

heavy is the crown

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by [sweetlolixo](#)

Summary

“If we give him a bride,” Jiang Cheng says, solemnly. “They give us an army.”

The bride that they seek is of the blood of a fox, and Wei Ying is the last of his kind.

It can only be him.

- Translation into Español available: [El peso de la corona](#) by [Melany_Yiling](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

this was written for [Dark Lan Zhan Weekend](#)'s January theme: **Dark Royalty**... which I am obviously 2 whole months late by.

warning: I did not tag Dubcon/Noncon for nothing. it is **very** strong in this chapter, but it will ease off after this chapter. the scene will start off with **strong Non-Con elements/speech**, and will fade off into the type of Dubious Consent that's like "nononoyes", which while leads to eventual consent—WILL contain Wei Ying protesting a fuckton in the beginning, so!!! Please Advance With Caution (or Do Not Read), In Case That Makes You Uncomfortable.

if you are highly sensitive to a Non-Con/Dub-Con sexual premise, but would still like to attempt reading this fic, please read this chapter up till when you reach the very last scene where it starts with **“Wei Ying is so nervous about the events to come...”** and skip the whole of that scene, to go to the next chapter :) I will have to warn you though, that if this already squicks you out, then just to be on the safe side—the tone of dubious consent will absolutely carry throughout the rest of this fic. while wangxian *do* fall in love by the second chapter, if you are extremely sensitive to a marriage or wangxian relationship portrayal in which characters/events aren't so black and white, then I'm not sure this fic is for you.

I hope I've warned you sufficiently enough; again, this leads with a Game of Thrones!Drogo/Daenerys inspired premise, so you can imagine what kind of Dubious Consent I'm referring to. <3 Games of Thrones isn't exactly famous for wholesome sexual portrayals, to paint a clearer picture.

now, please enjoy!

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

It is not that Wei Ying does not love the Jiangs enough to do this for them. It is that he loves the Jiangs *too* much. And, in particular, his brother—the last of his family that he has to cling on to.

“If we give him a bride,” his brother says solemnly, placing two hands on his shoulders.
“They give us an army.”

The bride they seek is of the blood of a fox. It can only be him—if they have to curse anyone for it, they can only curse the divine Heavens for the unfortunate legacy they have bestowed upon foxes—that because foxes are seen as an omen of death and the foretelling of war and disaster, others either seek to destroy them, or worship them; that they hold power these lands

cannot contain; that marrying a fox spirit is rumoured to bring about the inversion of this curse and ensure the success of war *and* victory of a clan; that foxes bring with them healing, and fertility, and finally, ensure the purification of a sacred bloodline.

Wei Ying is a carrier, all fox spirits are, and dragons are notoriously conceited and particular about outsiders sullyng their blood lineage. Wei Ying will pose no threat to that. Besides, because Jiang Cheng is a male Phoenix, he does not have a womb to carry their next heir.

Wei Ying is the last of his kind. There is no other like him, not that anyone else knows of—all other fox spirits have been hunted into extinction, from the last Great Sect War. His poor mother left him on the doorstep of her childhood friend, with her last dying breath. The Jiangs took him in, despite all the repercussions of doing so. Of course, there is much to gain with a fox spirit in your household, but unfortunately in the case of the Jiangs it seems like the Heavens chose the path of death. (Jiang Fengmian, Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Yanli, all gone, in the throes of war.)

The dragons are arrogant enough to believe it the opposite for them.

“It has to be me,” Wei Ying says aloud, in a muted whisper. Jiang Cheng nods, though he has a grim look on his face.

“I wish it were me,” Jiang Cheng murmurs, regretfully.

“Don’t,” Wei Ying places a hand over his. “You have a legacy to carry on.”

“I’ve heard that the dragons aren’t that bad,” Jiang Cheng’s lips are pursed tight. It’s obvious he doesn’t think too highly of them, but he respects that they’re the only ones in their camp right now. “They may be excessively pious, and overly ruthless in war—but they aren’t savages. They’ve agreed to help us, and that’s worth something.”

Wei Ying gazes to the floor. “I am not afraid of mere dragons.” Still, his grip on Jiang Cheng’s hand is tight.

Even if he is afraid, he will not let it show.

“If they hurt you...” Jiang Cheng begins, hesitantly.

“No,” Wei Ying says, putting up a happy face. “I’ll be fine. I just have to get through the wedding night.” And the next, and the next, and the next.

There is not much to be known about the dragons, they hardly come down from the clouds. But if the rumours about them are to be trusted, then Wei Ying has a ton to fear about—in bed.

Jiang Cheng sees right through his forced smile. “Put on these robes,” he says with a long sigh, squeezing the violet silk within his hands. “We only have an hour before they arrive.”

“Alright,” Wei Ying says, swallowing hard.

The dragons descend from the clouds—like a mirage. The Lans themselves come to them like kings and princes, seated majestically on dragons in their humanoid forms, as if they are not one themselves with the dark antlers on their heads. They ride elegantly and with much precision, landing swiftly onto the ground without so much as a sound. Wisps of smoke and clouds follow them from above. When the air is finally clear, they stand before the pair of brothers, proud and tall.

It's the first time Wei Ying has seen a dragon up-close. They are magnificent, and grotesquely *huge*. The one closest to him has bright golden pupils, observing him curiously like he is a mere *ant*. Wei Ying has never felt so small.

Like clockwork, all eyes are drawn to Wei Ying, standing at the centre of it all.

He cannot breathe. All around them, everyone else is keeping silent. The one before him—the *prince*—he sits high atop his dragon, his bare, chiseled chest jutting out proudly, his pointed jaw tipping low. His light golden eyes narrow into coarse slits, as he looks, and *observes*. The way he looks at Wei Ying actually causes the latter to feel shy. His pupils—the exact same shade as the dragon he rides.

He is extraordinarily handsome. Regal, is the word that comes to mind. And overly imposing in posture, as one can expect from a dragon. His skin is naturally light in tone and colour, matching the whiteness of his scales *when* he is in full dragon form; but his slight tan indicates he does his fair share out on the battlefield. Their clan's finest warrior, as Jiang Cheng had explained to him earlier.

Wei Ying cannot read the expression on his face. The prince gazes down upon him, and tilts his head once or twice. His long hair—pleated behind him into one thick, neat braid. When he parts his mouth to utter a word, of which Wei Ying cannot hear, Wei Ying swears he sees steam leaving his nostrils.

"Is that him," Wei Ying asks, holding his breath.

"Yes," Jiang Cheng says. He has a hand on Wei Ying's shoulder, in solidarity. The winds are strong out here, even more so now that the Lans have brought the clouds with them, and Wei Ying is clothed in mere silk. The front portion is thin, translucent even, allowing glimpses of the fair, rosy skin that lies underneath. His long hair, let loose in waves down around his shoulders. Jiang Cheng had helped untangle most of it.

Wei Ying is dressed like a war prize—and maybe, in some ways, he is. Because isn't he collateral damage in a war, allowing himself to be held captive in a marriage he does *not*

want just so Jiang Cheng can have the army he wants? All just so they may hopefully rise up against the Wens, and take back everything once stolen from them?

Only I can do this, Wei Ying thinks to myself. *They want only me*. Maybe he should learn to take this as the highest honour, that of all things the dragons can covet—it is him they want.

“His name?” Wei Ying exhales, remaining still. So still. The coldness of the breeze is chilling him to the bone, and he can feel his nipples hardening, and proudly standing to attention. They show pointedly, right through the thin silk. Wei Ying feels utterly exposed, in front of his betrothed.

“Lan Wangji,” Jiang Cheng says. “The second prince of the Lans.”

The minute he announces his name, the prince is glaring down towards him. Evidently, he does not enjoy the sight of the phoenix.

To Wei Ying, however—his gaze remains... curious. Curiously fond.

“See that long braid he wears?” Jiang Cheng whispers, disgruntled. “I’ve been told it means he’s never lost a fight. Dragons only cut it in defeat, so the world may see their shame.”

“Oh,” Wei Ying says. That makes him a bit more nervous about the prince, somehow.

A light breeze suddenly rustles Wei Ying’s clothing, lifting the hems slightly up, sending them flying around him. He lets out an unintentional yelp, desperately yanking at his robes and pushing them back down. The fox ears he’d been so desperately trying to suppress all these while finally come out of hiding as a result of his nervousness, unveiling themselves from beneath his hair.

Lan Wangji’s antlers jolt to attention, and he lifts his head immediately, his nose tipping into the air. He is scenting something.

Oh, and it’s particularly *good*.

From the back of his throat, he emits a low, primal growl.

He turns his head, and rests his fingers atop the dragon’s head. He drums his fingers twice, signalling he is ready to go. They quickly take their leave—his men going along with him.

“Wait, why are they leaving? He hasn’t said anything,” Wei Ying asks hurriedly, panicking. “Did he like me at all? Is our agreement still on? Will he really take me as his bride?”

Jiang Cheng’s mood has taken a turn for the worse. “I think he liked you,” he glares towards the dragons, now with their back against them as they ascend back up into the air. “A little bit too much.”

The dragons come back for them, two days later.

No one is allowed at the gates of Cloud Recesses without prior, explicit permission, but no one's ever been able to make it that far into the clouds without the aid of a dragon to transport them up, anyway. Jiang Cheng and Wei Ying are each hoisted up a dragon of their own, seated right behind a section chief that commands the very dragon. These men utter very little and only speak in low, firm tones, and in their dragon tongue. It's the first Wei Ying has ever heard of it—in their voice, it sounds overly unkind.

They are flanked on both sides, by other soldiers on their respective dragons. They travel in a convoy, for protection, like honoured guests. In a way, they are. Wei Ying is to marry in; he is to be one of theirs.

When they arrive at the Lan kingdom, a group of guards and handmaidens are already standing there at the entrance, waiting for them. The golden gates have already been decorated in light of the wedding festivity; red lanterns are hung all over, with exquisite dragon and fox motifs painted on them.

When Wei Ying is helped down the dragon by a handmaiden standing below, he takes his first step into the indiscernible clouds and finds the foggy white smoke dissipate the minute his feet touches the floor. Every step he takes—the clouds clear up, and unveils each tile he steps on to be gold, pure hard gold. Wei Ying has no doubt they're real. So ostentatious, he thinks. And so befitting of dragons.

What little he knows of the dragons is that: true to the legends, they *do* enjoy hoarding treasure. Gold to them symbolises prosperity, and endless gold means just that—prosperous days, until the end of time. Wei Ying silently thinks it is a bit conceited, and a big roundabout way to excuse their flashiness and innate greediness, but he is not about to vocalise any of that on their grounds.

“So the rumours are true,” the handmaiden standing next to him, holding his hand in hers, suddenly speaks; in a beautifully accented voice. When Wei Ying glances to her, he realises it's really a *him*. Dressed in pale blue robes, he looks ethereal—as do all the Lans do—enough that Wei Ying had mistaken his gender. “Fox spirits are beautiful.”

Oh. Wei Ying hadn't expected *that*. Yes, there are malicious rumours to be had with his kind, despite their association with death and loss: they say fox spirits are experts at deception and seduction, and often take on forms that are very easy on the eyes. It is the only reason shrewd women are called *hu li jing*, named right after them. Perhaps it is part of what makes them so appealing to most—perhaps the dragons, too, covet their beauty.

“The wedding will commence immediately,” the male handmaiden says. “We don't have time to waste. Follow me.”

Wei Ying turns his head, and sees Jiang Cheng being led away by servants of his own, into a separate direction. It seems his brother is being made to prepare himself for the wedding as well. Wei Ying tries not to think about how unprepared he is, for all this; tries not to think about how he'd rather be anywhere but here, being held hostage by a war he does not want.

While the dragons have indeed been in a hurry to get this wedding in order, and to solidify their union as quickly as possible, they have definitely spared no expense. Wei Ying's long hair is heavily brushed, over and over again by the girls, before being braided up into a bun that is held together by a million gold hairpins and floral ornaments that feel too heavy on his one, small head. His wedding frock, comparatively, weighs a lot less.

They dress him in—after a long, intense bath where they scrub all dead skin and possibly any hair follicle out of him—a long, sweeping red traditional *qipao*, tight around his shoulders and waist, overlaid with a translucent, illuminating gold outer covering, sewn with embroidered dragon patterns. Wei Ying looks into the mirror, and thinks he very well looks like an empress in his own right. He *could* be an empress. Lips tainted with red rouge, skin loosely powdered with white. His wrists, covered in endless bangles and jewelry. A small golden crown of sorts, carved like a dragon, sits at the top of his head.

They cover his head with a red veil, and then lead him to where he has to go.

The male handmaiden from before must sense his nervousness, because he tells Wei Ying, “do not be nervous, fox bride, our young master is very kind, we have been eagerly waiting for your addition into our family”, and gently pushes at him from behind.

He walks down the aisle of the main hall, and takes his place next to his husband, already seated there waiting for him.

Dragons are a very showy lot. Wei Ying is barely half a day into Cloud Recesses, and he already realises this. The way the dragons do their wedding procession focuses less on the

main couple—and more on the celebration of it all. Wei Ying and his husband prostrate thrice first, offer tea to their elders, then offer nuptial wine to each other, and that is it. He can hardly make out the faces of the rest of the Lan family through his thick veil. He only knows there is an elder brother, and an uncle, and they speak in low, frantic (excited?) tones to Lan Wangji in their dragon tongue, and to him, a simple: “Welcome to the family, fox bride.”

Everyone around here has referred to Wei Ying by what he is; not *who* he is. I have a name too, he wants to scream. I know I am akin to a war prize, but at least pretend to acknowledge me in name, and not my body. For, yes, he possesses the rare body and soul of a fox spirit; but isn’t he anything more than that? He is beautiful, too, as Wei Ying.

What is worse is the fact that Lan Wangji—*his* supposed husband—has not spoken a single word to him throughout their wedding procession; their marriage ceremony. He simply treats Wei Ying as just... there. Wei Ying feels like air. Is this already foreboding how the rest of my marriage will look like, he thinks. How the rest of my life will look like? A family that cannot see me for who I am, and a husband that pretends I am not here? Wei Ying wonders if this marriage had been as forced upon Lan Wangji, as much as it had been forced upon him.

Wei Ying can only take solace in the fact that Jiang Cheng is still here with him, standing by him, his hand squeezing his in comfort.

When it is time for them to take their places on the golden throne, one chair carved out with a dragon silhouette and the other carved out like a fox, they sit side by side up high, overlooking the rest of the clan. Wei Ying sits still with his veil, and watches as groups of people walk up to them and present them exorbitant gifts. None of them are of interest—most are exquisite war weapons that are meant more for Lan Wangji and not for him, while the few meant for Wei Ying are expensive silk and more showy hair ornaments. Wei Ying does feel sick, just a little bit. He knows how he is viewed by everyone here—nothing more than a trophy fox wife.

Jiang Cheng gifts them both a set of wedding jewelry, though this gift really is for Wei Ying.

“From jiejie,” he says, brokenly, speaking of their late sister. “It was meant to be hers, but I know she’d have loved for it to be passed down to you.”

He presses the box into Wei Ying’s hands, and from Wei Ying’s eyes slips out a lonesome tear. He misses their older sister so much, and wishes he could have been the one to take her place instead. The Wens—they had been so cruel; and the Jins—they had stood by, and done nothing...

After Jiang Cheng steps to the side, his new brother-in-law ascends the steps and takes his place, holding a golden plaque in his hands.

Wei Ying tries to remember his name, Jiang Cheng had mentioned it to him in passing... Lan Xichen?

“Honoured fox spirit,” Lan Xichen begins, this time speaking in the common tongue (very fluently, he may add) for Wei Ying’s benefit. Clearly, his gift is for Wei Ying and Wei Ying alone. “Once again, we are delighted you have joined our family.”

Wei Ying's throat is dry. "The pleasure is mine," he says. He never had a choice. There is only Wei Ying and Jiang Cheng left, and they have nowhere else to go, nothing left to prop them up.

"I gift you this plaque," he says. "Written on it, is your prophecy."

Wei Ying stills.

"Prophecy?" he asks softly, because this is the first he's ever heard of it. He receives the plaque into his hands, god it's *heavy*, it must be pure gold like everything else is around here. Indecipherable dragon runes have been inscribed onto the surface of the plaque that shines so brightly—Wei Ying can see his very reflection in it.

He strokes past it, saying, "It's beautiful. But I cannot read this."

"Forget envy," Lan Xichen narrates, rather poetically. "The prince that emerges from the union of a dragon and a fox will finally lead to unity in the world. The fox in him rains bloodshed on those deserving, the dragon in him ensures success and power. Enemies will cower before him, and their wives will weep tears of blood. Forget your envy, relinquish all desire. For this prince will set this world on fire."

Wei Ying's stomach churns. One hand immediately leaves the plaque, and moves to caress down at his empty womb.

"I am wanted," he whispers, with wide eyes. "For a child."

This explains a lot. It is not only his presence alone that they need—they want his *baby*.

"I have not heard about this prophecy," Wei Ying breathes out, painfully. The knowledge that he is but a pawn in their game of playing with fate and destiny only makes him that much more sick.

"It is a hundred old prophecy," Lan Xichen says. Through his veil, Wei Ying can only make out a wide smile on his face. He wonders if he looks as handsome as Lan Wangji. He has to be—he's the crown prince. "A well-guarded secret of the Lans. We have searched long and hard, and have finally found you. The last fox. The harbinger of death."

Wei Ying's eyes burn. He wills himself not to show any sign of weakness, or hurt. "I see. Thank you for this gift and knowledge." Not a trophy wife, he thinks; his worth is that to be a mother.

"You and Wangji will make me proud," Lan Xichen says, smiling further. He takes a step back, and walks away.

Next to him, his husband breathes not even a single word.

The rest of the wedding feels like a circus. War generals launch into their dragon forms heartily, dancing and entwining around each other in their lengthy forms, breathing blue and red fire all over the place. When something inadvertently bursts into flames, everyone applauds and claps. It is merry. It is joyous. The manic, fast-paced playing of the guqin in the

background is matched by the wildly playing flute. Wei Ying has heard plenty of the way the dragons manipulate music to their favour during war, often using slow, sinister songs to confuse and throw off their enemy. It seems they take the opposite approach for weddings.

Towards the end of the celebration, right as the sun begins to set, Lan Wangji suddenly gets up from his seat, and raises a hand, beckoning something forward. He turns to Wei Ying and extends a hand to him, waiting for Wei Ying to take it.

Wei Ying casts a look to his side, where Jiang Cheng is still standing. He gives him a slow but sure nod, instructing Wei Ying to go on.

Wei Ying takes his husband's hand for the first time, and feels up the scarred, large palm of his. Oh, he thinks. This man has been through battle, alright.

Lan Wangji's grip on him is firm but gentle, like he's afraid of breaking Wei Ying otherwise. He leads Wei Ying down the steps of the throne, and waits as the man lifts the hems of his sweeping *qipao* to follow after him.

Lan Wangji raises his other hand to beckon again, much more urgently this time.

A dragon soon descends into view. It slithers through the crowd, and stops right before Lan Wangji's raised hand. He pats the head of the dragon in what seems like an order, and then guides Wei Ying's delicate hand, such that Wei Ying is caressing the side of the dragon's head himself.

The dragon opens its eyelids fully, exposing its large, cerulean blue orbs. It stares right at Wei Ying, rather docilely.

Wei Ying is intimidated, to say the least. He looks back up to his husband through his veil, and wonders why he is showing him a dragon.

All around them, the crowd has gone quiet in anticipation.

It then occurs to Wei Ying that this is *his* gift. This is Lan Wangji's marital gift to him.

"Mine?" Wei Ying asks, in disbelief.

He sees the outline of Lan Wangji's head nodding, and Wei Ying shudders. He's never been gifted anything quite so... extravagant.

No one is allowed a dragon—only members of the Lan clan themselves. While dragons are aplenty in Cloud Recesses, not every one of them harbour spiritual power enough to cultivate into having a human form. Those that remain as dragons because of their low spiritual power are given the choice to be assigned to generals and soldiers for battle; or to stay in Cloud Recesses and help with domestic duties or training and lessons. Wei Ying rubs at the head of his assigned dragon, and wonders if this is meant to be his bodyguard, to safekeep him.

"I love him," Wei Ying whispers, in awe. The dragon purrs lightly underneath his touches, enjoying the attention his new master is bestowing unto him. "He's gorgeous. Thank you."

Lan Wangji doesn't respond. He lets Wei Ying pet the dragon a bit more, then reaches for his bride's hand again.

Wei Ying knows this is the signal to finally retire to their chambers.

Their wedding night is about to commence.

Wei Ying squeezes his eyes shut, and resigns himself to his fate. He wraps his hand back around Lan Wangji's, and lets his husband lead him to where he must go.

Wei Ying is so nervous about the events to come, he can't even focus on the luxuriousness of the bedchamber he's been led into.

Lan Wangji sets him down onto the bed, and Wei Ying sits obediently, because he doesn't know anything else. The man slowly lifts the hems of his veil—finally—and pulls it over him, revealing Wei Ying's beautifully made-up face in its entirety, looking just as he remembered the last time he saw him.

He pauses, when he sees that Wei Ying's cheeks are wet with tears.

Somewhere on the way to their chambers, Wei Ying had begun crying.

Perhaps he will have a heart, Wei Ying thinks. Perhaps he will see me distraught over this, and understand I have not asked for this. I have not wanted a marriage. I am frightened and scared—and he still will not say a single word to me. Does he loathe me, why will he not speak to me? What have I done to deserve his silence?

"Don't," Lan Wangji finally says, softly, as he thumbs at his cheeks. His strong gaze weakens at the sight of Wei Ying's tears. His tone, low, controlled.

Wei Ying gasps out, "Don't?"

"Don't," Lan Wangji says.

"Do you," Wei Ying gazes up into his dragon eyes, and tries to convince himself that this could be worse. On his face, Wei Ying can make out the faint outline of his dragon scales. And yet Lan Wangji still remains extraordinarily handsome; like the royal prince that he is. "Do you speak the common tongue, like your brother?"

Lan Wangji does not reply; he only takes a seat next to Wei Ying on the bed, and slowly takes Wei Ying's wrists into his, pulling off his many gold bangles. He is... beginning to disrobe him. Wei Ying stares at him, growing frustrated.

"So we do not share a language," Wei Ying whispers out, terrified.

"Don't," he says again. Wei Ying wonders if he knows what that means.

"Is that the only word that you know," Wei Ying asks, in defeat.

Lan Wangji unbuttons Wei Ying's *qipao* from the back, and slides it down his fair shoulders.

"Mm," he mumbles out in response, kissing up his neck. Wei Ying is gasping again, shaking in his hold. His husband wraps his arms around him, from the back, in a possessive stance, his mouth unable to leave Wei Ying's skin for even a second. He's biting, nipping, teething over and over again. Nosing up his neck like he's scenting him, breathing in every of his pheromones and rubbing his own ones off Wei Ying.

It's very apparent that Lan Wangji has already taken a liking to the pretty little fox he has in his grasp. Who wouldn't; when dragons love rare treasure so much and Wei Ying is the last of his kind. Pretty, cherished, rare little fox. He will bear him children so well; so fertile, so beautiful, so powerful in nature.

Wei Ying whines uncontrollably—like the fox that he is, so embarrassingly animalistic—at all of the marking and scenting, and his ears protrude from his hair again, rising up just before his braided hair bun. He can't help it; he gives into his true nature too easily in front of the other man, just by being in his presence alone Wei Ying always finds himself being subdued so easily into submission...

He hears Lan Wangji emit the loudest growl from his throat, when he sees this.

Oh, he will drive the dragon so *crazy*.

Lan Wangji eagerly pulls the silk *qipao* on him down lower, unveiling his bare chest and rosy red nipples to the cold air. His large hands then roam up Wei Ying's thighs through the slit of his *qipao*, feeling up bare flesh that now belongs *rightfully* to him. His one hand slips in between his thighs, and reaches down to feel for an opening.

He finds it easily, his finger catching Wei Ying's hole, and finds it already heavily wet with slick.

"Hm," Lan Wangji makes a low, guttural sound of approval. "*Wei Ying*."

It's the first time he's ever said Wei Ying's name in full—in heavily accented speech. It's so sexy, Wei Ying is shuddering once more in his arms.

Wei Ying feels deep shame flooding him for this. Despite his crying, it's obvious his body is reacting extremely well to the dragon in the vicinity. It's giving in. It recognises him as the alpha animal. His womb *begs* to be bred, innately.

“No,” Wei Ying hiccups, trying to rationalise this. “No, no, no, I don’t want—no,” he whispers, shifting away from Lan Wangji’s hands. He fights and pushes and against his hold, and tears his neck away from Lan Wangji’s open mouth, where sharp canines extend. “I don’t —”

“Don’t,” Lan Wangji hisses, when he realises what Wei Ying is trying to do. He grabs Wei Ying by the arms, and pins them down behind his back, frustrated with all of this unnecessary pushing and prodding. Then, as if mimicking Wei Ying’s cries from before, he commands, “No.”

Great, Wei Ying thinks. The second word his husband knows of the common tongue, and it’s learned from his bride protesting him in bed.

“Please, this is my first time,” Wei Ying whimpers, as he’s pushed head first, into the bed sheets. Lan Wangji’s mouth is back on his neck, biting at his tender skin, scenting him until he’s driving Wei Ying mad. “You’re my husband, please be kinder, I don’t—I don’t want this —”

“Baby,” Lan Wangji suddenly says, and it stirs up such a visceral reaction within Wei Ying.

“I know I have to give you a baby,” Wei Ying’s tears run down his face at the reminder. At the humiliation, of what he has been reduced to. “I know, I know, Lan Wangji.”

“Mm, baby,” Lan Wangji repeats, again, as if the mere idea of that is turning him on. He presses the front of his pants right against Wei Ying’s ass, nudging it in between his cheeks, and Wei Ying’s thighs tremble at the very—large—feeling of his husband’s clothed erect cock. He’s long heard about how well-endowed dragons are in bed.

“No,” is all Wei Ying can say, as he hears Lan Wangji disrobe himself from behind. He knows logically he has to do this, he has to make Lan Wangji happy, he has to be a good fox bride, he has to give the dragons an heir, he has to make sure Jiang Cheng gets his army—but Wei Ying is suddenly finding he never had a say in this, he knew it was the right thing to do, but now he’s left alone in the quarters with a husband who cannot understand him, and only knows to fuck him because it’s his duty and because the fox looks so pretty.

“No, I’m scared, please,” Wei Ying begs, again, when he feels two hands on his rear, pushing the rest of the red qipao up onto his waist so all the cloth is gathered there. His naked ass—bared full to Lan Wangji completely. His husband props him up into a kneeling position, spreading his legs just slightly apart, so Wei Ying’s hole is parted open for him, dripping non-stop, from the natural wetness of it all.

It’s a very lewd sight. The dragon prince is licking his lips, as he watches.

“Lan Wangji, Lan Wangji, *please*,” Wei Ying cries out with real tears, as the man shifts himself into position behind him. He palms the two fat cheeks, then forcefully pushes them apart so the hole can be seen tight, taut, slightly gaping.

“Mm,” Lan Wangji hums. He likes what he sees.

He grips his own cock by the base, and guides it to Wei Ying's entrance. For a few moments he simply teases, and doesn't enter just yet; he simply rubs the head of his cock against the hole, slides it in between the cheeks, and grazes against it over and over again so it's stained with pre-cum, and evidence of him. Wei Ying's gasping and hiding his red face into the sheets, wondering how long Lan Wangji plans to extend his shame and misery.

Wet slick gushes down the back of his thighs—so incredibly telling of his body's eager need to be fucked, *already*.

Lan Wangji obeys such a direct and obvious plea from his wife. He finally pushes the tip of his cock in, already so big it stretches Wei Ying's hole whole.

"No," Wei Ying whimpers, shaking and burying his head into the sheets. His hole is dripping *wet*, and so is his lovely face, with sweat. "No no no no, please, I can't, you'll break me, you'll hurt me, I'm scared—"

Lan Wangji simply ignores him (or cannot understand him; perhaps this is to his benefit). He coaxes the rest of his cock in, panting slightly as he feels Wei Ying's muscles fighting him—so *resistant*. His calloused palms hold Wei Ying's ass cheeks in position, making sure the fox does not get to move an inch and is made to take every single inch of him. Wei Ying is very tight, and his virginal muscles, so stubborn. It makes for a very fulfilling first fuck.

He finally groans, when he manages to fit all of him in. It feels good, just being inside of the fox. It feels good—dominating him.

"Lan Wangji," Wei Ying moans out, his mouth gasping wide open, as he cries into the sheets. He can feel the cock inside of him, the large appendage jutting out just slightly from the surface of his belly. Wei Ying is so so full, he is filled to the brim. His body was not made for a dragon's cock—but he has been made to take it. "Lan Wangji, you're so—*big*—I can't, I really can't—"

Lan Wangji growls out then, low and deep into his ear, explicitly in dragon tongue for the first time, "*You can, and you will.*"

Wei Ying is slightly dizzy from it all. He cannot understand what his husband says, but somehow, in his gut, he already knows what it means.

Lan Wangji slaps Wei Ying's ass so crudely, then begins fucking him. He thrusts in and out like a machine, like he was always meant to fuck Wei Ying. Every hit sends Wei Ying moaning feverishly—he cannot contain his noises, he is reduced to nothing but a doll meant to be bred. Lan Wangji doesn't slow down one bit, only going faster and faster, Wei Ying's cries encouraging him the most of all.

Every thrust, every glide, stretches Wei Ying's hole and turns it increasingly red, like a blushing chrysanthemum. It's a very pretty sight. Lan Wangji *approves*.

He slams himself back in, then wraps his arms around Wei Ying's waist so he can maneuver the fox quickly into a different position, seating him right back down onto Lan Wangji's heavy thighs. Wei Ying lies down against him, with his back pressed right against Lan

Wangji's sticky chest; the man's large hands enclosing around Wei Ying's thin waist so he can lift his fox bride and bounce him up and down onto his cock, manhandling him like it is *nothing*.

"I can't, I can't, I really can't, you're breaking me," Wei Ying screams right then, as Lan Wangji's cock grazes past his prostate. Oh *fuck*, he thinks, unable to contain the loudest moan of pleasure. It is Wei Ying's first *time*, and yet his husband is as rough as he looks, sparing Wei Ying no mercy.

Does he fight as viciously as he fucks, Wei Ying thinks, because if so, he understands why he is the Lan clan's greatest warrior.

"*Then I will break you until you can,*" Lan Wangji growls into his ear, in a voice usually reserved only for war commands. Wei Ying feels like all muscle in his body immediately goes slack. He listens. He has to submit. This is his alpha, this is the man of his household. His eventual family—once he bears him children, as is his duty. He is *his*. He is Lan Wangji's.

Dragon tongue; so foreign, and so foul-sounding in that tone. Wei Ying does not know if it's for better or for worse that he does not understand what his husband is saying.

Lan Wangji, he sounds like he wants to *break* him.

And yet, his husband is so attractive—so crazily attractive, so menacing, so dangerous, so beastly and carnal and when he picks Wei Ying up by the waist it feels like Wei Ying weighs nothing—that Wei Ying's own cock is straining up against his qipao, overflowing with pre-cum of his own. He *does* like and find his husband arousing, in the same way that two animals who find themselves compatible may come together to mate; perhaps in the wild, Wei Ying would think him a good fit to make a family with, because Lan Wangji has the resources, the status to protect him, and even his pure, raw strength... it's enough, it's so so telling.

Skin slapping against skin, Wei Ying moans noisily, all red-faced, as he allows his tight hole to be opened and bruised by Lan Wangji's thick and fat cock over and over again—fucking up into him like he's desperate to impregnate Wei Ying tonight. In this position, Wei Ying's belly bulge is even more obvious. Lan Wangji's dragon cock causes a thick bulge to form each time he slides back inside of Wei Ying. His fox claws extend from his red nails in his deranged ecstasy, and he's grabbing onto Lan Wangji's dark antlers on his head for support, afraid Lan Wangji will fuck him out of his mind, for real.

"*Does it feel good, my beautiful fox bride,*" the dragon groans into Wei Ying's ear, as he feels those small dainty hands prod and pull at his sensitive antlers. He's so cute. Wei Ying's so cute. "*You flush so prettily in bed, just as I expected. Just like they say all foxes would. I will make sure to breed you every night as is your right, alright?*"

"No," Wei Ying sobs out. He doesn't have to understand dragon tongue to know his husband is making evil threats.

“No?” Lan Wangji hums, halting in his thrusting. He slides out of Wei Ying, leaving his thick, erect cock standing in the air.

Wei Ying suddenly feels so empty. This is more punishment for him, than for Lan Wangji.

“No, I don’t want it,” Wei Ying whines out, still, stubbornly. “Whatever you’re planning, I don’t want it, I’m so tired—” His body betrays his words; his ass shifts right back against his husband’s lap, desperately rubbing against the man’s hard cock to regain the friction it had from before.

“*Filthy, wanton fox,*” Lan Wangji grunts, when he witnesses such a sight. “*Tell me what you really want.*”

Wei Ying gasps, when he feels the heavy dragon breath on his face. “Lan Wangji, please…”

His hole is gaping open, and desperate to be filled again. Is this his fate as a fox, he wonders dazedly. Is it written in the stars to be this debauched, to enjoy the roughness of a man in ways he cannot understand why.

“Please please please,” he begs. He didn’t want to have to beg, but the way his husband was currently ignoring him left him no choice. “I’m sorry, I was wrong. Baby, please.”

“Baby,” Lan Wangji’s golden eyes narrow into dragon-like slits. Wei Ying knows the exact right things to say, to persuade him.

“Yes, a baby,” Wei Ying whispers, slowly going delirious. Holy fuck, he thinks. Lan Wangji *has* fucked me out of my mind. “You have to breed me, give me a baby. I’ll be so good, I’ll let you put as many babies as you want into me, okay, husband? Please, fuck me like you did before…”

“Baby,” Lan Wangji repeats again, this time appeased.

He hoists Wei Ying up by the waist again, and then drops him back down onto his cock, without so much as a thought.

“Baby, baby, baby,” Lan Wangji chants, possessively, fixatedly. It seems there is a bestial need in him to impregnate his bride. He bites at the tip of Wei Ying’s furry ears as he returns to fucking back up into him, making sure to lick the ears clean afterwards. Wei Ying moans so wantonly in response; it feels so good to be touched *there* as he’s fucked; it heightens all of his animalistic senses. “*You will make such a pretty mother, you will give me all the children I want. I will make sure your belly is never empty without being filled, little fox.*”

He cums violently inside of Wei Ying at that very thought, groaning and grunting and with his eyes fastening shut, and with steam leaving his nostrils. When he does, he keeps Wei Ying’s thighs locked to his lap, his hands holding Wei Ying down and refusing to let him go. He waits until his throbbing cock has spilled every ounce of cum into him, before he opens his bright dragon eyes back up again to gaze upon his sweet, sweet fox bride.

“Wei Ying,” he croons. His erection is going away, but his cock is big enough that Wei Ying’s belly bulge still stays. In between his thighs also lies that evidence Wei Ying had come all over himself—untouched—the very minute he had felt his husband reach his climax inside of him. It’d been too much, the thought of his husband fucking him raw, fucking him so senseless; with only the very goal of breeding him.

Wei Ying’s lithe body is not made to withstand such harsh fucking from a dragon.

Of course there are tears still trickling out of his eyes, sliding down his cherry red cheeks. Of course the little fox in his arms is still nervous and crying like a newborn kit, like a bride that’s been defiled for the very first time. Lan Wangji licks his tears and scents away his fear, like the good husband that he is.

Lan Wangji is not at all worried about the fear and shame he sees in Wei Ying’s silver eyes, nor the tears that gather around them.

