

Superstar 641

Chapter 641 Guest Coaches List!

In the afternoon.

After ending Grandma Zhang's call, Zhang Ye made a few calls in a row after that. Through the management agency, he found the agent before finally reaching the intended party after much trouble. After he made the intention of the call clear, Zhang Ye arranged to meet up with the person and drove over immediately.

In a district.

In a villa.

He followed the address and found his way here. Upon arrival, he saw the doors to the villa already opened and the male and female owners had both spotted Zhang Ye approaching. They came out immediately to welcome him.

"Teacher Zhang." The man waved at him.

The woman smiled and said, "We were still thinking of suggesting a more centralized place to meet. Was it hard to find this place?"

Zhang Ye smiled and shook their hands. He said, "It's best to discuss this in the privacy of your home since it is easier to speak there. There are people everywhere outside and it's not so convenient to talk about business. Once I had a meeting with someone at a coffee house and the staff and guests there were all busy taking pictures and creating a constant shutter sound with their cameras. Some of the young people were even more aggressive, coming up to our table to take photos of me up close. That really overwhelmed me, so how do you suppose we can talk about any business there at all?"

The man laughed and said, "Teacher Zhang, please come in."

The three of them went into the villa.

The woman went to the kitchen and came out with some tea. "Old Chen and I have both heard of Zhang Ye's reputable name so much and we've always been paying attention to your news. I really like the songs you wrote and have been hoping to meet you so that we could talk."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Me too. The Heroic Couple¹ of the singing industry—I've heard about the both of you for a long time now."

The man was taken aback and asked, "What is the Heroic Couple?"

The woman laughed, "We even have such a nickname? Where did it come from?"

Zhang Ye got a little nervous, knowing that it was a slip of tongue. There was no such thing as The Return of the Condor Heroes in this world, so he quickly added, "It's just a description for an ideal couple, ha ha."

The man said with a smile, "What ideal? We also argue on a daily basis."

Zhang Ye said, “Oh, but that’s not how they said it on television!”

The man laughed heartily and replied, “If it’s a television program, of course it will be slightly exaggerated to make us sound better. In our daily lives, which couple does not have their quarrels?”

The woman added, “If the argument gets too heated, we might even get physical.”

If it were with other industry outsiders or the media, they would surely not say that much. However, since Zhang Ye was also an industry insider and the three of them were similar in popularity with all of them being B-listers, together with the fact that they had no conflict of interests, their conversation was naturally also much more lighthearted.

The man was Chen Guang. He was in his early thirties.

The woman was Fan Wenli. She was thirty years old exactly.

They were both top singers in the country and were ranked a little higher than Zhang Ye on the Celebrity Rankings Index. One was in the middle of the B-list rankings while the other was in the lower half of the B-list rankings, making them look like they were just average celebrities. However, these two people were considered top singers in the singing industry. As comparison, when Heavenly Queen Zhang Yuanqi was at her lowest point in terms of record sales, she was estimated to be selling two-thirds of what Chen Guang and Fan Wenli were. Citing either one of them as an example, they could easily be labeled top singers in the singing industry. But of course, when they were at their lowest point in record sales, they also lagged far behind Zhang Yuanqi. After all, a Heavenly Queen was still a Heavenly Queen and even at that lowest point, her fanbase was still on a different level. This also clearly explained the problem here.

Chen Guang and Fan Wenli were only focused on their music careers and hardly ever crossed over to the film and television drama industries. If the Celebrity Rankings Index excluded those movie stars and hosts, and the rankings were only based on the music industry alone, then the two of them would surely be ranked in the top 20. They could be considered as B-listers in the entertainment circle but A-listers in the music industry! This was also the reason why Zhang Ye was paying them a visit today after pondering for a long time. Because the two of them were the most professional of singers, their image also aligned with *The Voice*. Actually, even if he found an A-lister celebrity who was primarily a movie actor and secondarily a singer, it would still be alright. But Zhang Ye felt that would make the selections a bit incomplete. A stage where vocals were the main feature would surely need to focus on that point. So whether it be the stage, the contestants, or the guest coaches, he knew he needed the most reputable singers from the music industry and not just someone who was highly rated in the overall entertainment industry. These two things were totally different!

After chatting for a long while, Zhang Ye had gotten familiar with them.

Only then did Zhang Ye touch on the topic. He said, “Regarding my invitation over the phone earlier, what do you think?”

Chen Guang looked at his wife then said to Zhang Ye, “Actually, I specifically went online to do some research on it. A program that does not care about looks and only focuses on vocals—I get the feeling that it’s just a gimmick, isn’t it?”

Zhang Ye said, "Yes, it is a gimmick, but not the type of gimmick you're thinking of. What I want is to make a most professional singing program. That's no lie. The contestants we want are also not limited only to those who have the looks or stage presence. As long as they can sing well, I want them all."

Chen Guang sighed, "The concept of this program is good, at least. That's something I agree with."

Beside them, Fan Wenli laughed and said, "Yes, if only you'd encountered such a program back then, you wouldn't have had to toil so hard for five full years. You would've gotten very popular early on."

Fan Wenli was very beautiful and was a singer who overall had good looks, a good demeanor, and a good voice. However, Chen Guang's looks could only pass as so-so. He didn't look outstanding and even had some pockmarks on his lower left cheek from past acne. This was why Chen Guang had a very difficult time when he debuted. It wasn't until recently that his singing career took off due to his determination and some lucky opportunities, helping him get accepted by everyone. Now that his popularity was soaring, Chen Guang was finally able to reap the fruits of the labor he had put in all these years.

Chen Guang was laughing and sighing at the same time. "My singing career path can only be described as extremely arduous. I've easily put in more effort than others by ten or a hundred fold before I was able to stand at the same level as some of them. Other people would find it difficult to relate to this experience of mine."

Zhang Ye said, "I do understand it."

Zhang Ye, too, was not someone who had good looks.

Chen Guang took a look at him and said happily, "How can we be compared? You have the eloquence, literary, and math talent, and even musical talent, so don't compare yourself to me. With my looks, I had to walk this entertainment industry's career path with only one leg. Those who were blessed with good looks could be described as walking down it with two legs, but for you, Zhang Ye, you have been walking down it with ten legs! Even those pretty boys from Korea could not compare to you, so your situation is totally different from mine, hur hur."

Zhang Ye said, "Brother Chen, you're really praising me too much. Usually, the strategy is to praise first before attacking, so does that mean that you're going to reject my invitation? If that's the case, then I won't have any other people I can approach. Sister Fan and you are the most suitable coach candidates I can think of."

Fan Wenli said, "May I ask who else will be joining?"

Zhang Ye answered, "I've already confirmed one coach: Grandma Zhang Xia."

Chen Guang was stunned. "Grandma Zhang? She's a great artist and a veteran of the music scene. No one can match her soprano, but isn't Grandma Zhang already half retired? I've also never heard of Grandma Zhang ever participating in any variety programs, so how did you manage to invite her?"

"Grandma Zhang and I have a bit of a friendship, so you could say that she gave me a little bit of face this time," Zhang Ye explained.

Chen Guang thought about it for a moment and then looked at his wife. “What’s your opinion about this?”

Fan Wenli shrugged. “Whatever you decide, I’ll go along with it.”

Chen Guang said, “I think this will be good opportunity and I’m really interested in such a program as well.”

“Then why don’t we discuss the joining payment?” Fan Wenli looked at Zhang Ye and said.

Zhang Ye immediately said, “It will be a general contract for a duration of up to three months. Of course, before the scheduled recording of the main program itself, we also need the both of you to accommodate our program team’s promotional and other related activities as well as endorsements that are related to the program, all of which will be covered under the joining payment and not additionally payable. But if it has to do with endorsements outside of the program or extended promotional activities, then the relevant fees will also be paid out according to the clauses of the contract. We can always discuss that at a later time.”

Chen Guang grunted his understanding.

“As for the joining payment,” Zhang Ye smiled and said, “What I can say is that it will surely be the highest in the industry, especially when it involves two heavyweight coaches like the two of you. It wouldn’t be good if we paid too little.”

It was easy to speak to Grandma Zhang since they had a friendship, and more importantly, she did not really care too much for these contracts. But for others, the joining payment was surely the most important factor. Money always came first, so if it wasn’t agreed upon, even if they felt that your program was good, it wouldn’t matter at all. Besides, Zhang Ye already intended to produce such a mega-scale talent show, so he wasn’t afraid to spend. He knew that however much he spent, it would surely be worth it.

Zhang Ye paused for a moment, and then said, “For the two of you, what if I offered each one 10 million RMB as the joining payment?”

Chen Guang’s eyes moved.

Fan Wenli was also surprised for a bit.

Zhang Ye added, “How does that sound?”

The couple looked at each other for a moment before Chen Guang said, “I’m really unable to reject an offer like that.” He had only ever participated as a guest on a talent show once before—two years ago—and that program had only paid him 4 million as the joining payment. Although back then, he wasn’t as famous as he was now and inflation wasn’t high either. But as an industry insider, Chen Guang knew that the current market was not as good as that time either. The market for talent shows was in a downturn with every television station lowering the guest joining pay, yet Zhang Ye offered the two of them a total of 20 million in joining pay. That was already a big show of sincerity. If it were any other program approaching them, he believed they wouldn’t have even offered them half of what Zhang Ye had!

Zhang Ye stood up and put his hand out. "So, let's have a happy partnership?"

"To a happy partnership!" Fan Wenli and Chen Guang both stuck out their hands to shake Zhang Ye's hand in response.

With the agreements made, the only thing left was just to sign the contract at a later date.

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Leaving the villa, Zhang Ye did not have Chen Guang and his wife see him out. He casually strolled toward the district as he took out his phone and scrolled through his contacts.

Out of four coaches, three were already settled!

He was finally down to looking for the last coach!

But this last candidate was also the most difficult to convince. With such a huge reputation, it was someone that Zhang Ye had to convince no matter what, for the sake of The Voice. But he knew that it would be very difficult as well, and did not hold out much hope. He left this candidate as the final one to contact as he was ready for a protracted battle. He knew of the importance of this person for The Voice since a mega-scale singing talent show should unquestionably be fronted by an S-list, big shot celebrity. Only then would the entire setup look grand, leaving the audience screaming and helping to drum up the promotions for the opener of The Voice. This person would eventually serve as the main attraction for the program!

Who would it be?

Who could hold up the entire panel of coaches and represent them for The Voice?

There was already no suspense to the answer—it had to be the Heavenly Queen, Zhang Yuanqi!

Perfect looks, a perfect body, a perfect voice, and she even had the largest fanbase in the whole of China. Other than her, no one else could step up to this role!

In Zhang Ye's previous world, The Voice was lavishly decked out, from the stage to the equipment, contestants to the coaches. Zhang Ye was also aiming to achieve that right now. To avoid any accidents and a noncompliance situation when he brought over the program to this world, he needed to make sure that he laid out all the proper groundwork so that this world-class program would be restored in its full glory. That was the reason why he needed such a strong lineup for the program's coaches. It needed to at least be on par, or surpass, his previous world's version of The Voice of China!

Old Zhang must definitely be convinced to join!

But how should he do it?

A Heavenly Queen was not simply invited with just a snap of the fingers!

Right now, Zhang Yuanqi's focus was on releasing a music album, holding concerts, or taking parts in movie, and was basically not planning to participate in any recordings for television programs. As there was a market downturn presently, the programs did not pay well and tended to take too long to finish recording, only to end up getting very average viewership ratings, which could also be described as an

“unable to make ends meet” situation. These were the reasons why any genuine Heavenly Kings and Queens or even A-listers were taking part in fewer and fewer television talent shows. A normal variety or interview program was still alright since those would only take a day or just several hours to record. But a talent show was different. Beginning with the auditions and moving to the round of 16, then the quarterfinals and semi-finals, etc, the entire process was too lengthy. The big shot celebrities who did not lack any job offers couldn’t possibly want to waste their time on such shows.

So how would he try to convince her?

Zhang Ye typed and retyped his words before finally sending out a very long text message to her. He made an introduction of his program and briefly explained the mechanics and format to Old Zhang.

Di di.

Old Zhang replied: “Not interested.”

Zhang Ye was speechless but replied: “Consider it for a moment. You can also tell me the joining payment you’re looking at.”

Old Zhang: “Too many activities, no time.”

Zhang Ye: “It’s not like I need you to be here at Central TV every day for 24 hours to do the recording. It’s only a few days and we’re also willing to accommodate your schedule to record the program. If you have something on, then we can always record it later and will surely wait for you.”

Old Zhang: “Look for someone else.”

Zhang Ye replied angrily: “Old Zhang, you’re really ungrateful. My new program has just started production and needs some support, so you should really try to help me out here no matter what. Hurry up and agree, otherwise, don’t expect me to write any songs for you in the future.”

Old Zhang: “What good songs do you have?? Send them over.”

Zhang Ye: “I don’t have any now, so let’s talk about the program first.”

Old Zhang: “Even if I did state a joining payment, Central TV would not be able to afford it.”

Zhang Ye: “If you don’t state it, how would you know that I am unable to afford it?”

After about five minutes or so, Zhang Yuanqi finally replied: “The lowest I can accept is 40 million, along with two songs from you.”

Zhang Ye: “One song.”

Old Zhang: “Two songs.”

Zhang Ye: “One means one, I don’t have more.”

Old Zhang: “.....Fine.”

Zhang Ye decisively said: “Deal! It’s settled then!”

Old Zhang: “Are you sure that you can afford the joining payment of 40 million?”

Zhang Ye laughed loudly as he typed in his reply to her: "You don't have to worry about that. Just wait for your money."

Old Zhang: "OK, talk directly to my manager about the contract. Notify me in advance about the filming of the show and promotional trailers. Also, start thinking about the new song."

"I won't forget, do you think I would go back on my words for that?" Zhang Ye said.

It was settled!

He finally managed to get the Heavenly Queen to join the coaching panel for The Voice!

Was 40 million RMB a lot? To others, this might look like it was an astronomical amount, but for Zhang Ye, as long as it could help the program do well, it didn't matter how much it was. Besides, based on Zhang Yuanqi's status and popularity, as the person on top of the food chain that was the entertainment circle, if 40 million RMB was able to convince her to join the show, then it should not be seen as a business loss at all. At the minimum, even if other television stations offered 40 million RMB to Zhang Yuanqi to join their program, she would not agree to it. Those television stations were unable to produce and offer what Zhang Ye was able to give: a song. Old Zhang was not someone who would be moved by just anyone!

Everything was A-OK!

It was all settled!

The four generals have been fully assembled!!

Chapter 642 Dissolving the program team?

Later that afternoon.

It was almost time to leave work.

At the program team office of The Voice, many of the staff who had been stationed at the recording site were back. They were gathered back here for a short meeting to update each other on the day's work and their progress.

"How's your progress?"

"The progress is a little slow and there aren't too many registrations from the public."

"I couldn't settle my task either; the main issue still hinges on our offer being too low."

