

The Double 301

Chapter 301

with the

Mirabella slid back into her seat subtle grace of a cat reclaiming its favorite sunny

spot.

Just as Delilah was about to inquire who her daughter had been speaking with, her gaze lifted to see Emmitt entering the room, prompting her to snap her lips shut. She cast a cautious glance at Mirabella's expression. The siblings were wrapped in a thick fog of

misunderstanding.

Clearing her throat, Delilah set aside her fork. "Emmitt, you're back? Have you had dinner?"

As she spoke, Zach and Leo, both hunched over their plates, along with Shawn, turned to look at Emmitt. Their faces mirrored Delilah's reaction, an uncanny mixture of concern and curiosity. Then, almost reflexively, their gazes shifted to Mirabella as if to ensure she was alright.

Emmitt felt a sting at the sight, the bitterness in his throat intensifying. After a moment, he nodded to Delilah. "Yeah, I've eaten."

The air turned awkward, thick with the unspoken. Delilah, for once, found herself at a loss for words. It was Zach who broke the silence, "Emmitt, you're home late. Got something on your mind?"

"Mmm," Emmitt hummed, striving for a tone of nonchalance. "I saw online that Leo got hurt. Is that true?"

Leo's hand trembled, nearly dropping his fork.

Delilah, unaware of any such incident, chuckled, “Oh, no. Your brother is fine. Look at him.”

Emmitt’s gaze shifted to Leo, and seeing that he bore no resemblance to the rumors online, he relaxed, “Good, that’s good.”

Leo coughed, lifting his head to add, “The internet is full of wild tales. Don’t believe it. It’ll blow over soon.”

“Right,” Emmitt replied, dropping the subject.

Conversations dwindled, and once again, the dining room fell into silence. Emmitt stood still, suddenly feeling like an outsider. He took a deep breath and forced a smile. “You guys enjoy your meal.”

With that, he moved toward the living room, his eyes fleetingly catching the gleam of trophies in a glass cabinet, his expression distant as he noticed two certificates hanging on the wall. He approached them—one for first place at the national competition, the other for first place in a French contest.

At that moment, Shawn finished his meal, and approached Emmitt, who was lost in thought, staring at the certificates. Remembering he had recorded a video of Mirabella’s competition that day, Shawn pulled out his phone. He unlocked it, opened the few minutes-long competition

video, and tapped Emmitt’s arm. “Take a look at this.”

He wanted Emmitt to see his little sister’s excellence in person and dispel misunderstandings through her undeniable talent.

Emmitt’s eyes lowered to the phone screen. There was Mirabella, standing at the podium in the video, her face alight with confidence, her French crisp and clear, commanding the stage with an aura that made it impossible not to recognize her brilliance.

For a moment, Emmitt was transfixed. He remembered a time when he had scoffed at Mirabella for reading a French book, accusing her of being pretentious. But what was the reality? The video seemed to mock him, highlighting his ignorance.

He looked away before the video ended.

Shawn simply patted his son's shoulder, saying nothing more. Some lessons had to be learned

on one's own.

The next day, as soon as the school bell signaled freedom, Mirabella's phone began to buzz insistently. She pulled it out of her pocket, calm and unhurried.

Chapter 302

It was Wyatt on the phone.

Mirabella slung her bag over her shoulder as she answered the call.

"Ms. Mirabella, I've got all the herbs you asked for." Wyatt said with a respectful tone.

"That was quick," Mirabella responded, genuinely surprised.

"Yeah," Wyatt paused before adding with a bit of a sheepish tone, "I'm actually right outside the entrance of Parkside High School. Are you free?"

"Sure, give me a few minutes. I'll be right out," Mirabella replied briskly.

Wyatt was clearly delighted, thanking her several times before ending the call.

Curtis was supposed to be shadowing James, but, for some reason, he'd ended up at Parkside High School with Wyatt. Sitting in the passenger seat, Curtis was mulling over the information he'd gathered about Mirabella in the last couple of days.

She was just as Wyatt had described – a girl who'd grown up in a small town after a mix-up at birth, nothing more. But when he tried to dig deeper, like where she'd learned her medical skills, he hit a wall. It was as if her abilities were innate.

This Mirabella was indeed a conundrum.

As for Mirabella, she had just stepped out of the school building when she ran into Summer again. The phrase "small world" flashed through Mirabella's mind upon seeing her.

