

## heartkeeper

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# heartkeeper

by [postingpebbles](#)

## Summary

In Gusu, there is a story about the most beautiful man in the world—and the wager he gives to anyone who wants to take his hand in marriage.

Being from Yunmeng, however, Wei Wuxian doesn't hear a word about this story until his aimless wandering brings him to the outskirts of Caiyi Town.

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(in which there is wei wuxian, a rabbit, and a secret.)

## Notes

hi hi!! i originally posted this around the end of august/beginning of september last year on twt [here](#), and i finally cleaned it up to post on ao3 c: the story is inspired by [this prompt!](#)

hope you'll be able to enjoy it in this format too! <3

also pls check out these cool arts!!!! i love them so muchhh

- [xiao-tuzi escaping from his pursuers! round tush!](#) by @pensinthedesk
- [xiao-tuzi snuggling in wwx's robes... comfy...](#) by @itoshiki\_n

THERE IS NOW A [PODFIC](#)!!!!!! it's so gorgeous. pls give it a listen.

MORE ART!!

- [xiao-tuzi snuggling in wwx's lap and wwx having the most adoring expression on his face aaaaa](#) by @wyrdsoup.art

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

In Gusu, there is a story about the most beautiful man in the world—and the wager he gives to anyone who wants to take his hand in marriage.

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To Wei Wuxian, Lotus Pier is at its most beautiful in the hours after dark.

While he loves soaking up the bustle and energy during the day, there's something he loves even more about how *still* it gets once the world has gone to bed. Because more often than not, Wei Wuxian's days have been like trying to balance on the thin railings around the pier—usually manageable, but accompanied by the occasional slip and fall if he's not paying enough attention to his surroundings.

And he's learned to deal with those falls! It means taking the punishment for his shidi and shimei if they're not progressing in their cultivation as quickly as they should. It means being the first volunteer for the most dangerous nighthunts so that Yu-furen will stop accusing Jiang-shushu (at least for a while) of favoring him over his own son, and use that energy to mock Wei Wuxian instead. It means pushing forth a smile even when all he wants to do is scream.

That's how it's always been since he first arrived, a tiny and malnourished slip of a boy, cradled in Jiang-shushu's steady arms. Come to think of it, Lotus Pier was also dark when he'd first arrived here, so it's somewhat poetic that Wei Wuxian is leaving it in such a similar state.

Wei Wuxian lets out a breath. His clarity bell swings at his waist as he continues walking across the docks, trying to stamp every memory into his mind. It makes him want to linger for a while longer—to take off his boots and socks and dip his feet in the warm water as he stares up at the moon. He's done it before, especially on nights where his thoughts were too loud to let him rest.

But Wei Wuxian resists the urge this time, fully knowing that he would never leave once his resolve wavered. His falls aren't just affecting him anymore. Their shockwaves are lengthening. *Don't be selfish*, Wei Wuxian chants to himself. *They've already done so much for you.*

*Street children aren't meant to survive.*

Then the sound of the pier creaking under a series of footsteps, followed by a furious hiss of his name, makes him turn. The moon doesn't provide a great deal of light, but Wei Wuxian can still tell that Jiang Cheng's outer robes are barely fastened, and that his hair is only pulled

up in a messy ponytail rather than his preferred sleek bun. Shijie trails behind him, looking much more put together even though her hair is still unbound.

Wei Wuxian's heart lurches at the sight of them. Shit. He should've left before they caught him. It's too late now.

His mouth curves into one of his most winning smiles as he slips his qiankun pouch into his sleeve. "Jiang Cheng! Shijie!" he greets before they even have the chance to say a word. "I can't believe you're awake this late too!"

Jiang Cheng somehow manages to glare even harder as he stomps closer. "Wei Wuxian, I *knew* you were planning something!" he scolds, his lips pulled into a frown. "You worried A-Jie with how you were acting at dinner earlier, so what are you even *doing* out—"

Now that they're close enough, Wei Wuxian can see a myriad of emotions flicker across Jiang Cheng's face as he absorbs how Wei Wuxian is dressed. Hair done up, robes fastened properly, qiankun pouch hastily shoved into his sleeve. And looking, for all intents and purposes, like it's the middle of the day rather than the middle of the night.

It's absolutely incriminating.

"Jiang Cheng—" Wei Wuxian tries, reaching out, but Jiang Cheng just slaps his hand away.

"Save it," Jiang Cheng says flatly. "You're leaving, aren't you."

Wei Wuxian doesn't answer. Pressure—suffocating and painful—builds in his chest when he hears the hurt in Jiang Cheng's voice. Wei Wuxian knew that Jiang Cheng wouldn't take his departure well. If he had left Lotus Pier right away like he had planned, instead of being selfish and still entertaining thoughts of staying *just five minutes more*, then all of this could've been avoided.

"I've always wanted to see the world," Wei Wuxian says, forcing cheer into his words. "Yufuren just helped me realize that sooner. It's generous of her to allow me the experience that all cultivators can only dream of!"

Jiang Cheng's hand shoots forward to grip Wei Wuxian's collar. They both hear Shijie's alarmed *A-Cheng!* but Jiang Cheng still doesn't let go.

"*Generous*," he repeats. Wei Wuxian can feel how much his hand is trembling. "A-Niang is many things, but generous is not one of them."

