

PAW 1581

Chapter 1582: That is my wife

Half an hour.

One hour.

An hour and a half.

The plane slowly descended.

The two chatted all the way, reluctant to part when they had to, speaking faster, trying to squeeze in more conversation.

Hou Wen asked, "Xuebingg, you have a child now?"

Dong Xuebingg nodded, "My wife just gave birth. It's a boy."

Hou Wen exclaimed happily, "Great! Then I'm officially his godfather."

Dong Xuebingg chuckled, "Sure, why not? But the child is being taken care of by a nanny. He didn't come this time. When we go back, I'll introduce you. After all, we're both in Jiangnan Province."

Hou Wen asked, "Are you planning to develop here in the future and transfer over?"

Dong Xuebingg shook his head, "No, I'm still in Beijing. It's my wife who's here."

"Oh, so this time, your wife is on a business trip, and you're accompanying her?" Hou Wen asked.

"Yeah, haha, I'm just tagging along with her." Dong Xuebingg replied.

Hou Wen glanced at him, "Which company does she work for? Is it a state-owned enterprise, a private company, or a government agency? In which city?"

Dong Xuebingg answered, "She works for the Xiaxing City government. We are both civil servants."

Hou Wen slapped his thigh, "Alright, I'll inform my father when the time comes. My father still has some connections in Jiangnan Province. He probably knows quite a few leaders in Xiaxing City. Rest assured, if your wife encounters any trouble here, find me. I'll make sure to handle it for you. Previously, I couldn't do much in Beijing, mainly because there were too many officials. But here, you can leave it to me. I can't promise big things, but for small matters, my father's word will be effective."

"Hehe, no need," Dong Xuebingg laughed.

"Why are you being polite with me?" Hou Wen stared at him.

Dong Xuebingg wasn't being polite because he knew that if Huilan found something troublesome, Hou Wen's father wouldn't be able to help. He still didn't know what position Hou's father held, but he wasn't a provincial leader. However, seeing his old classmate say so, Dong Xuebingg didn't refuse. "Alright, I won't be polite with you then. If she encounters any trouble, I'll come to you. Oh, the plane has stopped."

Hou Wen regretted, "We haven't chatted enough yet."

"Yeah, that's true." Dong Xuebingg also smacked his lips, suddenly saying, "Do you have plans this afternoon and evening? How about we go out together?"

Hou Wen pondered momentarily, then slapped him on the back, "Okay, that's settled then. This time, traveling with many old men and following them around is no fun. Moreover, my parents are watching over me. Just thinking about it annoys me. Haha, today it's just the two of us."

"Alright, let me tell my wife."

"You go ahead, I already informed my mom."

"Okay, we've landed. Let's talk more after we get off."

"Got it. My luggage is behind; I'll go get it; see you downstairs."

Dong Xuebingg picked up his small bag and followed the crowd downstairs. As soon as he exited, he took out his phone and dialed a number. The phone rang.

"I've arrived."

"I've arrived, too. Where are you?"

"I just finished dinner with some local officials."

"Hey, listen, I met an old classmate at the airport, a guy from my old dormitory. He and his family are also here for a holiday. We chatted all the way and didn't get enough. I told him I might not find you immediately and suggested we go out together. It's been so long since we last met."

"Leaving me behind all by myself, huh?"

"Cough, cough, isn't this a special situation? If it works, Hou Wen and I will return in the afternoon, and the three of us can have dinner tonight."

"Just kidding with you, playing with you, kid."

"Yeah, let's contact each other later and discuss it again. For now, you can go ahead and walk around on your own."

"Not going for a walk anymore. I might have to go to a development zone for research in the afternoon, and the car hasn't arrived yet."

After hanging up the phone and putting it away, Dong Xuebing turned around and saw Hou Wen and his mother approaching, still talking. It seemed that Hou Wen's mother's expression wasn't too good.

"Mom, are you being reasonable?"

"I still need to carry your luggage for you?"

"I'm just going out to play with my classmates. How can I carry luggage while moving around?"

"Your dad asked you to come over as soon as you exited the plane. Why are you wandering around? He'll scold you if you make him wait."

The mother and son chatted for a while, and it seemed that Hou Wen's mother didn't want her son to go out with Dong Xuebing. She probably didn't think highly of Dong Xuebing.

Dong Xuebing pretended not to hear and looked around.

Seeing Dong Xuebing ahead, Hou Wen told his mother, "Well then, let's go to my dad's place first. Dong Xuebing and I will drop off our luggage, and then go out."

Hou's mother asked, "Where are you guys going?"

"Why do you still care about where we're going?" Hou Wen was not pleased.

Hou's mother said coldly, "I don't want to bother with you. Do whatever you want."

Hou Wen snorted and walked towards Dong Xuebing. "Xuebing, let's go to the hotel first, put the luggage in my room, and then the two of us can find a place to drink."

Dong Xuebing said, "Shall we make another appointment? Auntie..."

"Never mind her. Let's do our own thing," Hou Wen said, lowering his voice and gesturing behind him. "That's it. I'm already grown up. After all, I'm also a junior cadre in a state-owned enterprise. Look at my parents, still controlling me like I'm in elementary school every day. It's so annoying."

Dong Xuebing smiled, "Parents all hope for the best for their children."

"But it's too much. I'm almost fed up. They have no self-awareness at all. Do you know why I'm not married yet? The ones they introduced to me are not up to my standards, and the ones I like, they disapprove of. The girl's family background may be better, but I don't like her. What's the use of that?" Hou Wen said helplessly.

"Every family has its difficulties."

"Yeah, let's go. Let's take a taxi."

Hou Wen walked ahead.

Dong Xuebing's bag was small, almost like he wasn't carrying anything. He turned around and saw Hou's mother holding a large suitcase. He said, "Auntie, let me help you with that."

Hou's mother glanced at him. "It's fine."

"It's just a small thing." Dong Xuebing took it over.

Hou's mother didn't say anything else and let him carry it. "Thank you."

The three of them went to the taxi exit, waited for a while, and then lined up to get into a taxi.

Hou's mother sat in the front with a cold face and told the driver the name of the hotel. Then she remained silent, "Go to the Royal Hotel."

Hmm.

Royal Hotel?

Dong Xuebing suddenly felt a little familiar. He blinked and couldn't help but take out his phone from his pocket and look at the hotel address his wife had just sent him.

Royal Hotel.

It turned out they were going to the same place.

Then Dong Xuebing remembered something. This coincidence was too much.

They were all flying from the provincial capital of Jiangnan Province, going to Macau on a business trip. They were even going to the same hotel. Dong Xuebing couldn't help but feel a little dizzy. He only realized that Hou Wen's father might have also been on this business trip organized by Jiangnan Province. It must be. He hadn't thought about it just now, but seeing an old classmate had made him too excited. Now that he thought about it, the two of them were probably traveling together with their families. Dong Xuebing couldn't help but smile at this unexpected turn of events. It was great that they could all hang out together these days.

Dong Xuebing glanced at Hou Wen, originally intending to ask, but seeing Hou's mother still in front, he said nothing.

Dong Xuebing smiled, "What a coincidence, I'm also going there."

Hou Wen hadn't reacted yet because the research this time was city leaders' level, and he was also very clear about Dong Xuebing's family situation. His father had passed away, and his mother was a teacher in the village. In his impression, even if Dong Xuebing's wife was a civil servant, she was probably just a staff member. Hou Wen hadn't thought about it at all. He hesitated, "You're also going to the Royal Hotel? Your spouse is on a business trip. Your unit is generous. Although it's not the most high-end hotel there, it's still pretty good and not cheap."

Dong Xuebing said, "It will be reimbursed."

"Perfect. Then both of us can drop off our luggage first." Hou Wen chuckled. And we can also meet your wife. Oh, I'm looking forward to it."

"She might be busy this afternoon."

"Don't make excuses. You must let me meet her."

"Hehe, what excuses would I make? My wife is not someone who can't be seen."

"Then I'm even more looking forward to it. I wonder which girl is so blind to pick you. Haha."

"Just wait and see. Let me give you a heads-up. My wife is extremely beautiful, not to brag, she's absolutely stunning, enough to scare a lot of people."

"Keep bragging."

"Action speaks louder than words. I must let you see."

"Hehe, I'm waiting. Hurry up and let me see."

"I'll bring a camera later and must capture your expression."

"You're showing off now. Keep bragging. Quickly call your wife out." Beijing people have a distinctive way of speaking. Among close friends, especially when their relationship is particularly good, conversations often involve teasing and banter rather than praise. Hou Wen smiled with his legs crossed, "You used to be such an honest person, but now you've become more talkative. According to what you said about stunning beauties scaring people away, I've only seen three or five over the years. By the way, your spouse is a civil servant in Xiaxing City, right? You should know the new Secretary of the City Party Committee in Xiaxing City, Xie... Xie..."

Dong Xuebing added, "Xie Huilan."

