

Superstar 1031

Chapter 1031: The third episode is broadcast!

Saturday.

Evening.

The third episode of King of Masked Singers was about to be broadcast.

After the last two episodes' build up, the show was getting more and more popular. Those who had not noticed or viewers who were not optimistic about the show at first were now attracted to it with the massive amount of talk the show had generated. Coupled with Li Yu revealing himself before this episode was recorded, the discussions on Weibo had exploded since yesterday after everyone knew that he was competing in the show. With today's official broadcast, it had pushed the show to its highest point on the trending lists!

"It's starting!"

"I'm so looking forward to it!"

"My Brother Li Yu!"

"Someone mentioned that Li Yu got eliminated?"

"Damn, you really believe that?"

"Haha, it must be a rumor."

"Even if Brother Li Yu did not get crowned as Masked King, he definitely wouldn't get eliminated. Are you stupid? How can you believe that?"

"That's right. There isn't even anyone who can eliminate as a talented singer as Li Yu on this stage, unless it's someone on the level of Zhang Yuanqi, Chen Guang, or Fan Wenli!"

However, when they saw that Petal Shower won her match against Li Yu, many people went crazy for a moment. It was totally unbelievable!

"What?"

"Goddammit!"

"Petal Shower won?"

"This..."

"There's really no doubt about her victory!"

"Petal Shower must have been on adrenaline today!"

"Uh, I think I know who Petal Shower is. At the very least, it should only be a select few candidates!"

"Petal Shower's singing was wonderful!"

"Sunflower cannot be blamed for this loss."

Still, there was no one who felt that Li Yu would get eliminated.

Then, it was The Clown's turn to take to the stage.

"'Life's More Than the Grind'?"

"Pfft, isn't this face smacking?"

"Fuck!"

"Damn, The Clown is way too mean!"

"Yeah, Li Yu just lost, but he's kicking him when he's down?"

"Aiyo, I'm so entertained by this song!"

"Does he need to be so ruthless?"

But they had yet to find out that the even more ruthless event was about to place.

The Clown admitted defeat!

A lot of the people were dumbfounded by this decision!

"Admit defeat?"

"What's he planning?"

"Oh my god!"

...

Within the music industry.

At a recording company.

Many people's expressions changed.

"The Clown intends to go into the elimination round?"

"H-Has he gone crazy?"

"He hasn't gone crazy! He wants to verse Li Yu!"

"Isn't that crazy? He has no chance of winning against him!"

"Unfortunately, he already did."

"How do you know?"

"Yesterday's industry news. I heard that Li Yu's hand was forced to the point that he didn't even take off his mask and left the stage in dejection!"

"That's impossible!"

"I don't believe it either. Could it be a rumor?"

"Hur hur, just wait and see then."

...

At a talent agency.

Today, many people were watching King of Masked Singers while working overtime. It was not that they were lazing around, but that they had been tasked by their boss to do so. Ever since the premiere, this show was no longer treated as just a simple entertainment show. It had become an industry benchmark and a case study to follow.

"When did such a person pop up in the music scene?!"

"Who is this Clown guy?"

"Can we sign him?"

"How mysterious!"

"We don't even know which celeb he is!"

"I've already contacted some of my friends at Beijing Television, but their mouths are all zipped shut and they won't reveal any information. It's possible to guess who the other singers are as there are some likely matches, but there are zero details when it comes to The Clown! If we want to sign him from his previous agency, we'll have to establish his identity first!"

...

On Weibo.

"'I Really Hate You'?"

"Li Yu has finally sung a Cantonese song!"

"Yeah, he's finally used his trump card!"

"Haha, he's definitely going to win!"

"The Clown was too confident. He should be dumbstruck now, right?"

"Li Yu sang well!"

"Yeah, Li Yu performed well!"

"Ah, it's The Clown's turn!"

"What's this song about?"

"Fuck! 'I Really Love You'? Is he trying to contradict Li Yu?"

"When was there ever such a song? Is this yet another one of his originals? Where did he get so many originals! Who could've written all those songs for him?"

"Oh my god!"

"It's a Cantonese song!"

"It's a fucking Cantonese song!"

"The Clown is competing against Li Yu with a Cantonese song?"

"Heavens!"

"Is he crazy?"

"When it comes to singing Cantonese songs, who can beat Li Yu?"

"Yeah, how many years has Li Yu been singing Cantonese songs? Does he think it's funny to do the same? Isn't this a joke?"

"Stop chatting. Listen to it!"

"This song...this song..."

It suddenly went quiet online!

When the viewers listened The Clown's performance on television, they were all stared and their jaws dropped!

"It's great!"

"Holy shit, it's so good I'm crying!"

"Please permit me to say 'I really love you?'"

"This singing...my fuck!"

"Can, can the song be any more amazing than this?"

"It's time to vote!"

"He won!"

"The Clown won!"

"Li Yu really got eliminated? Fuck, I still thought that that was a rumor!"

"Is The Clown even human?"

"There's really no question about him winning!"

"By performing this song, how can he expect anyone to compete against him?"

"He can't really be a Hong Kong singer, right?"

"Uh, your home's in the northeast? On the Songhua River? He said that he is a northeasterner?"

"Pfft, do you guys really believe that?"

"This dude is full of bullshit!"

There was an explosion of comments on Weibo!

The results of the third episode's competition exceeded everyone's expectations. In no time, the Internet was filled with discussions related to this episode of King of Masked Singers. Whether it was on Weibo or the forums, they were similarly flooded with messages!

...

The next day.

The viewership rating of King of Masked Singers was out!

The third episode had once again ushered in a significant increase to the viewership rating and was steadily climbing!

The staff of Beijing Television were bursting with joy. Meanwhile, the King of Masked Singers program team staff were just as excited, and their celebratory cheers could even be heard in the hallway outside their office!

The Top Chinese Music Chart was also updated!

On this day, the Top Chinese Music Chart was once again dominated by King of Masked Singers!

#1: The Clown's "I Really Love You."

#2: Petal Shower's "That's Me."

#3: The Clown's "Life's More Than the Grind."

From the fourth to the twelfth place, more than half of the songs were from King of Masked Singers.

Although Petal Shower became the third episode's Masked King and it was her first time getting the title, the number one song on the Top Chinese Music Chart still belonged to The Clown. In fact, it was far ahead based on the statistics. "I Really Love You" had even shot up directly to the fourth spot on the monthly chart, with the second and third spots also belonging to The Clown at this moment. They were "Wild Rose" and "Opera," respectively, both of which had charted for more than a week now. According to this momentum, there was no doubt that "I Really Love You" would take the place of the monthly number one. It might even storm onto the annual chart! Petal Shower followed closely behind. No one else on the entire chart was a match for these "masked series" of singers!

It was too popular!

The show, its singers, and the singers' songs had all become extremely popular!

Even a lot of the well-known musicians and producers in the industry were tongue-tied and wide-eyed!

Chapter 1032: The Ugliest Celebrities Rankings!

Monday.

Zhang Ye woke up early.

Zhang Ye browsed the latest Celebrity Rankings Index and saw that his popularity had dropped a little again. Actually, it was not considered a drop as the popularity scores still rose. However, if it rose too slowly or remained constant, then with the other celebrities' overall popularity scores rising, it caused his popularity to appear like it had dropped. Although King of Masked Singers was created by Zhang Ye single-handedly, he was not credited as the show's executive director nor was the host. He did not even appear onscreen. As a result, even though King of Masked Singers became popular throughout the country, the popularity it gave to Zhang Ye was limited. On this point, he was not surprised and even felt that it was expected, so he did not treat it as something serious at all. As long as he did not go down in the rankings, things would be fine.

Zhang Ye turned his attention to the other celebrities.

Amy's popularity had soared.

Yao Jiancai's popularity had soared.

And it was the same for Chen Guang as well.

The judges who were part of the guessing panel on King of Masked Singers all experienced an increase in their popularities due to the show's vast exposure and viewership. This was the most prominent for Dong Shanshan. As the show's solitary host, her position was a special one. Although she did not have many lines in the entirety of the show, she gained the greatest increase in her popularity score!

It was the same for the contestants who had revealed their identities.

After "King of Oddity" was eliminated in the first episode, his popularity kept rising and there were constant inquiries for him to take on commercial appearances. There was even talk about how his value had increased by 50%. "Yesterday's Daylily," who revealed himself two days ago, also saw a surge in his popularity. In today's morning news, it was revealed that he was going to hold a nationwide concert tour, and his talent agency was already promoting it heavily. Before this, Yesterday's Daylily's popularity would at most enable him to hold a medium-sized concert in a first-tier city like Beijing. But now, he was talking about holding a nationwide concert, though the attendance numbers were still in question.

What about The Clown?

Petal Shower?

Sunset Glow?

As far as they were concerned, everyone knew that once these people took off their masks to reveal themselves, there would definitely be an explosion in their popularity. It would assuredly be much more than all the contestants whose identities were already revealed put together. And their popularity was still accumulating right now. As for who the final winner would be, it all depended on the latter part of the competition to see who could remain until the end and be crowned as the grand champion of King of Masked Singers in the grand finals!

In any case, the show had made a lot of people even more popular than they used to be.

Of course, there was also an exception, Sunflower Under The Starlight—Li Yu.

Li Yu also gained an increase in his popularity, although it was not enough for him to get back onto the A-list Celebrity Rankings. Based on Sunflower's popularity and momentum before this episode, if Li Yu had revealed his identity onstage, his popularity should logically have experienced the greatest increase. But no one could have expected the factors of the competition to change so unpredictably. Who could have thought that Li Yu would lose so badly after Petal Shower and The Clown worked together to "team kill" him? The Clown was even the most vicious of all, kicking him while he was down, then repeatedly "kicking" his face so badly to the point that Li Yu wouldn't even remove his mask and just left the stage quietly. His Weibo had remained inactive ever since. This incident affected his popularity greatly and had paid the price twice over. Not only did his popularity not increase by much, his reputation was tarnished as well. He was now getting farther and farther from the A-list rankings and was unlikely to make a comeback anytime soon.

That about summed it all up.

Zhang Ye was still in a good mood and was humming a tune in bed.

Di di.

The chat app notification on his cell phone sounded.

Someone had mentioned him in the Goof Group.

Ning Lan: "Boss Zhang, are you still unemployed?"

Zhang Ye sent a smiley face. "I've been sitting idle at home."

When he looked at the chat history, he saw that a lot of messages had accumulated. Although this group consisted of the Heavenly Kings and Queens, as well as A and B-listers, it was always very active with the chat members constantly shooting the breeze. As Zhang Ye was not much of a chatty Cathy, he had muted the group some time ago.

Ning Lan: "Sister Zhang was looking for you."

Zhang Ye wondered: "Hm? What's the matter?"

Zhang Yuanqi popped out. "I'd like to ask you about someone."

Zhang Ye typed: "Ask away."

Zhang Yuanqi: "Who's The Clown?"

Zhang Ye got anxious for a moment and lied: "I don't know either."

Ning Lan: "Aren't you on the program team?"

Zhang Ye: "I was only in charge of pre-production. I didn't take part in the production itself."

Zhang Yuanqi: "@ChenGuang What about you, Old Chen? Do you know?"

Chen Guang also appeared. "I'm just a judge. If Director Zhang doesn't know, all the more I wouldn't know. I've also been trying to guess who The Clown is. Actually, the entire music scene is trying to guess who he is!"

Fan Wenli showed up. "Does anyone have any idea at all? I'm also curious."

Spring Garden's Xiaodong: "Hehe, Sister Fan. Tell us the truth, did you go on King of Masked Singers?"

Fan Wenli: "I didn't."

Ning Lan harrumphed. "Liar!"

Fan Wenli: "..."

Chen Guang tried to change the subject. "Xiaodong, did Li Xiaoxian from your group go on the show?"

Xiaodong: "How would I know?"

Chen Guang: "You don't even know about your team member?"

Xiaodong: "And you don't even know about your wife."

Chen Guang: "Pfft!"

Ning Lan: "Boss Zhang, did you write those songs for The Clown?"

Zhang Ye blinked several times. "No."