Jiang Cheng says things he doesn't mean when he's upset; Wei Wuxian knows this about him as well. He places a hand on top of Jiang Cheng's and squeezes. "I'm lucky that I even made it to adulthood," Wei Wuxian says gently. "I owe my entire existence to Yunmeng Jiang."

The fabric (noose) around Wei Wuxian's neck tightens as Jiang Cheng pulls his robes even harder. "Then why don't you *stay*?" he demands. "Just one comment from A-Niang and you decide to abandon us?"



Frustration suddenly erupts in Wei Wuxian's stomach. "You know it's not like that!" he fires back. "Don't you know how much trouble I've caused for you and your family? If I were any more selfish, I'd stay forever if I could!"

For a few moments, the only sounds are their ragged breaths and the water gently lapping against the pier. Then, the sound of Shijie stepping closer and separating them as she's done hundreds of times before.

"A-Xian, I know you haven't been... happy here for a while," she murmurs. "I won't lie and say I'm pleased with your choice, but—" Shijie reaches up to tug his ponytail, smiling gently. "This shijie will support your decisions, no matter what they are."

Jiang Cheng's arms are crossed, his gaze fixed on the water below. "I can't believe you," he mutters. "Of all the stupid things you've done, this is *definitely* the stupidest. No one *ever* said you had to leave."

True enough. It's only ever been hidden behind other words.

And in a moment of weakness, Wei Wuxian relents. "I'll be back," he promises, watching guiltily as his siblings' eyes fill with hope. "This won't be forever. Just until things calm down."

So with a bag of food and money from his sister, a punch and a rough hug from his brother, and an extracted promise to write them regularly and return home within the year, Wei Wuxian begins his journey on foot.

(He could use his sword to fly, but where would the adventure in that be?)

Wei Wuxian decides to head east first, since he's never seen the ocean before. And to make the trip a little easier, he also haggles in the first town outside of Lotus Pier for a donkey.

An ill-tempered, stubborn donkey, but Wei Wuxian affectionately calls her "Little Apple" anyway.

So Wei Wuxian travels and travels and travels, dirtying the hems of his robes and earning food, shelter, or coin in exchange for performing various odd jobs.

By the time he steps foot in Caiyi Town, Wei Wuxian is financially comfortable to spend a night in an inn without working for it.

The palate in Gusu is much milder than the fare he's used to in Yunmeng, but the flavors are still very good. He thinks about how some wine would pair perfectly with the remainder of his dishes, and after mulling it over, he decides to splurge on a jar of Emperor's Smile.

Wei Wuxian is pleasantly full and feeling warm and sleepy when the whispers first reach his ears.

"—almost had it that time! It's too damn fast."

“Gods of course it is, are you stupid? A spiritual animal belonging to Hanguang-jun can't be caught *that* easily.”

Needless to say, Wei Wuxian is intrigued.

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” he asks, swiveling around and breaking into their conversation. “I’m just a passing cultivator, and I know nothing about the local stories.” Wei Wuxian offers them a cheerful smile. “Would you mind entertaining this humble servant for a while?”

It’s almost funny how easily they spill the story, eyes alight with the prospect of good gossip.

“You'll know who he is when you see him,” the first man says confidently. “A cool beauty like Hanguang-jun is unmistakable.”

“And unattainable,” the second grumbles. “He has too high standards for marriage. He'll be alone forever if he keeps this up.”

Wei Wuxian frowns at his disparaging comment, but keeps silent as they continue their story.

Hanguang-jun's supposedly “high standards” turn out to be only one standard—he will only marry the person who can retrieve the key to his home, which can be found around his rabbit's neck.

They both assure him of the task's deceiving simplicity.

“But that seems easy enough,” Wei Wuxian muses, thinking about all the animals he's trapped back in Lotus Pier. “What's taking everybody so long?”

“It's clever,” insists the first man. “Chasing it doesn't work. Bait doesn't work. It chews through traps in an instant.”

“There's got to be another way,” Wei Wuxian says, already thinking about how to successfully trap an untrappable rabbit. “Something you're not thinking about.”

But the other man sniffs. “If you think you're intelligent enough to do it, then be my guest. I’m sure you'll only fail like the rest of us.”

And Wei Wuxian does.

Fail, that is.

It's an intentional failure, though.

He doesn't see any point in catching a stranger's pet just to marry him. Wei Wuxian doesn't even know who Hanguang-jun is!!

(And also, Jiang Cheng would actually *murder* Wei Wuxian if he showed up at Lotus Pier after a year with a brand-new husband in tow.)

The next morning though, Wei Wuxian puts all his thoughts about Hanguang-jun—and his rabbit—out of his mind. He has much more pressing matters to attend to.

After a quick breakfast for both Little Apple and himself (and paying for another night at the inn), they continue farther east.

The scent of the sea grows stronger the farther they travel. The mountainous terrain surrounding Gusu is so different compared to Yunmeng's marshes, but it's still beautiful nonetheless.

After an hour or so, he hears the sound of the waves tumbling against the cliffs.

Wei Wuxian spends a while sitting on the cliff's edge, sketchbook in hand as he draws. "We should come back someday," he says aloud, glancing at Little Apple. "Shijie and Jiang Cheng would like it here."

Little Apple doesn't reply, of course, but her ear twitches as if she did.

