

PAW 1781

Chapter 1781

Morning.

Provincial capital.

In an old bus station on the outskirts.

Dong Xuebing was the only one left. He was lost in thought as he pulled his luggage into the station and approached the ticket window.

“Is there a bus to Jiaojin County?” Dong Xuebing asked.

The ticket clerk looked at him and said, “The last bus just left. What time do you need it?”

Dong Xuebing checked his watch and replied, “The soonest one. The sooner, the better.”

The ticket clerk said, “The soonest one is around noon. Fewer buses are going there.”

“Noon?” Dong Xuebing was taken aback. “That’s so slow. So, I have to wait here for four hours? It’s still morning.”

The clerk responded indifferently, “Then you should go to the South Long-Distance Station. From there, there are more buses to Jiaojin County. Most of our buses go north.”

Dong Xuebing asked, “What time around noon?”

“Between twelve and one, though it depends on whether the driver returns on time,” the clerk said.

At that moment, Dong Xuebing longed for the traffic situation in the capital city. Although it was congested there, at least the roads were well-connected. The roads were less congested, but there weren’t many vehicles. Strictly speaking, this situation was more frustrating for Dong Xuebing than the traffic jams. He wasn’t familiar with this place and couldn’t just stand around at the station for hours—that would be too boring. As for taking a taxi, it was unlikely that one would go

to that area. So, Dong Xuebing decided to make do. He walked out of the ticket window, found a nearby food stall, ate something, and then loitered around, appearing idle.

“Going to Jiaojin County?”

“Is there anyone else?”

“Bus to Jiaojin County?”

Suddenly, two people started calling out from across the street.

Dong Xuebing was startled and looked over. It was a small minibus, old and quite dirty, with a sign that read “Provincial Capital Jiaojin County.” Dong Xuebing was pleasantly surprised, thinking there was a vehicle available. He had expected the next bus to be at noon, but it seemed this bus was leaving sooner. The bus might not be in service for long, as few people were inside. So, Dong Xuebing finished his breakfast, paid the bill, and then crossed the street with his luggage to inquire with the two people.

“To Jiaojin County,” Dong Xuebing asked.

A burly man with a dark complexion said, “Yes.”

Dong Xuebing asked, “Where do I buy the ticket?”

The burly man replied, “Just buy it from me, one hundred per ticket.”

Dong Xuebing glanced at the money in the man’s hand and realized that this bus wasn’t a regular one from the station but a private vehicle, also known as an “unlicensed bus.” Although the ticket price was higher, Dong Xuebing thought it was acceptable. He didn’t want to wait for hours, and the clerk mentioned that the noon bus might not depart on time. So, Dong Xuebing took out his wallet, handed over one hundred Xuebing, and boarded the bus.

By this time, the bus already had a few passengers, with about half of the seats occupied. Of course, there weren’t many seats, so half wasn’t a lot.

Dong Xuebing preferred sitting in the back or a corner, so he chose the last row, stuffed his luggage, and sat by the window.

“Going to Jiaojin County?”

“Leaving soon.”

“Is there anyone else?”

Two people outside were still shouting.

Dong Xuebing stopped listening, closed his eyes, and continued to ponder his thoughts. He had a lot on his mind: Li Guian and Zhang Dongfang’s issues, the current situation in Jiaojin County, and the ancient tombs described in the newspaper. Dong Xuebing felt he needed a systematic approach to organize his thoughts. His new position required him to be more organized—he needed to be clear about what to do first and what to do next. He couldn’t afford to be aimless like before. Although Dong Xuebing wasn’t naturally organized, having worked in the system for many years, he needed to show some growth and maturity; otherwise, his years of work would have been in vain.

Minute by minute, a few more people got on the bus, filling it up completely.

Bang.

The seat next to him shifted.

A young man sat down, looking about Dong Xuebing’s age but probably a year or two older. He looked pretty sharp, lean, and short.

Dong Xuebing glanced at him.

The man also looked at him, smiled, and nodded.

Since the man was polite to Dong Xuebing, he naturally responded with politeness, smiling and nodding back.

Finally, two or three more people squeezed on just before departure, but no more seats were available. The clearly prepared driver quickly brought out a few stools to place in the aisle for them to sit on. Although it wasn't very safe, with a black car, profit was the priority, so they didn't care much about safety—just as long as they got paid. Of course, these last few people only paid fifty Xuebing each instead of a hundred.

