

Full-Level 501

Chapter 501 - 501: I Don't Want to Know 1

After a while, Li Qiaomeng's forehead had already turned red, and blood vessels could even be faintly seen seeping out. Anyone who saw her sorry state would feel pity, especially since Li Qiaomeng was quite attractive, eliciting even more sympathy from those around her.

"Ye Lengan, no matter what she and her mother did, there is no need to relentlessly pursue them!" said a classmate watching nearby, looking at the kowtowing Li Qiaomeng with some heartache. "Look how sincerely she is admitting her mistake. Please let her off this time!"

"That's right! One should forgive when possible!" Seeing someone had spoken up first, another student chimed in, "She's already so pitiful. There really is no need to keep investigating her!"

"Ye Lengan, no matter what, one should still be magnanimous. Look how far you've pushed her – if this continues and an irreparable tragedy truly occurs, will you be able to live with yourself?"

The surrounding students had turned into righteous crusaders, standing up for the kneeling Li Qiaomeng, feeling that regardless of whatever egregious thing had happened, now that she was begging for mercy, there was no justification for clinging onto the issue.

Not far away, Ye Xiyuan had been hiding in the shadows observing the situation. Seeing everyone criticizing Ye Lengan, she couldn't help raising a smug grin.

No matter today's outcome, Ye Leng'an would gain no advantage. As expected, rescuing Li Qiaomeng was an excellent weapon against Ye Lengan.

However, regrettably, such a ploy could only be used once. Whether ultimately successful or not, Li Qiaomeng would never expose her, unless she no longer wanted that 1.5 million.

Spending 1.5 million still pained her. After returning to the Ye family, in order to keep up her guise as a kind and sensible person, she hadn't requested anything from her biological parents. This 1.5 million was her accumulated savings.

However, she felt spending 1.5 million to ruin Ye Leng'an's reputation was worthwhile.

By now, Li Qiaomeng's forehead had a bloody wound. Although her expression was pleading, she was burning with impatience inside.

She had assumed public pressure would compel Ye Lengan to at least let her stand first no matter what. Yet despite so many people speaking for her, Ye Leng'an remained unmoved with no hint of accommodating her. Li Qiaomeng also wanted to stop kowtowing but worried onlookers would accuse her of acting, undoing all her efforts thus far.

“You’d better stand up first!” One boy ultimately couldn’t bear watching, directly stepping over to pull up the still-kowtowing Li Qiaomeng, saying: “You see she has a heart of stone – even kowtowing yourself to death here wouldn’t elicit her pity. You needn’t debase yourself like this.”

As Li Qiaomeng already intended to halt her kowtowing, under the boy’s tugging she reluctantly stood halfway up.

Yet after rising, she persisted in begging Ye Lengan, “Miss Ye, I implore you, spare my mother! She still remains in custody, and at her age absolutely cannot withstand such torment. Furthermore, my father and brother back home have no idea of matters here. My brother will soon take his university exams – this news would greatly impact him. Please be merciful and pardon us this once!”

In stark contrast to Li Qiaomeng’s woeful pleading, Ye Lengan remained extraordinarily composed, even cold. “What bearing does your family’s affairs have upon me? You yourselves committed wrongs, so should naturally accept punishment. I absolutely do not yield to moral coercion.”

Hearing Ye Lengan’s response, Li Qiaomeng’s tears flowed unceasingly.

The wound on her forehead still oozed blood, and her countenance was deathly pale as she sobbed without pause..

Chapter 502 - 502: I Don’t Want to Know 2

Anyone who saw Li Qiaomeng would feel that she was a pitiful person. Hence, everyone began criticizing Ye Lengan, thinking she was too cold-blooded. Now that Li Qiaomeng looked so miserable, Ye Lengan still wanted to pursue the matter. Moreover, Li Qiaomeng clearly knew she was in the wrong and had even apologized so sincerely. What hurdle was there could not be overcome?

Ye Lengan’s expression did not change even when being criticized by those around her. She then looked at Li Qiaomeng and bluntly said, “Li Qiaomeng, look, everyone is on your side. Since that’s the case, why don’t you tell everyone what matter I have been pursuing with you? It would be good to let everyone judge and know how miserable you are.”

After hearing Ye Lengan’s words, Li Qiaomeng froze, She had never expected Ye Lengan would say that. She had never intended to reveal what she had done because she knew in her heart she was not in the right. If she really said it aloud, the others might start despising her, just as they were blaming Ye

Lengan.

