

Unwanted Girl Spoiled by Billionaire – c 271-280

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Chapter 271

Nestled in Nicolas' arms, Noelle suddenly felt an intense gaze pierce through her.

She shuddered, then turned around to look.

Brandon stood just on the other side of the institute gates. He **wore his usual** elegant smile, perfectly composed—but in his **calm** eyes, Noelle caught a glimpse of something far more dangerous lurking beneath the surface.

She hadn't even said goodbye. She had just... run.

Instinctively, she stepped in front of Nicolas, as if to shield **him**, her voice trembling **as** she called out, "Brandon..."

Before she could say anything more, Nicolas gently took her hand.

"Huh?" Noelle blinked.

Nicolas stepped up beside her, no longer behind her but standing shoulder to shoulder. With a polite smile, as if unaware of any tension, he looked Brandon in the eye and asked Noelle. Is this your friend?"

JUh... yeah... Noelle stammered.

Brandon was **still** technically her friend... right?

But now they were face to face—Brandon and Nicolas. Was that really a good idea!

The institute gates creaked open.

Brandon walked through slowly, with calm, deliberate steps. He had reined in his aura, adopting a courteous air, and extended a hand. with a smile. "Nice to meet you. I'm Brandon, a friend of Noelle's."

Nicolas returned the smile just as calmly. "Pleasure. I'm Nicolas—Noelle's partner."

That line made Brandon's eye twitch ever so slightly.

Noelle's partner? What **a** bold claim.

Nicolas had seen it in an instant—Brandon had feelings for **his** girl. So, of course, he chose that moment to make things crystal clear.

And judging by the sudden **shift** in Brandon's expression, the hit landed right on target.

Nicolas smirked inwardly. So **that's all** it takes to shake him?'

The two men **locked** eyes—calm on the surface, but **sharp** tension crackled in the air between them.

Even Noelle, usually oblivious to these things, could tell they were at odds.

"Nicolas she whispered, tugging gently at his sleeve. She didn't want them to fight.

Nicolas glanced down at her.

In her bright, innocent eyes, now clouded with unease, he could see it—she **was** afraid of this man.

Nicolas eyes narrowed.

How fearless, firecracker of a girl actually **afraid** of someone!

Father Brandon was stronger than her

Or he had a way of controlling her.

no **point** pushing this further.

She sighed again and gently asked. "Noelle, are you done for the day?"

It was late—let her go home" He spurred her for hand.

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"Okay..." Noelle murmured, casting **a** hesitant glance **at Brandon**. Waiting for his **approval**.

Brandon **didn't** make things difficult. He smiled and said, "It **is getting** late. Go on home, Noelle. Mr. Sawyer."

"Okay!" she said quickly, grabbing Nicolas **hand** like a lifeline. "Let's go."

"Mm" Nicolas pulled her close and **walked** away with her in his arms.

Even as the car drove off, Brandon's eyes didn't leave its trail.

Hands in **his** pockets, posture relaxed and poised, he stood silently under the night sky—his smile unreadable, somewhere between amusement and rage.

One more week.

In one week, Noelle would be ready for the full memory read-write test. After that, none of this would matter.

But then.... her birthday was coming up.

The Anderson family would definitely throw her a party. And Nicolas would be there.

Wouldn't it be fun, Brandon thought, 'to turn that into a blood-soaked celebration!

He could already picture it: the shock on the Anderson family's faces, the devastation in Nicolas' eyes.

Brandon laughed aloud, delighted by the vision.

He really **couldn't** wait for Noelle's 19th birthday."

Nicolas held her close, heart aching as he looked at her—completely drained, so **unlike** her **usual** lively self.

"Tired?" he asked softly.

"Mm, she hummed, **too** worn-out to lift her head. 'So tired"

Then stop going to Bennett's lab, Nicolas said gently.

He'd noticed it too—every time she came back, she **was** exhausted. The girl who **used** to light up at the mention of food could barely eat now. Even her appetite was disappearing.

That wasn't **a good sign**.

↑ can't" Noelle murmured, **shaking** her head.

"Why not?" he asked.

But she didn't answer.

Nicolas jaw tightened.

Was it really that **she** couldn't **say** no—not even to Bennett?

Then he thought of Brandon

Noelle had flinched at the mere sound of his voice,

thought of training him

dropped

what happens when the lab gives the under Will she **really**

Just because they told her to

the twound painfully an has go

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“Noelle?” she called his name softly, sensing his shift in mood.

He turned to her, brow still furrowed.

She reached up with a shaky hand **and** gently smoothed his creased forehead. “Don’t frown, Nicolas. You’re not handsome when **you** frown. You have to **smile**.. you look better that **way**.”

And just like that, she smiled at him—so brightly it almost hurt to look at.

Nicolas stared **down at** her.

She was exhausted. Her eyes were dull. Her body was shaking.

And yet she still tried to **make** him feel better.

“Idiot, he thought, ‘why do I love **you so** much?’”

There was no **way** a girl like this—this **sunshine** in human form—could kill him over a command.

A tool? No.

She wasn’t a tool. She was Noelle.

And she was **his**.

Suddenly, a thought struck him—sharp and terrifying.

He had to know.

Nicolas tightened his **arms** around her, looked deep into her eyes, and said quietly, “Noelle. I need to ask **you** something. Think carefully before you answer.

“Okay,” she nodded sleepily, **resting** her head b’Ask away“ack on his chest.

Nicolas exhaled slowly, then **asked**, very clearly. “If someone **told you** to kill me... would **you** do it?”

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Noelle froze. What kind of question was that?

