei Ying that stood on the roof in Lanling expecting a fight. The Wei Ying that is now infamous and whose name lives on in town after town, story after fabricated story.

"Be honest with me, Wangji," Xichen had approached him about a month after he'd gotten out of isolation. *I always am, xiongzhang*, Wangji was tempted to say, but he just inclined his head to show he was listening.

"Would you do it again?"

"Yes," Xichen had barely asked the question before Wangji answered firmly. He found himself meditating on this question during the three years, and Wangji discovered that he never once doubted the choices he made in standing with Wei Ying. His only regret is that he didn't do more. Wangji could have stood to break a few more rules and receive a few more punishments, if it could have saved Wei Ying. Wangji wishes he had taken Wei Ying up on his offers to drink; he wishes he had gone to visit the Burial Mounds more frequently. He wishes he had chosen his side before it was too late. Wei Ying would be beside him on the paths of Cloud Recesses right now. He would smile again, without a hint of regret or pain, and he would walk with a skip in his step and a fire in his eyes and pull Wangji along by the hand. They would live life with no regrets, like Wei Ying promised that night.

"Alright, Wangji," his xiongzhang gave a smile and turned to walk away. He seemed to remember something at the last moment, and angled his head back to make eye contact with Wangji again. "Despite what the others may say, I find that admirable."



---

There are bottles upon bottles of Emperor's Smile hidden under a floorboard in the jingshi. Wangji has collected them, conspicuously purchasing one every time he went to Caiyi Town. He thought of Wei Ying, of course, of the first night they met. Of the many times he's seen Wei Ying drink, head thrown back in laughter, of the times he's drank with him. He thinks that if, when, he gets Wei Ying to come back to Cloud Recesses with him, when he settles him in this room, he will for sure go sneaking around and find the bottles.

“Lan Zhan! Did you buy all these for me? I know you did, because you don't drink! You even hid them for me!” he'll say, and Wangji will deny ever knowing the bottles were there. He'll make a face that implies he thinks Wei Ying hid the bottles under the floor sometime himself, but Wei Ying will understand. He'll smile the smile that makes Wangji swoon every time, and he'll pat “his Lan Zhan” on the shoulder. Wangji knows this would happen, because he always knows with Wei Ying, just like Wei Ying always understands his looks and his intentions.

But this doesn't happen. Wei Ying is most likely dead, presumed and celebrated as such by all the cultivation clans, big and small. He can't come back to Cloud Recesses now, because he's gone. He won't discover the jars of Emperor's Smile under the floorboards, the bunnies in the back field that Wangji feeds and pets without his uncle finding out, the jingshi and the story of Wangji's mother and father. There's so much that Wei Ying doesn't know, and now may never know.

Wangji tentatively opened a jar of the drink. He's hit instantly by the aroma, and by the memories it brings back. Wangji knows he's drank it before, but he doesn't remember a single thing except the punishment he received the next day. For an odd reason, he wants a taste. Wangji has never desired alcohol; he has never desired to break most of the rules at cloud recesses, but he takes a swig straight out of the jar like he's seen Wei Ying do a million times. *Gross*, he thinks.

Wangji has barely swallowed the drink before he's knocked out cold on the table.

The drinking becomes a regular thing. It's just a swig, every night before crawling into bed at nine. Wangji doesn't enjoy being drunk every night, he doesn't even remember it, but the smell of the Emperor's Smile and the feel of the bottle in his hands and the warmth that fills him makes him think of Wei Ying.

The first time Wangji sees a ghost, aside from those encountered on night hunts, he is sure it's an unforeseen effect of his new drinking habits or a trick of the moonlight streaming through the jingshi's open window. He sees a figure, about his height, standing in the corner of the room. The figure's long, black hair drapes over even darker robes with a sliver of red peeking out shyly from inside. It looks like Wei Ying, sure, but everything looks like Wei Ying to Wangji.

“Lan Zhan,” the figure whispers. Well, it’s definitely Wei Ying, then. It moves towards where Wangji lies on the bed, making its way gracefully in a manner reminiscent of floating. Wangji should have realized at this point that the figure was a ghost, but he was too elated at seeing Wei Ying’s face for the first time in five years. Wei Ying is above him, now, and runs two fingers across the space where Wangji’s headband usually sits. The fingers slide down his face to gently tilt his chin upwards.

