

Superstar 991

Chapter 991: The first song has been decided!

Under public attention.

The countdown to the recording of King of Masked Singers begun.

There were three more days.

There were just three days remaining.

...

At home.

On this morning.

Zhang Ye was feeling unwell after getting up from bed. He felt a little dizzy, but was more bothered by a tickle in his throat. However, he did not think much of it. It might have been due to the added pressure in recent days or the long duration that he'd spent practicing that led to him catching a slight cold. He believed that he would recover after taking some medicine.

His mother, who had made prepared breakfast, suddenly said, "Son."

Zhang Ye said, "Ah?"

His mother smiled and said, "I discussed things with your dad yesterday. We're planning to sightsee and vacation in Hainan for a while. The two of us haven't really traveled much all these years."

His father, who wasn't too keen on going, asked, "Are we really going?"

"Didn't we already agree to it?" His mother stared hard at his father.

Zhang Ye found them funny and said, "Go on then. It's good to get out and have some fun."

His mother made a noise in agreement as she looked at him. "Will you be paying for us?"

Zhang Ye replied, "Of course! I must!"

His mother said, "Great, shall we book the tickets then?"

Zhang Ye said, "Go ahead. Go and have fun with Dad. I'll take care of all the expenses."

"Will you be fine staying at home by yourself?" His father was a little worried.

His mother sneered, "Our son is a grown-up. Does he still need you to worry about him?"

Zhang Ye smiled. "Don't worry about me. If I get hungry, I'll order something to eat. I won't starve to death."

His mother said, "We'll be back in a couple weeks. And you better find a job quickly."

"OK, I will," Zhang Ye responded.

His mother was the impatient type, who would act as soon as she made a decision. In that sense, Zhang Ye had inherited a part of her character. After booking the airplane tickets and the hotel, his parents packed their luggage and headed for the capital's airport to catch their same-day, afternoon flight. They left just like that!

At night.

Zhang Ye cooked a packet of instant noodles for dinner, then took some medication for his cold before turning in early for the night.

When Zhang Ye got up from bed the next day, he nearly fell down on the spot. He was feeling a bit dizzy, and his legs were a little wobbly. Only now did he realize that his cold had gotten worse, and that he even had a fever!

Damn!

No way, right?

Why are you chaining me up at this key point in time?

Zhang Ye didn't know what to do. He was scheduled for a rehearsal today at Beijing Television, where he was supposed to discuss the songs with the musicians and the arrangements. But Zhang Ye probably couldn't go anymore in his current condition. So he took The Clown's cell phone and called Han Qi, his liaison, to apply for time off.

Han Qi was very worried when she heard. "Teacher, are you alright?"

"I'm fine."

"We start recording the show tomorrow. This..."

"I'll be able to make it tomorrow."

"You're one of the contestants scheduled for the first round, so it's too late to make any changes at this time."

"I know that."

"Let me visit you. Where do you live?"

"There's no need."

"Then please get some bed rest. It won't make much of a difference to discuss tomorrow's rehearsal."

"OK."

After hanging up, Zhang Ye struggled and crawled out of bed quick as he could. He ransacked the drawers and found a bunch of cold and fever medicine and popped them all in one go before lying back down to sleep. He was hoping to recover from the cold quickly. Otherwise, it would be really stupid if it affected tomorrow's competition.

Many outstanding singers had come to compete on the stage of King of Masked Singers. Although Zhang Ye did not know their names, but when he saw their stage presence and heard their voices, he knew that every one of them was going to be a strong foe. Even if Zhang Ye faced the competition in his best condition, he might not necessarily win, much less if he had to perform when he was down with a cold. He could not even guarantee that he would not be eliminated in the first round, so he was feeling rather anxious!

He had to recover as soon as possible!

If he lost in the first round, and was forced to reveal his identity, how could he advance in this industry in the future?

But things don't always go as planned. Sometimes, the more you hope something will get better, the more it gets worse!

...

Friday.

On the day of the recording.

The interval between this world's recording of a television show and broadcast was much shorter than Zhang Ye's previous world. Due to having a live audience at the recording studio, it was impossible to keep a lot of news and competition results a secret. They would be leaked to the public. Therefore, in consideration of the possibility that, if the interval between recording and broadcast was dragged on for too long, the show's intended effect would be affected. As such, the King of Masked Singers program team compressed the interval even further by recording the show on Friday and then broadcasting at 8 PM on Saturday. The entire turnaround time was only a day, but even though there was enough time to do it this way, there was no allowance for any problems to arise. Everyone had to be extremely careful and focused, because if there were any recording accidents or problems, they would be unable to get the episode to air on the following day. That would then become a massive problem!

Around 5 in the morning.

It was still dark out.

Beijing Television's King of Masked Singers program team had all arrived.

Inside the recording studio, the entire place had been renovated. Anyone would be astonished once they saw the stage, lighting, studio, and heard the audio system, as they were all the best that anyone could get in the industry. The program team, which secured the 150 million RMB in title sponsorship, had also reinvested a lot of that money back into the show. They were essentially willing to dump any amount of money into it. They would either not make a splash, or they would amaze everyone with their show! Beijing Television's executives were also very cooperative on their part. This was the most important show for Beijing Television this year, without any other shows even coming close. so the station's and program team's efforts were fully concentrated on it!

"Brother Hu, Teacher Sunset Glow has arrived!"

"This early?"

"She wasn't too satisfied with the rehearsal yesterday, so she changed part of the arrangement and wanted to come rehearse with the band one more time. She's already in the second rehearsal room!"

"That's fine. The official recording will begin at 1 PM. Let's hurry and get our preparations done!"

"OK!"

"Understood!"

"Eh, where's Teacher Zhang Ye?"

"He didn't come?"

"He's here. I just saw him come in after getting out of his car when I went downstairs."

"Is that so? But I didn't see him."

"I didn't see him either. Maybe you were mistaken?"

"It was a BMW X5, the car that Teacher Zhang drives."

"Let's not worry about Teacher Zhang for now. The biggest variable right now is Teacher Clown. Where's Han Qi?! Little Han! Has Teacher Clown arrived yet?"

"He's here! Little Han went to bring him here!"

"Has he recovered?"

"I don't know."

"Go and check it out! If Teacher Clown does not make it for the recording, that'd be trouble! There's no way we could find someone to replace him at this time!"

Backstage.

Outside the rehearsal room.

The Clown again arrived wearing his mask. No one saw when he came in either. When Han Qi came out to bring him in, The Clown had already changed into his costume. His mask already covered his entire face!

Han Qi said in surprise, "Teacher Clown, you've recovered?"

The Clown was silent for a moment before saying, "I'm...alright."

The moment he spoke, that hoarse and broken voice was immediately unveiled!

Han Qi was stunned. "Sir, your..."

A little while later, the rehearsal room door opened.

When Sunset Glow emerged from inside and saw that man in the clown mask standing at the door, she was startled for a moment before giving him a smile with her eyes from under the mask. She had heard The Clown singing those working class songs in the video clips and was also extremely curious about his identity. She wondered what kind of wondrous song this "50-year-old driver" with a beautiful voice

would perform this time, so she tried to explore the enemy's plans. "Teacher Clown, what song did you choose to perform?" she said with a purposely disguised voice, as she did not wish for her true identity to be exposed.

The moment The Clown spoke, she also got stunned.

The Clown said in a hoarse voice, "Haven't...thought of...it yet."

Sunset Glow said, "Your voice..."

The Clown spread his hands. "A...serious...cold."

Sunset Glow immediately said, "Don't talk anymore. The less you can speak, the better. Have you gone to the hospital yet? Did you get a cortisone injection 1 yet? No, your case is too serious! Even a cortisone injection is useless!"

Han Qi stamped her feet in worry. "W-What can we do now!"

Suddenly, Hu Fei, Hou Ge, Xiao Lu, and the others rushed over. When they heard about the condition of The Clown's voice, their expressions changed slightly for the worse, and everyone fell silent.

Dafei clenched his teeth and said, "Let's get a replacement, Brother Hu!"

Hu Fei said, "How're we to make any changes? It's too late for that!"

Xiao Lu exclaimed, "This is bad!"

"The show's gonna start recording this afternoon!" Hou Ge was getting anxious.

However, The Clown just looked at them and smiled. He was obviously very sick but his mental state seemed to be much more better than theirs. "I'm...fine. I can still sing."

Han Qi said anxiously, "But how can you sing like that!"

The Clown ignored her and went straight into the rehearsal room. "Let's...rehearse—" A coughing fit consumed him.

When he walked in, everyone looked at him and found that his footfalls were a little light and swaying!

When the Miracle Wheels' band members saw him, their hearts pounded.

The music director, Bai Yuanfei, immediately came forward. "Are you alright?"

The Clown smiled. "Yes."

Bai Yuanfei nodded. "Then, let's rehearse."

The Miracle Wheels' drummer said, "How can you sing in that state? You'll definitely be eliminated even if you insist on singing!"

The guitarist sighed and said, "You sing bel canto, The Clown, but you can't possibly sing—"

"Pop...songs or rock, I can...sing them all," The Clown said.

The guitarist said, "You really can't sing like this!"

The Clown said staunchly, "Even if I can't...I must!"

Lose?

Elimination?

Zhang Ye was not afraid to lose. If he really lost, so be it. He was not a sore loser. But what he couldn't accept was that he did not even have the courage to get onstage. Having worked for so long in the industry, what sort of difficulties had he not encountered? What calamities had he not been through? He could lose, but even if he lost, he still wanted to lose while standing onstage!

This was who Zhang Ye was!

He had a bit of the wolf in his bones!

The word "retreat" didn't exist in his dictionary!

When he thought of all this, Zhang Ye suddenly knew what song he was going to sing today. The melody and lyrics of a song naturally surfaced in his mind!

He wanted to tell the audience.

Who he was!

Where he came from!

And where he wanted to go!

Zhang Ye immediately picked up pen and paper and started to write out the song.

When Music Director Bai Yuanfei and the musicians saw this, they were in disbelief.

Bai Yuanfei gasped and said, "Y-You're even thinking of singing an original?"

Zhang Ye nodded.

The bassist facepalmed and really had to hand it to Zhang Ye. "You're still thinking of singing an original in your current state? This is too hard. Why don't we choose something simpler instead?"

The guitarist also disagreed with Zhang Ye. "Besides, the audience might not even be convinced by it. How many people would accept a song that they've never heard before? How many would accept it after only hearing it for the first time? That's still a question mark. Your voice is already not up to mark today, so if you still insist on taking such a risk, you'll definitely get eliminated!"

But Zhang Ye just looked at them with determination and handed them the score.

"My...first...song...must be...this one!"

Chapter 992: A madman!

At Beijing Television.

Behind the closed doors of the rehearsal room.

Guitar strums...

Bass strumming...

A song's melody repeated over and over.

Except there was no singing!

That was because Zhang Ye was no longer able to sing. The condition of his voice had gotten so serious that he had almost lost his voice, though he could still speak. But when he sang, half of his vocalization could not be heard at all! Even so, he still hummed along and tried his best to coordinate with the band.

They finished rehearsing the first song.

Then followed up with rehearsing the second song.

After two hours, the band members and program team staff felt sorry for the sight of the man wearing a clown mask standing onstage who looked like he was on the verge of collapsing.

Bai Yuanfei couldn't bear it anymore. "Alright, that'll do!"

However, Zhang Ye said, "Ba-and, let's do it one more time...."

Bai Yuanfei was fretting over him. "You're already in this state, so don't push yourself! Go to the hospital!"

Zhang Ye waved it off. "I'm fine. Let's try...again." He even got down from the stage to discuss things with the band's guitarist. He pointed out some issues. "I...want...cough...cough...guitar here....I don't want other...instruments." Then he pointed to another part and said with much difficulty, "I will sing...a capella here."

