

LU CHENG ZINE



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VEGA
ALTAIR

SOME CONCLUSIONS

risandsteel, with spot art by Conniecriesalot

A friendly spar—what could be better? A friendly spar—what could be better? Two great warriors, leaders of powerful cultivation sects, putting more than just rage or hatred into their duel—they pour their very souls. To some, it might seem meaningless or foolish, but to them, every strike, every lunge is a language they speak.

Wild. Untamed. Almost animal-like.

There is no room for words or the lies that people are used to.

The force with which Jiang Cheng swings Zidian is not blind—it is precise, like the grudges forged over years. Liu Qingge dodges with a grace even the wind might envy, his movements honed by experience, but in his eyes, there is no contempt—only challenge. They both know: this fight is not about victory. Liu Qingge has always been straightforward, never one to evade blows like a coward—he prefers to charge head-on, crushing his opponent to dust.

Jiang Cheng is somewhat like him—he too prefers to strike head-on, shattering enemy forces that dare stand against him—but wielding a whip requires finesse and agility. Years of refined technique, an iron grip, and eyes burning with battlelust. Lightning cracks through the air as Zidian lashes out, yet Liu Qingge calmly sidesteps each strike, keeping his new techniques hidden. He was saving them for the real fight—just a little later. Jiang Cheng nearly growled, his arm burning from exertion. No matter how much he denied it, Liu Qingge was faster, stronger, more experienced—after all, the Jiang Sect Leader was still young.

The Sect Leader Jiang is still young, but he refuses to yield. Soaring atop his sword, he rained down strikes with Zidian, each one furious, sparks dancing between them. Finally, Jiang Cheng managed to graze his opponent—the whip cracked through the air, leaving its mark. One more move, and Liu Qingge could have been sent sprawling. However, he wasn't called the War God of Bai Zhan Peak for nothing, was he? With a sharp tug, he yanked the whip toward himself, throwing Jiang Cheng off balance. There will definitely be a burn and a scar, but he doesn't actually bother himself with these little scratches.

It is about the battle now.

Liu Qingge's movements are subtle, Jiang Cheng cannot catch Cheng Luan with Zidian but soon his opponent lands on the ground. His eyes exude all the power of the owner, he does not feel pain in his tightly clenched fingers and does not feel tension in his leg after a long time dodging from other's swinging the whip. Liu Qingge attacks with renewed enthusiasm, not giving Zidian the slightest chance to touch again his arms or legs. His sword, Cheng Luan, cuts through the air so fast most cultivators wouldn't even see it coming.

Jiang Cheng barely twists away in time, feeling the blade graze his sleeve—a fraction slower, and it would have drawn blood. Fearless now, he charges forward,



knocking them both to the ground. Bai Zhan Peak lord dropped his sword in surprise. Jiang Cheng even slams into Liu Qingge's chest, knocking the breath from his lungs. The impact sends them both tumbling to the ground, rolling across the dirt in a tangle of limbs.

Elbows dig into ribs, knees jab at thighs—neither holds back. Jiang Cheng snarls, twisting beneath Liu Qingge's weight, managing to hook a leg around his opponent's waist and flip them over. Now on top, he swings his fist in Liu Qingge's face, only for the Bai Zhan War God to catch his wrist in an iron grip.

Liu Qingge blocked the attack and finally caught Jiang Cheng's wrists. Their breaths were ragged, they locked eyes, both aching from the dull pain that spread through their bodies... Still, they loved beating each other up; it was somehow better than dual cultivation sometimes. And this was the best way to vent their emotions after sect and peak lord meetings.

"You... almost got me with that last one," said Liu Qingge, looking straight at the sky. He didn't have that much stamina left to talk or move, so he just smiled at Jiang Cheng, who seems to be more than tired. He looked at his sleeve and rolled his eyes irritably. It was ruined and... well, what was going on between him and Liu Qingge was really not straight but Jiang Cheng is still hesitating. "And that whiplash with Zidian when you caught me was insanely strong", he paused for a moment to catch his breath. "I thought I was going to lose at that moment."

"I'd never thought you were good at maneuvering, but you still can't handle a whip", Jiang Cheng chuckled and finally took a deep breath. "So what now?" he asked hoarsely. Liu Qingge shakes his head slightly, weighing this difficult dilemma, and then slowly got to his feet, wincing in pain. With his level of cultivation, he could easily heal himself, but for some reason, he wanted to keep the bruises. It was... kind of nice.

Liu Qingge nodded towards the sound of rushing water not that far away. "River," Liu Qingge finally grunted. It was less a suggestion and more an invitation. Jiang Cheng nodded in agreement and slowly got to his feet, trying not to strain his overworked muscles, his body protesting every movement. They walked in silence, the only sounds of their breathing and the rustle of trampled grass under their feet. The air, once crackling with violent energy, now hung heavy and warm between them, filled with things neither of them knew how to say.

The small clearing by the river was secluded, shaded by ancient willows whose branches dipped into the cool water. Without a word, they began to shed their ruined robes, letting the expensive fabric pool carelessly on the mossy bank. The unspoken feelings were as palpable as the humidity clinging to their skin.

Liu Qingge waded in first, hissing slightly as the cold water hit the fresh welts and bruises on his back and shoulders. He submerged himself completely, emerging a moment later with his long black hair plastered to his neck and back, water streaming down the defined muscles of his torso. He slicked his hair back, letting the water soothe his aching body.



Jiang Cheng followed more cautiously, his movements stiff. The cool water was a shock, then a relief, washing over the dust, sweat, and the metallic tang of exertion. He focused on scrubbing the grime from his arms, the simple, physical task a welcome anchor. But his gaze kept straying, pulled against his will to the man across from him.

Water ran down Liu Qingge's shoulders, tracing the paths of old scars and new bruises, some of which Jiang Cheng knew were the work of his own fists and Zidian. In the dappled light filtering through the willows, the Bai Zhan War God looked as an untouchable deity. The defined lines of his back, the way his muscles shifted under thick skin as he moved... Jiang Cheng's breath hitched. He quickly looked down, pretending to be intensely interested in cleaning a nonexistent spot on his wrist.

"Come here," Liu Qingge requested. Jiang Cheng glanced at him with slight embarrassment before finally stepping into the water. He felt intensely hot. As he entered, steam seemed to almost rise from him. The moment the cold water reached Jiang Cheng's abdomen, Liu Qingge splashed him with an icy wave right over his head.

Jiang Cheng stared at him in shock. He. Did. What. Without a second thought, Jiang Cheng lunged at Liu Qingge, splashing him back with the frigid water, not even noticing how his own fingers were turning numb. It was damn cold in here!

Liu Qingge let out a satisfied grunt but didn't retaliate, his eyes catching how violently Jiang Cheng was shivering.

"Your hands are blue," he stated bluntly. "Come. I'll warm you up," he said it with utter nonchalance, as if he did this every day! Jiang Cheng wanted to retort, but all he could manage was a stiff nod, squeezing his eyes shut. How could Liu Qingge endure this hellish cold? And why was Jiang Cheng reacting so foolishly? He was acting like a stupid teenager, not the leader of a powerful clan!

Liu Qingge grabbed his partner—his sparring partner—by the wrist and led him to the riverbank. They dried off quickly, but Jiang Cheng still saw no sign of a fire. Liu Qingge made no move to get dressed.

And then, Jiang Cheng thought he understood. He is a damn fool.







ENEMIES TO FRENEMIES

Acernor and Adarksweetness, with spot art by Barghest Shadows

First Meeting

Demon Jiang Cheng

Fluff

"You know the rules," Sha Hualing says. "Mask on, no unauthorized fighting, and if anyone asks, your name is Lord Sour Face."

A vein jumps on Liu Qingge's temple, but he resists the very obvious provocation to violence. He'll get his fill of that soon enough. He'd better, for all the trouble he went through, bullying Luo Binghe's second general to attend this event. To think, Sha Hualing only planned to take Liu Mingyan to a demon melee, and that too, for "sightseeing and literary inspiration"... Youths these days.

Arms crossed among a crowd of demons, Liu Qingge observes his surroundings. He's never been in a gathering of demons this large without a fight breaking out; he supposes there's no need for them to begin one now, when the main event is due to start in only a few moments. "That's one of the ones you mentioned?" Liu Mingyan murmurs. Sha Hualing follows her eyes over the crowd to a skinny, mostly unclad demon with long, glossy hair and nods. Liu Mingyan scrutinizes the demon and pulls out a brush, using a tiny flick of qi to wet the dry ink, and begins writing on a thin piece of paper braced against her hand. As she runs out of space, she gestures impatiently to Liu Qingge, who resolutely turns his back to her. Someday her ink is going to spatter on his white robes and he's never going to do this for her again; but she's been meticulous so far. The movement of the brush is ticklish on his back, barely perceptible. Liu Qingge watches the crowd through the slits in his mask.

Many gathered are low level demons with beastly features, but there are a number of what Liu Qingge recognizes as nobility, equal in rank if not power to the likes of Mobei-jun or Sha Hualing. Sha Hualing points the worthiest of them out with appropriate disrespect.

"Xuefeng-jun," she gestures to a large, grizzled looking demon wearing a white bearskin. "One of a-die's stupid entourage. Didn't come to defend him when I stole his palace, though."

"The one with all the spikes is elder Bloodstone. She defeated the Corrupt Xuanwu of the Abyss once twenty years ago and won't shut up about it."

There's a fat, sturdy female demon with mottled skin, bulging eyes, and a large, one-eyed wolf by her side. "Baigou and her wife Toadskin," Sha Hualing rolls her eyes. "They fight together as a team. Weaklings."

"Ah, so teamwork is for weaklings?" Liu Mingyan asks silkily.

"Aiya, obviously not when it's with you!!!" Sha Hualing simpers, and Liu Qingge takes his cue to start ignoring them. He looks around more and builds a list in his head of potential opponents. It's a short list; he's not looking for strength after fighting with Luo Binghe for so long, rather for an opponent with smarts and special abilities he hasn't encountered before.



As he looks, a small commotion starts at the cavern entrance. Several demons stop to take notice, including Sha Hualing, who drops her coy wheedling to tug at Mingyan's arm and whisper, "Sandu Shengshou!"

Liu Qingge feels the brush jump on his back. He glares over his shoulder, the ink only smeared on the paper, not on him, then follows both womens' gazes to a demon striding into the room.

He's a noble, evidenced by his violet huadian and a palpable aura that physically intimidates baser demons. A silver lotus guan rests on his head, but the only other jewelry are silver earrings coiled along the shell of his pointed ears, and a few neck chains of moderate length.

He looks practically dressed for a fight, but for better or worse, Liu Qingge's learned enough about demons to recognize the display of wealth. Any demon could amass gold or jade, but the best of them coveted human-made crafts. This demon is wearing silk robes dyed purple and tailored in the jianxiu style; his belt and braces are quality leather decorated with metalwork that would be costly enough in the human realm and likely went for a premium in the demon realm. Still, in demon fashion, the newcomer's robes leave his chest shamelessly bare and Liu Qingge glares at patches of iridescent skin.

"I didn't think he'd come," Sha Hualing says thoughtfully. "He almost never leaves his precious lotus lake."

Perhaps true, but this Sandu Shengshou carries himself like the world owes him something. He carries himself like he knows he'll win any fight he starts. He carries himself like the crowd will part for him, easy as water for the prow of a ship.

And it does; he stalks through the crowd, demons of all shapes and descriptions making way for him until he's reached Sha Hualing, who draws herself up to look haughty and insolent. "Saintess," Sandu Shengshou directs a curt nod at her and goes to move past the three of them- right through Liu Qingge's space.

Liu Qingge holds his ground and doesn't move.

The demon stops close enough to Liu Qingge that he can make out the fine scales dusting his hairline- the slits of his pupils. Cool breath washes against Liu Qingge's face as he opens his mouth to speak.

"Get out," he says, voice low and venomous, "of my way."

"Come now, Jiang Cheng, don't mind him," Sha Hualing says teasingly, pulling on Liu Qingge's arm like she wants to lose her hand. Liu Qingge stays where he is, immovable as stone, and breathes back on Jiang Cheng's face, meeting his eyes.

"Move!" Sha Hualing warns him under her breath. "If you anger him now, I'm throwing you out."



Liu Qingge relents at the threat, but can't resist a parting shot as he steps to the side. "Didn't realize serpents are blind."

Unexpectedly, the air around Jiang Cheng crackles. "Insolent," he says acidly. "Is Saintess Sha traveling with useless personnel again?"

"Don't get it twisted," Sha Hualing replies, showing her fangs. "Sour Face here is..." she stutters a bit, then gestures at Liu Mingyan. "...my wife's lowly manservant. Yeah, to bring her books and steamed livers and stuff."

All of Liu Qingge's growing offense shatters when Mingyan gasps and utters, "Wife?" while blushing profoundly above her veil. So, it was already like this between them, then...

Sandu Shengshou lifts a brow, but is clearly uninterested in Sha Hualing's relationships.

"Congratulations," he says blandly, and pushes past them. Liu Qingge nearly yelps when the demon's aura stings him like lightning, somehow burrowing into the few tender spots left uncovered by his mask and robes. He glares violently at Jiang Cheng's back. Impertinent creature...though a demon with a lightning spiritual root was interesting, maybe the challenge he was looking for.

"I'm fighting that one," he declares.

Sha Hualing rolls her eyes. "Get in line."



The line, as it were, is long but moves quickly. Sandu Shengshou easily defeats a number of opponents and a number more drop out before it's their turn. If nothing else, demons are good at knowing their place in the hierarchy of strength. Liu Qingge is an exceptional judge in that regard, too, and so when Elder Bloodstone limps away, he draws Cheng Luan from qiankun space.

Liu Qingge takes care not to pass any qi to the sword, but its killing intent still rings like a brass bell across the arena, a clear challenge as any.

And for all that Jiang Cheng greets Liu Qingge on the battlefield with a disinterested face, he doesn't let his guard down, not even after he parries Liu Qingge's first volley of sword glares with Zidian. Jiang Cheng then leaps back to maintain range and Liu Qingge follows, Cheng Luan's hungry edge singing through the space his opponent once occupied. They trade ten more blows in the blink of an eye, steel meeting lightning in a burst of blinding white sparks. Jiang Cheng moves like water whipped up by a storm and in spite of himself, Liu Qingge finds a thrill in keeping up.



He dodges a spiraling blow and heads straight for Jiang Cheng, doubles his speed halfway through to get inside the demon's guard, where Liu Qingge takes advantage of his opponent's surprise to snipe one of his silver necklaces with Cheng Luan's tip. It slips from Jiang Cheng's neck and falls to the ground with a satisfying chime, leaving the demon breathless. Not quite first blood, but the crowd gasps, and then roars.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng stares at him in shock, clutching at his now bare collarbones. "You dare?!" he hisses, and Liu Qingge is struck by the scandalized note in his voice.

What was that for?? Face hot behind his mask, Liu Qingge backflips out of range when the demon retaliates with a furious blast of qi, but he can't completely avoid Zidian when it follows the blast in a loop. It scorches the front of his robes wide open. This time, the crowd openly jeers.

"Competent," Liu Qingge mutters the next time they dance past each other, a hairsbreadth apart. "For a demon."

Jiang Cheng eyes grow sharp behind his sneer. "You too. For a demon."

Shit. Liu Qingge doesn't have time to wonder if he's given himself away because Jiang Cheng retracts Zidian and his huadian glows fills with steady purple light. Liu Qingge senses anticipation in the crowd and his body leaps a mere moment before his mind catches up, narrowly avoiding a large serpent's tail suddenly hurtling toward his feet.

So, this is the trick up Jiang Cheng's sleeve. Liu Qingge had been waiting — Luo Binghe had his dream powers and Mobei-Jun his portals; Jiang Cheng, it appears, can merge with his spiritual weapon and project as a colossal, electrifying serpent.

Cheng Luan hums in Liu Qingge's hand, but he keeps the bond closed to maintain his disguise. He holds up against Zidian's dominance of the field for ten more moves, after which Jiang Cheng makes a lucky turn and clips his escape route.

Liu Qingge grunts as Zidian's thick tail swats him into the ground, though the energy needed to keep this colossal form leaves little to actually hurt him. Liu Qingge shakes off the ringing in his ears and prepares to unseal Cheng Luan, but Jiang Cheng manifests from Zidian's coils and pins his hand back.

Heart beating wildly, Liu Qingge watches the demon bear down on him, a mocking smile playing about his mouth.

"Who are you, really?" Jiang Cheng asks, voice pitched low to keep it between them. When he touches Liu Qingge's mask, however, a red ribbon swiftly wraps around Jiang Cheng's wrist.



"I'm bored," Sha Hualing says, an authoritarian edge to her voice. "Quit hogging the field and let's see some real entertainment."

She's doing this for Liu Qingge's sake, but somehow, he's furious at being interrupted. It's almost a disappointment to see Jiang Cheng back down. If he really removed Liu Qingge's mask and exposed him as a human, maybe they could have fought in earnest with the pride of their species at stake. As it stands, however, Jiang Cheng returns to his normal form, nods briefly in Liu Qingge's direction, and walks off the field. Liu Qingge summons his sword back to hand. He'd never be so dishonorable as to attack an opponent's back, but he's grimly satisfied in the way Cheng Luan's aura makes Jiang Cheng waver in his stride.

A fortnight later finds Liu Qingge on a nighthunt by the borderlands. He camps outside as usual and takes respite in a wide lake, still warm with traces of pure qi. Body thrumming with spiritual energy, Liu Qingge lingers more than usual and vaguely casts about for the source. It's increasingly rare to find lone spiritual reservoirs; they quickly tended to attract flocks of yao or cultivations sects, but there's little sign of life except for a thick bed of lotus flowers and whatever lived among them.

A shimmer catches Liu Qingge's eye. When the water outright glows purple, he leaps up, sword at the intruder's throat right as he reveals himself. Jiang Cheng eyes the blade disdainfully, then tastes the air in Liu Qingge's direction.

"I knew you were human," he says. "Could smell one of you anywhere."

"Are you following me?" Liu Qingge demands.

Jiang Cheng scoffs, unimpressed. "Didn't you wade into my house?"

Liu Qingge casts a look around. All he sees is a serene expanse of water, though he recalls Sha Hualing mentioning a lotus lake. "I don't see a burrow."

Unexpectedly, Jiang Cheng laughs. "Immortal master Liu Qingge," he says, each syllable like a pebble in his mouth. "You really know how to talk to us demons."

Liu Qingge grips Cheng Luan, aware of a charge in the air. So, he's been found out. This might not become a problem for Sha Hualing, and therefore Mingyan, if he could take care of it right here.

"You're here for revenge?" Liu Qingge asks, despite the fact that he's decidedly not dressed for battle. But Jiang Cheng with his sheer robes clinging to him like wet snakeskin is not dressed to impress either. What he is dressed for, Liu Qingge can't guess.

"Revenge implies you defeated me," the demon sniffs. "Which you did not."

"You didn't defeat me, either."

Jiang Cheng folds his arms imperiously. "Remind me: who was pinned down under whom?" A surge of heat fans along Liu Qingge's cheeks. Yet instead of barking out a provocation to fight, he retrieves an item from his qiankun pouch; tosses it at Jiang Cheng. "And who should take better care of his things?"

Jiang Cheng stares at the silver chain between his fingers: the same one that Liu Qingge cut from his neck during their fight. "It's been repaired," he murmurs, a little wondrously. Liu Qingge makes a conscious choice to be polite about it because demons, no crafting skills, and so on.

"It was easy."

"You repaired it?" Jiang Cheng looks at him more intensely this time, enough to make Liu Qingge aware all over again that he's naked in front of a demon. Before he can reply, however, Jiang Cheng lists close and tips his head, exposing his long neck.

Liu Qingge stares. "What are you doing?"

Jiang Cheng jingles the silver chain. "Isn't it your duty as a manservant?"

Liu Qingge bristles. "I am not," he says. "That was my sister."

"Oh," The demon looks thoughtful, then churlishly admits: "My sister also wedded a human. He is very annoying."

"Well, Mingyan is perfect," Liu Qingge counters. "It's Sha Hualing who's annoying."

Jiang Cheng nods. "Yes."

Something in Liu Qingge yields at this simple agreement. Wading toward Jiang Cheng, he picks up the silver chain. "If she didn't interrupt..."

Jiang Cheng smiles, fangs and eyes flashing silver under the moonlight. It should be off putting, this obvious threat of demonic energy flaring. But instead of being on edge, Liu Qingge finds himself raising his hand to loop the chain around Jiang Cheng's neck — as if he were a manservant after all. Jiang Cheng's mouth twists in what had best be pleasure, and not smugness.

"If she hadn't interrupted," Jiang Cheng says, voice low and clear, "Would you have fought for real? As yourself?"



Liu Qingge's fingers tingle where they brushed against Jiang Cheng's skin. The back of his hands feel like they've been dusted with embers, they burn so from the brief touch of his long, loose hair. Is this some sort of snake demon magic? He's only known snakes to be venomous, not poisonous to the touch. Liu Qingge clears his throat and withdraws, nodding stiffly.

"Yes." There is no other answer. He would have opened his bond to Cheng Luan, and the flare of his unique qi would have given up the game. A small price to pay to test his mettle against lightning.

Jiang Cheng glances down at the chain; raises his long, elegant fingers to toy with it, as if seeking the place where Liu Qingge mended it. "Good, I hoped for it." After a few moments, he raises his eyes, dark and captivating, to Liu Qingge's.

"You're quite skilled," he says. Liu Qingge doesn't know what to say in response; he hasn't had to field compliments on anything but his sword work in a long time. Jiang Cheng's considering gaze on him slowly draws his attention to the fact that he is still quite nude. He clears his throat and steps back, glancing over at his clothes. It's a mistake; he should have known better than to take his eyes off any demon.

A touch at his chin; he startles and spins around to face Jiang Cheng, but the demon is already inexplicably close. His eyes are half-lidded as he stares at Liu Qingge's mouth.

"Arrogant too," he murmurs, so close that his cool breath washes against Liu Qingge's skin just as it did the first time they met. Little streaks of electricity sing through Liu Qingge's veins, even as he holds himself stock still. "But strong enough to deserve it."

"Obviously," Liu Qingge's mouth says for him. He can't look away from the snake yao. Is he being bewitched?

When Liu Qingge doesn't move, Jiang Cheng's eyes slowly drag up from his lips to linger on his eyes. His mouth curls in a smile and he steps back just far enough that it allows Liu Qingge to exhale. Then, at a wave of his hand, the lake roils and its surface dips, like a perfectly round sinkhole had opened at its center. Liu Qingge stares as the moonlight illuminates glimpses of an estate, large and mysterious and beautiful in a way that was only heard of in fables.

"My burrow," Jiang Cheng says, eyes crinkling. "Master Liu is welcome, if he can keep up." In the next breath, Jiang Cheng returns to his serpent form and slips soundlessly under the water.

Liu Qingge immediately follows, swift as a breeze, leaving behind the lotus flowers, the shore — and his clothes.







@CONNIECRISALOT



TO MOVE THE NEEDLE

Neuvoid, with spot art by Cheermione

Piercings

Blood (Piercing)

Needles

"Mingyan, are you sure this is the place?"

"Yes. This is it," his sister answered as she stepped underneath the pharmacy awning. "It's on the second floor," she continued as she closed her umbrella shaking it carefully, watching water droplets slide onto the sidewalk.

Rain continued to splatter against the plastic tarp ahead of them as Liu Mingyan walked towards the dark and narrow stair corridor.

Even her masked face couldn't hide her concern from him.

"Ge, are you sure you want to come with me?" She asked quietly, "you don't have to you know."

"I don't mind," Liu Qingge answered following his sister into the corridor upstairs. "I've just never been to a tattoo shop before."

Their steps echoed up the tiled stairs.

"Well," Liu Mingyan continued, "Your friends clearly have them."

"Luo Binghe isn't my friend."

"I didn't say he was," Liu Mingyan answered.

Liu Qingge isn't sure how to respond.

They stopped near the second floor landing at the front door of the shop.

"Suibian Tattoos?" Liu Qingge murmured, his lips curling up in slight amusement. "The owner has a sense of humour to name a tattoo shop 'Whatever'."

"They're really good at what they do, Ge," Liu Mingyan said as she took his umbrella, hanging them on the stand beside the door.

"I don't doubt that." Liu Qingge thought.

They must be, considering the fact that his sister had been coming to this shop regularly for more than three years.

The brass bell rang cheerily as they entered into Suibian Tattoos, taking in the clean interiors and the ambient rock music playing in the background.

The place felt oddly peaceful.



"Welcome, Miss Liu and guest," the receptionist greeted them, setting his book aside from the counter. He readjusted his wire frame glasses, his elegant features fixed in a slight smile. "Here for your follow-up appointment?"

Liu Qingge felt his breathing hitch when those violet eyes studied him with polite interest. This receptionist was uncommonly pretty.

Those elegant hands as they tapped on their tablet screen, the hair held in his bun haphazardly with a pen, threatening to spill down his neck—

Liu Qingge shoved the unhelpful thoughts away, doing his best to ignore the fine lines encircling Jiang Cheng's neck: a web leading to a spider, bobbing against his Adam's apple, the dark ink splayed beautifully across that pale skin.

He poorly ignored the coiling snake tattoo around that left forearm, twined around wrist and fingers, the head of the snake staring down a ring on his middle finger, silver and amethyst, those elegant fingers readjusted those glasses once more —

Staring too long at him was rude.

"Good afternoon, Jiang Cheng," Liu Mingyan greeted the man. "I'm a bit early, but we were in the area."

"That's alright." Nodding once, Jiang Cheng answered easily— those four silver drops glinting under his lower lip with his movement, "it'll be a bit until Wei Ying is ready."

"I don't mind, I wanted to take my time to look at the jewellery." Liu Mingyan took off her face mask.

Perching on top of her bottom lip and slightly underneath were golden piercings — snake bites, newly healed.

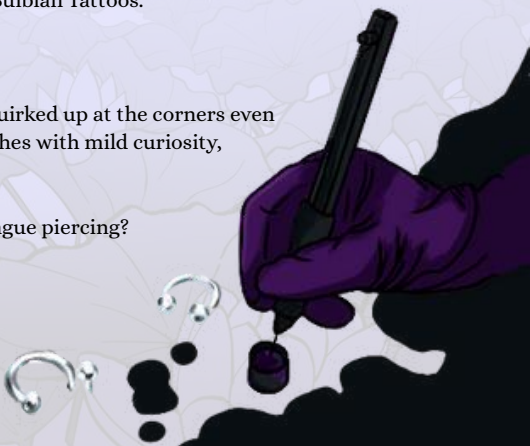
"They look good." Jiang Cheng hummed in approval, "I don't see a problem from here, but it's best to have him look it over— He's probably dying to catch up with you."

Liu Mingyan smiled. "Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot to introduce my brother." She glanced to her left. "Ge, this is Jiang Cheng, co- owner and piercer of Suibian Tattoos."

Liu Qingge nodded towards the receptionist.

"So, you're her brother." The beautiful man's lips quirked up at the corners even more, those violet eyes glancing through thick lashes with mild curiosity, "I've heard quite a bit about you."

Something glinted in Jiang Cheng's mouth — a tongue piercing?



"Nice to meet you," Liu Qingge managed, trying not to think of that or anything else about the handsome man before him.

The last thing he wanted was Jiang Cheng to judge him as a weirdo.

"Hm. I'll be here if you two need anything. Feel free to look around."

"Thank you," Liu Mingyan answered. "Ge?"

"Mn." Liu Qingge followed Liu Mingyan to the display cases, eager to focus on something else. He was accompanying Liu Mingyan, nothing more.

"This would really look good on Ge," Liu Mingyan said, breaking Liu Qingge away from his spiralling thoughts. Her fingers pointed at a silver hoop with a dagger charm. "It suits you."

"Cute, but... I don't have any piercings."

"Well! You're in the right place to fix that, don't you think?"

Liu Qingge turned to greet the new voice — a grinning man with a ponytail and a waist apron was making a beeline across the lobby towards them.

"You'd do well with a lot actually," the man added as he stopped before them, his inquisitive eyes scanning over Liu Qingge in a rather clinical manner. "It doesn't even have to be the ears! You have a really good face —"

"Wei Ying..." Jiang Cheng's soft sigh as he rang up the previous client's payment could be heard.

"Oh. Right. Sorry," the man responded not looking too sorry.

"Hello, Wei Ying," Liu Mingyan smiled.

"A-Yan! Hey!" Wei Ying beamed at Liu Qingge, "You must be her brother with those facial similarities! I'm Wei Ying, the other owner of Suibian Tattoos. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Liu Qingge."

"But I'm serious," Wei Ying continued, "you'd look wonderful with piercings."

"Has it occurred to you that he might not want one?" Jiang Cheng walked around the counter and ambled towards them. With his arms crossed, his purple dress shirt rolled up past his elbows revealed more of those inked designs: the snakes on his left entwining with the spider lilies on his right—

"Oh, boo. You act like I'll have my nefarious way with him." Wei Ying pouted. "I'm not THAT desperate for clients!"



"I'm not acting like anything," Jiang Cheng deadpanned, though Liu Qingge noticed a smile forming at the corner of those lips again, those snake bites gleaming under the store lights—

"You're no fun." Wei Ying patted his client's shoulder, "C'mon, Mingyan, let's check that out." Liu Qingge was suddenly alone with the very pretty, Jiang Cheng.

"I'm sorry about my brother," Jiang Cheng sighed. "He doesn't mean anything by it, he's just... very passionate when it comes to body art."

"It's okay. I'm not offended." He tilted his head, "He did Mingyan's back piece, didn't he? It's gorgeous."

Jiang Cheng reassessed him. "You're different than I expected."

"Hm."

"She's mentioned the Mid Autumn Festival when her right helix was pierced."

"Ah." Liu Qingge said, "I'm not like them." He frowned when he thought of that event. he remembered the stink the other extended family members raised that year, thinking themselves so clever and subtle with their passive aggressive comments.

Liu Qingge made sure that those comments were quickly shut down.

"You wouldn't be here if you were."

"I'm sure they'll raise a stink again." Liu Qingge shrugged, "But so what? I'm just as ready to call them out."

"Good." Jiang Cheng let out a hum.

Liu Qingge immediately put that praise out of mind.

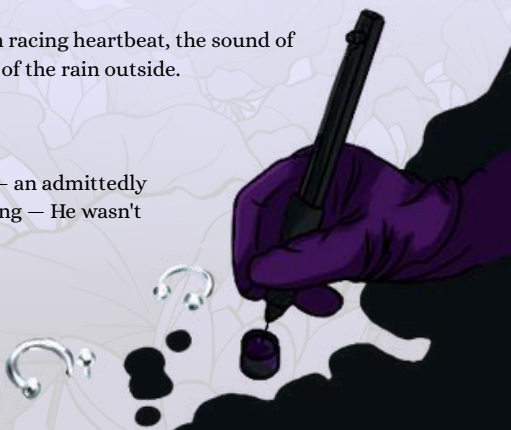
"A-Cheng, I need you for a moment!" Wei Ying shouted from the booth, "A-Ning called my cell — I've told him to call the front desk instead — could you take it? I'm a bit occupied right now."

"I'll be right there," Jiang Cheng answered. "Excuse me,"

Liu Qingge now left alone, suddenly noticed his own racing heartbeat, the sound of the air conditioner running, and the faint pounding of the rain outside.

The thunder rumbled in the distance.

What the hell was he doing getting tripped up by a — an admittedly attractive— stranger?! This was beyond embarrassing — He wasn't twelve anymore!



How they hadn't met before now must be because they ran in completely different social circles with Liu Qingge mostly around other Jianshu students and Wushu masters and Liu Mingyan surrounded by her own modelling and acting cohorts.

The only overlap Liu Qingge had with his sister was the occasional emergency modelling gig foisted upon him by Liu Mingyan's friends.

And yet with all the (admittedly) visually attractive people he'd met in his life, it was Jiang Cheng who somehow flustered him the most.

There was a sudden sound of curtains racing against the metal track followed by Wei Ying and Liu Mingyan's reappearance in an animated conversation, Jiang Cheng following behind.

"All done? That was fast," Liu Qingge stated.

"Yup." Wei Ying nodded. "Mingyan's piercing has healed up nicely."

Liu Mingyan's gold jewellery was replaced by small diamond-shaped studs of platinum, better fitted to her lip.

"They suit you."

Liu Mingyan beamed.

"Don't they?" Wei Ying smirked, "you really should consider getting a piercing y'know—"

"Wei Ying—" Jiang Cheng interrupted.

"I know, I know but I have to try!" The tattooist slumped somewhat. ".... you're right, he shouldn't be pressured like this—"

"I want one."

"Ah?"

"An eyebrow piercing..." Liu Qingge repeated, "I want one."

"Ge... are you sure?"

"Mn," Liu Qingge answered. Perhaps it looked like his sudden desire for one came out of nowhere but — "Do you take walk-ins?"

"Determined I see, I like that in a client." Wei Ying had a strange spark in his eyes, "Unfortunately, I'm booked after Mingyan. My next client's arriving soon so I've got to go clean up and get ready—"



"Hey—" Jiang Cheng protested.

"— Jiang Cheng would be the one to take this job. Would that be alright?" Wei Ying waited.
"Yes... That would be acceptable."

"Last chance, are you absolutely sure?" Jiang Cheng sat on a stool, setting the new eyebrow piercing beside the sealed equipment on a tray beside them.

"Absolutely." Liu Qingge sat back on the chair in the private booth that he and Liu Mingyan were led to, a strange sense of calm washing over him as his sister stood watch.

"Right brow?" Jiang Cheng re-checked as he brought a skin-safe marker towards Liu Qingge's face.

"Mn."

"Do you have a specific placement in mind?" Jiang Cheng nodded towards the mirror on the wall.

"Just somewhere around here." Liu Qingge gestured after a glance at the mirror. "I was hoping to get a second opinion from A-Yan..."

Jiang Cheng paused studying his face, those dark lashes and glasses concealing the violet irises underneath.

Violet, Liu Qingge decided, was a great colour on Jiang Cheng.

The piercer uncapped the marker — "Here?"

Liu Qingge felt a dot on his brow, as light as a single raindrop. He looked at the mirror on the wall, a blue spot somewhat hidden by his brow.

The piercer frowned, "I was thinking vertical from here — Miss Liu?"

Liu Mingyan peeked over her brother's shoulder at his reflection, a mischievous knowing look in her eyes. She took a moment to evaluate the marked dot.

"It looks good to me. I'll wait outside the lobby — I have a call to take," she said not so subtly.

She didn't even look at her phone.

They were alone again.

Liu Qingge couldn't help but watch those nimble hands as the piercer spoke about the importance of aftercare.

"I'll give you more information as a reminder." Jiang Cheng pulled on those blue nitrile gloves, the silver ring on his left middle finger and the ink disappearing beneath—

"Thank you."

"I'll start now?"

"Mn."

Those gloved hands carefully cupped at the base of his jaw, moving Liu Qingge a bit closer towards him, tilting his head, his grip gentle as he moved him to a proper position.

They were close, almost pressed together. Liu Qingge could see the crisp lines of the inked webbing on his pale neck, trailing down past his dress shirt, each inked scale on his biceps. Jiang Cheng's expression was that of concentration: Those violet eyes dark, shadowed by their closeness the piercings under his bottom lips glimmering—

Liu Qingge felt cold sweep across his brow, the scent of rubbing alcohol — he closed his eyes. And then it was gone, Jiang Cheng's fingers were on him.

"Good. Keep them closed." Jiang Cheng commanded softly, "Let yourself relax."

Liu Qingge breathed out as he felt Jiang Cheng's fingers feel at his brow.

"You'll feel something cold. It will pinch," Jiang Cheng's voice felt strangely close now that Liu Qingge had closed his eyes.

He felt a cold pinch around the marked area.

"Stay still," Jiang Cheng instructed.

A white star sparked in the darkness arcing through his brow followed by the sharp scent of iron.

Something soft was placed underneath the pain—

Quick movement followed, deft and tender against the dull tugging pain, strangely sweet, those cool gloves against his heated brow —

"All done."

Liu Qingge opened his eyes.



"How are you feeling?"

"Alright."

"It might swell up or bruise a bit in the next few days due to the tissue trauma." Jiang Cheng continued with a slight satisfied smile admiring his own work. "Just take it easy. Keep to light activity for the first two weeks or so if you can."

"When do I see you again?"

Jiang Cheng paused at the breathless question, his cheeks flushing. "Sorry?"

"For the jewellery change..."

"... Two months." Jiang Cheng's blush was gone, as if it had been a trick of the light.

"Oh." Two months.

The noise of the piercer clearing the used equipment broke the sudden silence between them. The rain outside seemed to have stopped.

Two months...

"Once you're ready, let's head back to the lobby."

Jiang Cheng was reviewing this month's budgets trying his best to concentrate when he heard Wei Ying running across the lobby floor.

"Wei Ying?"

"Sorry, gotta go! Lan Zhan said it was an emergency~"

"Wait! Come back!"

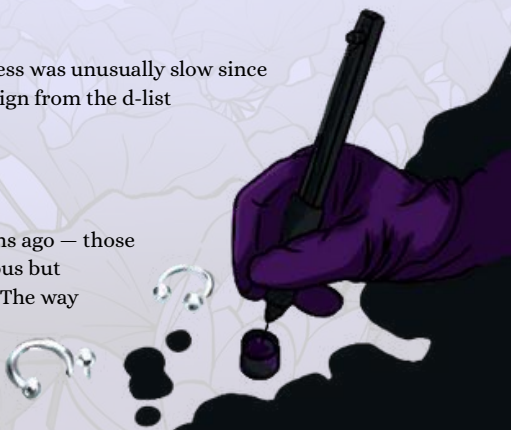
But his brother was gone in a flash, the door ringing happily as it swung shut behind him.

Jiang Cheng sighed.

Manning the counter alone wasn't a problem. Business was unusually slow since the end of last year thanks to that one smear campaign from the d-list influencer — Wen Chao's girl.

But for Wei Ying to pull this today of all days—

Jiang Cheng tried not to think of the visit two months ago — those dark eyes, pupils blown as they looked at him. Curious but without judgement, innocent and wholly rusting — The way



the Jian Master spoke to Liu Mingyan in some of her story posts off-screen, gentle, witty, yet teasing—

Yes. He'd looked up Liu Mingyan's Instagram profile to find out more about Liu Qingge. Not his proudest moment there.

The brass bell rang again.

Liu Qingge stepped into the lobby a few minutes early to his appointment.

"Welcome to Suibian Tattoos." Jiang Cheng's greeting was too gruff.

"I saw Wei Ying downstairs, he seemed frantic— is everything alright?" The attractive man frowned, a slight flush on his beautiful face from the hot summer afternoon, those expressive brown eyes flickering in confusion despite his even expression —

"It's nothing alarming," Jiang Cheng answered, clearing his throat as he stood. "Your brow piercing. How is it?" He moved closer towards his client, studying those elegantly-shaped brows.

No infections, no inflammation, no bumps.

"Looks like it healed well," Jiang Cheng commented. "Any issues while caring for it?"

"Not really," his client answered with a shrug. "Doesn't hurt either."

"A good sign. It'll take a bit longer to completely heal." Jiang Cheng hummed. "I recommend switching out for a shorter piercing now. Won't be good for it to get caught on something." Liu Qingge followed Jiang Cheng to the displays, his motions graceful like his viral sword dances, the flush at the base of his neck reddening from the last of the summer heat— his expression suddenly serious as he surveyed the case before him.

Cute.

Jiang Cheng ignored the thought. It wouldn't do to be unprofessional.

"I think this one." Liu Qingge pointed at a platinum curved barbell, "It's a bit simple..."

"Simple is best." Jiang Cheng took out the sealed item from the case.

They didn't talk much once Jiang Cheng led Liu Qingge into the private booth.

Jiang Cheng, for his part, tried not to be weird.

Liu Qingge didn't seem to be the talkative sort, content with the silence they shared, opting to watch Jiang Cheng.



And yet. It wasn't a bad silence. The Jian Master seemed distracted again like he had been during the piercing all those months ago: his eyes suddenly unfocused, slightly glassy — a set of miniature night skies filled with stars, those petal-like lips, plush and slightly parted—

Jiang Cheng quickly changed out the piercing, keeping his touch light and refusing to think any further on the matter.

If Liu Qingge's appearance was exceptional and attractive on the day he stepped inside, he now looked... dangerous — devastatingly alluring in his unguarded manner—

It wouldn't do for Jiang Cheng to act creepy around Liu Qingge. Heaven knows how many weirdos the other had dealt with already as a National Level Jian Master?

"Ready to check out?" Jiang Cheng asked instead. "I'm all done here."

The man nodded stiffly, perhaps preoccupied with his own thoughts.

They meandered to the receptionist counter where Jiang Cheng rang up the total for Liu Qingge.

Whatever was bothering the Jian Master seemed to intensify as he handed Jiang Cheng his card, those brows scrunching further as his card was swiped in the reader.

Jiang Cheng tore the receipt off the card reader for Liu Qingge to sign and clicked open the shop's appointment app—

"I— Would you like a coffee?"

Jiang Cheng paused.

He looked up at Liu Qingge.

The other man's face was now fully red.

Jiang Cheng felt a hot flush form at his cheeks, burning at the tips of his ears. His face must match the swordsman's shade of scarlet.

"I—" Jiang Cheng cleared his throat. "You don't have to go such lengths to ask me out on a date... Having me pierce your eyebrow like that—"

T-That's different." Liu Qingge's face turned an even brighter ruby, contrasting against his mole while framing those phoenix eyes. "I've been thinking of getting one for a while."

Jiang Cheng was speechless.

Was Liu Qingge that flustered?



"... Unless you don't drink coffee?" Liu Qingge's tone was worried, looking somewhat lost.

"Ah... Forget it. This was too presumptuous of me."

"I don't do instant coffee." Jiang Cheng took the shop's name card from its stand and scrawled his number onto it, handing that to Liu Qingge. "I'm off Mondays and Wednesdays."

"Right. I can do that..." Liu Qingge murmured as he accepted the card, his eyes suddenly bright. "Then. I'll see you later, Jiang Cheng,"

"See you."

Jiang Cheng slowly counted to ten after Liu Qingge's shadow vanished from the frosted glass of the front door—

—And then sank back onto his receptionist chair, his heart racing.

What the hell was that?

A date?!

With Liu Qingge?!

The door rattled open, the brass bell ringing chaotically, breaking Jiang Cheng from his stray thoughts.

"A- Cheng~! How goes it?" Wei Ying grinned. "Did you have fun with Mr. Pretty Swordsman?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Didn't your precious Lan Zhan need something?"

"Oh please, enough with the lies!" Wei Ying waved, flopping on the counter's surface, his expression knowing. "I only want what's best for my dearest brother!" He propped his head up with a hand. "And the best thing to do here was not be the third wheel in our shop!"

"Right."

"Sooooo? How did it go?"

"He asked me out for a coffee date."

Hah! I told you he liked you! Mingyan and I were right on the money!"

"Wait. You two planned this, didn't you?!" Jiang Cheng accused, the burning flush returned to his ears.



"Of course we did! You're not very subtle about him! Staring at those Jian dance videos of his afterwards and whatnot—"

"It just came up on my 'for you' page!"

"—Mingyan was tactful too. If it were up to me, I'd tease you about the way the two of you were eyefucking—"

"We weren't!—"

"—Anyway, we both saw the shared looks between you two. So, we did the wise sibling thing and dipped—" A ding from Jiang Cheng's phone interrupted Wei Ying, but it only made that infuriating, shameless grin wider. "— And I see that it was the right call to make too!"

"I hate you."

"You're welcome!" Wei Ying cackled as he ducked into his tattoo booth laughing.

Jiang Cheng unlocked his phone, his face now aflame:

'Coffee next Monday?'

And yet, somehow, he couldn't stop himself from smiling.





Kinnaoo

DRIFT COMPATIBLE



DRIFT COMPATIBLE

Leukodon

Combat

Kaiju

Kissing

PacificRimAu

Canon Compliant Violence

Canon Character Death

Jiang-zongzhu,

Thank you for your action on this matter. Regarding your family, I can only express my sincerest condolences. I had not intended to call back unpleasant memories in my orders, though it seems that was a foolish notion.

Your lack of a copilot holds no bearing on the council's decision- you are still drift compatible. All Jaeger pilots are to assemble to the final frontier post; The Twelve Peaks Shatterdome. Respectfully,

Zewu-jun, Commander of the Northern Shatterdome

The reply rested heavy in Jiang Cheng's pocket, crumpled and damp from where his unsteady hands had gripped it. He'd known the call would come again.

Shatterdome consolidation was an expected and painful conclusion to his self-imposed isolation. An order for all Jaeger pilots to converge upon key bases, protecting what was left of humanity in some desperate last surge. There had been notes of formations, battle plans, and training included in that first dreaded letter- and his reflexive refusal of the order had received the attention it was due.

Zewu-jun's stance was clear: when the world is ending, what else was there to do but fight?

Jiang Wanyin returned to a Shatterdome for the first time since the death of his brother.

He arrived with minimal fanfare. The base hummed with life in a solemn rush, the seconds marked with a ticking timer looming in bright red over every door. Days, hours, minutes, seconds- all counting down to the next attack. The next time their world would be breached by a Kaiju, engineered to bring about the end of days and genetically identical in every way. Machines to end all wars, if the scientists were to be believed. Jiang Wanyin, chronic denier, agreed with them.

They were fighting a losing war.

Jiang Wanyin attended the meetings, shaking hands, training, and training, and training. His every waking hour was occupied and rest achieved only through catnaps and momentary reprieves when he passed out from exhaustion. It wasn't sustainable, but nothing they were doing was.

The clock counted down, and was reset. Another team lost. New pilots rolled out on half-completed mechs barely out of their plastic wrappers.

And there was nothing to be done. Humanity didn't have the time and resources they did when they created monsters like the Crimson Piper. Wei Wuxian had been their best pilot. Innovative. Confident. Adaptable in a way that Jiang Cheng had never been. He made Jiang Wanyin a hero, earning them both titles as they had bagged their 4th kill.

During their 6th mission, the hull of Crimson Piper had been breached. The category 4 Kaiju went down, but the monster gored Jiang Cheng's abdomen on the way out. Jiang Cheng's memories after were a hazy blink of flashing color and oily darkness.

He woke up a month later to dead siblings and a history with the world's first rogue Jaeger. The reports said his brother had been experimenting with Kaiju blood, hoping to gain solo drift compatibility. And he had succeeded— at the cost of himself, an entire city, and their sister.

Jiang Cheng faded into the background as the unlucky former copilot of the Red Rogue. That is, until Zewu-jun and his council had forced his hand. But despite the peerless man's best efforts, no pilot or team at the Shatter-dome was drift compatible. As time dragged on and hope dwindled, Jiang Wanyin found himself dreading his meetings with the command team more than the ticking clock. Every second in that office was spent in stilted but polite conversation with the unlucky pilot of the week and only served to drag him down.

Another opportunity where all parties would leave unsatisfied.

Jiang Wanyin knew he was not his brother. No ace in the hole, once in a lifetime talent to be found. It figured the one person in the world he shared drift compatibility with was the poster child that effectively killed the Jaeger program, reducing it to a few token Shatterdome clingers to life.

It was after one of those meetings that Jiang Wanyin found himself in the mess hall, picking at rations with half-hearted motions. The hour was late, and the room was empty aside from a few janitorial staff and one other individual half dragging himself to the meal kits.

Jiang Wanyin watched the stranger for a moment with some level of sympathy. The guy looked like he had taken a beating. With a shrug and a sigh he decided to focus back on the increasingly unappealing meal in front of him. Not his business.

After a minute of pushing around something green that was probably once a vegetable, Jiang Wanyin was jolted out of his head by the clatter of a tray across his table. The stranger from before had half collapsed there, shoveling down gruel with an alarming fervor.

When Jiang Wanyin couldn't school his surprise at both the unexpected company and behavior the other man grunted once before rudely gesturing with his chopsticks towards the janitorial staff.

"They cleaned the other tables." The stranger said, his voice an oddly pleasant interruption to the quiet. The pair stared at each other before the soft-voiced stranger went back to devouring his meal.

“Ah.” Jiang Wanyin replied after realizing that was all his odd company intended to say.

And that was all, as the other made no move to speak for the remainder of the meal. Jiang Wanyin continued his token effort of vegetable excavation for a few minutes longer then retreated to bed, discomfited enough by the break in his routine that he slept the whole night through.

What an odd man.

That strange encounter didn't change much in Jiang Wanyin's routine, only in his awareness of others. It took a few more odd run-ins for the cafeteria man to be a semi-permanent fixture in his life that merited investigating. With a little prodding Jiang Wanyin unearthed his name; Liu Qingge. A Jaeger pilot who had bagged more copilots than kills during his career. His simulator compatibility scores ranged close to 97%, a feat near unheard of. For some reason though, the practical application of that compatibility received mixed results. Liu Qingge was unable to prolong a neural handshake with other pilots and would rarely mobilize twice. He got the job done, but the general rumor mill spoke of a difficult pilot whose partner ratio ranged in the extremes.

He had the exact opposite of Jiang Wanyin's problem— incompatible in the simulator and unable to execute the real deal.

Despite their opposing issues he could sympathize with Liu Qingge, and almost looked forward to their occasionally overlapping schedules. Late nights spent in silent camaraderie were... nice.

The second time Jiang Wanyin truly spoke to Liu Qingge was a night memorable in its own right. Breach sirens had cut the air, calling individuals to their battle stations. The Shatter-dome hummed with activity, a controlled frenzy reacting to the Kaiju threat.

Jaeger pilots gathered in the assembly bay, drift suits sharp and shining in preparation to deploy. Jiang Wanyin was among the rear of the murmuring formation. The adrenaline coursed through him in a static of nervous motions, hands clenching and unclenching as he suppressed the urge to fidget.

He would not be selected. No drift partner, no Jaeger. His presence was a cruel joke excused as a show of force. Zewu-jun and the other dome commanders had their reasons, but Jiang Wanyin privately believed it was all theatrics in the name of keeping hope alive. A bay full of candidates tended to spark more confidence than a handful.

Soon enough, the Jaegers and their pilots were selected and racing to their launch bays. The energy in the assembly hall faded to a grim hush. Jiang Wanyin counted the distant thundering footfalls of the mechs, then the flashing alarm lights. A half-hearted attempt to redirect his misplaced adrenaline while they waited for updates from Mission Control.

It was during that exercise in futility that Liu Qingge clapped him on the shoulder. The abrupt nature of the movement jolted Jiang Wanyin back to the present.

"We should spar." The other pilot announced, turning and moving towards the training halls with purposeful strides. Jiang Wanyin followed after a moment of deliberation. Rolling on the mats wouldn't ease his heart, but it would provide ample distraction. That had to count for something.

By the time the Kaiju was subdued, the adrenaline had been thoroughly beaten out of Jiang Wanyin. He gave as good as he got, but it was readily clear how Liu Qingge had earned the moniker 'War god.'

On an impulse Jiang Wanyin invited Liu Qingge to eat with him as they washed up, an offer that was accepted with a grunt and a nod. The pair retreated to the mess hall together, still half damp from the showers.

Dinner that evening was shockingly tolerable. Rice, meat identifiable as such, and steamed vegetables in contrast to the usual pulverized fare.

Jiang Wanyin hummed in pleased appreciation, an action which made the stoic Liu Qingge outright laugh. A sharp scowl met his laughter the moment after Jiang Wanyin registered the origin.

"It wasn't that funny," he grumbled, with very little heat behind the words.

"Did you know that is the first time I've seen you almost smile?" Liu Qingge countered, waving a lazy hand towards Jiang Wanyin. "Over a vegetable."

"Over a vegetable." Jiang Wanyin echoed primly, taking a quick bite of his dinner to end the conversation. After a few moments he couldn't resist his own jab. "Just because you refuse to eat anything green doesn't mean everyone is so inclined."

Liu Qingge snorted but tilted his head in acknowledgement as he continued to eat around his cabbage, the plant forming a sad pile on the edge of his tray. Conversation stalled once more, revived when Liu Qingge spoke up.

"You fight well. Though you favor your left leg. It leaves you open." His tone was straightforward, honest. Jiang Wanyin still fought down the instinct to bristle at any critique. It wasn't an attack, and Liu Qingge's earnest expression assured him of no ill intent. Jiang Wanyin breathed out, releasing the reflexive tension from his muscles with the air from his lungs.

"Thank you for the tip." He replied with a tone he hoped was not outright unfriendly. Liu Qingge seemed to take his response in stride.

"We should train together. I can help you fix the habit." The other man offered, dispelling any remaining tension in Jiang Wanyin as he considered the proposition. It would be nice to have a sparring partner, and it could be a good way to get Zewu-jun off his back in one move.

After that realization it was easy to accept. The rest of the meal passed in mundane chatter. Inexplicably when Jiang Wanyin bedded down for the night no nightmares found him, an unnameable feeling settling in his chest at the realization.

Thus began his new routine. Nothing really changed from his schedule; just the addition of one stubborn Jaeger pilot into his life. He had a companion to dine with and someone he could trust to have his back.

Liu Qingge was nothing like he expected. The man was blunt and ridiculously direct with his every thought. Inexplicably, Jing Wanyin found himself growing fond of the pilot who regularly beat him into the ground. Days of sparring sessions turned into weeks, weeks into months, fondness a warm ball growing inside Jiang Wanyin's chest. He chalked it up to the first positive human contact he'd had in years and shoved any associated feelings down as much as possible.

Liu Qingge was late, and then missed their sparring session.

It wasn't exactly a scheduled event, but after that first invitation during a breach event it became a habit. Wait for the Jaegers to deploy, meet in training bay 4. Jiang Wanyin hung around until the mission lights faded from red to ruddy yellow. Green was a success, yellow indicated a Jaeger or her pilots took casualties.

It was the more common color in recent months.

Jiang Wanyin shook off his disappointment, finishing up the set of stretches he'd started. Without Liu Qingge's post-workout review period Jiang Wanyin was stuck walking to the mess hall during peak hours. Ugh. He would get Liu Qingge back for that.