“Nicolas, what are you talking about?” she said, stunned,

“There’s no way I’d ever kill you” she said firmly, without hesitation. “You’re the **most** important person in the world to me. I couldn’t do

She wouldn’t **even** hurt him—how could she ever kill him?

Nicolas stared at her, unreadable. Then, softly, he asked, “But what if the person asking you to do it... is someone you can’t say no to?”

At that, Noelle’s **body** stiffened.

A **name** surfaced in her **mind** immediately: Brandon

What if Brandon did order her to kill Nicolas?

At first, her feelings for Nicolas **had** been shallow—just a crush on a face too handsome to be real. He was **nice** to her, too, so naturally, she liked him. But back then, if the labs had ordered her to kill him, she **would’ve** obeyed **without blinking**

But now... now everything had changed.

These days, she liked Nicolas so much it scared her. He always put her first, always paved the way for her, always treated her like she was precious. Since meeting him, she’d felt like she was living in a dream.

She’d never known someone like him. Never known **this** kind of gentle love.

Everyone else in her life had mocked her, used her, or treated her like a tool.

But not Nicolas

From **the** moment they met, he **had** treated her with kindness—without expecting anything in return. Even her own blood relatives hadn’t done that

How could she kill the one person who had loved her so unconditionally?

Noelle didn’t even want to imagine hurting Nicolas. The thought **alone made** her chest ache so badly she felt like she couldn’t breathe.

She took her head fiercely, then looked up at him with eyes filled with unshakable conviction.

“No,” she said. “Nicolas, no matter who it is no matter what they **say** I will never hurt you. I swear it. I won’t. Ever.”

–

Nicolas stared at her, taking in the determination etched across her face, and in **that** moment, it was **like** a weight **had** been lifted from

his shoulders

He smiled softly, then pulled her tightly into **his** arms.

I believe you, Noelle, he whispered. “That’s **all** I need.”

And with that, the storm in his heart finally settled.

next morning. Noelle was already bouncing back to li

to her cheerful self. After a full night’s rest, her energy had **somewhat** returned.

Nicolas rapped her face and said, “Finish up your test early today. I’ll **cook** something for you myself”

selle’s eyes widened. “Wait—you can cook?”

house, they’d only ever seen the housekeeper or chief do the cooking. **Nicolas** had never touched a pan.

“A” he said, chuckling “But nothing compared to Chef Noelle

laugland. “Won’t that be unfair to your taste buds?”

tastes terrible, | eat every last bite—because it’s from you?

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“If it’s **from** you, it’s never unfair.

After their little morning cuddle session, Nicolas insisted on personally driving her to the lab.

But as they stepped outside the villa, they saw a sleek black car parked nearby.

And leaning against it, **like** something out of a movie, was Brandon—stunningly beautiful, aloof, and ice-cold. When **alone**, he radiated a chilling distance **that** made people afraid to get too close.

But the **moment** his emerald green eyes landed on Noelle, something sh

Then he waved and called out. “Noelle.”

Noelle blinked, **surprised**. “Brandon?”

shifted

He straightened up, **walking** toward her with a smile. “I came to pick you up.

Gone was the icy veneer. Now, Brandon seemed more... **human**.

1. More alive.

But Noelle didn’t notice the change. All she saw was the end of her peaceful morning with Nicolas. She had hoped to spend a bit more time with him on the drive, just the two of them.

She looked over at Nicolas, conflicted.

She didn’t want to disappoint him.

But Nicolas, ever gentie, smiled and said. “It’s fine. If **Brandon** came to pick you up, go with him”

“Nicolas... she murmured, **guilt** welling in her **throat**

“I’m okay.”

Noelle wanted to say something—but what could she **say**? This wasn’t her choice.

So she **gave** in, climbing into Brandon’s car.

Brandon shut the door, then looked back toward Nicolas with a smile.

His emerald eyes glinted with malice—mocking, taunting.

He **gave** a little nod... and drove away.

Nicolas watched the car disappear with a dry chuckle..

How childish,‘ he thought. **Was** that supposed to be some kind of declaration? A show of power!

“Alright then, Brandon,” he murmured. “Let’s see who laughs **last**.”“

As Nicolas turned to head back inside, his phone buzzed.

A call from an unknown number.

But the location? Kory’s estate.

Nicolas eyes narrowed

wer yet. So this was probably his w

way of following u

cred “Hello”

They had only met last night And Rory already knew?

I do **is** under this man’s surveillance, Nicolas thought grimly. Heil have to be

nore careful **going** forward

Sell, he played dumb “The meeting? Oh, not hard He seemed pretty polite

Kory scoffed. “Pulite! Are you blind or just pretending! Tui your lare purifical–h

outlity toward

tically overflowed. He’s not just interested in.

“Maybe.” Nicolas replied coolly

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But Rory wasn’t calling to banter.

He got straight to the point. “So! I gave you a day to decide. What’s your answer?”

“Will you marry Angeline **and** protect Noelle? Or walk away, and leave yourself at the mercy of the very girl you love? In Rory’s mind, **the** answer should’ve been obvious. Any smart man would know which path to choose.

But all he heard on the other end... was Nicolas chuckling-

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Nicolas said, “**You** know, Grandfather, my **mom** died early. My father never give **a** damn about me. If I hadn’t grown a spine and toughened up, the Sawyer family would’ve devoured me–bones **and** all”

Rory fell silent for **a** moment.

He narrowed his eyes, wondering. Is this boy **trying** to play the sympathy card? Hoping I'll feel bad and agree to help him without forcing **the** marriage? Ridiculous,

Rory might share blood with Nicolas, but there wasn't much affection there. He hadn't built the Jenkins family into a powerhouse by being soft. He didn't believe in sentimentality—he didn't even attend his own daughter's funeral.