Ning Lan: "Is that so? @HuoDongfang Was it your company's Old He who wrote the songs?"

Huo Dongfang appeared as well. "I don't think so? Old He rarely writes songs for people he doesn't know."

Zhang Yuanqi: "What if it's someone he knows? All of The Clown's songs were each better than the last. It's impossible for them to have come from nowhere, right? Quick, please tell me if any of you know who The Clown is."

Chen Guang: "Tell me too. I'm already planning to work with him!"

Ning Lan: "Old Huo, are you The Clown?"

Huo Dongfang: "Ah? What are you talking about!"

Xiaodong: "Eh, why do I get the feeling that Sect Leader Huo is guilty? Could it really be you?"

Huo Dongfang: "..."

There were all sorts of guesses and random accusations.

Then, a big shot actor said: "Stop talking about The Clown. Old Li is still in this group, so let's leave some face for him, hur hur."

"Hai, Old Li sure was unlucky."

"Forget it. Let's not talk of it."

Everyone stopped speaking about it. Although a lot of them felt that Li Yu had indeed handled the situation improperly, they would still leave some face for him. However, they knew that Petal Shower and The Clown were not to blame for getting mad over the issue either.

"Eh? There's a poll on Weibo again?"

"Oh, it's that!"

"Haha, it's time for that poll again?"

"What poll?"

"There's a link posted. See for yourself."

Zhang Ye tapped it in curiosity. Weibo's front page popped up onscreen with a headline that was extremely eye-catching. It turned out to be a celebrity attractiveness rankings poll held by Weibo, similar to the annual Most Popular and Unpopular Celebrity Awards poll that was also organized by Weibo around the Chinese New Year period.

There was always a lot of attention on these two polls each year.

At 12 noon, the domestic celebrity attractiveness rankings poll officially began!

The chat messages in the Goof Group were flooding in.

Xiaodong: "Who participated in this poll last year?"

Huo Dongfang: "Ning Lan was last year's champion, with Sister Zhang coming third while I was ranked eleventh? Or was it twelfth?"

Ning Lan was a little embarrassed. "My company helped to boost my votes to create hype back then as I had an upcoming movie. Please don't mention it anymore."

Zhang Ye asked naively: "You can even do that?"

Ning Lan: "What did you think?"

Zhang Ye: "This industry is a real mess."

Xiaodong: "Pfft! Teacher Zhang, you're also part of the industry, alright!"

Chen Guang reminded everyone: "Hur hur, how can Director Zhang possibly be in the same industry as us? Have you ever seen a person as carefree as him in the entertainment industry?"

Ning Lan: "I'm not going for it this year. Old Chen, why don't you help your wife contend for it? It would do her popularity good."

Chen Guang: "She has no chance. I think I have a better chance."

Ning Lan: "Dream on! I think you're better off contending for the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings."

Chen Guang: "..."

Zhang Ye asked: "There's even an ugliest category?"

Ning Lan: "Of course there is, Boss Zhang. You really don't pay much attention to the entertainment industry's affairs, do you? Although it's not an official ranking, there's always been a great deal of interest in it. The winner's sure to make a few headlines."

Zhang Ye mocked himself. "I've been busy fighting people at all times since I've entered the entertainment industry. Where would I have the time to pay attention to any of these things?"

At this, everyone cramped up with laughter!

"Hahahaha!"

"That's true!"

"In the entertainment industry, the only person I'll submit to is Zhang Ye!"

"Yeah, when'll you change that temper of yours!"

...

In the afternoon.

His parents had made lunch.

Zhang Ye was browsing Weibo while eating at the same time.

His mother asked, "Can't you eat normally? What are you so distracted with?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "I heard that there's a ranking poll that's quite the talking point, something about a 'Beautifulest Celebrities Rankings' poll that ranks celebrity by their looks. I wanna see if I'm in the rankings."

His mother rolled her eyes. "Why don't you eat instead."

His father was speechless for a second. "What looks do you have?"

When Zhang Ye finally found the poll, he saw that he was indeed not in the rankings. There hadn't been much attention on him recently, and he had barely had any public exposure as well, so his topicality naturally decreased.

On the Beautifulest Celebrities Rankings poll.

First: Zhang Yuanqi (720,000 votes)

Second: Hu Xue (650,000 votes)

Third: Petal Shower (610,000 votes)

A Heavenly King was fourth.

And Huo Dongfang was seventh.

Dong Shanshan had actually gotten into the rankings as well and was ranked 17th.

Hu Xue was a female C-list celebrity who looked very pretty, but she wasn't considered very popular. Obtaining such a spot in her first appearance in the rankings was probably the result of getting outside help like what Ning Lan had done last year. What surprised Zhang Ye was that Dong Shanshan and Petal Shower had also appeared in the rankings. Dong Shanshan being in the standings was understandable since she was quite beautiful and was currently the host of the highly popular King of Masked Singers.

But what about the third place Petal Shower? She had not even shown her face yet, so how could the audience know whether she was good-looking? Could it be that everyone had already guessed who Petal Shower was? But that wasn't possible!

Then, Zhang Ye moved his hand and tapped on the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings poll to browse through it.

As of 12:30 PM.

The rankings were as followed:

First: The Clown (990,000 votes)

Second: Zhang Ye (710,000 votes)

When Zhang Ye saw the rankings, he slammed his chopsticks onto the table and nearly cursed out loud!

His mother was shocked. "What's the matter? You're in the rankings?"

Zhang Ye went green with anger!

"Let me see." His mother took his cell phone and looked. She chuckled. "The Ugliest Celebrities Rankings poll? You're in second place? Pfft! This isn't too bad. It shows that the people's attention is still on you. Although you don't have a job right now, your fans are still thinking of you."

Zhang Ye fumed, "What's the use of this kind of attention!"

His mother pointed at the screen. "Alright, alright, you're merely in second place. Isn't there someone who's preventing you from becoming first?"

At the mention of this, Zhang Ye almost burst into tears!

Your sister!

First place is also me!

Chapter 1033: Someone provokes The Clown!

Goof Group.

The big names in the group were engaging in intense conversation.

"Sister Zhang is in first place now."

"But she's not leading by much."

"Little Hu is catching up too? Oh, that's right, she's promoting her new show right now."

"Haha, quick, go and take a look at the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings poll."

"Ah?"

"Aiyo, Boss Zhang has gotten onto the list again!"

"In the Most Unpopular Celebrity Awards poll a few months back, Zhang Ye took first place without a doubt. Pfft, and now he's in the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings poll too? Second place? Not bad, not bad."

"I'm dying of laughter."

"Boss Zhang's social skills are terrible!"

"Who told him to offend that many people!"

"Yeah. Just two days ago at Beijing Television, he drove away those fans of Old Li's as well?"

"Why is The Clown also on the poll? He's even in first place?"

These people sounded rather happy.

Zhang Ye rolled his eyes and typed: "Don't bother me. I need some quiet time."

This has gone too far! Why do I always end up on the negative polls? In the past, it was OK since the worst that could happen was me taking first place. But look at this now! I've taken both first and second place!

...

On Weibo.

The netizens were laughing nonstop!

"Zhang Ye has appeared once again!"

"Hahahaha, there are always bits of Teacher Zhang in these polls!"

"I nearly pissed myself laughing!"

"Why did everyone give their votes to Zhang Ye? Teacher Zhang might not exactly be handsome, but he still looks decent and is considered average!"

"Teacher Zhang has offended too many people. Just look at those comments of many of Li Yu's fans, all scolding him and voting for him. They're even calling on others to vote for Zhang Ye in the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings poll, so it'd be a wonder if he didn't have a ton of votes. But I'm not surprised that Teacher Zhang got second since those diehard fans of his are all people who enjoy such polls and would surely have voted for Zhang Ye as the ugliest celebrity. That's just how his fans are, treating Zhang Ye more ruthlessly than others would, haha. But why would The Clown be in first place? That's something I can't work out!"

"The Clown purposely conceded so that he could head into the King of Masked Singers elimination round to knock Li Yu off the show. That alone is enough for all the hate, so how would Li Yu's fans not answer the call?"

"That's true."

"Besides, the idea of a clown 1 is already pretty ugly!"

"Actually, I've done some analysis and found that The Clown is likely not good-looking either. Why? Here's my explanation. We've stated before that The Clown mentioned on the show that he's at least a B-list celebrity. But after speculating for the longest time and with all the comparisons, there wasn't anyone on the B-list and above who could sing that well or even someone who matches his figure. Coupled with him singing those lines of 'My ol' home is right in this hamlet' and 'My home's in the northeast,' we know that his words are untrustworthy. Rather, we should consider him a nonsensical person who isn't even a B-lister to begin with. Therefore, I have reached my conclusion. A person who can sing this well and has such good songs but still isn't at least a B-list celeb? He's managed to stay unnoticed by the audience all this while? There can only be one reason for this. His looks are probably not that good, or perhaps even ugly, so even if he could sing great, no one bothered to listen to him. Thus, he went unnoticed all this time!"

"Godly analysis!"

"Good reasoning!"

"Right, that's very logical!"

"Wow, you're right!"

"Holy cow, godly prediction there. Give us your name!"

"Name yourself! This thread will definitely go viral!"

When this analysis was posted, a lot of those who read it felt that it was a very justified and on point argument.

As a side effect, The Clown's votes increased even further. By 1 PM, The Clown was far in the lead in the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings poll!

Meanwhile, the Beautifullest Celebrities Rankings poll was still a very close and intense competition.

"The Clown has already secured first place!"

"Hahahahaha!"

"Yeah, there's no more suspense to the results!"

"If there's anyone who could catch up, only Zhang Ye has a chance!"

"Teacher Zhang, we're cheering you on!"

"Go, go, go, The Clown!"

"Let's see which of them will get ranked as ugliest!"

...

At home.

Zhang Ye nearly vomited blood a few times as he browsed through the Weibo comments!

Fight for the ugliest?

Fight, my ass!

They're both fucking me!

Who the hell came up with this poll? Could they be any more mean than this? Who in the world voted for me? Could they be any more awful than this?! His own fans, Li Yu's fans, the fans of those celebrities he had offended, all of them were rushing to vote for him. Zhang Ye had no words!

And yet, someone decided it was the perfect time to come and provoke him!

Due to the masked singers not being able to reveal their true selves, Beijing Television had even prepared some verified Weibo accounts based on their stage names. However, these accounts were not really used much other than the times some of the singers used them to say a few words of gratitude after they were eliminated.

Out of the blue, someone posted on one of these Weibo accounts.

The Weibo name was: Masked Singer "Flowing Time."

Those who had watched King of Masked Singers until the third episode would know that "Flowing Time" and another contestant were the replacement singers for the fourth episode. They had been given a special introduction in a clip of the next episode's preview. In the clip's introduction, Flowing Time had left the deepest impression on everyone. The narration introduced him as someone who only came onto the show after great efforts by the program team to invite him. He was a very famous singer in a niche genre in the industry and had very few rivals in his field. As such, after the audience had seen the preview, a lot of them started guessing as to who Flowing Time was.

But today, Flowing Time had fired a direct shot at The Clown: "I've been a good friend of Li Yu's for many years. After watching the third episode, I can't help but say a few words. Is this a tag team competition? How could Petal Shower and The Clown take turns like that? There was even a need to admit defeat so that he could get into the elimination round? Is such behavior even allowed in the rules? And Petal Shower and Spinach switching their appearance orders, isn't that horrible?"

This Weibo post resonated with quite a few of Li Yu's fans!

"Those two bastards!"

"Right!"

"This is going too far!"

"It was a tag team tactic!"

"Brother Li Yu was cheated by them!"

"Especially that Clown, he's vile!"

"Well said! Supporting Teacher Flowing Time! There's finally someone who's willing to put in a fair word for Brother Li Yu! I can see that The Clown is not a good person. Just look at how he's already first place on the Ugliest Celebrity Rankings poll!"

"Li Yu lost in such an unfair manner!"

"Teacher Flowing Time, please avenge Brother Li Yu!"

"Right, kill The Clown!"

"Destroy him!"

Of course, more of the reactions were questioning voices.

Quite a few people who saw the post were shaking their heads.

