

Unwanted Girl Spoiled by Billionaire – c 221-230

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ase, once Damon made sure everything had settled down, he called 960

Noelle out for a private tal

ate. Noelle tilted her head curiously. “What

Examinen? Just say in

the one who exposed her, yes—but Leia was the one who hurt done something unforg

(going to apologize.

of, roxy eberks and couldn’t help but recall that terrifying che When she’d been hurt

the first time he’d mier seen her like that. It had scared the hell out of him.

pur wound benter |

«?” The question came out of nowhere.

blinked in surprise, then realised he was talking about the

the bullet wound from that night. Her expression whened.

ght smile. That healed ages ago. Why bring it up now

But Damon looked pale

Lowering his gaze, he said quietly, almost like it pained him, “You have the right to kn

“What is it” Noelle asked, intrigued

truth... so I need to tell you someti

Damon hesitated for a beat, then said. “The assassin from that night it was Leia. She was the one who sent them after you

Damon continued. "You're okay now, but you were hurt. If you want to press charges, that's completely your right- won't stop you. But if n posible. I hope you'll consider letting her go

He knew how selfish that sounded.

Gorlle almost died that night

And now here he was, shamelessly asking her to spare the person who wanted her dead.

af the yelled at him or cursed him out, Damon would accept it.

Noelle crossed her arms and eyed him, amused by his inner conflict.

"Well, if you really want me to let Leia off the hook..." she said, tilting her head. "then I won't report it. Problem solved, right?"

Damon **blinked**. He hadift expected her to agree that easily.

"You're sure?" he asked, searching her face.

Totally" "Noelle nodded. "And here I was thinking you called me out to yell at me for ratting Eria out."

"What Why would I yell at you?" Damon looked half-exasperated, half-amused "Teu did worthing wrong. You went wrong to repose her

Noelle chuckled and covered her mouth. "A few months ago, I bet you would have yelled at me. You used to be sooo protective of Leia"

Damon dadn t deny it. "She's been like a sister to me for eighteen years. I raised her, basically You and I might be related by Mood: were strangers. Of course I protected her more."

Then the suddenly cupped her face and leaned in close to Damon, smiling mischievously "So what about now" Am I your sister yet!

Damon squatted, uncomfortable, and pushed her face away. "Donita

"Why not?" Noelle pouted. "Would you push Lea away if the got this close Houph. You're playing favorites"

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to people like th

shove ber of paranoid

Welldo And Impol you answer. Am your rood" be trued "ayor Tocking to you all day

ou are

annoying” Damon prased.

now” Norte wad sweetly, not budging

tingin. “If you weren’t by I

y roster, and anyone else acted like you. I swear I’d have already punched

Noelle beamed.

va yes! Demon finally ad

Damon sighed ‘Can you of me now

“Nope. I’m your sister Big brothers are supposed to be patient

“You are seriously unbearable”

Later that afmoon Damon returned from the police station.

Leia had been officially taken into custody. But her sentencing would depend partly on the Anderson family’s stance.

Since Adriel was on his way back, Damon decided they should wait and discuss it together as a family

be” Eli muttered “We’ll ulk once Adriel gets back”

Robbing has head, he trudged upstairs. Tve been up all night–I’m gonna crash for a bit before heading to see Dad”

Charlie and Noelle followed him upstairs **as** well

Norlie was planning to tell Damon everything once she was **back** in her room

After everyone else had gone **up**. Bennett—who hadn’t i mosed–looked over at Danson **with a** faint **smile**. “Not heading **up** to rest?”

“Yes” Bennett replied poly

Dumns expression turned serious. In

“I need to ask you something”

Bennett’s eyes flickered. He seemed **to** know exactly what Damon was getting at. But he just kept smiling pleasantly. “Of **course**. Let’s **talk** in the study”

The two of them entered the study and closed the door.

5:58 AM

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Damon didn't be

bother with small talk. He went straight in

"When Leis poisoned Dad, the power went **out**. The electrician said it was because the main breaker tripped. But there was no sign of a short circuit. So that leaves only one explanation—someone shut it off manually."

Bennett's expression didn't change.

He vinded and said smoothly, "And what exactly does that **have** to do with me?"

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Damon stared at Bennett, who still wore that calm, unbothered smile.

For some reason, that expression made Damon's temper flare.

His tone turned sharp. "If the power hadn't suddenly gone cut, Leia wouldn't have had such an easy

by time poisoning Dr. Maybe if she'd hesitated even for a second, the might've hacked off entirely

But Bennett just laughed lightly, voice calm and measured. "Damon, you're being naive Leia had already made up her mind to kill Dad. Whether the power went out or not, she would've found another way to do it"

"Oh, **really!**" Damon let out a cold **chuckle**, his meaning clear. "So that's why the power mysteriously cut our?"

Bennett raised an eyebrow, feigning confusion. "Why are we still on about the circuit breaker? Whers that got to do with me?"

Damon didn't respond immediately

1. ly. "What d

did it have to do with Hennett? Nothing...and yet, somehow, everything

When Damon had suspected something was off and tried to intervene, Bennett had stopped him.

That night. Bennett had deliberately distracted him, keeping him away from Leia. Then—blackout. Poisoning.

Now Damon couldn't help but wonder, Was Leia really acting alone? Or had someone pushed her down that path!"

"What exactly are you playing at, Bennett?" he asked, voice low,

Bennett had always been the most brilliant of the Anderson brothers.

Even though all five of them were considered exceptional by others, within the family, it was clear—Bennett was **on** a level of his own

And yet Damon had never quite been able to understand him

They were close, yes. But something about Bennett always felt... unreachable.

Bennett met his brother's sharp gaze with **a** smile, completely at ease. "I **have no idea** what you're talking about" he said lightly. "You thinking about switching to philosophy? Your questions **are** getting deeper and deeper."

Damon gave a bitter smile, "Maybe"

He knew there **was** no way Bennett would admit anything without concrete proof

Still, there was one thing he **couldn't** let go.

"What are you planning to do with Noelle?"

At that, Bennett raised an eyebrow **again**, amused. "Why the sudden question! What did I ever

"You cut her hand."

or do to

Noelle!"

Her healing ability was extraordinary. The **family** hadn't noticed yet,

and yet, but someone as

sharp as Bennett definitely had.

Damon didn't bother beating around the bush.

The others might not know, but he did—he knew Noelle's body wasn't normal,

Bennett had intentionally nicked her hand with a knife. And according to the staff, when Noelle **was** cleaning up, Bennett made sure to leave that knife behind—the one with her blood still on it.