The walkways were indeed busy when he exited the room, small clusters of individuals discussing the latest breach event in hushed tones. Jiang Wanyin was half eavesdropping on a group of cadets when the words 'war god' caught his attention.

"...heard it was pretty bad this time. Such a loose canon I'm surprised it took this long." One of the cadets sneered.

"And his Jaeger took so much damage. Going to be a bitch to fix the thing." Another groaned. Jiang Wanyin felt ice race through his veins.

"You." He interrupted, sharply addressing the nearest cadet. The young man at least had the brains to look embarrassed at being caught slandering an officer. "Which bay does the 'war god's' Jaeger deploy from?" Jiang Wanyin asked, impatience coloring his tone.

"Bay seven sir— I, I mean—" The cadet stuttered out, half saluting as Jiang Wanyin spun on his heel, redirecting his attention to the launch bays and cutting off the younger man. His pace wasn't quite a run as he marched forwards, but by no stretch could it have been called a walk.

His mind was a jumbled mess of memories, fear, and anger. How could he have forgotten? Unlike him Liu Qingge wasn't sidelined. He had a Jaeger, a copilot. Jiang Wanyin moved faster.

The shouting reached him before he had stepped foot into bay seven. Bracing himself, Jiang Wanyin entered the space. He was immediately met with the stench of burnt wires and electricity, a vile smell eclipsed by the relief he felt seeing two arguing Jaeger pilots.

"—You absolute brute! You WILL get yourself killed at this rate and I want no part in it!" A pilot with green trim and an arm sling snapped, jabbing his good finger in Liu Qingge's face.

"Please, Xiao-Jiu." Yue Qingyuan, the easily recognizable commander of the Shatter-dome attempting to get between the Jaeger pilots. It looked like his attempt at mediation was only escalating things, as the man who'd been yelling at Liu Qingge instantly rounded on him instead.

"Absolutely NOT. Do NOT call me that, and you know as well as I do that this moron nearly got us killed." The green pilot practically shrieked.

"Qingqiu." Yue Qingyuan amended, and Jiang Wanyin finally recalled the green pilot's name. The infamous Shen Qingqiu, former co-pilot to Yue Qingyuan before the mission that grounded the man.

"I'm at fault." The quiet but firm admission from Liu Qingge halted the festering argument in its tracks. Shen Qingqiu sniffed in disdain, 'hmp-hing' loudly enough that Jiang Wanyin could hear from where he hung back.

"I will not drift with him again, Commander Yue. Find the brute another suicidal pilot." With that declaration, Shen Qingqiu stalked away. He spared Jiang Wanyin a single glance as he passed before disappearing into the hall.

Commander Yue sighed before speaking with a stiff Liu Qingge in tones too quiet for Jiang Wanyin to make out. He waited until the pair separated before approaching Liu Qingge, whose grim expression highlighted his split lip and black eye.

Not entirely unscathed, then. Liu Qingge seemed to notice Jiang Wanyin for the first time, a flash of pleased surprise coloring his expression. Suddenly feeling a bit wrong-footed, Jiang Wanyin realized he hadn't exactly thought through his decision to search for his friend. Now faced with a conscious but mildly injured Liu Qingge, he wasn't sure where to start.

"You missed our spar." Was what ended up coming out of his mouth before he could think it through. To his relief, Liu Qingge cracked a lopsided smile.

"I'm sorry." Liu Qingge offered, some of the tension leaving his body.

"You'll have to make it up to me over dinner." Jiang Wanyin declared, nudging Liu Qingge's shoulder with his own.

"I'll pay." The other pilot joked back, cautiously repeating the motion.

If the warm ball in Jiang Wanyin's chest grew, that was no one's business but his own.

They'd spent that evening together in Liu Qingge's bunk, trading stories and enjoying each other's company. What began as a simple way to avoid disgruntled crowds of people rapidly fell into a new part of their routine, until Jiang Wanyin realized he'd memorized the cracks in Liu Qingge's ceiling and the creased spots in his mattress.

Waking up shoulder to shoulder with a friend was a pleasant indulgence that Jiang Wanyin hadn't been able to have for years, and suddenly it was near constant. Despite his best judgement, Liu Qingge had wormed his way past his defenses. It was terrifying. It was exhilarating. There was a certain inevitability to things when done by Liu Qingge. His self assurance and unbothered nature made everything seem... normal. Peaceful, and fine.

There was, of course, the other end of things. The alarms that were never truly silent for long, preceding monsters that lurked beyond steel walls.

Jiang Wanyin groaned as bright red flashes moved through his eyelids, and heard an answering grumble just off his right. Liu Qingge's arm that had been slung across his chest slowly retracted as the other man stretched, shoulders popping.

"Can you-" Jiang Wanyin's words were interrupted by a yawn, "Grab my suit for me?"

A grunt answered him, followed seconds later by the thunk of fabric hitting the bed. Jiang Wanyin joined Liu Qingge in getting dressed, finishing up just as Liu Qingge yanked the door open. A stream of people jogged by, bracketing the pair of pilots as they made their way to the assembly area.

When they arrived they were met with a disorganized wreck of arguments breaking out. People were shouting, shoving, and panic filled the air so much Jiang Wanyin could almost taste it.

The leaders of the Shatterdome were present, an uncommon sight among the mobbing in the bay. Yue Qingyuan and Zewu-jun broke away from the crowd to speed towards Jiang Wanyin- or likely Liu Qingge.

"Qingge, thank god you're here." Yue Qingyuan said with audible relief coloring his voice. "We have a situation."

"What category?" Liu Qingge asked, straight to the point.

"Four." Yue Qingyuan responded, his grim expression echoed in the winces from Jiang Wanyin and Zewu-jun. The dull roar in the bay felt condensed in Jiang Wanyin's chest, a twisting infernal thing. He knew where this was headed.

"You need me to pilot." Liu Qingge guessed, a flatness to his tone that betrayed his discomfort. Now it was Yue Qingyuan's turn to wince, as the older marshall nodded.

"And my copilot?" Liu Qingge asked, shrugging his shoulders in a nervous stretch that Jiang Wanyin only recognized from months of shared training. To Jiang Wanyin's confusion, it wasn't Yue Qingyuan who answered.

"We meant to give you more time. But there's only one pilot we have fighting fit who might be able to pull this off." Zewu-jun shifted his gaze from Liu Qingge to Jiang Wanyin as he spoke. "I'm sorry, Wanyin."

A strange buzzing began, drowning out the rest of the conversation for Jiang Wanyin. Somehow, he managed to get from the assembly bay to armor up fully, stepping into the helm of Liu Qingge's jaeger while barely taking in his surroundings.

The noise didn't end until lights flashed and suddenly Jiang Wanyin wasn't alone in his head. The neural handshake activated, all things falling away into the drift as memories raced like visions through Liu Qingge-no, Jiang Wan- Phoenix Bravo's head.

Phoenix Bravo could feel the warmth of mud through the lotus flats where Jiang Wanyin had grown up, the dusty ground of Liu Qingge's childhood home. It felt their hurts, triumphs.

It was them, and strong. They were Phoenix Bravo.

They were absolutely going to destroy that Kaiju.

The combined martial prowess of two of the world's premier Jaeger pilots was more than enough to wipe the floor with the Cat 4 Kaiju. Phoenix Bravo was built for speed and agility. Jiang Cheng and Liu Qingge had honed their fighting skills into an intricate dance- and that translated to an unparalleled sword swinging pair.

It was only in the aftermath, shaking with adrenaline and nervous laughter that Jiang Cheng finally felt a weight lift from his shoulders for the first time in years. That relief was so strong he almost missed the arm that wrapped around him, a cool and familiar hand cradling his face as Liu Qingge leaned in and kissed him.

It wasn't the best kiss. Teeth and laughter causing them to slide against each other in a rattling collision. But it was Liu Qingge, and that made it perfect.

- END -







MISSION: COUPLE UP OUR WEIRD SINGLE BROTHERS

Orion, with spot art by Gaya

First Date

Blind Date

Pre Relationship

Falling in Love

"Thanks for helping pick up," Liu Mingyan said, looking over from the sink to where Jiang Yanli was picking up wine glasses and empty plastic snack containers.

There were a couple other women in the little book club Liu Mingyan hosted, but she wasn't ashamed to say that Jiang Yanli was the one she liked the best. For example, she always stayed after the meetings to help clean up any left over snack messes. She was also just a delightful person in general. And always brought delicious baked goods.

Jiang Yanli smiled back at her. "It's no problem! Besides, my brother is watching A-Ling tonight, I have to take all the free time I can! Zixuan is on a business trip, it's madness dealing with a teenager on my own."

"Which brother?" Liu Mingyan knew Jiang Yanli was the oldest of three, and she couldn't really make conversation about raising a kid. "If one of them is there, feel free to hang out here a little. Get some time to yourself." She scooped the trash from where it precariously balanced in Jiang Yanli's arms and dropped it in the recycling bin.

"Maybe just ten minutes, I have to take a train," The older woman said, taking her turn at the sink washing the wine glasses. "A-Cheng is there. I think they went out for dinner."

"The usual babysitter, then."

"Right! I wish he wouldn't be," Jiang Yanli sighs sharply. "I mean, it's nice to have someone available but really! I keep telling him he has to do something besides his work, and he just sits at his place all by himself. I'm married, A-Xian has his boyfriend, and then A-Cheng isn't even trying to meet anyone, I don't know what he does all day or if he talks to anyone..."

Liu Mingyan nodded along in agreement. "Qingge's the same. I think he's got, like, one friend. Scares away any potential dates. He likes his job though."

Jiang Yanli glances over at her, a mischievous sparkle in her eyes. "I think I know a way to fix this for us both."

"Oh my god, do you have *any* nice clothes?"

Liu Qingge glared at Liu Mingyan, who was rooting through his dresser. "I don't need anything fancy. Do you even know this man?"

She'd come to him last week about setting him up with somebody. It was a ridiculous idea and he'd obviously told her so, but she was insistent. So he just gave in. It'd be one date, he wouldn't like them and they wouldn't like him, he'd go home, end of story.



"He's a friend's brother," Liu Mingyan pulled a blue polo out of a drawer, contemplated it, then tossed it at him with a sigh.

"Who's this friend? Do I know them?"

"It's Yanli, from my book club. You've seen her, she's nice," Liu Mingyan said. "Don't be so paranoid. His name's Jiang Cheng, Yanli says he's sweet,"

Liu Qingge narrowed his eyes slightly. "If I were introducing you to someone for the first time, there's a lot of things I wouldn't mention."

"If he murders you, I'll take responsibility at the funeral. Are you happy?"

"No," But he still shoved her out of the room to change.

"I just can't believe it, my little didi is going out with a boy, growing up so fast--"

"Wei Ying, will you shut the fuck up?" Jiang Cheng glowered at him in the mirror. He'd smack the stupid smirk off his face if Jiang Yanli didn't have him by the hair. "I don't know why this is a group thing in the first place."

"What do you think about a braid?" Jiang Yanli asked, tactfully avoiding the question. "That would look cute."

"That would be *so* cute." Wei Ying was hovering at her shoulder, making stupid comments the whole time. Trying to piss him off on purpose.

"Just do whatever," Jiang Cheng sighed. He didn't know how he let himself be roped into this bullshit, besides the fact that he'd pretty much do whatever his sister asked. Despite the fact that he was fine not dating because it'd always gone nightmarishly, despite the fact that he doesn't even know who this Liu Qingge is, despite the fact he knows this is going to end badly. Jiang Yanli had asked and she'd pulled the concerned jieje card so he had to agree.

"Make sure you tell us when you get there," Jiang Yanli said, starting to braid his hair. "And when he gets there. And when you leave."

"And if you decide to take him home, make sure--"

"Shut up!"



Liu Qingge was both pleased and annoyed to see that the man he was meant to meet was already outside the restaurant sitting at a bench when he arrived. It was good that he wouldn't have to wait around but he'd also wanted a bit of time to try and figure out what you're meant to talk about on dates.

Still, he's never been one to back away from a challenge. "You're Jiang Cheng?" He asked, looking down at him.

"Yeah, that's me. You're Liu Qingge then?" Jiang Cheng stood but didn't look up from his phone. "Hold on, my sister's gonna blow my phone up if I don't tell her you haven't kidnapped me."

"Bit protective of her," Liu Qingge said. But on some level he can understand it. If Liu Mingyan were out on a date with some random strange man, he'd want updates.

"She just worries," Jiang Cheng put his phone in his pocket and sighed. "Right. Let's get this over with."

He wasn't expecting the other man to have also been pushed into this, or him to be so blunt about it. Liu Qingge chuckled softly as he followed him to their table. They were sat and ordered drinks and then they were stuck silently staring at the menu.

"I'm just gonna get the egg drop soup," Jiang Cheng said after a moment, flipping his menu shut dismissively. "They have Dan Dan noodles, but at this sort of place they don't make it properly spicy. Why bother putting it on the menu?"

Liu Qingge was still figuring out what the hell he'd be eating, but he nodded. Just to show he was listening. "This place is way too fancy, I don't know why they picked it out."

"Yeah, little bit elaborate. It's not as bad as some places," Jiang Cheng shrugged and glanced around. "Do you usually go for fast food then, or what?"

"I don't really eat out, I like to cook for myself," Liu Qingge took a last look at the menu. "I'll just get the lemon chicken if they'll take the green onions off, I guess."

"Oh, that's good. Good skill to have. I can cook a little, which is better than some people."

"Some people are useless. You can't rely on some future wife to do everything."

"Right! No one wants to be self-sufficient," Jiang Cheng nodded. This conversation was going pretty alright, if Liu Qingge said so himself.

There was a slight lull in their chatter when the waiter came by and took their order, which stretched for a bit longer than probably needed. Honestly, Liu Qingge just wasn't sure what sort of talk people were meant to do on a date. Like, how personal was he meant to get? Because he'd just rather not at all.

"So," he started, then stopped. This all felt so stupid. He felt stupid. "What do you do for a job?"

"I do portfolio management for a couple companies," Jiang Cheng replied. "Honestly? Don't go into finance. It's dull and makes you want to jump into traffic."



This Jiang Cheng guy was funny, he'll give him that. "I run a pest control service. So I guess that's more exciting than yours. Might be less money in it."

"Oh, so like," Jiang Cheng blinked a couple times. "Like, rat catching or whatever?"

"Yeah," Liu Qingge nodded. "Mostly rodents or bugs. Sometimes there's bats. One guy had a couple foxes in his basement, and that was a nightmare to deal with. Mostly because I didn't want to deal with that but he kept getting pissed off"

"You should've told him to fuck off. As if he couldn't call someone else to get rid of it."

"Yeah, just a cheap bastard probably," Liu Qingge shrugged. That sort of thing never bothered him that much, sometimes you just have to wrangle a fox and be mad about it for the night and then get on with life. Nice to be able to complain a little though.

"So," he said again. What the hell else does a person talk about? Liu Qingge mentally reviewed the list he'd found online about good first date conversations. "What sort of hobbies do you have?"

"You got some sort of checklist or something?" Jiang Cheng snorted. "I don't know, I don't do too much. Used to be on my school's swim team if that's anything"

"That's kind of sad," Liu Qingge said, then was promptly interrupted from watching whatever interesting thing Jiang Cheng's face was doing by their meals getting delivered.

"This one's done wrong," Jiang Cheng gestured at Liu Qingge's plate. "Can you take it back and we get one without green onions?"

Liu Qingge, who was in the middle of scraping the chopped onions off with his knife, glanced up at Jiang Cheng half-glaring at the waiter. "It's fine, it's just on top."

"Yeah, so all the easier for them to not fuck it up. There must be some idiots in the kitchen, honestly."

"It'll take forever for them to cook a new one. I'm hungry and I took them off now anyway." He takes a bite of the chicken to prove his point and tries to will away the heat in his cheeks. No one ever really kicks up a fuss for his sake. It's a stupid fuss and he'd rather eat at a decent time. But still.

Jiang Cheng still looked a bit annoyed—which might just be how he looks in general, Liu Qingge thinks—but he gave it up and waved away the poor waiter. Things go quiet again as they eat, but he found that that wasn't all that terrible. Better than his damn checklist anyway.



This is not exactly the sort of person he would've expected his sister to set him up with, or to be described as "sweet". Jiang Cheng is interesting and funny and he doesn't seem to mind that Liu Qingge is how he is. And Liu Qingge is finding he likes spending time with him. When the bill comes, they bicker a bit about who'll pay and Liu Qingge won that fight by being faster at handing over his card to the waiter. It's fun. He almost wants for them to stay there.

"I thought you said rat catching doesn't make much money," Jiang Cheng said.

"Just less than finance," Liu Qingge shrugged. "Do you have a pen?"

Jiang Cheng rummaged in his pockets for a moment before handing over a pen, a pretty fancy looking one by Liu Qingge's standards. He wrote his phone number down on a napkin and handed it over to Jiang Cheng.

"Here," he said. "Next time, let's not come here."

"Next...huh?" Jiang Cheng went a bit red as he stared down the napkin. "You don't have to." Even while saying it, he folded the napkin up nice and neat and tucked it in his pocket.

"I'd like to, if you would." Liu Qingge didn't see a point to mincing words or using his sister as a communication proxy or something weird and complicated. He liked spending time with Jiang Cheng, he might as well try and do it again. And Liu Qingge doesn't believe in love at first sight because it's bullshit, but he thinks that somewhere down the line, maybe. He'd like to.

Jiang Cheng blushed redder, somehow, then nodded once at the wall. "Yeah. I'd like to."





PUPPY LOVE

Orion

Dogs

Getting Together

Friends to Lovers

Liu Qingge has a way his days always go. And he does not like making any deviations from this routine, despite how much Ace wants to.

Ace herself had been a deviation from his routine, although he'll begrudgingly admit now that he doesn't mind it. His sister was always on him about "actually doing things with his life", and suggested getting a pet. Because he allegedly "didn't have a social life". At first it started with just volunteering some at an animal shelter, and then this shy little pitbull had gotten attached to him...so he adopted Ace.

It wasn't bad because he could just integrate her into the existing parts of his life. He fed her right before he fed himself, she went on his afternoon runs with him, they stopped at a nearby park so she could pee and nap under a tree, and then they went home. And once he'd had her for a couple years it was just natural. Up until now.

Liu Qingge glanced down at his watch, then back up to keep watching Ace sniff around some other dog he'd not seen around here before. By his guess, some sort of retriever mutt. And it was barking and jumping around and he did not see its owner. Not a stray, had a collar. He wanted to keep an eye on it so it wouldn't run off while its owner wasn't around, likely some irresponsible kid, but he was being kept at the park now longer than he usually would be.

A few minutes go by and Liu Qingge is considering just taking Ace and leaving when he hears someone having a very loud phone call. A man walks up the path to the little scene, one hand holding his phone and the other holding a leash. Mystery dog owner, found. Liu Qingge gets up and clips Ace's leash back on, and he would leave except for her crying and tugging to try and jump around some more with this other dog.

"Look, just figure it out, I can't babysit this entire project," the mystery man says (loudly) into his phone. "And I'm on my break right now, so don't call again. See you in a few." Then he whistles and holds the leash out. "Honeybun, come here!"

The dog immediately runs up to him, stays nice and still while the leash is put on, and leaves with the man without a problem. Liu Qingge feels some sort of respect well up within him.

What sort of a name is Honeybun?

His stays at the park were now extended. Apparently this man took his dog out on his lunches and this was the same exact time as when Liu Qingge went on his runs. And Ace decided that she really loved Honeybun so they had to play until the dog left.

Of course, this went on for a couple weeks before Liu Qingge ever spoke to this man.

The man was sitting on a bench in the usual spot they both tended to stop at, but this time he didn't have his dog. He was just sitting and scowling at his phone, which seemed normal enough for him actually. Liu Qingge still let Ace off-leash and stood next to the bench with his hands on his hips, watching as she sniffed around and did her business.

"Where's your dog today?" Liu Qingge asked after a moment.

The man startled, looking up at him with a frown. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"You usually have your dog with you," he pointed at where Ace was barking at some birds. "I think we just end up here at the same times. My dog plays with yours."

"Oh," the man blinked. "Yeah, he's just at the groomer today. I didn't really notice what he got up to, as long as he isn't running into traffic."

"You're always on your phone."

"Yeah, and? I have things to do," the man held out his hand. "I'm Jiang Cheng. I guess it's been decided we'll be hanging out."

"Liu Qingge," he replied and shook Jiang Cheng's hand. "I suppose it has been."

So, that ended up with them talking more, but just at the park and usually just about their dogs. Liu Qingge learned that Jiang Cheng used to run a dog training course as a side gig and that Honeybun is fixed. Which, seeing how things go between him and Ace, Liu Qingge wanted to make sure he didn't end up with a bunch of puppies suddenly. They also complain about Jiang Cheng's job, which Liu Qingge has deduced is some sort of high-up corporate bullshit.

"He doesn't take anything seriously. He keeps trying to put memes in actual professional presentations," Jiang Cheng said. He was scowling at Liu Qingge instead of his phone. "Don't work with family if you can help it, it just makes you want to kill them."

Liu Qingge just nodded along. He actually thought working with Liu Mingyan wouldn't be so awful, but it could just be a different situation. He watched Ace wiggling around on the ground in front of Honeybun. It was good for her to get her excess energy out.

"I'm going to really lose my mind some day," Jiang Cheng sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Sorry, I just keep bitching at you. Not good conversation."

"It's fine."

"No, we can talk about something else. You can tell me about your nightmare job."

"If I minded it, I would say so," Liu Qingge shrugged. "But we can change topics if you want."



So, they talk more and that's fine. It ends up making him take longer at the park than he usually does and he thinks Jiang Cheng keeps getting back to his work late but it doesn't seem like he cares about that too much. Sometimes Jiang Cheng doesn't show at the park, which is fine because the man has his own life. Ace always sniffs around the grass a little if Honeybun isn't there, which Liu Qingge thinks is a little funny.

Jiang Cheng, apparently, does not.

"My damn dog is codependent now," he said, sliding onto the bench next to Liu Qingge. "If I can't take him out when you're here, he gets all depressed. Can't go twenty-four hours without seeing his girlfriend."

"I don't know if that's how it is with them." Liu Qingge is pretty sure he'd have noticed. He really had worried at the start, he does not want puppies. "I mean, you never know, but—"

"That's not the point, the point is Honeybun is more social than I figured," Jiang Cheng grumbled. "I'm gonna have to work on that, because I don't need him crying and jumping on me while I'm on the phone."

"Well, if you weren't on your phone—"

"Oh my god, I know, you're a technophobe who only owns a brick. Some of us have things to do!"

Liu Qingge grinned and turned back to watch the dogs playing. So far, it's never failed to wind him up.

They never actually saw each other outside of the park, which was fine by Liu Qingge. They both saw each other almost every day, and it's not like you need to talk to someone every single day to be friends. The thing is though, and Liu Qingge would never admit this outside of his own thoughts, he does miss Jiang Cheng a little on the days they don't see each other. A little! It's just that Liu Qingge doesn't care much for wrapping his words and himself up in several layers of niceties and obfuscation before it's all presentable for the world, and he knows most people are put off by him because of it. Well, whatever, he doesn't care what most people think about him. It's nice, then, that he happened upon someone like Jiang Cheng who'll take it and give some right back.

Because this had been part of the routine, Liu Qingge did not expect Jiang Cheng to show up at the shelter he volunteers at.

He was going about feeding the dogs in the kennels when he heard an "oh?" behind him and turned to see Jiang Cheng being led by one of the employees.

"What are you doing here?" Jiang Cheng asked, even though Liu Qingge thought that should be pretty obvious. He was out of his work clothes, he noticed, in some sort of nice purple fall coat. He never saw Jiang Cheng when he wasn't technically at work, he realized, until now.

"I volunteer," Liu Qingge pointed at his name tag. "Just looking after the animals a bit. Why are you here?"

"I'm going to try fostering some dogs for a time," Jiang Cheng shrugged. "Hopefully it stops Honeybun from going insane if he has someone to play with at home."

The woman who'd led Jiang Cheng in glanced between the two of them and grinned, handing her clipboard off to Liu Qingge. "That's so fun that you know each other! Here, you help him, everything's taken care of besides just getting the dog." And before anyone could say anything, she was out in a flash.

Liu Qingge looked down at the papers and rolled his eyes. "You must've interrupted her trying to watch TV shows on her laptop."

"Good. People need to do their damn jobs," Jiang Cheng said. "I didn't know you did volunteer work here. That's cool. This is where I got Honeybun, so that's how I know it's good. Some shelters, honestly. Terrible. You really have to do your research."

"I got Ace here too. She got really attached, so I figured I should."

"She was the only one of you two to get attached, I see."

"Ah, shut up," Liu Qingge brought them to the correct door, where an older mutt named Rose had been living. He wasn't sure when she came in, but she'd been here for a while now. "You sure you want an old dog? She's not really going to be able to keep up with Honeybun."

"It'll be fine," Jiang Cheng pulled a colorful leash out of his coat pocket and knelt down to clip it onto Rose's collar. He also fished out a treat to feed her. "Well, I guess we'll be on our way. It was nice seeing you."

"Yeah, good seeing you," Liu Qingge said. "Do you live very far from here?"

"Um?" Jiang Cheng raised his eyebrows. "Not that far, no. Why?"

"Well, maybe sometimes I could bring Ace over," Liu Qingge wasn't actually completely sure why he offered this. "She and Honeybun could play. If that's fine."

"Absolutely not. I don't have the room in my house for those two to go crazy," Jiang Cheng shook his head. "But. I mean. You can always just come over." He stood there a second more before speed-walking himself and Rose away.

Liu Qingge watched them go and then went back to finish his shift. When he went home he did some online sleuthing, and the realizations he had about his feelings towards Jiang Cheng kept him up later than usual so he slept in later than usual. This man just couldn't stop messing up his schedule.

Eventually, he worked up the nerve to go visit Jiang Cheng at his house. It felt like some sort of weird bubble was being burst, like if they saw each other outside of the park then it would really all go weird. They had a set time and place for each other and if they deviated from that then Liu Qingge might do something really crazy and–

Well, who knows what. Anyway, it was a stupid feeling. Liu Qingge went over to his and it was normal. Nice place, definitely the sort you don't want two dogs running around and jumping on each other in. They just talked and then Liu Qingge went home. It was normal.

He didn't visit him in his house often, but they still saw each other at the park almost every day. It was the same, but it was different. Like some sort of barrier had broken between them even though they were still standing in the same place they always were. Sometimes Liu Qingge thought about crossing that barrier. If they were sitting on the bench together, he'd think about putting his arm around Jiang Cheng. It was worse when he went over his house. He'd think about just telling him his feelings outright. Or kissing him and seeing how that went over. But if he tried to decide to actually do any of these things, it felt a bit like being strangled. So he didn't.

Of course, things came to a head without Liu Qingge having any sort of say in the matter.

It was another night when he was over at Jiang Cheng's house later than he meant. He'd be tired in the morning and Ace would be absolutely desperate to go out when he got back, but he wasn't really worried about that at the moment. He was more interested in Jiang Cheng sighing and fixing him with his sharp glare, which was somehow frightening and attractive.

"You," Jiang Cheng started, setting his wine glass down on the counter, "are probably the densest man alive."

"Excuse me???"

"Jock types never pick up on hints," Jiang Cheng shook his head. "You think I just have people over *my house* for fun? You think I'm happy to have every random person I see in the park chat me up? Come on."

Liu Qingge blinked a couple times at Jiang Cheng, putting his own cup of water down. He was coming to some conclusions he didn't want to vocalize, because if he was *wrong*...

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes. "Look, I'm trying to say that I–"

Honeybun jumped up at Jiang Cheng's legs, barking and whining. Jiang Cheng groaned, looking down at the dog and then back up at Liu Qingge like he was lost.

"I have to take this stupid dog out, but when I get back in, I..." He faltered, face going red. Liu Qingge barely got a chance to think 'cute' before Jiang Cheng pressed a kiss to his cheek and stormed off.

Liu Qingge heard Jiang Cheng call for the dog, the door opening and closing. He felt rooted to the spot, a hand pressed to his burning cheek. Maybe he was the densest man alive.







WAR GOD'S INTERVENTION

LivingMeatloaf, with spot art by Dan

God! Liu Qingge

Sunshot Campaign Era

The Inherit Eroticism Between a Supplicant and their Deity

His mother gave him many things. Zidian may be the most obvious, but he also inherited things less tangible. A short temper. An exacting desire for perfection. Hyper-awareness of the social pressures and expectations of the jianghu. A tendency to overextend with his swordwork.

From a young age, Yu Ziyuan's children also developed a reverence for the mountain gods. Meishan Yu, her natal sect, had once been a part of a large, ancient sect that spanned a dozen mountain peaks. Before the time of Wen Mao and Jiang Chi, cultivation was taught as traditional forms and philosophies in merit-based schooling environments. Family names had mattered only so far as helping students enter the schools; some, once they reached high levels of cultivation, renounced their blood ties to the world. As the sects specialized further, groups splintered off into smaller schools to focus on unique techniques. Wen Mao popularized clan-based teaching; as the Wens grew stronger, more followed his lead, and the schools fell out of favor. Still, Meishan Yu honored their ancestors, especially the ancient leaders who ascended to godhood.

Though Jiang Cheng knows all their names, one in particular fascinated him. It is to this god he prays now, desperate, pleading, his throat hoarse around the words he whispers every night. If ever he needed the blessings of a Bai Zhan Shen — a War God of a Hundred Battles — no time is more pressing. Locations important to the gods hold their shrines, as well as in villages where their names are known. With the gravity of his plea, nothing short of visiting the original temple would do.

Hunting Wen Chao brings him to the mountain range of Meishan Yu, where the temple sits, close enough to merit a side trip. Lan Wangji or the other disciples on this hunt will signal if they find Wens in the nearby towns. Without many words, they separate; Jiang Cheng does not have to explain himself. After a brief visit with his grandmother, who calls him a fool chasing fairy stories but does not stop him, he begins the ascent.

Climbing the mountain strains his body, even with his restored core shining inside him. The steep paths grab at his ankles with choking weeds and overgrown shrubs. He steps carefully on the loose stones of the stairs, lest they send him falling into the valley below.

He climbs near ruins of the old sect that once inhabited this entire mountain range. Where once disciples trained, now the barracks and learning halls sit empty, derelict, sheltering only animals that curiously peep at him through holes in the mossy walls.

Thoughts of the remaining immortal master from that period crept into his mind. Were Baoshan Sanren's dwellings of the same style? His blindfold had afforded him no view of her home. He awoke after the procedure at the bottom of the mountain, alone.



Cresting the peak, the world opens before him, clouds shrouding the land far below. Cold sunshine beats down on small, dilapidated stone buildings that ring the summit, edges worn smooth by time and wind. He walks to each one, bowing in greeting, before searching out the nameplate. Some are so old, no name remains. He lights a single stick of incense at each, to be polite.

Finally, as he follows the spiral out to sharper, newer buildings, he finds the nameplate of The Willow Leaf General, god of warfare and long winding paths. Jiang Cheng swiftly leaves an offering at the remaining temples, not wishing to offend these younger gods, before entering the small space.

The detritus of neglect covers the inside of the temple. He clears the worst of it with a handful of stiff leaf-fronds, then cleans the altar and its statue with his hands. A spark of qi lights his remaining incense sticks. Soon, smoke curls through the room. He places fresh fruit from wild trees and hard travel rations on the stone between the incense burners. He ignites a small bundle of joss money acquired at the town at the foot of the mountain. Kneeling, he folds himself into the humblest of bows. His breath stirs the dust as he prays aloud:

"Honored War God of a Hundred Battles, Willow Leaf General. Victor of the battlefield and relentless dueler. Grant this one success in battle and wisdom in strategy. My people face a long campaign against terrible evil." He cannot stop the mirthless laugh that escapes his mouth. "Should the General be able to spare it, help on the battlefield would be appreciated, as my disciples are scattered to the winds if they are not dead. Mighty warriors are needed to reclaim my home, protect my people, and avenge my parents and sect-mates slain by the enemy. I cannot do it alone."

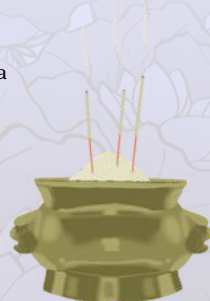
Grief closes his throat. He breathes in the scent of incense and ancient dust. A sob breaks free of his control; he wrestles back any further show of emotion lest he spend his entire day crying like a child and have to descend the mountain in the dark.

He repeats his prayer, then thanks the god for listening and sits up. The wind howls outside, little tendrils sliding in to twirl the smoke; it's the only sound this high on the mountain, a steady background noise that lulls Jiang Cheng into a meditative quiet within himself. He watches the bright lines of the incense burn down. A cone of ash falls. He breathes out, his mind empty but for reverent contemplation.

When the sticks all crumble away, he bows again and rises, refreshed. If nothing else, the quiet meditation is a nice break from thinking about the Wens and Lotus Pier and his missing shixiong. Those thoughts pour back into his mind as he descends the steep stairs, filling in the spaces between his focus to not fall off a cliff.

Halfway down, as the sun dips behind the highest mountains in the range, a noise breaks the quiet.

"Hey!"



Jiang Cheng's head whips up, immediately on alert. A man in simple, old-fashioned robes strides across a field toward him, a longsword in a scabbard on his back. He hadn't seen anyone on his ascent, no signs of inhabitants, but this rogue cultivator could have been on the other side of the peak in quiet seclusion.

Jiang Cheng steps off the stairs into the field, his hands coming up to politely salute.

"Apologies for the interruption—" Jiang Cheng begins.

The stranger cuts him off with a curt, shallow, archaic bow. "This one is Liu Qingge."

"Ah, this one is Jiang Wanyin," he hurriedly replies, bowing in return.

The man nods, then draws his sword. "Fight me," he commands, sinking into an effortless ready stance.

Without questioning, Jiang Cheng draws his sword and mirrors him before leaping into action. He could not later recall why he felt so compelled, but he knew that this fight was important, that he must give his all.

Even unspooling Zidian and sending Sandu soaring in secret Jiang sword seals aren't enough get on equal footing with the rogue cultivator, let alone best him. The man fights hard, faster than anyone Jiang Cheng has ever seen, yet with precise turns and twists of his blade. Every hit unleashes barely-restrained power.

The fight ends quickly. Jiang Cheng sprawls on the ground, panting for breath, the stranger's sword at his throat. The man hums, pleased, and removes his sword.

"You fight well. Watch that overextension, you leave too many openings when you throw the whip."

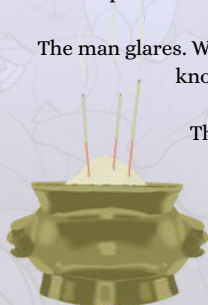
He extends a hand and pulls Jiang Cheng up from the ground. The firm grip sends a shiver down his arm. Such strength! With his skill, he would be an amazing asset for the Jiang sect.

As he puts together an offer in his mind, the man declares, "You are worthy enough. I will assist you."

The self-important air of this stranger instantly rankles Jiang Cheng. Though he just contemplated recruiting him, he snaps out defensively, "And who the hell are you?"

The man glares. With a 'tsch', he spins his sword, sliding it home in the scabbard. "You should know who you're praying to before giving offerings, boy."

The sun hits the planes of the stranger's face just right. In a flash, Jiang Cheng recognizes them from the temple's statue, down to the mole perched like a falcon on his cheekbone. He falls into a kowtow, an apology tumbling from his lips.



The Willow Leaf General nudges him with his foot until Jiang Cheng stands. He makes no further comment, simply walks down the stairs. Jiang Cheng hurries after him. As they descend, he recounts to the god Wen Ruohan's rise to power, his madness and overreach, and the burning of Cloud Recesses and Lotus Pier. His voice croaks, overused, when they reach the town at the base.

Lan Wangji waits for him. His sharp gaze catches on the god. Jiang Cheng clears his throat.

"I found someone willing to lend his strength to our cause."

Lan Wangji nods, brisk. "A lead has been found," he says.

Excitement squeezes his chest. Finally. He turns to the Willow Leaf General and bows.

"This one is currently on a quest to retrieve his shixiong. My sister will assist you when you join the main camp." He carefully instructs the paths to the Jiang war camp with a quick map, giving more detail than he might for another. Who knows how familiar the god is with the current roads and landmarks. The god walks away. Jiang Cheng watches him go.

As loathe as he is to separate, he doesn't want the god to see him be selfishly vengeful, nor get impatient for the battlefield.

He turns to Lan Wangji. "Let's go."

After his business with Wen Chao is complete, with Wei Wuxian by his side, Jiang Cheng returns to find the camp shockingly orderly. New recruits drill, tents form a grid of walking paths, and everyone moves with purpose without being frantic. He finds his sister, head of camp logistics and — after they exchange hugs and meaningful looks at Wei Wuxian's quickly departing back — he compliments her on getting everything in order.

Smiling, Jiang Yanli shakes her head. "It wasn't me! General Liu got everyone into shape within two days of arriving."

"Who?"

"The man you recruited from the mountain. He's amazing! He must have previous experience running a war camp."

Jiang Cheng blinks. Who—? Wait. The man on the mountain: the Willow Leaf General. He had introduced himself right before the fight. The thrill of battle and prayers answered had wiped the name from his mind.

"Sect Leader Jiang."

Jiang Cheng snaps his head up to see the Willow Leaf General saluting him. The soldiers and cultivators around them murmur, surprised: the salute is shallow, as informal as one given to a subordinate or family.



Of course, he thinks hysterically, a god wouldn't bow to the likes of me!

"General Liu, was it?" he replies out loud, returning the salute, proud of the steadiness of his voice. "I see you are already hard at work. You have my thanks."

The Willow Leaf General nods, curt; every move is controlled, economical, and graceful in its simplicity. "I will make my report now," he says plainly, gesturing to the large tent that bears the Jiang lotus. That must be the strategy tent, connected to the sect leader's travel quarters. Jiang Cheng leads his sister and the god into the tent. A flick of his fingers dismisses those tending to matters within and simultaneously adheres a sound-dampening talisman to the tent flap. Once they are alone, Jiang Cheng bows deeply.

"A-Cheng?!"

"Jiang Yanli," he says formally, still bent at the waist, "this one introduces to you the Willow Leaf General."

She gasps. "The Bai Zhan Shen, master of warfare? How—?" A rustling of skirts; he sees her deeply bowing from the corner of his eye.

"Yes, thank you," the Willow Leaf General replies dismissively. His finger taps impatiently on the battlemat-strewn table. "The report."

The Jiang siblings stand, and the god immediately launches into a succinct list of their fighting forces, including numbers of troops, their specialties, the general weaknesses of their battalions, and his recommendations for fighting group structures. He also summarizes reports from the Nie and Lan, which smaller sects have been subsumed by or joined either side, and the current estimated size of the enemy. The numbers rattle off his tongue as easily as if he were reading them, while his sharp eyes flick between Jiang Cheng and the movements of pieces on the map, controlled by his heavenly qi. The corpse army of Wen Ruohan particularly rankles him: his frown deepens in dislike as he recalls what the reports told of their strength.

"Leave them to me," the Willow Leaf General instructs. "I will not fight all of your enemies for you, but I have no qualms putting down these unnatural things."

Jiang Cheng bows deeply again. "We appreciate all of your assistance and wisdom, Willow Leaf General."

Jiang Yanli mirrors him. "Yes, thank you for helping us, Willow Leaf General."

"Tch. This is what I'm here for. Don't bow so much." They straighten, surprised. The god's arms are crossed, a scowl on his beautiful face. "You may call me General Liu, no need for such a long title. I'm not the battlefield commander in this war," he admonishes, striding up to poke Jiang Cheng's chest. "Whether your people achieve victory is up to your leadership, not mine."



The god leaves, ducking through the tent flap. The spot he poked burns in Jiang Cheng's mind. Jiang Yanli draws in a shaky breath, reflexively smoothing down her gown, eyes wide.

"I should make sure we have proper offerings for him," she says, quiet with awe.

Jiang Cheng nods. "Ensure I have plenty in my tent," he instructs, "I already have a travel altar."

Within the week, the Jiang camp joins the main fighting force. In a private meeting between the sect leaders present, Jiang Cheng introduces General Liu's full identity. As expected, few believe "fanciful words" said within the safe walls of a strategy tent. Far more nearly fall to their knees in shock and awe when he dispatches a hundred of the resentful corpse soldiers in a single blow, his sword glare lighting the dawn-streaked killing field as if it were noon. His swift steps dodge between the baffled and blinded Wen soldiers; he touches none of the living, targeting the undead.

Those he slays do not rise for Wei Wuxian's haunting flute. Luckily, the Wens are too disoriented to pose much of a fight; plenty of fresh corpses stand at his shixiong's command. After the battle, when their injured and dead are accounted for, Jiang Cheng sees General Liu having a conversation with Wei Wuxian. He frowns: General Liu looks serious, while Wei Wuxian holds himself in a purposefully nonchalant slouch that means he's hiding how upset he is.

"Hey!" Jiang Cheng calls out, hastening to them. For all that the crowds part before him, General Liu stands alone when he reaches his side. "What was that about?" he asks.

"Giving advice."

General Liu claps a hand on his shoulder. Jiang Cheng knows it to be a gentle touch, since none of his bones break, but he will surely have a bruise in the shape of the god's hand. A shiver runs through him at the thought.

"Good work out there," General Liu compliments.

Jiang Cheng's face heats. He fights it back with a scowl, self-consciously crossing his arms. "My people fought well, but we still took casualties." He nods respectfully. "Your opening move stunned the Wens, so we lost fewer than we might have. You have my thanks."

"Stunned your allies, too," General Liu laughs. He walks off, calling casually over his shoulder, "When we get a break, we should spar again!"

Few breaks avail them. The war gains intensity, especially as the Wens realize the threat General Liu and Wei Wuxian are to their underhanded tricks.



Months into the campaign, a knock on the post heralds a twilight visitor to Jiang Cheng's tent. He doesn't stand, even as he bids them to enter; only two men would dare visit his tent so late without the emergency signal. If it's his shixiong, he can wait until he's finished. If it's not...

"I'm right here. Why do you do that?"

Jiang Cheng speaks with his head bowed and eyes closed, his mind focused on his prayer. The soft glow of incense plays across his face. "Prayers give gods power. My mother and the temple keepers told us that. Your temple was an abandoned shithole, so I'm ensuring you can be strong."

General Liu watches him silently, leaving once he bullies Jiang Cheng into sleeping after the prayer.

The next night, General Liu knocks on his tent just as Jiang Cheng lights the incense. Slightly annoyed, he lets him in. His annoyance vanishes as the god settles onto the low table that serves as his altar, his feet tucked up on his knees in a lotus position. Jiang Cheng raises an eyebrow.

"What are you doing?"

General Liu shrugs. "You pray to my statue. No different than praying to my face."

Jiang Cheng fidgets by the tent flap. General Liu tsks; he flinches.

"Your incense is burning down."

"Fine!" he snaps, stomping over and slamming his knees down into the dirt. "Just be quiet!"

General Liu exhales a single chuckle, then waits.

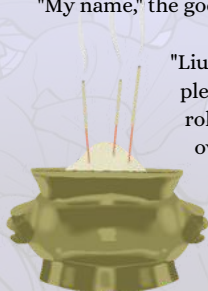
Jiang Cheng gathers his resolve. "Willow Leaf General, Bai Zhan War God—"

"Liu Qingge."

"What?" Jiang Cheng looks at him, bewildered. The god plucks a ripe peach from the offering plate, his long, elegant fingers cradling the fruit. Jiang Cheng swallows, his mouth suddenly dry. It feels sacrilegious, and yet aren't those fruits meant for this god?

"My name," the god says, incense smoke swirling around his tall ponytail, "is Liu Qingge."

"Liu Qingge," Jiang Cheng repeats, his tongue thick in his mouth. The god hums, pleased, and bites into the peach. Juice erupts as the skin splits, fragrant drops rolling down his chin. His eyes stay locked with Jiang Cheng's as he stumbles over the prayer. The words come easily, for how often he repeats them, but he could not say what they are.



At the prayer's end, Liu Qingge nods, satisfied. The god offers him the peach, ragged and open from where his teeth ripped into it, on his outstretched fingers. The juice runs down their length, golden in the candlelight. Warmth drips onto Jiang Cheng's cheek; he flinches, then flushes from recoiling. Such an offering is not befitting one such as him!

"If I thought you unworthy, I would not offer it."

The heat from the juice seems to spread down his neck, though he knows it's only his own embarrassed flush. The beads of liquid tremble on his cheek before falling down, leaving tingling trails.

Liu Qingge's other hand darts out, so fast he could catch light; his dry knuckles gently land on Jiang Cheng's cheek. The peach juice pools where their skin meets, cold in comparison to the god's burning inner fire. Jiang Cheng sees it blazing in his eyes. He cannot look away. His frozen body still kneels in supplication to the one he had always believed in most.

How could Liu Qingge be only the size of a man when his presence fills this tent? When starlight seems to catch in the moisture he draws from Jiang Cheng's cheek, that sparkles in the wetness of his mouth as he opens it to—

Those knuckles had touched his skin, and now his heavenly tongue pulls the flavor from his hand. The drips of peach juice vanish into his mouth. Jiang Cheng cannot swallow. His cheek burns with static, as if the very touch of Liu Qingge's hand was to have brushed pure lightning.

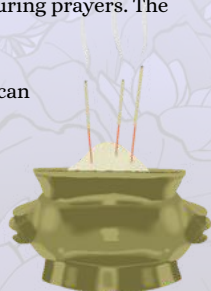
His fingers in his mouth, his eyes scorching Jiang Cheng, Liu Qingge stands and leaves his tent. Jiang Cheng kneels until the candles sputter out.

Every day, Jiang Cheng prays. Usually, Liu Qingge finds him when he begins the prayer. Sometimes, he waits at the altar, knowing Jiang Cheng will come. Every time, tension stretches between them as thick as a thunderstorm.

This ritual feels inescapable, as sure as the moon and sun rising and falling.

Jiang Cheng comes to rely on these meetings. The prayers center him. He looks forward to offering praise after a hard-fought battle, giving thanks that he and his disciples survived again. Liu Qingge shines. A war god thrives in battle, after all. Jiang Cheng hears others murmuring prayers before battle; Liu Qingge grows in power with their belief. Still, to his knowledge, he is the only one Liu Qingge graces with his actual presence during prayers. The only one whose offerings are more than symbolically eaten.

The battles will end. They will be victorious. Jiang Cheng wonders what he can do to keep the war god's favor once the war is won...







TIGER HICKS

Screamingbees, with spot art by Yanghu / Amiaaa (* • •)σ

Tiger Au

Grooming

Playing

Fluff

Jiang Cheng stretched out his paws, spine arching as he rubbed against the worn planks of the dock. The wood felt heavenly through his coarse fur, and as he rolled to and fro, scratching the top of his head on the boards, he couldn't help but rumble out his pleasure, the sound deep in his chest.

Finally. He deserved this.

The sounds of cubs playing and yelping made his ear tufts twitch, but Jiang Cheng had no major concerns about his nephew's or sister-in-law's safety. His mate was, of course, capable of ensuring their well-being, and with Liu Qingge supervising, Jiang Cheng felt comfortable enough to simply lie back and soak up the sun rays, luring him into a peaceful catnap.

Which was what he did.

As the sun drifted across the sky overhead and dyed Jiang Cheng's tiger-striped fur golden orange, he purred and melted into the ground, the smell of fresh water and chirp of songbirds perfecting his tranquil afternoon. A mighty roar echoed in the distance, but Jiang Cheng's eyelids barely fluttered. Liu Qingge must be having fun.

He wasn't sure how long he lay there, shifting every so often so every part of him could get a bit of sun, but by the time the splashing of rippling water got louder, the sun had started to dip towards the horizon.

Jiang Cheng paid it no mind, letting the motion of waves rock the dock ever so slightly, until he heard giggles from beneath the floorboards. A heavier *thud* landed beside him, audibly dripping water, but Jiang Cheng refused to react other than an annoyed *hmpf* in his feigned sleep. What were they doing here? Didn't Liu Qingge promise that he wouldn't get tired?

"Jiu—*meyack!*"

Jin Ling was cut off by a cry as presumably Liu Mingyan dragged him away. Jiang Cheng almost snorted, giving away his facade, but he held it in. Good. Finally, a playmate that could handle the lion cub.

He heard them splashing in the water, tussling, before they reached the shore, and then Jin Ling's offended shouts that he wasn't a kid before Liu Mingyan scruffed him, her teen form able to handle a small kitten, then brought him back to town. Jiang Cheng couldn't help but laugh at that, and when he opened his eyes, Liu Qingge was still there.

The white tiger rumbled out a greeting. He had already known Jiang Cheng was faking, and as he dipped down to lave a tongue over Jiang Cheng's forehead, his eyes squinted in amusement.



Jiang Cheng huffed. His mate knew him too well.

But he tilted into the kiss and let Liu Qingge groom his head before water began dripping on his face.

“Hey!”

Jiang Cheng shook from underneath Liu Qingge, trying to avoid the dripping water from Liu Qingge’s fur as the other kept licking them away, but no matter how he tried to writhe away, it was impossible to avoid every one.

“Qingge!”

Just as Jiang Cheng was about to roll onto his four paws and leap away, Liu Qingge flopped down on him. All 500 pounds of pure muscle and wet fur landed onto Jiang Cheng’s body, and he yowled in displeasure as Liu Qingge chuffed and pinned him firmly in place.

“Qingge!”

The two wrestled. But no matter how much Jiang Cheng squirmed and batted his own powerful paws against Liu Qingge’s face, shuddering each time Liu Qingge licked between his toe pads, he was unable to escape. Liu Qingge was clearly having fun; Jiang Cheng, less so. Liu Qingge only got playful like this when he was missing Jiang Cheng, though, so the orange tiger couldn’t exactly stay mad, however.

Still, by the time Jiang Cheng gave up and was subdued, face buried in Liu Qingge’s chest, his own sun-soaked fur was now damp. He growled menacingly and got a nip on his ear in response. Then Liu Qingge seemed to get heavier as he completely sank on top of Jiang Cheng, suffocating him in Liu Qingge’s fur.

Jiang Cheng thrashed again. His hind legs were free, but they did little to dislodge Liu Qingge’s immovable weight, and at best, all they did was bat Liu Qingge’s tail. His own tail flicked angrily.

In a move brought by desperation, he dug his hind legs into the planks and flipped both of them over.

Except... which way was the walkway again?

SPLASH!

Jiang Cheng and Liu Qingge tumbled into the lake unceremoniously. They broke apart, and Jiang Cheng could barely comprehend where or what he was before instinct set in sooner than panic, and he remembered to swim. Liu Qingge popped up next to him, sniggering.



“You—!”

Jiang Cheng tackled Liu Qingge in the water. His powerful paws had long grown familiar with the lake, and he was able to easily shove Liu Qingge back down, snarling and roaring his displeasure. Liu Qingge wrestled with his body underneath, but of the two, Jiang Cheng was the stronger swimmer, able to maneuver out of Liu Qingge’s grab around his middle easily and splashing him back with big waves when he resurfaced.

“Liu Qingge!”

Jiang Cheng had actually been the one to teach his mate how to swim since Liu Qingge came from the mountains and rarely practiced this skill. Still, Liu Qingge didn’t seem to let this disadvantage stop him, playfully continuing to tease Jiang Cheng.

By the time Jiang Cheng managed to escape from the lake and wrangle Liu Qingge out too (he had to practically drag the other by the tail), he was miffed and sopping wet. Liu Qingge didn’t mind. He pressed right up against Jiang Cheng, nearly tipping him over, and earned himself a snarl. But Liu Qingge was warm despite also being completely soaked through as well, so it was only for that reason that Jiang Cheng didn’t push him away.

As Jiang Cheng plodded back to their den, Liu Qingge bumping up against him every so often, he refused to acknowledge Liu Qingge’s affections, letting the head butts go unreciprocated. Liu Qingge wasn’t bothered by this, however, clearly knowing what kind of mood Jiang Cheng was in, and unfortunately, he was right when by the time they arrived at their home, Jiang Cheng had begrudgingly let Liu Qingge wind their tails together.

This time, Jiang Cheng pushed Liu Qingge over onto their nest of straw before lying on top of him. Liu Qingge snorted with amusement, but Jiang Cheng paid him no mind as he began grooming himself, starting with his hind legs. An eager tongue started on his back, which Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes at, but he let it pass. There was no deterring Liu Qingge from grooming once he got started anyway.

The short, quick licks became long, soothing laps, and Jiang Cheng’s eyelids drooped as he settled fully against his mate. Liu Qingge managed to free his arm and wrap it around Jiang Cheng’s chest as he kept grooming Jiang Cheng’s neck and head, and eventually, Jiang Cheng was trapped in his hold as his face was once again subjected to Liu Qingge’s love.

“Mmnggh...” he complained when a rough tongue dragged his eyelids open.

Liu Qingge continued, grooming Jiang Cheng with determination, and Jiang Cheng, who had long grown used to these sessions, let him, only turning when he was directed to. By the time cubs had wandered back in, Jiang Cheng was putty. He let out an “oof!” when Jin Ling greeted him by jumping onto his back, but greeted Liu Mingyan first instead, chuffing as she leaned in to bump heads.



“Jiujiu! Jiujiu!” Jin Ling cried, indignant. He got one sniff from Jiang Cheng before a paw smooshed him on the face and pushed him into Liu Qingge’s embrace. Too late, he was subjected to a grooming session as well, and his cries were muffled as Liu Qingge licked his face first.

Warm and rested, Jiang Cheng welcomed Liu Mingyan’s weight on his side and closed his eyes, ready for another nap. He liked having time on his own to relax, but here, surrounded by family, he would say he deserved this too.







@yelowek



KamKamQuats

NO FLIRTING WITH THE NANNY ON THE CLOCK!

SleepySnail

Pluff

Nanny Jiang Cheng

Soft Liu Qingge

Liu Qingge is Bad at Feelings

Pining

Liu Qingge wouldn't call himself a romantic, but he couldn't deny he had feelings for the ridiculously attractive and downright perfect nanny.

