

Superstar 1041

Chapter 1041: Winning!

The performance ended.

Suddenly, a few female audience members stood up.

"I love you, The Clown!"

"I'll love you no matter how ugly you are!"

Applause rang out through the studio!

Screams came from all places!

"This is so good!"

"This song is so amazing!"

"What a good song this is!"

"I'm ugly, but I am so tender?"

"I want to learn this song! I must learn it!"

"The Clown surprises us every time!"

"Yeah, I thought that The Clown wouldn't do well this week. When I read a lot of the comments by industry insiders and other people, they were all talking about how he had done too well. Now that we were into the fourth episode, the audience would no longer feel that he was fresh. That would only make it harder and harder for him to proceed and possibly even put him on the decline. But after listening to him sing today, I find that all those comments are bullshit! How could The Clown not be good enough? Is this what you call not good enough? Is this what you'd fucking call a decline?"

"Each of his songs gets better!"

"What I most admire about The Clown is that he tells a story through each of his songs. And, the stories are always about himself and fit the situations to a T!"

"How surprising!"

"Where did all those songs come from?"

"I don't know. Damn, who on earth wrote them for him?"

"Even a master lyricist and composer like Wang Zhuishu, who is on the judging panel, could not possibly come up with so many earth-shattering songs in such a short span of time, could he? Could it be that Wang Zhuishu, along with Zhang Ye and a dozen of those famous songwriters, fucking wrote all those songs for him? And they're even tailor-made for him and the situations that he's in? That's impossible! If it were that way, why hasn't anyone recognized him yet?"

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

The shouting came wave after wave!

This song that had come from Zhang Ye's previous world was the famous classic by Zhao Chuan, "I'm Ugly But Tender 1," and it had shocked everyone in the studio. A classic would always be a classic. This song that had stood the test of time in Zhang Ye's previous world was also capable of shocking people here now that it had been brought to this world!

The host came back onstage.

Dong Shanshan smiled. "Let's welcome Marshal Persona back to the stage."

Marshal Persona came back up to the stage and gave The Clown a nod.

The Clown nodded back to greet him.

Dong Shanshan looked over to the guessing panel. "Judges, what do you think?"

Chen Guang opined, "My eyes turned red just now. After four episodes of King of Masked Singers, this is the first time I've felt my eyes turn red in the studio. I don't have much to say. This song affected me deeply. Marshal Persona sang well today. In fact, he sang especially well. However, The Clown's performance can only be described with two words: absolutely perfect!"

Amy said, "Earlier, Teacher Chen and Teacher Yao told us about how people who don't exactly have outstanding looks have it almost impossible in the entertainment industry. Although I personally feel that Teacher Chen and Teacher Yao are both quite handsome, after I finished listening to your song, I experienced a lot of emotion. I won't say anything more as there isn't much else to say." She spread her hands and said, "I just like The Clown very much, so much that I can't use words to describe my like!"

Zhang Xia talked from a technical point of view, "Marshal Persona is a very good singer and is very comprehensive technically. I can tell from his singing that he has a very strong foundation and should be a professional singer. His status in the music industry should also be quite high."

Marshal Persona smiled.

Zhang Xia said, "As for The Clown, I really do not know who he is. There's no one I can match him to. Listening to his song today, it felt a little different from his previous two songs. There are even some parts where even the average person would think they could hear a mistake. Like the trembling in his voice? The crack in his voice? But I don't think that's what it is!"

Wang Zhuishu said, "Correct."

Zhang Xia continued, "The way The Clown sang today was by using his emotions to drive the music. He used his raw emotions to sing and transmitted his innermost feelings to everyone through the music. I've already said this once before, but this is such a high standard and not something that every singer can hope to have. This song's difficulty lies not in its high notes or other aspects, but in its expression of

emotion. Handling this emotional nuance is truly difficult and I personally believe that I couldn't sing this song either. There can only be two outcomes when singing this song. Either it gets sung really badly or it gets sung really well, of which The Clown belongs to the latter category! Even if the pickiest person faced The Clown's song today, they wouldn't be able to nitpick a thing! It's that good, just that good!"

The Clown nodded to express his thanks. He wanted to say "you're flattering me," but suddenly remembered that he might say it with an accent since this was a commonly used phrase in the Beijing region. So he did not dare to say it since he was afraid that he would get recognized immediately.

Yao Jiancai said, "If I were to vote, I would also vote for The Clown. It's just that simple!"

The judges were done commenting.

Dong Shanshan followed up with, "Alright, we'll proceed to the voting now."

The voting began!

The audience picked up their voting devices!

Marshal Persona looked at the audience, as did the judges. Actually, no matter what their comments were, it was all useless since the voting depended entirely on the audience. They had to be convinced of a contestant's performance. Just like in the previous round where Flowing Time and Spinach were at a pretty similar level of singing with an unclear difference, the audience did not see it that way and voted for Flowing Time in a one-sided affair. The right to vote and decision-making laid in the hands of the audience!

When the voting began, the conclusion became obvious!

When a lot of the people saw the real-time tallies on the big screen, they exclaimed!

The Clown: 10 votes.

Marshal Persona: 1 vote.

And then.

The Clown: 45 votes.

Marshal Persona: 9 votes.

The difference was too large!

There was basically no suspense as to how it'd end!

In the end, when the final tallies were counted!

The Clown's total votes: 377 votes!

Marshal Persona: 123 votes!

Dong Shanshan announced, "The winner of this match: The Clown!"

The Clown bowed in thanks.

Marshal Persona applauded the winner.

The moment he got off the stage, The Clown was surrounded by people!

Xiao Lu was flabbergasted. "Teacher, you were so awesome!"

Dafei said sincerely, "You sang great up there!"

Meanwhile, Flowing Time had gone backstage at some point in time and was nowhere to be found.

Han Qi was beyond excited. "Teacher Clown! Why didn't you use this song for the next round? With it, you definitely wouldn't have lost to Flowing Time, even against a hundred-plus Hokkien speaking audience members!" She was both happy for The Clown and bemoaning the disadvantage he had!

This song was incredible!

But what about the next round?

Flowing Time had challenged him!

Even if Teacher Clown had done well in this round, when he faced Hokkien singer Flowing Time in the next round, he would still not have a good chance of winning. In Han Qi's opinion, this huge killer move should have been used as a last resort. But Teacher Clown had brought it out in the first round!

However, Zhang Ye simply smiled, not saying a word.

The next round?

He had a song up his sleeve for the next round!

Chapter 1042: Flowing Time vs. The Clown!

On Weibo.

Someone broke the news.

"The Clown won!"

"Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously! I'm at the fucking recording studio right now! The program team took everyone's cell phones, but this bro has two of them! I'm in the bathroom secretly connecting to the Internet!"

"By how many votes?"

"300 votes to 100. The gap was massive!"

"What! The Clown has been singing amazingly for four episodes now! How does he continue to be so awesome?"

"This, this isn't scientific!"

"He wasn't just awesome! The Clown was godly today. I won't spoil for you guys, so watch it on TV tomorrow and find out for yourselves! Oh yes, Flowing Time also won his first round match. He won by a huge margin and steamrolled Spinach! And there was an unexpected incident that happened today. Your sister! When I saw the people attending the recording, almost all of them spoke Hokkien. I was dumbfounded. After I asked around, I found out that they were the employees of the show's sponsors from Xiamen and Chaoshan. There are close to two hundred of them! I'll reveal a little more. Flowing Time's identity is as good as confirmed. He's the flag bearer of Hokkien songs—Teacher Zhao Qiquan! Even though he sang a Mandarin song during the first round, we could still hear his accent!"

"Almost all of the audience are Hokkien speakers?"

"Damn, then what's there left to compete on!"

"What are these circumstances?!"

"Flowing Time will definitely win today!"

"What's wrong with Beijing TV?"

"Who knows! What a terrible mishandling of things!"

These Weibo messages were deleted soon after they were posted.

No one really knew if the messages were deleted by the person themselves or if Beijing Television found the person and made them delete them.

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At the television station.

In the waiting room.

Zhang Ye was watching the competition through the TV.

Flowing Time was the first person to proceed to the battle round while The Clown was the second to get through. The fight for the last spot in the battle round was about to begin.

Petal Shower vs. Sunset Glow.

In the previous episodes, Petal Shower had directly or indirectly come up against Sunset Glow. Based on prior experience, Petal Shower's chance of winning was up to 90% and she held a big advantage. Petal Shower performed very well onstage today as she once again went back to the type of falsetto that she had used in the first and second episodes. As she sang entirely in falsetto, her voice sounded ethereal. Although she did not sing to her third episode's godly level, it was still remarkable and she did quite well. Essentially, she had performed the song to her usual level.

That was how the judges saw it.

That was what the audience thought as well.

Zhang Ye also felt that Petal Shower would win.

But when Sunset Glow went onstage and raised her microphone, a lot of people were stunned!

It was still a slow song like before.

It was a love song.

But the Sunset Glow today was just too amazing. Be it her singing skill, voice, or song selection, it gave everyone a completely different view of her. It was a heaven-defying performance and she placed herself in a fantastic position!

This was what it was like being a singer. Talent was only one factor; the ability to perform onstage was another. For example, Zhang Ye was the type of performer who always did things spontaneously. Normally, his singing would probably be average. But when he got into the right mindset, he was able to perform exceedingly well. Today, Sunset Glow was undoubtedly in this frame of mind as well. She had sung a very classic oldie called "How Often Does the Sun Set in the West" to a very godly state. She had been tepid in her performances so far and had been keeping relatively quiet for the past three episodes. But in the fourth episode's recording, Sunset Glow had finally broken out!

Even Zhang Ye was utterly convinced after listening!

In the wings, Petal Shower was applauding Sunset Glow!

When the results came out!

Petal Shower: 218 votes!

Sunset Glow: 281 votes!

Sunset Glow won her match against Petal Shower to become the third person to get through to the battle round!

This was something no one had expected. But when they listened to this matchup's performances, it was still within reason. Someone had analyzed that even if The Clown were to go against Sunset Glow in the first round, it would have been very difficult to decide a victor between the two songs and who would win or lose. In this competition, it was not only The Clown and Petal Shower who knew how to sing. Those who could appear on this stage were all people who could suddenly burst onto the scene someday. In fact, everyone was more or less at the same level!

And the key reason that many people had analyzed the potential matchups before today's competition was that there was too much attention on Petal Shower. Ever since the first episode, discussions about her had never stopped. After three episodes, the audience had become all too familiar with her singing, style, and choices of song. This led to their anticipation lowering. Instead, it was Sunset Glow who had never excelled so far to suddenly perform so well. This surprised the audience greatly!

Thinking of this, a lot of people were feeling even less optimistic about The Clown's upcoming performance. Like Petal Shower, there was too much attention given to The Clown in the previous episodes. He was in the same situation as Petal Shower was earlier. Moreover, today Flowing Time also held the "home field" advantage in the studio!

