

ROU BAO BU CHI ROU



The  
HUSKY & His  
WHITE CAT  
SHIZUN

8

ERHA HE TA DE BAI MAO SHIZUN



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## Chapter 244: Snake-Shed

**T**HE CULTIVATORS who had escaped Mount Jiao with their lives fled to Guyueye to recuperate. With the medicine sect's disciples' help, they extracted Hua Binan's heart-tunneler insects and bandaged their many wounds. The fog of dejection, however, proved harder to treat than any injury. The air itself seemed heavy and lifeless.

Xue Meng sat on the shore of Rainbell Isle with the scimitar Longcheng in his lap, staring blankly at the rise and fall of the tide. Footsteps sounded behind him, and he whipped around, eyes wide and filled with earnest hope. Yet when he saw who it was, the light in his eyes died in an instant; he dragged his gaze back to the boundless sea.

Mei Hanxue took a seat next to Xue Meng. "Your dad received a message and had to return to Sisheng Peak. He left in a hurry, so he asked me to inform you."

This statement was met with silence.

"You and your dad seem to be in a lousy mood," Mei Hanxue remarked.

"Since you've finally noticed, feel free to get lost."

Mei Hanxue did nothing of the sort. He tossed a wineskin to Xue Meng. "Do you drink?"

Xue Meng turned on him, furious, like a hedgehog with its quills raised. "Do I drink?! Like hell! I haven't fallen that far!"



Mei Hanxue smiled. His fine golden locks curled softly in the sea breeze, and his eyes were like pale jade, twin pools of teal flecked with fallen petals.

“What do you mean, ‘fallen that far’? It’s just a drink.” Mei Hanxue smoothed a wisp of fair hair behind his ear. The silver bell around his wrist tinkled softly. “I heard Sisheng Peak forbids its people from visiting the pleasure districts, but surely the taverns aren’t off-limits as well?”

At Xue Meng’s lack of response, Mei Hanxue continued, “I also heard Chu-xianjun adores pear-blossom white wine. You’re his disciple; have you not learned to hold your drink?”

Xue Meng glowered. His lips parted as if to curse Mei Hanxue out, but he simply twisted open the wineskin and took a generous gulp.

“Gutsy. This liquor’s from Taxue Palace, it’s quite str—”

“*Pff—!*” The gutsy Young Master Xue sputtered mightily, face ashen, and broke into a violent fit of coughing.

Mei Hanxue pressed his lips together, seemingly taken aback. “You really can’t hold your drink?”

Now this, Xue Meng’s pride could not take. He swatted Mei Hanxue’s hand away as he reached for the wineskin and gulped down another burning mouthful. Not a second later, he turned his head aside and spat it out with a cry.

Mei Hanxue watched him in a rare state of bewilderment. “I didn’t know you... Never mind, you’ve had enough.”

“Get away from me!”

“Give me my wineskin back.”

“Go *away!*” Xue Meng would nip at anyone who provoked him whenever he got into a temper. Glaring daggers at Mei Hanxue, he snapped, “How would it make me look if I started and stopped whenever you told me to? What dignity would I have left?” He patted his own slightly flushed cheek, already slightly tipsy.

There was a saying on Sisheng Peak: Chu-zongshi could down a thousand cups, while one was enough to bring down Young Master Xue. As Mei Hanxue wasn't from Sisheng Peak, he'd naturally never heard such a thing. Otherwise, he would've known better than to pour liquor down Xue Meng's throat.

After Xue Meng was done spitting out his second swig, he picked up the wineskin again, this time managing four or five gulps. He gasped as he surfaced for air, his face alarmingly pale.

Mei Hanxue snatched back the wineskin and frowned. “All right, that's enough. Go home and rest. You've been sitting in this cold ocean wind for hours.”

“I'm waiting for someone,” Xue Meng replied obstinately.

Mei Hanxue blinked.

“I... I...” Xue Meng scowled at him for a long moment before surprising them both by bursting into tears. “You wouldn't understand. I'm waiting for my ge, for Shizun, for Shi Mei...got that? There're four of us, and all of us have to be here... It won't be the same if someone's missing...”

When it came to comforting women, Mei Hanxue was an expert: He'd put his arm around them and utter a few sweet nothings, make some pretty promises. It always worked like a charm. He'd never needed to comfort a man before.

Perhaps it was fortunate, then, that Xue Meng wasn't really in need of comforting. Rather, he had bottled up his emotions for too long, and once the liquor got to his head, they surged up and broke the levees. He wanted

nothing more than to let them out. “There were four of us, but I’m the only one left—my heart hurts. *Fuck*. Do you understand?”

Mei Hanxue sighed. “I do.”

“Liar. You don’t understand shit.” Xue Meng bowed his head and wailed. He hugged Longcheng tightly to his chest, a piece of driftwood to keep himself afloat.

The liar didn’t know how to convince him otherwise, so he agreed. “Okay, you’re right, I don’t understand.”

