

under the seams

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Summary

What are you doing? Wei Wuxian wants to ask. Always-proper Hanguang-Jun, what's all this about? Why did you bring this Mo Xuanyu here?

This is a personal room, isn't it? No kind of place for a demonic cultivator—an emulator of the Yiling Patriarch—

CQL canon divergence in which Wei Wuxian is brought back into Mo Xuanyu's body per MDZS, the Dafan Mountain reunion is just that little bit messier, and fear drives Lan Wangji to confession.

Notes

further content notes: heavy disorientation around being in an unfamiliar body here. all suicidal impulses/suicides are past tense, offscreen & canonical, but do come up enough that i want to flag it.

rejected but not incorrect alternative summary:

In which CQL edition Wei Wuxian experiences: being in Mo Xuanyu's body, a headache, some nice music, and maybe 50% of the weight of Lan Wangji's feelings, in extremely quick succession.

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

I.

Three people meet on a mountainside. One is furious beyond reason, and one is a barely contained mass of grief and hope.

The third is not dead, but is feeling like death, and that's about as far as he's gotten in his self-assessment when the lightning strikes. Scouring.

II.

Coming back from the dead is no joke. This one is disjointed. His frame is the wrong size. His scars are the wrong shape. The pathways of his mind press against his thoughts and try to bend them along new lines. He stumbles when he walks. Stolen food is heavy in his stomach, makes him nauseous—his body's fault, or his spirit's?

He isn't Mo Xuanyu. He doesn't remember ever being Mo Xuanyu. But his body, which isn't his body, remembers nothing else. It protests. Fights him. Suicide is difficult—the animal part wants to live. He remembers that. The world is jerky, an inexpert puppet-show.

Wei Wuxian, stubborn, presses on. Fakes it. He'll think later, later, later.

Three people meet on a mountainside. It isn't *later* yet, and he's still trying not to think more than he has to, because thinking blurs him. Reflex carries him forward.

Reflex is not enough to get him out of the path of the lightning.

Lan Wangji is a white cloud descending between the two brothers on the mountain, and he is a sharp strike of sound, but lightning is quicker than thunder. Wei Wuxian blurs out into darkness.

III.

There was a theory, in Wei Wuxian's papers, that a spirit summoned into a body by willing sacrifice ought not be possible to evict by simple exorcism, because it would have every right to be there—because nobody else would remain with better claim. It is a theory, because the spell is untested.

This is one way to carry out an experiment, Wei Wuxian thinks, as he anticipates the blow. And he thinks: Jiang Cheng's face is harsher than it should be.

Both these thoughts hurt, because every thought hurts.

Zidian strikes him, scouring. Bites.

He does not see Lan Wangji's expression.

He blurs into darkness.



He blurs into a soft pool of light. Night lives at its edges—he lies in the light beside a window and the window lies beside a natural living darkness, a darkness which is a presence and not an absence. He aches—presence, not absence. He is in a body, and that body can ache.

It aches and aches. Only one cut on its arm, but it remembers more. Cousin, aunt, uncle, servant.

Stupid kid, he thinks, tiredly, although Mo Xuanyu's life must have been at least as long as Wei Wuxian's first. Stupid desperate kid. They fucked you up, huh—?

These are the easier thoughts to think. Try a harder one:

The familiarity of the incense burning. The familiarity of the guqin—both sequence and style. The shape of the window—he climbed through enough of them here, didn't he, in another life.

Jiang Cheng's expression. Jin Ling's expression. Lan—

The way the guqin's melody cuts off is sharply inelegant. The slip of fingers, a note wrenched out of alignment—slammed into silence.

The breath Lan Wangji takes, too—

The aftermath of both reverberates, dull and wooden.

So now I have to be awake, Wei Wuxian thinks—now he's noticed—now I have to—

To *what*?

But Lan Wangji's fingers settle on the strings again.

What are you doing? Wei Wuxian wants to ask. Always-proper Hanguang-Jun, what's all this about? Why did you bring this Mo Xuanyu here?

