

ROU BAO BU CHI ROU

The
HUSKY & His
WHITE CAT
SHIZUN

ERHA HE TA DE BAI MAO SHIZUN

6

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ERHA HE TA DE BAI MAO SHIZUN





The HUSKY & His WHITE CAT SHIZUN

← 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. 6

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Chapter 181: Shizun's Memories

THE MORNING AFTER the confession, Chu Wanning woke early. He didn't get up. He could see Mo Ran through the canopy, still asleep on a simple pallet of straw on the ground beside the bed.

It was difficult to see through the gauze of the curtain. Chu Wanning hesitated a moment before reaching out to lift it—yet before he even touched the thin fabric, he curled his outstretched hand into a finger, pointing. Using that single fingertip, he parted the veil the merest crack, as if it wouldn't count as peeking were it only through that gap.

The light of dawn streamed through the paper of the window. Cut into thin beams, the rosy glow gilded Mo Ran's handsome features.

Chu Wanning couldn't remember the last time he'd seen his sleeping face. He watched him quietly and carefully for a long time—so long he began to recall when Xue Zhengyong had first brought Mo Ran back to Sisheng Peak. Mo Ran had been a bashful youth, yet he seemed to shine with a fiery enthusiasm when he was happy. He spent his spare moments clinging to Chu Wanning, determined to

become his student no matter what Chu Wanning said or how Chu Wanning tried to shake him off.

He looks the gentlest, I like him the best. Mo Ran's declaration back at the Heaven-Piercing Tower had been so absurd, so unbelievable, it left Chu Wanning without any intention to take him as a disciple. In the end, he'd left Mo Weiyu hanging for two whole weeks.

In that time, he heard Mo Weiyu had asked Xue Zhengyong, Madam Wang, Shi Mingjing, and Xue Ziming in turn for advice on how to become his student. Which of these Mo Ran ultimately got the idiotic notion from, no one knew, but he took to lurking outside the Red Lotus Pavilion like it was Cheng Yi's door,¹ waiting for Chu Wanning to appear. When Chu Wanning left in the morning, he greeted him and begged to become his student; when Chu Wanning returned in the evening, he greeted him and begged once more. He continued in this vein, rain or shine, with the persistence of water wearing a hole in a rock.

Each time, Chu Wanning had huffed and walked away, as if Mo Ran didn't exist. He didn't like this kind of fervent pursuit. As someone who was himself indifferent, he preferred others to approach him with emotions that were equally mild.

But the boy was keenly observant, surely a result of the environs in which he'd grown up. He only pestered Chu Wanning this way for two days; sensing Chu Wanning's coolness, he stopped

chasing after him to beg for his tutelage. Yet he still came to the Red Lotus Pavilion every day without fail to sweep the fallen leaves from Chu Wanning's courtyard. Once Chu Wanning emerged, he would stand with his broom and smile, scratching his head as he said: "Yuheng Elder."

No *good morning* at dawn, or *rest well* at dusk. Only the simple greeting, *Yuheng Elder*, and a smile to go with it. Chu Wanning would barely spare him a glance before striding off, but Mo Ran wasn't fazed in the least. As Chu Wanning left, the rustling sounds of swept leaves carried on behind him.

Ten days peacefully passed in this manner.

The dawn of the eleventh found Chu Wanning in unusually high spirits. It was a particularly fine morning, which contributed to his mood; nearly a dozen lotuses had bloomed in the pavilion overnight, filling the air with their sweet fragrance. When he pushed open the doors, he saw the young Mo Ran on the winding mountain path. Mo Ran was sweeping the fallen leaves as he slowly made his way up the steps, head bowed in concentration. One leaf seemed stubbornly caught in a crack in the stone; he bent to pick it up, intending to toss it into the bushes.

As Mo Ran glanced up, he saw Chu Wanning standing before the gate. He stared in stunned silence; then his face split into a grin. Arms bare beneath rolled-up sleeves and that leaf still in his hand, he waved at Chu Wanning. "Yuheng Elder."