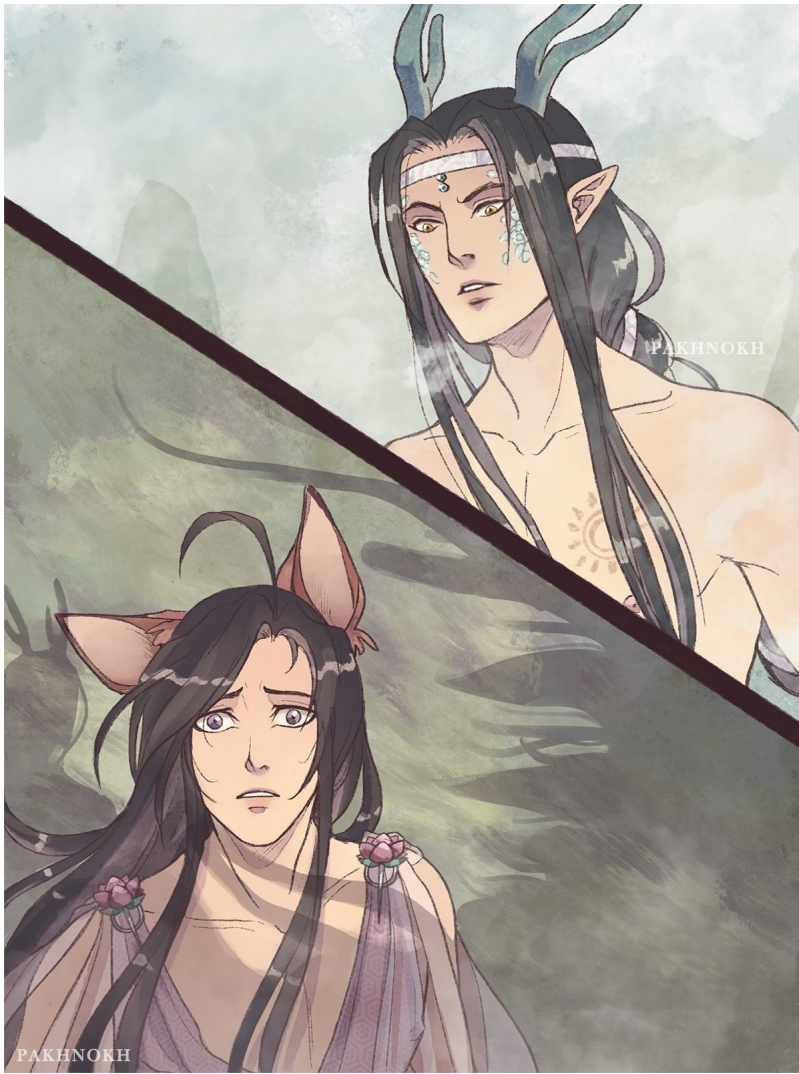
“Baby,” Lan Wangji purrs lovingly, as his hands move up to caress past Wei Ying’s lower stomach. There lies his womb, soon ready to be filled. He holds him in his lap, so tenderly and kindly, unlike the way he’d fucked before, and whispers sweet, incomprehensible nothings to Wei Ying. *“Do not worry, I will take good care of you, I will love you and make you happy, I have already fallen in love with you. Do you understand?”*

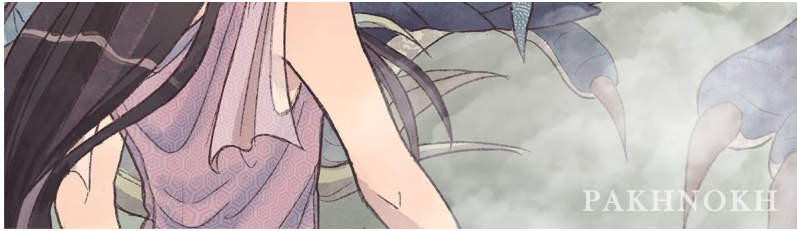
He speaks such loving things, but one hand of his drifts down to Wei Ying’s sore hole—still full of Lan Wangji’s cock, still oozing endless dragon cum—and pushes back against every trickle of cum that slides out, nudging it back in. The royal prince is adamant on making sure Wei Ying will be bred. He *will* see to it.

Wei Ying’s red-rimmed eyes finally flutter to a close, and he collapses promptly in Lan Wangji’s arms, completely fucked out.

Chapter End Notes

my good friend @pakhnokh_art drew me art of dragonji and foxxian meeting for the first time in this story, I love her (and this!) so much:





comments, if enjoyed? :DDDDDD subscribe to let me know you're interested in the fic!!!!

(WOW it has been a hot second since I've written darkji.)

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“Dragon’s sickness. It’s in our very blood. Dragons are very obsessive creatures. Sometimes, our desires even overcome the rational mind. From young, we’ve had to actively learn to control the greed in our nature. Often, when we fall in love, or grow attached to something of value—some of that dragon’s sickness, it escapes us.”

Chapter Notes

couldn't stop listening to [dark horse by katy perry](#) writing this...

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

Wei Ying wakes up naked and alone, in a bed too big for him.

He is aching everywhere. His back and thighs are sore, and his hole is bruised. When he shifts, he still feels cum spilling out of him, dribbling down his inner thighs. Wei Ying is sure his husband must have made sure to keep them all inside of him overnight, in hopes of getting him pregnant. He raises his hands up to his head to feel for his loose wavy hair, and realises it’d been pulled out of the tight braided bun the very night before, every gold hair pin meticulously removed from his hair so he could have a good night’s sleep. Had Lan Wangji requested for his handmaidens to do so for him, before he put him to bed? Surely his husband could not have done such a menial task all on his own, right? There must have been over fifty hair pins stuck in his head. Not to mention the heaviness of his crown.

The second dragon prince, the Lans’ greatest warrior, now his husband... Wei Ying’s still not sure what to make of him. He’d begged and begged the man multiple times last night, but the man saw no reason and took him as he liked. And then Wei Ying couldn’t help but give in, and—and he’d *enjoyed* it. He’d enjoyed their wedding night, he’d enjoyed getting roughed up and fucked until he’d lost his mind and begged for more. He’d cried and cried, and Lan Wangji had kissed away every tear, soothed him gently like a baby.

As rough as the prince had been, Wei Ying had also felt tenderness in his touches...

The aforementioned man is gone now, having probably left earlier to tend to matters of the ongoing war. Wei Ying doesn’t expect an esteemed war general to stay to coddle him on their very first morning together. Wei Ying is a grown man. Lan Wangji is a grown man. Wei Ying can handle the brutal aftermath on his own.

He's just about to pull himself out of bed, when he hears a knock on the door.

"Lan er furen," a familiar voice calls, so comfortingly in a tongue Wei Ying *does* speak.
"May I enter?"

Oh—it's the beautiful male handmaiden he'd first met at the gates of Cloud Recesses.

"Yes," Wei Ying answers.

He pushes open the doors, and enters the bedchambers with a tray of food in hand. Two more handmaidens follow after him, holding chests full of things.

"Good morning, Lan er furen," he bows, as he sets the tray down. "Let me formally introduce myself as Lan Jingyi. I am pleased to announce that I will personally serve you from now on. And so will these two handmaidens behind me."

They are clothed in hues of blue and white. Lan Jingyi wears silk—not as good as the kind the royals wear, but still better than the common servant—while the rest wear plain cotton. Whenever Lan Jingyi takes a step, the silk twirls around his feet. When he raises a hand, the silk falls to his elbows, exposing lean muscles hidden by his graceful style of dress. His shoulder-length hair, pulled into a high ponytail behind him. A sword of considerable weight hangs at the side of his hips this time, its hilt carved with the signature Lan insignia. There is boyish determination in his eyes; unwavering, youthful tenacity that easily separates him from the other two handmaidens.

He moves very elegantly; every move taken purposefully. One look at him, and Wei Ying already knows he is well-bred.

"Lan Jingyi?" Wei Ying asks, trying to understand. "You are a... Lan? Are you related to my husband?"

And if he is, why has he been assigned to being nothing more but a mere servant? The boy looks eighteen at most, still a teenager. Surely he has many more opportunities to prove himself worthy of a title better than just a mere... servant.

Lan Jingyi cracks open a small smile. "I am related to the royal princes, but very distantly. More than a servant, I have been bestowed with the honor to guard you with my life. You may rely on me for all things."

So he is more than a pretty face, and the sword by his hips is not just decoration—he can fight.

Wei Ying eyes the biceps on his arms, and thinks, those muscles mustn't be for *nothing*. It's clear he has had his own fill of training.

"Why do you not serve in the war, like my husband?" Wei Ying asks.

"Guarding you is more important than the war," Lan Jingyi proclaims. The boy states it so confidently, like he believes it himself. Wei Ying's not sure who has this poor boy fooled.

Why would Wei Ying's life be more important than the greatest war of their time? "The Second Prince was adamant you get the best protection."

So this was done upon Lan Wangji's insistence. Regardless of whether Wei Ying is deserving of it or not, he is grateful he has the boy with him. At least without Jiang Cheng around, he still has one person who he can speak with, and understand fully.

Lan Jingyi instructs the other two handmaidens to begin drawing a bath. He then kneels before the bed himself, and presents Wei Ying with some looser robes he can put on in the meantime.

He glances to Wei Ying's hair, and clucks his tongue in approval. "You have done a good job undoing your hair bun yourself, furen," he says. "It usually takes two handmaidens at least, just to remove the crown."

Wei Ying's heart beat slows. "Oh," he whispers aloud to himself, suddenly feeling warm at the thought.

It really had been *him*.

He cannot imagine it. The Lans' greatest war general, and he had spent the night painstakingly removing every gold bit in his hair just so Wei Ying wouldn't wake up the morning after with a throbbing headache.

There is kindness to be had in Lan Wangji, after all.

"Tell me, Jingyi," Wei Ying asks, as they wait for the bath to be ready. "How is your Second Prince like? Will I be happy?"

Lan Jingyi's eyes flash with renewed strength. "I respect him very much, and aspire to be just like him. He has brought great honour to our clan. Nobody around here does not feel the same."

"I see," Wei Ying says. He remembers those cold eyes of his husband's, and wonders why he thinks of him so differently. Granted, he has only known the prince for... three days, maximum. "Perhaps I will view him the same, come one day."

"I am sure you will," Lan Jingyi smiles to him, encouragingly. "There is nothing to dislike about Hanguang-Jun."

"Hanguang-Jun?"

"Oh," Lan Jingyi explains, slightly giddy. "It means light-bearing lord. He is called that in war."

Lan Jingyi appears to like the Second Prince a great deal.

"Do you," Wei Ying's hands cross over the front of his stomach, self-conscious. "Do you, perhaps, know why I have married into your clan?"

Lan Jingyi doesn't even bat an eyelid. "We have a prophecy." Then, he recites perfectly, word for word: "*The prince that emerges from the union of a dragon and a fox...*"

Wei Ying swallows, and interrupts him quickly with a heavy heart. "So even you know." Everyone, except the fox bride himself. It feels bizarrely shameful for everyone to know his very purpose and existence here; but there is nothing he can do about it.

"Us Lans take our prophecies very seriously," Lan Jingyi says. "We are traditionalists."

"I can tell," Wei Ying remembers how insistent, how terrifyingly *serious* Lan Wangji had been on breeding him yesterday—putting into him a *baby*—and wonders if the Second Prince had only been trying to fulfill his duty to his clan. "Is that why everyone has been nothing but kind to me? Because I am the prophesied fox spirit? Because... my son will bring glory to the dragon clan?"

Wei Ying does his best to conceal the spite in his tone.

Lan Jingyi smiles. "No," he says, shaking his head. He outstretches his hand, and slides it across Wei Ying's lap, resting it over the fox's own one. He looks up to Wei Ying with a sweet gaze, full of admiration and awe. "It is because you are such a rare jewel, furen, so priceless and beautiful."

It is the second time Lan Jingyi has flattered him as such.

"Of course," Wei Ying murmurs, like he shouldn't have expected otherwise. Lan Jingyi is so young, and so impressionable. "Dragons covet beauty."

"Dragons covet many things," Lan Jingyi nods. "You are more than just beauty."

"Is that so," Wei Ying glances away. Should he trust the sweet words, and the warped gaze, of a dragon? "Tell me, have you heard news about my brother?"

"The Jiang heir?" Lan Jingyi confirms. "No. We sit in the Inner Palace, and he has been housed in the Outer one."

Wei Ying widens his eyes. He was not told this beforehand. "He is not staying near me?"

Lan Jingyi stifles a laugh at his naivety. "No," he explains. "You have married into royalty. The Lans live within the inner walls."

"Does this mean," Wei Ying's heart drops. "It will be difficult to see Jiang Cheng? As I please?"

Lan Jingyi's eyes flicker up to his—pleasantly surprised by the smart deduction. "Yes," he says. "The instructions are that you stay within the Inner Palace. You will have to ask the Second Prince to take you out."

Wei Ying looks defeated again. How archaic, he thinks. To have to defer to my husband for everything. And yet, he isn't completely surprised by how the Lans operate around here.

But how is he supposed to ask favours from a husband he cannot even communicate with?

“Before I get to see him,” If he *even* does, Wei Ying thinks, sullenly. He’s still not sure how partial his husband is to him. “Can you ask around, and help me find out if Jiang Cheng is well? We haven’t been apart since we were little.”

Lan Jingyi parts his lips to deny him, but upon seeing the dispirited look on Wei Ying’s face, immediately changes his mind.

Lan Wangji is not the only dragon around here that has grown deeply fond of the fox spirit.

“For you, furen,” Lan Jingyi musters up a weak smile, squeezing Wei Ying’s hand in his. “I will try.”

Wei Ying spends the entire day in his quarters, sorting out his wedding gifts. A menial but daunting task, and one that is his responsibility. Within the large confines of his room, Wei Ying sits on the bed, and nods or shakes his head each time his servants hold up each piece of gift to him. Some are to be kept, others are to be discarded, and the rest, Wei Ying allows them to keep for themselves.

They bring in treasure chests full of silk and jewelry—*all his*—and store them right next to Lan Wangji’s own. There is much to be done, when it comes to the re-organisation of Lan Wangji’s chambers. Wei Ying has yet to fully make this space his own. He is *expected* to make this space his own. His husband fights the great fight out there, and Wei Ying is the fox bride who warms his bed for him, and makes sure everything is neat and tidy.

The knowledge still sickens Wei Ying, but in a way much less than before. Each day will pass by him, and the facts will remain as they are. There is no point in being bitter about a Great War that still needs to be won, and a husband that he is already bound to. And when he thinks of Lan Wangji’s handsome face, and the way he’d licked every one of his tears, or the gentle way he’d held Wei Ying close, and whispered seemingly affectionate words into his ear; the bitter feeling of disgust leaves him, and he feels better.

This could be worse, Wei Ying constantly reminds himself. This could be worse, and I could have a husband who looks just like Wen Chao, or a man who wouldn’t have stayed up late into the night, and meticulously removed over fifty golden pins in my hair.

This *could* be worse.

Come night time, and Lan Wangji finally returns.

Wei Ying sits on the bed after a rather lonesome dinner by himself, waiting for him, butterflies rampant in his stomach.

Lan Wangji eases the door close behind him as he enters, and turns his head up slowly to gaze upon the fox.

Dressed in violet, translucent silk—the signature colour of the Jiangs—and his long hair done up in a sophisticated half-up hairstyle, with lotus flower pins sitting atop his head, Wei Ying looks very much different from the bridal red and gold he'd been decked out in head to toe, yesterday. Still elegant, though. Still ethereally beautiful. His handmaidens make him up in the same celestial styles that the Lans are so fond of around here; so much so that Wei Ying already *feels* like one of them.

At the sight of his husband, Wei Ying wonders if he should say something. Anything. He tries to muster up a simple “*Welcome back, husband*”, but no sound leaves him.

His husband, after all, harbours a very imposing stance.

Lan Wangji makes his way to the bed, first thing, like there has been nothing else on his mind all day but returning to the fox's embrace. He places a knee down onto the sheets, right by Wei Ying, and lowers his nose into Wei Ying's hair, inhaling in his unmistakable fox pheromones. They drive him absolutely wild, everytime.

When Lan Wangji pulls away from him, he glances down, and realises the fox's eyes have since squeezed tightly shut. Wei Ying's entire body has not stopped shaking underneath him, for even a minute.

Wei Ying is scared. *Frightened*. Some part of him still remembers how cruel Lan Wangji had been in bed yesterday; the other part takes in the scent of the dragon, and knows he is the alpha male. Wei Ying is to submit.

After all, I am his to breed.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji calls out, softly. He sniffs the air, seemingly sensing Wei Ying's fear. His hand slips into Wei Ying's hair, tucking a loose strand of hair behind his ear as he does so. He can't help but nose down the side of Wei Ying's neck though, pulling the silk around Wei Ying's shoulders down so he can examine the bruises he'd made there, the night before.

Still intact. Still raw and red. Still his.

“*Beautiful*,” he can't help but murmur against his skin, eyes so glazed at the sight. “*So, so beautiful, Wei Ying.*”

“S...Sorry,” Wei Ying chokes out, pulling his eyes open. It's so hard—it's so hard to gather courage in front of this man. Wei Ying is usually way more confident than this; but being forced into a marriage of convenience and getting rawed so brutally last night by a man you've just met *does* things to you. “Sorry, I don't understand...”

“Mn,” Lan Wangji simply hums, seeing no issue. He pulls further at the silk, slipping it off Wei Ying’s shoulders, clearly meaning to undress him. Luckily the silk is so seamless and sleek; it’d be ripped apart otherwise.

The events of last night are due for a repeat.

When Lan Wangji lays his lips upon Wei Ying’s skin once more, that’s when something in Wei Ying finally *snaps* and he rambles out, “S... So, how has your day been?”

Lan Wangji was not expecting that.

Trembling, Wei Ying tugs at the fallen silk around his shoulders, and tries in vain to cover himself up. His intention is obvious. He wants to hold a conversation with the man—an *actual* conversation.

Not just have plain, mindless sex. Not like their wedding night.

“How,” Wei Ying’s teeth is chattering. His fear is *paralysing*. “How has your day been...?”

Lan Wangji stares at him, deeply perplexed.

For a moment Wei Ying thinks the man is going to descend onto him again, and ignore him completely; but the soft spot his husband holds for him eventually wins out, and the man ends up settling down onto the sheets right next to him.

(Perhaps it has something to do with the petrified look on Wei Ying’s face; or the way his bottom lip won’t stop quivering in the presence of the other man. Lan Wangji cannot bring himself to ignore such a sight.)

“War,” Lan Wangji says.

It’s just one word, but it’s one step taken in the right direction—Wei Ying can tell his husband is actually *trying*.

“War,” Wei Ying’s eyes brighten, with hope. Lan Wangji wants to talk to him, he wants to get to know him! Lan Wangji, he knows more words than simply ‘don’t’ and ‘baby’! This is extremely promising. “War planning? War strategizing? Military training? Have you spent the entire day preparing for your next fight?”

Lan Wangji returns to the same, curious, golden-eyed stare. Wei Ying’s not sure if the man still understands him, but the man nods anyway.

“War,” Lan Wangji repeats, rather thoughtfully, as if afraid Wei Ying didn’t catch him the first time.

Then, he extends a hand of his—large, scarred, rough—and cups Wei Ying’s small face, his thumb caressing past his cheeks.

He gazes down at Wei Ying’s silver eyes, with a questioning look of his own.

It's your turn now.

"Oh," Wei Ying hiccups, nervously. He points to himself. "Me?"

Lan Wangji nods. He smiles faintly, like he's resisting a much wider smile.

"I spent the day with Jingyi," Wei Ying hurriedly answers. "Lan Jingyi."

"Jingyi," Lan Wangji repeats. He seems content to hear of the name.

"Yes, Jingyi," Wei Ying murmurs. He likes this version of Lan Wangji—soft, happy, constantly pleased. He's incredibly gentle and he looks at Wei Ying with a perpetual smile, like he can't stand to give Wei Ying any otherwise. This Lan Wangji exudes pure kindness; and love. Wei Ying could learn to love this man if things continued to pan out this way. "Do you like Jingyi? Jingyi likes you very much. He speaks so highly of you."

"Mn," Lan Wangji says, wearing a pleasant expression on his face. "Jingyi."

The boy had mentioned it was Lan Wangji who personally demanded for bodily protection for Wei Ying, after all. Perhaps Lan Wangji had handpicked Lan Jingyi himself.

"Yes, Jingyi's extremely great. He... um, he, also mentioned something else," Wei Ying whispers out, hesitant.

Perhaps he is growing a bit bold; his husband had let him ramble on thus far without stopping him, and so Wei Ying thinks Lan Wangji does not mind listening to him, does not mind his pathetic attempts at communication despite them not sharing a language.

"He tells me we live in... what is called the Inner Palace?"

Lan Wangji simply stares at him.

"Um, what I'm trying to say is," Wei Ying raises his voice just slightly, growing increasingly excited. Perhaps he really can get somewhere with this. With his husband. "I heard I require your permission to... leave? I want to see my brother, Jiang Cheng. Will you let me? I want to know if he's okay. You said that you were out preparing for the war—have you seen him? Have you started working together with him? Have the Lans given him an army, as promised?"

Immediately any ounce of kindness—held in that once loving gaze—vanishes from his husband's face.

Lan Wangji's eyes narrow into disapproving slits. He parts his lips just slightly, puffs of steam airing out of his mouth as he breathes.

Wei Ying fails to notice such an obvious warning.

"Jiang Cheng, Jiang Cheng," Wei Ying continues harping on the topic of his brother, urgently. Why is Lan Wangji not responding? Does he not recognise the name? "My brother. Jiang Cheng. Jiang *Wanyin*."

Lan Wangji is spitting out the name on his tongue in a second, “Wanyin.”

“Yes, Wanyin,” Wei Ying answers, now growing hopeful, still oblivious to the complete distaste in his husband’s eyes. Perhaps Lan Wangji is not yet that familiar with Jiang Cheng; perhaps he needs a bit more nudging, and then he will recall Wei Ying’s one and only family left. “His name is Jiang Wanyin. You Lans promised him an army, if I married you. Do you know who I’m talking about? Can I see him?”

“Haa,” Lan Wangji sneers, like he *can’t* believe what he’s hearing.

Lan Wangji’s answer to his demand comes swiftly, not in the form of a word—but in the form of golden eyes glowing fully in the dark, and blue-green dragon scales coming to life on his pale, scarred cheeks, and bright yellow dragon claws extending from his nails. He raises a hand up into the air, and for a good moment Wei Ying’s breath is caught in his throat, and he wonders if Lan Wangji plans to hurt him.

Instead, the hand swipes down on him before Wei Ying can even manage a blink, slashing unhappily at the seamless silk around Wei Ying’s shoulders.

(*Oh*, so the dress *is* rippable after all.)

Wei Ying goes into complete shock.

“Lan Wangji,” Lan Wangji growls aggravatedly into his ear, his dark antlers gleaming prominently under the night light. He grabs hold of Wei Ying’s two hands, and places it urgently back onto his own chest, like he is insistent on Wei Ying seeing *him*. “*Lan Wangji*.”

Why is he repeating his name to me, Wei Ying thinks, in panic. Have I done something wrong? Why does he think I have forgotten his name?

“Lan, Lan Wangji,” Wei Ying stutters out, feeling cold and bare as the shreds of ripped clothing now hang down his body, shamefully. “I know, I know, you are Lan Wangji.”

“*Lan Wangji*,” Lan Wangji warns again, very pointedly. “*Only me*.” His dragon claws curl over Wei Ying’s hands, squeezing his fingers tightly.

Dominance runs through the dragon prince’s very veins—and his tone. When he speaks during a war, all listen to him. The same happens within the confines of his quarters; in his bed. When Lan Wangji speaks—Wei Ying is expected to *listen*.

His meaning is obvious. The conversation that they were having about Jiang Wanyin, is over.

While their night together has only just started.

When Lan Wangji settles behind him and sinks his sharp teeth into the nape of the fox’s neck, Wei Ying bites his lip. He shudders as his fox ears rise to life so easily, right underneath his husband’s touches.

“*Mineminemine*,” Lan Wangji chants firmly into his ear, in incomprehensible dragon tongue. “*My Wei Ying. Mine only. Do you understand me? Mine. My Wei Ying.*”

This time, Wei Ying knows better to protest.

And so, for the second night in a row, Wei Ying is pressed into the sheets, and ruthlessly marked and bitten and scarred within every inch of his skin.

It only takes a couple of hours for it to sink in that, Lan Wangji may, perhaps, not be the most fond of topics regarding his *brother*.

“Dragon’s sickness,” Lan Jingyi explains, the next morning. He sits behind the fox, carefully brushing through Wei Ying’s hair right before a long, oval-shaped mirror. His eyes are occasionally distracted by the prominent red marks littering Wei Ying’s pale shoulders, the blood red bruises, a sharp contrast to the fairness of Wei Ying’s skin; and the bite marks, so undeniably in the shape of a dragon’s teeth.

“Dragon’s what?” Wei Ying moans out. His body now aches doubly from two rough nights of brutal lovemaking in a row, but his husband so far looks as though he has no intentions to stop. Wei Ying *knows* he will not stop. Only two nights with Lan Wangji, and Wei Ying already knows the rumours about the ferocity of dragons in bed are true. Lan Wangji is a wild beast, and Wei Ying does not hold the power to tame him.

“Dragon’s sickness,” Lan Jingyi repeats. “It’s in our very blood. Dragons are very obsessive creatures. Sometimes, our desires even overcome the rational mind. From young, we’ve had to actively learn to control the greed in our nature. Often, when we fall in love, or grow attached to something of value—some of that dragon’s sickness, it escapes us.”

Wei Ying has not heard of this. His fox ears perk up lazily from his hair with interest, confused. “You mean, like the way you guys hoard treasure?”

Lan Jingyi laughs at the analogy. “Furen, do you see us as only that? Treasure-hoarding creatures?”

Wei Ying’s cheeks flush. “I do not know much about dragons.”

He thinks back to his husband, and tries to reconcile this newfound knowledge with what he has seen of the man. “You are saying,” he says. “My husband has dragon’s sickness?”

Well, it’s not that far fetched an explanation. Wei Ying thinks about how territorial Lan Wangji gets about him, in bed alone, and finds that he *can* believe it.

“Of course, they call it a sickness, but it really is a part of all of us,” Lan Jingyi hums. “All of us dragons, at least.”

“So,” Wei Ying frowns, trying to put two and two together. “How did bringing up Jiang Cheng set him off?”

That, he still cannot make full sense of.

“Well, I can only take a rough guess, as a fellow dragon, and as a Lan,” Lan Jingyi says. “But perhaps it wasn’t the wisest decision to ask to see your brother so soon, after the wedding.”

“Why?” Wei Ying asks, visibly upset. “He is my brother.”

Lan Jingyi pauses, and turns towards the mirror. “Forgive me if I speak out of turn,” he starts. “But I have heard that he is not your blood brother. Am I correct?”

Wei Ying frowns, wondering what that has to do with it. “No, he isn’t. He is a Phoenix. But that hasn’t—that hasn’t stopped me from viewing him as a brother. We grew up together.” He has had much experience with people denying their kinship ties based solely on the fact that they are not blood brothers.

“If he is not of blood,” Lan Jingyi finally says, as a matter-of-factly. “Then he is a threat.”

Wei Ying freezes. The hairs on the back of his neck—suddenly all stand.

“A threat,” he says again, in disbelief. *How?*

“Yes,” Lan Jingyi says, cautiously. “Hanguang-Jun will view him as a threat.”

“A threat for *what?*” Wei Ying asks, incredulous. “What would he even feel threatened by Jiang Cheng about? Lan Wangji is already my husband. *And*, he’s not the one whose entire clan and family got wiped out in a single night. Jiang Cheng has nothing, compared to him.”

“Hm,” Lan Jingyi smiles, humoured. “You still don’t get it, do you, furen? If your attention goes to Jiang Cheng, then none of it will go to the Second Prince.”

And so it finally all *clicks* within Wei Ying’s head.

“*No*,” Wei Ying’s hands grip at the dressing table he sits at. “No. He *cannot* be that petty.”

Lan Jingyi laughs, and shakes his head. “I’ll make sure not to inform the Second Prince you said as such.”

Wei Ying whips his head to the back then, and faces Lan Jingyi questioningly. “He can’t always have been this way? This... *this* jealous?”

“Uh,” Lan Jingyi grins. “I wouldn’t know, furen. You are the only person he has ever consorted with.”

Oh.

Upon hearing this, Wei Ying's lips curl up of their own accord, his smile utterly revealing of his pleasure. "I see," he says, trying to hide his delight on his face. "I did not know..."

He is the same as me.

"I know everything must be new to you," Lan Jingyi says. "But I think it must all be incredibly new for the Second Prince, as well."

"Ah," Wei Ying says. He thinks about Lan Wangji, and how self-assured he is in bed, and wonders how it can possibly be his first time, when—when he knows exactly all the right things to do make Wei Ying *cry*.

If only he could speak to him, and learn all these things about him from the man himself. But it is difficult to carry an actual conversation with Lan Wangji when half the time Wei Ying is hysterically sobbing into his chest, being fucked out of his mind on his cock.

"Jingyi, do you think you could teach me the dragon tongue?"

Lan Jingyi's eyes glint. "Oh? Is it bothering you not knowing?"

"I want to speak with him," Wei Ying says, newly determined. "Properly."

"Mm," Lan Jingyi smiles. "Hanguang-Jun *is* a man of few words."

"Is he now," Wei Ying says. When Lan Wangji is fucking Wei Ying, he always rambles on and on in what sounds like filthy curses—all whispered into the crying fox's ear. "He sure seems like he has a lot to say." If only he could learn what all of it meant.

"Perhaps he is different with you," Lan Jingyi says. "Of course, that is understandable. Lan er furen will *always* be an exception."

Lan Jingyi, his tongue is ever so sweet.

They begin lessons immediately.

Wei Ying's days may be mundane, but they pass so quick and fast, made lively by the presence of Lan Jingyi. Lan Jingyi painstakingly writes out every word and sentence Wei Ying possibly wants to learn onto a bunch of empty scrolls, and teaches Wei Ying all day, only taking breaks in between because they are made mandatory for the Second Prince's consort.

Dragon tongue is difficult. It is a stiff and rigid language, and yet when spoken it sounds unbelievably refined and cultured. It shares little commonalities with the common tongue, and so Wei Ying has a difficult time picking it up. But he has always been highly intelligent, and Wei Ying has always been so unyielding when it comes to setting his mind on things he wants to do.

And so, after just a week of lessons (and a week straight of pure, mind-numbing, hot-blooded sex), Wei Ying thinks he is ready.

He sits on the bed as usual, just like he has done so every night since the wedding, and waits for Lan Wangji to return.

“Welcome back,” he greets softly, when he sees Lan Wangji enter, pausing for effect—and to gather the courage necessary to speak.

His hands have begun trembling again, but he hides them hastily behind his back, hoping his nervousness will not detract from his... performance.

Then, in perfectly enunciated dragon tongue, Wei Ying calls out, rather sweetly:
“*Husband...*?”

Lan Wangji stops in his tracks.

“Wei... Wei Ying?” he asks, unsure.

His dark dragon antlers, jolt excitedly into the air. Wei Ying looks at him and thinks, *cute*. The sight soothes the nerves just a tad bit.

“*How...*” Wei Ying musters out, trying to recite the dragon tongue he has learned from memory, as best as he can. He has to make sure Lan Jingyi’s lessons don’t go to waste. “*How was your day, beloved husband?*”

Oh... *oh*. Newfound exhilaration burns within his husband’s very eyes, as if he’s just discovered a rare piece of treasure.

Wei Ying speaking to him in dragon tongue of his own volition...

It is not perfect, of course. Wei Ying still doesn’t have the tones down right, and his accent is still very firmly that of the common tongue. But the fox is trying—*trying*—so adorably, it rouses such a primal instinct inside the dragon; his predator.

“*Good,*” Lan Wangji answers, as he takes large steps towards him. “*But I missed you the whole time I was out there.*”

Wei Ying does not get *any* of that. A week’s worth of teachings is not enough for him to understand the spoken word, right off the bat.

“*Forgive me,*” Wei Ying says, quickly turning embarrassed. Lan Jingyi taught him how to say this much, at least. “*I still cannot understand you.*”

“That is alright,” Lan Wangji quickly descends upon him in bed, like a vulture does to its favourite type of prey. *“I would so fear it if you could, my sweet Wei Ying.”*

“Ah, I really can’t understand,” Wei Ying moans out, frustrated. He knows his husband has mentioned his name—but that is it. “I’ll have to get better at this.”

“Take your time,” Lan Wangji hums, his teeth scraping alongside Wei Ying’s jaw. *“There is no rush.”*

Still, Wei Ying has exchanged more than a couple of lines with Lan Wangji today in dragon tongue, and that’s more than he could have ever asked for. He’s still rather satisfied with the fruits of his labour.

When Lan Wangji kisses up his neck today, he’s gentler. Just a bit. He speaks even more than before, whispering on and on into Wei Ying’s ear. He’s affectionate, and sweeter, and more loving.

He is also incredibly chatty.

“Where did you learn dragon tongue from? Did you spend the day learning it from Lan Jingyi? How cute.”

“Are you afraid of me not understanding you? Have you come to like me that much? What did I do to deserve such an adorable bride?”

“Wei Ying, if you come to learn all that I truly think of, and constantly say to you, would you fear me? Would you love me less? Do you really want to be this close to me?”

“You are cute. So very cute. When you attempt things like these, I want to bully you even more. Do you not realise how dangerous you are, to me? You are the loveliest thing I have ever seen in my life.”

When he hoists Wei Ying onto his cock, he fucks him with much more patience, and holds his waist that much more delicately. Maybe tonight he won’t leave purple-red bruises on him, Wei Ying thinks. Maybe tomorrow Wei Ying will be less sore.

When he looks at Wei Ying, there is great fondness in his eyes—in a way that Wei Ying does not recognise.

Perhaps he is proud of me? Wei Ying thinks. He had kept the language learning a secret all these time for good reason, after all. And it seems to be working—I put effort into getting to know him, and suddenly he thinks the world of me.

This was not a marriage of love, merely convenience, but Wei Ying just has to try, and perhaps things will get better for him. For them. He *wouldn’t* have to be unhappy. He wouldn’t have to be permanently afraid of a man he has been forced to marry.

At the end of their night, when Wei Ying is plugged full (again!) of his husband’s cum, and pressed close to Lan Wangji’s sweaty chest, Wei Ying paws at him and asks, softly, breathlessly, panting and in *want*, with wispy lashes, “Lan Wangji, will you kiss me?”

He purses his lips into the air, and watches as his husband merely stares at him, stupefied.

Huh.

“So this is slightly embarrassing,” Wei Ying says before his dressing table, as his two handmaidens dutifully pleat various locks of his hair into tiny braids. Lan Jingyi kneels by the side, and fixes up his regular cup of morning tea for him. “And I’m not sure if it’s too appropriate to be told to you.”

“I am your humble servant,” Lan Jingyi boldly smiles up to him, possessing an innate confidence only known to the Lans. Sometimes Wei Ying looks at him, and he feels like he can pick out bits and pieces of Lan Wangji. Lan Jingyi says he is but a distant relative, but Wei Ying might have guessed otherwise based on the many resemblances alone... “You can tell me anything.”

“You are only eighteen, yes?” Wei Ying asks, hesitant.

“Dragons live for hundreds of years, sometimes thousands,” Lan Jingyi hums. “I am merely a young dragon.”

So do fox spirits, Wei Ying thinks. That doesn’t mean *anything*.

“I am still older than you,” Wei Ying squints. “Slightly.”

“Lan er furen,” Lan Jingyi contains his laughter. “You can be frank with me. I’m here to make sure you are comfortable, and at ease, at all times. Did something happen with the Second Prince last night?”

Wei Ying hides his wince. “Don’t you respect him a lot? Are you okay with knowing about his bedroom... intimacies?”

“If I wasn’t,” Lan Jingyi laughs. “I would have told you that the very morning I started serving you, furen.”

There is some truth in that. Wei Ying has certainly been covered in—*brutal*—marks from the very beginning.

Wei Ying swallows, bashfully. *God*. His only confidant here is a teenage dragon. It’s either him, or no one else. Wei Ying has no choice.

“It really is... a tiny bit embarrassing.”

“I got that the first time.”

Wei Ying raises a braided lock of hair, and pulls it across his cheeks, still shy. “So, I think the language lessons are working.”

Lan Jingyi looks satisfied. “You are improving relations with Hanguang-Jun by speaking with him, yes?”

“Yes,” Wei Ying says. “But perhaps... it is not enough.”

“Not enough,” Lan Jingyi repeats, frowning. That’s not something he’s too happy to hear about, not after exerting so much effort teaching the fox day in and out. “Has the Second Prince done something of concern?”

“No,” Wei Ying hiccups. God, he really can’t—he really can’t bring himself to say this to an eighteen-year-old! How has he fallen so far?

“It’s just—it’s just! Have... have you, perhaps, ever kissed anyone, Jingyi?”

Lan Jingyi instantly goes quiet.

“Kissed...?” Lan Jingyi asks, stunned.

And then he’s quickly turning horrified, when he puts it all together and the reason why Wei Ying is asking him this... finally dawns unto him. “Has... has Hanguang-Jun not kissed you? Not since the wedding night?”

“Um,” Wei Ying hiccups. “Not ever.”

“Oh,” Lan Jingyi whispers out, speechless.

“I asked him to, a few nights ago,” Wei Ying says, with burning cheeks. “I asked him to, in common tongue. But I think he did not understand me.”

“I,” Lan Jingyi says. “I see.”

“Perhaps,” Wei Ying whispers back, with curious eyes. “There is something else I can do? Or say? Are there ways to word this nicely in the dragon tongue, Jingyi?”

Lan Jingyi falls into deep, pensive thought. Everything that ails Wei Ying *is* of grave concern to him, and so he personally takes it upon himself to deliberate carefully upon this.

Eventually, it comes to him, and his eyes light up. He asks, rather triumphantly, “Well, Lan er furen, you are a hu li jing, are you not?”

Wei Ying scoffs at the idea, and waves that away. “You know those rumours are grossly exaggerated.”

“Are they, really?” Lan Jingyi hums. “And yet you have attracted the attention of every dragon there is here, the minute you entered Cloud Recesses.”

