

Superstar 1541

Chapter 1541: Dear Showbiz, I trust you've been well?

On this night.

At Zhang Ye's house.

The main door of the villa was open. Zhang Ye was busy washing vegetables and cooking the dishes in the open kitchen all by himself. It was going to be the first meeting for the main cast of the drama In the Name of the People. Zhang Ye had chosen not to hold the gathering at a restaurant this time. Instead, he held it at his house because it meant a lot to him.

Outside.

The door was being knocked on.

Ning Lan was the first to arrive. "Zhang'er, may I come in?"

Zhang Ye said, holding a kitchen knife in his hands, "Come in, the door's open."

Ning Lan looked around. "Where's Minister Wu?"

Zhang Ye said, "Oh, her? She's working overtime today."

Ning Lan broke into a smile. She didn't even change out of her shoes and stepped in with her high heels still on. "You could have said so earlier. I wouldn't have knocked otherwise."

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Big Sis, can't you be a little more courteous?"

Ning Lan chuckled and said, "What's the need to be polite with you?"

Zhang Ye ordered her, "By the way, help me take care of my daughter. She's upstairs."

Soon after, Ning Lan went upstairs to bring Sisi down.

From outside, Yao Jiancai entered the villa. "Yo, kid, you're personally whipping up the courses?"

Zhang Ye grinned. "But of course. I gotta show you guys what I'm capable of, after all."

Yao Jiancai asked, "Is your wife around?"

"No, she's working overtime today," Zhang Ye replied.

Yao Jiancai also came in casually and started rummaging through the cabinets for tea leaves without any courtesy. "Where's the Da Hong Pao? Hurry up and hand them over!"

Sisi, who had just been brought downstairs, asked, "Daddy, who are they?"

Zhang Ye patted his daughter on her head. "They're your uncles and aunties. Have you greeted them yet?"

Sisi shook her head as she became rather shy.

Yao Jiancai got rather excited. "This is your daughter? Do you know me, little girl?"

Sisi tugged at her father's shirt. "Daddy, can you play with me?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Daddy is preparing some good food. Go find Auntie Ning and play with her."

Ning Lan clapped her hands and said, "Come here, Sisi, Auntie will play with you. Let your daddy cook dinner for us."

Outside the doorway, Zhang Xia also slowly walked in. "Is everyone busy with something? Hur hur."

Yao Jiancai greeted Zhang Xia.

Ning Lan smiled and said, "Grandma Zhang, this kid even managed to convince you to make a return?"

Zhang Xia smiled back. "Yes, I couldn't refuse him at all." Then she asked Zhang Ye, "Is your wife around?"

Before Zhang Ye could answer her.

Jiang Hanwei had also arrived.

The moment Jiang Hanwei came into the house, he said, "Minister Wu isn't at home?"

Zhang Ye rolled his eyes. "She's not around. She's working overtime today and probably won't be back before 9 PM. Hai, but this is really interesting. Why are all of you asking whether my wife is around or not the moment you step in?"

Ning Lan laughed and said, "Your wife is now an important minister at the Central Publicity Department. If she were around, do you think we would dare to speak so casually? We'd have to behave ourselves."

Zhang Ye said, "Don't worry about her. She is her, and I am me."

Dong Shanshan arrived shortly after as well. "Zhang'er, is your wife—"

Before she could finish asking, Zhang Ye was already answering, "My wife is not around. Make yourself at home."

All of the guests arrived.

Sun Qishuo: a big name in the theater scene.

Shu Han: a former A-lister.

Jiang Bin: a veteran actor who had debuted 30 years ago.

Over a dozen people had gathered here, but none of them needed any introduction to one another. Everyone knew each other, although some were more familiar with others, while some were just acquaintances.

Half an hour later.

The dishes were served and the drinks were waiting.

Zhang Ye said confidently, "Come, have a taste of my cooking!"

Dong Shanshan smiled and took a bite of the food. "It's pretty alright."

Ning Lan smacked her lips. "It's edible."

Only Shu Han was patronizing. After all, she wasn't all that close to Zhang Ye in the past. "It's quite delicious. I really couldn't have expected Director Zhang to be so good at cooking."

Zhang Ye said, "When my wife broke her leg years ago, I had the opportunity to learn and practice."

Ning Lan raised her glass. "May I suggest that we have a toast first? It's not easy for the group of us to gather here today. Especially for Old Jiang. I really couldn't have expected that you managed to convince him to join."

Jiang Bin wondered, "Yeah, didn't you two have some disagreements back then?"

Jiang Hanwei said indifferently, "Work is work, and private matters remain private."

Ning Lan asked, "Why has Shanshan come as well? You aren't lacking opportunities, right?"

Dong Shanshan said with a smile, "He came to my studio, crying and begging me to join the cast. My heart softened at the sight, so I said yes to him."

Zhang Ye was floored. "Did I?"

Everyone laughed.

With the first toast, it got lively on the dinner table.

Zhang Ye stood up and said, "Allow me to say a few words. I gathered everyone here today for the first meeting, but it's actually just a party for old friends. All of us here should know each other, right? Some of us have deeper friendship with others, while some of us might even have a grudge against someone. But with that toast earlier, and with this dinner party, let's all agree to turn over a new leaf. Let's gather all of our strength and focus it onto the project and act well for the drama. It's time that us old-timers produce some results for the world to see, so don't screw it up."

Yao Jiancai said, "I'm just afraid that you'll be the one screwing up."

Ning Lan agreed, "Yeah, all of us here should be best actors and best actresses, right?"

Zhang Ye blinked. "Is that so?"

Shu Han smiled. "Of course. I don't think there's a need to mention more about Old Ning's achievements. The number of best actress awards that she's won are uncountable, and I myself have gotten it twice before."

Jiang Hanwei said stiffly, "I've won it four times."

Yao Jiancai laughed and said, "I've gotten it once, and another four for best supporting actor."

Jiang Bin smiled. "I've not counted it before, but I've probably won two or three domestic awards too?"

Sun Qishuo said, "Do theater awards count? If it does, then I've won eight or nine awards."

Dong Shanshan looked at Zhang Ye. "I've won it once as well."

Zhang Ye said in surprise, "You have one too?"

Dong Shanshan smiled and said, "I got it last year, but it was just a best actress award for a short film."

Ning Lan said in amusement, "The best actress for a short film is a best actress award nonetheless."

Zhang Ye wiped away his sweat. "So I'm the only one who isn't a former winner?"

Dong Shanshan said, "It's not only that. You haven't even acted in any dramas before."

Zhang Xia was also laughing from all of this. She said with a sigh, "For someone who hasn't even acted in a TV drama before, he actually dares to gather everyone to act in a drama? Zhang'er, just how bold do you have to be to do something like that? In the entire entertainment industry, when it comes to courage, I really can't think of anyone else who is braver than you."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Then why did all of you dare to take part?"

Shu Han laughed. "That's because we all know how capable you are."

Ning Lan smirked. "Yeah. Other people might've forgotten about how capable you are, but how could we? This time, it's only you who can manage to convince us veterans to come out of retirement to join you."

Zhang Ye cupped his fists and said, "Thank you for your love, everyone. Now then, all this talk is putting so much stress on me. I'll do my utmost not to drag you best actors and best actresses down with me. Although I'm the director, I still hope that everyone will criticize and correct me freely if there are any problems that I cause during filming. I promise that I won't get angry."

Everyone rolled their eyes.

Are you just the director?

The project manager.

The producer.

The executive director.

The protagonist.

You have a part in all of those roles, so who would dare point out your mistakes like you asked!

"Don't listen to his nonsense anymore. Let's drink."

"Right? When others criticized this fellow back then, he would hit back at them with a barrage of criticism. If he were someone who could accept criticism so easily, he wouldn't have offended so many people years ago."

"Haha, that's right."

"Do you guys still remember that one time? Zhang'er unexpectedly turned the police station upside down with those poems of his. They're still inscribed in the walls there and have become an attraction of the police station."

"I heard about this matter back then as well. But the details, I don't really remember them. Little Dong, quickly tell us about it."

"Shanshan, quiet!"

"Haha, but everyone wants me to talk about it."

"Alright then, I'll spill some of your embarrassing secrets too if that's the case."

"Get lost!"

Banter.

Jokes.

Reminiscing.

Speaking of the past.

Everyone drank heartily in happy moods.

Eventually, Zhang Ye suggested, "Come, let's take a photo together."

Ning Lan said, "Sure, this is a day worth remembering."

Dong Shanshan asked, "Does this mean that the production crew is officially set up?"

Zhang Ye smiled. "Yes, it's officially set up."

Zhang Xia said, "Come, let's take the picture."

Shu Han said, "Grandma Zhang, you stand in the middle."

Zhang Ye said, "Quick, I'm gonna take the picture."

"Three."

"Two."

"One."

"Cheese!"

In this picture were all sorts of silly behavior.

Dong Shanshan made bunny ears over Zhang Ye's head.

Zhang Ye mischievously pinched Yao Jiancai's face.

Ning Lan pinched Shu Han's chin.

Shu Han was laughing and tiptoeing to appear much taller than everyone else.

With the photo taken, everyone gathered around to look at it. Then all of them burst out laughing.

Even Jiang Hanwei couldn't help but shake his head in amusement.

Dong Shanshan said, "Quick, put this up on Weibo."

Zhang Ye didn't want to. "But I look really ugly in this photo."

Yao Jiancai said, "My face was already all distorted, yet I'm not grumbling about it being ugly!"

Ning Lan said, "This is a pretty good shot. Quickly post it!"

Zhang Xia said, "We shouldn't just post the picture alone. We should write something to go along with it too."

Shu Han said, "We could inform people that our production crew has been set up."

"What should we write then?" Zhang Ye asked.

Shu Han smiled. "That's your job."

Yao Jiancai said, "Yeah, we're not as talented as you when it comes to writing showy."

Ning Lan looked at him. "You've been locked away for three years. Surely you didn't become stupid during that time? You can still write, right?"

A bunch of washed up veterans were behaving mischievously like teenagers. Perhaps deep down in their hearts, none of them wished to admit that they were old.

That was the reason they came.

That was the reason they were making a return to the industry today.

For dignity?

For beliefs?

Or maybe it was for that lost honor?

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Alright then."

Uploading the picture, Zhang Ye closed his eyes and thought for a while. Then he opened his eyes and started typing on his phone with a smile. Very quickly, Zhang Ye's first Weibo post since his return appeared and showed itself to the world.

The original Weibo post went:

"The torrents of the Yangtze wash away heroes of yore,

"Right and wrong, success and failure—all are no more.

"Green hills remain the same,

"Deep the setting sun spreads its flame!

"Fishermen with gray locks work on rivers and banks,

"The scenery and good times simply blanks.

“They lug jugs of spirits and drink at ease,

“Chatting about the past and smiling in the breeze.”

Finally.

At the end were two simple lines.

“Dear Showbiz, I trust you’ve been well?

“—From Zhang Ye & the main cast of In the Name of the People.”

Yao Jiancai shouted, “Great!”

Ning Lan said excitedly, “Well written!”

Shu Han gave him the thumbs up.

What a good “torrent of the Yangtze”!

What a good “green hills remain the same”!

What a good “deep the setting sun spreads its flame”!

What a good “Dear Showbiz, I trust you’ve been well?”!

With just a few sentences, it left a soul-stirring impression!

Chapter 1542: As reckless as ever!

The next day.

In the morning.

It was getting rowdy on Weibo.

The “Immortal by the River”¹: The Torrents of the Yangtze” by Zhang Ye, along with his selfie with Ning Lan, Dong Shanshan, Jiang Hanwei, Shu Han, and the others had created a huge commotion. There was just too much information within it that could be processed, so much so that it dumbfounded a lot of people as everyone crazily discussed it.

