

Unwanted Girl Spoiled by Billionaire – c 281-290

Unchosen 281-290

Chapter 281

“Noelle.”

Hearing the familiar voice behind her, Noelle turned around and smiled brightly. “Brandon! You came? She waved at him cheerfully

“Am I too late?” Brandon asked with a smile, holding a bouquet of white roses. As he approached, he handed them to her. “These are for you, Noelle. Happy 19th birthday

“Thank you, Brandon, she replied with a smile. Glancing **down at** the white roses, she tilted her head curiously. “Why white roses?”

“Because I think they suit you perfectly” Brandon replied, still smiling.

“Really?” Noelle didn’t have a strong preference for flowers and wasn’t sure if they suited her or not—but a gift was a gift, and Brandon’s thoughtfulness warmed her heart. She accepted them happily. “Well, I’ll take them then. Thank you, Brandon. It’s freezing out here. Let’s go inside.”

Brandon nodded. “**Sure.**”

Before following her in, his eyes swept to Nicolas, and although his lips curved into a smile, there was no warmth in it—just cold hostility.

“Nicolas?” she tugged on Nicolas’s hand when she noticed him frozen in place, distracted.

He blinked, snapped out of his thoughts, and met her worried gaze. Smiling gently, he said, “It’s nothing. Let’s head inside.”

No matter what Brandon was planning, Nicolas had to trust Noelle. She had promised she wouldn’t follow the **lab’s** orders—not **against** him, and not against the Anderson family. As long as she stayed true to that, Brandon’s presence meant little.

Still, to be safe, Nicolas had stationed **a** special ops team nearby, ready to act in **case** anything went wrong.

As **Nicolas** and Brandon flanked Noelle on either side and walked into the Anderson family’s main hall, they drew plenty of attention

Many guests already knew of Noelle through “The Legend” and as the hit songwriter behind Reyna’s iconic track The Shadows. But few realized she **was** actually the long-lost biological daughter of the Anderson family. This birthday party wasn’t just **a** celebration—it was a public acknowledgment of her identity,

As for Nicolas, once dismissed **as a** playboy, he was now known as the sharp businessman who single-handedly took over the Sawyer **Group**—a man who could turn the world upside down if he wanted to. And yet, in front of Noelle, all **his** edge melted away. He looked at her with nothing but warmth and devotion.

On Noelle’s other side, Brandon—though unfamiliar to most—carried an unmistakable aura of nobility and danger. **His** striking looks and elegant demeanor **made** it clear he wasn’t ordinary.

A group of well-dressed socialites gathered around Kimberly, all full of admiration.

“**Mrs.** Anderson, you’re truly blessed,” one of them gushed. “Such an exceptional daughter—and so many remarkable young men surrounding her. We’re all **jealous**!”

Kimberly, practically glowing with pride, beamed as she looked at Noelle between the two men. Thank you. Honestly, it’s all Noelle. I don’t deserve the credit—she’s **always** been so thoughtful and kind. I’m **not** exaggerating when I say having Noelle as my daughter makes **me** prouder than anything else in this world.

The ladies exchanged glances, seeing the genuine affection in Kimberly’s expression. It was obvious—she adored Noelle, perhaps even more than she had ever **adored** Leia. After all, nothing compares to the bond with your own flesh and blood.

Elwhrer, Stanley had just escaped **a** swarm of overly friendly girls when he noticed his terrifying bass walk in. He was debating whether to go say hello when something—or someone—made his blood run cold.

Wait isn’t that the chief commander of Atoraka Nowedon Laboratory? What the hell is he doing here?

He wasn’t alone in his shock. He glanced at Elsie and saw the same panic flash across her face. She was clearly just as uneasy

“Elsie?” Adriel, standing next to her, noticed how tense she was. Her whole body was trembling, and her eyes were locked onto the man standing beside Noelle. Frowning, he reached out to hold her hand. “What’s wrong?”

2:26

Chapter 281

Even though Elsie didn’t remember her fight with Brandon—at least not consciously—some buried instinct still **screamed danger** at the sight of him. She shook her head quickly and leaned closer to Adriel, whispering, “It’s nothing”

Adriel, **of** course, didn't buy it. But instead of pressing her or taking her over to Noelle, he quietly led her away to a different part of the

JOGIL

Noelle, meanwhile, had brought Brandon over to introduce him to her friends,

With a bright smile, she said, "Harley, Tina, **Stanley**—this is Brandon, a close friend of mine."

Brandon, polite and **charming as** always, greeted them with a warm smile. "**Hello**, I'm Brandon. Nice to meet you."