"Li Yu broke the rules by paying for PR campaigns and revealing himself. If you want to criticize others, why don't you criticize that so-called good friend of yours of many years instead?"

"Li Yu is clearly a sore loser."

"After asking for all those votes, he still lost?"

"I don't think that Petal Shower and The Clown went overboard!"

"That's right. Li Yu was in the wrong to use his popularity to crush the other contestants. How laughable. Why are there still people trying to seek justice for him?"

"Haha, someone who doesn't side with reason has made an appearance!"

"No wonder he's good friends with Li Yu! These two people are cut from the same cloth! They can't even differentiate between right and wrong? Or are they pretending not to know?"

In reality, the problem Li Yu caused had been resolved some time ago. After Beijing Television broadcast the third episode, a statement was released to announce that Li Yu had breached his contract, thus his agreed upon joining fee would be reduced by half. On top of that, Beijing Television's higher management also expressed that they would no longer collaborate with Li Yu. Li Yu's team had yet to comment on the matter.

The media reported this.

The fans discussed it.

But no one expected that someone would come and "defend" Li Yu at this time. It was even one of the replacement masked singers scheduled for the upcoming episode!

It could be seen from this that Flowing Time and Little Yu's relationship was especially good. And Flowing Time posted on Weibo again. "What's happened has happened and whatever's said won't matter, so I won't harp on it. @MaskedSingerTheClown Dare you compete honestly against me in the next episode? Dare you accept my challenge?"

The netizens were puzzled.

"Who's that?"

"He's talking this arrogantly?"

"Hur hur!"

"Could it be another big shot?"

"That might be possible!"

"This person should be a somebody."

In the end, the Weibo of Masked Singer Petal Shower showed that she came online. She replied: "I don't think it's nice to send a Weibo like this, is it? An honest competition? You make it sound like the match we had was not honest. If you're unhappy for Li Yu, let's meet onstage. What's the point of saying all this?"

The conversation stopped at that.

The reason for that was because the posts on Flowing Time's Weibo were deleted very quickly after that. The same happened for Petal Shower's Weibo, so obviously, Beijing Television intervened. Such negativity and infighting among the show's contestants were definitely not something they wanted out in the open. These Weibo accounts were all officially registered by Beijing Television, so they naturally could delete any posts or take back the singers' access rights.

But the netizens had already taken screenshots of the exchange.

Instantly, another uproar broke out on Weibo!

"Flowing Time wants to challenge The Clown!"

"Yeah, the next episode is gonna be exciting!"

"Who could Flowing Time be?"

"He's definitely a famous singer in the industry!"

"Haha, the next episode's competition is going to be intense as well!"

"Where does Flowing Time's confidence come from?"

"Li Yu's good friend? Li Yu has too many friends, but if it's someone who is very close to him, there seems to be only one person? Could it be his sworn brother, Zhao Qiquan?"

"Ah?"

"Teacher Zhao Qiquan?"

"Aiyu, that might be possible!"

"Their tempers are also alike. The two of them are of the same mind!"

"I was wondering how he could be so bold. But if it's Zhao Qiquan, then that's just how he is!"

Zhao Qiquan.

A famous Hokkien 2 singer.

In this world, Hokkien songs were considered a very niche market in the music industry. Not many people sang them and there weren't a lot of good songs either. However, there were still famous Hokkien singers around. If there had to be one representative of Hokkien singers, then Zhao Qiquan would definitely be the first person to come to mind! In the genre of Hokkien songs, Zhao Qiquan indeed

had no rivals. He was even very popular as a Hokkien singer and had a large score of diehard fans from the region!

Could it be him?

If it was him, it would be really difficult to say who would win and lose!

The Clown had been singing for three straight episodes, and starting contestants who made it this far into most singing shows would enter an audience appreciation fatigue period. The audience would know the style of the singer and how well they could sing by this point, so there was nothing fresh for them to look forward to. Unless you could step it up in your singing, or come up with something novel, it would be very difficult to impress the audience. But it was exactly at this time that the incoming contestants had an advantage since the audience had not seen them before. As a result, as long as they could perform good enough, the audience would love them!

And since Zhao Qiquan was obviously a supporting pillar of the Hokkien music scene, there were no doubts about his singing. There was also no one who could compete against him in this market, making him a unique personality in the industry!

...

It was late afternoon when Zhang Ye found out that somebody had openly challenged him.

The Goof Group also discussed this event.

Ning Lan: "Is it really Zhao Qiquan?"

Huo Dongfang: "It's probably him. I heard from a friend that Zhao Qiquan sidelined all activities this week and said that he would be coming to Beijing, so it should be him."

Xiaodong: "Big Brother Zhao is quite the rash person!"

Chen Guang commented: "But he's a very strong competitor."

Zhang Yuanqi said: "In the area of Hokkien music, it's all about Old Zhao. If the audience truly gets impressed by his performance, The Clown might not be able to beat him."

When he read that, Zhang Ye chuckled in spite of himself.

I can't beat him?

Bullshit!

Zhang Ye was in a terrible mood today. Yes, if it anyone placed first in the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings, they wouldn't be in a good mood either. And now that someone had come to provoke him over an obviously unreasonable matter, how could Zhang Ye not get angry!

Chapter 1034: Getting his hands on his girlfriend's house keys!

Tuesday.

Early in the morning.

Zhang Ye had set his alarm the day before. When he woke up, the first thing he did was check on the Weibo organized Beautifullest and Ugliest Celebrities Rankings polls. The voting had ended and the results were published!

The Ugliest Celebrities Rankings polls:

First: The Clown (10.7 million votes)

Second: Zhang Ye (8.85 million votes)

Third: Zhao Xiaoyan (2.7 million votes)

There were no changes to the rankings whatsoever. All that had changed was the number of votes, with the numbers increasing from before. Whether it was the first place Clown's votes or his own votes in second place, the tallies were several times higher than the third place's votes. There was essentially no suspense to the outcome!

The netizens were still gloating over it.

"Hahaha!"

"Teacher Zhang's ranked firmly in second!"

"I love what I'm seeing!"

"So The Clown still ended up in first place?"

"This result is defying all common sense!"

"Who voted for him? Damn, why are there so many votes?"

"I did!"

"I contributed 10 votes to The Clown from my household!"

"I contributed seven votes to my idol, Teacher Zhang Ye!"

"I registered several accounts and gave all my votes to The Clown!"

"Pfft, do you guys have nothing better to do?!"

The Clown's name was really a hot topic now. Ignoring he was attractive or not for now, at least there were people who knew about him and paid attention to his happenings and thus gave him their votes. This was also a reflection of The Clown's current level of fame. This was not previously seen on Beijing Television's King of Masked Singers' official website when the show's contestants' popularity polls were held. The individual singers had each gotten hundreds of thousands of votes over several days at the beginning, which rose up to the millions later on. This was because the reach of Beijing Television's official website was small, and it was not accessed by everyone. But it was a different case for Weibo since virtually everyone had access to it. A singer who had not taken off their mask and who nobody knew could garner this many votes? This was a miracle that would never be replicated!

At home.

The main person involved in that poll was getting unhappy with the outcome and got up from bed listlessly.

His mother was sweeping the living room floor. "Eh, why are you up so early?"

Zhang Ye mumbled in response.

"I haven't made breakfast yet," his mother said.

"I'll go out and eat then." Zhang Ye yawned and went into the bathroom to brush his teeth.

His mother made a sound in understanding and said with a smile, "What's the matter? Are you still angry over the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings? Don't be bothered by it. They're all just having fun. Besides, this clearly shows that your popularity has not dropped."

Zhang Ye said, "I'd rather it dropped a little."

He changed clothes and went downstairs to get his car.

On the road, he called Wu Zeqing.

Du du du, du du du.

After four or five rings, the call finally connected.

Zhang Ye: "Old Wu, are you up yet?"

Wu Zeqing: "I'm awake now."

Zhang Ye: "Were you still sleeping? It's about time to go to work, isn't it?"

Wu Zeqing: "Yes."

Zhang Ye: "What time are you leaving?"

Wu Zeqing: "At eight, but I'll be eating breakfast first."

Zhang Ye: "Don't bother making it. I'm coming over now. I'll get you something on the way."

He heard a graceful sounding yawn. "Alright, I'll get changed then."

When he reached Old Wu's house, it was just a quarter past seven.

In the villa.

Wu Zeqing was already up and watering the plants in the yard.

Zhang Ye ran in. "Quick, eat it while it's hot. I got held up on the way here when someone recognized me. The breakfast stall's boss insisted that I give him a signature and even asked me in disbelief why a famous celebrity like me would eat breakfast. I didn't even know how to answer him."

Wu Zeqing laughed gently and set the things in her hands down. "Alright, what did you buy?"

"Soy milk and fried dough sticks, and there's also a tray of buns. Have whatever you like."

"You haven't eaten either?"

"Not yet. I just got up too."

They started eating.

The two of them sat at the table and shared the food.

As Zhang Ye ate, his gaze fell on Wu Zeqing's face. He was happy just to see her. "How's the taste? I bought this from that roadside stall on Taiping Street."

Wu Zeqing nodded. "It's pretty good." Then she smiled and looked at him. "If you're coming over in the morning next time, you don't have to go out of your way to bring me breakfast. There are quite a few people who can recognize you even if you have your sunglasses on, so just come over. There's food at home, and I can always make breakfast for you."

Zhang Ye said happily, "How would that do? You have to go to work early every day, so don't make yourself any busier than you have to. I'm just twiddling my thumbs at home nowadays anyway, so I have plenty of time."

After breakfast.

It was 20 till 8 AM.

Wu Zeqing suddenly said, "How do I look today?"

She was dressed in a bog standard gray women's suit over a white dress shirt.

Zhang Ye took a look, smiled, and said, "You look fine."

"Does fine mean middling?"

"Hai, you look good no matter what you wear."

"Why don't you help me to choose something to wear then?"

"Sure!"

"I don't even know what I should wear to work these days."

"Let me think for you. I'm a professional!"

Zhang Ye volunteered himself and went upstairs with Wu Zeqing. He went to her wardrobe and searched through it, even lowering his head to a drawer and opening it. In there, he saw undergarments of all kinds of colors before coughing and quickly closing it.

But Wu Zeqing did not mind and sat down next to him, smiling and watching him.

A moment later, Zhang Ye took a pair of pants off their hanger and walked over to Wu Zeqing, gesturing to her. "How's this? It's also gray, but it's slimmer than the one you're wearing. Those pant leg openings are wider and look ungainly. It doesn't seem all that put together."

Wu Zeqing glanced at it. "OK."

Zhang Ye nodded. "Here, change."

When Zhang Ye was about to leave the room to let Wu Zeqing get changed, he was startled to see that Old Wu had already taken her belt off with a click after taking the pants from him.

Ah?

She's taking it off just like that?

Zhang Ye got nervous and instinctively turned away. "I won't look. Please change."

"OK."

He could hear rustling behind him.

Zhang Ye could not resist the thought of turning around. Then he remembered that he had successfully proposed to her, so what would it matter if he turned? If Old Wu did not avoid him or say anything, why couldn't he just watch?

It would be such a waste to not look!

After a moment's struggle, Zhang Ye turned around.

He even tried to cover his actions. "You're done?"

Her new pair of pants were up to her fair and supple thighs, although they weren't fully put on yet and just slightly above her knees.

"Almost," Wu Zeqing said.

Zhang Ye blinked.

Wu Zeqing finally put her belt back on.

Zhang Ye snapped his fingers. "These pants look good!"

Wu Zeqing walked to the mirror on the front of her dresser and took a look. Then she smiled and said, "Yes, this is pretty good. I'll wear this." She glanced at her watch and turned around, saying, "Alright, I've got to get to work. Any later and I'll be late."

Zhang Ye said, "Hurry up then."

"That's right," Wu Zeqing said as she suddenly walked to her nightstand. She pulled open the drawer and took out a set of keys for Zhang Ye. "These are the keys to my house. Whenever you wish to come over, you won't need me to open the doors for you anymore." She pointed at a large number of keys at the top of the set and said, "This is for the main door, this is for the gate to the yard, this electronic one is for the garage, this one is for the master bedroom on the second floor, and this is the master key for the cabinets, although I don't usually keep those locked."

