

## PAW 1823

### Chapter 1823

#### At the Meeting.

Li Niu also chose his side.

Although the County United Front Work Department Minister doesn't wield much power and has limited influence in the Party Committee, he still casts a crucial vote. For both Dong Xuebing and Zhang Dongfang, every vote counts. Zhang Dongfang already has his own five votes firmly secured. If they can win one more vote or have someone abstain, they will emerge victorious in their first confrontation with Dong Xuebing. On Dong Xuebing's side, the only vote he could count on was his own, plus perhaps Meng Hanmei. Everyone else was uncertain. Fortunately, Chang Lin had sided with Dong Xuebing, and Wang Bin had also aligned with him. Now, with Li Niu added to the mix, Dong Xuebing had finally regained some balance.

Five to Five.

Both sides were even.

Only the Publicity Department Minister Sun Changzhi had not chosen a side among the eleven Party Committee members at the meeting table. According to the ranking of the Party Committee members, Sun Changzhi should have voiced his opinion before Li Niu, even ahead of the deputy county heads, given his seniority and position. However, he spoke later than Li Niu, who ranked last among the Party Committee members, indicating his indecision.

Dong Xuebing knew little about this person. His only encounter with Sun Changzhi was when he first arrived in Jiaolin County and went to the police station; Sun Changzhi had also come to welcome him. However, Dong Xuebing hadn't met anyone then. His first real meeting with Sun Changzhi was on the day of his official reporting, during a meal where they exchanged very few words. He always felt that this person seemed a bit unreliable and uncertain.

Others knew Sun Changzhi better. After working together for many years, his overall evaluation was similar to Dong Xuebing's assessment. It might be due to Sun Changzhi's character; since he took over as the head of the county Publicity Department, he had been very indecisive. Although he aligned himself with the old county secretary Li Guian in the past two years, his support for Secretary Li wasn't particularly evident. He seemed overly cautious about this and that, similar to Li Niu. He had never openly clashed with Zhang Dongfang in the Party Committee or privately.

To put it nicely, he was an “easygoing” person; bluntly, he had a somewhat duplicitous nature. As a result, Li Guian had never held Sun Changzhi in high regard. Politically, they were aligned, but it was said that their relationship was quite mediocre.

This gave Zhang Dongfang an opportunity. Once again, he turned his attention to Sun Changzhi. Zhang Dongfang knew that success or failure hinged on this moment since Sun Changzhi was the last Party Committee member who hadn’t voted yet. He felt a strong sense of anticipation, which showed on his face.

Meng Hanmei glanced at Sun Changzhi.

Chang Lin also shot a look in Sun Changzhi’s direction.

The atmosphere grew increasingly tense, leaving everyone uncertain about the outcome.

However, many people knew that after the old secretary Li Guian was reassigned and before Dong Xuebing took office, Zhang Dongfang had already engaged in “deep” discussions with Li Niu and Sun Changzhi, likely more than once. With Li Niu now aligned with Dong Xuebing, there was no need to discuss that further. However, Zhang Dongfang still believed there was a significant chance to win over Sun Changzhi, as Li Niu was a more emotionally driven individual who didn’t care much about others’ opinions and preferred to act based on his preferences and personal judgment. Zhang Dongfang had attempted to win him over but had been unsuccessful, which was a matter of circumstance.

Although Sun Changzhi became a relatively neutral official after the old secretary’s departure, the fundamental difference between him and Li Niu was that he lacked conviction and was quite indecisive. He was overly cautious in his actions. This was precisely Zhang Dongfang’s opening. He had privately communicated with Sun Changzhi many times. Although he hadn’t anticipated that Dong Xuebing would convene the Party Committee so quickly and pressure everyone to take sides, Zhang Dongfang had promised Sun Changzhi certain things in preparation for Dong Xuebing’s arrival. Despite being caught off guard by Dong Xuebing’s sudden move, Zhang Dongfang felt he had prepared enough and believed he was at least better positioned than Dong Xuebing, who had just arrived and hadn’t communicated with anyone yet.

Zhang Dongfang felt confident of victory.

Given Sun Changzhi’s character, there was a significant opportunity to pull him into his camp, especially since he would have a higher chance than the twenty-something rookie Dong Xuebing. If Sun Changzhi aligned with him, Zhang Dongfang could claim an early advantage over Dong Xuebing in their struggle. Despite Dong Xuebing’s actions, the situation would not change: six

votes against five. What more was there to say? With that initiative, Zhang Dongfang was prepared to kick Dong Xuebing aside. He felt grateful for Dong Xuebing's sudden attack. Now that it had come to this point, it was time to see who was stronger. Zhang Dongfang believed he had a significant advantage.