Harley gave a polite nod. "Hi, I'm Harley. But his eyes lingered on Brandon for a moment. Seriously? Why are all the guys around Noelle this ridiculously good-looking? No wonder I never stood a chance,

Tina's gaze flicked over Brandon with interest. This guy is drop-dead gorgeous. If he ever becomes famous, I need to get a few autographed photos **while** I still can!

Meanwhile, Stanley... was panicking

"Why is the high-ranking **freak** from the lab here?!"

He was already trying to stay under the radar, and now Brandon was standing right in front of him, smiling like a gentleman but radiating danger.

Brandon took a leisurely glance at the three of them.

His smile was easy and refined, but in his mind, it was **a** different story altogether. So these are Noelle's friends? Interesting. The bonds of friendship have **already** formed. Should I just kill them all now!!

And right then, Stanley felt it.

An icy chill ran down his spine. He shivered involuntarily and glanced at Brandon, who was now looking straight at him—still smiling. but it made Stanley want to cry.

I just want to go home,' Stanley thought miserably.

12/2

曲

Chapter 282

The birthday banquet began in full swing.

Guests lined up to offer their congratulations. Noelle stood beside the Andersons, politely greeting **each** guest. She wasn't great with social etiquette, but Kimberly and Vincent stayed

by **her** side, guiding her on how to interact with others. With her sweet smile and **endearing** charm, Noelle quickly won the hearts of many.

Meanwhile, her **fiancé** Nicolas quietly slipped **away** from the crowd and beckoned Stanley to join him outside.

“Mr. Sawyer?” Stanley looked wary. “Why’d **you call me out? You’re not** planning something **shady** again, are **you?**”

Nicolas’s gaze was unreadable as he cut straight to the point. “What do you think of the man Noelle brought with her?”

Stanley froze. His eyes widened in alarm **as** he stared at Nicolas, voice tight. “What are you planning?”

“If things go south.” Nicolas said calmly. “I want you to take him down. Can you do that?”

Stanley instantly broke into a cold sweat. You want me to take down Brandon?!”

That’s right. Can you handle it?” Nicolas knew by now **that** Stanley was a transformer—a product of the Serpaton–Mocrta Alliance Laboratory. And that lab was, in theory, a direct rival to **Brandon’s** Atoraka–Nowedon Laboratory. Which meant, technically, Stanley had the right to attack Brandon.

But **Stanley** shook his head furiously. “No **way, no** way, no way. I’m not even in the same league as that guy.”

He had never fought Brandon before, but it was common knowledge **Brandon** was at least an 55-tier transformer—a level not even worth dreaming about tangling with.

Nicolas clicked his tongue in disappointment. “Useless.”

Stanley was speechless.

Before meeting this group of people, he used to think of himself as a prodigy, a born elite. Now? He felt more like the comic relief.

Still, he crossed his **arms and** said, “No matter what you **say**, I’m not going to fight Brandon. Besides, he’s Noelle’s friend. Why would you want to hurt him?”

“**You really don’t** know?” Nicolas asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Know what?” Stanley blinked.

Nicolas didn’t elaborate. The truth was, the lab had released many transformers into the world not just for training—but to build emotional bonds with others, only to later destroy them in cold-blooded “emotional severance tests. From Stanley’s reaction, it was clear he didn’t know **that**

So Nicolas simply **said**, “I just don’t like his face.”

“**Really?**” Stanley didn’t buy it.

You can guess the rest, Nicolas **said** vaguely

Just as they were about to head **back** inside, a voice spoke behind them. Brandon was standing **there**, smiling faintly, as if he’d been watching for a while.

Stanley jumped “Brandon_”

Oh crap. Did he hear everything? Of course he did. An SS-**tier’s** hearing was better than a trained hound. There was no way Brandon

But Brandon didn’t spare Stanley a glance. His emerald eyes locked straight onto Nicolas as he slowly strolled forward, hands in **his** pockets.

“So you do know **fear** after all, he said with a soft, mocking

Nicolas didn’t flinch. “And where exactly did you see fear on my face?”

Brandon leaned in close, lowering his voice. “Don’t worry–I won’t **make a** move on you he here. Besides, it won’t be me who does it

776 PM

Chapter 282

Nicolas met his gaze, calm and **unfazed**. “So confident your plan **will** work?”

“Absolutely, Brandon replied with ease.

Nicolas smirked. “Overconfidence usually leads to disaster.”

Thanks for the concern, Brandon said casually. “But it won’t happen.”

“Let’s wait and see.

“Sure, Brandon agreed:

II

The two men stood face to face, eye to eye, locked in a quiet but intense standoff. The tension between them could suffocate an entire

TODI

Meanwhile, **Stanley** stood awkwardly nearby, caught in the crossfire and deeply regretting every life decision that had brought him to this moment. I heard every word, but understood nothing. But one thing’s **for** sure–Brandon is 100% **here to** stir up trouble.