Key to her house?

Zhang Ye held the keychain in his hand. "Are you serious about giving this to me?"

Wu Zeqing asked, "Why?"

"Nothing." Zhang Ye smiled. "Then I'll tuck them away."

Wu Zeqing said, "OK. Don't rush to get a job. Take a break for a while."

Zhang Ye said, "Thanks."

Wu Zeqing said, "If you're still sleepy, you can sleep here before you leave. You can sleep in the other room or my room, whichever one you prefer. I'll be leaving now."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "I won't see you off, then. If someone spots me sending you to work early in the morning, I bet the entertainment industry will blow up!"

Wu Zeqing smiled and said, "Alright."

This was no joke.

If someone found out that Zhang Ye and Wu Zeqing were going to get married?

The SARFT would be thrown into disarray!

The entertainment industry would be tossed in chaos as well!

Chapter 1035: Teaching Taiji!

In the morning.

After Old Wu had gone to work, Zhang Ye stayed at her home and started thinking about which songs to sing on the show. He had to come up with two songs for the upcoming episode and practice them, as well as get a sense of how they'd do.

There were some songs that were indeed good songs and classics, but they were unsuitable for him as everyone's voice was different. There were just some things in singing that you couldn't control. The timbre of vocal registers was also different, leading to a different type of feel which would determine whether that song was suitable for him or not. Zhang Ye had to try singing first before he would know. It was fortunate that Old Wu's villa had good sound insulation. He didn't need to worry that anyone would hear him. He could just sing as he desired, and even if he screamed, no one would care. Unlike at home. If he were to sing a little louder than normal there, the neighbors upstairs and downstairs would surely complain.

This song sounds fine.

Well, this song seems good too.

He decided on a tentative four songs that he was quite satisfied with for the time being. As he could feel his voice tiring, he walked out of the villa and locked up before driving off. Since he had nothing to do at home, he decided to drive over to Rao Aimin's and Yang Shu's place to have a look. He realized he hadn't been there in quite some time.

Jiaomen East.

When he drove into the neighborhood, he was stunned by what he saw.

In the neighborhood's public square, over a hundred people stood in formation and were holding stances. There were all kinds of people in the dense crowd, with elderly men and women accounting for at least half the numbers. There were also young and middle-aged men and women, and some parents even brought their ten-year-old children with them. The district's public square was very large but was almost entirely packed by these people. This formation of people was as large as you could imagine it to be.

What's going on?

Is there a multi-level marketing meeting taking place?

Or is it a plaza dance event?

Then Zhang Ye spotted Yang Shu. Yang Shu was standing in a stance that was different from the others. She stood facing everyone and was shouting some commands at them. Occasionally, she would gesture like she was demonstrating something.

"Relax your shoulders! Don't tense them up!

"Uncle Sun, your stance is wrong!

"Auntie He, don't keep your knees so straight!

"Little Wang, your stance is too rigid. Loosen a little! That's it!

"Come on, everyone, copy my stance!"

Yang Shu shifted stances.

The crowd tried to imitate her.

"Do as I do."

"Teacher Yang, is this correct?"

"That's correct, Little Zhou. Well done."

"Master Yang, what about me?"

"You're a bit off. Continue to work hard."

"Alright!"

Only now did Zhang Ye understand what was going on. These people were all shadowboxing, which was a simplified form of Taiji Fist. He was rather dumbfounded and rapidly parked his car. When he got out of his car, he observed them from afar for a short while. Every previous time Zhang Ye came here, he would get recognized by people and they would walk up to greet him. After all, Zhang Ye had lived here for quite some time and was considered a part of the community. However, no one recognized him today, probably because no one noticed him in the first place. They were all practicing Taiji under Yang Shu's guidance. Some people would take their child and leave the square from time to time to bring

them to school. At the same time, people from other neighborhoods would come over and join the crowd, making the number of people gathered here increase!

Ding.

Behind him in the building's foyer, the faint sound of the elevator arriving could be heard.

Chenchen's voice suddenly rang out, "Zhang Ye, what're you doing?"

Zhang Ye turned around and saw Rao Aimin dragging Chenchen as they came out of the foyer. He immediately said in surprise, "I was watching them practice. What's going on here?"

Rao Aimin was clearly about to send Chenchen to school. "It's been going on for many days now. That junior sister of yours started teaching those people how to do Taiji some time ago. At first, it began with just one or two people learning from home. Then, two days later, even people from the nearby neighborhoods were attracted to her. Quickly take her in hand. Estate management has already come to me several times. If this carries on, the neighborhood's public square will be out of space soon."

Zhang Ye wondered, "How did she get so many people?"

Rao Aimin tilted her chin upward toward Yang Shu. "Did you forget about your apartment's windows getting smashed? When Little Yang jumped out from upstairs to chase after the crooks and took the three of them on all by herself, many of the neighbors witnessed it. On that very night, someone approached Little Yang to learn kung fu from her. She taught him a few moves and then it ended up like this, with more and more people joining."

Zhang Ye was secretly surprised. "She seems quite charismatic, doesn't she?"

"Within one kilometer, there had better not be anyone who speaks ill of your junior sis. If they do, they'll get ganged up on and scolded by a bunch of people." Rao Aimin glanced at him. "Even your influence in this area is no match for her anymore. Alright, enough talking. I have to send this kid to school."

Rao Aimin led Chenchen away.

Zhang Ye quickly called out, "I'll be eating lunch at your place at noon!"

"Yeah, yeah," Rao Aimin said impatiently.

Chenchen yelled to Yang Shu, "Old Yang, I'm going to school."

As Yang Shu turned to look and wave at her, she spotted Zhang Ye. Taken aback, a look of embarrassment appeared on her face as she busily instructed the crowd of people. She coughed, then shouted to them, "Alright, that's all for today. Go back home and practice on your own what you learned today. If you can't grasp the gist, practice more and you'll be fine. If you really still can't get it, you may come back and find me tomorrow. That's all then."

"OK!"

"Thank you, Teacher Yang!"

"Little Yang, thanks for the hard work."

"Master Yang, thanks for all your work."

The crowd started dispersing and went their separate ways. Some of them were even sharing their experiences as they left.

Yang Shu timidly walked over to Zhang Ye. "Senior Bro."

Zhang Ye said expressionlessly, "Let's go upstairs and have a talk."

Upstairs.

In the apartment.

The moment they entered the apartment, Zhang Ye put on a stern face and criticized, "Taiji Fist is a martial arts meant for fighting. In this modern era, a lot of the other martial arts are being promoted as something to practice for the strengthening of one's body and mind. But as to what it really is, I would have expected you of all people to know better! Strengthening of one's body and mind is just a secondary effect. Taiji Fist's primary goal is to inflict hurt on others and stop an enemy's attack. There were so many people downstairs just now, but did you question if any of their characters and minds are suitable to learn the art? Were you just going to teach any person that came along? How could you do that? What if you teach them and they use what they learned to go out and commit evil? There were so many of them. Did you test them one by one?"

Yang Shu lowered her head. "I was just teaching them some simple moves, not real Taiji."

Zhang Ye said, "You call that simple? The set of moves you taught included techniques that could hurt others. Besides, with so many elderly uncles and aunties learning, you actually risked teaching them? What if something happens to them while they're practicing what you taught them? Are you going to take responsibility? That set of moves is totally unsuitable for older people! Something will surely happen if they keep practicing it!"

Yang Shu lowered her head even further and didn't make a sound.

Zhang Ye got angrier as he went on, pointing at her and saying, "You're really daring, huh, not even discussing something this important with me?"

Yang Shu muttered, "But you weren't around."

"Oh, so you can run wild just because I'm not around?" Zhang Ye said, "Luckily, I came back today and found out early. If I came back a month or so later, there'd surely be trouble!"

In Zhang Ye's previous world, the Taiji Fist that people popularly knew about was the simplified version of the original. It could be said that it was almost no different from common aerobic exercises and was indeed practiced to strengthen one's body and mind. There weren't any techniques that contained any lethality and they all existed in many styles, like the Yang forms and Chen forms. But none of these techniques were considered true Taiji Fist since the true form was an internal style, the purpose of which was to stop an enemy's attack, and had a deadly lethality. Anyone who did not have a martial arts background and was too advanced in age would only hurt themselves if they blindly practiced an internal style. Of course there were exceptions, but for most people, this was definitely not a good thing. Practicing an internal style was absolutely not simple! That was the reason why a lot of internal

style martial artists did not teach the people outside of their schools. Even if they did, they had to see who the person was and judge if they had the moral character to learn the martial art.

Yang Shu did not speak.

Zhang Ye was afraid that she would not know the seriousness of the matter, so he rambled on for over half an hour. "Don't go around teaching other people anymore. Today will be the last time!"

Rao Aimin came home from sending her kid to school.

She pushed the door open and came in after hearing the yelling. "Whoa, you're still on about it?"

Yang Shu finally raised her head. "I was just hoping to spread the art of the Taiji Fist, that's all."

"There are many other ways to spread the art!" Zhang Ye reproached, "You're too anxious to achieve that and brought harm to others in the process!"

"I'm not!" Yang Shu bit her bottom lip, feeling aggrieved.

Rao Aimin smacked her lips and mediated, "Alright, alright, it's not that big a deal. But Little Zhang is right. You shouldn't be teaching internal style martial arts to people so easily. It's not that we're keeping this knowledge to ourselves and refusing to share with others, but that learning an internal style can be quite harsh. If it isn't practiced properly, it can cause one's body a great deal of damage." Then she added, "But I've also seen the set of moves Little Yang was teaching, and they're very simplified. Although, some of the moves, even if not to the extent of causing harm, are still not suitable for the middle-aged and elderly to learn since the movements are too sweeping."

Yang Shu looked at her. "Then, Master Rao, how can we further simplify Taiji Fist so that we can teach it to everyone?"

Rao Aimin spread up her hands. "It's not like I know anything about your Taiji branch of martial arts. There's only the two of you in this world that know Taiji Fist, so why are you asking me?"

Yang Shu immediately looked to Zhang Ye. "Senior Bro."

Zhang Ye said, "What?"

Yang Shu said, "You must know."

Zhang Ye said in exasperation, "Why would I know?"

"Can you help me simplify the moves of Taiji Fist?" Yang Shu said seriously, "I would like to let everyone learn it. Just look at our neighbors, all of them really enjoyed practicing it!"

Zhang Ye sat down on the sofa without replying.

"Senior Bro." Yang Shu quickly poured him a cup of tea and brought it to him with great respect. "Have some tea."

Zhang Ye took it from her and drank.

Yang Shu said, "I understand what you were trying to tell me just now. I was too anxious and I realized that I was wrong. Senior Bro, please guide me."

Chapter 1036: Hiring a female bodyguard!

Giving him tea.

And pouring water.

Yang Shu kept herself busy while she helplessly watched Zhang Ye.

Zhang Ye knew that his junior martial sister had a one-track mind and was a somewhat rash person. If there was something she had made up her mind about, she would see it to the very end no matter what anyone had to say. Thinking about it, it was her life's goal to glorify the martial art of Taiji Fist. After arriving in Beijing and depending on him for so long, all she could do was stay at home doing nothing and also occasionally borrowing some money from Zhang Ye. Yang Shu probably felt dejected with nowhere and nohow to expend her energy. With people suddenly recognizing her, all the neighbors and even people from the nearby neighborhoods were now coming to learn Taiji Fist from her. They even kept addressing her as Teacher Yang or Master Yang, so Yang Shu certainly found value in this and also saw it as a way to promote Taiji Fist to the entire country, and perhaps even to the world. Naturally, she was being very diligent about it.

"Senior Bro!

"Senior Bro.

"Please teach me.

"Senior Bro!"

Zhang Ye was just about to speak.

However, Rao Aimin smirked and said, "Even if you beg him, it might not necessarily lead to anything. He has to first know how to go about doing it."

Are you trying to goad me?

Hur hur!

Do you think I'll fall for that?

Hmph! Alright, I'll really fall for it!