By the time the sun is sinking past the horizon, Wei Wuxian has drawn all he can. He's disappointed that he didn't get the chance to find a path down to the water yet, but he's determined to try again tomorrow.

The sky is completely dark by the time he drags himself back to town, and he's *starving* .

Wei Wuxian also realizes that his savings aren't enough to buy a full meal if he wants to stay at the inn tomorrow night as well, and he resigns himself to putting off his plans to see the ocean. For now.

*There must be someone around here in need of a cultivator's help* , he thinks, trading a few coins for a box of dumplings. He'll have to ask around.

Maybe he can use tomorrow to explore town as well?

"Good luck!" the vendor says as he hands Wei Wuxian the food, and Wei Wuxian nearly drops it in surprise at his next words. "You'll need all your strength to catch Hanguang-jun's rabbit."

"Ah, Uncle, I'm not here for that," Wei Wuxian laughs, suddenly remembering his conversation from last night. "I'm just passing through!"

When he's lying in bed, Wei Wuxian thinks about how Hanguang-jun's beauty *must* be exaggerated. No one man could have the power to make an entire town chase a rabbit just for the opportunity to marry him!

It's ridiculous—yet Wei Wuxian is still interested in seeing Hanguang-jun's face at least once.

Just to see what the commotion about him is. Really.

And that's how Wei Wuxian finds himself within Caiyi Town's busy marketplace the next day, staring in awe at the white-robed man gliding down the street.

Even if he didn't hear the murmurs of *Hanguang-jun! Hanguang-jun!* scattered among the townspeople, Wei Wuxian would have no problem figuring this out on his own.

Wei Wuxian was told this man was worth chasing a rabbit for, but after seeing him— *now* he can understand the appeal.

But do they even know who he is? Wei Wuxian wonders, watching the broad line of Hanguang-jun's back become smaller and smaller in the distance. In the time he's spent in the marketplace, no one has even *tried* to approach him!

Wei Wuxian runs to catch up with him, falling into step. He still has no interest in catching the rabbit or marrying Hanguang-jun himself, but maybe they can be friends!

"I made a friend in Gusu," he imagines himself telling Shijie and Jiang Cheng. "you won't believe how beautiful he is!"

"Hi, I'm Wei Ying, courtesy Wuxian!" Wei Wuxian introduces himself, grinning when Hanguang-jun's heavy gaze slides slightly down ( *down?* ) to face him. And Wei Wuxian is proud to say that he's only dazed for a moment before he continues, "I'm from Lotus Pier, in Yunmeng."

Hanguang-jun only blinks at him.

Ah, fuck it. "You're Hanguang-jun, right?" Wei Wuxian asks, diving right in, and Hanguang-jun's eyes return to the road ahead.

"Mn. Lan Zhan, courtesy Wangji." And he says nothing else.

Wei Wuxian purses his lips. "I'm only visiting, but we should be friends while I'm here," he tries. "I've never made a friend so far from home before!"

Then Lan Wangji glances back down at him, flinty-eyed. "I will not marry you," he finally says, and Wei Wuxian gapes. "The same rules apply to everyone, whether they are visitors or not."

For the first time in his life, Wei Wuxian is utterly speechless.

"Then I won't marry *you!*" Wei Wuxian bursts out, indignant. "I wasn't trying to—I can't believe—I just wanted to be your *friend!*"

Wei Wuxian suddenly notices that they've walked out of town, and stopped at the base of a mountain. Lan Wangji's expression is still as impassive as ever.

But Wei Wuxian is stubborn, and an expert in smashing through awkward, angry silences thanks to Jiang Cheng.

"You're not going to get rid of me *that* easily, Lan Zhan," Wei Wuxian says, taking a risk, and delights in the smallest fracture in Lan Wangji's composed features. *Hmph.* "Come with me to the ocean tomorrow morning," he continues. "I'm still trying to find a path down, but I'm sure you can help me since you live near here!"

Lan Wangji still says nothing in reply, yet offers a small, polite incline of his head before sweeping away and walking up the mountain.

*That was weird*, Wei Wuxian decides. He doesn't know if Lan Wangji will even show up tomorrow, but at least he tried!

As he's walking back to Caiyi Town, Wei Wuxian thumbs over the remaining coins he has left in his pouch. He really should be finding some work to do if he's going to stay longer.

But as it turns out, there's a cultivation sect that oversees the territory within Gusu, so Wei Wuxian has no hope of finding work with *them* around.

Luckily, the inn he's staying at allows him to work there in exchange for staying in his room, and even gives him a small wage as extra.

When he unties Little Apple from her post the next day, Wei Wuxian isn't surprised that Lan Wangji didn't show up. What he *is* surprised by though, is the white, floppy-eared bunny perched on Little Apple's saddle.

"Hi there," Wei Wuxian says cautiously. "You're not—Lan Zhan's rabbit, are you?"

The bunny only twitches its tiny nose and tilts its head adorably. There's also a key attached to a chain around its neck, nearly hidden in the thick fur.

...It's Lan Wangji's rabbit. Of course it is.

Wei Wuxian sighs. "You can sit there if you'd like," he tells it, "but we're gonna have to share the space."

Wei Wuxian is mildly disappointed that he's spending his morning with a donkey and a bunny, rather than a donkey and a beautiful man, but he appreciates the company nonetheless.