The banquet carried on well into the evening, past nine o'clock.

On the other side of the hall, Noelle had been helping her parents greet guests for hours, and her face was nearly frozen from smiling.

As another wave of guests finally left, Kimberly turned to her and asked, "Tired, sweetheart?"

"Absolutely. Noelle said without hesitation

Kimberly chuckled. "It's your first time hosting something like this. It's understandable."

Vincent added. This **is** just the beginning. Once you marry Nicolas, you'll be attending plenty more events like this. Consider this **good** practice.

"Of course," Vincent said with total seriousness.

Noelle muttered. "Ugh... being upper-class sounds exhausting."

Vincent nodded, taking the chance to lecture. "You think it's easy? Keeping a family **name** respectable takes effort. Social networks are vital, and learning to manage those relationships is part of your future. Once you become Mrs. Sawyer, you'll need to hold your own in high society."

"Oh." Noelle's response was half-defeated.

Kimberly wrapped an arm around her **daughter** and gently scolded Vincent. Don't scare her, Vincent. Do you think Nicolas will actually let her suffer through **all** this?"

She then turned to Noelle and said with a giggle, "Don't worry, sweetie. Socializing is all about status, Nicolas's position is already so high, no one will dare **make** things difficult for you. Just relax **and** enjoy yourself. People will flock to praise you no matter what."

"Really Noelle's eyes lit up, only to dim **again** a second later. "But Dad **just** said..

Kimberly laughed. "Your **dad** was **teasing** you."

Noelle glanced **at** Vincent, who—despite **his usual** stoic face—had **a** subtle smile on his **lips**.

Realizing she'd been tricked, Noelle pouted. "Dad! You were messing with me?"

Vincent chuckled "Your mother says I'm too stiff and distant, so I'm trying to be more humorous"

Noelle raised an eyebrow "You think you're funny?"

'an't I just now!?" he asked.

She answered with mock seriousness. "Not even close"

Vincent let out a dry "Really?"

“Hrally” she confirmed

As father and daughter stared each other down in awkward silence, Kimberly quickly stepped in to smooth things over. “Alright, alright,

Chapter 282

enough with the standoff Noelle, your friends are still here. You’ve been glued to us all evening. Go spend some time with Nicolas and the others,”

“You’re right!“ . Noelle perked up. She hadn’t seen **much** of Nicolas tonight. He’d been busy all day, and she had no idea what he was up

But as she glanced around the hall, she didn’t see him anywhere.

That’s odd... Where did Nicolas go?

E

Upstairs, Adriel was still holding Elsie in his arms, trying to soothe her. “Elsie, what’s wrong? **What** are you s

so afraid of

Elsie clung tightly to him, refusing to let go. No matter how he asked, she just shook her head again and again, holding onto his arm like her life depended on it. In a pleading voice, she whispered, “Don’t... don’t go out

The man Noelle had brought home—he was dangerous, Elsie didn’t know what exactly was going to happen, but something inside her screamed that if Adriel went out there, he would get hurt. **And** she couldn’t let **that** happen.

“Elsie?”

“Please don’t go, she murmured again, trembling

Meanwhile, Noelle was searching all over the villa for **Nicolas** but found Stanley instead.

“Stanley!” she greeted him with a smile. “Sorry **I’ve** been so busy—I kind of left you hanging. Oh right, where are Harley and Tina?”

Feigning calm like nothing was wrong, Stanley **replied**, “I sent them home already.”

“Already?” Noelle blinked. “Why didn’t they say goodbye?”

“You were swamped. We didn’t want to bother you”

You still could’ve said something.” Noelle pouted, clearly unhappy with how casually they’d left.

Stanley ignored **her**

your distance from. After glancing around to **make** sure Brandon wasn't nearby, he suddenly said, "You should keep

"Keep my distance? Why?" Noelle frowned.

Even though she'd sensed Brandon **had** changed, she still saw him as a friend someone who'd once brought light into her **dark** childhood.

But Stanley's expression **was** dead serious, and that set off alarms **in** her mind.

"It's complicated," Stanley muttered, raking a hand through his hair. Just trust me on this **one**."

"Okay," Noelle said uncertainly, sensing he wasn't going to explain mor

Then she asked, "Do you know where Nicolas is?"

"Oh, he's with the military-" Stanley began, then stopped himself abruptly.

But it was too late

"The military?" Noelle's entire body tensed. She grabbed Stanley by the collar. "Why? Why is he contacting the **military**?"

Stanley tried to deflect, but Noelle wasn't letting him off the hook. She shook him hard. "Answer me, Stanley! **What** is Nicolas doing with the military!"

Panicked, Stanley looked around and **hissed**, "Keep your voice down! Do you want to cause a panic?"

"Then tell me the **truth**," she demanded. "What are you **all** hiding from me?"