The guitarist hurriedly said, "I got it, I got it. Please...please don't speak anymore!"

Zhang Ye nodded. "Let's do it one...more time. Sorry for the trouble."

Once.

Twice.

And yet again.

This had always been Zhang Ye's way. He set very high standards for himself and would never allow any shortcomings in his pursuit of the arts. Even in his current poor health, he still had to carry on to the best of his ability.

Bluff his way through?

Make do?

Not pushing himself to the limit?

That was not his style!

Han Qi, who was seated in the audience, unwittingly started to tear up.

The rehearsal ended.

Han Qi quickly rushed onstage to help The Clown down and quickly returned to the waiting room. "The station called for a doctor, who's arrived!"

Zhang Ye nodded. "Thank...you."

Her heart aching, Han Qi said, "Please...please don't speak anymore."

Right after they left, Hu Fei arrived with a group of people!

Hu Fei said in worry, "How was it?"

Bai Yuanfei forced a smile and said, "We're done rehearsing."

The guitarist looked very touched. "I've never come across person as hardworking as him! The healthy competitors only rehearsed two songs seven or eight times yesterday, but he rehearsed two songs 23 times despite being sick! I've really never seen a person like him before! He's really risking his life that way!"

Hou Ge asked, "Can he sing? Will he be able to go onstage?"

Dafei said anxiously, "We're going to start recording very soon!"

Bai Yuanfei pondered for a moment. "Don't worry. He can definitely take the stage. Even if the sky falls, with the type of person he is, he'll remain standing onstage to finish singing before collapsing!"

...

Besides The Clown, the other five singers scheduled for the first round were ready to go.

In the waiting room of Sunset Glow.

Sunset Glow asked, "How's The Clown doing?"

Her liaison sighed and replied, "I heard that he just finished rehearsing, but that he just couldn't make a sound."

"That's such a shame."

Her liaison said, "Yeah, he'll definitely get eliminated."

...

In the waiting room of Petal Shower.

Her liaison asked, "Teacher, how do you feel?"

"I'm feeling great," Petal Shower smiled. "I can't wait to start."

Her liaison said, "That's great then. We'll crush the other singers for sure this time!"

Petal Shower suddenly asked, "I heard that one of the masked singers has fallen sick?"

Her liaison acknowledged, "That's right. It's so serious that he's having difficulty vocalizing. The rules state that two people will get eliminated in each round, so he'll definitely be one of the two today. He might not even be able to finish performing his first song, much less the second."

The other competitors had also heard about The Clown's health and felt that it was unfortunate. Even though they found the songs the man had sung a bit weird, his singing was still very strong. There was no one else who could sing better than him in bel canto. Ordinarily, he would be a very formidable competitor. But now that he had lost his voice after coming down with a serious cold, it was obvious that it would be a fatal blow to him. Whether or not The Clown would be going onstage to perform, his chance at moving on to the next round was as good as gone!

...

In the infirmary.

Zhang Ye was waiting here.

Han Qi said anxiously, "Doctor, please take a look at him, please!"

Zhang Ye was sweating profusely and beads of sweat were trickling down his forehead. No one could see his face underneath the mask, but it was obvious that he did not look good!

The doctor frowned as he made his way over. "Open your mouth."

Zhang Ye did as he was told.

"Say ah."

"Ah."

"Push your tongue down."

The doctor took out a thermometer and placed it into Zhang Ye's mouth. Then he wore his stethoscope and moved the chestpiece around Zhang Ye's chest. At this moment, the thermometer beeped to signify it was done taking his temperature. The doctor retrieved it from his mouth to check.

A fever of 40 degrees!

The doctor looked alarmed!

Han Qi paled a bit as well!

Hu Fei and some others on the program team pushed the infirmary door open and came over. Even Dong Shanshan, who had just finished doing her makeup, rushed over in a hurry when she heard about the emergency over here.

Dong Shanshan asked, "How is he?"

"Doctor," Hu Fei asked, "is he going to be alright?"

Without a second thought, the doctor suggested, "Get a substitute. It's impossible for him to go onstage in this state!"

Hu Fei gasped. "How serious is it?"

The doctor showed the thermometer at them. "He has a fever of 40 degrees, a severe viral cold, inflammation of the tonsils, and even has pneumonia symptoms. What say you?"

"What?"

"It's this serious?"

"This..."

"Then he really isn't going to be OK!"

The doctor looked at Zhang Ye and commanded, "The ambulance is just outside. You must immediately follow me to the hospital to get treatment. Don't even think of taking the stage. That is impossible!"

Zhang Ye shook his head and said, "There's nothing wrong...with me!"

The doctor said furiously, "You're in that state and you still say that there's nothing wrong with you? Anyone else who has a fever as bad as yours wouldn't even be able to get out the bed, yet you can still get here for the rehearsal? You even managed to rehearse for over two hours? You don't want to live anymore, do you?"

Only now did everyone realize the shape The Clown was in when rehearsing just now!

They heard a determined voice come from behind the clown mask. "I'm fine."

The doctor said angrily, "Follow me to the hospital right away!"

Hu Fei also knew that this couldn't continue, so he promptly said, "Teacher Clown, you—"

"I can go on. You don't have to say...more," interrupted Zhang Ye.

The doctor lost his temper and shouted, "You can't even stand straight right now! And you have nearly lost your voice! Go onstage? What stage!"

Zhang Ye looked at him. "Give me...a cortisone shot!"

The doctor said, "An injection probably won't improve your health!"

Zhang Ye said weakly, "Give me...shot!"

He was frequently losing his voice when speaking now. As a result, there were some words that didn't even come out. It made his speech sound a bit broken, Although, everyone still understood what he was trying to say!

"Teacher Clown!"

"You..."

Zhang Ye waved his hands to stop them from talking!

The doctor gazed into Zhang Ye's eyes. "Are you sure?"

Zhang Ye nodded. "Do it!"

The doctor had no other choice. "Let me tell you this first. As you're in grave condition, if you are injected with corticosteroids, the damage and side effects will be much greater than on others!"

Zhang Ye said a single word, "Understood!"

The doctor grit his teeth. "Alright!" He then turned around. "Don't crowd around in here. Everyone, please go outside."

Hu Fei and the others hesitated, wanting to speak, but eventually left the room.

However, Han Qi did not depart. She stayed behind with Zhang Ye.

Zhang Ye loosened his collar some and exposed his neck.

The doctor prepped the medicine and adjusted the dosage.

Han Qi stood right next to him, biting her lip, not saying a word.

Five minutes later.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to inject you now."

"OK."

The doctor pinched Zhang Ye's neck and soon started injecting the shot with care.

Zhang Ye's eyelids twitched as he felt a sudden gush of intense pain. He was the type who was most afraid of going to the hospital. Ever since childhood, he would look scared whenever someone brought up "the hospital." As such, he would self-medicate at home whenever he was sick. But this time, he couldn't do that. He needed to have a voice to sing!

After the injection was administered.

The doctor helped massage his muscles.

Awhile later, the doctor asked, "Try to make a sound, please."

Zhang Ye attempted to sing a line. "Land...as pretty as...a picture..."

His voice was still not back!

The doctor shook his head. "It didn't work."

Han Qi hurriedly said, "Forget it, Teacher, just forget it!"

But Zhang Ye put forth, "It's slightly...better! Give me another shot!"

The doctor said angrily, "You think this is an IV drip? We're talking about injecting you with steroids here! Do you know what side effects this could cause? Just one shot is enough to make you suffer!"

"Shoot me up again!" Zhang Ye yelled.

The doctor clenched his teeth. "It's none of my business if something happens to you!"

Zhang Ye said, "Do it!"

A second injection was administered to him!

This injection was even more painful than the previous one. Zhang Ye's hands were even trembling. The pain did not come from being pinched, but rather spread from his throat to his chest!

The injection was done.

Zhang Ye was sweating even more profusely. After he rested for a while to let the steroids take effect, he tried to sing again, "Land as pretty as a...picture!"

It was much better!

But still not enough!

He couldn't hit the higher registers!

Zhang Ye closed his eyes. "Another!"

Han Qi immediately deterred, "No! You absolutely must not!"

Zhang Ye looked tranquil. "Again!"

Han Qi shouted, "Teacher!"

Zhang Ye yelled without any explanation, "Do it!"

The doctor did not argue this time. In silence, he looked at the man in the clown mask, turned around, and picked up the syringe.

Han Qi could not watch any longer. She turned around and ran out after opening the door. Hu Fei had already gone back to the stage to oversee things, but quite a few of the others had remained outside the infirmary.

Hou Ge, Xiao Lu, Dafei, and the others were all waiting there.

"How are things?"

"Can he sing?"

"What're things like, Little Han?"

Han Qi didn't utter a word. She just squatted down and started crying!

"Little Han!"

"You..."

Everyone looked each other in the eye and suddenly felt their hearts grow heavy!

A short while later, the doctor pushed open the infirmary door and came out.

Everyone gathered around him in haste!

"Doctor!"

"Is he better?"

"How is Teacher Clown?"

The doctor scanned the group and proclaimed, "If something happens to him in the future, don't call me! I've treated a lot of celebrities before, as well as given them cortisone shots, but this is the first time in my entire life that I've encountered a madman who's not afraid to die! Just what kind of person has your program team invited this time?"

Chapter 993: The show begins!

In the King of Masked Singers recording studio.

The audience was already seated; the recording was about to begin.

Presently, the first judge walked onto the stage and took a seat, followed by the second one, then the third.

"Wow, it's Chen Guang!"

"It's Chen Guang!"

"Grandma Zhang Xia is here too!"

"Hahaha, Old Yao!"

"Why did Old Yao style his hair into a pompadour 1 ? Did he grow out his hair?"

"Amy!"

"Amy! I love you!"

"I've finally seen her in person!"

The recording did not begin yet. Yao Jiancai and Chen Guang were both smiling and waving at the audience.

Amy was chatting with Zhang Xia. The two other judges, Chen Yidong and Wang Zhuishu, were also sharing a laugh, discussing the competition that would be taking place soon. It was not just the audience who was looking forward to the start of this show; even the judges were greatly anticipating it as they did not know who the participating masked singers were. Would any of their old friends be competing on the show?

At this moment, Dong Shanshan, who was dressed in a women's suit, stepped onto the stage. Her fashion today was different from before. She not in her usual sexy short skirt or long dress. Instead, she was dressed in a more gender-neutral, more conventional petite suit today, with her hair up, and even wore a pair of golden-rimmed glasses. This style had completely changed her air, and was in

consideration of the show having only one host, so it would be unsuitable if Dong Shanshan dressed in the way she used to. That wouldn't help her solidify her stage presence, as the clothes of a host had to befit the stage. All such details were carefully observed in their production.

Quite a few of the male audience members started screaming.

"Shanshan! She's so beautiful!"

"She looks really pretty in those clothes!"

"Yeah, it really suits her nicely!"

"She's got class!"

The atmosphere in the studio was heating up!

The staff were doing their final preparation work in the recording studio.

Hu Fei made last checks with his team. "Lights?"

A lighting technician replied, "OK!"

Hu Fei asked, "Cameras?"

"Camera 1 OK!"

"Camera 2 ready!"

"All cameras on standby."

Hu Fei said, "Shanshan, do a mic test."

Dong Shanshan blew into the microphone. "Hello, hello, OK!"

The Miracle Wheels also went onstage. They had done their sound checks earlier and only needed a final confirmation check.

Everything was ready.

Hu Fei nodded and said, "Alright then. All departments, take note. The one-minute countdown begins now!"

30 seconds...

20 seconds...

10 seconds...

It was time!

The recording began!

A camera jib crane captured the panoramic view of the studio!