"Assistant Director Zhang, are you able to spare us some funds from your side?"

"I can't, I don't have enough to use either. Teacher Zhang specifically instructed that the equipment had to be the best, and after my discussion with the vendors today, I am still lacking some funds. One of the machines went over the budget."

"Ai, we're really too poor."

"I finally understand what 'money makes the world go round' means now!"

“I wonder if Teacher Zhang managed to pull in any sponsors over at his side.”

“We’re done for. Everyone has such bad opinions of our program and the stage isn’t even set up yet. When we have nothing to show for at all, who would even dare to sponsor our program?”

The colleagues were all sighing. At the beginning, when they arrived at this program team, they were all full of anticipation and looking forward to this Central TV Department 1’s new program which would be helmed by the legendary Zhang Ye. But who would have thought that they would be regretful after just one day of work? The strong support from Central TV Department 1 was gradually becoming just average support. With the audience not thinking much of it and the program team running out of money, they all felt that there was no longer any future for this program. Darkness lay ahead of them and they felt that if they continued on like this, the program team might even get dissolved before the program could be made.

Meanwhile.

A rumor had started internally at Central TV Department 1.

“Hey, did you hear?”

“What’s the matter?”

“The program team for The Voice is going to be dissolved.”

“Ah? Didn’t they just form the team recently?”

“They ran out of money, spending 20 million RMB on equipment purchases alone. That was all the station had given to them as funding, but now that they’re out of it, they can only sit and watch.”

“Would the station just leave them like that?”

“Of course the station wanted to do something about it. They were already planning to make a strong return to the variety genre of programs and did so by risking it with Zhang Ye’s employment. But I don’t suppose they had expected Zhang Ye to be so risky. Not mentioning the controversy behind the proposed program, but when the 20 million RMB was spent just like that on those equipment, how do you expect the station to give them anymore support? Who wouldn’t be fazed by seeing money being spent like that? Even Central TV Department 1 would not have that much spare cash for Zhang Ye to burn through like that. 20 million RMB worth of production costs is already several times more than many of our other programs, so I’m sure the station was already hesitant to approve the initial sum.”

“Oh, then this is going to be really interesting to watch.”

“Will Zhang Ye be finished even before the ship sinks?”

“The program really won’t go on as planned then?”

“Didn’t I already say? If we got Zhang Ye to join us, then Central TV Department 1 would not have a day of peace anymore? Now do you all see why? He’s only been here a day and such a situation has occurred.”

“It’s not a problem even if the audience is not too optimistic about the program. After all, he had so many programs that did not look promising before but still succeeded as a precedent, so even if the final product is not completed yet, it would still have been alright. But without money, the problem becomes real. If he can’t even invite any celebrity guests or dress up the stage, how can he make any program at all? It can’t even be produced and recorded for the audience to watch! Let’s just see how The Voice program team is going to solve this.”

Central TV Department 1’s staff were all discussing fervently in secret, not knowing who had heard about this news or where its source was. It resulted in the rumor intensifying, not only within Central TV Department 1, but also spreading to the other departments housed in Central TV Tower.

Half an hour later.

Zhang Ye came back. He walked into the tower.

Ding. The staff elevator door opened. By coincidence, Chen Ye, the host of Central TV’s Spring Festival Gala who had been relegated from the B-list rankings by Zhang Ye, was just walking out of the elevator. He was going in the opposite direction of Zhang Ye.

Chen Ye was a little stunned.

Zhang Ye’s expression did not change. He casually swept his eyes over him as he entered the elevator.

To bring it up, although these two had a heated scolding battle on the internet, this was actually their first time seeing each other in person. Chen Ye had a more pronounced reaction as he was, after all, the one who had lost his position to Zhang Ye. Furthermore, the Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You targeted at him by Zhang Ye and his fans had left him grossed out for several days, and became a joke that netizens laughed at for a while. Naturally, when he saw Zhang Ye, it stirred up his feelings quite a bit. But Zhang Ye did not feel anything. He saw Chen Ye? Then so be it. He still went about going where he needed to go and did not stop in his tracks for a moment.

The reason for their different reactions was mainly down to their different experiences. As a Central TV host of this level, Chen Ye was one of the station’s pillars and had hosted the Spring Festival Gala before, so he could be mentioned as someone close to the top of the hosting world. He had a high status and hardly ever got into quarrels with anyone nor did he really have experience in such matters. As a result, after the previous fearsome scolding battle with Zhang Ye, it left a mark in his memory, especially since he did not win the battle. But for Zhang Ye? This person was someone who got into trouble so very often and always found the time to scold or beat up someone. For him, those were just part of his daily life, so you could say that he was very used to such situations. Now that he was seeing Chen Ye in person for the first time, Zhang Ye did not show any special reaction to him either. There were really too many people he had offended.

They brushed past each other, but neither one bothered with the other.

There were also a few other people in the elevator, possibly colleagues or staff who knew Chen Ye. When they saw the situation, they also had strange looks on their faces. They followed Chen Ye out of the elevator.

One of them started speaking.

“I heard that The Voice is going to be canceled soon.”

“I heard so too.”

“The program team was only put together two days ago, and it’s going to get canceled so soon?”

“They were too ambitious. For program with a funding of 20 million, they wanted to make it into the standard of several tens of millions more. When the funding couldn’t be increased and the advertising deals didn’t sell, the only out was to cancel it totally.”

“Oh right, Teacher Chen, I heard that your program’s title sponsor increased their bid?”

“Yes, it’s a newly signed contract.”

“Could you reveal to us what kind of a figure it is? Everyone’s quite curious about it.”

“Yea, Brother Chen, how much did you get?”

“Hur hur, there’s nothing confidential about it. It sold for 38 million RMB.”

“Woah, that’s a new record.”

“With the rise of the internet and the decline of the television market, there are fewer and fewer programs that can break 30 million RMB in title sponsorship fees, yet your program’s sponsorship is almost at 40 million?”

“Yes, the contract’s already been signed.”

“Congratulations, Teacher Chen.”

“How awesome! The program team I’m working for only managed 12 million RMB for the same thing. 38 million RMB, now that’s really an astronomical figure to us!”

Their conversation had inadvertently touched on that topic.

Inside the elevator, Zhang Ye could still hear what they were talking about. Even though the elevator doors had closed and he was separated from them by a large metallic door, the sound insulation wasn’t actually that good before the elevator started ascending. When Zhang Ye heard their conversation, he also wondered what they meant by the program team for The Voice was dissolving. Dissolved for what reason? And that title sponsorship fee they were talking about? How could 38 million RMB be called an astronomical figure?

Ding.

He reached his floor.

Zhang Ye walked back quickly to his own program team’s office. Before he could step inside, he already saw some faces etched with worry, as several people gathered around each other looking stunned.

Chenchen, sitting beside Ha Qiqi and playing games, apparently became aware and raised her head to see Zhang Ye walking in. The little kid got off from her chair and said with a sunken expression, “Zhang Ye, why are you only back at this time?”

Zhang Ye said, "Didn't I already say that I had something to do?"

Chenchen was still not looking too happy, probably because she blamed Zhang Ye for not being around to take care of her.

"What's the matter? You don't know how to go to the toilet by yourself? Didn't I tell you before that after you climb up onto the toilet, as long as you don't sit too far back, you won't fall in?" Zhang Ye went up to coax her a little and promised her that she would get more snacks and television time before she was satisfied and went back to playing her games.

As Chenchen walked away, Ha Qiqi and Zhang Zuo suddenly surrounded Zhang Ye altogether.

Zhang Zuo said, "Teacher Zhang, our program team is going to be dissolved!"

Ha Qiqi also said, "I heard from so many of my friends too. I think it might be true."

"Director Zhang, what should we do now?" Wu Yi was panicking. "Why don't you go look for the director and have a few words with him? Help us to fight against that decision? We went to look for Brother Fu just now, but he wasn't around."

Zhang Ye said in a speechless manner, "Who did you all hear that from?"

A female editor said, "Everyone's talking about it. There isn't smoke without fire, so it was definitely said by someone up top."

Zhang Ye had heard about this as well when he was taking the elevator up. Actually, he already knew that this was just a rumor. No matter how conservative or unreliable Central TV Department 1 was, they wouldn't possibly cancel a program just two days after starting it. If the rumor were true, then that would truly have been most silly. Although Central TV Department 1 had some doubts about him, but with the program not produced yet and with his previous experience and results for all to see, even if Central TV Department 1 wanted to give up on him, they would only decide on that after seeing how The Voice performed after broadcasting. To cut their losses before anything was implemented? That was impossible! Zhang Ye knew that this was surely just a rumor that spread after someone had made a wild guess!

Everyone was just saying what they thought.

Zhang Ye pressed his hands together and spoke reassuringly, "Stop talking everyone. I need all of you to calm your minds. This matter is just a rumor, so please ignore it."

Everyone stopped talking, but their eyes still showed signs of uncertainty. If it were purely just a rumor, then it would be fine, but the problem now was also that their program was out of funding and the station was very unsatisfied with the program and Zhang Ye's handling of the funds. At this moment, when the staff were already very worried that the team would be dissolved, hearing such a rumor only made it feel more real. That was what led to this situation of panic now.

Seeing them in this way, Zhang Ye was angry and tickled at the same time. Was this bro so lacking in prestige? Didn't I already say that I would find a way to settle the money issue? Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Alright then, let me give everyone a piece of good news. This afternoon I went out for a bit and managed to confirm an exclusive title sponsor for our The Voice of China program!"

When Ha Qiqi heard this, she immediately beamed with delight and said, “You got a deal?”

Zhang Zuo also turned from worry to joy and said, “It’s only been a few hours and you’ve already managed to pull in a title sponsor? Teacher Zhang really get things done! It must be because of your great reputation!”

A program that had not officially begun production and did not get much optimism from both industry insiders and the audience—without having any production movements or promotions since it was announced—was able to get a title sponsor? If this were anyone else or any other program team, that would surely be just as good as daydreaming! But Zhang Ye did it. This clearly showed the value of Teacher Zhang’s face and reputation. No one else could do something like this!

Highlighting this with an analogy, it was the same as shooting a movie. If you were an average director with an average screenplay, it would be difficult to pull in investments whomever you approached. But if you were a famous, big shot director in the country—with all of your previous films getting several hundred millions in box office earnings, and intended to shoot a new movie today—then even if you did not have a screenplay or proposal yet, as long as you announced that you wanted to make a movie, investors would still arrive in droves, offering to make investments into this project of yours! It was the same logic!

The key question right now was: how much was Zhang Ye’s reputation valued at?

A male editor hurriedly asked, “Director Zhang, how much did we get?”

A female administrative staff member asked, “Yeah, Teacher Zhang, how much did we manage to get?”

Zhang Ye kept them in suspense. “Hur hur, guess.”

A female editor made a bold wild guess and said, “20 million?”

Zhang Ye shook his head. “Guess higher.”

Higher than 20 million? Everyone was getting excited!

Zhang Zuo immediately said, “30 million?”

Zhang Ye laughed and said again, “Even higher than that.”

Ha Qiqi took a deep breath before saying, “Could it be...35 million then?”

Zhang Ye said, “Still higher.”

Wu Yi said, “Could it be that it’s also 38 million? I heard that Teacher Chen Ye’s program has finalized their title sponsorship contract with a renewed fee of 38 million. That is already this year’s highest title sponsorship fee amount!”

Zhang Ye graciously said, “You can still add to that amount.”

What?

That’s still not enough??

Everyone was stunned. They said, “Could it be...could it be 40 million?”

When they mentioned the words “40 million,” their hearts shuddered. They couldn’t help it either, since in their minds, their knowledge and past experiences told them that a singing talent show’s title sponsorship fees were only worth around this level. They had a limit and if it crossed that line, it would probably be something that they could not begin to imagine. They did not try to make any more guesses, nor would they be able to guess correctly!

Seeing their expressions, Zhang Ye was feeling extremely pleased with himself.

Ha Qiqi said parched, “Teacher Zhang, just tell us quickly!”

The female editor hounded him and asked, “Yes, Teacher Zhang, don’t tease us like this anymore! Just how much did you get for the title sponsorship fee?”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “Alright then, I won’t keep you all guessing. For the title sponsorship of The Voice, I have already negotiated with the Brain Gold company to purchase it at the amount of...100 million!”

When this figure rolled off Zhang Ye’s tongue, everyone in the office was shocked into silence!

Even Chenchen busy playing games raised her head to look at him!

100 million?

A title sponsorship fee of 100 million RMB?!

“Ah?”

“Huh?”

“Aiyo!

“This...is this for real?”

“How much? 100 million??”

Ha Qiqi almost fainted!

Zhang Zuo and all the other staff of The Voice were getting noisy from excitement. This happiness had arrived too suddenly and out of the blue! Everyone was taken by great surprise!

Chapter 643 Zhang Ye’s name is worth 100 million!

Soon after.

A piece of news began spreading inside of Central TV. Many of the staff who were just getting off work or already at the base of the tower heard an unexpected rumor!

The title sponsorship of The Voice had been sold!

And it was even sold for an astronomical figure of 100 million RMB!

Everyone’s first reaction was disbelief, followed by more disbelief, and finally...still only disbelief!

“Holy shit!”

“Isn’t The Voice defying all common sense now?”

“Zhang Ye’s reputation is worth 100 million? I won’t believe it even if it kills me!”

“That’s right. While I agree that Zhang Ye is awesome, if you tell me that he can get 40 million for the title sponsorship, I can still somewhat accept it. After all, as such a big shot celebrity, he must have some appeal to him, but 100 million? Are you kidding? Anyone with common sense will know that it’s impossible! Due to the climate of the current market, if a singing talent show program can get 30 million RMB in title sponsorship fees, it would already be one of the highest tier productions around, but you managed to get 100 million RMB for your title sponsorship? Are you taking blank pieces of paper as money?”

“It must be a false rumor!”

“That’s right, this has to be a rumor!”

“Hur hur, how can it be so high?”

“Do you all really believe it? It’s obviously a lie that someone is spreading. This is really a brag that has gone too far! In the history of Central TV, there haven’t been any cases of a variety show getting more than 80 million RMB in title sponsorship fees, let alone your so-called 100 million RMB in title sponsorship fees!”

“Not only Central TV, I don’t think there’s a single title sponsorship that has crossed the 100 million RMB mark at all out of the television stations across the country? If the title sponsorship was really sold for 100 million RMB, then when added with the other advertising rights fees, won’t it be headed towards 150 million RMB in total? Even if you think with your feet, you should know that it can’t possibly be that much! This amount has already exceeded the maximum possible for the industry! A 100 million RMB title sponsorship? Do you think this is the Spring Festival Gala? But the Spring Festival Gala doesn’t even sell title sponsor rights!”

At the program team’s office of The Voice.

Fu Sihong who was not in the around for the whole afternoon appeared back at the office!

At the same time, Jiang Yuan and a few managers of several related departments from Central TV Department 1 also appeared at the program team’s office of The Voice.