"Yes, that's her." Hou Wen clicked his tongue, "What it means to be beautiful, what it means to be stunning. Secretary Xie is a true example. I saw her on TV once, a news report from Xiaping City aired on the provincial channel. It seemed like she was giving a speech somewhere. That face, that figure, that aura, that grace, heh, let's not mention it anymore. I've never seen someone so charming. And she's just in her early thirties and already the City Party Secretary."

"Beautiful, right?"

"Stunning."

"As long as you acknowledge it."

"What do you mean acknowledge? I acknowledge what?"

"She's my wife."

Chapter 1583: Meeting

Afternoon.

In the taxi.

Dong Xuebing had been considering finding the right moment to mention it. After all, there was no need to hide that they were all family members of the research team from Jiangnan Province. When Hou Wen brought it up, Dong Xuebing casually responded with a smile.

"Your wife."

"Yeah."

"You mentioned Secretary Xie."

"Yeah, Xie Huilan."

"You're exaggerating."

"Sweat, what am I exaggerating about?"

Hou Wen, not surprised at all, burst into laughter. "You're just talking about it without even seeing her. You're stretching it. She's already in her thirties, while we're still in our twenties. How many years apart are we? And her appearance... I won't say it, but you know. I believe I could rule the world someday if you could marry Secretary Xie. Besides, Secretary Xie is already married, and her rank is higher than my dad's. Xuebing, not bad, you're getting more and more humorous."

"I know she's married," Dong Xuebing said.

"Then why are you still bragging?" Hou Wen grinned.

"But we two got married," Dong Xuebing sighed. I came here with Xie Huilan for this business trip, just like you're here with your dad for the one organized by Jiangnan Province. So, it's all convenient for us."

Hou Wen didn't believe him. "Oh, you know quite a lot, huh? Your wife is also a civil servant. She must have heard about leaders going on business trips."

"Huilan is the leader, so why would she need to hear about it?" Dong Xuebing said.

Hou Wen's mother, in the taxi's front seat, couldn't stand it anymore. She turned around with a stern face and looked at Dong Xuebing. "Don't think you can talk nonsense just because you're not in Jiangnan Province any more. Don't gossip behind Secretary Xie's back. Don't speak nonsense, especially about a female leader's reputation."

Dong Xuebing: ...

Hou Wen rolled his eyes. "Mom, you have no sense of humor. It's just a joke, not serious at all."

Hou Wen's mother replied coldly, "You still shouldn't speak recklessly. Wife? Secretary Xie Huilan is here, too, at the hotel. What if she overhears?"

"But she didn't hear," Hou Wen said.

Hou Wen's mother said, "Loose lips sink ships. Be careful what you say."

With that, Hou Wen's mother turned back to the front, seemingly having an even lower opinion of Dong Xuebing.

Dong Xuebing felt speechless. So, after all that talk with his buddy, it amounted to nothing.

Hou Wen signaled to Dong Xuebing, "Ignore my mother," and then they continued chatting but changed the topic.

Twenty minutes later.

At the entrance of the Royal Hotel.

The taxi stopped, Hou Wen's mother paid the fare and got out.

Hou Wen and Dong Xuebing followed behind. Dong Xuebing even took Hou Wen's mother's luggage out of the trunk. The three of them walked inside together.

The hotel was quite luxurious, especially in an area where most buildings weren't very tall. This twenty-story hotel stood out, and its interior decoration exuded a sense of wealth. The lobby was bustling with people. Some bellboys were helping with luggage, some guests were processing paperwork, and others were chatting in the lounge area, both inside and out. The entire city gave off a rather business-like atmosphere.

"Hey, my dad's here too," Hou Wen said, looking inside.

Hou Wen's mother also saw her husband and said calmly, "Let's go over."

Hou Wen glanced around. "Uncle Wang and Uncle Li are here too."

Dong Xuebing glanced in the direction indicated by the mother and son and saw several people, among whom one middle-aged man bore some resemblance to Hou Wen, evidently Hou's father.

"Mayor Hou, you're here too?"

"I was invited, so I had to come."

"Seems like the development zone over there is progressing decently."

"Hehe, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. This time, it's mainly for research purposes."

Mayor Hou and Dong Xuebing blinked their eyes. So, Hou Wen's father was a mayor or a deputy mayor. Hmm, it seemed more likely that he was the mayor. No wonder Hou Wen dared to talk about trivial matters with Dong Xuebing on the plane. His father, indeed, had some clout.

They walked over in that direction.

The elevator door opened at that moment, and a glamorous figure stepped out.

Hou's father smiled when he saw her. "Secretary Xie is here too."

An adjacent middle-aged man also said, "Secretary Xie, your husband isn't here?"

"Mayor Hou, Mayor Wang." The woman chuckled. "My husband is on the next flight. I'm not sure what time he'll arrive."

Hou's father checked his watch. "My wife and child are on the same later flight. They should be arriving soon."

They engaged in conversation, and though they weren't all from the same city's government, their connections weren't insignificant. A city Party committee secretary and a mayor or deputy mayor were definitely on different levels. It felt like a higher status, as hierarchy was crucial within the system.

Observing this, Hou Wen slowed and quietly pointed to the woman not far away. "See that? That's Secretary Xie."

Dong Xuebing sighed. "I know."

"Isn't she beautiful?" Hou Wen asked.

"Of course she is," Dong Xuebing replied. "She's my wife."

Hou Wen rolled his eyes. "Keep bragging, and you'll coax the cow down from the sky."

Hou's mother couldn't stand it and sternly said, "Didn't I tell you in the car not to speak nonsense? Now you're still blabbering. Watch your mouth."

Hou Wen gestured to Dong Xuebing to stop. "Don't say anything. If Secretary Xie hears, it'll be a disaster—not just for you but for both of us. Didn't you see how polite my dad was when speaking to her? She's the secretary of the city Party committee, governing a whole city. We can't afford to offend her."

Dong Xuebing didn't know what to say.

Suddenly, perhaps because their voices had grown louder, they attracted the attention of Mayor Wang. Seeing this, Mayor Wang smiled and said, "Mayor Hou, your wife and son are here."

Hou's father looked over.

Xie Huilan also noticed them.

"Dad, Uncle Wang, uh, Secretary Xie," Hou Wen quickly greeted, although his gaze lingered more on Xie Huilan. After all, everyone loves beauty.

Hou's mother also nodded at them. "Secretary Xie is here too."

Xie Huilan smiled and shook hands with her. "Is this my sister-in-law? Hello."

Hou's mother, who had been without a smile on the plane and in the car, also cracked a smile.
"You're even more beautiful than on TV."

Hou's father smiled and patted Hou Wen's shoulder, introducing him, "This is my son, Hou Wen, a disobedient kid."

"Mayor Hou is humble, I can tell," Xie Huilan said with a smile as she shook hands with Hou Wen.
"Hi."

"Uh, hello," it was evident that Hou Wen was slightly nervous.

Chapter 1584: I told you she is my wife

Hotel lobby.

It's three in the afternoon.

The few of them started chatting, getting to know each other. The other city leaders were all old comrades from Jiangnan Province, quite familiar with each other. However, Secretary Xie from Xiaping City was new here, so it was necessary to introduce her to the other leaders' spouses. The conversation was relaxed, not about work matters much. After all, this trip was mainly for tourism. Moreover, they were not from the same city, so there wasn't much overlap in their work. Most of the time, they chatted about daily life and cracked jokes, just like ordinary folks.

Xie Huilan smiled and said, "Your son is not even thirty yet?"

"No, just turned twenty-six," Hou's father said. "And he's not married yet."

Mayor Wang chuckled and pointed to Hou Wen. "Your standards are too high. You better hurry up so Mayor Hou and his wife won't worry."

Hou Wen seemed familiar with Mayor Wang. "Hehe, I'm still young."

Hou's mother sighed. "I've been telling Old Hou for a year or two, but he never listens."

Xie Huilan chatted casually. "Twenty-six is still young. I didn't get married until I was twenty-nine or thirty."

Hou's father waved his hand. "This kid can't compare to you."

Hou's mother half-jokingly said, "Huilan, since you came from Beijing, you know many people. If there are suitable girls, consider introducing them to our Xiao Wen, okay?" The identities of the people present were similar, so even though they were meeting for the first time, Hou's mother felt close enough to call Xie Huilan by her first name.

Xie Huilan smiled. "Sure. I'll keep an eye out for Xiao Wen."

Hou Wen was speechless. "Mom, you and Dad have been pestering me about getting married for a year or two. Can't your taste be a bit higher? I'm serving the people now. Where do I have time to think about love affairs? Sister Xie, please don't listen to my parents. I wouldn't dare to trouble you with introducing potential partners. Hehe, I plan to follow your lead and learn from you. No rush at twenty-six; we'll talk about it at thirty."

Everyone chuckled at his words.

"You rascal," Hou's mother playfully tapped her son's head. "Who are you going to follow? Don't call Sister Xie. From now on, call her, um, call her Aunt Xie." In terms of status, Xie Huilan, as the Party secretary of the city committee, was indeed a senior to Hou Wen and some other younger folks, but she was only five or six years older than Hou Wen.

Hou Wen hesitated for a few seconds and couldn't express himself. "Isn't calling her auntie making her sound old?"

