

## PAW 1806

### Chapter 1806

Noon

The restaurant was already booked.

It was a relatively modest place, not too extravagant.

Dong Xuebing preferred to eat at the unit's cafeteria, so he looked around and asked, "What about the cafeteria? Why don't we try the food there?"

Chang Lin smiled wryly. "The cafeteria has been closed for a while."

Ma Wei seemed unclear about the reason. "Why was it closed?"

Meng Hanmei, the director of the County Party Office, pointed to a run-down building in the yard. "It's that building. It snowed a few days ago, and the roof collapsed, causing serious leaks. The last time they served food, several people had to eat while holding umbrellas because of a big hole in the roof. They've tried to fix it several times, but it hasn't worked. Finally, the county temporarily closed the cafeteria to avoid potential dangers."

Although Jiaolin County's economic situation was passable, the office conditions were worse than those in some impoverished counties. Fortunately, the new county committee compound was nearly completed. Otherwise, Dong Xuebing's first task after taking office would have been to address this issue. The safety of the people is crucial, and the safety of civil servants is equally important. Such hidden dangers could not be left unresolved; otherwise, Dong Xuebing would be held accountable as the top leader. After all, he was responsible for the overall situation.

Power means what?

Greater power means greater responsibility.

Dong Xuebing asked, "So how is the food situation for the staff handled?"

This was probably Meng Hanmei's responsibility, so she said, "We have box lunches arranged, delivered by car every day. They're nutritious meals."

Dong Xuebing nodded and agreed to go with the restaurant option.

Box lunches would seem too political and performative, and that was unnecessary. It would be too artificial. Besides, with the Executive Vice Minister of the City Organization Department present and many leaders from Jiaolin County here to welcome him, Dong Xuebing couldn't have everyone sitting in one room eating box lunches. That would be quite ridiculous. If he insisted on this, it would leave a bad first impression, so it was better to avoid being overly formal.

### Inside the Restaurant

Even though it was mealtime, there were no other customers inside. A sign outside indicated that the restaurant was closed for the day. It was clear that someone had arranged this in advance, so the restaurant was empty, only serving Ma Wei and Dong Xuebing and their party.

"Secretary Dong, please take a seat," Ma Wei said, pointing to the main seat.

Dong Xuebing immediately shook his head. "I couldn't possibly. Minister Ma, please."

Ma Wei pretended to be polite. "Today, you're the main guest."

Dong Xuebing joked, "You're flattering me. With my looks, I'm not suited to be the main guest. The director's team wouldn't want me even as an extra." This was Dong Xuebing's humor. Sometimes, people from Beijing have a style of casually joking about themselves and others during light-hearted conversations. This self-deprecating humor is common among them when dining out.

Everyone laughed, though they might not fully understand the joke.

After all, Dong Xuebing was the Secretary. They had to laugh even if he told a cold joke; otherwise, it would be too disrespectful.

In the end, Ma Wei took the main seat, with Dong Xuebing and County Mayor Zhang Dongfang sitting on either side of him. Other County Committee Standing Committee members took their

seats in turn. Seating arrangements were very precise, reflecting ranks and seniority within the party. This was a formal occasion for welcoming the top leader, so seating could not be wrong. Everyone was well aware of this.

With his chubby body, Zhang Dongfang squeezed into the chair, "Want some wine?"

Ma Wei waved his hand, laughing, "If you want to drink, go ahead. Hehe."

Dong Xuebing said, "We have work this afternoon, so let's skip the alcohol. We can use tea as a substitute for wine; it's just a gesture, no need to overdo it."

The tea arrived.

The food was served.

Everyone started eating. A few people took turns toasting Ma Wei and Dong Xuebing with their tea cups, chatting casually.

Dong Xuebing wanted to gauge the situation during this meal, but it was probably too formal. Maybe it was because Dong Xuebing was the top leader, and everyone was more reserved or slightly uneasy. Without alcohol, no one relaxed. Conversations were cautious and polite, making it difficult for Dong Xuebing to understand their relationships and dynamics. He would need more time to understand them. So, he didn't discuss work but instead talked about everyday matters. He took the opportunity to remember and observe the County Committee Standing Committee members he hadn't yet memorized. The specific situation was unclear, so he focused on understanding these ten members' personalities and temperaments.