In the office, Zhang Ye was in the middle of a conversation.

He said, “Hurry up and get the contracts ready. I need them by tonight.”

A female editor replied excitedly, “Understood, Teacher Zhang!”

Zhang Ye added, “Then get someone from the related department to prepare four sets of contracts for the guest coaches. Don’t fill in the names or the amount yet. Just write it up according to the general contract template.”

A male editor said, “I’ll get someone to do it immediately.”

At this moment, a large group of people walked into the office.

“Little Zhang!” Jiang Yuan immediately asked, “What’s the situation with your program now?”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “Director Jiang, you’re here?”

Fu Sihong said, “You managed to pull in a sponsor?”

Zhang Ye responded, “Yes, I’ve have settled it.”

Jiang Yuan said, “It’s great that the title sponsorship was sold, but I heard that the title sponsor rights were sold at a price of 100 million RMB? Who spread such a piece of news? Was it you guys? If it is for the purposes of publicity and hype, you can just spread the news to the media and the audience instead. What’s the use of releasing the fake news within Central TV itself?”

Fu Sihong asked, “How much did you sell it for?”

Zhang Ye said happily, “It’s just as the rumors say, 100 million!”

Fu Sihong was rendered speechless.

Jiang Yuan stared at him and said, “Tell me honestly, how much was it?” He still did not quite believe it.

Ha Qiqi said on Zhang Ye’s behalf, “Director Jiang, it really sold for 100 million RMB. Just a while ago, the Brain Gold company’s manager of commercial title sponsorship rights called us to discuss the contract details. The manager also mentioned that we can sign the contract tonight and the money will be transferred to us in batches. They even said that they can include our name of The Voice into their current advertising campaign that is already active in the market to help us promote our show and will not charge us any extra advertising fees. It will be considered a part of our cooperation together!”

Zhang Zuo and the rest of the staff were also very excited. If not for that call, they would still be quivering and be like Jiang Yuan and Fu Sihong whom didn’t believe it!

Brain Gold?

The enterprise Zhang Ye was endorsing?

The health product group that became successful overnight due to Zhang Ye’s commercial??

Jiang Yuan took a deep breath, and looked at Zhang Ye in disbelief. He said, “So that 100 million RMB is for real? It’s not just some publicity stunt?”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “Of course it’s not a publicity stunt, that 100 million is the real deal!”

Fu Sihong was shocked!

Jiang Yuan could only stick his thumb up and exclaim, “Good! Good! Good!”

Zhang Ye said, “I’ve endorsed CEO Wu’s company and worked with him for some time now, so the discussions went quite smoothly. CEO Wu also gave me quite a bit of face.”

How was this even a case of showing face to him!

If it were, then the face given was just too flattering!

Just your name alone was already worth 100 million?

Jiang Yuan and the others really could not imagine this outcome as their opinions of Zhang Ye changed. There were some television programs that received good reviews from the audience and industry insiders but ultimately could not make much of a profit and their title sponsorship fees were only in the region of 10 to 20 million. However, there are also some television programs that the audience and industry insiders were not so optimistic about, but just because of the popularity of the person heading it, they could still pull in numerous investors. Even before the program started broadcasting, they had already made a good profit—and Zhang Ye obviously belonged to the latter group!

For the past two days, Jiang Yuan and many leaders of Central TV Department 1 had been tortured by Zhang Ye's antics and requests for additional funding. But today, there was finally some good news that helped restore their trust in Zhang Ye. Moreover, it also made them recognize Zhang Ye's worth once again! So what if the audience thought it was no good? So what if the industry insiders did not feel optimistic about it? The title sponsorship fees of 100 million had already been clinched! Their program has already been recognized by someone!

Zhang Ye took the opportunity to speak, "Director Jiang, you promised us before that we can freely allocate the amount of the title sponsorship fees as we like."

Jiang Yuan gave him a serious look and asked, "Are you going to invest all of the 100 million into the production of the program?"

Zhang Ye nodded, "Yes. With the station's funding of 20 million, I will use a total of 120 million as the production costs. I will create an excellent program that is both unprecedented and never to be replicated!"

Everyone gasped when they heard that!

Especially Fu Sihong, who trembled when he heard that amount!

120 million in production costs? This was only a television program! Would you need to spend so much money on it? Even if it was for a television drama or a generously budgeted movie production, a 120 million RMB investment would be considered a major production and would even reach the level of a Lunar New Year movie production! It might even be a Lunar New Year movie that was filmed in 3D! You're going to use the resources equivalent to a major 3D movie production to produce a television program? How much more extravagant could it get! How much of the money are you intending to burn through! What kind of a spendthrift are you intending to be! Can you get a return on investments?

Jiang Yuan was actually in a dilemma right now. If Central TV Department 1 had such an astronomical figure, their financial performance for this year would certainly soar. But when he thought of his promise to Zhang Ye, he knew that he could not take back what he said. Moreover, he knew of Zhang Ye's temper as well as his rather stubborn and thorny character, so Jiang Yuan was worried that Zhang Ye would quit if he did not agree. If that happened, the 100 million in title sponsorship fees was as good as gone. Without Zhang Ye, Brain Gold would definitely not invest in them.

Clenching his teeth, Jiang Yuan finally said, "Yes, it is all allocated to your program team!"

Zhang Ye also smiled. "Alright then."

Jiang Yuan gave some words of encouragement to the program team, “I’ve also received news that there was a rumor going around in the afternoon concerning how the station was planning to dissolve The Voice’s program team. That is a groundless statement and I’ve already gotten someone to investigate the identity of the rumormongers. All of you just relax and work well with Old Fu and Little Zhang on this program. The station will give you all the utmost support!”

Seeing an opportunity, Zhang Ye said, “Director Jiang, then can you give more manpower? Just the twenty plus of us are not going to be enough work on a production that’s worth over a hundred million.”

Jiang Yuan was speechless. He was just trying to placate and encourage the program team but now Zhang Ye was latching onto his words and trying to ask for more manpower? He asked, “How many people do you need?”

“Central TV has its own band, right? I do not need too many, just seven or eight people will do. That will save us the trouble of hiring a band, and besides, I trust our own people more.” Zhang Ye was making an exorbitant demand and was afraid that Jiang Yuan would not agree, so he said, “Otherwise, can the station give us another 8 to 10 million instead? The 20 million you allocated to us previously was not exactly a lot, so if you can give us more, I can make the program even better.”

Holy shit!

You still want more money?

With 120 million, it’s still not enough for you to spend?

Jiang Yuan was shocked by this request and said immediately, “I will get the band for you! Don’t even think about having more funds.”

Zhang Ye said regrettably, “Alright, I guess that’s also fine.”

Jiang Yuan did not dare say anymore and hurriedly left with his people. He was afraid that, if he stayed any longer, Zhang Ye would ask for even more resources.

When Jiang Yuan and his people left, they also brought along the news with them. The Central TV staff who were mocking the idea of a 100 million title sponsorship fee earlier had now heard the confirmation—The Voice had really signed a title sponsor for the astronomical sum of 100 million!

Shock!

Astonishment!

This reaction was everywhere!

Everyone at Central TV was stunned!

“Heavens!”

“So it really wasn’t a rumor!”

“It was true! It’s really 100 million!”

“How did Zhang Ye manage to do that?”

“This program hasn’t even been made yet and there’re no confirmed guests either, but someone still ventured to invest 100 million into it? Isn’t this about three to four times the title sponsorship fees of other talent shows?”

“They’ve gone mad! This group of people must have gone mad!”

“This totally defies all common sense!”

“This title sponsorship amount has blinded my eyes!”

“Teacher Chen Ye’s so-called astronomical title sponsorship fees are not even half what Zhang Ye’s new program is getting? Isn’t that too much of a difference! It’s not even something that can be called a slight difference! For the title sponsorship fees of a television program, a difference of 10 million is as good as a difference of one degree! Chen Ye’s program is actually behind Zhang Ye’s by six to seven degrees?”

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On the same night.

The news was spreading!

It was probably under the deliberate publicity of Zhang Ye’s team that the news of the 100 million RMB title sponsorship fees between Brain Gold and Central TV Department 1’s The Voice of China had been widely spread!

The media was shocked!

Fellow television stations were shocked!

Industry insiders were shocked!

All the citizens were also shocked!

A hundred million!

Was Zhang Ye’s name really worth so much money?

Chapter 644 The most prestigious lineup of coaches in history!

The next day.

It was Monday morning.

Zhang Ye was woken by Hu Fei’s call.

The current executive producer and director of Beijing Television’s Do You Remember, Hu Fei, said: “Little Zhang, did your new program’s title sponsorship really sell for 100 million RMB!?”

Zhang Ye yawned and said: “Yes.”

Hu Fei said: “Don’t fool around with me, tell me the truth!”

Zhang Ye laughed helplessly: “Why would I lie to you?”

Hu Fei: “.....”

Zhang Ye said: “We’ll be starting the official promotions and announcing it later today.”

Hu Fei restrained himself for a long time before finally saying: “You’re really awesome, kid! Everything that you’ve done up till now have been things that always leave others astonished! This title sponsorship contract for your new program is really too large, do you even know that? Everyone at Beijing Television Station and the other television stations are all talking about that title sponsorship fee of Central TV Department 1’s new program! This amount is...too frightening! When has any other television program ever signed a title sponsor deal that was worth as much as yours?!”

Zhang Ye laughed and said, “From now onward, there will be many others like this.”

Hu Fei did not agree with this. He said, “This was just a one-off case based on your reputation, how could it become the norm?”

“If you don’t believe it, then let’s see where we end up two years later. By then, a title sponsorship fee of 100 million will probably be the norm.” The situation of this world’s variety programs was seen before in Zhang Ye’s previous world as well. It was also a similar situation and similar downturn, so he knew that the downturn of the television industry here couldn’t go on forever either. There would be a time when it ushered in another golden age. There was always a trough and a crest, which was also often referred to as the laws of the market.

Meanwhile.

On the internet, reactions about the large sum of the title sponsorship for The Voice of many netizens fell in the stage of unacceptance. In the morning, at the places where the morning newspapers were sold at, many of the entertainment sections of the various newspapers had dedicated the headlines to the issue of the title sponsorship fees for The Voice!

Some people had found out about it last night!

While there were also those who only knew about it when they bought the papers in the morning. Upon seeing these headlines, they were all dumbfounded!

There were also people who found out about it on their way to work or when they were eating breakfast and overheard it from others. They were shocked by this piece of news!

“100 million?”

“Brain Gold must have gone crazy!”

“Will they even be able to recoup their capital?”

“Damn! What the hell! F**k!”

“Zhang Ye has started something big again!”

“This is more than something big, he has totally flipped everything upside down!”

“The Voice has surely broken the record for title sponsorship fees! I’ve heard that the rumored fees for the most popular singing program at the moment, Do You Remember, was only valued at 37 million!”

“Could this be fake news? Didn’t a lot of people from the industry say that there was nothing much to look forward to in The Voice? Didn’t they say that this program has nothing special to it and even goes against the trends of the market? If that’s the case, then why would any advertisers still dump such a huge lump sum to be the title sponsor? If this news is true, then Zhang Ye must really be very bold. Even though others are willing to pay 100 million, that doesn’t mean you should take it, right? Are you trying to reshuffle the industry’s cards for variety programs? Are you intending to reestablish the market rules and standards? All rules have been broken! All standards are toppled! The entire television variety industry has been totally stirred up by Zhang Ye!”

“Previous poster, aren’t you worrying too much over too many things?”

“Yeah, if the Brain Gold company is willing to offer that amount, then that just means that Teacher Zhang is worth that much. How does it reestablish any market rules or stir up anything? Isn’t it good that the title sponsorship fees are this much? If you let any other programs find their own title sponsors, I doubt they could even find someone willing to offer 50 million, much less 100 million RMB! What do you call this? This is what you call ‘difference’! This is also an affirmation from the market upon Zhang Ye’s strength and recognition! It’s not like anyone can get it just because they want it! They do not enjoy the reputation Teacher Zhang has!”

“Awesome!”

“100 million RMB...I’m utterly convinced!”

“Haha, I would really like to hear what those people who did not have much optimism for The Voice have to say now. Even without anything to show for right now, they still managed to secure a 100 million RMB title sponsorship! How face smacking!”

“Don’t you all understand Face-smacking Zhang’s style yet? How many times has it been already? From the start, when people said they were not optimistic about The Voice, I already knew that it would end up this way! Anyway, I’ve always thought well of Teacher Zhang Ye. No matter what programs or works he comes up with, I will surely support them!”

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Later in the morning.

Zhang Ye sent Chenchen to school before he turned around and headed towards Bayi Lake. He arrived at Central TV Tower very early to start allocating the tasks for the program’s marketing and promotions.

Not long after, Brain Gold published a statement, officially confirming their role as exclusive title sponsors to The Voice of China, having signed a sponsorship contract for 100 million RMB. At the same time, Central TV Department 1 confirmed the news too, with the program team of The Voice also stating that the 100 million title sponsorship fees would be fully invested into the production of the program. On top of the funding that was allocated to them by Central TV Department 1, The Voice would have a total production cost of 120 million RMB. They sincerely invited any interested advertisers to join as well as reiterating to anyone who had a passion for music to register for the program’s audition. They also publicly announced the registration and contact channels for the program team.

When the news got out, it reignited the heated discussions!

"It's been confirmed!"

"It's true!"

"It's really 100 million! The contract has been signed!"

"What the f**k! 120 million RMB, all to be used as production costs?"

"That has to be a record!"

"I'm so looking forward to it!"

"What kind of quality can 120 million RMB create in a program? I really want to see what they can come up with!"

"Can anyone please tell me loudly that I did not see this wrongly with my eyes? Isn't a funding of 100 million RMB more commonly seen in a movie shoot? Is this all going to be used only for producing a television program?"

"You did not see wrong!"

"Zhang Ye's making a really big move this time! And I like it!"

"Hahaha! If he's going to do it, he's going to make a big one! If he's going to do it, he's going to make it the most exciting! This has always been Teacher Zhang's style! If it succeeds, his name will surely go down in the annals of history! If it fails, then it will definitely leave a stink for ten thousand years! Zhang Ye's motto is 'reject mediocrity'! That is what I like best about him!"

"We already know the program's format and content, so now the only question left is: who will be the guests?"

"Yeah, who will be joining the show?"

"Those big shot celebrities basically no longer participate in talent shows anymore. With the viewer ratings and joining payments at near all-time lows, it makes it very difficult to get anyone good to join."

"If only Sister Zhang would join the show."

"Hur hur, previous poster, stop dreaming."

"I also know that it's just a dream, but I still want to think that way since I really like Sister Zhang a lot."

"It's impossible that an S-list Heavenly Queen would take part in these kinds of talent shows as a guest. Do you know how much people like them can earn from just filming a movie? They would gain more reputation as well, and even have a chance at winning an award, so why would they bother with a television program? Even if it's just those A-list singers, I doubt they could invite them either."

