

## PAW 1861

### Chapter 1861

#### Qingluan Mountain

In the small bus station.

Dong Xuebing walked up and knocked on the ticket window.

The small window slid open, and the clerk asked, "Where are you going?"

"A ticket to the provincial capital," Dong Xuebing said. "Where does the bus stop?"

The ticket seller replied indifferently, "It stops at the West Station. The bus will pick up in front. I don't know when the next bus will come. Just wait. Pay first."

Dong Xuebing paid the money but didn't get a proper ticket; it was just a scrap of paper with a few words from the clerk. It looked very informal, but Dong Xuebing didn't mind. He knew that things were often like this at the grassroots level. He'd never get anything done if he nitpicked about every little thing. Besides, the taxis wouldn't stop for him, and even if one did, it was unlikely to go to the provincial capital since the distance was too far. At this point, his only option was to take the long-distance bus. So, under the clerk's strange gaze, Dong Xuebing went over to wait for the bus.

It didn't take long.

In five minutes, a bus arrived and stopped.

The door opened, and Dong Xuebing immediately stepped forward and asked the driver, "Is this going to the provincial capital?"

"Yes," the driver said, giving him a strange look and slightly frowning. Let me see your ticket."

"Here." Dong Xuebing handed the ticket over, patted the dirt off his clothes, and stepped onto the bus, looking for an empty seat.

Quite a few people were on the bus, and nearly everyone turned to look at Dong Xuebing.

It was inevitable. He was covered in mud, looking like he had just come from a construction site, dirty from head to toe.

But Dong Xuebing didn't care. After all these years, he had become confident, even somewhat self-centered. People who lack confidence might seek validation from society or external sources, but truly self-assured individuals don't need others' approval to feel valuable. Dong Xuebing was one of those people now. He wasn't bothered by others' stares. He found a seat and sat down comfortably, closing his eyes and pretending to nap, taking a moment to rest after working so hard the whole morning.

Half an hour passed.

An hour.

The bus finally reached the provincial capital.

Looking out the window, the area around the bus station was bustling. Dong Xuebing straightened his clothes, and once the bus stopped, he followed the crowd off the vehicle.

Right, today was Old Fang's birthday. He couldn't show up empty-handed, could he? Dong Xuebing remembered that during the New Year, Fang Wenping had given her daughter Qianqian a longevity lock, a small gold one that cost at least several thousand RMB—not cheap. Dong Xuebing wanted to show his appreciation, so he thought it would be best to buy a gift. His eyes scanned the area, and after walking for a while, he finally spotted a watch shop. Initially, he had planned to look for a clothing store first, but none weren't nearby. Most of the shops in the area sold accessories or food, unlike the big cities where everything was available. The watch shop was tucked around a corner, typical for this area.

It was an Omega specialty store.

While Omega wasn't a top-tier brand, it was certainly one of the top brands.

Dong Xuebing pushed the door open and walked in. The staff behind the counter looked up and instinctively greeted him, "Welcome, how can I help you?" But then, they froze in surprise.

The other salesperson also looked over, dumbfounded.

"Who is this person? Coming in dressed like that? He's so dirty. Where did all that mud come from? Did he crawl out of a ditch?"

But Dong Xuebing remained composed and confident, calmly inspecting the watches.

The staff at high-end brand stores are generally well-trained, so no one commented. After exchanging a glance, they somewhat perfunctorily greeted him. Of course, they didn't think this person could afford anything. They assumed he was just there to look around. People like him were familiar with their line of work—Omega's sales in China had already surpassed Rolex, and the brand was quite well-known.

Just then, a few other customers entered. As soon as they walked in, they all noticed Dong Xuebing still covered in mud. Their gazes naturally shifted toward him.

"Who's this?"

"Why would someone like that come in here?"

"He's buying an Omega?"

The expressions on their faces clearly showed disdain and confusion.

Dong Xuebing, however, didn't notice any of this. He wasn't interested in what others thought. He was more focused on picking out a watch for Fang Wenping. He remembered she wore a watch regularly, though he couldn't recall the brand. It was something like Cartier, he thought. It was a high-end brand, and its women's watches were quite nice. That made it hard for Dong Xuebing to choose—if he bought something too expensive, it would seem inappropriate, but if he bought something too cheap, it wouldn't be as nice as the watch she already had. If she didn't wear it, wouldn't that be a waste? So he took his time and chose carefully.

One watch.

Three watches.

Five watches.

Dong Xuebing examined each one.