"Who are you, really?" Summer asked, her gaze piercing as she confronted Mirabella with her first question.

Mirabella squinted, nonplussed. "What?"

"If you were the real Mirabella, you wouldn't have such good grades, and you wouldn't be at Parkside High School," Summer probed, trying to find out if Mirabella, like her, was reborn.

But after Summer spoke, Mirabella didn't react at all. There was no panic, not even a flicker of guilt. It wasn't the reaction Summer had anticipated, and her brow furrowed. "Why so silent? Can't admit it?" Summer pressed.

"Get lost," Mirabella retorted, clearly annoyed, and she didn't give Summer another moment, walking away without looking back.

Summer watched Mirabella's retreating figure with a cold gaze, ultimately deciding not to follow and press further.

In the car.

“Ms. Mirabella, those herbs...” Wyatt glanced in the rearview mirror while driving.

Mirabella, phone in hand, was busy texting Nikolai. She heard Wyatt and didn't even look up. “We need to head to Nikolai's home.”

“Got it.” Wyatt said, knowing Nikolai's address and quickly making a U-turn.

Nikolai was asking what tools Mirabella needed, sending her a bunch of pictures to choose from.

Mirabella reviewed the images, finding the equipment quite comprehensive, though she was still picky. But considering it wasn't her clan's sophisticated alchemy lab, she settled for a few that would suffice.

Nikolai texted: [Can I assist you while you prepare the medicine?]

The message seemed almost pitifully eager. Nikolai had been anxiously awaiting Mirabella's arrival. He needed to watch her concoct medicine, especially after he had witnessed the effects of the medicine James had taken. His excitement was so palpable that his family almost thought he'd lost his mind.

Mirabella texted back a simple [yes.]

Upon receiving her affirmative response, Nikolai's face lit up like a blooming flower, and he hurriedly arranged for the preparation of the equipment Mirabella had requested.

Half an hour later, they arrived at Nikolai's residence.

Wyatt had loaded the herbs into a wooden box in the car before he'd picked up Mirabella from Parkside High School. He stepped out of the car carrying the box, and followed Mirabella into the Reeves family estate with Curtis in tow.

Chapter 303

Nikolai's apothecary was not small by any means. Mirabella entered, cast a quick glance around, and without further ado, left Nikolai to his devices, shooing the others out of the room.

Truth be told, Nikolai genuinely wanted to assist Mirabella, but it soon became blatantly clear that there wouldn't be much for him to do. He watched the young lady grind the ingredients with practiced ease and then carefully place them into the baking oven. Every step was executed with precision. Crafting the medicine was crucial, but the real art was in the precise measure and blend of the ingredients.

It amazed Nikolai that he was witnessing such preparation of ancient remedies in his lifetime, and by someone so young – a girl barely in her twenties. She worked with a mastery that suggested she had done this a thousand times over.

Three hours later, Mirabella carefully retrieved the medicine from the furnace. Twenty pills were produced, not a single one a failure.

The rich aroma of the concoction filled the apothecary as Nikolai snapped out of his daze. His eyes settled on the pills resting on the table. He sauntered over, picked one up, and inspected it. Whether one judged by appearance or scent, there was only one word to describe it: perfect. If this were to be evaluated by the Pharmacists' Guild, it would fetch an S+ rating, if not higher.

Nikolai glanced at Mirabella, who now wore a hint of fatigue. An eighteen-year-old top-tier alchemist – what a concept! If the Guild ever caught wind of this, they'd lose their minds!

Moreover, she had crafted twenty pills in one go, and in just three hours... Trembling slightly. Nikolai placed the pills into their special bottle, opened his mouth, and then, breaking the silence of the apothecary, he blurted out. "Mirabella, would you consider taking an apprentice? I know I'm a bit long in the tooth, but I swear, my talents are still sharp."

Mirabella, who had just taken a sip of water, choked on her drink, spraying it out.

She coughed a few times and said, "You're pulling my leg. Nikolai." Then, as if fearing he might continue in a similar vein, she quickly grabbed the bottle of pills and hurried out the door.

Lately, it seemed everyone wanted to be her apprentice.

No sooner had Mirabella stepped outside than Wyatt and Curtis approached her. “Ms. Mirabella, have the medicines been prepared?”