At this moment, the people around them also reacted, their gazes involuntarily shifting to Li Qiaomeng. Obviously, they too were waiting for Li

Qiaomeng to speak. Although Li Qiaomeng had been apologizing and begging Ye Lengan for forgiveness, she had not mentioned what had actually happened.

Therefore, they were also rather confused. It was just that people tended to sympathize with the weak by nature. Seeing the pitiful Li Qiaomeng, they had subconsciously taken her side earlier.

“I... I...” Li Qiaomeng stammered, unable to say anything.

Seeing Li Qiaomeng's response, the onlookers also began harboring suspicions. Could it be that she had really done something unforgivable, and that was why she did not dare speak? By standing with her, would they not be helping evil?

For a moment, everyone looked at Li Qiaomeng somewhat strangely.

Li Qiaomeng was no fool. She could naturally sense the change in people's attitudes. However, she truly had nothing to say right now.

“Why are you not speaking?” Ye Lengan did not let Li Qiaomeng off, continuing to urge her, “Did you not come today to apologize? Then why don't you dare say what mistake you made?”

“Miss Ye, I really was wrong. Please don't force me anymore,” pleaded Li Qiaomeng as her tears flowed even faster. “Do you really intend to force me to my death?”

“If you were really going to die, you should have committed suicide at the police station!” Ye Lengan retorted coldly, “Actually, I don't really care that someone saved you out. But you really should not continue appearing before me. Are you not afraid of going back to the police station?”

Hearing Ye Lengan's words, panic flashed across Li Qiaomeng's eyes, but she immediately calmed herself. “Miss Ye, I really came today to apologize, You needn't keep pressing me like this! Moreover, even someone who did wrong should have an opportunity to change!”

“Have you changed?” Ye Lengan pressed on. “You don't even dare say what you did wrong. What right do you have to claim realizing your mistake?”

“I... I...” Li Qiaomeng was rendered speechless, not knowing how to respond.

“Since you don't dare speak, why don't I say it for you?” Ye Lengan looked at Li Qiaomeng with a smile. “It works out nicely. We can also let everyone around judge whether your misdeeds are worthy of forgiveness or not.”

“No!” Li Qiaomeng blurted out upon hearing Ye Lengan's words.

She knew very well that if those matters came to light, the sympathetic gazes around her would instantly shift to scorn. She could even imagine what nasty words they would hurl at her.

Ye Lengan ignored Li Qiaomeng and went on. “The person before you is called Li Qiaomeng. Her mother, Auntie Zhuang, was the housekeeper I hired.

During winter break I went abroad. I didn't need them staying home anymore, but since they said they planned on remaining in the capital for the New Year, I allowed them to stay for the holiday. I even gave Auntie Zhuang a bonus. By then she had only worked at my home for a month or two. I'm afraid I was already more than fair.. But...”

“When I was abroad, they two treated my house as their own home. Not only did they invite many people over to my house as guests, but they also entered my room freely and touched my belongings. Even the room that I strictly forbade them from entering was attempted to be broken into. Tell me, if something like this were to happen, what would you do?”

Her words instantly shattered everyone's worldview. Who could have imagined such people still existing in today's society?

For a moment, the way many gazed at Li Qiaomeng turned contemptuous. Even the boy who had helped Li Qiaomeng stand shifted his feet, trying to distance himself somewhat from her.

Most students at Shengan High School came from affluent families, naturally hiring domestic helpers and maids. Merely imagining their own servants treating the household as their own was utterly revolting.

After all, who would want their home occupied by others? Moreover, to bring in strangers without the owners' knowledge and enter such private spaces as the master bedroom – who knew what those people got up to. The thought alone was nauseating, like swallowing flies.

Public sentiment swiftly shifted as many began pointing fingers at Li Qiaomeng. Some even shouted that she was a fraud, duping them for sympathy.

Although having expected such treatment after the truth came out, when all around her regarded her as a rat crossing the street, Li Qiaomeng still could not withstand this.

“I'm not...” she began defending herself but realized she knew not what to say.

All that Ye Lengan described were facts. Even if she wanted to deny them, there was no way to do so. Never had she lost face like today. At this moment she desperately wished the ground would crack open for her to crawl into.

Hiding in the shadows, Ye Xiyuan eyed the cowering Li Qiaomeng and silently cursed her uselessness. She had not anticipated such a reversal after mere minutes. This Li Qiaomeng was truly incompetent – why provide Ye Lengan the opportunity to expose everything?

