

**in the wake of lightning, the night hums**

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# **in the wake of lightning, the night hums**

by [teaandpaint](#)

## Summary

When Jiang Cheng inherits Zidian, he does not know how to completely control it. Thus, it is not uncommon for his arm to be fully numb after using it. Sometimes, he is too numb to even feel the pain of wounds.

Jiang Cheng, what it means to be the newest master of Zidian, and Lan Wangji.

## Notes

More writing practice. See end notes, please.

TW: This takes place during a battle. I do not describe wounds or attacks in great detail, but there are mentions of blood.

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

With a grunt, Jiang Cheng directs Zidian after the enemy. Zidian bites with the ferocity of a tiger, cutting past the man's robes and stopping him right in his tracks. Though Zidian obeys his commands, Jiang Cheng has yet to fully master it, judging by how lightning flashes up and down his arm. If he puts too much energy into it, his own arm will be burned. Too little energy causes the whip to lose its form.

This time, it seems, he's put about the right amount of spiritual energy into Zidian—a bit more than needed, but not to the point where his latest victim is dead with the first strike.

Goodness knows how many times a-jie has sat with him, rubbing feeling back into his arm. Jiang Cheng would be lying if he said he didn't like using those instances of numbness as a chance to check on his a-jie. They wouldn't lose *too* much face, considering that he is a Sect Leader who has to stay in the best of shape, and everyone knows that Zidian is a formidable, first-class spiritual tool that even the Violet Spider had to train under a master to learn how to use. Jiang Cheng never completed training with Zidian—or a whip, for that matter—a mistake he will rectify with all new disciples of Yunmeng Jiang *and*, hopefully, a-jie, if she allows it. Even if only to hear her voice from across the medical tent rather than beside him, melodious with life and energy, he will swallow his pride in favor of going to the medical tents. And— *and*—!

Well. Jiang Cheng's back is still guarded by the wrong person and the seat at his right remains unoccupied. And it is not only him that is hurting—a-jie hurts too. What kind of sect leader can he be called if he cannot take care of his one and only sister? He does not deny that he can be inattentive to others or that he holds grudges. But Jiang YanLi is holding him together and he will do his best to hold her back.

Speaking of his back being guarded by the wrong person, he has so many words to say to the person with him he would probably bite his tongue just getting the first phrase out!

"Hanguang-jun! I'm moving toward you!"

With a lunge with Sandu and Zidian back to its ring state, he puts all of his weight into spearing the man who dared to approach Lan Wangji. Jiang Cheng may not like the man (boy, just like him and Wei Wuxian, just like everyone in this godforsaken campaign), but even Jiang Cheng sees that this idiot will search for Wei Wuxian. The Second Jade of Lan is held in high regard while Jiang Cheng himself is known as the sect heir that was outdone by a servant's son. Hanguang-jun, no matter how much Jiang Cheng can't stand the airs he puts up, is an ally he can't afford to lose.

He kicks the corpse off his sword and blocks another with his sheathe, snarling. Slashing his way toward Lan Wangji, he eventually finds himself back-to-back with the last person that he'd expected. Good grief. The battlefield is much too chaotic for him to even complain about their positions, and he bites his temper. *For my idiot brother*, he thinks, beheading a corpse. The blackish, thickened blood remains on his sword and he grimaces knowing that it'll be a pain to wash out for both the fabric and his hands.

And, because the universe sees them as a joke, things go to hell.

Jiang Cheng knows the rumbling of reinforcements. Knows it intimately. Lan Wangji probably does as well. Even if it weren't for the waves upon waves of red and white robes rushing in from the sky, forest, and anywhere like damn bugs, Jiang Cheng would have known the Wens have fresh reinforcements. With their dwindling number of energetic soldiers and the influx of corpses, there is no way to keep pushing the line. There is no way to survive this if they carry on. *The other sect leaders aren't the ones with a decimated sect, he thinks viciously, so they have no right to insult me over this.*

*"All forces of Yunmeng Jiang! Prepare to pull back!"*

Lan Wangji spins in a flurry of white, pointedly looking at his direction. He bares his teeth, his bruised and bloody face no doubt like a fresh corpse's. "Lan Wangji, we are not leaving for no reason. As it stands, I cannot afford to lose my people by fighting a losing battle. I imagined that you would agree."

Fine. The bit about not being able to afford to get on Lan Wangji's bad side? Can't afford to attempt it if he never had a chance anyway.

*"Go! Do not stop even if your legs fall off or I'll break them myself!"*

If there is anything Yunmeng Jiang can be proud of, it's the efficiency that Jiang Cheng pounded into their bones. Years of doing work quickly in attempts to please his father or earn the softening of his mother's face culminated into a teenager who does not know how to be messy. He learned the rest off the peeling skin of his fingertips—washing clothes, sewing sturdy stitches—none too gently, but since when was he ever treated gently by anyone except a-jie? No, under the tutelage of war, he's learned to make do with what he has. Zidian is a testament to that.