The stage lights twinkled as countless spotlights suddenly focused simultaneously on a door. The door opened up and a woman in a suit, wearing a red mask, slowly walked out. Her high heels clicked with every step she took. In no time at all, she elegantly stood at center stage.

The woman raised her microphone and spoke into it, and a very shrill voice came out. It was obvious that this was being resynthesized through a voice transformer. "Welcome to Beijing Television's Mystery Music Show, brought to you exclusively by Bright Fruit Cocoa—King of Masked Singers!"

The audience instantly rose from their seats with cheers and applause!

After the advertising messages consisting of a few hundred words were read, the woman turned around all of a sudden and hooked her hand behind her head. By the time she turned around again, the mask she had been wearing was off. She gently put on a pair of golden-rimmed glasses and exposed her beautiful face to everyone.

"I am your host, Dong Shanshan!"

Her voice was now back to normal!

With this opener, the audience was instantly stoked!

A mask.

A synthesized voice.

The reveal.

This is what King of Masked Singers is about!

At the guessing panel.

Zhang Xia smiled. "Interesting."

Amy clapped. "This is fun!"

Chen Guang's heart was beating very fast. "I'm anticipating this more and more."

Wang Zhuishu laughed. "Old Chen, do you think we'll bump into any old friends here?"

"Definitely," Chen Guang said, "but we may not recognize them."

...

Backstage.

Zhang Ye was hooked up to an IV drip in the waiting room.

Han Qi stayed right beside him and helped him keep the bag aloft.

The recording had already started. In the waiting room was a TV he could use to watch the entire recording.

"You can go back, Little Han."

"No thanks."

"I'm fine, really. Can't you tell?"

"Please stop talking."

"That's why I'm saying you can go back. Come back and call me when it's almost my turn. I would like to rest for a while by myself, that OK? Don't make me talk anymore."

"...Alright."

Han Qi had no choice but to leave for now. She went out and closed the door behind her.

Only Zhang Ye was left in the waiting room. Now, he finally clutched his chest. He could feel a pain in his chest as he took several deep breaths and coughed. He couldn't help but smile bitterly to himself at his current situation. He knew that this was not pain from pneumonia but the acting up of his old injuries. He did not know if it was because of the cortisone shots, or if he had caught a cold this time because of a lowered immunity stemming from his old injuries, or if it was due to the inflammation of his wound, which in turn aggravated his old injuries, but he was feeling extremely uncomfortable right now. His lungs hurt even just breathing!

In the end, he still could not escape from the injuries he'd received during the National Martial Arts Conference two months ago. Initially, he was quite alright. But as those injuries were internal and were received from Grandmaster Chen Xi's concealed power attacks on him, followed by the concealed power injuries that he suffered when he went on a consecutive rampage against the dozen over large sects, the injuries were there all the while. Injuries like these required time to heal, and they might even kill him if they were serious. Rao Aimin's younger sister and brother-in-law had died a year after suffering internal injuries caused by Zhou Tianpeng's concealed power attacks on them. And it wasn't just him who was affected. Rao Aimin herself carried some internal injuries, while the Huashan Sect leader, Chen Xi, was even worse off. It was rumored that he hadn't been seen in public for over two months. A lot of people had suffered rather serious injuries during that intense battle!

Old injuries.

A cold.

A fever.

This was Zhang Ye at his weakest. It was also the time when he was in the worst shape, yet he was immediately about to take part in the first competition round of King of Masked Singers. Having been thrown into such circumstances, Zhang Ye was forced bite the bullet. Because he was the type of person who never believed in fate!

He wanted to sing.

So today, he wasn't going to let anyone stop him!

...

In the studio.

A smile hung from Dong Shanshan's face, and she said in a steady rhythm, "This singer, the first to make an appearance, has a very clean voice and wide vocal range. Let us welcome—King of Oddity!"

King of Oddity?

What kind of name was that?

Everyone stared at the door curiously.

At the guessing panel, the judges had already started to make guesses.

Chen Guang smiled and said, "King? Of Oddity?"

Yao Jiancai blinked and said, "Could this be Zhang Ye?"

Zhang Xia was tickled pink.

Amy nearly burst out laughing!

Zhang Ye?

Just because there was the word "oddity" in the name, it has to be Zhang Ye?

These two people were indeed long-time partners. All they did was mock each other!

That remark was also picked up by the cameras, but everyone knew that Old Yao was just kidding.

"Wow!"

"He's coming out!"

"That costume is so cool!"

"Oh!"

Dong Shanshan walked away from center stage and stood in a corner of the wings.

The first masked singer came out onto the stage. His mask was quite peculiar, with nearly every color of the rainbow, while the mesh he wore covered his entire head and even hid his neck! He took a few steps forward and stood in the middle of the stage.

The famous variety host, Chen Yidong, said in shock, "How are we supposed to guess like this! We can't even see their hands since they're wearing gloves!"

Yao Jiancai said, "We can see their socks though."

Wang Zhuishu laughed and said, "Are you going to identify them from their socks?"

Amy was already curiously leaning forward just to get a tad bit closer. "Who could this be? There's not a single clue as to who it is!"

Zhang Xia was also analyzing the singer. "Are they tall?"

The lights abruptly dimmed.

The entire studio quieted as everyone stared at the singer in anticipation.

The music played. A very playful melody rang out!

King of Oddity closed his eyes and started swaying his head. He wasn't nodding to the beat of the music, instead thrashing his head from left to right!

Then, his legs started moving too!

He was dancing to the music, except that this dance looked quite funny!

His voice immediately came out the moment he opened his mouth to sing!

"Ya ain't doing good.

"But ya ain't sayin' so.

"I think you're,

"Truly an idiot.

"Ya say, ya say.

"I say, I say."

When everyone heard the short rap intro at the beginning of the song, they immediately knew what song this was. It was a relatively popular song in recent years, titled "Idiot," and was originally performed by a female Taiwanese singer. However, King of Oddity's performance of this song differed from the original. The tempo was clearly faster, and there was more portamento 2 to it!

The first verse of the song finished.

The audience immediately started applauding!

Zhang Xia concluded, "It's a young man!"

Chen Guang said, "Right, he's definitely not above 40!"

Amy solemnly stated, "It's a man."

Wang Zhuishu laughed and looked at her. "I can make that out too, y'know!"

As King of Oddity sang faster, the studio's atmosphere became increasingly lively!

The rhythm was great!

It made everyone tempted to sing along!

Chen Guang evaluated, "This guy is great at performing live. He's probably a professional singer!"

Zhang Xia shook her head. "Not necessarily."

Wang Zhuishu sighed and said, "He sings really well, but who could it be?"

Amy suddenly said with a start, "Aiyo! Could it be that, um, that, what's his name again?! Qiqi? The Taiwan Music Awards winner?"

Wang Zhuishu denied her. "No. I've written songs for Qiqi before, and this singer's figure does not look like his."

"I think, I think!

"I think, I think!

"Ya are, ya are!

"Truly an idiot!"

The song ended!

Everyone was applauding in the studio!

Amy was also clapping in excitement. "Great! That was great!"

Zhang Xia's evaluation was very high too. "Are there any singers in the industry whose portamento and sense of rhythm are so good?"

Wang Zhuishu said anxiously, "Who could this person be!"

The audience was guessing as well.

"I like him so much!"

"That was really nice to listen to!"

"Is this guy a singer? Or an actor?"

"Are there any actors who can sing this well?"

"I don't know anyone who can!"

"He does sound a little familiar, but I can't remember who it is!"

"Aiyo, I'm so anxious. Please just reveal his face. When does the identity reveal happen? I really really want to know who this guy is!"

"He has to lose before he reveals his face!"

"Ah, then I guess I'd better forget about it."

"The first singer's this good?"

"This is so exciting!"

"This show's better than I'd imagined!"

"Yeah, I initially thought that I could guess their identities as soon as I heard them. Cuz they're all famous, y'know? Shouldn't this be super easy? It was only after I heard them that I realized it was completely fucking impossible to guess who it was!"

"Who's the next singer?"

"Who's next?"

King of Oddity smiled and bowed before leaving the stage.

Dong Shanshan returned to the stage and said, "The next contestant has a very beautiful sounding name and a very beautiful mask. Let us welcome—Petal Shower."

...

Backstage.

There was a knock on the door.

Zhang Ye took a deep breath. "Come in."

Han Qi came in. "Teacher, you can start prepping now. We're on the second contestant, while you're the fifth to go on. We have at most 15 minutes."

Zhang Ye nodded. "OK."

Then he stood up and pulled out the intravenous needle from his arm.

Let's do this!

Chapter 994: The Clown takes the stage!

In the studio.

"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?"

This was Petal Shower's performance of Zhang Yuanqi's song. To be exact, she was singing a song that was written for Zhang Yuanqi by Zhang Ye!

As soon as she started singing, the entire studio audience was in shock!

Zhang Ye could also hear her singing, from the TV in the waiting room. Petal Shower was still singing in falsetto for the entire song. Almost no one else would risk singing that way! This was because the pitch changes while singing in falsetto were too minute and would make it sound too monophonic. A lot of the syllable enunciations in falsetto were not easy to control, in addition. But Petal Shower's vocals and her handling of the technique were very special. Her falsetto was truly different from all others!

This was her absolute killer move!

A few of the guessing panel's judges were also shocked by her performance!

When it was over, Dong Shanshan came onstage together with the first performer, King of Oddity. The three of them stood at center stage and faced the guessing panel.

Dong Shanshan smiled and said, "Judges, what do you think?"

Zhang Xia praised, "Petal Shower's rendition of the song was very good!"

Petal Shower bowed slightly and used the microphone fitted with the voice transformer to say, "Thank you, Grandma Zhang."

Zhang Xia blinked. "You're addressing me as grandma, so does that mean you're quite young?"

Petal Shower said, "Isn't 'grandma' your official title?"

The audience laughed.

Amy was startled and said, "Are you Sister Yuanqi? You're using that falsetto on purpose to throw us off? So that we won't be able to recognize you?"

When Petal Shower heard that, she immediately imitated Zhang Yuanqi's posture and physical mannerisms.

The audience was tickled.

Zhang Xia instantly laughed and said, "You're definitely not Yuanqi. Yuanqi isn't this playful."

Chen Guang looked at King of Oddity. "Do we know each other?"

King of Oddity looked back. "More or less."

Chen Guang asked another question, "Do you have my cell phone number?"

King of Oddity kept silent for a bit. "Yes."

The audience burst into an uproar!

Amy walked over to snatch Chen Guang's cell phone. "Give me your cell phone! I wanna browse through your contacts!"

Chen Guang's hair stood on end. "I want to look through it, but I can't seem to recognize him! There are over a hundred people involved with music in my contacts!"

Next, it was time for the live voting round.

The competition format was divided into two rounds. In the first round, six contestants would face off in separate one-on-one singing duels, with the winners advancing to the next round to fight for the spot of Masked King. Of the three defeated contestants, one would be chosen to be placed on the safe list and remain in the competition while the other two would be eliminated. The eliminated contestants could then either choose to reveal their identities or not do so and just leave the stage. Two contestants would be eliminated per episode. This was how cruel this competition format was!

Dong Shanshan pushed her gold-rimmed glasses up and announced, "Can everyone please pick up their voting devices and vote for the contestant you like most?"

The voting started!

On the big screen behind them, both of the contestants' tallies rose.

There were a total of 500 judges in the studio and a total of 500 votes to be cast.

The audience voted excitedly, their eyes glued to the big screen!

Finally, the tallies stopped!

King of Oddity: 137 votes.

Petal Shower: 362 votes.

One voter abstained from voting. That vote was invalidated!

Dong Shanshan said with a smile, "I hereby announce: The first contestant to advance is—Petal Shower!"