Since the first day, Jiang Cheng caught Liu Qingge's eye. He was handsome, smart, with a dry sense of humor and a smile that lit up the room. If it were just those characteristics Liu Qingge might've had an easier time resisting.

Jiang Cheng took time to explain the instructions of games to Liu Mingyan and Jin Ling, and rules for going outside. He played with the kids wholeheartedly and genuinely cared about them. It was one thing for Jiang Cheng to care about Jin Ling, since the boy was his nephew, but he shared the same enthusiasm and interest with Liu Mingyan. Liu Qingge wanted to arrive home to Jiang Cheng waiting for him every day, not just Monday through Thursday.

The problem was that Liu Qingge didn't know how to put words to what he felt, and he wasn't about to try flirting with Jiang Cheng while he was on the clock. That felt unprofessional and manipulative. But every time Liu Qingge interacted with Jiang Cheng he could feel his resolve chip away bit by bit.

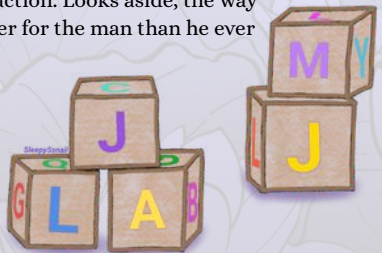
To make matters worse, Liu Qingge was almost certain his feelings were reciprocated. So Liu Qingge came up with a relatively simple plan. He'd act the way he usually did, say what he meant, do what felt right, and hope for the best.

It left the ball in Jiang Cheng's court, and gave Liu Qingge a little hope that his crush wasn't totally unrequited.

There were some amazing benefits to being a nanny that Jiang Cheng hadn't considered until he took the job. One was collecting a nice fat paycheck from his peacock of a brother-in-law. Just because they were on good terms didn't mean Jiang Cheng particularly liked Jin Zixuan, but he was happy to take his money. Another perk was spending time with Jin Ling every week. His nephew was so cute and smart, as evidenced by how he babbled and repeated things back almost verbatim.

But the best—and somehow worst—part was Jiang Cheng's crush on his unfairly hot employer Liu Qingge.

He'd admit it, the first time Jiang Cheng saw Liu Qingge he'd been taken by the man. Handsome features bordering on pretty, long hair that made Jiang Cheng jealous, and the beauty mark beneath his eye were just the start of his attraction. Looks aside, the way Liu Qingge treated his sister made him fall faster and harder for the man than he ever anticipated he could.



Why Liu Qingge was raising his sister Jiang Cheng didn't know, but the man was phenomenal at it. He talked to Liu Mingyan in a gentle tone, but never a baby voice unless he was playing or teasing her, always explained where he was going and what he'd be doing that day, and—based on his own braids and ponytails—did the girl's hair each morning.

Not only that, but whenever Jiang Cheng would arrive at Liu Qingge's with Jin Ling in tow, the man would greet him and Jin Ling the same way. When Jin Ling brought his new stuffed animal over and insisted on introducing the plush dog to Liu Qingge, he knelt down and listened seriously to Jin Ling's happy babbling before he complimented the stuffed animal and patted Jin Ling's head fondly.

So yeah, Jiang Cheng had it bad.

The only problem was that Liu Qingge was as dumb as a box of rocks and hadn't picked up on any of Jiang Cheng's admittedly inexperienced attempts to flirt. The only option Jiang Cheng had was to stop trying to force it and just be himself, no matter how awful his attitude was or how the real him turned people off. If he was lucky, Liu Qingge would finally notice and Jiang Cheng would be able to have the man look at him with the same affection he felt.

"Get her!" Liu Qingge yelled as Liu Mingyan darted past with a wordless shriek.

The day Jiang Cheng decided to take the kids to the park was sunny, nice, and became even nicer when Liu Qingge got home from work early and decided to join them.

"Did they run up the slides?" Jiang Cheng asked as he caught up to where Liu Qingge was searching the park playground where he lost sight of the two terrors. "My brother and I used to do that all the time."

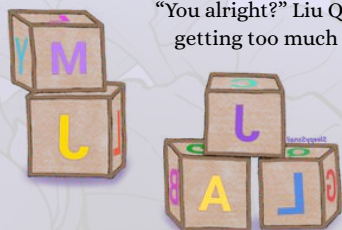
"I don't see them," Liu Qingge said disgruntled, his ponytail swinging as he bent down to look up one of the slides. "Damn, they're fast."

Shaking his head Jiang Cheng grumbled, "Little nightmares. They knew we were distracted and took the opportunity to book it."

It had been entirely Jiang Cheng's fault. He'd been so immersed in conversation with Liu Qingge and then distracted by how their hands brushed against each other—in a way that couldn't have been accidental no matter how he thought about it—that he hadn't noticed the kids sneak off until it was too late.

Thinking about it again, Jiang Cheng's stomach flipped at how casually Liu Qingge touched him and how earnestly he said he enjoyed Jiang Cheng's company.

"You alright?" Liu Qingge asked with a concerned frown. "Your face is red. Are you getting too much sun?"



"I'm fine," Jiang Cheng said, his words clipped as he tried to hide his blush. Looking around he added, "Maybe some water would—oh shit, there they are!"

Breaking into a run, Jiang Cheng pointed past the playground to the splash pads where Jin Ling and Liu Mingyan happily jumped in the water, fully clothed and without a care in the world. Liu Qingge caught up to Jiang Cheng and the two slowed as they neared the water feature so as not to slip and fall. Alerted to their presence, Jin Ling and Liu Mingyan shrieked in delight and scattered.

"I'll get Mingyan!" Jiang Cheng shouted as he rushed through a series of sprinklers that soaked his shoes and the legs of his pants. "You get A-Ling!"

Liu Qingge grunted in acknowledgement and raced toward the boy standing strangely still beneath a spout pouring water into a large bucket. Unfortunately Liu Qingge didn't notice the bucket or how full it was until Jin Ling sprinted with a burst of unexpected speed and a gleeful shout, leaving Liu Qingge in his place. The bucket of water tipped, overflowing, and drenched Liu Qingge.

Jiang Cheng stared open-mouthed at the sight from where he stood between a few mini geysers. He'd managed to easily catch Liu Mingyan just in time to see Jin Ling execute a perfect bait and switch on Liu Qingge.

Dripping wet, Liu Qingge shot a glare at Jin Ling who flung himself at Jiang Cheng's wet legs and giggled triumphantly.

"You did that on purpose!" Liu Qingge shouted, pointing an accusatory finger between Jin Ling and Jiang Cheng. "You knew he'd do that!"

The sight of Liu Qingge with his hair stuck to his face, clothes sopping wet, and pointing the blame for all of it at an almost two-year-old was too much for Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Cheng cackled loud and hard. Liu Qingge's face turned red in indignation and embarrassment. In a matter of seconds, Liu Qingge took control of one of the water cannons, aimed it at Jiang Cheng, and sprayed him right in the face.

Jiang Cheng sputtered and stumbled out of the way, ready to shout only for Liu Qingge to call, "Oops!" with a smug tone.

Jiang Cheng grinned and ran for the other water cannon, his need to flirt falling to the wayside as his competitive nature rose to the top. It didn't take long for him and Liu Qingge to utterly soak each other, their laughter and shouts of dismay filling the area as they tried to block the water streams with their own while also landing a hit on the other.

Laughing at how easy it was to get Jiang Cheng, Liu Qingge rushed to another cannon, just barely managing to avoid slipping on the wet ground.



“Careful!” Jiang Cheng laughed, only to step on a geyser as it went off and lose his footing. He hit the ground clumsily, but in an instant Liu Qingge was over him with a hand extended to pull him up.

“Come on,” Liu Qingge said, firmly taking Jiang Cheng’s hand.

Only Liu Qingge didn’t get the chance to pull him up because Jiang Cheng pulled him down with a maniacal cackle. Stunned, Liu Qingge splashed a puddle of water at Jiang Cheng only to be splashed back. In retaliation he shoved Jiang Cheng onto the ground by the shoulders and leaned over him with a smile.

It took a moment for Liu Qingge to notice their positions and realize how easy it would be to kiss Jiang Cheng—but he retreated and pulled the man to his feet.

Liu Qingge grinned wildly as he scooped Liu Mingyan up, eliciting a squeal of delight from the girl. “I’ve got you!” Liu Qingge said victoriously as he headed for the showers to rinse off. “My little escape artist!”

Jiang Cheng picked up Jin Ling who curled his arms around his uncle’s neck and waited in line behind the two siblings. When they finally managed to rinse off and started to make the soggy walk back, Jiang Cheng shivered at the cool breeze that blew past them. It wouldn’t have been bad if he weren’t soaked to the bone with his t-shirt sticking to him like a second skin.

Noticing Jiang Cheng’s discomfort, Liu Qingge wriggled out of his jacket and said, “Here, wear this.”

“It’s fine,” Jiang Cheng said, his eyes drawn to the artful way the fabric of his grey t-shirt clung to the muscles beneath.

Liu Qingge shook the wet jacket at Jiang Cheng insistently. “You should. It’s distracting.”

Jiang Cheng took the jacket, a bit perplexed at what could be so distracting, before realizing his own shirt was white and left absolutely nothing to the imagination. Raising an eyebrow at the pink slowly dusting Liu Qingge’s cheeks, Jiang Cheng scoffed and pulled the jacket on, the material heavy and comforting.

“Am I still distracting you?” Jiang Cheng asked with a smirk.

Liu Qingge didn’t answer, just mumbled something incoherent and tried to hide his still-red face.

Finger-painting was far messier than Liu Qingge realized.



He expected some mess, which was why he gave Liu Mingyan and Jin Ling two of his old white t-shirts to wear as smocks, but he hadn't anticipated that the kids would prefer to paint the shirts rather than the paper in front of them.

"I'm so sorry," Jiang Cheng groaned as Jin Ling put both of his hands in the yellow paint and then pressed them against his chest. "I'll get you new ones."

"It's fine," Liu Qingge assured him as he added a few dots of blue to the shirt Liu Mingyan wore. "I've got a bunch. Besides, it's a cute souvenir."

"A souvenir my brother-in-law will be thrilled to have," Jiang Cheng muttered sarcastically.

Something light fluttered in Liu Qingge's chest and without warning, he reached out and swiped his paint-covered fingers across Jiang Cheng's cheek, leaving a trail of pale blue in their wake.

Jiang Cheng blinked in disbelief, then huffed and grinned wildly as he shoved his own purple covered hand against Liu Qingge's cheek and neck. Liu Qingge yelped at the cold sensation, but Jiang Cheng didn't let up and continued to smear the paint until he was satisfied with the result.

"That's cold!" Liu Qingge gasped, reaching for the paper towels to wipe himself off.

"Serves you right!" Jiang Cheng said. "You started it!"

"Worth it," Liu Qingge said as he attempted to clean himself with the damp paper towels, futility spreading the mess further down his neck.

Rolling his eyes, Jiang Cheng took a new paper towel and knocked Liu Qingge's hands away. "Stay still," he instructed before intently cleaning the purple paint off his skin.

Liu Qingge's eyes widened and his mouth dropped open, both at the gesture and how close they were to each other. The nanny didn't seem to notice and continued to scrub until he deemed Liu Qingge paint-free.

Liu Qingge recognized an opportunity when he saw one, so he snagged some paper towels with one hand and held Jiang Cheng's shoulder with the other. "Your turn," he said, narrowing his eyes so he could focus on cleaning the blue streaks marking Jiang Cheng.

Liu Qingge's heart thumped in his chest at the close proximity. Gently wiping Jiang Cheng's face, Liu Qingge tried to suppress his delight whenever his fingers skimmed the man's cheek or neck.

The silence between them was palpable, only broken by the gentle chatter between Liu Mingyan and Jin Ling across the table.



When he deemed Jiang Cheng clean, Liu Qingge sat back and said, “You look good.” Almost immediately his face heated and he rushed to add, “Clean! Good and clean!”

Somehow that was worse and a pink flush crept across Jiang Cheng’s face to match Liu Qingge’s. Jiang Cheng muttered something incoherent and turned to clean the kids before his brother-in-law arrived to pick up Jin Ling.

Liu Qingge made himself busy putting the shirts in a safe place to dry, and tried not to berate himself for being so painfully obvious about his feelings.

When Jin Zixuan did show up to collect Jin Ling, he questioned if the paint stains on Jin Ling’s hands were jaundice, and fretted over his son.

“You should be more careful,” Jin Zixuan said as he hoisted Jin Ling onto his hip. “A-Ling is sensitive.”

Jiang Cheng scoffed and said, “Yeah, yeah. Just be grateful Liu Qingge doesn’t know you well enough to cancel the nanny share.”

“Do you--” Jin Zixuan frowned at Jiang Cheng, cutting himself off from his original train of thought. “Is that paint on your neck? It’s blue.”

Slapping a hand against his neck to hide whatever evidence of his exchange with Liu Qingge, Jiang Cheng snapped, “It’s none of your business!”

“It is if you’re being taken advantage of during work hours!” Jin Zixuan hissed under his breath. He shot a suspicious glare at Liu Qingge, protective of his brother-in-law despite their differences, only to pause as his eyes widened.

Just behind Liu Qingge’s ear and jawbone were a couple splatters of purple paint that Jiang Cheng missed when cleaning up.

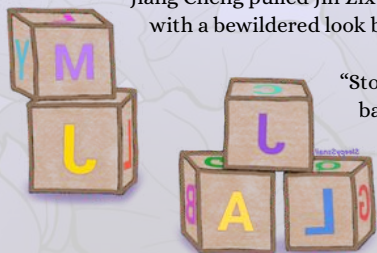
Jin Zixuan turned his attention back on Jiang Cheng, his expression scandalized as he declared, “You back alley harlot!”

Jiang Cheng hissed in defense, “It’s not like that, you freak! Why was that your first thought?!”

“None of your business!” Jin Zixuan shot back as he stomped over to grab Liu Qingge by the shoulder. Tugging the collar of Liu Qingge’s shirt down to expose his collarbones, Jin Zixuan asked heatedly, “Where else did he mark you? This is completely unprofessional!”

Jiang Cheng pulled Jin Zixuan away at the same time Liu Qingge shoved the man off with a bewildered look before disappearing into the kitchen.

“Stop scaring him!” Jiang Cheng griped as he shoved Jin Ling’s backpack at Jin Zixuan.



“You’re the one making the moves on him!” Jin Zixuan protested as he was hustled out the door.

“No!” Jin Ling shouted, grabbing his bowl of strawberry slices. “No bear!”

Jiang Cheng grinned at how invested the kids were in the book about a strawberry, a mouse, and a bear coming to eat the mouse’s strawberry. He’d cut up a few strawberries for the kids to have as a snack while he read to them and was thrilled with the level of participation he received.

Liu Mingyan shook her head and stuffed another slice in her mouth while juice dribbled down her chin.

Reading the next line, Jiang Cheng reached for one of Jin Ling’s fruit slices only to earn another loud, “No! It’s mine, Jiujiu!”

Chuckling at his nephew’s possessiveness, Jiang Cheng glanced toward the study where Liu Qingge was working. The man had stuck his head out the door to investigate the commotion, then slowly made his way over to stand behind the toddlers, who were too immersed in the story to notice him.

Jiang Cheng read the next couple pages with a dramatic voice to show the severity of the little mouse’s predicament while Jin Ling and Liu Mingyan stared at the pictures with rapt attention.

As he read the ending where the mouse shared half the strawberry with the narrator, he was pleasantly surprised when Jin Ling thrust a slightly mangled strawberry slice into his palm. “For you!” the boy declared proudly. “So the bear won’t come!”

On cue, Liu Qingge roared playfully behind the kids and reached for the fruit.

Jin Ling shrieked at the “bear” while Liu Mingyan stuffed a handful of fruit in her mouth so she wouldn’t have to share.

Liu Qingge laughed and ghosted a hand over Liu Mingyan’s head with a soft smile that melted Jiang Cheng’s insides.

“Any left for me?”

Jiang Cheng nodded and retreated to the kitchen with Liu Qingge in tow.

“Here,” Jiang Cheng said brusquely as he passed a bowl of strawberries to Liu Qingge. “You’re least likely to make a mess.”



Liu Qingge raised an eyebrow as if that were a challenge and bit into a berry. Juice pooled along his lips and Jiang Cheng fought not to stare at the drop that trickled down the corner of Liu Qingge's mouth. Part of him wanted to kiss the stray juice away and find out what Liu Qingge tasted like, but he suppressed that and quickly stacked the used dishes in the sink to wash later.

"These are nice," Liu Qingge said while he popped another piece in his mouth. "Almost as sweet as you."

Jiang Cheng hummed noncommittally before snapping his head up to look at Liu Qingge. To his credit, Liu Qingge looked unfazed for a few seconds before his cheeks turned a red that could rival the strawberries he held. Jiang Cheng wanted to demand answers, but Liu Qingge retreated to his office.

"You can stay as long as you like," Liu Qingge said, frowning at the heavy rainfall. "I don't think it's going to get better anytime soon."

Jiang Cheng nodded and slumped on the couch. He already put Liu Mingyan to bed, and since Jiang Yanli picked Jin Ling up early, he was stuck there until the rain decided to stop.

As he sat next to him, Liu Qingge snuck a glance at Jiang Cheng. He had already fallen asleep.

He sucked in a breath. Jiang Cheng looked so relaxed. Liu Qingge watched for a long moment before leaning over to get a closer look. The temptation to kiss him was strong but Liu Qingge resisted. If he kissed Jiang Cheng, he wanted the man to be awake and—

"Trying to sneak a kiss?"

Liu Qingge startled back at Jiang Cheng's sudden comment. His eyes opened, gazing at Liu Qingge with vague dissatisfaction.

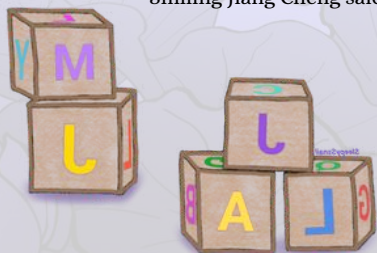
"That was the perfect opportunity and you passed it up. I've been waiting for you to kiss me for weeks and you're still not going to do it?"

Another low rumble of thunder shook Liu Qingge from his stupor.

He was sick of waiting, tired of holding back, and the way Jiang Cheng spoke made it clear he was too, so—throwing caution to the wind—Liu Qingge made his move.

Cupping Jiang Cheng's face in both hands Liu Qingge kissed him, savoring the sensation of soft lips against his own.

Smiling Jiang Cheng said, "I like you."



“I like you too,” Liu Qingge said, then added stiltedly, “A lot.”

Rolling his eyes, Jiang Cheng snorted. “I figured that when you shoved me in the water at the park! Why didn’t you kiss me then?”

“You were working.”

Jiang Cheng blinked at the stupidly simple answer while Liu Qingge held his face tenderly.

“It’s still raining.” Jiang Cheng’s eyes flitted to the window as lightning illuminated the sky.

“Mind if I stay the night?”

“I have some pajamas you can borrow,” Liu Qingge said. “Mingyan will be excited to see you in the morning. She loves it when you’re here early.”

“Hmm.” Jiang Cheng trailed a hand down Liu Qingge’s chest as the rain pattered against the window. “I like being here early too. Especially if it means I’ll get to see you first thing.”

“How about we go on a date sometime?” Liu Qingge suggested, brushing his thumb over Jiang Cheng’s cheekbone. “Just us, no kids.”

“That sounds nice,” Jiang Cheng said, shifting so he leaned against Liu Qingge. “What did you have in mind?”

Liu Qingge shrugged, jostling Jiang Cheng’s head. “This is nice. Does this count?”

“Only if you kiss me again,” Jiang Cheng decided.

Smiling, Liu Qingge hooked a finger under Jiang Cheng’s chin and tilted his face upward. “I think I can manage that.”







AS KIND AS IT GETS (AS INFURIATING AS IT IS)

Zenaeco, with spot art by Yanghu / Amiaaa (* • •)σ

Yue Qingyuan's study smelled like ink and candlewax. Tensions were high...they had been for the last couple of days. Who could have foreseen that one of An Ding's youngest disciples would pick a flower that would go around infecting not just their peak but several others with memory altering pollen?

Liu Qingge stood with his arms folded, shoulders stiff, as he tried to process what he was hearing. "You want me to what?" His voice was flat, devoid from formalities and had it been anyone other than their patient sect leader, it would be deemed as too sharp, insolent behavior.

"The timing is regrettable" The elder said in a gentle tone, trying his best to calm the man in front of him. "The representatives we had prepared have all been rendered unavailable. To send no one would risk our sect's reputation. And Yunmeng—" his tone warmed, coaxing reason into his words, "—is a powerful ally in the south, should we handle this meeting well. It would be unwise to let the opportunity slip by."

"Send someone else." Liu Qingge's jaw tightened. He was prolonging the inevitable; Yue Qingyuan had already decided he was the only viable candidate. However, both of them were painfully aware that Liu Qingge was not made for diplomacy. As leader of Bai Zhan, the war peak, his greatest asset was his strength in battle... not words.

Authority, yes. Diplomacy, absolutely not. Liu Qingge let out a breath that was more of a huff. I am no courtier."

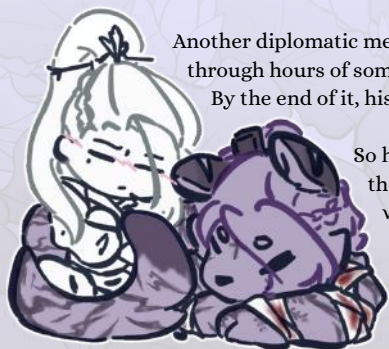
"No one is asking you to be," came the smooth reply. "Merely to represent us with strength and dignity."

Liu Qingge stared at him for a long, bristling moment. Duty was duty, no matter how ill-suited. Finally, with a clipped nod, he accepted. As Liu Qingge turned to leave, his expression didn't change, but inwardly he was already calculating how quickly he could get this over with. Diplomacy. Words. Politics. He almost preferred being sent against a horde of beasts.

At least then he could hit something.

Another diplomatic meeting, another wasted afternoon. Jiang Cheng had sat through hours of some pompous elder speaking at length while saying very little. By the end of it, his patience was spent, his temper fraying.

So he left. Out into the wilds, where the silence of the forest and the thrill of a hunt could bleed the frustration out of him in a way politics never could. Hunting beasts was at least



straightforward: kill or be killed, strength laid bare, no false courtesies to endure.

And then, as if life had not had its way with him as is, he had managed to get himself cursed.

Under ordinary circumstances, he would have called for his second in command—laid the matter bare, demanded a solution before anyone else caught wind of his humiliation. But this time... communication might be a problem.

In his youth, Jiang Cheng, heir of the Yunmeng Jiang Sect, had often been likened to a fox borrowing the might of a tiger. Bound to his mother's will, he had borne his shortcomings with clenched teeth... shortcomings he could not hide with effortless brilliance, unlike Wei Wuxian did.

And still, despite his inability to live up to their effortless strength, he had adored tigers.

Symbols of power, of unmatched prowess on the hunt.

Once, between bitter sobs muffled in his jieje's embrace, he had even said it aloud, I want to be a tiger. She had comforted him as best she could without bruising his pride further, but the words had stayed.

Out of all the dreams he had once harbored—dreams crushed beneath time and duty—this was the last he ever expected to come true.

The change came abruptly. One moment Jiang Cheng had stumbled upon a trail, one that had been quite promising, only for the world to tilt beneath his feet the next. His claws dug into the earth where hands should have been... his teeth were larger, sharper and the air had a different taste to it. His muscles coiled and flexed unlike before, his vision... turned into shades of gray, hues of yellow and traces of blue.

Panic flared through his mind, his heartbeat falling out of its rhythm, but only briefly. Instinct was strong, yes, but years of cultivation, years of fighting beasts and men alike, were stronger. The curse had altered his form, but he was still Jiang Cheng.

And then he saw it.

From the depths of the forest emerged a creature of legend. A Bai Ze. A body of a lion with fur as white as snow. On its head were three eyes that had locked onto him, with another set of three on each flank accompanying their gaze. Nine eyes in total, rendering any chance of flight near to impossible, there was no blind spot, no escape from a vision so all encompassing.

Two sets of horns crowned its head, and a single, spiraling horn protruded from its forehead. Its presence was both majestic and terrifying.



Time seemed to still. Then, with a roar that shook the very earth, it charged. Instinct took over. Jiang Cheng leaped to meet it, claws slashing through the air. He fought not as a beast, but as a cultivator— every movement precise, every strike calculated. The Bai Ze countered with equal ferocity, its multiple eyes tracking his every move, its horns aimed with deadly accuracy.

The battle raged, neither side yielding, but it did not need a trained eye to see that the purple tiger was losing. He lacked the strength to keep up, struck too many times by the Bai Ze to continue his attacks with the same ferocity.

Then, in a flash of pure white light, a sword materialized between them, its blade gleaming with celestial energy. The Bai Ze recoiled, momentarily distracted, allowing the purple tiger to gain distance and avoid sustaining more damage.

The sword had not summoned itself, it was accompanied by a figure, cloaked in robes that shimmered like starlight. His presence was commanding, his gaze unwavering. With a swift motion, the sword which obeyed his will soared through the skies, striking the Bai Ze with enough force that the beast staggered back, stunned.

Akin to the Bai Ze, his presence was overpowering. The surge of adrenaline had subdued Jiang Cheng's newly formed animal instincts, but now that he has begun to sober up, every fiber of his being told him to flee.

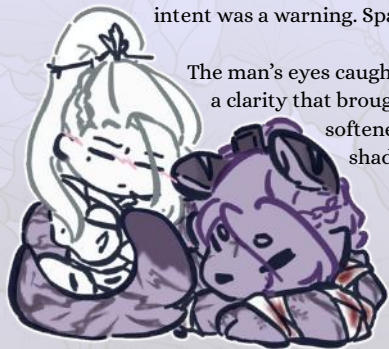
"Enough," the stranger's voice rang out, calm and authoritative.

The beast did not speak his language, but it understood enough. The cultivator would not spare its life should it linger any longer. Jiang Cheng's eyes would have widened in disbelief had he retained his human form, for a legendary Bai Ze to actually retreat in the presence of a mortal was unheard of. It was an unusual sight.

Was he mortal? If Jiang Chen was to trust his eyes he would say yes. But senses could be fooled, easily, even more so by a god descended from the heavens. No. Fate was a cruel mistress; after all, she had taken the life of his parents and sister alike. He knew better than to view this act as the man's good graces. There was always a price.

Crouching in his feline form, the sect leader did not hold back a growl—it wasn't a far stretch from what one would expect from his human likeness. After all; the only difference was that now, his biting words and Zidian's crackle were replaced by the rumble of a tiger's throat. The intent was a warning. Sparking fear into those who were deemed a threat by him.

The man's eyes caught his. A clear blue hue, like tears frozen before they could fall, a clarity that brought with it a feeling as if all evil had been stripped away. They softened, just slightly, as the Bai Ze turned away and vanished into shadow and the sword slid back into its sheath.



Jiang Cheng studied him with rising suspicion. His robes weren't those of any nearby sects, the cut of his clothes was unfamiliar, while the fabric was adorned with patterns woven and embroidered in an unfamiliar hand. A cultivator powerful enough to frighten a Bai Ze wandering Yunmeng's forests? That was trouble.

His thoughts had subconsciously affected his body language, enough for the cultivator to set down his weapon and crouch down—meeting the tiger eye to eye. It was as if he had heard Jiang Cheng's inner voice. "I mean you no harm." His tone was stripped of courtesy, blunt—yet comforting. It was almost enough to resonate with the sect leader and evoke something as unreasonable in him as trusting a stranger.

Jiang Cheng was no sect leader at this moment. Only a cursed beast, listening to a man with the odd habit of speaking to animals as though they could understand him. Jiang Cheng had yet to decide if that made him a fool—or something far rarer. A pure spirited individual.

He turned to leave, intent on dragging himself back to Lotus Pier, finding a solution in the privacy of his study. But pain lanced through his hind leg, sharp enough to stagger him. Before he could tumble further—a presence, the stranger, was by his side. The air around him was cold... the energy erratic.

Qi deviation.

Jiang Cheng knew it well. **Too well.**

A fool, he decided grimly. The man was a fool. Battling demons of his own while fussing over an injured tiger. He didn't catch the words the other murmured, but he heard the concern, felt the steadiness of that hand close by. And though his pride screamed to walk away, he found himself...just for a moment...humoring the stranger.

The next thing he knew, there was fabric, warm, draped across his side and hands carefully pressing against the torn muscle of his hind leg. He bristled instinctively, muscles tensing to launch away, but the pain shot white-hot through him, freezing him where he was.

The stranger only said, "Easy." No soft cooing, no reassurances, just the single word, firm and grounding.

It was infuriating.

Even more infuriating was that he stayed still.

The pressure shifted as the wound was bound with practiced precision. Jiang Cheng found himself listening to the man's breathing—controlled and measured, though beneath it he could hear the uneven rhythm of qi breaking against the edges of his meridians.



Jiang Cheng lowered his head onto his paws, growling softly in annoyance at his own compliance. He should have limped away with his dignity intact. Instead, he allowed himself to remain.

“Stubborn thing, aren’t you?” the man murmured. “Still fighting even when you can barely stand.” As austere as the man’s delivery had been before, his words softened with his actions and this last chide was accompanied by something that sounded dangerously like amusement.

Jiang Cheng’s ears flicked back. If he had his human mouth, he would have retorted—*Of course I’m fighting. That’s what I do. Instead, a rough huff escaped his throat.*

The stranger chuckled. Just a small sound, but startling in its warmth. “Mm. Quite a fierce little tiger.”

Jiang Cheng froze.

He would have scoffed aloud, denying the absurdity of it. He was no “little” anything—yet here he was, reduced to fur and claws, being fussed over like an injured cub. He gave a low, dismissive rumble. The stranger only smiled faintly, as if pleased to have been answered at all.

Their camp took shape quickly.

A cozy fire that offered them reprieve as the sun set and shadows stretched long. Jiang Cheng found himself drawing closer—not out of trust, he told himself, but necessity. The warmth eased the ache in his body, and the stranger’s presence kept the forest’s dangers at bay.

Still, he inched nearer, paws dragging in the dirt until he was within reach of the man’s robe. The fabric smelled faintly of steel and pine. Familiar, in a way he could not place.

“Better,” the man said softly. “Stay. Rest.”

Another growl rose in his throat, automatic, but it lacked real bite. His tail twitched, betraying him. He settled against the ground, muscles taut but no longer poised to flee.

The stranger’s hand hovered for a moment, then brushed lightly against his shoulder. Jiang Cheng almost snapped, but the other’s touch was steady.

He hated how much it soothed him.

Eyes closing, just for a moment, Jiang Cheng let himself lean into the warmth of fire and presence alike. Fierce little tiger, indeed. And yet, against his ill, he stayed.

Warmth.



It was the first sensation Jiang Cheng felt when his consciousness returned. A comforting warmth at his back, an arm draped over his middle... a steady breath against the nape of his neck.

His eyes snapped open.

The memories rushed back, the fight, the curse and the stranger.

Except for the fact that for a stranger... the other was awfully close. As he noticed the vibrant colors that surrounded him—and the lack of fur... it dawned on him that his body was human once more. And he was lying against someone.

Slowly, carefully, Jiang Cheng tried to crane his neck—turn and see the other. The cultivator was still asleep... though far from peacefully, his brows furrowed as his grip around Jiang Cheng tightened.

His skin bristled.

Mortification seemed to choke him momentarily. The stark realization that he was naked beneath loosely draped robes... robes that belonged to the other man were enough to put him to an early end. He sat up, too quickly, the robe slipping—the pain in his left leg was quick to remind him that he had taken the wrong choice of action.

His movement also stirred the other awake, his eyes meeting Jiang Cheng's as he grabbed the outer robe—one which he noted still had the lingering scent of pine needles—to maintain some decency.

"You've changed back." A statement. No surprise.

Jiang Cheng scowled, clutching the robe tighter. "Obviously."

The man pushed himself up, entirely unbothered by the awkwardness. He studied Jiang Cheng a moment longer, then asked, in that same blunt tone as before, "Who are you?"

Jiang Cheng's temper flared at the sheer gall. "Who am I? I should be asking you. You trespass into Yunmeng territory, interfere in my hunt, and then—" he broke off, the memory of last night intruding, "—and then..." He scowled harder, words failing him.

The man tilted his head, unimpressed. "Liu Qingge, of Bai Zhan Peak. Sent south for a diplomatic meeting."

The name fell like a stone into the pit of Jiang Cheng's stomach. He blinked, realization dawning, horror creeping in at the edges. "You're the one... I was supposed to meet."

Liu Qingge's mouth twitched—whether it was amusement or irritation, Jiang Cheng couldn't tell. "So it seems."



Silence stretched, brittle and unbearable. Jiang Cheng tightened the robe around him, glaring at the fire as if it had personally wronged him. “This never happened.”

A pause, then the faintest trace of dry humor colored Liu Qingge’s words. “The curse or the cuddling?”

Jiang Cheng nearly choked on his own indignation. “Both.”

If Liu Qingge was perturbed, he didn’t show it. He simply inclined his head, as though sealing an agreement. “As you wish.”

Jiang Cheng let out a sharp huff, half in exasperation, half to hide the rush of relief. Of all the ways a diplomatic meeting could begin, this was by far the worst—and yet, staring at Liu Qingge’s calm, straightforward expression, he felt strangely at ease.

“Although,” Liu Qingge added, his tone as flat as ever, “there is a problem with that plan of yours. If this never happened, your wearing of my robes is an inexplicable mystery.”

Jiang Cheng froze mid-step. Heat prickled across his neck as if he’d been slapped.

“Shut up,” he muttered. “Not a word.”

Liu Qingge didn’t argue. He simply inclined his head once, and together they made their way back toward Lotus Pier.

By the time they crossed the threshold into sect territory, Jiang Cheng had composed his face into its usual mask of cold authority. But even a sect leader could not silence the wide-eyed stares of his juniors.

The disciples waiting in the courtyard all but tripped over themselves. Their gazes flickered from their sect leader’s disheveled hair to the unmistakably foreign robe he wore and then to the stranger beside him. Mouths parted, whispers stirred, but no one dared speak aloud.

Jiang Cheng’s glare swept over them like a blade, and the whispers died instantly.

“Back to training,” he snapped, voice like thunder. They scattered as if lightning had struck.

Still, the damage was done. Rumors would sprout before nightfall.

The doors to Jiang Cheng’s private study shut behind them with a sharp thud, sealing out the murmurs and sidelong glances. The silence that settled was thick with unspoken words.



To Yue Qingyuan,

The initial meeting with Sect Leader Jiang has been made. Alliance talks are underway.
Progress is promising, though not yet concluded.

I will remain in Yunmeng until the matter is resolved.

—Liu Qingge









LOVE BETWEEN THE LINES

Zenaeco, with spot art by Dan

Sweat pooled at his brow as he trekked down a familiar mountain path. He let out a slow breath when his eyes caught the view that opened before him—the sea, glinting in the afternoon sun. Shimmers of gold, warm and dazzling, nothing like the colder steel-gray waters of the north.

At the start of his journey, he had been more than annoyed. What was meant to be a one-time arrangement with his sister had somehow transformed into a regular duty. The head of Bai Zhan Peak, reduced to nothing more than a courier.

Liu Mingyan, ever the avid writer, had recently gained not only success but also began to exchange letters with her longest most devoted reader in the south. Her truest fan to date, however, because she had become a mother and could not travel north to retrieve her favorite novels like she used to, she was unable to read her latest works. So, in a rare display of carelessness, Mingyan had written back to reassure her not to fret, she would send the books.

And to Mingyan, her novels were as precious as a pearl not to be discarded. Sending them through some ordinary courier was unthinkable.

It just so happened that Liu Qingge owed his younger sister a favor. And since he did not entirely dislike traveling, he found himself burdened with the task.

Once turned to twice, and twice to several times more. This, now, was his fifth visit south.

He was growing used to the humid climate, and with each trip his tolerance for spicy food inched closer to that of a southern toddler—though only just.

What began as a simple delivery had changed as well. Yanli, second in command of the sect and sister to the leader, insisted he stay for dinner each time. She asked questions about the north, gentle but curious, and her son Jin Ling had taken to him immediately. The boy showed no fear of the War God's stiff, forbidding demeanor. Instead, he laughed when Liu Qingge crouched to his level and, under the guise of "training," taught him to dodge tickle attacks.

Yanli had not been entirely certain when she first met him. But by their second meeting, she had put the pieces together. The familiar, recurring swordsman in *Liusu Mianhua's* novels, bore an uncanny resemblance to the very man now delivering them.

Liu Qingge's steps slowed as the lotus pier came into view. The curved roofs, the shimmer of water, the scent of lotus drifting in the air— it was a sight that had grown oddly familiar to him, despite the absurd reason for his visits.

And yet... each time, he found himself grateful to trade the north for this place. To leave behind the shadow that lingered over Cang Qiong— his shixiong, Shen Qingqiu, allowing a demon to nestle in their midst, even indulging him when he thought no one was watching. The memory sent a ripple of unease through his chest.



His thoughts broke off as his gaze caught on the pier.

The sect leader, who was deemed unapproachable and quick to lose his temper... laid on the wooden path, a book, his brows furrowed in focus. It was a usual sight, despite this being his fifth visit—his encounters with Jiang Cheng were brief. One might call them unpleasant at best, undeniable hostility at worst.

It was a sight that took Liu Qingge by surprise.

“My name is Liu Qingge, I have come to deliver books to Jiang Yanli on behalf of Liusu Mianhua.” Had been his introduction when he delivered his sister's novel the first time, he was met with a scoff and a pointed gesture in the direction of the hall which told him everything he needed to know.

Each visit seemed to stoke Jiang Cheng's ire further, though Liu Qingge observed it quietly, without comment. He was not unaware of the tension. What he did not know was that much of Jiang Cheng's irritation stemmed from his own jealousy. Jin Ling, eager and talkative, spent far more time discussing Liu Qingge's presence than engaging with his uncle.

Liu Qingge's steps were quiet, deliberate, as he approached the pier. He noticed with a small, inwardly amused smile, that the book the sect leader held was one of Liu Mingyan's novels—bound in soft covers, corners slightly worn from frequent reading.

When he pictured the type of person to be enchanted by his sister's works, rich with adult themes and not shying away from exploring societal taboos, Jiang Cheng did not come to mind.

The sect leader had not noticed him yet. There was a moment—a brief, delicate moment—where Liu Qingge considered simply stepping back, letting Jiang Cheng enjoy his stolen afternoon.

But just as he turned to retreat, Jiang Cheng's sharp, purple eyes flicked up.

Caught.

The snap of awareness was instantaneous. Jiang Cheng jerked upright, the book tilting dangerously in his grasp. “You—!” His voice was cut short by the sudden shift in weight as he scrambled backward, attempting to regain balance on the slick wood.

Too late. His foot slipped on a loose plank, and with a startled yelp, he pitched backward, arms flailing.

Liu Qingge reacted instantly. The bag he carried was tossed to the ground in an instant. There was no time to consider propriety, to weigh distance or dignity. He lunged, catching the edge of Jiang Cheng's sleeve, but the combined weight was too much. With a splash and a grunt, both of them tumbled into the water.



The book flew from Jiang Cheng's hands, landing safely on the pier with a thud.

Then, the world went cold.

Liu Qingge did not lose his composure, ignoring the shock of icy water soaking through his robes, his hair plastering to his face. Jiang Cheng flailed, spluttering and cursing in a mixture of outrage.

"Let go! I do not need your help!" Jiang Cheng barked, though his tone carried more surprise than authority, for Liu Qingge's grip lingered on his sleeve.

"You were falling," Liu Qingge explained himself, upon releasing the other.

"Falling?!" Jiang Cheng's anger... paired with the image of his inky black hair, framing his face perfectly despite being wet... did not seem quite as biting. Especially paired with the colour that flushed his cheeks. "I—this is... impossible!"

Liu Qingge did not respond. Instead, both men put their energy to better use... which was hoisting themselves back onto the pier.

"You... you threw yourself in after me," Jiang Cheng said finally, voice low, incredulous, and very, very irritated.

Liu Qingge's expression remained neutral, calm as always. "Your book landed safely," he said instead. The peak lord wasn't usually sly with his words... but, he wished to know why the other was reading the novel so intently. He was quite aware that this book belonged to the man's sister.

"It's... it's not my book," he said quickly, snapping the words out. "I—looked at it for errors. That's all. I wouldn't read... something like this otherwise."

"Errors?" Liu Qingge's tone was neutral, almost teasing, though his face betrayed nothing.

Jiang Cheng's ears burned. "Yes! Errors! Inconsistencies! That's... that's what I was checking. Nothing else."

He paused, but the words kept tumbling out despite himself. "It's just... my sister pointed out a character in the story. She said his way with the sword was written as if you were observing him from afar. And while romance isn't something I'd take pleasure in, I... I've come to sympathize with his tale."

Liu Qingge's eyes drifted to the novel, scanning the title with mild curiosity. He wasn't aware of every story his sister wrote—and it was better that way. Yet he knew she prided herself on letting readers experience a world that felt real and she often sought his advice.

The peak lord of Bai Zhan had an interest in men.



A little known fact, seeing as talk about him being a brute took over most of the conversation—and most gossip around the peak lords was focused on the demon disciple and his righteous master.

Liu Mingyan did not inquire only into love or idle curiosities that surrounded her brother. She was skilled in battle, and their fighting styles differed sharply. Luring her brother into sparring matches was easy, and questioning him about why he executed a particular move was never without proper reasoning and demonstration.

Liu Qingge understood how much his sister borrowed from the world around her, he also happened to recognize a recurring character that matched Jiang Cheng's description.

"She was right, of course... it's frustrating," Jiang Cheng concluded with a sharp huff. "That she was right?" Liu Qingge prompted.

Jiang Cheng's gaze flicked to him, incredulous, as though he had sprouted another head. "No. Yú Baihuan. The author clearly dislikes him. The world favors a demon and a cultivator getting married... and he is the one scrutinized for not rejoicing after all his hardships."

It was as if their gazes met for the very first time. Liu Qingge had always been met with cold stares and now the other poured out his frustrations... about a story he knew all too well.

There was no such thing as escaping the past, much less the present.

Jiang Cheng looked as though he had much more to say, but then he came to a sudden stop. His eyes narrowed, taking in every detail.

Liu Qingge.

The man Jiang Cheng was quick to dismiss as a courier... carried a sword. Up close, one would notice the mole under his left eye, the careful stance of a seasoned fighter and the precise, rapid reactions when they fell into the water moments before was not something attributed to a mere mortal.

Not to mention his looks... the sharp line of his jaw, the fire in his gaze, the way those blue eyes matched the description of Yú Baihuan.

"I will arrange a set of dry robes for you to wear; I expect to see you on the training grounds once you are done." The words, sharp and clipped, cut through the quiet of the pier. Jiang Cheng's tone carried no room for negotiation, no hint of warmth...yet it was authority enough to compel obedience.

And then he was gone, storming off with a swish of his soaked, dark robes, leaving Liu Qingge blinking after him, momentarily confused.

Soon he was met by a set of neatly folded purple robes and shown to a small, private room where he could change.



As he undressed and wrung out his own garments, Liu Qingge couldn't help but replay the earlier moments. The way Jiang Cheng had glared at him, indignant and frustrated, as if the world itself had conspired to inconvenience him.

Liu Qingge stepped onto the practice grounds with his hair still damp and his sleeves neatly tied back. Jiang Cheng was already waiting, arms crossed, jaw tight, a training sword in hand. His eyes flicked over the borrowed robes with something unreadable.

"You're late," Jiang Cheng snapped.

Without waiting for a reply, he lunged.

Their spar was supposed to be a formality—an outlet for whatever temper had been stirred on the pier—but the moment their swords clashed, it ignited something else. Jiang Cheng fought like he held a deep rooted grudge against Liu Qingge, each strike sharp and elegant, every movement laced with tension. Liu Qingge matched him with practiced calm, his blade meeting each blow with clean precision.

It didn't take long before the world fell away. No lotus scents. No onlookers. No shadow of old grievances.

Only steel. And the sound of breaths taken.

Jiang Cheng's sleeve brushed Liu Qingge's wrist during a tight parry. Liu Qingge felt the spark like an electric pulse.

He pivoted, redirecting Jiang Cheng's next strike, and in that pause—a hair too long, a breath too deep—Jiang Cheng froze.

Liu Qingge looked at him then. Really looked. Not the frosty Sect Leader. But someone he had, inexplicably and repeatedly, wanted to see him back.

The tension cracked.

Jiang Cheng moved first.

He grabbed Liu Qingge by the front of his robe and kissed him like he was mad at himself—fierce, furious, unpracticed. Liu Qingge didn't waste a moment pretending to hesitate. His hand found the line of Jiang Cheng's jaw, thumb brushing the damp hair at his temple as he kissed him back with a low, steady hunger that made Jiang Cheng's breath hitch.

They didn't bother pretending it was an accident.

By the time they separated, Jiang Cheng's ears were red to the tips.

"If you tell anyone," he rasped, "I'll bury you under this pier."



Liu Qingge only nodded once, calm as ever. Which somehow infuriated Jiang Cheng more—and made him pull the other man in again.

Yanli did not need to see anything to know everything.

That night, she wrote to Liusu Mianhua with the full, gleeful authority of a sister who had waited far too long for something interesting to happen.

She described the spar, the drenched robes, and the furious, lingering looks with the enthusiasm of someone already outlining chapter titles. Jin Ling contributed, loudly, that Uncle Qingge was “cooler” now that he made his jiujiu blush.

Liu Mingyan read the letter three times. By sunrise, she had already outlined an 18 chapter serialized romance tentatively titled: The Tiger and the Lotus Pier.



JIANGHU



SUMMER

Sāndú

Shèngshǒu

New head of Jiang
Motorworks is

"seizing the impossible"

**WAR GOD'S
CAMPAIGN**

*Cang Qiong's
hotshot bares all*

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:
JIANG CHENG AND LIU QINGGE**

SECRETLY DATING?

BURNING RUBBER OR BLAZING PASSIONS?

THE STORY OF A MATCH MADE ON THE TRACK

FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT

Melonbat, with spot art by Basilxalbum

Fake Dating

Modern Au

Inaccurate Wedding Banquet Customs

"Are you sure you're okay with this? Having to tell everyone you're my boyfriend even though you're not?" Liu Qingge asked for the hundredth time. Liu Qingge and Jiang Cheng were driving to the wooded area Liu Qingge's family had rented for his sister's wedding banquet to her now wife, Sha Hualing. "It's going to be weird to hold hands in public," stated Liu Qingge as he parked the car and turned off the engine.

Jiang Cheng laughed while checking to see if his phone had cell service in the area, "Did you just now realize this? No wait! Don't answer that. I know you did." He leaned over smiling and grabbed Liu Qingge's face, drawing it closer to his own, "You'll get used to it, I'm sure." Then before Liu Qingge could respond Jiang Cheng let go and turned to get out of the car and went to grab their suitcases from the trunk. Liu Qingge scrubbed his hands down his face and let out a breath. It was going to be a long weekend.

As they both walked up to the house they heard Liu Mingyan's voice call out to them, "Gege! Jiang Cheng! I'm so glad you're here!" She ran down and pulled her brother into a hug. "I saw you last week at lunch," Liu Qingge grumbled, but the way he leaned into his sister's hug without complaint gave away his affection.

Upon letting go she turned around, looping her arms through the arms of both men and leading them away from the main house and presumably towards their cabin. "How was the drive up? Did you drive in complete silence like two serial killers?" Liu Mingyan laughed loudly at her own joke and continued on without even waiting for a response, "Let me show you two to your room, and after you get your things put down, I can show you around. This place is massive and split up strangely, but basically every one has their own cabin and then the main cabin is for us and general socializing."

Upon arriving to the door of the cabin, Liu Mingyan unlocked it and handed her brother the key, "I'm gonna head back to the main cabin before my darling wife says something awful in front of our family. See you inside!" With that she scampered off and the men went inside. "She's full of energy as always," Jiang Cheng said with a smile on his face. He enjoyed his time with Liu Mingyan since she treated him like another brother and always had a way of making her older brother soften some.

"I know she's excited, but she told me she's feeling pretty anxious too. She's worried someone from her friend group, or hell even just Sha Hualing, will say the wrong thing in front of our mom and send her on some weird lecture. Honestly if anything us both showing up here together might be the perfect distraction she needs in that case."

The men continued talking as they looked around the cabin. It was small since it was mostly intended only for sleeping. There was a bed, a small table with chairs, a dresser, a bathroom, and a mini fridge. The men unpacked their bags and, once they had finished stalling as long as they could, set out for the main cabin.



As they drew closer, they could hear the festivities going on inside.

Sliding his hand into Liu Qingge's and lacing their fingers together, Jiang Cheng paused before going up the steps of the porch, "You ready for this?" Liu Qingge gave a resolute nod before starting up the stairs, shoulders set and face stern like a man entering battle.

Upon entering the main cabin things were chaotic and festive. Liu Mingyan and Sha Hualing had invited their families and close friends for the weekend celebration, choosing to alter the traditional wedding banquet to fit their own vision. In turn there were many small groups of people every where you turned, and a small table at the door where one would sign the wedding book and leave their red envelope.

Jiang Cheng jumped when he felt someone clamp a hand down on his shoulder and turned around to come face to face with his brother, Wei Wuxian, and his husband, Lan Wangji. Jiang Cheng should have known they would be here given how Wei Wuxian and Sha Hualing had hit it off the second they met and become fast friends, but he had been so focused on helping Liu Qingge out that he hadn't thought through who he would actually know here.

Wei Wuxian went to throw his arm around Jiang Cheng and tug him into a half hug, but upon realizing Jiang Cheng was more difficult to maneuver than usual, he looked down to see Jiang Cheng and Liu Qingge's hands intertwined.

"What's this? What's happening here? Are you? No! No way of course of my god! What since when? How? Tell me everything!" Wei Wuxian began to rapidly question Jiang Cheng and Liu Qingge while bouncing on the balls of his feet.

Jiang Cheng felt pure annoyance take over, as was typical when interacting with his brother, but he didn't want to blow up in front of everyone so he tried to take a steadying breath while Wei Wuxian continued to question him.

As he calmed himself down and prepared to respond to Wei Wuxian, he felt Liu Qingge pull gently at his hand, rubbing his thumb in a reassuring caress. Liu Qingge greeted Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji before simply stating they had been "together for a while now and only felt comfortable letting others know recently." Before Wei Wuxian could even respond Liu Qingge began to walk off taking Jiang Cheng with him, despite Wei Wuxian still clearly asking questions and being held back by his own husband.

Liu Qingge felt his hackles rise the more they walked into the party after their interaction with Wei Wuxian. The only thing grounding him was Jiang Cheng's hand in his, giving a reassuring squeeze every now and again. Liu Qingge closed his eyes, taking a few deep breaths in and out and tried to center himself.

When he opened them again he found his eyes drawn to Jiang Cheng next to him who was chatting with his nephew. Jin Ling had been partly raised by Jiang Cheng and in turn was often over at their house to spend time with his Uncle.



When they had first moved in together, Liu Qingge regularly had tried to leave the house to run errands or go to the gym whenever Jin Ling came over, so as to give the two of them their privacy and space. However, one night Jiang Cheng had turned to him and bluntly asked, "Do you hate Jin Ling or something?"

Liu Qingge had been deeply confused and shook his head no, to which Jiang Cheng had simply said, "Then stick around next time he's here, he thinks you don't want to be around him. Sure he's technically an adult now, but when it comes to family stuff he's still a kid at heart."

Liu Qingge had been shocked; he explained to Jiang Cheng that he had just been trying to give them family time, but after that conversation Liu Qingge had made sure to stick around and be part of whatever plans Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling had more often.

Jin Ling was laughing at something Jiang Cheng said, then he turned to Liu Qingge and wiggled his eyebrows, "I'm so glad you decided to come together!"

Liu Qingge looked away, ears suddenly heating up, while Jiang Cheng reached down to ruffle his nephew's hair. Liu Qingge let them continue their conversation, looking over the crowd at everyone who had gathered. He smiled to himself as he thought about everyone who had come to celebrate his little sister.

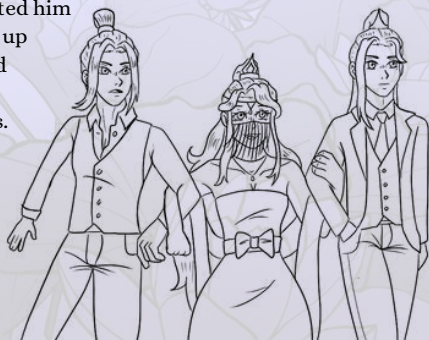
He felt Jiang Cheng lean into his space and whisper in his ear, "It's time for the toasts." Before he could react he felt a soft kiss just above his temple and Jiang Cheng pulled away and started to walk to the large room where people were gathering.

As Liu Qingge began to move into the other room, he felt a familiar hand clamp lightly onto his arm pulling him back. Upon being spun around he found himself face to face with none other than his mother.

"This is the boyfriend you've hid from us for so long? Really?" his mother hissed at him, clearly annoyed with her son.

"Hello, Mother. You know I'm private," Liu Qingge said in a firm but polite manner. While he and his mother had never been the closest he still respected her. However, he wouldn't let her make a scene about him bringing Jiang Cheng to the banquet, especially when she was the one who demanded he bring his, as she said, 'so called boyfriend' during the tea ceremony. "Are you saying you have an issue with my partner?"

She let her hand drop, busying herself by brushing away at invisible dirt on her dress. "That's not what I'm saying at all. You know I've always treated him well," she paused and let out a breath before looking up and making eye contact with her son. "I've wondered for a while now if you two were together. I just want you to be happy and cared for. That's all that matters. Does he treat you well?"