His units of purple relay his orders for retreat even though he shouted so loudly fishermen would be envious. Good. No questions or overzealous idiots.

The Wens still flood in, a sea of white and red washing away the units that have already fallen. They're quick—much quicker than before—these reinforcements have been conserving energy for the exact purpose of overwhelming the Jiang on the front.

They don't have enough time, Jiang Cheng sees. His brothers and sisters in all but blood drag each other away from the field, limping, clutching wounded stomachs and battered arms. Only some still have the energy to fly their swords. One of his newest disciples falls; only by the grace of another Jiang disciple does he not get stabbed on the way down. He is quickly grabbed and supported by another. The cries of Yunmeng Jiang echo in his ears, overpowering the crackling of Zidian, overpowering the shouts of the Wen. His ears burn with the hotness of a lightning strike, the wailing for friends, family, partners, block out everything until—!

*"A-jie!" Right, he remembers faintly, a set of siblings had joined my ranks after the deaths of their parents.*

*Thump.*



*Thump.*

*Thump.*

The core in his chest seems to spin, whirring until his blood heats up every part of his body. The heat sears through even the arm that he hasn't felt or remembered about shortly after the battle started. A twitch of his fingers heralds in light that etches itself on his eyes. Zidian lies in wait on his finger, impatient.

It's not as if the rush of crackling spiritual energy could numb away the loss of an arm. Zidian is a spiritual tool; its strength depends on how much of his energy he can tap into. Following that line of logic, pushing more of his spiritual energy through it would extend the range of his whip. If not, he can try to increase the amount of electricity in his attacks. If there is enough electricity coursing through Zidian, maybe it would be able to hit a larger area.

He still doesn't have full control of Zidian. Considering he's wielded it without permanently hurting himself, he *should* be fine.

No—he is of Yunmeng Jiang. He *will* be fine.

He watches, waiting for the last of his people to fall behind him. Only then, does he summon Zidian. His spiritual energy tugs at Zidian urgently—drawing out a longer length of chain formed by the combination of his spiritual energy and the techniques of Meishan Yu. Zidian coils at his feet as he gauges the length—he will have to put more spiritual energy and strength in order to direct it. Zidian also has no flag to allow him to discern where it ends, so he will have to guide it the entire way. More momentum is needed - he will have to spin for the momentum. He wants a wide sweep. If he grabs someone with Zidian, he can make a second, weighted sweep.

That is definitely not a plan that he expects to perfectly work. As it stands, it is all he has, along with Lan Wangji still covering the area as he prepares Zidian.

"Lan Wangji," he says, preparing to jump, "you should leave now. I"—

What will he do? Be right behind him? Cover his back?

"I will," he stops once more, testing the words in his mouth, "I trust that you will do what is required of the situation."

Would you look at that. Rather than learning how to trust Lan Wangji with what could be his life at Gusu, Jiang Cheng learns to trust him on the battlefield. Wei Wuxian would have chided him for being "so prickly," *how will you befriend others, Jiang Cheng? How will this young master make connections if he can't forge relationships with others outside of wartime?*

Well, this... *Sect Leader* will find a way. Just as he and a-jie cooked up ways to keep Wei Wuxian out of too much trouble, he will find a way once more.

Jiang Cheng jumps and spins, with the words of his brother echoing in his ears and his core in his throat. Zidian, an extension of his spiritual energy, soaks the battlefield with purple. *His* purple. Electricity causes the Wen-dogs to drop their swords as the bolts of lightning are conducted into unprotected hands. Hair sizzles and screams fracture the silence in Jiang Cheng's ears. Sweep one fells the Wen-dogs into a heap of cultivators at his feet. Sweep two clears the area.

They are more cautious about approaching him now. Some stand to direct their swords at him, to which he sneers. With a flick of Zidian, their hands are too wounded to steadily direct their swords.

Others charge him as he interlocks Sandu and Zidian to fend off an attack.

He wants to laugh. His disciples are nowhere in sight. Good. He can retreat.

"You think you can trap me that easily?" Another push at Zidian and electricity shocks them off into their allies.

He jumps onto Sandu, still wielding Zidian. Now that his disciples are gone, he departs.

The Wen-dogs follow. Of course they do.

He swerves away from their oncoming attacks, ducking and holding onto Sandu's hilt for stability. The hand that wielded Zidian still moves—surviving the channeling of his spiritual energy somehow, but he doubts he can use it again.

He curses. He needs to get back. A talisman narrowly misses him. He doesn't want to think of what would have happened if it had made its mark.

Arrows rush by his body—over his shoulder, at his feet, *by his head—!*

His energy flags and his center is cold. The coldness spreads through his body as his spiritual energy wanes, save for one area. It is, almost blessedly, *ironically*, pain-free and unfeeling of the cold that buffets his face and the dried blood on his skin.