This is a personal room, isn't it? No kind of place for a demonic cultivator—an emulator of the Yiling Patriarch—

He is dizzy with thought. His ideas splinter, their edges biting. He blurs—

—into blue dawn. Voices outside are a low murmur, deeply Gusu-sweet. Say servants, then—outer disciples—the family itself speaks with the tempered refinement of a gentlemanly education—

This is good, isn't it—that he can think thoughts like these without his mind tilting and fighting.

He breathes carefully, waiting to be proven wrong—shown that it was a fluke.

Nothing.

So—

So.

He lets his eyes slide sideways, away from the window which is all he has allowed himself to see. A personal room.

The guqin on its low table is Wangji.

The sword on its stand is Bichen.

At the bedside, at *Lan Wangji's own bedside*, a man startles at the turn of Wei Wuxian's head—

Wei Wuxian meets Lan Wangji's eyes—

Finds the expression in them is too much the same. Then to now. Last to first. Sixteen years, and Lan Wangji still looks as though he's balanced on some cliff-edge. What are you caught in now, Hanguang-Jun—?

Lan Wangji's face smooths itself out. The mask of it is cool and still.

That feels—

He can't place how it feels. Is the feeling even his? What does a body remember without a spirit? If Mo Xuanyu knew Lan Wangji—no, that's wrong—isn't it?

Lan Zhan, he said, on the estate, and those Lan juniors looked at him in surprise and asked if he knew Hanguang-Jun—

Ah, is that it?

His mind is still slow and stumbling. Death is a dream he can't shake.

Play the fool. Play until you understand the game. Then you can break it.

"Where am I?" he asks. It isn't hard to make his voice plaintive. True deception. "Ah, ah, I hurt all over. What happened—my donkey—"

Lan Wangji is silent. Looking. Just—looking. The squirming feeling of being under scrutiny is worse than Wei Wuxian remembers—makes him want to flush—does Mo Xuanyu's skin show a blush easily? It probably does—that probably doesn't matter—

"In the Cloud Recesses," Lan Wangji says. His gaze slides sideways. The squirming feeling in Wei Wuxian or in Mo Xuanyu fails to subside—slides sideways too, maybe. "It was necessary to take you somewhere."

Lying is forbidden in the *fucking* Cloud Recesses. A sunlit memory tries to turn Wei Wuxian's stomach—

Nausea settles away. He can touch it that moment, after all. The library, the courtyard. It nearly belongs to a different person. To a different life, entirely. A dream.

"And what will Hanguang-Jun do with me now?" Wei Wuxian asks, in Mo Xuanyu's voice. Pitches it into something coy, experimentally. "Am I a prisoner? Are you watching a dangerous criminal? Is that what you want me to be? The other one did—"

Lan Wangji's hands are tight in his lap, clenched in his spotless robes, and Wei Wuxian feels—cruel. What was his cruelty? Who is he meant to be? Not nobody, but not known—not to the junior disciples—

Nothing fits together.

Lan Wangji's hands relax slowly. He stands—turns away. His bearing is always so perfect, isn't it. But the silhouette of him seems strange.

How is it that Wei Wuxian notices his lack of a hairpiece only from behind? His hair is a neat but almost uncontained spill. It seems too intimate, too intimate, *nothing* fits together.

"No," he says—simple and heavy and incomprehensible.

"Ah, but you can't look at me to say it," Wei Wuxian says. Mo Xuanyu's voice. When will he escape thinking that thought every time? "I don't know if I can believe you. Hanguang-Jun."

Cruel.

Lan Wangji is so still. The moment feels frozen, although the world moves outside, a quiet background, the flow of life.

“*Wei Ying*,” Lan Wangji says, and he sounds—he sounds—

Fractured, Wei Wuxian’s own fractured mind supplies.

Wei Ying. Sixteen years ago, there is a cliff.

Impossible to speak. Impossible to have an answer to his name spoken like that, with that—depth of feeling. Of some feeling he doesn’t understand.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji says again—or Lan Zhan says—yes, if he’s going to speak with that smaller voice, that voice which has confessed things in dark places, then—maybe he is Lan Zhan. “I beg you—”

Lan Zhan turns. Something is drowning below his expression. Wei Wuxian forces himself not to gasp for air.