If Li Qiaomeng had pretended to commit suicide earlier, would Ye Lengan not have lost the chance? What an idiot. Her million spent for nothing. Now public opinion has completely turned around without Li Qiaomeng impacting Ye Lengan's reputation one bit.

After fiercely glaring at Li Qiaomeng and heaving a sigh, Ye Xiyuan directly turned and left without sparing a look at the figure in the storm's eye.

Facing condemnation from all sides, Li Qiaomeng desperately wanted to slip away. But the crowd encircling them blocked any easy exit.

“What’s this? Weren’t you begging me to forgive you earlier?” Ye Lengan felt no sympathy whatsoever for Li Qiaomeng’s plight, continuing, “Now that everything is out in the open, why do you not keep apologizing?”

“Miss Ye, we truly realized our mistake,” Li Qiaomeng could only steel herself to go on pleading upon hearing this. “My mother is advanced in years imprisonment would be too much for her. Please be merciful and let us off just this once! I guarantee nothing like this will ever happen again.”

Ye Lengan couldn’t help but chuckle lightly, as though having heard a joke. “Li Qiaomeng, what’s this about things never happening again? Do you think your mother can keep working for me? The reason this won’t reoccur is because I am no longer employing your mother, not because you’ve shouldered consequences for your mistakes.. I’m actually quite curious you’re already released, so where is your mother? Could it be she assumed all culpability, which allowed you to get out instead?”

Chapter 504 - 504: I Don’t Want to Know 4

Other than this, there was no other reason. However, there must be someone behind this. Otherwise, it would have been impossible for the people at the Public Security Bureau to believe whatever Auntie Zhuang said.

“I... This matter had nothing to do with me to begin with.” Li Qiaomeng evaded, not daring to look at Ye Lengan. “The Public Security Bureau investigated everything clearly, which is why I was able to get out.”

“I don’t care how you came out, and I don’t want to care.” Ye Lengan looked at Li Qiaomeng, her gaze piercing. “But now, you’ve appeared before me again to disgust me – that is my business. So...”

“What are you going to do?” Ye Lengan had not even finished when Li Qiaomeng was already afraid. “I’m telling you, I’m really innocent. You can’t wrongly accuse me.”

At this moment, she was truly a little frightened. Hearing Ye Lengan’s words reminded her of those days spent in the police station’s detention center. She dreaded having to return there. It had not been easy for her to leave recently, and getting sent back now, if it left a mark on her record, her future would be ruined.

Right then, she regretted being tempted by that 1.5 million to offend Ye

Lengan! Although Ye Xiyuan had said Ye Lengan was background-less, how could someone without connections live in such a villa? She genuinely feared Ye Lengan might send her back into custody.

Ye Lengan stepped towards Li Qiaomeng, an icy smile on her lips.

By now the crowd had distanced themselves from Li Qiaomeng entirely, even the boy who had helped her stand moving far away to rejoin them.

Soon, only Ye Lengan and Li Qiaomeng remained standing in the circle's center.

Seeing Ye Lengan right before her amplified Li Qiaomeng's fright – she even felt breathing becoming difficult. All she wanted was to escape, but her legs were as though filled with lead, too heavy to lift.

“Li Qiaomeng, exactly who got you out?” Ye Lengan asked, looking straight at her. “Did she not tell you, after getting you released, to keep your head down and not provoke me again?”

Hearing this, Li Qiaomeng's lips quivered. “1... I didn't, I only wanted to...”

“I don't care what you want,” Ye Lengan interjected. “But you really should not have shown yourself to me again.” She sighed, as if in regret. “If you hadn't come today, you could have still enjoyed peaceful days. But now, you've ruined your own life with your own hands – you've no one to blame but yourself.”

“What exactly do you want to do?” Li Qiaomeng raised her head upon hearing this, voice shaking. “You can't...”

“I can.” Ye Lengan nodded firmly. “Everyone must pay for their mistakes. Your first wrong deed sent you to lockup. You finally got out yet committed another folly – appearing at Shengan High School today.”

“I just wanted to apologize, I truly don't intend anything else,” pleaded Li Qiaomeng, now genuinely afraid. She felt subsequent developments were no longer within her control.

“You know your own intentions, just like the people behind you know theirs.” Ye Lengan shook her head. “The only one to shoulder consequences is you. Do you know why your backer refuses to show herself? Because she doesn't dare confront me directly – she merely pushed you forward, fool that you are.”