However, Zhang Ye did not care about the online comments. He had come to the Central Publicity Department early in the morning with Wu Zeqing and borrowed a small conference room. The production crew was about to start filming, and the equipment, venue, and actors were more or less set in stone. However, the most important matter of the funding still remained unresolved. They had already done an expense calculation for the initial funding of 30 million RMB that was supposed to cover the cost of filming. However, this did not include the miscellaneous expenses. Unless the actors did not take a single cent for their work, or the accommodation arrangements and packed lunches were done away with, they would barely have enough to spend even if they scrimped and saved. But how could they possibly do that? The Central Publicity Department was also unwilling to use any social funds, so

there was only one last option left. Zhang Ye could only turn to using advertisements to get more money.

There was a knock on the door.

Zhang Ye said, "Come in."

Old Wu's new secretary pushed open the door and came in. "Brother Zhang, I've brought the people over."

There were around eight advertisers who entered the room. They were all old acquaintances that Zhang Ye had contacted.

After coming into the conference room, the group of them turned very cautious. This was, after all, their first time coming to the Central Publicity Department to discuss a deal.

This was also Zhang Ye's intention as well. He had to fly the flag of this place since he was no longer as influential and popular. In that case, surely the name of the Central Publicity Department should do the job, right?

"Come, come, have a seat, everyone," Zhang Ye said with a smile.

Secretary Ci and another supervisor who was in charge of overseeing the project also joined the meeting.

Zhang Ye bluntly said, "There are no outsiders in here. We've all worked together before on advertisement projects. I'm sure that every one of you has already heard that the Central Publicity Department is funding an unprecedented, blockbuster, anti-corruption drama. I've accepted the job and will be the producer and director. That's why I've invited all of you here to talk about certain collaborations on this project. I tend to take very good care of my old friends, so I did not sell off any advertising opportunities yet. I'll be leaving that for everyone here."

The advertisers gave each other a look and seemed to have a lot of concerns, but none of them said anything.

Zhang Ye blinked. "What's the matter?"

Boss Liu finally spoke up. "Zhang'er, we've made a lot of money from our past collaborations with you, and we've never suffered a loss whenever we worked with you. We're all old friends, so now that you're back, all of us should be showing you some support. B-But this is a political drama we're talking about, so it's definitely going to be a little sensitive. It won't be easy to insert any advertisements."

Zhang Ye said in amusement, "Why would it not be easy to insert them?"

Boss Li added, "It'd be fine if this were a commercial collaborations. But for a drama like this—" As he spoke, he cast a wary look at both Secretary Ci and Supervisor Ke.

Zhang Ye said, "It's fine, just speak."

Boss Li smiled wryly. "For a drama like this, ads definitely won't be allowed in plain sight, isn't that right? Our company is currently advertising a product called Great River Medicinal Wine. If it's just going to be a few covert shots here and there, the advertising is not going to work effectively for us."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "How about this? I'll think up a plan for you."

Boss Li said with some interest, "Go on."

Zhang Ye lowered his head and flipped through the script. Suddenly, he banged on the table. "I've got it. There's a scene where a prosecutor was hit by a truck and turned into a vegetable. Lying in a hospital bed, there was nothing that the family could do. At this point, I'll add a close-up caption for you. It will go like this: Great River Medicinal Wine, Drink Away Your Sickness!"

Secretary Ci was disgusted!

Supervisor Ke nearly fainted!

That guy has turned into a vegetable. How do you expect him to drink away his sickness?

He can't even drink water by himself. As if he could drink any of that damned wine!

But Boss Li said excitedly, "W-Will that be allowed?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Of course it will."

Boss Li stood up. "I'll sign on for it then! I'll sign on to advertise!"

Boss Liu said in a dumbfounded manner, "Zhang'er, what about our Jiacao brand of cosmetics?"

Zhang Ye flipped through his script again. Very quickly, he snapped his fingers and pointed, saying, "How about this line? I'll change this line in the script, then get the role Dong Shanshan will be playing to use your cosmetics after washing her face in the morning. She will say after that, 'For good skin, use Jiacao day and night!'"

Secretary Ci was stunned. "You can change the script just like that?"

Zhang Ye said, "Of course, I'm the screenwriter, so I can change it however I want."

Boss Liu was very happy. "Good! Good! I'll accept this ad insert! And we'll go ahead with the agreed price as spoken over the phone!"

The other bosses were also getting excited.

"What about us?"

"Teacher Zhang, what about us?"

"Give us a product placement as obvious as possible!"

"Right, we don't want any subtle advertising. We want it to be as obvious as it can be!"

"Don't get anxious. One by one, everyone will be included!"

Adding captions.

Changing the lines in the script.

Having some writing on the shirts.

Every other idea that they came up with for the advertisements was getting more and more unconventional!

Crooked tricks, wonderful tricks, Zhang Ye was full of them.

In the end, Supervisor Ke really couldn't keep looking on. "Mr. Zhang, y-you can't do something like that!"

Zhang Ye said without a care, "Why not?"

Secretary Ci wiped her sweat away. "This is such blatant advertising. You're just adding in whatever you can think off. Don't forget that this is an anti-corruption drama. Aren't you kinda deviating too far from that if you do this?"

They were people from the organization. Regarding such matters, they were definitely going to have more reservations.

But Zhang Ye found this to be very normal. After all, he was very experienced and had been doing such things since many years ago. Was this even considered a big deal? That was how the people from my previous world did it too. You don't wish to fork out more money nor agree with turning to social funds, yet you're refusing to allow the advertisers to do some blatant advertising of their products? Does such a good deal exist in the world? They're the ones forking out the money, so of course we have to handle it well for them.

One advertiser.

Three advertisers.

Five advertisers.

The advertisement contracts were signed one after another.

The lack of funding was finally resolved.

Zhang Ye was very happy that they could finally start their production work.

However, Secretary Ci and Supervisor Ke could not feel happy no matter what. They kept thinking that these advertisements were simply too immoral and had no bottom line. However, when they suddenly remembered the wedding that happened between Zhang Ye and Minister Wu those years ago, they looked at each other and saw the helplessness in each other's eyes. Thinking back to that time, for someone who could even turn their own wedding into an advertisement and product launch, what bottom line could he possibly have!

Forget it, he can do whatever he wants. In any case, it wasn't like they could do anything about it either.

The two of them suddenly turned very pessimistic. They felt that the illustrious reputation of their Central Publicity Department was going to be ruined in the hands of Zhang Ye. Having left the

entertainment industry for so many years, they couldn't have expected that the character of Minister Wu's husband would still be the same as before. He was still as bold and reckless as ever!

...

At the same time.

On Weibo.

"This is so fucking nostalgic!"

"How many years has it been since we've seen a poem from Zhang Ye?"

"Hai, it's a pity that the times have changed so quickly."

"Why has this bunch of former big names gathered together?"

"Who knows!"

"What's this In the Name of the People referring to?"

"They're going to film a show? Of these people, other than Dong Shanshan, aren't all of the others washed up? And even if it is Dong Shanshan, how can she fight the popularity of those young hunks? Which show these days aren't headed by a cast of male idols? For them, there isn't even one stud on board, so what show can they possibly shoot?"

Eventually, the details were revealed on the news.

"Central Publicity Department funds the production of an anti-corruption drama!"

"Zhang Ye's first job is here!"

"Zhang Ye takes on his first drama series!"

"The title of the drama is confirmed: In the Name of the People!"

"The list of starring cast members is released: Zhang Ye, Yao Jiancai, Ning Lan, Dong Shanshan, Shanshan, etc."

"Ning Lan's first return to show business after her marriage?"

"Zhang Ye's late night post on Weibo: A group of veterans take on the industry again!"

The people were dumbfounded!

"What?"

"The investment amount is only 30 million RMB?"

"Are they really going to film the show?"

"*faints* For a drama based on such a serious topic and with a political message, who would want to watch it?"

"This is going to be dead on arrival!"

“Has Teacher Zhang directed a TV drama before?”

“Like hell he has!”

“For someone who has never directed or acted in a TV drama before, he’s actually leading a group of has-been celebs to take on an anti-corruption drama? Are these people crazy?”

“I’ve come across daring people, but I’ve never come across people as daring as them!”

“Hahahaha, this fellow is still as reckless as ever!”

“Pfft, I wanna see how Face-smacking Zhang will handle this!”

“Can Face-smacking Zhang still be the old Face-smacking Zhang?”

“Hai, who knows?”

“In comparison, my attention is going to be more on hunk Li Shao’s new TV drama!”

“Yeah, I heard that the production has already begun. It’s a big production with an investment of 500 million yuan and is headed by a well-known director.”

“When you put it like that, it really makes Zhang Ye’s drama series feel nonexistent.”

...

At the team office of a male idol.

“Eh?”

“Zhang Ye, Ning Lan, and Yao Jiancai are going to shoot a drama?”

“Looking at the time, I suppose they will be scheduled for the same slot as us?”

“Ignore them. They’re just a bunch of old-timers messing around. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“Hur hur, that’s true.”

...

At Chen Guang and Fan Wenli’s house.

“Ah?”

“Those guys had a party?”

“Haha, it’s gonna be interesting.”

“I’m also looking forward to seeing how the drama’s plot will develop.”

...

At Xiaodong’s house.

Li Xiaoxian was around as well.

“Teacher Zhang has really made his return!”

“That’s great!”

“Looking at them, why do I feel like I’m suddenly wriggling with excitement?”

“Me too.”

...

At his eldest younger sister’s house.

Cao Dan clenched her fists.

“Bro, you can do it! Show them that you’re still relevant!”

Chapter 1543: Zhang Ye’s daughter goes back to school

In the morning.

At home.

Wu Zeqing was helping Zhang Ye pack his luggage. “How long will you be away for?”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “At least a month.”

Wu Zeqing nodded and smiled. “You don’t have to be worried about anything at home, I’ll take care of it all. Just film the drama. When you get back, I’ll hold a reception for you.”

Zhang Ye hugged Wu Zeqing, who was kneeling on the floor and packing his luggage for him, from behind. “My wife is still the best. I had wanted to spend more time with you and our daughter since I just came back. It hasn’t even been half a month, but I have to go away again. Hai, look at me, why can’t I just seem to sit still?”

Wu Zeqing smiled. After packing the luggage, she stood up and adjusted Zhang Ye’s collar. “It’s good to be active. I gave you the project, after all. Since you have to do it, do it well. Don’t disappoint those who are still supporting you and show them what you’re capable of.”

Zhang Ye said, “OK.”

Sisi looked a little sad. “Daddy.”

Zhang Ye smiled and picked her up. “What is it, my dear?”

“Don’t go,” Sisi said.

Wu Zeqing smiled. “Daddy will be back soon.”

Sisi said unhappily, “Sisi has to go to school today. I want Daddy to come with me.”

Wu Zeqing said, “Didn’t we already agree that Mommy will go with you?”

Sisi tugged at Zhang Ye’s collar and said softly, “I want Daddy to go with me.”

Wu Zeqing smiled and said, "You've clinging to your daddy?"

Sisi said shyly, "Teacher hasn't met Daddy before."

When he heard that, Zhang Ye's heart melted. So he said, "Alright, Daddy will go with you to school."

Wu Zeqing said, "You still have a flight to catch."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "The production crew's flight is in the afternoon, so there's still time."

Sisi immediately cheered up. "Oh! Long live Daddy!"

Wu Zeqing reminded, "Drive slowly then."

"I know. Let's go, my dear." Holding his luggage in one hand, Zhang Ye carried his daughter in his other arm and walked out of the villa.

Sisi was elated.

...

At the kindergarten.

Today was the school's reopening day. The school had already prepared a public class for the parents had to sit in on. Many of the parents had arrived with their children very early in the morning.

Zhang Ye brought Sisi in and entered the kindergarten classroom. Everyone's eyes focused on him. The parents were all very surprised to see him.

Everyone was really excited to see Zhang Ye in person.

The children looked at Zhang Ye and Sisi with curiosity.

Several of the young children who usually played with Sisi ran over to her.

"Sisi, is this your daddy?"

"Yes! He's my daddy!"

"Is your daddy a big star?"