His voice was clear and sweet as fruit from the vine. Though it wasn't loud, it seemed to echo between the mountain peaks. A pristine expanse of clouds drifted on, and sunlight poured past the boughs of the trees. A breeze sang through the bamboo forest. Chu Wanning stood for a moment, squinting into the dazzling sunshine that turned his eyes to liquid amber. In that sunlit instant, the dead leaf in the young man's hand seemed no longer so mournful, but took on something of the bright, dazzling quality of that beaming boy.

Expressionless, Chu Wanning walked down those stone steps. Mo Ran had grown used to his indifference and paid it no mind. He tactfully stood aside as usual and waited for Chu Wanning to pass.

Chu Wanning came down the steps, one after another, and glided past Mo Ran as he did every morning. But that day, he turned his head ever so slightly and glanced back at the youth. In a voice crisp as a spring and as calm as a lake, he said, "My thanks."

Mo Ran stared for a moment. Then his eyes lit up. He waved a frantic hand. "There's no need, no need, it's this disciple's duty."

Chu Wanning paused. "I don't plan to take you on as a disciple." But his voice and expression were no longer so stern as they had been. He turned and continued on his way. Yet for some inexplicable reason—perhaps a twinge of conscience—after a few steps, he found himself glancing back once more. That was how he wound up catching sight of the youth, still holding his broom,

jumping for joy, wholly unbothered by his final words. Excitement was written all over his face, exuding an endless light and warmth.

This rascal hadn't listened at all to Chu Wanning's second sentence. Was a mere "thank you" enough to make him so happy?

Another few days passed just like this. One morning, it happened to rain. The downpour wasn't heavy, and Chu Wanning wasn't the type to bother with an umbrella or barrier. He reckoned it would take less than half an hour to get to the Platform of Sin and Virtue. Even if he got soaked, he could steam himself dry with a spell.

When he pushed the door open, Mo Ran was still there. But he wasn't sweeping today. He had put the broom aside and instead held an oilpaper umbrella as he crouched low to the ground with his back to Chu Wanning, shoulders shifting as he fiddled with something in complete concentration. His already small figure seemed even smaller when crouched. With the large, dark brown umbrella over his head, it made for a comical sight, as if he were a mushroom that'd popped out of the ground after spring rain.

Resisting the urge to smile, Chu Wanning walked up behind him and cleared his throat. "What are you doing?"

"Ah." Stunned, the youth turned and looked up at him. The first thing out of his mouth was, "Yuheng Elder." But before Chu Wanning could reply, his eyes widened, and the second thing out of his mouth was, "Why don't you have an umbrella?"

Mo Ran stood on his tiptoes and raised his umbrella as high as it would go. His third utterance was, "Take this one."

But he was too short, and stood one step below Chu Wanning. Even with great effort, his umbrella barely cleared the top of Chu Wanning's head. His grasp faltered; a gust of wind blew, and he fumbled it—the umbrella tilted, sending water streaming into Chu Wanning's collar and down his neck. Before Chu Wanning could speak, Mo Ran devolved into a flurry of apologies. "Sorry, sorry!"

Still Chu Wanning said nothing. He could have said *Mn* the first time Mo Ran spoke. He could have said *I don't need it* the second time Mo Ran spoke. And he could have said *Keep it for yourself* at the third. But Chu Wanning was left somewhat speechless by the fourth outburst, as Mo Ran cried out his apologies. Chu Wanning's gaze was downcast; his expression might've been one of apathy or sternness. In the end, he only sighed and took the umbrella from Mo Ran's hand. He held it up over the two of them, both his posture and grip precise. As he glanced at Mo Ran, he paused for a moment and returned to his first question. "What are you doing?"

"Saving the earthworms."

"What?" Chu Wanning frowned, thinking he'd misheard.

Mo Ran smiled, cheeks dimpling sweetly. He scratched his head, embarrassed, and stuttered, "S-saving the earthworms."

Chu Wanning looked down at Mo Ran's hand, which held a still-dripping branch he must've picked up from the ground. Past that, on the stone steps, there was indeed a helpless little earthworm lying in a puddle, wriggling away.