"Besides, The Voice already does not have a very good reputation, with the professionals rating it quite poorly."

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At Central TV.

In The Voice's program team office.

Everyone here was asking the same questions too.

After the female administrative staff member passed a few copies of the general contract template to Zhang Ye, she asked, "Teacher Zhang, do you need me to prepare a list of guest coaches candidates for you? Shall we start inviting them one by one?"

Zhang Ye gave a wave of his hands and said, "That's not necessary."

Ha Qiqi said, "The first round of preliminary auditions for the contestants will be held this afternoon. I've arranged for it to start at 2 PM. If we do not begin picking which guest coaches to invite, I'm afraid it will be too late."

Zhang Zuo also said, "That's right, Director Zhang. We ought to get prepared early since the market environment isn't that good. The guests are getting more and more difficult to invite, especially those big shot guests who always reject television talent show programs. We have to identify our targets first and contact them one at a time and negotiate. If it doesn't work out, we move to the next candidate."

Zhang Ye laughed, "No need to go through all that trouble. I've already negotiated with the guests."

"Ah?" Wu Yi said, "Already negotiated?"

Ha Qiqi said in surprise, "You contacted them yesterday afternoon?"

Zhang Ye nodded a few times, and then looked at his watch before saying, "I was afraid that the news would be leaked too early and cause unnecessary trouble or changes, so I kept it a secret instead. Looking at the time now, I think they should be here soon?"

As soon as he stopped talking, a few people were already at the door.

A staff member of Central TV Department 1 brought the guests in and said, "Teacher Zhang, they were looking for your office, so I brought them here."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Thanks, friend."

Ha Qiqi, Zhang Zuo, and the rest all did a double take when they saw them. It turned out to be the famous songstress, Zhang Xia, and behind her were her lawyer and manager, a total of three people!

Everyone was stunned!

Only Zhang Ye was not surprised. He went up to shake her hand and said, "Grandma Zhang, you're here right on time."

Zhang Xia shook his hand and said, "I'm always on time, hur hur. Let's get the contract signed then."

"Sure, it's already prepared. I'll let you have a look first." Zhang Ye took out the contract and passed it to her.

Ha Qiqi pulled Zhang Ye aside and asked with a face registering surprise, "You managed to get Zhang Xia to step out from her retirement? Doesn't she no longer take part in any variety programs?"

Everyone was truly surprised at this as no one could have expected Zhang Ye to get the issue of the guests settled so quickly after only going out for a short while. He even managed to invite the renowned songstress as a guest for their show. Everyone knew the program quality would surely be raised by several levels if they had Grandma Zhang fronting the show. With Zhang Xia joining, not only would her appeal and popularity help the program, her professional strength would also make the program more credible. This was a great artist who had sung for the country's leaders and foreign emissaries in the past!

Before Zhang Ye could answer, before they could get over their surprise, when Zhang Xia and her team were looking through the contract, another couple and their managers arrived.

A female editor exclaimed, "Chen...Chen Guang!"

Another male editor stared at them. "Fan Wenli!"

When Chen Guang came into the office, he directly went to Zhang Ye, smiling and waving at him. He said, "Teacher Zhang, we're not late, are we?"

"No, but since Teacher Chen and Teacher Fan are gracing us with both your presences, it wouldn't matter even if you were late." Zhang Ye spoke with a mouthful of courtesy and went up to welcome them with the contracts.

Zhang Zuo was getting excited!

Ha Qiqi was also getting excited!

Chen Guang had come? Fan Wenli had also come? These two were the very well-known ideal couple of the entertainment circle! And when it came to popularity, these two definitely belonged to the top of the singing world! As an example, among the guest coaches in all the singing talent shows being held by television stations across the whole country, even if the most popular one stepped forward, they would not be a match for the popularity of just one of either Chen Guang or Fan Wenli! And it was even more so if you compared the two of them together! If Chen Guang and Fan Wenli joined any of those singing talent shows, they would surely sweep all those coaching panels off their feet. They were definitely the Big Brother and Sister of any coaching lineup!

And now, the two of them were here?

They were both going to join The Voice??

The staff of the program team were all getting dizzy from this. This was no longer a matter of whether all this was happening too suddenly or not. This was a surprise no one could have expected even in their wildest dreams. With just one of them, they could already sweep away all the other singing programs, much less two of them! Zhang Xia together with Chen Guang and Fan Wenli? This lineup of coaches was too prestigious!

How did Teacher Zhang do it?

How did he get the three of them to come aboard??

Chapter 645: On fire even before the broadcast!

Outside the office area.

Many people from around Central TV Department 1 had gathered here to watch.

“Who’s that?”

“Is that Zhang Xia?”

“Whoa, what is Chen Guang doing here?”

“Fan Wenli is also here with her manager?”

“What are they doing here!”

“It can’t be that The Voice’s program team managed to pull them aboard for the show, right?”

“Ah!”

“Don’t scare me like that, my heart is not that strong!”

“Each one of them could be considered a big star who could easily shake the singing industry with just a light stamp of their feet! With any one of them coming aboard, it’s already a dream fulfilled, so how did they get all three of them?”

With so many celebrities here who were the big shots among big shots of the singing industry, many staff from the other departments had now gathered curious on this level at Central TV Department 1 where a small portion of the offices were located. Although they could guess what was happening, they were all still rather in disbelief that it could really happen.

Even Ha Qiqi and Zhang Zuo of the program team for The Voice found it hard to believe, much less them!

However, what would surprise them much more than that was only about to begin. They thought that the three people gathered here right now was already a very astonishing sight to see. But the next moment—when another person walked in from outside, whether it was Central TV Department 1’s staff or The Voice’s program team—everyone was left with their eyes wide and tongues tied!

It was a woman, and she was not a celebrity, yet many people knew her and had heard of her name. The reason was simply because she was the manager of the Heavenly Queen!

It was Fang Weihong!

Zhang Yuanqi’s manager!

At this moment, the entire area inside and outside of the office fell silent!

Zhang Xia blinked.

Chen Guang and Fan Wenli were dumbfounded.

Ha Qiqi, Zhang Zuo, and the rest were also stunned!

Only Zhang Ye quickly stepped up to welcome her. “Haha, Sister Fang!”

Fang Weihong did not look to be in the mood for small talk. She just shook Zhang Ye's hand and said, "Teacher Zhang, pass me the contract. I have to leave after getting it signed."

Zhang Ye asked, "Sister Zhang is not here today?"

"She's busy with an activity and authorized me to sign on her behalf." Fang Weihong was already a familiar acquaintance with Zhang Ye having worked with him twice before, so her tone with him was also less formal. "Oh, Teacher Zhang, do you know that Sister Zhang has such a packed schedule recently that it has almost filled up the entire 24 hours of her day? I was still thinking of how I could reject some bookings to lighten the load, but somehow, this new booking arrived. Sister Zhang is really great. She did not even ask me about it and directly agreed with you. She's not a superhuman. Besides, there's only so much time in a day, so who gets left with planning her time and schedules then? Won't it just be left to me to coordinate and organize her activities? I already have a big headache from all these."

Zhang Ye laughed, "That's because Sister Zhang is so popular. Just look at people like me who are small timers and have no activities. All I do is just go to work or drink some tea."

Fang Weihong laughed when she heard that. She replied, "Oh, come on. That's just because you don't have a management company and refuse to take on any commercial deals. If you spread the word that you'd do them, even with a hundred hours a day, it wouldn't be enough for you." She paused for a bit and then said, "What I'm really curious about is, since Sister Zhang has always rejected taking any talent shows, how on earth did you convince her to do it?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "I promised to write her a song."

Fang Weihong, suddenly understanding everything, exclaimed, "That's exactly what I thought!"

Zhang Xia said from a distance away, "Little Fang, you're here too?"

"Ai, Grandma Zhang, did you get deceived by Teacher Zhang and join the program too?" Fang Weihong politely greeted her while casually making a joke.

Zhang Xia was tickled and quipped, "Yes, I was fooled by this child."

After chatting for a little while, Fang Weihong also shook Chen Guang and his wife's hand and chatted for a while. They all knew each other; it wasn't the first time they'd met.

Chen Guang was quite surprised. "I hadn't expected Sister Zhang to join as well!"

Fang Weihong also said helplessly, "Me neither. Yesterday, Zhang Ye made a call and spoke to Sister Zhang directly about the contract. I didn't know about it until much later."

Fan Wenli looked over admirably at Zhang Ye.

Ha Qiqi and the others were also looking at Zhang Ye with extreme admiration!

Oh my god!

Zhang Yuanqi is really coming aboard!

Zhang Ye had somehow managed to invite the Heavenly Queen to join!

An S-list celebrity who always rejected taking any talent shows and didn't even usually appear on television as a program guest was now making an exception and joining their program? Everyone knew that Zhang Yuanqi was a celebrity at the very top of the entertainment industry in the country. Being able to invite her wasn't down to a matter of money anymore. It wasn't like she lacked that anyway. But what she was chasing after was of a different level and not found in the domestic market anymore. She had already set her sights on the foreign markets, so none of them knew how Zhang Ye had managed to get this deal done! How did he convince the Heavenly Queen!

Central TV was in chaos!

Jiang Yuan and some other leaders came over a while later, as they were the authorized signatories for Central TV for their part of the contract.

At this time, when the amount that Zhang Ye had agreed with the four celebrities earlier was written down by him, the figures were finally made known publicly for the first time. When they saw the joining fees, even though they had just received an astronomical title sponsorship fee earlier, everyone was still stunned with their mouths agape!

Zhang Xia: 10 million!

Chen Guang: 10 million!

Fan Wenli: 10 million!

Zhang Yuanqi: 40 million!

They could still reluctantly accept the joining fees of Zhang Xia, Chen Guang, and Fan Wenli since it somewhat matched their statuses and were done in accordance with the market practices for similar programs which usually paid out several million at least. But since the three of them didn't usually take up such projects, it resulted in an additional premium of about 2 to 3 million more than the market rates which everyone could understand. But the fee for Zhang Yuanqi left everyone sucking in a breath of cold air!

40 million!

That was a f**king sky-high joining fee!

Many other talent shows only had a total investment of around 30 million or so for the entire program and production, and that was even for the more highly invested in programs. But Zhang Yuanqi alone already commanded a fee of 40 million? It was even higher than the entire investments put into other programs? This was a never before seen sky-high joining fee in the entire variety show industry! Even if she were an S-list Heavenly Queen, this amount was still way beyond the market rates!

This was too frightening!

This was too exciting!

Yet another record had been broken!

Many of the staff looked over at Jiang Yuan, wondering what he would say.

Jiang Yuan was trembling from this for a while, but managed to calm his nerves, and he quickly signed off on the contract as the authorized party for Central TV. Then he stamped the contract firmly with the organization's seal!

Was it expensive?

Yes! It was too damn expensive!

But was it worth it? Jiang Yuan felt that it was worth it, and it seemed like many of the Central TV's staff also felt that it was worth it! If Zhang Ye's name could already pull in a sponsorship of 100 million, who was to say that the reputation of Zhang Yuanqi—an S-list Heavenly Queen—did not command a joining fee of 40 million!?

Being able to have Zhang Yuanqi to come aboard was already an unprecedented event. It was something that no other television stations' programs could achieve. Now that Zhang Ye had completed this unimaginable task, it was already considered a job completed. As for the money spent, that was only a secondary concern!

The contract signing ended.

Everyone started clapping.

Outside the office, many of those Central TV Department 1's staff who did not seem too optimistic about The Voice back then and felt that the program would be canceled even before it started were now looking at Zhang Ye and his program team with a different attitude. A 100 million title sponsorship, a total production value of more than 100 million, a coaching group headed by a Heavenly Queen. This investment and lineup had them patting themselves on the chest and admitting that no other television program in the history of this industry could do what The Voice had done. They did not know how the program would turn out from here on, but just this glittering lineup alone had totally blinded everyone!

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An hour later.

The promotions and marketing for The Voice began and immediately spread like wildfire!

On the official website for The Voice, the section where the introduction for the four guest coaches were originally a black picture with a question mark over them but were now being updated with their pictures and detailed introductions!

"Quick, take a look!"

"Wow, the list of coaches is being announced!"

"How exciting, I wonder who's the first?"

"I'm here, I'm here to check it out!"

With The Voice at the heart of the struggle on the news, all entertainment news today was focused on them. Right now, any minor changes on the website would attract the attention of countless people!

The first name was announced: Zhang Xia!

This caused quite a commotion!

“It’s Grandma Zhang!”

“She’s a great singer!”

“Heavens! Grandma Zhang has come out of retirement?”

The second name was also updated: Chen Guang!

At once, Chen Guang’s fans all flocked to this news!

“My prince!”

“Old Chen has joined as well?”

“Hahaha! Old Chen, well done!”

“Chen Guang and Zhang Ye are two of my favorite celebrities! I would never have expected them to work together! Looks like this is going to be fun!”

“Teacher Chen is a truly talented singer! I like his songs a lot!”

Then, the third name: Fan Wenli!

“Aiyo!”

“Old Chen, even your wife has joined!”

“Heavens! They’re all big shot celebrities!”

“Yeah, just how much did The Voice’s program team spend on this!”

“My eyes have been blinded!”

“Even Old Chen and Old Fan have been invited? Isn’t this line up defying all common sense? Won’t Teacher Zhang have to pay for his crimes if he scares us all to death? There’s still a fourth? Who’s the last one going to be?”

“Quick, announce the fourth coach’s identity already!”

“Why are they so slow, who could it be?”

“Who’s the final one?”

As the names were announced one by one, in just a short period of time, everyone’s appetite was whetted as they excitedly reacted to each announcement. Everyone was utterly convinced by Zhang Ye’s amazing work. It was truly too surprising!

Eventually, under the watchful gaze of everyone, the fourth coach’s picture was updated!

Refresh! A picture of Zhang Yuanqi at a concert now appeared in the place of the fourth coach’s introduction!

Upon seeing Zhang Yuanqi's picture, it was as if at that moment everyone browsing on the website for The Voice had fallen silent. It seemed like time had stopped for an instant!

Then the comment section exploded!

"What?"

"It's the Heavenly Queen!?"

"Damn!"

"Do they need to be that extravagant!?"

"Did Central TV invest all their money they had? They're really willing to give everything for this program?"

"Not only that, this is no longer a question of money! In the past, even when many variety shows offered Zhang Yuanqi a lot of money, she did not join them!"

"This is big news!"

"The Heavenly Queen has descended onto The Voice!"

"Is this for real?"

"Zhang Ye's truly awesome!"

"I only wonder how much Sister Zhang's joining fee is worth!"

"Yeah, how much?"

At this time, an anonymous user left a comment: "Don't ask how much it is, all I can tell you is that it is a sky-high figure!"

"Don't leave us in suspense!"

"Quickly speak!"

"Just how much money was it?"

That anonymous user did not reply for a long time, and then finally posted: "The exact amount is...40 million before taxes!"

With that, those industry insiders from the other television stations who came to check out the situation nearly vomited blood!