“It’s been so long, my Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying whispers into the silence of the room, his eyes watery with emotion. “Let me see your face,” Wangji lets Wei Ying use both hands to move his head into the ray of moonlight that shines across the jingshi. They are cold, frighteningly so, and Wangji suppresses a shiver at the feel of them running across his face like a frigid wind that reddens his nose and cheeks. The hands don’t feel like Wei Ying’s at all; his were always warm and left fire on Wangji’s skin in their wake. But he doesn’t think too hard about it, and lets this Wei Ying admire him. Wangji can feel himself falling back asleep to gentle touches on his face and across his shoulders.

“Goodnight, Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying whispers, drawing nearer and nearer to his face. The seconds draw out, and Wangji should be able to feel warm breath brush across his forehead as Wei Ying speaks again. “I will be here when you wake,”

But Wangji doesn’t feel anything except a quick, cold press of lips and the soft embrace of sleep.

The facts come flooding to Wangji in the morning. He is back in cultivator mode, back to being Hanguang-jun and not Lan Zhan, and it’s obvious that he was visited by a ghost in the night. As dangerous as that could have been, leaving himself completely unguarded against an unknown evil, Wangji finds himself not regretting the interaction. It was nice to see Wei Ying again. It was nice to pretend.

It is at least another two years before Wangji is visited again. It may have been longer, actually, but the months and seasons blur together. Wangji sits on the back field of cloud recesses with the bunnies, and he can feel Wei Ying sitting next to him, making the same joke as always about how he’s going to eat them. Wangji smiles a rare little smile at the memory. but the sensation of another person sitting next to him is more prominent than it generally is in Wangji’s daydreams. He looks to his right, and he can see Wei Ying’s long ponytail sway with the wind, always nearly falling out of its ribbon but somehow miraculously staying together.

“You’ve come back to me, Wei Ying,” Wangji breathed, his voice holding a certain level of emotion that he thinks only Wei Ying and his antics can bring out.

“Who said i went anywhere,” he answered, smiling as always. a smile Wangji thinks about daily, hourly even, but one that he hadn’t realized just how much he’d missed until he was looking at it once more. He reaches out to cup Wei Ying’s face like he’d dreamed of, Wei Ying’s bright eyes melting his insides just as they had the first time he’d seen him. As soon as Wangji’s fingertips reached the apple of Wei Ying’s cheek, though, he slowly began to fade.

“Goodbye again, Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying’s smile softens, the pain visible in his eyes this time. “I love you, and take care of yourself,” he says. Wangji wants to beg Wei Ying to come back,

even if he knows he's just a ghost. He wants to promise that he'll sleep from nine to five and that he'll eat three meals a day. He wants to return Wei Ying's vow; he wants to tell him that he loves him, that he loved him before he knew what love was, but Wangji doesn't dare. He does, however, let the tears fall freely when he feels them collect at his lash line.

---

In an effort to express the feelings threatening to overtake him, Wangji writes letters to Wei Ying. It was initially a one-off thing, but as of late it's become a near daily habit. He tells him about everything, from clan meetings to the junior cultivators' antics to his deepest secrets. Wangji had never written Wei Ying letters in life, and he wonders why. It's so much easier to express everything he wants to say in row after row of picture perfect characters than it is to speak the same words. It's ironic, Wangji supposes, that he has so much to say now that Wei Ying isn't there to listen.

He writes to him all the same, invitations to sect events Wei Ying would have hated to sit through quietly and detailed notes on new spirits Wangji encounters on night hunts. He blushes his way through idiom-filled confessions and love letters that Nie Huaisang would approve of. Wangji writes down memories, occasions that caused him to seethe uncharacteristically at the time, but he is now able to look fondly at. Wangji remembers the moment he fell in love with Wei Ying.

The cave was cold and damp and dark, and they could hear the tortoise still moving around outside. His leg ached from walking all day, but Wangji would die before admitting that. He looks down, and Wei Ying is pulling up his outer robe.