"Up you go," he says, easily scooping the bunny in his free arm as he holds Little Apple's reins with the other.

Based on the stories he's heard about how difficult the rabbit is to catch, Wei Wuxian begins to wonder if they were all exaggerated. It's actually surprisingly docile as Little Apple takes them back to the sea. The most movement he sees from it at all is the occasional ear flick.

As they travel, Wei Wuxian pets the spot between the rabbit's ears, marveling at how soft the fur is. The rabbit gives no reaction to the touches, but Wei Wuxian is convinced that it snuggled deeper into his chest at one point.

"I guess *you* don't know how to get down to the water," he says, gently scratching its neck, and it freezes when his fingers nudge the chain. Wei Wuxian moves back up to its ears. "Oops. Sorry."

Wei Wuxian does eventually find a pathway down, carved in the cliff face a few li down, and he grins.

"Lucky rabbit," he says, tapping its nose.

The rabbit sneezes.

Wei Wuxian also learns that the rabbit seems content to stay in his arms as long as he doesn't touch the key around its neck, and Wei Wuxian is completely fine with that.

"Has your Hanguang-jun ever brought you here?" Wei Wuxian wonders, watching the rabbit turn its head to face the shore. "He must have," he muses, "if he trusts you so much with the key to the rest of his life."

Once they reach the shore, Wei Wuxian deposits Lan Wangji's bunny back onto the saddle.

"I'm just going in the water, so don't go anywhere," he orders, shaking his finger at the two animals.

After one last glance around to make sure he's alone, Wei Wuxian strips down to his trousers. He folds his robes in a way his shijie would be proud of, and sets his boots and socks on top of them in a neat pile.

"See you soon!" he chirps, and finds that the bunny has closed its eyes.

Hm. Maybe it's tired.

The ocean is pretty from a distance, but not so much when Wei Wuxian is up close and personal. Why didn't anyone warn him about how disgustingly *salty* ocean water is? It's gross! It's nasty! How do people live like this?

(He really *has* been spoiled by the clean lakes in Lotus Pier...)

Even so, he spends the morning by the sea again, chattering away to both Little Apple and Lan Wangji's bunny as he dries off and continues doodling in his notebook.

"I actually invited Lan Zhan to come along," Wei Wuxian says after a while, setting down his brush and lying on his outer robes. "What a weird guy," he says, scooping the bunny up and placing it on his chest. They stare into each other's eyes. "Do you know what he told me? He said, 'I will not marry you' within the first *ten* seconds of our meeting. Can you believe that?"

The bunny butts against his palm.

"Okay, okay, so maybe I *was* a little forceful," Wei Wuxian concedes, stroking its fur. "Jiang Cheng—my brother—always tells me that I never think before I start 'talking at people' and I guess that's true? But *still*," he insists, restarting his rant, "what do people even see in him?"

Besides how smooth his skin is and how his hair effortlessly cascades down his shoulders, of course. Obvious physical reasons.

"He's so rude and probably incredibly dull and boring—*ow!*" The bunny had nipped at his fingers, and Wei Wuxian pulls them away with a quiet hiss. "You're biased, so you can't say

anything," he scolds. "But I really did want to be his friend! What sane person would want to marry someone they just met?"

But Wei Wuxian also knows that's not completely true. While he does want to befriend Lan Wangji because of the story he'd heard, he also still remembers the hushed whispers surrounding Lan Wangji as he walked through the streets of Caiyi Town, his head held high and his eyes fixed on the point ahead.

He remembers how Lan Wangji looked like a priceless jade statue come to life—a deity walking among them.

But Wei Wuxian also remembers how lonely Lan Wangji looked. A strip of solitary white in the golden sun.

The townspeople clearly knew *of* him, given by how much they gossiped about his life. But how many have tried to *actually* know him? How were his many suitors *so sure* that Lan Wangji was the one they were destined to marry?

He'd even rejected Wei Wuxian much too swiftly to not be practiced—which must be why he felt that he had no choice but to safeguard his future with a rabbit.

Wei Wuxian admits this to the bunny, who has tilted its head in apparent interest.

"It's sad, now that I'm thinking about it," Wei Wuxian says, before giving it a smile. "So don't worry, I won't take the key from you unless Lan Zhan gives it to me himself! Both of you will be safe with me."

The bunny blinks at him.

Then Wei Wuxian laughs, realizing how long he's spent rambling aloud. "Aiya, thank the gods you can't talk," he says fondly, scratching under its neck. He's careful to avoid the key this time. "It's embarrassing to talk about my feelings! Your Hanguang-jun is so pretty, after all!"

Wei Wuxian sighs and sits up, cradling the bunny close.

"I should apologize when I see him next," Wei Wuxian says. "You can help me if you're around, since I'm sure he won't be happy to see me again anytime soon."

But the bunny only blinks again, then paws at Wei Wuxian's inner robes.

"Ah, you're right—holding you probably won't make him like me any better. We'll have a forbidden friendship! Two friends, doomed to never see each other for long!"

Wei Wuxian takes the bunny to the base of the same mountain where he and Lan Wangji had parted yesterday.

"Be careful," he says, lowering it to the grass. "And tell your Hanguang-jun that I said hi!"

The bunny presses itself into his touch, then zips up the mountain in the space between a heartbeat.