Finally, he spoke again, his tone cold. "So what are you trying to **say**? If you're hoping to guilt me into-

But Nicolas cut him off with a calm laugh. "I'm saying. I'm not someone who takes well to being pushed around. The harder someone tries to force **my** hand, the less I want to give them what they want."

Rory's expression instantly darkened. "Nicolas... You mean to say

Yes, Nicolas said simply. "Exactly what you're thinking. I'm **turning** down the Jenkins family's support."

He chuckled faintly, as if amused at himself. "Honestly, I must've lost my mind for even considering it. Relying on someone else? That's never worked out for me. I've always stood on my own, **and** I'll keep doing just that. So **io** need to worry about me, Grandfather?

"Nicolas!" Rory snapped, rage bubbling **beneath his usually** calm surface.

But Nicolas just smiled, **his voice** steady. "Wishing you all the best. Let's part ways here. I don't think you want to see **me again** anyway?

"**Nicolas** Rory roared.

But before the man could get another word in, Nicolas **hung** up.

Then, without hesitation, he blocked the number.

When Nicolas **had first** learned the truth **about** Noelle—about who she really was and **what** organization stood behind her he had been shaken. He hadn't know **what** to do.

But last night, in the car, when Noelle looked him in the eyes **and** swore she would never hurt him—no matter who ordered her to Nicolas made his decision.

He would fight for her. **With** everything he had.

The way he **saw** it, there were only a few possible endings.

Best **case**? He and Noelle survive, and she breaks free of the lab once and for all

Middle ground? They both die—but at least they're together.

Worst case! He dies, and Noelle **survives...** but **what's** left of her is just an empty shell—a soulless **weapon**, hollowed out by cold-hearted

scientists.

If it ever came to that, Nicolas swore he'd do everything in his power to pull her out of **that** hell before she became a puppet.

Still, he wasn't one **to** assume the worst.

After all, he'd survived being raised by **a** cruel family who constantly schemed against him. **And** now, he'd destroyed them and taken everything they had. He hadn't just survived—he'd won.

Niezas dadn i think he was outmatched

Losing **Rory** a backing wasn't the end of the world. In fact, thanks to Rory, he now had clarity—he **understood** the real **stakes**, the power behind Nurlie, the truth about Brandon, and what they were all really after.

He brally had a target.

The Laborato

dear target, Nicolas could art

-the so-called “research facilities—were hidden in the shadows for a reason. **As** powerful as they were, they couldn't

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afford to be exposed. If the p

public ever learned what they were doing.

Well, Rory had said the law was just a tool for controlling the weak.

But Nicolas knew—when the people **turned**, **those** who thought themselves untouchable could fall just as hard.

Let's see who breaks first

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When Hory realized Nicolas had not only hung **up** on him but had also blocked his number, he was so furious that **he** hurled his phone to the ground.

The butler, startled, quickly picked it up and spoke in a low voice, "Please don't be angry, sir. Mr. Sawyer is just being headstrong—he'll come to his senses. Once he calms down. I'm sure he'll return and apologize."

"Hell only cry when he sees the collar, Rory said coldly, his eyes **gleaming** with malice. "Keep a close watch on him. I **want** to see if he's still so stubborn when **his** life is on the line"

As the **days passed**, Noelle's endurance in the brainwave resonance tests

is increased dramatically—from **40** minutes at the start to a full hour under high-voltage currents by the end of the week.

To the other researchers, this was nothing short of a miracle.

But that miracle came at a visible cost

Noelle's frame had grown noticeably thinner. The baby fat that once softened her cheeks had disappeared, leaving her with sharp features and a gaunt, almost fragile beauty,

After one of the tests concluded, Bennett rushed to her side, catching her just before she collapsed.

"Noelle.

"Bennett?" she murmured, leaning limply **against** him. She tried to smile and half-joked, "You've gotten really good at catching me.

It was true. At some point, Bennett had started showing up at just the right time—always catching her before she hit the floor.

"**You** still **have** the strength to joke?" Bennett muttered, exasperated.

He held her wrist gently—so thin now it felt like there was nothing but skin and bone.

Bennett had always considered himself a bit of a madman when it came to science. He **wasn't** one to **shy** away from sacrifice in the name **of** progress.

But even he had to admit—watching Brandon's methods made him uneasy

Every time Noelle was subjected to the experiments, Bennett found himself holding his breath, afraid **that** just one moment of weakness might break her completely. And yet... not once had she ever asked them to stop. Not one complaint, not one plea.

It was terrifying, the way she endured it all—so obedient it was almost inhuman.

That's when it hit him. The only reason Noelle could be **this** obedient was because **she** had been raised **that** way—from the very beginning. Conditioned to obey any command given by the lab.

If someone ordered her to die, she'd probably go without asking why.

The thought made Bennett's chest tighten.

To think

at the Andersons real daughter- who **should** have been adopted and cherished-had been treated like a **disposable** tool for so

Back when he first found out Nuelle had been switched at birth, Bennett didn't feel much. One sister or **another**-what did it matter?

net her, she'd kept surprising him. She was brilliant. Fascinating. And at first, he had viewed her as nothing more than

Y now that that was being treated like that he couldn't take it.

Niente was terse-stupid, even-but she was also light and cheerful. Anyone else might've turned bitter or broken under what she'd

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And somehow, they were cruel enough to keep hurting her anyway.

Just as that thought hit him. Brandon strolled into the room with his usual smile.

room

"Congratulations. Noelle," he said warmly. "You've passed every test. Once we complete the Memory Read Write trial, you'll never have to do this again."

is over?"