Seeing that he wouldn't drop it, Stanley finally **gave** in "Look, it's because-"

But just as he was about to spill the truth, a familiar voice cut in **from** behind.

Stanley froze

He turned slowly. Brandon stood there, smiling faintly, eyes gleaming with something unrealable.

Stanley instinctively took a step back.

"Brandon" Noelle's voice came out low, her face pale. She didn't know what exactly was coming, but her **instincts** told her something

was very wrong

226 PM

Chapter 283

Brandon's smile deepened. Let's talk, Noelle

Stanley immediately stepped in front of her. "Don't go

Brandon's gaze slid to him, mocking. "Since when did you become **Nicolas's** lapdog

Stanley didn't even know why he was still here. He could've left with Harley and Tina carler-but after overhearing Brandon's ominous exchange with Nicolas, he just couldn't bring himself to **leave** Noelle alone.

Noelle looked at Brandon's cold, commanding eyes, then at Stanley's clearly terrified face. After a moment of hesitation, she stepped. forward and said. "It's okay. Stanley. I'll go."

Stanley tried to stop her **again**, gripping her arm. "Don't."

But Noelle gently shook her head.

If Brandon had truly decided to do something, staying away wouldn't change anything. She might **as** well face him head-on-**and** figure **out** what exactly he wanted.

She followed Brandon out of the villa.

Stanley, unable to follow, could only stay behind and figure out a way to evacuate the Anderson family if things went south

Outside, Noelle and Brandon **walked** to the garden pavilion.

Once they were alone, she cut straight to the point. Brandon, what are you trying to **do**?"

She had too many questions. Why had Nicolas been so busy all day? Why was Stanley so tense!

But Brandon didn't answer. Instead, he turned the question around. "Do you like the Andersons!"

"Yes," Noelle replied without hesitation, eyeing him warily. He'd asked her this before-why bring it up again?

"What about Nicolas?" he asked.

like him too," she said plainly.

"I like

"And Harley Tina! Stanley!"

"I like them **all**."

Brandon chuckled 'Amazing. In just six months, you've **gained** a family, a lover, and friends"

But his smile was cold. There was no warmth, no sincerity. **Just** the kind of chill **that** crawled up your spine and sank into your bones.

“Brandon, **what** are you trying to say?” Noelle asked,

1, unease growing

g in her chest.

He gave **a small**, almost tender smile. “No.... that’s **not** the right question.”

“What do you mean?

“It’s not about **what** I’m going to do,” Brandon **said** softly. “It’s about what you’re going to do.

“Mel” Noelle’s heart skipped a beat. A sudden urge to run surged through her.

Before she could move. **Brandon** placed his hands on her shoulders. She flinched, instinctively trying to pull away—but he firmly turned her around

Just ahead, Damon stood in the distance, unaware of their presence. He was holding his phone, seemingly deep in a call.

Thanks to her enhanced hearing. Noelle could make out the conversation.

Le happy birthday,” Damon said calmly.

Leia’s voice came through, soft and bitter. “Damon I bet Mom and Dad are throwing Noelle some huge birthday party right now, aren’t they

They

Chapter 283

Leia laughed, but it was cold. “I’m rotting in prison, and she’s being pampered like a princess. Don’t you think that’s **unfair**! Why do I **have** to suffer like this?

Damon paused before replying. “You know exactly why.”

Leia’s **voice** trembled. “I regret it. I really do, Damon. I don’t want to stay here. Every day feels like hell.”

There’s nothing I can do about that,” he said flatly.

“You just

on me.

don't love me anymore, she accused. I heard about the dress you got Noelle for her party. You never spent that kind of money

"She never went through the things you put her through," Damon said quietly.

"You see? You're doing it again—always taking her side.

"I think we should end this **call**, Damon said gently. "You're not in a good headspace right now"

"Wait—don't hang up! Damon, it's Noelle's birthday, I just want to say happy birthday-

"No." Damon interrupted. I know what you're trying to do. And I won't let you ruin her day."

Leia's voice turned sharp. "Damon

"Goodbye, Leia" He ended the call without another word.

Noelle had heard everything. Her chest felt warm Was Damon... protecting her? He didn't even entertain Leia's request.

It wasn't right to be happy about someone else's **pain**, but... something about it made her feel oddly cherished.

And yet, the fleeting moment of comfort was shattered as Brandon leaned in

His lips brushed her ear, voice low and ice-**cold**.

"You asked what I want you to do?" he murmured. Then listen closely, Noelle. Right now... I want you to kill Damon."

AD

The sound hit her like a physical blow, Her body jolted.

I **was** as if something reached deep inside her and began to unravel her will. Logic, emotion, reason—everything began to fade beneath the growing tide of primal obedience.