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That evening, after helping the innkeepers out with all their responsibilities, Wei Wuxian wanders outside of town with *Suibian* strapped to his hip.

Wei Wuxian isn't sure how long he's going to stay here in Caiyi Town. If he's been counting the days correctly, he's been away from Lotus Pier for just over a month now.

He wonders how he'll be received when (if?) he goes back, and if anything has changed while he was gone. How did his shidi and shimei progress without him? Were Jiang Cheng and Shijie doing well?

As he thinks about these things, Wei Wuxian runs through the Jiang sword forms underneath the moonlight, starting with the basic forms he learned as a child. His muscles strain uncomfortably as he progresses into the more advanced sets, but he still flows through them even as breathing becomes more difficult.

Ah, Wei Wuxian should've been more diligent with his training while on the road! If Yu-furen was here, she would be more disappointed in him than she was already.

Then Wei Wuxian is pointing his sword to a spot in the dark before his mind catches up to what he's done.

"Hello?" he calls. Wei Wuxian squints, but can only see a white blob in the distance.

"I apologize for startling you," a soft voice says back, and Wei Wuxian's eyes widen.

"Lan Zhan?" Wei Wuxian blurts, lowering his sword as Lan Wangji steps into the clearing. "Why are you here?"

"You were not at the inn, so I searched for you," he says simply.

"No, but... why are you *here*?" Wei Wuxian repeats, emphasizing the last word.

Lan Wangji had looked at Wei Wuxian like he was the scum of the earth just yesterday. What changed his mind?

"I was unfair to you, and it seems that I have misjudged you," Lan Wangji replies, lowering himself into a deep bow, and Wei Wuxian feels himself flush. "I came to apologize."

Wei Wuxian sheaths his sword as he rushes over.

"Ah, please stop bowing," he begs. "Apology accepted, okay?"



But there's still a funny feeling in Wei Wuxian's chest; as the son of a servant, he rarely gets any apologies. So seeing Lan Wangji—someone who clearly looks very important—admitting to a fault against him? It's weird, but... nice.

Lan Wangji straightens to his full height, and—huh. Wei Wuxian hadn't paid attention to Lan Wangji's eyes before now, and doesn't think he's ever seen an eye color of this shade before. It's pretty.

Then something like embarrassment ripples across Lan Wangji's face. Oh... Wei Wuxian had said that aloud, hadn't he.

"Your swordplay is excellent," Lan Wangji says stiffly, and Wei Wuxian beams.

"Thank you!" he says. "I'm Yunmeng Jiang's head disciple, so—" he pauses. Wait, could he still call himself their head disciple? Shijie and Jiang Cheng never mentioned anything about him being struck from the sect records after he'd left...

(Well. He sorts this into the mental pile of "stuff for future Wei Wuxian to think about.")

"I am part of Gusu Lan," Lan Wangji says, saving Wei Wuxian from having to explain why he'd cut himself off mid-sentence. "My father is the sect leader."

"Lan-gongzi then?" Wei Wuxian asks, but Lan Wangji shakes his head.

"I am the second brother."

"Lan-er-gongzi! Er-gege?"

"Wei Ying," Lan Wangji says, pained.

Wei Wuxian grins. "So you *do* remember my name."

"Of course. I am not so forgetful," he says, and Wei Wuxian grows indignant when he realizes he's being teased. Then Lan Wangji looks up at the sky. "It is nearly hai shi. I must be going home."

Already? He just *got* here!

"Spar with me tomorrow," Wei Wuxian says, hand shooting out to grasp Lan Wangji's wrist when he turns to leave. Both their eyes widen when they realize that Wei Wuxian has done, and he quickly drops Lan Wangji's arm. "Sorry for my excitement! It's just that I haven't faced off against a proper opponent in ages. It'd be fun, don't you think?"

And much to his surprise, Lan Wangji nods. "I will be here at this time."

Wei Wuxian beams. "I look forward to it."

Later, when Lan Wangji is nearly out of his sight, Wei Wuxian cups his hands around his mouth. "And take better care of your bunny!" he yells. "I'd kidnapped it all morning, you know!"

"I *do* know," Lan Wangji calls back, still managing to sound gentle even as he raises his voice to be heard. "Thank you for placing him in your care."

Wei Wuxian laughs. "You're so weird," he says to himself, fond.

He finally begins a letter before bed that night, addressed to Jiang-guniang and Jiang-gongzi of Lotus Pier.

*Shijie! Jiang Cheng!*

*I'm currently in Caiyi Town, in Gusu territory. I'll be staying here for a while, so send me a letter or two if you can! I miss hearing from you.*

*(And some money please!)*

*Also, have you heard of the Gusu Lan sect? I met their er-gongzi here and we didn't exactly have the greatest first meeting, but I think we're becoming friends! He's probably just shy.*

*He also has a rabbit with a key around its neck! Listen to THIS story...*

Wei Wuxian continues writing, telling them about everything he's seen and slipping a few of his drawings (of the ocean, Lan Wangji's rabbit, the buildings in Caiyi Town) into the letter as well.

Then he signs:

*Keep me updated on everything at home! Missing you lots!*

*- Wei Wuxian*

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Wei Wuxian is almost thankful for the amount of the work he's given the next day, keeping him distracted enough from the thought of meeting Lan Wangji later.