"The worms came out of the dirt, but once the rain stops, the sun'll bake them into worm cakes." Somewhat abashed, Mo Ran continued, "So I wanted to put them back in the grass."

"With a stick?" Chu Wanning asked coolly.

A pause. "Yeah."

Seeing the man's icy expression, Mo Ran must have worried the Yuheng Elder was judging him. "I-it's not that I'm scared to use my hands," he hastily explained. "It's just that my mom told me when I was little that you can't touch worms with your bare hands, or they'll rot..."

Chu Wanning shook his head. "That's not what I meant."

He reached out and tapped a spot in midair. A delicate golden willow vine emerged from the cracks between the limestone steps and wrapped itself around the worm lying in the puddle, gently conveying it back into the grass.

Eyes widening, Mo Ran asked in astonishment, "What was that?"

“Tianwen.”

“What’s Tianwen?”

Chu Wanning shot him a glance. “My weapon.”

Mo Ran looked even more dumbstruck. “Elder, why...why is your weapon...”

“So small?” Chu Wanning finished on his behalf.

Mo Ran snickered.

With a sweep of his sleeves, Chu Wanning said blandly, “There are times when it’s ferocious, of course.”

“Really? Can I see that?”

“It’s probably best you never do.”

At the time, Mo Ran hadn’t realized what Chu Wanning meant. He turned to watch as that willow vine shimmied into each crack of the stone steps, picking up those hapless worms soaking in the water and returning them to the mud. Slowly, his expression became one of admiration.

“Do you want to learn how to do this?” Chu Wanning asked.

Mo Ran froze for a moment, then his eyes flew wide. He was so delighted he didn't know what to say; eventually, he managed to nod over and over with his handsome little face flushed red.

"After morning practice tomorrow, come to the bamboo forest behind the Platform of Sin and Virtue. I'll wait for you there."

Pristine silk shoes trod over damp stone steps as Chu Wanning descended the mountain path, umbrella held aloft. Mo Ran stared dazedly at his elegant silhouette. After more than a moment, the meaning of Chu Wanning's words finally dawned on him—the red of his cheeks deepened, his eyes sparkling. Heedless of the wet ground, he fell to his knees and kowtowed, his youthful voice ringing with joyful enthusiasm. "Yes, Shizun!"

Chu Wanning said nothing; he didn't acknowledge Mo Ran's words, nor did he stop him. He merely paused briefly before continuing down the steps, the raindrops skipping across the surface of the umbrella like the strumming of a harp.

Only after Chu Wanning vanished into the distance did Mo Ran rise from the ground—at which point he discovered a barrier set up over his head. The translucent gold of it, flowing with patterns of five-petaled flowers, had kept the drizzle from soaking him.

Xue Zhengyong had been both surprised and relieved to learn of this development. "Yuheng, what made you change your mind?" he had asked Chu Wanning.

At the time, Chu Wanning had been sitting on the dais at the Platform of Sin and Virtue, the umbrella Mo Ran had lent him still in his hand. His slender fingers stroked imperceptibly over the antique wood of the handle. At last he said, “To help him save the earthworms.”

Xue Zhengyong made a noise of surprise, his panther-like eyes widening like a cat’s. “Save the *what?*”

Chu Wanning didn’t reply; the suggestion of a smile hovered in his eyes, fixed on the umbrella’s bamboo ribs.

Time had passed in the blink of an eye. The youth he took in as a disciple had started pure, then wandered astray, yet thankfully, he had still grown into a good and proper xianjun in the end. He hadn’t let Chu Wanning down.

One pale fingertip poked through the gauze. Through that sliver of a gap, Chu Wanning stared at Mo Ran’s sleeping face. The youth of his memories was now a strong and handsome man; his features had grown more defined, and his maturity was visible in the lines of his face. But as always, his brow furrowed as he slept. Ever since he was young, Mo Ran’s lashes had scrunched low in slumber, as if weighed down by some load on his mind. Chu Wanning found it amusing. Mo Ran was so young—were his dreams so melancholy?

Immersed in thought, he suddenly saw Mo Ran’s long lashes flutter as his eyes slowly opened.