"No, Brandon... **please**... Noelle choked out, panicked

She lunged forward, trying to snatch the device from his hand.

But Brandon was faster.

Before she could even reach him, his voice came again—low and **clear**. "Now. Kill Damon™

This time, the effect **was** immediate

It felt like her mind shattered.

A crushing force pressed down on her, and her thoughts were drowned in it. Her instincts—those trained, unnatural instincts—took over. Her body no longer listened to her

Noelle gasped for air. She knew what was happening, knew what she was being **made** to do, but she couldn't stop it.

Her body turned on its own. Slowly, unwillingly, she began walking toward Damon

No... no, stop please stop...

She screamed internally, but her feet kept moving

She was fully aware—but she couldn't control herself.

It was like **watching** her own downfall in slow motion.

“Noelle!” Damon noticed her approaching. Still thinking about the call he'd just had with Leia, he frowned.

She probably heard that, he thought. Her hearing's sharp.

Even though he **had** nothing to hide, he felt compelled to explain. “Don't misunderstand—I didn't call Leia. She called me. It's her birthday **too**, and **I** just **said a** few words. I didn't agree to anything”

Noelle said nothing. Her breath grew shorter.

The lighting was dim, **and at** first, Damon didn't sense anything wrong. But as she got closer, he took a good look—and froze.

Her forehead was slick with sweat. Her complexion ghostly pale. Her breath shallow..

“Noelle?” Alarmed, he stepped closer and grabbed her hand. “Are you okay? Are you feeling sick!”

Still no response.

He tightened **his** grip and tried to lead her back inside. “It's freezing. Let's go back in. I'll **call a doctor.**”

But she wouldn't budge.

She stood rooted to the ground, unmovable,

“What's going on?” Damon frowned. “You can't walk? Then I'll carry you?”

He turned slightly, preparing to bend down.

But then-

“Damon “It was barely a whisper, like **a breath** caught in the wind. But it **was** enough

He straightened up, **looking** into her eyes. “What is it, Norlle?”

Her gaze flickered across his face, and for a moment, she looked **as if** she were about to cry

And then, in **a** voice trembling with **desperation**, she forced the word out—her last **act** of will.

Chapter 285

Blood poured from Damon’s chest, soaking through his shirt as pain surged like fire through his nerves.

He staggered back a few steps, clutching the wound tightly. His palm was instantly drenched in red—but even as the agony intensified. Damon didn’t make a sound. He didn’t want to alarm the others inside the house.

Instead, he just stood there, shocked, stunned... staring at Noelle

Why would Noelle do this?

But in the midst of his pain-blurred vision, he saw the tears streaming endlessly down her cheeks. **Her** face was twisted in grief, filled with unbearable sorrow.

In that moment, one thought echoed in Damon’s mind. ‘I

‘Don’t cry, dummy today’s your birthday.

But even those simple words he didn’t have the strength to **say** them aloud.

His body gave way. The pain and the blood loss swallowed his senses, and he collapsed.

Noelle” she choked out his name in a broken cry as Damon hit the ground, eyes closed, the knife still buried in his chest.

She had stabbed her brother.

couldn’t even make a sound. All she could do was stand there, staring at Damon’s

She wanted to scream, to cry out for help—but she co unmoving body, her soul in pieces.

And then-

“Noelle” A voice, urgent and familiar, called from behind.

Nicolas was running toward her.

The moment she saw him, the tears came even harder.

Nicolas rushed to her side, and when he saw Damon lying in front of **her**—motionless, a knife protruding from his chest his heart dropped

He didn't know what had happened, but it didn't take a genius to guess: Noelle did this.

His face turned grim, but he didn't waste time,

Kneeling down, he quickly checked Damon's vitals. There was still a pulse **faint** but steady. The blade hadn't hit any vital organs, but the blood loss was severe.

There was no to

was no time for proper first aid. Nicolas pressed both hands against Damon's wound, trying to stem the bleeding.

"Don't panic," he told Noelle firmly. **"Damon's** still alive."

Those words were the lifeline she didn't **know** she needed.

Noelle's lungs finally remembered how to breathe.

With

a **shaky** voice, she **asked**, "He... he's alive!"

"Yes. He is, Nicolas confirmed

But deep down, he was filled with questions. Noelle **clearly** didn't want to hurt Damon. Then why...!

Just then, Brandon strolled over casually, **hands** in his pockets, **as** if nothing unusual had happened.

He clicked his tongue and sighed. "What **a** disappointment. You could've killed him **instantly**... but you held back."

Noelle turned to face him, her tear stained face contorted with fear and anger.

Nicolas took one look at Brandon's smug expression and immediately understood

d the entire picture.

"You're insane, **Nicolas** snapped. "There are military **units all** around this house, and **you** still dared to **make** Noelle attack someone?"