Wei Ying has not noticed as such, but even if that were true... “I am the only fox spirit around here, that is to be expected.”

“No,” Lan Jingyi says. “Your pheromones are different, and they appeal very much to our kind, a predator race. They say seduction runs in a fox’s veins, and they are right. Have you not heard about the greatest courtesan there is to exist, Rou Na?”

Of course Wei Ying has heard the tale. Fox spirits are gifted with particularly enticing pheromones, and so once upon a time the lot of them flourished plenty at pleasure houses. Rou Na was one such person. She was an incredibly popular courtesan, perhaps the most popular there was, who bewitched thousands of men that all went to extraordinary lengths to win her favour; and yet she ultimately refused them all.

“It was said,” Lan Jingyi cups Wei Ying’s small face with his hand, and directs it straight at the mirror. He meets Wei Ying’s silver eyes through the reflection, with a playful smile. “That she could finish a man with nothing but her eyes. She could have brought devastation to the world, if she so wanted.”

“Are you asking me,” Wei Ying’s mouth falls slightly ajar, when he registers what is being told to him. “To *seduce*?”

Oh, eighteen-year-olds these days are so bold.

“I am merely asking you to consider,” Lan Jingyi smiles. “To use what you have on hand. To use what you have been gifted. If you wish to improve relations with Hanguang-Jun, this is the best option I can think of.”

“I, I grew up with Phoenixes,” Wei Ying chokes out. “I never knew my mother. I do not know how—to make men fall into my favour, like a hu li jing does. And I do not expect that you can teach me. How do you even know so much?”

Lan Jingyi laughs, and nods. “You are right, I can only help as far as the dragon tongue. But there are books that I know exist,” he lowers his voice into a sly whisper. “That I can covertly retrieve to help you, furen.”

“Lan *Jingyi*,” Wei Ying chides him, astonished. “Is this what you do in your free time? Browse forbidden readings in the library?”

“Who says they are forbidden,” Lan Jingyi snickers, in that boyish smile of his that slips out uncontrollably sometimes. “I am simply someone that is well-read, and knowledgeable in various... capacities.”

This Lan Jingyi—already so cocky at his tender age.

“Beyond seduction,” Wei Ying says, with a side-eye. “I think it’d also be helpful if I knew of Lan Wangji’s likes and dislikes. His interests... his hobbies, perhaps,” he’s coming to the

awful realisation that what he knows of his husband is in a very limited capacity, what with the constant struggle in which they communicate. “Do you know of any specific interests?”

“Mn, one thing comes to mind,” Lan Jingyi offers. “Hanguang-Jun is deeply fond of the guqin.”

“Guqin,” Wei Ying’s head perks up. That’s definitely a hobby he can endeavour to take on. “Does he play?”

“He used to, when he was much younger,” Lan Jingyi recalls. “He was personally taught by his mother, so it holds great sentimentality for him. In recent years, however, he’s had to trade it in for his sword. Once he took on the responsibilities of a war general, he stopped playing.”

“Then I wish to learn,” Wei Ying says, full of resolve. “Do you know how to play the guqin, Jingyi?”

Lan Jingyi laughs. “Furen, Cloud Recesses prides itself on the Four Arts. The guqin is one of them. All of us dragons are made to learn it from young. That does not mean we are necessarily all good at it, though.”

“So, are you good at it?”

Lan Jingyi grins. “The best.”

Wei Ying undergoes vigorous training. In the morning, after his meal, Lan Jingyi sits opposite him on the mat with a bunch of language scrolls, and drills into him the dragon tongue. In the afternoon, he brings in the guqin, and teaches Wei Ying the instrument, one note at a time. The boy is incredibly patient with his teachings, guiding Wei Ying carefully with his hand atop his, and praising him excitedly whenever he gets a perfect note. Despite his occasional playfulness, Lan Jingyi is an exemplary Lan who excels in every aspect of his education and training, through and through. Wei Ying is not surprised Lan Wangji has grown so fond of him; it’s no wonder Lan Jingyi was chosen, out of the many disciples here, to serve and guard Wei Ying with his life.

In the evenings, with the few solitary hours Wei Ying gets to himself, he busies himself with the books Lan Jingyi has procured for him—a great selection of books which, although hold outrageous titles like *The Art of Seduction* or *The Way of the Fox*, actually turn out to be of immense help to him. Wei Ying jots all of his notes down into a small book of his own, and keeps it underneath the bed as a thinly-veiled secret from his husband.

He repeats it in his head, like a mantra.

Blink slower. Pout your lips, tighter. Look up to him from beneath your lashes. Slip your robes off your shoulder. Speak softer, blush harder. When he comes near, exude your scent. Let out your ears. Let him think he is in control; but know that you are the one who really is.

You have all that you need right underneath your fingertips, Wei Ying—use it.

Lan Jingyi is right, seduction runs in his veins. He would be a fool not to use it to his advantage. If Lan Wangji insists on being cruel in bed, and insists on doing as he pleases with Wei Ying night after night, Wei Ying should find a way to manipulate that to his advantage.

After all, he *does* like his husband. And his husband, for what it's worth, does appear to be equally fond of him, back. There is only the matter of their language barrier; but Wei Ying is already actively working to eradicate that, and in time to come it should no longer be of issue between them. If Wei Ying is to spend the rest of his life with one man, and one man alone, Wei Ying will make sure they can communicate.

Both in language, and in *touch*.

Wei Ying does not fancy a life of living within his husband's bedchambers, forever; and if he is to change things, he has to learn to begin taking control.

Three weeks on, and Wei Ying thinks he is prepared.

He takes the longest, most self-indulgent bath, full of fresh goat's milk so his skin will be the softest, most tender; and drowns himself in floral scented oils that only accentuate the allure of his natural scent. He dresses himself in translucent red silk, clothes so bare they hardly cover anything. His long hair runs down in natural waves behind his back; his bangs pinned behind his head with his favourite golden lotus pins, courtesy of Jiang Yanli's wedding jewelry.

Tonight will be the night things *change*. He sets the guqin carefully down before him, and settles down into impossibly straight posture—Lan Jingyi has trained him well—with his two hands positioned on the instrument, his sharp nails flicking gently at the notes.

Lan Wangji enters the room just as the fox begins playing a song, and he almost sees white.

Wei Ying sits perfectly poised, like the Lan er furen of his dreams.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji breathes.

This is completely new. Wei Ying has not been so scantily clad since—since *ever*. He might as well be wearing nothing. Already Lan Wangji longs to feel how soft and tender that white expanse of skin is, of Wei Ying’s.

“*Welcome back*,” Wei Ying greets. His hands, no longer shaking in the presence of his husband. His eyelids flitting up, smeared with the loveliest shade of red. “*Husband*.”

His fingers do not stop plucking at the guqin strings even once. He carries on with the song, a short sweet melody waxing the melancholic narrative of a wife waiting for her husband to return home from the war.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji greets back, his heart beating faster. He had not known of Wei Ying’s guqin lessons all these while. The fox spirit had cleverly hid the faint cuts and lacerations on his fingertips from the guqin strings with powder, and distracted his husband from ever looking too closely at his palms. To witness Wei Ying in such a get-up, putting on such a thoughtful performance and surprise for him, no less; it takes everything inside of the dragon prince not to jump the bones of Wei Ying, right then and there.

Lan Wangji knows the exact song. It’d been one of his favourites, and one of the first few songs he learned straight from his mother’s hands. A simple and easy to learn melody, but poignant and beautiful enough that it remains nostalgic and sentimental for him to this day.

He stands by the door and goes completely silent, appreciating the performance. Wei Ying looks up ever so often from his playing, meeting his gaze head-on with an amorous smile. The fox scent that oozes from his skin are now out in full-force, and two-fold; it seems Wei Ying has mastered control over the sex pheromones that are so inherent to a fox’s nature, and has begun using them right to his advantage. It threatens to drown the dragon prince; it beckons him in.

When Lan Wangji sniffs the air, it turns him dizzy, and awakens his feral need to mate.

Already the tension in the room has changed. Before, Lan Wangji had always asserted his upper hand—now, Wei Ying is the one that has him fully captivated, and reeled in.

When Wei Ying approaches the end of the song, Lan Wangji is eager to finally take him into his embrace. He hastens to the fox’s side, and once he is near, reaches out a hand to grip at the base of Wei Ying’s chin.

“*You have been busy*,” he says, in a low guttural sound. “*Wei Ying*.”

By now Wei Ying has picked up on Lan Wangji’s favourite vocabulary to use on him; he’d memorised every word and recited them back to Lan Jingyi, who had to maintain a straight face as he translated every single one of them for Wei Ying’s knowledge.

He knows Lan Wangji likes to call him pretty. And beautiful, and sweet, and cute...

“I was waiting,” Wei Ying hums, with a twinkle in his eye that was never there before. *“For you.”*

“Hm,” Lan Wangji’s lips curl up into the faintest of smiles. *“Tonight you are bold, bolder than usual.”* He traces the curve of Wei Ying’s jaw, actively resisting the urge to break him. *“I feel you are up to something.”*

“What ever could I be up to,” Wei Ying asks, with big, guilt-free eyes. *“Hanguang-Jun?”*

The books have taught him well, alright.

“Haa,” Lan Wangji hisses, caught off-guard. It does things to him, being called by his title in bed. *“Do you not fear the things I can do to you? The things I will do to you? It seems you really wish for me to get worse.”*

Wei Ying only got half of that. His understanding of the dragon tongue has vastly improved from the very first night he began using it; but it’s not at the level where he can understand every word of his husband’s, especially when the man seems to be fond of using words that are particularly hard for Wei Ying to decipher. Sometimes the fox spirit thinks Lan Wangji does this on purpose—sometimes he thinks Lan Wangji *is* afraid of him knowing everything that passes through his lips.

Lan Wangji picks Wei Ying easily up from where he is sitting, carrying him into his arms. He drops the fox back onto the bed before them, and climbs right over him, anxious to get their night started. He has not spared Wei Ying even once since they got married, never missing a single night’s worth of... baby making, and a part of Wei Ying is starting to think this has gone far beyond fulfilling his duty to his clan, and simply that Lan Wangji has a voracious sexual appetite that is typical of the dragons.

Lan Wangji impatiently pushes up at Wei Ying’s robes, and slips his hands underneath to cop a feel of Wei Ying’s smooth thighs. His gaze does not tear away from the rosy buds peeking out on Wei Ying’s chest through the red see-through robes, and Wei Ying knows if he does not take action *now* all of his efforts from before will go to a complete waste.

“Wait,” Wei Ying rushes to stop him, placing a palm firmly against his husband’s bare chest. *“Wait, wait, wait.”*

“Hm,” Lan Wangji says. He is never happy when Wei Ying denies him in bed. His hands squeeze at the little fat around Wei Ying’s thighs, and he doesn’t let go, but he does pause, just as Wei Ying instructed.

He stares at Wei Ying, questioningly.

Wei Ying has recited this line before a mirror so many times, it’s impossible for him to fuck it up now. *“Tell me,”* Wei Ying says out, pleadingly. *“Tell me, why will you not kiss me?”*

Lan Wangji’s eyes dilate in surprise. He parts his lips to answer, then shuts it back close again. He does this once or twice, until he loosens his grip on Wei Ying completely.

It almost seems like he will not answer, until he does.

“Why do you want to know,” he asks, finally.

“If we are to make a family,” Wei Ying answers back, persistent. *“I think I am owed an answer.”*

Lan Wangji chews on his lip. It’s a compelling reason, and clearly one that Wei Ying had prepared beforehand.

He turns his head away, and finally speaks, in a voice so low Wei Ying has to strain his ears to hear it. *“I am afraid of what will happen if I do.”*

Wei Ying only understands ‘afraid’, but it’s enough for him to go on. *“Why,”* he asks. *“Why afraid?”*

“Oh, Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji swallows. *“I think I have been deeply cursed, and afflicted with great sickness from the very moment I first saw you.”*

He has lost Wei Ying.

“What... What are you saying?” Wei Ying asks. He’s always frustrated when Lan Wangji rambles on and uses words he has yet to learn.

“You are the first person I have ever loved so deeply,” Lan Wangji continues, without a care if Wei Ying is listening. In fact, it seems he’s even more *encouraged* now that he knows Wei Ying can no longer understand him. *“I think about you all the time when we are apart. I am still terrified of what will happen if I lean into it. Lean into everything. I know it is my duty to give my sect a child, and yet I no longer see it as duty. Now, I want us to have children so we have a legacy, a permanence of us, to leave behind in this world. Wei Ying, I have fallen so deeply in love with you, and if I feel the touch of your lips, I fear I may never leave for another war.”*

Wei Ying stares at him, with crystal clear eyes. *“You do this on purpose,”* Wei Ying laments. *“You know I can’t understand you, don’t you? But you always go on and on, even though I don’t. Why won’t you spare a thought for me?”*

“How can I be so sure you will not come to fear me should you know the way I feel about you,” Lan Wangji murmurs on, devastation trickling into his eyes. *“How can I be so sure you will not spurn me, and see me as sick.”*

“Hanguang-Jun,” Wei Ying moans, annoyed. *“Why does everyone say you’re quiet on the battlefield, and everywhere else, and yet you are always so talkative to me in bed? What do you have so much to say to me, every time?”*

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji finally says, his hot dragon breath airing on Wei Ying’s cheeks. *“I love you.”*

That, Wei Ying understands.

“You love me,” Wei Ying says. *“You love me, Hanguang-Jun?”*

“Yes,” Lan Wangji returns, helplessly. “Yes, yes, yes, I do.”

Dragon’s sickness, he remembers Lan Jingyi saying. *It’s in our very blood.*

Suddenly it all falls into place in his head, and Wei Ying can’t believe he had ever missed it. The answer had been right there, in front of him, all along.

Wei Ying knows what he must do.

“I,” Wei Ying’s heart pounds. “*I love you, too.*”

Lan Wangji’s eyes flare up with irresistible gold. He dare not believe his ears. He grabs hold of Wei Ying’s shoulders, and looks to him so solemnly, so seriously.

“*Do you, do you mean that, Wei Ying?*”

Wei Ying doesn’t understand that question, but he can take a guess.

“*I love you,*” Wei Ying repeats again, perfectly in dragon tongue.

Lan Jingyi’s training has not been for nothing.

Blink slower. Pout your lips, tighter. Look up to him from beneath your lashes. Slip your robes off your shoulder. Speak softer, blush harder. When he comes near, exude your scent. Let out your ears. Let him think he is in control; but know that you are the one who really is.

You are everything that you really need.

“*And I want you to kiss me,*” Wei Ying drawls out, his long red claws scraping up past the bare surface of the dragon prince’s chest. Whenever the man is pressed against him like this, he can see light scars lining the surface of his husband’s skin, so telling of the many fights and battles Lan Wangji must have gone through in his many years as a war general. There even lies the faint tattoo of a bright and burning sun at the forefront of where his heart sits, a story that Wei Ying will gather the courage to ask about one day. For now, his one red nail drags up Lan Wangji’s neck in a straight line, and hooks right over Lan Wangji’s slightly parted lips.

He flutters his silver eyes up in a slow blink. “*I really want you to kiss me so much, Hanguang-Jun.*”

It was said that, she could finish a man with nothing but her eyes.

Lan Wangji will never be able to look away again.

“Wei Ying?” Lan Wangji asks softly, dazed.

A fox spirit is not renowned for their many tales of seduction for nothing.

“Hanguang-Jun,” Wei Ying whines out, tipping his head just slightly up into the air. His one hand closes onto Lan Wangji’s jaw, and he pulls the dragon’s head downwards—nearer to

him—so their lips are only inches apart.

When Wei Ying speaks, it is dripping with purpose.

“I am yours, forever and ever,” Wei Ying whispers, softly. *“My dragon prince.”*

Their lips—almost touching. Wei Ying’s foxy, half-lidded eyes look up to him, his red nails pressing against the hard luminescent scales on Lan Wangji’s cheeks.

He gets what he wants.

Lan Wangji gives in.

He presses his lips against Wei Ying’s; and Wei Ying knows he has won. He will never be denied anything from this man, ever again.

It is Wei Ying’s first kiss. Wei Ying’s heart lunges as his husband’s tongue first slips in, and he turns absolutely giddy at the way Lan Wangji embraces him closer, extending dark dragon claws of his own to cup Wei Ying’s face gently, tenderly. The prince’s tongue is hot, so hot, and with every curl of his tongue Wei Ying feels like Lan Wangji will breathe fire into his mouth any moment now. Lan Wangji will set him ablaze. In a way, he already has.

Lan Wangji kisses him urgently and hastily, like he has never known anything else. He has never known self-restraint, not from the day he met Wei Ying. Wei Ying melts within his very hold. When steam leaves Lan Wangji’s mouth, and seeps in right past Wei Ying’s lips, Wei Ying is reminded so keenly of the sheer danger and power his husband holds.

Lan Wangji kisses him long and hard, without so much as a breather. When the heat gets too much, and Wei Ying almost feels like passing out from it all, his husband’s hands fall away from Wei Ying’s cheeks, and he is quickly shoving at the fox spirit’s chest, eager to push him into bed and have his way with him.

Not so fast.

“No,” Wei Ying says firmly, this time. When he pulls his mouth off Lan Wangji’s to speak, sparkling trails of saliva connect their bruised and battered lips. Lan Wangji... is definitely an overly zealous kisser. “No.”

“No?” Lan Wangji questions, rather unpleasantly again. As usual, he does not like it when Wei Ying denies him.

“No,” Wei Ying says. His hands drop to Lan Wangji’s shoulders, where he clenches onto him tightly. He catches the dragon by surprise, and uses it as an opportune moment to—in one swift motion—flip their positions. He pushes Lan Wangji back down onto the bed, straddling him.

“Stay.”

An order from the fox himself, and in dragon tongue, no less?

Lan Wangji can't help but follow his lead, in awe. Wei Ying sits atop of him with his two legs spread, trapping the war general securely under him.

They have not been too adventurous in bed, so far. Besides pinning Wei Ying down and fucking him from the back, *or* pinning Wei Ying into his embrace so he can fuck up into Wei Ying as he pleases, they have not tried any other positions in bed. Not like this.

Not where Wei Ying is in control.

"Lan Wangji," Wei Ying breathes out, as he lifts the hems of his red robes and hikes it up over his waist. His one other hand pulls down at the hem of his husband's pants, unveiling a quickly hardening cock in its entirety. The fox does not bother with preparation—they never have.

Wei Ying mounts Lan Wangji's hips and pushes himself up higher, such that his naked entrance is rubbing right against the side of his husband's rather large appendage. Lan Wangji can feel Wei Ying's hole has already begun leaking; already soaking wet and ready to be fucked.

A fox's body, or more importantly, *Wei Ying's*—so well-made for him.

"Wei Ying," Lan Wangji calls, attempting to push his own thighs up.

"*No, stay,*" Wei Ying commands again, louder this time. His red fox ears emerge from underneath his hair; the only thing that is telling of his embarrassment. The golden bangles and jewelry on his wrists chime as he adjusts himself atop his husband, lifting his hips ever so slightly. "*Let me serve you.*"

And who is Lan Wangji to deny him, when Wei Ying is trying so hard to please him?

Wei Ying positions himself right above Lan Wangji's cock, and with two trembling hands, grips at the base of it so he can guide it smoothly to his entrance. With a shivering breath, he sinks down onto Lan Wangji, his lips parting to let out the most obscene moan.

"Oh," Wei Ying's eyes are glassy, slinking shut. His two hands press at Lan Wangji's hard stomach, feeling up abdomen muscles that are so firm, so rigid. It takes him a full minute to get himself comfortable atop Lan Wangji, but Lan Wangji is so so patient, watching him intently with a dragon's unrelenting gaze. "Oh, Lan *Wangji*."

Lan Wangji takes one of his hands into his, and presses it to where his heart is.

Something has changed between them tonight.

"Zhan," he purrs, in a rare moment of vulnerability. "Lan Zhan."

Wei Ying's eyes are wide open. "Zhan?"

"Lan Zhan," Lan Wangji murmurs. He gestures to himself, with Wei Ying's hand still in his. "Lan Zhan. *Husband*."

His birth name. Wei Ying has never heard anyone referring to him as such, not even his own brother.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying whispers.

The locks wounded tightly around his husband’s heart—they shift in their gears, they unlock themselves one by one. Wei Ying can almost hear it in his ears.

I really did it.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji utters, so fondfully. He is happy to hear his name leave Wei Ying’s lips. “*You should know the weight of what you have done to me.*”

Wei Ying’s nails dig deeper into the prince’s abdomen, as he begins to move. He pulls himself up just slightly, and bites avidly down onto his lip as he feels Lan Wangji’s cock slowly drag out from within him. It’s hot, so hot, just like his tongue had been before; every single part of Lan Wangji is so warm to the touch, and threatens to burn him alive. Wei Ying succumbs completely to the fires of his pleasure just as Lan Wangji drowns in the seduction of his scent; a match-made in heaven, a well-mated pair.

Wei Ying rides the man experimentally, gyrating his hips in circular motions as best as he can. Lan Wangji’s cock slips out a bit each time, only to plunge back deeper into him with every firm grind Wei Ying delivers to his hips. The depth of it all sends Wei Ying keening, his fox ears folding uncontrollably into halves as he does his best to set a rhythmic pace in which he’s being fucked.

Wei Ying’s waist, so slender, so thin. When he rolls his hips, the robes hiked up around his waist shifts to reveal his flat belly, and the distinct bulge of Lan Wangji’s fat cock, sliding animatedly up into him. The bangles on his wrists—they jingle so loudly with every thrust. Sweat drips readily down the side of Wei Ying’s face, even sliding down the underside of his forearms.

Wei Ying is putting in much *work*.

Lan Wangji can only stand to watch this vulgar sight for only a minute more before he tries to take some action of his own. He soon lifts his upper body up and shifts himself into a sitting position, such that his arms are able to reach around the smaller man to embrace him more closely.

“Wei Ying,” he groans in a low voice, taking all of Wei Ying in. Wei Ying is a sight to behold, when he’s like this—sexy, confident, unbelievably risqué in the way he takes control and rides him like his life depends on it. His thumb grazes at Wei Ying’s flushed cheeks, gazing intently *and* hopelessly at the fox spirit that has bewitched his heart and soul, completely.

“Do you truly love me, just like you said before?”

Wei Ying hears the loud thrum of his husband’s frantic heartbeat, pressed chest to chest against him.

“Lan Zhan,” he answers back, with a tired, salacious smile. “*Of course I do.*”

He’s finally figured him out.

I have all that I need, right underneath my fingertips.

Chapter End Notes

FYI, I envision Lan Jingyi to look like [this](#).

I'm soooo happy there's interest in this story! ^^ I hope I will not disappoint you guys!!!
Let me know what you guys think of this chapter :D!!! (I told you the dubcon would ease off after chapter 1, LOL.)

Chapter 3

Just like that, Wei Ying gets everything that he asks for.

He'd thought his husband to be rigid, overly conservative in thought and so unnecessarily territorial; but Wei Ying now only has to call after him in a sickeningly sweet voice, "Lan Zhan..." and the man's immediately giving in, unable to resist the woeful plea of his mate. He wraps his arms around Lan Zhan's neck, tells him "*I love you*", and the poor man looks like he's about to hand the entire world over to him on a platter.

And so, after some coaxing and pouting (not to forget the otherworldly lovemaking!), Lan Wangji agrees to take Wei Ying along with him when he travels to the Outer Palace, so Wei Ying can finally meet Jiang Cheng.

Wei Ying rarely has the chance to leave his quarters in the first place, and so it is with wide and inquisitive eyes that he takes in all that he sees around him. His husband leads him down the many hallways of the palace, gripping Wei Ying's hand tightly into his as he does so, as if afraid Wei Ying will get lost should he let go for even a second. Though the place bustles with countless servants and handmaidens, they all part like the Red Sea the minute they lay eyes upon the royal pair. They are especially nervous and flighty at the sight of Lan Wangji, and Wei Ying wonders if it's fear or respect in their gaze when they scurry away, with their heads and dragon antlers bowed. Maybe it's both.

Eventually they arrive at the main doors of the Inner Palace, where two guards stand at attention and decide who enters, and who exits.

"Hanguang-Jun," they greet, in unison.

Lan Wangji tips his head just slightly in acknowledgement, but nothing more. He continues pulling Wei Ying along with him, though he pauses every now and then to warn Wei Ying to avoid the high ledges on the ground whenever they're about to cross one. "*Watch your step, Wei Ying,*" he would warn in dragon tongue, albeit in a tender voice. "*I would not want you to injure yourself.*" Sometimes, if he gets overly paranoid of Wei Ying tripping over his tiny feet, he hoists the fox by his small waist and carries him over particularly unmanageable ledges. It's all so very unnecessary, but Wei Ying only adores Lan Wangji all the more for it. His husband is so kind, and so ridiculously enamoured with him.

Lan Wangji would never let anything hurt him.

This time, as they pass through the main doors of the Outer Palace, Wei Ying begins to notice all the subtle differences, and how it compares to the Inner one. Of course, everything is still gold, always gold, from the tiles on the floors to every pillar around the corner; but the servants wear duller colours around here, and the decorations are much more inconspicuous. More groups of soldiers patrol the grounds in plain sight, mainly because the majority of Lan clan members who fight in the war are housed here. The ground is that much dirtier, the air that much dustier.

As Wei Ying descends onto the training grounds, dressed in lavender silk and smelling like an exceedingly fertile fox, his little feet barely able to keep up with his husband's big dragon steps; the attention he begins to attract from the many hot-blooded dragon warriors around here is... inevitable, to the say the least. None dare to look too closely, of course, not when the Second Prince is guarding him so closely and exuding the most threatening scent, particularly one that screams Wei Ying is already taken and his *mate*.

But Wei Ying's sudden appearance has already caused a shift in the pheromones clouding the air, a clear indication of what the sight of a beautiful fox can do to mere dragons. Before, the entire place smelled only of pungent sweat and overwhelming blood-thirst. Now, it seems a certain... desire has been added into the equation.

Lan Wangji is not happy to be scenting this in the air. He emits a low, territorial growl from the back of his throat, one that reverberates through the training grounds—and very quickly the soldiers begin to make themselves scarce.

What remains of the training grounds are small, concentrated groups of soldiers practicing their swordsmanship, and archery.

Wei Ying recognizes the one lone (purple!) Phoenix immediately, standing apart from the others with a bow and arrow in his hand. He tugs away from Lan Wangji's hand and picks up pace, eager to run over to his brother—but his husband pulls him back quickly into place.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji says, with a frown.

“It's Jiang Cheng!” Wei Ying whispers out, vibrating with excitement. “Can I go over to talk to him? Please? Lan Zhan? *Husband?*”

He's still not impressed by how easily Jiang Cheng captures Wei Ying's attention, or how unaware Wei Ying is of his surroundings when he gets into a frenzy, but Wei Ying's excitement is intoxicating, and Lan Wangji can no longer bring himself to deny Wei Ying—especially with that cute sparkle in his eye. He nods, and loosens his grasp on Wei Ying's hand.

“*Be careful,*” Lan Wangji says. “*I will keep watch from here.*”

“I will,” Wei Ying says. He's all smiles, taking a step forward, ready to leave. But then he seemingly remembers something last minute, and runs back to Lan Wangji's side, just so he can tip on his toes and press a warm, wet kiss to Lan Wangji's hard cheeks.

“*I love you so much,*” Wei Ying says. “Lan Zhan!”

Lan Wangji turns to look at him, completely stunned.

Wei Ying continues to test his limits everyday.

Wei Ying turns back to the front, and finally yells from afar, “A-Cheng!”

Jiang Cheng whips his head around in a heartbeat, lowering down the bow and arrow in his hands. The tension in his forehead and brows quickly melt away, and his pair of dark violet

eyes considerably lighten in colour.

“Wei Ying!”

A month of living with the Lans, training with the Lans, and feasting with the Lans, has clearly done him some favors. Jiang Cheng is back to looking healthily-flushed and fit, filling out the new purple robes that’d been gifted to him by the Lans very nicely. It appears he has adopted the ways of the clan rather well, too; his long hair has now been pleated into a thick braid behind him, giving him a much more rugged, menacing appearance that Jiang Cheng strangely... pulls off.

It has been so long since those tight lips pulled apart into a smile, but today Jiang Cheng makes an exception. For Wei Ying.

Wei Ying runs up to him, and without any reservations whatsoever, pulls his brother into the tightest hug. For the past month, he has only ever smelled dragons. Smelled *of* dragons. Breathing in and taking in Jiang Cheng’s scent right here, right now—he doesn’t only smell like a phoenix, he smells like home. Like the Jiangs. Like shijie, like Jiang shushu, like Jiang a-yi.

Wei Ying has come to like Lan Wangji a great deal, yes, but nothing will ever beat family, at its core.

“I missed you so, so much,” Wei Ying breathes out, rambling on. “I wanted to see you right after the wedding. But I couldn’t, not up till now. How have you been? Do they treat you well out here? Did they give you an army? All that you need for the war?”

Jiang Cheng allows himself to be clenched so tightly, he can hardly breathe. “I asked after you too, constantly. But the Lans follow very strict rules when it comes to the royals. How did you convince Lan Wangji to take you out here?”

“Well, he *is* my husband,” Wei Ying pulls his head back to answer—and very cheekily too, while he’s at it. He’s in extremely high spirits, now that he’s finally able to see his brother again. “As my husband, it is only right that he listens to me.”

Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes, and playfully taps at the fox’s head. “Silly boy,” he scolds. “You’ve clearly been very busy with whatever you’re up to at the Inner Palace. Tell me, has he been nice to you? Has he hurt you in any way?”

Wei Ying shakes his head. “No, no, no, Lan Zhan’s very nice to me. You never have to worry about me, alright? I’m a big boy, I’m the older one, I can handle myself. I’m more worried about you. You have a whole war to take on!”

“Wei Ying,” Jiang Cheng stops him short quickly—though his brows noticeably raise at the intimate ‘Lan Zhan’ that he hears. “If he has been hurting you in any way, you have to let me know. I can... I can always think of something else, for the war.”

Wei Ying parts his mouth in horror at the very idea. Even if Lan Wangji was truly a terror to deal with—which, luckily, he *isn’t*—Wei Ying would never go back on such a great deal

offered to them, by the Lans. “No, I’m really happy with him, I promise. Don’t worry about me! Besides, I heard from Lan Zhan that you guys have been doing a ton of planning for the war. Deciding on battle formations, and whatnot. I’m sure things are already in place for you, right?”

“Yes,” Jiang Cheng says, with sudden pridefulness. “I’ve been training closely with Lan Wangji in tow. I will be leading a formation of my own in the next battle. The soldiers under me are very respectful, even though I am not one of theirs. But it seems they trust their war general very much, and so whatever Lan Wangji tells them to do, they listen.”

Wei Ying’s heart flutters. It’s his very *husband* that Jiang Cheng speaks of. “Lan Zhan’s been good to you?”

“He’s surprisingly agreeable to my suggestions,” Jiang Cheng says. “Well, we *do* know more about the Wens than them, having fallen in their hands once.”

“That’s good to hear, A-Cheng,” Wei Ying’s hands palm up the sides of Jiang Cheng’s face, delighted to know his husband and brother are able to get on well. “I’m so glad you’re living well. I’ll try to come out here, to see you more often.”

“Please do,” Jiang Cheng smiles, wryly. “After all, we’ve just received word that the Wens will be advancing from Yunmeng. Lan Wangji has decided we’ll head off for battle in a week. I’m sure you’ve already heard about it from him. Even if all goes well, we won’t be back for months.”

Wei Ying blinks. He... hadn’t heard even a single word about this. Why had Lan Wangji kept this a secret from him?

“You’re heading off for battle,” his throat is suddenly so, so tight. “In a *week*?”

This means Lan Wangji will be leaving his side.

For *months*.

“Yes,” Jiang Cheng frowns. “Did... Did he not mention this to you?”

Wei Ying feels nauseous. All colour, drained all at once from his face. “No.”

He turns his head back to look at the dragon prince—only to find *two* of them huddled together, engaged in deep conversation. Now *that’s* another face Wei Ying hasn’t seen ever since the wedding. It appears Lan Xichen has also joined the training grounds, in search of his brother to speak to.

From afar, they almost look like carbon copies; except Wei Ying has grown too well-acquainted with his husband to ever mistake one for the other, anymore. Lan Xichen’s antlers are much paler than Lan Wangji’s in colour, and the robes he wears are significantly different from his brother’s. While Lan Wangji dresses in regal, fitting robes ready for battle, Lan Xichen wears longer, looser silk that trails to the floor behind him like a dragon’s tail. And

while the Second Prince commands the war front, the Crown Prince stays behind and manages the war from the palace with his prowess for politics and war strategy.

Lan Xichen meets Wei Ying's eyes from the distance, and nods to him in a friendly greeting. Wei Ying nods back, with a weak smile.

"I'm sure Lan Wangji meant to tell you soon enough," Jiang Cheng says, a hand patting lightly at Wei Ying's hair. He recognizes the unmistakable worry and uneasiness in his brother's eyes, and endeavours to make him feel better. "Don't worry about it, okay? We'll be fine."

"Is it a serious battle?" Wei Ying asks, dryly. The weight of his feelings for the dragon prince is only now sinking in. He is filled with nothing but dread—he does not want Lan Wangji to go.

Battle means bloodshed, and bloodshed means death.

If Lan Wangji were to ever meet his end...

"If all goes well, it will be a clean sweep," Jiang Cheng says. "Our plans are... very good."

That's not enough for Wei Ying.

"How good?" Wei Ying asks, softly. His hands—they've unconsciously moved down, to caress at his womb. He's not even sure if he's been successfully bred with a child.

And if he does, and the child's father dies in battle, then what will become of him? Wei Ying doesn't think he can handle raising a child alone. Even if he has the backing of the Lans, Wei Ying would be giving the child an incomplete family. He'd lost both his parents at a young age, and understands the abandonment one would feel at never knowing their birth parents. If he can so help it—he doesn't want the same thing for his child.

Even if he is not yet with child, he does not want Lan Wangji to be parted from him permanently, in any way. Wei Ying has grown to enjoy the company of his husband every night, and to think of losing that permanently upsets him a great deal, in many ways.

Oh no, Wei Ying thinks, his heart squeezing tight. *Is this love?*

"It will be fine, I promise," Jiang Cheng reassures, following Wei Ying's line of gaze down to his womb. "Are you..."

"No, no," Wei Ying shakes his head. "Not yet. I just, I'm just worried, that's all."

"I will look out for him," Jiang Cheng says, softly. "Are you worried about him? You have grown fond of him, fairly quickly. I'm... glad to see that, A-Ying."

It's not a nickname he uses on Wei Ying very often. Wei Ying knows Jiang Cheng's truly concerned about him.

“Um,” Wei Ying’s eyes flicker back up to meet his, slightly disoriented. “I just don’t want the both of you to go at the same time. The last time we fought in battle, we lost...” *Everyone else.*

He can’t lose his only remaining brother, and now, husband, too.

“It’s different, this time. The dragons have now joined the war, even though they’ve refrained in the past,” Jiang Cheng says. “This time, we have the sky on our side. The dragons have never lost a war.”

“I know,” Wei Ying’s eyes are glassy. Realistically, he knows the odds are in their favour, this time. It’s why the both of them had agreed almost immediately to an alliance with the Lans, when first proposed to. There was no denying it. Once you have the dragons on your side, you can conquer the world.

“Hey, it’ll be okay,” Jiang Cheng says, pulling Wei Ying back into a warm hug. This time, he’s the one that’s squeezing the fox spirit so tight, Wei Ying cannot breathe. He draws apart, and then offers up his bow and arrow to Wei Ying, a hearty smile on his face, hoping this will serve as good distraction for the fox. “Do you want to give it a go? Archery’s always been your forte.”

Wei Ying stares at the bow and arrow before him, slightly unsure. He raises his head back up to look over to his husband, but sees that Lan Wangji’s back is turned to him, still deeply engaged in discussion with his brother.

“I guess I can give it a go,” Wei Ying says.

He has sorely missed the feel of weapons in his hands. Their last battle at Yunmeng against the Wens, he had fought alongside the Jiangs with bow and arrows. When that had failed him, he’d drawn out the sword that hung at his hip, and cut down every man that came at him until his sister was slain right before his eyes. Jiang Cheng had held him back then from descending into homicidal madness, and losing himself completely to the Wens.

Instead, the last remaining Jiang heir had grabbed hold of his hand and pulled him away from the scene of the crime, and placed them both on a boat, just as his mother last instructed, before she’d perished within battle herself.

He’d saved both of their lives.

Wei Ying takes his position.

He lifts the bow high up, faces the target board, and squints as he draws the bow and arrow in his hands back into place. He inhales deeply, and very briefly envisions the face of Wen Chao at the centre of the board.

His hands are steady, calm. *Bloodthirsty.* Wei Ying’s been trained for this, his entire life.

He lets go, and fires his arrow.

“Wei Ying.”