Zhang Ye stared at her. "Hey, who says that I don't know how?"

Yang Shu's eyes lit up. "Senior Bro, you really know how?"

If it were anyone else, they would probably not know how to go about handling this. It would not only require a lot of time to plan to simplify a set of internal style boxing techniques into something that could be practiced by the ordinary people, but would also require time to continuously refine and tweak it. Without spending three to five years, it would be impossible to complete the simplification. This was because it wasn't purely about simplifying the moves. After doing that, there was still a need to bring it in line with the essence of Taiji Fist and reflect the discipline behind it. Therefore, it was an especially

difficult task, especially if a person was a master Taiji Fist martial artist. As they were already at a more advanced stage, it would be very difficult for them to see what the ordinary people were seeing.

But it was different for Zhang Ye since he was from another world. In his previous world, Taiji Fist had long since been simplified into countless versions. Whether it was the 42-form Taiji or the 24-form Taiji, Zhang Ye had seen it all. He even knew that the earliest 24-form Taiji, which was introduced in 1956, had used the Yang-style Taiji Fist as its basis for simplification. Further, the country was involved with its implementation at the time. Led by the Sports Administration in 1979, another version was introduced, the 42-form Taiji, which also used the Yang-style Taiji Fist as a basis but added the essence of other Taiji Fist styles. These were the two forms of Taiji Fist mainly practiced by the people in his previous world.

So he decided that he would teach her.

There was nothing to hide anyway.

Zhang Ye got to his feet and said, "Watch carefully."

Yang Shu immediately widened her eyes in interest.

Rao Aimin narrowed her eyes and also watched with great interest.

"This is the 24-form Taiji Fist!" Zhang Ye then demonstrated the opening stance!

First form: Initiation.

Second form: Part the Wild Horse's Mane.

Third form: White Crane Spreads Its Wings.

Fourth form: Brush Knees and Twist Step.

He executed the movements in a flowing motion!

Yang Shu was dumbfounded by what she was seeing!

Rao Aimin's eyes narrowed even more.

Zhang Ye continued, "Next, this is the 42-form Taiji Fist!"

Initiation!

Grasp the Sparrow's Tail, Right Side!

Single Whip, Left Side!

Raise Hands!

As he went through the stances, he finally reached the closing stance.

Zhang Ye asked Yang Shu, "How much can you remember?"

Yang Shu replied, "I've memorized everything!"

Zhang Ye was stunned. What? She had memorized everything? Did she need to be so full of herself? He said in disbelief, "Then show it to me. I want you to show me both the 24-form and 48-form sets."

"Yes, Senior Bro!" Yang Shu seemingly turned into another person and looked sharp. She demonstrated both sets without missing a thing!

Only then was Zhang Ye convinced.

This was what talent was. It wasn't worth it to compare people.

Yang Shu said excitedly, "Senior Bro, was that OK?"

Zhang Ye's eyebrows rose a little as he nodded and said, "It was very good."

Suddenly, Rao Aimin looked at Yang Shu and said, "Are you interested in learning from me? Transfer to the Eight Trigrams Palm? I can guarantee that you will achieve the usage of concealed power within half a year."

Yang Shu was stunned. "Ah?"

Zhang Ye panicked. "Hey, hey, hey, what's the meaning of this, Old Rao? Are you trying to steal my people?"

Rao Aimin smiled and said, "Your junior sister is a very talented person and quite suitable to learning the Eight Trigrams Palm. Her foundations are there and she has also attained great understanding, so it's not a problem for her to start learning the Eight Trigrams Palm now."

Even though Zhang Ye wasn't that fond of his freeloading junior martial sister and would talk to her impolitely at times as well as order her around, Zhang Ye would definitely not allow Old Rao openly trying to steal her from him. "There are so many disciples in the Eight Trigrams Palm School, and only two left in Taiji, so why are you trying to steal her from me? Have you no heart?" He immediately said to his junior martial sister, "Don't listen to her and continue practicing Taiji Fist. There's no point in learning some random lousy fist and palm techniques."

Rao Aimin looked at him. "Who are you saying has lousy fist and palm techniques?"

Zhang Ye stared at her and said, "Whoever tries to steal my people!"

The two of them nearly got into a fight.

Yang Shu quickly said, "Senior Bro, Master Rao, please don't argue. Master Rao, thank you for your kindness. Taiji Fist was handed down through my family, so I definitely wouldn't learn any other martial arts."

Zhang Ye nodded his head firmly. "That's the right way!"

Even if Rao Aimin's social ties were extremely poor in the Chinese martial arts world, she was still a grandmaster. Besides, other than Chenchen, she had not taken any disciples of her own yet. When he learned that Old Rao was eyeing Yang Shu, Zhang Ye was truly afraid that his junior martial sister would get stolen away. It wasn't easy for him to get a fellow junior martial sister, was it?

Rao Aimin stopped trying and turned away. "You can look for me anytime if you want to learn the Eight Trigrams Palm. Oh right, come over for lunch this afternoon."

Yang Shu said, "Thank you, Master Rao."

Zhang Ye asked, "What are we having for lunch?"

"You're not invited!" Rao Aimin strolled off.

Zhang Ye had no response.

Later that morning.

Zhang Ye taught some more simplified Taiji Fist sets to Yang Shu.

Yang Shu virtually did not need him to repeat his demonstrations as she could almost always remember the routine after observing it just once.

Zhang Ye was fully satisfied and felt that Yang Shu was becoming more and more pleasing to the eye. "That's about it. Take some time to digest what I've taught you. As for how you want to teach it to others or which sets to teach, I don't care. You can decide by yourself."

Yang Shu gave a fist and palm salute to him and said sincerely, "Thank you, Senior Bro!"

Zhang Ye said in amusement, "We are both practitioners of Taiji, so why are you still being so polite with me?"

Yang Shu nodded solemnly. "Alright, then I won't be so polite with you." Then she looked at him and said embarrassedly, "Senior Bro, can you lend me some money again?"

Zhang Ye rolled his eyes. "You're broke again?"

Yang Shu said, "Yes."

Zhang Ye said, "You didn't collect any money for teaching Taiji Fist?"

Yang Shu said, "They all liked Taiji Fist a lot, so I-I was too embarrassed to collect any money from them."

"Then how can you ask money from me?"

"Didn't you say that I didn't have to be so polite with you?"

"Did I say that?"

"Yes, you said that just now."

"I've already forgotten."

"Senior Bro."

"Fine, fine. I got it already. Here, take it."

"Thank you, Senior Bro."

Seeing her in such a miserable state, Zhang Ye couldn't bear refusing her. When he thought about that, he took out all of the money in his wallet, which totaled over 10,000 RMB. "Alright, I'll give all of this to you."

Yang Shu furiously waved it off. "I don't need that much."

Zhang Ye said, "I'm not sure when I will be coming over again, so just keep it for now. Remember, if you run out of money or meet with any troubles in the future, let me know"

Taking the money from him, Yang Shu nodded. "Senior Bro, you're really nice."

Zhang Ye said indignantly, "Cease with the niceties. They're useless against me. You should find a job in your free time. You have to be able support yourself before you can teach others about martial arts."

Dispirited, Yang Shu said, "I've interviewed, but nobody needed me."

Zhang Ye asked curiously, "What kind of job did you interview for?"

"A bodyguard position," Yang Shu said.

Zhang Ye said in surprise, "Ah?"

Yang Shu spoke angrily, "When they saw that I was a woman, they did not even give me a chance for an interview."

Zhang Ye chuckled. "As a Chinese martial arts master, why would you need to interview to be a bodyguard? Who could hire you? Even the head of state wouldn't have such a privilege, no?" His junior martial sister probably did not think of it that way. But Zhang Ye knew that with Yang Shu's skills, she would belong to the top of the Chinese martial arts world. She also practiced Taiji, and could even be considered the most authentic successor to Taiji Fist in this world, yet she wanted to become someone's bodyguard? How shameful would that be!

Yang Shu said, "But I only know kung fu and nothing else." She then thought of something. She blinked and asked, "Senior Bro, do you have a bodyguard?"

Zhang Ye said in bewilderment, "What are you planning?"

Yang Shu pleaded, "Let me be your bodyguard!"

Zhang Ye said in a speechless manner, "Will I be protecting you or the other way round?"

Yang Shu's excitement faded. "That's true. Your skills are so much better than mine, so you won't need anyone protecting you. Then I'll just keep looking and see if anyone requires a bodyguard."

Pfft!

You're still thinking about being a bodyguard?

Zhang Ye could no longer bear to listen and waved her off. "Come on! With your status, how can you think about becoming a bodyguard for others? Even if you don't feel ashamed, I feel ashamed for you! What about this? You can be my bodyguard and I'll call for you whenever I have any activities or matters to handle. You just need to shield me from the fans and reporters. As for your salary, I'll pay you 50,000 RMB a month for the time being, though that figure may rise in the future. That's right, do you know how to drive? Have you learned how?"

Yang Shu immediately nodded. "Yes!"

Zhang Ye decided, "Alright, it's settled then. In the future, you'll just need to drive and shield me from people. But of course, I won't call for you every day, so you can do whatever you need to as usual, since I won't need you for most situations. Open a bank account later and I'll transfer your salary to you every month."

Yang Shu was very happy. "Understood, Senior Bro!"

A celebrity with Zhang Ye's status would usually have bodyguards and a full-time chauffeur. Even if they did not hire anyone themselves, their talent agencies would still arrange it for them.

Today, Zhang Ye had finally gathered a full team of his own.

His agent was a Chinese martial arts grandmaster?

And his bodyguard and driver was a Chinese martial arts master?

In the entire entertainment industry, there was truly no one else who could assemble such a team!

Chapter 1037: Recording the fourth episode!

Friday.

In the morning.

On the day of recording the fourth episode of King of Masked Singers.

On the way to Beijing Television, Zhang Ye sat in the car with his heart in his mouth. It was Yang Shu's first time chauffeuring and bodyguarding today, and she was feeling quite nervous as well.

"Hey, hey."

"What's the matter, Senior Bro?"

"Drive slowly!"

"OK, Senior Bro."

"Hey, don't drive on the lane markers!"

"Yes, Senior Bro."

"Turn right, turn right here!"

"Understood."

"Are you sure you have a driver's license?"

"Yes."

It was obvious that Yang Shu was the kind of driver that had not touched a car since obtaining her driver's license. Furthermore, she was an extremely reckless driver just like her rash nature. She would keep driving straight at an extremely fast speed and was a typical example of those women drivers who would send a shiver down one's spine.

They arrived at their destination.

However, there were quite a few reporters clogging the entrance. Perhaps they had received some news or they had just been waiting there, but when they saw the car, around seven reporters immediately piled toward it.

"It's a BMW X5!"

"It's the bulletproof version!"

"That's Zhang Ye's car!"

"Quick, quick, quick!"

As the car was blocked from entering, Yang Shu had to park outside.

Zhang Ye said, "Get out and shield them off for a bit."

Yang Shu immediately got out of the car. "Please, could all of you make way! Make way!" Yang Shu was dressed in a black suit and even wore a pair of sunglasses at Zhang Ye's request. She was dressed as a typical bodyguard.

Zhang Ye also got out of the car.

A male reporter immediately raised an audio recorder and asked loudly, "Teacher Zhang, King of Masked Singers is getting very popular these days. As the executive producer, you deserve the credit. Would you accept an interview with us at Beijing Times?"

Zhang Ye smiled and waved it off. "I just did the pre-production. I haven't contributed much to the show itself, so let's drop the interview. But you guys can arrange one with Director Hu Fei."

A female reporter squeezed her way over to him. "Director Zhang, the netizens voted you into second place a few days ago in the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings poll. What are your thoughts on this?"

Zhang Ye walked forward while smiling. "I feel lucky that I didn't come in first place."

The reporters laughed.

"The Clown got first place. Do you know anything about this contestant?"

"I have no idea."

"Can you reveal anything about The Clown to us?"

"I don't know anything."

"The replacement singer, Flowing Time, has issued a challenge to The Clown. Who do you think will win?"