Petal Shower bowed slightly and glanced in the direction of the judges.

Chen Guang was looking right at her. Their eyes briefly met before both quickly looked away.

Dong Shanshan said to King of Oddity, "Let's have King of Oddity proceed backstage to rest and prepare for the next round."

King of Oddity did not show much of an expression. He nodded slightly to the judges and audience before leaving the stage.

Some of the audience members were happy with the result while some were feeling regret.

"I really like King of Oddity!"

"I still think that Petal Shower sang better!"

"Her singing was incredible!"

"This is so fun! This show is much more interesting than The Voice!"

"Hahaha, you can't put it that way. Compared to The Voice, this is a different genre. But I agree that this is super exciting indeed! I'd also like to know where the fuck this group of people who can sing so well jumped out from. Which big names are behind the masks?"

"Petal Shower has to be a big name!"

"That's right!"

Onstage.

The second group's singing duel began.

Sunflower in the Starlight vs. Sunset Glow.

Piercing screams once again rang out in the studio!

"The sun is my name."

"Heaven is my faith."

"The Earth is my refuge."

"Humanity is my enemy."

An amazing voice filled the studio!

...

The Clown was in the studio by now and was waiting behind the door.

Hu Fei deliberately rushed over and asked, "How are you?"

Han Qi hurriedly said, "Director Hu, don't make the teacher speak."

Hu Fei nodded and looked at The Clown. "Just do your best. It doesn't matter whether you win or lose, that's not important anymore. That you've endured til now to go onstage is good enough, honestly."

Dafei also came over. "Yeah. If you can't continue singing, just walk off the stage. That'd be fine; no one would blame you."

The Clown smiled but did not speak.

In truth, none of them knew that The Clown's present health was far worse than they could imagine. It wasn't as simple an issue as a cold or a fever. He'd been injured by a grandmaster's concealed power attacks, as well as the attacks by the martial arts masters and disciples from over a dozen large sects. Right now, Zhang Ye was very weak physically.

He could hear the roar of the audience from here.

The voting had begun.

"Sunset Glow!"

"Sunset Glow!"

"Sunflower!"

"Sunflower!"

Everyone was shouting the names of the singers they supported!

Zhang Ye, however, was not paying any attention to it. He did not have the energy left to care about the other contestants' results. Just trying to stay standing was already sapping him of all his strength.

Finally, the voting ended!

He heard Dong Shanshan announce, "Let us congratulate Sunflower in the Starlight!"

Sunset Glow had lost, and lost by a very small margin, only a mere dozen votes or so!

At this moment, the recording inside the studio temporarily halted.

Dong Shanshan verified something with Hu Fei through her earpiece.

"Director."

"Yes."

"Is the next contestant able to make an appearance?"

"He's fine."

"OK, I understand."

The audience and judges in the studio looked curiously at Dong Shanshan, unsure of what was happening.

The recording continued.

Dong Shanshan said, "Our next contestant is feeling a little unwell today, but he still insists on coming out to perform. Let us welcome—The Clown!"

The Clown?

Zhang Xia was taken aback.

The audience turned to the direction of the door and clapped enthusiastically!

Behind the door.

Hu Fei said, "You can do it!"

Han Qi, who felt sorry for him, encouraged, "Teacher, you can do it!"

Dafei clenched a fist and held it up. "Come on! Teacher Clown!"

A female employee added, "Hang in there and finish the song!"

"You can definitely do it!" someone else said.

Many people from the program team were moved by The Clown's tenacity and unbending will. They knew deep down that someone who could take three cortisone shots would definitely not be a normal person. This was someone who wanted to get on stage even if it risked his life! They did not know why this person went so far to do this, why he was so hungry for the stage, why he did not fall even though it was clear that he was already on the verge of collapse!

The light came on!

The door opened!

Zhang Ye touched his mask and then walked forward slowly, step by step. The closer he got to the stage, the more determined his steps became!

Applause rang out again!

"Wow."

"That's a really nice mask!"

"The Clown?"

"What's with the way he's walking?"

"Is he really that sick? Why's he still pushing himself to go on stage then!"

"Man, it seems like it's really quite serious!"

"Can he even finish singing one song in that condition?"

"I don't know."

When the audience saw him, they started whispering. Some of them even pointed in the direction of the stage.

The person wearing the mask of a clown was taking a long time to walk the 20-odd meters to the center of the stage.

Zhang Xia frowned. "Can he really do it?"

Chen Guang said, "I heard that he has a fever and a very bad cold."

Amy was taken aback. "Ah?"

They were also singers and had encountered such situations themselves. They knew exactly what it felt like to sing in such a state, and judging from this person staggering onto the stage, it didn't look like it was just a simple case of a fever and bad cold!

Chen Yidong said, "This is going to be difficult for him."

Wang Zhuishu said, "Let's hope he can persevere to the end of the song."

In each of the waiting rooms, the other five contestants were watching him on TV.

At the center of the stage.

Zhang Ye finally reached it and stood there. He gently closed his eyes.

The lights shut off!

The studio quieted down instantaneously!

The notes of a flute suddenly drifted across the studio.

It was followed by a few notes from a piccolo.

The music started, but Zhang Ye did not move nor did he open his eyes.

Persevere to the end of the song?

He had been hearing similar words countless times since he'd made his way here from backstage. Did you guys misunderstand something? Do you think that I took three cortisone shots and came here carrying my old injuries just because I wanted to finish singing the song regardless of whether it was good or bad? Not only will I finish singing it, I will sing it well too!

So what if I lose my voice?

So what if my old injuries have acted up?

Those are not reasons!

I won't look for any excuses, and I don't need anyone's pity. All this while, I've walked alone, by myself. So I cannot falter here. Because I know that if I did, no one would help me up. As such, I can only keep walking, onwards and onwards, to the place I want to reach—this is probably the reason why I'm standing here!

The dazzling lights were shining from every direction!

The cameras were aimed at him.

The audience was watching him.

The guessing panel was watching him.

The other five contestants were watching him.

Beneath the mask of The Clown, a pair of eyes opened without warning. That sorrowful and hoarse voice from under the mask suddenly resonated through the entire studio!

"I am a wolf that comes from the north.

"Padding through the boundless wilderness.

"The mournful northern wind blows by.

"The slow sand brushes by."

Chen Guang was stunned!

Amy froze!

Zhang Xia was shocked!

What song was this?

Why hadn't they heard this song before?

A wolf?

A wolf that comes from the north?

Zhang Ye had already thrown his entire self into the song. He was not performing with the spirit of aloofness that the original version of "Wolf" had. He was using his imperfect voice to sing who he was right now! A wolf, an injured wolf! An injured wolf that still wanted to move forward!

Zhang Ye raised the microphone.

"I can only clench my cold, cold teeth!

"Respond with two long howls!

"Not for anything else!

"But for the beautiful plains found in legends!"

This was the portrayal of him today!

It was also the portrayal of him after several years in the entertainment industry!

He was tired!

He was scarred and wounded!

But he had to keep walking!

Amy was mesmerized!

Zhang Xia was dumbstruck!

Meanwhile, Chen Guang had his eyes firmly fixed on him as though he wanted to rush onto the stage to take off the mask and find out who he was!

Mournful!

Wintry winds!

Clench your cold, cold teeth for the beautiful plains found in legends?

The plains that you have in mind...What are they like? Is it worth pushing yourself to stand onstage in that condition and sing with that hoarse voice of yours?

Even Yao Jiancai, a music industry layman, was moved!

The judges all knew that this man must have a story to him. However, no one other than him would know what this story was or understand it!

Zhang Ye sang on, his eyes drooping heavily.

"I am a wolf that comes from the north.

"Padding through the boundless wilderness.

"The mournful northern wind blows by.

"The slow sand brushes by.

"I can only clench my cold, cold teeth.

"Respond with two long howls.

"Not for anything else!

"But for the beautiful plains found in legends!"

All of a sudden.

The Clown faced the sky as he howled.

"Awoooooo!"

He was mimicking the call of a wolf!

This sustained howl lasted for a good nine seconds!

The studio atmosphere was instantly raised!

Chen Guang stood up. This was the first time he'd done so today while listening to a song being performed!

Amy did not stand up, though she did clutch her head and exclaim, "Oh my god!"

Zhang Xia was beyond curious. "Who on earth is this!"

Zhang Ye simply stopped caring about the state of his voice. Cracking? Trembling? Unable to hit the high notes? Breaking? Loss of voice? He did not care about any of that! The thought of not being able to continue singing or his voice suddenly disappearing did not even enter his mind!

"Not for anything else!

"But for the beautiful plains—found in legends!"

Chapter 995: The Clown wins!

The music stopped!

Applause rang out from everywhere!

Many of the audience members were fired up!

"That song's unbeatable!"

"It's too damn nice to listen to!"

"Could that participant be Chen Guang?"

"Pfft, Old Chen is sitting right there at the judges' panel!"

"Then how can his singing be this good! And that song was so amazing. It sounded like it was specially written for the condition that he's currently in! Which entertainment company is this big shot from?"

"I don't know!"

However, there were also those who were not convinced by his performance.

"The song was alright, but his voice is terrible."

"Yeah, his singing wasn't good."

"In any case, I don't feel it."

"Was his singing good? I don't think so."

"Maybe it's because it's my first time listening to the song, but I didn't feel anything special. I still think that the previous singers sang much better, and that this guy's singing isn't good enough."

No single work could appeal to everyone.

The audience had many differing opinions regarding The Clown's performance.

But there were only cheers from the judge panel.

Chen Guang shouted, "Great!"

Amy clapped with all her might. "Fantastic!"

"Is there such a person in the music scene?" Zhang Xia was also getting very excited.

Yao Jiancai liked the song very much as well. "Who is it!"

Chen Yidong glanced to his side. "Even if Chen Guang went onstage with a serious cold, he wouldn't necessarily sing better than him, right? He was already greatly disadvantaged by losing his voice due to the cold, but The Clown has infused that greatest flaw in his singing into the song. I must admit that it made the entire performance just spectacular!"

Chen Guang said frankly, "I definitely can't sing as well as him. At a concert three years ago, I sang while I was down with a cold and it turned into a hell of a mess!"

Wang Zhuishu nodded and said, "Still being able to sing this well even after the voice has been affected by a cold, there shouldn't be too many people in the music industry who can achieve something like this!"

They were all left guessing!

Yet they didn't even know where to start guessing from!

...

Backstage.

In King of Oddity's waiting room.

King of Oddity looked at the producer in the room and pointed at the TV. He said, "Are you sure this guy was the one who sang that 'as a fifty-year-old pro driver, I am all smiles' song?"

The producer gave a wry smile and nodded.

King of Oddity was floored!

Damn!

I really believed that you were a bel canto singer!

How did I fall for your nonsense!

...

In Sunset Glow's waiting room.

Sunset Glow got the goosebumps listening to the performance. "That was a really good song!"

So this was who the real Clown was!

So this was what his true style of singing was!

This fellow had indeed just been putting on an act back then!

...

Onstage.

The man in the clown mask lowered the microphone, bowed slightly, and turned around before walking slowly offstage. Before he could leave the stage, Han Qi and two Beijing Television employees were already running over to support him. But The Clown waved them off by gesturing that he did not need any help.

He had finished singing.

This song was called " Wolf 1 " and was performed by Chyi Chin 2 in his previous world.

Zhang Ye felt very good and mustered up an exhausted smile. He felt that even if his voice was at its best, it wasn't likely that he could have performed the song better than he had. He did not know how the judges felt or how the audience would judge him, but he was very satisfied with it himself.

In the wings.

Han Qi was going crazy. "Teacher, you sang so well! It was so good!"

Zhang Ye said, "Thanks."