Chapter 285

Brandon smirked. "Why not? Even if they gun me down, dragging a few people down with me sounds like a fair **trade**, doesn't it? Besides who said I'm dying tonight?"

“You think you’re walking out of here?” Nicolas’s tone dropped, icy. “If this goes public, the lab’s human experiments **will** be exposed. That’s it. Game over for all three of your so-called research facilities.

Brandon let out a low laugh. “So what? You think I give a damn about those labs?”

The madness in his eyes sent a chill down Nicolas’s spine. He wasn’t bluffing—this man truly didn’t care about anything.

Nicolas’s mind raced. Brandon’s combat ability was on par with his, maybe even stronger. And it was unclear if Noelle could resist him.

To shift the odds, Nicolas needed to break Brandon’s control over **Noelle**.

He looked her in the eyes and said loudly, “Noelle, remember what you told me! **You** said you’d never hurt me. Or your family. Why are you listening to him?”

Noelle turned to him, confused and shaken. Seeing her hesitation, Nicolas pressed on. “You’re a person, Noelle—not a tool. You don’t have to follow orders. You have a family. Friends. Me. Do you really want to throw all that away and return to that **dark**, hopeless life?”

... Her lips trembled. Her body swayed.

Brandon, watching their exchange, sneered. “Can you two **stop** with the soap opera? It’s nauseating.

Nicolas’s glare hardened. “What, jealous?”

Brandon scoffed. “You really think your so-called ‘love can override everything? Don’t flatter yourself, Nicolas. One word from me, **and** Noelle listens—whether she wants to or not

He stepped toward her **and** grabbed her clenched fist, **prying** open her fingers one by one, as if breaking her will by force.

Then he shoved a knife into her hand. “Noelle,” Brandon said coldly, kill Nicolas.

The command hit her like a hammer.

The mental imprint began gnawing at her reason again. Noelle clutched her head, struggling to resist.

She didn’t want to hurt him.

Nicolas saw her pain and said quickly, “Don’t listen to him! I believe in you. You told me even if it’s the lab’s orders, you wouldn’t hurt us. I believe you can resist. **You’re** capable of anything, Noelle. You’re strong enough to fight this!”

“Nicolas... Nicolas... Her **voice** cracked.

Noelle gripped her head and shook it wildly. Her cries were choked, her body wracked with agony.

Nicolas's heart broke watching her. He wanted to run to her, hold her. But he couldn't—he had to keep pressure on Damon's wound. If he let go, Damon would bleed out.

So all he could do **was** speak, try to reach her through words.

“Noelle,” **he said** gently but firmly, “think about everything we've shared. Your friends, your family. Do you really want to throw **that** away for his command? If you give in now, there's no going back.”

She clenched her jaw, trying to force the instinct down.

Her mind felt like it was being torn apart. The **pain** was unbearable—like her skull would crack open.

When will this nightmare end...?

Brandon watched her struggle, unmoved

So **this is** what she **looks** like when she's fighting for Nicolas, he thought bitterly. All this... for him. Noelle was supposed to be mine. And I will make her remember that

Then, without emotion, he gave the command again.

“Noelle **What** are yo

you waiting for? Nicolas is right there

there. Kill um.

ola Noelle, **don't!**

23

由

Chapter 286

“Noelle...

Nicolas stared at her, stunned.

Even Brandon's expression darkened as he spat, “You actually...”

The knife in Noelle's hand hadn't pierced Nicolas—but her **own palm**.

The blade went clean **through**, skewering her hand entirely. Blood spilled down in thick drops, trailing along the metal and splashing to the ground.

Noelle stumbled backward from the pain, her body trembling, sweat beading on her brow. But in that agony, she found a sliver of clarity. Gritting her teeth, she looked straight at Brandon, shaking her head.

“No,” she **said** hoarsely. “I won’t kill Nicolas.”

Brandon’s face turned grim

Cone was the calm, composed demeanor—replaced by a stormy darkness, Even after tightening the grip of the neural conditioning, she was still resisting.

Could it be? That the mental imprint—the lab’s psychological branding—was actually being overpowered... by love?

Ridiculous. His eyes narrowed, and he issued the command **again**, this time louder, sharper. “Noelle. I command you kill Nicolas Now.”

The impulse surged again—fierce and suffocating. Her instincts itched to obey. But Noelle shook her head violently, retreating step by

step.

“No. I won’t

Brandon’s focus narrowed entirely on her.

That was the opening Nicolas needed.

He fired.

The shot rang out, sharp and sudden. But it didn’t hit

Brandon turned his head slightly, and the bullet merely grazed his cheek—leaving behind a red **trail** across his face. He raised a hand, wiped the blood away, and looked at Nicolas with **a** mock smile,

“**Cheap** shot. Pretty cowardly.