"The competition hasn't even started yet. How would I know? Alright, I have to go to the program team now to discuss some things, so let's end it here?"

When Yang Shu heard Zhang Ye say that, she immediately took two steps forward and cleared a path for him. "Please make way, thank you."

A reporter had wanted to squeeze his way past her, but when Yang Shu held his arm that was holding a microphone, that burly male reporter looked dumbfounded as he got pushed back by her. Another reporter wanted to rush up, but Yang Shu used the same move to stop that person.

Inside a two-meter radius, no one could get close to Zhang Ye!

All the reporters were dumbfounded!

Who was that woman?

Did Zhang Ye hire a bodyguard?

And why was she so strong?

When he reached the television station's entrance, several security guards ran over to block the reporters and allowed only Zhang Ye in.

Zhang Ye turned around and told Yang Shu, "You can drive back. I'll probably finish in the afternoon or evening, so pick me up when the time comes."

Yang Shu nodded. "OK!"

A number of reporters got curious and quickly snapped some pictures of Yang Shu. Had Zhang Ye hired a beautiful female bodyguard? This was news too!

In the television station's courtyard.

Hu Fei and Xiao Lu saw what had happened.

"Zhang'er." Hu Fei waved at him.

Zhang Ye walked to him. "Why are there so many reporters out there?"

Hu Fei laughed and said, "The show is very popular. I was trapped out there for a long time too."

Xiao Lu chuckled, "Director Zhang, did you hire a bodyguard? What a beauty!"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "She's a friend of mine. Since she was sitting idle at home, I hired her to be my bodyguard."

Xiao Lu wondered, "Can a woman be a bodyguard too? Does she have the skills?"

"Her skills?" Zhang Ye said, "Against ordinary people, she could hold off more than 20."

Xiao Lu exclaimed, "That's such an exaggeration!"

Hu Fei also laughed. "More than 20 people?"

A woman?

And such a beautiful woman?

Hu Fei and the others did not believe it!

Zhang Ye just smiled without saying anything. There was no need to explain anything to these laymen. Even if he explained, they would not understand. Yang Shu was no ordinary bodyguard. Most celebrities whose bodyguards were tall and well-built—or knew some karate, taekwondo, or martial arts, or might even be retired soldiers—could not take even three attacks from Yang Shu. She was the genuine successor of the Yang-style Taiji Fist, an internal style master who was more legitimate than Zhang Ye.

Hu Fei said, "Let's go in and talk. So, that day some of the contestants used our official Weibo accounts to make those posts, that was something we hadn't expected. When we finally got around to taking emergency actions to stop it, it was already too late."

Zhang Ye said, "It's fine. Just treat it as promotion."

Hu Fei looked at him. "Do we need to tell the masked singers to stop posting with their Weibo accounts?"

"There's no need." Zhang Ye said, "It's unnecessary, so let the contestants settle it themselves."

Hu Fei snapped his fingers. "OK, I'll take your advice."

Although Hu Fei and the King of Masked Singers program team had produced a lot of shows, the scale of those past shows had always been very small. They had never taken part in a project that had such a huge investment and had never produced a dominant show with such high nationwide viewership ratings before. Only Zhang Ye had experience doing so, even on more than one occasion. As such, Hu Fei went to Zhang Ye for his opinions on a lot of matters. Having known each other for so long, there wasn't really anything to be embarrassed about. Everyone wanted this show to succeed!

...

An hour later.

As Zhang Ye finished his work, Hu Fei and the program team staff started getting busy with theirs. So Zhang Ye disappeared from sight and changed into The Clown's costume and mask.

After a phone call, Han Qi rushed over.

"Aiya, Teacher Clown!"

"I'm sorry I was late."

"The band is waiting for you."

"OK, I'll head over straight away."

He had already rehearsed one song yesterday and needed to rehearse the second one this morning.

On the way over, Han Qi rambled on.

"That Ugliest Celebrities Rankings thingy was pure nonsense."

Zhang Ye smiled.

Han Qi said angrily, "You haven't even revealed your face yet, so how could they mess around like that? How could they vote you to first place in the polls? And it's even in some Ugliest Celebrities Rankings?! They have really gone too far!"

They bumped into Dafei and Hou Ge.

Dafei stood still. "Teacher Clown, you've arrived?"

The Clown greeted him.

Dafei said, "Please don't be bothered by that poll."

Hou Ge added, "It's just the netizens joking around."

Han Qi said, "Just joking around?! That was downright insulting!"

The Clown said, "It's fine."

The masked Sunset Glow happened to come out of the rehearsal room at this exact moment.

The two of them saw each other and exchanged a few words.

"The Clown?"

"Hello."

"Are you actually unattractive looking?"

"In any case, I'm not handsome."

"Oh, I'm not pretty either."

Han Qi was wondering why Sunset Glow would straightforwardly ask someone whether they were unattractive. But when she heard her next words, she realized that Teacher Sunset Glow was taking a different tack to comfort The Clown.

The impact of the poll that was organized on Weibo a few days ago was still huge. Many people had participated in it, which was obvious from the millions and tens of millions of votes cast. Zhang Ye had gotten second place in the Ugliest Celebrities Rankings poll, but everyone already knew that he was quite an unconcerned man when it came to such things. Moreover, he had frequently featured as one of the front runners in many of these negative rankings before, so everyone was used to it. But as it was The Clown's first time in such a poll, everyone was unsure whether he had the mental fortitude to cope with the result. After all, not everyone could be as carefree as Zhang Ye. For example, if it were any other male or female celebrity who gained this title of being the ugliest, they would have long since cursed and sworn.

Chapter 1038: An unforeseen situation at the venue!

The door closed.

The rehearsal room cleared out.

The Clown started rehearsing.

"Teacher, you're still not going to sing the lyrics?"

"Yeah."

"Alright then, let's begin."

"Thanks, everyone."

The reason why Zhang Ye kept insisting on not singing during rehearsal was that he did not want to consume too much of his emotion and fervor. He was the type of competitor who would always do things spontaneously, which required him to be in the right condition to perform well. Sometimes, the more times a song was sung and the more focused one was, the easier it was to lose the original feeling for the song. That would only lead to a worse live performance compared to what was practiced during rehearsal. No singer could keep singing a song with fully invested emotions since they would get sick of it if they sang it too many times. So Zhang Ye needed to restrain himself as he hoped to leave his best performance for the actual stage.

Music Director Bai Yuanfei and the Miracle Wheels band members were used to this. However, when they got the score and saw the title of the song, they glanced at The Clown.

Eh, this song?

It's something worth looking forward to!

Half an hour later, they finished rehearsing after practicing the song about four times. Zhang Ye did not waste any time as the next contestant was still waiting their turn. After thanking the band, he got ready to leave the rehearsal room. When he opened the door, he saw an unfamiliar man wearing a mask and resting on the sofa outside. His mask looked very similar to Zhang Ye's own mask. It was a very artistic, silvery mask and even had some ethnic cultural elements emblazoned on it. It was clear that the mask had been meticulously created by the designer. His costume was very colorful and eye-catching as well.

Who was it?

Could it be Flowing Time?

As Zhang Ye studied him, the other person did the same.

That person stood up and looked straight into The Clown's eyes. "You should've seen what I posted on Weibo, right? You even admitted defeat just so that you could eliminate Old Li. Was there really a need to go that far?"

It was Flowing Time.

Zhang Ye chuckled.

Flowing Time said, "I don't like you."

Zhang Ye grunted.

Flowing Time said, "You're a Mainlander, right?"

Zhang Ye still did not say anything.

Flowing Time said, "Since when did it become popular for Mainland singers to sing Cantonese songs? Were you deliberately trying to knock Old Li out? We're all fellow industry peers. Did you need to be so extreme? You didn't even leave some face for him? Or leave some leeway for yourself? I also sing minority language songs. If you're so capable, why don't you sing another Cantonese song later?"

Zhang Ye gave him a look. "Are you done talking?"

Flowing Time said, "Yes, for now."

Zhang Ye curved two fingers up, one after the other. "First, I'll decide by myself if I'll sing a Cantonese song or not and what song I will sing. I don't need you to tell me that. Second, if you're here to defend Li Yu's actions, feel free to do so. But there's no need for so much nonsense. Let's leave it all on the stage." He turned around and walked away.

Flowing Time shouted after him, "Sure! Let's meet on the stage!"

When they walked far off, Han Qi, who was beside Zhang Ye all this while, said angrily, "Is that guy crazy?"

Zhang Ye said, "Who knows?"

Han Qi said, "Li Yu's punishment has already been decided. He was the one who didn't abide by the rules and interrupted our show's progression. Does he even think he has a case here?"

Zhang Ye threw his hands up.

Han Qi asked, "Is that really Teacher Zhao Qiquan?"

"I don't know."

"Since he said that he sings minority language songs, then he might just really be Zhao Qiquan. A lot of netizens were guessing that it's him. Teacher, I'll be cheering you on. Beat him!"

Zhang Ye nodded. "Mm."

...

Online.

There was a press release with a picture attached.

"Zhang Ye's Mysterious Female Bodyguard!"

"Wow!"

"What a beauty!"

"Yeah. Although I can't see her face clearly since she's wearing those sunglasses, from her profile and that figure, she must definitely be a beauty. Did Teacher Zhang hire a bodyguard?"

"A female bodyguard? Is she just for show?"

"Who knows? I heard that Teacher Zhang's newly hired agent is also a very beautiful woman!"

"Teacher Zhang has offended too many people. I guess it was about time for him to get a bodyguard."

"All I care about right now are the results of King of Masked Singers' fourth episode!"

"Who on earth is The Clown?"

"The industry is still guessing as well. No one knows who he is!"

"Flowing Time has challenged him. If it's really the Hokkien singer, Teacher Zhao Qiquan, then it will surely be interesting to watch. It would be even more wonderful if they end up fighting!"

"I wonder what song The Clown will be singing today."

"I'm so looking forward to Flowing Time's performance!"

"I still prefer Petal Shower!"

"Haha, I'll be headed to the studio soon for the recording."

"Ah, does the previous poster have a ticket?"

"Yeah, I got it through my company."

"I'm so jealous of you!"

"You gotta stream from the studio!"

Even before the show's recording, it had drawn the attention of the people!

As long as it was a topic related to the King of Masked Singers, it would be hotly discussed!

...

In the afternoon.

At Beijing Television, the drawing of lots began.

Before long, the matchups and appearance sequence for today were set.

The order of appearance was as followed:

First: Spinach

Second: Flowing Time (Replacement masked singer)

Third: Marshal Persona (Replacement masked singer)

Fourth: The Clown

Fifth: Petal Shower

Sixth: Sunset Glow

It was not yet time for the audience to be admitted into the venue. There was still plenty of time until then.

As such, Executive Director Hu Fei decided to organize a simple tea party at a small backstage dining area and invited all of today's contestants. Afternoon tea was served with some snacks, even including red wine. "This is the first time that all the contestants have gathered together. Let me briefly introduce our two new replacement singers. This is Teacher Flowing Time, and this is Teacher Marshal Persona. So then, everyone please feel free to have some tea and chat, hur hur. This part will not be broadcast anyway."

Marshal Persona was the first to greet everyone. "Hello, everyone. I'm a newcomer. Nice to meet all of you."

From his voice, he didn't sound that young. He was perhaps in his 30s or 40s?

Flowing Time smiled and said, "You don't sound like a newcomer."

Marshal Persona laughed but did not say anything.

Petal Shower looked at Sunset Glow. "The two of us are facing each other today."

"Please go easy on me." Sunset Glow smiled shyly.

Petal Shower smiled and said, "I was about to ask you the same. I'm not in too good a shape today."

Sunset Glow looked off to the side. "Then today's main event will have to be between The Clown and Flowing Time."

The Clown simply shrugged it off.

Flowing Time chuckled, saying nothing.

When the others heard that, they also looked at those two. Everyone already knew about the provocations by Flowing Time on Weibo and wanted to find out who would be the better singer between the two of them. But as they were not matched against each other, they would not get to meet each other in the first round. So the prerequisite was that the two of them had to get through the first round before they could meet in the second round.

Outside.

In the recording studio.

The audience had started to line up in advance to get into the studio.

