

Golden 67

Chapter Sixty-Seven: Entering Tibet (Part Two)

In the 18th century, a wandering poet named Tsangyang Gyatso used his beautiful words to describe Litang as a place that white cranes yearn for and are fascinated by: "White cranes, lend me your wings. I will not fly to faraway places, but only to Litang for a short while, and then I will fly back..." Since then, this captivating love song has pierced through the boundless years, transcended seasons, and crossed time and space.

Litang is one of the highest county towns in the world, known as the "world's highest city". The county town is 4,200 meters above sea level, which is more than 300 meters higher than Lhasa in Tibet. This city, which is known as "a city suspended in the sky", has been an important town for the tea-horse trade since ancient times. It is a place where merchants gather, where resources are abundant, and where people are outstanding.

Although Chengdu is only about 700 kilometers away from Litang County, the two cars took more than 10 hours to reach the border of Litang. It was already past 8 a.m. the next day. Because they had rested several times along the way, the group did not seem very tired.

Having slept through the night, the three girls were even more energetic, chattering incessantly in the back. Only then did Zhuang Rui realize that Qin Xuanbing, who appeared aloof and glamorous in public, was actually quite normal in front of other women. However, a thought immediately popped into Zhuang Rui's mind: Could Qin Xuanbing be a lesbian? The more he thought about it, the more likely it seemed. He planned to find a time to tell Liu Chuan to be careful of Lei Lei's potential infidelity, since Qin Xuanbing's beauty was irresistible to both men and women.

As the car entered Litang County, the vast and magnificent Maoya Grassland stretched as far as the eye could see on both sides of the road. In early spring, the grasses, in varying shades, turned a vibrant green, undulating across the grassland. Small wildflowers, scattered across the grassland, were brightly colored. Sunlight, filtering through the clouds, constantly shifted and changed among the large patches of color, creating a dazzling and beautiful scene that painted a colorful picture on the grassland of Litang County.

"Sister Xuanxuan, Sister Leilei, it's so beautiful! I've never seen such a beautiful view before..."

That was Bai Mengyao's voice. Ever since Lei Lei raised the automatic barrier in the morning, Bai Mengyao's mouth hadn't stopped for a moment. She was either excitedly screaming at the yaks on the grassland or gesturing at the eagles flying in the sky. If Zhuang Rui hadn't practiced driving on the Hefei-Chengdu section of the highway, he probably would have been scared into driving the car into a ditch by Bai Mengyao's sudden screams.

However, the scenery before him truly caught Zhuang Rui's eye. He couldn't believe there was such a beautiful and magical place in the world. Zhuang Rui couldn't help but feel a little tired of life in the big city. He wasn't the only one who felt this way. Bai Meng'an, who was in the Desert Prince car in front of him, was also looking on with great delight and wished she could live there.

At this moment, Lei Lei and the others were holding a map introducing the Litang tourist routes and discussing where to visit first. Meanwhile, Liu Chuan had suddenly become a friend of women, having somehow sneaked into the back of the train car. He wholeheartedly agreed with the women's suggestions and even offered advice from time to time.

Zhuang Rui couldn't help but feel sorry for Song Jun, his employer. Why did he think of sending Liu Chuan to help him buy Tibetan mastiffs? Judging from Liu Chuan's appearance, he was clearly just here for a vacation.

By this time, the two cars had entered Litang County one after the other. Litang is more like a town than a county, because it is too small. The streets are straight and grid-like, with a small square and a small street garden in the middle. Shops and restaurants are lined up one after another. Most of the people coming and going on the streets are local Tibetans. However, the streets are wide and the whole city is very clean.

Looking out of the car, the passengers in the Hummer found it all quite novel. Everyone there, men and women alike, wore a large-collared, wide-waisted, right-fastening, smaller-than-left fur-lined Tibetan robe. The rugged Khampa men, with their long, jet-black hair, distinct features, and large sunglasses, exuded masculinity and handsomeness. A sheathed Tibetan knife hung from their right hip, some even carrying two or three, adding to their dashing and heroic appearance.

Tibetan women wear large and beautiful ornaments on their bodies and heads, such as egg-sized red coral or green turquoise. Some have their hair braided into a dense braid and then adorned with colorful beads, making them exceptionally beautiful and charming.

