

ROU BAO BU CHI ROU

The
HUSKY & His
WHITE CAT
SHIZUN

ERHA HE TA DE BAI MAO SHIZUN

4

Table of Contents

[Color Gallery](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyrights and Credits](#)

[Table of Contents Page](#)

[Chapter 120: Shizun Goes into Seclusion](#)

[Chapter 121: Shizun Is the Real Zongshi](#)

[Chapter 122: Shizun's Reflection](#)

[Chapter 123: Shizun Visits My Dreams, for He Knows I Think of Him Often](#)

[Chapter 124: Shizun Awakens](#)

[Chapter 125: Shizun Doesn't Need to Find a Cultivation Partner](#)

[Chapter 126: Shizun, Wait One More Chapter for Me!](#)

[Chapter 127: Shizun, Careful, the Ground's Slippery](#)

[Chapter 128: Shizun, You Can't Just Wear Whatever Clothes You Feel Like](#)

[Chapter 129: Shizun, Do You Like What You See?](#)

[Chapter 130: Shizun, I've Crossed Five Years to Come See You](#)

[Chapter 131: Shizun Does Some Light Reading](#)

[Chapter 132: Shizun and Shi Mei](#)

[Chapter 133: Shizun Has the Purest Mind](#)

[Chapter 134: Shizun Sure Can Eat](#)

[Chapter 135: Shizun Studies on the Sly](#)

[Chapter 136: Shizun, Relax](#)

[Chapter 137: Shizun and I Get Settled In](#)

[Chapter138:ShizunJustMightBlue-BallMetoDeath](#)

[Chapter139:Shizun,SweetDreams](#)

[Chapter140:Shizun,TurnOver](#)

[Chapter141:Shizun,Don'tStrip!](#) _

[Chapter142:Shizun,ThisIsCruelandUnusual](#)

[Chapter 143: Shizun Is My Unattainable First Love, My Erstwhile Once-Lover, the Object of My Most Sincere Affection, the Source of My Most Torturous Affliction, andHasBeenAllAlong](#)

[Chapter144:Shizun,ILikeYou](#)

[Chapter145:ShizunHasaMealtimeCompanionNow](#)

[Chapter146:Shizun,IsSheReallyGettingMarried?](#)

[Chapter147:Shizun,Let'sUseOurWords,NotOurFists](#)

[Chapter148:ShizunIsaNaturalTease](#)

[Chapter149:Shizun,ICan'tGetUp](#) _

[Chapter150:ShizunandISwappedRooms](#)

[Chapter151:Shizun,IOnlyWantYou](#)

[Chapter152:Shizun,Look!It'sMeiHanxue!](#)

[Chapter153:Shizun'sMostHatedSectLeader](#)

[Chapter154:Shizun,I'mOfftoLookforYeWangxi](#) _

[TheStoryContinues](#)

[Appendix:Characters](#)

[Appendix:SectsandLocations](#)

[Appendix:NameGuide](#)

[Appendix:PronunciationGuide](#)

[Glossary:Genres](#)

[Glossary:Terminology](#).

[AbouttheAuthor](#)

Footnotes

BackCover

Newsletter

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← ERHA HE TA DE BAL MAO SHIZUN →



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Seven Seas Entertainment

THE HUSKY & HIS WHITE CAT SHIZUN:
ERHA HE TA DE BAI MAO SHIZUN VOL. 4

Published originally under the title of 《二哈和他的白貓師尊》
(Erha He Ta De Bai Mao Shizun)
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Seven Seas press and purchase enquiries can be sent to Marketing Manager Lianne Sentar at press@gomanga.com. Information regarding the distribution and purchase of digital editions is available from Digital Manager CK Russell at digital@gomanga.com.