Noelle's eyes lit up. "Really? I'll be done for good once the final experiment is

Brandon nodded. "That's right."

Just the thought of never having to go through this again gave her a fresh burst of energy. Beaming, she **said**, "Then I'll give it everything I've got. Brandon. I promise I'll pass **on** the first try."

Brandon smiled, those emerald-green eyes glinting faintly. "I look forward to seeing **what** you can do."

"Don't worry, I won't let you down!"

For the first time in days, Noelle's voice **was** full of **spirit again**. She was determined—if this was the end, she'd push through it.

But **standing** beside her, Bennett wasn't smiling.

with suspicion. His lips were pressed into a tight line, and his eyes drifted toward Brandon, cold and sharp. Because deep down, he knew—once the final test was complete, Brandon wouldn't need them anymore. And whatever happened then... probably wouldn't be good.

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After completing all the preliminary test rounds, Noelle returned to the Anderson residence with Bennett.

Between helping out with Nicolas's situation and constantly running experiments, she hadn't been home **in** ages—nor had she stepped foot on campus. As a result, she'd failed all her finals.

Had this happened right after she was first reunited with the Andersons, the household probably would've exploded. But now? Noelle was the family's precious darling—no one said a word of criticism. Even her school made an exception for her, thanks to her reputation as a “gold medal composer, allowing her to retake her exams next tertri

The moment they got home, Kimberly rushed over the second she saw her daughter. Cupping Noelle's face in both **hands**, she fussed, “Sweetheart, how **have you** lost so much weight in just a few days? Have you not been eating properly?”

slim d

down

Noelle, not **wanting** her **family** to worry, came up with a casual excuse. I've just been dieting a **bit**, Mom. Trying to

Bennett accepted the **blame** with a sheepish chuckle. “That's on me. Don't worry, I'll make sure she gains all that weight back.”

“You better,” Kimberly huffed, before turning back to her daughter with a beaming smile. “Noelle, your figure's already perfect. You don't need to lose a single ounce. Eat up and get back to a healthy weight. Oh—and your birthday's next week! Your dad and I are planning a big celebration for you. We're finally going to announce your identity publicly and welcome you into the family properly.”

“**Okay**, Noelle nodded, smiling sweetly. “Ill listen **to you** and Dad.”

That's my good girl,” Kimberly **said**, gently patting her cheek before pulling her toward the dining room.

With the year-end approaching, most of the Anderson siblings were home—except for Adriel and Bennett, who were swamped with work, **and** Charlie, who **had** a packed entertainment schedule. Damon and Eli were both present and sitting on either side of Noelle at the dinner **table**.

The moment she sat down, the feeding frenzy began

“Here, Noelle—eat some of this beef,” Eli said, plopping a chunk into her bowl.

“Have a drumstick,” Damon added immediately, **laying** it right on top of the meat.

Eli glanced **up** and frowned. “Damon, couldn’t you see I already gave her meat?”

“**And** what’s the problem?” Damon said with **a** shrug. “Yours is underneath. **She** can eat the drumstick first.”

“Don’t you know about first come, first served?” Eli grumbled, quickly shoving another piece of meat back on top.

Now Damon was annoyed. He **glared** and snorted, “You’re being childish Ever heard of last one wins?”

He promptly added another drumstick, flattening Eli’s **meat** again.

Eli **gave** him a deadpan look. “You said you didn’t care about the order. **So** why’d you put yours on top **again**?”

*Because you were

re being immature

“Oh, and you’re not?”

“At least I’m better than you.”

The two devolved into a full-on war of cullery—durling with fork right over Noelle’s bowl.

Noelle Buck between the **chaos and** looking at her poor, mutilated food, **just** sat there—**helpless** and speechless. She hadn’t **had** much of **an** appetite to begin with after the **constant** experiments, and now, seeing her food thoroughly manhandled by both brothers she

onestly felt a little queary

Ne, which one do you want to rat first? Eli **finally asked**, after their sibling **rivalry** hit a deadlock.

linked in confusion, unsure how to answer

“Kat the drumurick Damon insisted “Just look at what his beef looks like it’s falling apart. Isn’t it gross!”

ún't exactly pristine either. "Um, Damon yours doris't look that great

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Damon twitched. He shot her a betrayed look, like how could you sell me out like this?

Noelle stared back, wide-eyed and innocent. "I **really** don't have an appetite..."

Eli snickered "**Wow**, Damon. She totally rejected your drumstick."

Noelle shot him a side glance and muttered, "And you **have** the nerve to laugh?

ugh? Your beef looks like ground meat".

"What **was** that?" Eli gasped dramatically. He immediately hooked an arm around her neck and started playfully rubbing her head, That's **how** you thank me for feeding you? By insulting my beef?"

Struggling to escape, Noelle protested, "C'mon, Eli **What** kind of meat was that-it was practically mush. Can't you **give** me a whole piece?

"Fine, **fine**," Eli relented and picked out a perfect slice, stuffing it straight into her mouth. "There. Happy 1

Noelle chewed, then gave him a thumbs up. Tastes good."

Eli beamed. "Here, **have** another."

now?"

"You haven't finished this one."

Just as he was about to feed her again, Damon shoved another fresh drumstick in front of her." Noelle looked from the chicken to Damon's intense expression and knew immediately if she didn't take a bite, this **man** might never forgive her.

So she leaned in **and** took a big bite.

Damon,

satisfied, **gave** her a rare **smile**. "Good?"

"Mm-hmm," she mumbled with her mouth full

"Then have **another bite**."

She obediently chomped again, cheeks puffing like a squirrel's. **Damon** smirked triumphantly and **shot** Eli a smug look.