"A-Ying, take these water buckets to room three, won't you?"

"Go to the restaurant—A-Hui's bound to be overwhelmed with orders soon."

At the end of the lunch rush, Wei Wuxian is at the inn's front door, humming quietly as he sweeps fallen leaves from the steps. Then he hears the shouting.

His head snaps up at the commotion, and he squints as he watches a group of people race across one of the nearby bridges. Another group runs up to block off the other end of the bridge, leaving only a small space between the two crowds.

Wei Wuxian thinks, wildly, *maybe it's some sort of tradition here?* But that thought is quickly discarded when the group stationed closest to the inn falls into chaos.

"Catch it!" someone screams.

"It" turns out to be a small white blur, zooming down the street and leaping between countless legs and slow-reaching hands.

And it veers right towards Wei Wuxian.

"Oh, Xiao-tuzi!" he says, surprised when he suddenly finds his arms full of tiny, wriggly bunny. The broom clatters to the ground. "What are you doing here?"

The bunny burrows into Wei Wuxian's robes, mostly hidden from sight except for the obvious lump. It trembles.

"I'll hide you," he promises.

Wei Wuxian continues tidying up the walkway, pretending that he hadn't noticed the chaos across the bridge. "Oh, Hanguang-jun's rabbit?" he asks, feigning ignorance when the group of people eventually makes their way in his direction. Wei Wuxian keeps his back to them as he sweeps and looks at them over his shoulder. "I think it went down that way!"

They thank him, then leave.

"All gone," Wei Wuxian whispers, loosening his robes as the bunny pokes its head out, nose twitching. "And go home! Why do you keep going outside if people are trying to catch you?" He sighs. "What is your Hanguang-jun doing by letting you go into town?"

But the bunny doesn't move, seemingly content to stay put in Wei Wuxian's robes.

Wei Wuxian rubs the back of his neck. "Ahh, I guess you can stay with me while I work? That way, you'll already be with me when I see Lan Zhan tonight."

So Wei Wuxian goes about the rest of his day with a tiny bunny in his clothing.

No one calls him out on it for some reason, so Wei Wuxian uses this to catch xiao-tuzi up on everything that had gone on since they were last together. A short summary of their conversation includes:

- His letter to Lotus Pier
- The spicy meat stew he had for lunch earlier ("It wasn't rabbit, I promise!")
- His planned spar with Lan Wangji tonight ("He's not as bad as I thought! I didn't get a chance to say sorry to him, but I think that's all behind us now. Also I'm sure you know this already, but his eyes are the prettiest color—")
- His plans to still drag Lan Wangji to the ocean someday

Wei Wuxian gives xiao-tuzi a soft scratch between the ears, smiling when he sees its eyes drifting shut.

"You definitely had too much excitement for one day," he says. "Lan Zhan is probably wondering where you are." Wei Wuxian extracts the bunny from his robes, and places it on his bed. "You can stay here and sleep," he says. "I'll just bring Lan Zhan over when we're finished instead, so that way you'll be together when going home!"

Xiao-tuzi relaxes into the blankets.

"I'll tell him to watch over you more carefully too," Wei Wuxian whispers. "The key to your heart isn't something you can give to just anyone."

When Wei Wuxian walks back into his room hours later to retrieve his sword, he discovers that Lan Wangji's rabbit is gone. There's still a small indentation from where he'd left it, and the window is slightly ajar.

Wei Wuxian wonders if he should be worried, but it's more likely xiao-tuzi left on its own.

And besides, Wei Wuxian's room is 1) locked, and 2) on the second floor. No one could've seen xiao-tuzi.

Wei Wuxian waves goodbye to the innkeepers as he bounds down the steps, *Suibian* attached to his hip once again. He doesn't necessarily *run* through the streets leading to the clearing, but it's a near thing.

Wei Wuxian's blood buzzes with excitement. He hopes this will be a fun spar—he noticed last night how Lan Wangji had carried himself like a seasoned cultivator, and the spark of qi he'd felt when they touched was...

It felt like a promise.

Lan Wangji is already there when Wei Wuxian stumbles into the clearing, and Wei Wuxian takes a small moment to admire how nice his silhouette looks in the starlight.

Lan Wangji is just standing still, his white robes and white ribbon tails fluttering as the wind swirls by. His sword gleams by his side.

*I want to paint this*, Wei Wuxian suddenly thinks, trying to preserve the scene in his memory. Then Lan Wangji turns, and Wei Wuxian breaks into a grin.

"Lan Zhan!" he says. "I'm not late, am I? I couldn't get away fast enough!"

Lan Wangji shakes his head. "You are fine," he says.

Then Wei Wuxian remembers: "Wait, Lan Zhan. I found your rabbit in town earlier today. Is it back home now?"

"He is," Lan Wangji confirms, and Wei Wuxian sighs deeply.

"Good. That's—good."

"I must thank you for taking care of him again today," Lan Wangji says. "I know he can be... troublesome."

Wei Wuxian huffs. "Troublesome doesn't even *begin* to cover it. I can't believe someone as righteous as you can be so irresponsible! This wouldn't keep happening if you stopped letting him get outside."

"Mn. I will keep this in mind next time," Lan Wangji says. There's the smallest uptick in the curve of his lips.