Dafei also came over after being astonished by what he heard. He even said with some disbelief, "You could still sing that well even with your voice in that state? If there weren't any problems with your voice, how well would you have sung?"

Onstage.

Dong Shanshan spoke, "Next, let's invite today's last contestant, who has a very tough-sounding name. Let's welcome—The Yak!"

Zhang Ye had seated himself near the stage.

As he still needed to go onstage in a little while, he did not return to the waiting room.

The Yak appeared from the other side of the stage.

The Yak wore a cow mask, with horns, and looked very cute.

This was Zhang Ye's opponent this round.

The audience applauded!

Awhile back, Zhang Ye had listened to The Yak's performance on some video clips. His evaluation of him was that his singing was not bad, but it was only at an average level. He should be considered the one with a weakest singing among all the others in the first round. But since this was a competition, nothing was decided until the very end. No one knew who might suddenly decide to show their prowess and

light up the venue. In the music industry, singing did not mean everything as it was only a foundation for success.

The stage lights shut off.

The performance began.

"Deep emotions, as water, like smoke.

"Bring me before your very eyes.

"You are drifting between the clouds."

Although the Yak was named The Yak, the song he performed was rather emotional and did not match the mask, which had a wild look with a hint of cuteness.

"I don't know where you came from.

"Nor am I clear 'bout where you're headed.

"The flames of passions.

"Whoosh. Extinguished."

The song he was singing wasn't incredibly mainstream, but it was still very nice to listen to and a treat to hear. An adult man in a yak mask singing a love song was a stark contrast and also quite eye-catching.

All of the people's attention was on The Yak.

Even Han Qi and the program team staff watched with interest.

Meanwhile, no one noticed that Zhang Ye was sweating even more profusely now. Even though he was sitting in a chair, he was already struggling hard to hold it together. He wasn't listening to The Yak's performance anymore. He had opened up the game ring's inventory to retrieve a Stamina Potion instead. This was an item he had received a long time ago. There were still over a dozen bottles left in the inventory. Back when he was working overnight to help Beijing Television with their Quit Smoking PSA, he had depended on this potion to help him pull through the night. Now that Zhang Ye was unable to hold himself together for much longer, he had no choice but to chug a bottle of it.

The potion took effect very quickly.

Part of his stamina was immediately restored. He could sit straight at least.

The Yak was coming to the chorus of the song when a mistake was suddenly occurred. His falsetto cracked but he recovered from it very quickly.

What kind of singing performance was the most difficult?

A live performance was the most difficult! Because you never knew what might happen, and you could never redo things. Be it good or bad, you only had one chance!

The song ended.

The performance finished.

The audience members were still very absorbed in the performance and were applauding enthusiastically!

"Great!"

"That was so touching!"

"This guy has a very identifiable voice!"

"Great song! It was really nice!"

Of course, there were also some in the audience who thought that it just an average performance.

Dong Shanshan reappeared onstage. "Alright, let's invite The Clown back onstage."

A moment later, The Clown returned to the stage and stood with The Yak, each on either side of Dong Shanshan.

Dong Shanshan smiled and said, "Judges? If you were to vote, who would you vote for?"

Zhang Xia grabbed the opportunity. "Let me speak first. Needless to say, The Yak sang quite well even though his falsetto cracked, right? But his overall performance was very good."

The Yak nodded. "Thank you, Teacher."

Zhang Xia said, "Onto The Clown next. I don't really know what to say about him. I'm sure that he has a very high artistic level, and he's definitely a big shot judging from the way he moves, as well as his posture and onstage presence—"

"That might not be the case. I feel that he could be a newcomer," interrupted Wang Zhuishu.

Zhang Xia asked, "Can a newcomer sing that well?"

Wang Zhuishu replied, "The newcomers these days are all really amazing."

Chen Guang added, "I think that he might not be a part of the music scene and could be a movie star instead? Because the other contestants have clues that we can make our guesses from, and there are still some possible candidates that come to mind. But as for this guy here, I simply have no memory of anyone like him!"

Famous variety show host Chen Yidong spoke up, "If I voted, I would vote for The Yak."

The Yak bowed ever so slightly to express his gratitude.

The Clown just stood there calmly.

Chen Guang stayed silent for a second. "From an artistic point of view, The Clown's performance was absolutely wonderful and I would evaluate his rendition of the song to be perfect. On a personal level, I'm also fully in support of The Clown. But from a professional point of view, my vote must still go to The Yak even though there were some minor mistakes in his performance too."

The Yak bowed to show his thanks.

Wang Zhuishu gave it some thought. "I'd vote for The Yak."

The Yak bowed again. "Thank you, Teacher."

Yao Jiancai declared, "I don't understand what being professional or unprofessional is. All I know is that The Clown's song touched me, so I'd certainly give him my vote!"

Zhang Xia hesitated for a bit and sighed. "I guess I'd vote for The Yak."

Han Qi was getting anxious in the wings. "Have the judges gone blind?"

One of her colleagues said, "Yeah, I also think that The Clown sang very well!"

A different colleague said, "They're analyzing it from their professional point of view. The Clown sang well and the song is good too, but there were too many mistakes in every line that he sang."

Han Qi said angrily, "But Teacher Clown has a cold!"

The colleague sighed, "Hai, but this is a competition."

Han Qi could not accept this, she really could not accept it!

Meanwhile, Zhang Ye, onstage, did not say anything.

Dong Shanshan said, "Well then! Audience members, please pick up your voting devices and vote for the singer you like."

The critical voting round began!

But what made Han Qi's blood run even colder was that The Clown's vote count immediately fell behind the moment the voting started!

The Yak: 20 votes!

The Clown: 11 votes!

Their vote count kept rising!

The audience members were exchanging words among themselves.

"Who should I vote for?"

"The Clown for sure!"

"The Clown's song was so touching!"

"But he made singing mistakes—the judges said so."

"Yeah, the judges are still the professionals at the end of the day."

"I should just vote for The Yak then."

"Although The Yak's singing did not move me as much, his singing was still very good. At least there weren't as many issues with his singing."

"I don't think that The Clown made any mistakes. I believe he used what's called 'artistic license'!"

The Yak: 70 votes!

The Clown: 61 votes!

The Yak was leading all the way!

Han Qi urged, "Go up! Go up!"

Perhaps someone heard her pleas. The Clown's tally actually started catching up bit by bit.

The difference was only eight votes.

Then it became five.

Then one.

At the final moment, the voting ended.

The Yak: 217 votes!

The Clown: 219 votes!

The remaining voters abstained from voting; several dozen votes had not been cast. That made it the biggest group of audience members to abstain from voting today.

The Clown won!

A narrow victory of two votes!

Han Qi was thrilled and heaved a sigh of relief!

He won!

He really won!

At least there wouldn't be any more worry that he would get eliminated today, but as for becoming the Masked King of this first episode? Judging from the audience's enthusiasm and the judges' emphasis on the professionalism of one's singing, Han Qi and the program team staff knew that The Clown would definitely not be able to compete for the position of the Masked King in the first episode. Since the judges valued voice quality greatly and the audience also placed a great deal of importance on having a flawless voice, even if The Clown still had stamina left to take the stage for his next song, it was impossible that he would clinch the round with his already badly strained voice!

Chapter 996: A last-minute song change by The Clown!

In the waiting room.

Han Qi said, "We're already through to the next round."

Zhang Ye nodded.

"No matter how you perform the next song, we can still proceed to the second episode. Teacher, why not consider not performing the second song tonight since your health is..."

Zhang Ye smiled at her.

Han Qi said, "The second round battle for the crown of the Masked King will be taking place immediately. According to the broadcast order, the elimination round for the three singers who were defeated will take place first. However, today's recording order was changed, so we'll record the battle of the Masked King round first. You're slated as the last of the three to appear onstage, but if you really can't bear it anymore, let's just give this round up. I'll communicate this to the production team since we won't get eliminated even if we withdraw now."

Zhang Ye did not say anything.

Han Qi's earpiece crackled. "Ah, it has already started!"

Petal Shower's figure appeared on the TV as Dong Shanshan handed her the stage. The moment Petal Shower appeared, the audience suddenly rippled with excitement. This was because her previous performance left a deep impression on them and they liked her very much. Hence, the atmosphere exploded right as she took the stage!

Han Qi sighed and said, "It definitely wouldn't be a problem with your skill. We'll battle them after you've recovered from your cold." She took a pause. "S-So rest a little longer. I'm gonna head out."

Zhang Ye gave a noise of acknowledgment.

The doors closed.

No one else was left in the room.

Zhang Ye weakly propped himself up and watched the TV.

"When did we start putting on a façade?"

"When did we start forgetting to tell the truth?"

"When did we start forgetting how to love someone."

"When did we start forgetting how to admit we were wrong."

Petal Shower was performing a rock song that required her to sustain her falsetto. The range on her falsetto was simply extraordinary, and her technique was well-honed too. Her voice was completely different from Zhang Ye's voice that scattered through the registers. It was a very clear tone, and she could hit her falsetto range as and when she wanted to!

The audience had truly never heard someone sing in such a way. It was quite refreshing!

Waving hands!

Screaming!

The atmosphere in the studio was heating up!

Next, it was Sunflower in the Starlight's turn to take the stage.

"Bom!"

"Bom!

"Bom!"

It was a fast-paced English song!

The high notes were very strong! It was highly lethal!

The moment he opened his mouth, he sang in a high pitch and with great explosiveness throughout his performance!

Watching the TV, Zhang Ye could see that a lot of the audience members were so pumped that they stood from their seats. From inside the waiting room he even seemed to hear the faint sound of screaming coming from the studio!

Then Zhang Ye looked away and turned off the TV.

The room suddenly became quiet, similar to what Zhang Ye was feeling at the moment.

When Zhang Ye stood onstage after his performance and faced the judges' comments about the weaknesses in his singing, he did not say anything. Right now, he did not want to say anything either.

After he drank another Stamina Potion, he finally mustered up enough strength to open the game ring interface.

He activated the Lucky Halo (Upgraded) with much difficulty.

His Reputation Points were starting to decrease rapidly.

-100,000!

-100,000!

He tapped on the Lottery Draw (One).

He straight away added 500 additional stakes to the 100,000 Reputation Points per spin of the lottery draw.

The wheel began to move.

The needle started spinning.

One revolution.

Three revolutions.

Five revolutions.

Zhang Ye looked calmly at the wheel as the needle came to a rest in the Skills Category region. When he opened the golden treasure chest, the item majestically appeared from within.

[Piano Skill Experience Book] × 501: Increases player's piano skill experience.

It turned out otherwise indeed.

Zhang Ye laughed at himself, a self-deprecating chuckle.

The lottery was not omnipotent and the Lucky Halo did not necessarily help him achieve whatever results he wanted as it did not have sapience. It was only a tool that could help increase his luck stat. Zhang Ye was thinking of getting some sort of medicine to treat his cold or an item to treat his injuries from the lucky draw. However, Zhang Ye was not even sure if the lottery draw system had anything similar to the items he wanted, so he did not hold out hope that he would really win them so coincidentally. He had only intended to give it a try so that he could stop wondering if it would happen at all.

This wasn't too bad.

This was a rather good outcome, actually

Zhang Ye consumed all the experience books.

The door opened.

Han Qi and a program team producer walked in. "Teacher Clown, it's almost your turn to go onstage. Can you hold together? If not, then this round..."

Zhang Ye stood up. "I'm fine, let's go."

Han Qi quickly said, "Let me help you."

"There's no need." Zhang Ye shook his head.

On the way to the studio, he reached into the game ring's inventory once again. This time, he took out five Stamina Potions and gulped them all down!

Very good!

He could still hang in there!

Zhang Ye smiled. He was suddenly full of fighting spirit!