The first round ended.

There was a 15 minute intermission between rounds.

By rights, the next round should have been the elimination round in which two contestants would be knocked out. But soon, the singers received a notification.

Han Qi knocked on the door and came in. "Teacher."

Zhang Ye looked at her. "What's the matter?"

"Please get ready." Han Qi said, "It's gonna your turn soon."

Zhang Ye asked, "Now?"

Han Qi nodded and said, "Teacher Petal Shower has a bit of a stomach ache, so the program team decided to record the battle round first. That's why it's gonna your turn soon."

Zhang Ye nodded. "Alright."

He was ready at any time.

Han Qi cheered, "You can do it!" In reality, she was feeling quite aggrieved and was not confident at all. If it were normal circumstances, she would feel that The Clown wouldn't lose today. But the problem was that the circumstances were not normal. At least a small half of the audience present today spoke Hokkien. Under such conditions, how could The Clown compete against Flowing Time? Even if he sang really well, it would still be a Mandarin song and the audience might not like it!

...

In the studio.

The judges were also notified of the schedule change.

Dong Shanshan went up onstage and told the audience, "There has been a last-minute change of plans. We'll be moving up the recording of the battle round."

With that announcement, the atmosphere in the studio immediately changed!

"They're going straight into this week's battle for the Masked King?"

"Flowing Time is returning to the stage soon?"

"This is great!"

"I've been waiting for some time!"

"Flowing Time is going to face off against The Clown?"

"I'm looking forward to it!"

"What's there to look forward to?"

"What's the matter?"

"Just look over there and you'll know. There's no suspense to the results of this battle round!"

Many of the audience members looked over.

They saw two groups of many people in the audience wearing the same outfit and shouting in Hokkien. Some of them were cheering while others were shouting Flowing Time's name. When they heard that Flowing Time and The Clown were going to come back onstage next, the atmosphere at their spot in the audience immediately grew frenzied. Many of those who came to attend the recording today were waiting for just this moment. The challenge that Flowing Time had issued to The Clown had caused quite a commotion throughout the country and everyone was waiting to see how it would turn out!

The cameras started rolling.

The battle for the Masked King has begun!

The host's voice resounded, "Let us welcome—Flowing Time."

A round of applause rang out!

"Flowing Time!"

"Go for it!"

"Teacher Zhao, you can do it!"

"Can you sing a Hokkien song please?"

"Don't sing Mandarin songs anymore!"

"Flowing Time, I love you!"

Flowing Time came out onto the stage with a smile. When he saw the audience's expressions and heard their screaming, he got into a great mood and became very confident as well, although this was no longer a matter of whether he was confident or not. On today's stage, it almost felt like he had home field advantage. Flowing Time didn't think that he would lose at all, nor was there any reason to think so. It was just impossible for him to lose since he was the only Hokkien singer here today. He already had an overwhelming advantage, so all he had to do now was sing well and the title of Masked King would safely go to him!

Just a while ago, The Clown's performance had indeed left him stunned.

Later, Sunset Glow's performance had greatly surprised him.

If he had sung a Mandarin song, Flowing Time felt that he definitely wouldn't have beat the two of them. The two of them were in excellent shape today, but it would totally be a different story if he sang a Hokkien song! Even without counting those numerous audience members in the studio who could speak Hokkien, Flowing Time still had his own reasons to be confident. Although the Mandarin song he sang in the first round was very good, that was not his true talent. As a Hokkien singer, his forte was in singing Hokkien songs. His talent was totally different when singing in these two languages. It was like he was two completely different people!

Chapter 1043: 'Strive Hard to Succeed'! (First Half)

Onstage.

The music started playing.

Flowing Time's stage presence was already entirely different from his first round's performance. The moment the music started, he skipped along to the rhythm as he danced playfully for a bit. Compared to his previous song, he was able to let himself go. This was who he really was!

"Ignore me.

"Squinty eyes.

"Hey, ho, hey."

Flowing Time sang loudly!

Authentic Hokkien spouted out with every line!

When the audience heard, they immediately got pumped up. A lot of them were waving fluorescent glow sticks in their hands along to the beat.

At the judging panel.

Amy looked next to her. "Is it Teacher Zhao Qiquan?"

Zhang Xia smiled and said, "He has to be!"

Wang Zhuishu nodded. "I can confirm that he's definitely Old Zhao. I've known him for many years, but I haven't had much contact with him for the past two years. I never expected that industry veteran Old Zhao would come and join King of Masked Singers. This will be interesting. It's been a long time since I've heard him sing, but he's as passionate as ever!"

Chen Guang also nodded firmly. "There's such a huge difference when Flowing Time sings a Hokkien song instead of a Mandarin song!"

Chen Yidong praised, "It's indeed wonderful!"

Yao Jiancai was delighted from listening to the performance. "Is this what the top Hokkien singer is all about?"

How legendary!

How cool!

This song was called "Squinty Eyes." Not many people had heard of it before, because Hokkien songs were less mainstream in this world and there were only a few well-known ones. Flowing Time probably considered how if he sang those well-known Hokkien songs that he had sung so many times whenever he got featured on television shows and in his concerts, everyone would probably be sick of them. It would no longer bring any excitement to the audience, so perhaps it was due to these considerations that he chose this song.

The audience members who understood Hokkien were bought right into this performance!

These people loved watching King of Masked Singers. Among them, there were some who liked The Clown, and some who were fans of Petal Shower, Sunset Glow, and the others. But now that there was

suddenly someone singing Hokkien songs on the show, it brought a warm and familiar feeling to them, and they would definitely give their full support to him. Right now, be it The Clown or Petal Shower, they were both forgotten by these people!

This was human nature and easily understandable. For example, when you meet your fellow people in your hometown, you would not feel anything different and might even feel annoyed sometimes. But if you went to a different city and suddenly heard someone speaking your hometown's language on the buses or in the streets, you would surely be overcome by a surge of affection!

There was a man among them who was dressed differently from the employees. He obviously had the air of a boss and was likely one of the advertisers' upper management or even their CEO. He was probably a fan of Zhao Qiquan as he was currently standing and clapping with all his might!

The atmosphere was great!

Some of the audience members who did not understand Hokkien also got energized from listening. Although there was a language barrier, they could still look at the translated lyrics shown on the second teleprompter display behind the contestant. This teleprompter display was not meant for the contestants but the audience to look at. Some of the Hokkien words could not be translated word for word, and there were even some verses that were very difficult to translate into Mandarin, so only a transliteration was possible.

"Squinty eyes.

"Smiling guise.

"Ohh...ohh!"

When he was coming to the end of the song, Flowing Time even started dancing.

This "Squinty Eyes" was sung almost to perfection by him. From the song, his singing skills, to the musical arrangement, everything was flawless!

Although there were some people from Xiamen and Chaoshan who felt that this song's lyrics were just average, and that Flowing Time should have sung one of his more well-known songs, they were still quite satisfied that they could listen to a Hokkien song at the live recording of King of Masked Singers.

The song ended!

Everyone stood up and applauded!

"Good!"

"It was really quite good!"

"Experience still counts for a good showing!"

"I'm beginning to like Hokkien songs!"

"Me too! It was pretty good!"

Even some of the audience members who did not understand Hokkien also came to be interested in Hokkien songs. This was because either only Cantonese or Mandarin songs had been performed on this stage; everyone had heard them too often. So today, the audience was quite curious when someone suddenly sang a Hokkien song. They enjoyed it greatly!

Flowing Time bowed and went offstage with a smile.

When the audience saw this, they gave their most enthusiastic applause to him once more!

Flowing Time did not return to the waiting room. After he left the stage, he waited in the wings as he still needed to go back onstage after The Clown and Sunset Glow were done performing. Flowing Time kept his eyes peeled in the direction of the waiting area as he was quite curious about what song The Clown would sing this time to compete against him for this episode's Masked King!

At the judging panel.

Zhang Xia asked, "What do you guys think The Clown's and Sunset Glow's chances are?"

Wang Zhuishu laughed dryly and said, "They probably don't stand a chance."

When Chen Yidong turned around and saw those Hokkien audience members whose enthusiasm had not subsided yet, he also laughed. "I think so too. How are they going to compete with him this way?"

He had practically brought all of his extended family along!

A third of the people in the studio spoke Hokkien!

Chen Guang analyzed, "Actually, Sunset Glow still has some hope. Her form is very good today and she has maintained a low profile in each of the last three episodes, so the focus on her is lower than The Clown and Petal Shower's. The audience also seems to be looking forward to her performance, but as for The Clown...this round is much too difficult for him."

Amy added, "Unless he can come up with some weird surprises again!"

In the waiting area.

Zhang Ye listened as he watched without saying a word.

Han Qi was anxiously stamping around. Judging from the audience's reaction, Teacher Clown was definitely done for. If this were a normal recording like any other day, Han Qi would have been fine with things as long as The Clown was not eliminated. It was not like he had to be the Masked King every episode—that would be quite impossible—since he had already won it twice. Today was different. Flowing Time had issued the challenge and news of it had spread all over the Internet. If Teacher Clown lost today, who knew what Flowing Time would say? He was here to seek justice for Li Yu after all!

Han Qi did not like Flowing Time as she felt he had been hyping up the incident for his own benefit. Although he had some status in the industry, he was still just a minority language singer. His popularity was considered high, and he hadn't appeared on television for a long time. Before this episode's recording, Flowing Time had challenged The Clown directly. He even used the excuse of seeking justice for Li Yu to attract news and discussion interest onto himself. At the studio, he provoked The Clown through speech on more than one occasion. Now that there were many audience members who could

speak Hokkien attending the recording, Han Qi couldn't help but suspect that this was all planned by Flowing Time!

How despicable!

He was just using The Clown to increase his own popularity. Did Teacher Clown offend you or something?

Li Yu was one!

Zhao Qiquan was another!

There were really all kinds of people in the entertainment industry!

Han Qi angered the more she thought about it.

But The Clown did not have much of a reaction. No one knew what he was thinking about.

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

Dafei came over and said, "Break a leg, Teacher."

Xiao Lu apologized, "I'm sorry, Teacher Clown."

The program team felt quite apologetic as they believed it was their negligence that led to this match between The Clown and Flowing Time starting off in an extreme state of unfairness!

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "It's alright."

He slowly walked out onstage.

Petal Shower had recovered a little and came over as soon as she could.

Sunset Glow and Spinach were also standing in the wings.

Everyone knew that it would be very difficult for The Clown to defeat Flowing Time!

Flowing Time was already breaking out into a smile underneath his mask. He was very relaxed as he gazed with great interest at The Clown, onstage. He knew that he already had this round in the bag.

The audience was also discussing, as well as pointing at The Clown.

"It's The Clown turn now!"

"It's time to decide who the victor is between the two of them?"

"Actually, the result is obvious!"

"The Clown won't win."

The lights turned off.

The studio grew quiet.