Nicolas wasn’t surprised it didn’t work. Still, it stung to know even with the element of surprise, all he managed was a scratch.

No human could move like that.

But Nicolas didn’t flinch. He held Brandon’s gaze **and** smiled coolly. “When facing **a** monster, I think a little head start is **fair**.”

Brandon’s expression twisted. He couldn’t **stand** that even now, **Nicolas still** looked composed,

It's because of him, Brandon thought. "Because of this man, Noelle is in pain. If he didn't exist, everything would be different.

Brandon's **voice** dropped. "I've made up my mind."

His steps echoed **across** the ground as he slowly walked toward Nicolas, killing intent burning in his eyes.

"Noelle won't fish the job, then I'll do it myself."

Nicolas expression tightened **as** he heard the voice.

He could tell that Brandon genuinely intended to kill him. Despite the dire situation, **Nicolas** forced himself to stay calm. letting out a mocking laugh as he **taunted**. "Didn't you want Noelle to personally sever her emotional ties? So why are you taking matters into your own hands now! Looks like **you** don't have much faith in her, huh?"

You don't need to **try** and provoke me," Brandon replied, his pace unchanged. He shrugged with a smile, then continued. "Noelle has

Chapter 286

been so deeply swayed by you. It's **only** right that I eliminate you, this threat, on her behalf. It's only reasonable,

don't

you think?

"Isn't that just admitting your lack of confidence?" Nicolas sneered. "The concept of her!

r killing me versus you doing it can they really be the same? You're no longer **sure** she'll kill **me**, are you? You were so confident before. It's laughable.

"Say whatever you want, Brandon's eyes narrowed with rising murderous **today**."

With that, Brandon lunged toward **Nicolas**.

intent. "No matter what you say, you're going to die here

Nicolas instinctively moved to dodge, but he was acutely aware of Damon's precarious condition. If he let go, Damon would likely start bleeding again, and there might be no coming back from it.

What should he do? Run or stay? While Nicolas struggled with this dilemma, Noelle suddenly rushed forward, shoving Brandon aside

"Stop!" she shouted

Brandon, taken completely off guard, nearly lost **his** balance. His face darkened with fury as he turned to face the small figure standing in front of Nicolas, “Noelle.”

Noelle stood in front of Nicolas, her eyes full of hostility as she faced Brandon

“**Are**

you out of your mind? Do you have any idea what you’re doing?” Brandon’s smile vanished, replaced by a cold, **threatening** expression.

Noelle, still struggling to free herself from the mental shackles placed by the laboratory, panted heavily. But she clung to her remaining bit of sanity and made a firm decision to protect Nicolas

“I can’t let you hurt Nicolas,” she **forced** herself to say, each word an immense struggle.

Brandon laughed again, his tone cruel. “So, you’re going to defy the lab’s orders for this man, huh? Is **that what** you’re saying, Noelle?”

Noelle’s instinct was to obey.

She had grown up in the laboratory, where following orders was drilled into her **from an** early age. She had always complied without **question**. But Nicolas had told her that it was **okay** not to follow those orders.

However, whenever she tried to resist, a stronger mental force urged her to comply, to follow the lab’s instructions. Was this what they meant by a “mental stamp” on her thoughts?

Had the lab done this to **ensure** her obedience?

Not following orders felt like her mind would tear apart. Noelle was resilient, but she hated pain—especially the kind of headaches that reminded her of the torturous brain experiments from her **past**. If she had known that disobeying would hurt this much, she probably wouldn’t **have** resisted.

But **now** she **had** people to protect, and no matter how much it hurt, she couldn’t follow an order that would harm them.

She was Noelle, the highly capable “transformer” who always completed her missions flawlessly. She had the power to do anything she set her mind to. How could she let a single command, **a** single sentence, make her do something she never wanted to **do**?

Besides, she had promised Nicolas she wouldn’t let anyone hurt them because of some so-called orders. She couldn’t break that promise.

After **an** intense internal struggle, Noelle shook her head fiercely, then faced Brandon directly. With firm resolve, she said, each word deliberate and unyielding. “I’d rather not follow the **so**-called mission than hurt Nicolas, And that includes you, Brandon Jones.”

From the **moment** she met Brandon, she had always addressed him simply as “Brandon.” But this time, she used his full **name**, **as** symbolize the clear line between them from now on. They were no longer friends.

Brandon’s eyes flickered **as** he realized the significance of her words.

He pursed his lips, silent **for** a moment, as his expression grew more ambiguous, seemingly contemplating something.

if to

After a long **pause**, he let out another soft **laugh**. He looked at Noelle, his smile tinged with something **darker**, and asked, “Noelle, are you really planning to cut ties with me completely!”