"Yes, my daddy is amazing!"

"Your daddy is so handsome."

"Heehee."

Sisi was feeling really proud. She pulled on her father's hand and showed him off to everyone.

At this moment, the teacher entered.

Sisi's form teacher was a woman who had the surname Cui. She wasn't old, and was at most in her 20s. Judging by her appearance, she was a very well-mannered teacher.

Teacher Cui also spotted Zhang Ye. In the moment, her heart couldn't stop pounding. She was also Zhang Ye's fan years ago. Although Zhang Ye's position in her heart had been replaced by several male idols, that didn't stop her from getting somewhat excited at meeting her former idol.

However, it didn't show on her face. She had to treat every parent equally.

After a simple opening speech, the public class officially began.

Teacher Cui said with a kind expression, "During the holidays, did all of you finish the homework that Teacher assigned? Alright, Teacher will test you a little. Who wants to answer the first question?"

"Me!"

"Me! Me! Me!"

"I want to answer it!"

The children were all putting their hands up!

Sisi didn't make any movements at first. But when she saw everyone raising their hands, she was startled and hurriedly put her hand as well.

Teacher Cui's gaze landed on her. She smiled and said, "Alright then, let's have Sisi answer the first question."

Sisi was a little nervous.

Zhang Ye nudged his daughter encouragingly.

Only then did Sisi timidly stand forward.

All of the parents were looking at her.

Teacher Cui put up all five fingers of her hand and said, "Sisi's pocket has five pieces of candy. If Teacher takes away two pieces of candy, how many pieces of candy are left?"

Sisi counted with her fingers and thought for a long time. "There are...there are still three candies left!"

Teacher Cui asked again, "Then if Teacher were to take away another piece of candy?"

Sisi spent a long time thinking before saying, "Two pieces of candies! There are two pieces of candies left!"

Teacher Cui smiled. "That's very good. Then what if Teacher were to take away another two pieces of candy?"

Sisi was getting anxious by now. She counted with her fingers and couldn't find out the answer at all.

Teacher Cui said, "Count it carefully. How many pieces of candy are left?"

Sisi turned around and tugged on Zhang Ye's sleeve. "Daddy! Daddy!"

Teacher Cui said, "You cannot ask your daddy for the answer. Think for yourself."

Sisi couldn't calculate it no matter what and her eyes reddened.

Many of the parents laughed under their breath.

Now Zhang Ye demonstrated how protective he was of his daughter. He bent down and picked Sisi up, then said to Teacher Cui with a smile, "Teacher Cui, there's a problem with your question."

Teacher Cui was taken aback. "Ah? What problem?"

Zhang Ye said, "The child only has five pieces of candy, but you took all of it away and didn't even leave one for her. Aren't you being a little too unkind?"

Teacher Cui was horrified!

The group of parents burst into laughter!

"Pfft!"

The class ended.

Teacher Cui angrily called Zhang Ye and Sisi to her office.

Teacher Cui criticized, "Professor Zhang, how could you do that? You cannot be so protective of children. You were also a professor at Peking University's Chinese and Math Departments, as well as an honorary associate professor at Media College. The language textbooks also have your essays in them. In the field of academia, you're my senior. You're also involved in education work, so...so how could you have low awareness of things?"

Zhang Ye hurriedly accepted the criticism. "Teacher Cui, I'll change my ways."

Teacher Cui did not know whether to laugh or cry. "In the past, it was always your wife who came for the parent-teacher meetings. In terms of educating the children, you really have to learn how from Minister Wu."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Yes, yes, I will learn from her. It's only because I'm a first-time father who hasn't spent much time with his child that I am so inexperienced. If there's anything that I did wrong, please criticize me further. In the future, if my child makes any mistakes, please guide her well." Then he patted his daughter on the head and said, "Sisi, Daddy is going away for work today. From now on, you must listen to Teacher Cui's words, understand?"

Sisi made a noise in acknowledgement.

Seeing this attitude from Zhang Ye, Teacher Cui felt more at ease. Then, she looked at Zhang Ye and suddenly asked, "Are you really going to shoot an anti-corruption drama?"

Zhang Ye smiled. "Yes, we begin shooting today."

Teacher Cui said worriedly, "This is your first time directing a TV drama, right?"

Zhang Ye said, "Yeah, it's my first time."

In the office space, several other teachers stood up.

A male teacher smiled and said, "Teacher Zhang, you can do it!"

A middle-aged female teacher said, "We're all waiting to watch it."

Zhang Ye cheerfully waved his hand about. "Alright, please give me your support when the time comes, everyone."

"Definitely."

"That's a must!"

The teachers all nodded in response.

But of course, this was only them being courteous.

In fact, none of them were actually optimistic about it.

Chapter 1544: The cameras start rolling for In the Name of the People!

Nanjing.

The plane slowly descended.

Zhang Ye led the production crew as they disembarked from the plane. They were chatting and laughing as they came through the security checks. But before they could even take a few steps out, they heard a scream come from the other side.

"Ahhh!"

"He's here!"

"He's coming out!"

"How handsome!"

Quite a few young girls were behaving like they were crazy.

Zhang Ye was startled. "Are they here to welcome us?"

Ning Lan smiled. "Surely not, right?"

In the end, they saw that those fans were indeed not here for them.

"Qu Dong!"

"Qu Dong!"

"Qu Dong!"

A lot of people were looking in one direction and chanting a name.

Zhang Ye sighed. "I had thought they were here for us."

Jiang Hanwei sneered. "Do you think this is a few years ago?"

Dong Shanshan exposed him. "You're speaking like he ever had anyone welcome him at the airport."

“Can you not speak the truth?” Zhang Ye was very embarrassed. “My fans are all very sane people. They don’t believe in things like receiving me at the airport or whatnot. They’ll silently support me.”

Several of the crew members laughed. All of them knew that Zhang Ye’s fans were indeed quite different from the fans of other celebrities. For the fans of other celebrities, there was always a feverish sense of support for them. It was like this for Ning Lan, Jiang Hanwei, and Shu Han as well. Everyone received similar treatment from their fans except Zhang Ye. This was because one would never be able to guess that the people who scolded him in the fiercest possible ways were actually also his most diehard of fans. In the entertainment industry at that time, it was a scene to behold.

Zhang Ye asked, “Who’s that fellow?”

Ha Qiqi turned her gaze over to where a young man in his twenties had just stepped out. “That is Qu Dong, an extremely popular male idol these days who first debuted as a singer. I’ve not been paying attention to his celebrity ranking recently, but he should be at the forefront of the domestic A-list rankings and making a push for a Heavenly King spot. Oh yes, didn’t they already start showing the fifth season of I Am a Singer? Qu Dong is this season’s favorite, and he’s really popular on the show.”

Zhang Ye said emotionally, “They’re already into the fifth season?”

Shu Han smiled and said, “What thoughts do you have about it, being the show’s first season winner?”

“What thoughts can I have? Come on, let’s go.” Zhang Ye led the team forward.

Many of the people at the airport had their attention on Qu Dong, so there was basically no one who noticed Zhang Ye, Ning Lan, and the rest of the group. Someone even brushed past Zhang Ye without recognizing him wearing sunglasses. There were some things that didn’t need any explaining at all. Ever since Zhang Ye’s return, this atmosphere and his dwindling popularity felt very obvious to him. It had been close to four years. To a normal person, this wouldn’t feel like very long. But for a celebrity, it was a passage of time where everything could change.

Outside.

The bus that was picking them up had already arrived.

On the bus, Zhang Ye said, “We’ll get the cameras rolling and start filming today. Let’s strive to finish filming the entire series in one and a half months. We’re going to aim to finish earlier rather than later.”

Ning Lan said, “Won’t there be a lensing ceremony ¹ ?”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “How many people are paying attention to this production of ours? So what’s the point of holding the ceremony?”

Jiang Hanwei said, “A lensing ceremony is the convention. Which production crew doesn’t do it?”

Zhang Ye said in amusement, “I’m not one to stick to convention.”

Jiang Bin, who was the oldest of the lot and more superstitious about such things, said, “Traditionally, shouldn’t we at least hold a simple one?”

But Zhang Ye said, “Nope.”

Jiang Bin could only helplessly say, "Alright then."

Dong Shanshan laughed and said, "You're the director, you have the final say."

Praying to the Heavens.

Offering joss sticks.

Cutting the roast suckling pig.

Covering the prayer table with red cloth.

This was the customary opening ceremony for the filming of Chinese movies and TV series. Every production crew did it, but Zhang Ye refused. He had always been a superstitious person, but he didn't want to believe in this. Whether or not a drama could succeed depended on the director, actors, and the entire production team working together. Would praying to the Heavens and offering joss sticks ensure its success? Wasn't that bullshit? If holding a lensing ceremony worked, then what was the point of having a director direct the actors?

Zhang Ye had always been considered a maverick in the entertainment circle. He had his own style of doing things, and it wouldn't matter how others tried to persuade him. Everyone understood this to be Zhang Ye's nature. Be it directing variety shows or documentaries, or even a television drama, Zhang Ye had always been a very headstrong director. He was like this in the past, and he was still like this now.

Zhang Ye said, "Come on, I'll run everyone through the script again."

On the bus ride, he was telling everyone about the key points of today's shoot.

The script that he had written for *In the Name of the People* was not entirely the same one as his previous world's and had gone through many changes in the details as dictated by Zhang Ye. There were many reasons for that, such as the issues of the actors, and how they were their own persons. Since the actors from both worlds were different, the script had to be adjusted according to the actors' qualities and acting skills. Among the changes were also some subjective adjustments made by Zhang Ye, such as the son of the chairman of Big Wind Factory's union, Zheng Chenggong, and his daughter-in-law. Zhang Ye felt that it was too long-winded and had nothing to do with the main storyline, with more than eight episodes of scenes focusing on them. Not only that, a lot of advertisements were injected in between the scenes. All of that was absolutely unnecessary and the people from his previous world had criticized this too. So Zhang Ye cut a lot of scenes from the original, leaving his version of *In the Name of the People* at only 42 episodes instead of 55. There was no guarantee that he wouldn't cut it further in post-production as he intended to strip away many of the cumbersome and non-essential storylines. What he needed to do was create an excellent anti-corruption drama that would open the path for similar works!

On location.

The prearranged venue had been set aside for them.

Without any unnecessary chatter, they started setting up the cameras, decorating the set, and putting makeup on the actors.

At 5:10 PM, the filming of *In the Name of the People* officially started in Nanjing.

“Three.”

“Two.”

“One.”

“Action!”

Zhang Ye fell into his working mood, which was clearly quite different from his day-to-day. What was most obvious was his intense gaze and the serious expression on his face.

“Cut!”

“That’s not good enough, again!”

“Cut, again!”

“Cut!”

“That’s still not good enough!”

“That’s not right, you can’t eat a bowl of noodles like this.”

“Do you eat zhajiangmian ² that way? Your mannerisms are too elegant!”

“Again!”

Just a single scene took them eight or nine takes!

The actors of the production crew were not small-timers either. This lineup of best actors and best actresses couldn’t get more luxurious. Although they no longer enjoyed the popularity of yesteryear, their status in the industry was still there. The two assistant directors, Ha Qiqi and Zhang Zuo, were trembling with fright. They were so afraid that the best actors and actresses would quit filming as a result, and also felt that Director Zhang was being too harsh for one scene. But the two of them could not have expected the actors to not grumble one bit.

Especially the veteran actor who was filming the noodle eating scene. He was a very senior figure in the industry. He had already eaten three bowls of noodles, but the glimmer in his eyes was shining brighter and brighter.

Ning Lan smiled.

Jiang Bin and Jiang Hanwei looked at each other.

Shu Han also gave a slight grin.

At this moment, everyone was reminded of how much hard work they had to put into filming not just several years ago, but even decades back!

This was how it should be!

Acting was always supposed to be like this!

This was what you truly called acting!

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Chapter 1545: Wrapping up!

At the filming location.