Chen Guang and Amy sat up straight. Even though they knew that The Clown did not really have a chance of winning, they still couldn't help but look forward to his second song of the day!

Everyone focused their attention on The Clown!

Everyone was paying attention to every move he made!

Zhang Ye looked at the judges, then the audience. From the looks in their eyes, he could see many things.

I can't beat him? These were the words Zhang Ye had heard most today. Someone mentioned it right in front of him, and he also overheard others who said it in their private conversations. He also knew that Flowing Time had home field advantage today as many of audience members could speak Hokkien. But Zhang Ye never once thought he would lose. He could afford not to fight for the crown of the Masked King today. But you, Zhao Qiquan, if you want to use me as a stepping stone to climb higher? You wish to use me to elevate yourself? Then of course I'm not going to let you have your way! You want to step on me by resorting to those petty tricks? You think you can beat me by getting some audience members who speak Hokkien?

You have really underestimated me, Zhang Ye!

I'll show you what you get for underestimating me!

All of a sudden, Zhang Ye's entire aura changed!

Zhang Xia was taken aback.

Petal Shower looked bewildered.

Flowing Time frowned.

The music started playing!

This melody was still a song no one had ever heard of before. When they saw the title of the song, it was also a song that they hadn't come across before. "Strive Hard to Succeed"? It was obviously an original!

Flowing Time smiled when he saw the title!

Strive hard to succeed?

What are you striving hard for?

How are you going to strive hard?

This is not something you can succeed at just by trying hard! You sure are naïve! Alright then, I'd like to see how you are going to strive hard and how you are going to succeed!

A Mandarin song?

Or a Cantonese song?

Hur hur, sing whatever you want!

The Clown raised his microphone lightly.

Then, when The Clown sang the first verse of the song, Flowing Time received a bolt!

The Clown sang.

"Don't despair when you're in the mourn.

"Don't be afraid when you're forlorn.

"Passing time without any hope,

"Every day going down to tope.

"A person without a soul is like a scarecrow."

Chapter 1044: 'Strive Hard to Succeed' (Second Half)

Holy shit!

Holy shit!

Holy shit!

When The Clown opened his mouth to sing, everyone was dumbfounded!

Flowing Time was so shocked he nearly fell down!

Amy stood up in shock!

Wang Zhuishu was stunned!

Hu Fei and Xiao Lu's jaws dropped!

In the wings, Petal Shower, Sunset Glow, and Spinach nearly lost their footing!

The studio audience went slack-jawed!

It was Hokkien!

It was a Hokkien song!

What was going on?

What the fuck was happening?

How could The Clown possibly know how to sing a Hokkien song? This was impossible! I-It was just impossible! When did he learn Hokkien? Who, who could've written all those songs for him?!

The Clown did not even look at how everyone reacted or the expressions on their faces. He just sang loudly and fluently in Hokkien.

"Life is like the waves on the sea.

"Sometimes up, sometimes down.

"Good luck or bad,

"We still must continue to work.

"Thirty percent Heaven's will!

"Seventy percent hard work!

" Strive hard to succeed 1 !"

Oh my god!

Amazing!

It was so goddamn amazing!

The audience members who could understand Hokkien felt like they had seen a ghost. It was quite expected that Flowing Time would sing a Hokkien song because Flowing Time was Zhao Qiquan. He was a professional Hokkien singer and had been singing Hokkien songs for over a decade. But who was this Clown person? Who the fuck was this guy? How could there be someone else who could sing Hokkien songs in such a way? And be it his voice, singing, or vocal technique, all of them was even slightly better than the best Hokkien singer, Zhao Qiquan? This...this...

And where did this song pop out from?

Even though it was their first time hearing it, why was the melody so good? And the lyrics were good as well?

The Clown continued singing.

"Don't despair when you're in the mourn.

"Don't be afraid when you're forlorn.

"Passing time without any hope,

"Every day going down to tope.

"A person without a soul is like a scarecrow."

One!

Ten!

A hundred!

Many of the audience members started standing up!

Especially those who understood Hokkien—they had the greatest reaction out of everyone. Many of them were waving the fluorescent glow sticks in their hands madly as they watched, dumbfounded!

This song was incredible!

It was so good!

"Life is like the waves on the sea.

"Sometimes up, sometimes down.

"Good luck or bad,

"We still must continue to work."

Flowing Time's face turned green from anger!

When the nearby Spinach saw the look on Flowing Time's face, she burst out laughing.

When Sunset Glow noticed Spinach laughing, she let out a giggle as well. Looking at The Clown who was onstage and Flowing Time who stood in the wings watching, she had to give props to The Clown!

Chen Guang was impressed!

Zhang Xia was impressed!

Yao Jiancai was impressed!

The program team staff and everyone present were all impressed!

They didn't know what words they could use to describe The Clown with anymore!

The Clown pointed to the ceiling and sang.

"Thirty percent Heaven's will!"

Dong dong!

"Seventy percent hard work!"

Dong dong!

"Strive hard to succeed!"

Along with the beat, the audience got fired up!

Amy yelled, "Why does he even know Hokkien?!"

Wang Zhuishu said, "Who knows!"

Chen Guang said in amusement, "This person has truly brought us surprise after surprise, over and over again. By the way, who was the one that said The Clown would definitely lose this round?"

Zhang Xia smiled and said, "You were."

Chen Guang coughed, "Did I? I didn't say that."

Yao Jiancai laughed heartily. "Old Chen's trying to go back on his words. Stop denying it!"

Chen Yidong said in a speechless manner, "Who would have thought that he could sing in Hokkien and have such an original song lineup as well! Aiyo, I'm really impressed. Who in the world is he?"

As they listened to the song and chatted among themselves, they could not help but look to Flowing Time. Just by the shocked expression seen in Flowing Time's eyes behind his mask, they knew he could not have expected that The Clown would actually sing a Hokkien song even in a hundred lifetimes!

It truly was a matter of striving hard to succeed!

Everyone had underestimated The Clown!

In the previous episode, they could feel the pain on Li Yu's face!

In this episode, they could feel the pain on Flowing Time's face!

Han Qi was extremely excited as she waved her hands with all her might and screamed from the wings. Everyone thought that The Clown would surely lose, but who could have guessed that he would bring out this song!

"Life is like the waves on the sea.

"Sometimes up, sometimes down.

"Good luck or bad,

"We still must continue to work.

"Thirty percent Heaven's will!

"Seventy percent hard work!

"Strive hard to succeed!"

Flowing Time was already cursing in his head. He still did not wish to believe that The Clown was really singing a Hokkien song. It was unlike the Cantonese songs that many people knew how to sing. As there were more good Cantonese songs around, those who liked listening to Cantonese songs would more or less know how to sing a few lines as well as pronounce the lyrics quite accurately. Flowing Time had sung in Hokkien, which was considered as a minority language. Moreover, there weren't many Hokkien songs that were especially popular in this world!

So how the fuck did you manage to know how to sing this one?

You can even goddamn sing something like this?

Fucking hell, aren't you too multi-talented?!

You must be doing this on purpose!

On the stage.

The Clown finished performing.

The audience erupted into cheers and applause!

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

The audience members who understood Hokkien were shouting the loudest!

When Flowing Time saw this, his heart skipped a beat. He knew that he might actually lose today. The home field advantage he was relying on had turned into The Clown's advantage! He had intended to step on The Clown to win the competition, but who could have known that The Clown would slap him soundly instead! Flowing Time really regretted coming onto this stage. He didn't gain much popularity and, from the looks of it, might even lose the initial popularity and status he had had!

Although there were winners and losers on this stage, with even Petal Shower losing before, it was really no big deal. However, the current situation Flowing Time was in was different. He provoked The Clown by challenging The Clown to verse him. In the end, as a flag bearer of the Hokkien music scene, he got smacked in the face by a foreigner who sang in Hokkien? What sort of feeling was this? Just thinking about it made it unbearable for him to watch!

How could it just be painful for his face?

It was so painful that it felt like his balls were being crushed!

As Flowing Time thought about it, his face flushed red and green!

Zhang Ye quickly walked off the stage.

Petal Shower gave him a thumbs up!

Spinach raised both her hands and gave him two thumbs up!

Sunset Glow laughed dryly. "It was Flowing Time's misfortune to have bumped into you!"

Spinach nudged her chin in a certain direction. "Teacher Zhao is almost in tears! Teacher Clown, you were so ruthless. That was really ruthless, hahahahaha!"

Today's competition had been quite exciting!

Someone wanted to die while others wanted to laugh.

Everyone was even more baffled by The Clown now. The urge to go onstage and pull his mask off grew even greater as everyone wanted to find out exactly who The Clown was!

You can sing Mandarin songs?

You can sing Cantonese songs?

You can even sing a northeastern-accented song?

And now? You can even sing a fucking Hokkien song?!

Where did you learn all these from? Where did all these songs come from?

Chapter 1045: An extra round!

The Clown had exited the stage.

It was the next contestant's turn to go on.

However, there were still some people in the audience discussing him in astonishment.

"Zhao Qiquan didn't turn out to be such a big deal after all!"

"Just who is the true Hokkien singer between the two of them?"

"The Clown sang much better than Flowing Time!"

"Yeah. Without a comparison, no one would have known. But the moment they both sang a Hokkien song, I got shocked!"

"So it turns out that Zhao Qiquan, the so-called best Hokkien singer, is only so-so. It's not that his singing is good, but that there's too little competition in the Hokkien music scene. Not many people sing Hokkien songs, but once any of those elite singers sing in the language, any one of them would be better than him!"

"That's not really how it is. It was only because The Clown was so good that it made it seem like it."

"Right, the guy's incredible. How does he know how to sing everything!"

"He has already sung pop songs, rock songs, folk songs, a song without lyrics, songs with lyrics, a Cantonese song, a northeastern-accented song, Mandarin songs, and even a Hokkien song!"

"This is a singing show, but why does it feel like I'm watching a martial arts film instead? The Clown is really versatile and skilled in so many areas! Hahahaha! I'm dying of laughter!"

"That was really enjoyable!"

"This episode's gonna be wonderful!"

"This is what a professional singing competition should be. The Voice pales in comparison!"

"It's Sunset Glow's turn now!"

"Right, Sunset Glow is also a fearsome competitor today!"

Dong Shanshan smiled and said, "Now, let's hand the stage to Sunset Glow."

Sunset Glow went onstage.

The audience was very accommodating as they immediately quieted down.

Sunset Glow nodded to express her gratitude. Then she looked at the band and nodded at them, signaling that she was ready to start.

In truth, in this round of the competition, The Clown's and Sunset Glow's chances of winning were very slim. It was very difficult for the two of them to compete against Flowing Time as he probably had an 80% chance of winning. This was because Flowing Time was a Hokkien singer and a lot of Hokkien audience members had turned up for today's recording. But when The Clown sang "Strive Hard to Succeed," he ruthlessly reversed the situation and utterly broke up Flowing Time's chances of becoming

the Masked King. Further, with those two Hokkien songs performed, Sunset Glow as the remaining singer performing a Mandarin song actually gained an advantage. This was because the audience's curiosity had been dulled, and the hundred-plus votes from the Hokkien speaking audience were allocated between The Clown and Flowing Time. With such subtle changes to the circumstances, Sunset Glow instead became the one with the highest chance of becoming the Masked King among the contestants!