“Lan—Lan Zhan—?”

Mo Xuanyu’s voice.

Wei Wuxian swallows. “No,” he says desperately, turning onto his side to protest as Lan Zhan folds gracelessly to his knees. “Don’t—ah—”

Lan Zhan’s robes are disarrayed, caught awkwardly under one knee and twisted out of place. What he reaches for is not their folds but—

“Ah,” Wei Wuxian says, as fingers brush his cheek. Laughter is nervous under Mo Xuanyu’s ribs. “What’s this? What—”

“I thought,” Lan Zhan says. Drops his gaze—does not drop his hand. “You were gone.”

Sixteen years ago, there is a cliff. Sixteen years ago—

“I was gone,” Wei Wuxian says. Mo Xuanyu’s voice. “I was gone, Lan Zhan. I was done. Back then, I—”

He blinks, tilts his head. Surfacing from the lake in summer heat, sometimes, water would still deafen the ears—have to be reminded to leave. Death is a dream he cannot shake. Death is a dream, a dream.

“I thought,” Lan Zhan says, slowly, slowly, “on Dafan mountain, that you were gone.” His eyes are closed, his face half-shadowed. The line of his throat is in light, and the movement of it as he swallows is emphasised—a sharp line of shadow, shifting. His thumb trembles on Wei Wuxian’s jaw—on Mo Xuanyu’s. Death is a dream—

Three men meet on a mountainside—a white figure descending—the crack of obedient lightning. Jiang Cheng’s face, harder than it should be. The pain. The fall. Zidian will break a

soul from a body, if it doesn't belong.

"I'm not," Wei Wuxian says. He feels—he feels. All wrong. Lan Zhan should never look like this, not for Wei Wuxian. Lan Zhan should scold him again, Lan Zhan should be demanding answers. Should look at Wei Wuxian inhabiting another's body and be horrified at the implications, should be the one whose face is too hard. "I'm here. I'm here. I'm—look. I'll stay, don't—ah, you can't cry, don't cry. Lan *Zhan*—! That was then, that was then."

He can nearly hear his own voice in Mo Xuanyu's. The sound of attempted comfort is half-familiar in its stilted tumble. To touch with different skin is strange, but he reaches anyway—covers Lan Zhan's hand with his own. Mo Xuanyu's fingers are as slim as his own were, but less crooked.

"Sixteen years without you," Lan Zhan says, his gaze still resolutely lowered, "and then to see you struck down? Wei Ying . . ."

There's something here—the drowning thing Wei Wuxian saw in Lan Zhan's face, the tremble of Lan Zhan's fingers. His slow words, his wet lashes.

"You looked for me," Wei Wuxian says, with an awful quiet conviction. Mo Xuanyu's throat, his throat, is tight and aching. Mo Xuanyu is narrower than Wei Wuxian, by a fraction. His ribcage is too small. "You've been looking for me."

"Yes," Lan Zhan says. "There was nothing but dry bone, after. Jiang Wanyin found nothing but dry bone. You were not there. When I searched, three years later—there were not even bones."

"I," Wei Wuxian says—thinks—why three years—why look at all—why not at once. Takes a difficult breath. "Lan Zhan—look at me. What is this? What am I to you?"

"What you always were," Lan Zhan says. His eyes, red-rimmed, search Mo Xuanyu's face. Does he see Wei Wuxian's expressions written there—does he see a stranger? "But with the knowledge that I failed you, when I should have—"

The shudder that runs through him is a shared one, mirrored in Wei Wuxian, felt through their hands where they touch. He seems unable to speak another word.

"What *am* I?" Wei Wuxian asks again. His whole being feels unsteady, tenuous in the face of so much grief. Needs the words, needs to know how Lan Zhan would say it now. To know what it means to him, what it ever meant.

"The mirror of my soul," Lan Zhan says—whispers—almost below hearing. Squeezes his eyes shut the moment the words are said—breathes. Breathes.

Looks up.

"The only person I have wanted by my side," Lan Zhan says.

"The person I want," Lan Zhan says.

Has it always been that? All of that?