Wei Ying doesn't need to look at the target to know he had hit it, dead centre.

He spins his head around, and answers the worried call of his husband, now standing behind him, "Lan Zhan?"

"*Dangerous*," Lan Wangji murmurs out, pulling Wei Ying hurriedly into his embrace. The prince lifts his eyes though, and looks at the target board. "*I did... hear you were a good archer.*"

"*The best*," Wei Ying happily answers. Jiang Cheng stands by the side, his eyes widening in surprise once he hears dragon tongue leaving Wei Ying's lips—in perfect intonation, no less! His brother has been busy at the Inner Palace, alright. "*I fought in the war, too, back at Yunmeng.*"

"*Dangerous*," Lan Wangji chides, clicking his tongue disapprovingly. His hand brushes through Wei Ying's hair, dusting it off. "*You will stay here from now on, where you will be safe for me, forever.*"

Wei Ying recalls Jiang Cheng's announcement from before, and paws unhappily at his husband's chest. "*Lan Zhan, I heard that you are leaving for war? In a week?*"

Lan Wangji tenses. He glances to Jiang Cheng, slightly irked that Wei Ying had to get to know this way. "*Mn. Jiang Wanyin informed you?*"

"Were you ever going to tell me?" Wei Ying immediately asks aloud. He's too upset to have to translate that into dragon tongue word for word. "A week is not very far away."

"You'll have to forgive my brother," Lan Xichen's voice looms from behind. He steps up into view, a sympathetic smile on his face. "He didn't know how to break the news to you."

"Crown prince," Wei Ying greets.

"Please, don't be so formal with me," Lan Xichen says. "It's good to see you, A-Ying."

Wei Ying might have spent the past month alone in his quarters, with only the company of Lan Jingyi and his handmaidens to tide him over (and of course, his husband, *at night*); but he knows while he'd been scheming to win his husband's favor, everyone else had been hard at work planning for the next battle. He's sure everyone else must have been in the know—with the exception of him. It appears even if you are a part of the royal family, if a certain matter does not concern your jurisdiction, you will still be the last to know of these things.

"*I heard from Wangji that things are going well in your marriage*," Lan Xichen utters, in his native speak. "*You have even picked up our tongue. I'm very impressed.*"

"*I worked hard*," Wei Ying says.

"*Wei Ying certainly has*," Lan Wangji praises, his arm wrapped around Wei Ying's waist. He kisses the top of Wei Ying's head, gently. "*When I am gone for battle, brother will be here to take good care of you.*"

Wei Ying is... noticeably much more crestfallen at confirmation of such news. "Will it be a tough fight?"

"It'll be fine," Jiang Cheng says again, relieved to finally be understanding some words of the conversation. The two dragon brothers look to him, and Jiang Cheng feels the need to explain, "Wei Ying's worried about the battle. Trust me, it'll be fine."

"I should be going with you," Wei Ying says.

"No," Lan Wangji puts an end to that line of thought. "*You will stay here, where you will be safe.*"

"Your brother and Wangji are good fighters," Lan Xichen says, smiling to him. "They can take good care of themselves. You still have a week left with them, and there's the pre-battle feast to look forward to."

"Feast?"

"The Lans hold a feast before every battle," Jiang Cheng explains. "It's supposed to boost morale."

"Wangji usually doesn't attend, but maybe you can convince him?" Lan Xichen says. He turns to his brother, and says, "*I'm sure Wei Ying will enjoy the festivities.*"

Lan Wangji deliberates over it. "*Only if Wei Ying wants.*"

"I want to see Jiang Cheng again," Wei Ying says cutely, tugging at Lan Wangji's sleeve. Lan Xichen and Jiang Cheng both have to hold in their laughter at the rapid blackening of Lan Wangji's face.

"*We will go,*" Lan Wangji sighs.

Not before casting Jiang Cheng the iciest look known to man, though.

The week passes in a blur. Wei Ying counts down the days till Lan Wangji is supposed to leave him, and is that much more pliant in bed, that much more affectionate, much more needy. When he kisses Lan Wangji, he thinks about it possibly being one of his last few kisses with the man, and grows that much more frantic, that much more urgent in movement.

Even Lan Wangji has noticed his anxiety. He calms the fox down everytime, soothing him with comforting rubs to the back.

"It will be a quick battle," Lan Wangji would say, kissing up Wei Ying's cheeks. *"I will return to you, the minute it is over. I will fly back to Cloud Recesses, first thing. No matter how tired I am."*

"You better," Wei Ying would mumble back.

Perhaps it is not a very good idea to be married to a war general. Would life be so much calmer if he had married the crown prince instead, Wei Ying thinks. But he lays his eyes on Lan Wangji, and thinks he couldn't ever have loved anyone else.

Lan Wangji takes Wei Ying to the pre-battle feast, as promised. It is very reminiscent of their wedding procession, only much milder. Held in the main dining hall, beautiful Lan clan members sit up front with their high cheekbones and long straight hair, dressed elegantly with gold headpieces adorning their antlers as they work away at their music instruments. Guqin and the flute come together in the background, as they bring to life energetic tunes meant to bring strength to the army.

The Lan elders congregate at the long front table, facing the rest of the room. The soldiers largely sit with their battalions, around tables that are brimming full with a delightful selection of extravagant foods, all sitting atop silverware that has been encased in pure, hard gold. When one plate runs out, a handmaiden is quickly walking over to replace it with another. It almost feels like there is no end to the feast—not with the ravenous appetite of fearsome, bloodthirsty dragons.

Wei Ying takes his place right next to Lan Wangji at the front table, where the Lan elders sit. Now that he has married into the royal family, he is one of theirs. His eyes roam around the room, wondering where Jiang Cheng is. He finds him at a table with what looks like the battalion he commands, full of smiles as he feasts upon the food and listens in on the animated conversations his men are having.

Jiang Cheng was never good with people, not even back in the Yunmeng Jiang sect, and often it was Wei Ying who had to smooth things over for him with the others. And so, Wei Ying's highly pleased to see that Jiang Cheng is getting along well with others, without his presence.

"He is good with the men," Lan Wangji hums, noticing Wei Ying's gaze. Spending night after night with the fox has led him to gain a good understanding and read of Wei Ying's every look, every emotion. *"Do not worry."*

"He didn't use to be like that," Wei Ying laughs, shortly. "For the longest period of time, only shijie and I understood him."

"I will look out for him," Lan Wangji says in understanding, a hand rubbing soothing circles to his back. *"During the war."*

"Thank you," Wei Ying says, doing his best not to let his anxiety get the best of him. "I can't lose him, too."

“Mn.”

The chatter at the front table is mundane, as compared to the exuberant laughter in the rest of the room. Wei Ying mostly listens in as the brothers speak to the elders, reassuring them of their eventual victory for the ongoing war. There is an uncle, in particular, Lan Qiren, that pays special attention to Lan Wangji. The brothers address him as shufu.

“Wangji, you will do us proud again, I know you will,” he says. *“If something goes wrong, I want you home.”*

“It will go well,” Lan Wangji merely answers in response.

“The elders have also been wondering,” Lan Qiren glances not so surreptitiously at Wei Ying. *“About the prophecy.”*

Right away, Wei Ying feels sick to the gut. He does his best not to let it show, though, and puts a brave face on as he nibbles away at his food, trying to focus his eyes ahead, straight onto Jiang Cheng instead.

“It is in progress,” Lan Wangji says. *“The elders do not have to worry.”*

“The faster the fox is with child, the sooner they will stop talking,” Lan Qiren offers, helpfully.

“Shufu, rest assured we are trying every night,” Lan Wangji gazes dead-on into his uncle’s eyes as he speaks. *“I expect Wei Ying to be with child very soon.”*

Wei Ying is practically steaming from his ears from embarrassment. How did—how did Lan Zhan just say that with a straight face?!

“I see. Foxes are very fertile, so it should be as you say.”

“Yes, I will see to it. Do not worry, shufu.”

“You never disappoint, Wangji. You are the pride of our clan.”

“Thank you, shufu.”

Just before he takes his leave from the feast, Lan Qiren nods down to Wei Ying in greeting, to which Wei Ying scrambles to nod back as respectfully as he can, trying to pretend he hadn’t *just* heard the elderly dragon discuss his fertility right in front of his face.

“I hope Cloud Recesses has been to your liking,” Lan Qiren says.

“It h...has,” Wei Ying hiccups. *“I’ve felt very welcomed here. I’ve enjoyed spending the bulk of my time, too, with one of your disciples... Jingyi?”*

“Jingyi,” Lan Qiren frowns. Wei Ying has to suppress his smile at the obvious disdain he sees. He’ll have to ask Lan Jingyi about it later. *“Yes, he is an... exceptional disciple.”*

“My days are very lively with him,” Wei Ying says.

“Yes, of course, I can imagine,” Lan Qiren agrees. Then he drops his friendly demeanour, and launches into a much more serious tone of voice, one that he’d used with his very nephew himself. “Wei... Ying, I trust you understand your duties to this clan.”

“I do,” Wei Ying says. He knows Lan Qiren is not being prejudiced against him; he’d spoken to Lan Wangji about the same thing, just moments before. “I’m doing my best.”

“Good,” he says. “We are all waiting for the good news.”

After he has left, Lan Wangji is wiping at his mouth with a napkin and placing his free hand onto Wei Ying’s lap. “*Say your last goodbyes to Jiang Wanyin. I wish to have an early night with you.*”

“Okay,” Wei Ying answers.

Whatever his husband says, he listens.

Wei Ying kneels in bed right next to his husband with a wet cloth in his hand. He dabs at Lan Wangji’s forehead, then down his neck, and finally cleaning the rest of his arms. He pays special attention to the battle scars that litter his husband’s skin, wondering if his husband will come back with more.

“Be careful out there,” Wei Ying says, reluctant to let him go. “I don’t want to be a widower.”

Lan Wangji stifles his smile. “*Do you think that little of me? I will not die.*”

“I know,” Wei Ying frowns. “But if I was out there with you, I could protect you.”

Lan Wangji doesn’t hold in the low chuckles that escape his throat, this time. “*Pretty fox,*” Lan Wangji coos. “*Do you think me so incapable of war? I am a war general.*”

“You’re cocky,” Wei Ying glares. “That’s what you are, Hanguang-Jun. Don’t you know you shouldn’t get so cocky about war? It’s not a game.”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji hums, both hands reaching to cup at his cheeks. Then he vows, with utmost seriousness in his eyes, “Will not die.”

Lan Wangji so rarely speaks in the common tongue, out of understandable unfamiliarity, that whenever he does—Wei Ying gets goosebumps.

“I’ll miss you,” Wei Ying murmurs, with sad eyes. “You’ll miss me, too, right?”

Lan Wangji’s heart skips a beat. He nods, his golden eyes dilating with love. *“I will miss Wei Ying with the force of a thousand suns.”*

“Do princes take bed warmers when they are outside making camp for months, during a war?” Wei Ying asks, somewhat bitterly. “Even if you are lonely, no husband of mine is allowed to do so.”

Lan Wangji smiles. *“If it is not Wei Ying, I have no desire for a... bed warmer.”*

“Good,” Wei Ying says, crossed. “If you get someone else pregnant, I’m never letting you touch me again. Say goodbye to your prophecy, because I’m never having your baby.”

The dragon prince chuckles again. He gazes to him, a tender look on his face.

“You are not a duty.”

“What?”

“I love you very much,” Lan Wangji says. *“I know you heard what shufu said. But Wei Ying is not just a duty or prophecy to me.”*

“I,” Wei Ying’s heartbeat quickens. He answers softly, “I know.”

He’s very well-aware of his husband’s deep-seated affections for him.

“Good,” Lan Wangji says. He leans over to kiss at Wei Ying’s forehead. *“I only wish for Wei Ying to have my baby.”*

“Then,” Wei Ying averts his gaze, embarrassed. “Then maybe we should try one more time, before you leave for the war.”

Lan Wangji’s eyes enlarge, stunned. He hadn’t expected such boldness from Wei Ying, but the fox continues to surprise him everyday.

“Ten.”

“Ah?”

“Not one,” Lan Wangji purrs, taking Wei Ying’s wrists into his hands and swiftly flipping him into position underneath him. *“But ten.”*

“That is impossible, Hanguang-J—!”

But he’s quickly silenced with a soft kiss to the lips, and he forgets everything else.

Wei Ying is woken up by some intense licking of his cheeks.

“...Zhan,” Wei Ying whines out, swatting his husband’s face away. “Lan Zhan, you’re energetic this morning.”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji kisses him so sweetly on his face, and excitedly says, “Wei Ying, *your tails are out.*”

“My what,” Wei Ying strains his eyes open.

“*Tails,*” Lan Wangji says, hands drifting down to pull at the tip of one. “*All nine of them. They’re out. It’s so cute.*”

Huh? Wei Ying snaps his eyes wide open—he’s usually so careful to keep them hidden and out of sight. He strains his head to the back, and sees that his husband is indeed telling the truth; all nine of his very plush, very furry tails are out in the open, each taking on a life of their own, twitching and dancing into the air. It’s for good reason that Wei Ying usually hides them; they’re huge, of considerable size, and threaten to envelop his small body out of existence when out. They’re meant to protect him when in the wild, but otherwise they’re inconvenient in dresses and robes and Wei Ying hides them for simplicity.

It seems his husband is rather taken with them, though. He very experimentally—and *very* unapologetically—pulls and tugs at every tail, even licking and biting and teething at the fur at times so he can have a taste. He is completely enamoured with the sight, unable to keep his hands off them.

Wei Ying has to bite back on his moans. He’s so terribly sensitive *there*.

“*Why have you never shown me your tails,*” Lan Wangji says, cupping a fistful of fur. “*They’re perfect.*”

“Stop pulling,” Wei Ying whines, though he’s cosying further up into his husband’s embrace. “They come out when I’m tired.”

“*Did I wear Wei Ying out too much last night,*” Lan Wangji teases, kissing the soft fur. “*There is no need to hide them, I like them.*”

“Hanguang-Jun, don’t you need to get ready to leave? You can’t spend the whole morning in bed pulling at my tail like this,” Wei Ying chastises.

“Wei Ying has to get ready too,” Lan Wangji purrs, from the back of his throat. *“To see his husband off.”*

“I’m going to,” Wei Ying moans, getting up from beneath the sheets. He pushes at Lan Wangji’s chest briefly, pulling himself out of bed so he can get to the door and let his handmaidens in.

A wave of dizziness assails him, and he’s quickly falling back into Lan Wangji’s arms—rather conveniently, thankfully—instead of making it out of bed.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji hurriedly supports him. *“Do your legs still hurt?”*

He’s well-aware of his tendency to go overboard during their nighttime activities.

“No, it’s,” Wei Ying clutches at his stomach. He feels sick, like food from last night’s banquet is about to come up. “It’s nothing.”

“Wei Ying, *you are pale,*” Lan Wangji presses a hand to his forehead. The fox has begun uncharacteristically sweating. *“I will get the physician.”*

“What’s that,” Wei Ying asks, unfamiliar with the word. “Jingyi must be just outside the door, he can get me some herbs and medicine.”

Lan Wangji turns to the entrance of the chamber and loudly barks, “Lan Jingyi!”

The disciple hurries in the same time Wei Ying doubles over in Lan Wangji’s embrace and retches pure black liquid onto the floor—a sight that sends both dragons widening their eyes in fear.

“Furen!” Lan Jingyi yells, kneeling by the bed. “Is that blood? Furen, are you ill? Hanguang-Jun, *what has happened?*”

“Get the physician immediately,” Lan Wangji instructs, fearfully. *“Inform Zewu-Jun my departure will have to be delayed because of this.”*

“Don’t,” Wei Ying wipes at his mouth, shaking uncontrollably in Lan Wangji’s hold. He’s cold. “Jingyi, is he asking you to inform the crown prince to delay his departure? Don’t delay your battle plans because of me.”

“I am not leaving you alone,” Lan Wangji insists, furious. He raises his gaze to Lan Jingyi, this time much more fiercely than before. *“Lan Jingyi. What are you still doing here.”*

Wei Ying doesn’t have the capacity to argue, because in the next second he’s leaning his head over again and hurling another pool of black vomit to the ground.

Wei Ying must have somehow passed out in Lan Wangji's arms, because when he comes to, he's lying on his back in bed, warmly tucked in. A wet towel is now on his forehead, drenched with herbs and essences, accompanied by his husband's familiar, comforting touch. Wei Ying stirs awake to the sight of the royal Lan family surrounding him—Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren are here, alongside Lan Jingyi and his handmaidens, and even Jiang Cheng has been called in. An elderly man lingers before his bedside, holding his extended hand into his and feeling for the beat of his pulse. This must be the physician, he thinks.

"A-Cheng," Wei Ying first calls for his brother, his vision still dazed. "Why are you here...?"

This is still the Inner Palace, so Jiang Cheng would not have been let in without explicit permission given by the royal family. If Lan Wangji had allowed him to do so, he must have thought Wei Ying was in grave danger...

"Wei Ying, you will be the death of *me*," Jiang Cheng howls, agitated. "What happened to you? Didn't you say you were being well taken care of here?"

"The Second Prince's consort will be fine," the physician says. "There are no ill-effects to his body."

"But the blood!" Lan Jingyi yells stubbornly, only trailing off meekly when he feels Lan Qiren's heated gaze on him. "That has never happened to furen before..."

"Is he," Lan Xichen pipes up, asking the one question that truly matters. "Is the fox spirit with child?"

"If he is, I cannot confirm it," the physician explains. "Regrettably, I have not dealt much with fox spirits. However, I can detect the presence of dark *qi* taking root in his body. While this is usually harmful to the host, there seems to be no ill-effects besides the nausea and loss of energy."

"So there is a chance," Lan Xichen says. "You are saying there is a chance."

Lan Wangji holds his breath. "*Could this be a curse*," he asks.

"I cannot be sure," the physician says. "We will need to monitor him longer and see if ill-effects will begin to arise from his condition."

"This could still be harmful," Jiang Cheng aggravatedly says. "And Wei Ying already looks so pale from it. Is there a chance your *beloved* hundred year old prophecy will kill my brother?"

"I'm not going to die, A-Cheng," Wei Ying groans, saying. "The physician has already said he can't confirm the cause."

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji’s voice softens, rather regretfully. *“If this is because of our child...”*

“We don’t know,” Wei Ying raises his eyes to look at him, assuringly. “We don’t know anything yet, so we can’t speculate, Lan Zhan.”

“Is there a reason your tails are out?” Jiang Cheng asks, grumpily.

“The fox has suffered a sudden loss of energy,” the physician says. “Maintaining and keeping up appearances will be harder for him.”

Lan Wangji’s heart shatters.

“*Wangji*,” Lan Xichen’s quick to detect his younger brother’s sour mood—as if he knows what his brother is already contemplating to do, from the look on his face. *“There is still a war that needs to be won.”*

“I have not said anything.”

“A-Ying will be safe with me in the palace with me. I will keep watch over him.”

“*Wangji*,” even his uncle has joined in. *“Your brother and I will be here, and even... even Jingyi.”*

Lan Jingyi perks up at that, and pumps a fist up into the air. *“Hanguang-Jun! I will watch over furen to the best of my ability, and make sure you have nothing to worry about!”*

They are worried, Wei Ying realises. They are worried and anxious about my husband’s decisions, as if once Lan Zhan sets his mind on something, he will not budge.

They are worried Lan Zhan will forsake the war because of me.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying whispers, reaching to grasp at his hand. *“Are you worried about me?”*

“Mn,” Lan Wangji says. He interlocks their fingers together, unwilling to let go.

“There are innocents out there that need your saving,” Wei Ying says, smiling up to him.

“You promised me you’d take good care of Jiang Cheng, remember?”

“I don’t need *anyone* to take care of me—”

“Please, take good care of my brother for me,” Wei Ying murmurs softly, ignoring a yapping Jiang Cheng in the background. “And win the war, alright? And come back to me.”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji says, a pained look in his eyes.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying has to be the brave one here. “I’ll be waiting for you.”

Only Wei Ying has the power to convince him to do things he doesn’t want to do.

They finally depart in the afternoon, only three hours behind schedule.

Two months pass in the blink of an eye, without any further incident.

Wei Ying still gets the occasional nausea, but as the physician predicted, not much else happens to him. Although he's been mandated to stay in bed much more now for his well-being (and to take adequate rest; there have been many a time where his nine tails sprouted of their own accord in the middle of a stroll around the Inner Palace, surprising many), it really isn't that much different from his previous routine anyway, and he continues to spend day after day with Lan Jingyi. There certainly is never a dull day with that teenage dragon, and Wei Ying delights plenty in his company.

Messengers frequently travel back and forth from the battle grounds to the palace, informing them of the smoothness of the war. It seems everything is going as planned, and that Lan Wangji is on track to leading them to victory, and securing yet another stronghold of the Wens' territory.

That is, until Lan Jingyi comes tumbling into Wei Ying's bedchambers one bright and early morning, panting and completely out of breath, holding a long scroll in hand.

"Hanguang-Jun wrote back," he chokes out, fear in his voice. "Jiang Wanyin has been gravely injured in a surprise ambush, and they need reinforcements. Hanguang-Jun has requested for my aid at the battlegrounds."

And everything comes crashing down on him.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

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

Lan Jingyi leaves the very next morning, with a battalion of men. Wei Ying sees him off at the gates of Cloud Recesses, his figure completely dwarfed by the humongous dragon Lan Jingyi rides.

Wei Ying is on his toes when he presses three jade tassels into Lan Jingyi's palm, speaking to him with puffs of white smoke leaving his lips, "Jingyi, the journey down will be cold. Take good care of yourself."

"Furen," Lan Jingyi bites his lip, overwhelmed with emotion. He closes his fist, gripping the three jade tassels close—one for Jiang Cheng, one for Lan Wangji, and the last for him—knowing Wei Ying had laboured the night before to craft each one of them, painstakingly, wanting to gift them for good luck. "I won't be by your side, so you'll have to take good care of yourself."

"I still have the others," Wei Ying says, in a gentle stance. He smiles reassuringly up to the young boy, and caresses his hand. "Come back to me safely, alright?"

Lan Jingyi turns his head away, if only so he can hide the fact that he's on the brink of tears. "I will come back for furen, I promise."

Silly boy, Wei Ying thinks. So young, so innocent, and already embroiled in such a harsh war.

Wei Ying hopes he will be alright.

Lan Jingyi barks the harsh command to leave, and the group of them take off into the air with their dragons, looking as majestic as the first time Wei Ying remembers ever seeing them.

Within an incense stick of time, they're gone. Wei Ying is left behind at the gates, half his body hidden by the clouds. He lifts his robes as he walks, his bare feet stepping onto gold tile after gold tile. Flanked by royal bodyguards, Wei Ying begins the long walk home.

His days in the palace are dreary without Lan Jingyi. It had been bad enough without his husband, but now without Lan Jingyi as well, Wei Ying feels completely alone. The handmaidens that accompany him are not as talkative and bold as the teenage dragon; and without royal blood in their veins, they place much—respectful—distance between them and the Second Prince's consort. There is no playful banter or cheery laughter to greet him during the day anymore. Wei Ying spends most of his time now staring into the mirror as they comb at his hair, wondering what exactly his worth is when everyone he knows and loves are fighting a Great War outside, and he is to be sheltered within the walls of a gated sanctuary like a defenseless *pup* who is only good for looking pretty.

But before this, he thinks. Before I became a fox bride, before I became a prophecy, before I became a dragon's hoarded *treasure*; I was a great warrior of my clan, too. I trained well and hard under the Jiangs, and gave my blood, sweat and tears to fighting for them, until my hands went numb and my knees went weak and I couldn't feel my legs anymore. I could go out there, and fight alongside all of you, and protect everyone I hold so dear, if only you would let me—

—but fate has designated me to sit before this vanity mirror, with golden hairpins in my hair, wondering instead what will be the fate of everyone whom I know and love.

They covet me for my womb, my body, my beauty, my bloodline. And as Wei Ying raises a shaky hand up to cup at his wet, powdered cheeks, he thinks, *and power that runs through my veins. I am their one and only.*

“*Are you hungry, furen,*” one of the handmaidens kneeling by his side speaks. Unlike Jingyi, they remain much more comfortable conversing with Wei Ying in dragon tongue—in much more heavily accented tones that are still difficult to understand at times. Jingyi had explained to him once that amongst the clan here there are still various tribes, and amongst these tribes they still speak multiple variations of the dragon tongue. Non-royalty hail from a number of places, and so Wei Ying learns to be more understanding of that fact.

“I can eat,” Wei Ying says. Without Jingyi around, all he does is eat and sleep, or read and write or play the guqin whimsically to entertain himself. He doesn't know how long he'll be able to continue living like this—certainly not for another two or three months, which is the amount of time he can expect them to return by. He is already losing his mind, and it has barely been two weeks since Jingyi last left.

Wei Ying's already slipping into some sort of slump. He's not going to make it, he knows this for sure.

The two handmaidens that he has excuse themselves to the kitchen, leaving Wei Ying to ruminate in his chair alone. He spends a good few minutes tugging at the hairpins in his hair, wondering why he's even been made up so nicely when there is no one left in this palace he has to look good for. Even if he had to keep up appearances, he hardly meets anyone else in this palace. He is not married to the crown prince, and so he is in not in a political position where upon he *needs* to greet visitors to Cloud Recesses or partake in court affairs. No, Wei Ying does not need to undertake such burden, being married to the Second Prince—for better or for worse.

The handmaidens return with a tray of food, consisting of a soup and a light meal. Wei Ying's appetite has been growing from bad to worse in his loneliness, and the handmaidens have done their best to accommodate this fact.

"Your meal, furen," they greet with their heads bowed, placing the food onto a table. *"We will leave you to it."*

"Thank you," Wei Ying says. He removes himself from the chair and kneels to the mat, feeling his stomach churn at the sight of another lonely meal. The waves of nausea have been back in full-force, and he's sure most of today's meal will remain largely untouched, once again.

As the handmaidens leave out the door, Wei Ying takes his first spoonful of soup, and actively curbs the urge to retch it all back up. He raises a shaky hand up to clasp lightly at his throat, trying to soothe himself into swallowing it down. I have to eat, he thinks. I have to eat, because Lan Zhan will get worried about me if he knows I'm not, and so will Jiang Cheng, and even Jingyi... and I *promised* them I would be fine. They are fighting a Great War out there, and the least I can do for them is take care of myself. So I have to eat.

With unsteady hands, he picks up the spoon once more, and tries to digest another round of soup. Except this time he *actually* feels it coming back up his throat, and has to grab for a handkerchief placed conveniently on the side as he coughs his food out.

Black spots of bile stain the cloth, leaving Wei Ying's stomach further convulsing with dread at the sight. It's back, and it seems so much worse.

Perhaps there is some medicine he can ask for, from the kitchen. He pulls himself back up onto his feet, and hurries to the door, knowing his handmaidens hadn't left too long ago and must still be nearby. His fingers grip at the latch of the door, and he's almost pulling it open when he hears—

"...do...think...fox...pregnant?"

The handmaidens are indeed still outside, and have slipped back into their native dialect of the dragon tongue to speak with each other.

Wei Ying can only make out a few words, here and there.

"...even if...pregnant...food...kill..."

Wei Ying's heart completely deadens in his chest. Even with his basic comprehension, he's able to easily discern what they might be insinuating.

No, no, perhaps he'd simply recognized the wrong word. There is still so much vocabulary in the dragon tongue that he has yet to learn after all, and—

"...make Wens...happy...kill...baby..."

They're poisoning him.

They're poisoning him, *for sure*.

Wei Ying feels another round of bile coming up.

He's been eating their food for weeks.

Wei Ying knows he hasn't misheard a single thing now. He would recognize the vile Wen name anywhere. There is already the matter of his nausea to contend with—but to serve him poison? In his food? How long had they been doing this? And why were they working for the Wens? Why would *any* dragon possibly entertain an alliance with the very enemy their clan was fighting against?

Had they only started doing so right after Jingyi left, or had they been doing as such from even when the boy was still around? Wei Ying had never accompanied them to the kitchen before, he wouldn't know. Even then, he wouldn't be surprised if this matter slipped right past Jingyi's eyes. The poor boy was always spending every second of his time with Wei Ying, and standing guard 24/7 by him. Wei Ying really couldn't blame him for not realising the very handmaidens he worked with were actually trying to poison the royal consort they worked for.

And they'd mentioned 'pregnant' and 'baby' enough for Wei Ying to know the poison had to either do with his death, or to ensure the baby's death, at the very least. His pregnancy may not be confirmed yet, what with the physician reluctant to do so until he could verify such an important announcement with much more certainty, but Wei Ying knows that rumours have already begun circulating around the sect ever since he first hurled black bile back right here in Lan Wangji's bed chambers. Most around here already think him to be pregnant, and suffering from the unfortunate side-effects of cross-species breeding—much less fulfilling the hundred year old prophecy that's been hanging over his head.

Wei Ying tries not to think about it; tries not to think he is already with child, because he cannot afford to have his hopes up in fear of having them crash down should it turn out to be a simple illness of some sort. But people will still talk, and he knows what people have begun to think.

He just hadn't expected there to be people violently against it as well—to the point of wanting him, or his baby dead, because of it. But for what? Wei Ying can't come up with a good reason why. Out of jealousy? Fear? Envy? Hatred? Or were they really working with the Wens? What could the Wens offer them that they didn't already have at Cloud Recesses? Everyone lived magnificent lives here; everything he touched around here was made out of pure, hard gold!

This... wasn't good. No, this wasn't good at all. Without Lan Jingyi around, there is no one left he can trust to have his best interests at heart. He doesn't know exactly how many people around the palace have fallen to the Wens, and he can't trust that it is only his two handmaidens that have it out for him around here.

Wei Ying loosens his grasp on the door, his hands falling to his sides instead.

He's lonely in this palace. He's so terribly lonely.

He no longer eats any food that his handmaidens serve him, preferring to discard them out the window when they're not watching.

Wei Ying starts to wander around the palace during the daytime, because he can no longer stand to stay in a room with two handmaidens that he knows are scheming for his death. If the poison proves not to work in the long-term, he can't be too sure they won't have back-up plans, and try something else more direct in nature.

Without his husband or Lan Jingyi around, there are no more watchful eyes on him, and he no longer needs explicit permission to move about the palace. He still catches plenty of attention from the servants that bustle around the busy Inner Palace, but most simply greet him with reverence and quickly go on their way.

It is only by sheer luck one day that he passes by the imperial garden and sees a face—so familiar, but also *not quite*—that he hasn't seen in a full month, standing around in long cerulean blue robes, conversing with what must be a court official of sorts.

“Crown prince,” Wei Ying cries out in relief at the sight. Lan Xichen doesn't hear him right away, and so he raises his voice a little louder, “Crown prince!”

Lan Xichen lifts his gaze, sees who it is, and with the quick wave of a hand, immediately dismisses the court official he's speaking to. He turns to face Wei Ying, his lips pulling open into a wide smile.

“A-Ying,” he calls rather affectionately, beckoning Wei Ying closer.

Wei Ying scampers over, doing his best not to trip over his robes in his excitement. He stops short right before Lan Xichen, grateful to finally be in the company of someone he at least *knows* harbours no ill-bearings for him in this place. Well, at least he expects him not to. Lan Wangji is his husband, and is the crown prince's beloved younger brother. Wei Ying hopes by extension, he is favoured by the crown prince, too.

“It has been awhile, I must apologize,” Lan Xichen barely holds back his smile, his interest piqued by the sheer enthusiasm that greets him. “Matters of the ongoing war have been very... pressing. I promise, I was definitely planning to pay you a visit soon.”

“It's fine,” Wei Ying says, holding back tears. “I, I'm just happy to see you again.”

Even if Lan Xichen is not his husband, they look similar enough that Wei Ying still takes comfort in the sight of him. There has always been something so calming about the crown prince's demeanor.

Lan Xichen gazes at him with a curious look, taking in all of him. That friendly smile on his face quickly turns into a frown. "You have gotten much thinner," he observes, his antlers twitching in worry. "Since I last saw you."

Of course he has—Wei Ying's hardly eaten since then, only daring to eat the few pieces of bread he sneaks out of the kitchen that he *knows* hasn't been tampered with.

"Is it the nausea, still?" Lan Xichen asks.

Wei Ying knows no other way to answer this. "A little," he says, softly.

"I'll get us some tea and snacks," he says, snapping his fingers to call for a servant over. "Are you hungry?"

Wei Ying parts his lips, ready to protest, but then thinks that he can at *least* trust Lan Xichen's own entourage not to slip poison into the crown prince's food.

"Very."

Lan Xichen has no idea how much.

Wei Ying scarfs down the biscuits in his hand, ignoring the odd looks sent his way by Lan Xichen.

"Have you not had your afternoon meal?" Lan Xichen asks, concerned.

"I," Wei Ying averts his gaze, wondering how he should address this. There are many ears around, and many servants in attendance around them in this imperial garden, this open space that they sit in. He does not trust that there won't be a worse assassination attempt should he freely reveal he's aware of the fact that he's being poisoned in these parts. The very fact that there are people working for the Wens within the very Inner Palace already has him wary about how deep they've dug their claws into the dragon Lan sect.

And so, Wei Ying chooses to lie.

“I eat better with company,” Wei Ying murmurs, playing up the heartache in his eyes, folding his fox ears closer to his hair. He doesn’t need to, really; the loneliness of his days in the Palace have truly been getting to him. “Ever since Lan Zhan and Jingyi left, it’s been...”

“Difficult?” A look of understanding comes over Lan Xichen’s face. “I can imagine. I apologise, I should have been more perceptive of this, and paid you a much earlier visit.”

“It’s not your fault, crown prince,” Wei Ying says. “I know you’re incredibly busy.”

“I should have done better, I promised Wangji I would look out for you,” Lan Xichen counters, looking slightly upset with himself. “Also, you need not be so formal with me. It’s fine to call me Lan Huan.”

Wei Ying’s eyes bulge. That’s way too familiar than he’s comfortable with. “I, I’ll call you Xichen-ge, if you’re alright with that,” he whispers.

“I would like that,” Lan Xichen smiles, gently. “A-Ying.”

There is something to be said about how the crown prince has afforded himself the liberty of calling after Wei Ying so intimately, without prior permission from the fox.

“If you find it difficult to eat without company,” Lan Xichen offers. “And if you do not mind my company, I can set aside time to have my afternoon meals with you, starting from today.”

Wei Ying is in stupefaction. It’s a very generous offer, and one that he can’t believe would be readily made to him. “In... in um, this garden?”

“I like the view here,” Lan Xichen smiles. “Do you?”

Wei Ying would be an idiot to refuse. The servants may poison his food, but they will not dare to do so if the crown prince is in the mix. They may abhor him, as an outsider—but Lan Xichen is one of *theirs*. From what he can tell, the Lans are highly respected and beloved by the rest of their clan.

“I cannot let you go hungry,” Lan Xichen frowns, when he realises Wei Ying has still not yet answered. “Of course, I understand if you’d prefer—”

“The garden is great,” Wei Ying breathes out, smiling up to him. This time, it’s genuine, it’s purely him being beyond thankful that Lan Xichen is thinking for him, above all else. Even if his handmaidens against him, if their future king is on his side, Wei Ying has nothing to fear.

“I would love to have your company, Xichen-ge. Just so my meals are a little less lonely, from now on.”

Lan Xichen’s eyes—hazel, and in dragon-like slits—ignite with interest.

Then, in a flash, it is gone, like it was never supposed to be there.

“I’ll call on the servants to get us more food,” Lan Xichen returns to his award-winning smile. “So A-Ying can eat to his heart’s content.”

Wei Ying's heart is warm. "I'm almost full..."

"If you cannot finish the rest, I'll have it sent to your room," Lan Xichen says. "I write regularly to Wangji about the war, and will have to answer to him if he knows his consort has not been living well, back here."

"Has he been asking about me again?" Wei Ying asks, heart galloping at the thought. He misses his husband, truly.

"Always," Lan Xichen utters.

Lan Xichen makes good on his promise.

"Things were going well until the letter came from Wangji requesting for Lan Jingyi's aid," Lan Xichen explains, during one of their afternoon meals in the garden together. "Lan Jingyi should have reached them by now, so I am just waiting for more news."

"Lan Zhan must trust Jingyi a lot to ask for him, personally," Wei Ying says, cupping hot tea to himself. "Did he... did he mention the extent of Jiang Cheng's injuries?"

"No, he kept it rather vague," Lan Xichen answers, rather apologetically. "I am guessing so as not to worry you. I know it must be difficult to sit here and wait."

"It's fine," Wei Ying puts a brave face on. "I have faith in Lan Zhan. And Jingyi. Lan Zhan promised me he would look out for A-Cheng, so I... I trust him. I just, I try not to think about it."

"I understand," Lan Xichen manages a small smile. "I feel the same each time I send Wangji out for war. Uncle has faith in him, but I worry, everytime."

"Lan Zhan will be okay," Wei Ying forces out a smile of his own. "He said he would come back to me."