It didn't take a genius to figure it out. He wanted to analyze her blood.

Was he planning to treat Noelle like some kind of lab rat

just the thought of it made Damon uneasy

was starting to fear Bennett in a **way** he never had before.

And after what had just happened with the poisoning, he was

Because Bennett, was cold. **So** cold it was terrifying.

If it served his purpose, he wouldn't **hesitate** to sacrifice even family.

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And now, with his eyes on Noelle, who knew what he might try next!

But Bennett kept smiling. I told you—it was an accident.”

Damon let out a short, scornful laugh. “Your A surgical genius! Making that kind of accident?”

Bennett didn't flinch. No matter how Damon pushed, he calmly stuck to his story.

Just as the tension between them was about to boil over, there was **a** knock at the door.

“Mr. Bennett, Mr. Damon—Adriel's b

hack”

At that, Bennett's smile deepened. “Adriel's home! Let's go greet him.”

Without waiting for a reply, he turned and walked out.

Damon followed, knowing full well he wasn't getting anything more out of him for now.

Downstairs, a tall, composed figure stood in the foyer. His presence alone commanded attention.

as Adriel—the eldest Anderson brother.

But this time, he hadn't come back alone.

Beside him stood a young woman, about Noelle's age. She clung to his sleeve like a child, hiding slightly behind him. Her big blue eyes darted nervously around the room. She looked timid, almost like a frightened rabbit.

Eli's gaze locked onto her instantly. “Yo, Adriel—who's that? Your girlfriend?”

Adriel answered calmly, “No.”

Then why's she glued to your **side** like th

that?”

Adriel paused for a beat. He looked down at the girl, then replied vaguely. “It’s complicated.”

Just then, *Noelle* approached, eyes locked on the girl **like a** hawk.

If looks could pierce, she’d have already burned a hole through her.

er with his body. His tone was cool as he told Noelle. “Don’t stare at her

Seeing this, Adriel instinctively stepped in front of the woman, shielding her **like** that. **She’s shy.**”

“Oh, Noelle muttered, backing off at his chilly tone.

But in her mind, she was **already** calculating

There was one month left.

Adriel was the only one she hadn’t won over yet.

And judging by his attitude... he wouldn’t be easy.

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Just then, the mad god hiding behind Adriel peeked en **again** Something about Noelle clearly caught her attention—her eyes lit up with excitement, and before anyone could rest, she ran straight toward her

“Elsae” Adriel was momentarily stunned. He instinctively reached out to stop her, but she had already grabbed Noelle’s hand, staring intently at her neck with eyes sparkling, mumbling a string of soft, incoherent words—“Terriya_reya.”

“Thor” Adriel was momentarily stunned. He instinctively reached out to stop her, but she had already grabbed Noelle’s hand, staring intently at her neck with eyes sparkling, mumbling a string of soft, incoherent words—“Terriya_reya.”

And judging by the equally baffled expressions on the rest of the Andersons’ faces, she wasn’t the only one confused.

Everyone turned to Adriel, waiting for an explanation. Aliel’s gaze stayed on Elsie for a moment before he finally **said** Elsie suffered a head injury. She’s lost her memory, and along with it, her ability to speak normally”

“Ah, no wonder.” Ei let out **a breath**. For a second there, I thought we were dealing with alien language?

He then looked at the two girls **and** asked, puzzled, “That why **is** she clinging to Noelle like that?”

Adriel was wondering the **same**. **He’d** found Elsie during a business trip abroad, covered in blood.

At first it had looked horrifying.

1. g. but most of the blood had been hers—only a wound on her head was her own.

After waking up, she'd clung to him and him alone, crying in panic whenever anyone else got close.

Even now, though she was more stable, she remained fearful of strangers and refused to **leave** Adriel's side—until now.

The moment she saw Noelle, she had run straight to her without hesitation, as if drawn by something she didn't understand herself.

Before anyone could process what was happening, Elsie smiled and suddenly threw her arms around Noelle in a tight hug, softly murmuring incomprehensible sounds with visible joy. Everyone stared at the scene in stunned silence.

Noelle, trying her best to interpret the odd behavior, said awkwardly, "1... **think** she's happy?"

Eli gave a sheepish smile "Well, judging by that hug, she definitely likes you."

Bennett remained quiet, his gaze lingering on Noelle thoughtfully.

For someone as skittish as Elsie to be so openly affectionate, there had to be something unusual about Noelle—and perhaps something familiar.

Watching the scene unfold, he found himself wondering what **kind** of person Noelle really **was**, and why she always seemed to attract the unexpected.

But Noelle herself was still in shock. She never imagined her first real face-to-face meeting with Adriel would unfold like this

Her eyes flicked to Elsie, mind racing. This girl **was** clearly important to Adriel

And if she wanted to get close to him, maybe the key was through **Elsie**.

After all, the girl seemed to like her a lot already.

Still, there was something else—an odd, creeping **sense** of familiarity. Noelle couldn't quite place it at first, but then, like a light switching **on**, it hit her: Stanley

1. y. That qu

quiet, almost unearthly vibe.

This girl gave off the same energy **as Stanley**.

Noelle's heart tightened. She quickly pulled back to look at Elsie again.

There was no matching necklace—but on her ears were earrings eerily similar to the ones Stanley wore.

She's like me, Noelle thought. Another transformer. But why can't she speak? And what is she doing here? Was she sent for a mission too? With seconds dozens of **questions** flooded her mind. Then, without thinking, she tightened her grip on Elsie's hand and whispered, "Come with

Elur blinked in confusion. but Noelles tone **was** serious. Before

re anyone could stop them, she turned and bolted toward the front door, dragging Elsie behind her. As they ran, she **tossed** a quick shout over her shoulder. "Adriel! I'm just having a girl talk with Elsie—don't follow **us**

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Then the two disappeared out the door, leaving everyone behind in **a daze**,

"Did she just...wither over that fast?" Eli muttered in disbelief.

Damon, watching from the stairs, couldn't hold it in. "Can someone please explain what just happened?"

Bennett, on the other hand, looked thoroughly entertained. A lazy smile flicked at the corners of his lips as he watched the doorway where the g

the girls had vanished. "Tamon," he said with deliberate casualness, "don't you think that girl Adriel brought back... looks a lot like Noelle?"

Damon frowned. "Looks like her! How?"

Bennett simply chuckled, offering no explanation. His smile remained, but beneath his lashes, his eyes turned darker and more contemplative. Damon shivered. He'd grown wary of Bennett lately. Whenever that man smiled like this, something dangerous always followed.