She handed the bottle to Wyatt, “There, that’s all I’ve crafted. It’s not much, so make it last, will you?”

Behind her. Nikolai, who had just managed to get one leg over the threshold, nearly tripped at her words.

Were twenty pills not much?!

Did this little prodigy have any idea that with the same amount of ingredients, a senior alchemist might’ve, at best, produced only five or six pills?

11:01

Today felt like the most humbling day of Nikolai’s life.

Wyatt opened the bottle and was momentarily startled. While not an alchemist himself, he had a basic understanding due to James’ health needs and knew that it was nearly impossible for an apothecary to produce so many in one batch.

Instinctively, Wyatt’s gaze drifted back to Nikolai. Catching Wyatt’s look, Nikolai cleared his throat, stepped fully out of the doorway, and slapped Wyatt’s hand with a smack before snapping the box shut. “Such a precious medicine shouldn’t be left open to the air. Do you want all the potency to evaporate?”

Chapter 304

Wyatt froze for a moment, narrowly avoiding getting his hand pinched by the lid of the box, but he shrugged it off like it was nothing.

Feeling a bit mischievous from the shock he had received, Nikolai couldn't resist adding fuel to the fire with a snort, "Do you have any idea how much Mirabella's pill is worth?"

Wyatt shook his head, suspecting it was way out of his league..

"At the Pharmacists' Guild, this baby would be rated at least 5+," Nikolai said, stroking his beard.

S+ grade medicines were rare commodities. Not only were they difficult to concoct, but their extraordinary effects on the body made them incredibly valuable. For instance, if someone was on death's door with some incurable illness, swallowing S+ grade medicine tailored for their condition wouldn't necessarily cure them completely, but might just buy them a few extra decades. Pretty impressive, right?

That was nothing compared to the other effects S+ medicine could have beyond healing.

Wyatt's face could no longer be described as surprised; he was outright shellshocked. He had seen S+ grade medicine auctioned off on the black market, with opening bids starting at a cool five million—and that was just for a single pill!

Glancing down at the box he was holding. Wyatt felt his knees go weak. Nikolai wasn't the type to bluff, so that meant... He suddenly found himself swaying on his feet and turned to Curtis, his voice shaky, "Bud, buddy, lend me a hand, will ya? I skipped dinner, and I felt a bit faint all of a sudden."

Curtis was equally shaken, his hands trembling. It was clear he was just as startled as Wyatt. Nikolai watched with satisfaction as both Wyatt and Curtis gaped in horror. The setback he'd suffered at

Mirabella's place seemed to evaporate in an instant.

There was nothing quite like the thrill of seeing others out of their depth.

Standing off to the side, Mirabella glanced at Nikolai, thinking how some folks just got more mischievous with age.

After dropping Mirabella off at the Davis estate, Wyatt drove back to the luxurious villa where James resided. He and Curtis walked in to see James, their expressions as grim as a cloudy day, their strides almost ghostly.

James, looking much better than he had earlier in the day, raised an eyebrow at them. "You two..."

Wyatt nudged Curtis, "C'mon, give him the medicine."

Worried his own hands might betray him, Wyatt had delegated this moment of glory to Curtis.

Finally snapping back to reality, Curtis unwrapped the medicine, which was bundled in layers of his jacket, and carefully placed it on the coffee table.

James gave them a look, then casually reached for the bottle. Instantly, both Wyatt and Curtis piped up.

"Easy there. James."

"That potion's worth a fortune!"

James was confused. Was he being upstaged by a bottle of pills? Had they lost their minds?

Wyatt touched his nose, muttering. "Nikolai mentioned that Ms. Mirabella's potion is S+ grade."

James' hand was about to open the lid and paused. That young lady could concoct S+ grade medicine?

Though surprised, he kept his composure, his face the picture of serenity, and opened the bottle.

Upon seeing at least a dozen or so S+ grade pills inside, James was momentarily speechless. A minute later, he nonchalantly closed the bottle and placed it back on the table. "Did Ms. Mirabella provide any instructions on how to take these?"

He sounded utterly calm.

"Oh, she just said there weren't many and to use them sparingly," Wyatt replied respectfully.

Just a few?

James was shocked.

Heh.