Sun Changzhi suddenly became the focus of the room.

He felt a bit out of place, not making eye contact with anyone and struggling internally. For him, it was just like Li Niu's situation; he had not made any plans. He thought the decision to take sides would at least wait until Dong Xuebing had been in office for ten days, two weeks, or perhaps even longer. Therefore, Sun Changzhi had considered the situation but made no decisions. Like many others, he first wanted to see how things would unfold in the county. If Zhang Dongfang couldn't compete with Dong Xuebing, he would align with Dong Xuebing. If Dong Xuebing's experience in struggles was as shallow as his age suggested, and he couldn't contend with County Head Zhang, Sun Changzhi would side with Zhang Dongfang. He thought this was a simple, low-pressure situation. However, he didn't expect Dong Xuebing to force such a quick decision on him alongside Zhang Dongfang, leaving him confused about his stance.

What to do?

Which side to choose?

Sun Changzhi felt overwhelmed, especially with Zhang Dongfang, Dong Xuebing, and the others watching him. They weren't giving him much time to think. Everyone knew him well; Sun Changzhi was indeed very indecisive. Whenever a slightly controversial draft came up for his approval as the head of the Publicity Department, he would hesitate and deliberate for a long time, even seeking the opinions of higher-ups. Let alone this situation, which involved choosing a side and would affect his future development and various work matters, he couldn't afford to be careless.

If he sides with Zhang Dongfang:

Even though Zhang Dongfang had communicated with him a few days ago and made grand promises, Sun Changzhi felt he was still aligned with the old secretary's faction. He would always be disadvantaged compared to others who immediately sided with Zhang Dongfang. The importance he received in the future would likely differ, and he certainly felt some pressure.

If he sides with Dong Xuebing:

Dong Xuebing was a new county party secretary with no foundation and was so young—rumor had it he wasn't even twenty-seven. Given his age, it was clear he had connections, but Sun Changzhi was unsure about how those connections compared to others. He knew this was Shaanxi Province. The fact that an executive vice minister from the organization department was sent to escort Dong Xuebing indicated that the city did not value him, even suggesting discontent. If the city didn't care, they would at least have sent someone from the head of the organization department to give a nod. The lack of even that gesture suggested the city's attitude was quite evident, and the province's stance could likely be inferred similarly. With no experience, youth, and a lack of political maturity, and without support from the city or province, Sun Changzhi felt that aligning with Dong Xuebing would come with many challenges.

Everyone had their concerns, anyway.

Sun Changzhi was genuinely caught in a dilemma.

Chang Lin had a decent relationship with Sun Changzhi. He looked at him deeply, seemingly hoping he would side with Dong Xuebing.

Sun Changzhi pretended not to see, still hesitating in his heart.

One second.

Three seconds.

Five seconds.

Everyone was waiting for Sun Changzhi to speak.

Zhang Dongfang's eyes tightened as he looked at him, saying, "Old Sun, you're the last one we need."

Sun Changzhi instinctively glanced over, locking eyes with Zhang Dongfang and noticing the intensity in his gaze, which only increased the pressure on him.

It was down to the last vote.

This vote was undoubtedly of great interest to the entire county's leadership, as it would determine the future working dynamics between Dong Xuebing, the county party secretary, and Zhang Dongfang, the county head. The leaders above were choosing sides, and those below were no different. Who wouldn't want to follow a leader who could lead them further and longer in Jiao Lin County? This would undoubtedly benefit their development, creating a series of positive and negative cycles, and the leadership preferences would be shaped accordingly.

"I..." Sun Changzhi remained silent for a long time before finally speaking up.

Meng Hanmei was very nervous. She knew how important this Party Committee meeting was for Dong Xuebing—it was a significant gamble for Secretary Dong.

Chang Lin and the other Party Committee members who sided with Dong Xuebing felt the same. Since they had already chosen their side, there was no turning back. They naturally hoped Secretary Dong would win, and Sun Changzhi's vote clearly played the most critical role.

Who would he choose?

Everyone was waiting.

At that moment, Zhang Dongfang glanced at the clock. It was getting late, almost time for the lunch break, and he urged Sun Changzhi, "Old Sun."

This was applying pressure.

Sun Changzhi's mind raced, and with a grit of his teeth, he said, "I support County Head Zhang's proposal." After saying this, he relaxed completely, feeling a weight lifted off his shoulders.

Well done.

Zhang Dongfang smiled inwardly.

Upon hearing this, those on Zhang Dongfang's side also slightly clenched their fists, feeling excited about winning the first round of the Party Committee meeting against the county party secretary.

The significance of this was extraordinary.