“You heartless brute! Why can’t you understand?” Xue Meng was too drunk to be reasoned with. He leveled a baleful glare at Mei Hanxue through the tears pooling in his eyes. “What don’t you understand? It’s simple!” He held up his fingers. “Four. Of. Us!” He put down one finger, then another. Before he got to the third, he dissolved into tears again, as if that trembling finger was a lever that opened the floodgates. “There’s only one left—I’m the only one left. Get it now?”

Mei Hanxue didn’t want to be a liar, and he didn’t want to be heartless either. Since he couldn’t say he understood, but he also couldn’t say he didn’t, he decided it was best to remain silent.

Xue Meng stared at him, then turned aside and vomited loudly.

The famed paramour Mei-gongzi was used to people staring at him, starry-eyed and besotted. Xue Meng was the first to stare and then throw up. Mei Hanxue’s temples began to throb. “What’s your problem? When you were little, I gave you fish mint and you threw up. Now that you’re grown, I give you Kunlun wine and you throw up. You’re fussier than a girl.”

He watched Xue Meng’s hunched-over figure as he heaved until he was dizzy and breathless, jade-green eyes exasperated. “Okay, enough cursing and puking—go back and rest,” said Mei Hanxue. “None of them—your ge, your shizun, or your friend—would want to see you like this.”



He stood to pull Xue Meng to his feet. After his spate of vomiting, Xue Meng felt weak, like his feet weren't planted firmly on the ground. He didn't even try to throw off the steadying hand Mei Hanxue placed on his arm.

Mei Hanxue escorted Xue Meng away from the shore and through the back entrance of Guyueye. He had intended to take him back to his room to rest, but before they made it through the gate to the garden pavilion, Mei Hanxue sensed danger. He quickly steered Xue Meng behind a column in the open-air corridor.

Xue Meng let out a whimper of protest that was swiftly cut off by Mei Hanxue's hand over his mouth. "Quiet."

"Let... Let go of me... I'm...gonna throw up again..." Xue Meng mumbled around his fingers.

"Swallow it."

This, at least, rendered Xue Meng temporarily speechless.

Still worried his intoxicated charge might stir up trouble, Mei Hanxue tapped a finger to Xue Meng's lips and cast a muffling spell. He turned and cast a swift glance into the pavilion—only to be struck dumb by the sight before him.

*Mo Ran?!*

By this point, most of the sect leaders and elders had returned to their own sects. After the chaos that had unfolded on Mount Jiao, all urgently needed to reinforce the barriers protecting their respective domains. But a number of injured cultivators still remained at Guyueye. These were currently gathered in the pavilion, staring at the man who'd appeared in their midst with looks of alarm.

"Tsk, tsk." Clad in a long, hooded cloak of black and gold, Mo Ran surveyed his surroundings with narrowed eyes. "Look at all these familiar

faces. After so many years, I never thought I'd see you all standing here, alive and well."

One of the cultivators screwed up their courage and bellowed, "M-Mo Weiyu! What the hell's gotten into you? Have you been cursed?"

"What's gotten into me?" Mo Ran's thin lips curled in a sneer. "This venerable one should be asking what the hell's gotten into *you* to speak to me like that."

The crowd only saw the flash of a dark blur before blood spurted from the chest of the cultivator who'd yelled, splattering over the ceiling.

"M-murderer!"

"Mo Ran! What are you doing?!"

"Quick, get Jiang-zhangmen!" someone screamed. "Someone get Jiang-zhangmen now!"

"Oh?" Mo Ran languidly raised his gaze. "Jiang-zhangmen—Jiang Xi?"

When no one dared answer, Mo Ran continued. "He's got some skill, I'll give him that. Among all the people this venerable one has killed, he was in the top ten for sure."

"The hell are you talking about?!"

Something was not right. This man was nothing like the Mo-zongshi Mei Hanxue knew: Rancor and malevolence radiated from every fiber of him. Yet he looked and sounded exactly like Mo Ran. How could anyone have learned to mimic his appearance and voice so precisely, in such a short amount of time?

One of Guyueye's elders spoke up. "Mo-zongshi, I'm afraid you've been cursed by the demon dragon on Mount Jiao. Please have a seat so I can check your pulse—"

“What?” Mo Ran cut him off, eyes narrow. “Stop beating around the bush, you nitwit. Are you saying there’s something wrong with this venerable one?”

The elder blinked in trepidation.

“Since you’re so eager to treat someone, this venerable one will help you out. After all, without the sick and injured, you healers would starve— isn’t that right?”

The cloaked figure leapt into the air like a shadow, and the pavilion was suddenly awash in scarlet. Mo Ran landed on the burgundy polliapatterned carpet in the middle of the pavilion in a whirl of black robes as screams filled the air. The gathered cultivators were afflicted with a variety of gruesome injuries. Arms were hacked off, legs shattered; the most unfortunate died on the spot, their torsos ripped open in an instant.

Mo Ran gazed down at the elder who had spoken, now a crumpled heap on the ground. “Look, all these patients are for you. Aren’t you happy?”

“Mo... Mo Weiyu...”

“Congratulations, and many happy returns.” A brilliant smile unfolded over Mo Ran’s face as he stepped over the cultivators, both the ones writhing miserably, and the glassy-eyed dead.