"You asked me,

"Why I never cower.

"You asked me,

"Why I never panic."

After just two verses, all the judges revealed astonished expressions! Was Sunset Glow on steroids today? Her form was spectacular. It looked like she had already familiarized herself with this stage. She did not feel nervous anymore and was able to let herself go. Perhaps this was what you call a late bloomer? No wonder even Petal Shower was taken down by her during the first round!

Once the song finished, the studio thundered with applause!

A lot of people were moved by the gentle and soothing voice in Sunset Glow's singing. This song was originally a rock song and was a song that had shot a male rock band to fame. Now, Sunset Glow had arranged it and used a quiet and womanly voice to sing the song. Be it the audience or the judges, none of them had ever heard anyone sing the song like this. It was extremely original and everyone was very impressed with it!

The audience was faced with a dilemma!

"This is too difficult to choose!"

"Yeah, who should I vote for?"

"They are all super great!"

"Sunset Glow was so incredible! I didn't pay much attention to her before, but I could never have expected that she would be such an amazing singer!"

"Sunset Glow should probably win this!"

"Yes, she has really good chances of becoming the Masked King!"

"The interpretation of the song was very well done!"

"It looks like The Clown will perish together with Flowing Time today. The two of them fought such a battle and the victor has been decided, but Sunset Glow should benefit the most from their fight!"

"Let's see what the judges are going to say."

"I still haven't decided who to vote for."

Dong Shanshan went onstage.

The Clown and Flowing Time were also invited back to join her.

Dong Shanshan smiled and said, "Wow, I'm really enjoying today's competition." She gestured to her rear. "This is the first time that I've realized that live singing can really make one sweat." She looked at the judges and said, "I wonder what the judges think. Teacher Zhang Xia?"

Zhang Xia smiled. "In fact, I was sweating too just now."

A smile hung from Dong Shanshan's lips. "You did too?"

Zhang Xia nodded and said, "When I listened to Sunset Glow's singing, I enjoyed it to the point of sweating. But when I listened to The Clown's singing, I was...sweating with shock!"

Everyone laughed!

Indeed, a lot of people were shocked just now. No one could have expected him to sing a Hokkien song so fluently the moment he opened his mouth. At that time, even the Miracle Wheels band members, who were playing the live accompaniment for his performance, were shocked. This was because The Clown did not sing the lyrics during the rehearsal beforehand. Hence, all of them thought that it was going to be a Mandarin song!

Zhang Xia thought for a moment. "If I were to vote, I would vote for Sunset Glow today. She was fantastic!"

Sunset Glow bowed. "Thank you, Teacher!"

Chen Guang laughed and said, "The Clown is the singer I most admire today. I never thought that he would still have that sort of song. But if we are judging from pure singing skills and fine details, I would probably vote for Sunset Glow."

The Clown nodded.

Sunset Glow bowed again. "Thank you."

Yao Jiancai chuckled, "I would vote for The Clown. I can't give any professional comments here. I just feel that "Strive Hard to Succeed" was just that good!"

The judges expressed their opinions.

Four of them supported Sunset Glow while two of them supported The Clown.

Standing next to them, Flowing Time was left hanging. Only Wang Zhuishu, whom he knew from long ago, praised him a little and even that was just a symbolic gesture. The other judges did not even bring him up in their comments. Actually, this was probably the best outcome for Flowing Time. Whether the singing, lyrics, or melody, Flowing Time knew that he was far inferior to The Clown's Hokkien song. If the judges really used their professional point of view to analyze, Flowing Time would be even more disgraced. As the best Hokkien singer, he would have been even more embarrassed!

Then the voting began!

The tallies for each of them kept changing!

The audience's shouts and expressions kept changing as well!

"Ah, The Clown's votes went up!"

"Sunset Glow is in first place now!"

"Give your vote to Flowing Time!"

"Aiyo, vote!"

"Sunset Glow!"

"The Clown!"

The voting ended!

But Zhang Ye did not even turn around to look because he did not have the thought of competing for the title of Masked King in mind today. Nobody could be the center of attention all the time. He had to occasionally give the chance to other people. Besides, he was already making preparations for the King of Masked Singers' grand finals by keeping a low profile. If he kept being the center of attention and the height of popularity and brought out all his killer moves this early on, how could he handle the grand finals of the competition?

As a result, he felt great. This fellow was here today to teach Flowing Time a lesson, and his objective had been met!

However, when the voting ended, he realized that the audience looked surprised. Dong Shanshan also delayed announcing the results!

What was going on?

What has happened?

Did Sunset Glow win?

The audience was stunned.

The program team was stunned.

The host was also stunned.

"Uh..."

"This..."

Zhang Ye couldn't help but turn around to have a look. He was also slightly taken aback by what he saw!

Flowing Time: 36 votes!

The Clown: 232 votes!

Sunset Glow: 232 votes!

They tied!

The Clown and Sunset Glow's tallies were exactly the same!

Dong Shanshan giggled and looked over to Hu Fei and the program team staff offstage. "This is the first time such a situation has arisen. We never expected that there would be a tie, so let me seek the program team's views on this."

Offstage.

The program team staff gathered together to discuss this.

Flowing Time was the most tormented person onstage. His tally was so low that he could not bear to look on any further. It was really, really appalling to look at. Just choose a winner already and end it quickly. Why are you all still making me stand onstage with everyone? Are you people trying to ridicule me? Can't you come to a decision more quickly?!

The audience:

"Flowing Time lost so terribly!"

"Pfft, he was the one who started the clamoring and provoked The Clown a few days ago. But in the end, the outcome turned out like this? He still intended to seek justice for Li Yu? I'm already feeling embarrassed for him!"

"To the victor go the spoils!"

"Flowing Time is no match for The Clown!"

"Yeah, it's useless even if he practices another few years since these two singers are on totally different planes."

"I never expected a tie."

"I thought that Sunset Glow would win for sure."

"That's right. Even the majority of the judges were supporting Sunset Glow."

In fact, Zhang Ye himself was not prepared for this result. He also thought that Sunset Glow would be crowned this episode's Masked King. But he couldn't have expected that the audience would give him so much face. Zhang Ye was hoping that they would stop discussing any further and just declare Sunset Glow as the winner of this episode. He was willing to forfeit this round automatically. But he definitely could not say that as it would be showing disrespect to Sunset Glow. The last time he lost on purpose was because he was targeting Li Yu. But he couldn't do that again as Sunset Glow would definitely not agree with it!

A few minutes later.

The outcome of the discussion was decided!

Dong Shanshan received the program team's instructions through her earpiece. "Mhm...mhm...yes, I understand." Then she smiled and announced, "Since who becomes each episode's Masked King is quite important as it affects the order of appearance in the grand finals of King of Masked Singers, our program team has decided to implement an additional round!"

The audience got excited the moment they heard!

"Wow!"

"An extra round?"

"Haha, that's great!"

"We get to listen to another two songs!"

"I bet Sunset Glow will win!"

"My bet is on The Clown! That guy's abilities can't be fathomed!"

Dong Shanshan looked at the two contestants and asked, "Do you two have any problems with that?"

Sunset Glow was in excellent condition today and she was highly competitive too. She glanced at The Clown, then nodded and said with a smile, "I don't have any problems with that!" It looked like she wanted to compete with The Clown to see who was better.

Zhang Ye smiled and said in return, "Then I have no problems with it either."

Chapter 1046: Deciding the tiebreaker match song!

In the recording studio.

The program team hammered out some details regarding the tiebreaker match.

Then, Dong Shanshan received the information through her earpiece and announced the rules for the tiebreaker with a perfect smile on her pretty face, "The tiebreaker match will begin soon. Due to the show's time constraint, each contestant will have two minutes of performance time. After they finish performing, six of the judges on the guessing panel will vote to choose this episode's Masked King."

The judges could vote?

Have the rules changed?

Chen Guang said with a laugh, "We hold the authority today."

Amy was also quite happy since they did not need to have the right to vote.

They understood the program team's intentions. The team must have wanted to prevent the show from progressing too monotonously, always following the same rules. Otherwise, the audience would get sick of watching it. They could make use of this tiebreaker match to make an adjustment and let it become a rule to follow in the future. If a tie happened again, they could use today's rules to decide on a winner.

Dong Shanshan looked at The Clown and Sunset Glow. "Our two singers?"

Sunset Glow said, "OK."

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "I understand."

Dong Shanshan smiled and said, "Then would the two of you please start prepping now."

The two of them nodded and left the stage.

The cameras stopped rolling.

Dong Shanshan told the audience, "We break for 15 minutes."

Although the actual broadcast would seamlessly continue into the tiebreaker, at the live recording, there would definitely be a need to allocate some time for the contestants. As they had only prepared two songs today, and the need for a third song was due to unexpected circumstances, it was absolutely necessary to give The Clown and Sunset Glow some buffer time. It was easier for Sunset Glow as most mainstream songs would not be a problem for the band. They could easily play her accompaniment without much practice. But as The Clown's song selections were a little more troublesome since he was always singing originals, the tiebreaker match presented more difficulties for him.

Zhang Ye did not seem to mind as he was prepared to give up the title of Masked King.

Perhaps Sunset Glow could already see it. She suddenly stopped in her tracks in the corridor and turned around to look at him. "You don't seem too keen on winning today."

Zhang Ye said, "That's not true."

Sunset Glow said seriously, "I can sense it."

Zhang Ye felt a little embarrassed. A woman's intuition was really not something that should be trifled with. In truth, he did not treat the tiebreaker too seriously and was planning to just sing a random song. After all, Sunset Glow was probably someone he knew personally. Since she was in excellent shape today, he did not wish to compete against her for the title of Masked King.

Sunset Glow said, "I want a fair and square match. Can you oblige?"

Zhang Ye did not say anything.

Sunset Glow looked into his eyes and said, "Don't you concede to me."

Zhang Ye gave a wry smile. "I would never."

"Good." Sunset Glow nodded. "See you onstage."

Zhang Ye replied, "Yeah. I'll give it my best shot!"

Sunset Glow was happy. "I hope you'll walk the walk. I don't care for being the Masked King if you just hand it on a platter to me." Then she went to find Music Director Bai Yuanfei to discuss her song for the tiebreaker match.

In The Clown's waiting room.

Walking in, Zhang Ye felt a little embarrassed. Since Sunset Glow had put it so bluntly, what could he say? He also started to feel like he was disrespecting this stage and Sunset Glow!

Concede?

Go easy?