Chapter 305

"James, what's your take on a gift for Ms. Mirabella?" Wyatt piped up before long, his mind already rifling through the inventory of James' valuables. He'd even considered the antiques in the storage room, but ultimately, he felt none of them were quite right.

Curtis glanced at Wyatt, suspecting the man might've been playing both sides despite also feeling the question was a good one.

James' mouth twitched, showing no desire to entertain Wyatt's query. "Got too much time on your hands?"

Wyatt rubbed his nose. "Just curious, is all." He followed it up with an awkward chuckle.

A thought struck Curtis, and he said out loud, "What about gifting Ms. Mirabella a house?"

Wyatt's eyes lit up instantly, "That's a brilliant Idea! Maybe the one next door so that they could be neighbors."

Wyatt remembered the house next door seemed rarely occupied despite some recent renovation activity. Perhaps a generous offer would tempt the owner to sell?

"I could pop over tomorrow and see if they're willing to discuss selling." Wyatt said, his enthusiasm palpable at the prospect of having a top-notch alchemist for a neighbor. "It's a win-win!TM

James listened to their exchange, massaged his temples, and, without a word, picked up his medicine bottle and stood up, heading upstairs.

Once James was out of sight, Wyatt turned to Curtis, dropping a bombshell, "You know, I think the most practical gift would be giving Ms. Mirabella our boss."

Curtis was speechless. Wyatt had clearly lost his mind.

Time flew, and half a month had passed since the national competition. The international contest was finally scheduled for the end of the month.

The questions in the international competition were expected to be tougher than the national ones, so Mr. Hammond had sourced some practice questions for Mirabella and Vincent to work on. Mirabella spent the half-month leading up to the competition immersed in

problem-solving.

Meanwhile, the reality show Leo had signed up for, "Country Comfort," had set its premiere date, nearly clashing with Mirabella's competition schedule. One event was at the end of the month, the other at the beginning of the next, back-to-back.

The day to depart for the international competition arrived swiftly.

The international competition was taking place in Washington. Coincidentally, Mirabella's

elusive relative, Nick, lived in that very city.

In the first two days leading up to her competition, Mirabella's family had already instructed Nick to make sure he picked her up from the airport and personally escorted her to the hotel. Mirabella wasn't keen on troubling him, but Delilah insisted, so she agreed.

Both Mirabella and Nick were sparing with words, so after adding each other on Messenger and confirming flight details, they didn't chat much.

Only Mirabella and Vincent were representing Parkside High School in the international competition. This time, Mr. Hammond wasn't leading the team. Instead, a teacher from Prestige College specializing in competition projects took charge.

The five students were to meet at Riverdale Airport. At the time Mirabella and Vincent arrived, the rest of the team was also just about there.

Their flight to the capital of the States was scheduled for 6 PM, with a fifteen-hour flight ahead of them. Due to the time difference, they arrived in the States at around 1 AM.

Stepping off the plane, Mirabella pulled a jacket from her backpack and wrapped it around herself—the temperature in the States was a good five or six degrees cooler than back home.

Chapter 306

The international roaming on Mirabella's phone was activated, and as soon as she powered it on, a message from Nick popped up on Messenger.

LIN: (Landed yet?)

Zippering up her jacket. Mirabella texted back. [Just did.]

LIN: [Okay.]

Mirabella didn't follow up, slipping her phone into her pocket instead. She began making her way but with the other students participating in the competition.

Within minutes, they all passed through the exit. The airport wasn't crowded at this hour, so as soon as Mirabella stepped out, Nick made his way over.

"Mi...Mirabella." His tone was timid as he called out to her, perhaps due to the unfamiliarity. Mirabella took a moment to size up Nick, who was tall and lean with skin so pale it seemed he might not have seen sunshine in years. She paused before calling out, "Nick."

Nick gave a faint "hm," his sharp features expressionless. He seemed to be trying for a friendly demeanor, but it only made his facial muscles tenser, nothing close to natural.

Mirabella touched her nose and glanced at her fellow students waiting nearby. She suggested. "Nick, shall we head to the hotel first?"

Nick nodded, "Ride with me." He then led the way.

Mirabella explained the situation to the teacher leading the group and got the hotel address before breaking away to follow Nick alone.

In the car, Mirabella sat in the passenger seat, not fiddling with her phone but resting her hands naturally on her knees, with wisps of hair framing her calm, composed face.

