

Unwanted Girl Spoiled by Billionaire – c 251-260

Unchosen 251-260

Chapter 251

The Sawyer family burst into the office in a fury, with Bryan and the **security** guards trailing behind, visibly displeased.

“Excuse me,” Bryan said with a frown. “I hadn’t even announced your arrival. This is extremely rude-

“Spare us the lectures, Luciano barked. “You’re just a dog trailing behind Nicolas. Who gave you the right to yap at us?”

Bryan’s expression turned cold, but before he could respond, Nicolas’s voice cut through the room.

“Even **a** dog **has** an owner,” he said lazily. “**And** if Bryan’s a dog. then he’s my dog. Who do you think k you are to discipline what’s mine? Next time you disrespect **my** assistant, you can get the hell out.”

The Sawyer **family** immediately shifted their attention to Nicolas, **who** remained seated, utterly composed. Even more infuriating was the fact that Noelle was still comfortably curled in his lap, as if they weren’t in the middle of a heated confrontation.

Their family business was in shambles, **and** here Nicolas sat, holding a woman and acting like he didn’t have a care in the world. It was outrageous.

“You bastard,” Braiden spat, stepping forward, his face twisted with fury. “You secretly bought up the Sawyer Group’s shares? Are you trying to destroy this family!”

Nicolas smiled, calm and unbothered. That’s exactly what I’m doing. And what are you going to do about it?”

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Braiden couldn’t contain himself. **He** lunged forward, **ready** to **strike**.

Noelle instinctively prepared to defend Nicolas, but he stopped her with a hand on her arm.

“Nicolas?” she looked at him, puzzled,

He leaned in and whispered. “Relax. These fools aren’t even worth your energy.”

Sure enough, before Braiden could lay a **hand** on him, the security team stepped in, firmly restraining him.

“Sir, please calm **down**,” one of the guards said.

“Get **your hands** off me!” Braiden roared. This is my son—I discipline **him** however I **damn** well please!”

The guards held firm. “**Sir**, we don’t care what your relationship is. We only follow Mr. Sawyer’s orders. If you continue to behave violently, we’ll have to call the authorities.”

At the word authorities, Braiden froze, his rage cooling just enough to make him back down, though he continued to glare at the guards

with **venom**.

Marshall stepped **forward**, attempting a more diplomatic **tone**. “Nicolas, **what** are you doing? We’re family. Splitting the Sawyer Group apart—**what** good does that do you? Can’t we just talk things through?”

“Exactly,” **Luciano** chimed in, face dark with frustration. “You took the money we gave you and used it to buy **us** out, And **you** don’t even feel the slightest bit ashamed? If **you** have any **conscience** left, hand **those** shares back—before **this** gets any audier.”

Nicolas listened **with** that same maddening, **unfazed** smile. He remained silent, but Noelle couldn’t. She was practically **shaking** with

anger.

Cheeks puffed out, she snapped, “**You** people have no shame! **Family**? You’re the ones who drove Nicolas’s mother to her death. He’s not **even asking** for your lives—just taking back what was rightfully hers. And now you have the nerve to call him shameless?”

The room fell quiet as everyone turned to **look** at the girl in Nicolas’s lap.

They’d all been too fixated on Nicolas to realize who **she was**, assuming she was just **some passing** fling. But now that they looked, even Marshall recognized her instantly.

“Thurs Noelle, isn’t it?” he **said** coldly. “You may be engaged to him, but you’re not part of this family yet. This is family business. **You’d** best keep out of it.”

Noelle was about to argue **that** her bond with Nicolas was a hundred **times** stronger **than** anything the Sawyers ever gave her

But Nicolas cut in first.

chuckled. “Marshall, Noelle is the woman I love. Fidd hand her all of United Press if she **asked**. So you tell me—does she get a say in

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Sawyer family matters?”

“Outrageous!” Braiden exploded. “So **this** girl means more to you than your own family?”

With United Press now owning 52% of the Sawyer Group, what Nicolas had just said made it sound like he was handing the entire company over to this **girl**.

Nicolas met Braiden’s eyes with a cold smile. “Don’t flatter yourselves. You think you deserve to be compared to Noelle? You’re not even worthy of shining her shoes. You’re trash,”

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“You bastard! Is that how you talk to your own father?” **Braiden** roared, seething with rage. If it weren’t for the guards holding him back, he would’ve lunged at Nicolas **right** then and there.

Nicolas gave a cold, mocking **laugh**. “You think **you still qualify** as my father? You and Marissa schemed to drain my mother of everything she had. Once she was no longer useful, you tossed her aside like trash. From the moment I was born, have you ever once done your duty as a father? If my mother hadn’t left **me** her 30% stake in the company, I doubt I’d even be alive today. So tell me. **Braiden**—do you really **think you** deserve to be called ‘father?’”

Braiden’s face flushed purple, then pale. He gritted his teeth in silence, unable to offer even a **single** word of rebuttal.

But Nicolas **wasn’t** finished. He smiled and said. “Besides, I haven’t even wiped you out completely, have I? Sure, the Sawyer Group has changed **hands**—but I still left **you** with over 40% of the shares. If you **behave**, you can **still** sit back and enjoy the dividends. All things **considered**, I’ve been a pretty generous ‘son, wouldn’t you say?*

His words hit like a slap in the **face**. To the Sawyer family, this was nothing short of open provocation.

Braiden stared at Nicolas, his voice low and dangerous. “You really feel no **remorse** at all?”

Nicolas’s smile faded slightly. He leaned forward, eyes sharp. “Tell me what I did wrong, exactly? Was it wrong to reclaim the assets you stole from my **mother**? Or **was my** mistake being too merciful? I can always leak more—maybe expose every dirty little secret the Sawyer family has tried to keep buried. Would **that** be more to your liking?”

Though Nicolas's voice was calm, every word hit like a dagger, slicing through what little pride they had left.

Braiden finally forced down his **rising** fury, but his tone dripped venom. "Fine. Very well. **You** think you've won? Let me give you **some** advice—never underestimate those who've been through the fire. Experience always trumps arrogance."

Nicolas leaned back lazily, unbothered. "**Maybe** so. But the younger generation always surpasses the old. That's just nature taking its

course.

Braiden's gaze darkened. He glanced **at** Noelle still sitting in Nicolas's lap, watching them quietly. Something cold and calculated flickered in his eyes.

"Nicolas," **he** said **at** last, voice tight, "this isn't over."

With that, he turned **and** left without another word. Marshall and Luciano quickly followed, but not before Luciano shot Nicolas a furious glare. This isn't the end, Nicolas. You'd better watch your back."