Liu Qingge felt himself soften and reached out to pull his mother into a gentle hug, over her shoulder he found his gaze settling on Jiang Cheng who was trying to shove his brother away from him. He smiled while saying, "He treats me wonderfully."

After being freed from a longer hug than he had signed up for, Liu Qingge made his way back to Jiang Cheng who was quietly fuming even after getting away from his brother. He came up alongside Jiang Cheng who handed him one of the champagne flutes for the toasts. He linked their free hands and leaned up to give Jiang Cheng a gentle kiss on the cheek and rested his head against his shoulder. Jiang Cheng stiffened a little at the action but as the toasts began he started to relax, eventually leaning more into Liu Qingge's space as well.

As the night continued on and the festivities began to become more chaotic, Liu Qingge and Jiang Cheng found themselves feeling tired and a little tipsy. They said their goodbyes for the night to the brides and to Liu Qingge's parents, and stepped outside onto the porch.

They took in the crisp night air and let the sound of the party behind them start to drown out. Jiang Cheng and Liu Qingge both stood there for a while staring into the woods and at the stars together, just enjoying one another's presence.

Liu Qingge turned and stared at the man next to him. The man who had been there for him for years. The man he had lived with for over a year now. His best friend. He leaned up slowly and tipped his face gently towards him. Jiang Cheng leaned in and they brought their lips together, sharing a soft and slow kiss.

When they pulled apart, they stared at each other, both with a small smile on their faces. "You know I love you, right?" Liu Qingge said, his ears starting to turn pink.

Jiang Cheng's grin grew wide, "Of course I know that. I'd have to be a fool to not know." He leaned in and gave Liu Qingge another brief kiss before whispering, "I love you too." They led one another to their cabin to retire for the night, unaware of the eyes that were watching them the entire time.

"Are you fucking with me?" Jin Ling hissed to Liu Mingyan under his breath. Liu Mingyan hid her giggle behind a hand when Jin Ling threw both of his hands up in the air, "They've been dating for what 3 years now? We've known and haven't told anyone this whole time! They're fucking engaged!!! I thought we were going to be free of this secret but now they show up as boyfriends??? Come on!" He let out an angry breath while bringing his hands down his face in frustration.



Liu Mingyan at this point couldn't control her laughter, "Look, I can't say I'm shocked that those two continue to have the weirdest secrets possible. I guess we just get the fun of being the only ones in the know. Wanna make a bet on how long it takes them to tell anyone they're actually engaged?"

Jin Ling let out an angry noise at the idea, "Knowing them they'll be married before they do that!"

Sha Hualing walked out to find her wife and her wife's best friend laughing and raging together. Smiling she happily skipped up and slid her arm into her wife's arm before whispering "What are we talking about?"



ENTERTWINED TAILS

Vic (mvanubis)

Chimeras Au

Summers at Lotus Pier were very hot.

The cicadas screeched loudly enough to deafen everyone in the sect. The disciples' sensitive ears rang with frustration from the constant chanting. The best time of day was after the lectures, when they could dive into the Yummeng lakes. There were never so many volunteers to hunt water ghouls as in the summer.

That afternoon, like many others, Jiang Cheng was training with his disciples. They were a sweaty mess. He and everyone else. The defeated cubs were panting on the wood of the practice square, consumed by the fury of the Sun and their sect leader.

Li Mengzhen attacked from the left, her practice sword in mid-guard. Her steps were swift as the spotted tail swung behind her. Jiang Cheng easily deflected her blow. She was predictable, but also young. Li Mengzhen wasn't frustrated and twisted her body to attack again: The same result.

Even with their exhaustion, no cub dared to take their eyes off their sect leader. The hypnotic dance of limbs made everyone turn their heads in his direction.

This is how Liu Qingge found him.

In the summer, beasts were easily on the loose. Liu Qingge appointed himself the one in charge of clearing Yummeng Jiang's territory of any threats that were too much for the developing disciples of the sect. Consequently, it was common for him to be out hunting all night. After a much-needed nap, it was common to see Liu Qingge chasing his husband around Lotus Pier in the evenings.

Jiang Cheng looked gorgeous like this. Under the blazing Yummeng sun, without his ceremonial robes, surrounded by disciples and fighting. Jiang Cheng was surrounded by life. Jiang Cheng, full of life.

Liu Qingge walked leisurely across the bridge that connected to the plaza. In his primal form, Liu Qingge's paws were as big as a cub's head. Slightly sleepy, the chimera walked along the edge of the plaza, surprising the exhausted disciples.

Jiang Cheng didn't acknowledge his presence until he finished beating Li Mengzhen for the fifth time. The cub knelt on the ground, trembling from the exertion.

"Good, keep it up." Jiang Cheng was sparing with his praise, but Li Mengzhen's face was shining like a star, or maybe it was the sweat that trickled down her skin.

The chimera rose from its place beside the cubs and wrapped his sinuous body around his husband. Jiang Cheng casually stroked his white fur and feathers, absently scratching behind one of his ears. Liu Qingge responded to the greeting with a small chuff that made his whiskers vibrate.

The cubs looked at their master hopefully. They knew that if Master Liu Qingge interrupted the class, they'd most likely finish early. Or they'd have to fight him too, which wasn't a very good option.

Jiang Cheng was benevolent. He blamed the Sun, not the creature that gazed lovingly at him with his crystal eyes. With a gesture, the disciples ran away, probably toward the lakes.

Liu Qingge seized his opportunity and licked the unprotected hand. Jiang Cheng, in a good mood, played with his husband's fangs before letting him go with a gentle squeeze of his muzzle.

Together they walked back to the sect leader's private residence. Jiang Cheng briefly spoke about his last meeting with the elders. Their footsteps crunched on the dry wood, and they could hear the faint murmur of water all around. In the distance, splashing and shouts of enthusiastic disciples were enjoying their early afternoon.

In his chambers, Jiang Cheng opened the doors leading to his private lake.

"You know, Qingge. I need to cool off." Liu Qingge blinked, soft and slow. Without looking back, Jiang Cheng took off his sweaty robes and jumped into the water. The tinkling of his Clarity Bell was muffled by the fabric.

Fur and feathers broke the cold water.

Jiang Cheng swam gracefully, propelled by his legs and wings. Another splash and Liu Qingge was beside him. Cheeky, the white chimera used its paws to spray the other with water. They played around, following each other's tails and leaving soft bites on the spotted fur.

They swam gently side by side, their paws tumbling underwater. Liu Qingge turned his head and gently bumped his snout against his husband's.

A fleeting kiss.

Jiang Cheng blinked, soft and slow.









WORTH MORE THAN GOLD

Shamelesscooper

Au-Canon Divergent

Post-Sunshot Campaign

Pre-Slash

As sunlight pierces through the veil of storm clouds, the rogue cultivator alights on the pier with all the grace and dignity of a lofty immortal coming down from his mountain. His white robes, though drenched by the cursed jiao's storm magic, are just as pristine as they had been the moment they left the tailor's hands. His hair clings to his face in artful waves, and the raindrops studding his eyelashes glitter like diamonds in the slowly growing light. He looks so utterly perfect, Jiang Cheng can hardly believe that this man was the same one that had been flung like a ragdoll through Jiang Cheng's storehouse.

He glances Jiang Cheng up and down, the corner of his mouth tugging up a fraction as he says, "Not bad."

Jiang Cheng stares up at the rogue cultivator, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. "Not... not bad?" Jiang Cheng hears himself say as he takes a single, wooden step towards the rogue cultivator, and then another. All he can think about is the crushing weight of the setback this would have on his sect's finances. With the war finally behind them, Jiang Cheng had put his all into restoring the Lotus Piers to its former glory. Things were finally starting to look up... and now, this?! "Not bad?! What part of all this is *not bad* to you?!"

The rogue cultivator looks taken aback, staring at Jiang Cheng like he's grown another head. Jiang Cheng throws his arm out to the wreckage of his storehouse and says, "Do you know how much this *alone* will cost to repair?"

The rogue cultivator shrugs. "Would've been worse if I hadn't been there to fight it off."

He had a point, but it doesn't change the fact that this is yet another expense Jiang Cheng hadn't expected to incur—and with so little time before Jin Guangshan's stupid autumn hunt, there was no way they were going to be able to afford the fixes before monsoon season hits.

Jiang Cheng does his best to suck in a calming breath. It only marginally helps, but at least he can speak civilly, albeit through gritted teeth. "That does not change the fact that you destroyed my storehouse. Please take responsibility, Gongzi."

The rogue cultivator crosses his arms over his chest and tilts his head *just so* to glance at the gigantic fuck-off hole in Jiang Cheng's storehouse. "I've no skill in carpentry," he says dismissively. "You'd be better off hiring someone."

With a snarl of a smile, Jiang Cheng holds out his hand. "So you will be footing the bill, yes?"

The rogue cultivator raises an eyebrow at Jiang Cheng. They stand there at an impasse for a long moment, before finally, the rogue cultivator shrugs and says, "I was going to harvest the jiao for parts for my shidi, but you did deal the killing blow. You can take what you like and sell it."

Growling, Jiang Cheng grabs the cultivator by the lapel and drags him in. "Don't you dare try to weasel your way out of this. You will be paying for the repairs in full, with cash. No exceptions."

The rogue cultivator wraps his hand around Jiang Cheng's bracer, his glare turning deadly cold. "Unhand me," he says, his tone promising violence.

Zidian sparks threateningly at Jiang Cheng's side. "Not until you've fixed what you've done."

The rogue cultivator's grip tightens until Jiang Cheng can feel his bones scraping together, but Jiang Cheng refuses to let go. Finally, the rogue cultivator says, "If money's such a big issue, I can go back to my sect and—"

The vein in Jiang Cheng's temple pulses ominously. "Do you think I was born yesterday? There's no way I'm letting you out of my sight!" Jiang Cheng growls.

The rogue(?) cultivator scowls and says, "If you want money, let go of me. I can give you what I have now and come back with the rest."

Jiang Cheng glares at the cultivator for a long moment, before finally letting his hands drop. With a huffy flick of his wrists, the cultivator straightens out his clothes and pulls out his qiankun pouch. Rifles through it a bit. A bit more.

Frowns.

Starts pulling things out—expensive spiritual tools and expertly crafted weapons. Rare materials from demonic beasts. A small collection of exquisite folding fans. A scholar's bounty of books and scrolls.

A veritable fortune in its own right... just not money.

With a long sigh, Jiang Cheng pinches the bridge of his nose and says, "Let me guess: you lost your wallet."

The cultivator glances up at Jiang Cheng and takes that as his cue to start packing up his treasure trove again. He seems to be exceptionally blasé about not having his wallet on him. "I don't usually need money." After a pause, he tries again, "If you'd let me go back to my sect—"

"Like I said—I'm not letting you out of my sight until you've dealt with this mess," Jiang Cheng snaps. "Who are you? What sect are you from? I've never seen you at any of the cultivation conferences."

"Liu Qingge, lord of Bai Zhan Peak. I come from the Cang Qiong Mountain Sect," he says. "We don't interfere with this area much, so you wouldn't have seen me."

Jiang Cheng blinks. The man's face is too straight, too earnest, to be joking and yet, what else could be doing but that? Cang Qiong Mountain Sect isn't real; like most "immortal" cultivation sects, it's just a stupid fictional sect made up by some stupid daydreaming mortal, popularized because a stupid pornographic novel got a ballad.

A laugh bubbles up from a dark, bitter place as Jiang Cheng grabs "Liu Qingge's" lapel again.

"Very funny. Are you going to tell me you're *also* a disciple of Baoshan Sanren, too? No, no, wait—let me guess, you're an immortal from the days of Xianle," he sneers, looming so close to the cultivator their noses nearly touch. "This is your only warning—lie to my face again, and you'd better be prepared to face the consequences." At his side, he whips out Zidian, the crack of its lightning so close their robes billow out in an ozone-scented gust.

Liu Qingge doesn't balk at the threat—he just stares Jiang Cheng down, his brow furrowing in almost believable confusion. "...neither Baoshan Sanren nor Xianle exist," he says, slowly, like Jiang Cheng is stupid.

They stare at each other for long enough that Jiang Cheng doesn't think this guy will back down. Though his temper urges him to *do* something, his practical side wins out. With a sigh, Jiang Cheng shoves Liu Qingge away and says, "Next time, don't try to bullshit me, asshole." Gesturing at the jiao, Jiang Cheng says, "If you can't pay for the damages, you're going to have to fix them yourself... starting with *that*."

Liu Qingge blinks and nods, his entire body seeming to lighten up at the prospect of.... waste removal.

While Liu Qingge gets to work on butchering the jiao, Jiang Cheng rounds up his disciples to check on the village and provide aid. Once he's done, he situates himself under a nearby pavilion and has one of the servants bring him his paperwork. In all honesty, he'd expected the process of butchering a divine beast would be... more gruesome, but Liu Qingge is surprisingly neat. It is... admittedly fascinating to watch.

Unfortunately, between his account books and the mountain of correspondence waiting for him, Jiang Cheng has simply too much to finish to keep staring.

It feels like altogether too soon when A-Jie comes clinking over with a tray of bowls and utensils. "A-Cheng," she says, her voice deceptively gentle, "you haven't rested a moment since you woke up. Come have lunch, please?"

Jiang Cheng sighs and stares up at his sister. Lunch is the last thing on his mind, but he knows she won't take no for an answer. With an exasperated smile, A-Jie says, "The lunch bell rang out ages ago. The accounts can wait until you've had a break." And then, with a more polite smile, she glances up at Liu Qingge and says, "You're free to join us, if you like. The baths are not that far away, and I can keep heating talismans on your meal to keep it warm, Gongzi."

"Liu Qingge," the man gruffs. And then, after a moment, he asks, "You're feeding me?"

Jiang Cheng and Jiang Yanli stare at Liu Qingge like he's grown another head.

"Yes...?" Jiang Cheng says, like he's stupid, at the same moment Jiang Yanli heatedly cries, "Of course we are!"

"What do you think we are, heathens?" Jiang Cheng grumbles, getting to his feet.

"You're forcing me into indentured servitude," Liu Qingge points out. And then, as if to be diplomatic, he adds, "You'd be well within your rights not to."

Jiang Cheng's face heats with embarrassment as he protests, "Y-you led a monster to my sect territory and destroyed my storehouse! It's only right that you fix what you broke! But if you're doing me a service, I won't let you go hungry. We may still be experiencing the lingering effects of war, but we haven't fallen so low as to be unable to feed our people."

Liu Qingge stares at him ponderingly, before nodding. "Thank you." And then, to Jiang Yanli, he asks, "Where might I find the baths?"

After lunch, Liu Qingge asks to be allowed to write to his sect before he returns to his work. Jiang Cheng allows this, but he doggedly keeps watch over the man until he's done. Afterwards, Jiang Cheng drags Liu Qingge back to the storehouse and pulls out the qiankun pouch holding his carpentry tools.

"I know nothing about carpentry," Liu Qingge reminds him, a hint of unsureness in his voice as he glances at the pouch, and then back at Jiang Cheng.

"It's not that hard to grasp," Jiang Cheng grumbles, before pulling the storehouse's schematics out from his robes. "Here's the schematics. This is the only copy, for now, so don't lose it. I'll be at the pavilion keeping an eye on you, so don't fuck up."

Liu Qingge stares blankly down at the carefully-folded paper in his hands and grimaces.

"...the fuck is this?" Jiang Cheng asks, staring at the crooked pile of wood. He'd come by just after finishing some correspondence with Baling Ouyang, and honestly... he's a little glad he got here before much else could be done.

Liu Qingge, cheeks red and shoulders hunched, mumbles, "I don't know. That's what it looks like in the picture." He points at... well, a random place in the building schematics and glances up at Jiang Cheng for approval.

Jiang Cheng stares down at it, and then sighs, rubbing his temples. It very much does *not* look like "the picture," but that's the least of Jiang Cheng's worries. "That's not even the part that's broken," he says, because that's the most diplomatic thing he can say at the moment.

"Alright, come on," Jiang Cheng sighs. "I'll show you how to *properly* do things."

At that, Liu Qingge perks up. As Jiang Cheng starts explaining the schematics, he finds Liu Qingge to be a surprisingly diligent learner. He hangs onto Jiang Cheng's every word and pays close attention when Jiang Cheng demonstrates how to use various tools. They practice on sections of the lumber Liu Qingge had been using until Jiang Cheng finally deems him competent to work independently. Unfortunately, though, that didn't leave much time before a disciple came to fetch them for dinner.

As they start putting their tools away, Liu Qingge glances over at Jiang Cheng, and though he doesn't quite smile, there's an easy curve to his eyes as he says, "You're good at this."

Jiang Cheng pauses, caught by Liu Qingge's expression. He stumbles on his answer just a moment too long to be natural, before he manages, "A-at what?"

"Teaching people," Liu Qingge says simply.

Jiang Cheng snorts. "Tell that to my disciples. They think I'm a demon."

Liu Qingge huffs a laugh and shakes his head. "You need discipline to learn. If they balk at a little constructive criticism, then they don't deserve to be here. I doubt I'd find any of them running away in the middle of the night."

Jiang Cheng stares, wide-eyed, at Liu Qingge. "And that... happens a lot in your... sect?" he asks, trying not to laugh. What in the world did this man think happened in cultivational sects? Sure, some of them were tough on their students, but at the end of the day, most sects were businesses. What kind of business drove away its own people?

Liu Qingge shrugs, utterly nonplussed. "Bai Zhan is different from the other peaks. If you can't make it, you either leave or you die. Most of them are smart enough to leave before it gets to that point, though."

What is Jiang Cheng supposed to say in response to that?!

"...sounds rough," Jiang Cheng manages, because if he calls Liu Qingge out on his obvious lie, they're just going to go in circles again.

"It has to be," Liu Qingge says. "Better than letting the weak ones get killed in action."

"...right," Jiang Cheng manages.

They have a scant couple of hours to keep working on their respective duties after dinner, but when the mosquitoes start coming out, Jiang Cheng calls it quits. Liu Qingge is surprisingly docile as he carefully puts away his materials, and when Jiang Cheng inspects his work in the dusk-dim light, he finds it more or less acceptable.

Upon receiving Jiang Cheng's approval, Liu Qingge nods, politely thanks him, and starts to walk off.

"Where are you going?" Jiang Cheng asks, doggedly following at Liu Qingge's heels.

Liu Qingge blinks, as if surprised Jiang Cheng would follow. "I'm finding a place to sleep."

"Where?" Jiang Cheng demands. "Out in the open?"

"Yes," Liu Qingge says, wholly serious.

"No! Absolutely not!" Jiang Cheng cries out, horrified. "Do you really think I'm letting you out of my sight before I'm done with you? Come on. I'll show you where you'll be sleeping."

Liu Qingge stares at Jiang Cheng and then sighs, following after. As Jiang Cheng ushers Liu Qingge into a guest room within eyesight of Jiang Cheng's own rooms, Liu Qingge glances around with bewildered curiosity. "I thought you'd have put me in a cell. Not proper guest quarters."

With a sigh, Jiang Cheng asks, "Would a cell even hold you?"

"No," Liu Qingge says, the stupid smug ass.

"B-Besides," Jiang Cheng says, "we have other ways to keep an eye on you. If you leave your quarters without permission, I'll know. So don't even try."

Liu Qingge shrugs and says, "Fine."

Jiang Cheng decides to leave it at that. "I'll have a disciple fetch you for breakfast. Good night, Liu Qingge."

Jiang Cheng jolts awake at the crack of dawn—not from a nightmare, for once, but from several talisman alarms clanging in his head. Throwing on the first outer robe he sees, Jiang Cheng rushes out of his rooms... only to find Liu Qingge walking leisurely around in the hallways like he isn't doing the one thing Jiang Cheng asked him not to do.

Preposterously, Liu Qingge seems to brighten at his approach and asks, "Where are your training grounds?"

"First you escape, and now you want to make use of my facilities? Who do you think you are?!" Jiang Cheng snaps, his mood admittedly rather irritable given his, ah, rude awakening.

Liu Qingge shrugs. "I'm not going to neglect my training just because I've got other responsibilities. You're free to try and stop me if you'd like; I wouldn't mind a good spar."

Jiang Cheng stares at him and almost wants to tear his hair out, because he's known this man for a handful of hours and he already knows that he's 100% serious. For a second, he's tempted to try and wrestle the man back into his rooms so they can both sleep an hour longer, but he knows it's a lost cause.

With a sigh, Jiang Cheng drags a hand down his face and says, "Just... let me wake up a little. I didn't even have time to brush my teeth."

Liu Qingge gives him a strange look, as if he was the one being ridiculous here. "If I wanted to escape, I would've done so yesterday," he says. "I had many chances."

"Right. Yes. Got it," Jiang Cheng groans. "The training grounds are that way. Don't harass any of my disciples. I'll come and spar with you when I'm done."

At that, Liu Qingge perks up in some quiet, intangible way, and he happily turns and heads in the direction Jiang Cheng pointed out.

It is... unexpectedly charming. In a Liu Qingge sort of way.

They spar. It is... surprisingly fun.

Admittedly, when they had faced down the jiao, Jiang Cheng had felt a long-forgotten thrill—the same one he'd felt often, back when things were easier, back when he stood proudly alongside Wei Wuxian.

It's been a long time since he'd felt that—it's been a long time since Wei Wuxian even deigned to wear Suibian on his belt, let alone pull it out for a spar.

Jiang Cheng had forgotten how much he missed this.

As the days pass, Jiang Cheng gets used to Liu Qingge's presence on the Piers. He's a quiet man, but it doesn't take long before Jiang Cheng finds a rhythm to Liu Qingge's little idiosyncrasies. Though he doesn't often have the time to share more than a morning spar and his meals, he finds that Liu Qingge is practical to a fault, so straightforward he occasionally comes off as obtuse, and unintentionally hilarious.

Jiang Cheng finds himself making excuses to come out and check in on Liu Qingge's work, and sometimes, they just... sit around and talk.

When Liu Qingge finishes the storehouse, he goes out with the disciples to help around the villages without even needing to be asked, and by the end of the week, Jiang Cheng almost wants to ask him to stay. He wouldn't have to keep pretending he's part of some stupid, made-up cultivational sect; he could just... be part of theirs.

Only—a little after the two-week mark, two youths make their way to Jiang Cheng's doorstep, requesting Liu Qingge's return. One of them, a mousy girl in practical, celadon-colored robes, offers Jiang Cheng a frankly obscene amount of silver and a box of qi-refining pills—"as a token of our sect's esteem, and to sustain positive relations between our sects."



There's no way two teenagers would have such rare cultivational aids, let alone that much money, so what is Jiang Cheng supposed to do but believe that they're legitimately part of Cang Qiong Mountain Sect?

Cang Qiong Mountain Sect *exists*.

Go figure.

The moment Liu Qingge is fetched, the other teenager—a rough-and-tumble stripling of a young man—all but throws himself at his shizun, halfway to tears... only for Liu Qingge to deftly sidestep him and knock him to the ground. They spend a good few minutes wrestling on the ground, and Liu Qingge is in the best mood Jiang Cheng's ever seen him in outside of their spars.

It feels like much too soon before Liu Qingge packs up his things and is ready to be rid of Yunmeng Jiang and Jiang Cheng altogether, and Jiang Cheng can't stop the bitter disappointment welling up in his belly. It's so childish to feel this way, and yet...

Jiang Cheng wishes he could stay. Wishes he would *choose* to stay.

As he walks them all to the gate, Liu Qingge turns back to Jiang Cheng with a soft grin on his face. "I'll miss sparring with you. No one on the peaks ever comes at me as seriously as you do."

Jiang Cheng finds himself laughing. "Is fighting the only thing on your mind?"

Liu Qingge shrugs and nods. Clapping Jiang Cheng's shoulder, he says, "It was fun while it lasted."

Jiang Cheng should say something—Liu Qingge wouldn't blink twice at Jiang Cheng coming at him with awkward overtures of friendship... but there's nothing he can say that would make him *stay*.

It's only when Liu Qingge hops on his sword that Jiang Cheng manages to find his words. He nearly pulls Liu Qingge clean off his sword when he grabs hold of Liu Qingge's robes, but he just has to make sure Liu Qingge knows—"Next time... come visit as a friend, alright?"

Liu Qingge raised his eyebrows, amusement tugging at his lips as he asks, "Not as an indentured servant?"

Jiang Cheng's cheeks heat, his grip still tight on Liu Qingge's robes as he says, "Well—just don't forget your damned wallet next time."

Liu Qingge huffs a laugh. His joy is beautiful. "Sure."

And then, he's off.



@cheira





nori

ONE STEP, TWO

Tachibanaswife, with spot art by SleepySsnail

Arranged Marriage

First Meeting

Au-No Powers

It was the first son of a marital sect. That's all that Liu Qingge was told when his parents had 'found' a spouse for him. He didn't think, as the second son of the Liu family, that he'd be married off for any reason. Even political, as his parents said now. And yet he was still being dressed in expensive silk, from head to toe, like a bride on her wedding day. Liu Qingge hadn't ever considered marriage. It had never crossed his mind.

"You must be Jiang Cheng."

"Be polite," Liu Qingge's mom told him; if they were not in front of Jiang Cheng's parents, she might've hit him for being impolite. Liu Qingge bowed and introduced himself as he was supposed to. Jiang Cheng seemed rather unsettled by the entire situation and it was clear that he was trying to hide the grimace from his face. Liu Qingge looked down at himself. There was no good reason for him not to approve of the marriage, or of Liu Qingge. Liu Qingge was not known to be the wisest of his siblings, but even he knew of his beauty.

"So," Jiang Cheng said when they were finally freed from their parents. "I guess you were dragged into this too."

Liu Qingge grunted in agreement. "It is my duty," he said. "I do not neglect my duty." Even if he'd prefer his duty to be something along the lines of serving in his father's army like his elder and younger brothers. They were walking along the edge of a pond; smooth, grey stone lined the path, steady and strong underneath his feet. His robes were a flight of grey as well, though they shone with the sun and the bits of silver embroidery flickered when the light touched them.

"Do you not wish you had another duty?" Jiang Cheng asked. "Something more noble than marrying another man?"

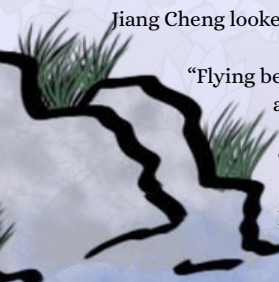
"I do as my family bids," Liu Qingge replied. "While I would rather hunt monsters along the eastern border," and he really would rather be doing so, "I cannot deny the responsibilities placed upon me by my parents."

Jiang Cheng looked him over. "What do you like hunting best?" he asked.

"Flying beasts," Liu Qingge said. "I've heard there are demons up north that take the appearance of dragons."

"Wouldn't you be afraid of killing a real dragon?" Jiang Cheng asked.

Liu Qingge looked at him, his brows pinching together. "No human can defeat a dragon," he pointed out as if it were obvious. To him it was, anyway. "They are creatures bound to the heavens. If I can kill it, it cannot be a dragon." The gods wouldn't allow such foolery. There were legends, of course, about humans killing dragons, but they were humans chosen by divine hands.



"You think you couldn't kill a dragon?"

"No," Liu Qingge replied. "I would like to fight one, however."

"If you can't kill it, it'll kill you," Jiang Cheng pointed out. "You shouldn't go into a fight if the result is death either way."

"It would be a worthy death," Liu Qingge said. "However, I do not intend to approach the dragon as a man would a wolf. I would approach it as a man going to a man for a spar."

Jiang Cheng snorted. "It'd eat you before you had time to speak."

"Then, again, it would be a worthy death," Liu Qingge repeated. Dying via dragon was at the very least, noble. He eyed the koi that swam in his family's pond. They were a gift from the Shang Patriarch—not normal koi by any means, with their long, serpentine bodies and mouths full of razor sharp teeth. They were pretty. And rare. Total cowards, however. They scared easy and didn't bite. His little sister could handfeed them, even. Liu Qingge turned his attention back to Jiang Cheng.

"Why are they marrying you off?" Jiang Cheng asked. "It makes sense that our parents are trying to create a connection between our families. But why you? You've a sister that's of age."

"I didn't ask," Liu Qingge replied. He didn't feel the need to ask. "I would imagine it's because she's been betrothed since birth." Jiang Cheng grumbled something under his breath. Liu Qingge ignored him. "There are more water demons and monsters near your territory."

Jiang Cheng nodded. "Yeah. There is—you're not curious about why a top martial family would engage their heir to a man?"

"No," Liu Qingge replied. "Why?"

"Never mind."

"Alright." Liu Qingge crouched down beside the pond and tossed a rock into the water. The lotus barely shifted as water rippled outward from where the rock had landed. "I imagine it would be for a good reason."

Jiang Cheng pursed his lips. "Do you think?" he asked sarcastically.

"Yes," Liu Qingge replied. Jiang Cheng was oddly aggressive. He stood. "Otherwise you'd be marrying a woman." He cocked his head to the side and watched golden scales dance between the lotus. They were blushed pink and were in full bloom.

"I...I've been blacklisted," Jiang Cheng grumbled. "No noble's daughter will marry me—they don't fit my standards anyway." He crossed his arms over his chest and was blushing. Whether it was in embarrassment or anger, Liu Qingge didn't dare guess.

"I wasn't," Liu Qingge replied.



"I know you weren't," Jiang Cheng snapped.

Liu Qingge understood why no woman wanted him. "Either way, we're to be married."

"Yes."

It was rare, Liu Qingge losing his footing. But the soft earth at the edge of the pond had him tripping over his own feet and spilling backwards; without hesitation, Jiang Cheng reached a hand out to grab the front of his robes. What Jiang Cheng didn't expect was how heavy Liu Qingge was. Jiang Cheng was no small man, but Liu Qingge had a good foot and a half on him and he was shamelessly muscled. Jiang Cheng went down with him. Water splashed, servants gasped, and Liu Qingge's head dipped under the water briefly before he found his footing at the bottom of the pool and he pushed his way back to the surface.

Jiang Cheng was on his knees at the bank of the pond; mud was staining the knees of his pants and it had splattered up onto his chest. There would be no saving his clothes. Liu Qingge looked at his own robes, which also would be unsalvageable. All the servants' hard work seemed to be nothing. He could feel the mud leeching into his boots, his pants, ruining everything it touched.

"Are you okay?" Jiang Cheng demanded.

Liu Qingge looked at him and raised his sleeves. "I'm wet," he said. Of course he was okay. It was just water.

"I know you're wet," Jiang Cheng snapped. He offered his hand. "Get out of the water."

Liu Qingge took the hand even though he could've walked out on his own accord. Servants attacked him as soon as he was on dry land and he could see his mother trying to hold back her curses. His father often called her a 'spitfire', though Liu Qingge thought his mother was simply not made for the life of a noble at her heart. She was like him. She wanted to fight. But like him, she was forced to marry instead.

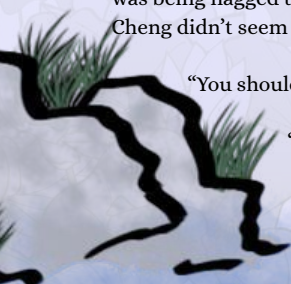
"Thank you," he told Jiang Cheng, who was clucking over him just like the servants, saying something about paying for the robes even though he wasn't responsible for the slip. And he was being nagged too, by his own mother; her tongue was sharp but with a wisdom that Jiang Cheng didn't seem to possess.

"You shouldn't have been standing that close to the bank," Jiang Cheng told him.

"It's fine," Liu Qingge replied. "They're clothes." Expensive clothes, but he'd ruined clothes more expensive than the ones he was wearing. "Are you okay?"

Jiang Cheng tsk'ed at him. "I'm fine. You're the one that fell in. You're going to catch a cold if you stay out here too long like this."

"No I won't." Liu Qingge denied the idea immediately, steadfastly. "I will not get sick."



"And how would you know?" Jiang Cheng demanded. "Of course this had to happen."

Liu Qingge didn't see what the big deal was. It really was just water. And some mud. Nobody died. He looked at the hand that was still on his arm, holding him steady. He looked at Jiang Cheng, caught his eye, then looked at the hand. It was snatched back immediately and Liu Qingge somewhat missed the warmth that had seeped into the wet fabric.

"We'll have to finish our meeting another day," Jiang Cheng said. "I can already hear Wei Wuxian..." he shook his head. "We best return to our parents."

"They are coming to us," Liu Qingge pointed out. "I don't think we need to return anywhere."

Jiang Cheng looked up at the sky, which was reflecting the pale white of clouds that threatened rain. "Yes," he said exasperatedly. "Yes. We'll stay right here."







LIUCHENG STICKERS



LiuCheng Scrunchies

by biancaboop



Recommended yarn

Drops Paris

Content: 100% Cotton

Yarn weight: Aran/Worsted

1 skein each of Drops Paris in the colorways Petrol 48, Black 15, White 16, Dark Purple 08, and Mauve 60 is enough to make all 4 scrunchies

Knitting Needles/Crochet hooks

mm/US 9 double pointed or circular needles

US H hook

Notions

1 elastic hair tie for each scrunchie, stitch marker, tapestry needle, waste yarn for crochet cast-on (optional), spare circular needle to hold stitches for grafting

Techniques

Long tail cast on:

<https://www.purlsoho.com/create/long-tail-cast-on/>

Crochet/Provisional cast on:

<https://www.purlsoho.com/create/provisional-cast-on/>

Horizontal invisible seam:

<https://www.interweave.com/article/knitting/mattress-stitch-tutorial-horizontal-seams/>

Grafting/Kitchener stitch:

<https://www.purlsoho.com/create/kitchener-stitch-video/>



Sword Scrunchie (knit)

Use Petrol 48, Black 15, and White 15.

Starting with Petrol 48, cast on 60 sts with US 9 double pointed or circular knitting needles. Recommended cast on is a crochet/provisional cast on, but feel free to use your preferred cast on method. Join in the round and place a stitch marker to mark the beginning of the round.

Knit chart A 10 times to the end of the round. The cast on row counts as row 1. Knit all rows of the chart twice (34 rows). If you did not use a crochet cast on, bind off all stitches.

Slip the elastic hair tie over the knit tube with the wrong side facing the elastic. Pull both edges of the knit tube together, so the hair tie is encased in the tube. If the edges have already been bound off, join the edges with a horizontal invisible seam. If you used a provisional cast on, place the cast on stitches on a spare circular needle and graft the edges together. Sew in the ends.

Lightning Scrunchie (knit)

Use Black 15 and Mauve 60

Starting with Black 15, cast on 60 sts with US 9 double pointed or circular knitting needles. Recommended cast on is a crochet/provisional cast on, but feel free to use your preferred cast on method. Join in the round and place a stitch marker at the beginning of the round.

Knit chart B 4 times to the end of the round. The cast on row counts as row 1. Knit all rows of the entire chart twice (30 rows). If you did not use a crochet cast on, bind off all stitches.

Slip the elastic hair tie over the knit tube with the wrong side facing the elastic. Pull both edges of the knit tube together, so the hair tie is encased in the tube. If the edges have already been bound off, join the edges with a horizontal invisible seam. If you used a provisional cast on, place the cast on stitches on a spare circular needle and graft the edges together. Sew in the ends.

Willow Leaf Scrunchie (knit)

Use White16

Cast on 60 using crochet cast on method and join in the round. Knit 7 rows. On the next row, place the live cast on stitches on a separate needle. Slip the elastic hair tie over the knit tube with the wrong side facing the elastic, so it sits between the two edges of live stitches. Knit together one stitch from the front and back needles, so the hair tie is inside the tube. You should now have 60 stitches on your needles. Work chart C 6 times around. Bind off all stitches and sew in the ends.

Lotus Scrunchie (crochet)

Use Dark Purple 08



Round 1: with the crochet hook H, crochet 35 (or a multiple of 5 that fits) single crochet (US)/double crochet (UK) stitches around a hair tie. Join to the beginning of the round with a slip stitch.

Follow chart D. Round 1 is in blue, round 2 is in purple, and round 3 is in red. Cut yarn and slip through the last stitch to anchor it. Sew in the ends. Written instructions for each row below:

Round 2: chain 1, single crochet (US)/double crochet (UK) 3, **chain 3, single crochet (US)/double crochet (UK) 5. Repeat from ** until 2 stitches left in row, single crochet (US)/double crochet (UK) 2. Join to the beginning of the round with a slip stitch.

Round 3: chain 1, ** skip 1 stitch and single crochet (US)/double crochet (UK) 1 in the next stitch, crochet the following stitches in the chain 3 space: 1 half double crochet (US)/half treble crochet (UK), 1 double crochet (US)/treble crochet (UK), 1 treble crochet (US)/double treble crochet (UK), chain 1, 1 treble crochet (US)/double treble crochet (UK), 1 double crochet (US)/treble crochet (UK), 1 half double crochet (US)/half treble crochet (UK). Skip 1 stitch and single crochet (US)/double crochet (UK) in the next stitch. Repeat from ** to the end of the row. Join to the beginning of the round with a slip stitch.

Row 4: chain 1, ** single crochet (US)/double crochet (UK) in the next 3 stitches. In the chain 1 space: 2 half double crochet (US)/half treble crochet (UK), 1 double crochet (US)/treble crochet (UK), 2 half double crochet (US)/half treble crochet (UK). Single crochet (US)/double crochet (UK) in the next 3 stitches. Skip 2 stitches. Repeat from ** until the end of the row. Join to the beginning of the round with a slip stitch.

Cut the strand, make a slip knot, and weave in the end.

ScrunchieCharts

Chart A

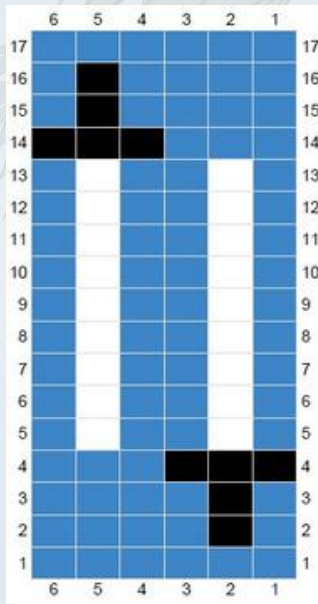
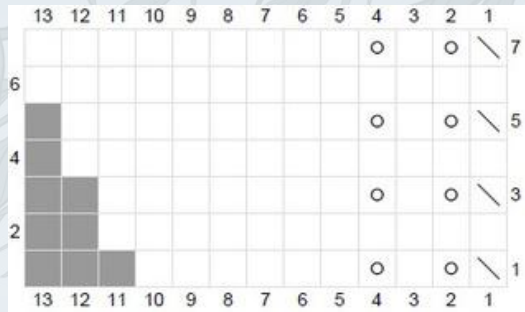


Chart C



- ☐ Knit
- Slip 2 stitches knitwise, then knit the slipped stitches through the back loop (left leaning decrease)
- Yarnover
- No stitch

Chart B

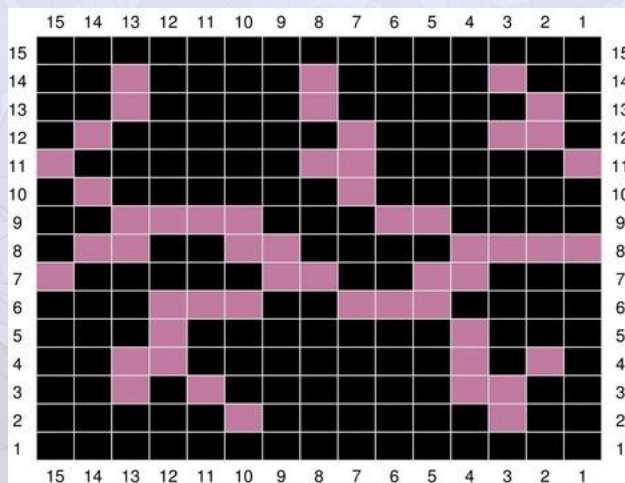
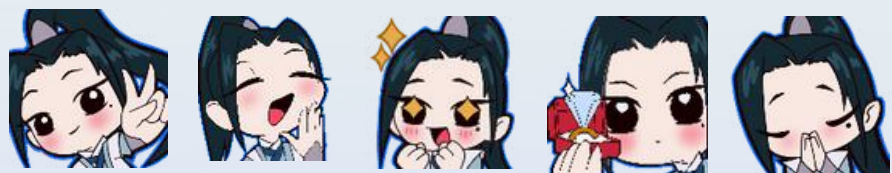


Chart D





MAN



https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15BXtGfrvm_As0R40W7iNWID_JwiIWzRm?usp=sharing



NSFW

IUCHENG ZINE





STORM AND SAVIOR

Dionte, with spot art by Neuvoid

Mythweaving Au

Minor Character Death

Anal Sex

Slightly Dubious Consent

Noncon (not main ship)

Ebb and flow.

Life and death.

Yin and yang.

Nothing was whole on its own and this concept started– as all did– with the gods.

Yue Qingyuan's antithesis was Shen Qingqiu.

But for all they were opposites, they understood their completion was in each other. What started with one, ended with the other, and thus the world was created in turns.

Not all who came from them appreciated it– in fact, there were many who sought to surpass the primordials. Those bold beings pulled Shen Qingqiu from his place, causing the sky to darken in fury.

No fury was as brilliant as Yue Qingyuan's.

He fought against those who pulled his other half from the sky, and it was from this battle that Liu Qingge was born– the god of war and brotherhood.

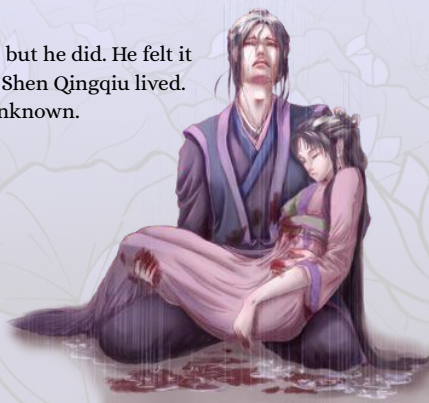
He was a splintered piece of Yue Qingyuan– one desperate to cut down these things, these demons, to save Shen Qingqiu. The gods won– striking the rebels down to the mortal world and lower– but in the aftermath, Yue Qingyuan splintered again. Mu Qingfang was born of the desire to save Shen Qingqiu, but even the newborn god of medicine and healing was unable to restore what had been damaged.

Shen Qingqiu vanished from Yue Qingyuan's arms, and his name that only Yue Qingyuan knew was struck from the world itself. Though Yue Qingyuan was lauded as the lord of all gods, he only suffered on his throne. It became known that for his day, an unknown presence brought night. For his life, someone still gave death. And Yue Qingyuan became possessed trying to discover if that source was Shen Qingqiu.

Yue Qingyuan shattered himself until all the gods he made outshone him, until– in the dead of night– he slipped away.

He wasn't dead– Liu Qingge did not know how he knew this, but he did. He felt it with the same certainty Yue Qingyuan had in declaring that Shen Qingqiu lived. He felt that somehow, the two of them had reunited in the unknown.

The mortal and godly realms continued to grow and change.



Mortals ascended to godhood, sprites and spirits formed, and demigods and demons vied for more. A rainbow bridge connected the mortal world to the peaks of the gods– but few crossed it. Most gods stayed upon the peaks, looking upon the mortals from above.

Liu Qingge preferred staying near the mortals to feel close to his domains. And as he wandered the world, he heard tales from his sister. Gods and mortals– she knew stories of them all.

Liu Qingge's first encounter with the one he considered his other half started with the story of the sun.

Wen Ruohan was a celestial god– one who had enough light to fill the sky. He enjoyed descending among the mortals and reveling in their attentions. He claimed his followers would gain divinity in their bloodline and had greater chances of joining him as gods– and he wasn't wrong. There were followers and descendants who joined him in the heavens, and his sect grew with the news.

But Wen Ruohan wanted more.

It was at this time that Liu Qingge took action. The scream of a soon to be broken brotherhood called him, and Liu Qingge flew to it. He'd learned his immediate intervention could turn the tides– to save a bond that would otherwise be severed by sacrifice or death.

So he drew his sword, rushing to intercept that noble sacrifice and cutting through gods and followers alike to reach... a boy.

They were surrounded by red blood and golden ichor. As his breathing calmed from the battle, Liu Qingge saw the boy's resemblance to the bodies he sat between.

“Jiang Cheng!”

A yell rang out, and the boy– Jiang Cheng– turned to look at the newcomer.

“Did you come back for them? You shouldn't have– that was too dangerous!”

Liu Qingge felt the tie between them. So this was what he'd saved.

The other boy looked at them, moving to hide Jiang Cheng behind himself. “Who are you?!”

“Stop it, Wei Wuxian. He– he saved me.”

This... Wei Wuxian saw the slain gods and swallowed. “But... who is he?”

Liu Qingge dispersed his sword. “Mortals call me the God of War and Brotherhood.”



Their eyes widened, and they bowed to give their thanks to him. The one called Wei Wuxian dragged Jiang Cheng away as Liu Qingge watched, unable to tear his eyes from Jiang Cheng until he was hidden from sight.

Liu Qingge glanced at the bodies. Yu Ziyuan had been a cloud sprite, favored to ascend. Perhaps she had, given the gold that spilled from her chest. Jiang Fengmian was the god of rivers.

Jiang Cheng shared a family name with the appearance of cloud sprite– not to mention what the other boy said– was he their son?

For the first time, Liu Qingge found himself writing to his sister for her knowledge on the matter. She seemed thrilled at his interest in... well, anyone.

Liu Mingyan told him Yu Ziyuan never made it to the peaks of the gods– she had been dragged out of her ascendancy into Jiang Fengmian’s bed. She bore him two children and stayed near his rivers– near Lotus Pier, where her children grew among the humans.

When Wen Ruohan approached, she covered the sky. The mortals were protected under her shade, and in the heat they found relief in Jiang Fengmian’s waters.

The worshipers and offspring of Wen Ruohan grew angry at the couple’s obstruction of their takeover. He and his sect descended upon them and Lotus Pier in attack, with no mercy planned for the civilians and children. This was what Liu Qingge had seen the results of.

Liu Qingge didn’t visit Jiang Cheng, but he did check on him– in his own way. He could pinpoint Jiang Cheng’s bond with Wei Wuxian as it frayed.

Liu Mingyan took it upon herself to tell him as Wei Wuxian tied one of the lives Liu Qingge had taken to the lone survivor of what had come to be known as the Sunshot Campaign. When she ascended to become the new goddess of the sun, her deceased brother had risen with her as the ever-phasing moon.

Such a thing had never been heard of– never thought of. Whatever it was Wei Wuxian had done, it wasn’t natural. And he’d made people upset.

A storm began to brew, and Liu Qingge followed it.

Loud cries shrieked through the air and splashes of water hit his face as it began to rain.

The brotherly bond he once saved had shattered.

Liu Qingge never had a favorite before– what kind of person had the favor of a war god? But here he was, rushing to the same boy– an adult now– and hoping he wasn’t too late.

Jiang Cheng sat on the ground, facing the sky as he wailed.



A body sat cold in his arms.

No one else was in the clearing– they had either run, or been thrown away by the howling wind.

Liu Qingge had seen the birth of some gods before, but none were quite like this.

Jiang Cheng lifted a hand and a sword shimmered to existence in it. Another sign of his increasing divinity. But Jiang Cheng only looked at the sword with empty eyes, and slowly brought it to his own neck.

Liu Qingge jumped forward with a shout, summoning Cheng Luan to strike Jiang Cheng's weapon away. "What are you doing?!"

Through gritted teeth, Jiang Cheng replied, "I don't want to live."

Finally, Liu Qingge put together who the body in Jiang Cheng's lap must be– Jiang Yanli.

He swallowed. "Nothing good will come of taking your life here. To accomplish anything, you have to live–"

"Shut up!" Jiang Cheng yelled, and a blast of wind burst from him. "You don't understand– until now, everything I've done, all I was– it's all meaningless."

Liu Qingge weathered the blow.

"Wei Wuxian, my sister– even my parents. They're all gone."

Water was in his voice, and Liu Qingge did understand– or at least he understood part of it. "Do you know why I showed up back then? Why I slaughtered the Wen Sect who surrounded you?"

Jiang Cheng shook his head.

"I felt your bond with the one called Wei Wuxian. I felt you move to protect him at the cost of your own life. So I came to protect you."

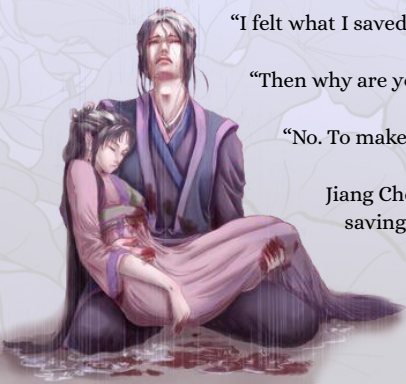
Jiang Cheng swallowed and looked into the lifeless eyes of his sister.

"I felt what I saved back then fray. And I felt it break."

"Then why are you here?!" Jiang Cheng screamed. "To bask in my failure?!"

"No. To make sure it doesn't break you."

Jiang Cheng shook his head, grimacing. "Why are you so insistent on saving me? Both now and then– why?"



Liu Qingge hadn't truly had a reason. He had nothing beyond, "I wanted to."

Jiang Cheng's fingers clenched tighter on his sister's body until it burst into motes of light, rising into the sky. He jumped at the sudden emptiness but remained hunched over himself, and Liu Qingge could not tell if it was rain or tears streaming down his face.

There was a snap of wood, and debris shot towards them. Liu Qingge struck it down, frowning. It seemed like Jiang Cheng's own divinity was trying to kill him.

"Jiang Cheng, do you want to live?"

"I—" he hesitated.

The hesitation could kill him if Liu Qingge did nothing. "Isn't there anything you want to live for?!"

Jiang Cheng's eyes widened, and the raindrops in the wind sharpened to cutting edges.

"Anyone?!"

Jiang Cheng gasped, and for the first time since Liu Qingge had arrived, he tried to defend himself. Cuts opened on his hands, and the storm raged on. Was Jiang Cheng's resolve not enough to quell it?

A whisper reached him. "Help me."

Liu Qingge rushed to pull Jiang Cheng to him, to protect him, but this squall beat at Liu Qingge's body the same as it did Jiang Cheng's. Fingers gripped him tight in fear and Liu Qingge wondered if a more physical sentiment could calm it.

It felt like the world itself stopped when Liu Qingge's lips met Jiang Cheng's.

When Liu Qingge pulled away, the rain was a bit lighter. Jiang Cheng seemed stunned.

He leaned in and kissed Jiang Cheng again. The rain softened to a comforting patter as Liu Qingge cupped a wet cheek, and Jiang Cheng tilted into it. He swept inside— as much as this was to light some desire for life in Jiang Cheng, Liu Qingge couldn't deny it was something he wanted.

Jiang Cheng's mouth was warm and wet, and he gave as good as he got. Liu Qingge slipped his hands under robes, feeling smooth muscles and soft skin. Soon he felt Jiang Cheng's own interest rubbing his leg and Liu Qingge pushed them over. Arms wrapped around Liu Qingge's shoulders, making sure he joined Jiang Cheng in their fall.

Closer— he wanted to feel closer.



Thighs wrapped around his waist, and Liu Qingge responded by thrusting into the cloth between them. Jiang Cheng sighed and clutched him tighter, and Liu Qingge grappled with their robes, lifting away to see Jiang Cheng arched beneath him. Liu Qingge scrabbled at Jiang Cheng's belt and yanked at ties to see flesh. His hands drifted over the beauty before him before he hooked onto those leggings, dragging them down as much as he could with Jiang Cheng's thighs still squeezing him. He couldn't get far, but moved to curl his fingers into the flesh of Jiang Cheng's ass before the new god shifted, lowering himself onto the robes so Liu Qingge could drag his fingers down flesh and cloth to bare Jiang Cheng's thighs and cock.

Before he could admire the view, Jiang Cheng reached for his robes, pulling them out of place. Liu Qingge's arms caged Jiang Cheng on the ground, feeling the cool humid air hitting his chest and stomach as Jiang Cheng exposed them. He leaned down to kiss the storm god, trapping him as hands stroked along the cloth still covering his length.

He reached down to stretch Jiang Cheng open, huffing when he realized he needed something to open his storm with. He pulled his hand free, hesitant to fully pull away from Jiang Cheng, but—

“Liu—”

Liu Qingge pushed his fingers into Jiang Cheng's mouth, listening to a sweet groan as he ground down against the other god.

One of Jiang Cheng's legs curled over Liu Qingge's calf, and he watched intently as he pet his storm's tongue. Liu Qingge heard the gurgled moan of his name, drool spilling from spit slick lips. Jiang Cheng struggled to speak through his fingers, and Liu Qingge pulled them free, turning his attention to open Jiang Cheng's tight furl.

Jiang Cheng cried out— but not in pain.

“How does it feel?”

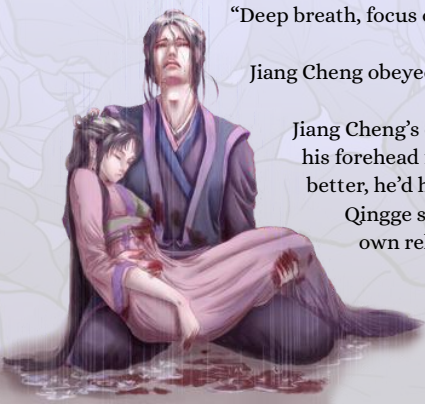
He felt Jiang Cheng's legs shaking and moved his finger. “S— Strange? Good!”

Jiang Cheng was looking down, and Liu Qingge felt robbed of his attention. He used his other hand to get those stormy eyes focused on him. Liu Qingge thrust his finger more, feeling the tight tunnel relax as Jiang Cheng got used to the sensation.

“Deep breath, focus on me.”

Jiang Cheng obeyed, and Liu Qingge forced another finger in.

Jiang Cheng's eyelashes fluttered, face pink with pleasure. Hair stuck to his forehead from water and sweat, and if Liu Qingge hadn't known better, he'd have thought Jiang Cheng was a god of temptation. Liu Qingge stretched him impatiently, wanting to sink inside— for his own relief more than anything.