Nick leaned his head against the seat, occasionally glancing in the rearview mirror. His biological sister was different from what he had imagined; she was laid-back and serene. exuding a lazy elegance devoid of the typical girlish airs.

Nick cleared his throat, breaking the silence, "How many days is your competition?"

Mirabella turned her head slightly, replying with ease, "Two days."

After a brief pause, Nick offered in a softer tone, "If you have time, I'll have someone show you around."

Mirabella tucked a stray lock of hair behind her ear, unaffected by Nick's choice of words—"Have someone show you"—instead of offering himself. She replied indifferently. "No need. The school will probably have other arrangements."

Before her arrival, Zach had briefed her on Nick's personality. He was reclusive, cool-tempered,

averse to closeness and social interaction, with a tendency for mild aloofness. If it weren't for the family pressure, Nick might not have shown up at the airport today.

Noticing Mirabella's nonchalant expression in the rearview mirror, Nick hesitated before slowly admitting. "I'm not comfortable in crowded places."

Mirabella hummed in understanding, "It's okay, Nick. You're busy. I'll explain to Mom and Dad

later."

At that, Nick finally exhaled in relief.

The silence returned. Mirabella pulled out her phone, lowered her head, and with slender fingers tapping on the screen, she quickly dispatched a message to her parents confirming her safe arrival.

Nick stole another glance at his sister, silently affixing the label 'empathetic' to her in his mind.

Before long, they arrived at the hotel booked by the school. Mirabella got out of the car and went to fetch her luggage from the trunk. Nick had intended to offer help, but he found his gesture hanging in the air as she effortlessly managed on her own.

Chapter 307

Mirabella effortlessly swung her suitcase from the trunk and gently lowered the hatchback a fluid motion that spoke of her independence. She took a deliberate step back, positioning herself a meter away from Nick, and said with a considerate tone. “Nick, you should head back now. It’s getting late. Thanks for going out of your way today.”

Nick scratched his head—a subconscious gesture—as he observed the space his little sister had placed between them. Usually, he would have found such a distance uncomfortably close, but for some reason, a vague sense of unease settled in his chest.

“So, I guess I’ll be off then?” Nick’s speech was unhurried, a result of years living abroad that made his English sound drawn out.

“Yeah,” Mirabella simply nodded, showing no sign of wishing him to stay.

After a few moments of hesitation, Nick finally started to walk away. He reached for the driver’s side door of his car and glanced back at Mirabella as he ducked inside, feeling an urge to make sure she was alright.

Mirabella offered him a gentle, lip-curved smile—a beautiful, tender gesture that made Nick’s grip on the car door tighten. “I’m really going, okay?”

“Goodnight, Nick,” she called out, even giving a small wave.

“Night,” Nick mumbled, his cheeks unexpectedly warm as he slid into the car.

The engine purred to life, and as the car moved forward, Nick stole one last glance in the rearview mirror. There stood Mirabella, her figure gradually shrinking with the distance until she disappeared

from view. Only then did he direct his attention back to the road. Nick couldn’t help but notice that his sister lacked that off-putting aura he found so distasteful in others.

Once Nick's car was out of sight, Mirabella wheeled her suitcase into the hotel. The other students had already arrived and retreated to their rooms. She had barely stepped into the lobby when she spotted Vincent at the front desk. Upon seeing her, he walked over and handed her a room key.

"Thanks," Mirabella said, taking the key.

Vincent pursed his lips slightly. "You're welcome. Give it your all tomorrow."

Mirabella glanced at the room number on the key card and then headed for the elevator. Her voice sounded even-keeled. "You too, Vincent."

Vincent watched her go, standing still for a couple of seconds before straightening up and following her, his suitcase in tow. "Do you think you could go over a few more equations with me?"

After pressing the elevator button, Mirabella turned to him with a resigned look and pointed to her watch, her tone serious. "Vincent, do you see the time? If you don't get a good night's sleep, you're asking to be eliminated tomorrow."

Chapter 308

As the first light of dawn crept across the stateside sky, Zach was rudely awakened from his deep slumber by the persistent buzzing of his phone. With a scowl, he grabbed the device and saw it was his kid brother calling. Taking a deep breath, he reined in his annoyance. "Nick, what's up?"

Nick was nervously twirling his glass, taking a two-second pause before finally speaking up. "I ran into Mira today."