He may die here, being the rear guard of a diminished Sect. He can imagine the gossiping now—how the Jiang heir was not up to par, that Wei Wuxian would have done a better job, that Lotus Pier would have fallen twice-over even if his father hadn't died, all due to him.

All due to him for being unable to successfully attempt the impossible.

So be it. A-jie is capable. His disciples will return to a-jie and under her direction Yunmeng Jiang will flourish beyond the splendor it had when his father and mother stood as its heads. Lan Wangji will find Wei Wuxian.

He puts in more speed, draining his core, his energy, incorporating sudden turns and drops to knock the Wen-dogs together. With luck, he will take as many of them down as possible and lead them on a wild chase—!

A jolt at his midsection and he's no longer flying. An arm holds him back. Zidian crackles feebly in warning and he angles Sandu for a stab.

"Let me go," he hisses.

"No."

He twitches.

"Lan Wangji, why are *you, of all people*, still here?" Now that he's not flying, he can feel a muted ache at his core, as it pulses slowly.

"Sect Leader Jiang is wounded."

"Your point? This is a war."

Jiang Cheng moves to turn and the arm leaves his midsection, settling at his elbow.

The face Lan Wangji has as his eyes slide over Jiang Cheng's person—probably over how the blood on Jiang Cheng's robes are transferring to his own—twists.

"My disciples?" Jiang Cheng asks, pointedly ignoring how he's shaking.

"Safe."

"You..." Jiang Cheng lets loose a breath, fumbles with his hands, "make sure my sister gets Zidian. Please." He's babbling as his head swims. The "please" tacked onto his request is a hasty addition from one of his earliest memories. *Manners*, a-jie would scold, *mind your manners, especially if you have a request, a-Cheng*.

Lan Wangji's eyes, widened gold in the darkness, are the last thing Jiang Cheng sees before the numbness spreads to his eyelids.

He can't keep them open anymore.

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Lan Wangji has been horrified by many things during Sunshot. The anguished gasp and cry of Jiang Yanli is one thing he never wants to hear again in his lifespan. He does not want to witness Maiden Jiang forcing herself to stay still as Zidian, the famed whip of Madam Yu, transferred itself to her finger from her brother's limp body again. He does not want to think of Wei Ying, who *must* be alive, losing another family member.

What can he say to Wei Ying, when they find him? How can he tell Wei Ying that he had to knock out Sect Leader Jiang after he regained consciousness, because he woke up in extreme pain? That, when he steadied Sect Leader Jiang after pulling him out of sight of the Wens, Lan Wangji's hand came away bloodied from the burst veins in Sect Leader Jiang's arm?

There are many things Lan Wangji has witnessed, that he prays will not repeat. Jiang Wanyin, screaming his throat hoarse through bitten cloth as Maiden Jiang rubbed ointment into his arms and Lan Wangji passed spiritual energy to him, is one of them.

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When Jiang Yanli returns to her brother's side, she does so with the coldness of Zidian on her finger. When she opens his bandages to change them, she once more forces down a shudder.

Lighting branches across her a-Cheng's arm and shoulders, reddened against his tanned skin. He hadn't noticed how wounded he was, when Lan Wangji found him and brought him back after covering the most dangerous area in a retreat. Of course he didn't—not after wielding Zidian in such a fashion. Adrenaline, combined with Zidian's numbness, would have smothered most of the pain.

She lightly kisses his forehead.

"Wake up soon, a-Cheng. Please don't scare me like that again."

She swallows her unease at seeing Zidian on her finger and begins changing his bandages.

## End Notes

This was a practice in characterization, a prompt I made for myself, and the first time I have written for this fandom. I have read through this several times during writing and several times before posting, but I am still human and prone to mistakes. If there is anything in this fic that you, the readers, feel is offensive, warrants additional tagging, or other such actions, please do not hesitate to let me know.

That being said, this is one result of my takes on Jiang Cheng based on my interpretation of canon:

- 1) He and Lan Wangji grudgingly trust each other due to the fact that they both love Wei Wuxian, platonically, romantically, or otherwise. Their relationship goes south when Wei Wuxian returns, for a number of reasons.
- 2) Jiang Cheng is harsh on himself. Having a core doesn't change that OR that he is aware that he has faults and his belief that others are better than him (both due to his upbringing and the standards he has for himself).
- 3) Jiang Cheng learns to trust in times of need and subtly shows signs of trust. This is in contrast with Wei Wuxian, who trusts more easily and boldly (ie: Wen Ning, Wen Qing).

On my depiction of Zidian: CQL has it as it as a whip made of pure lightning. The donghua and manhua depict it with what looks like barbed sections. So I combined the two based off of what is known as a chain whip, so in this fic, Zidian is a whip that can be extended past its original metallic range with the additions of more 'sections' made with spiritual energy.

Have a different perspective and take on canon? Have a question? You want to tell me something? Go ahead, in the comments!

Thanks for reading :D

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