Xie Huilan smiled. "Just call me Sister Xie, don't call me auntie. Hehe, let's keep it casual."

Mayor Wang laughed heartily. "Don't force Hou Wen if it sounds awkward. Secretary Xie is so young and beautiful. If you call her auntie, I can't bear to listen."

Xie Huilan modestly said, "What beauty? Mayor Wang is teasing me. Hehe, I saw your wife on the plane. She's even more beautiful than me."

Mayor Wang listened with pleasure and waved his hand. "My wife, when she was young, was indeed beautiful, but not anymore. She's aged. Now, let's talk about Mayor Hou's wife. She's the one who's getting younger by the day. She's not even forty yet." He turned to Hou's mother and said, "Sister-in-law, you must teach my wife how to maintain herself. You can't keep secrets."

Hou's mother smiled broadly. "Old Wang, you're flattering me. Are you trying to lift me to the sky and then drop me?"

Everyone bantered back and forth, complimenting each other, and was all in good spirits, creating a warm atmosphere.

As Hou Wen and Hou's mother walked past, Dong Xuebing saw them engrossed in conversation, so he didn't join them. Instead, he leaned against a chair in the rest area, holding Hou's mother's luggage and his bag, and lit a cigarette. Even though he had smoked half of it, they were still talking. Dong Xuebing had come here this time to relax and enjoy a vacation. The time to make a big splash to promote Xie Huan's candidacy had passed, and he wanted to keep a low profile and enjoy the trip. But after extinguishing the cigarette and seeing that they were still talking, Dong Xuebing couldn't wait any longer. He stood up, dragging his wheeled suitcase, and walked over.

None of them noticed him.

But Hou's father did. Perhaps he had noticed earlier when they entered that Dong Xuebing was with Hou's mother and Hou Wen, probably assuming he was the relative of some city leader. Maybe they had met on the plane and attended the research group as family members. "Who's this?"

Everyone turned to look.

Hou's mother frowned imperceptibly and replied, "He's Xiao Wen's classmate."

Then, not much else was said. Maybe in Hou's mother's view, now wasn't the time for Dong Xuebing to come over. After all, this was a circle of leaders, and everyone present was either a senior official or a direct relative. A junior civil servant like Dong Xuebing didn't belong here. Even if he was Xiao Wen's classmate, he should be aware. Hou's mother didn't have a good impression of Dong Xuebing, subjectively or objectively. Especially after he made that boastful remark about Secretary Xie being his wife. Hou's mother felt it was too much. A joke about a female City party secretary wasn't something to be taken lightly. Hou's mother believed there should be boundaries. Based on this point, she didn't want her son to have too much contact with Dong Xuebing. Those

who associate with the ink will be blackened. In the system, people who speak recklessly have no future. She didn't want her son to become like Dong Xuebing, someone who dares to say anything.

"Claiming the City party secretary is your wife. Why don't you say the provincial governor is your brother? What's the point of boasting like that?"

Seeing Dong Xuebing approaching, Hou Wen hurriedly greeted him, "Xuebing, let's catch up later. Don't say anything reckless now." Then, turning to his father, Hou Wen smiled and introduced himself. "This is my university classmate; we're very close. We met at the airport. Dad, you should have seen him when you visited the university in the first year."

Hou's father didn't remember, but he still nodded, "Hello, young man."

Hou's mother and Hou Wen thought Dong Xuebing would feel awkward. After all, in their eyes, Dong Xuebing was just a junior clerk who had just started working. It was natural to feel uncomfortable when meeting so many mayors and secretaries. But unexpectedly, Dong Xuebing remained calm and unruffled, without any discomfort.

"Hello, Uncle Hou," Dong Xuebing greeted politely.

Hou Wen heard him speaking seriously and felt relieved. He was worried that Dong Xuebing might repeat something inappropriate.

Mayor Wang didn't even glance at Dong Xuebing. Upon hearing that Dong Xuebing wasn't the relative of any leader, Hou's father greeted him briefly and didn't take him seriously. It wasn't that he looked down on people; Hou's father was usually very kind. But with so many city leaders around, he naturally couldn't chat much with a junior. This wasn't a family gathering.

Hou's father shifted his gaze back to Xie Huilan, the City Party Secretary of Xiaxing City. He had just gotten acquainted with Secretary Xie, and it was sure they needed to communicate more. Moreover, he also intended to build a good relationship with her. Mayor Wang probably felt the same. Firstly, it was for future work considerations; you never knew when there might be opportunities for mutual assistance. Secondly, a leader from the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection arrived two days ago in Jiangnan Province for an investigation and inspection. This was no longer a secret, and many people were aware of it. The leader from the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection happened to be Secretary Xie's husband. Even though they hadn't met him, they could tell from the incident in Xiaxing City the other day that Secretary Xie's husband was assertive. He even scolded the provincial leaders and sent them back. All because the inspection team criticized Secretary Xie. Hou's group wasn't clear about how things would develop, but it was inevitable that it wouldn't hurt to have a good relationship with Xie Huilan no matter how it went. At the very least, it wouldn't lead to trouble from her husband for some reason.

"Her husband is a Central Commission for Discipline Inspection leader."

"That's almost equivalent to Secretary Xie being a leader in the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection."

Therefore, with this matter in mind, many people were somewhat cautious.

Father Hou asked again, "Secretary Xie, if your husband hasn't arrived yet, he should be about the same as my wife and them, right?"

Mayor Wang said, "Maybe he couldn't find the place. I'll ask the hotel to send someone to pick him up. The taxi drivers here might take the long route if they realize he's from out of town."

Xie Huilan chuckled, "No need, Mayor Wang."

Mother Hou also asked, "How about we call him to check if he's arrived by now?"

"No need to call." Xie Huilan smiled, "My husband is already here."

Mother Hou was stunned, "He's here? When did he arrive, and where is he?"

Mayor Wang was also puzzled, "Didn't you say he hadn't arrived just now?"

Father Hou and Hou Wen looked around but didn't see him. Where did he come from?

Seeing that no one paid attention to him, Dong Xuebing filtered himself out. He couldn't help but spread his hands helplessly, making an innocent expression to his wife.

Xie Huilan also smiled. Under the stunned gazes of Father Hou, Mother Hou, and the others, she walked two steps forward and stood beside Dong Xuebing, naturally holding his hand. With a faint smile, she pointed and said, "Let me introduce hehe; this is my husband, Dong Xuebing."

"Dong Xuebing?"

"So, this is Dong Xuebing."

Father Hou and Mayor Wang were both stunned.

But they weren't the most astonished ones. The most shocked were Mother Hou and Hou Wen.

Upon hearing this, Mother Hou was dumbfounded, and Hou Wen almost spat out a mouthful of blood.

Looking at Father Hou, Xie Huilan said, "I didn't expect my husband and your son to be college classmates. What a coincidence, hehe."

Hou Wen was about to sit on Dong Xuebing to death, shocked, he pulled him aside and said, "Why didn't you say so earlier?"

Dong Xuebing looked at him speechlessly, "I've been saying she's my wife all along. I said it in the taxi and just now when we entered the hotel. Didn't you listen?"

Hou Wen was speechless, "I thought you were joking."

Dong Xuebing: "....."

Mother Hou was the most embarrassed. Thinking back to her criticism of Dong Xuebing's nonsense earlier, she felt a flush of embarrassment on her face, a bit unable to face them.

Good heavens, what's going on here?

So the City Party Secretary is your wife, huh?

Chapter 1585: Amazing

The lobby fell silent.

The change was quite dramatic, and for a moment, everyone couldn't digest this fact.

Seeing Secretary Xie holding hands with Dong Xuebing so intimately, everyone knew they were a couple. A City party secretary wouldn't joke about something like that. However, while Father Hou and Mayor Wang could manage, Mother Hou and Hou Wen truly couldn't accept it. Hou Wen and Dong Xuebing were college classmates and roommates for four years. They fought together and shared a bed. Hou Wen knew Dong Xuebing too well. Although Dong Xuebing was a good person, objectively speaking, his conditions were lacking in appearance, family background, and status. Hou Wen was well aware of all these facts. So, he never expected Dong Xuebing to marry such a stunning City party secretary. Mother Hou felt the same way. Based on her observation at the airport, Dong Xuebing left her with a very average impression. He didn't exhibit any qualities typical of a leader's family member. He liked to brag, was fond of talking about his poverty, and seemed lazy and lacking in dignity. As a result, Mother Hou's worldview collapsed.

How is this possible?

How can these two be husband and wife?

Mother Hou was the least accepting, and she fell silent for a moment.

Hou Wen was speechless and surprised for a long time. Ultimately, he patted Dong Xuebing's arm and said in a low voice that only they could hear, "You're something, relying on sheer luck. I'm almost jealous of you. How can you be so shameless? This wife of yours is too amazing."

Dong Xuebing was feeling proud. He whispered, "I told you my wife is beautiful, didn't I? But you didn't believe me. By the way, I haven't taken a photo of you yet. I must capture your expression at this moment. This expression of yours is the biggest affirmation to me, my friend. I'll have to take out this photo from time to time in the future and reminisce."