After the Meal

Everyone left the restaurant.

Ma Wei looked at his watch and said, "Alright, it's almost time for the afternoon shift. Everyone has work to do, and I need to head back. I have some tasks this afternoon."

They escorted him to his car.

Dong Xuebing said, “Safe travels, Minister Ma.”

Zhang Dongfang and others also said a few words to Ma Wei.

Ma Wei waved his hand, “Alright, everyone go back.”

He got into his Audi, which drove out of the County Committee compound, and left.

Zhang Dongfang turned to Dong Xuebing, “Secretary Dong, let me show you around the compound and help you get familiar with the environment and do a quick inspection.”

Regardless of Zhang Dongfang’s inner thoughts, he was outwardly polite to Dong Xuebing, and Dong Xuebing had no issues with his attitude. Dong Xuebing was not petty and adhered to not offending others if they didn’t offend him. “No need, Mayor Zhang. I know you have a lot of work, and everyone is busy. Don’t let me delay your important tasks. Today is just a brief introduction, not official work. We’ll start officially from tomorrow, and I won’t give any instructions before I understand the situation. Hehe.”

Dong Xuebing was still very modest, keeping his stance low, and didn’t come across as issuing orders or claiming territory. If not for the previous incident, people might have thought Dong Xuebing was humble and low-key because of his youth. After all, even the youngest County Committee Standing Committee members were likely old enough to be his elders, with a difference of not just seven or eight years but ten or even twenty years. However, given Dong Xuebing’s shocking actions on his first day—attacking police and overturning the minibus—everyone knew that someone capable of such acts couldn’t be just low-key. They understood that Dong Xuebing was presenting himself this way for now, making it even harder to see through him.

Sometimes, he was a jerk.

Sometimes, he was modest.

And he was still so young.

Every detail about Dong Xuebing made people curious. How could someone like him become a County Committee Secretary? Many people were puzzled about his background. Before Dong

Xuebing arrived, his age had caused quite a stir among the leadership. A position at the level of a county secretary typically requires significant experience and age. Based on the usual career trajectory starting from university graduation at around twenty-three and considering a promotion every three years, reaching the level of a County Secretary would usually require being at least thirty-five years old. Some people spend their whole lives trying to reach this level without success. Yet, Dong Xuebing, who was only twenty-six or twenty-seven—when most people are just a few years into their careers and might still be job-hopping or struggling to find stable employment—had already become a County Secretary. It was astonishing and made others feel like their years of hard work were in vain. Many of the leaders' children were around Dong Xuebing's age, making the comparison even more striking.

Everyone had their thoughts, but none showed their feelings outwardly.

Zhang Dongfang thought momentarily and said, "Alright, I'll get back to work now. There are some issues I still need to address, primarily related to the new County Committee compound. The previous Secretary, Li, directly oversaw this, and now that he's left, I've been temporarily assigned. In a few days, you'll need to review it."

Dong Xuebing replied, "Okay, I'll look in a few days."

Zhang Dongfang nodded, "If there's anything, we can stay in touch."

Dong Xuebing agreed. They had already exchanged phone numbers during the meal.

Once Zhang Dongfang left, seeing that Dong Xuebing preferred to be alone, everyone else said their goodbyes and returned to their departments. Those from departments outside the County Committee compound drove away as well.

Only Meng Hanmei, the director of the County Committee Office, stayed behind. "Secretary Dong, let me show you the office. It's all set up, and since you might not be familiar with it yet, it's better if I accompany you. I also need to give you the keys to the staff quarters. Your luggage was delivered by Director Chang before, and I've already taken it to the staff quarters."

Dong Xuebing wanted Meng Hanmei to stay. It wasn't because of her good figure or looks but because of her position. As the director of the County Committee Office, Meng Hanmei was essentially the County Secretary's chief manager, a role inherently aligned with the County Secretary. Dong Xuebing wanted to see if Meng Hanmei was an exception to the norm, to evaluate her trustworthiness, and whether she tended to align with him. Given the natural conflicts between a new secretary and the previous administration, such a transition would typically be expected.

Since Meng Hanmei was from the old secretary's team and was now isolated, Dong Xuebing thought it reasonable for her to align with him. Therefore, he decided to start by working with her.