Eli rolled his eyes **and** fired back. “More meat, Noelle. Eat up!”

Noelle sighed internally. These two are so immature

But somehow, despite herself, she ended up eating more than she had all week. By the end, she was so full she nearly threw up. But before she could daydream further about her revenge plans, she turned toward the door—and froze.

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“Bennett?” Noelle **was** a bit surprised.

“Noelle?” Bennett stood in front of her door, surprising her.

She blinked. “What’s he doing here, lingering like t

that? Don’t tell me he’s got something else for me to do...

Sensing trouble, she immediately tried to shut it down. Just so you know, I’m completely exhausted today. If you’ve got something to say, save it for tomorrow. Actually—no, wait. I’ve got another experiment tomorrow. Say it the day after.”

Bennett raised a brow **at** how wary she looked, then let out a laugh. “Do I really seem that scary to **you**? Like **some** kind of monster?”

“In my eyes?” Noelle tilted her head. “You’re way worse

than n a monster.”

Thinking about all **the** hellish experiments she’d endured, she was practically traumatized by now.

“You’re not exactly sugarcoating it,” Bennert said dryly.

Noelle pouted. “We’re siblings—why bother being polite?”

Bennett paused, caught off guard. “Siblings?”

She blinked. “Aren’t we?”

“Yeah,” he replied after a beat. Then he looked at **family**?”

ther more closely and suddenly asked, “Noelle, do you like being part

of the Anderson

Noelle **was a** little confused by the question but nodded. “**Yeah**, I do.”

“But we weren’t exactly nice to you in the beginning,” Bennett reminded her. “Damon even said he’d kill **you**.”

Somewhere, Damon sneezed.

Noelle tilted her head, unsure why Bennett brought this **up out** of nowhere. After a moment, she said, “I didn’t think you were that bad.”

“You didn’t? Bennett looked at her, surprised.

She shook her head. “No. Not really”

Sure, they’d been cold at first, but no one in the Anderson family had ever deprived her of basic needs. And honestly, in Noelle’s life experience, that was already more **kindness** than most had ever shown.

She’d been out in the world since she was ten, after being released from the lab. People who were nice to her always wanted something in return. She never expected kindness from anyone, nor did she take it for granted.

Even Vincent, their pride-obsessed father, still sent Kimberly to buy her clothes when he realized she had none. Eli might grumble nonstop, but he always brought her along **with** Leia. And even when they fought, they **never** really cast **her** out—if anything, they’d apologize when they were **in** the wrong

To Noelle, the Anderson **family** was surprisingly **good**. Not quite **as good** as Nicolas, of course—but still pretty great. Bennett studied her face, the unwavering **sincerity** in her eyes. A smile tugged **at** the corner of his lips. “You really

“So what?” she asked, her interest piqued, expecting praise.

“You’re

Norile deflated instantly. She looked like a puppy that had just been denied a **treat**.

y are something else.

help but right. He had seen the worst of people and firmly believed in the darkness of **human** nature—**until** Noelle

maybe people could still shine. Reminded him that maybe

her so easy to bury

* Brandon wanted all of Noelle’s memories **from** birth—the long experiment succeeded, Bennett was sure Brandon would make his

and he had to stop whatever Frankon was plotting

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The next day, Noelle officially began the “Memory Read/Write experiment. It would last a full eight hours. She lay flat on the table, her head covered in dozens of metallic electrodes, while **beside** her, a massive machine pulsed and flickered—mapping out the wavelength of her memories.

Once her memories were fully transferred, they could be decoded and implanted into other life forms, effectively allowing others to inherit Noelle’s experiences.

And the experiment **was** a resounding success. Just like she promised, Noelle passed it **on** the very first try—transferring all her memories perfectly.

Brandon was more thrilled than anyone. For the first time, he even beat Bennett to Noelle’s side, scooping up her nearly unconscious body and exclaiming with delight, “Noelle, you were incredible. We got the entire memory set!”

Soaked in sweat and completely drained, Noelle managed a tired smile. She had never seen Brandon so happy before.

“That means I don’t have to do any more experiments now, right?” she asked weakly.

“No more,” Brandon confirmed with a bright smile. He held her close, practically glowing with joy. “It’s all over.”

Thank goodness...” **she** murmured. If she had the energy, she would’ve run laps around the lab in celebration.

Brandon gently patted **her** head. “To celebrate, I’ll take you out to eat tonight—anything you want.”

Noelle froze, then gave him an awkward glance. “Uh....actually, I already made plans with Nicolas. We’re supposed to have **dinner** together.”

The moment Nicolas’s name came up, Brandon’s smile faltered.

Noelle immediately grew nervous. Is he going to forbid me

from going TOW?

But to her surprise, Brandon simply smiled again. “I see. Then go ahead—you two have fun. We’ll celebrate another day.” Noelle blinked. ‘Wait, that’s it? Just like that? No pushback? Is **this**... a trap? Or did Brandon actually mellow out?’

As soon as she stepped out of the lab, Nicolas’s car was already waiting at the gate

“Nicolas!” she called, rushing into **his** arms.

Nicolas hurried to catch her. “How did it go? Did it work?”

“Of course it did!” she grinned, showing off her pearly teeth. I’m amazing, remember? One and done.”

“My brilliant girl, Nicolas **said**, fondly pinching her cheek.

Let’s head to

the restaurant,” he added.

Noelle nodded “**Okay**”

Before e getting into the car, she **didn’t** forget to turn around and **wave**. “Brandon, we’ll head-out first!”