The office door slammed shut behind them.

Nicolas remained unfazed. He turned to Bryan. "Got the whole conversation recorded?"

"Yes, Mr. Sawyer, Bryan confirmed. "Every word."

"Perfect" Nicolas's **smile** returned.

Noelle tilted her head, curious. "You're **planning** something again, aren't **you**?"

He nodded calmly. "I provoked them today on purpose. **Knowing** them, they won't let this slide. They'll be coming for **me**."

Noelle's eyes widened. "Then you're in **danger**?"

"Exactly, Nicolas **said with a** smirk, kissing her **cheek** shamelessly. "So you'll have to protect me, okay?"

Noelle puffed up her chest, nodding **seriously**. "Don't worry, I'll keep **you**

"Really?" Nicolas teased, raising an eyebrow, "You're committing to that now?"

"**Men—hmm**" the nodded again, all earnest **and** adorable

Well then, I feel very reassured" úd, pulling her into a tighter hug. He rested his head in the curve of her **neck, his voice** low **and** playful. "Remember what **you** said—protect me. Always

Noelle, thinking he was **just** nervous about the threat, gently patted his head to comfort **him**.
“Don’t worry, Nicolas I’ve got you”

He let out a soft chuckle **and** held her even closer

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Watching this overly affectionate scene, Bryan quietly slipped out of the office, leaving them to their syrupy bubble.

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Meanwhile, Braiden and his sons stormed into their car.

“Goddamn it!” Luciano cursed. “I always **knew** Nicolas was no good, but I never thought he **had** it in him to pull something like this.”

“We can’t show him any mercy now,” Marshall said darkly. “If he wants to play dirty, then we’ll play dirtier. I’ll get in touch with a hitman and end this.”

“Not **yet**,” Braiden finally spoke,

Both sons turned to him, startled.

“Dad, what are you talking about?” Luciano snapped. “We’re just going to let that bastard get away with destroying everything we built?”

“You think I’m just going to sit here **and** do nothing?” Braiden growled. “He’s not my son anymore. Just thinking about the fact he shares **my** blood makes me sick.”

That at least reassured his sons.

Luciano frowned. “Then why are you stopping **Marshall!**”

Braiden’s eyes gleamed with something cold and sharp. “Have you noticed **how** attached Nicolas is to that Anderson girl?”

Luciano waved it off. “He’s just a playboy, Falling for women is what he does.”

“No,” Braiden said firmly. “He’s had plenty of flings, but I’ve never seen him act like that. That girl–Noelle–clearly holds a **special** place in his heart.”

Marshall’s brow furrowed. “**You** think we should target her instead?”

Braiden’s lips curled into a sinister smirk. “Exactly. That girl was way too arrogant today. Clearly, she’s gotten used to being spoiled **Time** to bring her down a peg.”

Marshall leaned in slightly. “You mean... get rid of her!”

Braiden nodded. That's right. Consider it a warning. If Nicolas still **doesn't** fall in line, then we take her out for good. He likes stealing what matters to **us**? Then we'll **destroy what** matters to him."

His eyes glinted with malice as he uttered the final words through clenched teeth.

"When you want to kill someone—start by breaking their heart."

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Chapter 253

Noelle had returned to the Anderson estate to pack some clothes.

Vincent had just been discharged from the hospital. Thanks to the medicine Noelle gave him, his recovery had been swift. The hospital had been so impressed with her prescription that they begged her to patent it—assuring her that money was no issue.

But Noelle **had** simply handed over the formula for free. She didn't care about **money**. All she asked was that the hospital not use her formula to inflate drug prices for patients.

After all, the old man who had taught her medicine had treated people for free. In her eyes, this was her way of honoring his legacy.

In the Anderson family's grand hall, Vincent watched his daughter bounce down the stairs with a massive suitcase in tow. He raised an **eyebrow** and asked, "Noelle, you're taking that much with you?"

Noelle nodded with a bright smile. "It's getting cold, Daddy. Winter clothes take up **space**. And I have so many outfits I haven't even worn yet—I just thought I'd bring a few more."

Truthfully, before she even came back to pack, **Nicolas had told her** she didn't need to—**whatever** she needed, he'd have it prepared. Clothes, accessories, jewelry—he'd make sure she had only the best.

He had even **mentioned** that if she wanted royal couture, he could pull strings to make it happen.

But Noelle had turned him down.

Because even just the clothes she already had at the Anderson estate could last her a lifetime. Buying more felt wasteful.

In fact, Kimberly had already arranged for Noelle to have a walk-in closet identical to Leia's

Back when they went shopping. Nicolas had practically tried to buy out the entire mall for her, Dresses, jewelry, shoes—he'd had a mountain of it delivered.

But he **wasn't** the only one.

Vincent had always believed that his daughter's appearance represented the family's image, so naturally, he'd spared no expense in building up her wardrobe.

Then there were her brothers—starting with Eli, who was the most **enthusiastic**

He had once spent lavishly on Lela, so now, to be fair, he made sure Noelle got everything Leia once had—times two. The clothing El bought **alone took up** half of her **closet**.

Damon was less vocal, often pretending to be indifferent and claiming he si favored Lein. But every time he bought clothes, he'd always purchase duplicates. He'd claim the second set was just “an extra” and pretend it was no big deal—but anyone could see both sisters' outfits were of equal **quality** and price.

As for Charlie, there was **no need to** explain. He frequently collaborated with luxury fashion brands and would always send home the Latest seasonal pieces—Noelle included.

Adriel and Bennett had only recently reconnected with Noelle, but they weren't stingy either. Bennett, in particular, felt he owed her, so he'd gone all out—gifts, clothes, jewelry. Adriel, not to be outdone, brought an entire stack of presents as a belated welcome.

With that many people spoiling her, Noelle had more **than** enough to wear. She could probably wear **a** different outfit every day for a year and still not run out.

And since she wasn't the type to be **wasteful**, she'd **made** up her mind—no new clothes **until** she got through the ones she already had

Eli, standing to the side, looked at her suitcase **and** grumbled. “I just got out of the hospital, and **Nicolas already has** the nerve to drag you luck to stay with him“

Though his grudge against Nicolas had mellowed. Eli **still couldn't** help but feel **sour** about the whole **situation**. The thought of his precious little sister being married off to that man just didn't sit right.

In his mind, he muttered, Damn toto our **family**, I won't even make

But instead. Noelle was the one going

the Anderson estate put b enough for him? Why can't he move in here? If he wants to marry

there? Eli felt like their beloved family gem was being handed over to a wolf.

