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THE CHANCE & THE TEMPTATION



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Prologue

In addition to the brighter side, there are always obscure and eccentric people and things in a city. This phenomenon is especially true of Los Angeles, the entertainment capital of the world, with beauty and ugliness, opportunities, and temptations.

This book narrates stories of the people and events encountered by an Uber driver in Los Angeles.

Through this driver's contacts and conversations with various people, this book reveals aspects of the nightlife in the City of Angels, revealing unknown lives in a presentation of human nature at multiple times and places, and at the same time, integrates the author's comparison and analysis of cultural differences between China and the United States.

The book has various characters, including teenagers, adults, ordinary citizens, homeless people, and prostitutes. They have incredible stories, significant confrontations, and thought-provoking displays of human nature.

Different individuals in each chapter bring out unique stories. These are described and narrated in

detail to envision various forms of friendship, morality, and sexual relations.

The author does not expose the dark side of life from the perspective of curiosity, nor has he worn tinted glasses to judge absurdity. It explores the diversity of human nature, desire, and the inevitability of their existence by presenting various forms of living and lifestyles.

There is always ignorance and evil in society in an era of highly civilized science and technology. Life is full of opportunities, which are bound to be accompanied by temptation.

It is real life.

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Preface

The world was full of surprises, and surprises came from the unknown. The unknown was both opportunity and temptation. The opportunity brought hope, and temptation led into the abyss.

Uber was an opportunity accompanied by temptation.

When talking about the electronics industry, the recession in the United States began quietly after the end of the Cold War.

The rise of high-tech industries, new materials, and new technologies has pushed the traditional electronic sector to a cliff. While creating new opportunities, the world had eliminated many conventional enterprises and talents. Large-scale integrated chips and computing technologies had undermined the circuit principles and modes of thinking that these people were familiar with. Many worthless circles, squares, horizontal lines, and vertical lines were left.

Hundreds of millions of spare parts were stacked on the shelves as a pile of useless waste that was a pity to discard.

The traditional electronics industry grew for decades and needed help to eliminate its growth cycle. Any common industry would succumb to the laws of the jungle and eventually die out. However, people expected this day to come later.

Although I was about to retire, many projects still needed

money. It was better to have no income than to lose money. I decided to rein in at the brink of the precipice and quit.

I had not done anything for one year.

I knew Uber from two sexual assault cases that took place in two different countries.

On December 6, 2014, an Uber driver in Boston, USA, was charged with kidnapping and sexually assaulting a female passenger using Uber services.

On December 7, 2014, police in New Delhi, India, captured a 32-year-old Uber driver. The police arrested him for sexually assaulting a female passenger through an Uber ride. The driver was charged with sexual assault three years ago. The government of New Delhi issued a ban, and Uber stopped all operations in New Delhi.

Two cases of sexual assault in the newspaper had taught me about the Uber service. It was an unheard-of ride-hailing service, and the barriers to entry were low. It was famous for over a year, and I knew nothing about it.

Legend had it that Travis Kalanick, the co-founder and former CEO of Uber, was a man who created a miracle from an unpleasant experience.

One night, In 2008, he won a sum of money in a casino in Paris and was looking for a taxi on the Avenue des Champs-Elysees. To his surprise, the taxis passing by were full of passengers.

He wore only a coat and a thin shirt in the cold wind, which upset him. He devised a bold idea: Applying Internet thinking to smartphone ride-hailing. It would enable lots of people to find a necessary ride quickly. He then came up with the great idea of Uber.

He and his partner established a business model that has changed the work and lives of many people.

In this way, there were more than 70 million ride-hailing drivers globally. However, he left his company for personal reasons.

It was a profession with great freedom: You did not have to face your boss or colleagues, and you were free to handle your time. There were almost no income quotas (one trip per month was eligible) or working period restrictions. Naturally, the most crucial thing concerning income is allowing you to earn an hourly salary more than twice the legal minimum wage without a cap. You didn't need to have the courage of Don Quixote or the self-reliant initiative of James Bond. With a bit of daily English, you could get on the road. Of course, your background must be clean: No criminal record.

I still wanted to utilize my remaining momentum when I reached retirement age. Besides, my nature determined that I was unwilling to do repetitive and monotonous labor, no matter how popular and meaningful it was. I liked challenges and taking a few risks, and I was not reckless or indulgent. Uber's work style fits my personality traits: Curiosity, sensitivity, and an adventurous streak.

Dealing with people was challenging and risky when the unknown degree was high. As a driver, I faced people of various backgrounds and personalities. And different situations happen every day, and they could be good, bad, or ugly.

For nearly a thousand days and nights, I had seen all kinds of characters, and their stories were full of surprises, joys, and subtler human interpretations. The various episodes were playing out on the five-seater stage, and it became a school for me to observe lives and understand human nature.

Albert Einstein said: "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when contemplating the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day."

Arthur Schopenhauer pointed out: "The two enemies of human happiness are pain and boredom."

Moreover, Alan Pal added: "The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for it."

All these implied that contented stasis was a bore while curiosity was our way out.

Curiosity could be endless if life remained a never-ending novelty. Being curious would lead me to learn more about people and things in this city where I had lived for half my life.

