

## PAW 1865

Chapter 1865

It was 5 PM.

At Fang Wenping's house.

The lighting was excellent, and since it was a top-floor duplex apartment, the soft golden sunset gradually poured into the room, creating a scene as beautiful as a painting.

Of course, the scene in the kitchen was far from beautiful.

Dong Xuebing, drenched in sweat, was struggling to scrape the fish scales off, the smell of fish filling the entire room, and he had absorbed a fair share of it himself. He couldn't help but complain. Damn, I came all the way here to celebrate your birthday and didn't even bother to change clothes. I even bought you a gift, and here you are, not even offering to cook. And I have to cook for you? What is this?

"Is it done yet?" Fang Wenping called from outside.

Dong Xuebing was fuming. "It's not done yet."

Fang Wenping, with her typical air of superiority, said, "Hurry up, or just close the kitchen door. The sound of you scraping fish scales is making me anxious."

Dong Xuebing was practically seething with anger, wishing he could kick her out. He muttered back, "You're eating my home-cooked meal. At least stop being so picky about it."

Fang Wenping, clearly irritated, shot back, "Say that again."

At that moment, her phone rang. It was her call. She immediately dismissed Dong Xuebing's remark, answered the phone, and said, "Hello? Yeah, I know. I said I know. About this matter, go talk to Governor Li. It's not my responsibility. I'm off today and not at the office. If you don't understand me, then I'm telling you again: go ask Governor Li. If he doesn't deal with it, you can wait until I return to work on Monday. That's it."

Dong Xuebing overheard, thinking that her working style hadn't changed even though Fang Wenping had moved from the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection to here and was promoted to the Deputy-provincial level. She was still as hard-nosed and foul-tempered as ever. She was the same domineering woman from Beijing, the kind everyone avoids. No matter where she goes, it's always the same. Dong Xuebing shook his head helplessly, finishing up with the fish. Checking the time, he decided it was time to start cooking.

Deep-frying fish.

Stewing meat.

Stir-frying vegetables.

Dong Xuebing was busy in the kitchen all by himself.

Meanwhile, Fang Wenping sat in the living room, watching TV calmly, with no intention of helping. Not only did she not offer any help, but she also started bossing him around. She complained about the smell of the oil smoke and told him to turn the extractor fan up. Then she said he used too much sugar in the stir-fry, claiming she didn't like things too sweet. She kept giving instructions from the couch.

Dong Xuebing was so furious that he could hardly describe his feelings.

The only way to describe his emotions now was that he wanted to kick Fang Wenping out. He was beyond frustrated.

What's with the picky attitude?

If you're so particular, why don't you come over and cook?

With a bang, he slammed the kitchen door shut. Out of sight, out of mind. He wasn't expecting any help anymore. He decided to handle everything himself, from stir-frying to cleaning the dishes and serving the food. Finally, after everything was ready, he opened the kitchen door, holding several plates of cooked dishes, and walked out.

"Dinner's ready," he said.

Fang Wenping, still on the phone, heard him and immediately gave him a cold look. He then spoke into the phone, "Hmm, who? No one, just me. You little gossip, didn't I say no one? The noise from the TV is just that. I don't have any friends or relatives here to celebrate my birthday with. Yes, of course, I'm spending it alone. Haha, who's going to come? They're all too scared of me, and I don't like many people around. It's too chaotic. Alright, I'm about to eat. I'll talk to you later, okay? Good girl, go ahead and get busy."

At that moment, Fang Wenping's tone completely changed. She suddenly sounded like a different person, filled with maternal warmth and gentleness. The soft, caring vibe gave Dong Xuebing goosebumps.

"Still want a kiss?"

"You don't mind looking silly, but even the kid thinks it's embarrassing."

Dong Xuebing knew who was on the other end of the phone—it was Fang Wenping's niece, Fang Shui Ling. Only when Fang Wenping talked to her niece would she show this gentle, warm expression. Well, and also to her daughter, Qianqian, whom she was very fond of. As for everyone else, she never really bothered with them. Thinking about this, Dong Xuebing's anger toward Fang Wenping, which had built up earlier, faded significantly. He must have been pretty special to her, right? Sure, Fang Wenping never showed him any warmth, but she had come to his room in the middle of the night to drink with him before and now invited him alone for her birthday—those things spoke volumes. Why would she have bothered inviting him if she didn't care about him?

Thinking this through, Dong Xuebing felt a lot more at ease. Forget it. I won't hold it against you anymore.

"Fang Da Jie, let's eat. I'm tired after the morning's work, and my arms are sore. I'm not sure if the food is cooked well, so I'll make do with it. There are two more dishes. I'll bring them out."

Fang Wenping muttered an "mm" and placed her phone on the table.