He glanced again between where the girls had disappeared and the expression on Bennett's face. He couldn't shake the feeling something was off.

What if Elsie wasn't just some girl Adriel **saved** by chance

For a long time. Damon had suspected Noelle came from **some** sort of secret organization. Now, watching Elvir's instinctive bond with her, he had a sinking feeling they were from **the** same place.

That would explain the instant trust, even with no memory.

But then why had someone like Elsie ended up with Adriel

And if they were both from the same mysterious background, what was the real reason behind this sudden reunion?

Something

didn't add up. And **Damon** was sure of one thing—this was only the beginning.

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illa. Noelle dragged Elie away until she was sure no one was around. Then she stopped, turned around, and

Without any hesitation, she launched into a barrage of questi

luared

straight at her, eyes

“Are you a transformer toot Why are you here! Wisch lab are you from? What's your mission?”

Elsie blinked her big blue eyes in confusion, tilting her head like a curious puppy. She didn't seem to understand a word Noelle was saying.

Noelle frowned and gave her a light pat on the head, already annoyed. “Why do you look so clueless! Did you really hit your head that hard! Can your communicator still function! Can you contact anyone from your lab?”

Elvir thud her head again, still uncomprehending

The more Noelle observed her, the more she felt that this girl was seriously out of it. She's really just dumb, she fought to herself, **half** exasperated

Since

there was no way to get information out of Elsie directly. Noelle decided to check her communicator

She reached up without **asking** and touched the girl's earring, checking to see if it was still functional.

Under normal circumstances, the lab would never leave a malfunctioning subject unmonitored.

But when she pressed the back of the earring, there was no **signal**. No response.

“Hello? Anyone there! Can anyone hear me?” she called softly, Silence. Nothing.

“Maybe the earring's broken too,” Noelle muttered, frustrated.

Unable to get anything useful, she decided to contact Brandon instead. “Come with me,” she said, pulling Elsie along toward the pavilion in the garden. There, she reached beneath her collar and retrieved her necklace, activating the embedded communicator

Within moments, Brandon’s familiar, warm voice **came** through. “Noelle, what’s up!”

“Brandon,” she greeted quickly

Hearing his voice, Elur suddenly **leaned** in,

i, her eyes glued t

Noelle quickly smacked her hand away.

Elsie gave a quiet sound of acknowledgment. Though she didn’t try to touch the **necklace** again, her gaze lingered on

Brandon, having heard some of the noise, asked, “Noelle, **who’s** with **you?**”

glued to the necklace. She reached for it, but Not

it with even more curiosity.

Noelle didn’t hide it. “It’s like this, Brandon. My brother Adriel came back today, and he brought **a** girl with him—someone like me, from **a** lab. But something’s wrong with her. She’s got memory issues and can’t speak properly. I was hoping you could help me figure out which lab she’s from, and maybe reach out to them”,,

There was a brief pause before Brandon’s one grew noticeably more serious. “What kind of **communicator** is she wearing! Necklace or earrings

“Larring,” Noelle replied.

“Check the serial number on the **back**. Does it start with a ‘D’ or an ‘57’”

Noelle did as instructed. “It was

Brandon’s answer came without hesitation.

“She’s In

‘s from the **Serpaton**–Morria Alliance Laboratory”

Noelle nodded slowly, then added, “Brandon, her brain’s messed up right now—she **can’t talk at all**. Her communicator’s probably broken. Can you help her? Or contact someone from her lab

Brandon’s tone turned cold. “That’s not my responsibility. Sure, she’s a transformer like you, but the three regional labs are competitors. I have no prastis to help a rival Libi’s subject. If she’s lost her **memory**, the best thing is to dispose of her quickly”

“What dispose of her? Noelle was shocked.

But Brandon’s voice softened again, with a teasing smile. “What’s wrong? You getting attached already? Didn’t Adriel just bring her back? You can’t possibly be this sentimental

Noelle hesitated, then spoke her thoughts aloud. “Brandon, I can tell Adriel really cares about her. And since I’m still working on winning **over** the rest of my family, he’s the last one I haven’t gotten close to yet. I was thinking, maybe I can use Elsie in build **a** connection with him

Brandon thuckled. “So that’s your plan, huh? Alright. If you want to keep her around for now, fine. But listen to me—if she ever becomes a threat. you deal with her immediately”

Noelle grinned, her tone sweet Thanks, Brandon.”

Brandon laughed lightly at her cheerful voice. “Everything on my end’s almost wrapped up. Give me another week, and I’ll come visit you like to see this girl for myself.”

“Really You’ll be here in a week?” Noelle’s eyes lit ups. She smiled so brightly it showed in her voice. I can’t wait to see you, Brandon. It’s been way too long

He laughed again. “Then you better look forward to it

“will” she replied with a happy hum.

Thave things to **take** care of now, so 171 talk to you later”

“Okay, bye, Brandon”

Goodbye, Noelle

Once the call ended, Noelle carefully tucked the necklace back into her shirt. She noticed Elsie was still staring at her chest, so she reached out and grabbed the girl’s hands, swinging them gently with a teasing smile. “Elsie, I think Adriel really likes you.”

Elsie blinked, **confused**, then tilted her head again, making Noelle laugh.

She’d made up her mind. She was going to befriend Elsie—and use her to win Adriel over.

Smiling warmly, she said. “Let’s **get along from** now on, **okay?**”

Elsie didn’t seem to fully understand, but **she** smiled back **and nodded**. “Mhm”

At the **Atoraka**–Nowedon Laboratory, Reid **had** just finished reporting on his current assignments. “That’s everything for now. If there’s nothing cle, I’ll **take** my leave.”

But just as he turned to go, Brandon called him back. “**Wait.**”

“Yes?” Reid stopped and **turned around**.

Brandon's expression was calm, but his voice carried weight. "Look into Adriel. There's a transformer with him—one from the Serpaton–Mocita Alliance Lab She's with the Anderson family now. I suspect Serpaton's up to something. Investigate.

"Serpaton–Morria Reid's expression turned **serious**. "Understood"

Two hours later, Reid returned, urgency written all over him

Brandon looked up at the file in his hands. "You found something?"

"Yes," Reid replied, face grim. He handed over the documents. "Adriel's been overseas on business. A month ago, there was a massive explosion in the area he was stationed. The girl he brought back—the transformer—was the only one rescued from that blast."

"The official report blamed it on a flammable gas **leak**, **but several** of the bodies pulled **from** the wreckage were clearly **transformer** subjects. Some of them were even from our own lab."