"Why aren't you going to hell?" Hou Wen was annoyed. "Don't take pictures, don't take pictures. Let me tell you, Xuebing, this matter isn't over. You have to explain everything to me later."

"Okay, later," Dong Xuebing said.

Hou Wen grunted, "It's not convenient to talk now. I'll interrogate you later." After speaking, he couldn't help but punch him in the chest. "Why don't I have such luck?"

Such a beautiful wife from a big family,

And she's a City party secretary.

Hou Wen truly felt that his good buddy was extraordinary. If this matter were revealed, those former college classmates of theirs would surely go crazy. In their circle back in college, marrying someone from a family that owned a company, had a house, had a Beijing hukou or someone who was reasonably attractive made the men feel invincible. Hou Wen had attended a few weddings of such classmates and had seen their proud and self-assured faces. But compared to Dong Xuebing today, Hou Wen felt that everyone else would feel embarrassed to death. Those wives who made them feel particularly proud were nothing compared to Dong Xuebing's wife. The gap was just too big.

Dong Xuebing was genuinely remarkable.

Hou Wen was genuinely envious of him. They had never expected that the quiet and unassuming guy from college would be the most ruthless among them.

Father Hou suddenly came over and extended his hand. "Mr. Dong, as Secretary Xie said, this is quite a coincidence. I believe this isn't our first meeting."

Dong Xuebing stopped talking to Hou Wen and shook hands with him. "Yes, when I was a freshman, you and Auntie came to enroll Hou Wen, and we met."

Father Hou immediately said, "Don't call me uncle. Hehe, Secretary Xie calls me Big Brother Hou. You can call me uncle. What's the meaning of this?"

Dong Xuebing chuckled, "Hou Wen is my buddy, so I have to call you uncle."

Xie Huilan shrugged, "No need to fuss too much, hehe."

Dong Xuebin replied, "It's not that complicated. Ah, this must be Mayor Wang."

"Hello, Mr. Dong." Mayor Wang also quickly approached to shake hands with him. Instead of walking forward, Dong Xuebing took the initiative to step forward to meet Mayor Wang.

Hou's mother and Hou Wen didn't quite understand. They were not well-informed, so they didn't understand why Mr. Hou and Mayor Wang were so polite to Dong Xuebing.

Secretary Xie's husband.

But that's not necessary.

The mother and son were a bit puzzled.

But this wasn't the place to talk, so Mayor Hou didn't explain anything to them. Instead, he smiled at Dong Xuebin and said, "Back then, Xiao Wen didn't do well on the college entrance exam, entered a second-tier university, and his mom and I complained about him for half a day. But now it seems we were a bit narrow-minded. Xiao Wen benefited from having someone like Mr. Dong in University. You two were roommates, Xiao Wen must have learned a lot from you during these four years."

Dong Xuebing waved his hand, "It's not like that, Uncle Hou. Hou Wen and I learned from each other. You don't have to be so polite. It makes me embarrassed."

Hou Wen found his father's words inexplicable.

Hou's mother thought the same way. It couldn't be that her husband was like this.

"I'm not being polite. We're not strangers, after all." Mr. Hou smiled kindly and said to his son, "Xiao Wen, learn well from Mr. Dong in the future."

Hou Wen hesitated.

Mayor Wang also praised Dong Xuebing.

Regarding Xie Huilan, although she held a higher position than Mayor Hou and Mayor Wang, there wasn't much vested interest involved, so they didn't need to pay much attention to her. But Xie Huilan's husband was different. Compared to him, Mayor Hou and Mayor Wang valued Dong Xuebing more. This didn't need to be asked.

Suddenly, Mr. Hou saw the luggage that Dong Xuebing was holding. After a brief moment of confusion, his expression changed, "This suitcase..."

Hou's mother suddenly remembered and hurriedly said, "Oh, I almost forgot. Just after getting off the plane, my arm was sore, so Xiao Wen's classmate helped me carry it." Now that she understood Dong Xuebing's identity, Hou's mother felt it was inappropriate. How could she let the spouse of the City Party Secretary carry her bag? But Hou's mother only felt it was a bit inappropriate, but didn't expect her husband to get angry with her.

Mayor Hou's eyes widened, "You can't carry it yourself?"

Mayor Hou was usually very doting and easy-going towards his wife, rarely saying anything negative about her. But this time, he unexpectedly got angry in front of many people.

Seeing this, Hou's mother's eyes immediately turned red, "I..."

Dong Xuebing hurriedly intervened, "I snatched Auntie's luggage. Mr. Hou, there's no need for this. You're treating me like an outsider."

After hearing this, Mr. Hou's expression softened, "That's not what I meant."

Xie Huilan smiled, "Sister-in-law is also my husband's elder, so it's only right for him to carry the luggage. What's the big deal? Mayor Hou, you're making a fuss over nothing."

Mayor Hou pointed at Hou's mother, "We'll settle this later."

Chapter 1586: Classmate's identity

Inside the Royal Hotel.

There was a bit of unpleasantness over a piece of luggage.

In front of many people, Hou's father scolded Hou's mother.

However, Dong Xuebing didn't think much of it. He didn't even consider it a big deal. Even though Hou's mother hadn't looked at Dong Xuebing properly at the airport or in the car, she was still the mother of an old classmate. Dong Xuebing's relationship with Hou Wen was there, so he didn't take it seriously. As Xie Huilan said, Hou's mother was Dong Xuebing's elder, and he should address her as "Auntie." It shouldn't be a big deal to carry her luggage.

Mayor Wang pretended not to see anything.

Hou's mother couldn't bear to lose face. After gritting her teeth momentarily, she relaxed and forced a regular expression. "Give me the luggage."

Dong Xuebing disagreed. "It's alright, Auntie."

Hou's mother insisted, "It's not appropriate. Auntie will take it herself."

"It's not that serious. I'll carry it up for you later," Dong Xuebing persisted.

Xie Huilan also said, "Sister-in-law, don't be polite to him. My husband may not have much else, but he's strong. Let him carry it."

Hou's mother hurriedly said, "How can I let him carry?"

She couldn't compete with Dong Xuebing, so she glanced at Hou's father.

Seeing that Dong Xuebing and his wife were indifferent, Hou's father felt relieved but didn't dare to be rude to Dong Xuebing. So, he took matters into his own hands and reached out to take his wife's

suitcase. "You also need to take the luggage upstairs yourself." With that, he threw the suitcase to Hou Wen.

Hou Wen caught it and brought it over.

Dong Xuebing shook his head helplessly and didn't say anything more.

Xie Huilan looked at her watch. "The car hasn't arrived yet, has it?"

"It should be arriving soon. They're probably preparing over there," Mayor Wang replied.

Xie Huilan smiled. "Then I'll go upstairs with my husband to put away our things first and return later. Mayor Wang, Mayor Hou, Sister-in-law, see you later."

Dong Xuebing said, "Then we'll leave first."

Hou's father immediately said, "Mr. Dong, join us for the development zone inspection."

Dong Xuebing chuckled. "I won't go. I just made plans with Hou Wen to go out for a while this afternoon."

"How about having dinner tonight?" Hou's father tentatively suggested.

Dong Xuebing pondered for a moment. "Maybe next time. I'm planning to have a drink with Hou Wen. It's been a long time since we've seen each other. I guess we'll have to talk about our university days. I don't think you and Auntie would be interested in that. Anyway, I'll be in Macau for quite a few days, even the day after tomorrow."

Hou's father nodded. "Okay, I'll treat you then."

Dong Xuebing knew that Hou's father was trying to make amends for his wife, but he didn't think it was necessary. It wasn't a big deal. Although he might sometimes lack some tolerance, Dong Xuebing showed respect when it came to good friends' parents. But seeing Hou's father like this, Dong Xuebing didn't know what to say. Saying too much would seem affected.

After a few words, Dong Xuebing turned and walked towards the elevator with Xie Huilan. Ding, the elevator door opened, and the two of them went up and disappeared into the lobby.

Meanwhile, Mayor Wang and his subordinates were waiting outside for him and also left.

Nearby, only Hou's father, mother, and son remained, and the atmosphere was a bit tense.

"Take your things. Let's talk upstairs," Hou's father said to Hou's mother, glancing at her. His expression didn't look good. Then, he went over and pressed the elevator button without waiting for her response.

Hou's mother was also irate and didn't understand why her husband was so angry today. But she couldn't afford to lose face, so she reluctantly accepted a suitcase from her son and went over with him. Hou Wen blinked his eyes, equally puzzled, but he didn't ask much. He knew he would get an answer later. This was the hotel lobby, with many people and much noise. His father wouldn't explain to them here.

Upstairs.

In a business suite.

Mrs. Hou was the last to enter the room. She threw her suitcase to the side and angrily slammed the door shut. Well, 'slammed' might be more accurate, as it made quite a noise. Hou Wen jumped in surprise. Seeing his parents about to argue, he wisely kept silent. He generally avoided getting involved in such matters, pretending he hadn't seen anything, and went to sit in the living room. But he kept his ears open; he was also puzzled.

Why was his dad being so polite to his classmates?