Lan Xichen glances to him, pleasantly surprised. He hides his smile behind a cup of tea of his own, "I have to say, you are certainly not what I expected, when Wangji's marriage was being arranged."

"Oh," Wei Ying looks up to him. "What were you expecting?"

Lan Xichen pauses. "I am not sure," he admits. "But fox spirits have been hunted into extinction, and the Jiangs have always hidden you from the prying eye of outsiders. Until the

Wens attacked, we heard close to nothing about the fox spirit they'd come to shelter."

It's true—Jiang Fengmian was well-aware of the dangers and reputation that came with sheltering fox spirits, and always kept Wei Ying close, on Yunmeng Jiang sect grounds. While it had been a source of contention for the spirited Wei Ying during his childhood years, who wanted nothing more than to run off and travel the world, he understands why Jiang shushu had been so overly protective of him, now. It was almost as if he *knew* that Wei Ying's life would eventually be traded with for a price, and considering what has befallen them thus far, Wei Ying can't begrudge Jiang shushu for all of that, now. In a way, Wei Ying is thankful he is who he is—because when he and Jiang Cheng had lost everything else, with nothing to hold onto but each other, it was Wei Ying who was able to offer himself up to give Jiang Cheng, and by extension, the Jiangs, a renewed chance at life, and at overturning the war.

"There are only cruel things to be said about fox spirits," Wei Ying says, with a leaden heart. "I'm aware of our ill repute."

"We do not believe in all of that," Lan Xichen hums. "Dragons hold fox spirits in high regard, and believe formidable power can come out of a union together. You already know we have a prophecy."

Wei Ying no longer takes the existence of the prophecy to heart—not when he has come to love, and be loved, by the man tasked to marry him for that very reason. "I am grateful that the dragons think otherwise."

"No, *I* am grateful that we were able to find you," Lan Xichen chuckles. "The last of his kind. The fox that will lead the dragons to victory, and whose child will finally bring forth unity and peace in this world—Wei Ying."

Wei Ying doesn't know what to say to that. "I am grateful," he says again. "To be found by the dragons."

No matter the fact that without the death of Jiang shushu, a-yi and shijie, the dragons would never be able to get their hands on him otherwise.

But the thought of never meeting Lan Wangji is excruciating, and Wei Ying wonders what is worse.

"Is there a reason," Wei Ying asks, out of a sudden, because he has been wondering this. "That I have been wedded to Lan Zhan, and not you?"

Usually, it is the crown prince.

Lan Xichen laughs. "I understand your curiosity. It is for black and white reasons—his name is part of the prophecy, and so we believe it can only be him."

"Forget envy," Wei Ying deduces, very quickly. "That's the part he's been mentioned in."

"Yes," Lan Xichen smiles. "The elders are very superstitious. In the end, I am thankful it was Wangji. He looks... significantly happier with you around, and I'm glad to see him occupied

with matters besides the war. Wangji has always been so sentimental, and I'd always feared he wouldn't be able to find someone truly deserving, but you've allayed all of my worries."

"Ah," Wei Ying looks down to his plate of food. "Has he always been like this?"

"Sentimental? Yes, he has been like this from young," Lan Xichen says. "Do you not think so? When he loves, he loves—so deeply. It'd been the same for our mother, and now it is the same for you. He almost gave up on a war because of you."

"He wasn't really going to give up on a war," Wei Ying says insistently, shaking his head. "Not for me."

"He can, and he will," Lan Xichen says, with a tense smile. "And that is why I have to make sure to take good care of you. Before he comes back to see you in such a state and then vows to never leave, again."

Wei Ying bites at his lip. He knows Lan Xichen isn't kidding.

"I miss him," he confesses.

"I know," Lan Xichen says. He extends his hand, and takes Wei Ying's one into his, reassuringly.

"He will come back soon, for you, no doubt."

Their conversations begin to progress beyond shallow conversations about food and palace affairs, to court politics and the war. Lan Xichen sometimes takes the court documents along with him after he finishes his morning meetings with his advisors, and freely allows Wei Ying to examine the scrolls at length over their shared meals.

While Wei Ying is nowhere near being a court advisor, he had been groomed to become the right-hand man of a sect leader, once. He holds the intellect and wit necessary for one to thrive in politics, and finds himself thoroughly enthralled by the sort of affairs Lan Xichen brings to him. At first Lan Xichen had simply done it as a form of indulgence for the fox, and perhaps to bring him some entertainment amidst his mundane days of being cooped up here as an imperial consort, but upon realising Wei Ying was up for serious discussions about the issues Lan Xichen was working on—began actively debating Wei Ying and seeking out his opinions.

Wei Ying is not just a pretty thing. He *is* a pretty thing, but he's more than a womb and a potential mother to a baby that they are after, and he's glad Lan Xichen trusts him enough to involve him in important sect matters of which Wei Ying would normally have no jurisdiction over. Lan Xichen does not do it to be patronizing either; he firmly respects the fox spirit and line of thought, and takes his words and advice to heart when making his decisions.

Two weeks of daily meetings pass like this, and Wei Ying slowly comes to view Lan Xichen as a confidant of sorts; someone he can place his trust in when everyone else he knows is gone for the war. The crown prince too, always travels with an entourage, and being with him brings safety to Wei Ying in ways that he appreciates. They have still not heard back from Lan Wangji, and so have no news on how soon they may return, but Wei Ying thinks he may just survive this tumultuous period with the company of the crown prince, who seems determined to take care of him in his beloved brother's absence.

The Lans are not bad people, Wei Ying thinks, as he holds an imperial scroll up and reads up on the latest tribulation brought up to the court today. The dragons, who live high up in the clouds, have always been responsible for governing a huge proportion of the lands—Gusu, and beyond—and the amount of petty cases brought to them by the common folk never ceases. Today, a villager has brought forth a dispute whereupon he accused his neighbour of stealing his livestock in the dead of the night.

"What do you make of the case?" Lan Xichen asks, raising a cup of tea to his lips.

"The neighbour did it," Wei Ying says, eyes still rooted to the words on the scroll. "They have a history of crossing each other, and this isn't their first dispute."

"Do you think I should bring the neighbour in for questioning?" Lan Xichen asks.

"You should fine them, and make an example out of them," Wei Ying places the scroll right down. "Aren't they wasting the court's time and resources with their petty squabbles?"

"Mm," Lan Xichen chuckles. "I should, shouldn't I? There is still the war that I have to take care of."

"Xichen-ge, you're too nice," Wei Ying rolls his eyes saying, though it's with a smile. He picks up a biscuit, chewing on it as he speaks. "Don't you get five cases like this a day? To put a stop to it, you shouldff jusch fineff themsch."

"A-Ying," Lan Xichen reaches a hand over, to lightly wipe at the crumbs on the fox's mouth. With a gentle smile, and laughter in his eyes, he hums aloud, "No talking while eating in Cloud Recesses, remember?"

Wei Ying immediately goes rigid. "Ah," he says, swallowing thickly.

He hears footsteps rushing over before he can even ascertain who it is—

"*Wei Ying*," comes a voice, so angry and hostile in nature; and a hand that swipes in to aggressively swat at Lan Xichen's one.

Wei Ying raises his gaze, and thinks he must be in some sort of a dream.

“Lan... Lan Zhan?” Wei Ying asks, with disbelieving eyes.

There his husband stands, tall and forbidding in stature, still decked out in full battle garment. He’s thoroughly drenched in sweat, his golden eyes flared wide open, looking bloodshot and almost delirious. Down his bare arms are freshly wounded scars gained from the recent war, and the long braid that trails behind him is all out of sorts, with hair sticking out in a number of different directions, as if he’d been on an impossible flight—in a race to get here. His boots are still muddied from wet grass, and leave messy mud prints wherever he walks. Behind him, guards and servants follow closely in a mad dash, running after him with frantic calls for him to slow down.

“*Wangji*,” Lan Xichen stands up, retracting his hand awkwardly to himself. The slap from Lan Wangji stings. “*You have returned?*”

“*Honourable crown prince, we had no time to inform you, the Second Prince made his way here as soon as he arrived...*” the servants utter weakly, keeping their heads bowed.

“*What is the meaning of this,*” Lan Wangji barks, sparing his own brother no courtesy. “*Do you not know how to mind yourself in the presence of another man’s consort?*”

“*Wangji, surely there has been a misunderstanding—*” He stretches a hand out again, only to be viciously rebuffed by the infuriated Second Prince. “*Wangji, please. Is there a reason you have returned so soon?*”

“*The letter requesting Jingyi’s aid wasn’t from me,*” Lan Wangji snaps, his eyes narrowing into furious slits. “*It was forged. I left the minute Jingyi arrived at our camp. Someone drew him away from the palace... from Wei Ying, for a reason. Instead of philandering with your brother’s consort in your spare time, perhaps you might want to consider launching a full-scale investigation on potential Wen spies infiltrating our network.*”

“Forged?” Wei Ying’s fox ears lift up, in pure shock. “It wasn’t you who asked for him? Does that mean Jingyi... and Jiang Cheng, are fine? Did they come back with you?”

“*Wei Ying,*” Lan Wangji hisses in a non-reply, yellow dragon claws extending to clutch at the fox’s thin wrists. “*Come with me.*”

“Lan Zhan, are you sure we can’t talk this out with your brother,” Wei Ying hastily says, darting anxious looks back and forth between the two princes. Lan Xichen remains rooted in place, positively distraught at the horrid accusations dished at him by his younger brother. “It really isn’t what it looks like. And shouldn’t we talk about the matter of the forged letter in the first—”

But Lan Wangji’s grasp on him is tight, and Wei Ying can barely keep up with his small feet. He follows after his husband in a confused flurry, watching as the war general stalks right back to their quarters with clenched fists, hot steam emitting from every inch of his skin.

His husband is, very evidently, *not* pleased.

Lan Wangji sits on the bed, deeply silent and still fuming, as Wei Ying pulls the door close behind them.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying calls softly, turning his back onto the door. He takes cautious steps towards his husband, the violet silk he wears twirling elegantly around his pale ankles as he does so. “Can we talk about what happened back there with Xichen-ge?”

It slips out of him without warning, and he regrets it the very minute the name leaves his lips.

Wei Ying has grown closer to the crown prince in his husband’s absence, out of necessity, out of survival, but Lan Wangji’s not going to see it that way. Not going to *understand* it that way. No, all he can see and witness is the love of his life seeking comfort in another while he’s away, as if he has forgotten who he is truly wed to.

Dragon’s sickness, he remembers Jingyi explaining to him. It’s unforgiving, and it overcomes the rational mind. It’s obsessive, it’s greedy, and borne out of overpowering love.

Lan Wangji’s wrath becomes even more apparent with every rising second, his balled fists starting to turn white at his knuckles as he regards the affectionate manner in which Wei Ying addresses his brother.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying falls to his knees, sweetly laying his head against his husband’s lap, unfurling Lan Wangji’s fists and interlocking his hand with his. If he plays up his charms, he’s bound to soothe that odd temperament of Lan Wangji’s for sure. It’s never failed him once.

“Lan Zhan, we’ve been apart for so long, there’s no reason to get upset over a small misunderstanding. Can’t we talk about this?”

“Do you prefer him?”

And suddenly it feels like the entire world has come to a standstill.

Wei Ying shudders. “W...What?”

He almost thinks he has entered a hallucinative state.

“Do you prefer him,” Lan Wangji spits out, in perfect, non-accented, common tongue. The dragon prince speaks in eerily calm, clipped sentences, so unlike the long, passionate ramblings Wei Ying is more familiar to hearing from him in his native tongue, normally.

“Do you prefer my brother, the crown prince, have you spread your legs for him, have you found *comfort* in another in my absence? Do you prefer him to me?”

Wei Ying cannot believe his ears. His silvery-gray eyes dilate in astonishment, completely taken by... rude surprise.

“You can speak,” Wei Ying’s pulse is racing, and he grows slightly light-headed with this new revelation. “You can speak the common tongue.”

“Wei Ying, I asked you a question.”

“No,” Wei Ying loosens his hold on Lan Wangji’s hand, removing himself from the floor. “No, I can’t believe you. You—you’re *incorrigible*. You could have communicated—you could have said something to me, from day one. What the hell? I learned a whole new language for you!”

He should have known. There was no way, *no way*, his uncle, his brother, even Jingyi, all could speak the common tongue so well, and that Lan Wangji could not. Lan Wangji may be a war general, but he’s still a born and bred Lan, and as a royal he would have received the best education possible within his sect.

Wei Ying had never questioned it, and no one sought to inform him any otherwise, perhaps to protect the Second Prince’s wishes. But Wei Ying feels like he’s been taken for a mere fool.

He should have known.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji sees the fox begin to draw away from him, and hurries to encircle his hands around the fox’s wrists, pulling him right back onto his lap. “Wei Ying, I had my reasons.”

“What reasons?” Wei Ying raises his voice, questioning, clearly upset. He squirms against his husband’s legs, fighting futilely in his hold. It’s not like he can escape; he’s never been able to overpower the dragon prince in strength, the difference in size too jarring. “Lan Wangji, you don’t—you don’t get to waltz back in here and demand answers to something that isn’t even happening—you dare insinuate me and your brother—do you even know how much I’ve *suffered* in your absence—”

“Do you prefer him,” Lan Wangji questions for the last time, his vice grip on Wei Ying quickly turning the soft, tender skin on the fox’s wrists red. “Do you like him better than me? Why do you let him touch you in ways that only I am allowed to?”

“Are you out of your mind,” Wei Ying scoffs, a blaze of indignation burning in his eyes. “Are you trying to insinuate that I’ve been unfaithful to you? Lan Wangji, I can’t believe you’re trying to pin this on me when—when *you have lied to me right from the very beginning*. Is this a game to you? Have you been toying with me all these while? You’ve heard my every

word, every plea, every wish—you knew what you were doing that wedding night—have you no conscience—”

“So, are you going to love me less because of it,” Lan Wangji asks, through gritted teeth, bringing Wei Ying closer. “Do you think me despicable, do you abhor me for this lie?”

“What is wrong with you? Do you,” Wei Ying gasps, out of breath from thrashing violently in his husband’s embrace. “Do you only care about me losing love for you? There are more pressing matters—”

“Yes,” Lan Wangji snaps, tugging Wei Ying closer. “If you prefer my brother over me, I will lose my mind.”

Wei Ying’s skin tingles upon his admission. “I don’t,” Wei Ying’s heart rate slows. He can never ignore the soft spot he holds for his husband. “I don’t view him in that way. You know I only, I only love you.”

“Love me,” Lan Wangji breathes out, clenching Wei Ying’s skin. His eyes glaze over, “You only love me?”

“I do,” Wei Ying hisses, exasperated, wishing otherwise. “I do, god, I do. But I’m starting to regret it, because I’m starting to think you don’t deserve it.”

“Wei Ying, I have missed you,” Lan Wangji moves his hands up to cup at the fox spirit’s cheeks, looking angrily but beautifully flushed, brimming with hot emotion. “I worried over you, every second I was out there. I came as soon as I realised something—or someone—pulled Jingyi away from you. You are all that I have, do you know that, Wei Ying?”

His sweet words are so convincing, only because Wei Ying knows he means it, through and through.

“I love you,” Wei Ying says again, because he knows assurance is what his husband needs. Lan Wangji always looks at him with such forlorn eyes, full of begging, and Wei Ying can never resist him. “I love you, Lan Zhan. It’s only ever been you, it’ll only ever be you. Don’t you already know that? Do you not trust me?”

Lan Wangji caresses at his cheek, admiring the sweet countenance of his fox bride. Wei Ying’s repeated assurances has calmed him down somewhat. “I love you more,” he whispers, looking at Wei Ying with dilated dragon eyes. Moments ago, they were feral. Now, they’re tender, and laced with unbearable affection. “I love you most. I live only for you, and only you. You cannot toss me aside for another, do you understand?”

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying sighs out, softly. His husband is so single-minded when his love for him comes into question.

Lan Wangji’s declarations of love, too, are even more sincerely worded in the common tongue. It tugs at Wei Ying’s heart, it sends his heart squeezing at the weight of his husband’s affections.

He really cannot begrudge Lan Wangji for anything, in the end.

Lan Wangji's hand cups at the back of his head, pressing the fox in for a bittersweet kiss. He still stinks of war, of bloodshed, of a brutal reality out there, but those familiar lips claim Wei Ying's ones, and very soon Wei Ying's entire body is slackening, and melting instinctively into his hold. The dragon prince bites and licks at Wei Ying's bottom lip, yanking them open with his sharp teeth, sliding his tongue in hungrily without so much as waiting for permission. He's only ever known to take what he wants, so presumptuous is this dragon prince—and Wei Ying is what he has wanted, for so long.

Lan Wangji, he tastes so sweet, he tastes like months of painful separation and longing, he tastes like home. Wei Ying kisses him back urgently, his hands pulling at the front of his battle garment. Lan Wangji's scarred chest is as sturdy as he remembers, and as Wei Ying paws at them and pulls himself further up on Lan Wangji's lap, the bigger man places his hands on Wei Ying's waist and hoists him up and over him, so he can lay the fox back down onto their bed.

"...so lonely out there, without you," Lan Wangji murmurs, overly eager hands hastily peeling at the robes around Wei Ying's shoulders. He crawls over the fox, greedily sinking his mouth into every new patch of skin that's unveiled, leaving fluttery, mouthy kisses everywhere he can. "War is so difficult, without Wei Ying by my side. Has it been difficult for Wei Ying, too?"

"Lan Zhan," Wei Ying can't hold in the soft moans that are drawn from him with every tingly kiss pressed against his body. His fox ears twitch up uncontrollably each time Lan Wangji's lips meet his skin, sending electrifying jolts running through him each time. "Lan Zhan, I missed you, too."

"How much," Lan Wangji questions, and in one single stroke of movement—pulls loose the thin waist ribbon holding Wei Ying's robes together, from the front. The silk slides down and unravels completely from Wei Ying's body, and the very scene is akin to Lan Wangji unwrapping Wei Ying like a war prize. Wei Ying squirms slightly in embarrassment, averting his eyes as he feels his husband's dark gaze travel up and down his delicate frame, inspecting his every inch of skin as if making sure no foreign marks are to be found on him.

He wants to make sure for himself.

"How much did you miss me? Can I take your words at face-value?"

His thick fingers dip down, and grab firm hold of Wei Ying's slim thighs. He spreads them with one swift movement, firmly keeping them open even as Wei Ying tries to snap them back close on instinct. It's been so long since he has been in his husband's ravenous company, and he'd almost forgotten how rough the dragon can get in bed.

"Wei Ying has been apart from me too long," Lan Wangji frowns, nails digging into the insides of the fox's milky thighs to make sure they stay open. "He has forgotten how to behave."

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying gasps, writhing in his husband’s grasp. He can already feel himself getting wet—so *so* wet, months of pent-up sexual frustration quickly coming to light. His heart still carries the slightest hint of bitterness, but his body betrays him, *curse his soft spot for Lan Wangji*... “You’re so much worse in the common tongue.”

It’s so much worse because Wei Ying actually understands every word for what it is; with dragon tongue he often still had to guess using contextual cues. With the common tongue, Lan Wangji is unhinged—he does not wax poetry, he says it for what it is.

Perhaps there is good reason Lan Wangji held back for so long.

“Does Wei Ying like it?” Lan Wangji asks, spreading his thighs even wider. Wei Ying’s breath hitches, allowing himself to be manhandled so evidence of his arousal is plain and out there for Lan Wangji to look at. His taut hole stretches open, warm slick running down his inner thighs with every additional provocative word that his husband utters.

“Does Wei Ying like hearing my thoughts in its most raw, pure form? Does Wei Ying prefer it? Would Wei Ying like me to detail exactly to him the things I have been thinking of doing to him in my absence?”

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying’s almost kicking up a fuss now, growing increasingly flustered in his lust-addled mind. He’s spent so many months away from the man, spent so many lonely nights by himself, went from getting fucked and bred good every night to complete abstinence; and Lan Zhan’s teasing is getting way too much for him to bear. “Lan Zhan, please, please just—*fuck*—already—don’t tease, please, *husband*.”

“Hm,” Lan Wangji utters instead, his gaze growing with interest. It seems he is in an unforgiving mood. “How am I to know Wei Ying has been faithful to me in my absence? Wei Ying should show me how he has been dealing with his needs, otherwise, I am to assume otherwise...”

Oh, *fuck*. Lan Wangji is so, so terrible. And so unbelievably *mean*.

“I didn’t fuck your brother,” Wei Ying whines. “I didn’t, I didn’t, I promise, I touched myself whenever it got too much, please, husband, I’ve been so faithful...”

“Prove it,” Lan Wangji hums, in a much more pleasant mood than before. It’s clear he doesn’t actually believe in Wei Ying’s infidelity—he’s just doing this because he can, because looking upon Wei Ying’s tortured face is such a lovely thing, because Wei Ying is so breathtakingly beautiful and bullying him to helplessness is such an addictive thing, and Wei Ying *knows* it. He knows the way Lan Wangji looks at him, he knows his husband is so inherently jealous and just sharing a small, intimate moment with his older brother had set him off *so bad*, and now Wei Ying has to appease him well before Lan Wangji will make nice with him again.

“Lan Zhaan,” Wei Ying begs, impatiently.

“Prove it,” Lan Wangji states for the second time. He takes Wei Ying’s hands into his, guides them down to the twitching hole located in between his thighs. “Show me how you thought

of me, all those nights.”

Wei Ying cannot deny his husband’s commands.

With a sharp, staggered gasp, he pushes two fingers into himself, the same exact way he has done so everyday ever since Lan Wangji left him. His small fingers slide in so easily, his body having grown accustomed to the digits. Wei Ying arches his back briefly off the bed with a parted mouth as he thrusts the fingers right against his sweet spot, having grown expert at locating it after much practice.

“Oh, *oh*,” Wei Ying bites at his lip, his eyelids falling to a close as he starts his fingers off slow, just as he has always done. “Oh, Lan Zhan, Lan Wangji, *husband*, please...”

A fox tail pops out from his back, stirring up Lan Wangji’s interest. It appears Wei Ying’s control over his appearance has severely weakened over the past few months, and is at the weakest when Wei Ying is most honest with himself, in the throes of intense pleasure.

“Are you thinking of me,” Lan Wangji asks, swiftly undoing his lower robes so he can relieve the tightness in his pants. “Tell me how you think of me when you pleasure yourself.”

Wei Ying’s fox ears fold back down into his hair, utterly embarrassed. Through his hazy, half-lidded eyes, he can see his husband begin to thumb at the head of his thick, hard cock that he’s pulled out, and he wonders if this is how Lan Wangji has been pleasuring himself to thoughts of Wei Ying while he’s out in his camp, out at war. Surely the past few months have not been easy for a dragon with such a voracious sexual appetite; surely Lan Wangji, who is a healthy virile hot-blooded dragon, who has promised never to seek out another partner, must have had so many urges to curb in Wei Ying’s absence. Thinking about his husband being rendered helpless by his own sexual frustration, and sweatily jerking himself off repeatedly every night to thoughts of him *and him only*, sends Wei Ying keening in ways never before. He pushes a third finger into him, and produces the most deliberate, careless moan.

“I think of you and your thick cock fucking me good,” Wei Ying rambles out, in a feverish daze, working his fingers frenziedly inside of him. Tails pop up from behind him, one after another, betraying his true, lewd nature. “I...I think of you holding me down as I fight you, making me take it like you did that wedding night. I think about you b-breeding my womb with your cock, r-reaching my womb with your cock, m-making sure you fuck me so good I can think only of having your baby and your cock. I think—*fuck*—I think of being taken by you everywhere, in this bed, against the wall, in the garden, on the throne.”

“Haa,” Lan Wangji groans, his hand maintaining a firm grip around his cock. Pre-cum dribbles from the tip in white loads, filthily staining through his fingers—the man clearly hadn’t expected such bold, confident dirty talk from the fox, despite having challenged Wei Ying to do so; and hearing the bulk of it leave Wei Ying’s cherry-red lips and his seemingly innocent face had aroused the prince so, *so* much. “Mark your words, pretty fox.”

“Mark my...” Wei Ying repeats, in slight confusion. But then Lan Wangji’s two hands reach down to grasp firmly at his waist, pulling the fox closer to him until his two lean legs are folded into the air and his wet hole is pressed right against the head of his cock. Wei Ying’s three fingers slide out of himself, this time digging into the silk bed sheets for support.

“Lan Zhan, do you have to be so rough,” Wei Ying says.

“You like me rough,” Lan Wangji says, barely disguising the smugness in his tone. “I am only listening to the pleas of my pretty wife.”

“*Husband*,” Wei Ying moans with scarlet cheeks, red foxy claws extending from his nails. He is sure he has been reduced to their true form in its entirety, now, nine tails completely out, fox ears twitching needlessly in the air. He has never felt more vulnerable—and yet so, so powerful at the same time. He knows the way Lan Wangji looks at him, looks at him like he wants to *devour* him. At their very core, they are animals, evolved animals but animals nonetheless, and Lan Wangji is his alpha mate.

“I am so lucky to be married to such a beautiful fox,” Lan Wangji coos, seizing his cock so he can guide it to the entrance of Wei Ying’s hole. “Do you know the way other men look at you. Even my brother, I see it in his gaze, I cannot *trust* him around you,” he nudges his cock right in, expecting a smooth glide as it usually is, all the other times before. But months of being apart has clearly tightened the fox right back up in some way, because only the head of his cock fits in, but nothing more. *Fuck*.

For some reason, Wei Ying grows, once again, embarrassed. “I’ve only had my fingers,” he whimpers, feeling the stretch. It’s not painful, but it’s slightly uncomfortable. “I, I’m not used to your size. Not anymore. You’re so big, it’s—it’s to be expected...”

“Like a virgin,” Lan Wangji’s golden eyes radiate with pleasure. “You did say you enjoyed our wedding night.”

“I, I did not,” Wei Ying stutters, turning his cheek to him. “I don’t know what I was saying.”

“Cute,” Lan Wangji purrs, reaching for Wei Ying’s hand so he can lift it to his lips to kiss it. “You get so cute when you are shy.”

“Lan Zhaan,” Wei Ying whines. He’s starting to prefer it when Lan Wangji only spoke in the mysterious dragon tongue. “I don’t like talking to you when I can understand you.”

The Second Prince lets out a wry laugh. He leans right over, until his mouth is mere inches away from Wei Ying’s face, and airs his hot dragon breath on his face. “*So you prefer me like this*,” he speaks eloquently, in a much deeper tone that Wei Ying recognises. “*You prefer me when I am incomprehensible, and can threaten you in words that you have to guess?*”

Suddenly his demeanour has shifted: his eyes glow, his antlers look all the more sinister, and his voice is dripping with venom.

“*If you want me to return to my native tongue*,” Lan Wangji continues, drawing his head back. His hands return to the red marks he has left around Wei Ying’s waist, pressing his fingers back down for a firm clutch as he pushes another inch of his cock inside of the smaller man. “*I can do that for you, Wei Ying. I can speak vile things in my own tongue, I much prefer that. If you think it safer for you to not hear the depraved things I think about you, if you think that somehow shields you from the dragon that I am, then...*”

It's hot. God, it's mind-stoppingly hot when Lan Wangji prattles on in dragon tongue, because his husband is *so* often fond of speaking in convoluted terms that Wei Ying is yet able to understand. He does this on purpose, Wei Ying knows. Should the man truly wish to communicate with him, he uses much simpler vocabulary, just so it is easier for Wei Ying's comprehension. But there have been many a time—whether out of shyness, or him being a plain bully—he speaks purposefully so Wei Ying is left unable to understand him.

This is one of those times.

Wei Ying can only hazard a guess, though he's sure his husband's intentions are far from good.

"Did you really think I could not understand you," Lan Wangji hums, plunging the rest of his cock in without much care—Wei Ying's increasing wetness receives his girth *very* well. *"That wedding night? Hm? I listen to your every word, I hear your every cry. I want to know your every thought, I will make sure I know everything about you. My beloved consort, my one and only light of my life. You will never escape me, not a single word, not a single action."*

"Zhan," Wei Ying hiccups, teary-eyed. He chews on his lip as he takes in his husband fully, his red claws almost ripping the sheets. "Lan Zhan, what are you saying?"

"I am thinking of doing bad things to you," Lan Wangji hums again, ever so sweetly. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Wei Ying frowns, somehow not trusting that is the intention of Lan Wangji's words. He *knows* what 'I love you' is in the dragon tongue—and it certainly is not *that*.

This time, as Lan Wangji begins thrusting, his hands drift from Wei Ying's waist to grab at the fox's nine tails, pulling and fingering and rubbing at the fur, heightening all the sensitive areas of Wei Ying's body. The fox spirit almost blacks out at the overwhelmingness of it all, his eyes rolling up to the back of his head.

They hadn't ever fucked with Wei Ying's tails thrown in the mix before.

"My pretty little fox," Lan Wangji sighs, in an animalistic purr. "My pretty Wei Ying."

"Lan Zhan," Wei Ying is in hysterics, choking out endless sobs as the dragon prince slams his fat cock back inside of him, while ruthlessly tugging at the sensitive ends of his tails. His own erection jostles in between his thighs, begging sorely for attention. "Lan Zhan Lan Zhan Lan Zhan, I—I—I'm your pretty little fox, I'm made to be bred by you—*fuck*—I've missed you so bad—missed being bred—"

"Wei Ying, you are always so honest for me," Lan Wangji groans. He already knows he cannot last long at this rate with Wei Ying, having been apart from him for so long; but no matter, because the dragon has never been sated with just one round with the fox spirit. The stamina of a dragon is ferocious, and Lan Wangji will certainly not disappoint his clan by missing opportunities to breed Wei Ying as far as possible. "I will breed you good and well,

until your hole is raw and red, until you beg me to stop and even then I will not stop, because you have a duty to uphold to me, my beautiful fox bride.”

Oh, his husband is fond of saying such terrible things. But Wei Ying grows harder every time; and with just a few more hard thrusts, Wei Ying is shamefully spilling all over himself with a loud cry like a—oh *god*, it’s just like Lan Wangji said, like an overly sensitive virgin deflowered for the first time on his wedding night.

Lan Wangji leans right over him as the fox cums, locking Wei Ying’s two wrists together and holding it up high over his head as his fucking grows even more urgent, even more desperate, as he nears his own climax. He holds Wei Ying down—just like Wei Ying said he *liked*—with such force he’s quickly turning Wei Ying’s skin red, ignoring the woeful whimpers and mewls of the fox spirit squirming underneath him.

“Terrible,” Wei Ying moans out, with wet tears dried on his cheeks. “My husband is so *terrible*.”

“I can be worse,” Lan Wangji’s lips brush against the tip of his ear, in a cautionary whisper.

When he cums, it’s in bucket loads full. He pins Wei Ying down even harder, making sure the fox has little to no movement as he seeks to empty himself completely out inside of him.

“You will have my baby,” Lan Wangji pants, burying his head in the crook of Wei Ying’s neck. “You will have my baby, I will make sure of it, you will have mine and mine only, no one else’s, not my brother’s, not any other dragon’s. *Mine*. Mine, *mine*. Wei Ying is mine.”

“Yours,” Wei Ying whispers, his heart fluttery. “Your child, only, Hanguang-Jun.”

This dragon prince may be lethal—but he is *his*.

The story of the two handmaidens eventually comes to light. With Lan Wangji back in his arms—with Jiang Cheng and Jingyi, too, in tow—Wei Ying is finally confident enough to spill the beans on his suspicions on the true loyalties of his palace maids.

Lan Wangji takes it as well as Wei Ying imagines; which is, plainly, *not at all*. Upon hearing Wei Ying had been left to starve due to his unwillingness to touch any food served to him, the dragon prince goes absolutely *berserk*. There was a reason Lan Jingyi had to be drawn away from the palace, away from Wei Ying’s side, and evidently this must be the reason why. It is

harder to poison your target with an overly attached dragon guarding every move and step of Wei Ying's, and so Lan Jingyi had to be done away.

Unfortunately, they hadn't factored the crown prince's protection in.

Lan Wangji immediately calls for their execution, although Lan Xichen intervenes enough to ask for an interrogation, first. After acquiring their statements, as well as conducting a thorough sweep of the palace, it is determined that the two handmaidens acted on their own, having been personally approached by the Wens to poison Wei Ying and cause the fox to have a miscarriage, in exchange for the promise of being taken in as esteemed cultivators in the Wen sect once the job was completed.

"Why do they want my baby dead," Wei Ying had asked, bewildered.

"They know of the prophecy," Lan Xichen had explained—while kept in much distance away from the fox, as supervised by Lan Wangji himself. "They fear the prophecy, because that will guarantee our victory, and their loss, in this war."

"It will not happen," Lan Wangji maintains, insistently. "Wei Ying will have my baby."

"Do you think," Wei Ying's hand moves to his belly. "Do you think the poison might have already taken effect?" They'd already gotten the physician to check twice, but as always, the physician has been unable to detect anything else but dark *qi* swirling within him.

"No," Lan Wangji says. "The physician mentioned you'd be much sicker, otherwise."

"I should have been more attentive while Wangji was away, I apologise," Lan Xichen says.

"I am here now with Wei Ying, so it is alright," Lan Wangji responds, rather curtly.

It appears his relations with the crown prince is still strained from their altercation, from before.

Betraying the clan is one of the worst violations of the Lan sect rules, and a public execution is only fitting for such traitors—especially those who had deemed themselves worthy enough to poison a member of the royal family, an imperial consort, *amongst all others*. Wei Ying is not merely a consort, either; he has married in to fulfill an exceedingly important prophecy, and one that the victory of the war hinges upon. It can only be him, it can be no one else.

The Lans have the two handmaidens tied upon wooden posts, and hang them out to dry for all to see on public execution grounds. The entire sect is invited to be in attendance, and witness the consequences of violating one of the most sacred rules there is.

As is with every other event, the festivity of it all almost mirrors a celebration.

There are no torchbearers needed for the occasion. They are on Gusu Lan grounds, where every single member of the sect lives and breathes fire. Usually a guard is appointed to lead a dragon out to carry out the execution, but this time the Second Prince himself readily volunteers his services.

It's also the first time Wei Ying witnesses his husband in his dragon form. He almost doesn't recognise him at first, doesn't recognise the pure white dragon that descends from the sky like a heavenly deity with such a lofty, imposing presence, so befitting that of an actual royal. Doesn't recognise Lan Wangji in all of his raw power, two golden antlers sitting atop his head, two equally bright golden eyes sitting narrowly within his scaled, narrow skull, doesn't recognise him with the huge sharp, predatory teeth jutting out from the side of his mouth. Four powerful limbs carry his body, hideously yellow claws extending out as if ready to hunt for prey. The very sight of an imperial Lan dragon is meant to instill awe and terror; its effect profound even on the other dragons. Lan Wangji exhales, and steam leaves its flared nostrils in a sheer act of dominance, heating up the very arena.

His body is long in length, much longer in appearance than the other dragons Wei Ying has seen around here, and as it slithers down into and around the crowd, members of the sect disperse accordingly and make way for the prince as he navigates the grounds. Silence befalls the place; no one daring to utter a single word or ruining the majestic sight. Wei Ying has been told that Lan Wangji transforms and uses his dragon form for war and war purposes only, and that the reclusive war general rarely launches into such a form within the confines of Cloud Recesses. Wei Ying can guess why. His husband most likely thinks it's too showy, too over the top, to be done without reason.

But today he does it for Wei Ying, and Wei Ying only.

Lan Wangji slithers right up to where Wei Ying is standing at the front, next to Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren, and Jiang Cheng and Lan Jingyi for moral support. The white dragon bows its head slightly to the fox spirit, in what seems like an incredible act of submission (and love and devotion) to the man. Its golden eyes blink once or twice, its pupils noticeably dilating as Wei Ying steps nearer to the creature.

"Lan Zhan," Wei Ying calls after his husband affectionately. He pats at the scaly head, and watches as those big dragon eyes fasten to a shut, purring satisfactorily under Wei Ying's head pats. "You look very handsome today."

Puffs of steam leave his nostrils, like the dragon is pleased to hear of such a compliment. In this form, his speech is limited, and so he opts to hum instead, indicative of his agreeable mood.

"Don't hurt yourself out there, alright?" Wei Ying says, smiling to the dragon.

Lan Wangji looks at him incredulously, as if such a thing is unfathomable. Wei Ying laughs.

The Second Prince makes his move. He rises into the air, and heads straight for where the two handmaidens are located, at the very centre of the square. The handmaidens continue to plead and beg for their lives, but Lan Wangji has long made up his mind. Anything—*anyone*—concerning Wei Ying gets no second chances.

He encircles the handmaidens once or twice, observing them with wrathful eyes. Letting out a roar with uncontrollable fury, he lunges straight at them, parting his mouth wide open so flames that he spits out burns the handmaidens alive. It only takes a few good seconds of tormented screams and animalistic howls before the two handmaidens are burnt completely to crisp, their black, charred remains crumbling down to the grounds.

Wei Ying is left slightly reeling, from the heart-stopping sight. *Is this how he fights at the Great War outside*, he wonders. Because now he fully understands why Jiang Cheng had placed utmost faith in him, in them, conquering the war against the Wens.