Along the way, he saw a lot of the program team staff.

Hu Fei was being astonished by Petal Shower's and Sunflower's passionate singing. When he saw The Clown, he immediately turned around and asked with concern, "Are you going to be alright?"

Han Qi answered for him, "The teacher will be fine."

Hu Fei nodded. "Just try your best."

Hou Ge said, "You already performed amazingly."

Dafei added, "Don't force yourself. The outcome isn't that important anymore."

In reality, it was not that the outcome was unimportant, but that there was no suspense.

Han Qi had listened to the two contestants' performances, as had Hu Fei, Hou Ge, and the others. Judging from the audience's expressions and outpouring, it was quite clear that today's Masked King would definitely be either one of them. As for whether Petal Shower or Sunflower was better, that was

still hard to say. Anyway, it definitely wouldn't be The Clown. Be it his health, voice, or the audience and judges' judgment, it was unlikely that they would let him, a singer whose voice was not in a good state, take the throne of the Masked King in this first episode. It was already made clear in the previous round between The Yak and him. Although The Clown's performance had moved many of the audience members and judges, he still just barely won and nearly got eliminated.

Hu Fei reported the time, "Get ready. There's only a minute left."

Music Director Bai Yuanfei also came over, wishing to have a last-minute discussion with Zhang Ye, "Since your body can't handle it, lower the song by an octave and don't sing the high notes. Just finish singing the song. That'll be enough."

Zhang Ye smiled.

Try my best?

Don't force myself?

Just finish singing the song?

Zhang Ye suddenly said something in his hoarse voice that shocked the program team staff. "I'm terribly sorry, but I'd like to switch songs."

Everyone was stunned!

Bai Yuanfei exclaimed, "What?"

Hou Ge nearly toppled over. "Switch songs?"

Hu Fei was also panicking. "Why would you switch songs at a time like this? You're about to go onstage!"

"Teacher!" Han Qi was also stunned!

No one knew what The Clown was thinking!

Bai Yuanfei said, "It's too late for that! There isn't an arrangement; the band isn't prepared either. Who'll play your accompaniment if you take the stage like this? You didn't even rehearse it! Y-You're taking a huge risk!"

At this moment, the Miracle Wheels band members came over.

The guitarist said, "Switch songs?"

The drummer said, "That's not actually necessary, right?"

You stand no chance of becoming the Masked King now, so why would you do that?

Your health and voice are in this state. Why are you still trying so hard?

Zhang Ye bluntly asked, "Do you have a piano?"

Bai Yuanfei was taken aback. "We do."

Zhang Ye nodded. "That's enough."

What's the meaning of this?

You even know how to play the piano?

Chapter 997: I am a beautiful, beautiful wild rose!

In the studio.

Host Dong Shanshan announced, "Let's welcome our next singer—The Clown!"

Applause sounded.

The Clown came out onstage looking very lonely.

Chen Guang sighed. "This is the worse time to come onstage."

Wang Zhuishu nodded. "The two contestants before him should've squeezed the atmosphere dry!"

Amy asked, "Who do you guys think will be the Masked King?"

Zhang Xia pondered and said, "Petal Shower's chances of winning are the greatest."

Chen Yidong disagreed, "Just based on the first round of songs alone, Sunflower is definitely going to be the Masked King!"

Zhang Xia said, "Petal Shower handled some parts of her singing really well."

"Who can compare with Sunflower's tenor?" Chen Yidong said.

The judges all had differing opinions and started disagreeing with each other, yet no one mentioned The Clown.

The audience did not keep him in mind either.

The two contestants before him had both performed passionate, fast songs with high notes. They were songs that fired up the atmosphere, which was why many in the audience were still clinging to the earlier performances.

"Aiya, Sunflower's singing was so intense!"

"I still like my Petal Shower!"

"Haha, when did she become yours?"

"Anyway, I'm already a diehard fan of Petal Shower!"

"Do you know who she is?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm curious!"

"Eh, The Clown has already taken the stage?"

"He won't be able to sustain his voice anymore, so he's more like a supporting act in the first battle to be Masked King."

"He only advanced because he got a lucky win."

"Yeah, the Masked King will definitely be either Petal Shower or Sunflower."

"Obviously. Must we spell it out?"

"Hur hur, seems like these two people have stage names related to flowers?"

"All that's left to see now is which 'flower' has the greater skill!"

The lights suddenly dimmed!

When the audience and judges finally realized that the next performance was about to begin, they were surprised to discover that the house band had already left the stage!

Where had the band gone?

Where was everyone?

All of a sudden, they realized The Clown was sitting in front of a piano.

Ah?

Playing the piano and singing at the same time?

Everyone froze!

Chen Guang, Zhang Xia, and the others were also surprised!

They had all seen The Clown's state and knew that it couldn't have been faked. He was indeed quite sick and had to force himself to stay standing, but what was this? In that state of his, why would he still want to play the piano himself? Playing the piano was unlike playing a keyboard. It was pressure sensitive and required strength to play it properly! You already have no hopes of fighting for the throne of Masked King, so what are you trying to do? What are you thinking?

No one in the crew or judging panel could understand!

The audience was also unable to understand!

You pushed so hard to finish your previous song! Why are you trying so hard for the second song as well?

The judges and audience, and even the program team's staff, knew one thing though. If you could get on this stage, you must at least have some level of fame. At the minimum, you had to be someone that a lot of people knew. To be able to get to that level, you couldn't possibly lack a stage to perform on. Even if you gave up today, there would still be other platforms and stages welcoming you with open arms, so why are you risking your life like this! Just why?!

However, no one knew this one thing.

There were no other stages for the man under The Clown's mask to perform on!

Banned!

Frozen!

Suppressed in the news!

Ostracized by industry peers!

Jobless!

Old injuries acting up!

A serious cold!

It was the worst period that he was going through, as well as the time he felt the most vulnerable!

No one appreciated him!

He had sunk to a supporting act!

The piano sounded.

A flowing, watery melody reverberated throughout the studio.

The judges were stunned!

The audience was stunned!

The piano's melody carried sadness, a sorrow that silenced the entire studio!

The spotlights shone down on him.

Everyone's gaze fell to where he sat.

Zhang Ye played the piano oblivious to all around him. The melody flowed from his fingertips ceaselessly with every note representing a part of his sadness. He should have been the most beautiful thing in this world, he should have been the most beautiful wild rose in this world. But right now, he could only wear a mask and hide all of himself beneath it. In this place where no one appreciated him, he would sing a song that perhaps only he knew, with that hoarse voice of his!

"These days, seasons fly by, flowers bloom aplenty.

"Winds wander, clouds float by, nature shut behind the door.

"To be plucked uneasily, I slowly realize.

"Bloomed already, but no one coming is completely expected."

Han Qi was stunned in the wings. "Teacher..."

Music Director Bai Yuanfei was watching slack-jawed.

Zhang Xia was stunned!

Amy could feel herself getting the goosebumps all over her body!

This...

Zhang Ye closed his eyes and sang softly.

"In the night, I'll sway with the wind and rain.

"When I see the break of dawn, I'll shed some tears.

"I'm a beautiful, beautiful wild rose.

"Not letting spring arrive in vain.

"Blossoming til it's dark, infatuating passersby.

"As I calmly watch myself wither away."

Wild rose?

A withering but beautiful wild rose?

Chen Guang stood up impassioned!

Zhang Xia stood up!

Amy and the other judges all stood up in a frisson of excitement!

This...

This song...

Zhang Ye continued playing and singing with his eyes still closed.

"I'm a beautiful, beautiful wild rose.

"Hating the Heavens for being unfair.

"Plucked of my buds.

"Stripped of my heart.

"Sadly given away as just a rose."

Plucked of his buds?

Stripped of his heart?

Sadly given away as just a rose?

Han Qi stared blankly at the stage, not knowing when her tears had started falling. She tried to wipe them away but found that she couldn't stop them from flowing!

Many of the audience members watched the stage, hypnotized, feeling felt like someone had pierced through their hearts!

The figure sitting at the piano looked very sad and lonely.

However, there was a hint of a smile on his face when he finally opened his eyes. His singing was still as rough and hoarse as before. But this time, he didn't even have the strength and voice to hit the high notes anymore, yet this represented the current Zhang Ye. Having had his hands and feet bound, getting his mouth muzzled, this was the current him!

"Ground's my bed, sky's my blanket, meteors are my tears.

"At times awake, at times drunk, the geese have made their return.

"In turn happy, in turn sad, the spring's light isn't bright.

"No regrets, no burdens, sweet dreams drift away like the stream.

"Willingness is a patch of color adorning the world.

"But unwilling to touch on what is right and wrong.

"I'm a beautiful, beautiful wild rose.

"Not letting spring arrive in vain.

"Blossoming til it's dark, infatuating passersby.

"As I calmly watch myself wither away."

Blossoming til it's dark?

Even if no one were to appreciate him?

Even if no one found him?

Even if he was withering away?

Listening to this, Zhang Xia's eyes reddened.

Why are you still smiling?

Why are you still smiling at this time?

Suddenly, the piano music stopped!

The man sitting at the piano was out of strength. The hand he was using to play the piano was no longer able to play the complex melody as it became more and more sluggish. He was forced to simplify the melody and use the simplest combination of notes to accompany his singing!

"I am a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful wild rose!

"Hating the Heavens for being unfair.

"Plucked of my buds.

"Stripped of my heart.

"Sadly given away as just a rose."

There were no high notes, but those hoarse and sad vocals cut deep into everyone's hearts!

Han Qi was crying!

Xiao Lu was crying!

A lot people were crying!

The emotions of many of the audience members exploded at this moment!

The entire audience stood up!

The atmosphere had hit a fever pitch!

Supporting act?

No!

No!

You're the true lead!

You're the most beautiful "flower" of all today!

Chapter 998: Birth of the first Masked King!

The music stopped.

The performance ended.

Suddenly, someone in the audience shouted, "The Clown! The Clown!"

Another person shouted along, "The Clown!"

Han Qi was wiping her tears away while shouting, "Teacher Clown!"

Amy raised her arms over her head and shouted, "The Clown!"

Xiao Lu screamed, "The Clown!"

Executive Director Hu Fei clenched his fists tightly in the wings!

It was fantastic!

This song was fantastic!

This guy was...fantastic!

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

The shouting increased and slowly became more similar!

Such a scene was nearly impossible to describe in words!

Eyes now open, Zhang Ye was stunned for a bit. He stood up from the piano and struggled a little to bend forward slightly in the direction of the judges and audience. It was supposed to be a bow. Zhang Ye did not expect that his song would stir up such a huge clamor in the studio as all he wanted was to express his inner feelings. He did not even expect that anyone would understand the things in the song because it was not a popular song with the masses in his previous world. Not everyone knew this song, and there were also some people who disliked it. The Midday Sun performed the original version; Wang Bao was the songwriter and wrote the piece with a piano accompaniment. The version that Zhang Ye sang was an adaptation from the original version with some modifications of his own. For example, the last verse with the "beautiful, beautiful, beautiful" repetition was implemented by Zhang Ye based on his understanding of the song. It was subsequently covered by Han Hong, and her version was the one that most people had probably heard.

Zhang Ye liked this song greatly when he was still in his previous world. As he was neither handsome nor had great qualifications, those who knew that he wanted to join the entertainment industry were always persuading him to give up the thought. It was only when he had joined the entertainment industry that he had a much deeper sentiment for this song. Everyone liked garden roses and thought that they were the most beautiful flowers of all. However, he knew that he was not a garden rose. He was just a wild rose shrub that thought of itself as very beautiful, yet went unnoticed by all around him.

So he wanted to switch songs for this performance. Even if he sang badly, he still wanted to change songs at the last minute.

The crowd was very excited.