Actually, were they really any better than each other? Even if he did not hold back, he might not be able to beat Sunset Glow today. The thought he had was already belittling others in and of itself. Zhang Ye was a person who could accept criticism and was also critical of himself. Alright, I'll sing properly this time then. Whoever wants to be crowned Masked King this episode will have to depend on their individual talents!

But which song should he sing?

He had not prepared another song in advance!

Immediately, Zhang Ye turned serious. Giving it some thought, the songs sung in this episode's competition were too impressive and the audience's emotions had been brought to a high by the performances. If he had to choose a song for this tiebreaker match, Zhang Ye would not want to sing a fast song or one with high notes. He'd prefer to sing a rather calm song.

Dong dong.

Someone knocked on the door.

Zhang Ye said to the outside, "Please enter."

Three people came in from outside. They were Han Qi, Hu Fei, and Dong Shanshan.

When he saw Dong Shanshan, Zhang Ye became nervous. Every time he met Dong Shanshan in the program team's workspace as The Clown, his entire person would be wary. Because she was not just anyone, but his university classmate of four years. In addition, after graduation, they had lived and worked together as colleagues, so Dong Shanshan knew Zhang Ye very well. He did not even dare to cross his legs in front of her as he was afraid she would recognize him instantly. As a result, his speech and actions all had to be "uncharacteristic" of him. For example, he folded his arms in a way which he usually did not.

Dong Shanshan said, "Teacher Clown."

The Clown looked at them.

Dong Shanshan asked, "Sunset Glow is just about done preparing and will be ready anytime. If you need more time here, we can still delay a bit more."

Hu Fei said, "If not, we can also leave the tiebreaker match's recording for after the elimination round is done. In any case, we skipped past the elimination round and went straight to recording the battle round just now."

The Clown said calmly, "It's alright."

Dong Shanshan confirmed with him, "Are you sure?"

The Clown nodded.

Dong Shanshan looked at Hu Fei. "Director Hu, shall we proceed as planned?"

"Yes," Hu Fei acknowledged.

Dong Shanshan smiled and said, "Then I'll speak freely later."

Hu Fei said, "Sure. Thanks for the hard work."

Dong Shanshan looked at The Clown as she blinked and said, "You can continue preparing for now. We'll await your word, then?"

Han Qi said, "Teacher, you can do it!"

The Clown nodded and gazed at Dong Shanshan and the others as they left.

As the door was not fully closed yet, he could hear Hu Fei talking to Dong Shanshan. "Teacher Shanshan, I saw the info on your ID card and know that your birthday is next month. What would you like as a present?"

Dong Shanshan replied, "There's no need for that, Brother Hu."

"Then why don't we organize a birthday party for you?"

Dong Shanshan seemed to want to refuse him. "There's really no need to. Actually, my birthday is not—"

"Hur hur, that won't do," Hu Fei interrupted. "This is what our department's usual practice is. You're not exempt."

The door closed.

He could not hear the voices anymore.

Zhang Ye was stunned. Dong Shanshan's birthday? Next month? How could that be?

He immediately looked at the calendar, and then laughed. He facepalmed and silently cursed himself for being so harebrained. It was already that day? He had almost forgotten about it! He even forgot to send her his well-wishes! As her old classmate of many years, an old friend, and an old colleague, he really did not deserve to be called all that!

He was hoping to gift her a song now.

But which song?

Zhang Ye could not think of anything, but he remembered the lottery draw. So he simply opened the game ring's virtual screen and activated the Lucky Halo (Upgraded). In Lottery Draw (One), he added 500 additional stakes!

The wheel began to spin!

Spinning and spinning...

It spun and spun...

Finally, it stopped in the Skills Category region!

Gold Treasure Chests (Small) appeared!

[Guitar Skill Experience Book] × 500: Increases player's guitar skill experience.

Guitar?

How convenient.

Piano? Guitar? He was now equipped with these two performance skills!

After he deactivated the Lucky Halo, he narrowed his eyes to a slit.

Guitar.

Guitar.

Why not that song?

Alright then, that song it is!

Chapter 1047: Happy Birthday, Ms. Dong!

Around the stage.

Scattered voices were sounding from all around in the audience.

"Why isn't it starting yet?"

"Hurry up, I can't wait anymore."

"Good things are worth waiting for, haha. Don't worry!"

"It's already been 10 minutes? Just 5 more minutes and it's gonna start!"

"I'm really looking forward to the tiebreaker match between those two!"

"Speaking of performance ability, Flowing Time really isn't comparable to The Clown and Sunset Glow. It's really exciting to see them both fighting for the crown of Masked King in this episode!"

"I can't wait to see how it turns out!"

"Who do you guys think will win?"

"If we're talking about their form, Sunset Glow is totally unbeatable today!"

"The contestant's form isn't everything. Do you guys still remember the competition's first episode? The then Clown was so sick, and his voice had deteriorated so badly as well, so how could he be in good shape? Yet he was still crowned Masked King in the crucial first episode! The Clown has always been someone who's really unpredictable!"

"Are they coming on yet?"

The audience was getting excited and eager for the next match to begin.

Everyone was waiting for The Clown and Sunset Glow to take the stage.

In the wings, Petal Shower and Spinach were also watching.

Spinach asked, "Sister Petal Shower, who do you think will win?"

Petal Shower laughed and said, "I'm more optimistic about Sunset Glow's chances today, but I'd like to hear what The Clown will sing."

Spinach's eyes lit up. "Me too. I just want to hear what he'll sing this time."

Dong Shanshan checked her watch and felt that it was almost time to begin. She went onto the stage in advance and had a short exchange with a few staff members to brief them on the things to look out for later.

Dong Shanshan said, "Hand the microphones to the contestants at the waiting area in a bit."

The staff said, "Got it, Teacher Shanshan."

Dong Shanshan said, "Those of you who are standing here, move a little to your right. You're blocking the third camera's view."

"OK."

"Understood."

After everything was set, Dong Shanshan stood there to catch a breather. She suddenly remembered Hu Fei's words and could not help but reveal a helpless smile. On the way here to the stage earlier, Xiao Lu and Dafei also seemed to be preparing for her "birthday" next month. The two of them did not put it clearly but were trying their best to find out what kind of things she liked. They were probably trying to prepare a gift for her. However, Dong Shanshan was too embarrassed to let them know that the actual day of her birthday was not next month.

It was today!

Today was the actual day of her birthday!

Not many people knew this!

Because of a mistake made during her birth in which her parents completed her birth registration late, the birthday shown on her household register and ID card was late by a full month. But as particulars were already exposed and her birthday was also posted for all to see online, no one knew that it was her birthday today and everyone believed it to be next month. In fact, in recent years, Dong Shanshan stopped explaining. She had always been the carefree type and since others thought that her birthday was on that day, she'd just let it be. Besides, she also felt quite helpless about it.

Her earpiece crackled.

"All departments, attention. All departments, attention. The contestants are ready and standing by."

"Ten seconds and counting down."

Dong Shanshan adjusted her suit and nudged her gold-rimmed glasses upward.

"Three..."

"Two..."

"One..."

Instantaneously, a glittering smile appeared on Dong Shanshan's face as she announced, "Next, we'll be heading into the tiebreaker match. Let's welcome—The Clown!"

Screaming came from the audience!

"The Clown!"

"Break a leg!"

"I love you!"

"I'm so looking forward to this! I'm really looking forward to this!"

"What song will he be singing? Will it be a Cantonese or a Hokkien song?"

"Eh? Where did the band go?"

The Clown walked onstage in his usual unhurried pace.

Chen Guang noticed it first. "Where's the band?"

Amy was startled. "Oh yeah, why isn't the band there?"

Everyone was dumbfounded when they saw The Clown walk toward where the house band should have been and pick up an electric guitar from among the musical instruments!

Spinach said in surprise, "A guitar?"

Petal Shower did not expect this either. "He even knows how to play guitar?"

Wang Zhuishu said, "What's this supposed to mean?"

Yao Jiancai asked with interest, "Is he going to sing and play at the same time?"

Zhang Xia gasped. "He's quite brave. He's going to be playing and singing at the same time on this stage?"

Singing and playing a guitar at the same time without any accompaniment might be workable in street or pub performances. But on a grand stage like this with such a large audience, this way of singing and performing was much too risky. It wasn't something most people could handle!

Dong Shanshan was stunned by this too. After she handed the stage to him, she went off and looked at The Clown curiously.

The Clown had taken his seat onstage. He clasped the guitar and adjusted himself while one hand strummed the strings to check the tuning.

Everyone focused their attention on him!

No one knew how he was going to sing or what song he'd be singing.

Sunset Glow unwittingly made her way to the waiting area to look at The Clown onstage.

Zhang Ye shifted in his seat, then smiled.

He wanted to dedicate this song to a certain someone today, a very important person to him and was someone he liked a lot, someone who used to give him butterflies.

He could still remember the first time they met. It was during an English class in university. It would be a wonder if Zhang Ye, someone who got into Media College by tossing a pen to answer his English tests' multiple choice questions, could understand the English classes in university. The teacher had distributed a set of papers on that day, which gave him such a headache that he was crying out in his seat with worry. That made the female student seated right in front of him turn around. She looked at him and smiled. Zhang Ye could remember that smile with perfect clarity. Even today, he still couldn't forget that smile of hers.

It was very sweet.

And very beautiful.

Zhang Ye smiled.

As he strummed the guitar, a dulcet melody took to the air.

Chen Guang was stunned. "A ballad?"

Amy wondered, "Is he singing a ballad this time?"

The next moment, they were no longer talking.

The Clown started singing softly.

"Ms. Dong.

"You've never forgotten about your smile.

"Even if you're just like me, eager to get senile.

"Ms. Dong.

"When your lips curl downward, it's so pretty.

"Like the pure water under Anhe Bridge in the city."

Dong Shanshan froze!

The judges and audience also froze!

Ms. Dong?

Which Ms. Dong?

Amy instinctively glanced at Dong Shanshan!

Many of the audience also instinctively looked toward Dong Shanshan!

The Clown smiled as he continued playing and singing.

"Ms. Dong.

"I, too, am a complicated creature.

"Saying one thing, replaying it inside as a feature.

"Ms. Dong.

"Time flew by that night at Gulou.

"Stranger, please give me a Lanzhou 1 ."

On the day after their English class, that female student was very patient as she explained the questions to him one by one. In fact, thinking about that right now, Zhang Ye had not really taken in anything she'd said on how to answer those questions. He only cared about looking at her while replying with "mhm's" and "ah's." But that female student still patiently explained things to him and even assured him that English was actually very simple. That was likely the most they had ever talked during their days in university. After their second year, there wasn't too much interaction between them.

Zhang Ye knew that they were people from two different worlds.

One was a fairy from heaven.

The other was just an earthly mortal.

But somehow, the two of them became best friends after graduation. She confided in him that she did not wish to get married and shared many other things with him. To others, she was someone who liked to laugh and didn't speak truthfully to people. But the person they knew was not the real her.

I know the real her.

Strong.

