

## PAW 1816

Chapter 1816

Evening.

In the kitchen.

Both Su's father and mother had gone into the kitchen. After glancing outside, they shut the door behind them.

When Su's father stepped in, he scolded his wife in a low voice, "Look at you! Look what you've done!"

Feeling wronged and knowing she was at fault, Su's mother didn't dare argue back. "I didn't know he was the county party secretary! Look at him—his appearance, his age—how does he look like one?"

Su's father replied, "But that doesn't justify treating him like that."

Su's mother explained, "I thought he was here to curry favor with our son. I didn't want us to lose our dignity, so I acted with a bit of authority. Isn't that how families of officials behave? Why are you blaming me? Besides, you didn't realize who he was, either. Who could have guessed that a newly appointed county secretary would visit our home just a day after his promotion in the middle of his busy schedule? And who would've thought he got lost and just happened to pass by here?"

Su's father pointed at her. "Behaving like an official's family already, huh? The promotion isn't even set in stone yet, and you're already putting on airs. How do you think Secretary Dong will feel seeing that?"

Su's mother, growing anxious, asked, "What should we do now?"

Su's father shook his head, "How should I know?"

Su's mother worriedly said, "Could this affect Secretary Dong's attitude toward our son? Oh no, what should we do? Xiao Yan's transfer hasn't been finalized yet. If something changes... I even

told people over the phone that our son would be the county secretary's secretary. There's no taking that back now."

Su's father thought momentarily and shook his head slightly, "It shouldn't be that serious. From what I can tell, Secretary Dong might be young, but he seems quite kind. I don't think he was angry. Think about it—he's a county secretary, a high-ranking official. He must've seen all sorts of things by now. Why would he hold a grudge over something like this? He was polite when talking to you, wasn't he? That means it probably won't affect Xiao Yan. You shouldn't overthink it. Let's focus on cooking. If Secretary Dong is willing to eat a bit, everything is fine, and we're just worrying about nothing. Hurry up and cook."

Su's mother, still uneasy, replied, "Alright, okay. My big mouth messed things up. Not only did I not help our son, but I made things harder for him."

Su's father chuckled, "You thought he was here to ask for favors! If this gets out, people will laugh for days."

Su's mother blushed in embarrassment and snapped, "Can you stop rubbing it in?"

...

Ten minutes later.

The kitchen door opened. Dinner was ready.

Su's mother said, "Xiao Yan, bring the dishes to your boss."

Su Yan responded and quickly went to bring the dishes to the table. These weren't the simple vegetarian leftovers from earlier but meat dishes or a mix of meat and vegetables. There was also a pot of soup simmering on the stove, bubbling away, and it smelled delicious.

Su's mother smiled as she approached, "The soup's not ready yet, Secretary Dong. Please start with the dishes first."

Dong Xuebing hesitated for a moment but eventually stood up and took a seat at the dining table. “Thank you, Auntie. I am full, though. I had a bowl of tomato and egg noodles before I came over, but since you’ve gone through the trouble of cooking, I can’t eat. I’ll have a little.”

Hearing this, Su’s mother was overjoyed. Since Secretary Dong was willing to eat her food, it meant he wasn’t upset at all. She had been overthinking it, assuming the worst. As her husband had said, a county secretary wouldn’t be petty about such things.

Everyone sat down to eat.

Even though Su’s father and mother had already eaten, they joined in. With the county secretary at the table, they felt it was only right to accompany him, even if it meant eating a bit more.

Dong Xuebing tasted a few bites. “Hmm, this is delicious.”

Su’s mother smiled proudly, “Really? Have some more, then.”

Dong Xuebing chuckled, patting his full stomach. “I’m stuffed. I really can’t eat much more.”

“It’s fine. Xiao Yan hasn’t eaten yet, so he’ll finish the rest. He had just gotten home when you arrived,” Su’s mother said.

Dong Xuebing turned to Su Yan, “You came back this late?”

Su Yan, worried Secretary Dong might misunderstand and think he was already socializing or forming cliques before officially assuming his role, quickly explained, “After work, I went to the library to buy some books. I spent much time picking them out, just trying to improve myself.”

Dong Xuebing asked curiously, “What kind of books did you buy?”

Su Yan hesitated for a moment, “Well, academic ones.”

Dong Xuebing chuckled, “Why so hesitant?”

Su Yan scratched his head, “A few of them are about the Beijing dialect. I wanted to study it.”

Beijing dialect? Why would you study that? Dong Xuebing thought briefly and then laughed, “Is it because my accent’s too strong? You can’t understand me sometimes?”

Su Yan hurriedly replied, “No, not at all! I just wanted to learn it and gain some knowledge. I’ve always liked the sound of the Beijing accent; it’s pleasant to the ears.”