Zhang Ye was at the scene overseeing all operations.

“Action!”

“Cut! Alright, that’ll do!”

“Shanshan, well done. Your expression is spot on!”

“Beautiful, Old Yao!”

“Let’s go, we’re moving to the next location.

All of the actors were getting in the groove. Being veteran actors from yesteryear, they knew exactly what was required of them. There was no real need for Zhang Ye to make any unnecessary remarks. A hint was all they needed to make the scene work out. Furthermore, the production crew was in a very good form and it only took a short time for them to work seamlessly as a team. Even during their breaks and moving between filming locations, no one would be on their cell phones. Instead, they would be discussing their roles and the storyline for the next scene. Everyone was very serious, with a deep sense of dedication towards their love and determination for acting. This was something that wasn’t present in any of the production crews that consisted of those hot, young men.

Ning Lan said, “Old Yao, can you put on a more intense expression?”

Yao Jiancai said, “This is good enough. If I overdo it, that would make it worse.”

Shu Han said, “Teacher Yao is right. I feel that it’s enough.”

Jiang Hanwei said, “Director Zhang, I want to modify my lines for the next scene.”

Zhang Ye said, “Sure, the lines are just written for you, but it will still have to depend on how you deliver it during the shoot. There’s no need to adhere exactly the script. That would be meaningless.”

Jiang Hanwei said, “OK.”

Ning Lan asked, “Director Zhang, I’m wondering how you honed your acting skills?”

Zhang Ye said, “Haha, guess.”

Yao Jiancai said, “That’s right, Zhang’er has really changed my view of him. He’s really got such great presence in front of the camera. When we were acting opposite each other in a scene, I was nearly upstaged by him.”

Shu Han said, “Hur hur, that’s why we mustn’t take our director for a newcomer. Although Director Zhang has never acted in a TV drama before this, don’t forget about how capable he is. If he really gets

serious at acting, he won't be lacking to any of us best actors and actresses! Otherwise, would Zhang Ye still be called Zhang Ye?"

Ning Lan said, "What a good bootlicking that was."

Shu Han laughed. "Pfft!"

Jiang Bin said, "With today's shoot, it really felt like the old days again."

Yao Jiancai replied, "Yeah, wasn't this exactly how we used to act years ago when we first debuted? It's totally unlike how the other production crews do it these days. They think that everything will be fine as long as they can get a young gun on board their productions? Can't remember their lines? Requiring a stunt double whether they're playing a role in an emotional drama or action movie? And they aren't bothered by their acting standards either? What the hell!"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Actually, there isn't really any designated lead or supporting roles in this drama in my opinion. As long as we play our roles well, everyone can be the main lead. Every role has its own shine and can be performed well with our different styles. This is also the effect that I would like to achieve. So, please, let me request this of everyone. Whatever acting chops you have or however good you are at acting, please pour all of that effort into this drama. Once we leave this behind, there won't be another chance like it again."

Ning Lan said, "I'm just afraid my screen presence will oust you, making me stand out in our scenes."

Zhang Ye said, "Alright, as the male lead, my role is actually just to serve all of you. Hur hur, but it won't be that easy to upstage me."

Ning Lan said, "Sure, let's give it a try."

Zhang Ye said, "If everything proceeds smoothly, we'll add another two scenes after this."

Yao Jiancai said, "I have no problems with that."

Dong Shanshan agreed, "Sure thing."

For some directors of a movie or drama, their production tenet would be based on the principle of "slow work means careful work." Li Ke was an example of one who did it that way. He would repeatedly polish his projects until they were to his satisfaction. Others placed more emphasis on the actors. As long as the actors were popular enough, and as long as the actors could bring up their productions, all other requirements could be lowered. Every director had a different style of directing, and Zhang Ye was the type who focused on efficiency. He asked for both quality and speed in a production, not because he didn't want to seek the finer details through slowing down, but because in his opinion, it would be an insult if he had to keep hammering out every detail with a group of veteran actors.

...

One day.

Two days.

Three days.

Time passed very quickly.

On the tenth day since In the Name of the People had commenced filming, many netizens were on Weibo discussing the upcoming television series that they were anticipating. It was currently a lull for television series. At the end of last year, Heavenly King Guan Zhaohua's xianxia series had set a record high viewership rating in recent years. With no highly anticipated series since then, the people were all causing a ruckus at the shortage of series, and at the same time, anticipating the next blockbuster.

Heavens of the Gods, a xianxia series starring Li Shao, a hot, young man.

As well as a costume period drama titled Age of Kingdoms, starring Chi Hao, another hot, young man.

Both series had put in a huge publicity effort in recent times, making the people look forward to them in great anticipation.

"Li Shao's new show is coming soon."

"I'm so looking forward to it."

"I like Chi Hao."

"Chichi is the most handsome of all!"

"It looks like the viewership ratings for this year's television series will have to depend on the two of them."

"Yeah, last year was Guan Zhaohua's year, so it should be our Li Shao's year this year. I believe his ascendancy to the throne of a Heavenly King is just around the corner!"

"Get lost! The new Heavenly King will definitely be our Chi Hao!"

"Heavens of the Gods should be wrapping up filming soon, right?"

"Yeah, it's almost done."

"Oh yes, how is Zhang Ye's production doing?"

"I don't know."

"Yeah, I've heard no updates about it."

"Has that anti-corruption drama already started production?"

"I didn't see any publicity for it?"

"I suppose they just started the production then? I'm not gonna pin any hopes on a political drama. There will be all sorts of restrictions and praise lavished on the government, so it's not likely that it will be interesting. The production is going so slowly as well. If it were Zhang Ye of yesteryear, he would not have needed to take on that sort of TV series. But look at him now. His appeal is really lacking compared to the male idols these days. And with that temper of his, how many people has he offended before? So who would possibly invest in a production of his? Therefore, the only projects he can take will be these small productions."

“Hai, for a Heavenly King of his generation, it’s such a pity.”

“Yeah, looking at the comments and topicality of the matter, it’s clear to us how things are. No one is paying any attention at all to that In the Name of the People production of theirs.”

...

Elsewhere.

At the Central Publicity Department.

At this moment, some people were reminded of this production as well.

Although this production was headed by their Central Publicity Department, Zhang Ye’s status in the project was still too unique. He was Deputy Minister Wu’s husband, so who would dare question him? Today, when Bureau Chief Liu, who was assigned to oversee this project, found out about the news online, he called for an update from Supervisor Ke.

Bureau Chief Liu asked, “How is the production that we’ve invested in progressing so far?”

Supervisor Ke said, “I didn’t ask for details.”

However, Bureau Chief Liu didn’t get angry at him.

If it were some other director who was directing the show, even if it were the famous Director Li Ke, the Central Publicity Department would definitely be hounding him for an update every day. To check if the production has started? To see how the filming was progressing? They would definitely ask for a report every day. After all, it was their Central Publicity Department who was forking out the money, so of course they would have to supervise the project. But it was different for Zhang Ye. He was Minister Wu’s husband after all. Who would dare to call him every day for an update? If they did that, how would Minister Wu view them?

Bureau Chief Liu said, “It’s been so many days. It’s probably time to ask for an update.”

Supervisor Ke replies, “Alright then, I’ll check with them.”

Bureau Chief Liu said, “They should have started on the production, right?”

Supervisor Ke nodded, “I believe they have already started.”

Bureau Chief Liu said, “Check out what the situation is. This sum of money is not small for our department. If the higher-ups ask about it later, we should at least be able to give them an account of things. We cannot act like we don’t know anything.”

Thus, Supervisor Ke made a call to the site. He did not call Zhang Ye directly but got in contact with the production crew’s assistant director, Ha Qiqi. It was usually her who handled the external communications of their studio. Supervisor Ke also knew that Ha Qiqi was the external communications manager for Zhang Ye’s Studio, as well as a temporary agent for him.

The call connected.

Supervisor Ke said: “Director Ha.”

On the other end, Ha Qiqi said: "Supervisor Ke, hello."

"Well, about that, how is the production crew's preparations going?"

"We're already all prepared."

"Have you all commenced with the filming?"

"Commenced with the filming?"

"It's been ten days? And the filming still hasn't started yet?"

However, the response from the other end of the line left Supervisor Ke in shock.

"What commencement of filming are you talking about? We've already wrapped up the shoot!"

Supervisor Ke was stunned. "What?"

Ha Qiqi said: "We just wrapped up filming an hour ago. All of the scenes have been shot, so filming has ended. We should be returning to Beijing tomorrow. After that, we will start on the post-production work, and Director Zhang has said that he will personally oversee it. He will edit the show scene by scene, so once everything is completed, the source footage will be submitted to the SARFT for approval. And after it passes the approval of the SARFT, we will get in contact with the TV stations. Supervisor Ke, please don't worry about the progress of the drama. When has Director Zhang ever caused any delays for the matters that he is personally overseeing?"

After hanging up, Supervisor Ke was dumbfounded.

Bureau Chief Liu looked at him. "What's the matter?"

Supervisor Ke wiped away his sweat. "They said that they've—"

Bureau Chief Liu frowned. "They've not commenced filming yet? "

Supervisor Ke didn't whether to laugh or cry. "They said that they've already wrapped up the filming!"

Bureau Chief Liu's jaw dropped. "What? Wrapped up? H-How many days has it been!"

Supervisor Ke was also nearly going crazy!

Writing novels!

Recording radio broadcasts!

Recording variety shows!

Writing songs!

Everyone knew what Zhang Ye's other nickname was—the fastest draw!

Years ago, the incident in which Zhang Ye recorded several episodes of a variety show in a single day had shocked the entertainment circle!

But it was different this time!

This was a television series they were talking about!

A television series that spanned over 40 episodes in total?

But you wrapped up filming for it in just 10 days?

You filmed four episodes per day?

Wasn't this too fucking fast!

How is this just the fastest draw! You should be fucking known as the fastest machine gun!

Chapter 1546: In the Name of the People gets allocated a broadcast slot!

The next day.

In the morning.

Beijing Airport.

Supervisor Ke came here personally to receive them. The moment they boarded the bus, he started asking anxiously, "Director Zhang, what's going on? Did you encounter some problems while filming?"

Zhang Ye was taken aback. "No, there weren't any problems."

Supervisor Ke said, "Did the script change?"

Zhang Ye blinked. "No, it hasn't been changed."

Supervisor Ke wiped at his sweat. "It's still the original 42-episode script then?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Yeah, not a single episode less."

Supervisor Ke said, "But it has only been 10 days."

"10 days is enough." Zhang Ye smiled.

Supervisor Ke said, "I've never heard of anyone in the industry who can wrap up a TV series shoot in 10 days!"

Zhang Ye chuckled. "Now you've heard of it."

Supervisor Ke facepalmed. He did not know what else he could say.

The area that Supervisor Ke was in charge of at the Central Publicity Department was the promotion of government ideological films, propaganda. Although he wasn't professionally involved in the production of television series, he wasn't a fool either. He had ears that he could listen with, so of course he knew how other drama production crews worked and what was involved in the workflow of a drama production. In his opinion, filming a television series consisting of around 40 episodes would have to take at least two to three months to complete, and this was under the pretext of having no production issues either. Some other production crews could even take up to half a year, while the even longer

ones took up to two to three years to complete. For many directors, especially the older generation ones, most of them aimed for perfection and would not allow one flaw to appear in their works.

As for Zhang Ye?

He only took 10 days?

No one had ever come across something like that before!

Nearby, Ha Qiqi also asked with some doubt, "Director Zhang, is there really no need to shoot any additional scenes? We allowed the main cast members to leave yesterday, but what if there are any scenes that were missed? Then that would—"

Zhang Zuo was smiling wryly.

Zhang Ye waved it off. "That won't happen. Is there a need to worry with me handling the matter?"

Supervisor Ke looked at him and felt it would be a wonder if they could feel assured. Could a television series with more than 40 episodes filmed in 10 days even be watchable? You sure you aren't messing around with us? Supervisor Ke had a niggling feeling that the 30 million RMB the Central Publicity Department had invested had likely gone smoke. This entire matter just didn't feel like it was reliable!