Brandon stood in place, smiling gently. “**Go** ahead. Have a great time*

Noelle nodded and goi

in the car.

only to catch the man staring at

about to climb in too, but he glanced **back** at Brandon—only

was cold, like he was staring straight through **Nicolas...** as if he were already

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Kimberly had told Noelle that for her upcoming birthday, she could invite **a** few friends over to celebrate.

The first people that came to mind were Harley, Tina, and Stanley.

So, one by one, she picked up the phone and began dialing—starting with Harley.

As soon as the call connected—barely three seconds in—Harley answered. His voice, as always, **was** a little cool and aloof, but there was no hiding the faint trace of joy **beneath** it. “Noelle? What’s up?”

“Harley, my birthday’s coming up—it’s this Thursday. Come over to my place and celebrate with me,” Noelle said brightly, cutting straight to the point.

“Your birthday? This Thursday?” he asked, **clearly** surprised.

“**Yup**, that’s right!”

“That’s only three days away, Harley **said**, his tone suddenly anxious.

It’s still three **days**—plenty of time, Noelle replied, puzzled by his urgency.

But Harley disagreed. Three days isn’t enough. I haven’t even picked a gift yet!”

Noelle giggled. “You don’t need to bring me a gift. Just being there is enough.”

“No way. Of course I have to bring a gift, he said firmly. It would be his first time celebrating her birthday he had to make it count.

Time was tight, and Harley didn’t want to waste another second. Til be there Thursday. If there’s nothing else, **I’ve** got to go prep.”

Noelle nodded. The party starts at 11:50 am. Just come about half an hour before.”

“GoLi

“Okay, see you then!”

“Bye.

After hanging up with Harley, Noelle rolled around on the bed a few times, then dialed her best friend, **Tina**.

It took a while for the call to go through. The first attempt timed out. But Noelle was persistent—if at first you **don’t** succeed, try again.

On the third ring. Tina finally answered.

“Hello? Noelle?” came Tina’s voice, drowned out by what sounded like utter chaos—shouts, blaring music, and the high-pitched screeches **of** a crowd.

Noelle winced. “Tina? What’s going on over there? It sounds like a stampede.”

Tina sighed and explained, “I’m at a concert venue right now.

“**Oh, so** you’re here to see **a** show?”

“Nope. I’m here **selling** merch.”

“You can sell merch at a concert?”

“Of course not. Tina replied flatly

“Then how are you selling it?”

“Where there’s demand, there’s a market. Did you sleep through econ class?”

Noelle snorted.

“Pretty sure th

sure this falls under **law**, not economics.”

“Eh, who cares—**as long** as I’m making money.” Tina said breezily

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Chapter 278

Noelle once again found herself impressed by Tina’s fearless hustle. This girl really would do anything **to** earn a buck.

“So, what’s up? Why the **call**?” Tina **asked**.

Right—this Thursday’s my birthday. I wanted to invite you to come over.”

“**Thursday**?” Tina repeated. I’ve got two offline events **that** day, and I’m still in Crestfall City. It’s a three-hour train ride to Reniam.”

“Oh...” Noelle’s voice deflated. “So you can’t make it?”

Well, technically no—unless you cover my round-trip train fare:

That brought Noelle right back to life. “Really? That’s it? Done! You don’t even need the **train**—I have Nicolas send **his** helicopter. You’ll be here in an hour and a half”

“You rich people are the worst, Tina muttered.

“I’m not! Nicolas is”

“You’re married to him. That makes you guilty by association.

That made Noelle giggle uncontrollably. Her legs swung off the edge **of** the bed as she laughed.

“Okay, send me your address, and I’ll have them pick you up.”

“**Deal**”

“I won’t bother you anymore. Just be careful, okay? Don’t get caught by security.”

As soon as the words left her mouth, she heard a stern voice over the line. “Hey, you there! Girl in the back! Stop right there!”

Tina cursed. “Noelle, your mouth is cursed. You jinxed me.

Noelle panicked. I didn’t mean to Run!”

I’m running. If I end up in a holding cell, you better come bail me out.”

“You got it!” Noelle said quickly.

And with **that**. Tina hung up. Noelle **silently** prayed for her friend’s safety... for three whole seconds,

Then she called Stanley.

It only took about ten seconds for him to answer, sounding thoroughly **lazy**, chips audibly crunching in the background.

“**What’s up?**” he mumbled.

“You sound like you haven’t moved from your couch all day,” Noelle teased, then got straight to the point. “Stanley, my birthday’s this Thursday!”

“Oh. Happy birthday,” he said, deadpan

Noelle pouted, “Seriously? Could you be any more half-hearted? My birthday’s not today, it’s Thursday,”

“Then I’m wishing you a happy birthday in **advance**.”

“No way. Aren’t we supposed to be friends? That’s how you treat your friends?

“I am treating y

you **like** a friend. That’s why I said happy birthday,” he replied shamelessly.

Noelle gritted her teeth. “If you don’t show up, I’m calling Nicolas and asking him to dump even more work on you.”

Dut did the trick.

“Okay, okay, jeez! **You** just want me to come to your place, right? Fine, I’m in”

He had known what she was getting at from the first sentence. But Flie was around lately, and the trauma she’d left faded. He really didn’t want to risk running into her.

And suddenly, facing Elsie didn’t seem so bad.

his life still hadn’t

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Chapter 278

“See? You knew exactly what I **was** getting **at**,” Noelle grumbled. “Why’d you play dumb?”

“Because once you say it out loud, I can’t say no, Stanley muttered.

Noelle mitterred back. “You’re such a pain.”

Stanley huffed. “Mind your own business.”

“Oh, you’ve got **a** mouth on you now? Should I call Nicolas and let him deal with it!”

“Unbelievable. You’re really gonna call in backup? Stanley groaned.

“Yep

You liule

“What?” Noelle smirked.