“No, please let me go. I truly didn't mean it,” Li Qiaomeng swiftly responded.

“Yes, someone instructed me.’

At this point, inspiration seemed to strike Li Qiaomeng, her eyes shining brighter. She reached out wanting to grab Ye Lengan's hand but was dodged.

She cared not one whit, continuing, “I can tell you who ordered me around.

But you must release me. If not, you'll never know who wanted to harm you.”

Unsure of what Ye Lengan planned for her but sensing nothing good,

resentment and hatred towards Ye Xiyuan also arose in Li Qiaomeng's heart. When getting Li Qiaomeng to do all this Ye Xiyuan hadn't warned her of Ye Lengan's fearsome nature at all.

Thus, with the other party heartless, Li Qiaomeng felt it reasonable to betray Ye Xiyuan for her own safety.

She had assumed Ye Lengan would surely agree. But instead, her reaction went completely beyond expectations.

“No need to tell, I’ve no wish to know.” Ye Lengan shrugged, wholly unconcerned. “In any case, it’s only a few people holding grudges against me. Even without you confessing I can investigate. Besides, I feel those acting against me typically meet unpleasant ends – look at you now.”

Li Qiaomeng instantly felt as if plunged into icy waters, chilled to the bone.

Ye Lengan reached out tapping Li Qiaomeng’s shoulder lightly, a meaningful smile on her lips. “You don’t have many peaceful days left. Treasure what little tranquility remains yours.”

Having said this, Ye Lengan walked past Li Qiaomeng, the crowd automatically opening a path at her approach.

With Ye Lengan’s departure, only the disheveled Li Qiaomeng remained, wearing a look the onlookers regarded with scorn before dispersing themselves.

Li Qiaomeng stood rooted in place, pallid. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to leave – she simply hadn’t the strength to take a step.

Only after a long while did Li Qiaomeng finally depart.

Making her way back to the dorms in a daze, she collapsed upon her bed.

After release from detention, she returned to school, still living on campus.

News of her misadventures had already spread through campus. Dong Qiuyi, whom Li Qiaomeng constantly quarreled with, already knew of the matter after all..

Chapter 505 - 505: Judge 1

Now, in school, almost everyone was looking at her strangely when they saw her. Privately, they were constantly gossiping about her matters. Those once so-called good friends of hers in the past no longer kept in contact at all. As for Ye Anyun, he turned around and left upon seeing her.

Even in the school dormitory, she was not at all at ease. All her roommates were ostracizing her, not even trying to hide their rejection.

However, even so, she was unwilling to leave campus. She would graduate in one year. As long as she survived this year and obtained her graduation certificate, she would have a future.

Therefore, no matter the difficulty, she had to endure. She just needed to get through this period of time. Moreover, with the one million Ye Xiyuan had given her, she planned on renting an off-campus apartment until graduating. When the time came, she would only come to campus for classes, otherwise living off-grounds. This way her days would improve greatly.

However, she still felt some regret over that remaining 500 thousand. Based on current circumstances, Ye Xiyuan would surely not give her the money now. But, this one million was enough. Additionally, whether she admitted it or not, if not for Ye Xiyuan’s actions, she would have had no way of leaving detention.

At this moment, Li Qiaomeng was still brimming with confidence about the future. Yet she did not know that often, just one wrong choice could entirely upend a so-called future. Still immersed in her own fantasies presently, she would soon face harsh realities.

To the students of Shengan High School, Li Qiaomeng's matter was like a pebble tossed into a lake – though creating some ripples initially, it soon calmed, leaving not a trace in anyone's heart.

Having failed to plot against Ye Lengan, Ye Xiyuan was naturally unhappy. But presently she had no time to dwell on Ye Lengan, for the fashion design competition was about to commence.

During this period her father's attitude towards her remained decent. She understood clearly this stemmed from the upcoming contest – her father was counting on her winning the top prize, thus raising their company's renown and seeing improved development.

Moreover, it was nearly the day of the competition itself. This particular event was being held with great fanfare, reputedly having invited numerous famous fashion design masters alongside top figures from the fashion world to serve as judges.

Ye Li brought Ye Xiyuan to the competition early.

Upon entering the venue, they saw many heads and designers of other companies had arrived. Clearly, everyone placed tremendous importance on this design contest.