Of course, there may be only a few words to communicate with most people. Occasionally, I had met people who talked nonsense, and I instinctively needed to remember the topics they said if I was not interested in them. Whether the good, the bad, or the ugly, I would store it in my memory as long as it stimulated my senses. Usually, they rambled about mysterious and obscure affairs or poorly defined things that meant little to others. It was a unique journey, exploring human nature in this way.

I took the “Vehicle Checklist” downloaded from the Internet and came to a vehicle checkpoint of Uber in Santa Monica. In less than an hour, I was on my way home. A few days later, Uber sent a text message saying that I was ready to go, impressing me with their rapid efficiency.

The adventure lasted three years, nearly 180,000 miles, and tens of thousands of trips began on the second day.

As long as it was an opportunity, I was not afraid of temptation. Because I believed that: “All’s Well That Ends Well.”

1. Lives Were Full of Surprises

Without any taxi experience and professional training, I started my first trip with Uber. It was an adventure.

More than 30 years ago, shortly after I got my driver’s license, a colleague said I was like a race car driver and loved to drive fast.

I never doubted my driving skills: Fast and steady.

Despite this, there were worries about whether it would be safe to let strangers into the car.

The uncertainty led to worry, which in turn made me vigilant, and the vigilance became my assurance of personal safety. With experience, I gained self-confidence.

With good communication skills, proper speech, and full respect, everyone would play his role and put on a good show on the “stage” of the car’s five seats. I had become a pertinent critic and a director, playing an outstanding supporting role and occasionally a leading character.

I have lived in China and then here in the United States for more than 30 years and observed the differences in people’s interactions in the two places.

People didn’t say hello or nod when meeting someone they didn’t know in China. They regarded each other as transparent.

Acquaintances could visit and talk openly without the concept of privacy. (Now, people's ways are closer to the West's.)

In the United States, it was just the opposite. People were used to greeting each other when they met, at least nodding to each other. It was unusual for acquaintances or colleagues to visit each other. People's relationship was as light as water.

People had different living habits and ways of thinking in those two places. However, when it comes to human nature, they were the same. It was precisely because of this premise that our joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness could communicate, even though they could be good, bad, or ugly.

As an Uber driver, it was necessary to have good self-improvement and a proper way of communication. That would make the ride more enjoyable, and it didn't matter whether I could get a good comment.

Doing anything in the beginning was always unforgettable to me.

The first passenger was a young man who had just gone to college. He seemed to be a "Dreamer Student" who had recently immigrated to the United States with his parents' accent a few short years ago. He would see his grandmother that day, which he had to do every weekend. After a half-hour trip and a few simple conversations, this honest Hispanic young man didn't surprise me, but he made me feel a calm trust. Few young people like him were connected in family concern for their elder relatives.

With a good start, the rest of the journey became relatively smooth, beyond my expectations. I gradually found that passengers were busy with their daily lives, and they were either commuting or going back and forth to different places. Surprisingly, they were very calm and polite. My initial worries soon faded, and I spoke with more people and was bolder. As long as they were willing to talk, I happily accompanied them. When I met a quiet one, I could also enjoy the silence.

When I was just a bit smug, someone unexpectedly gave me a big shock and sounded the alarm.

It was an ordinary afternoon at the end of May.

After Memorial Day, the weather was already warm, and Los Angeles had entered the lowest rainfall period. The sun in Southern California was not stingy with its light and heat, and it had been shining for more than 12 hours a day.

People couldn't wait to change into summer styles and enjoy the full sun in the Los Angeles Basin.

Among the pedestrians, men wore sweatshirts and jeans, and women wore vests and skirts.

Men were not more heat-resistant than women. Perhaps clothes were never as good-looking as their bodies in women's eyes. I assumed many people would agree with this opinion.

The copilot door opened. A young, petite lady came in and tied her hair into a ponytail, a popular hairstyle for high school students.

She shook her head frequently while walking, and the ponytail always bounced. She had thick eyebrows, long eyelashes, and dark pupils. The skin was light brown, like coffee, with too much cream and moisture on her round face.

Her clothes were not as glamorous as some ladies on the street: a dark gray hooded coat and a pair of jeans with holes in them. The whole look was in contrast to the current temperature.

After sitting down, she put a canvas bag in between her legs.

Since she was sitting next to me, I glanced at her and reminded her to fasten her seat belt. I didn't want to give her pressure. Then, I asked about her destination and set off.

Usually, if passengers wanted to talk, they would take the initiative. Out of courtesy, I only sometimes took the initiative to chat with passengers. People didn't take a ride to speak. I would certainly do what they like if they were willing to talk. It would pass the time on the road and make everyone feel comfortable. That was my way of treating passengers.

As soon as the car started, she got busy. First, she unzipped her canvas bag and rummaged through it to find something.

It was a red light ahead. I stopped the car.

She took something quickly out of the bag, put it behind her, and tilted one leg to take off her sneakers, then the other. Right after that, she unbuttoned her jeans and took them off.

I was surprised and almost shouted out. What was going on?

Fortunately, not many pedestrians hurried by in front of the