Why was Mayor Wang also showing so much respect to his classmates?

Even if it was the husband of a member of the municipal party committee, it shouldn't be like this. Even if they respect him, they should respect the Party Secretary more. Family members come second. But now it's the other way around.

But Mayor Hou was even angrier than her. He turned back, pointing at her. "So, you're slamming doors now, huh? You've got quite the temper. Who are you trying to impress by slamming the door like that?"

Mrs. Hou, with red eyes, glared back. "Why are you shouting at me?"

Mayor Hou shouted, "If I don't shout at you, who else would I shout at? I spoiled you too much in the past, and now you've developed such a bad temper."

Feeling wronged, Mrs. Hou said, "With so many people around, including Mayor Wang and many leaders from the province, what were you saying about me in the lobby?"

"I wasn't talking about you, so who was I talking about?" Mayor Hou retorted.

Mrs. Hou, feeling indignant, continued, "All I asked was for Xiaowen's friend to help me with a bag. But it's not like I asked him to do it. You can ask Xiaowen. It was his classmate who offered to help me. What's wrong with that? I didn't even know he was married to Secretary Xie. How was I supposed to know? I don't deserve this treatment."

Mayor Hou glared back. "You still think you're right? You don't know anything. How dare you!"

Although Mrs. Hou had always been the one to criticize Hou Wen, her son mostly sided with her. Seeing this, Hou Wen tried to mediate. "Dad, calm down. I can testify to this. Mom didn't say anything. It was Xuebing who offered to help Mom with the bag. Come on, it's not a big deal. You're blowing it out of proportion. I know Xuebing is now the husband of the Party Secretary, but you don't know the relationship between me and Xuebing. We've been good friends since college. I had a suitcase in my hand and couldn't help, so Xuebing offered to take the bag. It's perfectly normal. When I went to his house for dinner, I helped Xuebing's mother with things. I even cooked instant noodles for Aunt Luan and Xuebing. It's not a big deal. And besides, my mom said she didn't even know Xuebing married Secretary Xie. And Secretary Xie didn't mind. Why are you so upset?"

Mayor Hou glared at his son. "You and your mom know nothing. Do you two ever use your brains? Even if your classmate is a cadre's family member, do I and Mayor Wang need to be so respectful? After all, I and Mayor Wang are at the Bureau Director, not to mention Secretary Xie."

Mrs. Hou was taken aback. "He's not a cadre's family member, then what is he?"

Mayor Hou looked at Hou Wen. "Did your classmate tell you what he does?"

"He did. He's a civil servant," Hou Wen blinked. "What's wrong?"

Mayor Hou said, "There are many civil servants. I'm also a civil servant. Did he tell you what he specifically does?"

Hou Wen hesitated momentarily, "He told me that Xie Huilan is his wife, and my mom and I didn't believe him. We thought he was joking. Later, I didn't inquire much about his job. Dong Xuebing is just like me. He graduated only two or three years ago. What important position could he possibly hold? My situation in the state-owned enterprise is somewhat better. I could climb up faster by leveraging connections. But he is within the system and has to take things step by step. Many pairs of eyes are watching him. In three years, he probably meets the criteria for promotion. At most, he might become Section Chief. I think the possibility of him being a Deputy Section Chief is higher. Um, I've always thought Dong Xuebing was just an ordinary clerk. Isn't it, Dad? What's with all the fuss?"

Mayor Hou chuckled, "A clerk?"

Mrs. Hou also sensed that there might be a problem. She put aside her annoyance with her husband and lowered her tone, "Old Hou, what's going on?"

Mayor Hou replied, "You almost caused me a big problem."

Mrs. Hou anxiously asked, "What happened? Just say it."

"Yeah, Dad," Hou Wen said in confusion, "Just tell us."

Mayor Hou took a deep breath, "A few days ago, something happened in Xiaxing City, you know?"

Mrs. Hou said, "I heard a bit about it but didn't catch everything. What happened?"

Mr. Hou continued, "It's Xiao Wen's classmate who carried your luggage. Provincial leaders went to Xiaxing City for an inspection, and he scolded them from head to toe. And do you know the result? The provincial officials didn't continue the inspection and left in disgrace. Initially, Deputy Governor Jia was supposed to lead the delegation but fell ill and couldn't come. A clerk! Have you ever seen a clerk scold provincial officials for half a day, and the other party dared not to retaliate?"

Mrs. Hou exclaimed, "What?"

Hou Wen was also stunned, "Really?"

"What do you mean?" Mr. Hou said, "The matter has already caused a stir. Everyone in the province knows about it."

Hou Wen sighed, "Now that you mentioned it, I think I heard something about it, but I didn't ask for details."

Mrs. Hou hurriedly asked, "Old Hou, what does Dong Xuebin do exactly?"

Mr. Hou explained, "You guys... Even in the hall, you didn't think carefully. Secretary Xie is such a beautiful young city party secretary. How many people are worthy of marrying her? How many can marry her? But she chose Xiao Wen's classmate. If Xiao Wen's classmate didn't have some ability, do you think it's possible? Stupid! Look at my and Old Wang's attitude. Can't you tell? Things would have gotten worse if I hadn't taken a stand then."

Hou Wen urged, "Dad, please tell us quickly."

Mayor Hou sighed, "Your classmate is not any small fry now. Just because he's about the same age as you doesn't mean he's unimportant. He's a Division Chief level Inspector in the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, Eighth Inspection Office. He's in charge of our Jiangnan Province. With just a word, he can investigate the property declarations of provincial leaders. After obtaining approval, he has the authority to interrogate provincial leaders. You still asked him to carry your luggage. Why didn't you ask the governor to do your laundry?"

Hou Wen was shocked, "Division Chief level Inspector in the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, Eighth Inspection Office?"

Mrs. Hou was also startled, "I-I didn't know."

Chapter 1587

In the suite,

The atmosphere was tense.

Hou's father continued criticizing his wife, saying, "With your stubborn temper, you brought this upon yourself this time. I could tell from earlier how you disdain Xiao Wen's classmates. Just look at your tone and your expression. I feel like slapping you. In the system, appearances can be deceiving. How many times have I told you this? Each time, you don't listen. Now look, have you learned your lesson? Do you think I don't have enough trouble? Offending colleagues is one thing. Offending leaders is another. But offending someone from the Disciplinary Commission? They could take action against you with just a single document."

Hou's mother, feeling remorseful, dared not argue with her husband anymore. She finally understood why her husband scolded her in front of many people. She felt a sense of guilt inside. "Old Hou, I didn't know."

Hou's father pointed at her. "Ignorance."

Hou's mother whispered, "So what do we do now?"

Perhaps seeing his wife's regretful expression, Hou's father softened and sighed, "Alright, it's not all your fault. You didn't know him, you've never met him, and fortunately, Xiao Wen and Xuebing are classmates, even dorm mates, and have a good relationship. It shouldn't be a big deal."

Hou's mother looked at her son. "Xiao Wen, is your relationship with your classmate okay?"

Hou Wen hadn't fully processed the situation yet and instinctively replied, "Of course it's fine. And don't worry, Xuebing is not that kind of person."

Hou's father nodded and said to his wife, "Just now, I saw him insisting on carrying your bag for you. He's generous and considers Xiao Wen's face. Because of Xiao Wen's relationship with him, this incident won't become a disaster for us."

Hou's mother breathed a sigh of relief. "That's good. I'm sorry, Old Hou."

Hou's father looked at her. "It's over now. Just be more careful next time."

Hou's mother felt guilty. She turned and poured him a glass of tea. "Have some water."

Gulping down a few mouthfuls, Hou's father looked at his son. "Look at your classmate. He's the same age, but look at him now. Learn something from him."

Hou Wen smiled bitterly. "But Xuebing doesn't have any background. I'm happy for him, but I'm also puzzled. We've been in university for so many years. I've been to his home more than once. I know about Xuebing's family situation. How could he become a Division Chief official in just three years? It's like he's riding a rocket."

Hou's father said, "Heroes don't ask for their origins. Who told you that you need a background to survive in the system? He must have skills that you don't know about."

Hou Wen sighed. "The thing is, I don't know what they are. In university, our whole dormitory felt that Xuebing was relatively low-key and didn't talk much. His grades were average. But now, he's thriving. He married such a beautiful wife, and he's a Division Chief official in a powerful department like the Disciplinary Commission. I don't even know what to say anymore."

Hou's mother was also skeptical. "Old Hou, is he a Division Chief? Is it a genuine Division Chief position or just a deputy Division chief?"

Hou's father affirmed, "He's a genuine Division Chief cadre. When he was in Xiaping City, I heard that he showed his work permit, clearly stating his rank. Otherwise, why do you think Deputy Provincial Governor Jia didn't come this time? Why do you think there's been tension in the province recently?"

They fell silent for a while.

Hou Wen slammed the table and exclaimed, "You got promoted and didn't tell me? You married such a beautiful wife and didn't even inform me! That's so unreasonable. I must ask about this in the afternoon. Ah, I have so many questions! It's unbearable to keep them inside. Xuebing, you're shameless."

Hou's father frowned. "Don't say such things."