Carefree.

With many stories to tell.

Zhang Ye closed his eyes and sang.

"So, Ms. Dong, all those things may not be true.

"You aren't a schoolgirl with no stories to look to.

"Befriended a wild horse, but there's no prairie in my home.

"This makes me feel despair, Ms. Dong."

A lot of people were covered in goosebumps!

They were uncontrollably brought back to their days of youth!

Chen Guang said, "This..."

Wang Zhuishu's jaw dropped and he stared. "Wh-Who is he singing this for?"

In the wings, Sunset Glow and Petal Shower were looking at Dong Shanshan in shock!

Dong Shanshan was stunned, her eyes reddening as she gazed unblinkingly at the young man singing onstage. All sorts of images were suddenly conjured up by her mind's eye!

They flashed in front of her eyes one after another!

Touched!

Dazed!

Shocked!

Zhang Ye also experienced a lot of emotions. He remembered the times they were on campus when their group was chatting and fooling around. He remembered the times after graduation when that female student brought up those memories of their times on campus. That female student's expression at that time looked a little nostalgic and sentimental, or perhaps it was a look of sadness?

Zhang Ye continued playing and singing.

"Ms. Dong.

"You closed your book, and started talkin' 'bout the past.

"You said to let the first half of life be, tomorrow's still at last.

"Ms. Dong.

"You know I've shared enough goodbyes.

"And on one May morning, I finally lost sleep likewise.

"So, Ms. Dong, all those things may not be true.

"You aren't a schoolgirl with no stories to look to."

Tears were somehow rolling down Dong Shanshan's cheeks!

Is this song for me?

The Clown!

Do...you know me?

The Clown sang in a cappella.

"Befriended a wild horse, but there's no prairie in my home.

"This makes me feel despair, Miss Dong.

"So, Ms. Dong, all those things may be true.

"Who's gonna go out of their way to comfort that ignorant young man?

"I wanna be like you, ignore all those reasons.

"Cheer up.

"Ms. Dong."

The thrumming of the guitar fell silent.

The Clown's hands stopped moving.

He suddenly looked in the direction of Dong Shanshan and sang:

"Happy birthday.

"Ms. Dong."

The strumming of the guitar came back.

The melody and voice resonated throughout the studio!

When they heard the last verse, a lot of people were suddenly enlightened!

Hu Fei laughed and said, "So it's not a song for Teacher Shanshan."

Xiao Lu wiped her sweat away and said, "Yeah, I also got a fright. I thought that The Clown and Teacher Shanshan knew each other!"

People in the audience also heaved sighs of relief.

"Dong Shanshan's birthday is next month, right?"

"That's right, it's next month!"

"Then that song isn't for her!"

"I knew it! But that still gave me such a scare!"

However, when Dong Shanshan heard the last verse of The Clown's song, she had a totally different reaction from everyone else. Dong Shanshan's hair stood on end at that moment as she was dumbfounded with an astonished expression! No one should know it. There were not many people who knew when her actual birthday was! At this moment, Dong Shanshan was almost sure that The Clown definitely knew her!

Happy birthday?

How did you know!

How did you know that today is my birthday?!

Who are you really?

The Clown!

Just who the hell are you?!

Chapter 1048: Who is the Masked King this episode?

He finished singing.

The Clown put down the electric guitar and bowed before exiting the stage.

Only then did the audience's applause gradually sound. Many people had not even come around from the images brought about by the vocals, but the song had already ended!

Just two minutes. That was how short it was.

"I haven't had enough of it yet!"

"Why is this song so good!"

"I like it so much!"

"Me too, I love this song to death!"

"Ms. Dong ? Who was The Clown singing this for?"

"Who is Ms. Dong?"

"It doesn't sound like his lover, but it's definitely someone very important to him!"

"This song has such a good feel to it. This ballad really brought me back to the time when I was still in school!"

"Although I don't know what some of the verses mean or what the story behind it is, I'm sure that the Ms. Dong he is singing about would definitely understand. It's really good."

"Whose birthday is it today?"

"Me! It's my birthday today!"

"Is your surname Dong?"

"No, my surname's not Dong, but my second maternal aunt's husband's is."

"Get lost! Who's asking about your second maternal aunt's husband!"

The stage was emptied.

The audience was in heated discussion.

The judges were also exchanging their opinions.

Zhang Xia said, "This song is actually...how should I put it?"

Chen Guang shook his head. "It's not easy to describe."

Wang Zhuishu added, "Let's talk about this later, it should be Sunset Glow's turn now? Eh? Where's the host? Why hasn't anyone announced the next contestant?"

Sunset Glow was already on standby behind the door.

However, Dong Shanshan was still standing offstage in a daze. It was as though her soul had left her body as she stood there thinking about something. She even forgot to announce the next contestant.

Xiao Lu ran over. "Teacher Shanshan!"

Dong Shanshan turned around. "Ah?"

Dafei didn't know how to react. "What's the matter with you?"

Xiao Lu laughed and said, "The Clown has finished singing."

Only then did Dong Shanshan come around. She immediately went back onstage and said, "Let's welcome our next performer—Sunset Glow."

Dafei whispered to Xiao Lu, "The song that The Clown sang, could it really have been dedicated to Shanshan?"

"No way." Xiao Lu blinked and said, "Teacher Shanshan's birthday is next month. The dates just don't match."

Sunset Glow took the stage.

The house band also came on.

Zhang Ye did not go far. He stayed just offstage to listen to Sunset Glow's performance. Sweeping his peripheral vision, he realized that someone was watching him. He turned to look into the distance.

It was Dong Shanshan!

Zhang Ye smiled and looked away.

He was very satisfied with today's song and had been very serious when he sang it. He modified some parts of the lyrics like "fell in love with a wild horse" into "befriended a wild horse." Then, there was the part of "extinguishing your cigarette and reminiscing about the past" that got changed as Dong Shanshan did not smoke, as well as that ending verse of "happy birthday, Ms. Dong." He had sung it according to his personal style, not the original version by Song Dongye or Zuo Li's cover of "Ms. Dong." He had performed this song based on what he felt in his heart.

Sunset Glow's performance had begun.

"That day, we said nothing to each other.

"Standing at the bus stop, you frowned.

"When suddenly, I felt the urge to grab your hands.

"Yet, I did not.

"I did not."

It was another love song!

It was still as good a listen!

It was still as exquisite as before!

The Sunset Glow today had truly performed in a godly manner. It was as though she had been enlightened and suddenly had a breakthrough. Her entire scope of singing skills was fully embodied into this performance!

Even Zhang Ye couldn't help himself and wanted to shout about how good it was!

The song ended!

The applause continued for a long time!

Zhang Ye was also smiling and clapping the wings.

Dong Shanshan had gone back onstage at some point in time. "Let's welcome The Clown back to the stage."

Zhang Ye strode out and made his way up.

Dong Shanshan still behaved very professionally. She kept a smile on her face and did not look at The Clown a second longer than required. "The tiebreaker match has come to an end. What do our judges have to say? Or perhaps we could also proceed straight to the voting. Remember, your votes will decide who becomes the Masked King this episode. Please choose carefully."

Yao Jiancai nodded. "Understood, Ms. Dong."

Dong Shanshan said, "Please vote then, Mr. Bite."

The judges laughed.

The audience egged them on.

Bite Building Materials. This was the name Zhang Ye had given Old Yao during their crosstalk when he teased him.

After some bantering, it was time to get to the main event.

Wang Zhuishu started the commenting. "I feel that Sunset Glow performed really well today. There's nothing I can find fault with at all, it's just that good. Whether it's her singing or emotion, it was all on point. The Clown's previous two songs were also especially good. But that third song called 'Ms. Dong,' I feel that it's not as good as the other two when it comes to the lyrics and melody. Of course, that's just my opinion. As I am a lyricist and composer, I'm very picky on these two aspects. I understand that it's not easy for an original to do well, not to mention that every song you've performed thus far has been an original. Since it's everyone's first time listening to them, you're usually at a disadvantage, especially in a competition. But since you performed it on this stage, I have to evaluate it objectively."

The Clown laughed.

Dong Shanshan looked at Wang Zhuishu. "Then who do you choose?"

Wang Zhuishu said, "I'll be giving this vote of mine to Sunset Glow!"

Sunset Glow bowed in thanks.

The Clown clapped next to her.

Chen Guang spoke up, "Let me say a few words as well. This ballad is a rather quiet one and usually wouldn't require an electric guitar. But I can understand why The Clown would choose to play and sing simultaneously. It's due to the stage and set being quite large with a lot of audience members, and in this atmosphere, an acoustic guitar wouldn't be able to sustain the performance. That's why he chose to use an electric one. But, even though he restricted the noise to a very low level and controlled the vibrations when playing, I still found it to be too noisy. Perhaps I was the only one with this issue, so I shall reserve my feelings on it. I'll also give my vote to Sunset Glow."

Sunset Glow gave her thanks.

The Clown nodded and clapped.

Chen Yidong said, "I think the guitar part was alright. He played really well and I can accept the change from an acoustic guitar. I do not think it's a problem at all, although I couldn't really understand the song. So, I'm sorry, but I'll be voting for Sunset Glow."

Out of the six judges, Sunset Glow had gained three votes!

The audience began to bellyache.

"What's this?"

"Why are they all voting for Sunset Glow?"

"Damn, I liked 'Ms. Dong'!"

"Me too! It's such a good song!"

"What do you mean you can't understand?"

"The evaluations of the judges had all been great, but I think that they've finally reached their limit this time! It's too unprofessional!"

"If Sunset Glow gets another vote, she'll win!"

"Honestly, I don't care who wins. I feel that both of them performed incredibly. But if you say that the song, 'Ms. Dong,' is not good? Then I'll definitely disagree with you!"

Many in the audience complained!

However, the tiebreaker match's votes were for the judges to decide, not them.

At this moment, Zhang Xia said, "Maybe it's because I'm old, but I don't really understand what 'Ms. Dong' is trying to express either. Also, the song is somewhat mellow. The other ballads I know are like that too, but in the current setting, the song is definitely at a disadvantage. So I'll also vote for Sunset Glow. She definitely deserves to become the Masked King today!"

Four votes!

Sunset Glow had won!

It was Yao Jiancai's turn to speak. "'Ms. Dong' is a rather nice song. But compared to The Clown's previous songs, it was indeed a little lacking and couldn't showcase his technique as much. Although I've been supporting The Clown all this time and like him a lot too, I'll also be voting for Sunset Glow today."

5 votes!

Sunset Glow bowed. "Thank you, Teacher."

But for reasons unknown, Sunset Glow showed no trace of happiness or excitement. Her eyes turned to The Clown and seemed to contain a tinge of unhappiness.

The Clown smiled wryly.

What are you looking at me for?

What's up with that gaze of yours?

Afterwards, the last judge commented.