...

A while later.

At the Central Publicity Department's editing studio.

Zhang Ye did not even head home after coming back to Beijing. He immediately came here to start editing the footage. Looking at the scenes that they had recorded, Zhang Ye felt very satisfied.

Let's get started then.

An hour.

Three hours.

Zhang Ye started burying himself in his work.

Meanwhile.

A debate was going on within the Central Publicity Department.

Everyone had found out that Zhang Ye was back in Beijing after wrapping up the filming.

"Have you heard?"

"I've heard."

"Did they really wrap up filming already?"

"My God!"

"Isn't that too fast?"

“Why is Teacher Zhang’s productivity still as efficient as ever?”

“B-But this is a TV series we’re talking about.”

...

That same night.

Wu Zeqing had just finished making dinner.

Zhang Ye’s parents were also here.

As soon as Zhang Ye arrived home, his daughter pounced up to him in excitement.

“Daddy! Daddy! Carry me!”

“Ai, my dear, did you miss Daddy?”

“Yes!”

“Then give Daddy a kiss.”

“OK!”

Father and daughter were very close.

His mother complained, “Why are you back so early?”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “I’ve already finished filming, so why would you want me to stay there for a few more days?”

His mother curled her lips. “Don’t take others for a fool regarding this matter.”

“Who did I take for a fool?” Zhang Ye said in a speechless manner. “I’ve dedicated my very best to the project.”

His mother said, “It takes others more than 10 days to shoot one episode of a drama. But for you? You only took 10 days to shoot over 40 episodes. What is that if it isn’t taking others for a fool? What if none of the TV stations agree to take your drama after that? You can go wallow in your tears!”

Wu Zeqing smiled. “Have you contacted the TV stations yet?”

Zhang Ye said, “Not yet.”

Wu Zeqing asked, “Should I get the Central Publicity Department to head a meeting with them?”

Zhang Ye said, “There’s no need for that. Surely I still have enough influence left for that, right?”

His mother sneered. “Don’t overestimate yourself.”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “I’ve already made an appointment with an old friend, and he’ll be here soon to discuss this matter.”

While they were talking, the doorbell rang.

Zhang Ye opened the door and was met with a familiar face.

Hu Fei looked at Zhang Ye.

Zhang Ye looked at Hu Fei.

Then the two of them broke into smiles and gave each other a bear hug!

Hu Fei was a little excited to see him. "Well, well, you haven't changed one bit, I see! You really haven't changed at all!"

Zhang Ye laughed heartily. "You too, Brother Hu, you too. You still look as spirited as ever. So how have you been? I just came back, but I've already heard about your promotion. You're the Deputy Station Head of Beijing TV, huh?"

Hu Fei smiled and said, "I worked hard to get there."

Zhang Ye brought his daughter over and said, "Greet Uncle Hu."

Sisi hid behind her father and peeked at Hu Fei. Then she said timidly, "Uncle Hu."

Hu Fei gave her a broad smile and said, "So this is our little princess? How pretty."

From the dinner table, Wu Zeqing laughed. "You're here?"

Hu Fei's expression quickly shifted, and he said courteously, "Minister Wu, I'm here for a free meal."

Wu Zeqing said, "Quick, have a seat."

Hu Fei also knew Zhang Ye's parents from before. He went over to greet them.

They sat down and began eating.

While eating, Hu Fei asked, "I thought you went away to shoot the drama? Has the filming started yet? Why are you so free to treat me to a meal today? I was thinking of meeting up with you after you finished with the shoot."

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Filming has already wrapped up. "

Hu Fei nearly spat out a mouthful of food. "What?"

Zhang Ye said, "We wrapped up filming yesterday."

Hu Fei smacked his forehead. "When it comes to work efficiency, I will only take my hat off to you in the entire entertainment industry."

Zhang Ye said amused, "Well, I always work very quickly when it comes to filming. You should know that."

Hu Fei said helplessly, "But I didn't know that you could shoot a TV series that quickly, though."

"They're all the same." Then Zhang Ye said, "So how about it, Brother Hu? I'm still editing the footage and can probably send it in for approval in a few more days. Do you want to purchase the broadcast rights of the drama?"

Hu Fei smiled and said, "How much?"

Zhang Ye said, "It will surely be a fair price for you since both of us go way back. If it were anyone else, I wouldn't sell it to them no matter how much they offered."

Hu Fei chuckled and said, "Get off it, since when did you speak so honestly? Do you think that anyone would dare to buy a show that's produced by you? It's only our station that would do it." With a pause, he said, "Alright, I'll make the decision on the matter. Once the approval goes through, we will still need to have a quick look at the footage before signing the contract. I wouldn't honor this if it were anyone else, but since it's you, Little Zhang, I have no choice even if I didn't want to give you face."

Zhang Ye said, "Sweet, it's settled then. Don't forget to leave us the best time slot that you have for the scheduling of the show."

Hu Fei said, "Don't worry about that. How could I possibly shortchange you?"

Zhang Ye said, "So which time slot will we be taking over?"

Hu Fei gave it some thought before saying, "There's going to be a primetime show ending next month, but that slot isn't too good. Heavens of the Gods and Age of Kingdoms are both very highly anticipated blockbuster series for the year. Although you have only just returned, I think you should have heard of them too, right? These two series will be broadcasting at around the same time on two other TV stations. They've already gone through the final round of talks, so my guess is that they will begin their broadcast run in the following month. Two very popular young guns are going to be fighting for a spot in the S-list rankings, and the battle will be happening in full force, so it's better that you don't join in the fun there. Which series is not stepping back and avoiding them? How about this, I'll arrange a broadcast slot for you two months from now. There shouldn't be anyone competing with you then, and it will be much easier to get good results."

Hu Fei's idea was created with good intentions. In this era of hot, young male stars, with Zhang Ye having just returned and his popularity slowly recovering, there wasn't any need for him to fight it out with them.

But Zhang Ye did not appreciate his kindness at all.

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Two months is too long."

Hu Fei was taken aback. "Ah? "

Zhang Ye said, "Let's just go ahead with the broadcast next month."

Hu Fei didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure." Zhang Ye grinned. "Brother Hu, it has always been others avoiding my shows and time slots. Back when we were doing variety shows at Beijing TV, even Central TV Department 1 had to steer clear of us and change their show's broadcast time. When have you heard about me avoiding others?"

His mother rolled her eyes and said, "Do you think you're still living in that time?"

Zhang Ye boasted, "It has always been that way, and it will continue being so."

His father said, “Little Hu, don’t listen to him. This kid is getting big-headed again.”

Zhang Ye laughed and said, “Dad, I know what I’m doing.”

Hu Fei massaged his temples and said, “Kid, that temper of yours still hasn’t changed.” He couldn’t help looking at Wu Zeqing to see what she had to say. This matter wasn’t something that Zhang Ye could decide on alone. Being a project led by the Central Publicity Department, the final say still rested with them.

At this moment, Old Wu spoke up.

Wu Zeqing smiled as she ate. “Just schedule it according to what my husband says.”

No matter what decisions Zhang Ye made, Wu Zeqing has always been very supportive of him. There was really no one else like Zhang Ye’s wife.

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “This is a good opportunity to pit the appeal of the young hunks against the strength of the veterans. Bring it on! Actions speak louder than words. It’s time to see who is worthy. This is no big deal.”

Competing on appeal with the young male idols?

Competing on viewership with the young male idols?

If any other person heard this, they would probably think that Zhang Ye had gone mad.

In this age, who could still fight against the hunks?

Hu Fei had no choice, so he smiled and said, “As long as you’re not afraid that it will affect the viewership ratings, I won’t have any problems with it on my side. Scheduling a show is just a matter of scheduling for us after all. Isn’t that so?”

Zhang Ye was amused. “Affect the viewership ratings?”

How was that possible!

This was In the Name of the People they were talking about!

If a single series comes at me, I crush them!

If a group of series come at me, I’ll crush them all!

Chapter 1547: An invitation from I Am a Singer!

Several days later.

The SARFT received the source footage of In the Name of the People.

“What?”

“They’ve finished filming?”

“And it’s even been edited already?”

"Isn't this a little too fast!"

"Is this for real?"

"It's really that anti-corruption drama that was sent over from the Central Publicity Department?"

"I'm gonna faint. How many days has it been!"

"Let's have a look at it first."

"Uh, the scope of involvement is really big."

"Yeah, it involves so many issues of the political arena?"

"Can a show like that even get approved?"

"The tune was set by the higher-ups, so how can we not pass it?"

"That's true. In that case, there's no need to watch it anymore. Let's just get it approved and certified."

"Zhang Ye is too daring to film a drama like this!"

"Shouldn't you know who Zhang Ye is by now? This fellow has always been stupidly brave, so what doesn't he dare to do!"

Not even a day passed.

After only a few hours, Zhang Ye received news that *In the Name of the People* had been passed for broadcast. The permit for the distribution of television plays and the drama approval ID were also issued, with all the paperwork in order. This was what you called "a man leaning against a big tree can enjoy the shade it provides." If anyone else had produced this sort of an anti-corruption drama, just the approval process alone would have taken several months to a year, with the outcome not even guaranteed. But since the Central Publicity Department had set the tune by investing in the drama, the SARFT didn't even need to finish watching it to issue the permits. This was what you called efficiency.

The production was brought to a successful completion.

They could throw the celebratory feast now.

So Zhang Ye smilingly made a call to book a location to hold it.

...

Noon.

Somewhere in the suburbs.

It was now spring, so the temperatures had risen a bit. The outdoor barbecue pit was set up through the efforts of Zhang Ye and several others. Then they took out their cell phones to check the news.

"I Am a Singer Season Five comes to a close!"

"The grand champion, Qu Dong, will be holding a concert tour next!"

"The countdown begins for the television series *Heavens of the Gods*!"

“Li Shao and Chi Hao battle for a Heavenly King’s throne!”

“Xu Meilan to fall off soon from the S-list rankings?”

“Sister Lan—the only remaining Heavenly Queen from the old generation!”

The others also arrived.

Other than Dong Shanshan and several actors who had events to attend today, the rest were all here.

Ning Lan greeted from afar, “What are you guys reading? Why isn’t anyone welcoming us?”

Zhang Ye laughed and said, “We’re reading the news.”

Yao Jiancai asked, “Is it about us?”

Zhang Ye shrugged. “There’s not a mention of us. It’s all news related to the young guns. Is this how the news is these days? I saw them writing about our group of people, and we were described as belonging to the ‘old generation.’”

“It’s fine once you get used to it.” Zhang Xia wasn’t bothered by it one bit.

Jiang Hanwei said indifferently, “That’s how the media is these days, or should I say, that’s how the people like it these days. Since it’s something that everyone is fond of, they would naturally report it in that way.”

Ning Lan asked, “Has it been approved?”

Zhang Ye said, “Yes, it was passed.”

Ning Lan said, “Have you contacted the TV stations yet?”

Zhang Ye smiled. “Yes, Beijing TV.”

Shu Han said, “Beijing TV is strong at variety shows, but they’re not that good when it comes to their TV series.”

Zhang Ye said, “Beijing TV is the only station that I have a good relationship with. For the other, larger TV stations, they immediately steered clear of me the moment they knew that it was an anti-corruption drama with a political message. In any case, it’s quite good that we could get the show to broadcast on a satellite channel in a primetime slot. Oh yes, I haven’t informed you guys about this yet, but our series could be starting its broadcast during the same period as Heavens of the Gods and Age of Kingdoms. Therefore, I hope that you will be mentally prepared for it, hur hur.”

Shu Han was taken aback. “The same period as them?”

Zhang Xia looked at him. “You’re that confident?”

Zhang Ye laughed and said, “I guess.”

Ning Lan said, “Kid, are you trying to slap others again?”

Zhang Ye said happily, “Guess.”