"That incident was quickly buried, but we took a closer look once we realized we'd lost some of our own. We reviewed the emergency signals that were sent out during the explosion. All of them had one thing in edimmon"

Brandon's

is gaze surprised. "What did they **say**?

Rejil hesitated, his face **pale**. "They **all said** the same thing—Help me. There's a monster. A monster is here"

Brandon's expression darkened noticeably at those words. His **striking** eyes turned murky, unreadable, as if weighing a hundred things at once.

After a moment, his voice lowered. "Has the Serpaton–Morta Alliance Laboratory made

any major me

moves lately?"

Reid thought for a moment, then answered. "They've always been flashy with **their** announcements. Just recently, they claimed they'd cultivated the most perfect transformer in history. But it's mostly noise, Statistically, their subjects don't come close to the average performance in our zone. And besides, Noelle is already in the final testing phase. Once she clears it, she'll be the most flawless transformer ever developed. Im confident none of the other labs have anyone who could rival her?

Brandon didn't respond right away. He stayed silent for a long while before asking **again**, more pointedly, "How much information about Noelle have **we** leaked to the other labs?"

"None" Reid replied instantly. "Noelle is our top

top-priority subject. We've never disclosed anything publicly—not even her classification level. The whole point is to keep her existence under wraps, so the other talis can't target her

“Good: Brandon said mildly

Reid hadn't expected praise and was so surprised he stammered slightly. “Th—thank you, sir. Just doing what's expected”

But stay **vigilant**, Brandon added.

“Yes, of course Reid straightened up, his tone returning to seriousness,

He circled **back** to the main concern. The transformer with Adriel—the girl—was found **near** the **blast** site. Our biggest fear is that the distress signal shouting “monster might ve come from her.”

“It almost certainly was, Brandon said flatly.

Reid tensed. “So what do we do? Eliminate her preemptively? Serpaton's been bragging about their perfect transformer, and now this so-called monster shows up. For all we know, they're the same person. Maybe this is their **plan**—to plant her near Noelle, observe her **up** close. If she poses even the **slightest** threat to Noelle, everything we've worked for could go to **waste**”

Reid's nerves were high, but surprisingly, Brandon now looked more relaxed. Propping his chin in one hand, he gave Reid a faint, amused smile. “Didn't you just say Noelle was better than anything Serpaton could create?”

“Uh—yes” Reid said, caught off **guard**. “That's true...”

Brandon's eyes gleamed, **a** sign he had made up his mind. He smiled lazily and said, “Then let her stay close to Noelle. In fact, I'm a little curious. If. Noelle and this ‘monster‘ ever went head-to-head who would come out on top?”

Reid stared at him, alarmed. “Is that really okay? Noelle is our **most valuable** asset. If she's harmed, we're throwing **away** over a **decade** of work”

“She'll be fine. I'll be watching closely,” Brandon said calmly,

Reid still didn't fully understand what Brandon **was** planning.

But Brandon gave him a pleasant smile and said, “Tim going to visit

“What?” Reid almost choked. “**You're going to** see Noelle! **Seriously?**”

Noelle **in** a week. While I'm **away**, you'll manage things here?

Brandon replied casually, “What else? Tin trusting you to run the lali while I'm gone. Don't let me down.”

His words were friendly, but the smile on his face carried weight—a silent warning. “Mess this up, **and** I’ll **make** you regret it.”

Reid stiffened, suddenly pale. “Yes, sir. I won’t let you down”

When it **came** to Leua, Noelle had **expected** Adriel **to at** least **speak** a few words in her defense out of sibling loyalty. But when the family brought up how to handle her sentencing, Adriel’s reply was cool and detached.

“Of **course** she should be **dealt** with according to the law. Let the courts **do** their job. The Anderson family **isn’t** wronged Leia. The fact that we’re not publicly condemning her **is** already more than she deserves.”

“Great, Bennett said with a small smile. “I’ll **speak** with the lawyer later. From here on out, we’ll let the legal team handle the rest.”

Adriel nodded, the picture of calm professionalism. “Now **that this scandal’s** out, we need to control the narrative. Keep the staff quiet. Talk to the

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police. For the public record, say Leia fell ill and has gone abroad for treatment”

“Understood” Bennen replied.

Adriel turned to Damon “Any objectione

He knew Damon had always been the one most inclined to defend Leis. The others might show leniency out of old family ties, but they

understood wrong was wrong

Damon, however, had always protected her blindly. If this incident hadn’t involved their father, he might have even helped cover it up.

Damon pressed his **lips** into a thin line, **his** gaze flicking subtly toward Noelle

She promised not to expose Leia for hiring a lutman. If she’s willing to keep that quiet, what right do I have to ask the family to go easy on Leia? If speak up now, what will Noelle think of me?

Not to mention, their father **was** still lying in a hospital bed. Damon had no right to interfere

After a long moment of inner conflict, he lowered his head and said quietly. “No objections. Let the court handle

“Good” Adriel concluded. “Then we’ll let the legal process run its course. I **heard** Dad’s awake—I’ll go see him now

He stood.

1. d. but his eyes flicked toward Noelle—not at her directly, but at Elsie, who was currently clinging to Noelle like a little shadow

Since she'd met Noelle. Elsie **had** refused to leave her **side**. Wherever Noelle went, she followed like a tail. It was as if she had completely imprinted on her.

Adriel, now technically i

free of Elsie's com

's constant presence, found himself **oddly**... unsettled. He hesitated briefly before shaking off the feeling.

Then looking at the two of them, he asked, "**Elsie**, are you planning to **stick** to Noelle from now on?"

When Adriel asked the ques

- question. Elsie lifted her head and looked at him. Her bright, sky-blue eyes blinked with innocent confusion.

"I'm braiding our for a bit." Adriel continued, "do you want to come with me to the hospital, or stay here with Noelle

Elsie hesitated and slowly rose to her feet. Though she'd grown deeply attached to Noelle, it was clear she still didn't want to for too far from Adriel either. Seeing her struggle to decide, Adriel's lips curved into a faint, satisfied smile. So she's not completely heartless after all.

He extended a hand toward her. "Come with me, then"

Elie looked at the hand he offered, seemingly about to take it. But then she glanced at Noelle, a clear reluctance in her eye her hand still rightly gripping Noelle's arm. Torn between the two, she looked utterly conflicted.

Just as the situation reached a silent standoff, Noelle unexpectedly stepped in to defuse it with perfect timing and a last of social finesse.