“Liu Qingge– please–”

He leaned down, pressing their lips together harshly as he pulled his hand free, grabbing at his neglected cock to aim the tip at the hole he’d been stretching. Liu Qingge could only groan as his tip popped inside. He let his hips slide further, only stopping them when Jiang Cheng’s whine turned strained.

Jiang Cheng whined, “I– I can take it. Need it.”

Was Liu Qingge supposed to ignore his cries?

He slid in to the root– until they were panting against each other.

“Fuck me.”

Sex had always seemed a crass thing– something Liu Qingge had avoided. Now he knew why even gods surrendered to this. He thrust into Jiang Cheng, and felt transcendent. Jiang Cheng was warm and tight and perfect, and the cool drops of rain against his back only reminded Liu Qingge of who it was he was fucking.

“Jiang Cheng.”

The new god moaned at the sound of his name from Liu Qingge’s lips, and their sounds became muffled as Jiang Cheng licked into his mouth.

They melted into each other, sounds of pleasure drowning out the storm as Liu Qingge slammed his hips as deep as he could into Jiang Cheng’s ass. He fucked Jiang Cheng into the ground– his storm gripping tight to him, as though he couldn’t bear to be further from Liu Qingge than it took for him to thrust.

“Liu Qingge.”

The whispered song of his name was what pushed him to completion. Liu Qingge pushed into the hilt, and it felt like the world thundered as he released into Jiang Cheng. He felt the squeeze of Jiang Cheng all around him, and the tremble of arms and legs as he scratched Liu Qingge’s still covered back. Jiang Cheng’s breathy groans were the first thing he heard as he came down.

Jiang Cheng’s sticky cum was between their stomachs, and when he sagged back to the ground, Liu Qingge followed after him. He balanced on his forearms, nosing at Jiang Cheng’s neck as he gasped. He could hear Jiang Cheng’s heartbeat slowing as the storm calmed, light droplets falling on where Liu Qingge and Jiang Cheng were intertwined.

Liu Qingge pulled free and laid beside Jiang Cheng.

It was quiet.



“Will I have to remain on the peaks?” Jiang Cheng whispered.

“No. You may be expected to show your face on occasion, but the peaks need not be your home.”

“Will you come with me?”

Liu Qingge nodded. “Yes. But I won’t be able to stay with you. Not all the time.”

Jiang Cheng looked sad, but he nodded. When dawn came, Liu Qingge escorted and introduced him to the other gods personally, unyielding to the questioning stares and his sister’s starry eyes.

They separated afterwards, but Liu Qingge found his way to Jiang Cheng over and over again. Over years, over centuries, it was known to mortals to not go out in the storm. That soldiers must rely on their own luck and skill if they attacked in the rain– for the god of the battlefield would not hear them while his paramour was near.

Liu Qingge admired the darkening clouds and welcomed the first drop of rain. It never took long for him to walk into the tempest– he could never fear it.

A yellow streak shot beside him, and a lightning sprite appeared from it. “Jin Ling.”

“Liu Qingge.” The lightning folded his arms– the little thing was a spitfire, much like his Jiang Cheng. “My uncle is waiting for you.”

“I know.” He ruffled the kid’s hair, much to Jin Ling’s ire, and continued forward.

Jiang Cheng would be at the center– as he always was.

The rain softened, and the wind calmed.

Black hair swept around purple robes, and the god of storms turned towards the god of war and brotherhood.

“My storm,” Liu Qingge said.

Jiang Cheng flashed a smirk, though he couldn’t hide his fondness. “My savior.”

Liu Qingge reached towards him, and with a firm grip, he pulled Jiang Cheng close. He could hear thunder near them, but it was surrounded by such chaos as this, as a battlefield, that Liu Qingge had found peace.

Jiang Cheng’s hand tilted his face, and Liu Qingge closed his eyes as he felt his other half’s lips caress his own.





Newborn
Lucheng Zine
2025

HISS HISS FALL IN LOVE

Screamingbees, with spot art by Magabet

Explicit Sexual Content

Nagas

Top Jiang Cheng

Bottom Liu Qingge

Medical research

Cloacas

Liu Qingge's eyes snapped open the moment the door swung open. The lights came on shortly after.

"Mmgh..."

Liu Qingge ignored his bedmate and quietly rose over the shifting coils, bracing himself as his fellow naga groaned at the sudden brightness. The clock on the far end of the wall had a long hand pointing towards the right. Liu Qingge hissed in displeasure. Nie Huaisang was late again. The gurgle in his stomach only cemented his annoyance; if Liu Qingge was already hungry, then Jiang Cheng must be even more so.

He watched with slitted eyes as Nie Huaisang toddled around the lab, taking his time to put down his belongings before shrugging on a long white coat and tying his hair into a low bun, whistling carefree.

Liu Qingge hissed again when Nie Huaisang neared their enclosure.

"ChengCheng! Qingge! How are you today?"

Liu Qingge answered with a pound against the glass. His tail lashed in anger, and he nearly knocked into the heat lamp when he rose to a taller height, stubbornly refusing to let the human look down on him.

Nie Huaisang laughed nervously, cowed at Liu Qingge's ferocious display but still largely unconcerned as he turned and grabbed tongs hanging from the wall. He opened a box, and Liu Qingge's senses narrowed in on it as the sound of squeaking filled his ears. Food.

The live mouse was dropped onto the far end of the cage, and Liu Qingge sprang for it, wrapping his long body around the rodent as it struggled, a hint of satisfaction thrumming through his veins as its tiny claws did nothing to his tough scales. When his prey finally fell limp, Liu Qingge unhinged his jaw and began swallowing it whole.

As he worked it down his gullet, he blinked up to see Nie Huaisang staring at him in mild horror. After Liu Qingge caught him, however, he quickly returned to feeding Jiang Cheng breakfast.

Liu Qingge waited as his mate gulped down his food at a much calmer pace before returning to his side. Nie Huaisang anxiously passed Jiang Cheng one more pinkie before quickly pulling back his arm.



Jiang Cheng glared at Liu Qingge like it was his fault Nie Huaisang was leaving, but Liu Qingge merely lay down next to him, closing his eyes as the heat-warmed rock caressed his body. The end of his tail successfully intertwined around Jiang Cheng's without protests, so Liu Qingge knew he was at least forgiven. Large and full, he twisted till the bulge in his tail sat comfortably on the stone. Jiang Cheng joined him a few moments later as he too settled under the heat lamp and nosed at Liu Qingge's chin until the silver naga opened his arms and let him cuddle close. Their naked torsos and smooth scales slipped against each other. A chuckle.

Liu Qingge slit his eyes open to see Mu Qingfang, the other human in the lab, join Nie Huaisang in observing them. The researcher's eyes twinkled behind his spectacles as he spoke in a hushed voice with his colleague, taking out a clipboard while gesturing at it with a pen.

Liu Qingge was able to understand only a few words of the human language, so only bits and pieces came through between indecipherable phrases.

"... do we have to... today?"

"... he's due... we need..."

Liu Qingge frowned. He didn't understand what "fresh batch" meant, but whatever it could be hardly mattered.

Jiang Cheng was close, and with that comfort in mind, he settled down for a nap with his mate.

The Qian Cao research facility oversaw a wide variety of scientists and their projects in its centre. Privately funded by its larger organization, Cang Qiong Co., it was a leading performer in the research of bio-medicine.

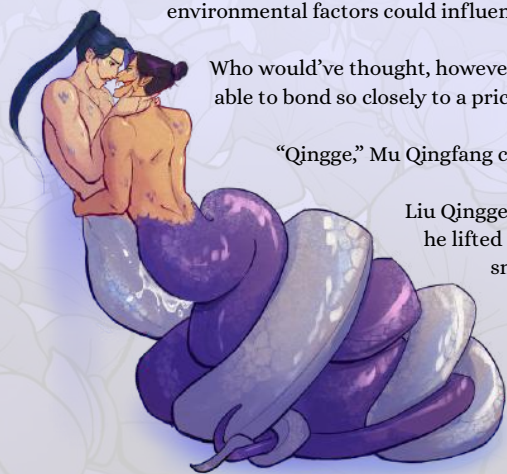
Mu Qingfang had originally invited Nie Huaisang from the Unclean Realm Research Centre after his team had miraculously found a live specimen of the Yumeng Viper. A rare venom with the rumoured unique property to attack specific cells, they had obtained the creature to extract its venom, and observed its behaviour in a variety of experiments to see if environmental factors could influence the quality of poison it produced.

Who would've thought, however, that Qian Cao's own Bai Zhan Serpent would be able to bond so closely to a prickly naga of the South?

"Qingge," Mu Qingfang called as he approached the enclosure.

Liu Qingge eyed him suspiciously, but he was listening as he lifted his head. In his arms, Jiang Cheng continued to snooze.

It still astonished Mu Qingfang how easily the two cohabited. Not only were they able to live



together amicably, but they actually *enjoyed* each other's presence.

Liu Qingge curled possessively over Jiang Cheng, and Mu Qingfang offered a wry smile. It wouldn't do to make Liu Qingge nervous or hesitant, especially when they needed to separate the two in a few moments.

"How are you?"

Of course, the naga couldn't speak, but he answered with a *hiss* and settled back down, this time on top of his mate as his eyes followed Mu Qingfang's movements intently.

The scientist internally sighed. He still didn't know how it had fully happened.

He had known that the Bai Zhan Serpent's wary nature made them excellent bodyguards, but he hadn't anticipated Liu Qingge to *try* to get into Jiang Cheng's cage. Luckily, Nie Huaisang's shrill scream had alerted him to the situation, and they had managed to disengage the two before any injuries could've occurred.

Unfortunately, enclosures were broken in the process and in the end, Mu Qingfang was forced to relocate a few snakes to make up for the lack of space.

Into one cage went the Bai Zhan Serpent and the Jade Green Adder, while the Yumeng Viper was quarantined on its own. Unfortunately, this arrangement upset a nearby Heavenly Demon Cobra, and after a tense night where Mu Qingfang had to stop 4 snakes from killing each other, he cried into his mega-sized cup of coffee in the morning, forced to face with the reality that not only did he have to replace 2 busted enclosures (not cheap!), the silver serpent and purple *hadn't* been trying to fight earlier. In fact, they were very *interested* in each other. So interested, he needed to upgrade security and get sturdier habitats in case the two ever canoodled too roughly.

The rest is, as they say, history, because now Liu Qingge and Jiang Cheng are happily mated, and Mu Qingfang is putting on double the amount of protection to avoid being bitten by a protective mate.

Nie Huaisang stood behind him, holding a sack and a net. Snakes were, in essence, slippery, and these two were even more so.

"Ready?" He asked, and a quick nod from his coworker confirmed the preparations. It was go time.

Mu Qingfang steeled his nerves and carefully lifted the lid to the enclosure. Liu Qingge's small hands were pressed against the glass as he hissed loudly at Mu Qingfang's looming gloves, and his displeasure turned into anger when a pair of tongs pushed him to the side. A hook lifted Jiang Cheng into the air.



What can only be described as fury exploded in the tank. Liu Qingge's muscular length transformed into a mass as he flipped and thrashed, emitting loud *bangs* as the room erupted with the sound of snake expletives (probably). Liu Qingge howled as he tried to reach for his stolen mate, and Mu Qingfang hastily shut the top, jumping as the plastic nearly burst open from Liu Qingge's lunge. A heavy book slammed down on the cage, however, saving them from the danger of a loose snake, and Mu Qingfang quickly shouted at Nie Huaisang to open the bag.

Jiang Cheng was beginning to wake up, the danger and panic pheromones Liu Qingge were firing, setting off his alarm bells, but luckily, they had the sense to lace his food with a bit of relaxant, and at most, a confused, conflicted expression was on the purple naga's face before he was dropped into the bag.

Thank god Nie Huaisang was still capable despite his shrieking hysteria.

"Okay, okay!" Mu Qingfang shouted over the din. He nodded his thanks at Nie Mingjue, the one who had brought the encyclopedia, and latched the enclosure shut, breathing a sigh of relief when a blanket was thrown over it, and finally, everything came to a still.

"Thank you," he said again to the security guard before he hustled Nie Huaisang away to the lab they had booked.

The sooner they could finish this, the better.

Liu Qingge punched the glass once more. How dare they?! That was his mate! That was A-Cheng, his one and only!

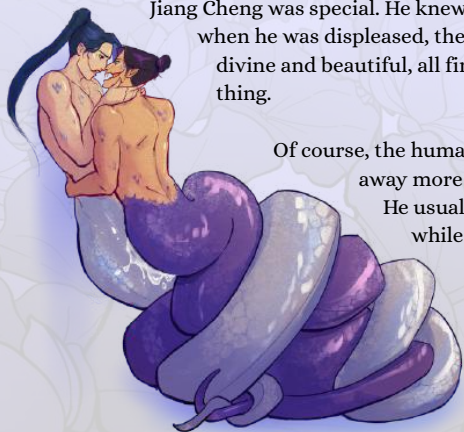
He punched again, fist smarting, but nothing happened.

The enclosure was dark, plunged into the abyss, but he could still hear and sense the vibrations of humans hurrying around. Running, perhaps. The table was shaking ominously.

Liu Qingge didn't like it. His anger was replaced by fear, and in a rare moment, he was terrified—not for himself, but for his mate.

Jiang Cheng was special. He knew that. The way his scales glittered, his narrowed eyes when he was displeased, the little divots in his cheek when he smiled. He was divine and beautiful, all fire in a lithe figure, and his scent the most wonderful thing.

Of course, the humans would want him. Jiang Cheng had been taken away more frequently than Liu Qingge for reasons unknown. He usually complained of a toothache after he returned, and while "biting weird things" sounded tame, he didn't want Jiang Cheng subjected to unusual and cruel tests either.



When he felt the cage lurch—moved, but where?—he shouted his complaints and fastened himself around a log, hissing as the human's movements swayed under his weight. Where was he going!? He couldn't be taken away as well! How else would the humans know where to bring Jiang Cheng back to?!

His habitat continued to move. Liu Qingge could see flashes of the floor as the tarp over his cage flapped, and he lunged for the hands holding his home, rearing back only when he banged harshly against the glass.

"Cool it, brute."

Liu Qingge punched harder. He recognized that voice. That mean son of a bitch who handled him so roughly when he was younger! Shen Jiu!

Before Liu Qingge could strangle Shen Jiu, however, his enclosure was set down with a *clunk*, and Liu Qingge tumbled off his anchor, landing sorely in a heap. The drapery was whipped off without care, and instantly, the silver naga was assaulted by bright lights. His eyes immediately slit to protect his vision, but it also meant that he was temporarily blinded.

"Oh, thank you, Researcher Shen. Just put him over here."

"Mm."

Liu Qingge felt his world slide in a dizzying motion. When he finally regained his senses, popping up like an angry groundhog, he had had enough and began trying to break free from the enclosure through the lid.

Then he saw Jiang Cheng.

He began throwing himself even harder against the ceiling.

"There, there," Mu Qingfang's voice managed to rise over Liu Qingge's demolition attempts. "He's not hurt, just relaxed."

Liu Qingge didn't believe him. His mate was sagging in the human's gloved hands, upper body perched on a stand. Jiang Cheng's eyes were open, but they were unfocused, and his eyelids kept drifting shut before he blinked himself awake. Liu Qingge hissed possessively when the researcher pet Jiang Cheng on the head, but then paused, confused, when Jiang Cheng leaned into the touch, chin drooping after.

He tried to get his mate's attention, but Jiang Cheng didn't seem able to hear or see him, and it was only when the human brought the purple viper closer that Jiang Cheng responded to his worry, dragging the tip of his tail against the other side of the glass of Liu Qingge.

"See? He's fine. We just need a bit of his venom."



Liu Qingge glared at Mu Qingfang. He didn't quite understand the vocabulary, but it was clear from the human's tone that he thought Liu Qingge was a fool. His displeasure grew in volume.

Mu Qingfang chuckled in response, which only riled Liu Qingge further. But then the other human, Nie Huaisang, entered the room. He nervously glanced at the enclosure, but Liu Qingge dared him to comment with a pointed glare. Choosing not to make an enemy of Liu Qingge today, instead, Nie Huaisang huddled close to Mu Qingfang out of Jiang Cheng's line of sight.

"Here," he timidly handed Mu Qingfang a clear cup with a film on top of it, and Liu Qingge's hackles rose. What was it for? What did it have to do with Jiang Cheng?

But to his surprise, Mu Qingfang did nothing much with the cup besides hold it. Instead, he squeezed slightly at Jiang Cheng's jaws with his finger and thumb, and it was Jiang Cheng himself who, quick as lightning, lunged at the container, plunging his powerful fangs through the lid with a barely restrained snarl.

Liu Qingge left his perch. He slithered as close as he could against the glass, entranced, as Jiang Cheng's hunter instincts were brought out to play.

Slitted eyelids and a face scrunched with exertion, Jiang Cheng's body was tense, all muscles pointed in a singular direction. His scales rippled under the fluorescent lights as he fought against the researcher's grip, intent on sinking his fangs deeper into his "prey", and his hands had even unsheathed their claws, leaving punctures in the plastic.

A dark purple liquid trickled down the side of the cup, staining the clear walls. Jiang Cheng never let up, alert and determined as beads of potent venom kept welling from his fangs, and his growls and grunts were muffled as his jaw was held open. Liu Qingge squirmed, body heating from the sounds.

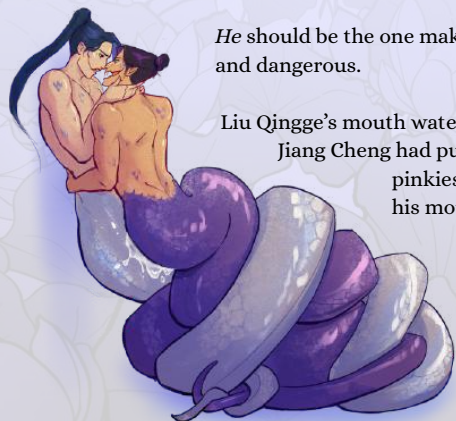
Jealous...

Mu Qingfang's thumb kept petting his mate, encouraging more poison to ooze out, and wild at the thought of his mate's instincts powering his deadly weapon, Liu Qingge could only wriggle in anger as he wished that he was the one in there, placating Jiang Cheng, massaging venom out of his pretty teeth.

He should be the one making Jiang Cheng feel like that. All hot and angry. Lethal and dangerous.

Liu Qingge's mouth watered, and even though he knew it was impossible—Jiang Cheng had pushed him away from one too many purple-injected pinkies—he imagined that it was Jiang Cheng's venom filling his mouth instead.

"A-Cheng, A-Cheng," Liu Qingge moaned.



His tail thrashed as he yearned to get as close to his mate as he could. The cold glass, unfortunately, was impenetrable, but it didn't deter him from writhing against the cool surface, mind going crazy at how he couldn't tackle Jiang Cheng right now... trap him into Liu Qingge's coils... sink his cock into Liu Qingge's slit.

Jiang Cheng seemed to sense his frenzied state, and he too, began to squirm against Mu Qingfang's fingers, desperate to get to his mate.

"Ah," Nie Huaisang began before Mu Qingfang let out a curse, and he had to rush in to hold Jiang Cheng down as well.

Liu Qingge didn't care. In fact, they could all fuck off with their experiment. He needed Jiang Cheng now!

When Jiang Cheng almost slipped free from their grasp again, his head was accidentally let go. The humans yelped when Jiang Cheng flailed, his sharp incisors still able to do damage and swiftly, in one sweeping motion, Mu Qingfang grabbed the snake hook and deposited Jiang Cheng onto Liu Qingge.

Liu Qingge didn't wait, and neither did the viper. The two crashed into each other heavily as they lunged, long bodies already coiling into a tight ball.

"Bite me, bite me," Liu Qingge panted, and Jiang Cheng hesitated, but only briefly, before plunging his fangs into Liu Qingge's shoulder.

Liu Qingge moaned loudly at the sting and rush of adrenaline that overwhelmed his brain. Heart racing and loud whines emitting from his mouth, he could only helplessly claw Jiang Cheng's back bloody as he begged his mate to enter him, to fill him, to *eat* him.

Jiang Cheng did all that—except for the last request. His fangs, now milked empty of poison, were hardly lethal to Liu Qingge's physique, and instead, they sent a thrill of arousal through Liu Qingge's entire body. His slit, swollen with arousal, pulsed hungrily like a little mouth, aching for his mate to stuff him, and Liu Qingge rubbed himself up against Jiang Cheng, unable to resist leaving slick behind. Overcome by Liu Qingge's pheromones, Jiang Cheng didn't wait, rubbing his chin against Liu Qingge's jaw before his cocks found Liu Qingge's hole and immediately pushed into him.

"Ah!"

Liu Qingge keened as he was filled to the brim. His wet cloaca squeezed happily around Jiang Cheng's lengths, and his muscles disengaged tightly when Jiang Cheng tried to pull back.

"In me, in me!" Liu Qingge demanded, and Jiang Cheng's fangs sank deeper into his flesh, sending a howl and arc through Liu Qingge's back, punished for being a disobedient mate.

Jiang Cheng didn't stop there.



He grabbed ahold of Liu Qingge's hips, pinning them down to the tangle of coils they were writhing upon, and began to fuck him, pulling back despite Liu Qingge's desperate whines, and plunging in to Liu Qingge's delight. His hemipenes, slippery with Liu Qingge's slick, were violet and significantly larger, a flash of iridescent scales the only hint of their colour before Jiang Cheng fucked back into his sobbing mate.

Diligent blows and forceful thrusts. Jiang Cheng didn't let up on his powerful pace, and it was only when Liu Qingge's blood began to bleed onto Jiang Cheng's tongue did he loosen his grip, panting in tandem with his whining mate.

Liu Qingge's indignation was pacified with a bite to his clavicle, then his chest, and when Jiang Cheng sank his fangs into his neck—careful to avoid any major arteries—Liu Qingge finally came with a mewling cry between.

Jiang Cheng heaved, feeling the strong muscles of Liu Qingge's walls clamp down on him so. In such a narrow space, he could feel Liu Qingge's cocks press up against him from inside as well, but it was the feeling of his breath being choked out of him when the tip of Liu Qingge's tail suddenly coiled around his midriff that had him cumming dutifully into Liu Qingge's cloaca.

"Mm!"

Liu Qingge trilled as he nuzzled against Jiang Cheng aggressively. Jiang Cheng did his best to reciprocate, his mouth feeling dry from both the venom milking and biting, yet when Liu Qingge's lips pressed against his, all thoughts about his discomfort went away. Silky and greedy, Liu Qingge's tongue was not unlike his insides as he practically jammed his wet appendage down Jiang Cheng's throat, bullying him like it was an attempt to suck the poison clean from Jiang Cheng's glands.

Jiang Cheng huffed, tearing his face away, before admiring the work of art he'd left on Liu Qingge's body. Liu Qingge wriggled like a brat, and it took a hot second before he managed to pin Liu Qingge back down, taking a deep breath.

"Stop that," he ordered, voice rough from misuse.

Liu Qingge squirmed underneath him petulantly, but his cute display didn't convince Jiang Cheng until he gave a deep pout, brows furrowed in annoyance.

Flushed skin, bloody marks, a slit oozing with seed. Jiang Cheng could feel Liu Qingge's tail curling around his, a constriction sure on its way to vex him, yet none of these truly convinced Jiang Cheng of Liu Qingge's anger.

No, instead, it was the way Liu Qingge blushed when Jiang Cheng flashed his teeth once more. The way he let Jiang Cheng draw back with a lewd sound—still inside him— and nudged forward to sink once more into Liu Qingge's tight heat. The way he was so so angry... that he wanted more.



“Open up,” Jiang Cheng commanded, and his beautiful mate automatically opened that strong jaw of his to fulfill his demand.

When Jiang Cheng bit Liu Qingge’s tongue, fangs sinking into the squishy muscle, claws into his back were his reward alongside loud moans.

Liu Qingge, *oh Liu Qingge*. How lucky Jiang Cheng was to be gifted a mate as faithful as he; Jiang Cheng couldn’t wait to fill him up with his special “venom” next time.





NOT MY PARTY, BUT IT'S MY PLEASURE

LivingMeatloaf, with spot art by Neuvoid

T4T

Oral Sex

Squirting

Semi-Public Sex

Any party thrown by a Nie is an Event™, doubly so when hosted by Nie Huaisang, triply so when that party celebrates a birthday. So Nie Huaisang's fortieth birthday is guaranteed to be not only a rager, not only an Event™, but possibly the biggest party Jiang Cheng has ever been invited to, weddings included.

He debates not going.

Just looking at the invitation makes him feel old. Huaisang might be able to get away with this lifestyle still, never outgrowing zir partyboy nature, but every year since college weighs on Jiang Cheng like a decade. He goes to bed at 9pm, for fuck's sake! He might as well be keeping the Lan hours, like back when they spent their summer in Gusu's Youth Leadership Educational Retreat.

His fingers type out a refusal, but before he can hit send, thumb hovering, messages chime in from the rest of the group chat. All of them are excited, immediately agreeing, asking about attire and alcohol as if the years hadn't passed them by. Abruptly, Jiang Cheng is tired of being the "wet blanket party-poop", aka the one with any common sense. He furiously erases his message and types out, "I'll be there."

Now, shoving through hundreds of people crammed into the sprawling Nie estate, bass thumping through his bones from the current DJ set, Jiang Cheng curses Nie Huaisang and zir stupid party emoji reaction. This was a terrible idea. If he doesn't end up with a migraine before leaving, it will be a miracle.

There is no way Nie Huaisang knows everyone here; ze had briefly mentioned expanding zir invite to friends-of-friends, to really pack the place, before gushing about the apparently big-name DJ ze had booked. The only good thing about a crowd this big is that no one will stare at Jiang Cheng when there are so many other things to look at. Even if the miasma of fog machine, smoke, perfume, and alcohol fumes crawls over his skin in a sticky residue, even if he feels ill-suited and out of place in clothes he hasn't worn for years, even if he stared at the gray streak forming from his temple for agonizing minutes before deciding he didn't care enough to play around with box dyes, Jiang Cheng is just another face in the sea.

Wei Wuxian, already buzzed, drags him into what was perhaps once a formal dining room, then an expanded living room, now converted into a tightly-packed dance floor with a DJ stage bathed in lights and fog at one end. Holding onto each other so they won't get lost, they thread into the center of the pack. A new song starts, high electronic squeals blending beautifully with snatches of an orchestral piece, all supported by booming bass that thrums through his stomach and chest. The crowd moves, and he moves with them. He thought he wouldn't have any fun — no booze or drugs, not with the meds he's on — but now he's on the dance floor, buoyed by the infectious energy of the crowd. As the song changes, he turns to grin at Wei Wuxian, but he's lost to the press of bodies.



While dancing, finally feeling loose and relaxed and a little giddy, Jiang Cheng bumps hard into someone. He turns to apologize— his words stick in his throat, where they pound against his heartbeat.

The man is incredibly hot, his long hair up in a high ponytail, wearing a cropped tank top and denim shorts with a slit so high on the side, Jiang Cheng can see the full sword tattoo going down his thigh. He's Chinese, too, and at least a decade younger, maybe two, a man but so young he might as well be a boy compared to Jiang Cheng. But he's taller than Jiang Cheng and hotter than most models he's seen in advertisements. Their eyes meet in the sweeping lights; there's a little mole under one eye, high on his cheekbone. He moves. Jiang Cheng thinks the boy is going to slip past him until he leans close and asks to dance.

Liu Qingge tagged along with the group, even though parties aren't really his thing. Still, it had been a long time since he had gone anywhere other than the park to run, to his job, or to the gym. His sister claimed he was "under-socialized" as if he were one of the dogs she worked with. When the invitation came through Shang Qinghua that one of his book club buddies was going to throw a party that would make the club seem tame, his curiosity got the better of him. He dressed for a club, feeling a little silly — but he's glad for it now. The heat of bodies pressing around him makes even the scant clothes he's wearing feel like too much. Just like in a club, individuals flail and couples, small groups, whole mosh pits form to bump and grind in the swaying mass of humanity. He loves it.

Turning at the sudden slam of an elbow to his ribs, Liu Qingge locks eyes with a gorgeous older man, his dark hair pulled back in a harsh bun that draws attention to the cut planes of his face, his intense eyes, the shining streak of grey weaving into the bun. Heat pools in his core immediately. He didn't think people this hot existed in real life. He takes the chance to touch him, even for just a song. He has to lean down to shout in the man's ear; a loose curl of his hair brushes his cheek as he nods. Liu Qingge winds his arms around the man's shoulders; no fucking way will he let this catch go.

They dance, pressed together at first by the crowd, then by their grasping hands, destroying any gaps between them. It's hard to say which of them presses their hips together first. The shape they create is startling yet familiar. Hot.

Smoke wreaths the room in a thick haze, a vapor blanket nearly tangible. Not all of it comes from the fog machines. Acrid and floral and sharp — just breathing it is enough to send Jiang Cheng's head spinning. All those muscles rippling under warm skin, a heated look in his eyes, his packer digging into the boy's hip — Jiang Cheng's tired body suddenly remembers how to want.

Jiang Cheng drags him off the dance floor, or was the boy pushing him? They bump mouths, a sloppy kiss, fumbling down a hallway toward a side room.



Liu Qingge pants against the man's mouth, cheek, neck, wherever he can land his mouth, hand grasping and tugging. He's desperate for it, horny like he's a freshman in college taking his first T shots all over again. Everything burns. More than that, though, his mouth waters. It wants to be filled.

Grinding on each other in the hallway, Jiang Cheng shoves his thigh between the boy's legs. He keens, immediately humping it, his denim dragging the loose material of Jiang Cheng's cargo pants up and down. Hot breath pants on his neck between cute whines.

"You're so hot... wanna get my mouth on you," Liu Qingge gets out. He has to swallow a mouthful of saliva. The man's eyes hungrily watch his neck bob.

"Ha, yeah? You know what to do with it?" Jiang Cheng impulsively pokes the boy's lips. He gasps when he sucks the finger into his mouth, tongue swirling and flicking across his fingertip. He bites his own lips, hypnotized by the plush pout in front of him. His tongue subconsciously traces a mimicking path as the one fellating his finger against the top of his mouth.

Liu Qingge moans. He's already getting lost with just this man's finger in his mouth, he wants his cock so bad. He grinds on the thigh, bobs his head on the finger, wants and wants and wants—

"Alright, come on."

The third door they try opens onto an unoccupied bedroom. They kick the door shut and stumble to the bed. Jiang Cheng sits on the edge of the mattress, hooks a foot around the boy's knee, yanks to make him kneel before the bed. He moans as he drops. A shiver runs across Jiang Cheng's skin at the sound. Jiang Cheng shoves off his pants until they dangle from one ankle. Fuck, he's so wet. His underwear peels off his cock, exposing the heat of it to the cool room. It twitches. His packer drops out of the pocket as his underwear swings, bouncing off into some corner.

Liu Qingge's eyes immediately lock onto the swollen cocklet above a dripping, red slit as the older man strips out of his underwear. He has to swallow back saliva.

"I want it," he moans, leaning forward to press his face into Jiang Cheng's thigh. He can smell the sharp tang of his arousal and squirms, heat pressing against his own pants. His teeth find the soft skin of an inner thigh, and he nibbles there to keep himself from pouncing.

God, can this guy be any more perfect? Well, there are still ways he could disappoint. Jiang Cheng certainly isn't mentally prepared for anything in his holes today, no matter what the young man has in his pants. He reaches down, grabs his chin. The boy's eyes are hazy, pupils blown wide, but he meets his gaze. Jiang Cheng tightens his grip a little, feels the breath hitch against his fingers.

"You can use your mouth, but nothing goes inside me. Say one word and I'll kick you in the face."



Liu Qingge nods against the hold on his jaw. He tips his face into it, just to feel the rasp of callouses on his jaw. The moment he's released, he dives in. Starts with kissing and sucking marks into those thick thighs that have tormented him since he felt the shape of them in the hallway. This guy must do squats every day! His skin tastes like sweat and the sharp funk of arousal the closer he gets to his cock. It juts up out of the mound of wiry hair, hood pulling back, flushed and shining like a jewel. The thick muscles of the man's thighs tense as Liu Qingge breathes on it. Moisture glistens in the half-light.

When he slips it into his mouth, his eyes slide closed in bliss. Thick and hot and the perfect mouthful, just like he thought it would be. He cradles it on his tongue, strokes the underside before sucking gently. The man swears and twitches. His hands pat Liu Qingge's head until he guides one to grasp his ponytail. He gasps, groans, as the man grips it tight, sure, presses him in closer. Liu Qingge sucks with fervor. His hands slide up the man's legs, brushing through his leg hair, to pet those thighs.

Jiang Cheng blurrily watches ecstasy come over the younger man's face as he blows him. He's never had someone go down on him with this much... glee. Single-minded focus. It's always been a prelude, an opening act to the main show, but he thinks this guy might be happy staying on his knees all night. That thrills through his body; he arches into the next stroke of his tongue with a gasp, clenching on nothing.

They both jolt when voices pass by. For a moment, Jiang Cheng can hear them clearly. He can imagine them opening the door, seeing him with his dignity in shambles, pants around his ankle. Can imagine their eyes dragging down his body to the hottest person here, between his legs. Can imagine their jealousy.

Liu Qingge moans around the man's cock as a fresh gush of liquid heat drips down his chin. He thought he heard someone outside the door. His mind can't let that go: someone watching him practically worshipping between this hot man's legs. Someone seeing how wrecked it makes him.

The voices pass without even touching the door.

Jiang Cheng pants, eyes locked on the boy's bobbing head. Each wet slide up and down his cock makes him buck his hips, a low sound punched out from his lips. He's close, so close. Sparks fizzle under his skin. His fingers have gone numb where they grip the boy's hair and the blanket.

Sweat pools in Liu Qingge's binder. He shifts, and the seam of his pants presses tight against his cock, eliciting jolts of pleasure that almost distract him from the pleasure in his mouth. There's nothing more luxurious, nothing more intense, nothing more intimate than taking someone's delicate skin into his mouth and drawing their bliss out. He loves fucking, of course, but this always puts him in the best headspace. Even the soreness of his jaw and lips feels good. The skin beneath him twitches and jolts, faster and faster. He must be close. Liu Qingge speeds up his mouth.

"Fuck, yes, just like that!" A little more—



Just as Jiang Cheng feels his climax coming, someone in the hallways bumps heavily into the door. The handle rattles, as if threatening to open. It's not locked. He clenches.

He has to bite his hand to stop the scream of pleasure as his whole body tenses, as hot gush after gush squirts from him, hooking something deep inside him and dragging it out, like molten metal or lightning or- or- or something, fuck, he feels so good! Was that squirting? It's been ages since he did that, he forgot how good it feels.

He gasps up at the ceiling. His muscles relax, tingling. Heat suffuses his whole body. He can feel his muscles twitching, clenching, eager for more. He props himself up on his elbows, looking down at the young man between his legs with a chagrined expression.

"Sorry, I wasn't expecting—"

The boy's face is red. It makes the mole on his cheekbone stand out even more. He blinks his eyes open against drips of fluid running down his face. His mouth is swollen, shining, pink, panting out breaths. He looks like he's ready to eat Jiang Cheng, to sink his teeth in and dig until he finds bone. Jiang Cheng throbs at the thought.

I did that, he thinks proudly, hysterically.

Coolly, he nudges the back of the boy's head with his heel. "You done?" The boy shakes his head vigorously, eyes darting between Jiang Cheng's face and his cock. "Then get back to it."

They both moan as Liu Qingge devours the older man's cock again. Even if he hadn't been told not to speak, his words drained out of his mind to make room for pure horny energy when the man squirted all over his face. That was the hottest thing that has ever happened to him! He licks his lips, appreciating the changed flavor, licks over the cock before him, too. Various fluids drip down his neck to soak in the collar of his shirt, his binder. He doesn't care. This only stokes his hunger.

It takes the man longer to get to his second orgasm. He's louder, more squirmy, more into it. Fuck, everything about this is so hot. He shifts to dig his heel into his own crotch, to give himself something to grind on. Liu Qingge holds the man's hips down with one arm, so he can press his knuckle to the delicate skin between holes. He likes to play with it when he's on his own, so maybe—

Jiang Cheng stumbles out of the bedroom hours later. He lost count of his orgasms after the fourth one. Might have passed out a little bit, to be honest. When he tapped out, he dragged the boy up, intending to return the favor, but found his denim shorts soaked through. All it took was cupping his hand over his crotch and letting him thrust a few times before he got the pleasure of watching the hottest of men climax in his hand. That sense of power will carry him for days.



What won't carry him are his legs. He stumbles into the back of a couch, steps wobbling wildly. It feels like he ran a marathon. He has to find Wei Wuxian; no way he can drive home like this.

He locates him outside, in the immaculately maintained garden out front, on a bench with none other than Lan Wangji. Jiang Cheng is too high on fantastic sex to be annoyed by the Lan. He collapses to the grass beside Wei Wuxian's feet, knocking aside two empty, expensive wine bottles.

"Hey A-Cheng," Wei Wuxian giggles. Well past drunk into plastered, then. "Lan Zhan is gonna drive us back, okaay? He's so good, so chivell- chavel- so honorable." He grins and pats Lan Wangji's chest enthusiastically.

Jiang Cheng closes his eyes. He refuses to let their weird homoerotic *thing* ruin his afterglow. Maybe if they would make out, the tension would snap. Or it'd get worse. Who knows. "Whatever," he grunts.

A foot nudges his side. "Did you have a good time?" Wei Wuxian drawls.

Jiang Cheng snorts to hide his smile. "No thanks to you."

"Aiya, A-Cheng, how could I leave Lan Zhan all alone in the corner! No one would even talk to him!"

Jiang Cheng lets Wei Wuxian's whining prattle wash over him. They stumble their way to the parking area, Wei Wuxian practically carried by Lan Wangji, Jiang Cheng wobbling behind them. They pile into Lan Wangji's stupid little electric car, and Jiang Cheng mumbles out his address. He leans his head back. Streetlights race by, blurring the world into soft colors.

The evening replays in his head. He smiles. When Nie Huaisang throws a party, it will always be memorable. He burns the boy's face in his mind, eager to remember this hot one-time thing.

Barreling out of a side door toward the long driveway, Liu Qingge squishes his way to where Wei Qingwei waits. His clothes stick to him, drenched. His bangs are plastered against one side of his head. Wei Qingwei wrinkles his nose.

"Bro, what the fuck happened to you?"

"I—" He has to cough to clear his throat, his voice too hoarse to continue.

"Did you get booze spilled on you? Like, a whole punch bowl?!"



Thankful for the excuse, he just nods. Wei Qingwei holds out his fist; Liu Qingge bumps it. They both grin.

"Right on, dude. Wild party, right?! You know where the tarp is. Don't drip on my upholstery. Everyone else is staying for a bit or hooked up, so it's just us."

Liu Qingge spreads out the tarp in the narrow backseat and stumbles into the truck. He winces as he bends his bruised knees; the expensive rug had barely cushioned them, especially once it was soaked. Once he was soaked. He shivers in his wet clothes, an echo of delight at the fresh memories. His clothes are only drenched with water, from where he tried to rinse off, but— He discreetly lifts his crop top to his nose and inhales. His core heats, tightens. He can still smell that man on his shirt.

That man...

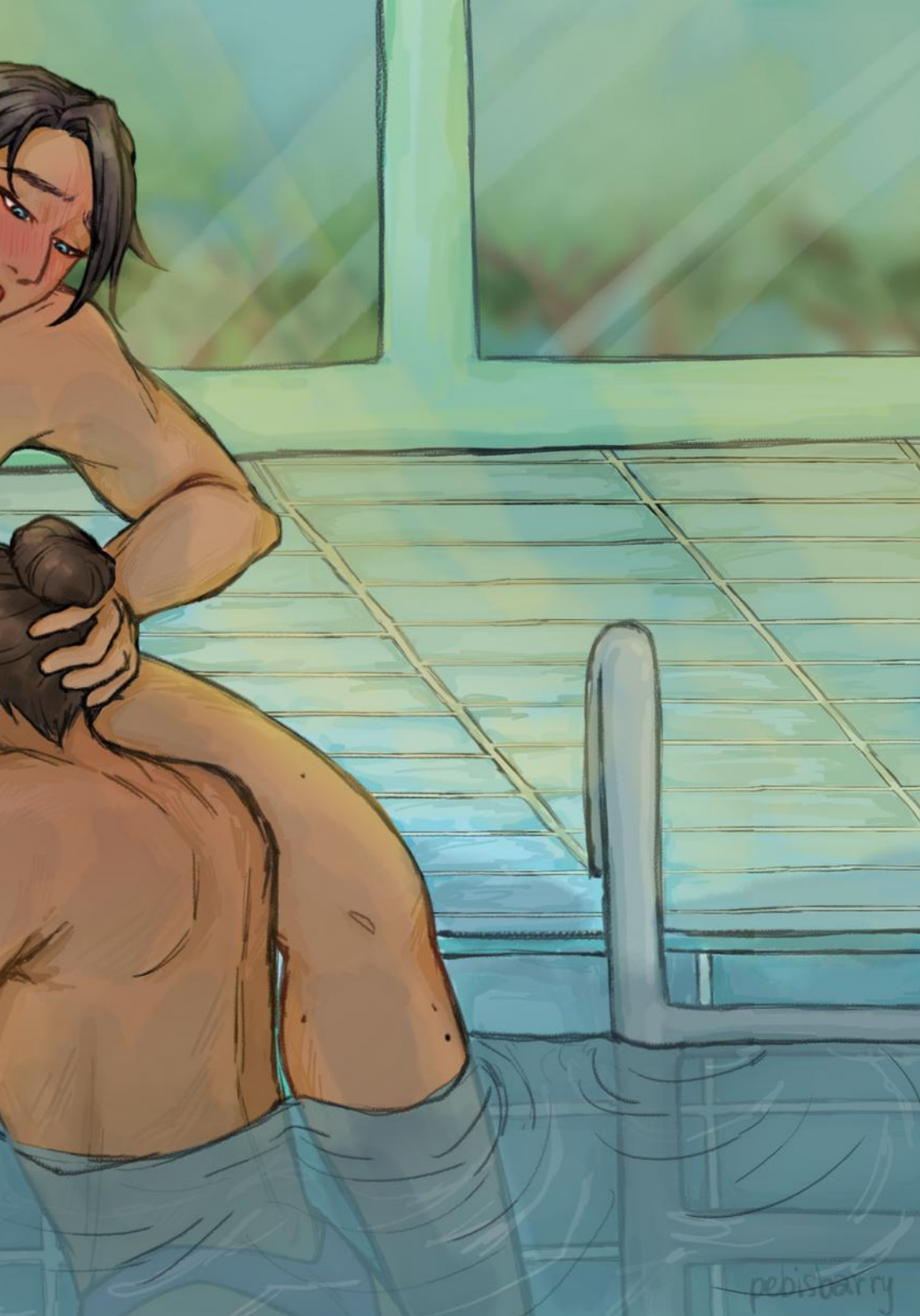
"Shit!"

"What?? Fucking hell—" The truck jerks as Wei Qingwei gets it back under control, startled from the exclamation.

Liu Qingge slumps, annoyed. "I didn't get his name..."







pebisbarry

AND THEY WERE ROOMMATES

Cherry_Blaze, with spot art by adarksweetness

Roommates to Lovers

Mutual Pining

Trans LQG

LQG has a Vagina

Period

Starts Dub-conl

Liu Qingge feels *miserable*.

It's not like he hasn't had a period before, but just because you have experience with something doesn't mean it gets *easier*.

So now he stands here, in the store's hygiene alley, staring at the selection of period products, trying to find the one he came here for.

The period cup.

In all the years of his life, he's never used one, but... now he's kind of desperate.

Tampons had those weird threads dangling between his legs and sometimes they ripped off. Pads did not fit well into his boxers, and wearing them with regular panties gave him dysphoria. Free bleeding was not an option either, with his flow being on the heavier side.

Period cup was his last solution.

Liu Qingge reaches out his hand for the only two models available at the store. They are the same brand and color, just different sizes. Not the best selection, Liu Qingge thinks, but it saves him time deciding.

According to the packaging, the smaller size fits people under 170cm and the bigger one — everyone else, apparently.

Liu Qingge doubts the accuracy of those estimates, but those things are supposed to fit most of the population, not all of it. So he just shakes his head and sighs. It is what it is.

Liu Qingge is a tall man, so he chooses the bigger one.

The package itself is colorful, with a pink strawberry pattern on it. The plastic window on the front reveals what Liu Qingge is currently in need of: a cup, no bigger than a shot glass, made out of pink silicone, with a "tail" at the bottom.

Fortunately, there's no one else in the alley. Liu Qingge puts the box in his shopping cart and proceeds to the self-checkout. He's not eager to receive questioning looks, especially now that people are annoying him more than usual.

He makes his way home, feeling the incoming wave of cramps.

The first symptoms started the day before, when Liu Qingge got a migraine out of nowhere. He spent the



entire day in bed, nauseous and wishing for a quick death instead of whatever this bullshit was.

This morning, the migraine was gone, but his stomach felt uneasy. Liu Qingge suspected he was just hungry, unable to put anything into his mouth the day before. But even after devouring a full plate of protein pancakes and scrambled eggs, the weird pressure in his abdomen didn't cease.

It wasn't until he started work that he noticed: his discharge, usually translucent, was tinged red.

Liu Qingge doesn't get his periods regularly, but when he finally gets one, it comes with the force of all the missed ones combined.

Knowing that he needed to prepare before it finally hit with full force, Liu Qingge had went to the store immediately after finishing his work.

Now, safe in the confines of his home, he decides to try out this new "device" before his period enters the heavy flow stage.

He takes a quick shower, puts on a tank top and sits at the edge of the bathtub.

He opens the box and takes out the silicone cup. It's light, soft to the touch and squishes easily.

Liu Qingge has already seen a few videos on how to insert such thing, he knows how it goes: first, you squish it until it looks like a wobbly letter C, then you insert it, push in gently, just below the cervix, and adjust to fit comfortably. If the "tail" is too long for your comfort, you can just cut the excess.

Liu Qingge washes the cup with warm water and soap, then shakes his hand to get rid of the water droplets.

Now, what position would be best for insertion?

He tries putting one leg up, but that does not feel right. Does he have to stand up? Lie down? But people are using those cups in public bathrooms too, there's no way they do this lying down...

After a few aborted attempts at different positions, Liu Qingge decides the simple squat will work best.

He pinches the rim of the cup, finds his hole and slowly pushes the cup in, like in the instructional videos... or at least he tries to.

The first time, he doesn't hold the top hard enough, and it pops back into a circle before he can even insert it.



The second time, he does manage to insert it, but loses his grip and the cup is barely inside. He tries to push it further in, but it seems impossible from this point, so he takes it out and tries again.

Third time is a charm, as they say. Liu Qingge needs both hands though, one to pinch the cup and the second to push it in deep enough. This is so much effort, how can people do this a few times a day?! If Liu Qingge was in a public bathroom now, his heavy flow at its finest, his hands would undoubtedly look like he just committed a murder. And there are no sinks to wash his hands in the small bathroom stalls. Maybe he should start carrying wet wipes for such occasions.

After some trial and error at positioning it, Liu Qingge sighs with relief. It's finally in, thank god. He almost broke a sweat. A small bit of the "tail" is sticking out of his hole, but it's fine.

Liu Qingge puts a finger in to check if the shape popped back into a circle. Seems like it did? He checks one more time from the other side. Yeah, looks good.

The feeling is... alien.

Of course it is, Liu Qingge thinks. It's a foreign object. It's his first time trying it out, obviously he needs to get used to it.

Liu Qingge stands up. The feeling resembles a slightly uncomfortable cramp now, but not enough to be considered painful.

He looks at his fingers. There's some blood on them, so his period must've started officially. But... should the blood be bright red? Well, he probably just scratched his insides with a fingernail. Not a big deal.

Liu Qingge washes his hands again and goes to his room.

Sitting down feels... weird. The pressure is definitely *there*. He's not sure how his bowels will react in the following hours.

Liu Qingge sighs heavily and flops on his back. He is *EXHAUSTED*.

He closes his eyes and decides to take a quick nap. This day has been too much for his current state.

But it wasn't long before he heard the lock on the door turn. Seems like Jiang Cheng, his roommate, finished his work early today.

"Dude, you'd never guess," Jiang Cheng says from the hallway, taking off his shoes. "It was my boss's birthday today, and we all got cake. I brought you some."



"Sure, put it in the fridge. I'll get to it," Liu Qingge grumbles, staring at the ceiling.

And Jiang Cheng, too, is *STARING*.

Staring at Liu Qingge who, in his hormone-driven ragequit, didn't bother to close his door, nor get under the blankets, *NOR PUT HIS BOXERS BACK ON*.

He is lying there, spread out like a starfish, slick pussy facing the world.

His folds are pink and puffy, with a little bit of translucent fluid flowing out of the not-so-tight hole and pooling on the bedsheets.

What in the world was Liu Qingge DOING just now???

Jiang Cheng swallows. Hard.

The silence stretches for a few more moments until Liu Qingge says:

"What are you standing there like an idiot for." The tone of his voice and furrowed eyebrows seem to urge Jiang Cheng to do *something*.

Oh! Jiang Cheng finally understands. It's an attempt at flirting! Liu Qingge isn't the type of guy who beats around the bush, so of course he'd take the direct approach at seduction, splay himself on the bed half naked and ready, and just wait for Jiang Cheng to come back from work! Straightforward strategy, no excess words needed. Classic Liu Qingge.

Jiang Cheng is shocked; he wasn't expecting his secret crush on his roommate to be reciprocated!

Overwhelmed by happiness — and an unbridled lust — he drops to his knees directly in front of Liu Qingge's glistening pussy.

Liu Qingge only manages to stutter out a confused "The fuck you-?!" before his voice transforms into a prolonged moan when Jiang Cheng dives right in.

Liu Qingge jolts. He feels Jiang Cheng's tongue circling around his entrance and instinctively grabs him by the hair. At first he just wants to yank the man's head away, after all, who jumps between people's legs like that?! But on the other hand... he thought about pinning Jiang Cheng to the wall and kissing him senseless so many times now.

Shen Yuan and Shang Qinghua also got together after living in the same house for a few months, so it must be normal behaviour between roommates, right? Judging by what Jiang Cheng is doing, that must be the case.



Good. Liu Qingge accepts the offer. He pulls on Jiang Cheng's hair to bring him closer, giving him a sign to continue.

And Jiang Cheng does so. He purrs with contentment, burrowing his face into Liu Qingge's curly bush.

Jiang Cheng licks him intently, side to side, up and down, then full circle. He's *tasting* Liu Qingge. And he must like the flavor, because his tongue teases Liu Qingge's entrance more and more.

Yes. To say that Jiang Cheng is enjoying this would be an understatement. He's dreamt of sucking Liu Qingge off ever since they first met. He wanted it so bad the thought seeped into his dreams and he often woke up with his underwear soaked and Liu Qingge's name on his lips.

But Liu Qingge never seemed interested in men, or anyone for that matter. So Jiang Cheng did what he was doing best: he bottled up his feelings.

Until he saw Liu Qingge freshly bathed and splayed seductively on the bed, then his self control was no more.

Jiang Cheng feels Liu Qingge wiggle under his touch. He reaches up to grab onto the soft flesh of Liu Qingge's hips and pins him in place, almost melting when Liu Qingge whines in response.

Liu Qingge's lower half always got more sore and tender right before his period, so for Jiang Cheng to manhandle him like this... it was just too cruel...!

Liu Qingge feels another ache when Jiang Cheng's tongue directly enters his hole, swollen and abused from all the previous attempts at inserting the cup.

But the pain makes hot waves run through his muscles and it hurts *just so right*. Together with the skilled movements of Jiang Cheng's wet tongue, it is enough to spark a fire of lust in Liu Qingge's core.

Jiang Cheng moves one of his hands down and between Liu Qingge's plush thighs. Using his middle and index fingers, he spreads the slick pussylips to reveal the puckering hole between them. It's beautiful, cherry red and makes Jiang Cheng salivate even more now that he can see it directly.

Above it is a swollen nub - Liu Qingge's dick. It's just as red as his hole and silently begs to be sucked off. Jiang Cheng moves his other hand onto Liu Qingge's abdomen, pulls the clitoral hood up with his thumb and does just that - takes the nub wholly into his mouth.

Liu Qingge holds back a scream.



His dick is being sucked and licked and he's about to lose his mind. It feels just *TOO GOOD!*

Liu Qingge never expected to receive a blowjob, especially not from his stern-faced roommate! And yet here he is, squirming under the man as if he was fighting for his dear life!

Jiang Cheng is mouthing at his dick, nipping gently at the delicate skin around it. He looks up, not breaking away from his doings, but he is by no means *ready* for the sight.

Above Liu Qingge's V line, his abdominal muscles are shaking uncontrollably. His nipples are now perky and hard, like little jewels crowning the soft curves of his pecs. And there is also Liu Qingge's face — oh gods, *his face* — flushed red, with hazy eyes and mouth open, panting and whimpering in rotation. He looks at Jiang Cheng, and that gaze makes Jiang Cheng's own dick twitch.

Those eyes seem to say, "Don't stop. Give me more. I need your touch and I need it now!" And who is Jiang Cheng to decline such a tempting offer?

He gives one slow lick, watching intently as Liu Qingge's eyes roll back. He teases the tip of the dick with his tongue, moving side-to-side, keeping it as gentle as possible. He wishes he could just stop time and stay like this, eating Liu Qingge out slowly and unhurriedly for eternity, building up his pleasure one step at a time.

Liu Qingge is *NOT* having that!

He pulls harder on Jiang Cheng's hair and thrusts his hips upwards, trying to fuck himself on Jiang Cheng's face. If you decide to do something, at least do it properly, dammit!

Jiang Cheng feels delighted. His beloved not only returned his feelings, but also returned his *lust*. He *wants* Jiang Cheng just as much as Jiang Cheng wants him. This loop of reciprocation makes him grow hotter and he cannot stop the canting movement of his hips.