Amy was silent for a while before suddenly saying, "Before, even if I had a different opinion from the other judges, our general understanding was still quite similar. But that isn't the case today." She stood up, a little agitated, and protested for The Clown, "I know Sunset Glow and have confirmed who she is. Logically, I would vote for her since we've known each other for many years. But I'm really can't do so today. My vote will definitely and absolutely, a 100%, be given it to The Clown! There's no two ways about it!"

When many in the audience heard this, they suddenly started clapping for Amy!

Amy looked at the judges next to her. "So what if he used an electric guitar? Playing a ballad on an electric guitar is not something that nobody's done before![1.] This song was not nice? How can that be? By the time I listened to the third verse, I could feel goosebumps rising all over me." She rubbed her arms. "And they're still there now!"

Bba bba bba bba!

The audience's applause boomed again!

Chen Guang lifted his arms and pressed them down and said with a laugh, "Calm down, calm down."

Zhang Xia added, "To each their own. That's quite normal."

When Amy heard that, she sat down and said, "Yes, ballads are not considered mainstream, and most people would not use a ballad in a singing competition either, but this 'Ms. Dong' is no ordinary ballad. The Clown's singing also wasn't ordinary at all, so I really can't accept this result."

Wang Zhuishu smiled and said, "But it's five against one."

That's what the rules were.

With five out of six judges saying that "Ms. Dong" was just ordinary and with Sunset Glow already as today's Masked King, whatever Amy said had no effect on the outcome at this point.

Dong Shanshan smiled and said, "Then let's congratulate Sunset Glow for taking the crown of Masked King this episode!"

Sunset Glow gave her thank you speech.

The Clown had already quietly departed from the stage.

Looking at Amy, Zhang Ye smiled inside. He rather liked this girl as she spoke without qualms and seemed even more headstrong than him. In fact, Zhang Ye could accept this result. It wasn't that he was worse than Sunset Glow, but that he knew that back in his previous world, "Ms. Dong" wasn't an instant hit. Sometimes, after listening to it several times, one would start thinking of their own "Ms. Dong." Afterwards, they would start falling in love with this song until it got out of control. This was why Zhang Ye did not mind the result. If he had really wanted to become the Masked King today, he wouldn't have chosen to sing this song.

It was fine if the judges didn't like it.

Even if the audience didn't like it, that was alright too.

As long as Dong Shanshan liked it—that was all that mattered. As long as Dong Shanshan could understand it, it was good enough. Today, this song was meant for Dong Shanshan alone!

Happy birthday.

Ms. Dong.

Chapter 1049: Zhang Ye, you're The Clown, aren't you?

Later that afternoon.

Recording continued into the elimination round.

In his waiting room, Zhang Ye called Yang Shu.

"Hello, Little Yang."

"Senior Bro."

"Come and pick me up."

"Alright, I'll be there immediately."

He had planned to leave after he finished recording his parts, but with Yang Shu saying that she'd be there immediately turning into half an hour later, he got a call from her. She sounded embarrassed.

"Senior Bro."

"Are you here?"

"No, I...I'm still stuck on the road."

"Where are you?"

"Xizhimen Interchange."

"Wow, how'd you end up all the way at Xizhimen Interchange?"

"I got lost."

"But you dropped me off here this morning!"

"But weren't you giving me directions this morning?"

"Use the built-in GPS!"

"Uh, I don't know how to use it."

This junior sister of his was way too unreliable!

Whatever! She can come whenever she arrives. I'll just wait.

Zhang Ye was forced to stay behind to watch the competition between Petal Shower, Spinach, and Marshal Persona. Among the three of them, two would be eliminated. It was very cruel, but those were the rules. In the end, Petal Shower won to almost no surprise. Petal Shower was feeling a little unwell today, probably because her menstrual cycle had arrived as she had been complaining of stomach cramps earlier. She was in average shape, but no matter how average she was, she was still a strong competitor. She couldn't possibly lose at this stage.

Marshal Persona did not reveal himself and exited the stage, keeping the audience in suspense.

Spinach chose to take her mask off. At the moment of the reveal, gasps of astonishment filled the studio!

It was a very pretty young lady!

She wasn't old and looked to be around twenty, maybe even younger!

Liao Yiqi!

It was Liao Yiqi!

"Wow!"

"It's her!"

"What the!"

"H-How does she know how to sing?"

The judges had already figured out who she was, but many audience members hadn't!

Liao Yiqi. She was the granddaughter of a famous Peking opera master, a professional Peking opera singer. Liao Yiqi was also very well-known and had even gone on the Central TV Spring Festival Gala before, but of course that was to perform Peking opera! No one had expected that they would see her on this stage. Wasn't this crossover too huge of a leap? A Peking opera singer singing pop songs? And she even sang quite well?

All the judges gave her a standing ovation!

The entire studio audience also stood up and cheered for her!

"Liao Yiqi!"

"Liao Yiqi!"

"Liao Yiqi!"

Spinach's eyes reddened. She was very touched and clasped her hands together to thank everyone. She said, "Thank you, thank you, teachers. Thank you, everyone, thank you!"

Zhang Xia smiled and said, "There's still the revival round! We'll be waiting for your return!"

Liao Yiqi, also known as Spinach, looked at the judges. "I definitely will!"

This reveal had greatly surprised everyone and left them in disbelief!

Meanwhile.

Yang Shu finally arrived from the upper side of Xizhimen Interchange. She called Zhang Ye to tell him that she had arrived.

In his waiting room, Zhang Ye was just about to get changed and leave. But there was a knock on the door and in came Sunset Glow.

Zhang Ye was startled. "What's up?"

Sunset Glow gazed at him. "Didn't I say to not go easy on me?"

Zhang Ye laughed dryly. "I didn't."

"If you're like that, what's the point of me grabbing the title of Masked King?" Sunset Glow said coolly. She wanted to become the Masked King at least once, but why did it now feel like she had been given the win?

Zhang Ye finally understood why Sunset Glow had seemed a little unhappy despite getting crowned as the Masked King. So this was the reason. He said at once, "You became the Masked King today based on merit. Did you think that I didn't sing seriously?"

Sunset Glow quietly nodded. "Your song was simply average."

But Zhang Ye laughed. "That might not be true."

Sunset Glow looked at him with some doubt.

Zhang Ye tacked on, "You don't believe me? Then let's wait and see." So many people felt that "Ms. Dong" was just average? They even thought that I was holding back? You guys are really funny. Would I need to do that? Forget it. It doesn't matter what I say now. Let's just wait till after tomorrow's broadcast and we'll know how this song does. Zhang Ye, in truth, did not agree with the judges' evaluation of the song. He was waiting to smack them in the face. But of course, it might be his face getting smacked. He couldn't say for sure since it was a different world after all, so who knew?

20 minutes later.

Zhang Ye had quietly sneaked out of Beijing Television. He found his car in the parking lot and opened the door to the front passenger seat and got in.

Yang Shu looked at him cautiously. "Senior Bro."

Zhang Ye said, "Drive."

"OK." Yang Shu quickly started the engine.

As they drove, Zhang Ye started criticizing her and also taught her how to operate the GPS. Then he continued scolding her.

Yang Shu listened in silence.

Later, when Zhang Ye realized that she probably couldn't recognize the roads because she had arrived in Beijing recently, he stopped chiding her. He started humming a ditty in a good mood.

Yang Shu gave him a furtive glance, then heaved a sigh of relief.

Yang Shu might act impetuously around others, but she was still very afraid of Zhang Ye.

At this moment, a call came in!

This was a call that Zhang Ye was rather unwilling to pick up right now!

It was Dong Shanshan!

Zhang Ye cleared his throat and answered with a chuckle: "Hello, Shanshan. What's up? Who won today? I didn't get to watch the latter half of the recording since I went home."

The voice on the other end stayed silent for a moment.

Dong Shanshan then said: "Go on, keep pretending."

Zhang Ye faked surprise and said: "Ah? Pretend about what?"

Dong Shanshan probed: "You're The Clown, aren't you?"

"Whoa!" Zhang Ye said in surprise: "What are you talking about? The Clown? You must really have a rich imagination!"

Dong Shanshan laughed and said: "If it's not you, then who is it?"

Zhang Ye said: "How would I know who it is? I would like to know too. Hey, why'd you even guess that it was me? It's not like you don't know what my singing sounds like, right?"

Dong Shanshan rolled her eyes and said: "You can even fly a plane, so who knows if you could suddenly sing too? I wouldn't be surprised if you did!"

Zhang Ye couldn't deny this.

"So tell me. Don't lie to me!"

Zhang Ye coughed and said: "It's really not me."

Dong Shanshan said coldly: "Today at the studio, that last verse of 'Ms. Dong' was to wish me a happy birthday. If it wasn't you, who would it be? Who else knows that it's my birthday today?"

Zhang Ye pretended to be taken aback. "Huh? It's your birthday today? Isn't it next month?"

"You don't know?" Dong Shanshan blinked.

Zhang Ye said: "Why would I know? Have you ever told me when your birthday is?"

Dong Shanshan thought for a moment and suddenly felt uncertain. "I haven't told you before."

"Then that settles it!" Zhang Ye said: "Since I don't know, does that mean The Clown knows you? Could he be a relative of yours?"

Dong Shanshan said in a speechless manner: "I don't have any friends or family who can sing that well! There's only you who's worth being suspicious about. Are you sure that it's not you?"

"It's not me," Zhang Ye lied without even blinking.

With Zhang Ye standing his ground, Dong Shanshan got confused. She said: "Alrighty then, I probably guessed wrong. I'll go think about who it could be."

After hanging up, Zhang Ye could finally sigh a breath of relief and he laughed. Dong Shanshan had indeed not told him her birthday, but that did not mean that Zhang Ye did not know. When they were in college, Dong Shanshan had told one of her close friends that her birth date had been registered wrong. Zhang Ye was nearby at the time and accidentally overheard it. As he had liked Dong Shanshan at the time, he remembered this quite well. However, he had never given Dong Shanshan a birthday present in all these years.

Haha.

Keep guessing, just guess whoever you want.

In any case, this bro will never admit to it!

Yang Shu said, "Senior Bro, we're almost there."

Zhang Ye acknowledged her and said, "Pull over to the curb and help me get some cigarettes. There's no more at home."

"OK, Senior Bro," Yang Shu responded.

All of a sudden, his phone rang again.

Dong Shanshan said: "Are you sure that it's really not you?"

Zhang Ye said anxiously: "It's not."

Dong Shanshan gave a plain sound of understanding and said: "Swear to me. If it's really you, you won't be able to get breakfast when you want to buy some, and all the cigarettes that you buy will turn out to be fake, the same for any alcohol that you have..."

She rambled on for a minute about this.

Zhang Ye was dumbfounded!

Fuck!

You're too ruthless!

"Hurry up and swear to it!" Dong Shanshan urged.

Zhang Ye stemmed his tears and said: "Alright, I'll swear to it."

Only then did Dong Shanshan hang up.

Yang Shu parked the car. "Senior Bro, what cigarettes do you want?"