Wei Wuxian is thrown slightly off-balance. "Good," he says again, mollified. "You do that—I won't always be here to defend your virtue!"

"I am grateful for Wei Ying's generosity," Lan Wangji says solemnly. "My rabbit is grateful as well."

"Next time I see him outside, I'll just keep him with me!" Wei Wuxian threatens. "Just you watch."

"He will still make his way back home. Your room was very easy to escape from."

Wei Wuxian squints. "How do you know that?" Then realization dawns on him. "Wait... can xiao-tuzi actually *talk*?"

Lan Wangji shifts. "...Only to me," he says, and Wei Wuxian freezes.

"Oh!" Wei Wuxian says, laughing a *little* too loudly. "He hasn't—uh. Said anything *weird* to you, right?"

Lan Wangji is silent for a moment. "Only that you miss home," he finally says. "You've talked greatly about your brother and sister. They sound wonderful."

And *that* launches Wei Wuxian into a full spiel about Jiang Cheng and Shijie, and everything about Lotus Pier. They end up sitting on a fallen tree as Wei Wuxian talks (and as Lan Wangji gives the occasional encouraging noise), their swords forgotten by the wayside.

"What's your home like?" Wei Wuxian asks when there's a lull in the conversation. "I should've known that there was a main cultivation sect in Gusu since it's such a large territory, but I've never heard of the Gusu Lan sect before."

"We often keep to ourselves," Lan Wangji says. "As a sect, we are not very sociable."

"But the townspeople call you Hanguang-jun," Wei Wuxian points out. "A person with a title like 'Light-Bearing Lord' doesn't sound like someone who's unsociable."

"I nighthunt more often than the others."

Such a simple response to cover a complex act, Wei Wuxian thinks, and tells him this.

“So *that* is why everyone wants to marry you, er-gege,” Wei Wuxian intones. “They witness your combined beauty and prowess and think, ‘Ah, this man *must* be my husband.’”

It’s hard to tell in the faint moonlight, but Wei Wuxian thinks that Lan Wangji looks *embarrassed*. “Ridiculous,” Lan Wangji says, turning his face away.

Wei Wuxian grins. “I’m complimenting you! I know we still don’t know each other that well, but I think you’re very good. And your rabbit is good, too—even *if* he keeps telling you all the things I told him in confidence.”

As he speaks, Wei Wuxian’s eyes catch on their forgotten swords.

“Oh, we never did get around to our spar tonight,” he realizes, disappointed. “It’s late for you, isn’t it?”

Lan Wangji nods, looking apologetic. “It is almost curfew,” he says.

Wei Wuxian wants to curl up into a ball. “Ahh, it’s my fault. I distracted us. Sorry.”

Lan Wangji shakes his head. “There is no need to apologize. I enjoyed my time here with you.” Then he glances at their swords as well. “It is rare for me to get the chance to speak so freely with another person.”

Wei Wuxian huffs out a laugh. “Then I’m glad this wasn’t a *total* waste of time.”

Lan Wangji nods. “And if you would like, I am available in two days’ time to meet again,” he offers, rising to his feet. “I was also looking forward to experiencing your swordsmanship for myself.”

Wei Wuxian grins. “Yunmeng Jiang’s maybe-head disciple vs. Gusu Lan’s er-gongzi? You’re on!”

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Before he knows it, Wei Wuxian settles into a routine.

He works at the inn, writes and receives letters from home, finds xiao-tuzi in increasingly odd places, and meets Lan Wangji whenever he can.

Much to his delight, Lan Wangji is an excellent fighter—their first spar ends in a draw.

And during this time, the townspeople have begun to notice the tiny bunny that frequently appears around Wei Wuxian’s person. They are also shocked to see the little key swaying from the bunny’s neck, marking it as Hanguang-jun’s.

“An outsider,” they whisper, “easily finding favor with Hanguang-jun’s beloved pet!”

"You just like me because I feed you and talk to you," Wei Wuxian tells xiao-tuzi later, dangling a piece of lettuce from his fingers. The bunny, disappointingly, does not rise to the bait. Wei Wuxian's tried so many times to taunt xiao-tuzi into a jump or *something*, but xiao-tuzi just sits there. All prim and proper, just like his owner.

Feeling defeated, he places the lettuce strip on the plate and xiao-tuzi nibbles at it delicately.

Wei Wuxian pulls his knees to his chest. "This should be Lan Zhan's job," he comments, running his hand over the bunny's back as he eats. "Poor xiao-tuzi, not getting enough attention from your master."

The bunny sits back on his bottom, ears flopping with the movement. His nose twitches as he stares soulfully into Wei Wuxian's eyes. Wei Wuxian laughs.

"Shijie and Jiang Cheng said to come home in their last letter," Wei Wuxian says aloud, picking xiao-tuzi up and placing him on his knees. "Ah, I guess I never told you why I left," he says, tugging gently on the bunny's ears. "I've already told Lan Zhan some things about my family, but not everything."

Over time, Wei Wuxian has grown to realize that xiao-tuzi, much like Lan Zhan, is a very good listener. Even though Wei Wuxian knows he's going back, he regrets leaving sometimes. Wei Wuxian owes the Jiang sect everything—his life, his cultivation—and he'd repaid them by abandoning them without warning. How unfilial.