Zach, face buried in his pillow, mumbled in a nasal voice, "Hmm? Spit it out if there's something on your mind."

"You know Mira pretty well, don't you?" Nick asked, dragging out the words.

Zach's eyes, which had been closed, snapped open. "Of course. Nobody's tighter with her than I am."

Nobody was taking his place in her heart!

"That's great. So, do you have any clue what she's into?" Nick had been racking his brain on the couch, thinking hard. It was his first time meeting his biological sister, who turned out to be quite empathetic. It felt wrong not to offer a gift.

Zach instantly replied, "She's all about hitting the books!"

Nick let out a puzzled "Ah," as it dawned on him, "A bookworm?"

"Yep. When she's not buried in a textbook, she's got nothing else going on. Didn't she come off as a total nerd when you met her today? She's not cute at all, right?" Zach said, keeping a straight face.

Nick pondered for a moment. Mira did seem to carry an air of academia, but... not cute? She seemed alright to him.

"Is there anything else she likes?" Nick probed further.

"That's it!" Zach asserted. After a pause, he remembered Mira's reluctance to accept cash gifts and slyly added, "Oh, and she loves getting cash gifts."

So, she was a bit of a money lover. Nick was taken aback but quickly responded, "Okay, got it. Thanks, Zach."

"Yeah, I'm going back to sleep. Don't bother me again." With that, Zach hung up. He tossed his phone on the nightstand, a mischievous smile playing on his lips. The irritation from being woken up had mysteriously vanished.

Still holding his phone, Nick sent a message to his assistant, instructing him to gather all the study materials for Mirabella's senior year of high school. The more, the merrier, as it was urgent.

After sending the message, he opened Messenger and started a chat with Mirabella. His finger hesitated over the digital cash gift option, then paused. A \$200 gift seemed a bit stingy.

After a moment's thought, he went for a direct transfer instead, sending a hefty \$9,999.

LIN: [A little something for our meeting.]

LIN: (Zach mentioned you like cash gifts.)

So when Mirabella, fresh from the shower and ready for bed, checked her phone, she was once again floored by the large sum.

Here we go again. This confirmed the family's odd habit of hefty transfers.

But when had she ever shown a preference for cash gifts? Mirabella's expression darkened. Zach was up to his tricks again.

The next day, a group from Prestige College, led by their teachers, arrived at the Olympic Center building.

Stepping out of the bus, the students looked up at the towering edifice before them, knowing that only the truly skilled and gifted were allowed to compete within its walls. The pressure was palpable even before they entered the arena.

Given the global nature of the event, with participants from over twenty countries, the area outside the building was already teeming with students from all around the world.

The clock hadn't struck the hour, so the grand entrance of the skyscraper remained closed momentarily.

The team's coach huddled the students together for a final briefing, his expression more grave than ever. This international competition wasn't just about personal prowess but about national honor on the global stage. As he reiterated the significance of the event, a palpable surge of determination swept through the group.

Mirabella glanced toward the Olympic emblem at the top of the building, her lips curling into a subconscious smile. If one looked closely, they'd see the spark of combativeness igniting in her eyes. She had tackled more cases of puzzling ailments than anyone else, and now it was time to reap the rewards of her hard work.

At 9 a.m. sharp, Eastern Time, over a hundred young scholars from around the globe filed into the examination hall in an orderly fashion. There were ten exam rooms in total and Mirabella was assigned to Room 10 alongside Vincent and three others. Their placement in the same room seemed odd at first.

Settling into her seat, Mirabella twirled her pen thoughtfully. According to the usual protocol, they shouldn't have all been in the same room. But soon enough, she overheard two international students conversing nearby, and the mystery unraveled. The assignments were based on the previous year's national rankings. Those who were at the bottom, or didn't make the cut at all, were lumped together in the last two rooms.

In other words, the countries represented in Rooms 9 and 10 hadn't made the leaderboard last time. If none had ranked before, then it hardly mattered if students from the same nation were grouped together. After all, they weren't expected to rank this time either.

Propping her chin on her hand, Mirabella thought, 'Is this a slight?' The flames of competition blazed even fiercer within her.

Before long, a proctor entered with the exam papers, his demeanor icy, as if none of the students were worth his notice.