They were shouting.

They were screaming.

Some of them were even crying.

Applause thundered as everyone stood up!

Are they...applauding me?

Are they...crying for me?

When Zhang Ye saw this, he suddenly felt quite touched. He wanted to use a poem to express himself like he used to but knew that he couldn't do so.

Dong Shanshan returned to the stage. "Let's thank The Clown for his performance."

Zhang Ye glanced at her.

Dong Shanshan's smile seemed a bit unnatural. "Please welcome Sunflower in the Starlight and Petal Shower back to the stage...." She then stopped.

A lot of the audience members were momentarily stunned when they realized that the host was crying.

Petal Shower was the first to get back on the stage. When she saw Dong Shanshan crying, she immediately went to pat her on the shoulder and gave her a quick hug.

Dong Shanshan smiled while wiping away her tears as she said into the microphone, "I'm sorry that I got a little emotional." She turned to look at Hu Fei, off in the wings, and said, "Director, please edit this part out."

Hu Fei raised his hand and gave her a thumbs up. He didn't blame her at all, instead comforting her.

Dong Shanshan apologized, "Please pardon me for being unprofessional."

By now, Sunflower in the Starlight had also come back onto the stage. He patted Dong Shanshan on the shoulder in encouragement like a senior would.

Zhang Xia spoke, "It's alright, Shanshan, I cried too. There's only one thing that I want to know right now." She stared straight at that man in the clown mask and asked, "Who are you?"

The Clown did not say a word.

Zhang Xia fired off, "For someone who's in such bad shape, with a fever and cold, you can still sing like that and put in so much feeling into it. If you told me that you weren't a professional singer, I certainly wouldn't believe it. But I really can't think of anyone who matches you in the entire music industry!"

Wang Zhuishu said, "Maybe it's because of his cold that his voice changed. That's why we can't tell who it is! Or could he be a newcomer? But how can there be a newcomer who's like him!"

The judges' thoughts were scattered!

Someone had previously thought that he was from the acting industry, but that thought wavered now!

Another felt that he could be a big shot from the music industry, but they soon hesitated about that thought too!

Who was it!

Who the fuck was this guy!

The audience also had an important question right now. They really wanted to find out the identity of the man underneath the mask!

By this point, Dong Shanshan had recomposed herself. "Before the final voting starts, would our panel of guest judges please cast their votes first. Who do you think should be crowned as the Masked King tonight?"

Wang Zhuishu gave it some thought and answered, "I think I'll probably still vote for Petal Shower! Her singing was very good and her technique was wonderful. It's practically without any faults!"

Petal Shower bowed.

Chen Yidong said, "I'll vote for Sunflower in the Starlight. Combining the two rounds of singing, I feel that he truly deserves to be the first Masked King."

Sunflower nodded and said into the voice-transforming microphone, "Thank you, Teacher Chen."

Han Qi clenched her fists tightly in the wings.

Why?

Why is it not The Clown?

What the hell are you guys thinking!

Before, Han Qi did not really like this clown person. Since their first interaction, The Clown been constantly teasing her. Everyone thought that he was some experienced but very mischievous veteran of the music industry. But as she came to know more about The Clown, she became completely moved by him. She felt that it was very fortunate for her to be the only liaison in the program team for The Clown and was very honored by this as well!

He was a wild rose!

A flower that was different from everyone else!

The audience also made some subtle criticism.

"What the heck!"

"Are those two deaf?"

"They should totally have voted for The Clown!"

"The Clown's song was amazing!"

"I think the same. It's so good that it's beyond description!"

"You can't say that! Sunflower sang better!"

"I still prefer to support Petal Shower."

It was only normal to have differences in opinions. It was impossible for everyone to think the same. Music itself was perceived based on each individual's opinion and life experience. People who listened to the same song could not possibly have the same emotions about it at the end. Perhaps only those who have had similar experiences could understand Zhang Ye's "Wild Rose."

Then, Chen Guang spoke.

Chen Guang looked at the three masked singers. "On a professional basis, I would definitely choose between Sunflower and Petal Shower. Their voices, singing techniques, and appeal cannot be faulted; they're impeccable. In the first round, I made my decision following this set of standards even though I really liked The Clown's first song, 'Wolf.' But right now, I would like to apologize."

Apologize?

What are you apologizing for?

The judges were taken aback.

The audience were also startled.

Chen Guang said loudly, "To claim that I was judging on a professional basis was totally unprofessional of me! My decision might be a little willful and rash of me, but I can't not be rash. If I were to vote, I would definitely, definitely, definitely...cast this vote for The Clown and only The Clown! There's no why! There isn't a need for a why either!"

Han Qi was pleasantly surprised!

Someone was supporting him!

Someone was finally supporting Teacher Clown!

Yao Jiancai also spoke up, "Let me say this first: I do not fully know what being professional or unprofessional is, nor am I a person from the music industry, nor have I dabbled in music before." He smiled and said, "If my long-time crosstalk partner were here, his evaluation would probably be more professional than mine. But I can only follow my heart, so if I chose, my choice would be the same as Old Chen's. I would 100% cast my vote for The Clown without any hesitation! I don't know how good his voice is, and I also don't know how well it was sung. All I know is that this song, 'Wild Rose,' has moved me! This song has totally said what I wanted to say."

Amy stood from her seat and cleared her throat. "I hereby announce that from today onwards, I have become a fan of The Clown!" She looked at The Clown and said anxiously, "Who are you? I really, really like you a lot!"

The Clown gave her a slight bow.

Zhang Xia said, "I will also cast my vote for The Clown this time. Singing well requires a good voice, good technique, and all kinds of other factors. But ultimately, music has to be able to move people, and feelings are above all that. Petal Shower and Sunflower have both achieved that, but The Clown has undoubtedly done it best today with his song. His second performance essentially disregarded all the so-called technicalities and techniques of singing and was of such a high level as well. This sort of infusion and projection of emotions, this turning of the disadvantage of a bad vocal condition into something that helped make the song even better, it's absolutely not something that can be learned. This has surpassed any techniques around!"

The judges finished with their evaluations.

Dong Shanshan said, "Well then, let the voting begin. Will the 500 audience members please consider who you think is best and cast your votes so that we may witness the crowning of our first Masked King."

Han Qi felt extremely nervous.

Many of the program team staff were debating.

"I like The Clown!"

"Me too!"

"He tried so hard!"

"I just wish that the voting would end quickly so that The Clown can get off the stage and rest."

The audience had already picked up their voting devices and started to cast their votes!

On the big screen, the tallies were being compiled in real-time!

Petal Shower was at 10 votes...20 votes...30 votes!

Sunflower's votes were also increasing very quickly. 20 votes...30 votes!

"Rise higher!"

"Ah, Sunflower's votes went up!"

"Oh, Petal Shower's in first place!"

"The Clown! The Clown!"

"The Clown has taken the lead! He's in the lead!"

"He got overtaken!"

The competition was very intense!

The judges looked at the screen in astonishment!

The audience was staring at the same thing, not blinking. A lot of them were chanting for their favorite singer's stage name!

The three contestants' stage names in the standings kept switching positions, each replacing the other's at the top. A lot of people expected this, but could not predict who would end up as the final winner of this round. The suspense was too great to bear!

Finally, the voting phase ended!

Dong Shanshan immediately said, "The voting stops now!"

On the big screen, the tallies suddenly stopped. Those who did not vote within the time limit were considered to have abstained!

Everyone looked at the big screen!

Sunflower turned around!

Petal Shower leaned sideways and looked!

Han Qi glanced at the big screen nervously!

Only Zhang Ye did not turn around. He stood there very composed, or maybe he only had enough strength to remain standing.

The results were out!

The Masked King was crowned!

The crowd was instantly stoked!

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

Han Qi was so emotional that she started crying again. She screamed and hugged a male colleague next to her. "He won! Teacher has won! " Sobbing, she smiled through her tears.

That male colleague on the program team coughed in embarrassment. "Congratulations."

Chapter 999: A few words from The Clown!

The Clown won!

Applause rang out in the studio!

The judges were also cheering for him!

The Clown raised his voice-transforming microphone to say a few words.

His first words were: "Thank you."

His next words came after some thought: "Thank you."

Zhang Ye had braced himself and taken the stage to perform. He never considered singing just well enough, no, he wanted to do his best on every song he sang, to relate all that he wanted to say, and to finish doing the things that he wanted done. Just like the time he released the documentary live at the Central TV press conference by himself, he did it to the best of his ability. Even if he landed himself in a tight spot because of his actions, he did not care as the consequences were unimportant to him. He was the same today, not thinking about winning some spot as the first Masked King. He personally knew that he was in very bad shape too and that he was very lucky not to have been eliminated in the previous round. So when he saw some of the audience members crying, when he saw that many of them were moved by his song, and when he realized that he had actually been voted as the first Masked King of the show, Zhang Ye honestly felt...very good.

His face was covered!

His voice caught!

But there were still people who understood him!

His voice could still be heard by others!

This was good.

This was really very good.

And so he wanted to thank them.

As such, he said thank you twice.

Applause thundered!

"Great!"

"You're the best!"

"The Clown!"

"The Clown!"

"You sang so well!"

With that, Zhang Ye exited the stage.

There was still another segment to be recorded, the elimination round to send away two contestants before the first episode's recording of King of Masked Singers could be concluded. In the next episode, the rules of the competition were different from the Chinese version of King of Masked Singers. The Masked King would not have to reveal their identity, but that position was also not going to be theirs forever. The Masked King from the previous episode would still have to participate in the next episode's competition and could even get eliminated from it. Meanwhile, the two contestants who were eliminated from the first episode would be replaced by new masked singers to compete in the show's new episode! However, Zhang Ye no longer had any strength to watch the rest of the recording. He was utterly exhausted after having spent all his energy onstage!

Han Qi and many of the program team staff surrounded Zhang Ye to help him off the stage.

"Teacher Clown."

"How are you doing?"

"You sang so wonderfully today!"

"Will there be a vehicle coming to pick you up? Why don't you let Little Han send you back instead?"

Zhang Ye thanked them for their kindness but did not let anyone see him off. After everyone left, he found a place to change out of his costume and even took off his socks. Then he took his bag with him before activating Invisibility (Upgraded) and departed from Beijing Television.

In the vicinity of the parking lot.

"Eh, Teacher Zhang Ye?"

"Teacher Zhang, you're here?"

"Brother Hu and Teacher Shanshan were looking for you earlier."

"Yeah, when they saw your car parked here they looked for you for a while, since you didn't answer your phone when they called. So you were here watching the recording all this time? Are you leaving now?"

A few of his former colleagues spotted him out here.

Zhang Ye smiled and nodded at them but did not open his mouth and speak. He was afraid that he would give himself away.

Those coworkers of his did not notice anything unusual about it. Back when they were working in the same office, Zhang Ye was not someone who really liked to talk much. It was only when the topic of work came up, or if there was a quarrel or fight with other people that he had no lack of words to say. So no one thought much of it nor was there anything for them to contemplate.

"Take care then."

"Goodbye, Teacher Zhang."

Zhang Ye waved goodbye to them and caught his breath before struggling into his car. After fastening his seat belt, he took out another Stamina Potion from the game ring's inventory and drank it. He managed to perk himself up and drove back home in a hurry.

...

Back at home.

Zhang Ye collapsed into his bed and coughed a couple times. He could feel his cold becoming less severe. It might have been due to the cortisone shots that he had received at the Beijing Television infirmary taking effect, although his chest throbbed and he could feel slight shoulder and middle back pain in the places he had been injured!

But Zhang Ye was smiling.

He had been crowned Masked King!

That was enough for him! It was worth all the pain and injuries he endured!