Trying to distract himself and not cum too fast, he moves the hand resting on Liu Qingge's abdomen upwards and grabs a handful of the firm pec.

Liu Qingge *squeals*.

Fuck, did his period make those sensitive too! And now Jiang Cheng is...!

Jiang Cheng is teasing his swollen nipples...!!!

Liu Qingge's muscles tense up. It hurts, it hurts so much! It's a sharp feeling, setting all his nerves on fire! *OH, he's so close now...!!!*

With another desperate whine, Liu Qingge's thighs wrap around Jiang Cheng's head like a deadly trap. They're clearly shaking now, just like Liu Qingge's breath.



Pressed so close to Liu Qingge's pussy, Jiang Cheng has no choice but to fully open his mouth and eat him out, his upper lip teasing the bulging nub, while his tongue circles around the entrance. Collecting juices into his mouth, he is pushing them back in before slurping them back down.

Liu Qingge is too busy enjoying himself to care about muting the sounds he's making. When Jiang Cheng finds that specific sweet spot, his moans go an octave higher.

Fucking teaser! HOW DARE HE BE THIS GOOD WITH HIS TONGUE!

Liu Qingge can't take this anymore. The pleasure Jiang Cheng was providing him with has been pushing him closer and closer to the finish.

Holding Jiang Cheng's hair in one hand, Liu Qingge reaches out the other to grab the palm relentlessly bullying his nipple. He entwines his fingers with Jiang Cheng's and, with one more exhausted cry, he finally gives in.

He can no longer control the frantic jerks of his hips, his back arches and all reality is lost for a few seconds. It's just him, the heat and the blinding pleasure.

When he comes back to his senses, he's still gushing slick and covering Jiang Cheng's whole chin with it.

He catches his breath, slowly grounding himself, using Jiang Cheng's hand and the hair he was still clutching as anchors.

For a few more moments, he has to try really hard to open his eyes. It's as if all his strength was wiped out by a single orgasm — an orgasm like he has never experienced before.

After making sure his partner is breathing steadily again, Jiang Cheng finally removes his mouth from Liu Qingge's sensitive area. He was also not expecting such an intense reaction — not that he was complaining. Liu Qingge looked beautiful when he was at the peak of his pleasure.

Jiang Cheng straightens his back, but remains between Liu Qingge's thighs. He's unwilling to leave that spot anytime soon. Besides, Liu Qingge is still holding him by the hair.

Jiang Cheng uses the sleeve of his shirt to wipe his chin, but is alarmed when he sees a red smudge on it. Did he hurt Liu Qingge? Was he too rough after all?

"Um, hey... how are you feeling?"

Liu Qingge mumbles something in response, slowly recovering the ability to talk. He sits up carefully and looks back at Jiang Cheng.



"I... I think I might've hurt you just now..." Jiang Cheng shows him his sleeve stained in red.
"I'm so sorry, I got too excited and..."

Whether it was anger or embarrassment or both, Liu Qingge somehow got all his energy and attitude back.

"Shut up, I'm fine." Liu Qingge frowns and looks to the side, blush lingering on his cheeks.

"But you're bleeding, that's not 'fine'!" Jiang Cheng grows more concerned by the second. His crush was always like that when it came to injuries, but this time was different! This time, it was *Jiang Cheng* who caused the injury! He *had to* take responsibility!

"I said, SHUT THE FUCK UP!" Liu Qingge's face is all red now. In a quieter voice, he adds: "...it's just period..."

"P...period...? I'm sorry, I didn't know, there was no blood before..." Jiang Cheng was beginning to panic. What if he actually messed up Liu Qingge's vaginal tract and made the whole period thing *worse*?!

Liu Qingge sighs, clearly annoyed. Then, before Jiang Cheng can even react, Liu Qingge grabs him by the collar and, using the newfound strength in his legs, flips their positions, scissor-sweep style.

Jiang Cheng squeaks a short "WTF!!!" but is quickly crushed by Liu Qingge's massive ass. Liu Qingge is now sitting on his face!

"If you can't shut the fuck up then I'll make you. Hmpf. Now, eat me again."





Melon
Cellie
25

NOT A MILE HIGH CLUB, BUT CLOSE ENOUGH!

Cherry_Blaze, with spot art by Neuvoid

Strangers to Lovers

TSA

Guns Mentioned

Slutty JC

JC has LOTS of Piercings

JC has a Vagina

The sun peeked through the windows of the near-empty airport as Jiang Cheng arrived — suitcase in one hand, energy drink in the other — for his first-ever flight.

The airport itself was quite small. Just some parking space and a building no bigger than a shopping mall. Jiang Cheng had driven here only once before, to pick up Wei Wuxian. But today, it was his first time taking a plane himself.

He submitted the checked luggage and entered the TSA line. A sign on the wall read "no liquids". Jiang Cheng quickly downed his energy drink and put the can into his pocket.

He placed his belongings on the tray as instructed and proceeded to the narrow gate. The traveler ahead of him walked through the gate and it glowed green. A staff member dressed in blue uniform urged Jiang Cheng to come through next.

He was handsome, with long hair put up in a slick ponytail and a beauty mark under his eye. The uniform shirt fit snugly against his chest.

Jiang Cheng reprimanded himself for such thoughts and approached the gate.

But as he stepped through, it suddenly glowed red.

"Huh?" Jiang Cheng didn't know what happened. He wasn't a criminal, why would the gate turn red on him?

"Sir, please remove all of your metal items and put them on the tray," said the handsome staff member.

Oh, right. Jiang Cheng took the empty can from his pocket and threw it into the trash.

He crossed the gate again, but it still presented him with red light and annoying beeping.

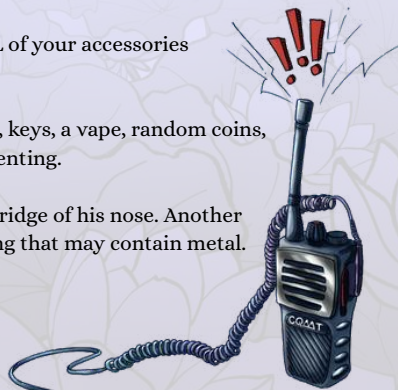
Jiang Cheng sighed, and took off all the rings and can-caps bracelets he'd carefully picked for this outfit. Even his lip and eyebrow piercings were set aside.

Nothing changed, the gate still glowed red.

"Sir" The handsome man narrowed his eyes "Please remove ALL of your accessories that may contain metal."

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes and emptied his pockets — earbuds, keys, a vape, random coins, all piled up on the tray. But the metal-detecting gate was unrelenting.

The handsome staff member, Officer Liu Qingge, pinched the bridge of his nose. Another one of those people, huh? "Once again, please remove everything that may contain metal. That includes hairclips, belts, even shoes."



Officer Liu watched the passenger remove his platformed boots, his height suddenly decreasing 4 inches. The bright blush racing over his face caught Officer Liu's attention.

He unbuckled his belt next, tossing it on the tray. Finally, he locked eyes with Officer Liu as he pulled his ornamental hairpin. His hair fell down majestically around his face, reminding the TSA officer of pieces of silk streaming in the wind.

Jiang Cheng could swear at that moment he saw a glint in the other man's eyes.

Yet still — the gate glowed red, as if mocking Jiang Cheng for overdressing for something as simple as taking a flight.

Officer Liu Qingge was just as annoyed. "I'm sorry, Sir, I'll have to ask you to come with me."

Jiang Cheng furrowed his brows. "Come where? I didn't do anything that would get me arrested, did I?"

"We'll check that in a moment. Come." The staff member said curtly.

Jiang Cheng quickly grabbed his belongings and followed the man. Yes, still in his socks.

They arrived at a separate corridor with many doors, one of which the handsome man opened. Jiang Cheng entered, threw his stuff on the chair and leaned on the edge of the table.

He crossed his arms, clearly upset about this whole situation.

"Sorry for the inconvenience," the handsome man said half-heartedly. "I'm TSA Officer Liu and I need to inform you that because our detector sensed unidentified metal objects on you, we are obligated to perform a pat-down. It can be done by me or another officer, if that's your request."

"It's fine. Let's not make this longer than it needs to be."

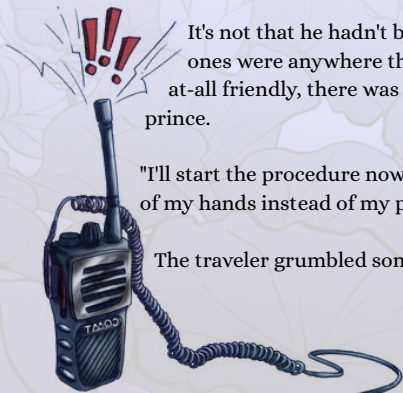
"Fair enough." Officer Liu opened a nearby drawer and took out a pair of black nitrile gloves. He put them on in quick, practiced movements, his fingers shockingly elegant in them. "Alright, stand straight, hands to the side."

Jiang Cheng did as he was told, a warm feeling forming in his gut.

It's not that he hadn't been touched by other men before, but none of the previous ones were anywhere this handsome! Even though Officer Liu seemed harsh and not-at-all friendly, there was something alluring about him. Like a cold, unattainable ice prince.

"I'll start the procedure now. When I get to touching your sensitive areas, I'll use the back of my hands instead of my palms. Ready?"

The traveler grumbled something in response, which Officer Liu took as a 'yes'.



He started by checking Jiang Cheng's hair and behind his ears, then moved down to tug at his collar. Jiang Cheng swallowed, imagining what that would mean in a different context.

Officer Liu proceeded to move his hands along Jiang Cheng's shoulder and arm. Jiang Cheng wondered if he could feel his bicep. And if he did, did it have any impact on him? Well, considering how well-built the officer was himself, probably not.

As promised, Officer Liu used the backs of his hands to feel around Jiang Cheng's chest. He made a sound of surprise when his hands caught on two little rings right on his nipples.

"It's just piercings... don't worry about it..." Jiang Cheng looked to the side, a bit embarrassed at how the gentle tug sent a shiver down his spine.

"Alright..." the officer continued to move his hands downwards. Jiang Cheng held his breath, trying not to pant. His chest was indeed sensitive.

Dammit, get it together. This man is just trying to do his job, Jiang Cheng chastised himself mentally.

"Another one?" Officer Liu asked, his hands on Jiang Cheng's lower belly.

"Um, yeah... I have a navel piercing too..." Jiang Cheng sent the officer a nervous smile.

"Uh-huh... Okay, now I need you to grab your belt loops and hike your pants up. I'll begin to check your buttocks and legs."

The passenger did as ordered, pulling his pants up and forward. His buttocks strained the fabric, round and juicy. Officer Liu's face prickled with a blush.

Jiang Cheng smirked. Yes, his ass never disappointed.

Officer Liu knelt and respectfully checked Jiang Cheng's behind, but when he proceeded to the front, he visibly stiffened.

Hm? Jiang Cheng looked down to see what happened.

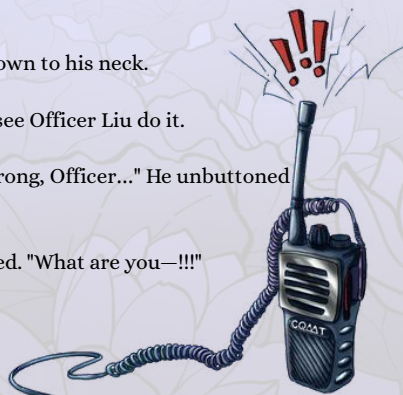
"Sir." Officer Liu started, with obvious pink on his cheeks and a crease forming between his perfect eyebrows. "I must ask. Are you this happy to be experiencing the pat-down, or is this a gun in your pants?"

Jiang Cheng immediately reddened, from the tips of his ears down to his neck.

Yes, he was enjoying the procedure. And yes, he was happy to see Officer Liu do it.

Jiang Cheng sighed and dropped his hands. "Well, you aren't wrong, Officer..." He unbuttoned his jeans and unzipped the fly.

The officer, still kneeling before Jiang Cheng, looked scandalized. "What are you—!!!"



Before he could say anything more, Jiang Cheng reached into his pants and pulled out a gun.

"!!!" Officer Liu acted quickly. He pounced on Jiang Cheng, turning and pinning him to the table in one move.

"Hey! WHAT THE HELL!" Jiang Cheng yelled. The gun fell out of his hand and was kicked aside. Jiang Cheng was now bent over the table with his new crush pressing onto him from behind.

"Carrying a weapon on a plane is illegal. I don't know what you were planning, but I won't let you go now." The officer growled into Jiang Cheng's ear, his tone domineering.

Jiang Cheng was now confused — and extremely aroused. He melted under the officer's voice and the heat of his body. Jiang Cheng's hips instinctively canted up to get more.

His sensitive nipples pressed into the table and Jiang Cheng had to bite his lower lip to hold back the lewd moan forming in his throat. Oh god, he could even smell the officer's cologne like this.

He could feel Officer Liu being affected, too. The officer's uneven breath wafted over Jiang Cheng's nape. Strong arms dug into his flesh — definitely going to leave a mark. Something hard pressed between Jiang Cheng's cheeks, and it was *NOT* walkie-talkie-shaped!

Officer Liu seemed like he wanted to say something but was trying to calm down first. If he was unable to even call for backup right now, he must be affected pretty badly. So they stayed like that for a long moment.

"I..." Jiang Cheng groaned weakly after shaking off some of the horny haze clouding his brain, "I have a license for that... it's in my wallet, in the right pocket..."

Officer Liu said nothing, just gripped Jiang Cheng harder with one hand, moving the other to check said pocket.

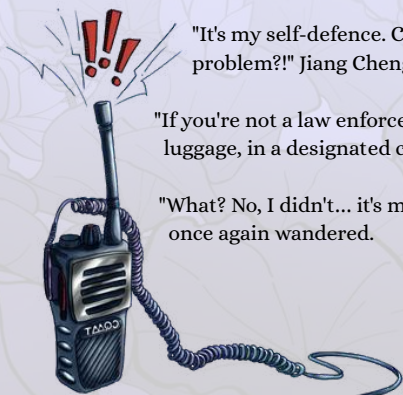
He struggled with it for a while, before pulling out a folded piece of paper. He studied it for a few seconds.

"Mr. Jiang." The officer loosened his grip, but kept Jiang Cheng pressed down to the table. "Please enlighten me as to why you decided to bring your weapon with you as a carry-on."

"It's my self-defence. Carrying a weapon is legal, and I have the license, so what is the problem?!" Jiang Cheng was angry and embarrassed. And still very, very horny.

"If you're not a law enforcer, you can only bring the weapon on a plane in your checked luggage, in a designated case and *unloaded*. Don't you know that?"

"What? No, I didn't... it's my first time... taking the plane, I mean!" Jiang Cheng's thoughts once again wandered.



"I recommend checking the internet next time." Officer Liu finally let go of Jiang Cheng and straightened his back.

Jiang Cheng looked over his shoulder and noticed that the officer was flushed, his pants a tad too tight. And he *DID* steal a glance at Jiang Cheng's ass, still bent over the table.

Jiang Cheng smirked. *Heh. Interesting.*

Officer Liu coughed into his fist. "That's everything from my side, you're free to go, Sir. Please do your research next time. Take your belongings and I'll escort you back to the main hall where you can check your firearm."

Jiang Cheng slid off the table, a little disappointed. He really wished this handsome man would fuck him silly on that table. What if they never met again? Jiang Cheng didn't want to miss his chance...

"Well, Officer..." Jiang Cheng stepped closer. His pants, still unzipped, hung low on his hips, revealing his abdomen. A small gem dangled from his belly button.

"What... *ekhem*, what is it, Sir?" Officer Liu seemed to still be under Jiang Cheng's charm. Good.

"I just wanted to apologise for the inconvenience..." Jiang Cheng invaded LQG's personal space, and oh god, the man was a whole head taller than Jiang Cheng!

"N-no need... Sir, please take your items, I need to get back to work."

Jiang Cheng put on a sultry expression, something he saw Wei Wuxian do a few times. With a sweet and enticing voice, he said, "But you cannot go back to work like this, Officer~". He could smell the other man's cologne again, he was so close, but not close enough to make their chests press against each other. Jiang Cheng decided he wouldn't touch until the man took the initiative himself. Jiang Cheng already played it risky by trying to seduce the officer; being accused of physical harassment wasn't on his to-do list.

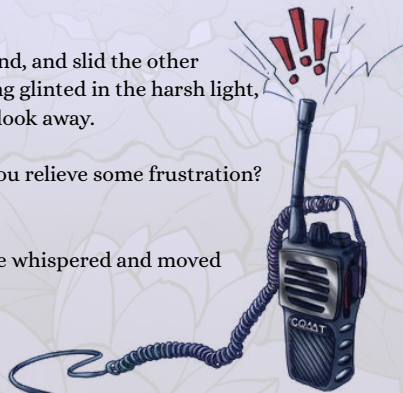
Officer Liu swallowed. "I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, I think you do." Jiang Cheng crooned. "I can see you want it, so why not take this chance? Seems like no one will come into this room anyway, and my pants are barely hanging from my waist~"

With that, Jiang Cheng pulled his shirt halfway up with one hand, and slid the other down to play with the waistband of his pants. His navel piercing glinted in the harsh light, and Officer Liu zeroed in on it. He tried valiantly, but couldn't look away.

Jiang Cheng giggled. "So, what do you say~? Want me to help you relieve some frustration? Apologize properly for making your work harder?~"

Officer Liu's eyes darkened with lust. "I... I'll lock the door..." he whispered and moved aside.



Jiang Cheng knew he won this game.

He sat comfortably on the table and shortly the officer joined him, standing between Jiang Cheng's thighs.

"So" Officer Liu leaned down to be face-to-face with Jiang Cheng. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"Seducing the TSA officer during working hours after he found a gun in my pants? Yeah, I'm aware~"

"I meant this" the handsome man took Jiang Cheng's hand and pressed it to his crotch. The erection Jiang Cheng spotted earlier was larger now; the zipper struggled to contain it.

"Oh. *Oh*, yes, I am prepared." Jiang Cheng sent the officer a lecherous smile. "But I want you to say that you want it."

"Want what? You? Isn't it already obvious?"

"Obvious or not, I like the way it sounds" Jiang Cheng pulled Officer Liu in by the collar and whispered into his ear "And I want you, too. So, so much~"

Officer Liu stiffened and held his breath. This little troublemaker was right — knowing it and *hearing it* were very different things.

Taking advantage of the officer's shock, Jiang Cheng captured his lips. They were softer than they seemed, and Jiang Cheng made a point of nipping them.

Officer Liu returned the kiss eagerly, putting one hand on Jiang Cheng's thigh and the other on his waist.

Jiang Cheng reveled in the feeling. The officer was taller than him, his muscular body pressed close to Jiang Cheng's own. The smell of his cologne was driving him crazy. Flight be damned, he'd much rather stay here with this man.

The officer's hands explored, one groping from Jiang Cheng's waist up to cup his pec, jolting Jiang Cheng with pleasure as he played with the nipple piercing. Jiang Cheng whined into the kiss.

Officer Liu seized this opportunity to add his tongue into the fun. As he kissed Jiang Cheng deeper, he felt something in his mouth. A ball on a stud? So this guy had his tongue pierced too, huh. Officer Liu groaned, imagining how that one would feel on his cock.

His other hand slid upward from Jiang Cheng thigh and slipped into the back of his open jeans. He intended to get under Jiang Cheng's boxers, but to his surprise, the buttcheek was covered not in boxers, but in something far less.

Jiang Cheng leaned back from the kiss at the officer's confused hum.



"What's wrong?"

"What's up with your underwear?"

Jiang Cheng smirked.

"Well, why don't you take a look?"

Officer Liu furrowed his brows and — led more by curiosity than by lust — yanked Jiang Cheng's pants off in one fell swoop.

Jiang Cheng now sat on the table only in his t-shirt, a pair of purple socks and... fishnets. No underwear. Just fishnets.

Officer Liu felt himself grow harder.

"The hell. Who walks around like that?" He demanded with barely controlled want. Jiang Cheng shrugged.

"Let's just say I don't like to feel restricted."

Officer Liu snorted. "Let me relieve you from your misery, then." He quickly removed Jiang Cheng's t-shirt and pinned him to the table. Willingly, this time.

Jiang Cheng wrapped his legs around his waist, pulling him closer.

Officer Liu stole a few more kisses before marking Jiang Cheng's neck with bruises. If this little troublemaker wanted to play hard, he might as well bear the visible consequences of it. He marked his trail down, remembering to lick around the pebbled nipple. When he bit on it, Jiang Cheng shivered and lewd moans spilled from his lips. So the officer made sure to bite the other one, too.

He finally moved low enough to kneel in front of the table, head between Jiang Cheng's thighs. Thighs covered in those damned fishnets. Officer Liu gave in to his impulsive thoughts and ripped the fishnets right in the middle, revealing a swollen and glistening... pussy. A perfect, peachy-colored pussy, with a stud going vertically through the clitoral hood.

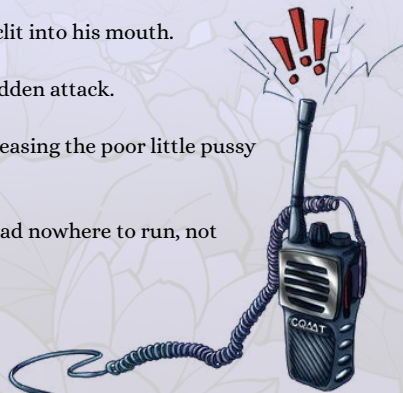
"Hey!" Jiang Cheng complained. "Those were my favourite!"

"Too bad." Officer Liu said curtly before sucking Jiang Cheng's clit into his mouth.

"AAAh!" Jiang Cheng threw his head back, not expecting the sudden attack.

Officer Liu played with the stud, rolling his tongue around it, teasing the poor little pussy until it started crying juices.

Jiang Cheng wiggled on the table, making cute noises. But he had nowhere to run, not when the officer's strong arms held him down.



Or, one arm, because the other hand was now pressing two fingers into his slick hole. They went in with no resistance.

Jiang Cheng didn't even bother muffling his moans. Those fingers worked magic: he might as well let the officer know how good it made him feel.

A static sound came from under the table.

"Hello, Officer Liu, do you copy?"

Shit. The officer quickly reached for his walkie-talkie with his free hand. The other one, however, was still busy abusing Jiang Cheng's little pussy.

"Loud and clear. Go ahead." He responded calmly, seemingly unbothered by the scene playing out before him.

"It's been a while since you left, is everything okay?"

"Yeah. I found a suspicious item, proceeding according to the protocol." When he said 'suspicious item', his thumb rubbed the stud embedded in Jiang Cheng's clitoral hood. "It'll take a while, but no need for backup."

"Roger. Over and out."

Officer Liu turned off his walkie-talkie and threw it to the side. "So bothersome." To ease his frustration, he plunged his fingers harder into Jiang Cheng's leaking hole.

Jiang Cheng was so close now, he could feel his brain getting hazy from all this pleasure.

"Aaah! Officer! Please, harder...!"

But the officer removed his fingers and stood up.

Jiang Cheng lifted his head to see what was happening, only to witness Officer Liu opening his work-appropriate cargo pants and pulling out his dick.

Jiang Cheng salivated at the sight.

The handsome man slapped his dick against Jiang Cheng's pierced clit a few times, then rubbed the length against his hole. Fuck, Jiang Cheng was not going to last long.

When Officer Liu decided he was wet enough, he pressed in with one swift motion.

Jiang Cheng arched his back and let out a strangled moan. That cock was the biggest he'd ever had, and it made his lower belly bulge a little.

Officer Liu didn't waste his time. He snapped his hips back and forth in a punishing rhythm, as if to make Jiang Cheng pay for all the trouble he'd caused.



Jiang Cheng was happy to oblige. He squeezed around that girth like he tried to hold onto it for dear life, provoking a deep growl from the officer.

Jiang Cheng was already close to his peak, but Officer Liu was quickly catching up. All of Jiang Cheng's previous teasings and current moans were driving him into madness, where all he could think about was drilling deep into that welcoming heat.

"Officer...!" Jiang Cheng whined, tears bejeweling the corners of his eyes "Inside... come inside...! Breed my pussy, make me yours!!!"

Officer Liu's control snapped the instant he heard those words. He yanked Jiang Cheng's legs onto his shoulders, folding the insolent traveler into a mating press. He thrust frantically into that messy pussy, leaking juices all over itself. Skin slapped against skin. Officer Liu felt himself getting close to the edge, and with a few final thrusts, he bit down on the nearest thing he could reach — Jiang Cheng's inner thigh.

He came in waves, filling the tight space more and more with each load.

Jiang Cheng squealed under him, the feeling of fullness and the wetness between his legs sending him into a frenzied orgasm. He grabbed the officer's shoulders and refused to let go even as his fingers went white. He screamed and moaned, and tears ran down his face, smearing his eyeliner.

They trembled in the aftershocks together for a long minute.

Officer Liu regained his consciousness first. He loosened his teeth and straightened his back, looking at the mess he'd made of Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Cheng was absolutely fucked out. His face was red, his legs shaking.

The officer pulled out slowly, watching the mix of slick and cum dribble out of the clenching hole. The place he bit already bruised. Jiang Cheng was marked. He belonged to him.

Jiang Cheng chuckled. "I like that look in your eyes. You can stare as much as you want, I don't mind." With that, he reached down with one hand and spread his pussy lips to give Officer Liu a better view.

Fuck, he'd be willing to go again. Except...

"You need to hurry or you'll miss your flight, Sir."

"Not before you give me your number, Officer~"





Baobei,
does it hurt?

Tell me if
it does...

Good-
I love you

N-no...

Mn.
Feels good...

I love you

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE

Dionte, with spot art by Shamelesscooper

Fuckbuddies to Lovers

Rough Sex

Anal Sex

Unsafe Sex

Top Liu Qingge

Bottom Jiang Cheng

The final bell rang, and the referee stepped forward to separate them. They paced the ring, letting their blood and breath calm after the bout. The judge's scores were announced, and the referee moved to Liu Qingge to raise his hand, to the applause and screams of the audience. A gold for China, with another medal guaranteed from their heavyweight. Out in the audience, he thought he could see Jiang Cheng standing and clapping for him.

Liu Qingge made his way out of the ring, guided by his coach. He heard some congratulations in the locker room and muttered his thanks and returned their words while changing into his red sweats and jersey.

Soon enough, an announcement rang for the welterweight's award ceremony, and Liu Qingge led the way outside. He stood on the highest podium- as he had for all but one year. The judges arrived with the medals, and he bowed his head as they hung the gold around his neck.

Applause rang through the crowd, and Liu Qingge lifted his medal to show everyone.

After all the pomp of the ceremony, he made his way to the audience to seat himself by Jiang Cheng. He wrapped an arm around Jiang Cheng's seat, whose head leaned back to press against Liu Qingge's bicep.

"We're not leaving right away?"

"I want to see-"

"Oh, Liu-shidi! I didn't think you'd be here."

He recognized that voice. Shen Yuan. Jiang Cheng stiffened beside him, and Liu Qingge rubbed his arm until he could feel Jiang Cheng relax again.

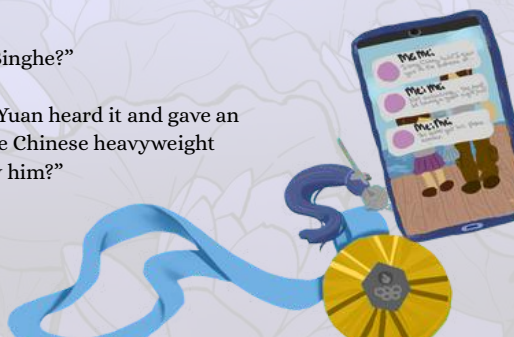
Shen Yuan looked at them and gave Liu Qingge a judgemental glance.

"Man-spreading a bit, are you? I hope your neighbor doesn't mind- sorry about him, by the way," Shen Yuan apologized to Jiang Cheng, who glanced at Liu Qingge with a look that screamed, is he serious?

Shen Yuan settled himself beside Liu Qingge, blathering about his brother and Luo Binghe. And more about Luo Binghe- and more-

Jiang Cheng whispered to Liu Qingge, "who is Luo Binghe?"

Liu Qingge felt gratified by the question- but Shen Yuan heard it and gave an offended huff, "you don't know Luo Binghe? He's the Chinese heavyweight representative. Why are you here if you don't know him?"



Jiang Cheng frowned. "I knew Nie Mingjue."

"Well, Luo Binghe is much better."

The swimmer's frown turned to a full scowl. "More like new."

Shen Yuan vehemently explained, "He got gold last Olympics, just as a lightweight."

Jiang Cheng's brows furrowed, and he glanced at Liu Qingge. "So he beat you?"

It was apparently Liu Qingge's turn to scowl, and he nodded.

Shen Yuan raised a brow, "you aren't still upset about that, are you?"

Liu Qingge glared at his friend, "Shen Yuan."

Shen Yuan tsk'ed, but he didn't say anything more.

The match couldn't begin soon enough.

When Luo Binghe and his opponent stepped into the ring, Shen Yuan immediately left his chair to stand and pull out a sign to cheer on his fiancée. Liu Qingge rolled his eyes and leaned back to watch the match. He leaned closer to Jiang Cheng to whisper, "Shen Yuan is engaged to Luo Binghe. They're obsessed with each other."

He got a huff in reply, before Jiang Cheng muttered. "I'd want to watch the guy who beat me too, if I were in your situation."

Liu Qingge glanced at his companion, feeling appreciative.

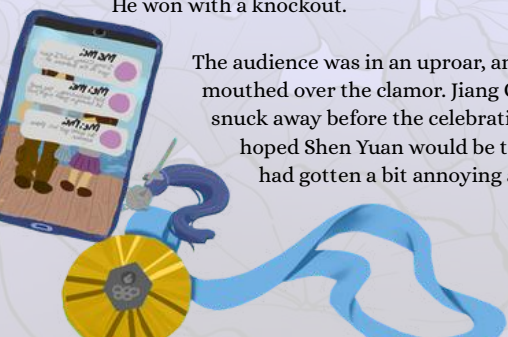
Shen Yuan yelled his encouragement for Luo Binghe– Liu Qingge knew he would deny it later.

The first round went quickly enough, Luo Binghe taking quite a beating. He scored highly regardless, and Liu Qingge knew he was just biding his time to deliver a devastating blow. As far as he knew, he'd been the only one to not be knocked out by a solid punch from Luo Binghe.

And sure enough, in the fourth round, Luo Binghe delivered a devastating hit– knocking his opponent to the floor of the ring.

He won with a knockout.

The audience was in an uproar, and Liu Qingge turned to Jiang Cheng. "Let's go," he mouthed over the clamor. Jiang Cheng seemed surprised, but he nodded and they snuck away before the celebrations of Luo Binghe's victory died down. Liu Qingge hoped Shen Yuan would be too distracted to text him about it later. His friend had gotten a bit annoying about Luo Binghe since they'd met, and Liu Qingge



had been having a much better time talking to and being with-

Liu Qingge snuck a glance over to Jiang Cheng, who was walking quietly beside him.

He grabbed Jiang Cheng's hand.

Jiang Cheng seemed surprised for a second, but Liu Qingge saw the corners of his lips twitch upwards.

"Let's get something to eat and head back."

Jiang Cheng agreed, pulling out his phone as he had for their past meals, guiding them to another restaurant. This one felt a bit lackluster compared to some of the others, although Liu Qingge felt he didn't have the attention for anything other than Jiang Cheng right now. When they were full and ready, they returned to Liu Qingge's hotel room, and he closed the curtains before turning to Jiang Cheng, almost desperate to taste him- to push him to the bed and fuck him.

"Whoa- mm- Qing-ge-"

He bit at Jiang Cheng's lower lip to pull his mouth open, seeking that warm tongue he'd been quite enjoying for the past week.

Jiang Cheng groaned as their tongues tangled, and Liu Qingge swallowed it. He adjusted himself, then lifted Jiang Cheng- his hands digging into the crevasse between his ass and thighs.

Liu Qingge walked them over to the bed, dumping Jiang Cheng on it and crawling over him. He began tearing the clothes off the younger athlete, prompting Jiang Cheng to breathlessly mutter, "what's gotten into you?"

Liu Qingge replied by biting Jiang Cheng's chest.

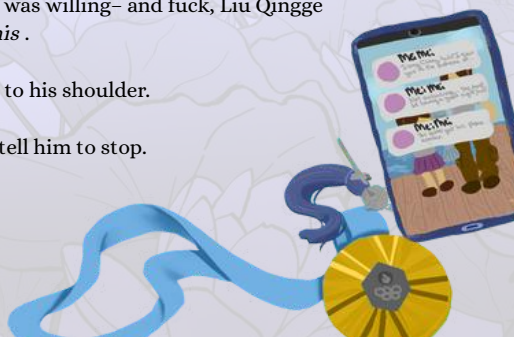
He got a moan in return.

It didn't take long to strip Jiang Cheng of the rest of his clothes, and Liu Qingge grabbed the lube he'd bought after their first night together. He screwed off the top and dipped his fingers into it before tossing it back onto the side table. He pulled Jiang Cheng's leg, ignoring the yelp as he circled his fingers around the furl he knew he could stretch and pound to softness.

Maybe once they were back in China, if Jiang Cheng was willing- and fuck, Liu Qingge hoped he was willing- he'd let Jiang Cheng stretch *his*.

Imagining that, he bit a mark into the leg he'd lifted to his shoulder.

"Fuck- are you an animal?!" But Jiang Cheng didn't tell him to stop.



Liu Qingge let go of the flesh he'd been working with his mouth to push a finger inside Jiang Cheng. Jiang Cheng groaned, and Liu Qingge pumped his finger a few times to feel the give, adding a second quicker than he normally would. Jiang Cheng gripped onto the sheets, stuck half off the bed in Liu Qingge's grip.

He pumped and scissored his fingers, stretching Jiang Cheng's hole to take him. Jiang Cheng was panting where he'd twisted into the sheets, and Liu Qingge felt wronged that Jiang Cheng's eyes weren't on him.

"Look at me." He said, while he spread his fingers and slowly dragged them out, to feel that tension of Jiang Cheng being pried open.

Jiang Cheng whined, brows furrowing as his eyes remained closed.

Liu Qingge pushed a third finger inside. "Look at me!"

Jiang Cheng's eyes opened, and he looked at Liu Qingge with a flushed face, still half hidden away.

He shifted Jiang Cheng's leg low enough for him to lean forward. Between them, his fingers pumped and slid, the lube loud in the quiet of his hotel room.

"It sounds good right? Don't you want to see? Watch me open you up before I wreck you tonight?"

"Wreck me-?"

Liu Qingge curled his fingers against that spot that sent electricity through Jiang Cheng's body, and Jiang Cheng arched.

"Wreck you." Liu Qingge repeated, knowing well that Jiang Cheng probably hadn't heard him over the pleasure rushing through his veins.

He thrust his fingers like he was fucking Jiang Cheng, holding Jiang Cheng down when he began to writhe, cock twitching.

"Are you going to cum?"

Jiang Cheng's legs slid and curled against the sheets as Liu Qingge continued to curl and press his fingers against his prostate.

"I'm going to make you cum on my fingers, then fuck you open and fill you with my cum."

"Shit--"



He didn't let up the pressure as he licked a stripe across his other hand and jerked Jiang Cheng's weeping cock.

"Qing-ge!" Jiang Cheng yelled, trying to curl up before arching backwards, cum arching across his own stomach in spurts.

Liu Qingge watched intently, milking his release until he sagged back onto the bed. He pushed his fingers against Jiang Cheng's prostate again to pull a whine out before dragging his fingers out to the breathless repeating of his own name.

He wanted more.

Liu Qingge quickly tore off his own clothes, lined himself up with a sated Jiang Cheng, and pushed inside in one solid thrust.

Jiang Cheng threw his head back with a moan, and Liu Qingge took a deep breath as he realized how much he'd worked himself up. He stroked Jiang Cheng a few times, feeling his tunnel squeeze as he let out a stuttered breath.

"Haaaaa- ah. Too much- too much!"

He let go of Jiang Cheng's twitching dick and dragged himself out to the tip, pushing back in slowly, watching Jiang Cheng shiver at the feeling.

He repeated the action, just a bit quicker.

"Qing-ge-" Jiang Cheng had tears at the corners of his eyes.

"You like it, right?"

"Mmmm- fuck- yes!"

Liu Qingge could live on Jiang Cheng's reactions.

He leaned over Jiang Cheng, adjusting himself to really fuck the younger athlete.

Jiang Cheng's arms reached up to wrap around his neck- he was sure Jiang Cheng would never admit as much aloud, but he knew Jiang Cheng liked the closeness. He liked to cuddle. The thought that he was the only one to know had Liu Qingge hammering inside Jiang Cheng, who took it perfectly. What else was Liu Qingge to do? He didn't have the mind to keep it slow, to build Jiang Cheng up to the speed he was fucking with, but the grunts and groans told Liu Qingge that it was fine. He loved the feeling of pushing into that tight tunnel, and felt that possessive snarl return.

Jiang Cheng was his- he'd seen him, he'd applauded for him, he'd fucked him- after all his efforts elsewhere, he'd finally found a person who seemed to appreciate him.

Had it always been so easy?



Jiang Cheng's gasps of his name sounded so sweet, Liu Qingge had to taste them straight from his lips. But when they were gone, he grabbed firm onto Jiang Cheng's shoulder and anchored him to the bed, thrusting and grinding inside.

Jiang Cheng keened.

Loudly.

His dick was still soft from cumming earlier, and Liu Qingge wondered how quickly he could get hard again. Jiang Cheng seemed to be enjoying the roughness.

Fuck.

Liu Qingge stopped his thrusting to get hands underneath Jiang Cheng's knees, lifting and pushing them up past Jiang Cheng's shoulders.

Were swimmers always this flexible?

When he pushed back in, it was closer- deeper.

"Qing-ge- feels, ah, deep. Good."

"You like it deep?"

"Oh, fuck. Yeah-!"

"You like it when I hold you down and fuck you hard?"

"Yes- please, harder!"

Liu Qingge lifted his hips and dropped them, enjoying the slap of flesh as he thrust inside. Jiang Cheng cried out, arms tucking between his legs to reach up and around Liu Qingge's shoulders. He felt nails dig into his back, and hoped they'd leave marks.

He continued fucking Jiang Cheng, lifting and dropping his hips as he muttered his ownership, how good Jiang Cheng was and felt, and how he was going to cum inside.

Jiang Cheng didn't have much mind for a response, so Liu Qingge curled an arm around to stuff his fingers into Jiang Cheng's mouth, petting at his tongue. Jiang Cheng drooled and sucked at his fingers, eyes glazed and blotches of red coloring his face. Liu Qingge's heart pounded at the sight.

He ground inside, pushing their hips together, and Jiang Cheng couldn't hold back a raw and pleased groan. Liu Qingge dragged out to repeat the action, and felt Jiang Cheng tense up, a watery, "ah-" sounding through his fingers.

Again, faster.



And again.

He panted as he pounded inside, barely of mind to aim at Jiang Cheng's prostate, and grinding to feel that connection between them.

Liu Qingge's fingers were soaked in Jiang Cheng's mouth, shouting out at every thrust.

He felt it when Jiang Cheng tensed up, and for the first time since they started fucking, Jiang Cheng came untouched.

Liu Qingge whined at the squeezing tunnel around him, unable to stop his hips from moving. He made unmeasured thrusts into Jiang Cheng until he himself began to cum, hilding himself and grinding as he pushed Jiang Cheng into the bed.

They panted together in the aftermath, Liu Qingge feeling the tremble of exertion in his muscles before he let go of Jiang Cheng's legs and dropped over him. Jiang Cheng was taking deep breaths, and Liu Qingge turned his head to nose at his hair. Jiang Cheng shivered at Liu Qingge's breath puffing against his neck, both of them coming down from the high of sex.

Jiang Cheng slapped at Liu Qingge's back, mumbling, "- 'eavy."

Liu Qingge rolled himself off, taking a few more breaths before he sat up, looking at Jiang Cheng- spread on the bed and leaking Liu Qingge's spend.

He cursed and looked away, pushing off the bed before his dick decided he could go another round tonight. He quickly grabbed their phones, plugging them in and going to the bathroom to grab a washcloth.

The water sounded loud as he soaked the cloth, and when he returned to the bed, Jiang Cheng had folded his arms over his eyes. Liu Qingge lifted one of Jiang Cheng's legs to start cleaning his stretched rim. He tried to focus on Jiang Cheng's grumbles rather than the sight, dipping his fingers into the hole he'd used to clean out his cum. One of Jiang Cheng's feet kicked at Liu Qingge's shoulder as he whined.

Once he was done, Liu Qingge let go of the leg to mutter, "there. All good."

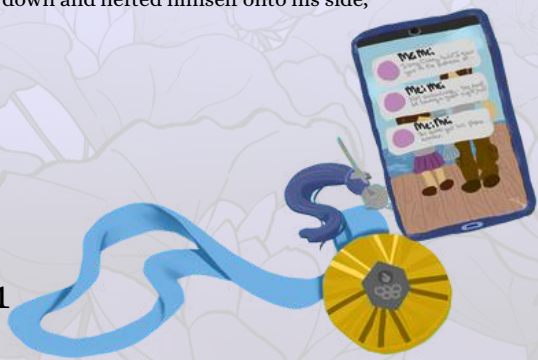
Jiang Cheng's foot hit his shoulder a few more times before it fell to the side. He laid beside Jiang Cheng, looking over the other.

After a few minutes, Jiang Cheng pulled his arms down and hefted himself onto his side, facing Liu Qingge.

"Hey," Liu Qingge said.

"Hey."

"Give me your phone number."



Jiang Cheng seemed a bit startled at this, but he looked... hopeful, Liu Qingge thought. He watched Jiang Cheng flail his arm, eventually finding his phone and waking it up.

"You sure about this?" Jiang Cheng asked, unlocking his phone and tapping it a few times.

"Yeah."

Liu Qingge grabbed the phone, restraining himself from smiling at the background of a small boy with a puppy– probably Jiang Cheng's nephew. He navigated to the contacts list and quickly entered his number. When he finished, he sent a text to his own number, putting Jiang Cheng's phone on the nightstand when his own phone vibrated with a sigh of relief.

He turned onto his back, and felt the shift of the mattress. A hand curled onto his chest, and Liu Qingge wrapped his own around Jiang Cheng's waist. He liked the feeling of it.

It didn't take long to fall asleep.

He woke to the quiet mumbling of Jiang Cheng on the phone, still curled against his chest.

"Yeah– my plane goes out on Tuesday. Mm, should get in– hi, A-Ling."

Liu Qingge could hear a loud voice on the phone and threaded his fingers into Jiang Cheng's hair as he spoke.

"Oh, good job, A-Ling. You'll have to show me when I get back." Jiang Cheng pushed himself up, tossing his feet over the bed's edge. "Yeah, jie– your mom said that. Mmm, thank you A-Ling." He stood, beginning to pace around the room as Liu Qingge backed up on the mattress to watch.

"You saw that? Cool, huh. Yeah, I'll show you the medal when I'm back. Don't tell your mom, but I got some souvenirs for everyone. Mmhmm. A secret."

Jiang Cheng's face was soft as he talked to his nephew, and he paused in his pacing and laughed.

"It's fine, jiejie. You know I like talking to A-Ling."

Liu Qingge liked watching Jiang Cheng happy.

"I'll text you the details later– it's still five in the morning over here." He paused. "No, no, don't worry about it. This time probably makes more sense anyway. It's A-Ling's bedtime, right?" He listened for a moment and shook his head. "Nah, I'm awake now."

Jiang Cheng suddenly glanced over Liu Qingge's way, then turned away.

"Yeah, it's been good over here. I don't know about friends, but– no, no. You don't have to worry."



Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes.

"No, they're fine, jiejie. Everyone is just focused on the competition... Outside of the swim team? I mean- well. Maybe."

Jiang Cheng paled. "What? Who's saying- No? Then why were you watching- no, I mean..." He began to blush. "That's- uh. We- We're staying in the same hotel is all. He saw me at the hotel pool and said hi because I was wearing-"

"..."

"I'm hanging up now." His face flushed an even deeper red, and he whisper-yelled, "I'M HANGING UP NOW," yanking the phone from his ear to jab at the end call button.

He turned, and for a second Liu Qingge was worried he was going to get hit by Jiang Cheng's phone. Jiang Cheng seemed to lose his energy as he waved his phone awkwardly.

"Sorry I woke you. Jiejie called, and they're picking me up from the airport when I get back, so-"

"No worries. I've been waking up early for most days of the competition."

"True enough. I think this was the first time I woke before you."

Liu Qingge chuckled, and Jiang Cheng smirked at him.

"Did you know you drool?"

Liu Qingge raised a brow. "You were drooling a lot last night, as I recall."

Jiang Cheng blushed, rolling his eyes. "How can you say that with a straight face?"

Liu Qingge shrugged.

Jiang Cheng opened his mouth, like he wanted to say more, but shook his head, saying nothing. He sat his phone on the bedside table and began looking around, grabbing the boxers Liu Qingge had mindlessly discarded on the floor.

"I'm gonna-"

"Jiang Cheng."

Jiang Cheng's mouth snapped shut, but he didn't turn to Liu Qingge.

"I like you."

Was that too much?



"I want to keep seeing you after we go back to China, I mean."

Jiang Cheng swallowed. He hesitated, then looked at Liu Qingge. "I think I want that too."

Thank fuck. "Right. Good."

"Yeah. Great. Uh, I'm gonna shower now."

Jiang Cheng pulled the bathroom door open, shutting himself inside with light slam. Soon Liu Qingge heard the shower start up, and pulled his phone from the nightstand. The screen lit to show he had a slew of missed calls and messages from— his sister?

Congratulations on the gold, gege.

Who are you sitting by?

Are you whispering to him?! Wast hat your arm around ihs shouldr?!

YOU LEFT TOGEHTER

WHO IS HE?!

Don't make me talk to Shen Yuan.

Never mind, he's useless.

You can't hide him from me, Liu Qingge! I'll make you regret it if you try!

Jiang Cheng, huh? I saw you in the audience of his gold medal heat too.

Not answering... You must be having a good night, huh?

[Message Deleted]

You better get his phone number.

Got it.

I want to meet him.





Mugabel

Jiang Cheng?

?!

PAS DE DEUX FOR TWO IDIOTS

Lavenderandrue, with spot art by dionte

Rivals to Lovers

Modern Au

Vampire Roleplay

CW Mild Choking

Biting

Frottage

Clothed Sex

Liu Qingge takes a swig from his near-empty water bottle, splashing the remains over his bare chest in a futile attempt to cool off. The ballet studio is like an oven, a far cry from the perfectly air-conditioned practice rooms he's become used to as an idol. The prissy pain in the ass he's stuck dancing with is sitting ramrod straight on the single folding chair in the room, waiting for Liu Qingge to be done with his break, because of course *he* doesn't need any rest.

"From the top," Jiang Cheng says, tapping at his phone with perfectly-manicured nails to restart the track. "You need to show more fear. You're pleading with an ancient vampire lord to spare your life, not dead drunk and stumbling around."

"Maybe be more menacing then," Liu Qingge snaps. Why his management had thought *this* guy would help him get better at acting, he'll never know.

Jiang Cheng doesn't answer. Sighing, Liu Qingge props himself against the pile of mats standing in for the bed that will be part of the eventual set as the music begins to play.

Jiang Cheng's body language changes with the few bars of music leading up to the excerpt they're performing, Dracula and Jonathan's Act 1 pas de deux. To the Jiang Ballet Company's credit, they'd chosen something relatively modern that's actually interesting to watch, but a good half of Liu Qingge's role is just rolling around (and being dragged around) on the dusty studio floor. And yes, he's good at lifts and acrobatics and he has a good foundation in ballet, but no matter what he does, this asshole who's probably been wearing ballet slippers since he could walk is going to judge him like he's the biggest idiot alive.

The shareholders of the group that controls both their contracts had set this up for a reason, and it hadn't just been to improve Liu Qingge's acting skills. He's used to playing off of the other members of Cang Qiong, giving them looks that (he's been told, anyway) show off their chemistry on camera and have the fans "shipping" them with each other, whatever that means. Jiang Cheng, though? His technique is perfect, his turnout almost concerningly good, and he embodies Dracula in a way that genuinely scares Liu Qingge a little.

And then he makes eye contact.

Or doesn't, as the case may be.

It's like the guy is too stubborn to admit that there's someone else sharing the damn stage with him. He's Dracula, but Jonathan might as well be in another universe for all Jiang Cheng is paying attention to him. His hand skates over Liu Qingge's chest, floating just above the bare skin, and that *is* the choreography but it's like Jiang Cheng is doing it to a mannequin.

"Are we done here?" Liu Qingge says flatly, rolling away from Jiang Cheng as he's supposed to. "What happened to the vampire women from a minute ago? I don't even like women and I'd prefer that to whatever this is."



"What are you doing?" Jiang Cheng hisses, smoothly transitioning into the kneeling position that Liu Qingge thinks is incredibly silly.

Oh, there's *fire* in his eyes now. Liu Qingge grins, crawling backward as Jiang Cheng stalks toward him, actually looking at him for the first time.

"Didn't you want me to act?" he says innocently. "If this is really all Dracula's got, then *Jonathan* is gonna get bored and leave."

When Jiang Cheng's hand snaps out to grab his throat, he presses down hard enough to bruise. Liu Qingge barks out a breathless laugh. "That's more like it."

"Shut up."

Liu Qingge turns in his hold, jerks out of it. Jiang Cheng holds his gaze as he brings his hand to his mouth, and where he would normally mime licking it, he actually sticks out his tongue. Something jolts in the pit of Liu Qingge's stomach at the sight. He almost forgets he's supposed to be clumsily running away, remaining frozen for just a beat too long as the music continues.

He doesn't make it all the way to the back wall, so he mimes climbing empty air as Jiang Cheng pulls him away.

"You trying to bite me or what?" he snaps, and Jiang Cheng's teeth nearly close around his neck as he arches into a deep backbend.

"You are aware that ballet does not traditionally have spoken lines?" Jiang Cheng drops him, letting him fall to the floor less than gracefully.

"Oh, here you go again. Like it's my fucking fault we're both beholden to some rich old assholes. I've been working my ass off training for this. Just because I don't eat, sleep and breathe ballet like you—"

"You're... not a bad dancer."

Wow. Liu Qingge almost stumbles as he's taken into a spin. "Thanks?"

"You are, however, the rudest, most irritating, most insufferable man I have ever had the displeasure to meet. You have absolutely no tact—"

"Oh, you're one to talk—"

Liu Qingge is cut off by a hand around his throat again. This time it's pressing against his windpipe just hard enough to take his breath away. His struggle is nearly all real, Jiang Cheng's arm an iron bar holding him up in the air.

He is, unfortunately, stunning on his knees.



Jiang Cheng's eyes are dark as night as he drags a hand over Liu Qingge's chest, forcing him to his knees in turn. They've practiced this next move so many times, a snakelike movement over Liu Qingge's shoulder and then a simulated kick. They're both supposed to be weakened by now, Liu Qingge's Jonathan crawling away on his stomach while Dracula comes after him on his knees, starved of blood and desperate.

Then the part Jiang Cheng always makes him do over: Jonathan pleading for his life, stumbling away and then being drawn back in again until he's being dragged bodily across the floor towards the bed. Probably the last eighteen out of twenty run-throughs, Jiang Cheng has interrupted this scene with "No. Again."

This time, he just stares, wild-eyed. Strands of dark hair are starting to escape his pristine bun. Liu Qingge's own undercut is starting to stick to his face with sweat; he resists the urge to toss his head and flick it out of his eyes. Jiang Cheng is always telling him to slick it back, but the choppy little ponytail usually serves him fine.

It's a lot easier to pretend to be hypnotized by those eyes, this time.

Muscle memory takes over. Handstand, slide between Jiang Cheng's legs, let himself work with Jiang Cheng and not against him as he's dragged across the floor. A leap off the mats into a lift, easy as breathing for Liu Qingge. The true pas de deux: spinning and leaping in perfect sync, another attempt to escape before he's pulled back in, an elegant turn with his leg extended in attitude, then a lift, Jiang Cheng catching him effortlessly before letting him go and shoving him down to the floor once more.

Jiang Cheng's little solo here has never looked so powerful. Grand jeté, pas de chat, pirouette, circling him like a predator as Liu Qingge tries to jeté away and is pulled back and lifted like a helpless animal being scruffed. His practice sweatpants are starting to feel a bit too tight every time Jiang Cheng's hand skims sensually over his rib cage, closes around his throat, pressing down on the bruises that are already starting to form. He's a little dizzy by the time his last desperate jeté lands him on the mats.

Jiang Cheng stands over him, bears down on him. He's smaller, lithe, a ballet dancer's body, but right now Liu Qingge's muscular frame feels like wet tissue paper as Jiang Cheng bends him over his knee in a sensuous arch.

Now is the time when the stage lights will go out. Now, as Dracula lowers his fangs to Jonathan's neck. Before the bite.

Jiang Cheng's breath is hot on his neck. Liu Qingge should be struggling still, but he's gone limp, pliant. He bares his neck, inviting the bite, forgetting there shouldn't be a bite at all.

Jiang Cheng's teeth sink into his throat.

Electricity arcs through Liu Qingge's body. The music fades,



his startled cry embarrassingly audible in the silence. He makes eye contact with his reflection, looking in the mirror for the first time in a while, and sees *prey*.

He's terribly, desperately hard. The arch of his back has his sweatpants half-slipping off his hips, making his erection even more obvious, and a red flush travels from his cheeks to his ears and all the way down his chest as he stares at himself in horrified arousal.

"Fuck," Jiang Cheng breathes. "I..."

It's then that Liu Qingge feels the answering hardness pressed to his lower back, and another jolt travels through his body, his own cock twitching.

All sense of reason falls right out of his head. He twists out of Jiang Cheng's grip, now gone slack, and before the infuriating, *gorgeous* man can protest, Liu Qingge presses him down to the studio floor, hips sealed to his so he can't help but feel how hard Liu Qingge is for him.