Stanley fell silent. In the end, the proud “transformer had no choice but to lower his noble head in defeat.

“**Smart** choice, Noelle **said** sweetly. Thursday. Don’t forget”

“**Yeah**, yeah,” he muttered—clearly still bitter.

But Noelle didn’t mind. She grinned as she hung up the phone

With all her friends invited, she hopped off the bed and was just about to head downstairs for a midnight **snack** when she suddenly paused.

She’d forgotten someone—Brandon.

Ever since the memory-copying experiment ended, he hadn’t sought her out. Her birthday was only a few days away. Should she.... invite him 1007

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hapter 279

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Noelle frowned. That's strange. Is he busy?

Just as she **was** about to try again **later**, Brandon's voice finally came through. ""Noelle? You were looking for me?"

"Yeah! I tried calling a minute ago and you didn't answer. Were you busy?" she asked curiously,

"I was," Brandon replied **simply**, his calm gaze fixed on the massive glass tank in front of him

Inside the tank, a girl floated silently in a viscous green liquid, her body curled into a fetal position. She wore a leathery mask, eyes tightly shut, as if in deep sleep. The most shocking part—she looked exactly like Noelle.

In this laboratory, human cloning was just another common technique. The girl

-a perfect biological replica

But Noelle had no idea.

There was a pause on the other end, followed by a soft chuckle. "I thought you wouldn't invite me

"Huh? Why would you think that?" Noelle asked, confused.

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"Well, Brandon said, with a hint of self-mockery, I've been putting you through all those exhausting experiments lately. You probably think I'm awful. **And** you've been more distant **with** me than before."

His voice was quiet, tinged with a bit of sadness and disappointment. Anyone who didn't know better might think he had been the one

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To be honest, Noelle had developed some fear and resentment toward Brandon because of the recent experiments, like the kind companion from her childhood.

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But Noelle wasn't one to hold grudges. She was the type who bounced back quickly, forgetting pain once it passed. And now that the experiments were over, she'd already returned to her usual sunny self.

Sensing Brandon's downcast mood, she earnestly replied, "**Even** if you were a little scary lately, you're still my friend. I haven't forgotten the **days** we spent together in the **lab**. I could never hate **you** over something like this?"

"Really? Brandon asked, his voice lighter. "You truly don't hate me?"

"Nope. Not at all."

For the first time in a while, **Brandon** smiled—genuinely,

Noelle was such a foul sometimes. But maybe that was exactly what made her so lovable. Her warmth and optimism were so rare in their cold, calculated world. That's why he **liked** her so much.

"I understand, Brandon said. I'll be there for your birthday."

"Great!" Noelle beamed. "Okay, I won't bother you anymore. Get **back** to what you were doing."

"Alright."

Bye Brandon!"

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Chapter 279

As the call ended, Brandon's gaze returned to the girl inside the glass chamber. His emerald eyes flickered with a storm of thoughts as **he** whispered to the unconscious clone. "If I can help it I hope I never have to use you."

With Noelle's birthday just

around the corner, she spent most of her days at the Anderson estate.

Nicolas had been swamped with work lately, returning home only past midnight. Since he couldn't be by her side during the day, he told her to stay with her family, where she'd be more comfortable.

But on the eve of her birthday, a shocking revelation took the world by storm.

A renowned international human rights organization dropped **an** explosive report, exposing the existence of three covert human experimentation laboratories. These labs were accused of heinous acts—violating ethics, desecrating life itself.

According to the report, the labs had been purchasing orphans from shelters and trafficking rings to conduct experiments—modifying their bodies into bio-weapons. Most of the children couldn’t withstand the procedures and died **as** a result, labeled as “failures”

The global community, already concerned with declining birth rates and aging populations, was outraged. Children were society’s most protected demographic—and now, it was revealed they **had** been used as disposable tools.

The story triggered international uproar. Protests erupted around the globe, with millions demanding the labs be shut down and their locations revealed, so the public could see justice done.

“**How** could anyone do something so vile?” Kimberly gasped in horror, watching the breaking news in the Anderson family’s living room. Even just reading about it made her skin **crawl**,

Eli echoed her anger. Those damn labs shouldn’t exist. Now that the human rights organization has gone public, the UN has to get involved.”

Vincent, however, wasn’t so sure. “It won’t be that e

easy. Running a Lab like that costs a fortune. For them to stay hidden this long, they must have powerful backers—big financial groups. If those step in, taking them down won’t be simple.”

Eli clenched his fists. “So what if they **have** money? If they weren’t afraid of public backlash, they’d **have** gone public a long **time** ago. Clearly, they do fear exposure. Once people rise up, even the wealthiest won’t be safe.”

Vincent fell silent. He couldn’t deny that point.

For now, to most, it was just **a** scandal on the news—distant and dramatic.

But Damon, who had begun to piece things together, **stared** silently at Noelle as she came downstairs.

Those labs Could Noelle **have** been part of one of them?’

Noelle hadn’t seen the news yet. She caught Damon’s intense gaze and tilted her head. “Why are you staring at me like that?”

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Chapter 280

“Noelle, did you see the news?” Damon asked as soon as she walked downstairs.

Noelle blinked, confused. “News? What news?”

Before Damon could respond, Kimberly turned and waved her over. “Noelle, come sit here, sweetheart.”

“Okay, Mom” Noelle walked toward her mother, glancing back at Damon. “So, what news were you talking about?”

Eli was the one who answered. “It’s about a human experimentation lab.”

“What?” Noelle’s eyes widened, her heart skipping a beat. “A human lab?”