"I'd like to visit Dad too," she said sweetly, standing up. "I'll come with you, Adriel"

Elie visibly brightened. Her entire face lit up **as** she clung tighter to Noelle's arm and turned a hopeful gaze toward him. Noelle smiled at him too wide-eyed and expectant, mirroring the same look. Adriel glanced between them—the two identical expressions staring him down.

He sighed, helpless. "Alright, let's go."

Noelle beamed. "**Yay!**"

“Ee-ya” Ehie chimed in joyfully.

Noelle looked at her and couldn’t help thinking that Elsie was her lucky charm, Just moments ago, she hadn’t the faintest clue how to bridge the distance between her and Adriel. Now, with Elsie stuck to her like glue, getting close to him was suddenly **as** easy as breathing

At this rate, I’ll finish the mission in no time: Giddy, she threw her arms around Elsie and bounced happily. “Elsie, you’re the best!”

Elsie didn’t understand the words, but she understood the hug and returned it, just as cheerful,

Watching the two of them wrapped around each other, the rest of the Andersons had varied reactions

Elsie’s face twitched. “I swear, it’s like watching two overgrown toddlers.”

Even the usually stoic Charlie muttered, “Agreed”

Bennett chuckled, eyes narrowing with amusement. They really are something”

Damon scanned the two girls and nodded. “I’ll allow it”

In the car. Noelle and Elsie sat on either side of Adriel in the backseat Elsie, perfectly **content**, had one arm wrapped around Noelle and the other linked with Adriel’s. She wore a soft, satisfied smile **that** made her look like she’d found her **place** in the world.

Adriel glanced down at her, and for once, the cool rationality in his eyes gave way to something warmer—in almost indulgent fondness. Noelle

Seeing an opportunity, she decided to strike up a conversation

“Adriel” she asked, **smiling** innocently, “where did you meet Elsie?”

He looked at her briefly, expression unreadable. Truth be told, his feelings toward Noelle were complicated. He’d never considered **himself** a good brother. To him, family honor had always come before blood ties.

When he first learned of Noelle’s existence, he’d investigated her background and found nothing impressive—she’d dropped out of middle school and spent years drifting **aimlessly**. Frankly, Adriel had been disappointed.

She didn’t fit the mold of an Anderson In fact, he’d even wished she’d never shown up, that Leia had remained the only sister.

Li was cold, even cruel—but it had been the truth.

And yet, in just a few months, the family dynamic had flipped on its head. Noelle, once unwelcome and overlooked, had integrated seamlessly into their world Leia, once beloved, had been exposed as

someone capable of poisoning the father who raised her. The perfect lule sister had turned out to be venomous, while the mister had proven strong, loyal, and even admirable.

Chapter 296

Now Adriel alidn't know how to treat Noelle. He couldn't just change **his** attitude overnight—he wasn't someone who faked warmth for **appearances**. But unexpectedly. Noelle was the ne who had the first step. She smiled at him, asked questions, offered **him** a way in.

Adriel was a businesanan

dharp, adaptable. Since Noelle had given him the opportunity, he saw no reason to keep his distance.

“She was in an alley near

i heimic all plant when it exploded,” he said calmly. “I found her there

(1, 1 see” Noelle nodded. “And you’ve been together ever si

ver since!”

Living together toad“.

Eating together?”

She gave him a **look**. “Sleeping together too?”

“Yes” Adriel answered automatically, then froze. His eyes narrowed **as** ise turned sharply to Noelle, who was staring at him with mock surprise **and**

“Wow,” she **said**, pretending to be shocked. “That’s fast”

She thought of how long she’d been with **Nick**, **and** they’d harely shared a bed. **Meanwhile**, **Adriel** and Elsic had reached that milestone in no time.

Adriel pinched the bridge of his nose, irritated. Can’t believe I walked right into that.

“Don’t repeat that to anyone,” he said wearily.

“Why not” Noelle asked innocently.

“It could give people the wrong impression about Elsie”

“Why would it!” Noelle blinked. “Unless... you don’t plan to **take** responsibility? **Are you a** heartless **playboy**, Adriel”

“Tm not” he said firmly, though he couldn’t quite figure out how this conversation had spiraled into a public interrogation

But Else was also looking up at him now, curious and wide-eyed, so he had no choice but to clarify. “I will take responsibility. But she’s lost her memory. She’s mentally not quite **stable**. I don’t know if, once she recovers, she’ll still want to be with me?”

That question struck a nerve. Adriel’s gaze lowered toward the girl leaning on him, There was a flicker of something bitter in his expression..

“If she doesn’t,” he said quietly, “then of course I’ll let her go”

Noelle made a face. Then **why** sleep with her in the first place! That’s **taking** advantage of her! I read in a book—that’s called being a creep.”

Adriel’s temple twitched

He wasn’t a saint, but when it came to Else, he had never crossed any lines. “We may have shared a bed, but I’ve never touched her inappropriately.” he said with strained patience. She refused to sleep alone. Even when I set up a room for her, she’d end up **sneaking** into my bed by morning. After trying to correct it a few times. I gave up. But I’ve never done anything to her.”

“**Oh** Norli nodded **as if understanding**, then leaned in with a mischievous look **and whispered**, “So... you’re just not capable.

Adriel nearly choked

He clenched his fists, trying very hard not to lose it. He was this close to telling her off—but what was the point!

-This girl was impenetrable.

Chapter 227

Noelle quickly realized she might have gone too far. Ever since she teased Adriel about being “norrspalte” he’d refused to talk every attempt she made to engage him. His face remained dark, and the silent treatment lasted all the way to the hospital

When they reached Vincent’s hospital room, Adriel knocked lightly on the door and stepped

Kimberly **was** at Vincent’s bedside, feeding him porridge as he sat up, pale and

“Dad, Mom” Adriel greeted as he walked in

visibly weakened

Noelle followed close behind, chirping sweetly, “**Dad**, Maan! We came to **see** you?”

Kimberly turned at the sound of their voices and smiled warmly. “Adriel, Noelle—you’re here?”

Her gaze then shifted to the girl clinging to Noelle’s arm and peeking around cautiously. A hint of hesitation flicker

Trexpession. “And this

Noticing her mother’s curiosity. Noelle gently pulled Elsie **forward** and smiled. “Mom, this is Elsie, Adriel brought her henne wali ban”

Elur gave Kimberly a shy glance before darting behind Noelle again, perking out just enough to watch both Kimberly and Vincent with guanded Curiosity

“Ah... 1 are.