The Tibetans on the street, both men and women, all had rosy cheeks.

Zhuang Rui knew this was caused by altitude sickness, so he explained it to Qin Xuanbing and the others while driving. They didn't know what "altitude redness" meant. Fortunately, the people in the car usually paid attention to exercise, so although they felt a little tightness in their chests, they didn't have any particularly uncomfortable reactions.

At this moment, the Desert Prince in front stopped by the side of the road. After Bai Meng'an jumped out of the car, she waved her hand weakly, signaling Zhuang Rui to stop the car.

Zhuang Rui stopped the car and rolled down the window, and a gust of cold wind rushed into the warm car.

"Let's grab something to eat and get out of here quickly. There isn't even a decent hotel around here."

At this moment, Bai Meng'an's face also showed signs of fatigue, clearly suffering from altitude sickness. His breathing was much more rapid than usual. This young master from Hong Kong, who had not experienced much hardship, had underestimated the difficulty of this journey.

"No, we want to go to Litang Temple and watch the horse racing festival..."

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to reply, he heard the voices of several women behind him.

"Miss, the horse racing festival doesn't start until June. Where can we go to see it now?"

Zhuang Rui gave Bai Meng'an a wry smile, signaling him to go and deal with his sister. He then opened the car door, got out, stretched, lit a cigarette, and enjoyed a leisurely smoke. He didn't care how Bai Meng'an would persuade or educate the three ladies. After all, if Liu Chuan, the person in charge, wasn't in a hurry, why should he be?

"Xiao Zhuang, put out your cigarette, or you'll feel uncomfortable after you finish smoking it."

Before Zhuang Rui could even take a couple of puffs, Zhou Rui's voice came from inside the SUV. At that moment, he also felt a tightness in his chest and quickly put out his cigarette. He took several deep

breaths before slowly recovering. Only then did Zhuang Rui realize that life on the plateau wasn't as wonderful as he had imagined.

It was already past eight in the morning. The rising sun shone on his face, feeling slightly hot. There weren't many tourists on the street; mostly local Tibetans strolled leisurely. Some sat in small groups at street corners or on the steps, chatting and squinting in the sunshine. As some people passed by Zhuang Rui, they gave him a kind, white smile and said, "Tashi Delek." Zhuang Rui knew this meant "hello," so he imitated them and returned the greeting, "Tashi Delek."

"Let's eat first. After we finish eating, we'll leave Litang. If we stay here any longer, I'm afraid none of us will be able to stand it."

After talking to the women inside the car through the window, Bai Meng'an walked over and patted Zhuang Rui on the shoulder.

Zhou Rui led the way and found a breakfast stall that looked fairly clean. Zhuang Rui and the others found two tables and sat down. Liu Chuan walked up to order food in a carefree manner, but he returned dejectedly in less than a minute. Everyone saw him trying to communicate with the owner for a long time by gesturing and guessing, but no one could figure out what he wanted to eat.

Upon seeing this, Zhou Rui, who had been keeping a low profile, stood up and shouted something to the owner in Tibetan. The owner immediately beamed and soon brought over seven bowls of mutton offal soup. The soup contained intestines, stomach, liver, and lungs, with scallions and cilantro floating on the milky white broth. It was neither fishy nor gamey, but had a rich flavor that made one's mouth water just by smelling it.

After a while, the owner brought over another plate of barley flour steamed buns. Zhuang Rui took a bite and found that the buns were even softer than white flour buns and had a sweet taste.

Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan were already starving. After calling out, they grabbed steamed buns and ate them with the mutton soup. Zhou Rui, who was usually quiet, ate faster than anyone else. In no time, he had finished half of the steamed buns on the plate, and the other half naturally went into the stomachs of Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan. The ladies and Bai Meng'an, who had been eating very politely, could only stare blankly at their empty plates.

"Hehe, I'm used to it. In the army, you have to fight for food."

Zhou Rui, unusually shy for someone his age, ordered two more plates of barley steamed buns and a dish of Tibetan pickled vegetables.

"Brother Zhou, could you ask this shop owner for me if anyone in Litang County sells Tibetan Mastiffs?"

After everyone finished eating, Liu Chuan seemed to remember the purpose of his trip to Tibet. Unfortunately, due to the language barrier, he could only ask Zhou Rui to inquire on his behalf.