One should understand this competition was hosted by the prestigious Neo Fashion Company of the fashion industry – virtually the leader of the field, its scope encompassing all facets including apparel, jewelry, accessories, and more. Nearly every designer aspired to work at Neo Fashion.

The very purpose of Neo Fashion organizing this design competition was to uncover fresh talented fashion designers. Should any company's designer obtain first place, they would gain an opportunity to collaborate with Neo Fashion itself.

The participating companies all focused primarily on apparel. Securing cooperation with Neo Fashion would be an incredible boost skyrocketing any to prominence, hence everyone awaited tense and prepared.

Ye Li also saw many rivals about, but unlike them remained composed and calm. He was highly attentive – in his eyes Ye Xiyuan would surely claim first place. Previously he had seen her design drafts himself; that level of skill far exceeded all other designers present.

Barring any accident, today's champion could be none other than Xiyuan. With her representing the Ye family, victory here would earn them cooperative prospects with Neo Fashion.

Simply attaining a partnership with Neo Fashion would enable great strides of progress for the Ye family.

Though she voiced no arrogance outwardly, inwardly Ye Xiyuan brimmed with confidence beside Ye Li. She already grasped the competition theme, and her very opponent who had claimed last life's crown presently convalesced absent at the hospital, unable to participate. This time, she would definitely take first..

Chapter 506 - 506: Judge 2

As long as she could win the championship this time, her position in the Ye family would stabilize. Not only that, when the time came, all the news media would surely report on her as the new young and beautiful designer rising to prominence. By then, she would truly gain fame.

Moreover, she still remembered numerous fashion designs growing popular over the coming years. When the time arrived, she would definitely establish herself as a world-renowned design master.

Even losing the system, she could still succeed relying solely on her own efforts.

The competition soon commenced, the judges entering one by one and seating themselves at the judging table. Seeing the figures there, everyone grew excited below. The host, presiding over affairs, began introducing those judges.

The panel this time consisted of internationally famous fashion design masters Airelly, Sun Liyi as well as Fashion Godmother Linda, and naturally also several Neo Fashion Company higher-ups. This surprised no one, given the contest was hosted by Neo Fashion; having their own executives serve as judges was only expected.

Only Ye Li and Ye Xiyuan sitting below, looking at the familiar figure on the judges' platform had unpleasant expressions. This was because, among the high-ranking executives of Neo Fashion serving as judges for the event, one of them turned out to be Ye Lengan!

Never could they have dreamed of encountering Ye Lengan in this sort of circumstance. Even more baffling was why Ye Lengan would be present as a Neo Fashion executive and judge.

Now with Ye Lengan judging, things looked ill for them. What if she intentionally scored Ye Xiyuan low later on?

At this thought Ye Li directly rose to his feet, proclaiming loudly before all,

“One moment, I have a question.”

Ye Xiyuan wanted to restrain Ye Li but by then it was too late. Every gaze centered onto them, appraising.

The host, in the midst of introductions, knitted his brows seeing this and glanced towards Ye Li's seat, confirming which company he belonged to before inquiring, “Mr. Ye, may I ask if you have some doubt?”

Though he spoke thus, impatience filled his eyes towards Ye Li. In all his years hosting these design contests never had he witnessed such behavior at the venue. After all, the companies and individuals qualified to compete had long grasped all the rules.

“I've no major doubts,” Ye Li responded frankly. “Just some confusion about a particular judge. Isn't she still underage? Can she genuinely qualify to judge at this level of competition? Wouldn't that seem unfair to the other judges, or us contestants?”

He had staked tremendous hopes on this event, absolutely unwilling to let anything go amiss. But Ye Lengan's presence on the judging panel constituted the greatest error.

“Father, please sit first!” Ye Xiyuan tugged Ye Li's sleeve, whispering, “Now's really not the time to say such things.”

Though also incredibly vexed by Ye Lengan judging, she understood they lacked all grounds to raise objections. After all, Ye Lengan appeared as a Neo Fashion executive; they wielded no right to question this. With Neo Fashion itself hosting the contest...

Now subjected to everyone's stares as if they were fools, she truly wished to directly yank her father down to cease further embarrassment.

Ye Li ignored Ye Xiyuan, gaze fixed squarely on Ye Lengan at the judges' table.

It wasn't that he failed to recognize his actions as inappropriate presently. But he had to ride on this competition, unwilling to let Ye Lengan's presence ruin everything.

Seated judging, Ye Lengan glanced at Ye Li before replying, "The member you just referenced should be me! Amongst all the judges only I'm still underage."