After a while, no one else came.

The burly man who had sold the tickets earlier got on the bus.

Another thinner man from the North, who had been shouting for tickets with him, took the driver's seat. With the door closed, the bus set off.

Rocking and jolting.

The bus was full of problems as it drove.

Dong Xuebing had endured many hardships in his youth. Being from a poor family, he valued face and was picky if he had acquaintances. He wouldn't ride on a bus like this because he valued his dignity highly. However, when alone, he was less concerned with such matters. He could tolerate a bumpy ride. He had endured hardship before and wasn't as spoiled as Fang Wenping and Xie Huilan. As long as there were no issues with dignity, he could manage with whatever.

The bus was in poor condition.

It kept jolting.

Soon, a middle-aged woman couldn't tolerate it anymore and complained, "Why is the bus so bumpy? Can't you drive more steadily? I'm going to vomit."

An elderly man sitting nearby, who was also carsick, said, "Yes, I can't stand it."

The burly man at the front turned around and retorted, "If you don't like it, don't ride. This road is like this, and it will be better once we get on the highway."

The old man retorted, “What do you mean, ‘don’t like it, don’t ride’?”

The middle-aged woman had already taken out a plastic bag and started vomiting.

The burly man ignored the old man and, with a disgusted expression, told the woman, “Don’t vomit on the bus. Throw the bag out later.”

Dong Xuebing opened his eyes at this point and thought about how they were speaking.

The young man next to Dong Xuebing frowned and muttered, “What kind of quality is this?”

The dismissive attitude towards the elderly and women, with phrases like “don’t like it, don’t ride,” was indeed quite disrespectful.

The other passengers on the bus said nothing, perhaps because they were indifferent or had grown used to the black car service.

Here's the translation:

The minibus got onto the highway.

But not long after getting on the highway, problems arose.

Dong Xuebing was still pretending to nap with his eyes closed, thinking about the tasks he needed to tackle after taking office. The burly man on the bus, who was responsible for selling tickets, stood up and loudly clapped his hands to get everyone's attention. The bus stopped and pulled over to the side of the road.

“What’s going on?”

“Why have we stopped?”

People started murmuring among themselves.

The burly man shouted, "Listen up, everyone! This route doesn't make a profit; it's hard to operate, and we have to pay for the highway tolls. So, to cover the costs, we need to collect a highway fee from each of you. It's ten Xuebing per person, which isn't much and should be within everyone's budget. We hope you can understand."

The old man who had been previously pushed objected, "The ticket is already a hundred Xuebing; isn't that supposed to cover everything? Why do we have to pay more?"

The burly man's face hardened, "That's the rule here."

The old man was angry, "This is completely unreasonable! What if I refuse to pay?"

The burly man glanced at him with a hint of menace, "If you don't pay, you'll have to get off the bus. Find your own way to the next highway exit and get another ride from there. We won't be responsible."

The old man stood up, "We've already paid for the ticket. Why should we be forced off the bus?"

The burly man replied, "But you haven't paid for the highway fee. Why should we care about you?" His tone carried a potent threat. They were on the highway, and since they were halfway through, getting kicked off would leave them stranded without guarantee of finding another ride to Jiaojin County. The burly man and the driver chose this location with apparent confidence and had probably done this before, knowing they could get away with it.

Everyone started complaining.

"What's this?"

"Why should we pay more?"

"This is completely illegal."

The burly man, however, stood his ground and glared at everyone, "If you don't pay, get off the bus. We're out in the wilderness here; let's see how you'll find another ride." He was arrogant and showed no signs of hiding his attitude.

The bus became noisy with chatter and protests.

The young man sitting next to Dong Xuebing seemed surprised by the extra highway fee. Although ten Xuebing wasn't much, it was still quite irritating.

The young man stood up, took an ID card from his pocket, and handed it to the burly man. "I'm from the Jiaojin County Committee, here in the provincial capital on business. Please show some respect, brother. Everyone here isn't wealthy, so don't make things difficult for them."

Dong Xuebing raised an eyebrow. From the Jiaojin County Committee?

The burly man was initially taken aback but then took the ID and looked at it. He read aloud, "Deputy Section Chief Su Yan, Secretariat Office of the County Committee." He paused, clearly not impressed, probably because he knew the leadership in Jiaojin County, "Alright, I'll cover your highway fee. I'll give you face. But the others have to pay."

The Secretariat Office wasn't considered a powerful department.