"Wow, the venue is so big!"

"The set design is really nice."

"This is all Zhang Ye's creation. I heard that Teacher Zhang personally decorated the set."

"It's just somehow better with Zhang Ye taking part in the production. He's currently the country's best television show director and producer after all."

"Ah, is that Dong Shanshan?"

"It's her, it's her. She's testing the microphone?"

"Where's Petal Shower?"

"And where's The Clown?"

"Don't bother looking for them. They're definitely backstage."

Suddenly, a large group of people arrived from outside. They all seemed like they knew each other and were even wearing the same outfit, which had a company's name printed on it. A rough estimate put about 70 to 80 people in the group. When they opened their mouths to speak, they were all talking in Hokkien!

The audience members around them all turned to look at them.

Many of the program team staff were momentarily stunned.

With The Clown attending the tea party, Han Qi was left with nothing much to do. So she came over to the studio to help out with work. However, when Han Qi witnessed this, she started to feel a little panicked and went to look for Dafei immediately.

Han Qi tugged at him. "Brother Fei!"

Dafei turned around. "What's the matter, Little Han?"

Han Qi pointed to the audience. "W-Why are there so many Fuzhounese?"

When Dafei saw this, he also found it a little odd and went to check with someone. Only then did he learn what was what was going on. He said to Han Qi, "They're from a company based in Xiamen and are a second-tier advertising sponsor for our show. They had asked for some tickets from us, so Brother Hu allocated 70 to 80 tickets for them. We originally thought that they were going to organize a lucky draw to give away the tickets, which was what they had claimed as well. We hadn't expected that their company employees and families would come to Beijing for a meeting. They decided to organize a tour while they were in Beijing and now they're here. The majority of the employees are from Xiamen, and they speak Hokkien over there."

Han Qi asked, "Then will they be allowed to vote as well?"

"Of course," Dafei said.

Han Qi was badly worried now. She ran off to look for The Clown. When she got there, the tea party had just ended. "Teacher Clown, come with me, quick. There's something urgent!"

Back in the waiting room.

The Clown asked, "What's the matter?"

Han Qi said, "There are nearly a hundred people in today's audience who speak Hokkien!" She related the matter to him and asked, "What should we do now? If Flowing Time is really Teacher Zhao Qiquan, then he's one of the best Hokkien singers around. Wouldn't those hundred votes go to him almost by

default? How could anyone compete with him if that's the case? Just think about it. If the abilities of two people are on par and the 500 audience members vote equally for each person, that will give them each 250 votes. Even with a slight deviation, ten votes would already be a huge margin, not to mention a hundred votes. But fortunately, Hokkien songs are slightly more niche. Other than this hundred people from the Xiamen sponsor company, the rest of the audience members would probably not—"

All of a sudden, someone knocked on the door.

Han Qi went to open the door.

Xiao Lu was standing outside. She quickly said, "I won't be going inside. Just let Teacher Clown know that a company from Chaoshan with roughly 40 to 50 people has arrived. They came to Beijing for a meeting a few days ago. The program team hadn't expected that these two groups would come to the recording session together. I'll be going as I still need to inform the other singers. We've made a mistake in our planning by not properly arranging for the attendees."

Han Qi was a little confused. "What's about the company from Chaoshan?"

The Clown spoke, "Teochew is a branch of the Min language. There's about a 60-70% similarity."

Han Qi exclaimed, "What?"

Xiao Lu sighed. "That's the issue I'm talking about."

The Clown said calmly, "I understand."

"We're terribly sorry," apologized Xiao Lu before leaving in a hurry.

"How can that happen!" Han Qi said, "Those 70, 80 people are already enough to mess the results up, but now there are another 40, 50 others? Wouldn't that be over a hundred people in total? Wouldn't today's stage become Flowing Time's home field then?"

Previously, the program team had been very particular with the audience composition. For example, when it came to age demographics, they would not only get young people to attend. They would invite people of all ages from their teens to their 50s. As for gender, it would basically be half-and-half with at most a 10% difference. As for the language they spoke, this was not a consideration at all. Since this was the Mainland, they couldn't possibly bring in half the audience from Hong Kong and the other half from the Mainland just to show that they were fair to the Cantonese singers. Moreover, Cantonese songs were quite mainstream and well recognized by Mainlanders, so there was no need to do that. As such, what was happening today was indeed unexpected. No one had expected that such a coincidence would happen, that so many people who spoke Hokkien would come to attend the recording! And from the apologetic attitude of Xiao Lu, it was crystal clear who Flowing Time was. He was definitely a Hokkien singer!

The other contestants gradually learned about it as well.

Petal Shower did not say anything.

Sunset Glow simply acknowledged that she understood.

Spinach had the biggest reaction. She felt she didn't need to take the stage anymore!

A lot of people were wondering if all of this was planned by Flowing Time himself. Could he have happened to know the CEOs of those two companies? So he got them to ask for more tickets for people to cheer him on? And that was why he dared to openly challenge The Clown on Weibo even though he had already been crowned Masked King twice?

Was that how it was?

No one knew!

In any case, the other contestants could only be sure of one thing: In these circumstances, it was going to be too difficult for anyone to beat Flowing Time!

Chapter 1039: Who is his opponent?

In the recording studio.

All of the audience had taken their seats; the cameras were about to start rolling.

Dafei found his way over. "Brother Hu, some contestants have expressed their views on the matter."

Hu Fei sighed. "What did they say?"

Dafei smiled wryly. "Last time it was Li Yu, now it's Flowing Time. One of the masked singers said that if she were allowed to bring people from her hometown to attend the recording, she could even beat Petal Shower and The Clown!"

"Brother Hu, what do we do now?" Xiao Lu came back after informing the contestants.

Hu Fei said remorsefully, "What else can we do? All we can do is record. Since everyone has arrived and they're from our sponsors, we can't possibly chase them off, right? We only have ourselves to blame for not clarifying and asking clearly what they needed the tickets for when they requested them. We just assumed that they would use it for a nationwide lottery event. If it was that, the gender and geographical demographics would've been more evenly distributed. Hai, we can only blame ourselves for being inexperienced at handling such a large singing variety show like this one. That's why it led to a series of consecutive problems occurring like it had. It was all due to my negligence. If Zhang Ye had been appointed as the executive director, such things would not have happened! If I had known that it would be like this, I would have made him accept the position of executive director no matter what. I'd have just stuck to being the executive producer and supervised from the side! That would have been so much easier!"

Dafei immediately said, "We can't blame it on you. We don't have the necessary experience either."

Xiao Lu wondered, "Has Director Zhang gone missing again?"

"He probably went back?" Dafei turned and looked around.

Hu Fei said, "Let's just go ahead and record. Things can't be changed no matter what. I'll personally go and talk to the contestants after we finish recording. Come, we'll start record in one minute."

...

Applause rang out through the studio!

"Hello, everyone."

"Welcome to this episode of King of Masked Singers!"

"I'm your host—Dong Shanshan."

Many in the audience started to scream in excitement.

And a lot of the guys were wolf whistling.

This scene was not planned by the program team beforehand. They had not requested for the audience to clap and scream to enhance the recording effects, but was rather the most authentic representation of the atmosphere in the studio. As Dong Shanshan had gotten very popular now and the King of Masked Singers becoming the top rated show in the nationwide viewership ratings, everyone was very excited that they could come attend the live studio recording where they could also vote to determine the "life and death" of the contestants. Their emotions were running high right from the start.

Dong Shanshan was still wearing that black women's suit and those gold-rimmed glasses.

After a string of advertising messages, Dong Shanshan looked at the audience and said with a smile, "I saw on the Internet that a lot of people are asking me why I keep wearing the same outfit for every episode."

Quite a few audience members looked at her curiously.

Dong Shanshan said, "It's because the program team does not have any money!"

In return, the audience heckled her!

"Yi!"

"Yi!"

"Hahaha!"

No money?

You're the richest program team in the country right now, alright?

Hearing that, Dong Shanshan looked at Yao Jiancai, who was seated at the judging panel, and said with a smile, "What a familiar sound this is! Teacher Yao, are they jeering at you?"

The other judges laughed.

Yao Jiancai pointed at Dong Shanshan. This Little Dong is even making fun of me now?

The host had a bigger part in the recording of today's episode. It was rare for Dong Shanshan to get the opportunity to say more than a bit during the opening speech, even though it was just a few lines. "I know that everyone has been waiting. Now, let's hand things over to the contestants, so please welcome our first singer onto the stage—Spinach."

The contestant was ready and waiting in the waiting area.

The audience started applauding!

"She's coming out!"

"It's Spinach!"

"She's the first one today?"

Spinach came onto the stage feeling a little unhappy. But she managed to recover from it very quickly after a few deep breaths while she stood onstage. Then she nodded at the band to signal that she was ready.

The music played.

She began to sing.

It turned out that Spinach chose a song that was based heavily on opera music and was aptly titled "Chinese Opera." There were parts of the song where it was sung in the controlled pitch style of Peking Opera 1 . When these notes went higher, the audience responded excitedly with round after round of applause!

When she finished performing, Spinach bowed and exited the stage.

Chen Guang exclaimed, "This?"

Wang Zhuishu was also stunned. "She is?"

"Now you know who she?" Zhang Xia said with a smile.

Chen Yidong said, "I think I've got it!"

"It's her?" Amy seemed to have recognized her as well.

Zhang Xia enjoyed a good relationship with Spinach, and they had worked together a few times as well. So Zhang Xia figured out who she was during the previous episode while the other judges finally guessed her identity today.

Yao Jiancai commented, "Her singing is quite good."

Zhang Xia smiled and said, "When she gets older, she'll definitely be even better."

Onstage, Dong Shanshan said, "Let's welcome our next contestant—Flowing Time."

The audience immediately cheered and screamed enthusiastically. Compared to the reception when Spinach came onstage, it was louder by several times, especially in two areas where there were about a hundred people. Many of them were wearing the same outfit and were cheering in Hokkien for Flowing Time. Maybe they had also read the online news, but a lot of them probably assumed this person was Teacher Zhao Qiquan.

Amy looked into the crowd. "They're all speaking in Hokkien?"

"Why are there so many of them?" Yao Jiancai exclaimed.

Zhang Xia knew a little about this as she had heard from the program team staff before recording began. "They're employees from one of the sponsors." Then she filled them in on the situation.

Chen Guang said, "There are this many of them?"

Chen Yidong said, "It's gonna be very difficult for the other contestants to win."

"It's far more than very difficult." Amy said in a speechless manner, "If it's really Teacher Zhao who has come onto the show, then the results are already set, aren't they? He practically has over a hundred guaranteed votes!"

They thought the audience was too one-sided this time. Did they come and attend the recording session solely because of Flowing Time?

Flowing Time took the stage.

Applause sounded once again.

In the end, Flowing Time slowly pressed his arms down to signal the audience to be quiet and finally halted the applause.

Flowing Time smiled. At the same time, the music started.

Everyone was looking at him and waiting for him to open his mouth.

"Please look at me.

"Is this the person you loved so deeply?

"Why, when you were in your hardest times, did she turn to go?

"Please look at me.

"Is this the friend you trusted so much?

"Why, when you were down on your luck, did he never look back?"

It turned out to be a Mandarin song!

It was that very famous song called "Please Look at Me 2"!

The audience was very excited!

"It's in Mandarin?"

"Shouldn't he be singing a Hokkien song?"

"Could it be that he is not Zhao Qiquan?"

"That's not right, just listen to his accent!"

"His Mandarin has a Hokkien accent to it!"

"That's right, it's indeed so!"

"It really sounds like it's from that area!"

"It's really Zhao Qiquan!"

"This is awesome! His singing is so wonderful!"

"Looks like there's something to look forward to today! Teacher Zhao has really joined the show!"

"Haha, The Clown has met his match this time!"

The cheers of those Xiamen and Chaoshan people were especially deafening. The majority of them were Zhao Qiquan's fans and loved listening to Hokkien songs!

When Spinach saw this from the wings, she felt only a sense of powerlessness.

When he finished performing, Flowing Time bowed in thanks. He was clearly quite pleased with his performance today.