Ye Li offered no rebuttal, questioning outright, "I mean no offense, just want to ask – do you actually understand fashion design? Do you genuinely feel qualified to sit there judging?"

Chapter 507: Judge 3

Hearing Ye Li's words, Ye Lengan laughed as if having heard some joke. "This is truly the most hilarious joke I've heard in my life. Mr. Ye, I believe you haven't grasped something vital. This competition was organized by our Neo Fashion Company. Now, with Neo Fashion acknowledging my qualifications to judge, by what right do you question our decision? Or do you feel capable of deciding things for our company instead?"

"I didn't..." Ye Lengan's speech left Ye Li's complexion oscillating between white and green. "I only... only..."

"Everyone else lacks objections, so why are you so opinionated?" Ye Lengan interjected bluntly. "If having me on the panel strikes you as unfair, feel free to withdraw from the competition."

"What?" For an instant, Ye Li appeared caught between a rock and a hard place.

"In any case, I'm judging and no other has qualms but you, so why don't you simply quit to resolve things?" Ye Lengan quirked a brow, continuing, "Or does withdrawing me as judge require catering to your perspective? If so, as soon as the first place is decided, anyone feeling unjustly defeated can step forth and proclaim it due to biased judging. Shall we hold the contest anew then?"

Rendered without rebuttal, Ye Li also sensed his present situation rather precarious, truly stuck between Scylla and Charybdis now.

Quitting the competition was out of the question. He dared to say that if he withdrew, negative news about the Ye family would undoubtedly spread like wildfire tomorrow. However, in the current situation, he couldn't step down either.

"Sorry, my father simply cares too deeply for this competition, thus raising such reasonable doubts," Ye Xiyuan stood explaining to the crowd with a bow. "He held no

intention of targeting anyone specifically, merely wishing to ensure fairness here. After all, we've undertaken ample preparations for today."

Her statements instantly warmed public opinion towards Ye Li and their family again. Truthfully seeing Ye Lengan earlier had birthed some confusion in their own minds, but learning she was a Neo Fashion executive they'd held tongues.

"I'm not interested in your thought," Ye Lengan went on. "My presence as judge naturally stems from my own reasons. My attendance was by Neo Fashion's decision – any with questions may abstain from competing, others included."

As she spoke Ye Lengan glanced about. All averted their gaze, not one wishing to withdraw from this long-awaited opportunity.

Who'd give up partnership prospects with the prestigious Neo Fashion over something so trivial? Moreover, the assembly of all these fashion luminaries as judges demonstrated Neo Fashion's clout.

This chance at collaboration was what they had been hoping for – now fortuitously obtained, who would relinquish it? No matter the judge, even a child failed to faze them.

Because Neo Fashion organized this, the choice of judges fell beyond their contestant scope. Thankfully none had been foolish enough to openly challenge the company's decision, otherwise, public humiliation would have been theirs today.

Inwardly fuming, Ye Li sat in taciturn dissatisfaction. Still, his concerns remained. "Xiyuan, do you think Ye Lengan might sabotage you?"

This worried him most – given the discordant relations between them, especially with Xiyuan, wasn't her judging tantamount to securing Xiyuan's defeat?

"Don't overthink, Father," Ye Xiyuan breathed deeply before responding. "Though I've no clue why Neo Fashion appointed Ye Lengan judge, the deed is done and can't be undone now. Moreover, you must have faith in me. If my work proves outstanding enough, Ye Lengan or not, my victory shall be certain. Even if she aims to undermine me she wouldn't dare act overtly – that would only incite resentment.."

Chapter 508: Judge 4.

"It's good that you're confident." Ye Li nodded and continued, "Xiyuan, your designs have a lot of creativity. Many senior designers in our company are not as outstanding as you, so I believe you can do it."

Ye Xiyuan nodded without saying anything else. This small episode did not affect the competition at all. After introducing the judges, the competition began. The participating designers had to enter the venue to design. Within the allotted time, they had to sketch their designs and create digital renderings to display on the computer. They would then go on stage one by one to present their work, after which the judges would score them.

With the designers in the venue, the representatives of the companies continued waiting. The judges, however, were free to take a break outside. Of course, there was no concern about participants bribing judges. The judges had just been announced that morning, leaving no time for the companies to arrange anything untoward.

Moreover, money alone would not sway these wealthy judges. Something more would be needed to influence them, and there had been no opportunity to prepare such an offer.