Shu Han said, "If our viewership ratings can perform on par with those two hunks' dramas, it wouldn't just be a slap to their face, nor would it only be a slap to the industry. This is going to be us old-timers returning to the industry to slap the entire world!"

On par?

Why does it have to be on par?

Zhang Ye smiled but did not speak. There was no need to explain further since no one would believe his claims at this moment in time. Zhang Ye would either not do it at all, or he would do it to an earth-shattering effect. He had spent so much effort to gather these old friends together not because he wanted to be on par with those hot, young men, but because he wanted to tell the entire world that even after three years, five years, ten years, or twenty years, they would still not be a match for him!

"Come, come, let's start eating."

"Shall we give a toast?"

"Sure."

"Cheers."

They barbecued the meat.

They drank beers.

Everyone was heartily enjoying the food.

Zhang Ye said, "There's about half a month more until our drama is broadcast, so I'd like everyone to put in some effort during this time to give our show more publicity on Weibo. You can also accept interviews if approached."

Ning Lan said, "Understood."

Yao Jiancai said, "I've already accepted some interview requests."

Jiang Hanwei said, "We know better than you regarding what needs to be done."

Shu Han said, "But the media and people aren't giving us any attention at all. Those two hunks' new dramas and the latest season of I Am a Singer have stolen all the limelight. Nobody's focus is on us." Taking out her cell phone and waving it around, she said, "I just had a quick look, and there's really no news of our drama. No one outside our group even knows that we've already wrapped up filming, or perhaps no one cares. This makes it hard to deal with."

Zhang Xia said, "If we want the viewership ratings to increase, then the topicality and publicity will have to increase as well."

Zhang Ye said helplessly, "The Central Publicity Department does not have any additional funds to put into purchasing ad spots. They can't exactly request that the media outlets report about their self-funded drama either. That isn't how authority is used. So we can forget about depending on them for publicity. It's all on us now, so let's just do however much we can. Everyone, let's give this matter a little more of our attention."

Ning Lan shook her head. "We're no longer popular like before. Even if we were to make an announcement right now, it's nothing compared to a single word by the hot, young guys."

Zhang Ye was also considering his options.

The following publicity work was indeed not going to be easy.

Five minutes.

Ten minutes.

Twenty minutes.

All of a sudden, a young actor said, "Hey, people, look at this."

Everyone looked at him. "What is it?"

The young actor said, "There's some activity from I Am a Singer's program team!"

Everyone gathered around to check out what the news was about.

When Zhang Ye read it, he was stunned. "I Am a Singer is already in its final season?"

Zhang Xia nodded. "Beijing TV announced half a year ago that this will be the final season of the show. After this, the variety show will cease to exist."

Zhang Ye knew that in the Chinese entertainment circle, all the singers that could be invited in these recent years had already all been invited. If I Am a Singer were to continue, it would keep repeating the same old formula, and there wouldn't be any meaning to it. Instead, why not finish at the peak with all the honors? Actually, Zhang Ye had put forward two conditions when he handed over the authorizations of the shows to Beijing Television Station before he left to serve his sentence. First, Dong Shanshan had priority when considering the host candidate for the shows. Second, the shows have to be done well no matter what. From the looks of it, Beijing Television had indeed carried out their promise with Zhang Ye. In their judgment, they believed that I Am a Singer would likely head downhill by the next season, so they decided to bring forward the decision of ending this phenomenal variety show that no one could bear to abandon. To be able to make a decision like that required a very strong will.

Zhang Ye felt quite pleased about it.

It was a different era. This was now a time where the hot, young male stars dominated the industry.

Acting skills? Singing skills? These things were getting less and less important nowadays.

It was a good thing that it was coming to an end. There was indeed not much meaning in having a stage for singers to compete based on popularity.

But at this moment, what surprised Zhang Ye and everyone else was that the program team of I Am a Singer had actually announced a new plan. This was also to be the final curtain call of I Am a Singer. They had thought of organizing a battle between the former grand champions of I Am a Singer as its closing show!

What was the meaning of this?

This meant that the grand champions from season one to season five would all stand on this stage to fight it out among themselves to decide the greatest

champion of all five seasons of I Am a Singer!

In the past, it was singers versus singers!

And now, they were planning to have grand champions versus grand champions!

Zhang Xia was amused. "They've really upped the ante."

Ning Lan said, "They're really dare to try something like that?"

Yao Jiancai said, "Would anyone go?"

Shu Han said, "Yeah, being a grand champion is the highest honor that can be achieved. But now, they're asking for all the past grand champions to return for another battle to decide the greatest champion?"

Beijing Television was very clear about it.

This was purely going to be voluntary and no one would be forced to take part. They would hold this battle of the grand champions in a fair and just manner. It would be best if the previous seasons' winners were willing to take part. But if that didn't work out, the first runner-up of that season could choose to participate instead, and so on and so forth.

...

On Weibo.

The netizens blew up.

"Wow!"

"This is good! This is really good!"

"This is so exciting!"

"A battle of the grand champions?"

"This is going to be a contest between two different generations of singers!"

"Qu Dong has just emerged as the grand champion of season five. His popularity is at its peak, so he'll surely have a very large advantage."

"That might not be true. The past few seasons' winners are not pushovers either."

"I'm so looking forward to it!"

"What a good plan by the program team!"

"Right, this is surely the most suitable ending for I Am a Singer!"

"I wonder if those previous grand champions will participate or not."

“Everyone probably cherishes their past honors very much, so it’s unlikely that they would agree to participate so easily, right?”

“Yeah. Besides, some of the grand champions have I aged and can’t sing good enough.”

“Can the past grand champions really stand together on the same stage?”

At this moment.

The Weibo of Qu Dong’s Studio gave their response.

—Qu Dong’s Studio announces that they will be taking part in the upcoming battle of the grand champions.

Ten minutes later.

Season four’s grand champion of I Am a Singer also made an official announcement.

—They would accept Beijing TV’s invitation to join the show.

The other grand champions responded in succession.

Heated discussions broke out on the Internet.

“They’ve really decided to join?”

“Oh my God!”

“How exciting! It’s gonna be really exciting!”

“Qu Dong will definitely emerge as the greatest champion!”

“Get lost, Qi Liang’s season of I Am a Singer is the best one ever!”

“Right, season four’s grand champion, Qi Liang, is definitely the singer who will give everyone a run for their money!”

...

In the suburbs.

Zhang Ye’s cell phone rang.

It was a call from an old friend.

Xiao Lu said: “Heehee, Teacher Zhang.”

Zhang Ye laughed and said: “Xiao Lu, what’s this that you’re planning?”

Xiao Lu said: “You saw the news already?”

Zhang Ye said: “It’s I all over the Internet.”

Xiao Lu said gleefully: “We spontaneously decided to hold the competition. In fact, we talked about this with many of the other grand champions and discussed it as well. At that time, you hadn’t been released

yet, so I couldn't get to you in time. But it's not too late, so how about it? Will you be interested to take part?"

Zhang Ye said: "You're really daring, huh."

Xiao Lu said: "I learned that from you, didn't I?"

Zhang Ye said: "That's a fight between the young guns. Why would I want to join in the tussle?"

Xiao Lu said: "Don't joke around. You're the creator of I Am a Singer, and also the first season's grand champion, so how can we leave you out?"

Zhang Ye shook his head. "I haven't sung in so many years."

Xiao Lu said: "Are you scared?"

Zhang Ye let out a chuckle. "Why would I be scared?"

Xiao Lu said: "Teacher Zhang, don't tell me that you're admitting you've become old?"

"Don't try that with me." Zhang Ye said: "This bro is not gonna fall for it."

The call ended.

Zhang Xia chuckled and said, "Is Beijing TV inviting you to join?"

Zhang Ye nodded. "Yes."

Jiang Hanwei laughed and said, "That's the best promotional platform that we can get. With the status and viewership ratings of I Am a Singer in the variety scene, there isn't another variety show that's a match for it. If they're going to hold a battle of the grand champions, the viewership ratings will certainly go up a notch. This is a hard to come by opportunity."

Zhang Ye rolled his eyes.

Ning Lan looked at him. "Don't tell me you're scared?"

Zhang Ye curled his lips.

Ning Lan said, "If you aren't going, then Grandma Zhang will have to go in your stead."

Zhang Xia waved it off. "Age has really caught up with me, I won't be able to out-sing the other contestants."

Shu Han said, "If you two aren't going, then wouldn't there be no representative for the first season of I Am a Singer? Without any representative, wouldn't that look really bad on the participants of the first season?"

Zhang Ye said, "Isn't Old Chen still singing?"

Ning Lan said, "Chen Guang can't win against them."

Zhang Xia laughed. "Honestly speaking, I can't beat them either."

Yao Jiancai said, "So does it mean that there will only be a chance of winning if Zhang'er participates?"

For a moment, everyone on the production crew looked at Zhang Ye.

Zhang Ye said helplessly, "What are you all looking at me for?"

Ning Lan said, "We're all depending on you for the publicity work."

Shu Han grinned and said, "If Director Zhang wins this battle of the grand champions, that would be the best publicity we can get for the drama. For the sake of our production crew, and as a director, it looks like you have no choice but to stand up for us."

Zhang Ye said with a laugh, "Are you guys throwing me under the bus?"

Jiang Hanwei said, "You're the director, after all."

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Alright, alright, let me think about it."

But Zhang Xia said, "Little Zhang, I actually recommend you don't take part."

Zhang Ye nodded. "I know."

Zhang Xia sighed and said, "It's too risky."

Chapter 1548: The list for the finale battle of the grand champions!

Two days went by.

The other grand champions officially announced their intention of joining.

The fifth season's grand champion of I Am a Singer, Qu Dong.

The fourth season's grand champion of I Am a Singer, Qi Liang.

The third season's grand champion of I Am a Singer, Hai Yifei.

Although the second season's grand champion had declined the invitation due to poor health, he recommended the female first runner-up from his batch of singers, Guan Xue, to participate in his stead. Guan Xue had received a similar amount of votes as the grand champion during that season's grand finals, so she could also be considered a very acknowledged and popular singer to the audience.

The grand champions from the five seasons had nearly assembled.

Only the singers from the first season did not respond to the call for them.

Being the earliest season of I Am a Singer, and also the opening class of this phenomenal variety show, none of the people from this generation of participating singers made a sound. Among them, those who had aged had aged, and those who have retired had retired. For some of them, they suffered from vocal injuries, while others were embroiled in contract issues with their talent agencies. Everyone was caught up in all kinds of different problems.

On Weibo.

"Qu Dong is prepared!"

“Supporting Hai Yifei!”

“Qi Liang is definitely gonna win!”

“In terms of popularity, Qu Dong is definitely the most popular one. After all, he was the winner of the latest season of the show. In terms of singing skills, it should probably go to Qi Liang. He hails from a musical family, after all.”

“Has anyone from Season One come forward yet?”

“The first season’s grand champion is Zhang Ye, right?”

“Hasn’t Face-smacking Zhang come back?”

“Can he still sing?”

“Who knows!”

“I guess that fellow will probably not be taking part. Isn’t he busy filming a drama?”

“And besides, it’s been such a long time. Actually, even the second season’s runner-up, Guan Xue, does not have that much of a presence in the music scene these days. She’s slowly getting marginalized from the industry.”

“Grandma Zhang was really popular back then.”

“Well, that was back then.”

“Seasons Two to Five have already sent out their participants, so all there is left now is for someone from Season One to respond.”

“But they should send someone to participate no matter what.”

“Hurry up!”

“@ZhangXia!”

“@ChenGuang!”

“Everyone, guess who will be chosen to represent the class of Season One!”

The people were in an uproar.

In the end, even the hot, young male stars started speaking up.

On Qu Dong’s personal Weibo account, he mentioned many of the singers of Season One, saying humbly: “Back when the first season of I Am a Singer was shown, I was still a part of the audience. At that time, I hadn’t even debuted yet and was a fan of all our seniors on the show. Years later, I am standing on this stage myself, so I really hope that I can get the chance to have a friendly competition with my predecessors.”