Spinach was then invited back onto the stage by the host, Dong Shanshan.

The judges began commenting.

Zhang Xia said, "They were both great, truly great."

Wang Zhuishu said, "I felt very satisfied listening to those two songs. They were quite enjoyable."

Chen Yidong said with a smile, "I like Spinach's performance more, and I think I have guessed who you are as well."

Spinach nodded in thanks.

Yao Jiancai said, "I prefer Flowing Time's performance more as I feel that he sang with deeper feeling."

"Each of them has their individual strong points, so it's really difficult to judge who was better." Chen Guang looked at them and said, "Hur hur, let's leave this difficult decision to the audience."

The styles of their songs were completely different with no overlapping qualities, so it was really quite difficult to say whose singing was better. Spinach was superior in terms of her clearer voice that had more carrying power, while her operatic parts had a very special feel to it. Meanwhile, Flowing Time was superior in terms of his experience and the control of his voice, and the projection of his emotions was quite good as well. Therefore, the judges considered the first match quite even. Even if Flowing Time was slightly better, the difference was not that great. But when the voting started and the outcome was shown, the judges fell silent!

The voting ended!

Spinach: 107 votes!

Flowing Time: 381 votes!

Flowing Time emerged victorious!

The difference was much too great!

Almost all of the audience had given their support to Flowing Time!

The program team staff looked at each other in dismay.

The other contestants who were in their waiting rooms looked downhearted!

Clearly, the audience has already recognized Zhao Qiquan through his slight accent and voice even though he had not sung a Hokkien song yet. He had only demonstrated a bit of his Hokkien accent through his Mandarin pronunciation, yet he had nearly four times more votes. With an advantage this overwhelming, if Flowing Time actually sang a Hokkien song, who would be his match?

This "home field advantage" he had was simply too great!

Chapter 1040: 'I'm Ugly But Tender'

It was time for the next matchup.

Marshal Persona vs. The Clown.

Yao Jiancai said, "This episode's battle for Masked King is going to be a difficult one."

Zhang Xia agreed, "That's right."

Chen Guang said, "Let's watch how this match will turn out."

Amy said, "Let's see which other two contestants will advance to battle Flowing Time for Masked King."

Wang Zhuishu asked, "Who is this Marshal Persona?"

Chen Yidong said, "His mask looks really good."

Marshal Persona had already come onto the stage, dressed in an overpowering, martial outfit that grabbed everyone's attention.

...

Backstage.

Zhang Ye did not get affected by anyone and was getting ready for his turn onstage. He closed his eyes and did some Taiji breathing exercises to calm his mind. No matter who his opponent was, no matter where the audience was from, all he needed to do was to sing to his best.

It was just that simple, no?

His impulsiveness gone, he was now in great shape.

A moment later, Han Qi knocked on the door and came in. "Teacher Clown, Marshal Persona is almost done performing."

After two seconds, Zhang Ye opened his eyes and stood up. "Alright, let's go."

Ahead of them was the waiting area. Surprisingly, Flowing Time was standing there with his arms folded. No one knew if he was there to watch Marshal Persona perform up close or if he was waiting for The Clown.

Flowing Time looked at him. "I'll be waiting for you in the battle round."

The Clown glanced at him.

Flowing Time said, "But from the look of things, you might find it hard to advance."

Somber, Han Qi looked to the stage.

Marshal Persona's smoky voice was extremely charming to listen to.

He was singing.

"Years after we're no longer together,

"I still can't forget your warmth.

"You said you weren't good-looking enough for me.

"Well then,

"I'll let you go."

He finished singing.

Many audience members were intoxicated by his performance.

"He's such a strong singer!"

"He's absolutely an impressive singer!"

"What a display!"

"Great!"

The judges were also clapping as they found it to be quite a good performance.

Zhang Xia said, "Have any of you recognized him?"

"His voice sounds familiar." Chen Guang was thinking hard.

Dong Shanshan announced, "Next, let's welcome—The Clown!"

Yao Jiancai was taken aback. "The Clown is going up against Marshal Persona?"

Amy said, "It won't be easy for The Clown today since he's facing two great opponents! If he goes through to the battle round, Flowing Time will be there waiting for him. The immediate problem is that he might not even be able to win in the first round."

Zhang Xia made a noise in agreement, then analyzed, "Since it's already the fourth episode, unless he can come up with something extremely surprising, everyone knows how well he can sing. Although the audience still likes him, there's nothing fresh to expect from him. They would also have higher

expectations for his performances. Him and Petal Shower progressing to this point in the competition has actually made it more difficult for them to move on. Let's see what he'll sing today, since that's gonna be the crux of the matter."

Chen Guang said, "Getting first place in Weibo's Ugliest Celebrities Rankings has surely affected him, in addition. At least, I think that some of the audience might change their view on him."

Amy turned to him. "That's just a poll for fun, isn't it? No way it'll be that bad, right?"

Chen Guang said calmly, "Because you're pretty, you don't understand how average-looking people like us find it hard to survive the entertainment industry. It's incredibly difficult."

Amy replied, "Aren't you doing rather well now?"

Chen Guang laughed bitterly, "But you didn't see how much we went through to get to where we are."

Yao Jiancai was deeply moved. "In this industry, even if we work five to ten times harder than some people, we might not be afforded the same opportunities."

Zhang Xia sighed. "I can understand."

Amy, Wang Zhuishu, and Chen Yidong fell silent.

The Clown slowly walked out and onto the stage.

Han Qi was cheering in her head, Go, Teacher Clown! Go!

Petal Shower went to the waiting area.

Sunset Glow also went.

The two of them did not expect each other to be thinking the same thing.

Sunset Glow asked, "What are you doing here?"

Petal Shower answered, "Any song that The Clown sings should be listened to live."

Sunset Glow laughed. "Agreed."

Petal Shower offhandedly asked, "Is The Clown really not good-looking?"

Sunset Glow said, "Yup. When I asked him this morning, he said that it was so."

"Who do you have your money on?"

"The Clown. He always manages to surprise us."

The audience's response was very different from the two contestants'!

Some were cheering!

Some were booing!

"It's finally The Clown's turn!"

"I'm looking forward to it!"

"What are you looking forward to? The image of my prince has been shattered!"

"Yeah, I had imagined The Clown to be very handsome!"

"You haven't even seen him yet, so how would you know he's not?"

"Someone online analyzed it and pretty much determined that he's indeed just average. I prefer a more handsome male singer!"

"Me too."

"I actually quite liked The Clown, but I can't bring myself to like him now! I'm all about the looks! Sob!"

"Marshal Persona is a handsome man for sure!"

"That's right! I've already decided to give my vote to Marshal!"

"I still can't decide. Is The Clown really that ugly?"

The girls especially could not accept the fact that The Clown was not a handsome guy. All of them were caught in a dilemma.

The lights dimmed.

But The Clown did not start singing.

This was a habit of his that everyone knew about, so the crowd fell silent.

Flowing Time was watching him from the wings. This was his first time listening to The Clown sing live.

The judges and audience were also looking at The Clown.

Zhang Ye stood onstage and took in everyone's attention. For a moment, he did not know how to sing. A complex swirl of emotions seemed to roil within him! His journey so far had been very difficult. Others could see some parts but not all. Zhang Ye had grit his teeth and walked step by step to get here. As he was just average-looking, he had nearly tripped right at the start without getting into the entertainment industry. Due to his mediocre looks, he had experienced countless criticism and doubt, as well unfair treatment! There were even people who would judge his personality and character based solely on his appearance! He had seen this on more than one occasion. Some Korean celebrities got praised as kind and good people by their fans, who would go crazy all because the celebrities said hello, even though the fans didn't know whether their idols had gotten plastic surgery. Meanwhile, Zhang Ye, who had gotten into a fight over a bullied fan, and scolded others as he sought justice for the people, had done a lot for others. He had done so much, truly, yet no matter what he did, he would always incur the wrath of others!

Why?

Why was it like this?

Zhang Ye raised his microphone and looked down as he rested it near his mouth 1 .

The soft and gentle strings of a guitar thrummed.

"In the nightly wilderness of my dreams, I stand a proud giant.

"But every morning, before the bathroom mirror, I realize I'm living on the razor's edge."

When everyone read the title of the song, they were stunned!

Chen Guang was stunned!

Amy looked shocked!

The audience also looked startled!

This...

This song...

Zhang Ye closed his eyes and sang.

"In a jungle of reinforced concrete, in a life of being ordered around,

"I think about the gulf between dreams and reality."

Please believe me!

Everyone, please believe me!

I am not a bad person!

I, Zhang Ye...really am not a bad person!

Suddenly, he opened his eyes and looked at the audience. He looked at all of them as he thumped his chest. Then, he used his shocking voice to sing loudly to everyone.

"I'm ugly,

"but I am so tender.

"Cold on the outside,

"passionate inside.

"That's who I am!"

Listening to this, Chen Guang rose to his feet!

"I'm ugly,

"but I have music and beer.

"A little lowly,

"a little fearful,

"but I'll never cower!"

Amy was screaming, "Oh my goodness!"

Spinach was dumbfounded in the wings. "What the fuck!"

Sunset Glow looked at Petal Shower in astonishment. "This..."

Even Flowing Time was stunned!

The audience was also stunned, to the point they even forgot to cheer and clap. How could this be! How could he still have such a song?!

Today, Zhang Ye was particularly sincere and couldn't control the emotions in his voice. Some of his pitch changes were all over the place as he didn't even try to control his voice! That was because this was a song he had wanted to sing for a while now, because this song contained all the things he had always wanted to say!

Yes.

I am not handsome!

In this entertainment industry filled with all kinds of handsome men and beautiful women, I'm not at all considered good-looking. I might be a TV host, but there are times when I really do not know how to express myself. I do not know how I should tell you what I'm feeling inside. I, Zhang Ye, have never harmed anyone nor ignored my conscience. I'm willing to give my all for you guys. I can go through all kinds of hardship for my country and fellow people, but I just don't know how I should tell you!

I can dig my heart out for all of you to see!

Would you like to see it?

I truly can dig my heart out for you to see!

It's red, really, and scalding!

Do you guys get it?

Do you...understand?

"Every morning,

"at the edge of the city,

"I wear a lonely mask.

"But in the nightly

"wilderness of music,

"I turn into a heartfelt, roaring giant.

"On a stage that stretches forever,

"on the other side of not being understood,

"I come alive with ego and dignity."

All of a sudden, Zhang Ye grabbed the shirt over his chest, held onto it for dear life. He grabbed it with so much strength that it was like he was trying to dig his heart out.

"I'm ugly,

"but I am so tender.

"Dull in the day!

"Eternal at night!

"That's who I am!

"I'm ugly,

"but I have music and beer!

"Sometimes soaring!

"Sometimes humble!

"But always good at waiting!"

Yao Jiancai had at some point clenched his fists!

Chen Guang's eyes had reddened without him knowing. All the things he wanted to say had been said for him by The Clown. This song had given voice to his innermost feelings so much that wanted to rush up on stage with a microphone and sing along!

The audience was getting pumped up!

On the big screen, the cameras captured several male audience members crying as well!

This was not done for the effect of the show, and they definitely weren't people recruited by the program team. They were crying from the live atmosphere in the studio and The Clown's heartbreaking voice. It made those who were in the same boat lose control of their emotions!

Yes! They were ugly and lowly!

But they were really tender and would never cower!

The girl who had said that she was someone who judged others based on their appearance was now wiping away her tears. "I only like handsome guys. I don't like celebrities who aren't good-looking, have never, and definitely won't ever! But can anyone tell me what's going on with me right now? Why do I like The Clown so much!"

Suddenly, the music stopped.

The entire studio fell so silent you could hear a pin drop!

Zhang Ye raised his microphone and, singing in a cappella, his voice reverberated through the studio.

"I'm ugly,

"but I am so tender.

"A little lowly,

"a little fearful,

"but I'll never cower."

Flowing Time was silent.

He had been silent ever since The Clown sang his first line. He asked himself if he could have won if he had used that Mandarin song versus The Clown.

The answer was no!

He realized that he would probably not have won!

No one could beat The Clown and his song!