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“Eli, there's nothing we can do about it, Kimberly **said**, smiling at her daughter to smooth things over. “Right now, things are **dangerous over at** Nicolay side. **With** everything that's happened, he needs someone to be there for **him**. We have plenty of people here, so it's okay if Noelle **stays** with him.”

The **events** unfolding **within** the Sawyer family had caught the **attention** of various industries, and the Anderson family was no exception. Through their interactions, the Anderson family had learned that Nicolas was different from **the** rumors **that** had circulated about him. They knew he wasn't the playboy he was once thought to be, and it seemed he had his own **ambitions and** goals.

However, despite this newfound understanding, most of the Anderson family **hadn't** imagined that the **man** who had long been seen as a spoiled heir would secretly be running such a **massive** business empire, even going **so** far as to swallow up the entire Sawyer **family**.

This revelation stunned everyone.

Though opinions of Nicolas were mixed, with some praising his deep and calculating mind and bright future, while others labeled him **as** ambitious and treacherous, the Anderson family didn't care much about the outside world's judgment. What mattered to them was how **Nicolas** treated Noelle.

In recent days, Nicolas' every action toward Noelle had been closely observed by all, and everyone could see his care **and** attention. So, no matter what Nicolas did—whether it was swallowing his own family—the Andersons would support him. **In fact**, when they heard others speak ill of Nicolas, they would defend him.

As for Noelle's abilities, everyone was well aw

aware of them.

Since Nicolas was now alone **and** in danger, whether for protection or comfort, everyone felt that Noelle should stay by his side. "Don't **worry**, Noelle. We'll take care of things here. You should stay with Nicolas for now," Adriel also spoke up, supporting Noelle's decision.

"Okay, Adriel. Noelle smiled at him in agreement

But Elsie, who had been following Adriel, still seemed reluctant to let Noelle go.

"Noelle..." Elsie rushed over as soon as Noelle was about to leave, grabbing her hand with red eyes, and asked, "When w

will you come

backtr

"I can come **back** every day." Noelle replied, noticing Elsie's near tears. She smiled and gently cupped Elsie's face, rubbing it affectionately. "We're not far apart, and if you miss me, you can come visit me anytime.

"Really?" Elsie asked eagerly.

"Of course" Noelle answered with a grin.

Ele quickly looked at Adriel, who nodded in approval.

“If you really want to see Noelle, I **can** take you, Adriel **said**.

Elsie’s face immediately lit up **with** a bright **smile**, and she gazed at Noelle with sparkling **eyes**. “Noelle, I’m going to visit you tomorrow!” “No problem.” Noelle replied enthusiastically.

She couldn’t help but take a careful look at Elsie. When she first met Elsie, she had been cautious, especially **since** Elie had once hurtzoned murderous intent toward her while she slept. This made Noelle very wary. Then, when Stanley warned her **that** Elsie was dangerous person, Noelle wasn’t sure how to handle her.

But before she could figure out how to deal with Elue, Nicolas issues had taken precedence, and Elsie’s problem was pushed aside. Now seemed that Elsie was behaving peacefully, and there didn’t seem to be any **danger** after all

her memories, the past version of her no longer esised Moreover, nor Adriel liked Elie, Noelle slecules to impanion from tium dei

After saying goodbye to her family. Noelle prepared to leave for Nicolas place Elate insisted on sending her off, which Noelle agreed to

dir path, with asked. “Thie do you like your life now?”

lue helping Nowelle carry her suitcase Norlie anuled

sight of Elsie being so obedi

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“Yes,” Elsie nodded dutifully and smiled back at Noelle.

“That’s good,” Noelle **said**, flashing a bright **smile**. “I like it too. Though things weren’t perfect at first, I really like everyone now. And Elsie, when you came, everyone was so kind to you. You’ll like them even more as time goes on.”

“I’ll like them more? Elsie blinked, a little surprised

She really liked Adriel, because he **was** so gentle with her, and the other members of the Anderson family were polite **and** respectful. Although she didn’t remember her past, the warmth she felt from them was something she had never experienced before, and it felt nice.

sister-in-

Noelle smiled again. “Yes, Adriel really likes you. I’m sure you two **will** end up together, and **when** that happens, you’ll be my s **law**. Our bond will be even stronger!”

“I’ll be **even** closer to you... Hmm, then I’ll be your sister-in-law,” Elsie said firmly

She really liked Noelle. Every **time** she saw Noelle, it felt like meeting someone who truly understood her, as if they were kindred spirits. If they could stay together in the future, that would be wonderful.

The two **women** continued to dream about their future, unknowingly walking all the way to the entrance of the Anderson family estate.

Then, a smooth and refined male voice called out from outside. “Noelle”

Startled, Noelle turned quickly toward the source of **the** voice.

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Standing at the gate of the Anderson estate was Brandon. He wore a black turtleneck beneath a camel-colored cashmere **coat**, hands tucked casually into his pockets. Tall, poised, and exuding a refined British elegance, he radiated charm and composure. Just standing. **there**, he was impossible to ignore.

“Brandon!” Noelle recognized him instantly.

Even though they hadn’t seen each other in nearly a decade, those deep emerald eyes s were unforgettable.

Delighted, Noelle ran straight into his arms. “Brandon! Brandon, Brandon, Brandon! You’re finally here! I missed you so much!”

Brandon’s lips curved into a smile as he opened his arms, catching her as she leapt up and wrapped herself around his neck like an

excited child.

His arms instinctively wrapped around her slender waist—much slimmer **than** he’d anticipated. Though he’d seen her physical data countless times, holding her in person made her feel even **more** delicate. A soft, precious thing.

He gently pulled her back just enough to see her face, brushing a hand against her cheek, **his** voice tender. ‘Have you been well here, Noelle”

“**Mm**—hmm,” she nodded with a bright smile. Tve been so happy. I have a dad and a mom now, a bunch of brothers—and **even** a future sister-in-law!”

Then, remembering something, she grabbed his hand and turned to introduce someone. “Brandon, look—this is Elsie! She’s a ‘transformer’ from the Serpaton–Mocrta Alliance Lab, but she’s lost her memory now. Totally harmless!”

Brandon let Noelle clasp his hand as his eyes **moved** to Elsie. His emerald gaze grew thoughtful as he murmured. “So this is their masterpiece...”

Noelle nodded, then waved at Elsie

at Elsie, beaming. “Elsie, this is Brandon Jones—my very best friend!”

Brandon’s eyes flicked quickly back to Noelle. Just a friend? Hm. Clearly, someone needs **to** be reminded of a few things. But he wasn’t in **a** rush. There would be plenty of time later,

Elsie, however, didn’t seem as thrilled to see Brandon. She didn’t run up or even smile—just stood there watching him with wary eyes. He had the same **aura as** her and Noelle... but something about him felt dangerous.