The dragons are all-powerful, and his husband is one—if not the most powerful—of them all.

They will win this war.

Their victory from their latest conquest calls for another celebration, and so Wei Ying finds himself accompanying his war general of a husband to another one of the Lan's festivities, held in their grand hall. This time, there seems to be special guests. Two men, or brothers as Lan Xichen tells them, have been invited to celebrate with them, as part of a new political alliance.

“Wei Ying, Wangji, I'm pleased to introduce you to the leader of the Nie sect, Nie Mingjue, and his younger brother, Nie Huaisang.”

“Oh, you are the fox spirit that's been the talk of the town,” Nie Huaisang snaps open his fan, saying, quite eager to make acquaintance. He hides his smile behind the fan he holds, dark eyes scrutinising down the fox's lean physique. “My heartfelt congratulations on your pregnancy.”

Lan Xichen pauses, unmoving for a good moment. “Are you sure?”

“I am not pregnant,” Wei Ying’s eyes fly wide open, wondering what has brought this about. “Not... not yet.”

“Nie Huaisang is a seer,” Nie Mingjue says, confirming Lan Xichen’s suspicions. “He has never been wrong in his predictions.”

“What?” Wei Ying asks again, hands instinctively moving to clutch at the front of his stomach. “I... am with child?”

“You have been with child,” Nie Huaisang cocks an eyebrow up. “For three months now.”

Ever since Lan Wangji left for war.

Wei Ying snaps his head back to meet his husband’s gaze—who looks equally dumbfounded.

“Wei Ying is with child?” Lan Wangji breathes.

“But the physician said,” Wei Ying’s hands have begun trembling. “The physician said there wasn’t life, just dark *qi*.”

“Oh, sweethearts,” Nie Huaisang grins.

“That *is* your child.”

Chapter End Notes

...I only realised after finishing this chapter that I ran out of space to write why LWJ kept his language speaking skills a secret, LOL. Oh well, it shall be revealed in the next chapter then! But did anyone else guess that he could actually speak common tongue?! Hazard a guess as to why he kept it secret from Wei Ying, I'm so curious what you guys think <3

Sorry I haven't been able to reply individually to your comments, but I read every single one and adore every one of them! Thank you so much for enjoying this fic <3<3<3

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

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

Lan Xichen is the first to react to the unexpected piece of news, with wide eyes and a hand over his heart.

“Excuse me,” he says, stepping aside, leaving the circle almost immediately. He whips the long tail of his silk robes around, his fists slightly trembling at his sides as he stalks off, heading into the direction of where the elders are.

Wei Ying’s own hands are still placed firmly on his belly, his body suddenly feeling the additional weight now that he knows he is *carrying*.

“I am barely showing,” Wei Ying says softly, looking down at his flat stomach. “I did not know...”

“This baby is special, after all,” Nie Huaisang assures. “He’s the prophesied prince, the one that will lead the dragons to prevail. Naturally, there are different elements to, well, the creation of him. It will take a bit longer...”

“We do not understand,” Lan Wangji utters, concerned. He reaches a hand forward, and presses it to where Wei Ying’s womb lays. “Will anything go wrong with the pregnancy? Wei Ying has been vomiting black bile, is that something of concern?”

“I may be a seer, but I don’t know everything,” Nie Huaisang throws his head back, laughing. “I cannot predict every detail of his pregnancy down to a tee, but there is nothing to worry about with regards to the dark *qi*. Aren’t foxes unnaturally high in yin energy? Wei Ying’s dark spiritual energies will naturally manifest in the prophesied prince. As for the black bile, if it has not caused severe deterioration in Wei Ying’s health so far, then it must be a natural result from the prince’s conception. He is awakening parts of you that have been lying dormant for too long.”

Wei Ying hesitates upon learning of this fact, “I am well-aware of the nature of my kind. But I have not—I have not had a reason to dabble in demonic cultivation of any sort. It was banned on Jiang grounds. And you are now saying...”

“We dragons possess only yang energy,” Lan Wangji says. “You are saying that the child will be able to wield both?”

“The child will be able to wield immense power,” Nie Huaisang’s eyes grin. “Although right now, it’s looking as though he’s taking much more after his mother.”

Wei Ying’s heart skips a beat. “Me?” He asks, unabashedly happy about such a fact. He caresses his belly, and tries to feel for the dark *qi* inside of him. He whispers coaxingly to the baby, “Little one, you want to take after me?”

Lan Wangji's chest is filled with warmth at the sight.

"If he takes after you," Lan Wangji murmurs, pressing his lips to the fox's forehead, as his hand squeezes around Wei Ying's belly. "I am in trouble."

"Lan *Zhan*," Wei Ying hides his smile.

Nie Huaisang snickers behind his fan for a bit. "The Second Prince truly does dote on his consort, as is in line with the rumours."

Lan Wangji looks rather satisfied to hear of such a repute. "You know a great deal of things about our child," he steps up to say. "I would like to beseech you to stay here, to aid with Wei Ying's pregnancy."

Wei Ying's eyes light up. "The healers here know little about how to deal with foxes," he agrees, nodding. "I would also appreciate the company!"

Nie Huaisang fans himself with a deliberately coy smile, flattered to hear of the offer. "A personal request? From the Second Prince himself? How can I reject?" He turns to Nie Mingjue standing solemnly by his side, and lifts an eyebrow. "We can't possibly disappoint the Lans, can we, da ge?"

Nie Mingjue grunts. "I have already made plans with Xichen to stay here for the following months, to aid with the battle," he says. "If the Second Prince would like your company as well, there is no reason to refuse."

"Then it's settled," Wei Ying says happily, taking Nie Huaisang's hands into his. "I will be in your care, from now on."

"Oh, esteemed imperial consort," Nie Huaisang fans himself shyly. "Quite the opposite, *I* will be in your care, as you deem fit."

"Furen!"

A distant and frantic yell from across the crowded room breaks Wei Ying away from his reverie.

"Furen, *furen*!"

It's not long before Lan Jingyi tumbles into the tight-knit circle, squeezing himself in, defiantly tearing Wei Ying apart from Nie Huaisang. The poor Lan disciple is almost sweating as he stands before the fox, with dilated, disbelieving eyes and breathy pants.

"Furen," Lan Jingyi's voice escapes him in a fit of anxiousness and excitement. He takes Wei Ying's hands into his, his big eyes peering right up at him. "Furen, I heard the news. Everyone has. You are with child?"

"Jingyi," Wei Ying chides, when he sees how rudely the disciple has pushed away their guests. "We are with company."

“*Furen*,” Lan Jingyi laments, gripping Wei Ying’s hands even tighter. “Is it true? It’s not a lie, isn’t it? Even the elders are talking about it!”

Wei Ying lifts his head, and scans the room. Jingyi is right. He’d been too immersed in conversation with Nie Huaisang to realise this before, but the minute Lan Xichen broke apart to inform the elders of the news, the room had rapidly descended into an animated flurry of gossip and chatter. Wherever he turns, all eyes are on him. The juniors have not stopped their fired up conversations about their incoming dragon prince. Shy maidens blush at the thought of their Second Prince’s virility, and actively avoid gazing into Lan Wangji’s direction. The elders, huddled in a group from afar, are all smiles and full of approval. When Wei Ying catches the eye of Lan Qiren, he sees him stroking his beard with a prideful look, clearly satisfied with his nephew and nephew-in-law.

Lan Wangji places his hand on Wei Ying’s back comfortingly, seemingly noticing Wei Ying’s attention has wandered.

“Wei Ying is with child,” Lan Wangji hums, bestowing forth a rare smile to Jingyi. He removes Jingyi’s hands from Wei Ying’s, and takes the fox’s hands into his, instead. “My child.”

“For three months,” Wei Ying murmurs, slightly dizzy at the revelation. “That’s when...”

“Our wedding night,” Lan Wangji says, with utmost certainty. “It has to be.”

Wei Ying can feel blood rising to his cheeks. “Our wedding night,” he whispers, knowing in his gut it *really has to be*. His husband is just so potent—and their union, their coming together, all of it, it had already been written in the stars.

“Wei Ying!” Jiang Cheng’s the next to burst forth into their circle, rushing to his adoptive brother’s side. “Wei Ying, you—it’s true? You and Lan Wangji? The prophecy has come true?”

It’s supposed to be joyous news, and yet the phoenix looks slightly broken, like Lan Wangji has truly done Wei Ying wrong in some way, now.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Ying laughs, pulling Jiang Cheng into an embrace. “It’s true. Isn’t that what I’m here for?”

“I can still be unhappy about it,” Jiang Cheng says, frowning. “I am happy for you, of course! But...”

“But what,” Wei Ying’s eyes twinkle up to him. “You’re going to be an uncle now. Isn’t that great? You’re going to have one more good reason to return from this war alive. To see your nephew grow up.”

At this, Jiang Cheng’s quickly going breathless. “Wei Ying,” he says again, with crystal clear violet eyes. If there are tears rising to the surface, he’s willing them away, with all the force of his might. “Shijie would have been so happy.”

Wei Ying had done his best not to think about that.

“She would have,” he says, quietly, slipping into contemplative thought. “I’m just glad you’re still here, A-Cheng.” *And you are not to leave me.*

“We will hold a proper celebration soon enough,” Lan Wangji says, slightly tense, and worried for his consort’s well-being. “Wei Ying, I will take you back to the room to rest.”

“Ah,” Wei Ying *does* feel tired, with so many eyes on him. He can see more people gathering in the distance, eager to offer their personal greetings to the royal couple once they have the chance. “Let’s go, then.”

“Jingyi,” Lan Wangji calls, beckoning him to follow.

“Yes, Hanguang-Jun!”

Lan Wangji is especially careful and gentle when he lays Wei Ying down on the bed, as if pregnancy has made him that much more delicate a person.

“I will get the kitchen to brew some tonic for you,” Lan Wangji says as a matter-of-factly. “Now that we know you are with child, your entire diet will have to change.”

“It’s not that serious, Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying protests, even as Lan Wangji pulls up the covers over him. “Our baby is strong. Haven’t I been alright so far?”

“The black bile,” Lan Wangji says, with furrowed brows.

“Huaisang said it was a natural act,” Wei Ying counters. “From our child.”

“I will not risk anything,” Lan Wangji ends the discussion, grimly. “I will not risk you.”

“Lan Zhaan,” Wei Ying sighs out. His husband is very stubborn. “Fine, fine, I’ll take rest, and wait for you to come back with tonic. Okay? I’ll be good.”

“Good,” Lan Wangji hums, contentedly. He leans over, and kisses Wei Ying’s forehead. “I’ll be back soon.”

He gets up from the bed and takes his leave, re-convening with Lan Jingyi standing just outside the room, waiting for him.

Wei Ying can hear their voices, slightly muffled but still discernible nonetheless, thanks to Jingyi's overly hyperactive tones. He pulls himself up from the bed, if only to lean closer to the direction of the door to hear better.

"Is furen okay?"

"Wei Ying is fine. However, we need to make sure to keep it that way."

"I understand, Hanguang-Jun!"

"Do you? I have not spoken at length with you about what transpired at camp. You should not have left Wei Ying's side in the first place."

"H—Hanguang-Jun, it was all my fault. I should have known better."

Oh, Wei Ying's fingers clench down on the sheets. Lan Zhan is giving Jingyi a scolding, and an unnecessary one at that. Of course Lan Jingyi couldn't have known at the time he was being manipulated into leaving Wei Ying's side—the poor dragon was only taking orders from the crown prince! Even if Lan Jingyi suspected something was up with the letter, he still wouldn't have defied Lan Xichen's orders to leave for the camp. Lan Zhan had personally requested for him, after all. Lan Zhan's word is regarded highly around here.

"Before I left for the war, I believe I ordered you to never leave Wei Ying's side. Not for any reason, not even if I—seemingly—requested it myself. And because of your mistake, Wei Ying has had to suffer momentarily. We are lucky that the handmaidens did not do anything more than poison. If they had, and I had lost Wei Ying for good..."

"H—Hanguang-Jun..."

"I selected you to guard Wei Ying for a reason. Lan Jingyi, you have heavily disappointed me."

Oh dear lord, Wei Ying can hear a sniff. At this rate, Lan Jingyi's going to burst into tears. It's one thing to be berated by his mistakes by an elder—it's another to be scolded straight from the mouth of Hanguang-Jun, who Lan Jingyi looks up to *with his life*. It wasn't Jingyi's fault, it really wasn't! Lan Zhan's being overly harsh on him, and for what? Lan Jingyi is so sweet, so thoughtful when it comes to his furen always, that he believes the disciple must have blamed himself enough when the truth came to light and he realised he'd been deceived into leaving the palace. The young dragon might not show it, but he can come down extremely hard on himself when it comes to matters, and persons, that he particularly cares about.

"It will not happen ever again, Hanguang-Jun... I will guard furen with my life, even at the expense of my life..."

Ah, this really is too much. Lan Jingyi's shattered tone and crippled confidence is too much for Wei Ying to bear.

Wei Ying leaps out of bed, and races to the door, pulling it open. He gazes upon the sight of Lan Jingyi with his head furiously bowed, unable to meet the brutal, hardened eyes of Hanguang-Jun.

“Lan Zhan,” Wei Ying calls, because he knows his husband will always be sweet on him. “Why are you still here?”

Lan Wangji’s eyes, when raised to his, immediately soften with love. “Wei Ying, you should be in bed.”

“I’m still waiting for the tonic,” Wei Ying says, feigning his impatience, in a tone so unlike himself. “I’m tired, and I want to sleep soon. Are you going to keep me up any longer?”

Shame quickly fills Lan Wangji’s eyes. “No,” he says, not wanting to argue, especially not when he now knows Wei Ying is with child. “I shouldn’t have kept you waiting. I will inform the kitchen now.”

He takes his leave without a word more to Jingyi, which relieves the fox. Wei Ying does feel bad for raising his voice at his husband, but it’s not as if he was ever impatient with him in any way. Hell, Wei Ying still has a score to settle with him for the grandiose lie he had pulled off, when it came to him faking his inability to speak the common tongue. Lan Wangji can surely take a snide remark from him once or twice. Enough to get him away from Jingyi, anyway.

“Jingyi, are you okay?” Wei Ying pats lightly at the boy’s head, his fingers brushing gently at his antlers. “Come, look at me.”

Lan Jingyi lifts his eyes, and Wei Ying sees that they are blood red.

“Ah, Jingyi,” Wei Ying’s heart stings. “Lan Zhan forgets you are still a child.”

“I didn’t mean to let you down, furen,” Lan Jingyi hiccups, breathy and shaking, raising his sleeves so he can wipe at the snot in his nose. “I didn’t mean to let Hanguang-jun down, either. I just wanted... I just wanted to protect furen, at the end of the day. Whether by fighting in the war, or staying by your side. In the end, it’s all,” and he’s hiccuping again, “It’s all for you.”

“Jingyi, I know,” Wei Ying sighs, wrapping his arms around the boy. “I know better than anyone. I know you are sweet on me, too.”

“It won’t happen again, I’ll make sure of it,” Lan Jingyi vows, wheezing into Wei Ying’s shoulder. “I won’t leave you, even if the crown prince asks of it himself. I can’t let furen get hurt again. Especially now that furen is with child...”

“Jingyi ah,” Wei Ying continues to pat him, reassuringly. “I believe you.”

“Y...You do?”

“Yes,” Wei Ying pulls back from the hug, only so he can gaze right back into Lan Jingyi’s tearful, dark lilac eyes. “I know I can always count on you. You’ve always done your best, I

know. I see it. Furen trusts you, okay? Furen believes in you.”

Lan Jingyi’s so heartened to hear such words, he’s immediately enveloping Wei Ying into another body-crushing embrace, and sobbing gratefully into the fox’s chest.

The months that follow are full of battle planning. While Lan Wangji and Jiang Cheng were able to easily win their portion of the war, despite having rushed back early to check on Wei Ying, the war is far from over. Now that Wei Ying is pregnant, Lan Wangji has all the more reason to remain at Cloud Recesses, and throw himself deep into planning their next move, with the help of Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue in tow. Nie Huaisang has also been of great help for the war, although Lan Wangji insists he spend most of his time by Wei Ying’s side since their child is of utmost priority. The elders, too, agree—they have showered Wei Ying with endless gifts, fortunes and blessings since the announcement of his pregnancy, having placed their faith in the Lan clan prophecy. Prophecy or not, though, Lan Wangji only sees Wei Ying as the mother of his child, and not an instrument in winning this war. And as the mother of his child, Wei Ying is his *everything*.

Now that the dragon prince lies in his belly, Wei Ying is distinctively aware of the privileged treatment he gets around Cloud Recesses. Before, servants and Lan clan disciples had already looked to him in awe, as if in both amazement and disbelief that a single fox can somehow guarantee their victory in this ongoing war. Now that Wei Ying carrying the clan’s next heir has become common knowledge, everyone certainly goes out of their way to revere him and treat him respectfully, afraid to even allow Wei Ying to feel discomfort when he’s done such great service for the dragon clan. The Lans assign him a group of handmaidens that are on a rotation basis—so as to minimise the possibility of wicked collaboration and spying—and Wei Ying is to be accompanied wherever he goes, with Lan Jingyi right by his side. The young dragon inspects every piece of food and drink that is offered to Wei Ying, even downs it in Wei Ying’s stead sometimes if he finds it suspect so as to ensure it is free of poison. They can’t be sure the Wens will not arrange for a second assassination attempt, particularly now that there actually *is* a baby to kill.

But of course, now that Lan Wangji is back in Cloud Recesses, none dare to even take a step too close to Wei Ying. The Second Prince is notoriously protective of his mate, and stares anyone to death should their glance so much as linger for a second too long. News of his cold treatment to his brother, the crown prince, after having caught him being overly familiar with Wei Ying in the imperial garden, had spread amongst the clan like wildfire. If even his beloved older brother is not spared by his wrath, then what more of the common folk?

Slowly, but surely, Wei Ying's belly grows bigger as the child begins to take shape. The dark *qi* that had formed for the first three months was simply laying foundation to the innate power, the core, that his baby will eventually hold, Nie Huaisang explains. It's the first we've seen of it, but this is also the first time a dragon has mated with a fox. Abnormalities are to be expected. There is nothing to worry about. Your child will protect itself.

Wei Ying and Nie Huaisang do plenty of reading, and spend the bulk of their time in the library pavilion of Cloud Recesses, researching up on every single thing to do with the nature of foxes and dark cultivation. Although Wei Ying has stayed away from it all—Jiang shushu and a-yi had been strict about staying on the clear path of righteous cultivation—if his child is to entwine himself deeply in the dark energies of his spiritual fox nature then Wei Ying wants to know everything about it, so he can prepare himself and raise his child accordingly. He certainly does not want to forbid his child from anything, even if it may be controversial in nature. He'd repressed the fox side of himself for most of his life, out of fear and disdain for what he really was, and he doesn't want to wish the same fate unto his child.

After all, it was him being a fox that had saved Jiang Cheng's, and his, life. If he had been anything else—they wouldn't be here today, with the immense support and backing of the Lans.

Lan Wangji whisks him away after lunch one afternoon, eagerly clutching hold of his hand and leading him out into an open clearing within the Inner Palace.

"Don't you have to meet with Jiang Cheng and the others today?" Wei Ying asks, laughing, barely able to keep up with his overly excited husband. Lan Zhan's in unusually high spirits.

"Is it a crime to spend more time with my furen," Lan Wangji says, masking his smile. "You spend all the time in the library now, I hardly get to see you anymore."

"Well, it's not like you ever let me visit you on training grounds," Wei Ying clarifies. "You know I don't mind going over."

"The training grounds are dirty," Lan Wangji frowns at the thought. "And... too many men."

"Too many *what*," Wei Ying repeats, rolling his eyes. "Will any dare to approach me with you there?"

"Even looking is forbidden," Lan Wangji huffs.

“Lan Wangji,” Wei Ying always finds it hard to begrudge the dragon prince for his jealousy when he looks so utterly *adorable* being petty. “Have you added to the long list of Lan clan rules, now?”

“Yes,” Lan Wangji says, his hands lowering down to hoist Wei Ying by his waist, lifting the fox slightly up so his feet aren't touching the ground. “My fox. My Wei Ying.”

“Lan Zhaan,” Wei Ying smiles, gazing down upon his husband's countenance. He extends his hands forward and cups the dragon's hard cheeks, kissing him softly. “If I didn't know any better, I'd think you were a child with this sort of behaviour.”

Lan Xichen had mentioned to Wei Ying, during their many afternoon sessions in the imperial garden, that they'd been through a pretty rough childhood, growing up. Lan Wangji did not take the loss of his mother very well. Perhaps some of that childlike innocence—possessiveness?—still arises to the surface in moments like these.

“You will have to learn how to share me, soon,” Wei Ying nags at the dragon. “You will soon be a father.”

“A father,” Lan Wangji echoes, his gaze suddenly looking so far away. He always gets so giddily caught up in his thoughts when he's reminded they have a little one coming soon, on the way. “Wei Ying...”

He places Wei Ying back down onto the ground, this time not even hiding his smile.

“Do you trust me?” Lan Wangji asks.

Wei Ying narrows his eyes, suddenly suspicious. “Lan Zhan, that's not a very promising question.”

“I want to take you somewhere, nearby here,” Lan Wangji says. “We can go there together.”

“On a dragon?”

“No—well, yes,” Lan Wangji says. “On me.”

Wei Ying's heart races. Lan Zhan can't be suggesting... “You want me to ride you? I have never... I have never ridden a dragon. Alone, that is.”

“Wei Ying, I will not drop you.”

“Ah, is, is that really okay,” Wei Ying grows nervous at the thought. He'd seen Lan Wangji's dragon form up-close only once, for the execution of his former two handmaidens, and his husband had looked out of this world—and absolutely terrifying. Lan Wangji's big, much bigger than all the other dragons. He can't imagine even riding such a creature, even if it's his very husband in question.

“Yes, you only need to sit on me,” Lan Wangji affirms. “I will go slow and be very careful. I will not bring any harm to you. You will always be safe with me.”

“Um,” Wei Ying knows he can believe him. If there’s anyone who will make sure that he’s safe, it’s Lan Wangji. “You will not be able to talk, in your dragon form?”

“I can, in limited capacity,” Lan Wangji says. “But it exerts a lot of strength, and I typically conserve it for battle. But do not be worried about not being able to communicate with me. I can listen and understand your every word, and if you feel you are in danger, I will lead you to safety.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be my first time having some sort of one-sided communication with you,” Wei Ying jokes, unable to resist teasing him. “I’m sure you’ve had a ton of practice.”

Lan Wangji’s face falls at the reminder. “Wei Ying, I am sorry…”

“Okay, okay, I’ll trust you,” Wei Ying sighs, reaching up to encircle his arms around the man’s neck. “You’ll turn into a dragon, and take me somewhere for a date?”

“Mn.”

“Okay,” Wei Ying nods, agreeing to his proposal. “So turn into a dragon.”

This would actually be the first time Wei Ying sees Lan Wangji’s mystical transformation into a dragon, first-hand, live.

The man takes several steps back from Wei Ying, giving his dragon form plenty of room to manifest in, then closes his eyes, as if willing his form into existence. At first it’s slow—the shallow scales on his scarred cheeks gradually come to life and become increasingly prominent, spreading rapidly down his neck to the rest of his body, one scale after another, blueish green slowly losing colour until it becomes pure white, sunlight reflecting off every shard. His antlers, they elongate from his head, his eyes, they dilate to disproportionate amounts, and his teeth, they sharpen and extend like feral canines. Steam emits from every crevice of his skin, producing rolls of sweat that drench him from head to toe.

In the blink of an eye, smoke and clouds shroud his frame, as if hiding him from plain sight; as if he does not wish to further horrify Wei Ying with the bloody details of his transformation. It takes only a split second before his monstrosity of a big dragon tail whips out and flies across the air, sweeping past the open area. As the smoke and clouds from before begin to clear up, his bright yellow claws are the first thing to extend from his lengthy body and find support on the ground. He leans his head forward, pushing past the grey smoke, breathing pure steam through his flared nostrils; and Wei Ying sees that his head is no longer of a human’s—even if certain characteristics are still so signaturely Lan Wangji’s.

His dragon form is incredibly imposing, but Wei Ying doesn’t remain frightened for too long.

Lan Wangji steps forth, until his head is bowed right before his furen’s.

“You want me to climb on now?” Wei Ying asks.

Lan Wangji grunts, which Wei Ying takes as some sort of a yes.

He walks to the side of Lan Wangji’s head, and gets on his tippy toes.

“You know, I used to climb plenty of trees back in Lotus Pier,” Wei Ying proudly exclaims, as he grabs hold of several of Lan Wangji’s hard scales up top, and positions his feet on some lower ones. It takes much effort, because Wei Ying is still considerably small in size compared to the large dragon, but Lan Wangji flattens his head and curls his tail around Wei Ying’s body to ensure he does not fall in his attempts. Eventually, Wei Ying makes it to the top without much effort, seating himself safely and securely right behind Lan Wangji’s golden antlers.

“If I hold onto these, I think I’ll be okay,” Wei Ying reassures, more so for himself than for the other man.

Lan Wangji grunts again in response. *Hold tight.*

He moves slowly as promised, first lifting them off the ground, before slithering higher up into the air. The adrenaline in Wei Ying’s veins begin to take flight. They fly over the rest of Cloud Recesses, from the Inner Palace to the Outer, from outside of the palace to the city of the common folk, and then finally to the golden gates where the clouds end. Lan Wangji disguises himself well enough behind the many clouds up above that no one notices the Second Prince travelling about—otherwise plenty would have a field day.

Just like that, Lan Wangji takes Wei Ying through the clear blue skies—finally free of clouds!—on a ride to the place of destination.

Flying on a dragon is not as scary as it’d initially seemed, Wei Ying thinks to himself, as he holds his husband’s dragon antlers close. *And I trust Lan Zhan to protect me, and never let me fall.*

They land at the highest mountain peak, hidden just below a billow of clouds. Lan Wangji floats down into an open clearing, with space big enough to accommodate his enormous body size. Wei Ying hops off only when Lan Wangji makes a grunt and indicates it’s safe to do so, extending his tail to lend Wei Ying a helping hand as he climbs down his body.

As Wei Ying dusts off his hands against his clothes and straightens his crumpled robes out, Lan Wangji curls up into a ball and gradually morphs back into his humanoid form. Before Wei Ying even knows it, there are already mortal arms wounding tightly around his waist from behind, with familiar, warm dragon breath airing right against his cheek.

“You were so good for me,” Lan Wangji murmurs sweetly into his ear, pressing butterfly kisses to his skin. “So brave.”

“Lan Zhan, you are my *husband*,” Wei Ying teases, turning around so he can tilt his head right up—and rub his nose cutely against Lan Wangji’s. “Why would I be afraid of you? Plus, you promised not to drop me.”

“Mn, I wouldn’t ever drop Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji hums, smiling down into his eyes. “I ferried Wei Ying like my life depended on it.”

“I know you did,” Wei Ying says, with a laugh.

Lan Wangji had been so careful.

The Second Prince spins Wei Ying back around, just so he can get a clear look of the view from where they’re standing. It’s certainly very picturesque. On the left, they have a complete bird’s eye view of the Gusu region, and the Caiyi town. On the right, there are scenic mountains, forests, and lakes. It’s the perfect contrast of human life right against nature.

Behind them lies a small cave that appears to provide shelter from the occasional rain. The open space they stand on is mostly clear, but is littered with plenty of stray bushes and flowers growing about, adding to the scenery.

The wind isn’t overly strong here, either, despite being so high up top—it’s just a light breeze. Wei Ying doesn’t feel all that cold, even with his thin layers of clothing. It’s the perfect spot for a getaway.

“So, is this your secret hiding spot, or something?” Wei Ying teases, hazarding a guess. There’s no way Lan Wangji didn’t know of this spot beforehand. He’d brought him here for a reason.

“Of sorts,” Lan Wangji admits. “I chanced upon this place long ago. I’ve come to like spending some time here alone, when I need space to clear my mind.”

“So, it *really* is your secret happy place,” Wei Ying laughs. He makes a show out of looking around the area, even stooping down to the ground so he can admire the flowers and shrubbery. “I like it. It’s pretty.”

“I thought you would,” Lan Wangji says, gratified to hear of it. “I also thought it’d be nice to get away from the palace, from Cloud Recesses for a while.”

“Yes, it is!” Wei Ying hurriedly agrees. He’s appreciative, for sure. The palace may be nice, and they take care of him very well over there, but it can still get rather pervasive and stifling at times. There are always people to meet, places to be, someone to talk to. Lan Jingyi has been adamant on not leaving his side for even a second, Nie Huaisang occupies most of his day, Jiang Cheng drops in every other hour, and the elders never seem to stray too far. “You couldn’t have gifted me anything better. Thank you.”

“Ah,” Lan Wangji’s ears flush. “When the child is born, and it is much safer, perhaps I can take you down to Caiyi...”

“Yes, *please*,” Wei Ying froths from the mouth at the idea. “I love exploring. I didn’t get to travel much back at Yunmeng, Jiang shushu was always too protective for that.”

“Mm,” Lan Wangji says, pridefully. “I’ll make sure to rectify that.”

He locates a nice and steady rock nearby, and seats Wei Ying up nicely upon it.

With one hand on the back of Wei Ying’s waist, the dragon prince gently supports the fox as he overlooks the rest of the world from where he’s sitting.

“So you can have a better view,” Lan Wangji says.

Wei Ying swings his legs happily against the rock. His husband is so thoughtful.

“You make it really hard to stay mad at you,” Wei Ying whines. Lan Wangji’s arm, as if on cue, tightens nervously around the fox.

“Mad?” Lan Wangji asks, softly, unsurely. “Have I... done something to upset you lately?”

In their many months of marriage, they’d never fought. That one altercation—when Lan Wangji had pulled Wei Ying away from the clutches of his brother back in the garden—was the closest thing they had to a fight, and even then, it really wasn’t even anything close to one. Lan Wangji had professed his love so earnestly, and Wei Ying had given in almost immediately.

“No,” Wei Ying answers, out of reflex. But then he remembers he’s been waiting for the perfect moment to settle this score with Lan Wangji, and so he quickly reneges on that answer. “I mean, yes.”

“Yes?” Lan Wangji’s face grows uncertain. “I have upset you?”

“Yes.”

“How,” Lan Wangji swallows down, thickly. “Wei Ying, you made no mention of it... Please, will you tell me how I have upset you.”

“You lied to me.”

“About?”

“Your language speaking abilities,” Wei Ying folds his arms, saying, deciding that he can be petty about things for *once*. “You pretended you couldn’t speak the common tongue, and made me go to great lengths just so I could get you to understand me. Or so I thought.”

Lan Wangji chews on his lip. “We talked about this, months ago.”

“No, we didn’t,” Wei Ying objects. “You fucked me delirious... into forgiving you.”

“Do you not forgive me for it?”

Why did Lan Wangji always have to look so irresistibly handsome in these sorts of situations? Wei Ying has to bite down on his tongue so he doesn't answer, just long enough to watch fear trickle into those watchful, golden eyes.

"Wei Ying?" Lan Wangji truly looks worried, now. "You really haven't forgiven me for it?"

"Forgive is a strong word."

"Wei Ying, I am your husband," Lan Wangji says firmly, doing his best to conceal his anxiousness. "I do not seek to harm you. I never have. Whatever I did—call it foolishness, or whatever, but it wasn't out of malice."

"Well, how am I to trust these sweet words of yours," Wei Ying points out. "When you understood me perfectly all those nights you fucked me, when I kept begging you to stop."

Lan Wangji looks mildly frustrated to hear of it. "It was, it was not, I did not do it to hurt you. I..."

"You liked it," Wei Ying accuses, with a sore huff. "You liked pretending not to know, so you could have your way with me."

"Wei Ying, I..."

"I can't blame you," Wei Ying sighs, in a tortured, dramatic stance. "I know it must have been so tempting, to simply have your way with your fox bride. You'd been gifted the bride, so titillating, so generous a gift, of course you wanted to make good use of it. You're still a dragon prince at the end of the day, aren't you? It's your birthright to have your way with things."

Lan Wangji appears horrified to hear of such a thing, his pride deeply wounded. "Wei Ying, I did not mean it like that. I love you."

"From the very beginning?" Wei Ying asks, in disbelief.

"If I said yes," Lan Wangji utters out, quietly. "Would you even believe me?"

There's underlying hurt in that tone he speaks with, that squeezes at Wei Ying's tender heart.

"You barely knew me," Wei Ying says back, still a tad bit skeptical. "You... really fell in love with me?"

Lan Wangji's eyes flicker up to his, in pain. "I do not want my love to be questioned."

Wei Ying breathes out, starting to feel sorry, "Lan Zhan, that's not what I'm trying to do..."

Lan Wangji has always been so sentimental when it comes to affairs of the heart. Wei Ying knows he has to tread lightly when it comes to this.

"Yes, I admit I was selfish," Lan Wangji says, diverting his eyes away. "The marriage, it was like nothing I had ever done before. I had handled many battles, but I could not sleep the

night before the wedding. I was afraid of loving someone, and being loved. I did not know how to handle things. I did not go about it the best way. It was... in major part, due to my inadequacies. I am sorry.”

Lan Wangji has alluded to this fear before.

A great war general, reduced to a boy inexperienced in love, at his core.

“And of course, I grew to love you in my own way,” Lan Wangji hesitates to say. “And I was nervous about letting you in, letting you know of the depths of it. I was afraid if you knew, you wouldn’t—wouldn’t even return it. In the end, you looked past my faults and still wanted to try for me, to come and love me. When you made it known you were trying to pick up dragon tongue just to speak to me I—” the dragon’s lips twitch, just slightly. “I was happy.”

“It wasn’t like I was going to be content staying in a loveless marriage,” Wei Ying whispers out. “And you... you had always been so kind to me. I liked you, and wanted it to be love, someday. I was going to try no matter what. If not for us, then for me.”

“I was,” Lan Wangji finally finds the courage to meet his eyes again. “Over the moon when you told me you loved me back, Wei Ying.”

“Ah, Lan Zhan,” and already Wei Ying wants to give in. His husband is so brutally honest and raw with his feelings, how can he not? “I still reserve the right to be mad at you.”

“You do,” Lan Wangji admits, reluctantly. “I am not without my faults, I understand that. Even when it comes to you and brother, I,” he glances away. “I cannot stand even the thought of you coming to rely on him, in ways that you should only be relying on me. Wei Ying, I am deeply sick...”

“Lan Zhan, it’s okay,” Wei Ying reassures, offering up a gentle smile to the man, palming up his cheeks. “I’m not mad. Well, not that mad, anymore. I know you were just nervous, and then things slipped too far out of your control. I know you didn’t mean to play with me.”

“I am sorry,” the prince says again, guiltily. “I was... rough with you in the beginning. I didn’t know any better. And yet I cannot... say that I did not enjoy it.”

Wei Ying lets out a haughty scoff, “Lan Wangji! Can’t you at least lie for the sake of the apology? *Shameless.*”

Lan Wangji’s frown deepens. “Wei Ying is very beautiful, it was very difficult to resist...”

“Lan Zhan, this really isn’t helping,” Wei Ying rolls his eyes, saying. “Are you trying to say that if you had a chance to do it all again on our wedding night, you would?”

Lan Wangji parts his lips, seemingly to answer—then closes it again. “Wei Ying should not ask me questions he does not want the honest answers to.”

“Lan Zhan!” Wei Ying exclaims, laughing. “I can’t stand you.”

“You will have to,” Lan Wangji insists. “You will have to bear with me, for the rest of your life. For the next hundreds of years.”

“If you aren’t good to me,” Wei Ying teases, just because he can. “I still have a couple hundreds of years to go to find a better dragon.”

“Wei Ying, you *dare*,” Lan Wangji says.

This time, he’s smiling though. And when he leans over to kiss Wei Ying softly on the cheek, Wei Ying happily nuzzles up against his touches.

“When the war is said and done, and the baby is born,” Wei Ying gazes at the view. “Let’s travel the world. What do you think? You can take me anywhere. I trust you.”

Lan Wangji doesn’t even deliberate over it. “Let’s travel,” he says, as the sun sets in the far distance and burns brightly behind them. “With the little one, too. I will see to it.”

“You can fly us around, like you did today,” Wei Ying smiles. “That is, if the little one is not a mighty dragon himself. Then I’ll fly on him too!”

Lan Wangji stifles a chuckle. “Our son will be a dragon, Wei Ying. You understand the dragon genes are dominant.”

“What if he’s a fox?” Wei Ying pouts.

“I will love him all the same,” Lan Wangji says. “But he will be born a dragon.”

“I already know he will bear my traits, my affinity for dark cultivation,” Wei Ying says. “So that’s fine by me.”

“Yes, he will take plenty after you,” Lan Wangji hums, kissing him once more. “I will be lucky if he does.”

(Except their child does end up taking much after his *father*, instead.)