Hou's mother quickly added, "He's a leader now and can even manage your father. Be more careful when talking to your classmates in the future; don't be so impulsive."

Hou Wen smirked dismissively. "It's fine. Xuebing and I have been buddies for many years. We've never held anything back in our conversations."

Hou's mother said, "You still need to be careful."

Hou's father pondered for a moment. "Xiao Wen knows what he's doing. Let him handle it himself."

"No need at all," Hou Wen replied. "What's the point of friendship if we have to be cautious? If Xuebing were the kind of person who looks down on others after getting promoted, we wouldn't have had such a good chat at the airport. He never mentioned his rank or workplace. There was no hint of showing off. Don't measure us with your standards. Rank is one thing. Friendship is another. If you don't complicate things, they won't conflict."

Hou's mother glanced at her son. "You'll have dinner together tonight. Help me explain things then."

But Hou's father shook his head. "He didn't take it seriously. Let's leave it at that. There's no need to keep mentioning it. It's not very graceful."

Hou's mother pondered for a moment. "But I still need to speak well of you. I heard that Xie Huilan has quite a background. Using Xiao Wen's relationship to get closer to her is good. In case of any trouble in the future, she could help. Besides, Xiao Wen's classmate works in the Disciplinary

Commission, which holds a lot of power. He could help you. To be blunt, even if someone from the commission wants to investigate you, Xiao Wen's classmate could give us a heads-up, right?"

Hou's father waved his hand. "Enough already. Let's go with the flow."

Hou Wen felt extremely helpless listening to their conversation. "You guys have too many thoughts. Just to be clear, I won't get involved. Alright, I'm going to hang out with Xuebing now."

"Go ahead, don't keep him waiting." This might be the first time Hou's mother has supported her son's outing like this. Knowing about Dong Xuebing's identity, her attitude naturally changed, and she said actively, "Xiao Wen, take some money with you. If it's not enough, I'll give you my bank card. You can pay when you go out to eat. And oh, this child, always leaving without saying anything."

Hou Wen opened the door silently and left.

In the corridor, Hou Wen took out his phone and called Dong Xuebing.

"Hey, Hou Wen," Dong Xuebing answered.

Hou Wen vented, "Hurry up and come downstairs to meet me."

Dong Xuebing chuckled, "What's wrong? You sound like you're going to eat me."

Hou Wen was annoyed. "I wish I could eat you! You've been hiding too much. You've just turned this age and are already a Division Chief official!"

"Hehe, you heard from Uncle Hou."

"How could I not have heard? And what's with your beautiful wife? Come out now, come out now! You have to explain it to me today. It's infuriating!"

"Haha, you're jealous."

"You can boast now, but tonight, when we're drinking, I'll make sure you regret it."

"You don't stand a chance. Even if there were ten of you, you couldn't outdrink me. Haha."

Chapter 1588

Afternoon.

Not yet four o'clock.

Royal Hotel, a business room on the upper floor.

After hanging up Hou Wen's phone call, Dong Xuebing didn't bother to pack his suitcase. He threw his things on the bed and straightened his sleeves in front of the mirror.

"I'm heading out now to eat with Hou Wen."

"You're leaving without packing your luggage?"

"You can tidy up a bit. Your clothes are inside, too."

"I had a long day, and I still have to go to the development zone for research."

"You're lazy. Would you even know how to remove your clothes if I'm not around?"

"Yes, come back early after dinner to help me, my dear. Haha."

"Haha, calling me fat and out of breath, you're trying to provoke me again. Alright, I'll tidy up the clothes and luggage later. You go ahead and do your thing. I'm leaving."

"Don't drink too much."

"I know, you don't have to worry."

"We might have an event tonight, so keep an eye on the time."

"Got it. If you need anything, give me a call. We won't be far, just nearby."

After leaving, Dong Xuebing hummed a tune as he took the elevator downstairs, feeling good. In the lobby downstairs, Dong Xuebing saw Hou Wen sitting in the lounge area waiting for him. He waved and greeted him, but Hou Wen glared at him and didn't say a word. Instead, he gestured for Dong Xuebing to follow him and left the hotel without calling a taxi. They headed west, towards a restaurant not far from the Royal Hotel. Dong Xuebing guessed that Hou Wen had already looked up the address before coming and knew that there was a decent restaurant nearby. Since Hou Wen didn't speak, Dong Xuebing smiled and followed him, and they entered the restaurant together.

Inside.

"Don't need a private room?" said Hou Wen.

"Just the two of us. No need for a private room," Dong Xuebing replied.

"Alright, let's sit by the inside then. Follow me." Hou Wen led the way.

Initially, the two of them had planned to wander around and have some fun before having dinner, but it was clear that Hou Wen had a lot on his mind. They went to the restaurant instead, as it was a more convenient place for conversation. It was not yet dinner time, as it was still before four o'clock, and hardly any people were in the restaurant. They chose a table in a secluded corner. Dong Xuebing quite liked the environment. When the waiter came, they casually ordered a few dishes.

After the waiter left, Hou Wen's eyes widened, and he angrily slammed the table. "Spill it. Tell me everything, or I won't be polite."

"Why so serious?" Dong Xuebing chuckled.

"Bring two bottles of Maotai," Hou Wen commanded the waiter without looking away.

"You're hoping I'll speak my mind after a few drinks?" Dong Xuebing laughed.

"Whether you confess voluntarily or I make you do it, it's up to you," Hou Wen replied firmly.

Dong Xuebing chuckled and said, "There's nothing to hide. There's too much to discuss, and I don't know where to start."

"Start with how you managed to marry Secretary Xie," demanded Hou Wen.

Dong Xuebing smiled and said, "We met on the street. I had just become a civil servant at the time, and later, when Huilan's wallet was stolen, I happened to see it and caught the thief. The real progress in our relationship came a few months later when someone fell into the river. Huilan jumped in to save them but got entangled in water plants and almost couldn't come up. I happened to be there and jumped in to save her. That's how our relationship progressed."

Hou Wen listened with interest, "Oh, a hero saves the beauty."

"It's something like that," Dong Xuebing replied. "After that, various things happened. She helped me, I helped her, and somehow we ended up together."

Hou Wen enviously remarked, "You've got some incredible luck."

Dong Xuebing sighed, "Yeah, I never expected her to marry me. It felt like a dream. She's older, higher-ranked, and comes from a prestigious background. Between us, I don't need to boast. Honestly, I always felt unworthy of her. So, after we got married, I always indulged her. I wouldn't let her cook, do laundry, or wash dishes. I took care of all the household chores. Even if she wanted to wash a chopstick, I wouldn't let her touch the detergent, afraid she might burn her hands."

Hou Wen empathized, "It's the same for me. If I could marry such an amazing woman or even just a fifth of your wife, I'd treat her like a queen. Especially in critical moments, taking her out would earn me so much face. She wouldn't have to do any work her whole life."

Dong Xuebing chuckled, "That's shallow."

"I've always been shallow, never pretended otherwise," Hou Wen shrugged, "And you, you're just riding on your luck now."

"It's not as simple as that," Dong Xuebing replied.

"See, you're already getting cocky after just a few words," Hou Wen teased.

Dong Xuebing laughed, "Haha, your envy won't change anything."

"I roughly know about you and your wife. The hero saves the beauty, love blossoms over time, yeah, it's passable," Hou Wen continued. But how did you manage to reach such a high rank? You're only twenty-six? How did you get promoted so quickly?"

"I got promoted out of the ordinary," Dong Xuebing explained.

"But even so, you can't get promoted every six months," Hou Wen was incredulous, "Normally, the quickest you can get promoted is every three years, and it's just a minor promotion. But you got promoted four times just three years into the system, from deputy section chief to section chief, then to deputy division chief and division chief. On average, you're getting promoted once a year, and it's the highest level of promotion. There are hurdles to overcome, even for promotions from clerk to deputy, deputy to full, or deputy division chief to division chief. It's all a challenge. Forget about not having a background. Even if you did, no one dares to climb up so quickly. It's unheard of. Even if the leaders and the organization department agreed, the discipline inspection commission wouldn't turn a blind eye. So, when I heard you became a division chief, I was dumbfounded."

Dong Xuebing paused momentarily, "I've been climbing step by step these years, not relying on any background. Although my relationship with my wife helped, I still relied on myself."

"What achievements have you made then?" Hou Wen asked curiously.

Dong Xuebing replied, "Remember the earthquake in Fenzhou City?"

"Of course, who doesn't know about such a massive earthquake," Hou Wen nodded.

"I was working in Fenzhou City at the time. I predicted the earthquake based on the reactions of some animals. I had someone in the propaganda department send out an article urging many people to evacuate to other cities, which prevented many casualties. When the earthquake hit, I also rescued many people."

Suddenly, Hou Wen froze, staring at him motionlessly.

"What's wrong?" Dong Xuebing touched his face.

Hou Wen exclaimed, "So, the Director Dong mentioned in the news was you!"

Dong Xuebing nodded, "I was working in the Guangming District Office."