Perhaps because Beijing Television had finished recording the show, Zhang Ye's cell phone suddenly started ringing. His cell phone was still in his pants' pocket as he hadn't taken it out since he'd gotten back home. He had to prop himself up while he looked for his pants that he had changed out of. He retrieved the cell phone from them. He took a look at the caller ID and saw that it was Yao Jiancai calling.

Zhang Ye cleared his throat to try to make himself sound as normal as possible.

He answered the call.

Yao Jiancai greeted: "Zhang'er, what's up?"

Zhang Ye replied: "I'm lazin' about."

"What's with your voice? Why do you sound so sleepy? Are you in bed?"

"Yeah, I just got back and hit the sack."

"I didn't see you at the recording studio today. Why didn't you come? Haha, I saw a really amazing singer today. He sang so wonderfully!"

Zhang Ye laughed. "Really?"

"You're the executive producer right? C'mon, share with me, who's that guy? You must definitely know something. Don't try to fool me."

Zhang Ye blinked. "I honestly don't know. I didn't follow up with or participate in the production work at all."

"Heh, I thought that you'd know for sure. You didn't hear that guy's song, but it was so good that I can't describe it in words. Also, nobody had ever heard the songs he performed before. Perhaps his talent agency had them written specifically for him before the competition, so going along that line, a newcomer would definitely not enjoy such privileges. He must be a big name, and it's definitely a big name who's a supporting pillar of their agency. That's why he could enjoy such treatment from them! They're all good songs and I believe it would cost quite a bit to even buy the copyrights to them."

Zhang Ye smiled and said: "I guess so."

Yao Jiancai said: "Oh well, I'll let you get back to sleep. I'll ask around some."

He hung up.

Soon after, Zhang Xia also called.

The moment the call connected, Grandma Zhang said: "Little Zhang, I have just two questions for you. Who is Petal Shower? Who is The Clown?"

Zhang Ye chuckled and said: "Old Yao just called me as well to ask about this. I really don't know as I'm only in charge of the overall production. I did not oversee any other parts of the show and did not participate in those roles either."

Zhang Xia did not believe him. "That's impossible. Even you do not know?"

"I really do not know." Zhang Ye lied without blinking.

"Alright."

Zhang Ye suddenly remembered something. "Oh right, Grandma Zhang. Did Sunset Glow get eliminated?"

Zhang Ye felt that Sunset Glow was someone that he knew personally, and Petal Shower also felt somewhat familiar to him, although he couldn't be sure. As for Sunflower in the Starlight and the other contestants, Zhang Ye did not have any idea about them because he probably did not know them, but it could also turn out that he was familiar with them. Nothing was certain here.

Zhang Xia replied: "Sunset Glow did not get eliminated."

"Thanks."

Old Yao.

Grandma Zhang.

I'm sorry about this, but I really have to keep it from you two for now. I will apologize to you two at a later time.

No one knew that Zhang Ye had anonymously joined the King of Masked Singers competition, not even his parents and Old Wu were informed about it, so he wasn't planning on telling anyone else!

The main issue here was that he was afraid that if he lost, it would be too embarrassing for him!

He had thought about it before, that if he were to lose, he wouldn't reveal himself and would just exit the stage!

Chapter 1000: Hero and Zero!

The next day.

It was a Saturday.

Early in the morning, the Internet stirred with activity!

"It's going to be broadcast soon!"

"My King of Masked Singers is coming!"

"I wonder if Zhang Ye's new work will create yet another miracle in the viewership ratings. After all, the show isn't directed by Zhang Ye this time, so everything is still a big unknown!"

"I'm just waiting for tonight. I'm so looking forward to it!"

"Who are the first episode's contestants? Did anyone attend yesterday's live recording?"

"I heard that the first episode's Masked King is someone called Petal Shower!"

"Ah? Why did I hear that it was someone called Water Buffalo who became the first episode's Masked King instead?"

"Is there even a contestant called Water Buffalo?"

"Damn, are you people for real? Who's telling the truth and who's lying? Can someone please give it to me straight!"

"In any case, those who went to the live recording said that the show is very, very good!"

"Really?"

"It shouldn't be too bad. It's Zhang Ye's creation after all."

"Will there really be big shots joining the show to sing?"

"I don't know!"

Online news was always a mixture of truth and lie. Some people who had not even gone to the live recording would confidently tell others just who the Masked King was and who had been eliminated in this episode's recording. In the confusion, the netizens could not tell truth from fiction, so they had no choice but to wait until the night to find out during the premiere episode!

...

Later that morning.

Jiaomen.

Rao Aimin's house.

Chenchen was doing her homework. "Old Yang, how do you do this question?"

Yang Shu looked at her. "Solve it yourself."

Chenchen said unhappily, "Tell me how to do it."

Yang Shu shook her head. "Your aunt won't allow that."

Chenchen said in annoyance, "Zhang Ye always helps me do my homework."

"I can't control what Senior Bro does," Yang Shu said, "but I can't help you do your homework because that's only going to do you harm."

Chenchen: "..."

These days, all of Yang Shu's meals were taken care of by Rao Aimin. The only condition for this arrangement was that Yang Shu had to tutor Chenchen every day. Yang Shu was a very dedicated and serious person, and would carry out what she promised. She really was keeping her eyes on Chenchen to supervise her and tutor her, although she definitely would not help her do her homework.

Bang bang bang.

Suddenly, someone knocked on the door!

Chenchen looked to the door and asked, "Who is it?"

Zhang Ye's weak voice came from outside. "Open up!"

Yang Shu instantly became spirited and ran over. She opened the door and greeted him joyfully, "Senior Bro!" However, she was startled at the sight of her senior martial brother.

Zhang Ye looked very pale and seemed like he was on the verge of collapsing. It was as though he would die the very next second. When Zhang Ye saw his junior martial sister, his legs turned even weaker as he wailed, "Help me stand! I can't stay upright anymore!"

Yang Shu was horrified. "Senior Bro, what happened to you?"

Zhang Ye cried, "I can't take it anymore. Quickly let me lie down!"

Yang Shu was extremely anxious. She quickly propped Zhang Ye up and led him carefully into the house. She hurriedly helped him to the sofa in front of them to lay him down. "Stay strong! You must stay strong!" Yang Shu was getting really anxious as she knelt down to remove Zhang Ye's shoes and quickly covered him with a blanket.

Chenchen blinked several times as she looked over. "Zhang Ye, what's with you?"

Lying on the sofa, Zhang Ye whined, "I'm gonna die. I can't make it. Where's Old Rao? Call Old Rao out now." His breathing was very shallow and he seemed about to die.

Chenchen: "..."

Yang Shu's eyes reddened, "Senior Bro! Senior Bro, you must hold on! I-I'll go and get Master Rao immediately!" Then she shouted upstairs in panic, "Master Rao! Master Rao, come down quick! My senior bro isn't gonna make it! Quickly save my senior bro!" She looked at Zhang Ye again and asked, "Who injured you? I-I will get revenge for you!"

Revenge?

Avenge your sister!

Zhang Ye rolled his eyes and said, "This bro isn't dead yet!"

Footfalls thudded from upstairs. Rao Aimin came trotting down the stairs. "Why the shouting?"

Yang Shu cried, "Master Rao, please come quick! M-M-My senior bro isn't gonna make it!"

When Rao Aimin saw Zhang Ye lying on the sofa wailing, she was amused. "What is going on here? Who crushed you?" Yang Shu did not know Zhang Ye that well, but how could Rao Aimin not know him? She and Zhang Ye had known each other for a very long time and she knew exactly what this fellow's style was. When she saw him behaving in that manner, she knew that he was definitely not in any serious trouble. She made her way over to him and nudged him with a foot. "Stop playing dead. You a piece of broken porcelain?"

Zhang Ye groaned but did not move.

Yang Shu said anxiously, "Please take a look at my senior bro!"

Rao Aimin shook her head as she sat down on the sofa and prodded him. "Go on, scooch in."

Zhang Ye obediently shifted closer to the backrest of the sofa.

Rao Aimin reached out and took his pulse. Eight or so seconds later, she scanned Zhang Ye. "Your old injuries, eh?"

"I'm not going to make it." Zhang Ye groaned and whined still.

Rao Aimin asked, "Didn't your injuries get better, kid? Who did you fight recently?"

Zhang Ye insisted, "No one."

Rao Aimin sneered. "Impossible!"

Zhang Ye realized he might as well tell her. "A few days ago, I sparred and exchanged several dozen moves with the master of the Lian Family Style."

Rao Aimin looked at him. "You haven't even fully recovered from your old injuries yet you still went to spar with a martial arts master? You even exchanged several dozen moves? You're suicidal! Serves you right!"

Zhang Ye was exasperated. "My colleagues and friends had been detained by their people. When I went over to sort out the problem, they gave me face and immediately released them upon my request. After

that, their master said that he would like to spar with me, so how could I turn him down? Where would I show my face if I did that! Hurry up, Old Rao, get me treated quickly!"

Rao Aimin told him, "Go to the hospital and get a checkup first."

However, the instant Zhang Ye heard the word "hospital," he panicked. "I'm not going there! I'm telling you this right now: I'm not going to the hospital!" He lay there even deader than before.

Yang Shu said anxiously, "Senior Bro, just listen to Master Rao!"

"I absolutely will not go!" Zhang Ye said firmly.

Chenchen pouted. "Zhang Ye, you're such a coward."

Zhang Ye stared at her and said, "Who's a coward? It's just that I'm too famous. If I go to the hospital, it would definitely cause a stir, understand? Forget it, a little kid like you wouldn't understand even if I explained it to you."

Chenchen smirked. "Hur hur."

No matter what anyone said, Zhang Ye would never go to the hospital.

He'd slept from yesterday until today and had almost recovered from his cold and fever. The most serious issue he currently faced were his internal injuries. He would still face this situation again in next week's competition if his internal injuries were not properly treated, and everything would be in vain. As his parents were on vacation, there was no one at home to take care of him. Zhang Ye could no longer bear with it, so he decided to head straight to Rao Aimin's place, knowing that she knew traditional Chinese medicine and massage 1 .

Rao Aimin said in a speechless manner, "Rascal, are you becoming completely dependent on me now?"

Yang Shu said anxiously, "Master Rao!"

"Alright, alright," Rao Aimin said. "I'll help you on account of you getting the injuries because of me." She then walked away and found pen and paper to write down a prescription for a traditional Chinese medicine. She handed it to Yang Shu. "Little Yang, go and pick these herbs. I've already written down the items and quantities that I need."

Yang Shu took it from her. "OK!" She turned around and said, "Senior Bro, I'll be back immediately! You must hold on!"

Zhang Ye waved his hands. "Hurry up! Take a taxi there and back! Don't go by the Third Ring Road. I got caught in traffic there when I was coming here!"

Yang Shu ran out of the house!

She slammed the door closed!

Zhang Ye laid there and made yet another request. "Old Rao, I'm hungry. Can you make some red braised pork for me? Oh yes, and chicken soup too. I must nourish myself a bit!"

Chenchen: "..."

Rao Aimin: "..."

Zhang Ye asked again, "Do you have any chicken wings? If you don't have any, can you go to the market to buy some and cook some red braised chicken wings for me? I haven't eaten those in a very long time."

Chenchen said angrily, "Zhang Ye, why are you so weak?!"

"These are internal injuries we're talking about. I can't move at all." Zhang Ye lamented, "I haven't eaten anything in a day. There's no one to take care of my meals either."

Chenchen: "..."

Rao Aimin: "..."

Zhang Ye was just going to impose himself here and lie on the sofa without moving. No matter who tried to pull him away, he would not get up. He just kept groaning and whining while asking for things to be done.

This fellow acted completely differently on and off the stage.

Sometimes, the difference between a hero and a zero was just down to a difference of circumstance.