Three more months pass, and Wei Ying’s belly has grown embarrassingly round. Embarrassing, only because it can no longer be hidden beneath his many layers of robes, and everyone who sees him treats him as if he is to deliver any moment now, and can no longer walk on his own. Sure, Wei Ying can no longer see his feet, but he can’t complain much; his pregnancy has been kind to him, much kinder than the tales he has heard from the court

ladies, who describe their pregnancies with much pain and disdain. His feet may have gotten swollen, but there are endless handmaidens—and even his husband himself—at his disposal, who are eager to give him a good foot rub should he request for it. His appetite may have increased, but he is fed well, even if they have had to dramatically reduce the spice in his food. In every waking moment, he is never without company, though now that he is nearing the end of his pregnancy he spends most of his time sleeping after his meals.

Carrying a baby dragon to term in his belly is exhausting work, all on its own. And yet with every passing day, Wei Ying does not feel like he's growing weaker, no, in fact the reverse is true—that he feels as if he is growing stronger. Before the baby, he'd cultivated his golden core well and hard, and was exceptionally great at martial arts. But with the presence of this child inside of him, and Wei Ying feels slightly insane for thinking this, but he can feel the child's spiritual power feeding his own golden core, nursing it and strengthening it in ways he didn't think possible without further cultivation. The baby will be exceptionally strong, there's no doubt about it; he has been prophesied to *be* exceptionally strong, to surpass the feats of anyone else on this earth. And as his mother, Wei Ying can already feel the budding potential of his son.

It feels more and more real, as he feels the baby taking form inside of him. He can feel his spirit, his soul, his liveliness, his gurgling laughter, even, when Lan Wangji speaks to his belly at night, in both dragon tongue and the common tongue. Sometimes the man even plays the guqin for their son to hear, as a bedtime lullaby, if he's so inclined. Wei Ying is always the first to be lulled into sleep happily when that happens, being overly indulged by his husband's sweet acts of affection. Lan Wangji is very good at the guqin, so much better than Wei Ying. Wei Ying is sure he will be able to impart a tremendous amount of skills to their son.

Soon, their baby will enter this world, and see the prophecy through. And when that day comes, he will set this world ablaze.

Until then, though, Wei Ying is stuck attending pompous celebrations with his husband in the grand hall of Cloud Recesses, one hand clutching his round belly and the other being held tightly by Lan Wangji. Lan Jingyi stands on the other side, ready to support him should Wei Ying show the slightest hint of inconvenience and discomfort. The fox is already growing slightly grumpy and impatient standing around in this party, seeing as the usual scheduled time for his evening nap is nearing. But he heard some of their troops that had been sent out recently have attained victory at their stations, and so it is mandatory he accompany his husband for a bit to celebrate the news at this feast, at least.

The golden pins are so heavy in his hair, though, and his—formerly favourite—violet robes weigh him down so much. He does his best to hide his displeasure, still, because he knows if he shows it Jingyi and the rest will begin coddling him like he is a sick patient, and Wei Ying can handle standing on his feet for at least a few minutes in a room. He really can!

He fakes an award-winning smile as military generals step forward to engage in conversation with his husband, and laughs beautifully at every compliment sent his way. *Lan er furen's beauty still puts our court ladies to shame at the height of his pregnancy, our Second Prince is truly blessed...*

All festivity and hearty laughter is interrupted the moment two guards rush into the hall, and call anxiously for Lan Wangji's attention.

The entire crowd breaks apart to give way to the bloodied and limping guards, holding in their hands the grotesque sight of a severed dragon head.

Lan Wangji steps forward the minute he sees this, shielding Wei Ying protectively from the view.

"Jingyi, escort Wei Ying back to the room immediately."

"Hanguang-Jun," the soldiers collapse onto their knees right before the dragon prince, spewing forth hysterically in dragon tongue. *"We were just delivered this, at camp. We came to inform your esteemed one, immediately."*

"They killed one of us," the rest of the room erupts into frenetic chatter. *"Dragons can be killed?"*

"Dragons cannot be so easily killed," even Lan Jingyi steps up to say, in sheer horror. "They couldn't have gotten close enough to one to do this. It's not—! It's not possible—!"

"Jingyi, *I will not repeat myself twice,*" Lan Wangji barks.

His gaze hardens towards the kneeling soldiers. *"How did this happen?"*

"We do not know," one of them says, face completely white like he's just seen a ghost. *"The dragon had been a missing general, we thought we'd lost him on enemy lines. His head... it came in a box, and in the box there was a note."*

"What note," Lan Wangji hisses.

The other man lifts a trembling hand up, holding a red piece of paper. *"On it is written just one character—infant."*

Lan Wangji swipes the note from his hand in a delirious manner, his two eyes bulging with blood-thirst, with the damning urge to kill.

"Infant," Wei Ying's hands clamp down around his belly, his heart filled with dread. "They still want my baby."

"That's not going to happen," Lan Wangji affirms. "They are not going to touch you, Wei Ying. Not with me here."

Wei Ying casts his eyes over the severed dragon head, and sees fresh blood still dripping from the ends where it'd been sliced apart. Those blue dragon eyes, they call out to him. The tongue lolling forth from the dragon's mouth, it seems to utter anguished voices in his head that only Wei Ying can hear, beckoning him forward.

He takes a step closer, and reaches a hand out.

“Furen,” Lan Jingyi yelps, in shock. “Furen, don’t touch it, it’s dirty!”

“Wei Ying—”

But before Lan Wangji can stop him, Wei Ying’s hand is already brushing against the surface of the dragon head, and his eyes instantly draw to a close.

He hears the sound of soldiers at war, shouting across the sky—

“Take cover! They’re getting too close!”

...and catches glimpses of a dragon, mid-flight, suddenly falling back in an erratic stance, like they’ve been possessed by the devil...

“Hey, what’s going on with you? We just need to head back to Cloud Recesses...”

...the dragon and its eyes glow bright red in colour—unheard of, amongst their kind—and snarls viciously forward, making a beeline for the host of these memories...

“You...! You dare betray our clan?”

...it bares its razor sharp teeth, delivering a fatal bite to the host, causing him to fall out of the sky, blood raining down those very eyes Wei Ying is peering out of...

“S...Something has gone horribly wrong with the war...”

...the host’s body thudding right down onto the muddied grounds of a forest, the last few seconds of its life spent observing as Wen crest-engraved boots walk over to his fatally injured self...

“You will make a fine gift for the Lans, don’t you think?”

Lan Wangji pulls Wei Ying’s hand off the severed dragon head, and immediately Wei Ying returns to his senses.

When he pulls his half-lidded eyes open, he’s lying against Lan Wangji’s chest, wrapped up in his embrace.

“Wei Ying, Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji calls fearfully, for the umpteenth time. “Wei Ying, can you hear me?”

Nie Huaisang pushes past the crowd to race to Wei Ying’s side. He hurriedly gestures to Jingyi. “Get him water and a wet towel, quick,” he instructs the Lan disciple. He turns back to the fox, and draws open the fan hanging at his waist, fanning Wei Ying and rapidly cooling him down. “Wei Ying, what did you see?”

“What do you mean,” Lan Wangji asks, with gritted teeth. “Are you not the seer around here? Why would Wei Ying...”

“Second Prince, I seek your permission to loosen his robes,” Nie Huaisang says. When he sees Lan Wangji’s brow twitch, he clarifies, “He needs the air.”

Lan Wangji’s face contorts in an indecipherable emotion. “I will do it.”

“There is dark energy emanating off the severed head,” Nie Huaisang quickly explains, as Lan Wangji pulls the robes apart around Wei Ying’s neck. “This is the work of Wens.”

Lan Wangji hesitates. “Wei Ying does not involve himself in demonic cultivation.”

“Wei Ying is a fox,” Nie Huaisang says. “This is his nature. It is not a big deal for him to tune himself into... into these energies.”

The crown prince, all these while observing silently from afar, finally steps in. “You are saying that the Wens are now weaponising demonic cultivation. This is how they are killing our kind?”

“Yes,” Nie Huaisang says. “And they will kill even more, until they win this war.”

“What?” Lan Wangji’s eyes widen at such a boldly uttered declaration. “They will win this war? You are a seer, and you are confirming this?”

“The goalposts have shifted,” Nie Huaisang says. “If you leave them as they are, they will win this war.”

Immediately the entire room quietens down, in fright.

“But the prophecy,” Lan Xichen says, his face paling.

“Prophecies,” Nie Huaisang sweeps a pitiful glance over the fox. “Can come true and still be broken, crown prince.”

Lan Jingyi rushes back to Wei Ying’s side, and dabs the wet towel all over his face. “Furen, furen, please drink water.”

Wei Ying’s eyes roll up, hazily. “Jingyi...”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji embraces the fox even tighter. “Wei Ying, I will keep you safe, I promise.”

“Lan Zhan, tell them,” Wei Ying murmurs out, on a dry throat. “Tell them...”

“What is it?” Lan Wangji hushes him, wipes away the sweat clouding his forehead.

“Tell them I know exactly where the Wens are, and what they’re doing to our soldiers.”

Surprise! I added 1 more chapter. I didn't realise how long these scenes would span, lol, I really thought I could end it all in 1 chapter... Hahahahaha

Anyways, this chapter took me so, so long to update, I'm sorry. It really took a lot out of me! Those who follow me on Twitter will know how much I've been bemoaning about writer's block. I'm so happy I managed to get this out. Progress!

Let me know what you think about this chapter!!! :DDD

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

tw: **slight blood and gore** as is common during a war, but nothing graphic or in detail. I also briefly describe **the process of giving birth** in this chapter, which is not meant to be realistically accurate whatsoever, this is a fantasy fic, lolol!!! please spare my smol brain, but here's a head's up incase you need it

I hope you enjoy the final instalment of [heavy is the crown], I'm so excited for you to read this :)

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

Wei Ying commands the room like a force of nature, like he was always meant to be here—in spite of being a very, *very* pregnant fox.

All around him, war generals stand at attention, listening attentively to what their imperial consort has to say. Jiang Cheng, Nie Mingjue, Nie Huaisang, and Lan Xichen, all in attendance. Even Lan Jingyi is here, supporting Wei Ying carefully from behind. Here, in the war room, they strictly discuss military strategy and plans, and such meetings are usually chaired by the Second Prince, the greatest war general of the Lan clan himself.

Today, however, it is Wei Ying who does the chairing. It is a rather endearing sight, with the fox spirit's brows furrowed in such deep concentration as he details the things he has seen being done to their men, while clutching a back that aches from carrying a belly that has become so round, harbouring a life force bigger than even himself. But no one laughs, no; no one dares, when the fate of their clan may very well lie in Wei Ying's hands.

Lan Zhan stays right by Wei Ying's side as he unrolls the map of their lands onto the table right before them, allowing the fox to quickly scan his eyes over the figures of mountains and forests, and towns and lakes, and finally landing on where it needs to be—

“Here,” Wei Ying points a finger to the far right of the map. “Deep within these enclaves, you will find the Wens’ camp.”

Lan Zhan questions, while holding his breath, “This is their base?”

“Yes,” Wei Ying responds, definitively. “If you cut them off at their roots, there is still a chance we can win this war.”

“So, what are they doing to our men?” Lan Xichen steps up to ask. “You alluded to such a matter.”

Wei Ying shares a look first with Nie Huaisang, who only nods at him and signals for him to elaborate. “They are turning our men against us,” Wei Ying says. “With demonic cultivation.”

“How?” Lan Jingyi murmurs, fear still apparent in his eyes. “We Lans will never betray our kind—!”

“They are blackening the souls of our kind,” Wei Ying answers, in a tone much more gentle to soothe the worries of the young dragon. “Turning our dragons red-eyed, stripping them of their humanity and using them to fight us.”

“The dragons have never lost a war,” Jiang Cheng curses, hands clenching into fists at the knowledge. “But if they have dragons too, then there is a chance they can win.”

“Those are *our* dragons,” Lan Jingyi yells, incensed. “Those are our men!”

His rage seems to have incited the war generals all around them to pipe up unhappily too, loud brazen voices filling the room noisily with chatter, some of them even taking to punching angry fists down onto the elongated table in the middle.

At this, Nie Huaisang speaks up. “We have an advantage,” he says, raising his voice over the rest. “They are only in the early stages.”

“Early stages?” Lan Xichen asks again.

“Demonic cultivation,” Nie Huaisang explains, snapping open his fan. “They are as new to it, as we are.”

“What are they using to control this?” Lan Zhan asks, glancing at Wei Ying. “Foxes are the only animals in tune with this, and we have the last fox.”

“I do not have an answer for you,” Nie Huaisang says, fanning himself. “But perhaps that is why they are eager to get their hands on your child.”

Wei Ying didn’t understand fully before, but he understands now. “If they can’t murder our child, then they want to use him to strengthen their power. I’m guessing whatever it is that they’re using—it’s not enough to sustain them for the long-term. If they want to remain in power, they need the likes of me. The likes of...” Wei Ying’s hands caress down his stomach, his face grim, his lips sealed in a tight line. “...him.”

“You are saying, that if we storm their base now, we will have an advantage,” Nie Mingjue repeats.

“Yes,” Wei Ying lifts his eyes back up to him. “They don’t know that we know.”

“They don’t have a fox spirit,” Nie Huaisang hides his smile behind his fan. “They don’t have a Wei Ying.”

“Then, we set off in a week,” Lan Zhan decides on the spot, already impatient to rain bloodshed on those who intend to hurt his family. He wounds an arm around Wei Ying’s waist and shoots Lan Xichen a look, “Brother, gather our allies.”

“Yes,” Lan Xichen nods firmly back at him. “It will be done.”

“Glory be to our clan!” Lan Jingyi cheers, his young face looking hopeful and bright, rallying the rest of the room to do the same. “Glory be to Hanguang-jun, and his esteemed Imperial Consort Wei Wuxian!”

“Glory be to our Hanguang-jun, and esteemed Imperial Consort Wei Wuxian!”

Wei Ying raises his eyes up to meet his husband’s resolute, golden ones, and feels his heart flutter in his chest.

The next time Wei Ying convenes with Nie Huaisang in the library, the seer is handing him a hand-crafted, black bamboo flute.

“What is this,” Wei Ying asks, caught off-guard by the gift.

“You have repressed your nature for far too long in your life, and so it’ll be difficult for you to suddenly cope with the bulk of it coming to light,” Nie Huaisang explains, out of the blue. “I was able to find an old scroll detailing the steps needed to awaken one’s dark cultivation.”

“So, a flute...?”

“The only reason you can tune into the effects of demonic cultivation, like the way you did with the dragon head, is because of the child in you,” Nie Huaisang says. “He is of your blood, and he is of a prophecy. He does not need the yin to be awakened in him—he *is* of yin. But because you have cultivated normally all your life, you will need some help to manage these dark energies that are suddenly coming to life.”

“What can I do?” Wei Ying asks, unsure.

“There is one way to fully awaken your nature,” Nie Huaisang details. “A blood sacrifice.”

Wei Ying frowns. “A sacrifice?”

“Traditionally, foxes are an omen of death,” Nie Huaisang says. “Death and demonic cultivation are closely entwined. I am guessing whatever the Wens are using—it involves a ton of blood sacrifices on their part, which should come easy to them due to the war. However, I do not envision such a thing is possible for you.”

“No,” Wei Ying says. “I don’t think so.” He will not have anyone’s blood on his hands, purely for such vain, ambitious purposes.

“The next best thing is music,” Nie Huaisang explains, presenting to him the flute. “Just like how the Lans use the guqin as a spiritual weapon during war, you can enlist the help of an instrument to attune yourself to your dark cultivation.”

It all quickly comes together. “How did you know I played the flute?” Wei Ying asks, wonderfully surprised. He accepts the flute gratefully, feeling the weight of it in his hands. It’d been meticulously crafted by a refined artisan, for sure.

“I was able to find out from Jiang Wanyin,” Nie Huaisang says, with a cryptic smile. “He was eager to share such information.”

“Huh,” Wei Ying eyes him with sudden suspicion. He hadn’t realised the seer had been in contact with his brother. “Have you always spent time with Jiang Cheng?”

“Hahaha...” Nie Huaisang raises his fan to his face, looking away. “I wonder...”

“Well, thank you anyway,” Wei Ying says, smiling down at the flute he holds. If Nie Huaisang won’t speak, Wei Ying will just have to dig it out of his brother later. Jiang Cheng always gives in to him, in the end.

“The flute is a good idea.”

“Why not give it a try?” Nie Huaisang hums. “And see if it really works?”

“Mm,” Wei Ying nods.

He raises the flute up to his lips, and sucks in a breath. Then he lowers his eyelids and blows at it softly, playing a tune once familiar to Lotus Pier, now forever lost to the burnt remains of Yunmeng.

Shijie, a-yi and shushu...

Nothing major outwardly happens, but after a minute or two Wei Ying does feel the rapid relaxing of his *qi* coursing through his blood, when what was once—a conflicting burst of dark *qi* overtaking his normal core, stripping him rapidly of energy and life—now it swiftly loosens and slackens in its hold, falling back into a much more manageable pace, living alongside its core in harmonious balance.

By the time Wei Ying is done with playing the tune, his energies are back in equilibrium.

“How do you feel?” Nie Huaisang asks, curious.

“Better,” Wei Ying whispers, pleasantly amazed. “You were right. It helps to steady my core.”

“Good,” Nie Huaisang smiles. “This should make the rest of your pregnancy much better for you.”

“Ah, Huaisang, this is great, thank you,” Wei Ying says, positively beaming. “I think this will help a lot.”

“At your service, your highness,” Nie Huaisang laughs. “Keeping you safe and healthy is my reward.”

The flute, it seems, will seek to do more than just that.

Wei Ying strolls through the training grounds on the Outer Palace, amongst soldiers relentlessly practicing their swordsmanship and archery. They lift their heads up whenever Wei Ying passes them by, greet their esteemed imperial consort, revering him as their very key to winning this war. This time, not only with the dragon prince in his belly—but for the foresight and abilities he offers as a fox spirit. Wei Ying is truly their only hope, in more ways than one.

Wei Ying can’t resist glancing over to the ones practicing their bow and arrows. He’d been such a good archer back in Yunmeng, and it’s unfortunate that his standing now keeps him out of active duty in the war. Still, Wei Ying knows he continues to contribute plenty to it in many other ways.

The fox spirit eyes the young ones—teenagers, just like Lan Jingyi, *so young and already made to go off into war*—practicing their archery, and Wei Ying simply can’t sit still.

“Here, let me show you how to better hold your bow,” Wei Ying says, making his way quickly to the side of a young soldier dressed in red. Unlike the others, he lacks dragon antlers, and so Wei Ying guesses he must be a soldier belonging to the other sects that have allied with the Lans. “What’s your name?”

“O-Ouyang Zizhen,” he furiously stammers. It seems he hadn’t expected to be personally taught by the great imperial consort today. “Y-Your highness, I am bestowed with great honour...”

“Ouyang Zizhen, keep your eyes right on the target,” Wei Ying instructs, placing a hand over the young soldier’s one on the bow. He guides Ouyang Zizhen, pushing him into place and revising his stance. “Hold your head up high, and steady your hands. Think of nothing but of making that shot. In battle, there are no second chances.”

“Y-Your highness,” Ouyang Zizhen splutters out. Wei Ying’s breath is on his ear, his gentle touch still lingering against his hands, and he’s far, *far* too close for the young soldier to be able to concentrate on the target on hand.

“Once you’re ready,” Wei Ying orders, stepping aside. “Then let go.”

Ouyang Zizhen ignores the irregular palpitation in his chest, and hardens his gaze. Renewed with sheer determination, and knowledge that the esteemed imperial consort is looking on, he lets the arrow fly.

He hits it, right on target.

“Ouyang Zizhen,” Wei Ying smiles, praising him quickly. “Make sure you make it out of this war alive.”

The young soldier is almost giddy when he responds whole-heartedly with, “*Yes, your highness!*”

“Wei Ying?”

Wei Ying spins around, and sees his brother has come to greet him.

“A-Cheng!” Wei Ying says, his smile widening. “I was looking for you.”

“For what?” Jiang Cheng says, slightly annoyed. He sheathes the long sword he’d just been brandishing into the air before, hanging it by the side of his robes. “I told you, it’s not safe to come out onto the training grounds. It’s also dirty here. If you want to look for me, just send Jingyi, and I’ll come meet you at the Inner Palace.”

Wei Ying swallows his laughter. “A-Cheng ah, why are you sounding more and more like Lan Zhan? You’ve seriously been spending way too much time with him for this war.”

“Well, the Second Prince makes you his priority, as he should,” Jiang Cheng sniffs. “I certainly can’t begrudge him for that.”

Wei Ying smiles, and shakes his head. “A-Cheng ah, I was hoping you’d join us for dinner again tonight in the Inner Palace. Just five days to go, and you’ll be on the frontlines again.”

Jiang Cheng’s vexed gaze visibly softens at the request he hears. “Of course,” he says. “You know I won’t miss it.”

“Yes, and Huaisang will attend too,” Wei Ying grins, to which Jiang Cheng’s expression immediately darkens—at Wei Ying is possibly insinuating. “What? Haven’t you been spending so much time with him?”

“I’m not going to indulge you on this,” Jiang Cheng says, turning away. “Clearly, becoming an imperial consort has given you way too much time on your hands.”

“A-Cheng,” Wei Ying laughs, tugging him back. “Just one last thing.”

“What?” Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes.

“If something happens during this war,” Wei Ying says, in a tone much more serious, and much graver, than before. “Jiang Wanyin, just come home.”

Jiang Cheng is hesitant. “We have dragons to win this war.”

“You are not a dragon,” Wei Ying says.

“I still can—”

“You are my brother,” Wei Ying says.

Jiang Cheng has nothing to respond to that.

“Promise me?” Wei Ying asks.

“Alright,” Jiang Cheng says, with a low sigh. “I’ll come home.”

The dragon that Lan Zhan had gifted to Wei Ying as his marital gift sits in the imperial stables—big, wide enclosures where dragons are well-fed and left to roam as they please. Wei Ying had begun paying him, the dragon, much more visits of late, having realised he’d come to neglect his prized gift in the flurry of his marriage and shortly after, his pregnancy.

Dragons are usually fond of being fed raw meat, but this one has his own little quirk. He enjoys being fed freshly plucked apples for dessert, and so Wei Ying decides to name him “Lil Apple”.

Wei Ying hasn’t had a chance to take him out for a ride yet, what with him being heavy with child, but he promises Lil Apple that he will do so the first chance he gets once the baby is born. And while Lil Apple is too low in cultivation to speak and exchange words with him, he understands every word of Wei Ying’s and seems to bask in the fox’s company.

“He will arrive very soon,” Wei Ying tells Lil Apple, as he offers up another piece of fruit to the dragon’s mouth. Standing right next to him, the dragon is at least three times his height. Wei Ying is no bit intimidated by it though, having long grown accustomed to the company of dragons. “Your little dragon prince! And then we can take rides to Caiyi Town, just like Lan Zhan promised. Isn’t that exciting?”

Lil Apple happily chomps down on the apple offered to him, and emits several bouts of steam from his nostrils. It’s his way of showing his pleasure, which Wei Ying appreciates.

“I wonder what he’ll look like, as a dragon,” Wei Ying smiles, hands hugging his own belly. “Will he have white scales, just like his father? Those are unique only to the royal family, aren’t they?”

“They are,” Lan Zhan’s voice answers, from behind. The Second Prince soon comes into view, placing a hand himself on the head of Lil Apple. In dragon tongue, he greets him, “*I hope you have been well.*”

Lil Apple does an equally respectful bow.

“Lan Zhan?” Wei Ying questions, turning to face him. Lan Zhan, that utterly handsome and impatient husband of his, he leans his hand over, and cups at Wei Ying’s cheek.

Then he pulls him up several inches off the floor, and kisses him.

Wei Ying completely drops the apples that he’d been holding, leaving Lil Apple to hungrily gobble them up behind him.

The fox is set back down onto the ground on his two feet after a short and heavy kiss, his pretty face flushing.

“Tomorrow morning,” Lan Zhan announces, regretfully. “We will depart.”

“I know,” Wei Ying says, with an unwilling heart. “I thought you’d be busier today.”

“I was,” Lan Zhan hums, his hand still tracing Wei Ying’s jaw. “But I missed you.”

Wei Ying grins. He leans into Lan Zhan’s touch, and nestles his head against his hand. “The sooner you get this war done and over with, the sooner you can be with our child. Who knows, you might just come back in time for his birth!”

“I am not missing it,” Lan Zhan immediately frowns. “For the world.”

“You’ll have to be here,” Wei Ying nods, then playfully adds, “Or I’ll hate you.”

“You’ll hate me?”

“I’ll positively hate you,” Wei Ying teases.

Lan Zhan relaxes his face into a smile. Then, suddenly looking rather nervous, he averts his eyes and says to Wei Ying with much hesitation, “I have a name for our child.”

“Hm?” Wei Ying asks, surprised. When did Lan Zhan even have time to come up with that? “What is it?”

“I’ll share it with you when I return,” Lan Zhan says, in a soft murmur. “So, wait for me.”

Wei Ying’s heart quivers. It’s a promise. “You will return, of course.”

“I will,” Lan Zhan affirms, with eyes full of promise that bore into his. “The universe cannot tear me apart from you.”

There is always so much weight in his words—his *gaze*—that Wei Ying will drown in all of him, forevermore.

“Okay,” Wei Ying says, with utmost confidence in the dragon prince. “Okay, I’ll wait to hear our son’s name.”

“Good,” Lan Zhan silences his words with one last kiss.

One final promise.

They leave in the morning, with the size of an army the likes of which none have seen before. This will be their biggest conquest yet, having allied with numerous sects and clans to overtake the overpowering hostile force that is the Wens. With the very last fox spirit’s blessing and a seer’s assurance, they are well-equipped for victory in this war.

They call it the “Sunshot Campaign”.

No less than two weeks later, Cloud Recesses burns up in flames.

Wei Ying is quietly seated on his bed in his chambers when it happens, with Lan Jingyi on his knees right before him, smiling faithfully as he serves him his early morning tea. The young dragon never leaves his side for even a moment, just as he’d promised Hanguang-Jun, just as he’d promised Lan er furen himself.

It’d been so early, Wei Ying hadn’t even changed out of his morning robes yet.

Then the grounds beneath them shake, and the skies above them become overcast. Lan Jingyi jumps up to run to the windows, and sees that dragons with red eyes have overtaken the grey skies, breathing down fire that raze the very palace grounds they’re standing on.

They hear the screams of charred bodies all around them, before they even see them. Lan Jingyi turns to look at Wei Ying, his face ashen, fear quickly rising behind his eyes.

“They’re here,” Lan Jingyi says, his throat collapsing in on itself. “I don’t know how, but they’re here.”

Immediately Wei Ying *knows* something has happened to his husband. To his brother. To everyone who has left for the war—perhaps even that young soldier he’d taught briefly back

on the training grounds.

The Sunshot Campaign must have been a failure.

Wei Ying wants so badly to keel over, and mourn for the husband who must have been left for dead on the battlefield. But Lan Jingyi is already trembling non-stop, and Wei Ying can't bear to let any bit of his own fear show.

There are two children in this room that he needs to protect, and one of them is still in his belly.

"Jingyi," Wei Ying parts his lips to say, slowing his breaths. Using every muscle in his body, he stifles his whimpers, and maintains a face of composure. He reaches for the flute and sword he keeps for security underneath his bed, holding them close to him should he need to use them.

He is hardly breathing at all when he orders, "Seal the doors."

The guards outside are already engaged in battle with the palace intruders—he can hear it, the deafening clashing of metal swords.

Just like the Wens promised, they are coming for him and his baby.

"Furen," Lan Jingyi swallows his tears, doing just as asked, even if he sees no way out. "They have the palace surrounded."

"I cannot die, do you hear me?" Wei Ying commands out loud, with his pulse beating in his ears, blocking out every other sound. Sweat pours down his body, but he will not give in to the sheer terror that engulfs him. If he shows weakness, he will die. "And I cannot die. There is still a child inside of me."

Under any other circumstance, Wei Ying would have gladly given his life to protect the ones he loved. But he cannot do so, not when his child—his *baby*—is still growing inside of him, with a heart still so small and weak to take shape outside of him.

Lan Zhan hadn't even told him his name...

Lan Jingyi seals Wei Ying's chambers with a protection array, a simple but well-devised concoction of the Lans' to keep those not of the royal Lan blood out of this space. Wei Ying sees no option here but to confine himself to this room and prepare for a fight if need be—he will defend his child to death, if that's required of him. Even if this child's parents leave this world, this child will still stand a fighting chance to live. Wei Ying cannot die. Wei Ying cannot die. *Wei Ying cannot die.* He will give his every breath for this child's survival, or so help him god.

He may be the prophesied dragon prince to others, but to Wei Ying, this child is of his very blood and flesh.

"Furen," Lan Jingyi backs away from the doors, saying. He stands on guard right before the fox, unsheathing his sword. With hands full of trepidation, he says, "I need to tell you

something.”

Wei Ying steadies his breaths in an attempt to clear his mind, and lifts his gaze up to him.
“What is it, Jingyi?”

Lan Jingyi never gets to answer.

The doors break open with a fiery blast, and the sacred array is smashed to bits.

A plain-looking young man, dressed in white robes patterned with red swirly rays of the sun around the collar and sleeves—signature to the sigil of the Wen clan—with a tall ruby crown, comes riding in on a dragon with eyes that are molten red.

Wei Ying would recognise that face anywhere.

The last time he’d seen him, he’d just slain Jiang Yanli right before his eyes.

“Wen Chao,” Wei Ying snarkily greets, doing his best to calm the pounding he hears in his ears. “You dare invade Cloud Recesses?”

Wen Chao lets out ugly, ghoulish laughter. “You’re right where I need you, Wei Wuxian.”

“How did you break the array?!” Lan Jingyi yells out, defiantly from below. “You’re not of the royal family!”

Wen Chao turns his head, and cracks his neck in amusement at what he sees. “Oh, so interesting, a kid has come out here to play. Of all the soldiers in the world—and your beloved Hanguang-Jun gets a *child* to defend you? My my, Wei Wuxian. I really wonder just how much he loved you at all.”

He pulls a piece of blood-soaked cloth from within his robes and discards it thoughtlessly to the ground, from where he sits on the dragon. The minute it leaves his hands, Wei Ying can so clearly tell it’d been ripped from his husband’s battle robes. A cold wave embalms him and freezes every muscle in his body as the realisation sinks slowly down into him, his mouth quickly running dry.

Wei Ying wants to open his mouth, but he lacks the will to scream.

My husband is dead.

“This is what’s left of your Hanguang-Jun,” Wen Chao sneers, mockingly. “I have to say, it’s such a waste I burned the rest of him. Don’t I only need the blood of a royal to break through your flimsy arrays, though? Does that answer your question, kid?”

Lan Jingyi can hardly hide the snot and tears running down his face. The very knowledge *that Hanguang-Jun is possibly gone*—it destroys him. Lan Jingyi has always been so sentimental, and it will be his downfall.

“YOU!”

“Jingyi,” Wei Ying ushers his blood red eyes shut, suddenly feeling so small. His voice is hoarse, broken. He already knows what the young dragon plans to do, he can feel it in his bones. Even if Lan Zhan is already gone...

“Jingyi, don’t!”

“I WILL AVENGE FUREN TWO-FOLD,” Lan Jingyi screams, steam erupting from his flared nostrils as he discards his sword and leaps into the air.

He shifts into his dragon form mid-air, a beautiful, blue thing, the first Wei Ying has ever seen of it, his bright yellow eyes coming into life as he roars with uncontrollable rage. There truly is something so grandiose, so majestic about the dragon forms of those of direct Lan descent, as young as Jingyi is. No one can deny the beauty in his luminescent scales, or the fearsome manner in which his fangs protrude, clearly meant to instil terror into his enemy’s hearts. But even with his long dragon tail whipping out from behind him, Lan Jingyi is small, far smaller than the adult dragon that stands right before him, even if Lan Jingyi has never been one to let his size get in the way.

As he bares his teeth in a hot frenzy, he lunges straight for Wen Chao, that silly boy—

—only for the adult dragon before him to raise his one claw, and fling Lan Jingyi carelessly to the side of the room. Lan Jingyi slams right against the golden walls, puncturing right into them. He slumps down to the floor in a bloody mess, several of his white bones twisting out of his skin.

“Jingyi!” Wei Ying shouts, his eyes dilating in fear. He’d already told Jingyi to hold back, but he *didn’t* listen, that stubborn boy. “Jingyi, are you alright?!”

“Even if he’s not dead, he’ll soon be,” Wen Chao laughs, rather triumphantly. “Ah, what a kid. Children, am I right? Now, Wei Wuxian, don’t you owe me something?”

Wei Ying glares up at him, a sliver of indignation still blazing up from within his eyes. “You took my sister, my husband, my Jingyi, and now you want to take my child. Wen Chao, it seems you will never stop.”

Wen Chao chuckles, shaking his head. “It seems my reign of terror will never end. Wei Wuxian, I am here to offer you a choice. You see, everyone on these lands knows of the prophecy. The child in you will set the world on fire, we know that. As terrible as I may be, even I do not wish to kill a child. So, how about we put to rest our enmity? Come join the

Wen clan, and in exchange no one will ever lay a finger on you and your child again. As the last fox spirit, you are far more valuable alive. It would so dreadfully pain me to kill you.”

Wei Ying looks at him, like he’s somehow gone insane.

He chokes out delirious laughter at such a proposal, because he’s lost too much, and he’s already holding on to so little. And yet, *and yet*, nothing will ever turn him to the way of the Wens’. Not when they have murdered every single person he loves—no, he’d rather choose death, over siding with the Wens’.

“No,” Wei Ying finally spits out, because as much as he wants his child to live, he wants it on *his* terms, and not the Wens’. “No.” He will not have his child grow up as a vassal to the Wens, serving them as a slave in order to further their endless thirst for power. Once his child is born, the Wens will dispose of him as the mother, anyway. They would never let Wei Ying watch him grow up. Not when Wei Ying has always been on enemy lines. Not when Wei Ying has slain too much of their men to ever keep count. They will not like him around, as much as he is the last fox spirit to walk this earth.

“No?” Wen Chao asks, again.

Wei Ying still remembers Lan Zhan’s voice, so sweet, so tender, in his head—

“I have a name for our child.”

“Hm? What is it?”

“I’ll share it with you when I return. So, wait for me.”

“You will return, of course.”

“I will. The universe cannot tear me apart from you.”

—and grips the sword in his hands tighter to him.

“No,” Wei Ying says with all of his might, for the last and final time.

“Ah, well, I thought so,” Wen Chao does a dramatic sigh, and waves a hand up in the air. It appears he is signalling for his dragon to kill. “Then I guess you choose death.”

Wei Ying unsheathes his sword, and prepares for a fight he knows he can hardly win. Normal humans, or animals for that matter, cannot win against dragons.

His eyes are bloodshot, his heart is shattered, and his teeth are chattering. But his fox claws still extend from his red nails, and his nine tails emerge in full form from behind him. He is poised and ready for a battle to the death. The life inside of him still kicks and breathes, and so Wei Ying still harbours an enormous will to live. To fight his way out of this. To give his child one last fighting chance. For his child might be the only shred of Lan Zhan left on this earth, and Wei Ying cannot bear otherwise.

The adult dragon before him bares its sharp teeth, and the sheer force and heat that leaves its open mouth threatens to knock the wind out of Wei Ying. Of course Wei Ying is scared. Why wouldn't he be? These are humongous military dragons, reared and trained for the exclusive use of battle. They are exclusive to the Lans—and that is why Wei Ying had been so hopeful for them to win this war. They simply had not anticipated just how skilful the Wens had gotten at gaining control of their kind, and will now pay for it.

But as scared as he is, Wei Ying raises his sword with hands that do not tremble, and legs that refuse to collapse. I will not cower, Wei Ying thinks. I will not cower before him, because Lan Zhan surely did not, and I cannot do so, for I am a Lan. I am now more Lan than I ever was a Wei, and if my husband died valiantly in battle, then I will follow suit.

Maybe in death, you can finally tell me what our child was to be named, Lan Zhan.

Wei Ying sees the dragon move to raise his claw, and he braces himself for the impact.

Only to see a beautiful blue flash leap in front of him once more, taking the fatal slash right to his chest.

Everything suddenly feels as though it's moving too slowly. Wei Ying drops the metal sword right down to the ground with a loud clang.

“JINGYI,” Wei Ying yells as he sees those golden claws bury themselves lethally into Lan Jingyi's chest.

This changes everything.

He quickly loses his voice as he falls to his knees and pulls the mortally wounded dragon close to him, heated sobs leaving him in helpless whimpers, saying, “No, no, no, no, Jingyi, what did you do? Jingyi, *what did you do?* Why did you take it for me? Jingyi, can you still hear me?”

The young dragon lays in his arms, hardly a breath left in him. As his half-lidded eyes pull open, with what little strength left in him, his dragon form slowly fades away and transforms back into the mortal form Wei Ying is more used to—with his high ponytail, his pale face, that flicker of boyish determination in his eyes, never to leave him even in death—and Wei Ying holds his face so gently, so closely to him, tears dripping endlessly from his face onto Lan Jingyi's sunken, gaunt cheeks.