Noticing Elsie’s hesitation, Noelle **took a** step toward her to check **what** was wrong—but before she could move far, Brandon caught her hand.

“Brandon!” she **looked** at him, puzzled

Still smiling, he leaned down slightly and asked, “Noelle, would you take me to meet your family? I’d love **to** see the people who share **your** blood”

“Huh? Right now the besitated. She’d been planning to head to Nicolas’s place. Brandon tilted his head, eyes narrowing ever so slightly. “Oh? Got plans?”

Sensing he wasn’t too fond of Nicolas, Noelle treaded carefully. “Well I was going

going to **visit** Nicola

Brandon kept smiling, but there was an unmistakable edge to it “Seems I came at **the** wrong time then.”

Noelle, now somewhat versed in social curs, suddenly felt a

up her spine. That smile **of** his didn’t feel friendly **at** all. She scrambled

to make amends “**No**, no—it’s fine! I can see Nicolas later. Since you’re here, I’ll **take** you to meet my family first.”

“You sure? I wouldn’t ant to intrude, Brandon replied gently.

elle shook her head firmly. “Not at all”

If **Brandon** got upset, who knows what he might do And if Nicolas got **caught** in the crossfire

Brandon chuckled, clearly satiated Using **his** height advantage, he pulled Noelle in close, kissed her cheek, and and with a teasing smule. “**I** knew it. Noelle always puts me first”

The sudden kass startled Noelle F Brandon had khand ber

Nicolas **had** warned her about things like **this**—no physical closeness with other men. And now

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Still caught in thought, Noelle blinked up at him. “Brandon... you kissed me

“I did. Brandon replied without shame, even **arching** a brow. “Why? Am I not allowed to?”

“Well... it’s just... Noelle looked down, unsure how to **answer**. Logic told her she shouldn’t **say** what came next, but she said it anyway. “Nicolas told me not to get too close to other men... **since** I’m **his** fiancée, I **should** keep a certain distance.”

Brandon’s expression darkened slightly, cutting her off. “**You** really listen to him, don’t **you**?”

He fixed her with a sharp, possessive stare, voice low and firm. “But you belong to me. I can do anything I want with you. Letting you stay close to him is already my bottom line. And now he wants to dictate my actions too? Isn’t that getting things backwards, Noelle? What do you **think**?”

“You’re right,” she **said** quietly, dropping her head. “I’m sorry, Brandon. Please don’t be mad.”

The way she shrank **back** made Brandon laugh softly. He crouched slightly to meet her **eyes**, caressing her cheek with exaggerated gentleness. “Why do you **look** so scared of me? I’m not angry, Noelle. Don’t be afraid.”

“Really?” she asked nervously.

Of course,” he said warmly. “You’re the **person** I cherish most. No matter what mistake **you** make. I’ll forgive you. Just promise me one thing—don’t ever be afraid of me. That would really **break** my heart

That did the trick. Noelle’s spirit instantly revived. If Brandon wasn’t angry, then everything was fine. No need to worry he’d do something awful

Brandon watched her brighten again, amused. He reached for her hand. “Come on—let’s go meet your family.

“Okay!” she smiled. “You’re my best friend—my parents and brothers are going to love you!”

That’s great. I even brought a few gifts for them. Let’s bring them along.”

Til help” Noelle offered, reaching for the bags.

Before leaving, she turned to Elsie with an apologetic smile. “Elsie, sorry—looks like I’ll need you to take **the** suitcase back again.” Elvie shook her head. “It’s **okay**.”

“Thanks Let’s go home. Noelle said.

Elsie nodded and followed them quietly, but her eyes lingered on Brandon. The communication earpiece **at** her **ear** began to flash a faint, pulsing blue...

Noelle returned home once more—this time with Brandon still holding her hand.

te all her recent lessons in social etiquette, “worldly-wise” Noelle didn’t think much of it. After all, Brandon had already kissed her the cheek; holding hands seemed harmless enough for someone who was her best friend.

As she stepped through the front door, she called out cheerfully, ‘Mom, **Dad**, I’m back!’

Kimberly looked up in surprise. “Noelle? You just left and

But her voice trailed off as she caught sight of the handsome young **man** by her daughter’s side. Not only had he returned with Noelle, but the two were holding hands—fingers interlocked

The sight stunned everyone in the room, including Kimberly and the rest of the Anderson family.

Brandon, unbothered by the shocked stares, stepped forward with a polite smile. “Hello. I’m Brandon, a close friend of Noelle’s,” he smoothly, offering a small gift bag to Kimberly. “I brought a few presents. I hope you’ll accept them.”

“Ah... thank you.” Kimberly was still trying to process the scene.

“Huh? Just an old friend. Noelle replied casually, skipping over at

any lab-related backstory.

“Huh’ **Just** an old friend, Noelle replied casually, skipping over any lab-related backstory.

Eli narrowed his eyes. “And how long **have** you two known each other?”

“A few

“years”

“That long” So he’s basically your childhood sweetheart?” Eli **shot** another **glance** at Brandon, clearly on high alert. “You’re not... two- timing Nicolas, are you?”

“Two-timing?” Noelle blinked. “What’s that mean?”

said

Eli sputtered. “It means—”

Before he could dig himself deeper, Bennett cut in. “Enough with the nonsense.

Stop st

p stuffing her head with drama”

“It’s not nonsense! That guy literally v

Bennett shot him a look. We have a guest. Try acting like a

walked in holding her hand,

grumbled

a civilized

person

Still. Bennett couldn’t help observing **Brandon** closely **himself**. The moment Brandon felt his gaze, he turned around and met Bennett’s

with a polite smile, something unreadable **flickering** in his emerald irises.

Bennett was momentarily caught off **guard**... and then returned the **same** ambiguous smile.

So **this is** Brandon, he thought. Definitely not an **ordinary** guy. It **was** Brandon who gave Noelle permission to tell me about the **lab**. And

Brandon who let her cooperate with me on the experiments. But **what** exactly is he after?

Cearly

nveniation between the two of them

inevitable.

underly. titi slightly randed by Brandon’s unexpected closeness with her daughter, kept her tone warm but probing. “So, Brandon,

the gentleman.

She smiled, eyes narrowing slightly. “You **and** Noelle seem very close. How did you two meet?

were in the same program a few years back. Brandon replied smoothly. “I was pretty reserved

don’t thank I’d have made it though. Me means a giral deal to mur

“That so “Kimberly kept smiling, but inwardly she was taking mental bars. A great deal! How great? She glanced at Brandon again. “You

daoine young **mann**—surely you have a girlfriend?

