

PAW 1835

Chapter 1835

7 o'clock.

County Family Compound.

Dong Xuebing's Dormitory.

It was truly dark now as darkness fell, not just the overcast gloom from clouds. A cold wind howled, and the temperature inside the room was no longer warm. It was already March, and the heating had long been turned off, so the only option at home was to turn on the air conditioning for warmth, blasting high heat.

In the Bathroom.

In front of the mirror.

Dong Xuebing mentally calculated the time; it wasn't long until 7:30. He had also invited several county committee members who leaned toward him to come over for dinner, so he naturally wanted to hurry. It wouldn't be proper for someone to see Director Meng cutting his hair—not for gender-related reasons, but for many other reasons. Fortunately, Sister Meng understood this and was quick with her movements.

Another roll of hair fell away.

Meng Hanmei gently brushed the hair that fell on Dong Xuebing's face aside and continued to tidy his edges.

Dong Xuebing glanced at her in the mirror. "Sister Meng, be careful not to get hair on your sweater; it'll be hard to get off later, and you'll have to pick it off strand by strand."

Meng Hanmei smiled, "It's no problem; it's a white sweater, easy to clean."

Dong Xuebing chuckled bitterly, "It's not about how easy it is to clean."

“It’s fine, don’t move,” Meng Hanmei said, firmly adjusting his head while focusing on his sideburns. “Almost done.”

Dong Xuebing didn’t say anything else; he still felt nostalgic for the fleeting softness on the back of his head earlier. It wasn’t anything else, but from that touch, it seemed Meng Hanmei wasn’t wearing a bra under her sweater, just her thermal shirt. The intricate patterns of the sweater made it impossible to tell from the outside, but the sensation was undeniable. As he leaned back, Dong Xuebing’s head practically sank into Meng Hanmei’s ample chest. If she were wearing a bra, it would have felt different. He felt he had taken advantage of the situation—she was cutting his hair, and he had bumped into her chest. He felt embarrassed and realized he and “Sister” genuinely connected. But he also knew he shouldn’t think like that; since Dong Xuebing had reached his level, the female colleagues around him were naturally a bit older. Therefore, the chances of such incidents happening were naturally higher.

A few minutes later.

Meng Hanmei turned off the clippers and examined Dong Xuebing’s reflection in the mirror, tilting his head slightly and adjusting it before nodding. “Alright, take a look and see if it’s okay.”

Dong Xuebing opened his eyes to look. “Wow, it’s really good.”

Meng Hanmei smiled, “My skills are just average; you’ll have to bear with it.”

Dong Xuebing replied, “Come on, Sister Meng, it’s really good. It’s much better than what I get at the barbershop. It’s natural and mature—great.”

Meng Hanmei chuckled, “As long as you like it.”

She brushed off the hair on the cloth and removed it for him.

Dong Xuebing stood up, moving a bit closer to inspect. He was genuinely satisfied. “I didn’t realize you had this skill!”

Meng Hanmei said, “It’s been passed down for two or three generations.”

“I can see that. It’s different.” Dong Xuebing turned around. “Thank you so much, Sister Meng. I just finished my work this afternoon and then troubled you to cut my hair.”

Meng Hanmei smiled, “No need to be polite; I haven’t cut hair for a long time, so I was itching to do it. I enjoyed it quite a bit.”

Dong Xuebing laughed, glancing at her sweater. “Then you should quickly remove the hair; you’ve gotten it all over yourself, and it’s on your pants, too.”

Meng Hanmei responded, “Okay, I’ll clean my clothes. You can wash your hair first; after you’re done, blow-dry it. If the style isn’t good, I’ll fix it for you.” After saying that, Meng Hanmei tidied up her things, then turned to leave, closing the door behind her for Dong Xuebing.

Dong Xuebing turned on the showerhead to take a bath. For one, he wasn’t used to washing his hair alone; for another, it was chilly in the room. So he rinsed off once more. After finishing, he dried himself and put on his pajamas, then used the hairdryer in front of the mirror to dry his hair. The reflection in the mirror looked quite spirited; he appeared much neater than when his hair was longer. Dong Xuebing nodded approvingly for a while, then cleaned up the hair on the floor, sweeping it away and mopping it. He picked up the watch he had tossed aside and noticed the time—almost 7:30—so he immediately walked out of the bathroom.

Bang.

Clang.

Quite a few sounds were coming from the kitchen.

Dong Xuebing was taken aback and walked over to see Meng Hanmei washing and chopping vegetables in the kitchen. He was momentarily speechless. “Sister Meng, I told you I was coming. What are you doing? Stop it, stop it! Just leave it to me; I’ll cook today.”

Meng Hanmei smiled, “That’s not how it works.”

Dong Xuebing said, “Every time I take office, I make a meal to thank everyone for their support and trust.”

Meng Hanmei didn't listen and continued chopping vegetables. "The kitchen is a woman's domain."