Hou Wen was almost fainting, "I've seen the news. It was broadcast countless times. They talked about Director Dong, and they mentioned your name too. But your name is too common. I had a thought at the time, but I didn't pursue it. I heard you were dead, and then you miraculously came back to life."

Dong Xuebing said, "I was buried alive, lucky to have survived."

Hou Wen finally understood: "No wonder you've been promoted so quickly these past few years. You've achieved something significant."

Dong Xuebing still felt lingering fear, "It's just luckier, to be honest. Several times were quite dangerous. If anything had gone wrong, we wouldn't be meeting today. Oh well, let's not dwell on it." Over the years, while others saw Dong Xuebing's steady rise, envied his marriage to a beautiful wife, and admired his repeated achievements and promotions, they had no idea what he had endured behind the scenes. They didn't know how many close calls he had experienced. He said that being alive and drinking with old friends here today was a miracle. Dong Xuebing would have died long ago if any link had been slower to react. These years hadn't been smooth for him, and no successful person had a smooth journey. Some might think that some successful people relied on luck or weren't as strong as themselves, but in reality, they might have been blinded by their pride and competitiveness, unable to see clearly.

At that moment, dishes were brought out by the waiters.

Dong Xuebing invited Hou Wen to pick up their chopsticks, eat a few bites together, and then refill their glasses.

"Ah, I'm really happy for you," Hou Wen said, raising his glass. "Here, let's have another drink."

"Sure thing," Dong Xuebing clinked his glass with him, and they both drank heartily. "I'm also happy for you, living more freely than me."

Hou Wen waved his hand, "You've got it. My little freedom is superficial, or you could say it's all supported by my dad. Without my dad, I'm nothing in Jiangnan Province. In this aspect, I'm not as good as you. Unlike me, You've climbed up step by step on your own."

Dong Xuebing laughed, "You're being modest now."

"It's because of you," Hou Wen replied, "I always thought I was doing well. I have food and drink; sometimes, I can throw my weight around. I live quite comfortably. But compared to you, what kind of comfort is this? When I show off, it's with my dad's backing. But you, you don't need anyone's support. Just flash your work ID, and everyone has to treat you respectfully. Everyone has to acknowledge what it means to be impressive."

"But it's not like that," Dong Xuebing said.

"You're at the top now," Hou Wen laughed, patting his arm, "Bro, everyone's almost jealous of you. From now on, I'll rely on you. If there's anything good, think of me. If there are any pretty girls to introduce, think of me."

Dong Xuebing laughed, "Your dad's at the Bureau Director level. I still feel belittled. It's just the nature of our work. I have the authority to check on party discipline and conduct. But when it comes to real power, Mayor Hou is several streets ahead of me, both in rank and authority. I'm still counting on you to look out for me."

"You're just pulling my leg. Your wife is the city party committee secretary."

They alternated between teasing and praising each other, having a cheerful conversation.

Chapter 1589

Evening.

It's past seven.

The sky darkens, and the streets are alive with colorful lights and revelry.

Dong Xuebing and Hou Wen have had quite a few drinks after reuniting. After dinner, they walk arm in arm down the street, singing loudly, attracting sideways glances from passersby. But Dong Xuebing and Hou Wen pay no mind, as they used to indulge in this activity in their college dormitory. After drinking, they would hit the streets, singing and dancing in high spirits. It had become a tradition for them. Now, as they start singing, Dong Xuebing and Hou Wen feel nostalgic for their college days. After finishing a song, they exchange a glance and burst into laughter.

"Today was delightful," Hou Wen remarks.

"Yeah, drinking was satisfying, too," Dong Xuebing agrees.

Hou Wen sighs, "I wonder how those two bastards from our dorm are doing."

Dong Xuebing smiles nostalgically, "I miss them too, but unfortunately, I can't reach them. Just like you, they've changed their phone numbers."

"That's because I had no choice. How could I use a Beijing number in Jiangnan Province? Any call I make would be long-distance and expensive. Before changing my number, I tried contacting your family many times, but no one answered. I also tried calling those two but couldn't get through."

"In that case, maybe they're not in Beijing anymore."

"I don't know. I'll inquire about it another day. We must find them."

"Agreed. I'll ask, too. The four of us brothers must reunite."

"Absolutely. We can't let such good friendships fade away. We must meet up."

"Let's go, it's getting late. Let's head back to the hotel. What do you want to do tonight?"

"I'm easy. I'm here for sightseeing this time, so anywhere is fine."

Ahead is the Royal Hotel. Cars come and go, and at this time, there are more people around. Although Dong Xuebing and Hou Wen have had several drinks, they're not drunk. They didn't drink excessively, so Dong Xuebing, with his sharp eyes, immediately noticed Xie Huilan at the lobby entrance. There are also quite a few other people around, probably leading cadres and their families

who have come for a study tour from Jiangnan Province. Dong Xuebing also spots a leader from Xiaxing City, a deputy mayor.

"Your wife is over there," Hou Wen points out.

"I see her. What's up?" Dong Xuebing looks over and, along with Hou Wen, walks up to her. After entering the revolving door, he greets her, "Huilan."

Having had some drinks, their voices are a bit loud.

This call attracts the attention of many people, but since they don't recognize Dong Xuebing, they have no idea who he is. They know Xie Huilan as Secretary Xie.

Xie Huilan smiles, "Just finished eating."

Dong Xuebing nods, "Just finished. What's going on?"

"We have nothing to do at the hotel, so we're discussing going out together. But we haven't decided on a place yet. Haha, why don't you join us?" Xie Huilan suggests.

"I don't mind," Dong Xuebing looks at Hou Wen, "What do you think?"

Hou Wen chuckles. Looking at Dong Xuebing, he says, "Of course, count me in. It's rare to meet up, and I was thinking of chatting with your wife more." After saying that, Hou Wen extended his hand toward Xie Huilan and said, "Sister Xie, we haven't formally met yet. I'm Hou Wen. You can call me Xiao Wen or Monkey."

Xie Huilan smiles at the corners of her eyes, shakes hands with Hou Wen, and says, "Then I'll follow Xuebing's lead and call you that. You don't have to call me 'Sister,' call me Huilan."

"Alright," Hou Wen is now more relaxed than when he first met her during the day.

Many cadres from Jiangnan Province know Hou Wen, recognizing him as the son of Mayor Hou, but they haven't met Dong Xuebing before. Now that the two sides have exchanged greetings, and judging by the content of their conversation, many people are slightly surprised to learn that this is Secretary Xie's husband, the leader of the Discipline Inspection Commission. The crowd's expressions are pretty varied, probably because Dong Xuebing's unassuming appearance has caught them off guard. Dong Xuebing's image and temperament differ from what they had imagined, especially in age.

"Hey, Mr. Dong."

"Director Dong, nice to meet you."

"Hehe, hello, Director Dong."

Some cadres come up with cheerful greetings.

Xie Huilan smiles as she introduces them to each other one by one, fostering mutual acquaintanceship.

There are deputy mayors from cities in Jiangnan Province, secretaries from other cities, and heads of departments. Dong Xuebing smiles and shakes hands with them, maintaining an air of dignity. If it were any other leader or ordinary family member, perhaps such formality wouldn't be necessary, especially since everyone is eager to stroll. However, Dong Xuebing's status is different, and naturally, he receives a certain level of attention.

"When did Director Dong arrive?"

"This afternoon, later than your two groups' flights."

"Oh right, we haven't decided where to go yet. What do you think?"

"Let's decide together. I don't know either; it's my first time here."

Only a quarter of the leaders and their families are gathered here, and Hou's parents are absent. Additionally, everyone is from different cities, and there's no one leading the group. Although everyone's intentions are similar, preparing to go out together for a stroll in the evening, it's unclear where to go. Opinions are divided, mainly because there's no one authoritative figure with the highest rank to decide. However, with Dong Xuebing's arrival, the atmosphere becomes somewhat different. He's probably the only person here who can command everyone's attention. If he suggests a destination, most people probably won't object. However, Dong Xuebing doesn't want to take charge. He came with the identity of Xie Huilan's husband and didn't intend to flaunt his authority here.

So, everyone continues to discuss.

"How about going to the Macau Tower?"

"I think we should go to the area near the church."

"When we came over, we saw several impressive palace buildings that we haven't explored yet."

"Old Wang, you like palace architecture. When we went on a business trip to Beijing last year, you dragged us to the Forbidden City for two days."

"Haha, mainly to experience the cultural atmosphere and understand the city. You have to take a look at old buildings."

As they continued talking, some people seemed to lose interest in going with the group and developing their ideas. They bid farewell and leave in small groups, perhaps impatient or uncomfortable with having a Discipline Inspection Commission leader around while shopping.

Dong Xuebing and Xie Huilan don't interfere, nor do many cadres. They casually chat on the side, indifferent to the destination.

Finally, a decision is made.

It's a place that surprises even Dong Xuebing—the Grand Lisboa Casino.

However, it's also expected. How could they come to Macau and not visit the famous casino? Even if they don't gamble, Dong Xuebing plans to explore it himself. Of course, as officials, they won't be gambling; they're just there to witness and experience it.

Chapter 1590

Evening.