Brandon chuckled, sily **catching** on to where that was going. “I do

If it weren’t for Noelle l

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“Oh, wonderful!” Kimberly visibly relaxed. Good. **That** means I don’t need to worry about a love triangle situation.

Noelle, on the other hand, was wide-eyed with surprise. She bounced over, beaming. “You have a girlfriend? Since when? You never told me! Who is she? You **have** to bring her to **visit** sometime!”

Brandon’s lips curved slightly. You already know her.”

“I **do**!” Noelle blinked, now even more curious. She **ran** through names in her head. ‘Leia’s **in jail**, Elsie likes Adriel... That just leaves- Tina? No way. Could it really be Tina?

Brandon only smiled, keeping his cards close. “I’ll tell **you** later.”

Wh

by not now?” Noelle poured “You’re so stingy. You **know** everything about me, and I don’t even know who your girlfriend is?”

The rest of the Anderson family, overhearing, finally let out a collective breath of relief—except Bennett, who narrowed his eyes slightly.

He glanced between Brandon and Noelle. The way Brandon looked at her—with indulgence, intensity, and something almost possessive —set off every internal alarm Bennen had

Brandon didn’t stay long. After some polite small talk, he announced he was heading off. Noelle offered to walk him out—partly to say goodbye, partly **because** she wasn’t done digging for gossip.

He glanced sideways at her, amused. “That curious, huh?”

“Of course! You’ve been secretly dating someone I know? That’s totally not **fair**. I should at least get a free meal out of it when I find out who she is.”

Brandon chuckled. Still as

ll as transparent as ever.

“Quit teasing me.” Noelle tugged his sleeve. “Tell me! I promise I won’t tell anyone. Scout’s honor.”

“You really haven’t figured it **out**!” he asked, feigning surprise.

“**No**! That’s why I’m asking, Noelle huffed.

She mentally narrowed the list: Leia—nope. Elsie—nope. Tina—could it be?

Just **as** she was spiraling into speculation, **Brandon** came to a stop. He set down her suitcase, then leaned down. gently cradled her face in one hand, and looked her dead **in** the eyes.

“Noelle,” he said softly, “you still haven’t figured it out?”

She blinked. “Figured what-

Before she could finish, his lips brushed **against** hier

Her eyes flew wide open. She froze

Brandon pulled bark slightly, emerald eyes locked on hers. He smiled with wicked warmth **and** whispered, “**Who** else could it be? prifriend could only ever be you*

Noelle’s mind was ringing-loud and chaotic like someone had set off a bomb in her head

She stared at Brandon in shock, stumbling backward, completely overwhelmed.

He kissed her. On the lips,

How could he kiss her?

She was Nicolas’s fiancée. Even **Nicolas** hadn’t kissed her on the lips yet-and now Brandon had just done it without asking.

Noelle didn’t fully understand the intricacies of romance or social rules, not yet. She’d seen people kiss on the mouth **as** a casual greeting back when **she** was abroad, even between people who weren’t lovers. But this felt different. **She** knew it was different.

If Nicolas found out, he’d be furious.

“Noelle, **what’s** wrong?” Brandon stepped forward and took her hand, stopping her from retreating further.

Her eyes turned red instantly. She bit her lip, voice trembling like a child who’d just been scolded. “Brandon... why did **you** kiss me? You

er lip. can’t You’re not supposed to kiss me.”

“Not supposed to?” Brandon raised **an** eyebrow, his tone still smooth-but there was a new edge to it now.

He stepped in close, tilted her chin up with his fingers, forcing her to look at him. His smile lingered, charming on the surface, but cold and commanding beneath

“What exactly is it **that** I can’t do to you, Noelle?” he asked, his tone soft yet unmistakably threatening.

1..she faltered.

But Brandon didn't let her speak. **He** pressed on, his grip firm. "Aren't you mine! I own you. Every part of you belongs to me—your body, your mind, your loyalty. If that's true, shouldn't you accept everything I do to **you**... gladly?"

His emerald-green eyes bore into hers, unblinking.

Noelle opened her mouth to speak, to protest... but no sound **came**.

She **had** been raised in a lab. Conditioned from the start to obey. Obedience was law. Orders were everything.

Brandon had said before that he held full rights over her—that she belonged to him.

And if she belonged to him, then he could do whatever he wanted with her.

Even if every fiber of her heart wanted to resist... her training refused **to** let her.

Her face turned **ghostly** pale. She stood frozen **for a** moment before finally lowering her head and whispering, "You're right.. **but**... but...

This person in front of her—this "friend" **she** once adored—now felt like a complete stranger. Even terrifying.

Brandon smiled again. "Say it, Noelle. Tell me you belong to me. Say you submit to me.

Noelle's chest was tight. She felt like she couldn't breathe. Every part of her wanted to scream no, but the years of psychological conditioning pushed back, crushing her resistance.

In the end, her defenses collapsed. Her voice was hollow when she **said**, "For life?"

"For life"

"Say it again"

"I submit to Brandon. For life"

Brandon grinned, satisfied

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her

Leaning

he cradled her in his arms, chin resting gently on her

"You're such a good girl, he murmured, eyes glinting with something unreadable. 'I'm very pleased'"

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Chapter 257

Noelle stood in his **arms**, utterly silent,

Mission Mission. Mission, her mind repeated over and over. Everything is for the mission. The mission comes first, no matter what.

Even if that **meant** breaking her promise to Nicolas.

Even if that meant betraying her own heart.

Her chest ached. Like something inside **had** been cracked wide open.

She felt like she **was** suffocating.

Still numb, Noelle followed Brandon **back** to the front gate of the Anderson estate.

The family driver was already **waiting**.

As soon as **she** appeared, he stepped forward to open the door. “Miss Noelle, **your** car is ready.”

Noelle nodded dully. Then she **glanced** at Brandon and murmured, “Brandon, I’m going to see Nicolas now.”

“**Mm**, go ahead” Brandon released her **hand**.

Noticing the faint red around her eyes, he brushed a thumb gently across the corner. “You look a bit pitiful. If Nicolas sees you like this, won’t he be worried? What will you tell him?”

Noelle flinched.

If she **kept** looking like this, Nicolas would definitely notice. And when he asked what happened, what was she supposed to **say**?

She couldn’t lie to Nicolas. But she couldn’t let him know Brandon had kissed her, either.

