

PAW 1749

Chapter 1749

Two days later.

The morning of the second day of the lunar new year.

Dong Xuebing woke up very early, almost at six o'clock. He knew colleagues would come to pay their New Year's respects today, so he got up early, brushed his teeth, and washed his face at the water basin in the courtyard of Houhai Courtyard.

Afterward, he changed into a clean set of clothes and had a simple breakfast with just an egg. It could have been more delicious, but it sufficed. Normally, he would eat out for breakfast, especially when alone, as he was lazy about cooking. However, it was the Lunar New Year, the street breakfast stalls were closed, and most places were shut down as people returned home for the holidays. Even many restaurants in Beijing would rarely open during this time, which was a unique characteristic of the city.

He wiped the windows, swept the floor, and tidied the house. It took him two hours to finish cleaning. The Courtyard was too large, and while spacious to live in, it was also quite laborious to clean. Without dedicating at least a couple of hours, he couldn't complete it, let alone put up the couplets and red window decorations.

Around nine o'clock.

Just as Dong Xuebing was getting everything ready, the guests started arriving. It seemed that Luo Haiting and Zhang Lili had either arranged to come together or coincidentally met at the gate. They knocked on the door and entered together, each holding some fruits and milk, nothing particularly valuable.

Dong Xuebing smiled, "I said no need for anything."

"Just a token of our appreciation," Zhang Lili chuckled.

Luo Haiting added, "It's the Lunar New Year. We couldn't come empty-handed. It's not about the money. It's about courtesy."

Dong Xuebing replied, "All right, but don't make it a habit."

Luo Haiting smiled, "We're here to pay our respects."

"Thank you," Dong Xuebing accepted the gifts and invited them in.

Just as they entered the courtyard, another knock came from the door. Since the door was open when they entered, Dong Xuebing said, "Please come in."

This time, Li Hong and Han Fei carried fruits and meat products, such as sausages and ham.

"Director Dong."

"Happy New Year."

"Here to pay our respects."

The two of them walked in with smiles. Dong Xuebing also accepted their gifts, saying, "Thank you, and Happy New Year to both of you. You all brought gifts even though I said there was no need. Our colleagues work in the same office, so let's treat each other like family. There is no need to be so formal."

Han Fei giggled, "It's just a small gesture."

"All right, let's all come inside. It's cold outside," Dong Xuebing ushered them into the northern room because snowflakes had started to fall, as forecasted yesterday for moderate snow today. Dong Xuebing liked snowy days like this; they gave him unprecedented calm. However, today seemed unlikely to be peaceful with the prospect of becoming a deputy bureau chief ahead of him. Since the day before yesterday, his mind had been preoccupied with that matter, feeling listless and lacking motivation no matter what he did.

At noon.

They all had a meal together and enjoyed a lively conversation.

In the afternoon.

Some of Dong Xuebing's former subordinates and a few people from other units whom Dong Xuebing vaguely recognized but didn't know well came to visit. Dong Xuebing was curious to know why they were visiting him since they weren't from the same department. He speculated they might have noticed his background to some extent, perhaps due to the incident involving Yang Zhen and Fang Ping. However, Dong Xuebing wasn't concerned himself with that. He welcomed anyone who came, regardless of their rank or relation. Dong Xuebing was always polite to people, engaging them in conversation for quite some time. However, the one thing he consistently declined was gifts. While fruits and milk were acceptable, any expensive health products or gifts exceeding a thousand yuan, even cash, were promptly returned. He made it clear that he did not accept such items, unconcerned with whether this offended anyone. After all, he had worked many years without accepting valuable items from his subordinates; this was his principle. Dong Xuebing didn't want to invite trouble over such trivial amounts; besides, he did not need that money.

One hour passed.

Two hours passed.

Three hours passed.

By evening, Dong Xuebing had greeted everyone who had come. Finally finding a moment of leisure when no one else was arriving, he packed up a few fruits that others had brought him. He braved the increasingly heavy snowfall and left the alley in his car.

Around seven o'clock.

Residence of a high-ranking official from the Central Organization Department.

Dong Xuebing drove slowly, mindful of the snow-covered ground. As he approached the entrance of the residential compound, he knew the protocol here. Vehicles were generally not allowed to enter, especially during the Lunar New Year when it was the residence of high-ranking officials. Cars bringing New Year's gifts were usually directed to another street corner. Nearly a dozen cars lined up, waiting to deliver their gifts. Some people had likely been waiting here since the afternoon. Naturally, Dong Xuebing wasn't going to join the queue. Instead, he took another route towards a side gate. He casually displayed the access pass under the windshield to the Beijing City Committee Members' Residence that Xie Huilan had arranged for him.