Dong Xuebing helplessly replied, "I'm not boasting, Sister Meng; my cooking skills are much better than the average person's. Just leave it to me; if I don't cook today, I probably won't have the chance or mood to do it again. You won't get to taste my cooking then!" Besides some sensitive areas, a woman's waist and a man's hair are crucial parts. After Meng Hanmei cut his hair, Dong Xuebing felt their relationship had become much closer than with others, and his tone wasn't so formal.

Meng Hanmei still didn't agree.

Dong Xuebing had indeed cooked for his subordinates and colleagues whenever he took office before. He was polite and wanted to show everyone what kind of person he was and what his temperament was like. But previously, he had not held this level of authority, and he hadn't been the main leader, so it didn't feel as significant. However, now Dong Xuebing was a county party secretary; it wasn't appropriate for Meng Hanmei to have the county party secretary busy cooking. That would be a bit too much.

While they were talking, the doorbell suddenly rang.

Dong Xuebing heard it and had to open the door.

As soon as he opened the door, four faces appeared outside: the Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission, Chang Lin; the Minister of the Propaganda Department, Sun Changzhi; the Secretary of the Disciplinary Inspection Commission, Wang Bin; and the Minister of the United Front Work Department, Li Niu. A few county committee members had arrived, probably coordinating to come up together from downstairs; otherwise, it wouldn't have been such a coincidence.

"Secretary."

"Secretary Dong."

"We hope we're not interrupting."

Everyone greeted him.

Dong Xuebing smiled and stepped aside. “Come in, come in.” After that, he noticed that all four were holding things—some nutritional products and some fruits. He couldn’t help but frown. “Hey, if you’re coming, why bring gifts? That’s not how we do things here. Just for today, I’ll accept them, but don’t bring anything next time.” Since this was their first deep interaction and their first time at his home, they were unfamiliar with his personality and temper, and Dong Xuebing didn’t blame them. But they would slowly get to know him; Dong Xuebing never cared about receiving gifts. Even fruits and such were not to his liking. When judging people, Dong Xuebing focused on whether they matched his temperament and whether they had work capabilities. Other things didn’t matter to him. He wasn’t a picky leader and would never turn cold toward someone because they didn’t give him gifts. Dong Xuebing was a practical person.

Everyone entered the room.

Dong Xuebing welcomed them, saying, “Please, take a seat. Director Meng will be here shortly; she’s washing and cutting vegetables. I’ll go call her out. I’ll be cooking today.”

Upon hearing this, Chang Lin, who had just sat down, stood up immediately. “That’s not how it works!”

Wang Bin, the Secretary of the Disciplinary Inspection Commission, also got up. “Secretary Dong, you’re not going to make us sit idly while you cook, are you? I think I should do it instead. Even though my cooking skills aren’t great, I cook a few times at home when my wife is away.”

Dong Xuebing smiled and said, “Secretary Wang, no need.”

Sun Changzhi, the Minister of the Propaganda Department, added, “Let me do it; I can cook a little too.”

Given their positions, several of the standing committee members were usually not involved in household chores, but when they heard that Dong Xuebing was going to cook himself, they all volunteered.

Li Niu was straightforward, saying, “My cooking skills are terrible so I won’t embarrass myself, but I can help a bit, like chopping some beef or bones, haha. Secretary Dong, you’re the star today; you can’t do anything. I heard you were busy all afternoon and wore yourself out.”

After much pushing back and forth, they still didn't let Dong Xuebing cook.

Dong Xuebing felt quite helpless. Seeing how they were, he didn't argue further, understanding that it was their way of showing respect for him. However, he didn't remain idle; instead, he poured them a few cups of good tea and dug out the last few bottles of fine wine from his luggage to bring out.

The kitchen was Meng Hanmei's domain. The other committee members occasionally helped, but in the end, Meng Hanmei cooked everything alone.

"Old Meng, is it ready?" Chang Lin asked with a smile.

Meng Hanmei poked her head out of the kitchen and replied with a smile, "It'll be ready soon."

Li Niu rubbed his stomach and said, "I smell something delicious; I'm starving."

"Don't rush; just wait," Meng Hanmei laughed, then withdrew her head back into the kitchen.

These people had been in the same camp as the former secretary, Li Guian, for many years and had a good relationship, so their conversations were notably casual.

Dong Xuebing enjoyed this atmosphere; it was precisely what he needed. The purpose of inviting everyone today was to create this kind of environment. Since he had just arrived, he always felt out of place, so gatherings like this helped him bond quickly with everyone. Although everyone had chosen sides, it didn't guarantee loyalty. There were always those who would stab you in the back even after you thought they were on your side. Dong Xuebing took his new position seriously; his only hope was to succeed quickly and advance to the deputy department level. Naturally, he wanted to ensure that his people were united, working together like a tightly bound rope, as only then could he compete with Zhang Dongfang.

Thus, Dong Xuebing focused solely on building relationships during this gathering and did not discuss work.