"Do you really think things have changed after I left?" Wei Wuxian murmurs. "I've been selfish."

Xiao-tuzi headbutts his hand and trills, almost sounding angry, and Wei Wuxian laughs wetly.

"I don't want to talk about this anymore if that's okay. We should talk about more fun things! Like Lan Zhan!"

The bunny places a paw on his wet cheek.

"He's just so good, you know? Even *if* he keeps letting you outside the Cloud Recesses," Wei Wuxian says, wiping his eyes with his sleeve. "Ah, xiao-tuzi, xiao-tuzi. I hope someone worthy of him catches you soon. He deserves only the best."

Wei Wuxian lowers himself on his back, feeling strangely sentimental. "Do you think he'd come see me at Lotus Pier even after he's married?" he asks, watching xiao-tuzi sit on his chest. Xiao-tuzi bats at the key around his neck and gets one of his paws tangled in the chain.

Without a second thought, Wei Wuxian touches the chain to free xiao-tuzi's paw—and his eyes widen when he realizes xiao-tuzi had *let him*.

The bunny hadn't reacted at all. Such a difference compared to their first encounter.

Wei Wuxian jerks his hand away. "No. I can't take this," he says. "Lan Zhan deserves to marry someone better than me! I know we've become friends, but—!"

Xiao-tuzi disappears in a puff of blue smoke, and is immediately replaced with a *much* heavier weight. A few locks of soft, dark hair fall onto Wei Wuxian's face. The key drops into his line of vision.

And when the smoke clears, Wei Wuxian is staring straight into Lan Wangji's familiar gold eyes.

Lan Wangji speaks first. "Wei Ying," he says, looking and sounding painfully earnest.

"Lan Zhan," Wei Wuxian whispers, barely managing to find his voice. "You... you're xiao-tuzi?"

Lan Wangji nods. "The inner family of Gusu Lan has always had the ability to shapeshift," he says. "It's a secret we've guarded for generations."

Then they both sit up, their knees touching. Without thinking, Wei Wuxian reaches out, and Lan Wangji meets him halfway. He finds that their hands fit together perfectly.

"Lan Zhan," Wei Wuxian asks helplessly. "I don't understand. Why are you telling me this?"

"I had never wished to marry anyone before meeting you," Lan Wangji says quietly. "I created this challenge so that I would be left alone, and I did not allow a single person to catch me." Lan Wangji tightens his grip.

"But you let me pick you up that first day," Wei Wuxian remembers.

"I did. You never reached for my key," Lan Wangji says simply. "And you were kind."

Then he lets go of Wei Wuxian's hands and reaches behind his neck, unclasping the chain. He holds out the key. "You do not have to say yes," Lan Wangji continues, "but I am certain that my heart has been yours for a very long time."

Wei Wuxian looks at the key. Looks at Lan Zhan.

"My duty is to Yunmeng Jiang first," Wei Wuxian says, listening to his mind first even as his heart screams to say otherwise. Is this love? Could the feelings blooming between them grow *into* love? "Lan Zhan—I can't abandon them again."

And Lan Wangji nods. "That is acceptable," he says, pressing the key into Wei Wuxian's palm.

Wei Wuxian startles. "No, Lan Zhan—I can't!" he insists, trying to give the key back, but Lan Wangji only closes Wei Wuxian's fingers over the key.

"I hear that Lotus Pier is beautiful this time of year," Lan Wangji says, his expression soft. "I would like to see the world outside of Gusu."

Wei Wuxian's heart thumps against his chest.

"Will you show me?" Lan Wangji asks, smiling tenderly.



One second passes. Then two. A smile begins to bloom on Wei Wuxian's face after the third.

By the fifth, Wei Wuxian has already launched himself into Lan Wangji's arms.

"I'll show you everything!" Wei Wuxian gasps, laughing tearfully as Lan Wangji holds him close. "Lan Zhan, you'll love Lotus Pier so much!"

And Wei Wuxian's heart sings as Lan Wangji says, his voice full of love—

"I will be with Wei Ying, so I have no doubt that I will."

## End Notes

some ending notes from the og threadfic:

- lwj later takes wwz to meet his family, who are also rabbit shapeshifters. it's a little weird to see so many rabbits dotting the fields in the cloud recesses. wwz constantly has to ask which ones are Actually bunnies and which ones are human
- lqr is a little suspicious of the boy his straight-laced nephew has been gallivanting around with for the past month, but he's just glad that lwj's weird "thing" re: his marriage is finally over
- when wangxian get to lotus pier, jc immediately tackles wwz into the water
- jyl, expecting this, is ready with a dry robe. lwj's opinion of her—which was already high bc of how much wwz loves her—skyrockets
- jfm welcomes wwz back with open arms, but it takes a few tongue-lashings and several hours kneeling in the ancestral hall for yzy to accept him
- wwz suspects that the only reason yzy wasn't harsher is bc he and lwj are courting
- wangxian do eventually get married!!! there are several arguments over where to hold the ceremony, and so they decide to have two of them—one in lotus pier, and one in the cloud recesses
- they split their time evenly b/t yunmeng and gusu, and have plots of land under their name in each territory
- and ofc, they later adopt a son c: (and several additional children after that!)
- everything is good, and they've never been happier <3

thank you so much for reading!! i'm also on [twitter](#) and [tumblr](#) c:

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