Get it together, she told herself. It was just a kiss. People kiss all the time **overseas** And I’ve had worse—like a bullet through my shoulder. A kiss is nothing.

‘Right. Don’t be dramatic. At worst, **just** pretend I got bitten by a dog she thought.

After psyching herself **up**, her mood started to lift. She **took** a deep breath and managed a smile.

“Brandon, Ill head off now.”

Brandon watched her quietly. **Just** moments **ago**, she’d been crushed- now she was cheerful again. The only difference? He’d mentioned Nicolas,

He’d mentioned **Nicolas**

So that man has such power over her. Brandon narrowed his eyes slightly, but his smile remained. "Be careful, then?"

"I will" Noelle took her suitcase from him, quickly stashed it in the trunk, and climbed into the backseat:

As the driver shut the door, she leaned over to wave goodbye. "Bye, Brandon!"

"Bye Noelle, he replied, waving gently as he watched the car pull away.

the vehicle disappeared down the road, the smile on **Brandon's** face slowly faded.

His expression darkened. I really ought to get rid of that man soon, he thought coldly. But doing it too **fast** would be far too boring

sudden

Just as he turned to leave, a sudden prickling **sensation** crawled up his back

Someone was watching him—watching with intensity and intent

narrowed his eyes, scanning the horizon

Far in the distance, across the sprawling grounds, stood the main Anderson estate. From this distance, most people wouldn't be able to see clearly

But Brandon wasn't most people.

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Chapter 257

His eyesight was eight times sharper **than normal**. Even at this range, he could make out exactly who it was.

He locked eyes with the watcher—but didn't react. Instead, he let out a low chuckle and turned away, the corner of his mouth curled in derision

Back in **the** house. Adriel **was** walking down the hallway when he spotted Elsie standing completely **still** by a window.

"Elsie? What are **you** looking **at**?" he asked.

She turned back at the sound of his voice.

All the tension vanished from her body in an instant—no more sharp gaze, no more killing intent.

Just innocent, sweet-eyed Elsie. She blinked and replied softly. "Nothing. I wasn't looking at anything"

Chapter 258

Noelle headed straight **to** United Press, Nicolas's company headquarters.

Ever since the acquisition of the Sawyer **Group**, things had been chaotic. The entire company was buzzing, and **as** the head of it all, Nicolas was busier than ever. Paperwork stacked like mountains awaited him every day.

Standing outside the CEO's office, Noelle took a deep breath, steadying the fluttering in her chest. Once her emotions were in check, she lifted the corners of her **lips** into a **bright** smile and pushed the door open.

"Nicolas

Inside, Nicolas was buried in documents, clearly on the verge of burnout. He hadn't been **this** swamped in a long time, and his naturally prickly temper was showing. **High**-level execs had been avoiding one-on-one meetings like the plague, afraid of his mood swings.

But the moment Noelle walked in—without knocking, no less—Nicolas performed a live demonstration of world-class double standards.

His scowl disappeared instantly.

When he saw her, his whole face lit up. He dropped **his** pen without hesitation and opened his arms. "Noelle

Without **missing** a beat, Noelle rushed into his embrace.

Holding her close, Nicolas began, "Did everything go well

But before he could finish, he felt Noelle rubbing her face insistently **against his** chest.

Confused, he glanced down, only to find her nuzzling into him with a determined vengeance—her lips even pressing and grinding against the fabric of his shirt like she was trying to scrub away a layer of skin.

The friction was maddening.

As a healthy, fully functioning man, Nicolas's breath began to catch. She was igniting a fire in his chest—and not the metaphorical kind.

And yet, here she **was**, stoking the flames with **no** intention of helping him put them out.

Just before things **got** dangerously close to combusting, Nicolas sucked in a breath and gently peeled her off him. He stared at her flustered lips, now swollen from all the rubbing, and chuckled in spite of himself.

“Sweetheart what **was** that? **You** trying to **nurse or** something?” he teased.

Noelle pouted. Her lips, already red, puffed up even more.

Nicolas winced in sympathy. He gently rubbed her lips with his thumb, his tone soft and full of concern. “What’s going on? You’re **acting**

little off today”

“Nothing” she said quickly, shaking her head.

She couldn’t tell him Brandon had kissed her.

But the truth was, she felt so wronged, so upset all she wanted was to hold onto Nicolas, **breathe** in his scent, and feel safe again

tu, she climbed into his lap, wrapped her arms around him, and murmured, “Just **keep** working. Let me **stay** like this a bit and I’ll be

Nicolas eroid see something wasn’t right. She was clearly upset, but if she didn’t **want** to **talk** about it, he wouldn’t force her. Instead, he gently patted her back and murmured. “Whenever you’re ready to talk, I’m here, okay?”

Noelle added against his shoulder Okay You work I’ll just stay here”

ely to **talk**, he could **only** lei ber rest

hated seeing her like this, but sin

ck of work would we taken the whole day Nicular

through

in put thure hours.

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By the time he finally put down **his pen**, night had fallen.

He **gently** patted her back. “Noelle? I’m done now. Want to grab dinner?”

Silence.

She was asleep.

With her usual alertness, Noelle would’ve normally jolted awake at the slightest movement. But **not** today. Either she was completely drained after dealing with Brandon... or she just felt especially safe in **Nicolas’s** arms,

He didn't dare move.

She'd gone home earlier to pack, insisting she didn't need **new** clothes when **she** still hadn't worn half the ones she already had. Nicolas had offered to buy her more, of course, but she proudly declared herself a budget-conscious homemaker.

Just thinking of her puffed-up cheeks and serious little voice made him smile.

But then she came back like this... clearly shaken. Even if she didn't say anything, Nicolas **wasn't** blind. He could see it written all over

her.

The Andersons were good to her now—**so** what could've happened while she was there?

He wanted to investigate, but he didn't want to risk upsetting her further. So instead, he stayed still, holding her while she **slept**. When Noelle finally stirred **again**, the sky outside was pitch black

She let out a soft, sleepy sigh... and left a nice, wet patch of drool on Nicolas's shoulder.

"Awake!" Nicolas's low, gentle voice rumbled in her ear, warm and affectionate.

Noelle blinked, still groggy. She quickly pushed herself upright, looking at him with a dazed expression. "Did I fall asleep...?"

"You did." he said with **a** smile, brushing back the strand of hair that had popped up at the top of her head. "You want **to** sleep a little longer!"

"I really fell asleep?" she asked, stunned.

She glanced outside and **gasped**. "Wait—how long was I out?"

"Five or six hours," he replied.

"What? That long!" Her eyes widened in horror. "You mean I've just been sleeping here this whole **time**?!"