It's becoming too much. Wei Wuxian feels frayed. He feels pulled out of shape. He feels—he feels.

“I can hardly even believe I'm alive yet,” he says. “All this—Lan Zhan, this body I'm in—this Mo Xuanyu—”

Lan Zhan watches him. Waits. The evenness of his gaze sits oddly together with the evidence of tears.

Wei Wuxian can only shake his head. What is there to say? He has too many questions, no answers. Loose threads, unanchored. Stray thoughts.

How can he say: I broke my old body, I left it hurting all the time, I threw it away, but it was *mine*? How can he say, to a version of Lan Zhan who looks like this: you can't want me, not when the world will hate you for it?

How can he say: I want so badly for you to want me anyway, but what if I only want to be wanted by *someone*?

He doesn't only want that. He thinks he doesn't only want that. Finds one answer, tentatively, in the mess of himself: I do want Lan Zhan to want me. Even though he shouldn't. Even though I don't really know yet how to—be. Anything.

That seems pretty fucked up, so it's probably true.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Zhan says. “Wei Ying—it is *you*. No matter what, I know that it's you.”

“So unshakable,” Wei Wuxian says, although Lan Zhan's body is trembling again, suppressed. “You were always so good, weren't you. Even when I didn't deserve it. No, I *didn't*, don't—don't argue. You'd better just—come here.”

He tugs gently at Lan Zhan, pulls him up from the floor—pulls him up onto the bed.

It feels strange. It feels strange, so strange, to touch. With these hands. This skin. It feels so strange to have the scent of Lan Zhan close around him.

It feels like something he might have dreamed, dead. If he'd known how.

They sit, bodies angled together. Lan Zhan's hand is hot on his hip. Lan Zhan's chest rises and falls under Wei Wuxian's fingers. Wei Wuxian is aching again—growing pains in joints and muscles, his soul trying to get this body to sit right on it. Aching behind his eyes, emotion forming a tight knot of pressure.

The person you want, Lan Zhan? This lost thing?

But he is—he is. Isn't he?

He is.

“You always wanted me,” he says, tasting the idea carefully on his foreign tongue.

Lan Zhan nods.

Wei Wuxian tucks his head against Lan Zhan’s shoulder. Tries to fit thought into mind into body. Body into context. He feels blurry at the edges again, and closes his eyes against it—opens them to find the blurriness has receded, that the cloth of Lan Zhan’s robes and the strands of his hair are real and definite. Incense, soap, skin. Silk.

“Okay,” he says. “Okay. That’s good, Lan Zhan. That’s good. I’m here.”

Lan Zhan’s breaths are still coming in such a deliberately measured way. Wei Wuxian strokes his hand down Lan Zhan’s chest—repeats the movement, backs of his fingers to fabric. Shifts closer, cheek pressed to cheek. They breathe into the soft skin below each other’s ears. It flutters in Wei Wuxian, a little bit of heat, something burning which dreams of taking flight. Arousal is distant, difficult. But he or his body can remember how to feel it. He knows he’ll remember how to feel it. To pull it closer. It’s there, living somewhere in this body.

He lets it settle, for now, however it likes. It flutters restlessly again as Lan Zhan’s lips ghost across the corner of his jaw. A satisfaction as he wraps an arm around Lan Zhan, pulls him in, down onto the bed—just to lie there, just side by side.

“Give me a bit of time, huh?” he says. Strokes Lan Zhan’s cheek, to soften it. “Maybe you know this is me, but I—I need a bit.”

A tiny nod. Lan Zhan looks as dazed as Wei Wuxian feels. Looks flushed and flustered, but without the anger from when they were young. His eyes are still bright in the growing dawn. Beyond the walls, life continues.

“I’m here,” Wei Wuxian says. Laces their fingers together, and wonders only fleetingly how his own body’s hand would have fit there. “Sixteen years. Lan Zhan, ah, Lan Zhan. But I’m here. I’m here.”

End Notes

find me on twitter or tumblr @ northofallmusic

with huge thanks to beeswaxing for taking me up on my offer of fic in exchange for donations to orgs supporting Black communities.

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