What did you say?

40 million?

It was getting lively on the internet as the media and netizens began discussing this. All these news and updates had really left everyone in shock!

The people left speechless were those experts.

Many of these experts and so-called industry insiders did not say a word. Because they really did not know what they could say anymore. They had analyzed The Voice of China from head to toe and called out its problems and flaws, saying and backing up their claims of how this program would definitely only be a cult television program or average quality show, similar to all the other talent shows produced in this time of downturn. Yet somehow these big shot celebrities still jumped aboard the program? Why did they all rush to join like they were not afraid of anything? Were they all crazy?

Some people were looking forward to it.

Some people called it good.

Some people maintained their doubt.

Some people still were not optimistic.

But however people put it, with the attention The Voice of China was getting, with the lineup of the guest coaches, with the invested production costs and title sponsorship, the program was already on fire even before the broadcast! This discussion topic could no longer be matched by anything else!

Zhang Ye had planned for all the news to be spread out within a 12-hour time frame in order to bombard the internet with overwhelming publicity for The Voice. The first steps were already beautifully taken, but from here on, he knew he had to spend more effort on the auditions!

Chapter 646 These are the contestants you guys picked?

In the afternoon.

At Central TV's basement recording studio.

This was the venue that The Voice's program team had booked temporarily to hold the preliminary auditions. They did not actually need to do any recording but only needed to use the location today to pick some outstanding and talented contestants for the recorded stage auditions by the coaches. The preliminary auditions were estimated to take place over two weeks. It would be held either once daily, once every two days, or even once every three days. The degree of intensity would depend on the number of contestants and their standards. The application conditions only required candidates to submit a demo of their singing. If the program team staff felt that the candidate met the required standard, they would notify them to make their way here for the preliminary auditions. If it's not up to standard, then they would not even be notified at all. After all, with just the program team staff's strength, they were unable to support so many contestants and decidedly had to make a small sacrifice in some of the proceedings.

At the venue.

The staff had all arrived and gathered.

Zhang Ye came over holding a box lunch he had taken from the Central TV cafeteria. As he was in a rush, he decided to eat as he walked over, finishing it up just as he arrived.

Little Wang walked up to him and said, "Hand that to me."

"OK, thanks a lot." Zhang Ye gave the empty lunch box to her.

At the other side, Ha Qiqi—in charge of the preliminary auditions—was pointing and instructing the staff on their work. When she saw Zhang Ye, she immediately brought two people over with her and said, “Teacher Zhang, the arrangements are almost all done. We can proceed with the auditions.”

Zhang Ye nodded. “When will the contestants arrive?”

Ha Qiqi answered, “Many of them are already here, but we’re only starting in the afternoon, so I got someone to bring them to the waiting room.”

They sat down in front of the computer.

Zhang Ye randomly opened a few emails and listened to some of the demos that the contestants sent in. He said, “Were these chosen today?”

Ha Qiqi nodded. “They were picked by me and the professionals one at a time.” Then she introduced the few people beside her to Zhang Ye.

A Teacher Sun.

And a Teacher Yan.

They were both music industry insiders who were borrowed from Central TV.

Zhang Ye shook hands with them and got to know them a bit. He said, “Teacher Sun, Teacher Yan, I will have to trouble the both of you in the coming days.”

Teacher Sun immediately said, “It’s no trouble at all. We’re here to help, so you can consider us professional consultants who give our opinions for your consideration. As for how the program will be done and how to pick the contestants, we will still leave that up to you, Director Zhang.” Since they were transferred to the program team of The Voice, they had to listen to Zhang Ye’s commands as they were now members of his team.

One of the music consultant recommended, “Director Zhang, this person you’re listening to right now is one of the better ones. Both Old Sun and I agree on this, as does AD1 Ha.”

Ha Qiqi praised, “Right, this person sings very well.”

Only then did Zhang Ye seriously listen to it.

It was a woman’s voice. The vocals and basic singing were quite good, and the sound was crystal clear. There wasn’t any sharpness or anything bad with it. She also had quite a high soprano voice.

Teacher Sun analyzed, “She should be considered a very trained vocalist. It feels very stable as well. Listening to her voice, it probably belongs to someone who has had experience performing onstage before. And judging from her picture, she looks quite good too. I feel that she has what it takes to become a star.”

Teacher Yan added, “But it will also depend on how well she performs later.”

Name: Chang Si.

Gender: Female.

Age: 25.

Hometown: Beihe Province.

Occupation: Music Teacher.

After taking a look at her personal information, Zhang Ye did not say anything. He just stored it in his mind and asked, "For today's first wave of preliminary auditions, are there any with good potential?"

Ha Qiqi pointed at an email on screen. "This person is quite good too."

The music consultant beside them nodded and said, "This person was trained in the performing arts and graduated from a real music college. His singing is very good and he's also currently a backup singer for a certain star, so we can consider him to be a professional. If such a person got on stage, he probably would not have any stage fright at all and could perform quite well instead. Since we have to consider if they can perform to their potential while on television, if we get total rookies for this show, they might get nervous and make mistakes. When that happens, the quality of the broadcast will also be affected. That's why on all the other talent show programs most of the contestants are in music-related professions. Those type of contestants are always the most well-accepted by television programs. They're often invited to take part in many different programs since due to various reasons they did not do well in their past participations on the other programs, though their stability on the programs is what's good about them."

Name: Hu Liangyi.

Gender: Male.

Occupation: Musician.

When Zhang Ye finished listening to that person's demo, he did not show any expression at all and only asked, "Just these two? No others?"

Ha Qiqi observed Zhang Ye's reaction, not knowing what to make of it. She answered, "We've already notified 50 candidates to join today's round of auditions. Most of them are good enough. It's just that these two are the more outstanding ones. We've also singled out a few others that are quite good, though they did not register for the audition and were recommended by staff from our internal department or seen on other television programs instead. If you agree to it, we can immediately start making contact with them. Invite them to join our program?"

Zhang Ye asked, "Who are they? Let me take a look."

"Such as this person." Ha Qiqi bent over to handle the mouse and clicked on a video clip of a singing talent show from two years ago. "Here, take a look at this one."

The video started playing.

It was of a man singing a Heavenly King's classic track.

Ha Qiqi said, "Back then, on the show, he did not qualify and was eliminated at the second round, but most music consultants have a good impression of him. He most probably did not get into the next round because of some result fixing by the program team for that competition."

Zhang Ye did not say a word.

Ha Qiqi said, “Director Zhang?”

The music consultants also looked at Zhang Ye.

Ha Qiqi immediately continued, “And there are a few other musicians we have our eyes on. Their professional qualities are very good. I know that our program is looking for people who can sing well, and those people are quite good at singing as well. Why don’t I show you? Their information is all in the computer. It should be easy to talk to them if I invite them over; alternatively, we can also offer them an appearance payment which I’m sure they’d agree to.”

Zhang Ye gave a wave of his hands and said, “Forget it, let’s not look at those first.” He checked his watch for the time and suggested, “Why don’t we do it this way: the auditions will start at 1:30 PM sharp, while I’ll go out for a while and be back very soon.”

Having said that, Zhang Ye left. Zhang Ye had come to the audition venue with high expectations, but before he could even warm his seat, he already had to leave.

The program team staff looked at each other with blank faces.

Wu Yi, puzzled at this, asked, “What’s with Teacher Zhang?”

“I don’t know,” Ha Qiqi replied, not understanding anything either. “We found people in accordance to the standards, didn’t we? Don’t all the other talent shows also pick their contestants this way? It’s not like we judged them based on their physical appearances either.”

One of the music consultants remarked, “Maybe it’s that Teacher Zhang just had something to attend to.”

Ha Qiqi took her mind off the matter and said, “Let’s continue from here then. Go through the candidates’ information once more while wait for Teacher Zhang to come back before we begin the auditions. Notify the candidates about the start time and provide them with box lunches if they haven’t eaten lunch yet. Little Wang, I leave you in charge of the waiting room.”

.....

Outside.

When Zhang Ye came out of the basement, he briefly shook his head a little. He wasn’t just dissatisfied with Ha Qiqi and the others regarding the candidates they chose, he was extremely frustrated. Was it that the contestants were not up to standard? It wasn’t that and in fact their singing was also relatively good and safe, but this was not the desired show effect he wanted. He needed a different kind of contestant! From the start, Ha Qiqi and the others—or rather it should be said that the whole of Central TV and the entire country—all did not know what kind of a program he was aiming to do. They basically had no understanding of the concept that Zhang Ye wanted, not one of them! But come to think of it, he couldn’t blame them. It was just because Zhang Ye had seen things they had never seen before, so their understanding of things was much too different!

How could he handle this?

What could he do to make them understand what he was looking for?

Zhang Ye felt that using words to explain was not enough. He needed to be more direct and place an example in front of their eyes and ears to get his idea of the concept across to them. And so, Zhang Ye thought of a person, someone whose voice involuntarily floated into his mind. He decided that he would pull in the first contestant for their program to tell them what his understanding of a good voice was!

Well-trained and safe?

A high soprano?

With experience performing onstage?

Slick and proficient in singing?

—Was that what having a good voice meant?

Zhang Ye got into his car and drove straight out from television station tower and headed for the city.

Chapter 647 Confirmation of the first-seeded contestant!

[collapse]

Afternoon.

Along Nanxinhua Avenue.

It was currently afternoon recess at No. 2 Experimental Primary School. The main gate was locked as students were not allowed to leave the school during lunch break or breaks between classes. The main gate would only be opened at the start or end of school.

The car stopped and Zhang Ye got out from the car.

He walked near to the guardroom and greeted, “Uncle.”

When the security uncle saw him, his eyes lit up. “Zhang Ye!”

“It’s me, can you open the side gate for me?” Zhang Ye smiled.

The security uncle naturally knew who he was and asked, “Your kid has given you trouble again? The teacher has called you up for a meeting again?” He fished out the key and opened the side gate for Zhang Ye. “Come on in.”

Zhang Ye said, “Thank you very much, Uncle.”

Walking in farther, he reached the large playground.

He could see many children playing on it, some kicking the shuttlecock,¹ some playing basketball, and some others in a group, playing Eagle Catches Chicks, a traditional Chinese chase game.

“Ah!”

“Don’t run!”

“Hahaha, Fang, you’re too slow!”

“Pass it to me, pass it to me!”

“Take the shot!”

The school field was filled with frolicking sounds and voices.

Zhang Ye could not see Chenchen anywhere. Even without needing to think, he could figure that out Chenchen would not participate in these activities. She was definitely in the classroom napping or reading some comic book she had snatched from some little boy. Zhang Ye did not go upstairs because he had not come for Chenchen. He had other motives this time. His eyes scanned the school field and he suddenly spotted the person he was looking for.

At a corner of the playground.

Chenchen’s form teacher Zhao Mei, P.E. teacher Luo Yu, and some other teachers were seated on a long bench, happily chatting as they supervised the children’s activities. This was a school regulation as they were worried that the children would get into trouble while playing or injure themselves from overexertion as they played sports during the break. Every afternoon recess, there would be some teachers on shift duty at the playground. If it snowed, there would be more teachers supervising the break.

Zhao Mei said, “Do you all know about Zhang Ye’s new program?”

A sixth grade mathematics teacher said, “How can we not know about it? It’s all over today’s news!”

Luo Yu added, “My goodness, even Zhang Yuanqi, Old Chen, and Old Fan joined as coaches for the program. With so much money spent, this program must definitely be good to watch!”

Zhao Mei laughed, “I’m also waiting for it as well. I’m really anticipating watching it on television.”

Beside them, a fine arts teacher suddenly looked at Luo Yu with interest and asked, “Teacher Luo, why don’t you go and take part in the program since you like singing so much?”

Luo Yu did not even give it thought and waved it off. “Heh, me? Forget it.”

Zhao Mei said, “Don’t the application conditions for The Voice state that they do not judge on looks or background? Teacher Luo, you should give it a try since you like to sing so much. Your dreams of becoming a singer might actually get fulfilled this time. Previously, when you criticized Zhang Ye and tore into him, it was only because of work. It was right to tell her guardian off as Chenchen was really being too naughty. From what I know of Zhang Ye, he is not a petty person and he certainly won’t take it to heart.”

Luo Yu continuously waved her hands. “Come on, even if Teacher Zhang did not bear any grudges, do you expect that I could appear on TV to sing? I’m afraid that the equipment will be damaged by my voice!”

With that, several teachers burst out laughing.

Everyone in school knew of her reputation for having a lousy voice.

Luo Yu sighed, "I love to sing but I still know where I stand. That is such a big program with over a hundred million invested and even has the Heavenly Queen as coach. With my looks, how can I appear on TV? As a P.E. teacher, I should just concentrate on teaching my P.E. classes. Teacher Yiyi is a more suitable candidate to apply since she is good-looking and also a music teacher. She should just go and apply. Besides, we have some degree of a relationship with Zhang Ye. If we ask a favor of him, it should not be a problem to take part in the audition, right?"

Zhao Mei said, "How would we ask for his help? Zhang Ye is not someone you can just meet if you want to."

Luo Yu exclaimed, "If not, then we can just call him up on the pretext of a guardian meeting. Call him and make him come over. Hasn't Chenchen, the little rascal, always been getting in trouble anyway?"

Suddenly, a voice sounded from behind their backs.

"Who wants to call me?" Zhang Ye abruptly appeared!

Luo Yu turned around and was dumbfounded. "Ah!"

Zhao Mei and the rest of the teachers were also stunned. "Zhang Ye?"

Then Zhao Mei seemingly thought of something and laughed. She patted Luo Yu and said, "Those words were from Teacher Luo and do not represent our opinions."

Why is he here!

Speak of the devil!

When Luo Yu heard that, her heart sank. Previously, she did know that this person was Zhang Ye as he was wearing sunglasses and it obstructed her view of his face. She only knew that he was Chenchen's guardian, so she criticized him without a second thought. Afterwards, when she realized that he was Zhang Ye, the composer and writer of her two favorite songs, her stomach churned. Today, Luo Yu was just idly chatting with a few other teachers and she just happened to make a joke of calling up the guardian for a meeting but who knew that Zhang Ye was actually right behind them and could hear what they were saying? Luo Yu literally wished that she could find a hole to crawl in to hide herself from this embarrassment!

How unlucky!

Why am I always so pathetic!?

"Teacher Zhang, no, no, I was just joking!" Luo Yu quickly came up with an excuse, "And the previous time, I really didn't know that it was you. No one told me anything at all!"

The bells started ringing.

It was the signal for classes to begin again.

A female teacher suddenly said, "I'm leaving then. It's time for class."

"I'll be leaving too," the fine arts teacher said.

Zhao Mei looked at Zhang Ye and asked, "Are you looking for Chenchen? Or?"

Zhang Ye said, "No."

Zhao Mei nodded. "Then alright, I'll go to my class with the children now."

When Luo Yu saw that everyone had left, she also wanted to leave, so she said, "Then I also..." Actually where could she go? As a P.E. teacher, even if she had classes, it would be right on this playground.