"Wei Ying," Wangji starts, looking down at him from where he sits on a rock.

"What Lan Zhan! I'm fixing up your leg! Can't you see," Wei Ying sticks out his tongue and pulls a medicine pouch from inside his robes. "Here, I saved this for you. It's from Wen Ning," Wei Ying puts the herbs on his wound carefully and gently. He hums an unknown tune, and Wangji just stares.

Wei Ying, who just got burned by a hot iron. Wei Ying, who just instructed his brother and best friend to leave him alone in this cave so that he could defeat the tortoise. Wei Ying, who earlier that day, despite his own injuries and irritation at the Wen Clan, offered to carry Wangji on his back when he saw him suffering. Wei Ying, who was nearly dead in the dungeon from fear and blood loss saved medicine for Wangji because he noticed he was limping when he arrived in Nightless City.

Wangji couldn't tell if the shortness of breath he was experiencing came from the sting of the herbs on his open wound or the realization he had just come to.

Wangji snatches the pouch from Wei Ying's hands. He yanks open his robes, ignoring Wei Ying's sputtering and questioning look. Wangji puts herbs on the triangular burn, feeling Wei Ying's lungs expand beneath his hand as he inhales sharply.

“You need it too,” Wangji says. “Why did you let yourself get burned?” Wangji asks, and Wei Ying answers, honest as always. As much as Wei Ying jokes and plays around, he doesn't lie. Evade the truth, yes, but Wangji believes him to be as trustworthy as himself. Wei Ying talks, about battle scars and Mianmian, flirting and Wen Chao and who knows what else, because it's nine and Wangji promptly falls dead asleep.

Days pass in the cave, cold, dark, and empty, aside from Wei Ying's constant chatter and laughter at the smallest things. They fight Xuanwu, and Wangji worries while Wei Ying is inside. He worries while he's dangling on a sword from the tortoise's mouth, and he worries while he gives him spiritual energy as Wei Ying lies on a rock, nearly unconscious. He asks Wangji to sing him a song, and how can he say no? He hums the tune that's been in his mind since Wei Ying's arrival at Cloud Recesses, since he waltzed into Wangji's life and became his self-proclaimed best friend and travel partner.

The rest is a blur. They are rescued, Wei Ying heading back to Lotus Pier with his brother. Months and months go by before they meet again. He was restless during that time, between war and missing his brother and dealing with new and confounding feelings. He missed Wei Ying, but as he's heard Uncle say in the past, absence makes the heart grow fonder. It couldn't be more true for Wangji now, he thinks, as it has been nearly a decade since he last heard Wei Ying's voice, but he still loves him all the same.

At this point, Wei Wuxian is no longer such a hot topic of conversation. Part of Wangji is glad; Wei Ying is no longer getting blamed for every clan's inconveniences. But another part of him feels the memory of his beloved slowly slipping away. Not from his own mind, of course; the dreams that bless him and the nightmares that plague him would never let that happen. Wangji thinks that Wei Ying would want to be remembered, whether for the good deeds he did or the harm that he brought. He would laugh either way.

“I don't know, Wangji,” Xichen answers, face and tone calm and comforting as always. “It's strange that his body and spirit haven't been found but...” Xichen pauses, and his expression shifts imperceptibly. “I think that if there was a way for Young Master Wei to have survived, he definitely found it,”

His xiongzhang tilts his head, and studies Wangji's face. “You need to rest,” Xichen states. “I can tell you haven't been sleeping,” He places his hand on Wangji's shoulder. “If it's meant to work out, it all will,” Xichen gives one of his characteristically soft smiles, and though Wangji hasn't really smiled since Wei Ying... left, he almost returns it.

“Okay, xiongzhang. I will rest. I will try my best not to worry,” Wangji purposely doesn't say that he won't worry, because he isn't allowed to lie. He will try his best though, but it isn't likely that his best will allow him to sleep through the night. It hasn't for years.

Wangji takes a detour before going to the jingshi. He doesn't mean too, really, but he does a lot more things he doesn't mean to and takes a lot more detours than he did before Wei Ying. As Wangji sinks into the cold spring, he can practically hear Wei Ying complaining about how cold the water was. He can feel the heat he radiated as he moved towards Wangji, sloshing the water without a care in the world. At that time, Wangji would have given anything for Wei Ying to have left him alone. But now, he would die to relive their year of study in Cloud Recesses.