Dong Xuebing understood and smiled, “No worries. You’ve reminded me—I’ll try to flatten my intonation from now on. That way, it’ll be easier for everyone to understand.” Dong Xuebing had never really spoken proper Mandarin; he’d never learned it and didn’t think much about it. Like many native Beijingers, he had a carefree attitude and didn’t care much if people couldn’t understand certain words he said. His attitude was often, “If you understand, great. If not, too bad. Why should I care?” But now, thinking about it, he realized it wasn’t ideal. He should consider others’ needs. Speaking more clearly wasn’t just about respect; it also made communication and work smoother. While speaking perfect Mandarin wasn’t in the cards for Dong Xuebing, he could at least slow down, reduce the slang and dialect, and make it easier for others to follow.

Su’s mother said, “Secretary Dong, you don’t have to change for him. Let Xiao Yan learn it on his own. It’ll be a useful skill, right?”

Su’s father agreed, “Exactly. It’s not right to make the leader accommodate his subordinates.”

Dong Xuebing smiled warmly, “Auntie, Uncle, you don’t know me well yet. I don’t care much about being a ‘leader’ or not. I prefer straightforward conversations and genuine personalities. I want Xiao Su to work with me because of that quality. Some people might think that a civil servant or official shouldn’t be involved in physical altercations, that it reflects poorly. But I don’t see it that way. Fighting depends on the context. Of course, if someone’s fighting for selfish reasons, that’s unacceptable. But if they’re fighting to protect the public’s personal safety or legal rights, I believe that’s something to be respected. Sure, fighting isn’t something we should encourage—everyone knows it’s not good. But isn’t it admirable that someone knows the risks yet still stands up for the people in critical moments, ignoring the potential gossip and consequences? I don’t know how others see it, but I see things differently.”

Hearing this, Su’s mother became excited, “You’re right! That’s exactly the kind of person Xiao Yan is. He has a warm heart and always cares about others. Some might say he meddles too much, but I’ve always believed my son is kind-hearted. You’ve described it perfectly!”

Su Yan, a bit embarrassed, muttered, “Mom...”

His mother pointed at him, “See, Secretary Dong understands you. I’m telling you, you better work hard from now on and never let him down!”

Su Yan immediately replied, “Of course!”

Dong Xuebing’s words were deeper and more personal, revealing his true thoughts. Su Yan and his parents now understood why Dong Xuebing had chosen Su Yan as his secretary.

Su’s father was in high spirits, listening to Secretary Dong’s words. “Secretary Dong, how about we have a drink?” He felt that Dong Xuebing’s sentiments echoed his evaluation of his son. At home, Su’s father had always taught his son that people might live their whole lives without wealth, power, or status, but they should never lose their conscience. This philosophy shaped Su Yan’s character. Despite often criticizing his son for being incompetent or troublesome, Su’s father felt a deep pride. Encountering a leader like Dong Xuebing, who appreciated his son, made him feel like he had found a kindred spirit.

Dong Xuebing smiled, thinking it over. “Sure, let’s have a drink!”

Su’s father commanded, “Xiao Yan, bring me that bottle of Maotai.” This was his reserve liquor, not something he would easily share with outsiders.

Su Yan complied and quickly went to fetch it.

Su’s mother worriedly interjected, “Is that okay for your blood pressure?”

Su’s father replied confidently, “I’m happy today; I have to drink a little!”

Su’s mother pouted but didn’t insist further.

Dong Xuebing said, “Uncle, we’re not strangers anymore, so there’s no need to be polite. Let’s just drink enough to enjoy ourselves; it’s not about how much we drink.” Unless someone truly offended Dong Xuebing, he never forced drinks on others. He believed in enjoying the experience of drinking—relaxing, chatting, and eating—rather than focusing solely on getting drunk. For him, that was what drinking should be about; the rest was merely consuming alcohol.

The Maotai arrived.

Dong Xuebing recognized it immediately, noting that it looked like it had been aged for about twenty years. It was valuable, and while he had tasted it before, he hadn't had the chance to enjoy it often.

Su Yan poured drinks for the others but didn't pour any for himself.

Dong Xuebing glanced at him and asked, "Xiao Su, aren't you going to have a drink?"

Su's father explained, "Xiao Yan is allergic to alcohol. He's been this way since he was little. If he drinks, he breaks out in red bumps all over—so many that it looks terrifying."

"Oh, then let him skip it. Allergies are indeed troublesome," Dong Xuebing said, raising his glass. "To you, Uncle! Here's to you and Auntie, wishing you both a long and healthy life!"

Su's father hurriedly replied, "No, we should be toasting you. Thank you for recognizing Xiao Yan!"