Zhang Ye stretched out his hand and called to her, "Teacher Luo, please stay put."

Luo Yu's eyes shrank. It's over, it's really over, Zhang Ye has a grudge against me now! He's going to find trouble with me! Oh my mother! Why do I have such a hard life!

"Are you calling me?" Luo Yu acted dumb, stood still, and turned her head around.

Zhang Ye asked, "Do you have any classes in the afternoon?"

Luo Yu wanted to say that she had classes until midnight, but she really did not have any classes in the afternoon, so she stammered, "About that..."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Let's have a talk, shall we?"

Luo Yu grit her teeth and acquiesced, "Alright." She turned around and led Zhang Ye to the equipment storage room as there was no one there. It did have some small chairs in an alcove where they could also have drinks.

The room was small and simple.

"I'll get you some water." Luo Yu busied herself with chores.

Zhang Ye said, "There's no need, I will not stay for long. I'm here to ask you about a matter."

Luo Yu said at once, "No need to say anymore, I know it's all my fault, I..."

"It's not about that matter." Zhang Ye was a bit speechless and said, "I'd like to ask you about that day I heard you singing 'Wishing We Last Forever.' Well, do you always sing like that normally?"

Luo Yu was shocked. "Singing? 'Wishing We Last Forever'? Uh, that's right. My voice has always been quite lousy and everyone calls me Raspy Luo. That's how my singing is and no one likes to hear it. I like to sing whenever I'm free and will just grab any opportunity to sing a few lines. My family members also find me irritating when I'm singing. Everytime I open my mouth to sing, my mother will go out and take a stroll."

Zhang Ye asked, "Do you like to sing?"

Luo Yu replied, "Of course I like to. I've even been singing every day since childhood. Why else do you think my vocals got damaged during puberty and became like this?"

Zhang Ye nodded and inquired, "Then if you are given a stage to perform on now, would you dare to step up on it?"

Luo Yu instinctively answered, "What's there to be afraid of? As long as anyone wants to listen, I will try to sing even if you place me on the surface of the moon! Eh, why are you asking me this?"

Zhang Ye acknowledged and then said something surprising, "In that case, as the Executive Director of The Voice of China, I hereby formally invite you to join us!"

Luo Yu was shocked. "What?"

Zhang Ye repeated, "I will reserve a spot for your participation!"

Luo Yu exclaimed, "Reserve a spot for me? Why are you reserving it for me?"

Zhang Ye said in an amused manner, "Because you're good at singing, so I want you to participate and get involved with The Voice's audition and the competition proper!"

Luo Yu said, "I can appear on TV?"

Zhang Ye confirmed, "That's right."

Luo Yu said, "Is it the most talked about program right now, that The Voice of China? The program that even the Heavenly Queen has joined?"

Zhang Ye affirmed, "Yes."

Luo Yu said, "My singing is good?"

Zhang Ye maintained, "That's right."

Luo Yu hurriedly waved it off. "Oh, come on, how can my singing be good when my voice is so lousy. You should reconsider. Even my own mother who is my immediate family does not like my singing, so why would others think it's good? Do you think I don't know what I'm worth?"

Zhang Ye was amused by these words. People from Beijing had a particular sense of humor, comprised of dark humor and self-mockery. It was specific to the locals of Beijing and could not be found at other regions as they all had their own different and unique humor styles.

Zhang Ye attested, "Teacher Luo, I came specifically for you this time. I'm very sincere in inviting you and truly feel that you are good at singing. Who says that you have a lousy voice? I really don't feel that way. Besides, I would not have come looking for you if you had a traditionally nice voice. Central TV is having an audition around 1 PM. I don't need to deceive you on this matter if you agree. You don't have any classes in the afternoon anyways, right? Then you should directly follow me right now and come to the audition venue. If you're afraid of embarrassing yourself or that your voice would scare others, then forget it. Treat it like I did not say anything. You will remain as a P.E. teacher here and continue to sing only for yourself."

Having said that, Zhang Ye stopped talking.

Seeing Zhang Ye this serious, Luo Yu was also at a loss for words!

After about thirty seconds, Luo Yu asked, "Can I really make it?"

Zhang Ye nodded. "It's not going to be a problem."

Luo Yu asked again, "Are you sure my voice can really..."

Zhang Ye interrupted, "I'm sure."

Upon hearing this, Luo Yu finally hardened her resolve. "OK! If you guys want to listen! Then I will sing! Who's afraid of who! Teacher Zhang, I will go!"

Zhang Ye smiled and uttered, "I was waiting for you to say that!"

Chapter 648 Open calls for The Voice begin!

Later that afternoon.

At the venue of the audition.

It was almost time and the first wave of contestants for the day were already gathered. However, since Executive Director Zhang Ye was not back yet, Ha Qiqi and the program team staff did not dare to kick off the audition as they preferred to wait for the person in charge to come back first.

"Why isn't it starting yet?"

"It should be starting soon."

"Aiyah, I'm so nervous."

"Actually, I just took a shot and submitted my application. I never expected that I would get notified."

"Who are the judges? What kind of music genres do they like?"

"I heard that Executive Director Zhang Ye will be here today, so getting through will completely depend on Zhang Ye's decision. I think that if we sing either of Zhang Ye's two songs for the audition, the chances of going through will be higher, but I'm only just guessing so."

"That's right, that's right!"

"Then I will sing 'Woman Flower.'"

"It will not be as simple as you all think. Whether it is 'Wishing We Last Forever' or 'Woman Flower,' these two songs were all sung by the Heavenly Queen before. Be it your singing ability or voice, do you all think you can sing better than the Heavenly Queen? Can you all carry the song and make it your own so that it feels different from the Heavenly Queen's version? This type of song that everyone is familiar with will not be of help when exhibiting your own unique characteristics. If not carefully dealt with, it may even backfire, making the song feel neither like your own nor like the original."

"That's true."

"Good point."

In the contestants' waiting room, everyone was busily chatting away. There were all kinds of people were here, such as some anxious contestants who made many trips to the toilet, some sitting by themselves in a corner and practicing their songs, and even some experienced talent show veterans relating their experiences to the first-timers.

Among them were two people in the group who were relatively more conspicuous. One of them was Chang Si and the other one was Hu Liangyi. They were the two highly recommended contestants by Ha Qiqi and the music consultants, both considered professional musicians. One was a music teacher, the other a backup singer. They'd already had some years of experience in the industry, could sing very well, and had good looks, so naturally they stood out with more confidence than the rest in such a setting. It could also have been due to the fact that Ha Qiqi and the program team had already communicated with them earlier, so they knew of their importance compared to the others. As a result, they unconsciously drew a boundary and stayed away from the rest of the contestants. They were both seated in the last row and when other contestants came up to talk to them they did not respond much. One of them played with their phone while the other was listening to music.

Suddenly, Little Wang of the program team came and announced, "Everyone get ready, the auditions are about to begin."

Everyone looked to her.

Little Wang was holding a roster. She explained, "I will start calling names one at a time in a while. When you get called, please proceed into the room where you will sing a cappella for the song you have chosen to perform. If the executive director and the judges feel that there is a need for further screening, you will be asked to sing a designated song."

.....

At the other side.

At the audition venue.

Zhang Ye had returned. He told Little Wang to notify the contestants to get ready. After that, he handed Luo Yu over to another staff member of the program team and said to him, "Bring Teacher Luo to the contestants' waiting room and add her name on the list of contestants." Then he told Luo Yu, "Teacher Luo, please get ready."

When Luo Yu saw the large setup, she felt a bit nervous since she had only ever sung a few lines of a song in the school. She had never, ever before seen and performed in front of such a large setup, but she said, "OK, OK."

Ha Qiqi asked dumbfounded, "Teacher Zhang, who is this?"

The music consultants also did not understand what was going on. Why did Zhang Ye go out and bring back a person? She even looks fat? And not the least bit good-looking? Her voice was even worse. In Beijing slang, it would be described as: A lousy voice that really sucked.

Zhang Ye smiled and replied, "This is a contestant whom I brought back, but let's not bother about her for now. Let's begin the auditions, shall we?"

"OK." Ha Qiqi raised her voice and called for the staff to get into their positions.

Zhang Ye, Ha Qiqi, Teacher Sun, and Teacher Yan sat at the judges' table which was in fact just a long table. As the preliminary auditions were not the television broadcast auditions, they did not get too

particular about how it looked. They just brought over a long table as a temporary measure and put some mineral water bottles or their own teacups on it. There weren't even any name tags displayed.

Zhang Ye said, "Let's begin."

Hearing that, Little Wang standing at the door started to call out names, "Number one, Li Lili."

Soon after, a very fair-skinned girl walked in from outside. When the door closed, she smiled and pretended to be calm as she stood in the center of the room, the microphone in front of her. Then she said, "Good afternoon, judges and teachers, I'm Li Lili, currently a university student. Ever since childhood, I've always liked singing and won my district's annual singing competition and..."

Ha Qiqi interrupted, "Let's first hear your singing."

Li Lili acknowledged, "OK, the song I'm going to sing is call 'Blue Coast.'"

Since this was not a television broadcast, there was no musical accompaniment or a live band playing. Although the effects of a cappella were certainly not better than with music accompaniment, it was precisely because a cappella would reveal a person's voice characteristics and basic singing abilities that the auditions were held this way. Of course, the contestants were allowed to bring their own instruments and sing while playing. Those capable of playing instruments would get additional points as well in any traditional talent show.

The first contestant started to sing.

As she was probably nervous or not used to singing without musical accompaniment, her singing went slightly off-key at the beginning of the second verse, though she was able to gradually return to the melody by the fourth verse.

Without waiting for her to finish singing, Ha Qiqi acted by observing Zhang Ye's expression and said to the first contestant, "Alright, that's enough, you can go back and wait for the news."

Li Lili voiced her understanding with slight disappointment.

However, Zhang Ye directly told her, "I'm sorry, but there's no need to wait for any news. You sang quite well, but the time being, you did not meet our requirements. Sorry about that."

Li Lili bowed with regret. "Thank you, judges and teachers." Then she left.

Zhang Ye told Ha Qiqi, "We don't have to lead the contestants on. It's meaningless to tell them to wait for the news. Just tell them upfront whether they passed or failed the auditions so that they won't hold out hope while waiting at home aimlessly. If they had kept their friends and relatives informed but ended up getting a call telling them they had failed, it would only be more troublesome." He would naturally act in accordance with his own style for his program. He did not care how the other program teams handled their processes and how the audition should carried out. All he knew was that he would do it based on what he felt was right.

Ha Qiqi nodded. "Understood."

Teacher Sun said with some regret, "We heard this child's demo and thought that it wasn't too bad. But her live performance was clearly different from her demo."

Teacher Yan said, "She's probably just too nervous."

Another judge remarked, "Nervousness was just one thing. Her singing also seemed to have some problems."

Ha Qiqi said, "Let's move on to the next person."

The second person.

The fifth person.

The tenth person.

Very quickly, ten contestants had finished their auditions, but apart from just one person who performed at an acceptable level, all the others were less than satisfactory. At least, the expectations were different after listening to their demos. Under the a cappella singing conditions, these contestants' potentials were greatly discounted.

Finally, it was Chang Si's turn to perform.

Ha Qiqi had high expectations of her as she was a seeded contestant.

The other music consultants also focused their attention on her. Their eyes were no longer distracted by other things as they had very high expectations for a good sapling like this person, who could easily compete for first place on any other talent show. Even if she couldn't place first, she would surely be considered in the standard of the top five contestants. Having been in this industry for so many years, the consultants definitely had the ability to spot such talent. Now, it only depended on how she could showcase her potential at the audition performance.

Chang Si was a tall and beautiful lady. Although her figure was not perfect, it was still quite good. She greeted, "Good afternoon, teachers. My name is Chang Si and the song that I'll be singing is 'Woman Flower.'"

As expected, she pulled it off like the professional she was!

When Chang Si started singing, Ha Qiqi and a few of the music consultants immediately nodded several times. This was what you'd call a professional, the true ability of a musician who even when singing a cappella could still sing it very well!

"Woman Flower, swaying in the red dust!"

"Woman Flower, wavering softly in the wind!"

Her singing style was unlike Zhang Yuanqi's and Zhang Xia's as she performed the song in a higher octave. Especially when singing the words "woman flower." If it were Zhang Yuanqi's version, this part here would carry an alto feeling. This song was not supposed to have any parts where the octave should increase, but because Chang Si managed to grasp the octave change nicely, this part of the song came to a penetrating soprano. Although at the end the last trail of her voice became somewhat shaky and did not stabilize, the overall feeling was still very uplifting.

After she finished singing.

Chang Si looked confidently at the judges.

Ha Qiqi nodded, "Teacher Zhang?"

Several of the music consultants were also very satisfied with her performance.

One of them said, "Although the higher octave singing strayed at some point and you did not managed to sustain the vibrato, the overall performance was still very good. I propose that she can pass through the audition."

Teacher Sun seconded, "Me too."

Teacher Yan concurred, "I agree as well."

Ha Qiqi also had no doubts about it and felt that she really sang quite well. "I approve too."

Chang Si had already revealed a smile. "Thank you, judges."

However at this moment, Zhang Ye looked at her and said, "I'm sorry, you sang very well but it still does not meet my requirements. Please return."

Chang Si was shocked.

Ha Qiqi was stunned!

Wu Yi was stunned!

Teacher Sun and Teacher Yan were also stunned!

Teacher Sun could not sit still anymore and asked, "Why? Little Chang's singing was a bit flawed but her flaws did not detract from her potential. This kind of standard is already quite good. In such an amateur talent contest, she already qualifies as a contestant with very high potential. Surely you cannot try to compare her with the Heavenly Queen's singing ability, right? Those flaws can be tolerated."

Zhang Ye said, "First, her voice didn't have any special characteristics to it. Second, her singing is only at a rather good standard, not an excellent standard yet. Third, 'Woman Flower' is not supposed to be sung in this way. The way she expressed herself did not match the lyrics. Neither is this song supposed to raise octaves. I did not feel too comfortable hearing it forcibly sung that way. The most important factor is that this higher octave singing isn't that good either. There was no feeling. If it's not sung by a woman around thirty or forty years old who has experienced more in life, it becomes very difficult to express 'Woman Flower' in a good manner—those are the reasons why."

Teacher Yan said, "But..."

Chang Si also said, "My soprano is..."

Zhang Ye waved his hand. "Don't say anymore, please go back."

"Please go back then." Although Ha Qiqi could not understand Zhang Ye's decision but she still respected his views. But she was crying inside thinking, what a waste!

Such an outstanding contestant yet she could not even pass the auditions?

Just what kind of a person are you looking for!

Chapter 649 An absurd voice!

The auditions continued.