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MANAGING EDITOR: Alyssa Scavetta
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Julie Davis
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: Adam Arnold
PUBLISHER: Jason DeAngelis

ISBN: 978-1-63858-939-6
Printed in Canada
First Printing: December 2023
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



• ————— • T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S • ————— •

120	Shizun Goes into Seclusion
121	Shizun Is the Real Zongshi
122	Shizun's Reflection
123	Shizun Visits My Dreams, for He Knows I Think of Him Often
124	Shizun Awakens
125	Shizun Doesn't Need to Find a Cultivation Partner
126	Shizun, Wait One More Chapter for Me!
127	Shizun, Careful, the Ground's Slippery
128	Shizun, You Can't Just Wear Whatever Clothes You Feel Like
129	Shizun, Do You Like What You See?
130	Shizun, I've Crossed Five Years to Come See You
131	Shizun Does Some Light Reading
132	Shizun and Shi Mei
133	Shizun Has the Purest Mind
134	Shizun Sure Can Eat
135	Shizun Studies on the Sly
136	Shizun, Relax
137	Shizun and I Get Settled In
138	Shizun Just Might Blue-Ball Me to Death
139	Shizun, Sweet Dreams
140	Shizun, Turn Over
141	Shizun, Don't Strip!
142	Shizun, This Is Cruel and Unusual

	Shizun Is My Unattainable First Love, My Erstwhile Once-Lover, the Object of My Most Sincere Affection, the Source of My Most Torturous Affliction, and Has Been All Along
143	
144	Shizun, I Like You
145	Shizun Has a Mealtime Companion Now
146	Shizun, Is She Really Getting Married?
147	Shizun, Let's Use Our Words, Not Our Fists
148	Shizun Is a Natural Tease
149	Shizun, I Can't Get Up
150	Shizun and I Swapped Rooms
151	Shizun, I Only Want You
152	Shizun, Look! It's Mei Hanxue!
153	Shizun's Most Hated Sect Leader
154	Shizun, I'm Off to Look for Ye Wangxi
◆	APPENDIX: Characters, Names, and Locations
◆	APPENDIX: Glossary

Chapter 120: Shizun Goes into Seclusion

THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN painted the clouds red. Though it was still early, a large number of disciples had already gathered outside the Red Lotus Pavilion. They lined the sides of the pathway in their white mourning robes, their heads lowered and eyes downcast.

Dong,dong,dong.

The sound of the morning bell rang out from the Heaven-Piercing Tower. Several figures could be seen walking slowly in the distance, bearing a coffin. Xue Zhengyong and the Tanlang Elder walked in front, followed by Mo Ran and Xue Meng. Shi Mei and a monk dressed in worn robes walked on either side. They approached slowly through the morning fog, following the dew-slick bluestone path.

The monk held a lantern. Even in the light of dawn, the lantern's brilliant glow was visible; it emitted a dazzling golden radiance, like summer blossoms. The gathered disciples lowered their heads solemnly, scarcely daring to breathe. They'd all heard that Master Huaizui of Wubei Temple had hastened over for the sake of the Yuheng Elder—this unassuming monk must be him. The juniors' reverence toward such a legendary figure far outweighed their curiosity; none dared look too closely as he made his way up the

long mountain path. Thus the great master passed by these reverent disciples, an airy billow of robes in his wake. His passage, for them, was marked by the tapping of his monk's stick and the occasional glimpse of hemp-woven shoes in their downcast gazes.

The coffin was steadily carried the whole way. Yet this was not a burial, but a revival. No one wept. As they reached the Red Lotus Pavilion, Huaizui looked around, then said, "Next to the lotus pond: that will do. There's an abundance of spiritual energy there, suitable for spells."

"All right, you heard the great master!" Xue Zhengyong, leading the others, set the black-ice coffin down beside the lotus pond. "Great Master, if there's anything you require, only say the word. Saving Yuheng is as good as saving my own life. If there's anything I can do to help, I will!"

"Many thanks for Xue-zhangmen's kindness," Huaizui said. "This humble monk requires nothing at the moment. but will be sure to inform the sect leader should the need arise."

"Of course. Please do not hesitate."