Zhang Ye was about to burst into tears. "Forget it. I don't want them anymore. Let's head back."

Chapter 1050: 'Ms. Dong' is a hit!

Saturday.

The fourth episode of King of Masked Singers was broadcast!

All over the country, countless people waited at their televisions and tuned into Beijing Television to catch the broadcast. As the show went on, a lot of people were getting excited and astonished by it. There were many discussions happening online as well!

"It's starting!"

"Wow, Spinach's singing is quite good!"

"Someone revealed that she is Liao Yiqi!"

"Ah? The Peking opera singer? Surely not?"

"It's true. Just listen to her singing. It really sounds like her!"

"It's Flowing Time's turn!"

"Damn, there's already no need to guess anymore based on that accent. It's definitely Teacher Zhao Qiquan!"

"He's the best singer in the Hokkien music scene! So he can also sing in Mandarin this well?"

"Haha, wait till he sings a Hokkien song. Then you'll know just how amazing he really is!"

"It's The Clown turn now!"

"Let's see what he's gonna sing!"

"The country's ugliest celebrity, lol."

"That poll was so funny! I keep laughing each time I see it!"

However, when The Clown's first song began, a lot of them could no longer laugh.

...

At a recording company.

"Don't be like this, OK?"

"Brother Liu, can you please listen to my song?"

"There's no need to. You won't make it. The company won't sign someone like you."

"Brother Liu! Give me a chance, I—"

"Don't tell me any more. I've already made it very clear to you, so just leave already. You don't have the looks, so my advice to you is to not take this route. You won't make it in this industry."

The young man silently left the recording company. With the dark night sky hanging overhead, he walked on feeling quite lost. He did not know where to go and how he should continue on from here. That was already the third company he approached. Every time he sent a demo to the recording companies, he would always get invited for an interview. However, when they saw him in person, those companies all turned him down without an exception. This was all because he did not have good looks nor the face of a star!

He liked music. In fact, he liked it so much that he felt that it was as important as his life. However, there was an insurmountable wall in front of him that he could not breach!

He had no way of doing so!

He really did not know what else he could do!

Give up?

Or maybe he should just forget about it?

Suddenly, he heard a voice singing.

The young man stopped in his tracks and looked toward a street food stall. When he saw the singer on the TV and heard his singing, he was shocked.

"I'm ugly,

"but I am so tender.

"Cold on the outside,

"passionate inside.

"That's who I am!"

The singer on TV put a hand over his chest.

"I'm ugly,

"but I have music and beer.

"A little lowly,

"a little fearful,

"but I'll never cower!"

The people who were eating at the street food stall were all dumbfounded when they heard the song. They could only stare in shock at the television.

The young man was also stunned in his tracks. Suddenly, a gush of tears poured from his eyes.

By the time the song finished, the young man's fists were tightly clenched. He wiped the tears off his face, then turned to walk off toward a bright light in the distance. His footsteps contained an unprecedented determination!

Thank you, Mr. Clown!

I know what I have to do now!

...

On Weibo.

"How spectacular!"

"Damn! This song is bursting with greatness!"

"I'm ugly, but I am so tender?"

"I cried listening to it!"

"Holy shit, I was the same!"

"I can't stop crying. Goddammit, what song is this!"

"It's such a nice song!"

"He came up with this song right after he got voted as the Ugliest Celebrity?"

"The champion, he'll definitely become this episode's champion!"

"Don't forget that there's still Flowing Time."

This "I'm Ugly But Tender" created a huge shockwave online. Countless netizens joined in the discussion as many of them were touched and inspired by the song!

Soon after.

When it was time for the battle for Masked King, everyone was once again shocked!

"Flowing Time really is Zhao Qiquan!"

"This Hokkien song is great!"

"Of course! This is Zhao Qiquan we're talking about!"

"This is the easiest singer to guess by far!"

"Let's see how the matchup between him and The Clown will go. Have you guys noticed that a ton of people in the audience are speaking Hokkien? Just listen, they're all cheering in Hokkien!"

"Yeah, what's with that?"

"Then won't Zhao Qiquan win for sure? Will there be any suspense to the results?"

Then The Clown sang.

"Don't despair when you're in the mourn.

"Don't be afraid when you're forlorn.

"Passing time without any hope,

"Going down every day to tope,

"A person without a soul is like a scarecrow."

The netizens were dumbfounded!

The audience was dumbfounded!

The industry insiders who were watching the show were also dumbfounded!

It was Hokkien!

The Clown could also fucking sing a Hokkien song?

And it was even an original that no one had ever heard of?

"This is bad for Flowing Time!"

"How painful!"

"Pfft! I'm dying of laughter!"

"Teacher Zhao Qiquan's fine reputation will be destroyed today!"

"He has as good as fallen to The Clown!"

"He's worse than The Clown, yet he still clamored for a match against him. Seems like he's the fool this time!"

"This 'Strive Hard to Succeed' sounds like an extremely good song!"

"Godly tune! An absolute godly tune!"

"He sang it so well!"

"Where does he get all his songs from?"

...

Meanwhile.

Zhang Yuanqi was currently on the phone with her manager, Fang Weihong.

"Are you watching King of Masked Singers?"

Fang Weihong said loudly: "I'm watching it. Who on earth is The Clown!"

"I was just about to ask you: Have you found out who he is yet?"

Fang Weihong said: "I totally can't find anything. You're not the only one who is concerned about this—everyone else in the industry wants to know who he is as well. But there are no clues to follow at all, and now he's even singing a Hokkien song too? He's a singer who knows how to sing Hokkien songs? This has widened the scope even further! The clues are too confusing! I suspect that The Clown is deliberately confusing the public because he's afraid that he'll get recognized. He's purposely trying to mislead us!"

They were completely confused!

...

At a recording company.

A vice president of the company made five calls in a row.

"Check! Check thoroughly!"

"But—"

"No buts! I want an answer as to who The Clown really is!"

"President Qi, I really can't find out. I-I've already asked everyone!"

"Then ask again! I don't believe that he broke out of some stone. Who in the industry would not know a singer as amazing as him? How can that be possible?! I want to know everything about him. If he doesn't have a contract with any recording company, we'll sign him immediately. If he's already contracted to one, then we'll steal him away at all costs! Can't you see? This man has the makings of a king!"

"I-I understand!"

...

On TV.

The voting for the episode's Masked King began!

The netizens were either anticipating it or feeling nervous. Many of them were "shouting" for their favorite singer's name online. When the netizens saw that the final results indicated a tie between The Clown and Sunset Glow, and with Dong Shanshan announcing the implementation of a tiebreaker match, they got excited!

"Awesome!"

"We can get to listen to another two songs now!"

"Go, The Clown, go!"

"Sunset Glow, you can do it!"

Afterwards.

The Clown went on stage.

The studio was filled with a song that became extremely popular for several years back in Zhang Ye's previous world, "Ms. Dong."

The Clown strummed his guitar as he sang.

"Ms. Dong.

"You've never forgotten about your smile.

"Even if you're like me, eager to get senile.

"Ms. Dong.

"When your lips curl downward, it's so pretty.

"Like the pure water under Anhe Bridge in the city."

...

The next day.

Sunday morning.

The air quality today was quite good. When Zhang Ye looked out the window, he saw white clouds and a blue sky.

Zhang Ye stretched his back before getting out of bed. Seeing the rather rare blue sky, he was feeling quite satisfied as he had played a part in contributing to it. Although he had been castigated and hated by a lot of people after the reveal of Zhang Ye's Documentary on Air Pollution in China that eventually led to his soft ban, Zhang Ye did not feel a tinge of regret whenever he saw a sky like today's.

After breakfast, he went to read up on Weibo.

He was stunned to find that there were many critical voices on his Weibo notifications.

For a person like Zhang Ye who often offended people on a large scale, his first reaction when he saw these critical voices was to wonder whether they were all aimed at him. This was because out of all those large scale scolding battles that happened on Weibo, the forums, or Tieba each year, 60-70% of them were targeted at Zhang Ye. He was feeling a little guilty, but this bro hadn't really stirred up any trouble recently, had he? I haven't even appeared much in public, no? When he read more carefully, he realized that the online criticism was not aimed at him!

"The Clown lost? Go fuck yourselves!"

"Were those judges all blind?"

"Do you all know music? How can 'Ms. Dong' not be nice? Oh my god!"

"I really have to give it to those judges on the guessing panel!"

"Amy was the only one with taste!"

"I could not hold myself back after I listened to this song once yesterday and played it on repeat over 20 times through the night! Over 20 times! How could the judges not vote for The Clown? I really have nothing to say to that!"

"That song was really great!"

"There should be a version of a 'Ms. Dong' in everyone's heart as well! But clearly, there's nothing at all in the hearts of those judges!"

"The Clown sang really well! Why wasn't he crowned Masked King this episode?"

"I like Sunset Glow too and I feel that she performed incredibly in the most recent episode. But I have to admit that for the two songs at the end, it was The Clown who sang better!"

"'Ms. Dong' was judged to be not good by Chen Guang, Zhang Xia, and the others. I'm speechless!"

"The entire song tells a story!"

"I don't know who The Clown was singing it to, but when I heard the song, my tears fell. No matter who that lady is whose surname is Dong, I would also like to wish her a 'Happy birthday, Ms. Dong!'"

Countless netizens were refusing to accept the result. They were all complaining on Weibo, and some of them were even flinging abuse at the outcome!

There were also sudden changes on the Top Chinese Music Chart!

The daily music chart's ranking had been published!

Some people felt that Sunset Glow's second song should have been ranked first. However, that song was only ranked in third place. Some people thought that The Clown's "I'm Ugly But Tender" should have been in first place. However, that song was only ranked in second place. "Strive Hard to Succeed" was ranked fourth on the daily music chart!

As for which song was in first place?

It was actually "Ms. Dong"!

And it was even far ahead of the second and third place songs!

This song had been a hit since last night. And today, it got even more popular, so popular that things got out of hand. All over the Internet, people were discussing this song and the controversy of why The Clown had not become the Masked King in the most recent episode!

...

Old Chen's house.

Fan Wenli had already made breakfast. "You misjudged it, didn't you?"

Chen Guang looked at his phone and couldn't help but give a wry smile. "I've been face smacked, right?"

"Yes," Fan Wenli laughed.

Chen Guang rubbed his cheeks and could somehow feel a little pain.

At other locations.

When Wang Zhuishu saw the Top Chinese Music Chart's rankings, he was dumbfounded!

Chen Yidong was speechless.

So was Yao Jiancai.

And Zhang Xia.

This ranking had caught them completely off guard!

That "Ms. Dong" which none of them had thought well of turned out to be the most talked about and widespread song of the songs sung yesterday! Now, they could not deny it even if they wanted to. This was because the market's reaction to a work was the most direct and fastest judgment of all!

They had misjudged the song!

They had truly misjudged the song!

This Clown was way too scary!