Finding the wait dull, Ye Lengan decided to step outside for some air.

Seeing her leave, a shadow flashed in Ye Li's eyes. After a moment's thought, he too stepped out.

"Ye Lengan, wait," Ye Li called out when they were alone.

"What's the matter?" Ye Lengan turned, a hint of impatience in her tone. "Don't you know competitors are not allowed to interact with judges before the end?"

"You know why I'm speaking with you," Ye Li said gravely. "Since you're a judge, I expect you to remain objective. Don't undermine Xiyuan's chances."

Ye Lengan smiled coldly. "You presume too much. And you overestimate Ye Xiyuan. Do you truly think she has the skill to win this?"

"Absolutely," said Ye Li proudly. "Xiyuan is tremendously talented. Barring sabotage from you, she'll undoubtedly claim first prize."

"It seems you barely know her!" Ye Lengan scoffed. "Blindly trust her if you like. But her score will reflect only her skill, not your boasts."

"Hmph, I understand Xiyuan's capabilities better than you," Ye Li said excitedly. "Her sketches are first m rate, practically at an international designer's standard. So unless you interfere, she is sure to prevail."

"Really? We shall see," said Ye Lengan evenly. "I look forward to gauging Ye Xiyuan's caliber. Nonetheless, you would be wise to prepare yourself for her defeat."

Hearing this, Ye Li bristled. "Ye Lengan, if you make any untoward moves, I promise you'll regret it." This competition was too vital for the Ye Group's prospects; he could not let it be ruined.

"Then you expect far too much of her," said Ye Lengan with a smile. "At this moment, Ye Xiyuan may well be utterly confounded! The theme is not what she anticipates, after all."

"What do you mean?" asked Ye Li sharply, a sense of foreboding rising within him – Ye Lengan seemed privy to something he did not know.

"Ye Xiyuan knows her own strengths," Ye Lengan went on. "Do you truly believe her work is her own? She feels no guilt claiming others' creations for herself!"

"Nonsense!" retorted Ye Li reflexively. "Xiyuan made those sketches herself."

You've no proof otherwise. Stop these wild allegations."

"You also have doubts, don't you?" Ye Lengan looked at him scornfully. "Every designer has a distinct style, but Ye Xiyuan's pieces display a range of aesthetics. Could one woman produce such variety? You ignore this because it benefits you."

"Make any more spurious claims and you'll force my hand," warned Ye Li, though his confidence wavered. "Any rumors from you will mean a slander suit. "

"I welcome it," Ye Lengan said with a shrug. "Have your lawyers send notice." She then walked off, leaving Ye Li fuming impotently.

After Ye Lengan's departure, doubts swirled inside Ye Li as he stood fixed in place. Thinking of Ye Xiyuan's diverse designs especially troubled him.

"No... Xiyuan would never do such a thing," he muttered, seeming to convince himself as much as dispel Ye Lengan's poisonous words. "Those sketches are surely hers. Ye Lengan merely spreads lies."

But though Ye Li tried to reassure himself, he could not shake a creeping sense of unease.

Meanwhile, the revelation of a vastly different theme left Ye Xiyuan shocked. Instead of the Spring Day theme she anticipated, the contest had announced a banquet theme. The two could not be more unrelated. This unexpected shift had caught her completely off guard..

Chapter 509 - 509: Zero Point 1

The change in the competition theme meant all her previous preparations had been in vain. Her mind was now a mess, unable to think of anything for the moment.

Ye Xiyuan felt her heart descend into chaos as she watched the others begin contemplating their designs while she remained confounded.

She then suddenly recalled Ye Lengan, who had just been seated among the judges. It must have been Ye Lengan who did this. Ye Lengan knew she was reborn, so she likely guessed she was aware of the intended theme and thus changed it.

What should she do now? The first-place design she remembered was useless with the new theme.

No, she absolutely could not lose this fashion design competition. It was her sole chance without the system's help. Failing to win first prize here would probably cost her any standing in the Ye family going forward.

It was obvious her father was already quite displeased over her lost backing from Nangong Xuyao. Only her demonstrated design talent had earned his good graces lately. The moment she lost value to him, her coming days in the household were predictable.

Struggling to calm herself, Ye Xiyuan tried recalling some relevant designs set to debut after a few years in her past life. Finally, a spark of inspiration hit. She remembered a stunning gown unveiled at Paris Fashion Week a year later, aptly suiting this banquet theme.