Following that, Qi Liang also posted on Weibo: “I’ll do my best starting now to prepare for the battle of the grand champions finale. I look forward to meeting with the seniors to exchange tips with them.”

On the surface, it sounded like they were asking for guidance from their predecessors. But in reality, challenge was in their tones.

A competition between different generations of singers.

A battle between the old and new singers.

Beijing Television's gimmick was well-crafted. Back when they were pitting the singers against each other, the viewership was already at a high figure. But with the impending battle of the grand champions, all of the people's' appetites were whetted again. Over the past few days, a lot of attention was given to this show on the news, media, and Internet. Rumors said that the grand finals of this grand champions' battle would be held live as well, which made the anticipation even greater. A lot of people clamoring and couldn't wait to watch it.

Even before the competition had begun, a fiery atmosphere arose between the different fans of the male idols.

...

In a group chat.

This was a very old chat group from years ago. In it, the group members consisted of the singers who appeared in Season One of I Am a Singer. There hadn't been any activity in here for many years, and it was one of the so-called "dead groups" that people commonly called them. But today, this dead group was resurrected. Many of the chat members had emerged from their slumber.

Chen Guang: "1111."

The Princess of Love Songs, Xue Kaiqi: "2222."

The Prince of Love Songs, He Huan: "Huh?"

Zhang Xia: "???"

Amy: "Oh, the dead group has come to life."

Xiaodong: "What's going on?"

Chen Guang: "Someone's challenging us. What do you guys feel about it?"

Xiaodong: "Hur hur, I don't feel anything."

Chen Guang: "..."

Amy: "Old Chen, go for it! Don't embarrass us!"

Chen Guang: "My voice hasn't been that good for some years. I can't reach the high notes anymore."

He Huan: "Amy, why don't you go and spar with them? You're one of the younger ones around here."

Amy: "I don't have any good songs that I can sing. The songs that people like these days are different from what we used to like. I don't even know what it is that they like anymore."

Xue Kaiqi: "You guys go ahead. I've retired from the scene."

He Huan: "I still have an issue with my contract, so I can't go even if I wanted to."

Xiaodong: "Grandma Zhang, what's that fella up to these days?"

Zhang Xia said, "Him? He just finished filming his show and should be idle."

Chen Guang: "Damn, why don't he go participate then?"

Amy: "Yeah, he has to step up no matter what. Otherwise, how embarrassing would it be for us? Even if we know that we will lose, we cannot do nothing about it."

Xue Kaiqi: "@ZhangYe Come on, go do all of us proud!"

He Huan: "@ZhangYe It has been so many years. Can you still write new songs?"

Xiaodong: "He can always stick to singing his old ones."

Chen Guang: "If no one is going, I guess I have no choice."

...

At night.

Back at home.

Zhang Ye was carrying his daughter and eating dinner.

His mother was asking from beside him, "So who's going to participate in the competition?"

His father asked, "Don't tell me you'll be the one going?"

Zhang Ye smiled. "I'm still thinking about it."

His mother rolled her eyes. "What's there to think about? I Am a Singer is no longer the same. They've already finished broadcasting the fifth season. Even though the results are supposed to be determined based on singing skills, and should be assessed on whether a song is performed well, the actual outcome still depends on how popular one is. The real competition is on who has a bigger fanbase, while singing skills are a secondary concern. You should just take it easy. What if you end up in last place after deciding to go onstage? How embarrassing would that be? In that case, you might as well not join at all."

Zhang Ye said in amusement, "That's what the staff at my studio says as well. Just how little confidence do you all have in me?"

His mother said, "That's what you get for being away for so long."

Zhang Ye looked at his wife. "Old Wu, what do you think?"

Wu Zeqing smiled. "Decide by yourself. I'll support you no matter what."

Zhang Ye rubbed his daughter's head and asked, "My dear, do you think that Daddy should join?"

"Daddy should join, Daddy is the greatest," Sisi said loudly.

Zhang Ye jutted out his chin. "See, it's still my daughter who is the most confident in me."

Sisi shouted, "Daddy will win for sure!"

His mother pouted.

His father suggested, "Think about it again."

The calls kept coming in one after another.

His friends called to ask about the situation.

And Beijing Television called him to harry him for a decision.

Only a few days remained until the battle of the grand champions began.

In fact, Zhang Ye had still not formally met with everyone since the announcement of his comeback. The people had only heard about this news through the media, and he had not come face to face with everyone through his activities so far. Therefore, he wanted to say many things to them.

Should he join?

To take to the stage of I Am a Singer once more?

So that he could let everyone know that he was back, not through the media or over Weibo, but by telling it to them face to face?

Chapter 1549: The five contestants gather!

Translator: Legge **Editor:** Legge

On this day.

At Beijing Television.

In the program team office of I Am a Singer.

Today was the day when the program team would finalize the list and also hold the initial meeting for the competition's contestants. From early in the morning, the staff were getting busy everywhere.

Just a moment ago, Beijing Television had announced the rules and competition format for the battle of the grand champions.

The show would continue using the stage of I Am a Singer, and it would be held live. There would be a total of five grand champions or their stand-ins representing each of the five seasons' winners, and everyone would have to perform their songs in turn. The format was very brutal, with only two episodes dedicated to the entire competition, and each episode consisting of two elimination rounds. The contestant with the greater number of votes would not get ranked while the one who received the lowest number of votes would have their names announced and eliminated without being allowed to advance to the next round. That was to say, within the first two rounds of the first episode, two grand champions would get eliminated from the competition. The second episode will also see two more grand champions being eliminated, leaving the last surviving contestant as the glorious greatest champion of I Am a Singer's finale battle of the grand champions.

The citizens would be allowed to vote in real time for their favorite contestants.

Each contestant would be allowed to perform one song per round, and one person would be eliminated afterwards.

Regardless of whether it was in terms of the show's quality, intensity, or scale, this competition was truly an unprecedented one in history. This was going to be the most brutal battle between the famous singers of the music scene.

The outside world was abuzz with discussion.

The program team was busy preparing for the upcoming battle.

"We're going to have song rehearsals today. Is the band here yet?"

"They'll be here right away."

"What time are the contestants arriving at?"

"We've asked them to come at 8 AM."

"Who is going to be the representative for the first season?"

"I don't know. I haven't received any updates on that yet."

"Logically speaking, it should be Grandma Zhang Xia who is coming."

"Yeah, even though everyone acknowledges Zhang Ye to be the deserved winner of the first season, and even Grandma Zhang Xia herself said so in the media, the official grand champion of the first season is still Grandma Zhang. If Grandma Zhang decides not to participate due to her age, there will surely be someone to take her place."

"Who do you guys think will come today?"

"I can't guess at all."

At this moment, the executive director arrived.

Everyone immediately greeted her.

"Director Lu!"

"Director Lu, good morning."

"Sister Lu, you've arrived?"

Xiao Lu nodded calmly.

Maturity.

Reliability.

Authoritative.

After several years, a lot of people were no longer the same.

Following close behind, the grand champions also arrived.

The first to step into the team office was the fourth season's grand champion, Qi Liang, and his agent. Other than that, he also brought along two assistants. Qi Liang hailed from a music family and was young and handsome too. Without any scandalous gossip affecting him, he was one of the more popular male idols at the moment.

Qi Liang wore a very brisk smile and his voice was very crisp. "Director Lu, am I the first to arrive?"

Xiao Lu smiled back politely. "Yes, the others aren't here yet."

Qi Liang smiled and said, "Alright then, I'll wait."

Xiao Lu acknowledged, "Have a seat."

Soon after, the first runner-up of the second season, Guan Xue, arrived with the third season's grand champion, Hai Yifei. They had probably run into each other downstairs before heading up together.

Guan Xue waved and said, "Director Lu, long time no see."

Xiao Lu said, "Yeah, it's been two to three years since we saw each other."

Hai Yifei asked in concern, "Director Lu, which senior will be coming to represent the first season's participants? Has it been decided yet?"

Xiao Lu shook her head. "I'm also waiting to find out who it will be."

Qi Liang stood up. He said, "Even you're not sure who it will be?"

Xiao Lu said, "Yep."

Behind them, the fifth season's grand champion arrived with his team.

Qu Dong had only arrived slightly after them. However, there were really too many people with him in his entourage. Not mentioning his agent, there were four other assistants who came along with him. It was obvious just how important this battle of the grand champions meant to him since he had nearly moved out all of his staff for this. Although Qu Dong and Qi Liang were considered to be at the forefront of the Chinese A-list rankings and were highly rated by the media as the most hopeful candidates to replace Heavenly Queen Xu Meilan as the new generation of S-list superstars, I Am a Singer was still a very important show that these male idols would fight hard to win. After all, they also needed to gain the honors of winning such a prestigious competition and the popularity that would come along with it. As such, every one of them treated Xiao Lu very politely as they understood she had the final say on all aspects of the show.

Qu Dong greeted, "Director Lu."

Xiao Lu replied, "Oh, you're here?"

Qu Dong's agent went up to her to shake her hand. "Director Lu, you've grown prettier since I last saw you a few days ago."

Xiao Lu smiled but didn't carry on the conversation.

Qu Dong's agent didn't mind and asked, "Can I check if you have a quieter waiting room somewhere around here? Our Little Qu just got off the plane, so he's pretty tired, you see. Can you make arrangements?"

Xiao Lu said, "Let's wait for everyone to arrive first. There's a lot that I need to brief you all on."

His agent smiled and said, "Oh, never mind then."

Hai Yifei asked, "Director Lu, is there a smoking area somewhere?"

Xiao Lu looked at him. "Beijing Television has banned smoking in the entire compound."

Hai Yifei gave a slightly derisive smile. "Alright then."

Xiao Lu didn't talk much with them and did her work.

The four celebrities started chatting.

Qu Dong said, "Sister Guan, your new song is pretty good."

Guan Xue said, "You've heard it?"

Qi Liang replied, "I've listened to it as well, and I think it's nice."

Guan Xue said, "It's nothing compared to you guys. My song didn't even make it into the top ten of the charts."

Hai Yifei said, "I heard that Grandma Zhang Xia won't be coming?"

Qu Dong replied, "Grandma Zhang might be a veteran singer, but she's at that age, y'know."

Qi Liang said, "I wonder who will be coming as the replacement."

Guan Xue wondered, "Could it be Big Brother Chen Guang?"

Hai Yifei said, "We'll find out soon enough."

Qu Dong said, "Why isn't he here yet?"

Qi Liang said, "We are scheduled to begin at 8. There are still a few more minutes to go."

The four of them were confirmed as contestants. The only thing they were unsure of was who the first season's contestant would be. They were also very concerned about who their opponent was and were hoping that it would be a weaker one since all of them wanted to win. Everyone here knew how valuable the title of the greatest champion was, and it was unlikely that there would be another chance to earn an honor like it in their lifetimes. Winning this competition would likely help bring their popularity to a new high as well.

Zhang Xia?

Chen Guang?

Amy?

He Huan?

Or would it be Zhang Ye?

At 8 AM sharp.

Xiao Lu looked at her watch with a frown.

Qu Dong and the others knew that Director Lu had been angered.

"We're not waiting anymore!" Xiao Lu took out some documents and handed them out to everyone.

"Let me briefly explain the competition format and point out some things to take note of. The live broadcast this time is mainly—"

Behind her, the door opened.

A man wearing sunglasses slowly walked in. When he noticed that Xiao Lu did not see him, he walked up to her with a smile and stretched out a hand. Under the startled gazes of Qu Dong, Qi Liang, Guan Xue, Hai Yifei, and everyone else, he placed a hand on Xiao Lu's head and noogied her. "I had to send my daughter to school this morning and was held back by her form teacher. Am I late?"

Xiao Lu turned around in shock.

Zhang Ye took off his sunglass and grinned at her. "Comrade Xiao Lu, long time no see."