More customers arrived, and the two salespeople moved to assist them, no longer paying attention to Dong Xuebing. After all, those people seemed more like potential buyers, while Dong Xuebing's appearance didn't exactly scream "wealthy customer." Looking at him, they probably thought he couldn't even afford a meal, let alone an Omega watch. Dong Xuebing's stomach had been growling—he hadn't eaten yet.

"Can I help you?"

"Would you like to see this one from the men's collection?"

"This one is 40,800 RMB from the Seamaster series."

"Or perhaps the Constellation series? It's one of our bestsellers."

The staff started helping the new customers while another salesperson attended to a female customer.

Ring, ring.

Dong Xuebing's phone rang. He pulled it out of his pocket with his dirty hands and saw it was the director of the Urban Management Bureau—no, it should be Deputy County Mayor Huo Yibang now.

Dong Xuebing answered, "Hello, Mayor Huo?"

"Secretary, I don't know how to thank you for this," Huo Yibang said.

Dong Xuebing chuckled and replied, "Cut the formalities. It's no big deal. You treated me to dinner yesterday. By the way, your official start date is Monday, so prepare yourself. I have high expectations for you. You're an old comrade, and I'll need to consult with you on many things in the future." The City Party committee had already approved Huo Yibang's appointment, which was officially confirmed. Dong Xuebing was relieved. If the city had rejected Huo Yibang's appointment, it would have hurt Dong Xuebing's credibility. It would have been a face loss for Huo Yibang and the Urban Management Bureau, and he didn't want that. Fortunately, as Dong Xuebing had anticipated, the city was too busy to focus on him.

"You flatter me, you flatter me," Huo Yibang replied.

Dong Xuebing said, "I heard things are pretty chaotic on your side at work."

Huo Yibang responded, "No, Secretary, I'm on leave today. I'm actually in the capital right now, taking my child to see a doctor. I thought if I got too busy later, I might not have time to come, so I took this opportunity to come and check on my child. If my child's illness doesn't get better, I won't be at ease."

Usually, at this point, Huo Yibang should have been trying to meet with other officials or leaders to network, which would be helpful for his future work. But instead, just two days after his appointment, he was taking his child to the doctor. This showed how much his child meant to him, and Dong Xuebing admired this. Dong Xuebing had always been the same; he believed that being a government official and striving for success wasn't a problem, and it was natural to consider one's interests. But at the very least, an official should have a heart for serving the people, with a basic sense of responsibility and ethics. Everyone wants to climb the ladder, and that's perfectly normal; there's nothing shameful about it. On the contrary, an official with no ambitions might be even more problematic. History has proven this many times. Having a drive is a good thing, as long as one keeps to their principles. Dong Xuebing felt that Huo Yibang's approach showed he had made the proper judgment—someone with a strong sense of family responsibility might fall, but he wouldn't fall too far. At least, that's how Dong Xuebing saw it.

Dong Xuebing asked, "Have you arrived at the hospital?"

"Yes," Huo Yibang replied, "The number you gave me... well, I didn't want to bother you, so I thought I'd let you know first."

Dong Xuebing could tell what he meant and smiled, saying, "I already told you last time. Once you get there, call Director Liu directly. Tell her I recommended you. No need to explain anything else. They'll take care of everything for you. You don't have to feel embarrassed about it. We're

not strangers, after all. If you're worried they might not give you enough attention, there's no need to be. Don't worry. My name still carries some weight in the capital."

Huo Yibang hurriedly replied, "Secretary, that's not what I meant."

Dong Xuebing smiled, "I know. Your wife and child are with you, right?"

"Yes, they're here with me," Huo Yibang said. "We just landed at Wukesong."

"Alright, go on in. There is no need to register; use the number I gave you. If the hospital doesn't treat you well, just let me know. Heh, I'll deal with it," Dong Xuebing said casually. People from Beijing love to boast, and Dong Xuebing was used to this way of speaking, but he reserved it for his wife, friends, and subordinates. He never exaggerated in front of his colleagues or peers. When he said something, it had weight. While each region has its customs and way of speaking, the government system is filled with people from different places—local, northern, southern, and so on. Dong Xuebing tried not to bring his regional habits into his work because he needed to consider whether others would understand.

The call ended.

Dong Xuebing continued to look at the watches.

However, the store employees and other customers overheard his earlier conversation and looked at him in surprise. They might not have understood the full context, but they could tell from his tone that someone with that kind of attitude and presence couldn't possibly be the type to dress so poorly and be covered in dirt.