Nicolas nodded with a **chuckle**. "What else would you **have** been doing?"

To avoid waking her, he hadn't moved an inch in hours. Now **his** arms were **pins and** needles.

But he didn't mention any of that

Instead, he gently wiped the drool from the corner of her mouth. "**Since** you're awake, let's go get some dinner

kay..." she replied sheepishly—just **as** her **stomach** let **out** a loud growl.

Nuolas laughed, stood up, and **helped** her to her feet. "Come on, let's get you your favorite—meat"

At the ton of food. Noelle instantly brightened Whatever had been bothering her was, at least for now, forgotten.

She decided there was no need to tell Nicolas what happened with Brandon. There was no point dragging him into it. That isn't stay feared forever

Having made up her mind, she wrapped her arms around Nicolas's and beamed. "I want tomahawk steak?" "Serak this late at night he raised an eyebrow "That's a little heavy."

"Alrigh

inight. Whatever you want" When it came to her. Nicolas never could hold out for long

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Chapter 258

Noelle cheered, tugging on his arm. "Let's go, let's go!"

Nicolas looked down at her, smiling so softly it could melt steel. His gaze held nothing but love.

And so, the two of them walked out of the office, **hand** in hand, chatting and laughing as they went.

Meanwhile, Brandon had driven to the seaside.

It was winter n

now, and this late at night, the shoreline **was** empty.

He stepped out of his car, gazing at the endless black waves under the moonlight. He didn't seem to be talking to anyone—but his voice rang out: low and casual, with a faint **smile**. "Well, since you've followed me **all** this way, why don't you come **out** already?"

AD

„Across the deserted road, a petite figure slowly emerged from the shadows—Elsie.

But unlike the harmless, wide-eyed girl she appeared to be **around** Noelle and the Anderson family, this version of Elsie had none of that innocence. Her eyes locked onto Brandon, gleaming with bloodthirsty excitement and combat-lust

Even an ordinary bystander would sense the danger radiating off her—but Brandon? He didn't flinch.

He merely turned around, leaned lazily against the guardrail, **arms** draped casually over it. His emerald-green eyes narrowed as he stared at her, his smirk taunting and condescending.

“Are all Serpaton–Mocrta Alliance Lab rats such hyenas? he drawled. “The moment I step outside, **you** sniff your **way** here?”

Elsie didn’t respond. She simply stared at him like a predator itching to strike.

Her earring, however, began to blink blue.

Then a low, hoarse voice came through the communication device—an aged **man** with a heavy **tone**.

The chief of Atoraka–Nowedon’s next-gen projects... **and** a fully **qualified** multi-type experimental subject. With a specimen **that** valuable, how could we not try to acquire him?”

Brandon chuckled, not moving **an** inch. “So... what? You send this piece of **trash** after me?”

“Trash?” The **voice** paused, clearly stunned

To call their pride **and** joy, Elsie, trash? The arrogance!

Then came **a** cold laugh. “Big words. Let’s see if you’re still laughing after-”

But the old man didn’t get to

finish.

With a flash, Brandon vanished from the guardrail—and reappeared directly **in** front of Elsie. In the blink of an eye, he had her by the throat, lifting her clean off the ground.

It happened so fast, no one—not even Elsie—had time to react.

Now, her feet kicked uselessly in the air, her face contorted in pain as Brandon gripped her neck, effortlessly immobilizing her.

He looked up at her with a chilling grin, his voice low and calm. “What? Offended I called her trash? Should I show you just how **easy** it’d be to break your little masterpiece?”

His **fingers** tightened.

Elsie choked, struggling, her body thrashing, but it was no use,

She tried to retaliate—but Brandon was faster, stronger, and absolutely merciless. In a matter of seconds, she **was** limp from lack of oxygen.

“**Wait!**” Armando Rivera’s voice c

cut through, panicked.

Brandon’s hand **paused**, though he didn’t lower Elsie.

“Something else to **say**?” **he** asked coolly, eyes flicking toward the blinking earring.

Armando's

to's tone had shifted—no more arrogance, **just** urgency. "We apologize for the ambush. If you want Just... don't kill the girl"

compensation, well offer it

Brandon let out a cold laugh and tossed Elsie aside like a broken doll.

She crashed **to** the **ground hard**, tumbling and scraping along the rough asphalt until she came **to** a stop. Her exposed skin was torn and bloodied a mess of **abrasions** and bruises

Most people would've shown at least a shred of pity

Brandon showed none.

He was cold-blooded by nature. In his eyes, the world was divided into two types of people—Noelle, and everyone else.

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Chapter 259

And everyone else? Tools, at best.

Even now, as Elsie lay battered on the ground, he didn't so much as blink.

The others on the line remained silent, afraid to speak, barely breathing.

Brandon casually **walked** toward her again, each step slow and deliberate. Then, looking down at the earring, he asked with an easy **smile**, "Let's talk compensation then. Start **by** telling me—why did you plant her in the Anderson family?"

Armando hesitated for a second, then relented.

"Elsie **was** originally aggressive **and** bloodthirsty. But after the lab explosion, she developed a secondary personality. We saw it as a rare chance to test emotional response. Sending her to the Andersons wasn't the original plan—we didn't know Adriel had ties to your subject."—

Brandon scoffed. Interesting. Then how do you explain her showing killing intent toward Noelle on day one?"

"That was during sleep. Her aggressive personality surfaces in unconscious states. Your subject's presence likely triggered it"

Brandon chuckled again, pure disdain on his face. "So a walking time bomb with unstable personalities is your lab's proudest creation? No wonder your facility's going downhill."

Armando **stayed** silent.

He wanted to argue. Technically, Ekie was a top-tier product—agility, strength, reflexes, recovery speed... all elite-level. She'd fought multiple elite test subjects during the lab wars **and** held her own. Among all creations, she'd been their standout.

But now!

Now they'd encountered a monster like Brandon—a man who defeated Elsie effortlessly. A man whose abilities exceeded every known

metric.

They **had** assumed Brandon was a high-tier, maybe SS-level, like Elsie

But the truth was chilling: Elsie reached 55-level by barely qualifying. Brandon, however, was capped at 55 simply because the ranking system didn't **go** any higher.

And he wasn't just strong. He was **also** the chief commander of Atoraka-Nowedon Lab—one of the most feared, powerful people in the underground world.

The mere thought **gave** Armando chills

you

One thing **was** now crystal clear: they must never become this man's enemy. "We still see Elsie **as** a critical asset, Armando said quickly. "If you'll spare her, we'll support whatever your current **goals** are. Just name . Serpaton-Mocrta Lab will back fully." Brandon raised an eyebrow.