“Oh yes—one more thing.” At the pavilion gate, he turned to look over his shoulder. “This venerable one almost forgot. The upper cultivation realm’s been a stinking cesspool for centuries. Pass on a message to your sect leader for me—it’s only a matter of time before this venerable one razes all the sects to the ground.”

“Mo Ran, you coward!” one of the braver survivors rasped out. “You attacked a pavilion full of injured cultivators—are you scared of fighting the other sect leaders face to face?!”



“Scared? Of *them*?” Mo Ran gave the man a sharp look. “Even if you all held hands and formed a great big army, as long as I don’t wish to die, none of you could touch a strand of hair on this venerable one’s head.”

“Mo Ran, have you gone mad? You and Hua Binan are working together! Wh-what do you want?!”

Mo Ran grinned, his dimples deep and his eyes distant. “You’re asking what this venerable one wants?” he drawled. A strange look flitted across his handsome features, and he closed his eyes. “Even this venerable one isn’t sure what it is exactly. But suffice it to say, it’s not something those left in this world can give me. Nor can they hope to bring me any cheer,” he said tonelessly. “For many years, this venerable one has been a dead man walking, without wants or desires. But if you insist on asking—” He chuckled and looked up, irises glinting scarlet. “Well then, I’d like to see you all dead.”

Everyone’s jaws dropped. Mo Ran swept his gaze over the crowd’s ashen faces and couldn’t help softly laughing. “It’s been ages since this venerable one’s seen anything so interesting. How fun.”

“Mo Ran... You’ve truly gone mad...”

“That’s the second time you’ve said that.” His smile twisted into a leer. There was a loud *crack*; in the blink of an eye, Mo Ran had darted behind the speaker and bashed his head in. Gore splattered everywhere.

Amidst the horrified screams, Mo Ran lifted his gallant, blood-flecked face, revealing a pair of unnervingly bestial eyes. He leapt out of the crowd that chattered like panicked sparrows. “This venerable one wouldn’t want to make a liar out of you now. So here’s some madness, just for you, good sir.”

This good sir had had his skull shattered, and his face was a torrent of blood. But Mo Ran barely spared him a glance. He surveyed the crowd coolly, as if he’d just finished a perfectly unremarkable meal.

“All right, this venerable one’s killed enough idiots today.” The corner of his mouth quirked up as he shoved the corpse over and kicked it aside. “It’d be a bore to get rid of everyone in one fell swoop. Besides, if all of you

die, this venerable one will be lonely again. You can stick around a few more days.” He paused. “Next time this venerable one’s feeling fidgety, I’ll take it out on your skulls.”

The man strolled away from the mess of gore and through the main hall. At the gate, he glanced over his shoulder once more. “Before then, make sure to look after your heads.”

He burst into laughter. With a swish of his cloak, he alighted upon the closest rooftop and vanished over the ridge.

In the cave on Dragonblood Mountain, Mo Ran and Chu Wanning were still sound asleep, recovering from the effects of the spell on the incense burner. Three days after those strange and gruesome events at Guyueye, the censer suddenly emitted a shrill whistle. The piercing noise echoed through the cave as black smoke and crimson blood spilled forth.

Mo Ran’s eyes flew open.

His chest no longer ached, and he was otherwise uninjured. The mysterious tendril of smoke that had passed between him and Chu Wanning was nowhere to be seen.

“Shizun!”

He shot upright. Much to his surprise, he found that a third person had joined them in the cave.

The new arrival stood in front of the stone table with his back to Mo Ran, scrutinizing the smoking censer. Even from behind, his slender figure was unspeakably lovely. A pale, elegant hand opened the lid and plucked out a densely petaled, exotic-looking flower, holding it up to examine it in the low light.

“Totally destroyed,” he said softly. Closing his fist, he crushed the flower into dust, which immediately began to glow with a faint pearlescence. He seemed pleased as he gazed down at the light with his hands tucked behind his back. “Ah. It’s lucky I melded a piece of my own soul into this flower when I refined it. If not for that fragment, this cave would’ve been impossible to track down.”

The light eddied around him, as though it knew he was talking about it. It grew fainter and fainter, until it vanished completely.

“Who...” Mo Ran rasped.

The man put down the censer and sighed. “You’re awake?”

“Who are you?”

“Who do you think I am?” the man replied lightly.

He sounded terribly familiar, but Mo Ran was still groggy from sleep. He felt he’d been dreaming for ages and couldn’t immediately place the voice. Who could this man be? Based on what he’d just said, he seemed to have a connection with the mysterious black flower. Refining magical flora and insects was Guyueye’s specialty...so...was this Hua Binan?

The moment the name crossed his mind, Mo Ran thought of Shi Mei and felt his chest burn with hatred. But before he could attempt an answer, the man turned around.

The cave was dim, but the newcomer’s face was so exquisite it seemed to light up the space. His hair, usually left loose down his back, was now bound in a high ponytail, with an embroidered ribbon tied neatly across his forehead. Below it, those peach-blossom eyes gleamed, as bright and clear as ever.

Everything about his appearance and aura was almost unrecognizable; not a trace of gentleness remained. Here was a beauty beyond compare, but