Xiao Lu let out a weird shriek. She laughed and pounced on him, giving him a bear hug. "Director Zhang!"

The other members of the program team also got excited!

"Director Zhang!"

"Aiyo, Director Zhang!"

"Director Zhang, you're finally back!"

A lot of people rushed up to him!

The program team erupted into a frenzy!

Zhang Ye looked at all of his old friends and greeted all of them by name. They were all colleagues that Zhang Ye had worked with. Some of these people had only worked under Zhang Ye once, while others worked under him from the day he joined Beijing Television until the day he left.

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Don't keep addressing me as Director Zhang. Director Lu is the one who is our boss now."

Xiao Lu grinned cheekily. "Are you teasing me? Wasn't I brought up by you in the first place?"

Zhang Ye said happily, "Where's Hou Ge and Hou Di? And Dafei?"

Xiao Lu said, "They've all been promoted."

Zhang Ye said, "Well, alright, lunch is on them then."

Xiao Lu said, "No problem, I'll go and arrange it!"

Zhang Ye looked at her. "Did you grow taller?"

Xiao Lu rolled her eyes. "What age am I? How could I possibly have grown any taller?"

"But it looks to me like you're still a child." Zhang Ye laughed.

Qu Dong stared at Zhang Ye.

Qi Liang and Hai Yifei looked at each other.

When Guan Xue witnessed this scene, she smiled bitterly.

Director Lu's attitude towards Zhang Ye was completely different from how she treated them. They couldn't help but think about how Director Lu was behaving like a child in front of him.

Qi Liang said politely, "Senior."

Zhang Ye looked over. "Hello. Excuse me, but I've only just returned to the entertainment circle, so I'm not very familiar with everyone. How should I address you?"

Qi Liang smiled. "My name is Qi Liang."

Hai Yifei put his hand out. "My name is Hai Yifei."

Zhang Ye shook his hand. "Hello."

Qu Dong also introduced himself. "I'm Qu Dong."

Zhang Ye said, "Hello."

Guan Xue smiled. "Teacher Zhang, it's been a long time."

Zhang Ye said with a sigh, "Yeah, it has. You're also taking part this time?"

Guan Xue gave a wry smile. "I didn't expect that you'd be the one joining."

Zhang Ye threw his hands up. "I didn't have a choice. Grandma Zhang refused to come, and that Chen Guang kept pushing the responsibility around. He Huan has a contract issue with his talent agency and was frozen by them. In the end, only I could come."

Zhang Ye knew Guan Xue a little as he had met her during an award ceremony four or five years ago. At that time, Guan Xue was not popular. Although they weren't exactly close, and he didn't have many dealings with her, the two of them were still celebrities from the same generation. But for Qi Liang, Hai Yifei, and Qu Dong, Zhang Ye did not know them at all. They were all newcomers who had emerged only after Zhang Ye had been sent to jail. Back when Zhang Ye first debuted in the industry, these three people were probably still in school.

Right now.

All five of the contestants had gathered.

The battle of the grand champions was about to begin!

Chapter 1550: My spirit is still full of fight!

Later that afternoon.

The news spread.

The list for I Am a Singer's finale battle of the grand champions was finally confirmed.

On Weibo.

"Have they announced it?"

"It's gonna be Zhang Ye?"

"*faints* Why is it him again?"

"It's been so many years. Can he still sing?"

"Hard to say."

"This fellow should have lost most of his popularity, right?"

"Hai, being away for four years is basically a death sentence for a celebrity."

"I wonder how the progress of the TV drama that he's making is going."

"Can the good ole Face-smacking Zhang rise once more?"

"We'll know after watching."

"This will be his first time onstage since his comeback."

"I'm just afraid that this fellow will be the first to get eliminated."

...

Qu Dong's fan club.

In a group chat.

"Why is it him?"

"I know this Zhang Ye. He's such a cheat!"

"Yeah, his works are all over the language textbooks."

"His essays are so damn difficult to memorize that I'm sick of him."

"Me too. I felt like vomiting when I was made to memorize 'Ode to Young China.'"

"My parents were both his fans in the past. I just don't get what's so good about him. He's not handsome at all and is totally lacking compared to our Qu Dong."

"Supporting Ququ to win as the greatest champion!"

...

Qi Liang's fan club.

In a group chat.

"There's nothing about Zhang Ye to be afraid of."

"Yeah, our biggest opponents are Qu Dong and Hai Yifei."

"Zhang Ye might've been awesome in the past. I believe anyone would admit to that. But there's no room left for him to stand in the entertainment circle."

"Our Qiqi is the most handsome of all."

"As the most notorious and infamous hacker in the world, Zhang Ye still has the cheek to join this battle of the grand champions? Isn't he a little too thick-skinned?"

"That's right, this person has such a tainted history."

"The people these days like idols who are clean-cut and handsome. He's only average-looking and has so many blemishes to his reputation. Celebrities like that are already slowly getting marginalized."

"Qiqi will definitely be victorious!"

"Kick that tainted celebrity out!"

...

Back at home.

Zhang Ye's mother said, "That kid really went to join the competition?"

His father said, "If he wants to go, let him go. Do you think that you can still control him?"

His mother said angrily, "I'm just afraid that he'll lose. That would be so embarrassing."

...

At his eldest younger sister's house.

His three sisters had gathered to catch the show on TV together.

"Wow, our bro is participating in the competition!"

"It's true!"

"I'm so looking forward to it!"

"Bro! You can do it! Defeat those hunks!"

...

At Zhang Yuanqi's house.

Her phone rang.

"Hello, Weihong."

“Sister Zhang, have you seen the news?”

“I haven’t been paying much attention to the entertainment circle’s news for the past two years. All I get is you calling me to tell me about what’s happening every day. What’s the matter now? Did something happen again?”

“Haha, Teacher Zhang has really gone to join the competition.”

“The battle of the grand champions?”

“Yeah, they just announced the news.”

“I knew that he wouldn’t be able to sit idly by.”

...

Somewhere.

The former Spring Garden group.

Although their group had disbanded, Xiaodong, Amy, and Li Xiaoxian still met up regularly.

“Look at this, Teacher Zhang has been confirmed as the representative of the first season of I Am a Singer!”

“Hahaha, this is awesome!”

“Can he win?”

“Who knows? I only know that this has gotten much more interesting to watch.”

“There are already signs of Qu Dong and Qi Liang’s fans scolding him on the Internet. Pfft, Teacher Zhang has been away in jail for so many years, yet his social relations are still as crappy as ever.”

...

At Zhao Wuliu’s house.

“Old Zhao, Zhang Ye went to join the competition.”

“Really?”

“They’ve already announced it.”

“Hopefully he can help us win back some dignity.”

...

At the studio of a Heavenly King.

“He’s really gonna participate?”

“Zhang Ye is still as ballsy as ever, huh?”

“But what he doesn’t realize is that he’s no longer the Heavenly King from before.”

“Could he be thinking of reclaiming his throne as a Heavenly King?”

“Times have changed. How could it be that easy for him to make a comeback?”

“In this battle of the grand champions, he might end up becoming the first person to get eliminated.”

...

In Zhang Ye’s fan group #37.

Someone sprang out in this previously dead group.

Big Saber Bro: “Brothers and sisters, how many people are still in here? Give me a shoutout if you are! My large saber is again again again again again again again again again again again again again again unable to endure the thirst!”

Immediately, seven or eight people responded.

“Big Saber Bro!”

“Ah, I haven’t seen Big Saber Bro in several years!”

“Is it the real Big Saber Bro?”

“Where have you been for the past few years?”

Big Saber Bro: “It’s me. I’ve been restricted from using the Internet for the past few years. But now, I’ve finally regained my freedom. I’m currently gathering people by giving a shoutout to everyone in different groups. For those of you who see this message, please pass it on. Tell our brothers and sisters from years ago that Teacher Zhang has returned, and that I have returned as well. How many of you are still willing to follow Teacher Zhang to take on the industry again?”

“Hai, there aren’t that many of us left from back then.”

“Yeah, we used to have a full 1,000 members in each group in the past. Right now, there are at most a 100 or so people left. Many of them have quit the group, and there are many who are just lurkers. It will be very difficult if we want to gather everyone back together again.”

Big Saber Bro: “Gather up however many people you can. Our friendship from years ago and the stories from that time, I’m sure that everyone wouldn’t forget it just like that. It’s only because a long time has passed, and some people have gotten married or had children, so they’re busy with their own matters, that’s all. Teacher Zhang will be taking part in the battle of the grand champions very soon. This will be his first time appearing in public since his comeback, and it’s going to be an elimination round competition as well. We’ve been slapping the faces of others all our lives, so it had better not become us who gets slapped this time! Hurry, hurry, gather everybody. Get as many people as you can so that we can show Teacher Zhang we’re still around!”

“Sure!”

“Understood!”

...

In the Celebrity Goof Group.

Back then, this was the most important celebrity group in the entertainment industry. The people who were added into this chat group were either Heavenly Kings and Queens, or at least A or B-list superstars. But right now, most of the members in this group were washed up or retired from the scene. The chat group was deserted and no longer lively.

Xu Meilan: "@Zhang Ye make sure you don't lose in the first round."

Li Xiaoxian: "Teacher Zhang, bring out your abilities and show them what you're capable of."

Ning Lan: "@ZhangYe Damn, so you really ended up joining?"

Xiaodong: "Pfft, wasn't it you guys who urged him to join?"

Shu Han: "We were only saying it for fun."

Chen Guang: "Haha, Zhang'er, you better seek your own blessings."

Fan Wenli: "Zhang'er, all of us will be supporting you. Go show those young guns what real singing is all about. That is, provided you can still sing."

Amy: "Ah? Teacher Zhang can't sing anymore?"

Fan Wenli: "I don't know. I haven't heard him sing since he got back."

Ning Lan: "We didn't get to hear him sing either."

Xu Meilan: "Why does it sound like the chances are getting lower the more I hear about it? I'm about to fall off the S-list rankings, so I was hoping that Teacher Zhang could shield me from that for a while longer. If he can get into the limelight more, the popularity of those male idols won't increase so quickly, and they won't be able to catch up to me so soon. Otherwise, I doubt I can stay in this seat for much longer."

Ning Lan: "Then I guess you better not pin your hopes on him. Let's place our bets on how many rounds Teacher Zhang can last."

Chen Guang: "He should be able to last for at least two rounds, right?"

Amy: "I estimate he'll last only one round."

Ning Lan: "One round, agreed."

Xiaodong: "Don't joke around. Teacher Zhang will be so saddened if he sees this."

Everyone: "Hahahaha."

After several years, the group was still as joyous and fun as ever.

...

At around 9 PM, Zhang Ye had finally returned home from Beijing Television.

When he turned on his phone to have a look, he saw many messages from his friends.

Chen Guang: "If I had not had surgery on my vocal folds during these two years, I would've gone instead. I'll leave the responsibility to you then. Don't disappoint the first season's class of I Am a Singer. You're not only representing yourself; you're also representing the entire lot of our old generation of singers. It's all up to you from here!"

Amy: "Teacher Zhang, you can do it!"

Xiaodong: "Defeat all of them!"

Big Saber Bro Fan Yingyun: "Teacher Zhang, I'm back as well. The incident from four years ago lifted the lid on some of my past misdeeds, like the matter of helping you to delete your Weibo posts and hacking into the official websites of the other celebrities. Later on, those idiots even banned me from using the Internet. I've finally had the restrictions lifted, so I'm trying to gather up the people of the fan club again. Wait for my good news!"

After Zhang Ye read through every one of the messages, he smiled to himself.

Anxiety?

Anticipation?

Excitement?

He realized that he was feeling those emotions all at once.

Zhang Ye was very happy because he discovered that he still hadn't changed. Although he had taken many detours along the way, had a lot of bumps in the road, and undergone difficult trials and battles, he was still the same person he was before.

Ten years of icy drinks.

Can't cool my impassioned soul.

Diving back into the struggle tonight.

My spirit is still full of fight.