Jiang Cheng moans and immediately claps a hand over his mouth to muffle the sound. Cute.

"There's no one else here," Liu Qingge reminds him, rocking his hips to punctuate the words. The friction, even through fabric, sends a shudder through him.

Jiang Cheng had seemed so powerful a minute ago, like he could really be an ancient vampire. Now, pinned underneath Liu Qingge's body, his stretched-out t-shirt pushed up to reveal a tantalizing amount of his toned stomach, he looks positively bullied, flustered beyond all sense of reason.

Liu Qingge makes the mistake of glancing up at the mirror, and oh, Jiang Cheng isn't the only one who looks flustered. His own flush has only spread, and his expression is uncomfortably revealing, like he's *smitten* or something.

"We can't," says the man whose hips are rocking upward to meet his even now. "It's such a bad idea. It will only complicate things, and if we remember *this* then at the showcase we'll—"

"You think too much," Liu Qingge interrupts, and pulls him into a messy, desperate kiss.

The truth is, Liu Qingge doesn't hate Jiang Cheng, as insufferable as he is. It's hard to hate someone who seems to share so much of Liu Qingge's own pain. Watching Jiang Cheng with his teenage nephew always sends a pang of homesickness through Liu Qingge, stirring the memory of having to raise Mingyan while still a teenager himself.

He knows what happened to Jiang Cheng's family. Everyone does. And he'd watched the backstage videos of their last performance before the accident, that clip of a young Wei Wuxian, now missing and presumed dead, grinning toothily as he tells the camera that his brother is the one to watch, not him. They'd been electric together on stage as Rothbart and Siegfried.

And the very next day, it had all vanished like smoke.



Jiang Cheng kisses back like Liu Qingge will vanish any moment, too.

Hands fumble at Liu Qingge's waistband, and it only takes a little push for his cock to spring free. Jiang Cheng's leggings are a little harder to unwrap, but Liu Qingge is determined, fumbling blindly at the soft fabric as he fights not to lose himself entirely in their kiss.

Skin to skin makes the whole thing feel more real. They both moan, the sound swallowed up by each other's mouths. Liu Qingge isn't sure if the slick wetness he feels is coming from him or Jiang Cheng or both.

"Wait," Jiang Cheng gasps. "I'm—"

"Me too." Liu Qingge almost doesn't recognize his own voice, rough with need.

Their cocks press and slide together in a fast, desperate rhythm. Liu Qingge feels himself approaching the edge, but it's Jiang Cheng who tips him over. A slender hand snakes up between them and presses at the side of Liu Qingge's throat, making the bite mark and the bruises throb anew, and Liu Qingge comes with a shout, muffling the sound into Jiang Cheng's collarbone as he shudders through his release. Jiang Cheng isn't far behind, hooking his legs around Liu Qingge's thigh and rocking into him until he's spilling all over his own shirt, the faded purple now spattered with white.

"Feel better now?" Liu Qingge takes it all in, Jiang Cheng's kiss-bitten mouth, his flushed face, his dripping wet, softening cock still trapped between them. He can't resist leaning down to capture his mouth again.

When he finally pulls away, Jiang Cheng is smiling. "No," he says. "Again. From the top."





SEXUALLY EXPLICIT KIND OF LOVE AFFAIR

Ms_ Contrary, with spot art by dionte

Fuck or Die

Anal Sex

Blow Jobs

Anal Fingering

This wasn't what he expected when he found that old letter in the drawer of his mother's desk. When he read it, reading his mother's longing, and grief for the woman she loved, he knew what he had to do. Jiang Cheng imagined he would go to the outer peaks, give the letter to the Xian Shu peak lord who it was addressed to, and perhaps learn a side to his mother that only a few knew. He had done research of the area before coming, and was fully prepared, but he soon found he was sorely mistaken.

After reaching the base of Cang Qiong Peak, he had gotten turned around when he encountered a strange beast that was difficult to fight. He had managed to stave off most of the attacks from the beast, but it managed to bite his arm, and toss him against a tree. As Jiang Cheng continued to block blows from the beast, a man in white soon joined the fray, and with his sword and Zidian, they defeated the beast.

As they both caught their breath, the other man noticed the injury to Jiang Cheng, catching him as Jiang Cheng began to swoon a bit. "Here, let's find shelter so we can treat your wound," the man said, his steely eyes tracing over Jiang Cheng for more wounds.

"Thank you, but what's your name?"

"Liu Qingge of Bai Zhang Peak, come, there's shelter over there."

They sought shelter in a nearby cave to tend to Jiang Cheng's wounds. Liu Qingge moved to Jiang Cheng who flinched away. The last time he trusted someone with medical care outside of an infirmary was something he'd rather not think of.

"Hold still. It's clear you're not from around here," the gruff man in white said, taking Jiang Cheng's injured arm into his hands. "I lost my supplies in the scuffle so bear with it."

Jiang Cheng opened his mouth to say something but a breathy gasp escaped his lips instead as the man placed his own lips on Jiang Cheng's wound, sucking out the poison from the creature's claws and spitting it on the cave floor. Jiang Cheng tried to pull his arm away, but the other man's arm held onto it like a vice.

"I need to get the poison out or your symptoms are going to be worse," the peak lord said as he leaned in to suck more poison from the wound before being shoved back by Jiang Cheng whose face was flushed.

"Y-you," Jiang Cheng gasped out, feeling an unfamiliar heat begin to form low in his belly. "W-what's going on!? I feel...hot."



The cultivator sighed heavily, his own breaths coming out in pants and his cheeks also had gained a pink hue. Jiang Cheng couldn't help, but admire the beauty of the other man. Sure there were plenty of people in Jiang Cheng's neck of the jianghu, but he could say none of them held a candle to this man in front of him.

"That was the Violet Fanged Lion. They're not common in these parts, but they possess venom that is known as an aphrodisiac." Liu Qingge managed to pant out, the flush beginning to creep down his neck, and Jiang Cheng had the urge to see if that blush extended further down his body which alarmed him.

"W-what's the cure!? Surely one exists!" Jiang Cheng exclaimed, the prickling of his skin becoming unbearable, and he began to tug on the top of his robe to loosen it. As he looked up he noticed Liu Qingge's eyes roaming over his neck and collar bones with a heat Jiang Cheng had never had directed at him.

"Dual cultivation," Liu Qingge said bluntly, "I know this might be uncomfortable, but if we don't do it, we'll both die."

Jiang Cheng felt the buzzing of arousal build as he listened to the voice of the man in front of him. While the idea of doing that with a stranger would normally be distasteful, the burning lust in Jiang Cheng's veins was screaming at him for release, and he could do worse than a gorgeous righteous cultivator.

"J-just do it" Jiang Cheng stuttered, his whole body felt hot, and ached for any sort of release. Liu Qingge walked over to the fellow sect leader, guiding him down onto the cool cave floor which brought a little bit of relief to the heat coursing through him but he needed more. Jiang Cheng pulled the other man on top of him, and clumsily crashed his lips into Liu Qingge's.

Liu Qingge's eyes widened as he was tugged onto the body of the other man, but he took the lead with the kiss, running his tongue along the seam of Jiang Cheng's lips, causing the other man to gasp and allow entrance into that soft mouth, his hands beginning to remove Jiang Cheng's robes.

A moan escaped Jiang Cheng's lips as the cold, calloused fingers of Liu Qingge trailed over his overheated skin. He whimpered when Liu Qingge's lips left his, but he arched into his body as Liu Qingge's lips trailed down his neck.

"You're so responsive, so beautiful" Liu Qingge murmured against his skin, Jiang Cheng shivered as those soft lips, and fingers traced over his chest. A part of him wanted to pull away and cover his scars, but with that firm body pinning him down, and Liu Qingge's other hand pinning both of his over his head, all Jiang Cheng could do is lay there, and relish in the pleasure being given to him by this man that bordered on worshipful.

"Y-you're not bothered by my scars?" Jiang Cheng found himself asking, cursing how his mind was foggy from the poison coursing through him that it allowed his lips to be looser than normal.



Liu Qingge looked at him with intense stormy eyes that caused Jiang Cheng's already hard cock ache in his trousers. "Why would they bother me? They've shown you've been through hell, and came out the other side. I admire that."

Jiang Cheng felt a frisson move throughout his body at that compliment right when those perfect lips of the peak lord wrapped around his cock. He bit his lip to keep an embarrassing whimper from escaping his throat, but it managed to slip out which seemed to spur Liu Qingge to take him deeper down his throat and swallow him down as two of his fingers slid into his slickened hole with ease which startled Jiang Cheng.

'Must be a side effect of the poison' he thought, taking a deep breath as his body adjusted to those nimble fingers pushing in and out of his body at a slow, maddening pace. His hips moved to meet with the thrust of Liu Qingge's fingers. Jiang Cheng thought he'd lose his mind if he didn't get release soon when a spot inside him lit up, causing sparks to dance across his skin as Liu Qingge pulled off his cock with a lewd pop.

"You feel so warm and tight, I can slide right in," Liu Qingge murmured, pulling away to strip himself of his own clothes. Jiang Cheng's in a haze of lust traced every curve and plane of muscle that was revealed to him. His tongue licked his lips as the other man was finally completely bare to Jiang Cheng's hungry gaze. Never before did he ever experience this sort of attraction and desire before, and while the thought should concern him more, he found himself too swept away in these new feelings to care.

Liu Qingge wasted no time as he pounced on Jiang Cheng, his thick pillar splitting his entrance. Jiang Cheng felt himself tighten, the discomfort almost unbearable when he felt those familiar fingers wrap around his own leaking dick, stroking him. "If it's your first time, I'll make sure you enjoy this, and take responsibility," Liu Qingge whispered into his ear, nipping Jiang Cheng's ear lobe as he finally pushed himself into the hilt.

Instinctively Jiang Cheng wrapped his legs around the other man's slender, but muscular waist as he began to slide into Jiang Cheng's body. His nerves lit up with electricity with each thrust of Liu Qingge's body against his. Though Jiang Cheng didn't know this man, he could instinctively tell he was holding back. Something about that irritated Jiang Cheng, he was no delicate maiden or pampered lord, he was a cultivator, and he could take whatever this man could dish.

Wrapping his arms around Liu Qingge tightly, pulling him close to whisper in his ear, "I'm not made of glass, I can take whatever you can give me." With that whisper, he used his weight to switch positions while Liu Qingge was still inside him, hitting even deeper than before.

Liu Qingge's eyes darkened as his hands gripped Jiang Cheng's hips with a bruising force. He thrust into Jiang Cheng who had no qualms of meeting his thrusts with the equal ferocity of the roll of his hips. Soon the sounds of skin against skin, breathy gasps, and grunts of pleasure filled the silence of the cave. The feeling of pleasure both overwhelmed the two men as their qi began to mingle together in their meridians, beginning to erode the poison within them.



It felt like hours before the both of them collapsed from exhaustion, Liu Qingge's arms wrapped around Jiang Cheng as Jiang Cheng's head rested against the peak lord's shoulder. He took in the time to truly take in the other man's features. His sharp phoenix eyes while closed were framed by long, dark lashes, a delicate yet powerful frame of strong muscles and a smooth, strong brow that formed a perfect package that any person would be lucky to have the attention of such a man.

When their qi mingled together, he felt a connection that he never felt before. It was intense, addicting, and terrifying. He had lost so much over the years, and he had long given up on the notion of having a partner, his priorities focusing on rebuilding his sect and raising Jin Ling. Even though Yungmeng was thriving and Jin Ling has now grown into a fine man and sect leader in his own right, he never gave much thought to his own personal happiness.

After such a passionate night, his thoughts wandered to if it would be so bad to have a partner by his side, to night hunt with, to share his space with. The way their qi mingled in each other's meridians during their coupling, and even now Jiang Cheng could still feel the buzzing of the energy under his skin. However the words the man spoke soured any soft feelings that bubbled up.

"I will take responsibility"

'Of course, it would be foolish to think I was actually wanted. It was just the poison, and the fool is noble enough to take responsibility as if I were some blushing, virgin maiden,' he thought bitterly, looking away from the man, grabbing his clothes, and dressing quickly. As he was about to turn to leave, he stopped to look back at the man, wanting to go back, but his pride refused to let him. Besides, he had a duty to fulfill to his mother.

It appeared a wedding was taking place when he arrived at Cang Qiong Mountain. The main hall was covered in red and gold, the sound of music and chatter filling the air. He felt out of place in his traveling attire in such a place, but he was determined to find Peak Lord Qi. His sharp eyes scanned the crowd when he noticed a woman around his mother's age speaking to a young veiled woman in soft whispers. As soon as the veiled woman left, Jiang Cheng approached the older woman.





DF

PRE-GAME

Nim, with spot art by pebisbarry

Mild Blood

Hand Jobs

“Stop fucking moving.”

“I’m not—ss!—“

“I told you to stop fucking moving.”

Liu Qingge wrenches his hand from Jiang Cheng’s grip, the clumsy line of homemade stitches finally complete. They climb over the rise of Liu Qingge’s thumb, securing the skin split by a busted beer bottle and a man with more whiskey in his gut than brains in his head.

Jiang Cheng lets go, but not without a roll of his eyes.

The kitchen-turned-urgent care of their shared mid-city apartment is nice. The place had been Jiang Cheng’s first, bankrolled by the VP job he inherited at his family’s investment firm, but Liu Qingge didn’t exactly struggle to pay his half when he moved in around a year and a half ago. It’s clean, expensive white furniture and clean, expensive white walls and beige carpeting and a beautiful balcony overstuffed with well-tended greenery. It’s the kind of two-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bath that only people like them could afford without wincing on the first of each month.

Between Liu Qingge’s rocketing law career and Jiang Cheng’s life spent staring at numbers behind a desk—sometimes Liu Qingge worries they’ve gotten boring.

“You’re next.”

Other times, red runs down the length of his arm—thinned by sweat—from the jagged fight wound on his bicep. Other times, someone says the wrong thing to one of them at the wrong time. Other times, Jiang Cheng splits his knuckles on the jawbone of some low-life piece of shit at the bar they first met outside of, idly circling each other’s bikes and making passing commentary disguised as compliments.

Jiang Cheng is always handsome in his well-tailored suits with an expensive watch and matching rings. His hair is always slicked back for work, pushed up off his brow, and scraped into a professional, clean aesthetic. There’s a sharpness to it, the way that a well-honed blade is sharp and ready for the quick-flash cut.

But like this? With the sweat of a bar fight drying on his skin, his henley stretched around the collar where some guy tried and failed to yank him by it and a bruise blossoming on the underside of his jaw. Jiang Cheng’s hair is loose, inky strands falling into his face as he focuses on bandaging the wounds on Liu Qingge next. Clean towels over broken skin, ice on bruised knuckles.



It makes Liu Qingge want to lick the coagulated blood from the split on Jiang Cheng's lip. It makes him want to suck fresh bruises over the red-to-purple blotches starting to cloud over his skin; it makes him want to bite and push and pull and wrench Jiang Cheng into his arms with the latent whisper of long burned-out adrenaline.

Jiang Cheng's fingers are steady and solid as he wraps the gauze around the cut, securing it with tape and a quick fold—the easy, mechanical gestures of a man who's bandaged enough wounds to last a half-dozen lifetimes. (Tell me about it, Liu Qingge had asked once, with the taste of cheap beer acrid and sharp on his tongue. Who was he to you?)

There is void there, emptiness. The space where someone used to be and the ill-fitting shape of one another pressed into the corners of it. Not quite empty, not quite filled. Liu Qingge knows he can't fill that scarred-over space in the hollow of Jiang Cheng's chest, where a love used to be—scratched out and clawed with hurt that healed into anger and a pain that sticks like tar-sap. He knows he overfills half of it and underfills the other.

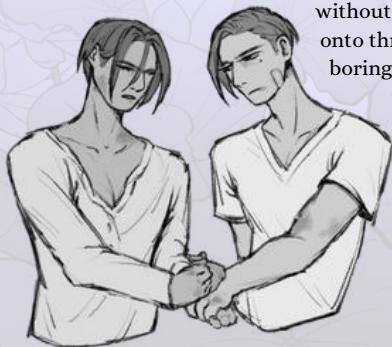
The cradle of his palm catches the bruise-splattered cut of a sharp jaw.

But he was here, and that had to count for something.

The kiss is slow to start, with the aftertaste of beer cheaper than they can afford and blood fresher than the fight. They're always slow to start, like this. The energy and fight are spent too much in the waning moments before they reach one another—expended on the anonymous faces and bodies in the bar until there's nothing left but raw nerves and cut flesh. It was always a balancing act for who opens to the other first—like a fresh-ripe fruit shivering under the fingertips of the stranger who plucked it from the vine.

Liu Qingge's teeth catch, light and easy, on the swell of Jiang Cheng's lower lip. It's a hiss and a gasp before his kindness is returned in full force. Jiang Cheng always bites harder, the fingertips pressed against Liu Qingge's skin digging into flesh and muscle. Jiang Cheng is always the forceful one, moving forward with the full brunt of his chest as he shoves his tongue past Liu Qingge's teeth like he wants to consume every inch of him from the inside out. He kisses like he wants to take, like he doesn't want Liu Qingge to know how badly he wants to give. He kisses like all he is; all he can be is something surviving off the taste of Liu Qingge. He kisses like tunnel vision, a single-minded focus that saps the air out of the room and leaves Liu Qingge clinging to him by nail and by claw.

Eventually, Liu Qingge gives. He bends into the kiss with his hand sliding up the covered expanse of Jiang Cheng's blood-spattered shirt to divest him of it without a second thought. It's hurried and rushed, buttons sagging onto threads that neither of them give a shit about anymore. They're boring, uptight fucking corporate shells now—they can buy new fucking shirts. Purple plastic strikes the tile flooring of the kitchen as Liu Qingge's fingertips find skin, and Jiang Cheng has rucked up Liu Qingge's shirt enough to skate scarred palms up the length of a scarred chest. A thumb catches over Liu Qingge's nipple, forcing a slick gasp into the warm, slick heat of Jiang Cheng's mouth.



"Shit," Liu Qingge manages, as his fingertips turn to blunt nails biting into the soft, thin skin covering Jiang Cheng's ribcage.

Jiang Cheng bites at his mouth again, and Liu Qingge draws his hands back to shove—hardly a quarter of his energy—at his chest. Jiang Cheng goes about as willingly as Liu Qingge expects, planting himself and resisting as Liu Qingge wrestles them both backwards against the hard edge of the kitchen counter. He knows it strikes the small of Jiang Cheng's back before it strikes the edge of his hip, and that's enough for Liu Qingge.

He's already hard. But he's always hard when Jiang Cheng fights him. He pushes forward, letting Jiang Cheng's tongue sweep the inside of his teeth as they crash back into a slick, starving mess of a kiss. His hands fall down to the waist of his pants instead, wrenching them closer to press the eager swells of them together.

In the cage of arms and teeth, Jiang Cheng hisses and chokes, "Fuck!"

"That's the idea," Liu Qingge grumbles, getting his own shot to bite Jiang Cheng's lip in return.

Jiang Cheng growls in response, a low noise centered in his bared chest, before hands come back in full force. In Liu Qingge's hair, on his arms, his chest, his shoulders, and the waist of his pants.

They fuck like they fight: full-bodied and single-minded devotion, with everything they have, to prove a point.

(to themselves or someone else, it doesn't matter. Liu Qingge is pretty sure he doesn't know anymore anyway.)

And with a hunger.

Rough, coarse hands are grabbing at one another—wrenching and pulling until slick, flushed cocks shove together. Bruise-knuckled hands wrapping around both searing, slick lengths to urge them to rut together. Strong arms wrap around strong arms, pulling tight and holding fast as they wage war against one another in the hushed breaths and quiet, bitten-off groans.

In terms of fighting, there are rarely ever clear winners.

Neither party walks away unbloodied.

Liu Qingge breathes in the taste of Jiang Cheng, sweat building on his brow as his hips and hand work in equal time with Jiang Cheng's. He swears, or Jiang Cheng does, or someone does. It's adrenaline, slick and sweet, and skin and sweat and bodies and blood and everything that Liu Qingge has ever wanted from a good, stomach-clenching, and mind-numbing bar fight. Only better.

It's always better with Jiang Cheng.



He never knows who finishes first like this, his eyes too caught on the flush that paints over Jiang Cheng's cheekbones and the way his brow furrows and his face scrunches in indignant pleasure. But he knows they're never slow after one another, the molten heat of precome or release or both slicking their hands and their cocks, the gritted and bitten-off groans, the noise, the smell, the taste—

Liu Qingge always comes harder than he thinks possible. His orgasm rushes through him like a tidal wave, staking claim to everything he has and smashing it down upon the broken-wood docks and moored ships of Jiang Cheng's body. He always gasps, and he always says something he never says by the light of fucking day.

He always hears the same in return.

The comedown from a fuck is remarkably similar to the comedown from a fight. The burn-off of adrenaline, the sweat, the mess.

They clean each other up from both, like animals tending to the others' wounds. Jiang Cheng strips the shirt off Liu Qingge's back, mumbling complaints about his choice of athletic wear and how much it holds onto. He bitches about the fact that Liu Qingge tore the buttons off his shirt—as if it would be the first time they had to take it to the tailors.

Liu Qingge always huffs, slapping Jiang Cheng's bare stomach with a warm, wet cloth to let him clean the cum off himself. They bite and bicker at one another as the adrenaline fades to a distant, half-forgotten bitterness, burying layers of tender quiet with the bitterness of something else. Neither of them is the most fastidious of people, the hallway to their shared bedroom rapidly becoming littered with the remnants of their clothes. They'll kick them into the hamper in the morning, angry with the selves they were in the dead of night, but that's not their problem now.

Right now, the only problem Liu Qingge has is that Jiang Cheng's chest is bare to the moonlight—his legs tangled in their sheets and his hair loose around his head. Liu Qingge drops his face to the scarred, hollowed-out center, in the place where a wounded heart lives curled in on itself, a wild animal hurt one too many times.

And yet still, it beats.





NAKED SWORDPLAY ISN'T ACCEPTABLE... EXCEPTIONS APPLY

SleepySsnail, with spot art by Cheermione

Weapons as Humans

Fluff and Smut

Multiple Partners

Partner Swapping

vers/switch JC and LQG

The tryst had been anticipated since the announcement that a delegation from Cang Qiong would visit Lotus Pier to discuss trade and disciple exchange programs. Liu Qingge hadn't hidden his enthusiasm in their letters, and Jiang Cheng looked forward to the times between meetings, discussions, and social gatherings when they could slip away to engage with each other alone.

The last event of the night had been winding down when Jiang Cheng stole Liu Qingge away to his room, desperate to hold Liu Qingge and feel him without the barrier of clothes between them.

"I missed you," Jiang Cheng said between kisses as they stripped, leaving a trail of purple and grey clothes on the floor.

"I've been here all week," Liu Qingge said, as if that would dispute Jiang Cheng's feelings.

"Still missed you," Jiang Cheng insisted. "How can you be right there and I still miss you?"

"We must be fated," Liu Qingge said, shaking his hair loose.

The two kissed roughly and tumbled to the ground, not bothering to get to the bed before touching and rubbing against each other, producing delicious sounds and happy moans.

Breaking a deep kiss Liu Qingge asked, "Should we try something new?"

Jiang Cheng paused, surprised at his lover's suggestion. Despite being an adventurous individual, Liu Qingge rarely offered to try anything new in the bedroom. Night hunts? Absolutely. Sexual encounters? He usually let Jiang Cheng take the lead in what to do, but the offer wasn't unwelcome.

Tilting Liu Qingge's chin up so he could leave a kiss just below his ear, Jiang Cheng asked, "What did you have in mind?"

"Not my idea," Liu Qingge admitted, sounding a bit miffed. "Cheng Luan."

"What about it?"

A surge of power emanated from where Liu Qingge and Jiang Cheng hastily propped their spiritual swords against the wall in their rush to undress and feel each other.

Gentle footsteps alerted Jiang Cheng to the weapon's human form, and it softly knelt next to him and Liu Qingge, its aura safe and protective like its wielder's.

Jiang Cheng stared at Cheng Luan. He was used to being around spiritual weapons and instruments that could change into human form, but he'd never had a chance to appreciate Cheng Luan's human shape up close before.



Like all weapons that gained a human form, it looked like Liu Qingge but with a few differences that set it apart. Its face was almost the same, but its eyes were sharper in shape and warmer in colour, with deep reds and oranges peppering the iris like the dying embers of a fire. Cheng Luan's hands felt smooth and strong like the steel it was forged from, and sent sparks of heat up Jiang Cheng's leg as it caressed him.

"Cheng Luan," Liu Qingge said, his voice low with warning and rough with desire. "Share."

Turning its attention to its wielder, Cheng Luan's mouth twitched upward in a small smile. "Of course."

Jiang Cheng swallowed thickly and returned to kissing Liu Qingge. Dragging his hands along his lover's muscular arms and back, Jiang Cheng embraces the man, only to shiver as Cheng Luan peppered him with warm kisses along his back and shoulders.

"I'm sharing," Cheng Luan said softly when Liu Qingge growled. "Jiang Cheng likes being shared, right?"

Jiang Cheng hummed in confirmation, a bit occupied by Liu Qingge's tongue in his mouth to say anything, but yes he liked the attention he received from Liu Qingge and his spiritual blade.

Cheng Luan pressed against Jiang Cheng's back and dropped another round of long kisses against his shoulders that would no doubt leave marks, while Liu Qingge held Jiang Cheng's face and traced his lips with his own.

"Tell us if you need to stop," Liu Qingge murmured, his breath ghosting across Jiang Cheng's face. "We can be a lot."

"Not yet," Jiang Cheng said as if it were a challenge. "Not enough."

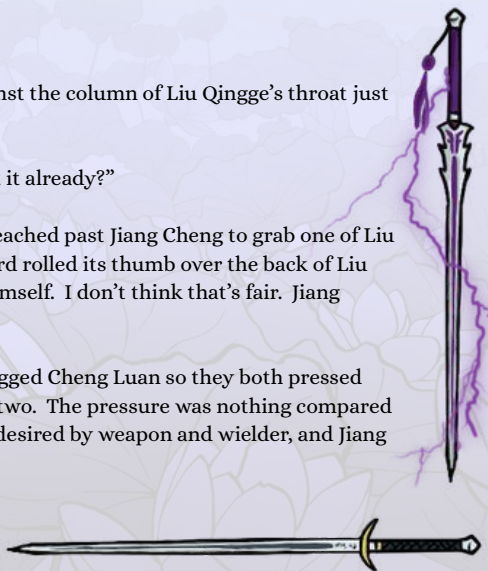
"Then you won't mind if Cheng Luan joins us?"

Jiang Cheng leaned forward to suck a hard kiss against the column of Liu Qingge's throat just low enough it would be covered by his clothes.

Drawing back with Jiang Cheng asked flatly, "Hasn't it already?"

Behind him, Cheng Luan let out a small laugh and reached past Jiang Cheng to grab one of Liu Qingge's hands. Tilting its head to the side, the sword rolled its thumb over the back of Liu Qingge's hand and said, "Qingge wants you all for himself. I don't think that's fair. Jiang Cheng should be mine for a bit."

Liu Qingge made a deep rumble in his throat and tugged Cheng Luan so they both pressed against Jiang Cheng, sandwiching him between the two. The pressure was nothing compared to the comfort and gentleness of being wanted and desired by weapon and wielder, and Jiang



Cheng began to sink into a blissful state of relaxation, only to jolt upright as something sharp pulled in his gut.

"What's wrong?" Liu Qingge asked, eyes full of concern as he looked Jiang Cheng over, trying to find what he did or said to upset his lover.

A flash of purple and silver light burst to life in the corner of the room, accompanied by a scream of pain and frustration.

Just as quickly as it began the light faded, and a force slammed into Cheng Luan, knocking the spiritual sword away from Jiang Cheng so it could replace it.

"Mine," Sandu growled into Jiang Cheng's neck. Scraping its teeth gently across the newly bruised skin it hissed, "Jiang Cheng is mine. I don't want to share him."

Sandu pressed hard against Jiang Cheng's back and shot an angry glare at Cheng Luan. It was one thing for Jiang Cheng to have a human lover, but after all it went through with the litany of other spiritual weapons that had a fondness for its wielder, Sandu didn't want Cheng Luan to touch Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Cheng sighed and rested his head against Liu Qingge's shoulder. No one knew what gave spiritual tools the ability to change into human form, but Sandu hadn't managed to achieve one before Jiang Cheng's golden core was destroyed. Even when Jiang Cheng got a new core, Sandu didn't change shape for years until just recently. The core from Wei Wuxian created a wall that Sandu couldn't break through until it felt like its position as Jiang Cheng's weapon was challenged. Even though it was able to change into a human form now, it took more effort than any other spiritual tool, and even though Sandu never confirmed or denied it, Jiang Cheng knew it hurt to switch back and forth between forms.

Liu Qingge stared at Sandu with calculating eyes, taking in the sword's human form for the first time. Sandu's age was different from Cheng Luan, who aged alongside Liu Qingge due to the bond between wielder and cultivator. In comparison Sandu was frozen in time, stuck resembling Jiang Cheng just before his core was destroyed. Its hair was a dark steely silver rather than black, eyes a dangerous violet, and it carried a youthful defiance that made it more handsome than was fair.

"Sandu," Jiang Cheng said in an almost placating tone he never used with anyone else, "Qingge and Cheng Luan are—"

"No!" Sandu hissed, tucking its face in the crook of Jiang Cheng's neck and grinding against his back. "I'm not sharing you with it!"

Before Jiang Cheng could so much as react, let alone argue with the sword, Cheng Luan asked, "What if we shared you?"



Sandu's head snapped up, and a fierce blush crept across its cheeks at the suggestion, but Cheng Luan had already invaded its personal space. Drawing Sandu into a slow deep kiss, Cheng Luan pried him off Jiang Cheng's back and ran its hands along Sandu with firm dedicated attention.

In seconds, Cheng Luan had Sandu on the floor and began to touch each other with passionate heat.

Liu Qingge pressed a soft kiss against Jiang Cheng's cheek and suggested, "They're putting on a show for us. Why not enjoy it?"

As he said that, Liu Qingge dragged a hand up Jiang Cheng's leg and pushed it to the side to get a full look at his lover on display. Liu Qingge smiled sweetly, his hair slipping over his shoulder as he leaned into Jiang Cheng until he was almost lying on top of him.

"I don't think you're watching," Jiang Cheng said, dragging his fingers through Liu Qingge's hair, savoring the sensation of how they moved against each other. Sparks of delight danced up Jiang Cheng's back as Liu Qingge rolled his hips against his, the soft sounds of Sandu and Cheng Luan's moaning only served to fuel Liu Qingge's advances.

"Qingge," Jiang Cheng groaned. The rest of his words vanished from his mind when Liu Qingge put a tentative finger to his ass. "Hurry up already!"

"Patience," Liu Qingge said as he inserted his finger and kissed Jiang Cheng softly. "It's better when you wait."

"It's better when you're in me," Jiang Cheng shot back, pressing into Liu Qingge's touch.

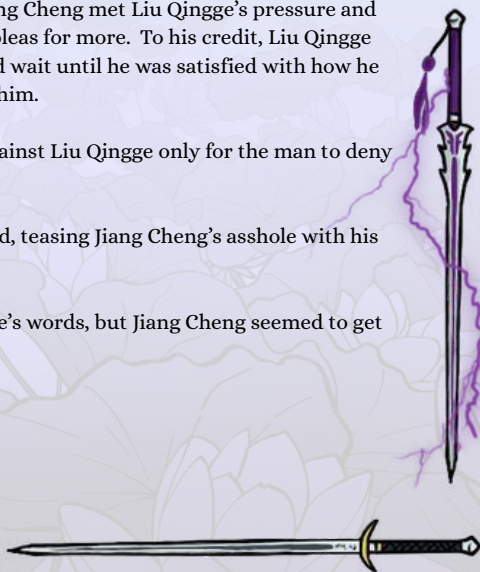
"Fine," Liu Qingge said, adding another finger and beginning to scissor them. "Better?"

Jiang Cheng threw his arms around Liu Qingge's neck in reply and pulled him into a messy kiss. Gasping at the pulsing heat between them, Jiang Cheng met Liu Qingge's pressure and movements with eager sounds of delight and little pleas for more. To his credit, Liu Qingge didn't hold back for the sake of holding back, but did wait until he was satisfied with how he prepared Jiang Cheng before pressing close against him.

Suppressing a whine, Jiang Cheng thrust his hips against Liu Qingge only for the man to deny him.

"Does Sandu Shengshou need me?" Liu Qingge asked, teasing Jiang Cheng's asshole with his dick.

His face was flushed from more than just Liu Qingge's words, but Jiang Cheng seemed to get redder.



"I can't hear you," Liu Qingge said, leaning down so his lips brushed against Jiang Cheng's cheek. "Speak up, A-Cheng."

"Qingge, please—" Jiang Cheng said, only to be cut off by a kiss at the same time Liu Qingge entered him.

Jiang Cheng moaned against Liu Qingge's mouth and arched his back, eager to take all that was offered him and more.

To the side, Sandu watched with wide eyes as its wielder submitted to Liu Qingge's ministrations only for Cheng Luan to kiss it and murmur, "Eyes on me."

Sandu nodded, a bit dazed as Cheng Luan settled on riding Sandu's blade with the same hot fervor as its name.

Jiang Cheng groaned as Liu Qingge continued to thrust into him strongly and methodically, like he was running through a series of intense sword drills, and Jiang Cheng's ass was his target.

Meeting him halfway, Jiang Cheng cried, "Qingge! Faster!"

The only sign Liu Qingge heard Jiang Cheng was that he picked up the pace, thrusting and kissing like he didn't need to breathe. It was so much and so good that Jiang Cheng couldn't think about anything other than Liu Qingge's hot length pulsing inside him and the hot sparks of pleasure that danced up and down his spine.

With a gasp that quickly became muffled by the kiss Liu Qingge stole, Jiang Cheng came and shuddered against his lover's gentle touch and how sweetly he withdrew with another gentle kiss.

The two sighed contentedly and lay next to each other, breathing in the smell of sweat and sex on each other. Jiang Cheng huffed a breath and twirled a strand of Liu Qingge's hair around his fingers, beyond pleased with what he'd been given.

With a soft sigh Liu Qingge closed his eyes and said, "I think they're just about done too." Glancing over his shoulder at the two spiritual blades whose own moans had been drowned out by his own, Jiang Cheng's face heated at the obscene yet attractive scene playing out before him. Sandu held Cheng Luan's hips tightly—not enough to injure or damage, but enough to leave light bruises—while the other all but clawed at Sandu's back each time it went down on it.

When the two swords finally finished and collapsed into a heap similar to Jiang Cheng and Liu Qingge, Cheng Luan breathed a happy sigh and said, "Incredible. Sandu is unbelievably talented."



Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes and turned back to Liu Qingge. Cheng Luan's earnestness was so much like Liu Qingge it made Jiang Cheng's chest tighten, and he could only imagine how Sandu would take the compliment.

"A-Cheng was fantastic," Liu Qingge said, his voice taking on a similar tone to Cheng Luan's—or was it the other way around? "A wonderful performance by Sandu Shengshou."

"Shut up," Jiang Cheng said, shoving a hand in Liu Qingge's face to silence him. "Or it'll be your turn."

Liu Qingge sat up at that, propping himself up on one elbow. "Really?"

"You mean it?" Cheng Luan asked, equally if not more interested than its wielder in Jiang Cheng's offhanded remark.

Even Sandu looked interested, its dark eyes flitting across Liu Qingge's naked form with intrigue.

"You just had me!" Jiang Cheng sputtered in disbelief.

"There's no 'just' with you, A-Cheng," Liu Qingge said smoothly. "I want all of you, and I'm yours to take whenever you please."

Jiang Cheng couldn't help how simultaneously sweet and frustrating Liu Qingge was.

"I just—" Jiang Cheng flushed, unable to get the words out with an audience. Barely meeting Liu Qingge's eyes he muttered, "I'm not hard yet."

Liu Qingge blinked and cocked his head to the side as if he didn't see what the problem was. "Cheng Luan."

"I know," Cheng Luan said with a glint in its eye.

Jiang Cheng only realized what Cheng Luan meant when it caressed Sandu's face and shifted back into a blade with no fanfare, landing sheathed in Liu Qingge's outstretched palm.

Without hesitation, Liu Qingge pushed Cheng Luan into Jiang Cheng's hands and said plainly, "Start with that, then you can finish me."

Jiang Cheng gripped Cheng Luan's cool sheath and thought about protesting, only for Sandu to slither up behind him and press its cheek against his bare shoulder.

"Jiang Cheng should take his time and ravish him," Sandu whispered in his ear, reaching over to trace the patterns of Cheng Luan's scabbard with a finger. "I'll take care of this when you're done with it."



Humming contemplatively, Jiang Cheng raised an eyebrow and said, "Alright." With a kiss to catch Liu Qingge off guard, Jiang Cheng shoved the man down and lifted one of his legs to expose his hole. "We'll start the same way you did with me."

Liu Qingge's eyes went glassy when Jiang Cheng hovered over him and began to prepare him to take Cheng Luan's hilt, almost like he'd fantasized about being held down. Taking advantage of Liu Qingge's compliance, Jiang Cheng dropped long deep kisses across his shoulders and collarbones that would mar the peak lord's skin.

Sandu stayed still and unmoving while it surveyed the scene and tried to decide what to do in the face of two people so entwined. Finally, Jiang Cheng deemed Liu Qingge ready and inserted Cheng Luan's hilt into the man, littering his face with kisses and murmuring sweet words.

Startled at the unfamiliar sensation, Liu Qingge turned his face into Jiang Cheng's neck and breathed, "A-Cheng—ah!"

"Is that all it takes to fell the War God of Cang Qiong?" Jiang Cheng asked, slowly twisting Cheng Luan's hilt deeper.

Liu Qingge gasped and pressed into Jiang Cheng's hand, his pillar hot and firm against Jiang Cheng's palm. The assault on his senses from both ends was indescribable and left Liu Qingge wordless.

"Beautiful," Sandu murmured, leaning close behind Jiang Cheng to watch. "Jiang Cheng holds it well. Liu Qingge should use me like that next time."

Scoffing at the notion that there would be a next time for something like this, Jiang Cheng set to gently thrust Cheng Luan's hilt while he stroked Liu Qingge to keep him hard. It didn't take long for Liu Qingge—crying Jiang Cheng's name coupled with Sandu's soft spoken praises—to get Jiang Cheng up and ready. As soon as he removed Cheng Luan from Liu Qingge's ass, Jiang Cheng took its place, filling the space with his hot throbbing cock.

"A-Cheng," Liu Qingge said, moving in tandem with Jiang Cheng. "I need you."

"You have me," Jiang Cheng promised, kissing Liu Qingge and savoring the taste.

With Cheng Luan in hand, Sandu caressed the sword scabbard and brushed his lips across the detailing. Rubbing Cheng Luan against its body, Sandu murmured, "Now it's my turn."

Taking Cheng Luan to pleasure itself the way Jiang Cheng used it to pleasure Liu Qingge, Sandu wasted no time in sheathing the hilt in his ass. Watching Jiang Cheng pump himself against Liu Qingge was more than enough to encourage Sandu's own exploits.

As they reached their dual climax, Jiang Cheng pecked Liu Qingge's lips and murmured, "I love you, Qingge."



Then he delivered the finishing blow, causing Liu Qingge to cry out his name so gutturally it would've scared anyone else, but to Jiang Cheng it was like the sweetest song.

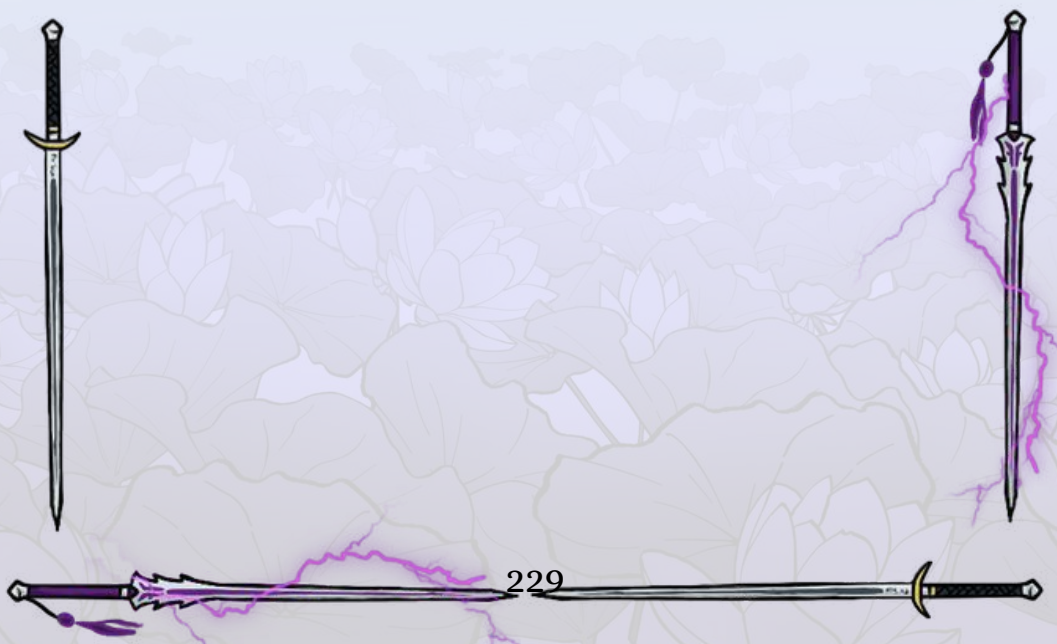
Next to them, Sandu panted and shuddered with Cheng Luan in its embrace. Reaching over Jiang Cheng carded a hand through Sandu's sweaty hair. Relaxing into the touch, Sandu let out a deep breath and settled back into its original shape, leaving two swords on the floor next to Jiang Cheng and Liu Qingge, their sword tassels crossed over each other.

Sighing as the rush of excitement left his veins, Jiang Cheng rested his head on Liu Qingge's chest.

"Missed you, A-Cheng," Liu Qingge said, curling his hand against the base of Jiang Cheng's neck.

"Oh?" Jiang Cheng asked, "I was just in you. How can you miss me already?"

"I just do," Liu Qingge sighed. "Love you, A-Cheng."



PROB



Kinnaroo



FISH ARE LOVERS (NOT FOOD)

Neuvoid, with spot art by Yanghu / Amiaaa (* • •)σ

Monsterfucking

Non Human Genitals

LQG has a Pussy

Size Difference

Micro Macro

"Jiang Chengggggg, is it done yet? I'm starving already," Wei Wuxian whined. "It smells sooo good!"

"I've already told you, the ribs still need to cook for longer." Jiang Cheng huffed, "go hunt something if you're that desperate."

"Boo! You're no fun."

"Would you like your soup with a side of food poisoning, dumbass?" He deadpanned. "You know it—"

A thudding over head interrupted Jiang Cheng, crashing down through the thatched roof.

It splashed into the soup, a cloud of dust following after it.

The same soup that Jiang Cheng had worked so hard for overnight.

What had punctured the roof of his kitchen?

"A-Cheng! Are you okay?"

"I'm not hurt," Jiang Cheng looked over at Wei Wuxian. "The roof..."

What the fuck was that?

"Well there goes our bonus pay from our last client..." Wei Wuxian frowned.

A splash erupted from the soup pot as the cauldron jostled.

"What the —"

"Stay there." Jiang Cheng's grip tightened around the ladle in his hand, ignoring the dirtied broth's faint and fragrant scent.

He'd worked so hard over this soup, following his Jie's recipe too—

There was something in the cauldron. A dark shadow, wriggling.

Wriggling and alive.

Jiang Cheng dipped his wooden ladle into the cauldron pulling it up from the muddied amber liquid—

Only to find a live fish curled up around the large spoon, its tail too big to even fit the scoop properly.



No, not a fish — it had humanoid features despite its finned ears, flushed from the heat of the broth, its tiny arms holding a piece of pork rib pausing in mid-bite—

"A merperson?" Wei Wuxian's tone matched Jiang Cheng's bewilderment.

The tiny fish creature flinched at Wei Wuxian's voice, nearly dropping the rib bone, its finned ears sluggishly perking up when it let out a squeaky hiss.

Jiang Cheng moved the ladle away from the ruined soup. "A new species? They usually don't come this small — ow!"

The chewed-clean pork bone had been thrown against his jaw, leaving a sting before the tiny merperson launched itself from the ladle —

"Get off me!" Jiang Cheng felt a sting of pain against his fingers —

The mer bit him! He shook the persistent creature away with a swing of his arms —

Only for the creature to land against his head, its webbed fingers digging into his scalp as it grabbed at Jiang Cheng's jade hairpin —

Jiang Cheng's hair fell away from his bun as he pulled the accursed creature off him, flushing at the sudden indignity—

"Oi! Stop laughing over there and get me a jar of water before it chews my hand off!" Jiang Cheng shouted at the currently breathless Wei Wuxian leaning against the kitchen counter, face red from gasping laughter.

"And don't forget the salt!"

The strange runty mer refused to give Jiang Cheng his hairpin back.

Not only had it taken his hairpin, it also had stolen an old silk hair tie from Jiang Cheng's tight bun, messing up his hair for the second time that day before it leapt back into the large saltwater-filled clay jar it had otherwise obediently stayed in.

The mer had fashioned the faded purple thing around its waist like a sword belt.

Jiang Cheng wasn't sure why the creature had ended up in Lotus Pier, so inland and far from the ocean. Salt was hard to harvest as the Marsh Witch, even with the brackish water of Jiang Cheng's territory amongst the lotuses.

Truthfully, he wasn't sure how to deal with this creature's abrupt appearance.



There was the strange language barrier, for one. The creature was too tiny, unable to vocalize anything more than a series of emotive squeaks. and with the language difference, they couldn't even write to communicate.

There was no origin they could easily trace this tiny mer back to, the mer himself being unclear of his origins even when he was in front of the large world map in Jiang Cheng's study.

"You'll need a temporary name." Jiang Cheng only dared after he determined that the mer wasn't going to leap from the jar and try to bite his face off in sudden retaliation.

The tiny mer turned away though those finned ears had clearly registered Jiang Cheng's words, twitching and flaring at them.

"You're slightly larger than my hand...A fish who rained down into a pot of soup... Xiao Yu-er?" And that's how Wei Wuxian found Jiang Cheng on the floor fighting against a very offended creature much to his amusement.

Nevertheless, the name stuck.

Jiang Cheng and Xiao Yu-er had come to a strange understanding by the end of the first week, uneasy at first, before slipping into a comfortable silence.

This understanding had stretched to the merman allowing himself to be held within a modified Water Cage spell with saltwater for Jiang Cheng to transport him around Lotus Pier. It wouldn't do for Xiao Yu-er to suffer without his accustomed salinity levels either within the modified cage or the various containers laid out for him in Jiang Cheng's office and bedroom — even if this meant that food was blander for the coming months in Lotus Pier.

Knowing that the tiny mer's movements had been restricted upon land, Jiang Cheng prioritized taking walks around the Lotus Pier with his feral guest to make sure that he wasn't restless due to his strange confinement and tried to escape.

Jiang Cheng hadn't dared to release Xiao Yu-er into the marshes. The water was too clouded and muddy to suit a sea creature like him. Jiang Cheng was sure that the mer's biology wouldn't be able to take the low salinity of the brackish marsh waters amongst the lotuses. Releasing a strange mer out in the marsh wilds in an unchecked manner also sounded like a surefire way to wreck a carefully balanced environment within a year, if not less.

It was clear to Jiang Cheng that sending Xiao Yu-er home must become a priority to remove the necessity of this strange accommodation.

And it was strange. Jiang Cheng's bedroom now had a semi-permanent fixture of ceramic bowls, pots, and containers placed on different perches and vantage points. The biggest container of them all was Jiang Cheng's personal wooden bathtub, an uncommon item of luxury for the times when Jiang Cheng had wanted to take a private bath.



Now they all served as a strange series of saltwater pools for the tiny fish creature to swim in, filled with strange rocks and rare sea vegetation. Jiang Cheng had done his best to obtain some from the shadier markets in town.

And while Jiang Cheng had found that he hadn't minded this strange coexistence, he couldn't help but be worried for Xiao Yu-er, thousands of li away from the deep abyssal oceans so far away from his home.

Jiang Cheng had only pretended to not hear the songs Xiao Yu-er had tried to sing in the depth night, the soft squeaky sounds stuttering and stopping as he valiantly struggled at the melody.

It was often followed by a frustrated splash of saltwater — a vulnerable, personal moment that Jiang Cheng wasn't supposed to witness.

Jiang Cheng had done all he could on his end, writing to the various witches he knew, pulling on all of his mother's connections and favours to figure out Xiao Yu-er's origins. Jiang Cheng had even attempted to contact the abyssal sea witches though without much success. They were known as the the most territorial and mercurial for a good reason.

Word soon spread that the Marsh Witch Jiang Cheng had finally accepted a familiar in the form of a fish — something that had caused much buzz since no familiar had wanted to claim him, not even his mother's Zidian. It had refused to even rise from its nest, even after these passing years following the burning and reconstruction of Lotus Pier.

Jiang Cheng let those rumours go, not bothering to explain what the truth was. They were more convinced of their theories for their own entertainment anyway. Jiang Cheng chose to focus on Xiao Yu-er's comfort and contentment during his temporary stay.

Thankfully, Xiao Yu-er seemed to have gotten used to his life here in Lotus Pier. He'd even devised a call that resembled Jiang Cheng's name — though that might be Jiang Cheng's pitch recognition improving due to the time he spent with the tiny being. They'd gotten along enough to hold long conversations, meaning passed non-verbally: sometimes with gestures and charades, while other times with the fish squeaking at the man and the man nodding without understanding, much to Wei Wuxian's baffled amusement.

For Jiang Cheng, it was never a boring day with Xiao Yu-er around.

The days would have gone on forever like this, if it wasn't for the changing heat of summer and the onslaught of near deathly, high temperatures.



Summer came with a sluggish drop in productivity from the marshlands; all the residents here paused their late morning activities until the sun crept long past noon. It meant that the days grew longer for Jiang Cheng as he found himself staying up later to finish his work as the coven head, catching up on sleep on the down-hours too tired to do much else from the simmering summer heat.

It was on one of these summer days when he noticed that Xiao Yu-er had hardly touched his portion of grilled fish and pork ribs during breakfast.

Jiang Cheng gently poked at him with the fleshy tip of his finger, nudging at his shoulders lightly.

"What's wrong with you?" Jiang Cheng asked softly, looking over the ceramic bowl of saltwater the latter was sitting in, "Are the sweet and sour ribs not to your liking?"

Xiao Yu-er looked at him and shook his head, his gathered ponytail clinging wetly against his shoulders as he did so.

A deflated-sounding squeak followed.

Jiang Cheng frowned. How strange. Xiao Yu-er was known to easily beat Wen Ning the Undying Warlock in terms of his appetite. The latter had been known to eat a lot as a side effect ever since the forbidden life-saving spells were cast onto him by Wei Wuxian.

Xiao Yu-er bit at his own handful of white fish halfheartedly, swallowing the morsel before he returned to that strange state of spaciness he had.

Concerned, Jiang Cheng placed a fingertip on Xiao Yu-er's forehead.

It was concerning that Xiao Yu-er had let him do so, even leaning against Jiang Cheng's cool hand —

Xiao Yu-er was warm.

Too warm.

Jiang Cheng immediately cast the modified Water Cage spell and swiftly brought him to his brother.

"There's something wrong with Xiao Yu-er. He's overheating," he said to Wei Wuxian. "Call Wen Daifu and clear my schedule, I'm going to do my best treat him on the meanwhile."

"On it."



Jiang Cheng felt a strange sense of relief when he slipped Xiao Yu-er into the large bathtub from the spell-cage. The large mass of water should be cooling enough for the tiny merman to relieve that alarming warmth he had.

Xiao Yu-er must be running a fever.

Jiang Cheng observed the mer for another short moment, noting that the latter had curled up on a comfortable patch of artificial silk grasses in the bathtub, not even bothering to check the jade hairpin on his hip — the only thing that usually roused the mer's interest as he was often seen dancing with the item, as if sparring with a sword underwater. Perhaps Xiao Yu-er was a sword wielder before all of this.

The sluggishness and fever made it all the more alarming for Jiang Cheng to witness.

He quickly went to the windows, closing them to prevent cool morning air from escaping the room and considered whether he should activate a cooling charm within the room.

Jiang Cheng took out the medical kit from his qiankun pouch and took out a pill, skilfully slicing its round form into fourths.

"Xiao Yu-er?" Jiang Cheng called out quietly as he stepped towards the wooden bathtub. "Xiao Yu-er..." He tried again.

The tiny merman slowly swam up to the surface of the tub under the diffused glow of the panelled windows, still sluggish but curious.

Frowning, Jiang Cheng reached out a hand, cupping the merman's tiny form.

He was still worryingly warm, his tail wrapping around Jiang Cheng's cool fingers as he melted against the callused surface. The scales on his tail were still glinting a bright, silvery blue, and speckled in a charming manner, the tips of his translucent tail and fins still vibrant and healthy.

This is bad. This could be a clear sign of Xiao Yu-er's decline of health.

Jiang Cheng had to return him to the ocean soon, with or without the abyssal sea witch's contact.

"Xiao Yu-er," Jiang Cheng's voice was gentle. "Hang in there... I have some medicine that might soothe your fever... but I'm unsure if it'll work on merfolk the same way it would work on my kind."

Xiao Yu-er shook his head, his flushed cheeks, reddened from fever as those small hands reached up to tug at Jiang Cheng's sleeves. Then Xiao Yu-er called out his name.

Something clattered onto the wooden edge of the bathtub.



Pearls. One after another, knocking carelessly against each other, tumbling underwater to the wooden floor of the vessel.

Xiao Yu-er's tears.

"Xiao Yu-er..." He murmured.

The tiny mer's eyes shone as he tugged at Jiang Cheng's sleeve again, urging for him to stay. Jiang Cheng suddenly felt more helpless than he ever had before.