Kimberly nodded slowly, ryeing the girl again. Maybe I’m just exhausted, she thought. ‘Bot... Is it just me, or does this girl’sermi ja

Turning back to Adriel, she asked, “Adriel, this girl is

But before she could finish, Adriel cut her off with

with a calm, “Til explain everything about Elsie later, Mom”

He shifted his attention to Vincent, concern evident in his eyes. “Dad, how are you feelingt Still uncomfortalale? Where’s your medical reporti

take a look later.”

Vincent had visibly aged in just a few days. His face was pale and drawn, and though he managed a faint smile, his voice was weak “Aside from feeling a little drained, I’m alright. The report’s in the drawer–go alicad and read it“.

“Alright,” Adriel replied, taking a seat beside his father. He reached out and gently held Vincent’s cold hand. “You’ve suffered a for this time, Dad”

Vincent gave him a tired smile and shook his head.

Adriel continued, “Leia has been taken into custody. The court will handle everything from here. Is there anything you’d like us to tell the lawyer

At the mention of Leia, Vincent’s expression darkened. A shadow passed over his eyes as he sank into silence. He had never imagined that the daughter he’d raised for eighteen years would actually try to poison him. And all because she believed the Anderson family had somehow wronged

ain in his chest still surged every time her name came up

her name again?

It wasn’t just betrayal–it was heartbreak. The poin

Closing his eyes, Vincent said flatly, “Leave everything about

you.

I don't want to hear

"Understood" Adriel replied.

Noelle stepped forward then, utting on the other side of the land and taking Vincent's other hand in hers. "Dad, you have to get well **soon**. I've prepared some herbal remedies to help you recover I had the hospital check them first—they're all safe and approved"

Hearing that, Vincent turned to look at her. Seeing how gentle and thoughtful she was, he couldn't help but feel a rush of emotion. In the was his biological daughter who proved to be the most caring

Worried she might think he didn't trust her, he quickly said, "Noelle. I know you mean well. Even if you hadn't shown the hospital, I still trust your judgment"

al before they could administer anything:

Noelle angled brightly. "I know you i

you trust me, Dad. For hospitals have protocols. I had to get approval before they a

Vincent indeed, eyes warm despite his fatigue. He reached out and gently

ly ruffled her hair

Elur watched the exchange with wide eyes, curious. She almost hoped to understand why Noelle was being so affectionate with someone who clearly

wasn't the same as them

Vincent's expression shifted as he brushed her soft, straight hair. His gaze landed on Elsie again, and he turned to Adriel "Nucle said hair is the

1/2

Chapter 227

you bright bank with you

Adriel sightened at the question, nodding with calm formality "Yes. Did I meet her overseas and brought her home?"

Vincent looked at him for a long moment, expression unreadable

Among his sons, Adriel's favorite was the one he trusted most. He was steady, rational, and always prioritized the family name. Vincent had always expected Adriel to take over the Anderson legacy. And with that expectation came restrictions Adriel had never brought home a girlfriend, had never once

But now, he had not only brought a girl back, but also brought her here—to Vincent’s hospital room, on a day like this..

Vincent understood what that in

Sall, he didn’t object. Not imeshately, lostead, he asked carefully, “Adriel.. you know what you’re doing, don’t you?”

“Yes” Adriel nodded without hesitation. “I understand the

or implications. Nat I take full responsibility. I will not only protect this family’s legacy–1- will make sure it thrives“.

Elsie’s background was unknown, and by high–society standards, she was completely unfit for a political marriage. If Adriel chose her, he would face resistance. Without the advantages of a strategic union, he’ll have to **work** twice as hard to prove himself

But he had no regrets.

Even if his father **disagreed**, Adriel had already made up his mind.

Vincent saw that clearly in his son’s eyes. He sighed deeply, but instead of reprimanding him, he simply said, “After everything that’s happened..... I’ve come to realize parents shouldn’t always assume they know what’s best. What we believe is right might not feel that way to **our** children.”

He thought of Iria He’d believed he treated her fairly-maybe a bit strict, maybe a little **distant**–but he’d never imagined she’d resent him so much she’d try to kill him. That one mistake had nearly destroyed the family.

And Vincent wasn’t sure he could survive another betrayal.

“Dad!” Adriel looked up, hopeful.

Vincent gave him a small, peaceful smile. “If she’s who you **want**, that’s enough. You boys have turned out better **than** I could have hoped. Whether the **Anderson** family grows or not–it’s not what matters to me anymore. As long as you’re all happy, that’s enough.”

“Thank you. **Dad**,” Adriel had expected a fight. Knowing his father’s traditional mindset, he had prepared himself for a tough conversation. But he hadn’t anticipated such easy acceptance.

Gearly. Leia’s betrayal had shaken Vincent to his cure, enough to change his worldview.

Sull, Adriel wouldn’t let his father down. “Don’t worry. Dad. I’ll **take** the Anderson family to even greater heights.”

“Good“**Vincent** smiled, nodding

The his gaze returned to Elsie. “So, your

your name's Elsie. What's your full name?"

Elsie blinked, eyes confused.

Vincent noticed the hesitation and grew puzzled himself. "Elsie?"

She blinked **again**, then murmured, "Ee.. ya.."

Hearing the odd sounds from her lips, a chill crept into Vincent's heart. A sudden, unsettling thought took root.

H

adriel_

ht back

Chapter 228

When Vincent asked, Adriel didn't hesitate to answer. He glanced down at Flir by his side, ruffled her hair, and gave a rueful smile as for confessor to his father, "Yes, Elsie suffered brain damage. She's mentally impaired now and can't speak".

Kimberly, who had noticed something was off with Lir once she walked in, sigh in realization. "I thought something was wrong with her. Guess I wasn't mistaken"

Vincent fell silent. He had come to terms with thi

that

had mental impairments What was supposed to

that as long as his children were happy, even without a marriage

But this... he hadn't expected it. Not only was Elsie not from a prestigious family,

He had just mentioned that he supported his children & children, but he couldn't flip his stoner immediately.

After a long pause, Vincent reluctantly asked. "Adriel, is there any chance she can be treated?"

Adriel **shook** his head, "Elsie resists going to the hospital, so she hasn't been checked by a doctor"

Vincent's expression shifted. "Not getting her checked isn't an option! What if we miss the best opportunity for treatment

Before he could say more. Elsie suddenly bared her teeth and let out some unintelligible sounds, clearly irritated.

What Vincent recoiled in surprise.

Adriel quickly placed his hand on Elsie's head, **as** if scolding her. "Elsie, be good. No showing your teeth. Be polite, alright?"