“Jingyi, you cannot leave me,” Wei Ying pleads, all emotion erupting from him like never before. He'd been holding them back for far too long, and now they are all gushing out of him, threatening to pull him down under. “Everyone else has left me, Jingyi, you can't leave me, too, *please*, I will have no one else.” If you leave me too, I will truly lose the will to live.

“Furen...ah,” Lan Jingyi coughs out clots of blood, right into Wei Ying's hands. “Furen...I did...my...best...Protected you...till...death...like I promised...Han...guang...Jun...”

Lan Jingyi is a mess of broken bones, withering away in Wei Ying's arms. The hot, searing gash embedded deep within his chest spills a torrent of blood Wei Ying is powerless to stop.

“You—You said you were going to tell me something,” Wei Ying cries, begging. He still remembers, he *will remember*. “Jingyi, Jingyi, please. Tell me, before you go. Tell me...”

“I,” Lan Jingyi’s eyes blink back guilt-ridden tears, as if he still feels shame, even if he is nearing death. “I loved...”

And then he passes.

He passes, the blood pouring forth from his body soaking deep through Wei Ying’s thin robes.

The only evidence left that he’d walked the lands of this earth.

Wei Ying lowers his head, and plants one final kiss to the boy’s forehead. The pain bleeds forth from his own eyes, his heart having become far too broken for him to take. The corpse in his hands is far too raw, too fresh, too young, too close to his heart for him to bear. He will never recover from yet another death of a loved one that has passed right in his arms, and so he does the only thing there is left to do.

He pulls open his mouth, and he *screams*.

He screams with the willpower of ten oscillating suns, he screams the way a mother would mourn for her child, he screams the way he should have when Jiang Yanli perished right before him, he howls until blood is running down the back of his head, he screams until glass shatters right out of his windows, until grass shrivels right back down into the soil and become seeds once more, he bellows until nothing can be heard in Cloud Recesses but *pure, agonising sorrow*, stripped from fresh wounds, raw and in the flesh, until none of the souls that are ripped from him are ever to return to him again.

He screams, until even the dragon before him loses his footing and he stumbles; until Wei Ying’s throat gives out.

And when he is done exhibiting his pain for all to see, Wei Ying looks up, and sees Wen Chao is shrinking in fear before him, staring at him wide-eyed like he has never ever seen such a *monster*. The dragon that he rides knocks him right off, and scampers off into the distance.

It appears there are even more terrifying things than dragons.

Wei Ying gazes back down to his bloodied hands, and realises he is no longer kneeling to the floor. Instead, dark mist and black smoke surrounds him, lifting him off the ground. The same way the Wens have tainted the souls of their captives with demonic cultivation, Wei Ying’s grieving, broken heart has now been blackened completely by the nature he’d been so desperate to hide—and taken on new life.

Wei Ying casts his eyes back to Lan Jingyi’s unmoving face, and finally understands why.

Blood sacrifice.

His heart still aches, but he knows what he must do.

He tosses out his sword in favour of the flute, and plays a tune that Lan Zhan once loved. As his eyes fall to a close and he plays, with every note that he blows into existence—he feels thousands of life-forces being drawn out of the fresh corpses lying on the battlefield just outside, all hurriedly swarming up and following the direction of the flute. These are resentful spirits to the highest degree; wronged in the battlefield, never to be given a chance to see their family ever again.

These are vengeful spirits of the Lan clan, and they will avenge these very lands, even in death.

It is Wen Chao's blood-curdling screams that force Wei Ying's eyes back open, to see what has become of the man.

Thousands of aggrieved dragon spirits circle him, their teeth gnawing at his hair and flesh, and their razor-sharp claws slicing him into chunks of filthy meat pieces. He dies wailing in misery and suffering, just as they had. And they are completely merciless in their thirst for Wen blood, as they rightfully should. As they turn their heads to gaze upon the fox spirit that has called them—their esteemed imperial consort, only partner to their beloved Second Prince—they offer Wei Ying a nod of thanks, and another one of pity.

They know exactly *how* they've been called here.

Wei Ying keeps the flute back into his robes, seeing that his job is done—here. He picks Lan Jingyi up, carrying him in his arms, and heads straight for the door, with a hardened look and newly fortified heart.

He only pauses on the way out for the piece of cloth on the ground, the only thing left of his husband. He grips it within his hands, and feels just the slightest tingle of life spark up from within his palm.

The man whom this blood belongs to, Wei Ying hears ghostly spirits whisper into his veins. *Is not dead.*

Wei Ying would cry if he had any tears left in him.

Stepping over the dead bodies of the guards lying by the door, Wei Ying knows where he must go. Even without the flute, the trail of black mist never leaves his shadow. Wherever he walks, dragon corpses and spirits follow. With his two bare feet, Wei Ying walks down hallways full of bloodshed, and without even a word, nods at the spirits to tear the remaining Wen soldiers apart.

“I am leaving to save my husband,” Wei Ying speaks aloud. He knows every single wraithful ghost that loiters these sacred Lan grounds will hear him. “But do what you must, to protect Cloud Recesses in my absence.”

A gust of wind flies by him, stirring up the hems of his robes, and Wei Ying knows the spirits have already gotten on to their task. With them around, he knows Cloud Recesses will be safe. Cloud Recesses will not burn forever.

Cloud Recesses is now under his control.

Wei Ying holds Lan Jingyi close to him, cradling his head close to his chest. He cannot bear to look back down, and give the sleeping corpse one second look. It wrenches at his heart each time, and he cannot stomach it. Not when he still remembers the look on Jingyi's face as he died in his arms. *I did you wrong, Jingyi.*

Wei Ying leaves the shelter of the palace, and emerges out onto the open clearing, where he already knows Lil Apple will be waiting for him.

"It seems like I'm taking you out for a ride far earlier than I thought," Wei Ying says to Lil Apple, who only lowers his head for the fox to first lay Lan Jingyi's corpse over him. "Don't drop him, at all costs."

Lil Apple grunts through his nose.

Wei Ying climbs over him, and takes his seat right behind his dragon antlers.

"Go," Wei Ying commands, in a voice that has known too much heartache to bear. He lays a hand down over Lil Apple's scales, and conveys to him a vision intimate only to him and his husband. "Take me to where he must be."

As Lil Apple takes flight, Wei Ying tightens his hold around Lan Jingyi with tear-stained cheeks.

"I am sorry," Wei Ying repeats over again and again, kissing the cold forehead of the young dragon. "I am sorry, I am sorry, I am sorry."

Even from high up in the clouds, Wei Ying can already make out the unmistakable sight of his husband sprawled out across the mountain peak. There he is—the pure white dragon, the highly revered Second Prince of the Lans. Even when drenched in blood, the magnificence of his form is undeniable.

Wei Ying has already pieced it all together, in his head. Lan Zhan must have done his very best to make his way back to Wei Ying the moment he learned of the Wens' ascent into Cloud Recesses, but had succumbed to his injuries mid-journey and had no choice but to seek temporary refuge on the mountain peak he knows no one will find him. No one, except Wei Ying. Somehow or another, something had gone terribly wrong with the war. They'd clearly underestimated what the Wens were capable of, or how far along they were with their demonic cultivation.

Either way, the very minute Lil Apple sets his two hind feet onto the ground, Wei Ying is sliding off the dragon, and hastening to Lan Zhan's side. Lan Zhan is slumped on his side, exhaling in and out in an incredibly slow, staggered pace, his large body finding support in the form of a long rock, of which he lies against. Only when Wei Ying rushes up to his head, and tenderly calls for his name, does Lan Zhan pull open his eyes with all of his strength, and breathe out an anguished cry of "Wei Ying..." with lukewarm dragon breath. Only then does he feel safe enough to revert back to his humanoid form.

The white dragon shuts his eyes once more. The next time he peels those golden orbs open, he's back to the face Wei Ying so knows and loves.

The first thing Wei Ying notices—is that Lan Zhan's long, beautiful, elegant braid is no more.

Instead, it has been sheared off, leaving his dark hair to fall to his shoulders in mid-length. Wei Ying lets out an anguished sob, wondering exactly how much Lan Zhan has suffered in the war. Did the Wens do this to him? Had they so brutally cut his braid off? Wei Ying is not of the Lan culture, but even he knows this is their greatest shame. Wei Ying cups Lan Zhan's wounded face towards his, feels for the hard dragon scales in his cheeks that he has missed so much, and presses their foreheads together.

"Lan Zhan ah," Wei Ying's *bawling* this time, because there is no one else he needs to put on a strong front for. "Lan Zhan, husband, I'm sorry I took so long, I should have come sooner."

"Wei Ying," Lan Zhan murmurs out with a raspy throat, having never looked more grateful to see him. Even in his semi-conscious state, and with eyes that can't seem to stay open fully, his voice is full of affection. "You're... you're safe."

"I'm safe, and the baby is, too," Wei Ying cries, kissing all over Lan Zhan's face. Even without his long hair, Lan Zhan is still the most beautiful man he's seen. "So you have to remain awake, and tide through this war with us. Lan Zhan, I love you. I love you, I love you, I love you."

Lan Zhan's lips pull up, with what energy he has left. He rambles, in dragon tongue, fast losing his consciousness, "*That's all that matters... I'm sorry... I was so weak...*"

"No," Wei Ying shakes his head, blubbering. "No, no, no. Lan Zhan, listen, you're the strongest person I know. This means nothing. *This*," Wei Ying's fingers reach for his sheared hair. "Means nothing."

In an impulsive move, Wei Ying lets his fox claws extend once more. He gathers his own hair and pulls it to the side of his neck, and without even missing a beat, slashes it all off. Just like that, more than half of his hair falls to the ground in a heap, leaving his remaining dark, satin strands of hair to fall to his shoulders, matching the same length of his husband's.

Lan Zhan's breaths escape him painfully when he sees this, like he knows it is his own shame that has led Wei Ying to do this. "Wei Ying..."

"Together," Wei Ying sobs, crying his heart out as he hugs his husband close to him. "We'll bear the shame together. I won't let you be alone. This war means nothing. I'll keep you safe,

I'll keep you alive, I'll never let you go. You need to stay here with me, you hear me? I can't be alone. Our child needs you. Above it all, *I need you.*" And then, for emphasis, he desperately speaks in dragon tongue, "*I love you, I love you, I love you.*"

Wei Ying's voice, it's so comforting, it's so soothing, Lan Zhan feels like he can almost be lulled to sleep. There's something different about the fox, Lan Zhan had noticed the moment Wei Ying set foot on this mountain peak, but he simply can't put a finger to it yet. All he knows is that when Wei Ying touches him, it feels like sparks, it feels like jolts. When Wei Ying speaks, it feels like he's speaking runes and divine spells meant to heal Lan Zhan from deep within. When Wei Ying's skin touches him, it feels like—

—raw, powerful spiritual energy pulsating through his veins, transferring slowly onto his own dragon scales.

This energy is dark, dark and pervasive, penetrating deeply within every inch of his tattered soul. It's demonic cultivation, it has to be. Lan Zhan felt the exact same on the battlefield, in a much watered down, much more impure version of it. But from the fox, though, it feels warm, and it feels like home.

It feels like Wei Ying.

Wei Ying's hands, pressed deeply onto the dragon's skin—they heal every cut there is, they make every ugly bruise disappear, they mend every broken bone. Wherever Wei Ying's tears drip, the blood that once covered Lan Zhan's skin sinks back down beneath, and returns to rebuild the flesh of which they belong. With every single one of his touches, what once was broken is now mended, and what once was dead now returns to life.

In just mere seconds, Lan Zhan no longer has to struggle for breath. Within just a minute, he's almost fully recovered, becoming as strong as he used to be. He sits back up against the rock, and feels like he has witnessed a miracle. Like *he's* the living miracle. He was on the verge of death, and now his heart beats once more.

He looks up at Wei Ying, and realises the fox hasn't even noticed this.

"You healed me," Lan Zhan whispers, in complete bafflement. "And at such an impossible rate. Wei Ying, this overwhelming yin energy..."

"I did?" Wei Ying asks, blinking away his tears. He sees the familiar sparkle in his husband's eyes, and realises with an unbridled glee that *he did*. "Lan Zhan, you're safe with me."

"How," Lan Zhan asks in disbelief, clutching Wei Ying's face close to him. "How are you this powerful?"

He'd heard that foxes are natural healers, but he hadn't fathomed to this extent.

Wei Ying is now but a ball of unfettered power, a deadly weapon on two legs; having finally awakened the dormant part of him he'd kept sealed away for so long. Lan Zhan can feel the magnitude of it within his fingertips; might have come to fear it, even, if he was a lesser man.

Perhaps this is the real reason why fox spirits had been hunted down for so long, for there is much to fear when they lean in fully into their god-given powers...

At Lan Zhan's question, though, Wei Ying's face drastically pales.

"Blood," Wei Ying forces out. "Blood sacrifice. Jing..." He can't even bring himself to say it, flinching with every try. To confirm it would be accepting the reality *of it*.

"Jing..."

Lan Zhan raises his head, and eyes the unbreathing body in the distance. In his excitement to see Wei Ying from before, he hadn't noticed Wei Ying had brought along some company.

"Is... that Jingyi?"

Wei Ying holds his breath, unwilling to look, and reluctantly nods.

But just then, the unthinkable happens.

The young dragon corpse gasps back to life.

"Furen," is the first thing Lan Jingyi breathes out, the second he snaps open those blood red dragon eyes.

Wei Ying runs over to the boy, still lying over Lil Apple.

"Jingyi, Jingyi!" Wei Ying races to his side, pulling him off the dragon so he can lay Lan Jingyi onto the ground. Lan Zhan follows after him, both perplexed and worried at the deep gash he sees in Lan Jingyi's chest.

Lan Jingyi's eyes flutter up to meet Wei Ying's, and even in the depths of those crimson red orbs, Wei Ying recognises that unwavering, youthful tenacity of Jingyi's; he would recognise the boy's soul anywhere.

The young dragon quirks his lips up into a tiny, weak, boyish grin, and Wei Ying's heart practically gives out.

"Jingyi, you're alive," Wei Ying weeps, pulling the boy's head into his chest. "Jingyi, how are you feeling?"

“Like I’ve just died, and returned,” Lan Jingyi whispers out, raising his hands to grip at the front of Wei Ying’s robes. “Furen always manages to do the impossible.”

“How...?” Wei Ying chokes out, still grateful either way.

“Your eyes are red,” Lan Zhan says to Lan Jingyi, frowning. They are reminiscent of the eyes of the dragons the Wens have managed to turn to their side, on the battlefield. They are not natural features of the Lan dragons. The Second Prince suddenly notices something else—curious, and so he pulls down the high collar covering Lan Jingyi’s pale neck, only to come into sight with veins that have blackened and protrude so unsightly, like—like Lan Jingyi is one with the undead.

“Wei Ying, stay back from Jingyi,” Lan Zhan immediately says, pulling Wei Ying back. “He’s no longer one of us. These are the dragons we’ve been fighting the past two weeks in the war.”

“What?” Lan Jingyi says, barely disguising the hurt in his voice. He’d been overly elated to see the Second Prince is still alive, only to receive such a harsh welcome from him.

“Han, Hanguang-Jun...?”

Almost as if on cue, Wei Ying tightens his grasp around the boy, like a protective mother to a wounded child. “I know what you’re talking about, Lan Zhan. But Jingyi isn’t one of them.”

“I would never dare hurt furen,” Lan Jingyi murmurs, tears welling up in his eyes like he’s just been so thoroughly disillusioned. “Han... Hanguang-Jun, please believe me. I haven’t lost my mind. I could never—hurt furen—like the others—”

Wei Ying silences him with a soft hush, as if knowing if the boy speaks any more the boy will descend into uncontrollable sobs.

“Lan Zhan, Jingyi saved my life,” Wei Ying pleads, gazing up at his husband. “I was going to die. He took the hit, for me and the child. He’s the only reason I’m still here... his blood sacrifice... Lan Zhan, I’ve never asked you for anything in my life. But I’m asking you to trust me now, because I can feel the spirit in his veins. And he’s Jingyi. *Our* Jingyi.”

Lan Zhan remains cautious, having almost lost his life to these dragons, but he nods anyway, knowing there is power within Wei Ying that he cannot even come close to touching.

“If it is as Wei Ying says,” Lan Zhan nods on to the boy. “Then Jingyi, you did well.”

Lan Jingyi does actually burst into tears, this time, too happy to earn Lan Zhan’s approval. “Hanguang-Jun, I am so glad...”

Even Lan Zhan’s heart is slightly moved. He gives another firm nod, then places his hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“Lan Jingyi, I will need you to stay here once more with Wei Ying. I will need to return to the war.”

“What?” Wei Ying says, whipping his head back up to him, clearly offended. “I’m not staying here. Lan *Wangji*, I protected Cloud Recesses in your stead. I’m going with you to the war.”

“I am not taking you to the battlefield with me,” Lan Zhan barely hides his flinch. “Wei Ying, you are heavy with child.”

“Did I not heal you back to life, or did you think you just imagined it?” Wei Ying asks, upset. “You said it for yourself, I’m powerful now. I’m more powerful than before, I’m even more powerful than you, Hanguang-Jun.”

It seems Wei Ying is trying to provoke him into letting him go. “Wei Ying,” he grits his teeth.

“Where is my brother? Is he safe?” Wei Ying questions. Upon meeting with his silence, Wei Ying continues, irked, “Lan Zhan, *do you even know?* If you don’t, I’m going with you. If I can save you, I can save my brother. If I can save Lan Jingyi, then I can save every other turned dragon on the battlefield. I can save this war. *I will save this war.*”

“You are with child—”

“It’s our child that’s doing all of this, don’t you see?” Wei Ying says, angrily flushed with annoyance. Then, he narrates perfectly in dragon tongue, “*The prince that emerges from the union of a dragon and a fox will finally unify this world. The fox in him rains bloodshed on those deserving, the dragon in him ensures success and power. Forget all envy, relinquish all desire...*”

“*...For this prince will set the world on fire,*” Lan Jingyi finishes off, with bright, wide eyes. “Furen, the prophecy, it’s coming true.”

“If the Wens want this world to burn, then we’ll let it burn,” Wei Ying seethes, with renewed conviction. “But we’ll let it burn on *our* terms.”

Lan Zhan knows what Wei Ying is saying is true. Wei Ying has become powerful, far more powerful than even him. He would be a fool to deny it. He falters in his steps, then turns so still, and finally nods, after what feels like eternity.

If Wei Ying so insists, then there’s only one thing left to do.

“Yuan,” he utters softly, to the fox. “Lan Yuan.”

Wei Ying’s heart stutters. He immediately knows what this is for. “Yuan?”

“Hope,” Lan Zhan explains. “For you and him are all that I ever hoped for, and beyond my wildest dreams. For he will be the hope of this world, the hope of the Lan clan. And one day, just like us, I wish for him to get all that he ever hoped for, as the one and only prophesied dragon prince.”

Wei Ying’s hand covers his stomach. The child now has a name. And he’d thought he’d only hear of it after death...

“Lan Yuan.”

Lan Jingyi’s wiping away tears from his eyes. “Hanguang-Jun, it’s beautiful!”

Lan Zhan offers him a small, rare smile. “Jingyi, you will have to care for him like a brother.”

“I will! I’ll defend him to the ends of this earth, just like I did for furen!”

Wei Ying’s grin is so wide. He looks at Lan Jingyi, and then his husband, and then back down at Lan Yuan.

“A-Yuan,” Wei Ying smiles quietly down to his child, caressing him. “Let’s go win a war.”

If you were to ask anyone present on that day to describe how the Sunshot Campaign finally managed to come to an end, they would describe the events on the battlefield as nothing short of miraculous, and fear-inspiring. For no one could have believed to witness the sight of Hanguang-Jun returning back in full health, Lan Jingyi joining the battle as an undefeatable fierce corpse, and last but not least, Wei Wuxian himself, the last fox spirit to ever walk these lands—

—walking right into battle with blood-soaked, torn and tattered robes, round in belly, holding a flute to his lips, radiating nothing but dark energy, conjuring up every spirit on this battlefield, black mist circling his feet and pulling up dead corpses from the ground everywhere he steps. His silver eyes glow in the evening darkness, and tell every spirit that looks to him for guidance on what exactly to do. On this battlefield, he is a commander. He is a ruler. He controls these very lands.

He walks through red-eyed dragons fighting against helpless Lan soldiers, and with just a simple playing of a note, makes the dragons bow their heads and submit to them. Wen men are thrown off each and every dragon they ride, and trampled to death by bright yellow claws that have never belonged to them. Vicious spirits that have died on these lands rise up to drag the remaining Wens back down into Hell with them.

Wei Ying does not stop walking through these fields, until he finds his brother, safe and sound.

The Wen soldier that Jiang Cheng is fighting is suddenly grabbed by the head by a hostile dragon spirit, and turned and twisted until the body is mangled and unrecognisable by the mortal eye. Jiang Cheng turns around, confused, wondering what has suddenly turned the resentful energy permeating these fields around—and *against* the very Wens themselves.

He stops when he meets Wei Ying's eyes.

"Wei Ying?" Jiang Cheng cries out, almost going into hysterics. He runs up to the fox spirit, and raises his sword to shield him from any incoming Wen soldiers. "What happened to your hair? And you have to go back, it's unsafe here!"

Right beneath his feet, a skeleton hand begins to crawl, digging itself out of the soil. Jiang Cheng jumps, when he feels this. "What—What is going on?!"

"A-Cheng," Wei Ying is hardly bothered by the corpses that have begun to surround them, in a blockade to protect their master from any harm. He reaches for Jiang Cheng's hands, and pulls him close to him. The phoenix looks thoroughly sweaty and worn-out, and although bloody cuts litter down his arms, and there are multiple gashes across his battle robes, he's still in one piece. Safe. Breathing. Wei Ying cannot be any more ecstatic. "A-Cheng, you're safe and sound..."

"Wei Ying, you have to get out here," Jiang Cheng tells him, urgently.

"The war is over," Wei Ying responds instead, shaking his head with a smile. "The war is over. Can't you tell? The spirits are on our side. The control they had over the dragons are no more."

Jiang Cheng pauses and scans their surroundings, only now realising this. *They are winning this war.* He sweeps one glance over his brother, and suddenly registers all that is different about him. This dark mist, and those spirits...

"Demonic cultivation. How did you...?"

"I am a fox," Wei Ying tells him, cupping his face, answering. "This is my destiny."

After all this time, Jiang Cheng finally allows himself to heave a huge sigh of relief. "Sometimes, this is why I'm glad you aren't a phoenix." He steps forward, and embraces Wei Ying into a tight hug. "As long as you're safe. As long as I still have you."

"Let's go home," Wei Ying whispers. "Come, walk with me."

And so he does. They walk back to where Lil Apple sits, waiting for them, and sees Lan Zhan and Lan Jingyi in the far distance, easily fighting off the remaining Wens. The Lans are truly so fearless in battle. In their dragon forms, Lan Zhan is a pure white menace—and Lan Jingyi, the sweetest shade of blue. They eat at the heads of human soldiers, and burn them to crisp with their flames. Lan Zhan breathes out fiery red, while Lan Jingyi breathes out charcoal black.

Everyone else, soldiers and allies that have been fighting for the Lans, seem to be equally stunned by the sight. Wei Ying sees Nie Mingjue from afar, gazing around his empty vicinity while holding a blood-stained sword, looking rather puzzled. Wei Ying surveys the remaining soldiers, and even manages to spot a familiar, young face, Ouyang Zizhen. He's still alive, Wei Ying thinks, gleefully to himself. He really lived up to the promise he made me on the training grounds.

“A-Cheng,” Wei Ying turns to his brother to say, stopping just before Lil Apple’s head. “I want you to be the first I tell. Lan Zhan and I have decided on a name for our child. He will be Lan Yuan.”

Jiang Cheng parts his lips, surprised. “Lan... Yuan?”

“Yes,” Wei Ying nods, smiling. “Today, Lan Yuan has helped to avenge shijie, shushu, and a-yi, and Yunmeng Jiang sect. They would be proud.”

Jiang Cheng doesn’t answer, but his heart resonates the same beat.

Everywhere they look, Lan dragons set their enemies aflame, in a myriad of black and red.

Lan Yuan, the prophesied dragon prince—he has truly set the world on fire.

As Wei Ying turns around, meaning to climb back up onto Lil Apple, he suddenly feels—the unceremonious breaking of water, and wet liquid running down his inner thighs..

“Wei Ying, are you—” Jiang Cheng’s eyes widen.

Wei Ying’s knees buckle down from the pain. It is Jiang Cheng’s arms who hurriedly support him as he sinks completely down onto the ground, knowing his son cannot wait.

“A-Cheng, go get Lan Zhan.”

The phoenix lays him right against Lil Apple, who has also quickly come to sense something is wrong with Wei Ying, before scurrying off to find his brother-in-law. Lil Apple puffs steam through its nostrils in a bid to comfort his master, curling his tail protectively around the fox to safeguard him on war grounds.

Every contraction in his belly sends ripples of pain throughout his entire body, sheeting through him with a terrible intensity. Wei Ying doubles over, unable to muffle his low animalistic growls of agony. His fox claws come out, and his nine tails shift into full view once more. It seems this child will be the absolute *death* of him.

The two Lan dragons from the distance fly over to him in record speed, a frantic mix of white and blue.

“Furen!” “Wei Ying!”

They drop down to the ground in their humanoid forms, accompanied by one lone phoenix.

“He’s coming,” Wei Ying gasps out, throwing his head back against Lil Apple, his face contorted in absolute pain. “He’s coming, he can’t wait, Jingyi, I’ll need your help.”

“Jiang Wanyin, look for the healers on site,” Lan Zhan barks out, with the voice of a war general. “We brought several, there must still be at least one alive from the war.”

Jiang Cheng anxiously leaves Wei Ying once more, leaping into his phoenix form mid-air, sending out distress signals with his large caw calls.

Lan Zhan rips the robes off his back, and hands it to Lan Jingyi who is already spreading Wei Ying’s legs and laying the cloth underneath him.

“Wei Ying, you will be okay,” Lan Zhan murmurs, calming the hyperventilating fox down. Wei Ying’s face is getting so hot and flushed, and his breathing, so erratic. He takes Wei Ying’s hand into his, and kisses him until the fox noticeably cools down. “Wei Ying, just breathe. In, and out, in, and out...”

“Hurts,” Wei Ying mewls, his fox ears folding up. His nine fluffy tails cushion his back, forming a protective ward around him. “Lan Zhan, everything hurts...”

Another contraction comes, and Wei Ying’s yelping in pain once more, sharp canines extending from his teeth. His nails dig into Lan Zhan’s arm, drawing fresh blood.

His muscles force him to begin pushing, to expel the life force inside of him that he no longer has the capacity to nurture.

“Furen!” Lan Jingyi yells, shrieking in delight. “Furen, A-Yuan’s really coming out!”

What an impatient baby, Wei Ying thinks, sorely to himself. *Like father, like son.*

Wei Ying bites down on Lan Zhan’s arm once more to muzzle his screams as he pushes a second time, of which the dragon prince mutters no complaints to.

“Wei Ying, you’re doing so good,” Lan Zhan murmurs, kissing so gently the head of the very, very angry fox—even if his arm feels like it’s about to be gnawed right off. “Just a bit more, and you’ll be bringing our child into this world, alright?”

Concerned corpses and spirits begin to gather around them, helping to see Wei Ying right through his delivery. They prop up the fox with their soiled hands, offer up clothing of which they no longer can wear, and support the fox as he breathes and pants and gasps through every push. The ghosts of grandmothers and young mothers whisper encouraging words so sweetly into his ear, with some helping to clean the blood off Lan Yuan’s face with a handkerchief as the babe is slowly pushed into existence.

You helped us exact our revenge, and we’ll make sure nothing will ever come to harm to this child for as long as he lives, beloved fox spirit.

Jiang Cheng comes back just in time with a healer to witness this utterly bizarre sight.

“The healer is here,” Jiang Cheng announces, guiding the dragon maiden to kneel right beside Wei Ying and take Lan Jingyi’s place.

Wei Ying can hardly feel his legs by this point, glossy sheens of sweat running down the side of his face, crimson blood dripping down his fox canines.

But when it’s all finally over, and he hears Lan Yuan take his first breath, hear his first wailing cry ring through the air, Wei Ying practically collapses in happiness.

“Lan Yuan, Lan Yuan!” Wei Ying moans out, his weak arms reaching out desperately for his baby. “Give Lan Yuan to me, give me my baby.”

“He’s beautiful, your highness,” the dragon maiden congratulates, handing over the child.

Lan Yuan is a bare, naked thing, with two little dragon antlers—mere stubs at this point—on his head, not fully grown. And when he opens his eyes, those orbs are made out of iridescent gold, just like his father. Lan Yuan cries and cries, as he should, just like a baby. But Wei Ying’s so grateful to hear all of it, he’s kissing him all over, to bits.

He never knew he could love so much until he lay eyes on his child.

Wei Ying sobs out loud, woefully, *thankfully*, because he could have almost lost this. Lost him. Wen Chao almost had him. If things hadn’t panned out the way that they did...

“I protected you, Lan Yuan,” Wei Ying cries along with him. “I did my best to give you a chance to live.”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Zhan’s heart is tender at the sight. “Wei Ying, you did so well for our child.”

Jiang Cheng can’t even speak. His face is full of tears. He shies away from the sight, only for a ghost lady to hand him a clean handkerchief for him, out of pity.

Lan Jingyi is happily blubbering too. “Lan Yuan, your Jingyi gege has waited so long for you to arrive!”

Lil Apple wraps its tail around the happy family, and purrs.

Lan Yuan raises a tiny fist, and Wei Ying laughs through his tears as he sees resentful energy swirl right atop of him.

“You’re going to be just like mama,” Wei Ying whispers, kissing him into oblivion.

Wei Ying sits on a golden throne meant for an empress, carved in the likeness of a fox. With a dragon crown on his head, he is dressed exquisitely as an imperial consort of the Lan clan with sheer, luminescent gold outer robes, embroidered with exquisite dragon patterns, laid over his shoulders. He raises his head up, deep in talks with a tall male phoenix, his only brother and now the esteemed head of the Yunmeng Jiang sect. After the war, Jiang Cheng had returned home to re-build their lands from scratch, equipped with help and support from the Lans and their allies. Now, six years later, Yunmeng Jiang is prospering and thriving once more. Wei Ying did wish he could have rebuilt it hand-in-hand with his brother, but he also understands deeply that he has a responsibility to another clan now.

A husband, and a child to raise.

Jiang Cheng still pays regular visits to Cloud Recesses, not only for political affairs, but also because he is unable to stay away from his only family—and nephew. These days, though, he usually comes with Nie Huaisang in tow, who had also survived the war, thanks to Wei Ying's securing of Cloud Recesses back then.

“So, when is the wedding?” Wei Ying asks his brother, eager to tease.

“You have too much time on your hands,” Jiang Cheng sneers, refusing to answer. “Aren't you busy enough with the affairs of your people?”

Ever since Wei Ying helped put an end to the Wens' homicidal rampage and an end to the common folk's misery and suffering, people have begun to revere him across these lands—comparing him to the likes of a modern-day deity or goddess. Multiple shrines of their last fox spirit to ever walk this earth have been set up in every town and kingdom, and people come to look for him for any sort of grievance they may have against unlawful transgressors. Without the war to occupy him as a war general, Lan Zhan frequently comes along with him to solve the problems of their people as well. In between helping the common folk and raising Lan Yuan, the dragon and fox pair have been busy, indeed.

“Never busy enough to make sure my brother is keeping well and happy,” Wei Ying grins. “I want a nephew too! Or niece! I'm not picky, I swear.”

“Wei Wuxian—!”

“A-niang!” Six-year-old Lan Yuan comes tumbling into the throne room, excitedly calling for his mother. His hair has been left long, and pleated into tiny braids behind him, as is customary of their clan. He almost trips over his chubby feet as he walks, although Lan Jingyi makes sure to support him and always hold his hand. He happily spews out, in garbled baby speech, “A-niang! Baba says he will take us to Caiyi town for a meal!”

Wei Ying quickly gets up from his throne, hurrying down the golden steps to receive his one and only child. “A-Yuan! Come here and say hi to Jiang shushu!”

“Mama!” Lan Yuan's voice bubbles up into a happy gurgle, as he's carried into Wei Ying's arms. He turns to Jiang Cheng, and does a hurried, exaggerated bow, pointing his growing

dragon antlers towards the older man. “Shushu! You can come join us with Huaisang gege too!”

“A-Yuan,” Jiang Cheng’s cheeks flush, as he reaches out to grab at Lan Yuan’s chubby fists. He’s always so weak at the sight of his adorable nephew. “Huaisang and I will be happy to join you.”

“A-Yuan ah, where’s baba?” Wei Ying asks, nuzzling his cheek against his baby’s. “Is he here? Does he want to ride us down to Caiyi again?”

“I am here,” Lan Zhan answers, at the foot of the throne room. He takes large strides into the hall, nodding on to Lan Jingyi—who still stands at respectful attention whenever he sees the man—and Jiang Cheng, as he passes them by. Six years in, and his hair has regrown to the lengths that they were before; and so he neatly pleats it in a thick braid behind him, as his son so happily emulates.

“Jiang Wanyin, I trust things are well in Yunmeng Jiang.”

“They are,” Jiang Cheng nods to him. “We owe a debt of gratitude to the Lans.”

“You owe us nothing,” Lan Zhan answers, dismissing it immediately. “I can never repay you enough for giving me my family... my Wei Ying and A-Yuan.”

Wei Ying smiles at what he hears, and he holds up Lan Yuan in his arms. “Baba,” he coyly greets his husband. “What do you say you give us a ride down for our afternoon meal? A-Yuan likes it when you fly him.”

“Baba dragon, Baba big dragon!” Lan Yuan raises both his hands up to exclaim enthusiastically. “I like when baba becomes a big dragon!”

Lan Zhan’s lips twitch up into a smile. Unable to resist, he pulls Lan Yuan up into his arms, telling him as he flicks a finger over the boy’s button nose, “One day, you will become as big too.”

Wei Ying laughs, and quickly falls into pace with his husband and son as they begin to stroll out of the throne room. Jiang Cheng and Lan Jingyi quietly follow, watching on with exuberant smiles on their faces, and an even lighter feeling in their chests.

“Do you think we should tell them later, during our meal?” Wei Ying whispers to Lan Zhan, as they proceed out into an open clearing.

“Mn,” Lan Zhan beams, smiling down onto the fox. “Shufu and brother already know. It’s time to tell them, too.”

“Hahaha, I can’t believe your uncle started crying the minute I announced the news! He certainly loves children, doesn’t he?” Wei Ying laughs, shaking his head.

“Mn,” Lan Zhan answers, eyes flickering down to Wei Ying’s growing tummy. “He cannot wait for his second nephew.”

Wei Ying only grins. Lan Yuan reaches a hand out to prod curiously at the dragon crown on Wei Ying's head, to which Wei Ying chastises gently, "A-Yuan, heavy is this crown..."

"But not for mama," Lan Yuan cheekily responds.

"Mn," Lan Zhan agrees, his heart full. "Not for Wei Ying."

After all, it can only be him.

Chapter End Notes

AAAAAAAND IT'S DONE! Guys, I am so happy I could cry. This was one of the hardest stories I ever had to write, I think I placed way too much pressure on myself and found myself at a writer's block at several junctures FOR SO LONG. BUT IT'S DONE! AND I'M FREEEEEEEE

I BET NONE OF YOU SAW THE EVENTS IN THIS CHAPTER COMING. BUTTTTTT JINGYI BABY IS SAFE, AND HE'S HAPPY. also he did not get to finish what he wanted to say to Lan furen on purpose, LMAO, but make a guess on what he wanted to say? ;))))))

Some fun facts about the fic:

- this fic is named after the lyrics of a Game of Thrones song, called "[Power is Power](#)"
- but I listened to [Unravel from Tokyo Ghoul](#) while writing this chapter LOL ANYWAY
- just like how I imagine LJY to look like [the one from the CQL game](#), I also imagine NHS similarly, like in this [photo](#).
- if you have any questions about this universe, please ask me and I will do my best to answer. I feel like I must have left out a lot of stuff! :0
- if you liked this fic, please consider **retweeting my fic promo post** [here](#) :D

my friend [@Ella](#) drew the amazing, heart-wrenching scene of WWX snipping his hair off for LWJ from this chapter!!! ([retweet here](#)):



my friend @Yonalla also drew me amazing NSFW art of dragonji and foxxian based on this fic ([retweet here](#)):





I'M SAYING IT HERE FIRST, MY NEXT WANGXIAN FIC WILL BE FLUFF & HUMOR!!!!!! man I've written some heavy stuff lately :)

SEE YOU GUYS SOON, I LOVE YOU.

PS: let me know what you think I am so excited to hear your thoughts!!!! (were there tears. were there tears...)

Works inspired by this one

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