Huaizui smiled. He pressed his palms together and bowed respectfully to Xue Zhengyong, then turned to address the others who stood nearby. "This humble monk is unskilled and will need five years to bring back Elder Chu's soul. So that this humble monk may

not be disturbed, the Red Lotus Pavilion will be closed to visitors from today until Elder Chu's revival."

Though XueMeng had already heard that it would take five years for his shizun to return, at Huaizui's reminder, the rims of his eyes grew red once more and he hung his head in silence.

"If anyone has any parting words they wish to say to Elder Chu, please do so now. There will be no opportunity otherwise for over a thousand days."

And so they stepped forward, one by one.

Xue Zhengyong and the Sisheng Peak elders went first, each taking their turn to stand solemnly before the coffin and say their farewells. Xue Zhengyong said, "Let us meet again soon."

Tanlang said, "Wake up soon."

Xuanji said, "Hope everything goes well."

And Lucun said with a sigh, "I kinda envy you, frozen in time for five years like this and not aging a day."

The rest of the elders all said their piece, some with long spiels and some with short ones. In no time, it was XueMeng's turn. XueMeng had every intention of holding it together—but the young

man had always been ruled by his emotions, and this was no exception. He stood next to Chu Wanning's coffin and began to cry.

Between sobs, while vigorously wiping away his tears, he managed to choke out: "Shizun, I'll train hard, even without you around. I definitely won't embarrass you at the Spiritual Mountain Competition. I'll tell you all about how high I ranked when you wake up. My shizun has no losers among his disciples, after all."

Xue Zhengyong walked over and clapped his son on the shoulder. XueMeng didn't cling to his father as he usually did, instead turning away with a snuffle. In front of his shizun, he didn't want to look yet again like a useless, spoiled child who relied on his father for every little thing.

Next was Shi Mei. His eyes were wet as well, but he didn't say anything. He only looked at Chu Wanning for a time with his head bowed before quietly backing away.

After Shi Mei retreated, a pale pink haitang blossom was placed gently into the coffin. The slender hand that held it, though still youthful, was already approaching the length and span of an adult's.

Mo Ran stood at the coffin's side. A breeze danced over the surface of the water in the pond, carrying the softly sweet fragrance of blooming lotuses. The breeze tousled his bangs, but when he lifted his hand, it was to brush Chu Wanning's face.

Mo Ran pressed his lips together. He looked as if he had many things he wanted to say, but in the end, all that came out, soft and slightly hoarse, was: "I'll wait for you."

Wait for what? He didn't specify. He'd considered saying, *I'll wait for you to wake up*, but those words seemed somehow insufficient. There was no way to express the feelings close to bursting the vessel of his chest, as though there was a pool of scalding lava in his heart, trapped and roiling, slamming against the walls and bringing him pain and anxiety. It felt like it was only a matter of time before those walls were breached, and the lava would spill out uncontrollably, the raging flow melting him to ash.

But even now, he was still unsure what that burning feeling was. So he only said: "I'll wait for you."

With this, the Red Lotus Pavilion was shut and barred. An enormous barrier came down like a gate separating life from death, denying entry to all. For the next five years, no one would be allowed the fragrance of lotus blossoms in the summer, nor the quiet solitude of winter snow within the pavilion.

Bamboo leaves rustled in the wind and haitang blossoms drifted slowly to the ground. From outside the Red Lotus Pavilion all the way to the main gate, disciples dropped to their knees and bowed. At the end of this vast river were Mo Ran, Xue Meng, and Shi Mei.

Xue Zhengyong announced in a booming voice that rang throughout the skies and forests, “Wishing Yuheng Elder well in his seclusion.”

The disciples, their heads bent to the ground, echoed solemnly, “Wishing Yuheng Elder well in his seclusion.”

Thousands of overlapping voices rose as one, rumbling from the mist-shrouded Sisheng Peak and startling birds into flight. Their calls filled the sky as they circled the treetops, afraid to land. The mass of voices rose heavenward, rolling like thunder through streaming clouds.

“Wishing Shizun well in his seclusion,” Mo Ran said in a soft voice. He bowed for a long time.