Dong Xuebing returned to bring out the other dishes and served some rice. "By the way, how old are you this year? What's your birthday age?" He regretted the question as soon as he asked.

Fang Wenping didn't even look at him, completely ignoring the question.

Dong Xuebing coughed, realizing that, at her age, asking her about her age was probably inappropriate. "Well, do you have any alcohol at home? Celebrating a birthday without some drinks is no fun. We definitely need a little something."

Fang Wenping pointed to a cabinet. "It's inside. You can help yourself. My stomach hurts, so I'm not drinking today."

"Okay, then you can just have tea." Dong Xuebing opened the cabinet, found a bottle of aged Guojiao liquor, which looked pretty good, and poured himself a glass. He didn't pick up his chopsticks, just raised his glass. "Fang Provincial Leader, I toast you a drink, wishing you always to stay young."

Fang Wenping barely responded, just clinking her cup with his and taking a sip.

Dong Xuebing didn't mind her indifference. He downed the drink in one go. The warmth spread through his body, and he felt comfortable and content. The drink was good. "Phew, time to eat, eat, try my cooking."

Fang Wenping had already started eating.

"How is it?" Dong Xuebing asked expectantly.

Fang Wenping casually replied, "It's okay, edible."

Dong Xuebing couldn't help but laugh bitterly. Damn it, I went through all this trouble cooking, and that's all I get? He took a bite himself. It was delicious! He was confident in his cooking skills and satisfied with how the dishes turned out. Sure, he wasn't a top chef, but it wasn't bad—certainly not just "edible."

"Try this one too."

"Mmm, it's okay, not bad."

Dong Xuebing didn't ask anymore. He just continued eating and drinking. He was hungry by now. He hadn't eaten since breakfast, and after a whole morning of running around, plus the time spent cooking, he was famished. Now, he ate faster and faster, feeling hungrier with each bite. He didn't care much about how it looked anymore. After all, they'd argued, gotten physical, and even kissed before. He didn't feel the need to act formally around Fang Wenping. He didn't see her as just a leader anymore, so he was relaxed and comfortable.

Fang Wenping frowned. "How many meals have you missed?"

Dong Xuebing sighed. "I haven't eaten all day. I'm starving. Don't just look at me. You should eat, too."

Fang Wenping ate very slowly, with grace and poise. She'd likely developed this habit from a young age, being raised in a large family. Dong Xuebing ate quickly but ate a lot, and since he was drinking as well, the meal dragged on for a long time.

After dinner, Dong Xuebing glanced at the clock—it was already past seven.

He hadn't bothered with washing the dishes today. He rubbed his stomach and sipped the last drink, not moving from his seat. He had already done the cooking and washing, so he wasn't about to start cleaning up now. Fang Wenping didn't move either. She didn't leave the dining table; she just turned on the TV to watch the news at the provincial station and on CCTV. Neither of them said anything, and by eight o'clock, they hadn't spoken a word. This was supposed to be a birthday celebration, but to Dong Xuebing, it felt more like a complete waste of time. He couldn't help but laugh bitterly.

It was past eight now.

The sky had turned completely dark.

Dong Xuebing spoke up. "I'll go check on the clothes."

Fang Wenping didn't even look at him and simply responded, "Upstairs, on the balcony."

"Got it." Dong Xuebing went upstairs, walking up to the second level of the duplex.

The place still looked luxurious, with spacious rooms. It was a far cry from his staff quarters. After a few glances, he found a large balcony extending from the hallway, opened the door, and stepped outside. He casually brushed his shirt and pants, only to find they were all wet—not just a little damp, but fully soaked. They hadn’t dried much at all. Well, it was only a few hours since the afternoon, and with winter just passing into the cold spring, it was no surprise they hadn’t dried. Dong Xuebing had to take the clothes down and head downstairs.

“They’re still not dry,” Dong Xuebing said. “Where’s the heater? I’ll try hanging them there.”

Fang Wenping casually pointed, and Dong Xuebing followed her finger, finding the heater. He didn’t dare hang his clothes directly on it, as the high-quality fabric would likely burn. So, he hung them on a hook above the heater and returned to the living room to watch some random TV programs with Fang Wenping.

It was nine o’clock now.

Another hour had passed.

The clothes were still the same, with no sign of drying.

Dong Xuebing could see that there was no way he could wear them out. “Fang Da Jie, don’t you have anything else I could wear? Otherwise, I can’t leave in these wet clothes.”

Fang Wenping glanced at his clothes. “Then just wait for them to dry. When they’re dry, you can leave. There’s a guest room on the first floor. If you want to stay, you can. I won’t bother you.” She stood up, adding, “It’s getting late. I’m going to bed,” before heading upstairs to brush her teeth and wash up, completely ignoring Dong Xuebing.