Although they had their differences in opinions, the auditions still had to go on. No doubt, the few judges—including Ha Qiqi—all agreed on and felt that Chang Si performed very well in every aspect and would qualify from here. But with just a disagreeing vote from Zhang Ye, she was eliminated. Everything still had to be done his way since he was the leader of this panel and the executive director of the show. It didn't matter that everyone else thought that Chang Si was good enough if Zhang Ye did not think so.

Zhang Ye said deadpan, "Next."

Teacher Sun was about to speak, but hesitated, then finally swallowed his words.

Next up was the promising second-seeded contestant everyone acknowledged—Hu Liangyi.

This person had been singing for many years and was trained in the performing arts, having graduated from a true music college. He had also appeared in many concerts and television programs, honing his singing along the way as a backup singer to several celebrities. His singing could be described as the real thing and would stand up to the test for sure.

Hu Liangyi stepped up.

Ha Qiqi said, "Alright, you may begin."

Hu Liangyi adjusted the microphone and said, "I'll be singing 'Mountains' for everyone today."

The song was one of the more well-known ones in this world and was considered a fusion of traditional and pop music. It had a bit of bel canto mixed with traditional folk singing styles and would leave the listener in enjoyment. Hu Liangyi's voice was quite good and he could sing very steadily in a well-balanced way without sounding rushed. His voice could go high or low as needed. His performance was done in such a textbook manner, without any flaws they could pick on. It was just too perfect!

The song was over.

Ha Qiqi was very excited.

Teacher Sun, Teacher Yan, and the others also perked up at the performance.

One of the music consultants even gave him a thumbs up and said, "It's so different when it's a person of the performing arts. You sang well..."

Before he could finish his praise, Zhang Ye had already put down Hu Liangyi's CV and remarked, "It's not up to my requirements, please go back."

What?

Still not up to requirements?

Even this was not OK??

Hu Liangyi immediately widened his eyes and asked, “My singing is not good enough?”

Teacher Sun could no longer bear to listen any further. “Director Zhang, if Hu Liangyi and Chang Si’s performances are not good enough, then we should just scrap the auditions since no one could do better than them anyway.”

Teacher Yan said, “We have all analyzed the strengths of the contestants and these two people are the most outstanding. Even if they might not have the champion’s look, they would still be in the top ten of any other singing talent show. Just what are your requirements? Isn’t the bar set too high?”

Ha Qiqi frowned and looked at Teacher Yan. She said, “Teacher Yan, whether a contestant can qualify or not will be decided by Director Zhang. If he thinks they can’t qualify, then he must have his considerations, so why are you being so outspoken?”

Teacher Yan replied, “But I don’t understand the reasons behind his decisions.”

Teacher Sun agreed, “I can’t understand either. Asking us to come participate and help with the selection, even though we might not be well-known or famous within the industry. We’re still industry veterans, so whether someone can sing or not, wouldn’t we know? These two contestants are obviously quite good, yet they can’t even pass the auditions? I’m not doubting Director Zhang’s professionalism, but when it comes to talent shows and singing, we are definitely professional about it.”

Zhang Ye looked at them and explained, “First off, my new program is made not in accordance to industry standards, nor does it follow the standards of other talent shows. That is why, when I measure someone’s singing to be good or bad, I have a set of my own standards to judge them by. Second, Hu Liangyi’s singing is not bad, but his voice is too common and he uses too many types of singing techniques, with some parts being ‘rich.’ You guys might look at this as singing and onstage performing experience, but in my opinion, there is nothing special about it and no pouring of emotions into the performance. That is why I am not satisfied with the it. Third, you all claim to be professional, but I’m no amateur either. How this program will be done and how the contestants are chosen are all up to me alone. What I need is not an excellent contestant, but someone who is unique and irreproducible by any others!”

Teacher Sun argued, “Voice is too common? This is the first time I’m hearing of anyone using that as a judging standard. What’s the point of using the uniqueness of a voice to make a judgement? I don’t understand at all. In the end, it still boils down to the singing and onstage performing experience.”

Zhang Ye countered, “The name of my program is The Voice of China. Everyone’s understanding of a good voice might be different, so I won’t force that on anyone. But as I am the executive director, if you guys don’t think that my requirements are better than yours and won’t respect the principles and decision of my choices, then please, go back now!”

He said those words with a hint of malice!

This was also the first time Zhang Ye was doing a program with such a headstrong attitude. When he was working on his new programs in the past, a lot of objecting and doubting voices constantly came at him. Each time Zhang Ye was hosting or planning a show, he would have to try to talk and persuade his leaders or colleagues, asking them to put their trust in him, convincing them that doing it his way would be for the best and why it would help to attract more viewers. But all that was unnecessary now that he

was the leader of the team. He was the executive director, and having been doubted so often in the past, he was already tired and annoyed by it all. He was getting impatient about having to explain himself to others and instead thought, if you all don't respect my decisions? Then I won't give a damn who you, you, you, or you are! Just get the hell out of here!

Wu Yi was extremely nerve-wracked. "Director Zhang!"

Ha Qiqi also tried to smooth things over. "Director Zhang, the teachers were only just suggesting their opinions, this matter..." If they did not have these music consultants, how would they be able to continue with the auditions!

"Fine then, I'll leave." Teacher Sun was so angry he stood up and walked away.

When Teacher Yan saw this, he also felt his dignity had been compromised, so he stood up and left together with Old Sun, but not before leaving some parting words. "Fine, I'll leave too. Since the program doesn't need the opinions of us professionals, it's pointless to stay around here!"

The remaining two music consultants looked at each other, hesitated for a bit, then also left.

They knew they were only suppose to be here for a few days to help the program team of The Voice. But who knew that not only were they not appreciated, even their professional advice was refused. You don't want us to stay? Well then, we don't care either! We would like to see how well the program's viewership ratings turn out after its broadcast! How your so-called The Voice will turn out to be!

Talking about voice uniqueness?

Irreproducible?

Bullshit! Based on those requirements, it would be a miracle if you could even qualify a contestant!

At this point, all of the music consultants had left the venue in anger and refused to work.

Zhang Ye told Hu Liangyi, "Please go then, I'm sorry."

Hu Liangyi could not accept the results at all and said just before he left, "When The Voice starts broadcasting, I will definitely watch it. I want to know what kind of a person would have passed based on your requirements." In terms of singing, Hu Liangyi was extremely confident of himself. A person like him would surely have some pride in himself.

Zhang Ye did not say a word. He was not against Hu Liangyi at all and knew that his singing was indeed quite good. As to whether Hu Liangyi would become famous in the future or have any developments in the music industry, Zhang Ye didn't know. But he knew there was definitely no spot for Hu Liangyi on the stage of The Voice. That was something he was certain of.

After quite a number of people had left, the venue of the audition became much quieter.

Ha Qiqi laughed bitterly. "Director Zhang, how do we go on from here out?"

But Zhang Ye responded with a smile instead. He replied, "It's just us from the program team left now, but that's also a good thing. Sister Qi, please call the next person in. We will continue with the auditions."

Ha Qiqi didn't know whether to laugh or cry. She could only continue with the auditions.

The next contestant was not good either.

The one after that too.

Zhang Ye was becoming disappointed. How could there not even be a good one?

Ha Qiqi and the others from the program team were also feeling very unsettled. There were so many contestants who sang rather well, but why did Zhang Ye not like them at all? Almost half of the first batch of audition contestants had already left, but not one of them caught Zhang Ye's eyes? Just what kind of a voice would he accept as a good voice?

Ha Qiqi said listlessly, "Next."

Little Wang announced to the outside, "Qian Pingfan."¹

Zhang Ye clicked on this contestant's demo and played it.

When Ha Qiqi heard it, she said to Zhang Ye, "This girl has a very clear and crisp voice, and it carries a nice, melodious feeling. Overall, I would say it's not bad, but looking at her name, it looks oddly casual. I wonder what her parents were thinking when they gave her this name."

At this moment, the contestant walked into the room.

But when this person appeared in front of those in the room, they were all caught by surprise!

Ha Qiqi asked dumbfounded, "And who might you be?"

It was a young man slightly past 20 who looked very ordinary, with short hair and a sense of style that was incredibly middle of the road. He wore a pair of shoes stained with mud, making him look like a simpleton who had wandered into the room.

The young man looked very nervous and stammered, "I, I, am...Qian Pingfan."

Ha Qiqi nearly fainted. "You're a guy?"

Qian Pingfan scratched his head. "Ye-yes."

The song demo Ha Qiqi received only had the candidate's name and contact number filled out. Other than that, they did not have any more details about the person, just like this contestant standing in front of them.

Ha Qiqi was simply in disbelief. She said, "The demo you sent to us was clearly a girl's voice. Do you know that you cannot simply take the place of a candidate and come in here for the auditions?"

Qian Pingfan anxiously replied, "That was sung by me."

TD2 Wu Yi said, "Please go back."

Qian Pingfan was getting very anxious and tried to say, "I, I really..."

"We only request for our contestants to be honest. I don't know who sang in that demo, but from your attitude here today, we clearly see a problem with you already." Ha Qiqi was of course not going to

believe that such a clean and crisp female voice had come from a man. Besides, this person was speaking with a very normal voice that belonged to a young man, so how could he be the owner of the voice in the demo?

Qian Pingfan was finding it difficult to explain himself as he continued insisting, "That was really sung by me!"

Ha Qiqi directly said, "Little Wang, call for the next contestant."

But at this moment, a slightly disappointed and dejected Zhang Ye suddenly spoke up, "Wait a moment." Then, he looked at the contestant and said, "Why don't you introduce yourself a little first?"

That person immediately answered, "My name is Qian Pingfan and I'm 22 years old this year. My hometown is in Shanxi but I'm currently living in Beijing. My occupation is...I repair bicycles with my master over at Lishuiqiao Station. We repair bicycles for others over there."

What?

Repair bicycles?

Everyone: "..."

Zhang Ye, seemingly not too interested about his occupation, began adjusting the volume louder for the demo playing on the computer. He pointed and asked, "Are you sure that this was sung by you?"

Qian Pingfan gave a firm nod. "Yes!"

Ha Qiqi doubted, "You must have used voice changing software, right?"

"No, I really didn't!" Qian Pingfan argued.

Zhang Ye was becoming much more interested. He stopped Ha Qiqi and the others from raising any more doubts and told Qian Pingfan, "Alright then, can you sing something for us?"

Seeing this chance, Qian Pingfan was also feeling excited. "Sure, sure. I'm going to sing 'Wishing We Last Forever.'" Perhaps he had the thought that this song would get him into Zhang Ye's good books, but being rather bashful, he could only constantly shake his head in embarrassment, though he did not change his chosen song and determinedly went ahead with this "opportunistic" song. Actually, he had changed it to this song only because he had overheard the other contestants discussing it as a strategy, in hopes that it would increase their chances of passing the audition.

Zhang Ye looked at him. "Begin."

Qian Pingfan took a deep breath and was about to sing, but lost his composure. Holding his chest tightly, he took another deep breath to suppress his nerves before his voice came out.

When the first verse was sung, all of the staff at the audition venue were dumbfounded!

"When will the moon be clear and bright?"

"With a cup of wine in my hand, I ask the clear sky."

"In the heavens on this night,"

“I wonder what season it would be?”

Little Wang’s jaw dropped!

Wu Yi also looked like he had seen a ghost!

Ha Qiqi and the others were all staring at the contestant in disbelief!

Holy shit!

It was a female voice!

It really was a female voice!

Qian Pingfan sounded quite normal when he spoke, but when he started singing, it somehow turned into an extremely soft and gentle female voice, a voice that could be described as more womanly than a woman’s voice!

He did not lie!

The sample sent to them was really sung by him!

It was sung by a man!

If they did not know that the microphone and speaker were untampered, Ha Qiqi would definitely have thought that his voice was going through some voice changing software. Right now, she felt her world had collapsed as she looked at Qian Pingfan’s face while listening to his singing voice. She would never have thought that there would be such a person even if she were threatened with death!

Moreover, the key point that also left Ha Qiqi wondering was how she did not find it too shocking. If the contestant did not sing well or did not sing like a woman, or even deliberately imitated a transvestite’s type of voice, Ha Qiqi would surely break out in goosebumps and not get used to it. But somehow, this Qian Pingfan’s singing was just too womanly, as though his voice had been switched with a real woman’s. On top of that, he did not have any sort of expression that made him look like he was forcing the emotions of the song to show. The look and demeanor of a unconfident simpleton earlier had now turned into one of concentration and unembarrassed confidence as he held the microphone and sang. It felt very natural—and perhaps that was why Ha Qiqi did not find it so shocking.

Very quickly, the performance was over.

Qian Pingfan put down the microphone and pulled himself out from the song, becoming a shy guy once more. He would turn his head here and there, touching his nose a little and looking like he did not know where to place his arms and legs.

Ha Qiqi rubbed her forehead and could only muster up, “Oh my god.”

Wu Yi gazed at Qian Pingfan like he was a fairy.

Qian Pingfan was getting embarrassed from all the looks he was attracting. “Teachers, if it’s not OK, then I have to get going. I came out today secretly and did not inform my master.”

Zhang Ye laughed, “Then you better be prepared to go back late today.”

Qian Pingfan was taken aback. "Why?"

Zhang Ye answered, "Because you'll need to fill in some forms and we'll have to brief you on the details of the competition rules and what to look out for during the recording of the show."

When those words were said, everyone was astounded!

Zhang Ye looked at him and complimented, "Congratulations! You've passed the audition!"

He finally found one!

This was exactly the type of voice this bro wanted!

Chapter 650 Why'd you get an old man here for?

[collapse]

He passed?

A contestant finally passed the audition?

Everyone in the program team were stunned by Qian Pingfan's voice, but at the same time, were even more stunned by Director Zhang's decision.

Qian Pingfan also felt the same!

He was so surprised he asked, "What? I qualified?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Yes."

Qian Pingfan pointed to himself, eyes wide. "Really? Me?"

"Yes, really, you," Zhang Ye replied.

"This, I, I...I thank you, thank you, Teacher Zhang. Thank you, teachers!" Qian Pingfan was speaking incoherently due to his excitement. He had come to the audition because he wanted to change his life and had a dream of becoming a star. With the hopes of giving it a try, he downloaded a singing app onto his phone and recorded a short demo that was just average in quality and sent it to the program team via email. Who could've guessed that they would inform him the very next day of the auditions, and right now, he was even told by the famous Zhang Ye himself that he had passed the audition. This excitement was simply indescribable with words!

Zhang Ye asked, "Did you bring your ID?"

"Yes, I brought it!" Qian Pingfan quickly replied.

Zhang Ye called a staff member over and got him to take Qian Pingfan to register himself and then brief him on the preparations for the show. After doing that, Zhang Ye was also unable to conceal the joy he felt. Having held auditions for almost half of the contestants for the first day of open calls, none of them were satisfactory to him and lot of time was wasted. But just the appearance of Qian Pingfan alone was enough to make up for it all. This was exactly the type of good voice he was looking for!

However, Ha Qiqi was unsure of what was going on. She said, "Director Zhang."

“Yes?” Zhang Ye looked at her.