Elsie still wasn't happy. She shook her head and tried to dodge Adriel's hand, but he kept his grip firm, his tone growing sterner, "Elsie, are you going to be naughty now?"

Feeling the **change** in Adriel's tone, Elsie quieted down, lugging Noelle's **arm** and burying her head in her back, looking as though she felt wronged.

Noelle, understanding that Elsie, a "transformer, was instinctively reluctant to disclose anything about her body, especially to doctors or gently patted her head. Don't worry. Elir. We won't make you go for an exam. He good."

Elsie **leaned** into Noelle's comfort, rubbing against her affectionately, then softly responded. "Ee-ee.

hospitals

Vincent and Kimberly, seeing how much Elsie clung to Noelle, were surprised. Kimberly couldn't help asking, "Adriel, did Noelle and Elie **know** each other before?"

"That's a question for Noelle, right?" Adriel replied, curious as to why Elsie seemed so attached to Noelle.

Noelle, sensing everyone's eyes on her, quickly smiled **and** explained, "I hadn't **met** Elsie before. But it's like we clicked immediately. We just had a special connection when we saw each **other**."

"Really?" Kimberly smiled, "**A good connection is great**. Many sisters-in-law and younger **listers** don't get along, but you two seem to get along so

well. Adriel can rest easy,"

Noelle nodded, pleased that Kimberly wasn't suspicious.

Vincent, **smiling**, added, "I think these two girls do get along. They seem very much alike—both s....innocent and carefree.

"You mean they both look silly?" Kimberly teased her husband.

Elie seemed to agree, nodding in approval, "Mi-limm."

Noelle turned to Adriel, **asking**. "Adriel, do we really look silly!"

Elsie might be silly, but Noelle definitely didn't want to admit it. She hadn't lost her mind, after all,

Elvie also believed she **wasn't** silly—she was quite clever, and Noelle was the one who looked i

Adriel, seeing the two Noelles stare at him, smiled, thinking they both had the same look of innocence. "Alright, you two... you both look like you're one step away from causing trouble."

"No response, Adriel?" Noelle **asked**, a little impatient.

Adriel, blinking, had **no** idea how to respond. If he called them silly, they would definitely protest. If he said they weren't, well, that would also lead

Chapter 228

In the end, he sighed deeply and said. "I refuse to answer the operation

Norite stared at him for a while before nodding. "Alright, boy,

Dur, however, wasn't satisfied, still glaring at Adriel's shirt and making rude remarks.

Then, "Adriel gave her a warning

Noelle, seeing the

situation, gently held his hand and said. "Thief, please don't bother Adriel

She glanced back at Noelle, who smiled reassuringly

Adriel, seeing Noelle act as the peacemaker was secretly relieved. It seemed like Noelle wasn't as naive as he'd thought

"You know," Noelle said thoughtfully, "Adriel is a good son. Even if he knows we're not silly, he can't go against his parents' wishes

She seemed to understand, and finally stopped pestering Adriel. She even handed him a light slap

Noelle smiled proudly at Adriel, giving him a thumbs up. It was clear to her now she was good at

Adriel, a bit stunned, thought, What does she know!

Later, back at the Anderson family home, Elsie naturally

was sleeping with Noelle.

"No worries. Let Elsie sleep with me," Noelle said, not minding at all.

Adriel sighed and said. "I won't let **you** do it for nothing. If you want a reward, just ask"

Noelle grinned. "Adriel, why so formal? We're siblings. I'm just sleeping with my future sister-in-law. No reward necessary. But if you want to tell me, just get me some water"

Adriel looked at her radiant smile, feeling a flutter in his chest. He realized, while he'd always been close to Leia, there was something completely different about Noelle. She had no boundaries, no hesitation.

"You're not actually a sister-in-law yet, Adriel corrected with a smile.

"No, but it's just a matter of time," Noelle replied, playfully.

Adriel smiled. "Alright, let's get ahead of ourselves"

fully said, "Elsie, you sleep here. I'll sleep on the other side. If you need anything just ask.

After **washing** up. Noelle jumped onto the bed and cheerfully i

Don't be shy, though I may not understand everything"

Elsie climbed onto the bed too, lying obediently on her side as Noelle had suggested.

Noelle watched Elsie's calm demeanor and felt an overwhelming sense of joy. Despite Brandon's words about Khie not bring a typical "transformer, Noelle considered her a companion. Now, being able to live in harmony with her made Noelle feel truly happy

As she turned off the light and **lay** in bed, Noelle whispered, "Elsie, goodnight"

Elsie responded, "Er-re, ya-ya"

"Is that your way of saying goodnight?"

"Ya-ya"

"Got it Goodlinghai, Dhie"

"Ya-ya"

In the middle of the night, **as** the two girls slept quietly, the car **sind** Eir had thought was broken suddenly flickered with a blue light

At the same moment. Els who was supposed to be - fast asleep, opened her eyes

hapter 229

Noelle was still sound asleep.

Elsie Lay beside her, wide awake, eyes open and fixed on the ceiling. In the faint silver of the moonlight, her

usually innocent, sky-blue eyes gleamed with a distant, glacial sharpness-gone was the doe-eyed confusions, replaced by something cold, mimb, and deadly, like someone who had seen too much bloodshed.

Without a sound, she slowly pushed herself up, then turned to glance at the sleeping Noelle. There was no warmth in her gaze n attachment-only a chill that pierced the air like frostbite.

no trace of

As if confirming **a target**. Elsie shifted her weight, inching closer to Noelle with movements so careful even her breath was fighly controlled. Finally, she straddled Noelle's body-not touching, not yet-just hovering there, face-to-fare, the distance between the barely a breath.

Her hand lifted slowly, fingers straight, palm curved inward-a textbook knifeisand strike. Lethal Precise,

The moment Elsie's hand began its descent, something deep in Noelle's instincts jolted her awake.

Her eyes flew open, immediately locking onto the dark silhouette above her. "Elsie!" she gasped, her **voice sh**

sharp in the silence

Her body froze mid-strike, and **within** a second, the murderous intent in her gaze vanished. Her eyes fluttered shur, and she collapsed, limp, falling

rectly on top of Noelle, completely motionless.

Noelle blinked, stunned. What the hell just happened?

Why was Elsie on top of her? And why had she suddenly collapsed the second her name was called? Was she faking it Sleepwalking' Or... something else?