Mirabella scanned the questions upon receiving her paper. As expected, the international level was at least twice as challenging as the domestic competition. She exhaled and began to write. She thrived on complex problems, much like diagnosing a difficult case – too easy, and it was hardly worth her time.

The exam spanned three grueling hours and was worth a total of two hundred points, with a high cutoff of one hundred sixty for advancement. Last year, nearly three hundred competitors whittled down to fewer than eighty finalists.

As the final bell sounded, the proctor sternly instructed everyone to drop their pens and exit. Not a second more was to be spared.

Exiting the exam room, Mirabella checked the signs and made a quick stop at the restroom

11:04

Ch 19

before descending the stairs.

The team awaited her, and she was the last to arrive. She approached with a measured pace, noting the crestfallen expressions around her. Even Vincent wore a shadow of gloom. She touched her nose, wondering, 'Did they botch it?'

"Mirabella," the coach's voice was raspy, his spirits clearly dampened. "Do you think... do you feel you stand a chance of making the finals?" He had already inquired about the others' performance. Although the results were not yet in, besides perhaps Vincent, the rest seemed to have little hope.

So, he didn't ask Mirabella for a score prediction but rather if she believed she had a shot at the final round.

Chapter 310

As the team coach finished speaking, the group's eyes instinctively sought Mirabella out. Among them, she was the powerhouse, the beacon of hope most likely to advance. Despite their collective defeat, they all yearned for her to level up and reclaim the glory that belonged to their nation.

At this juncture, it was no longer about individual wins or losses but about standing united in honor and disgrace.

Feeling a bit bemused under their intense gaze, Mirabella cleared her throat and puffed out her chest assertively. "Don't you worry, I'll win back that glory for us." Her voice resonated with brash confidence, starkly contrasting their prevailing mood of dejection.

Hearing this, Vincent's heart, which had been in a vice, suddenly eased. He knew Mirabella wouldn't be one of those who was eliminated.

The coach's dim expression seemed to flicker back to life at Mirabella's words. His lips quivered slightly before he asked in a low voice, "So, what score are you predicting for yourself this time?"

The coach had his mind set on a target of around one hundred seventy. The notion of a flawless score was too daring to entertain, especially in an international contest – a game that played on an entirely different field than national competitions.

Mirabella's eyebrows arched in a display of pride, "A perfect score of course!"

"Perfect... score?" The coach stammered.

"That's right!" Mirabella's confidence in today's challenges was unshakable. The freedom to approach problems creatively was a true thrill – anything less than a perfect score wouldn't do her justice.

The coach stared at Mirabella with a complex expression, feeling as if the exam she described was completely different from the one he had questioned the other students about.

Vincent silently observed the teacher and fellow teammates, now equally stunned into silence. The blow of defeat, it seemed, was no longer his to bear alone.

Thus, when the results were announced later that afternoon, and the coach saw Mirabella's perfect score and first-place rank, he was nearly thunderstruck, struggling to regain his

composure.

Out of over three hundred competitors, there was only one perfect score, and it was hers, a whole ten points ahead of the second-place contestant. This gap signified a prowess that went far beyond a mere ten-point difference. In such competitions, every five points marked a significant milestone. A ten-point lead meant that Mirabella's chances of securing first place in the finals were well over sixty percent.

In previous years, securing even a ranking in the finals was a challenge for them, let alone first

place.

The more the coach thought about it, the more his blood pressure seemed to skyrocket from excitement. After a few deep breaths to calm his racing heart, he pulled out his mobile phone and sent Mirabella's results back home.

The international competition's scores were not immediately accessible back home, and the teachers following the event eagerly awaited the outcome. When Mr. Hammond heard about Mirabella's triumph of achieving another preliminary round with a perfect score, his shock was on par with the coach's. He still remembered when he was chatting with Mirabella, he had mentioned that he wasn't seeking a medal. He said he would be contented with merely earning a place. Although the current scores were only for the preliminaries, would the final outcome be any different?

Moreover, he was in the middle of a meeting. The other teachers, noticing Mr. Hammond's stunned reaction to a phone call, were all curious about the news he had received.

Coming back to his senses, Mr. Hammond scanned the teachers gathered around the conference table, realizing his momentary lapse. He regained his composure, his face returning to its usual sternness as he said in an even tone, "Oh, that was a call from Prestige College."