As his car neared the gate, the guard saw the vehicle and quickly withdrew his hand from the barrier, opening it to allow Dong Xuebing's Land Rover to enter without questioning.

Such a fine car.

Such an ostentatious license plate.

Such a heavyweight access pass.

Such an assertive driving route.

The guards working in this place had keen eyes. They knew whom to stop, whom to wait for, and whom to allow through immediately. They understood very well.

The other people who had been waiting outside for a long time subconsciously glanced at Dong Xuebing's car. Anyone coming to the residence of high-ranking officials from the Central Organization Department for New Year's respect must have a significant status. With this understanding, there were no complaints or grumbles. In Beijing's environment, you never knew how many officials were around you. Even someone driving a modest car like an Xiali could have an impressive background. Therefore, many people working within the system here maintained a low profile and rarely got into conflicts with others.

The car drove inside.

Dong Xuebing parked under a three-story building.

This building had few residents, and each household looked upscale, contrasting sharply with the adjacent seven-eight-story apartment building.

Upon exiting the car, Dong Xuebing immediately called Han Zhenghe. "Hello, Director Han. I've arrived."

"Are you already here?" Han Zhenghe replied warmly. Come over quickly. I'll call the guards to let you in."

Dong Xuebing smiled, "No need, Director Han. I've already arrived downstairs at your place. Just parked the car, hehe."

"Oh, then come up quickly, especially in this heavy snow," Han Zhenghe replied, unsurprised. Other deputy-level cadres might not be allowed in, but Dong Xuebing's status ensured he could enter here without any issue.

Upstairs.

Dong Xuebing ascended to the top floor.

It was a luxurious duplex apartment, far more upscale than Dong Xuebing's residence in the compound.

As Dong Xuebing was about to ring the doorbell, the door clicked open, revealing Han Fei with a cheerful smile, "Director Dong, you're here!"

Dong Xuebing chuckled, "I'm here to freeload."

"Hehe, please come in, please come in," Han Fei said, pulling Dong Xuebing inside.

At that moment, Han Zhenghe and his wife, who was wearing an apron, also stepped out.

Dong Xuebing quickly approached and shook hands with Han Zhenghe and his wife. "Director Han, Auntie, Happy New Year to both of you. I wish you good health."

Mrs. Han smiled warmly, "Thank you, Xiao Dong. You're quite impressive. I've been hearing about you from Xiao Fei these past few months. We have to thank you for what you did for her."

Dong Xuebing waved it off, "Oh, it was nothing."

Han Zhenghe added, "It's cold. Please sit down and have some hot tea."

Dong Xuebing placed the fruits down, "Thank you, Director Han."

There were other guests in the living room. Han Zhenghe probably invited quite a few people today, and some might still be coming. Dong Xuebing wasn't surprised; at this level, such social engagements were expected during the Lunar New Year. He couldn't be invited to dine alone; if Dong Xuebing ever had that kind of honor, he wouldn't worry about a minor transfer now.

Still, Dong Xuebing's arrival attracted considerable attention. After all, Han Zhenghe, his wife, and three daughters came together to greet him. Everyone symbolically stood up, shook hands with Dong Xuebing, and exchanged a few words. During the introductions, there were officials from the Central Organization Department, leaders from other ministries, and some grassroots officials. Dong Xuebing exchanged pleasantries with them all. They exchanged surprised glances when they heard that Dong Xuebing was the Deputy Director of the Ninth Office of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. They hadn't expected an official of this rank to be so young. Not surprisingly, Director Han invited him to dinner, and everyone became even more friendly. Relationships were built on such occasions.

Mrs. Han went back to the kitchen to prepare dinner.

Han Zhenghe came over and began chatting with everyone.

Dong Xuebing didn't say much in such a setting and remained silent. However, Han Fei noticed this and promptly pulled Dong Xuebing away to her room, where she showed him around. Han Fei's room was very girly, decorated in pink, and cute compared to her personality.

Suddenly, Han Fei said, "Director Dong, hehe, you're here to talk to my dad, right?"

"You're sharp," Dong Xuebing admitted with a smile. "Yes, there's something."

Han Fei assured him, "No problem at all. After dinner, don't leave. I'll get rid of them, and you can talk to my dad alone."

Dong Xuebing couldn't help but feel that promoting Han Fei was wise.