Smart old bastards, he thought. At least they knew how to read the room.

Bennett—the genius, the prodigy, Noelle's brother.

Among the top labs, even the best minds rarely matched Bennett in brilliance. And now, Bennett was working on memory replication: a way to record and preserve a human's entire set of **memories**.

If successful, it would be a breakthrough—like copying a person's soul.

And Brandon needed it.

But it had to be done quietly. Atoraka-Nowedon couldn't know. Not yet.

So he smiled and said. "Since you're being so generous, I won't be **shy**. I'll call when I need you"

"Understood." Armando exhaled in relief.

He ordered Elie to retreat immediately

But before leaving **she** shot Brandon one **last** look—eyes burning with resentment, **like the** still wanted take him down

Brandon smirked. “What Dying **for a second round?**”

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Chapter 259

The moment the killing aura around him surged, Elsie flinched. Her fire completely extinguished.

She turned and bolted.

The next

next morning, just as the first hints of dawn lit the sky, Noelle slowly opened her eyes under the covers.

Still half-asleep, she turned her head-**only** to see a stunningly handsome man lying right next to her.....

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Chapter 260

The moment Noelle saw Nicolas's sleeping face, her heart began to race. Why is he so good-looking?!

Nicolas was already a stunning man when awake, but now-with **all** his sharp edges softened by sleep-his beauty felt almost unreal. Angelic, even.

As a hopeless sucker for good looks, Noelle couldn't help herself. She leaned in and gently placed a kiss on his cheek, feeling a giddy sense of victory-like a sneaky little thief getting away with something

But that single kiss wasn't enough.

So **she** leaned in **again**, giving his cheek another exaggerated “muah.”

How was it **even** possible that someone this handsome **was** hers?

It felt like she'd stolen a blessing **from** the gods. Would she get struck by lightning later?

Overcome with affection, Noelle's lips began wandering-kisses on his eyelids, his brows, the bridge of his nose, both cheeks, even his jawline. By the time she was done, his entire face was dotted with her love.

What she didn't know was-Nicolas had been awake the whole time.

He'd been pretending to sleep just to see what she'd do when she **woke** up. He hadn't expected her to start planting kisses all over his face.

It reminded him of his childhood golden retriever who used to wake him up every morning by slobbering on his face. Honestly, it felt weirdly **similar**.

Her kisses were light, but ticklish. Her sweet scent lingered at the tip of his nose, and considering it was early morning—when men were **naturally** more... susceptible—Nicolas was rapidly approaching his limit.

Before things spiraled out of control, he **opened** his eyes.

And right on cue, he locked eyes with a

a very startled Noelle.

Caught red-handed, Noelle panicked and tried to bolt. But of course, Nicolas wasn't about to let her escape.

"Where are **you** going?" he said, wrapping an arm easily around her waist and pulling her back into his arms.

Noelle toppled onto his chest, wide-eyed, "N-**Nicolas**... You're awake!"

Nicolas smirked. If I hadn't woken up, I'd be completely devoured by now."

"By who?"

"You, obviously

"I **would** not!" she pouted, crossing her arms. "You're making me sound **like** some pervy hooligan.

He chuckled, rubbing a thumb over the corner of her mouth. "So **who** was the one making **out** with my face like a starved puppy? Kissing an unconscious man.. you sure that's not hooligan behavior?"

Noelle's face went bright red.

"You were awake the whole time!"

"Vep" he replied with a grin

She puffed up **like** an angry chipmunk "Then why pretend to sleepi

Nicolas laughed and pinched the bridge of her nose affectionately. How he was I supposed to catch the little rogue in the **act**, hum?"

Realizing she'd already been exposed. Noelle gave up trying to play innocent. She leaned in, gave him a big kiss on the **cheek**, **and** declared. "Fine! I'm a rogue. Your rogue!"

Nicolas burst out laughing. "Wow, so bold"

Then, unable to resist, he cupped the back of her head and started to pull her in for a real kiss. But just as their lips were about to meet,

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he hesitated—then shifted slightly to kiss the e corner of her mouth instead.

It was soft. Tender. Loving.

Noelle froze for a moment,

She could tell Nicolas **had** been about to kiss her lips... but had changed his mind at the last second. Is it because I told **him** not to **kiss** me? she wondered

never a

asked.

He **had** remembered. Even now, he respected her boundary—**even** though she had never explained the reason why. He ne never pressed. Just quietly accepted it.

The guilt hit her like a freight train. Brandon kissed me. And I didn't stop him.

Suddenly, it felt like she'd done something terribly wrong. The weight of that kiss pressed heavily on her chest, guilt and self-blame swirling in her stomach.

“What's wrong?” Nicolas asked gently.

He saw the shift in her express the sudden hint of sadness in her eyes. He reached up and stroked her check. “Baby, **are** you feeling

sick?”

“No...” Noelle shook her **head**, then wrapped her arms tightly around him

She buried her face in his chest, holding him like she was afraid he'd slip away.

She didn't dare tell him about Brandon. Didn't even want to mention that Brandon had visited.

‘Don't let him worry. Don't make him sad:

For someone who used **to** breeze through any mission with ease, it now felt impossibly hard just to keep Nicolas happy.

He noticed the way her energy dropped again, even though she tried to hide it.

Something had definitely **happened**.

Last night, when she **got** back from the Andersons, she'd been acting off. So when she wasn't looking, Nicolas discreetly called the Anderson family—fishing for details.

One name had come up: **Brandon**

A name Noelle **had** never mentioned to him before.

But from the Andersons tone, it was clear—this Brandon was very important to her. They'd been close. Maybe very close.

That alone was suspicious.

Noelle **was** usually an open book. She'd even blurted out she was a mercenary without thinking twice. For her to never mention

someone du clos

There was only one explanation.

Brandon was from her original organization.

It made sense. Noelle had never **spoken** a word about the people behind her, The only reason to keep something that tightly guarded...

wat because of who he was

And now Brandon had shown up. Publicly. Introducing himself to the Andersons,

That couldn't be good.

Nicolas had a gnawing feeling that something big **was** about to happen—something that could change everything between him and

And he wasn't ready.

Not yet

Even with all his resources, even after acquiring the Sawyer Group and building an empire, Nicolas still **wasn't** sure he could go toe-to- toe with the force behind Noelle.

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Chapter 26o

He needed more power, which led him to **a** single, sobering thought, “The Jenkins family. His mother's family‘

He hadn't reached out to them **in** years. But now, for Noelle—for the future he wanted to protect—maybe it was time to lower his pride and knock on their door.