She immediately thought of Atoraka–Nowedon Laboratory–the one she had grown up in, the one that had made her what she was

“Yeah, Eli said, his voice full of righteous anger. “Those monsters should be torn apart. Using human beings for experiments–what do they **think** people are, lab rats!”

Noelle quickly moved to his side to look **at** his tablet. Sure enough, the lab scandal **was** everywhere, trending across all platforms. The comments were flooded with public outrage and condemnation.

‘How could this happen? she thought, panic slowly creeping in. The lab’s security has always been airtight. How did it get exposed all of a sudden? Who leaked it–and why haven’t they been silenced?’

“Noelle, are you okay?” Kimberly noticed her daughter’s expression darken and thought she was frightened by the news. She hurriedly tossed Eli’s tablet aside and pulled Noelle into her arms.

“Don’t be scared, honey. **That** evil organization will be brought to justice,” she **said** comfortingly.

“Evil organization? Noelle murmured, stunned.

She turned to look at Kimberly. “Mom... you really think the lab **is** an evil organization?”

“Of **course**, Kimberly said firmly. “Anyone experimenting on humans, especially children, is violating the most basic moral boundaries. They deserve to be wiped out.”

Noelle didn’t reply. Her **mind** was spinning.

She had grown up in that lab. Ever since she had memories, she’d been pulled from one test **to** the next. But she had never thought to question it. That was simply how life was–follow orders, survive. Disobedience meant punishment or **death**.

But now, everyone was calling the lab evil. If that place was a crime against humanity... then what did that make her?

Was she just the product of a monstrosity?

Meanwhile, Rory had found a way to contact Nicolas–through his assistant Bryan, since Nicolas had blocked him directly.

In Nicolas's office, Rory's furious voice practically shook the walls. "You bastard. Are you the one who leaked the lab's information to the human rights organization?"

Nicolas, calm and composed, **sat in** a leather **chair**, legs crossed as he spoke lazily into the phone. Grandfather, what are you talking about? What do you mean, I **leaked** it? Do you have proof? **Haven't** you had people **tailing** me this entire time? **Surely** someone **as** all-knowing **as** you would already know if I'd done something like **that**."

The sarcasm in his voice only made **Rory's** blood pressure spike.

"Don't play dumb with me. Just because I haven't caught you red-handed doesn't mean I don't know it was your. What are the odds of the happening out of nowhere?"

Nicolas let out a **cold** chuckle. "Then why don't you find the evidence first, and then we can talk?"

He was about to hang up when Rory snapped, "Don't **think** you're safe. You **leaked** the lab's secrets because you want to force them to stop Noelle's emotional trial, right? But if you don't **take** them down completely, once they recover, the first thing they'll do is eliminate you. And when that happens, not even I can protect you."

Nicolas's eyes darkened slightly. Rory was sharp—he'd figured out the plan.

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Chapter 28o

Yes, Nicolas had leaked the information, hoping that public outrage would halt the lab's operations. Whether or not it would destroy them completely was still unclear. But at the very least, it bought him time—time he needed to act

Still, he wouldn't **admit** anything to Rory.

"I really don't know what you're talking about," he **said casually**. There are plenty of victims. Anyone could've spoken out. Why blame me! **And** again—no proof, no point in calling me."

"Nicolas—1

Click Nicolas ended the call without hesitation.

He leaned back in his chair and smiled coldly,

He ran an entertainment company with one of the best PR teams in the country—experts at shaping public opinion. He would make sure this scandal stayed in the spotlight for as long as possible. The more people who knew about the lab, the safer he and Noelle would be. The more the world watched, the more pressure the lab would face

And as expected, just like Nicolas had planned, the lab was feeling the heat. **And**

Despite having financial backing from powerful conglomerates, once the international human rights organization got involved, the risk of exposure grew exponentially

The higher-ups issued immediate orders: all experiments must stop. Any equipment or materials related to human testing were to be sealed. And the infants currently prepped for trials? Burned in the incinerator—no loose ends.

“Brandon, whatever you do, don’t act on your own today, one of the senior researchers, Reid, pleaded with him. Things are too sensitive right now.”

He didn’t know exactly what Brandon was up to behind the scenes, but he knew enough to fear him.

Brandon sat silently, eyes lowered, irritation simmering just beneath the surface. When Reid kept nagging, Brandon finally looked up and

gave him a cold smile. If you say one more word, I’ll make sure you never move again.”

Reid went dead silent, pale-faced and trembling

“Get out” Brandon said icily.

“Yes... sir.”

Reid left as quietly as **possible**, and the door closed behind him.

Brandon’s eerie smile faded. His emerald-green eyes glinted with a murderous edge.

“So that’s how you want to play it, Nicolas?” he whispered “Very well.... Let’s see who wins.”

And finally, the **day** of Noelle’s birthday arrived.

Though the human experimentation scandal **was** still dominating headlines, the Andersons didn’t see it as something that affected them directly. Outrage **was** one thing—but birthdays still needed to be celebrated.

Everyone in the Anderson family was present, and all of Noelle’s invited friends had arrived as well.

Just as she was greeting **guests** and ushering them to their seats, someone **told** her **Nicolas had** arrived. Noelle immediately ran toward the entrance to greet him.

“**Nicolas**” she called out joyfully, spreading her arms.

Nicolas smiled and opened **his** arms to catch her. He pressed **a** kiss to her forehead and whispered. “Happy 19th birthday, Noelle

“Thank you, Nicolas” She beamed, happiness radiating from her.

Yes, the lab scandal still weighed on her. But today was her **day**, and she didn't want to think about anything unpleasant.

Just as the two of them turned to **walk** into the house together, another voice suddenly called out from behind

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Chapter 280

“Noelle.”

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