He thinks about Wei Ying's bright red ribbon blowing in the wind while he skipped along the white pebbled paths, and a fifteen year-old Wangji pretending he didn't notice. There was no way not to, though; there was no way to ignore the presence of the bright scarlet in his peripheral vision, and there was surely no way to ignore Wei Ying. He followed Wangji everywhere, like a shadow, and each day was a test of patience and self-control.

But Wangji got used to it, fell in love with it, despite his initial aversion to the idea. The rational part of his brain (the part that sounds suspiciously like Lan Qiren) reminded him daily that Wei Wuxian is a terrible influence. He gets himself and others into trouble, he doesn't know when to be quiet, he's a trickster and a rule breaker and everything Wangji isn't. Everything that Wangji isn't, and everything that he loathes in a person all rolled into one.

Wei Ying's good attributes greatly outweigh the negatives, though, Wangji thinks. He remembers the way they got pulled under the freezing water, tying his forehead ribbon to Wei Ying's wrist, what they learned from Lan Yi about the Yin Iron, the first of many secrets they would keep, both together and from one another. Wangji remembers Wei Ying's joy at having a connection with him that no one else knew about. Wei Ying gets into fights for his shijie's sake; he defends Wangji against his uncle and brother (after getting him into trouble, though). Wei Ying is outspoken, and courageous, and loyal, all things Wangji needs. All things Wangji needs, but didn't know he needed, and things he now misses like the sun during the rainy season.

Wangji sits in the cold water, reminiscing, something he can't say he ever did before. There was no reason to, and he's nearly sure there's a Lan Clan rule somewhere in the three thousand about not caring too much about the past. But Wangji doesn't have the presence of mind to think too hard about it. He's also definitely sure that there's a rule about not falling in love with a demonic cultivator, but he's already broken that one, so what's one more?

---

Wangji hears Wei Ying before he sees him. This tends to happen, as Wei Ying is loud, and his voice carries, entering the room first and dragging him along behind. Wangji always loved it though, despite the rules about silence and talking at a respectable volume. But this time, it isn't Wei Ying's voice Wangji hears. Over Wen Ning's growling and the clanging of swords, Wangji hears a terribly out of tune bamboo flute. Though the tune it plays is nearly unrecognizable, he knows it immediately. He's the one that wrote it. Wangji also knows that there's only one other person in this world that can play this piece. His Wei Ying.

He descends right behind Mo Xuanyu, grabbing his left wrist in an effort to stop the flute. The shorter man looks surprised, turning around abruptly to see who was there. When they lock eyes, he immediately knows. Even though he's looking at a different face, the butterflies Wangji hasn't felt in thirteen years come fluttering with a passion, finally getting to fly again after all this time. Mo Xuanyu looks frightened, like he's about to faint any minute.

"Lan Zha-," he starts, realizing his mistake a second too late. "Hanguang-jun, what are you doing to me! Let me go!" Mo Xuanyu starts to throw a fit, valiantly trying to escape Wangji's

grip. If Wei Ying had been in his old body, he could have broken it easily, but Mo Xuanyu is much smaller. He continues this until Jiang Wanyin arrives and makes a big fuss, whips him with Zidian, and proves to everyone except himself and Wangji that no one, definitely not Wei Wuxian, has possessed Mo Xuanyu.

But Wangji knows. He knows by the gleam of mirth present in his eyes after causing trouble; he knows by the tension present in his body upon seeing Wen Ning. Wangji knows by the way Wei Ying looks at him, the feelings present barely concealed. It doesn't matter that it's been thirteen years since Wangji has seen Wei Ying, because not a moment, awake or asleep, has been spent not thinking of him. He would recognize him in life, in death, and in life again.

## End Notes

thank you for reading i hope you enjoyed it! i actually sort of wrote this piece by piece based on [lyrics](#) but i decided not to include them in the actual work. if u wanna guess what parts came from which u can lol. kudos and comments are appreciated!!!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!