Xiao Yu-er refused to let Jiang Cheng's hand go, even as Jiang Cheng felt his the skin of his own hands prune up, even as he felt his knees ache against the side of the tub.

Xiao Yu-er had let out a sound of protest, when Jiang Cheng had attempted to move from the tub. No matter how he tried to reassure the tiny merman that he would be back after a while, the sick mer stuck to his palm.

In the end, Jiang Cheng took off his purple outer robes, leaving himself in his neiyi and sat down in the tub.

All the while with Xiao Yu-er in his palms.

"Will this really help you feel better?" Jiang Cheng watched with doubt as the much smaller merman swam towards him, coming back to coil around his dangling fingers.

Jiang Cheng held his other hand underneath Xiao Yu-er to support him.

Xiao Yu-er let out a soft and relieved chirp, calling out Jiang Cheng's name as he did so, his hands tugging at Jiang Cheng's index finger.

"Don't worry, I'm here, I'll stay with you if you so wish." Jiang Cheng answered softly. It wasn't strange for him to be sitting in the bathtub anyway, the mer having invited him over to sit with him once in a while.

Jiang Cheng moved his nibbled-on fingers carefully to smooth those loose hairs aside for the tiny mer, petting him at the back of his head for good measure. "You seem hungry. I can get someone to bring some fruit over but I would prefer you rest and recover — Ow!"

Xiao Yu-er had bitten his index finger — a blatant rejection of the idea, as he looked up at Jiang Cheng with flushed cheeks and bright eyes, glassy from the fever, those tears threatening to join those already solidified at the bottom of the tub.

A-!

"Alright, I'll stay here," Jiang Cheng said, as Xiao Yu-er called him again, pulling at his index finger and biting at it again.

Was the mer homesick? Lonely? Jiang Cheng had dealt with cases of perfectly functioning coven members having to leave for that same issue, though they'd all returned after their trip home.



The gnawing continued, insistent as Xiao Yu-er tugged at him.

"I hear you. What are you, teething?" Jiang Cheng was suddenly worried as he moved the finger closer for the tiny mer's comfort, feeling the other's body brushing against his knuckles

There was a strange dip of intense warmth against Xiao Yu-er's scales.

A stuttered squeak, quiet and flustered, filled the room as Jiang Cheng felt Xiao Yu-er heated form press against his knuckles, rubbing against him insistently as if— as if—

Jiang Cheng felt himself flush, his eyes widening in alarm.

"Xiao Yu-er?" He managed.

Do merpeople have heat cycles? Ruts?

Jiang Cheng felt something landing on his hand: Pearls, small like the rest of Xiao Yu-er as he desperately pressed himself against Jiang Cheng's knuckle for what the human now realised was relief.

It looked painful to Jiang Cheng.

But still... Xiao Yu-er was looking at him. his hips pressing the protrusion against Jiang Cheng's knuckle, his eyes pleading.

"I—" Jiang Cheng hesitated, his heart racing.

This was most likely nothing personal to the tiny merman despite Jiang Cheng's ugly feelings. It was just an instinctual response from the merman. Jiang Cheng had no idea how the merfolk deal with their cycles, but if it really was that bad, then there must be some sort of relief offered from other individuals... right?

Those hips nudged again, those eyes glazing over. Desperate. Needy.

"Please," The mer grated out, his eyes teary, those words broken, foreign and exaggerated.

A creature of the ocean thrown into the marshes to fend for himself, Xiao Yu-er had no one to help him.

He was alone.

"... I'll help you" Jiang Cheng said finally. "but we do have to talk about this after. Promise?"



The flush on Jiang Cheng's cheeks climbed higher as he slowly fingered open the tiny opening between Xiao Yu-er's hips, his slender digit brushing against the forming bump, a seam, slowly rising from Xiao Yu-er's scales in a shade of blue darker than the rest of his tail.

Jiang Cheng felt Xiao Yu-er shiver against him, the tiny mer's breath hitching as the warmth of fingers bumped up against the tiny appendage that had slowly announced its own presence. Jiang Cheng traced along the slit the mer had insistently rubbed against his fingertips.

He swallowed, as he listened to Xiao Yu-er's sounds — strange moans, oddly melodic even keyed at this higher pitch. The tiny mer's form was flushed, oddly pretty.

"Is this helping any?" Jiang Cheng's voice was dry as he continued to rub at the slit, noticing against his will as it grew slipperier, and more viscous at his touch.

There was an insistent squeak as Xiao Yu-er pressed himself against Jiang Cheng's middle finger.

"Hey—" Jiang Cheng protested,

The tip of his middle finger sank into Xiao Yu-er's slit.

There was a gasp, stuttery and broken in the middle as he felt Xiao Yu-er's walls clench around him impossibly tight, pulling him in.

Xiao Yu-er panted, bubbles swirling around him as he bucked his hips forward against Jiang Cheng.

More pearls fell to the bottom of the basin.

"It's alright..." Jiang Cheng soothed, fighting away his flush. His own shock over the situation could be reassessed later. None of that was important right now, not with Xiao Yu-er suffering like this. "I'm here... take as much as you need. I'll be here as long as it takes."

Xiao Yu-er let out a series of chirps, alien to Jiang Cheng as those hands tugged on the knuckle of his penetrating middle digit. His eyes were telling him to continue.

Jiang Cheng slowly slid the finger into Xiao Yu-er, remembering human anatomy charts from his apprentice years.

How much did that translate to mer-biology?

A-!

His middle finger finally sank halfway before the second knuckle, just slightly away.



Xiao Yu-er clenched down hard, his tail wrapping around Jiang Cheng's wrist as he let out an audible cry, melting against Jiang Cheng's right hand. The tiny mer slowly leaned forward from his position — and pressed a tiny kiss onto Jiang Cheng's open palm.

Jiang Cheng felt his own heart stutter.

The mer kissed his palm again, nibbling at the calloused flesh.

Jiang Cheng let out a soft exhale, not realising the tight breath he'd held within his lungs. Despite all of his tension, it seemed like Xiao Yu-er was enjoying what Jiang Cheng was doing to him.

Those hips nudged against him, the mer spoke insistently, pleading.

More.

Jiang Cheng had promised to stay with him.

He should keep his promise.



Jiang Cheng must have fallen asleep in the tub while monitoring Xiao Yu-er's heat.

Moonlight spilled from the paper windows illuminating the strangely cramped wooden tub.

Had it really been that long?

Jiang Cheng blinked tiredly as he moved. His neiyi clung against him as he leaned against the firm, solid warmth pressed against his back—

"Wha?" Jiang Cheng mumbled as his eyes slowly readjusted to the dark.

Someone was holding Jiang Cheng, bare arms, warm skin ...

A person.

Someone strangely familiar and safe.

Confused, Jiang Cheng turned around—

Only to see a handsome face, striking yet strangely familiar face, his eyes as clear as the night the scales on his cheekbones glinting under moonlight...

... that ethereal face, the familiar mole—

"Xiao... Yu-er...?"



JUST A LITTLE LONGER

Cherry_Blaze, with spot art by Barghest Shadows

Identity Porn

Demonic Cultivator JC

Extremely Dubious Consent

Somnophilia

JC has Dick and Pussy

Jiang Cheng choked on that cock.

It was even bigger than he assessed at first. His eyes rolled back, and his whole body shuddered. It was *delicious*.

He steadied his palms on his partner's thighs and sank his head lower. Finally, *finally*, he reached the base and his nose got buried in the tuft of curly hair. Jiang Cheng purred at the scent. It was not only musky and intense, but it also carried a metallic note. Jiang Cheng moaned around the base of the shaft, gaining a small shiver from his companion.

Falling into that headspace was similar to meditation. Jiang Cheng closed his eyes and focused on moving his head: pulling off with a strong suction, teasing the little hole at the tip, pressing its whole length on his tongue and giving the dick a few pumps with his hand, then swallowing it back down his throat. He liked repeating this sequence, just to feel as much of the cock as he possibly could.

Small noises and grunts escaped his partner's lips. Jiang Cheng chuckled, mouth still around the delicious thickness.

Good to know you enjoy it. I'd be very disappointed if you didn't~ Jiang Cheng thought and hollowed his cheeks, sucking as hard as he could.

"...Aaah!"

Getting vocal, aren't we? Jiang Cheng purred, and the reverberation caused the cock in his mouth to twitch.

I wonder how loud you'd be if you weren't unconscious, though~ He squeezed the base and ran his tongue from it all the way to the top.

There, an off-white, viscous liquid was slowly trickling from the weeping hole. Jiang Cheng licked it all off and smiled. Unlike his own secretions, this was full of flavour - tangy, slightly sweet, and full of the delicious qi.

Yes... Give me more of that, my dear guest... Jiang Cheng sucked on the tip alone, and it rewarded him by oozing more of the qi he needed so desperately.

His partner's body convulsed and spasmed. Loud, tortured moans rolled out of those alluring lips.

Jiang Cheng took him out of his mouth and climbed up on the bed to be face to face with the unconscious man.



Ah, your qi deviation is acting up again? Don't worry, I won't let that wake you up. I'm not done with you yet~ With that, Jiang Cheng struck a few pressure points on the man's chest, stopping him from struggling further. *There we go. Don't worry, soon I'll suck out all of your excess qi and you'll feel much better.* Jiang Cheng pecked the man's cheek and went back to kneel between his thighs.

Jiang Cheng glanced back at the sleeping man's face. If someone saw him now, they might as well think he was sleeping. After Jiang Cheng induced his temporary coma by striking the acupoints, the man's brows unfurrowed, and his expression became completely serene.

It's adorable how oblivious you are, dear guest...

The arousal fogging Jiang Cheng's head and coiling in his loins made him greedy. He wanted to take his time savouring the man. To taste every inch of him. Leave his marks all over the pale skin, kiss the beauty mark under his eye, ravish his lips until they bled.

The qi the man's body produced fed Jiang Cheng better than any of his dream escapades ever would. If the dreams were a bowl of thin soup, this man was a feast. If the dreams were but a small candle, this was a forest fire reaching the heavens. An ocean compared to a thimble.

However, drinking that ocean through a hole so small would take forever. As much as Jiang Cheng didn't mind the "forever", he was afraid his partner would not survive long enough. He needed to use a more *efficient* method.

Qj was stored in the lower dantian - 2 to 3 thumb's widths below the navel and 2 to 3 widths deep. It was known as the "elixir field", "energy center", "sea of qi" or, in Jiang Cheng's area, "the golden core".

The one he once cultivated, and the one he had lost to the Core Melting Hand, Wen Zhuliu. After the failed attempt at transplanting the core, the only option Jiang Cheng had left was to supply his qi like this: being a parasite and feeding on unconscious cultivators.

Though he mostly hunted on their wet dreams, he was just too desperate and hungry to resist this handsome man.

But who could blame him? Why would he deny a meal when it was right there, staggering in the empty alley on the outskirts of the city, verging on qi deviation? Of course he had to help a man in distress! Not to mention, he was protecting the Yunmeng city from a potentially dangerous person!

By sucking his dick, yes.

But it wasn't efficient enough, so Jiang Cheng had to implement the special measures.

The qi consumption through the mouth was always slow because it had to pass through Jiang Cheng's stomach first before reaching his dantian. However, there was a quicker, more *embarrassing* way.



Because Jiang Cheng's dantian was *actually, technically*, gone, he had to use the empty space *somehow* to store all the qi he accumulated. That something was, predictably, a *womb*.

The entrance to that womb was closed and hidden, just another patch of skin, indistinctive from the rest of Jiang Cheng's body. It only appeared at his will.

And right now, Jiang Cheng was very willing.

He reached slowly behind his balls and massaged the delicate spot. After just a few circling motions, the skin parted with no resistance, forming two plush folds and a tight passage between them.

Jiang Cheng gasped. He could already feel the slick flowing down his walls and past his entrance, making his inner thighs glisten. *Fuck*, he was so wet. It's been a while since he last used his pussy, he forgot how sensitive it can be.

Embarrassed as he was, he knew it'd be the fastest way to consume the excess qi. After all, the cultivator's dantian would be almost directly connected to his... *his womb*...

Thank god the other man was unconscious, Jiang Cheng would die on the spot if someone saw him like this. Just thinking about his secret body part being exposed to the touch of another made a new portion of slick flow down his legs.

He needed this man inside him *yesterday*.

Jiang Cheng crawled up and positioned his legs on both sides of the handsome cultivator, hovering directly above the length protruding from the man's clothes. Qi deviations increased the blood pressure in its victims, and Jiang Cheng found that very convenient.

He put two fingers between his folds and spread them, revealing his weeping hole. He tried to fit just the man's tip inside first, but his slick, mixed with the liquid qi coming out of the cock, made everything so slippery. Instead of sliding inside, the tip missed and hit Jiang Cheng's clit instead. This sudden contact caused electricity to run up Jiang Cheng's spine.

Fuck, he was so done waiting at this point, embarrassment be damned.

Using his other hand to keep the man's erection in place, he positioned his hips once more. His partner turned his head to the side, and a few louder moans spilled from his lips.

Someone likes being manhandled a little? Jiang Cheng laughed to himself. Dear, you're so much fun~

Jiang Cheng gripped him tighter and slowly inserted the cock where it belonged: into his pussy. Ah, he forgot how good this feeling was. Just the tip alone was stretching him nicely. After getting comfortable, Jiang Cheng sank lower, until his hips met the other's.



"You're so handsome... I want to keep you~" Jiang Cheng locked his gaze on the man's face: his lips were now parted, trying to catch some air with shallow breaths. And to think it was caused by the pleasure Jiang Cheng was giving him... His hips started to rock on their own. "So handsome... so oblivious..." Jiang Cheng moved up and down with smooth motions of his waist. "Ah... I can feel your qi flowing inside me already... you're feeding me so well..."

The man under him grunted and furrowed his brows again.

"Don't resist now... I'm only trying to help you, you'll feel better soon~" With that, Jiang Cheng put his palms flat on the man's pecs and ground his pelvis down *hard*. He felt a surge of heat when the engorged cockhead made contact with his cervix.

Jiang Cheng cursed under his breath. "You can reach so deep inside me... so close to my core...". Jiang Cheng moved up slowly and sank down again. *Gods*, the dragging motion, the heft of the cock against his delicate walls, the pressure, it was all so delicious. Once Jiang Cheng started moving, he could not bring himself to stop.

He worked his hips relentlessly, revelling in the sensation. The stretching, the fullness, the *heat* when the cock brushed against his delicate womb - Jiang Cheng's eyes rolled back, mouth going slack. *Fuck...!*

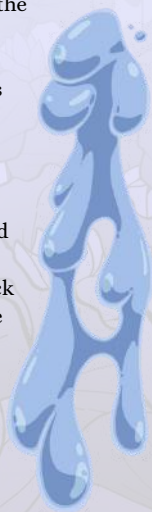
The more qi Jiang Cheng accumulated, the more strength he had - his thighs, although trembling, didn't falter as he increased the speed. He bounced relentlessly on that cock, even as the bed creaked under him in warning. Each time he took in the length, he felt his muscles tightening around it, refusing to let go.

At first, the wisps of qi flowing into him were erratic, as is common when dealing with a deviation. Jiang Cheng absorbed it with no complaint, savouring the sharp and chaotic sensation in his core. What was a little bit of pain for if not enrichment?

After a while, the flow smoothed out, and Jiang Cheng began circulating the qi through his meridians with a newfound eagerness. As they say, the appetite comes with eating. Jiang Cheng took and took, trying to absorb as much as he could. Each portion that soaked into his womb immediately percolated further, eliciting a wave of warmth rippling through the rest of Jiang Cheng's body.

'Aaah... It's been so long since I was being fed so well by someone~ Strong cultivators like yourself rarely go into a deviation, not to mention the handsome ones. And yet here you are... Lucky me~' Jiang Cheng grunted and slammed his hips down so hard even the walls shook from the force of it. Then again. And again.

'Fuck, dear... Sorry, but I'll probably leave a few bruises on you~' Jiang Cheng laughed under his breath and brushed aside the loose strands of hair that escaped from his bun. He leaned back and spread his thighs further, allowing the handsome man's cock to reach even deeper. Jiang Cheng could feel the tip of it kissing the little spot inside that made him shiver. He gave a few thrusts downward to chase that feeling. Abandoning all shame, he moaned loudly and increased his pace.



But he might've been a little too loud.

'Mhhnnn... what...?'

Jiang Cheng froze. In his cock-drunk state he lowered his guard and stopped paying attention to the flow of his partner's qi. He didn't notice when it happened, but the qi deviation... was now completely cured! FUCK!!!

The handsome man, despite looking exhausted, was now perfectly sober! And after scrutinizing Jiang Cheng up and down with his cold eyes, he immediately summoned his blade, unsheathing it right away!

Jiang Cheng needed to act quickly. Running away was the most convenient option, he now had the advantage of being at his full power. But he took one glance at the blade and immediately changed his mind.

It's Cheng Luan!!! So the man I just fucked must be... THE WAR GOD HIMSELF????!!!

Running away now would be futile. Even with his strength restored, Jiang Cheng wasn't sure he'd outrun LIU QINGGE, a Peak Lord whose prowess went down in history!

He decided on a different approach.

'Oh, husband! You're awake!' Jiang Cheng took on an innocent and wounded expression. 'This one just wanted to give you a surprise! Please, don't hurt your wife!'

Jiang Cheng lied through his teeth, and calling himself "wife" made him viscerally flustered. But the situation was dire. He just needed to calm Liu Qingge down, wait for him to fall asleep again, and then escape, making the man think it was all just a dream. A very vivid, wet dream!

Liu Qingge raised an eyebrow. Oh, he was much more expressive and handsome when awake!

After a few moments, Liu Qingge set his sword aside. 'Wife should save the surprises for after the sunrise. It's the middle of the night, I thought you were a demon.'

Jiang Cheng exhaled with relief. His plan had worked! Now he just needed to follow through.

'How dare you call this wife a demon! I am nothing of the sort!'

That was also a lie; the way Jiang Cheng was living off of stealing qi from cultivators made him more of a demon than not - a perfect example of someone turning into a succubus.

But fortunately, Liu Qingge didn't seem to notice.

'This husband is sorry. Wife is certainly more beautiful than any demon could ever be' Liu Qingge stated with a more relaxed expression.



Jiang Cheng felt something twist in his gut. No, NOT the man's dick. Something... deeper. Like an emotion he forgot he was capable of feeling.

He didn't have time to process it, though, because Liu Qingge grabbed him by the waist and changed their position. Now he was on top, hovering over Jiang Cheng, his bangs messy and drenched in sweat. Jiang Cheng's dick twitched at the sight.

'H-husband...? What are you...?'

'I ruined wife's surprise, I need to make up for it.' With that, Liu Qingge leaned down and kissed Jiang Cheng on the lips.

'''! Jiang Cheng didn't know what to think. That wasn't part of the plan! He just meant to finish the fucking until Liu Qingge fell asleep and skedaddle! He didn't even take into account he'd be the submissive one!

As if feeling the unease, Liu Qingge moved his hand and wrapped it around Jiang Cheng's cock. Without breaking the kiss, he began to stroke it slowly, up and down.

Immediately, Jiang Cheng felt as if his body was melting. He closed his eyes, forgetting what he was even mad about. Liu Qingge's hand was so big and rough... He opened his mouth, but the moan he meant to release got swallowed as Liu Qingge deepened their kiss.

Jiang Cheng returned it without a second thought. He was curious about the taste of those lips earlier, and now he finally got the chance to try.

Liu Qingge let go of the cock, pinned Jiang Cheng's hands to the bed and intertwined their fingers. He braced himself and, despite being literally *exhausted* just a second ago, started thrusting into Jiang Cheng, taking on their pace from earlier.

Jiang Cheng arched his back and wrapped his legs around Liu Qingge's waist. Oh wow, it felt totally different to be on the bottom! Since his prey was always unconscious, Jiang Cheng was the one doing all the work. So, in a way, was it his... his first time...?

While not entirely true, the thought alone made Jiang Cheng squeeze harder around Liu Qingge's cock, earning him a low growl. Liu Qingge buried his face in the crook of Jiang Cheng's neck, and his hips moved faster.

'H-husband...!' Jiang Cheng moaned loudly. 'This wife can't go on much longer... Please, hurry!'

'It's okay if wife finishes before me. This husband can always bring you to the edge again.' Liu Qingge purred into Jiang Cheng's ear without stopping his thrusts. He ground into Jiang Cheng's leaking pussy, feeling it getting tighter and tighter. Jiang Cheng's climax was fast approaching.

'Fuck...' Liu Qingge almost whined. 'Wife...'



'Husband...!' Jiang Cheng squeezed his eyes shut and threw his head back, screaming from pleasure as the orgasm finally hit him. Every muscle in his body tensed at once, and a few uncontrollable shivers ran down his spine. This made Jiang Cheng's hips jump up a little, right against Liu Qingge's.

'You're so beautiful... So beautiful when you cum...' Liu Qingge gasped between his thrusts.

Jiang Cheng's mind was floating. His breathing became shallow, and his throat was dry. His legs, previously wrapped tightly around his prey-turned-fake-husband were now lying uselessly on the bed, shaking.

Jiang Cheng, despite being fully charged with qi, has never felt so fucked out. And Liu Qingge hasn't even come yet!

Jiang's Cheng's pussy was swollen and pulsating, desperately trying to milk Liu Qingge's cock for all it was worth. But the man had other plans. He slowed down his thrusts, and before Jiang Cheng could process what was happening, he was flipped on his front, ass up.

'H-husband...?'

'Shh...' Liu Qingge pressed his chest to Jiang Cheng's back, resting his forehead on the other's nape and breathing heavily. 'Wife is doing... so well for this husband...'

Jiang Cheng squealed when he felt Liu Qingge enter his pussy again. It was now carved out into the shape of Liu Qingge, walls all chafed and sensitive. Jiang Cheng felt as if all of his nerves were on fire.

Liu Qingge was now leaning on his left hand, gripping Jiang Cheng's waist with his right. He was panting right next to Jiang Cheng's ear, quiet whines escaping his lips between each thrust.

'Wife... So... Tight... I'm gonna...'

Jiang Cheng gripped the bedsheets as hard as he could, pushing his ass back and feeling Liu Qingge's tip kiss the little opening of his womb~!!!

Liu Qingge *whimpered* as he came, pressed so deep into Jiang Cheng's pussy. His seed flooded the contracted space, making squelching sounds as he rode out his high.

Jiang Cheng felt the hot wetness seeping into his core. It felt like a healing balm on his abused pussy's walls. Letting go of a desperate howl, his overstimulated body went through another spasmodic orgasm. Jiang Cheng couldn't take it anymore, and some tears spilled from his eyes.

'Husband...' he sobbed.



'I'm here' Liu Qingge responded softly into his ear, then kissed it with reverence. Jiang Cheng was once again flipped, now sprawled on the bed like a starfish. A boneless, fucked out starfish.

But Liu Qingge was not done yet.

He moved down the bed, to lie between Jiang Cheng's legs.

'Husband... what are you doing...?'

'I made my wife cry. I need to apologise properly.' With that, he stuck out his tongue and licked a stripe right between Jiang Cheng's slick pussylips.

Jiang Cheng was *dying*. It felt just too good! Liu Qingge circled his tongue around the swollen clit a few times, before diving in and sucking it with his full mouth.

'HUSBAND!!!' Jiang Cheng screamed into the night. He had no strength left to resist, all he could do was lie there and *take it* like the good wife he claimed to be.

Liu Qingge licked and sucked, not minding his own taste in the slightest. He gripped Jiang Cheng's plush thighs and spread them further.

Jiang Cheng's mind was floating in and out of consciousness. He wanted to stop Liu Qingge, to have at least some time to calm down after coming two times in a row. He raised his hand to push the man away, but it flopped uselessly on Liu Qingge's head instead.

Who, in turn, took it as a sign of encouragement and focused all his remaining qi in his tongue, sucking Jiang Cheng's helpless pussy.

Just like that, Jiang Cheng was gone again. Violent shivers ran all over his body and his hips rose on their own. Before Jiang Cheng could even react, he squirted all over Liu Qingge's face. He was unable to even mumble a single 'sorry'. Instead, his sobbing intensified and he reached out his tired hand.

Liu Qingge wiped his face and joined his wife in a tight hug.

'Thank you for the surprise, my love. You did so well.' He kissed Jiang Cheng on the lips and pulled the blanket over them.

After a while, Jiang Cheng could hear Liu Qingge's breath even out. Now he could leave and make him believe it was all just a dream.

But being held like this by someone was... nice.

As weird as it seemed, Jiang Cheng felt safe. If it meant being embraced and fed this well every night, Jiang Cheng wouldn't mind being called a wife.

Maybe he could stay and listen to Liu Qingge's heartbeat... just a little longer...



XIN MO'S RESENTMENT

LivingMeatloaf, with spot art by Barghest Shadows

Dub-Con

Emergency Medical Dual Cultivation

Blood

Whip Bondage

A bright comet, trailing oily black and red smoke, streaks across the sky from the west. With a great splash, it crashes into a lake a li beyond the outer boundary of Lotus Pier.

Not knowing what danger this thing might present to his people, Jiang Cheng, four senior disciples, and two healers fly out immediately. Jiang Cheng arrives first, expecting some strange yao, but instead only sees a man thrashing in the water. Thick around him, a pool of blood and black qi that crackles with purple light. It reminds him at first of resentment, but this is sharper, stiller. Resentment moves like smoke. This clings oil-like to the surface of the water and to the skin of the stranger.

The man slips under the contaminated water and does not reappear. Taking a deep breath, Jiang Cheng dives in after him.

The man still fights, mindlessly thrashing around. His enemy must be invisible or internal; he fights alone. Jiang Cheng tries to help him surface, but gets kicked and then nearly stabbed. He scowls.

Zidian unspools in a wave of light. It casts the jerky movements of the man in sharp, unnatural relief. A flick of his fingers, and she wraps around the man's upper body. Some of the resentment-like qi bursts off him on contact with the whip. A type of possession, then?

He dodges a punch, then blocks a kick with Zidian, the whip taut between his hands. If they were on land, that kick might have sent him flying. Tethered as he is to the stranger, they drift apart for a moment before Jiang Cheng reels him in, like a fish thrashing on the line. Swiftly circling him, he binds Zidian around his arms, holding them together and against his chest.

The man weakly struggles, but Jiang Cheng pulls him to the surface before he drowns.

Thankfully, an island waits for them at the surface, a pavilion centered on the small circle of land. He heaves the man onto the reeds beside the steps, then drags himself up the silty bank. Nangong Chèyǎ [1], the senior healer, and her assistant Cao Zhīfēi [2] land beside them and immediately drop to their knees, hands hovering over the stranger. Diagnostic arrays light the space. When he goes to remove Zidian, the man thrashes, even half-unconscious, so the whip remains, binding him. Jiang Cheng leaves them to their fast medical talk and joins the disciples hovering over the contaminated lake.



They discuss options and perform identification spells. While the energy reduced once the man was removed from the water, a pool of it still floats stubbornly on the water, crackling with its strange light. It acts more like qi than resentful energy, so they decide to attempt a qi-sealing array. As the disciples set up their equipment, a whistle summons Jiang Cheng back to the island.

In the time it took Jiang Cheng to go and return, the healer's assistant had erected an emergency tent — an ominous sign. They mainly use these for delicate emergency field surgery, as it takes a great deal of qi to maintain the purification arrays. Cao Zhifei nods as Jiang Cheng passes, concentrating too hard on the array to bow.

As Jiang Cheng enters, a wash of energy strips the dirt and oil from his body, leaving his skin dry and itchy, but his person totally clean. Immediately, the air presses on him with heavier, thicker, malevolent energy, like a hand pushing down. He understands: not only is the tent's array cleansing, but it also contains, so any out-of-control qi cannot escape. That is why they erected it. He had seen it used to contain a cultivator succumbing to qi deviation after a battle, back in the war; it had not been pretty.

Nangong Cheya has her hand up to the wrist in the man's side, his robes ripped open, trying to repair a deep stab wound. That same dark qi oozes out of the wound, intermingled with the bright red blood. Zidian keeps the man's arms bound to his upper torso, so he cannot lash out, though he tries to bite the healer even as blood leaks out of his mouth and nose.

"Get in here," she snaps, not looking up. "Give him qi, this other energy is too yin."

Jiang Cheng kneels beside the bed. One hand holds down the man's shoulder, the other grasps his bound wrist. The stranger's eyes roll around in his head, unseeing. Grimly, Jiang Cheng calls upon his core. He chases the foreign energy out with his qi, passing through the usual wrist point, then directly to the lower dantian when the man teeters on the edge of qi deviation. The healer has the wound sealed, but tersely explains the man's qi is flowing backward and needs a strong force to reverse it.

Hesitantly, with a strange edge of apology in her expression, she suggests dual cultivation. He stares at her.

"It's not as fantastical as it sounds," she explains. "Great strides in that avenue of research have recently been made, based on medical literature introduced in a conference far to the west. I have read it. I believe it could be utilized here to push back on his qi and guide it in the correct direction."

"I'm not going to rape an unconscious man!" It bursts from Jiang Cheng in a horrified shout.

Her lips press into a thin line. "He's going to die." Flat. A fact.

"There's nothing else—?" He knows even before she shakes her head. She wouldn't have suggested it otherwise. Fuck. He drags his free hand down his face, cold dread dripping down his spine, numbing his body. "Fucking— Wake him up."



Nangong Cheya uses smelling salts and a bright orange medicine she drips into the man's mouth. He convulses, and his eyes blurrily open.

"Hey—!" he shouts, spittle flying from his mouth, before he collapses into a deep coughing fit. The drool froths, turns red, then darker. The blood he coughs up stains the floor beside the bed black.

Jiang Cheng grabs his jaw to force him to look at him. The purple light of Zidian reveals how his pupils tighten and dilate continuously.

Jiang Cheng enunciates clearly, speaking with all the authority he can muster: "You are qi deviating. We are helping you. I need to... To..." He can't get the words out of his mouth. They claw at his throat.

Luckily, he doesn't need to say them. The man closes his eyes as if dizzy, face scrunching up in distaste or discomfort. "Ugh, dual cultivation? Mu-shidi, you know I don't like—" He coughs up more blood. Distressingly, it also leaks from the corners of his eyes, gory tear tracks streaking down his cheeks. He tries to wipe his face, but his hands won't reach when bound. Jiang Cheng's hand presses tighter to his stomach, pouring more qi in. "Shit." He sighs, head thumping back on the cot. "Fine, do what it takes."

Jiang Cheng quickly strips while the healer digs in her bag for a lubricant, usually used to free stuck limbs. She also hastily activates privacy talismans on the cardinal points of the tent. He tries to ignore her presence. He doesn't need any more humiliation piled on top of this shitty circumstance.

He folds his clothes with shaking hands. If only he'd had a more wild and carefree youth, instead of being constantly aware of the scrutiny a sect heir received! He only has furtive hand jobs to draw upon for personal reference, clumsy minutes of pleasure hidden in shadow. Fortunately, he knows the conceptual technique by which dual cultivation works, from having to approve the literature for the healers to study, and unfortunately knows how cutsleeve sex works from accidentally seeing Wei Wuxian being fucked by his husband in broad daylight in a field.

Arousal eludes Jiang Cheng, even with his hand on his dick. He grits his teeth and focuses on the attractive features of the man, like his high cheekbones, his strong limbs, the way he obediently spreads his legs when Jiang Cheng presses his hands on his thighs. While Jiang Cheng had prepared himself, Nangong Cheya had cut the man's lower robes and pants open, revealing thick, pale thighs speckled with moles, and a flaccid cock equal in size to Jiang Cheng's own. He drags his fingers through the lubricant, then behind the man's balls to the tight pucker.

The man grimaces and tries to relax as Jiang Cheng clumsily prepares him, following the murmured guidance of the healer. How humiliating, to have his first time having sex to not only be a medical procedure, but witnessed as well? At least she is the only one; the tent provides another unexpected blessing.



Jiang Cheng pauses, finally hard enough to initiate the transfer. It doesn't feel right, just sticking his dick into a nameless stranger's hole. He should provide him some dignity, some farce of acceptance.

"Hey." He gently smacks the man's face, then harder when he doesn't respond. "Hey!"

Nangong Cheya looks between them nervously, though she keeps her distance. "Sect leader, please hurry—"

"Hey!" The man's eyes crack open at the third slap. "What is your name?"

The man blinks at him, his eyes a little clearer than they were before. "Liu Qingge. Who—?"

"This one is Jiang Wanyin. I'll properly introduce myself after this."

He slides into Liu Qingge's body. It's strange, tight and hot, shockingly pleasurable. He bites back a moan, pushing in slowly as he focuses his qi to flow through his hips and out. Liu Qingge bows up with a curse, his hands clenching into white-knuckled fists where they are bound against his chest. Zidian crackles between them, hold renewed by the flowing qi.

They both breathe heavily as Jiang Cheng hilt himself, his balls pressing against Liu Qingge's ass. His mind spins. He shakes his head and focuses on his qi. With every thrust, he pushes it forward, forcing Liu Qingge's to obey the new flow. Rough and splintery, like dried old wood, the errant qi lashes out at his system, strong enough to make sweat bead on his forehead at the effort it takes to fight it.

"Hey, dumbass," Jiang Cheng grits out, "work with me! Unless you are trying to die!"

"You—!"

Liu Qingge bares his bloody teeth in a rictus snarl. With a shaky breath, his eyes slam closed. He breathes deeply, as if meditating. Jiang Cheng matches him. They fall into a rhythm together.

Little sounds draw Jiang Cheng's attention away from his own breath. A flush sits high on Liu Qingge's face, chasing away the pallor of blood loss. His skin shivers beneath Jiang Cheng's hand, flinching like a horse's flank, warmer with every long, slick push into his body. Jiang Cheng shifts, and Liu Qingge chokes on a gasp. He slides his legs up to hook around Jiang Cheng's hips, giving him greater leverage to push back into each thrust. Jiang Cheng pushes in even deeper — they both curse at the disorienting spike of pleasure.



The rest of the world fades until it is as if it is only them, only where their bodies become one, and the flow of qi between them. Swirling and sparkling, bubbles against the inside of his skin. Jiang Cheng knows rushing water, knows how it moves. The whirlpool of Liu Qingge's qi calms under the unrelenting force of Jiang Cheng's river, spins out to flow alongside his in the proper direction. Their mingled qi race along the branching paths of Liu Qingge's meridians, flushing out the last of that dark, malevolent qi, faster and faster, spilling back into Jiang Cheng's body when Liu Qingge grabs his arm where it braces him over Liu Qingge's shoulder, twisting his torso to reach, moaning. Breathless sounds drip from Jiang Cheng's mouth, though he can hardly spare a thought for them, sounds as liquid as the sweat pouring down his forehead, his back.

The pleasure crests. Every move is like a hand sliding across the very core of him. Pleasure, unlike anything Jiang Cheng has experienced, floods his mind. He dismisses Zidian, afraid his control will slip. She cascades off Liu Qingge's body, slithering between them to rest as a ring once more. The metal cools a patch of his overheated skin. He collapses down with a deep groan, catching himself on his elbows, his hips still pumping, balls slapping harshly against Liu Qingge's ass with each halting. The slight sting only adds to the high. Liu Qingge surges up into every thrust. Freed, his arms slide from gripping his arm to raking his fingers down Jiang Cheng's back, clutching him close.

Jiang Cheng shivers as Liu Qingge moans in his ear. The strangest urge to bite the scarred shoulder in front of him pushes at his teeth. He wants to feel those scars against his tongue. Pressing his forehead against that shoulder quells the urge enough.

Suddenly— too much. All of the pleasure boils down his spine, lightning striking in his brain, his hips twitching and thrusting out of his control. Jiang Cheng barely holds himself together enough to direct his qi to flood Liu Qingge's system. The rush feels cool, like diving into the lake and letting the water close in over his head. A ringing satisfaction echoes in his mind.

The qi washes through the other cultivator's meridians; Jiang Cheng can feel it through their continued connection. Liu Qingge bows up, his legs tightening around Jiang Cheng's hips. With a moan, he climaxes, body clenching around Jiang Cheng's cock, and his qi pours into Jiang Cheng in return. This summer-rain-warm wave relaxes all of the tension in his body, like sinking into a hot bath at the end of a long day.

They collapse together on the cot, breathing hard. Jiang Cheng jumps, startled, when the forgotten healer takes his wrist. He groans and forces himself to get off Liu Qingge, so Nangong Cheya can check on him. Every limb hangs loose from his torso. He aches, but a pleasant ache, the soreness after a rewarding afternoon going through forms or a day of hard swimming. He wants to curl up and bask in the warmth.

Instead, he wipes himself down with a cloth provided by Nangong Cheya and redresses in his inner layers, forcing his limbs to move.

He glances at Liu Qingge — still sprawled loose-limbed on the cot, his shredded robes spread around him like a flower that has been peeled open — but quickly averts his gaze, his face burning.



Jiang Cheng ties his outer robes briskly. He asks, voice clipped, "How is he?"

"His qi is flowing normally again, no sign of deviation," Nangong Cheya replies. "The dual cultivation was successful." A smile colors her voice.

Relief releases the last tension in Jiang Cheng, and he sits heavily on the cot. It feels wrong that Liu Qingge is so bare, so debauched, so Jiang Cheng cleans between the man's legs with the same cloth he cleaned himself. It's his mess, after all. He should tend it. Nangong Cheya wets another cloth to begin wiping the blood and sweat off the rest of his body.

"Liu Qingge."

Liu Qingge, half-asleep, turns his head to face Jiang Cheng. "Hmm?"

"You are welcome as a guest of the Jiang sect for as long as your recovery takes, longer if you need protection from whatever did this to you." He tucks his hands beneath his thighs and his tongue behind his teeth, catching any other words before they can escape.

Liu Qingge grunts his agreement, obviously tired. Jiang Cheng stands, ready to get out of this tent. Liu Qingge's strong hand darts out and catches his wrist before he can leave.

Jiang Cheng looks down into Liu Qingge's clear eyes, open and coherent. The lighting talismans reflect in their depths like stars. Jiang Cheng tries not to notice.

With greater seriousness than he had heard him speak so far, Liu Qingge lowly says, "Thank you, Jiang Wanyin."

Jiang Cheng's face flashes with heat. He tsks and turns his head away, but does not move his grip. His wrist warms beneath Liu Qingge's hand.

"Once he is recovered enough to move, set him up in a guest room in my wing," Jiang Cheng instructs Nangong Cheya.

She bows. "Of course, sect leader." She wears a neutral expression, but he can hear the amusement in her tone.

Liu Qingge's eyebrows lower, gaze sharpening. "Sect leader?"

Jiang Cheng pats his hand, then carefully removes it from his wrist and sets it on Liu Qingge's chest. After a moment, he shrugs out of his outer robe and lays it over Liu Qingge's half-naked body, heedless of any filth still on his skin.

"Rest," Jiang Cheng commands. "We will talk later."



He leaves the tent and immediately flies home to prepare a space for his guest. If he has to land on another secluded, forested island to take care of the sudden spike of arousal from remembering the sounds Liu Qingge made as he climaxed, no one else would ever know.

Footnotes:

[1] 南宫 澈雅 Nangong Chèyǎ, surname refers to a Nangong county level city in Xingtai, Hebei, courtesy name means "elegant clear water"

[2] 曹志飞 Cao Zhìfēi, surname refers to Zhou Dynasty vassal state, courtesy name means "the ambition to fly"



PROMISE YOU'LL SAVE ME

Screamingbees, with spot art by Barghest Shadows

Rape/Non-Con

Dub-Con

Sex Pollen

Creampie

Restraints

Bodyguard LQG

Jiang Cheng woke the moment a person leapt onto him. He thrashed instinctively, terrified and alert as he tried to get away, but with the element of surprise and a dark room to hide within, the attacker pinned Jiang Cheng down in seconds.

"Help! Liu Qing—"

A palm cut off his call for his bodyguard, and Jiang Cheng yelled as heat and sweat clamped over his face. When tossing his head to and fro didn't work, he switched his tactic to teeth instead; a second of victory felt at the blood filling in his mouth until it was clear that *that* hadn't worked either, and suddenly the taste of iron and salt was repulsive.

"Mmph! Mmmph!"

His legs kicked uselessly, struggling in the sheets. Unable to grab onto anything, he could only writhe as his assailant settled atop him, a terribly feverish breath ghosting over his naked throat.

"Get off! Get off! Get off!" but Jiang Cheng's cries were lost to the large palm suffocating his airways. Before he could pass out, however, a heavy *crash!* on the nightstand sounded in his ears, then something stretchy and musky was shoved past his jaw.

No. **NO!**

Jiang Cheng's struggles were in vain when the man—because who else could it be other than a man—yanked at the collar of his shirt, the single layer of his pyjamas ripping open to expose his bare chest, and flipped Jiang Cheng over to wrench his arms behind his back, wrists bound by the rags into a crude form of restraints.

"Mmmm! Mmmmph!"

Jiang Cheng screamed into the gag. His hands fumbled to undo the fabric, but his panic was fatal, and he only knew how to flail about, useless and noisy like a stuck pig.



A heavy hand shoved his face into the pillow. For a split second, Jiang Cheng thought this was how he was going to die—suffocated and hogtied—but then he was let up—only for his relief to be short-lived when his hair, mussed and falling apart now, was compressed by a nose taking a deep whiff of his braid.

A guttural groan shook him to his core; he held back his tears.

"A-Cheng..."

Jiang Cheng's blood turned to ice.

This wasn't a random attack. His assailant knew who he was.

Worse, Jiang Cheng knew who *he* was.

"Mmmmm! Mmm mm mmph!"

His will to fight reignited. With a swift jerk, he headbutted the other in the face, hard, a satisfying *crack!* mitigating the consequential bloom of pain on his head. An animalistic howl echoed throughout the room.

Jiang Cheng didn't waste time. Adrenaline coursing through his veins, his hips bucked wildly, throwing the weight on top of him off-balance, before he tucked in his knees and used his face as a crutch, finally gaining enough leverage to push himself off his front.

His knees bore the full brunt of his weight, but before he could get far, a forearm snagged him around the neck from out of nowhere, slamming the air out of his throat in a swift move and turning his vision momentarily black.

He landed on the other's chest so hard that Jiang Cheng could feel the gust of wind escape from his opponent's lungs. But his gratification was brief when the man had had enough of his struggling and began squeezing Jiang Cheng's neck in a chokehold. Jiang Cheng choked, his breath cut off alarmingly quick, and reflexively, he kicked out, but there was nothing to win against, and desperately, Jiang Cheng wriggled his shoulders, knowing full well that his true disadvantage was his bound arms.

His vision darkened. Spots appeared. Just as Jiang Cheng was about to pass out, his thumb managed to yank out of the twisted bonds. Unfortunately, he was too late, the arm around his windpipe bulged with incredible strength, Jiang Cheng sucked in his last breath, and his world turned black.

He had fainted—

—to brazen pain.

Jiang Cheng screamed, his body suddenly seizing around an intrusion as it tried to force into him. Instinctively, he tried to push it out, but when his shoulders jerked uselessly in their sockets and his wrists smarted painfully above his head, he realized that he was still in his assailant's clutches.

Worse, he realized that he was being *raped*.

"Mmm! Mmm! Mmmph!"

Jiang Cheng cried around the gag as his hands, now bound in fluffy handcuffs he unfortunately recognized, only made the chain clang! around the spokes of the headboard. His insides roiled in agony from the rod that was splitting him in half,



and he could feel wetness coating his thighs, more being pushed out of him by the fucking cock.

So what if his rapist had put *lubricant* in him? It still hurt, every inch of his muscles straining to stop this, but to no avail whenever... whenever *he* pushed in.

Because Jiang Cheng *knew* who was raping him, who was defiling every part of his being. He had heard it from the other's voice, smelled it in the other's scent, and knew keenly all too well whose waist he had his legs wrapped around.

Liu Qingge. His bodyguard. The very same man who was supposed to protect him.

Why, Jiang Cheng wanted to yell. He couldn't see Liu Qingge's face, that usually sullen expression now hidden in the dark, yet he didn't know if he wanted to either. Would it be better to see Liu Qingge's steel eyes boring into him, the pleasure on his face as he violated Jiang Cheng? Or the dark void of an almost faceless man taking him apart?

Jiang Cheng wanted to throw up, the sense of doom in his guts paired with the overbearingness of Liu Qingge's cock, but the gag in his mouth was impossible to spit out and choking on his vomit would only worsen his situation.

Instead, he forced himself to keep calm. As he tried to control his breathing, he could vividly feel Liu Qingge slowly bottom out. But when he felt barely-clad hips, any effort he made to keep calm snapped. How dare he?! To barely pull down his pants, just enough to fish out his cock, and fuck Jiang Cheng with it?! How dare he? How dare he treat Jiang Cheng like a cheap toy? How dare he toss away the countless gestures of warmth and respect he had shown Jiang Cheng in the last decade? Did any of that mean anything to him??

His indignation made his head pound, and Jiang Cheng wished he could spit in Liu Qingge's face, but then his bodyguard's words broke the storming silence.

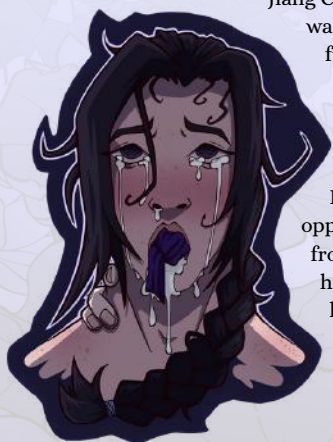
"S-sir... *please*..."

Jiang Cheng stilled, fury stoking into a raging fire. *Please!?* For what? He was already hilt-deep in Jiang Cheng's ass, penetrating him like a fucking stranger and destroying Jiang Cheng's trust all in one night. What more could he want?!

"Please... please..."

Liu Qingge's gravelly voice and pleading words were the complete opposite of his actions as he rocked his hips and emitted lewd sounds from between their bodies. Jiang Cheng's anger could only flame higher as his hips ached in agony and his insides burned like a fuse. If he could shut his eyes and clamp his ears shut, he would imagine himself to be anywhere but here.

"Sir..."



Except he couldn't.

He couldn't imagine himself to be anywhere else but in his bed, violated by his most-trusted man, with his limbs immobile and his body carved open by a throbbing cock that only pulsed with lust each time he tried to shove it out. He couldn't escape to anywhere else than here, and he knew that the day Liu Qingge bested him in combat and was hired, he would always be at the mercy of Liu Qingge's strength. But he never imagined that Liu Qingge would use that against him one day.

"I want... I want you... please"

Liu Qingge's forehead thudded against Jiang Cheng's chest, and Jiang Cheng flinched. He expected Liu Qingge to make it hurt—bite or something—but his bodyguard merely gasped against his skin as he jerked his hips and ground deep inside Jiang Cheng.

"Please... I can't—I can't—I'm sorry, they gave me something. Jiang Cheng, *I'm sorry*—"

Jiang Cheng didn't have time to ruminate on that new piece of knowledge or react when, in the next second, Liu Qingge's whines were cut off by a high-pitched moan and a heat burst inside Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Cheng recoiled as if he'd been shot. He didn't know—*he knew exactly what it was*. Hot and overwhelming, it was spilling into him from Liu Qingge's cock, lashing against his insides like whip-hot fire and filling every part of him with Liu Qingge's soul. He—he couldn't take it. He squirmed, whined, ground his teeth on the gag as Liu Qingge came and came and came into his unwilling body, and as his hole clenched tightly around the pulsating rod inside him, he had to pretend that he didn't like it.

That—that he *couldn't* like it.

Because who would *like* their rapist's cum? Even if it was from the man he had bonded with in the last decade, their relationship strengthened by intimacy and danger. Who would enjoy the coursing warmth cascading through his body and fill his head with mindless pleasure, a sick part of him delighting in the fact that he had made Liu Qingge rife with pleasure? Who? *Who?!*

And yet Jiang Cheng couldn't help but give his own reedy moan in response, knees tightening around Liu Qingge's hips despite the powerful hands already pinning them there and inadvertently shoving Liu Qingge inside deeper. His hole *did* want to be filled like this, to be taken roughly and savagely, to be a wrecked, pathetic vessel.

Jiang Cheng's head buzzed with static, and the rush of blood in his ears grew louder. Liu Qingge had said... he was... he knew all the right ways to make Jiang Cheng feel good—*had* made him feel good like this so many times before, so why shouldn't this count? Jiang Cheng squeezed his eyes shut.



Liu Qingge was still moving, his compromised body seeking another burst of satisfaction, another go at Jiang Cheng's broken state, except now he was quick and clumsy, all motion and no grace, a man a slave to his unfortunate desires.

Jiang Cheng let him. There was no other way to describe it.

He let Liu Qingge use him. He let Liu Qingge fuck him. He let Liu Qingge take his trust, power, and dignity, and when Liu Qingge came for the second time, he let the overflow of cum spill out between their bodies, his rim slick and open for a begging man.

"Sir. *Sir*—"

Jiang Cheng opened his eyes. The heat of Liu Qingge's pistoning hips. The sweat dripping on their skin. The tight grip around his wrist never faltering.

This was his duty. This was his burden to share. He knew that Liu Qingge would not have been poisoned or controlled or anything if it hadn't been for his role.

It was getting harder to remember the pain the longer Liu Qingge fucked him. The aches dulled. The stinging stretch gave way. His heart clenched each time Liu Qingge whimpered his name, and when his bodyguard turned him onto his knees, noticing his docility, he obeyed, propping himself up as a willing hole, ready to serve pleasure.

"Ah."

Jiang Cheng's moans came out easier. His entrance was soft and pliant when Liu Qingge slid back in, and his waist trembled as each thrust had him bowing forward from Liu Qingge's movements. His bodyguard's hands around his hips, squeezing his ass, wasn't helping in curbing his own desperation and without meaning to, he was beginning to rock back onto Liu Qingge's cock, each smack of their wet skin echoing in his ears.

His fingers dug into the handcuffs when Liu Qingge found his prostate, and as reedy moans filled the air, he could only paw at the chains with fervour, twisting and stretching in a way to both accept and escape the pleasure.

"*Sir*..."

"Qingge, Qingge..." Jiang Cheng whispered back.

Liu Qingge felt so good. His dick filled him up so perfectly, a firm intrusion that paved the way into Jiang Cheng's guts. Deep and heavy, Jiang Cheng felt almost weighed down by the force of Liu Qingge's arousal, his own coming out in the form of gasps, shivers, and wobbly knees. When Liu Qingge grasped his hips and sank in all the way to the hilt again—a telltale sign of his incoming orgasm—Jiang Cheng bit his own bicep, curbing the pleasure.



The overwhelming pressure to finish at the same time itched at his mind, and as he moaned Liu Qingge's name, half-begging him not to cum yet, half-begging himself to cum faster, he felt Liu Qingge's balls jerk and nudge against his ass, teeth closing around his nape.

Jiang Cheng wailed loudly when he and Liu Qingge came, the hot spill of seed deep in his guts and the sharp sting of fangs embedded in his skin triggering his own orgasm. His frame seized into a wanton figure, every muscle of his taut and stretched to its limits, and as he cried and sobbed his ecstasy, he could only feel the liquid warmth from Liu Qingge's cum spread into his limbs.

He collapsed into a heap, half-propped against the headboard.

Liu Qingge wasn't far behind, and while Jiang Cheng's instinct was to complain about Liu Qingge's weight on top of him, he couldn't—not when the feeling of being covered and *protected* was all he felt from Liu Qingge's overcompassing frame. He whined, however, when Liu Qingge's hips hadn't stopped moving and he hadn't freed Jiang Cheng from the cuffs yet. The pinpricks of oversensitivity were starting to ramp up the longer Liu Qingge kept fucking him, little aborted thrusts that had Jiang Cheng pressed uncomfortably against the wood. Still, he bit his bottom lip to keep himself quiet and tried to relax his tensed hole as much as possible.

Liu Qingge was still whimpering into his hair, pleas dripping from his lips as he begged Jiang Cheng for another round, and as Jiang Cheng's eyes rolled back from the flame building in his guts and the twinges of soreness settling into his thighs, he could only accept Liu Qingge's requests and keep himself pliant.

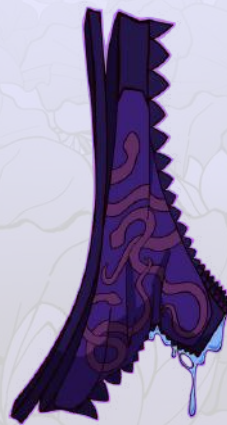
Because this was his bodyguard. His one and only who would ever truly put his life on the line for Jiang Cheng. The only one Jiang Cheng would ever—and had—grant access to his body like this.

"Liu Qingge," he gasped around the gag when his loyal subordinate ground into him and made his insides seize. *Promise me. Promise me you won't hate yourself afterwards.*

Liu Qingge kept pounding away, laboured breaths filling Jiang Cheng's ears, and when he released another load into Jiang Cheng before turning him over to wrench him back onto his cock again, his head tilted back to groan.

Jiang Cheng pretended he saw the word in Liu Qingge's eyes.

Promise.





BONUS DOODLES





My boyfriend wondering why I'm not responding



Me trying to spell Gorgus for 5 minutes





So, this is
how Yunmeng
Dang greet
each other!



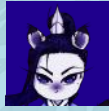


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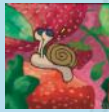
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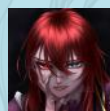
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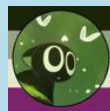
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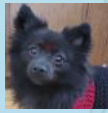
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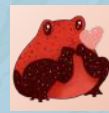
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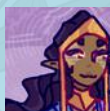
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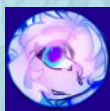
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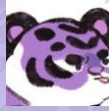
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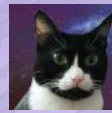
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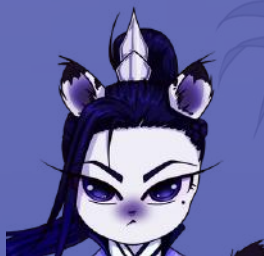
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THANK
YOU!