The memory brought a confident, proud smile to Ye Xuyuan's lips. She could recall the huge splash made by that dress on release. And she intended to bring a similarly impactful sense of brilliance today. If she could render that gown, it would surely prove even more eye-catching than the previous winner's work. Everyone would be amazed at her talent.

At that point, even a judge like Ye Lengan could not possibly suppress her design – not without incurring mass resentment.

Hmph! Did Ye Lengan think changing the theme last minute would contain her? She would force Ye Lengan to see her skills, to recognize her potency. Ironically, Ye Lengan's interference was about to ensure her success.

She only wondered if the knowledge might anger Ye Lengan to death when the time came!

Inside the venue, designers busily worked as those waiting outside agonized anxiously.

The outer screens showed the inner workings. After his talk with Ye Lengan, Ye Li felt not relief but gnawing disquiet and worry. Though he told himself Ye Lengan spouted nonsense, slandering Xiyuan out of spite, doubts still plagued him.

When he saw Ye Xiyuan wholly absorbed in her drafting though, exuding confidence, his heart settled somewhat.

He also cursed internally. Ye Lengan had plainly tried riling him earlier. If Ye Lengan's claims held truth, Xiyuan would be anxious now, mind blank.

Instead, she brimmed with assurance, no sign of creative hindrance.

Clearly, Ye Lengan had spun lies, seeking only to unsettle him.

Watching the same display, Ye Lengan lifted her brows at Ye Xiyuan's composure. Surprised, yes... but not too much so. Ye Xiyuan had lived an entire past life, after all. The Ye family's fashion focus meant she certainly kept abreast of industry developments before. With her experience, quickly pivoting designs to match an altered theme was unremarkable.

Ye Lengan only wondered which original works she might be plagiarizing this time..

Chapter 510 - 510: Zero Point 2

Time ticked by, and the five hours were nearing their end. These five hours were the competition time. If the designers were unable to finish their designs within this period, they would be disqualified. After all, no one was obliged to indulge anyone. The others could hardly be expected to wait indefinitely while someone struggled to complete their work. Everyone had their own matters and schedules to keep.

Moreover, as a designer participating in the competition, if one could not complete their work within the allotted time, what right did they have to remain?

As the deadline approached, Ye Xiyuan also ceased working. She looked over the design draft and computer renderings, a smug smile tugging at her lips.

She could well imagine the stir her piece would cause when revealed. It would surely surpass her expectations.

Truly, she owed Ye Lengan some thanks. Without her sudden theme change, she would never have conceived this remarkable gown.

Merely picturing herself crowned a genius designer after today filled her with pride.

Even Neo Fashion would soon plead to collaborate with her.

When time expired, all designers set down their tools. Out of habit, they scanned their opponents' progress.

The participants soon filed out one by one.

The first contestant began introducing and displaying his work.

As each designer presented, the audience intermittently nodded. The judges ultimately decided the victor. Every introduction held the room's attention contestants and company representatives alike listened intently, loath to miss any score announcements.

Finally, Ye Xiyuan's turn arrived.

Seeing her, Ye Li could barely contain his excitement. If not for the other attendees, he would have stood for a better view.

Though shaken by Ye Lengan earlier, relief now washed over him as confidence exuded from Ye Xiyuan. He firmly believed in her talent and skill to claim the prize.

Ye Xiyuan rose and transferred her slides to the large display, launching into an explanation of her creative approach.

When her drawings and dress renderings appeared, sounds of wonder rippled through the room.

It was a sleek black gown with a subtle sheen, its soft, fluid fabric nipped at the waist. Crystals dotted the full skirt's hem, evoking a river of stars against the satiny fabric. Wearing it, a woman would surely reign as the most dazzling queen of the night.

None present were immune to the draft's charm. The women in particular pictured themselves gliding in such a dress.

Grinning widely below, Ye Li could already envision others lining up to congratulate Ye Xiyuan on her impending victory.

Ye Leng'an's earlier words must have sprung from sheer envy. Xiyuan's gift came from the heavens themselves. That she produced such an exquisite design in mere hours approached miraculous. With her talents, the Ye Group would never lack prosperity.

On stage, Ye Xiyuan was elucidating her creative concept: "I drew inspiration for this gown from the Milky Way. Its skirt..."

Fortunately, stunned by the dress in her first life, she had read the magazine interview with its designer and recalled some of his remarks on its genesis.

His name escaped her now, but the general ideas remained to help conceal her plagiarism..