The intent to kill-Noelle had felt **it as** clearly **as if** a blade **had** been pressed to her throat. But it had lasted only seconds, then **dissipated as** if it had never existed

Was she really **trying** to hurt me? **Noelle's head** spun with questions, **none** of them with **clear** answers. The timing couldn't be worse either- Brandon's voice echoed in her mind, reminding her of **what** he said **earlier**, "If Elsie turns on **you**, eliminate her immediately.

Was this what he meant?

She hesitated, then gently lifted Elsie off her and laid her back on the bed. Lightly, she patted the girl's cheek. "Elsie... hey, wake **u**

up*

To her surprise. Elsie's eyes fluttered open again almost immediately. She looked around sleepily, rubbing her eyes like a child who had been disturbed mid-dream. 'Ee... **ya?**'

Noelle stared at her confused.

Este blinked at her with those same wide, **soft** eyes. Completely innocent. Completely blank

Noelle leaned in closer, studying her face for any sign of aggression. But all she saw **was** bewilderment

Elsie stared **back**, thing her head like **a** puppy, blinking curiously

This didn't **make** sense. That girl from moments **ago**—the one brimming with killing intent—was completely gone. Had Noelle imagined it! No... **she'd** felt the danger. It had been real

Without warning, Noelle narrowed her eyes and raised her hand in a swift knifehand strike—mirroring the exact move Elie **had** made earlier. Her palm sopped just a millimeter **from Elsie's neck**.

But Elur didn't inch. Didn't move. No defensive reflexes, no

s, no fight-or-flight response. **Just a wide-eyed**, innocent stare.

Noelle **slowly** lowered her hand. "Elsie," she **asked** quietly, "why didn't you dodger

Elvie didn't answer—just shook her head slightly, her expression soft and childlike. Then, without warning, she **snuggled** close and wrapped her arms around Noelle again

It was like being hugged by **a** harmless, affectionate **kitten**

III

Noelle intinctively pulled her head, but her mind was far from **at** ease. This was the same sweet Elsie **she'd** net—but the killing aura earlier had been **real**

"**Was** she sleepwalking? Or something else? Noelle wracked her brain but came up with nothing. She didn't have enough information. Too many variables. No clear pattern

1/2

Chapter 2:20

annually, she sighed **and** dropped the idea of overthinking it—for now.

She wasn't going to harm Elde. Not yet. Yes, Brandon had said to eliminate her if she became a threat, but **right** now Elsie wasn't acting hostile. And besides, Aduel clearly liked her. If anything happened to Elsie on Noelle's watch, it would destroy the fragile must shar'd worked so hard to build

And

| without that trust, her entire mission would fall apart.

Mission first, she reminded herself firmly.

Having made up her mind, she gently said. "Elsie, let's go back to sleep"

Elsie nodded, smiling as innocently as **ever**. “Ee-ya”

The two of them lay **back** down, and **Elsie** curled up beside her, wrapping her arms around Noelle in a sleepy hug. She fell back asleep almost

immediately.

But while Elsie returned to **dreamland**. Noelle remained wide **awake**. Her **eyes stayed** open, body tense, mind alery

What if she gets up agam? The **fear kept** her still, quiet, and hyperaware.

But Else didn’t sur agam. She slept peacefully, never once moving, never once waking. Eventually,

1. even Noelle started to wonder if the entire

Incident had just been... a dream

Chapter 230

e next morning, Noelle and Elvie came downstairs together

The

Eli passed by, took one look at them, and immediately launched into a critique. “Noelle, what the hell happened to you last night! You look like you spent the evening hotboxing with a bunch of stoners.”

Noelle had two impressive dark circles under her eyes, her entire aura drained and sluggish. In stark contrast, Elve looked radiant—completely refreshed after a good night’s sleep. She was her usual clingy self, holding tightly onto Noelle’s arm, her bright blue eyes scanning the room with

cunosity

The moment her gave landed on Adriel, she released Noelle without hesitation and dashed over with glee. She flung herself into Adriel’s arms. nuzzling against him like an affectionate kitten

Adriel didn’t hold back either—he wrapped his arms around her with practiced ease, his gaze softening in a way that completely ignored his brothen reactions. Did you sleep well, Elur?“:

Elur nodded eagerly, her whole face glowing

Noelle watched this exchange in silent frustration. Seriously! She looks exactly the same as yesterday. Totally fine. If I had known she was going to be this cheerful, I would’ve just gone to sleep too!

But she hadn’t. She’d spent the entire night on high alert, keeping one eye open in case Elsie tried anything again. And now, after pulling an all- nighter, she had a full day of back-to-back classes.

To put it mildly, her emotional battery was drained. **Negativity**: maxed out

“You’re zoning out,” Eli said, noncommittal to her dazed expression. He waved a hand in front of her face. “Hey! Anyone home!”

Noelle blinked, then turned to him with a lifeless look. “Didn’t sleep. Had too much on my mind.”

“What’s weighing on you?” Eli **asked**, genuinely puzzled.

Try nearly getting killed in your sleep by the girl currently cuddling **your** brother, she thought. But she couldn’t say that out **loud**.

Instead, she sighed dramatically and gave Eli a soulful look. “With everything that’s happened—Leia being arrested. Dad still in the hospital... how are **you** even managing to sleep!”

That hit Eli right in the heart.

“Wow. Noelle’s so thoughtful, he mused. Even after how we all treated her before, **she’s** the one lying awake at night worrying about the family. I didn’t lose a wink of sleep, but **she** did. Blood really is thicker than water... **unlike** that backstabbing witch Leia who tried to poison Dad.”

Overwhelmed with guilt and affection, Eli reached out and ruffled Noelle’s **hair**. “So that’s what’s been bothering you, huh? Don’t worry. **Dad’s doing** better every day, and **Mom’s** with him. He’ll be fine.”

Noelle gave a **small** nod.

Eli looked at her again, this time with real admiration. “You know, Noelle... **you’re actually** a pretty great person.”

She blinked, a **beat** behind, not quite following where this was going.

1. you’re my one and

Without warning, Eli threw an arm around her shoulders, pulling her into a side hug with surprising emotion. “From now on, only sister. Leia’s dead to me.”

Noelle was caught off guard, stiff in his grip.

“What just happened? she thought in disbelief. **What** did I even do?”

Back then, she practically had to chase him down, showering him with affection just **to** get a lukewarm response. But now, she barely said a word, and he was suddenly **all** over her with this passionate declaration of loyalty!

Noelle had no idea **what** was going on in Eli’s head. But one thing was **clear**: self-sabotage is real—because apparently, the less she tried, the more

they came to her on their own.