Five years of waiting.

After Yuheng went into seclusion, each of his three disciples, unwilling to take another elder as their teacher even temporarily, trained and cultivated on their own.

For various reasons—aptitude, cultivation path, other such factors—Shi Mei and Xue Meng stayed at the peak. Mo Ran chose to travel. It was true that he really did learn better through experience, but that wasn’t the only reason for his choice. So many things had turned out differently in this reborn life. Beyond Chu Wanning’s

unexpected death, Mo Ran was also still greatly worried about the fake Gouchen.

He suspected that the person behind all this might have been reborn too. After all, whoever it was, they were arguably quite proficient with the Zhenlong Chess Formation. Yet no one else in his previous lifetime—all the way up until he'd taken his own life—had been capable of utilizing this forbidden technique to the extent he'd witnessed in the course of their repeated encounters.

Mo Ran had no talent for sleuthing. Ever since the battle at Butterfly Town, the entire cultivation world had been on high alert, waiting and watching for that mysterious actor to slip up and expose themselves. He didn't really need to get involved. Mo Ran knew he wasn't exactly smart; his strengths lay in his abundance of spiritual energy and his natural aptitude for cultivation. Since a future confrontation was likely inevitable, the most productive thing he could do right now was to recover his pre-rebirth battle prowess as soon as possible.

In his last life, he had been a destroyer. In this one, he wanted to be a protector.

Not long after Chu Wanning went into seclusion, Mo Ran stood before the main gate of Sisheng Peak, a travel bag slung over his back, ready to set off on his journey. Only a few people had come to see him off: Xue Zhengyong, Madam Wang, and Shi Mei. Xue

Zhengyong clapped him on the shoulder and said, a little awkwardly, “Meng-er won’t be coming, he said...”

Mo Ran chuckled, “He said he’d be too busy training in the forest to see me off, right?”

After a brief, mortified silence, Xue Zhengyong swore, “That thoughtless brat!”

Mo Ran smiled. “He’s got his heart set on first place at the Spiritual Mountain Competition. It’s only natural he’s diligent about training. I’ll leave it to him to add some glory to Shizun’s name.”

Xue Zhengyong looked at Mo Ran, then said, hesitant, “The Spiritual Mountain Competition is the foremost tournament in the world of traditional cultivation. I’m sure Ran-er will grow and learn much in his travels, but the competition will probably bar the kind of hodge-podge techniques you’re going to pick up out there. It’d be a pity if you end up missing out because of that.”

“My cousin’s got it covered,” Mo Ran replied.

“Don’t you want to make a name for yourself?”

At that, Mo Ran actually burst out laughing. Make a name for himself? In his previous life, he had missed the Spiritual Mountain Competition because he had committed some wrongdoing and had been punished with confinement. He had always felt resentment over

it. But now that same thing seemed so insignificant—what did it even matter? He was someone who had seen so much death and so many partings, awash in an endless flood of trials and tribulations; he was someone who had gone from defiant to hopeful, from hopeful to resentful, from resentful to relieved, and from relieved to remorseful. The MoRan of the present no longer cared for beauties and fine wines or the worship of the masses, much less for things like revenge or the thrill of killing and destruction. He had already seen for himself the boundless opulence and luxuries at the apex of the world, and he had grown tired of it all. He didn't want to go back to such a cold place with no one by his side.

After all, he had once been Emperor Taxian-jun; he had stood upon the mightiest peak with the world in the palm of his hand, and he had seen all there was to see. Of course he wouldn't care about trifling things like some measly applause or a couple of cheers at the Spiritual Mountain Competition. And as for the ranking... Whoever wanted it was welcome to it.

"There are other things I'd rather do," MoRan said with a smile. "XueMeng is a young master, and young masters have their own lifestyles. I'm just a loafer, and loafers lead their own loafing lives."

Madam Wang chided gently, "Silly child, what are you saying? You're no different from Meng-er, what's with 'young master' this and 'loafer' that?"