

## PAW 1874

Chapter 1874

Afternoon.

Around four o'clock.

The sun was shining directly into Dong Xuebing's temporary office. He lit a cigarette and leaned back against the desk, squinting in the sunlight, feeling the warmth and comfort.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

It was Meng Hanmei. "Secretary."

Dong Xuebing looked at her. "Didn't they say they would arrive around six?"

Panting, Meng Hanmei replied, "No, they're not here yet. It's just a phone call. The translator they brought from the UK called the County Committee office, and then the call was transferred to me. The translator didn't speak Mandarin well, and there was static. After a while, I understood. He asked what kind of food we prepared for tonight. I told him it was a Western restaurant, which should suit their tastes. But the translator said they always eat Western food and are tired of it. Now that they're in China, they want to try the local cuisine. He said the British guests requested this and asked us to prepare that instead."

Dong Xuebing checked the time. "What time is it now?"

Meng Hanmei, looking displeased, said, "Yes, it's this late already. Where are we supposed to find something for them now? They should have told us earlier, but they only said it when they were about to arrive."

Dong Xuebing said, "Looks like they don't understand the concept of 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do.' They think they can act like royalty and do whatever they want."

Meng Hanmei added, "I didn't argue on the phone. Then, someone from the city took over the call. I don't know who it was. It was probably someone from the municipal government. They just

told us to entertain the guests properly, and everything should be according to their wishes. What could I say? I just agreed."

Dong Xuebing was frustrated. These people were causing trouble. He held back his anger, saying, "There's just over an hour until they arrive."

Meng Hanmei nodded. "The translator said they already had lunch with some investment groups in the city, and now their next stop is here."

"Is it too late to change the restaurant?" Dong Xuebing asked.

"I don't know," Meng Hanmei replied. "It might be fine if it's just ten or twenty people. But we have about forty to fifty people, including our own. Plus, we'd need to book a banquet hall. We can't just eat with other customers. I'll try, but I can only say we'll see if it works."

Dong Xuebing said, "Try your best, make it work."

Meng Hanmei didn't say more and quickly left. Dong Xuebing finished his cigarette and stepped out. He ran into Zhang Dongfang and Deputy Secretary Wei Zhixuan talking as they walked. Dong Xuebing greeted them, "Mayor Zhang, Secretary Wei."

"Secretary Dong," both of them turned around.

Dong Xuebing informed them, "The reception location has changed. It won't be at the Western restaurant anymore."

Wei Zhixuan was surprised. "Wasn't everything already settled?"

Dong Xuebing explained, "Meng just got the news. The British guests weren't happy with it, so they asked us to change the location. They said they don't want Western food. We don't know where the new location is yet, but Meng is already taking care of it. Once she settles it, we'll inform everyone to head there."

Zhang Dongfang furrowed his brow. "I've already had people set up the banners. I'll have them call everyone back right away. Ugh, what a mess."

Wei Zhixuan muttered, displeased, "Foreigners are always so particular."

Dong Xuebing also felt this. "They leave tomorrow. We need to get through this."

The three of them chatted briefly, and the atmosphere was quite cordial, a stark contrast to the confrontational, tense moments during their first Party Committee meeting. Now, the Dong and the Zhang factions had entered a phase of ambiguity or, perhaps, a period of détente. Both sides were more restrained, so no new conflicts arose, and a balanced state was temporarily maintained. This was a good sign; no county could continue to develop in an environment where the leadership was constantly in intense conflict.

It was nearly six o'clock.

Meng Hanmei had only just secured the restaurant venue. With her position in the County Committee, she had managed to clear the restaurant's main hall and reserve it for their use. Though this caused inconvenience to those who had made prior reservations, there was no choice—the foreign guests had to come first.

Once the location was confirmed, everyone rushed to the venue.

The preparations were chaotic: setting up the venue, arranging banners and signage, and the place was in a frenzy.

The British guests were demanding but didn't realize how much disruption their request caused in the neighboring county.

The team barely managed to get everything ready in time.

This was one of the best hotels in the neighboring county and was quite grand.

At the front of the hotel, Dong Xuebing and Zhang Dongfang stood, with other county officials behind them—Deputy Secretary Wei Zhixuan, County Office Director Meng Hanmei, Executive Deputy County Head Xu Zhuang, Deputy County Head Song Hefe, and others. Many relevant department officials besides the County Party Committee members arrived. Additionally, the

county government invited some local businesspeople and entrepreneurs, and there were about thirty or forty people in total.

Xu Zhuang looked into the distance and asked, “Are they here yet?”

A staff member from the county government said, “Deputy County Mayor Xu, not yet.”

“Should be soon, right?” Wei Zhixuan also checked the time. “It’s already six o’clock. What time did they say they would arrive?”

Meng Hanmei replied, “The notice said they would arrive around six. Maybe they're stuck in traffic. They should be here soon.”

Everyone waited.

What else could they do?

Five minutes.

Ten minutes.

Twenty minutes.

But by the time it was nearly 6:30, after waiting and waiting, the convoy still hadn’t arrived.

It might not have mattered if the people waiting were ordinary citizens. Still, with everyone from the county party secretary to the local officials present and a dozen, entrepreneurs invited through personal connections—standing there waiting for half an hour was a problem.

Many leaders had already started to look displeased.

The entrepreneurs, too, were getting frustrated. Most of them were wealthy, with net worths in the tens of millions, and they had been standing out in the cold for so long. They would have left by now if not for the face they were saving for the county.

Dong Xuebing's face was also dark. "Call and ask."

Since Meng Hanmei was in charge of the arrangements, she took out her phone and called. "Hello, this is Meng Hanmei from the neighboring county."

On the other end was a middle-aged man. "Oh, Director Meng."

Meng Hanmei said, "I just wanted to check when the exchange group will arrive."

Clearly a city official, the man replied, "Oh, I completely forgot to tell you. They won't be having dinner in your county tonight. The exchange group changed their mind and will have dinner with the city instead. However, their accommodation will still be at your place. They should be there before 8 p.m."