Outside the Royal Hotel.

A bus drove up and stopped not far from the revolving door. Officials and their families from Jiangnan Province walked out of the lobby.

"The bus is here."

"Let's go, let's get on the bus."

"Is anyone else going there?"

"I just made a few calls, and everyone who's coming is downstairs now."

"Let's wait a moment. A few kids also said they wanted to go. Oh, people are here."

Several young men and women came out in twos and threes as the elevator door opened. With everyone present, they began boarding the bus one by one. It wasn't clear if the local authorities provided it or if Jiangnan Province had rented it in advance, but there were enough seats. Dozens of people could fit in comfortably.

Dong Xuebing asked, "Are your parents not coming?"

Hou Wen replied, "I called them, but they're asleep. They got up too early to catch the morning flight."

"Alright, let's get on the bus then." Dong Xuebing and Hou Wen also got on.

"Where should we sit?" Hou Wen saw Xie Huilan talking to a middle-aged woman and sitting in the third row, surrounded by secretaries and mayors, so he asked.

Dong Xuebing gestured with his lips and whispered, "Let's sit in the back. We won't be able to chat with them."

Hou Wen laughed and said, "That's a Good idea. I agree. Let's take the last row."

The two of them went over and sat down. The last to come were a few young people who seemed about the same age as Dong Xuebing and Hou Wen, ranging from no more than three years older to no more than two years younger. They obviously knew Hou Wen and seemed to have a good relationship with him. When they saw him, they greeted him, and one by one, they sat down in the back rows or the second-to-last row and started chatting with Hou Wen and the others.

"Xiao Wen, you coming too?"

"Yeah, why not? What else am I going to do?"

"We planned to call you for dinner tonight, but you didn't answer your phone."

"Oh, I went out for dinner with my classmate and didn't hear my phone."

"Is this your classmate? Why don't you introduce him to us?"

These young people should all be the children of leaders, and from their demeanor, it was evident that they had an assertive attitude.

"Sure." Hou Wen smiled at Dong Xuebing and said, "Let me introduce you first. This is Secretary Liu's son; this is Mayor Sun's daughter and that's Director Wei's nephew." After introducing them, Hou Wen lowered his voice and whispered to Dong Xuebing, "They're just some wine and dine friends of mine."

Dong Xuebing nodded, smiled, and greeted them, "Hello."

Listening to Hou Wen, who didn't introduce his classmates first but talked about them instead, some of the young men and women looked displeased, feeling disrespected. When Hou Wen's classmate

finally spoke with a casual "hello," they felt even more uncomfortable. Who is this person with such an arrogant demeanor?

Hou Wen said, "This is my college classmate, Dong Xuebing."

Just as he finished speaking, the bus started moving, and a leader in the front spoke, "Everyone, I think we should appoint a leader. We have a lot of people here, and opinions are not unified. For example, there was a lot of disagreement about where to go. It's not conducive to collective action."

Another leader agreed, "I agree."

"Secretary Cheng, you're the most qualified here. You lead."

"I can't do it. How about Dong Xuebing, Mr. Dong? Mr. Dong is a superior leader. It's appropriate for him. What do you all think?"

"Okay."

"I have no objection."

Several young men and women were stunned. They were all secretaries and deputy mayors, and they agreed to let a young man in his twenties lead the team. What kind of agreement is this? And what's with this superior leader?

Dong Xuebing quickly waved his hand and looked at them, saying, "I can't do it. Everyone here is more qualified and has more work experience than me. You all think highly of me. I'm here to tag along with my wife, eat, drink, and stay free. I can't bear this heavy responsibility."

"Eat, drink, and stay for free,"

Everyone chuckled good-naturedly.

Xie Huilan smiled and said, "Indeed, my husband is unsuitable. You're all too kind. I think Secretary Cheng should lead the team. He is the most experienced here."

Secretary Cheng was a City party secretary and the oldest among them, and he had a good reputation. So, when everyone heard this, they didn't object.

"Don't be modest, Old Cheng."

"Yeah, Secretary Cheng, you lead."

Secretary Cheng couldn't refuse in the end, so it was settled.

Several young men and women's expressions toward Dong Xuebing changed in the back seats. They only then realized that he was Secretary Xie's husband, the disciplinary committee's leader.

So young.

So unremarkable.

They glanced at each other in astonishment.

A decent-looking girl beside them smiled and reached out her hand, saying, "So you're Director Dong. Nice to meet you. I'm Han Fang."

Dong Xuebing also shook her hand, saying, "Hello."

Han Fang chuckled, "You're Hou Wen's classmate. We're all friends from now on."

"Of course, we're friends." Dong Xuebing smiled and said, "No need to be so formal. Just call me Xuebing."

However, the other young people were not as proactive. Maybe because they were all around the same age and all males, they naturally had some resistance to Dong Xuebing's achievements. They didn't seem convinced. They couldn't see what Dong Xuebing had done to marry such a perfect woman as Secretary Xie and to hold such a high position. So, they talked among themselves, pretending not to notice him.

Only Han Fang seemed to get along well with Dong Xuebing.

Hou Wen knew what those wine and dine friends were thinking. Under the protection of their parents, these people were all influential figures in the city, with high self-esteem and a proud personality. Now, they encountered someone of the same age who was much more capable than them, and psychologically, they couldn't accept it. Why could he marry such a beautiful wife? Why could he hold such a high position? They weren't convinced.

Twenty minutes later.

The bus arrived at the street of the Grand Lisboa Casino.

Everyone got off the bus, but they split into several groups. Some people didn't intend to visit the casino nearby and instead planned to stroll around the shopping malls. Some were preparing for free activities, and only a group would visit the area outside the casino. Dong Xuebing, Hou Wen, and those young men and women were among them.

Xie Huilan came over. "Where are you going?"

"The casino, to take a look," Dong Xuebing said.

Xie Huilan smiled. "Then I'll go to the mall with Ms. Sun."

Dong Xuebing nodded. "Okay, when should we meet?"

"Secretary Cheng said one hour later. Keep an eye on the time," Xie Huilan said.

Xie Huilan left, and the casino was beside them; they could already see the signs. About a dozen people remained, and they walked over in that direction.

"It's quite grand."

"Yeah, very luxurious."

"Not surprising, it's a legal casino."

Most of this group were family members, and no leaders were among them. Presumably, those higher-ranking officials were afraid of gossip or causing unnecessary trouble, so they just took a distant look and didn't go with this group.

Han Fang smiled and asked, "If it's legal, can we play?"

"You'll have to ask Xuebing," Hou Wen said, looking at Dong Xuebing.

Dong Xuebing shook his head and said, "Definitely not. Although no explicit regulations exist for family members, it's not recommended. As for the officials, the rule is to look but not touch. You can enter and look around but can't touch the gambling tables. That's probably what it means."

A woman ahead said, "Then shall we go in?"

Dong Xuebing smiled, "That's no problem."

Another family member said, "Let's go in. Since we're here, we should take a look."

Seeing that this group seemed to be following Dong Xuebing's lead and seeking his opinion, several young people felt even more displeased, and their opinions about Dong Xuebing grew stronger.

Instead of going straight in, they walked around the perimeter of the casino first. Ten minutes later, they arrived at the main entrance and climbed the steps. The casino was open 24 hours a day, with flashing lights and quite a few people, perhaps at peak hours. They could see many people coming and going, and from the faces of the gamblers, they could sense various emotions—anticipation, frenzy, despair, and more.

This was the casino.

A place that devours people without spitting out bones.

As they queued to enter, a leader's son said, "I've been here once before. The security check here is stricter than at customs. The main reason for the strictness is not just to prevent cheating, but also to prevent gamblers from going crazy after losing. I saw two people here once; one of them flipped the table on the spot and went crazy, and the other was crying bitterly, like a grown man crying like a child. It's unbelievable. This place is like a man-eater."

Another young man said, "You'll definitely lose nine times out of ten. Even if you win occasionally, if you keep gambling, you'll lose everything. It's a matter of probability. The casino can't lose money."

"So, I don't understand why they keep giving their money away. It's crazy."

"It's addiction. They can't see clearly at all. It's not easy to win money from the casino."

They expressed their opinions after being overshadowed by Dong Xuebing's presence for a while.

However, Dong Xuebing didn't speak or offer any comments. He just walked around, observing his surroundings with great curiosity.

Finally, it was Dong Xuebing's turn for the security check. Several staff members began scanning them with instruments. Cameras, metal items, and dangerous items were not allowed inside. You might have the option to check them in at the airport, but here, there was absolutely no room for negotiation.

One by one, the group passed through security.

Dong Xuebing was the last one. After the inspection, he passed through a long corridor and noticed cameras from various angles.

Beyond the corridor was the casino.

At the entrance, however, there were a few people staring at the faces of the gamblers.

His pupils contracted when the middle-aged staff member saw Dong Xuebing's face.

Dong Xuebing glanced at him strangely, wondering why he was looking at him like that, but he didn't say anything and went in.

After he left, the staff member immediately picked up the walkie-talkie and hurriedly said, "There's a situation in the corridor."

Power and Wealth

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