Ha Qiqi said, “About this, he doesn’t have any professional music training and has never been onstage before. He’s just a bicycle repairman. Will it be fine to put him onstage and on television?”

Zhang Ye replied, “Our program’s motto states that we don’t judge looks or occupation.”

Because of how several of those music consultants were chased away earlier, Ha Qiqi was also very careful with her words. She delivered, “But I personally feel that even though Qian Pingfan’s voice is very unique, wouldn’t it also be considered a little odd? He’s a man who sings in a woman’s voice. Will the audience accept that? Of course, even though I think it’s acceptable, we do not know if the audience will accept it. That voice will be too controversial.”

Wu Yi added, “It’s literally unheard of.”

Another female editor also nodded. “Yes, that voice is truly an odd one.”

Zhang Ye smiled and explained, “That’s exactly what I’m looking for in the contestants. It’s good that Qian Pingfan has appeared. Using him, I can finally show you all a live example of what I’m looking for. In terms of voice uniqueness, emotions put into singing, and the irreproducibility of it all, Qian Pingfan demonstrates all of those characteristics quite well. That is the type of contestant we should be looking for. I am not afraid of controversy, in fact, I’m afraid we aren’t being controversial enough. Something all audiences can agree on and accept does not exist at all.” Then he reaffirmed his decision, “Regarding Qian Pingfan, we will put our focus on him from here on out.”

Ha Qiqi could only nod at this. “OK.”

Zhang Ye said, “Next contestant.”

Little Wang went out to call the next contestant in.

.....

One contestant.

Two contestants.

Another six contestants in a row were eliminated.

When the next person after that came in, everyone was left confused for a moment. It was a young man in his twenties, with rather tanned skin and a very tall build. He was a burly man who couldn’t be described as ugly, but was just normal-looking and a very average person.

That person went to the microphone and spoke into it, “My name is Sun Daxuan and I am a train driver.”

Ha Qiqi asked, “What song will you be performing today?”

“It’s called ‘Please Fall In Love With Me,’” Sun Daxuan answered.

When they heard the title, everyone’s expressions turned strange. “Please Fall In Love With Me”? This was an old song from more than a decade ago. It was one of the famous songs by a Greater China1 celebrity. Although this celebrity was no longer popular due to his works not catching on, and also

hardly appeared on television and entertainment news anymore, the song's popularity was still very widespread. Even now, this song would be a default choice when people went to sing at a karaoke box. As it was meant to be a slow and soothing love song, none of those present at the audition expected such a burly man to choose it as his performance piece.

Zhang Ye said, "Begin then."

Sun Daxuan cleared his throat and narrowed his eyes, then lightly began his singing.

"Hey...Hello...It's me."

"Hey...Please...Love me."

Sometimes it sounded gentle. Sometimes it meandered. Sometimes the vibrato was strong. And, sometimes, it was deeply soulful.

If this song were sung by any other pretty boy or a younger looking man, the image would surely be beautiful, with young love an especially harmonious scene. However, with the looks of this Sun Daxuan who was a train driver, it was a total mismatch to the lyrics of the song. Although his singing was very emotional and flawless, the image that they were looking at gave them a really odd feeling. It didn't match, or maybe it couldn't be said to not match but rather was too much of a contrast! The only thing worth mentioning was that this person was really owning it today. When they listened to his demo, they only felt that his singing was very soulful and emotional. But when he performed it live in front of them, those feelings intensified. Along with his confidence in performing, he even looked quite comfortable standing there in the center of the room, though they didn't know if he was exceeding his usual performance levels or if he had always been at this level.

He finished singing.

Sun Daxuan looked on at the judges helplessly.

Ha Qiqi looked to Zhang Ye and asked, "What do you think of this person?"

Zhang Ye returned, "What do you all think?"

Ha Qiqi laughed, "Should I speak the truth?"

"Then would you rather tell some lies?" Zhang Ye was tickled by this.

"Well, I think it's fine. There's not much of a stage presence, no celebrity feel, probably not someone who would become famous. Although, I do think that the love song was performed very well," Ha Qiqi answered.

Wu Yi said, "Not too bad."

A female editor said, "It's OK."

They were actually quite hesitant of Sun Daxuan, knowing that it wouldn't matter whether they passed or failed him. If they compared him to Chang Si or Hu Liangyi's level, they would definitely not let him pass. At least, if they were the judges, they would choose Chang Si and Hu Liangyi rather than him. The reason for that was because their mindset was still stuck in the traditional thinking. If a person's looks

passed and they had the X factor, then even if their voice was average, as long as they could sing well enough, those would be the points they used to judge. For someone like Qian Pingfan who was male but sang in a female's voice or this burly train driver's gentle and emotional love song, they still could not quite accept it.

But somehow, for whatever reason, Zhang Ye's views always differed from theirs. He only said one thing, "Being able to sing a love song is not easy in and of itself. Sometimes, a man compared to a woman, a burly person compared to a pretty face, when the former of each sings well, they carry much stronger emotions across to the listener. So I'll let him pass."

Ha Qiqi, "..."

Fine, whatever, you're the executive director anyway. If you say so, then so be it.

The program team staff were already feeling helpless about Zhang Ye's decisions. They gradually understood Zhang Ye's routine, which could be summarized into two words—seeking novelty.

The more they believed a contestant could not make it?

The more Zhang Ye thought they could!

.....

Following that were another series of auditions.

One after another, contestants entered the room, performed a song, and left the room, over and over again.

A couple of times, when Ha Qiqi and the other program team staff thought they had spotted a promising contestant, Zhang Ye rejected them all. This left everyone unsure of what to say as it seemed like Zhang Ye specifically preferred those who worked blue-collar jobs, did not have good looks, or had odd voices. He didn't look for any other qualities than those?

For other talent shows, the preliminary auditions had a good passing rate as they still weren't the televised auditions yet, so it shouldn't be too stringent. As long as a contestant was average, they would be let through to the next round. When they got to the next round where the blind auditions were held, the difficult decision of whether they were good enough or not would be left to the four coaches. At most, they would have to edit out any footage of those contestants who were really terrible but somehow managed to sneak past the preliminary auditions. Why would they need to be so strict in the preliminary auditions round? They could not understand it. As they were nearing the end of the day's auditions, they knew that if this were any other singing talent show, more than a dozen contestants would have already passed, yet what was the number for them? They had only let two contestants through! And they were even the extremely odd ones!

But Zhang Ye still went about doing things his own way and did not lower his selection criteria. Actually, he understood clearly that they needed to find some contestants who were good-looking and could sing well or others who were not as outstanding, just to make up the numbers. But at the same time, Zhang Ye also knew that such contestants were not difficult to find at all. For example, you could throw a brick into a crowd and easily hit someone like Chang Si or Hu Liangyi, so his main task right now was not to search for these "green leaf" contestants who could easily be found. Since he was spending time here at

the scene of the audition today, he prioritized finding those contestants who would serve as the red flowers of the program. The program team staff thought that Zhang Ye was being capricious and lacking consideration, but little did they know that he considered much more than any one of them had. He already had it all planned out!

Time was ticking away.

Finally, at around 3 PM in the afternoon, other than Luo Yu who was brought here by Zhang Ye, there was only one last contestant for the day's audition.

Ha Qiqi said, "The next person is the last one."

Zhang Ye nodded in acknowledgment.

The door opened and the last contestant entered.

The moment they saw this person, everyone had a vision of ten thousand lines of "what the f**k" flying in front of their eyes. When the program team requested for the contestants to submit their demos when applying for the auditions, they were told to include their self-introductions as well. But if they did not write it or forgot about it, there was nothing the program team could do. This was why the program team was quite clueless about some of the contestants' details, just like how this last contestant for the day turned out. No one could have expected it at all!

The person who entered the room was an old man!

It was an old man who must have been around sixty years old!

Half of his hair was already white and combed all the way back. He was wearing a rather fashionable leather jacket and a pair of jeans full of holes. His jeans weren't torn from age, rather deliberately styled that way.

Ha Qiqi gaped, flabbergasted. "Grandpa, are you a contestant too?"

The old man answered in high spirits, "Yes, my name is Zhou Danian."

A female editor asked dumbfounded, "May I ask how old you are?"

"Haha, I'm 59 this year, still young, still young, Zhou Danian chuckled.

Wu Yi nearly fainted at this, wondering how 59 years old was still considered young. My father's only 58 this year! He already has symptoms of cerebral thrombosis and struggles to walk around! You're even older than my father by a year!

Ha Qiqi could not believe it. She asked, "Was the demo sent in by you? Did you sing that?"

Zhou Danian replied with vitality, "That was me alright."

"But the demo was for a rock song." Ha Qiqi could not accept it. When she had a look at the contestants waiting room earlier, she remembered seeing him, but did not think of him as one of the contestants. She just thought that he was a family member of a contestant who might have been underage and felt that he might have been a father or a grandfather. But who knew that this old man who was almost sixty had indeed turned out to be here for the audition!

However, Zhou Danian only laughed and spoke, "The song I will be performing for you all is a rock song too, may I start now?"

Ha Qiqi said, "Sure, sure, please go ahead."

Little Wang felt a little bad for him, so she offered, "Grandpa, why don't I get you a chair?"

"No need. I'm still strong and healthy." Zhou Danian held the microphone, and without even preparing, suddenly roared into it!

"Wind!!!"

Whoa!

Everyone was shocked at the opening. The loud and hoarse voice had set the entire venue on fire as the female editor pressed her hands over her ears while Ha Qiqi and the others started in their seats. It was not because they were shocked by the loud voice but because they were afraid that this old grandpa would get a brain hemorrhage or a heart attack from his own shouting! This was a rock song! Can an old man like you take it? Don't risk your life like this!

But Zhou Danian was just getting into the mood!

"Wind!

"Gusting all around!

"Snow!

"Squalling till it's gone!

"Rain!"

This was a little known song barely any of those present had ever heard. It could be considered an older rock song, one that carried a bit of heavy metal in it. It was basically a rock song that depended on the vocalist to employ screaming² to sing the song. It could be seen just how hard Zhou Danian was trying. In just a short while, his forehead was dripping with beads of sweat!

Ha Qiqi was already in no mood to listen anymore. She wanted to go up to call a stop to it as she was worried that, before The Voice could even start broadcasting, news of a contestant dying of cardiac arrest would make the headlines first!

But somehow, Zhang Ye was listening to it in a most serious manner. Not only was he serious, his eyes appeared increasingly brighter by the moment. This old man really sang very well. Although his voice sounded somewhat dry and the high notes cracked at certain parts, it didn't matter since it was rock and voice cracking was allowed! Other than those points, the old man did not have any other problems in his singing and was even quite remarkable. His outburst of emotions was full on and almost every verse of the song poured his feelings out. Of the song's rhythm, it might not seem difficult to a younger person nor was there anything to pick on, but for a 60-year-old man, Zhang Ye was more particular about the contestant's sense of rhythm. He felt that this contestant had done very well in this area and was definitely comparable to the young ones. In fact, parts of the lyrics and high-pitched singing, if sung by a younger person, would have just been that. But when it came out from the mouth of a 60-year-old man

full of life experience and wisdom, it sounded particularly different. The impact of those lyrics was much greater! It was more intense!

What a surprise!

This was really another unexpected surprise!

This rock song sounded better and better as they listened!

When the performance was over, Zhou Danian was panting heavily, though he looked to be fine and still in high spirits. He said, "Teachers, did I do well? Do I qualify?"

Zhang Ye suddenly asked, "How is your condition and health?"

Zhou Danian answered, "No problems at all."

"Don't try to brush it off. I want to know the specific conditions you have," Zhang Ye said in a serious and firm voice.

Zhou Danian replied honestly, "I do have slightly high blood sugar, but other than that, I'm doing well. My blood pressure is stable and I've been jogging everyday to increase my lung capacity."

Ha Qiqi didn't know how to react. "Grandpa, you're already so old, why do you still think of coming to take part in this talent show? If we had known you were already at this age, we wouldn't have asked you to come to the auditions."

Wu Yi was already thinking of getting him to hurry back home. Seeing him rocking to a song like this, they were all trembling with fright that he would just faint right there and then!

Zhou Danian was having none of it. "So what if I'm at this age? I'll tell you something, young lady. Why don't we compete on our lung capacities? I believe that many of you here would not be stronger than me in terms of our lung capacities."

Ha Qiqi did not know how to react to this, she just knew they had to reject him. Have you ever seen any other talent show with a 60-year-old contestant before? Wouldn't this be crazy? Although their program did say that age didn't matter, it was possible to be too old as well. Someone in their forties would have been fine, someone in their fifties would be pushing it, but you're already close to sixty now and half your hair has also turned white. Who would risk letting you compete in their talent show? No matter how you put it, it was still ultimately a stage for the youngsters!

How should they reject him?

He's already at such an advanced age, so would it be alright to tell him as it was?

But he looks so confident. If they straight told him, would it deal a blow to him? He had better not get a heart attack from the rejection! Whatever, the dirty work of rejecting the old man should just be left to Zhang Ye to handle. He's the executive director anyway.

Ha Qiqi kept quiet.

The other program team staff all looked at Zhang Ye.

Sure enough, only Zhang Ye stood up to say something. He told the old man, "Grandpa, you're much older than my father and our competition is really quite physically demanding too. I think you'd agree you can't handle it?"

Ha Qiqi nodded inside her head. Right, just refuse him mildly and not be too direct with the rejection.

Zhou Danian immediately responded, "Physically demanding? It's no big deal to me at all. I'm still going strong, and whatever a youngster can do, I can do it too. I have never once thought that I'm older than any of you, so no matter how intense the competition gets, I can get through it. It's not a problem at all!"

Oh come on, you're still refusing to take our advice?

This old man was being too stubborn.

Ha Qiqi and the others were all wondering, if Director Zhang's mild rejection did not get through to him, then how should it be handled? Was it better to just put it plainly to him?

As expected, Zhang Ye gave it to him very plainly.

Zhang Ye stayed standing and said with a smile, "Grandpa Zhou, since you claim that your body is fine and that you can get through this intense competition, then I have nothing else to say. I hereby formally announce: you've passed the auditions and I insist that you join our competition, The Voice of China! On behalf of our program team, I welcome you!"

Zhou Danian stumbled back a bit and immediately broke out into a big smile, "I've qualified? Hahaha!"

However, the program team staff were all astounded. They were so shocked they felt like just laying down on the ground under the tables!

What?

The old man qualified?!

What the f**k!

Ha Qiqi nearly vomited blood!

Wu Yi and the other staff's eyes shrank!

Director Zhang, weren't you going to refuse him politely? Yet it turned out that you were not going to reject him! It turned out instead to be that you were only asking the old man to be clear about his condition and health issues before allowing him to proceed to the televised blind auditions round? But...but this is an old man who's 60 years old! Have you ever seen an old man taking part in any singing talent show before? We're holding selections for The Voice of China, not The Old Man of China! What sort of mess are you trying to create by getting an old man to join the competition!