“Yes, Noelle answered resolutely.

2/3

Chapter 286

If she didn’t sever ties with Brandon, she wouldn’t be able to protect everyone.

What mission? What task? They could all go to hell

Brandon felt the fuality in her words. He realized that even the so-called “mental stamp couldn’t fully break her will. In the end, she had chosen what mattered to her—family and love.

He sighed, an almost bored sound. “Ah... this is getting boring

His words sent a chill down Noelle’s spine, and an ominous feeling settled in her gut

A look of disappointment passed over Brandon’s face as he spoke, his voice tinged with regret. “Noelle, I had high hopes for you. I never expected you to disappoint me like this. You’re really going to defy me for that man

Noelle could only stare at Brandon, unable to respond.

Brandon lazily rolled his neck, cracking **his** knuckles. His emerald eyes reflected Noelle’s image as if the were the only thing in the world, and he smiled at her, his tone final. “Since you’ve chosen him, I’ll have to kill both of you right here.”

AD

Chapter 287

Brandon’s threat stunned Noelle. She hadn’t even had time to react before a dark blur shot toward her, a strike coming fast and deadly.

Already weakened from the mental assault and her injuries. Noelle's reflexes lagged—she couldn't block in time

Just one hit from Brandon, and it felt like her arm had shattered. Pain **surged** through her bones as she staggered back, barely managing **to stifle a** groan. Her arm hung limp, the whole side of her body numb with agony.

“Noelle!” Nicolas's voice rang with panic. He turned to Brandon, eyes blazing.
“Have **you** completely lost it? You're going to kill her now!

Until this moment, **Nicolas had** assumed that everything Brandon had done was, in some twisted way, for Noelle. For her attention. Out of jealousy. Possessiveness. But now, even that warped justification was crumbling.

Is Noelle so dispensable to him? Just because she refused to obey him?”

The situation **had** spiraled far beyond what Nicolas imagined

Brandon just chuckled. He turned and glanced at Nicolas, a cruel smirk on his lips. “Why would I keep something I can't control? **Since** she's decided to die with you, I'll grant her wish. Romantic, isn't it? You two can perish together.”

Then, without another word, he lunged at Noelle again.

They were both SS-ranked “transformers, full-spectrum experimental subjects at the highest level. But with his natural advantage in strength and zero hesitation, Brandon quickly gained the upper hand. In just a few brutal exchanges, he had Noelle by the throat, slammed against a tree.

“Noelle!” **Nicolas**, no longer caring about Damon's wound, started to rise to help—but Noelle stopped him.

“Don't come over here!” she gasped, choking out the words.

Her eyes met his, firm despite the pain. “Save Damon”

Even now, she was still thinking about someone else.

Nicolas hesitated, then dropped back down to press against Damon's wound again. He looked up at Brandon. If you kill her, you're not walking out of this alive.”

Brandon **laughed**, amused by the warning. You clearly don't understand how **strong a** transformer really is”

To prove his point, he caqually released Noelle and turned to the **massive** tree beside them. **With** one swift **motion**, he leapt up and delivered a powerful kick-

Nicolas's face turned pale. That strength... is inhuman.

Even Noelle, kneeling weakly on the ground, was stunned. She'd known Brandon was strong—like her, he'd passed **every** trial the lab threw at them—but this level of power... she couldn't match it.

Brandon turned back to Nicolas and waved mockingly. "Come on, shoot me."

Nicolas's eyes narrowed.

"You're hesitating?" Brandon teased. "I'm literally offering myself on a silver platter."

Nicolas grit his teeth, then pulled the trigger.

The bullet flew straight at Brandon's **forehead**.

And vanished.

No—Brandon had caught it

He slowly opened his palm, the bullet resting

in the center of his hand.

You've got to be kidding." **Nicolas** muttered.

It wasn't just **fast** reflexes. To catch a bullet in midair and stop its momentum... that **was** strength beyond comprehension. It was unnatural Terrifying

2.26 PM c c

Chapter 287

"Still think your little security squad outside can do anything to me?" Brandon asked, eyes gleaming

Nicolas sighed, shaking his head. "You win. I'll admit it—what you are, Brandon... isn't human."

He turned to Noelle with a bitter smile. "Looks like we really won't make it out of this one."

Tears welled in Noelle's eyes. "I'm sorry, **Nicolas**... if I hadn't fallen for you, you wouldn't be in this mess"

If only she had stayed away.

He'd **just** avenged his family. He had a bright future ahead. And now because of her...

But Nicolas shook his head. "Meeting you, Noelle, **was** the best thing that ever happened to me.

"But... you're going to die."

He smiled. "Everyone dies eventually. I just got lucky enough to meet you **first**."

“Noelle

“Don’t cry now. Don’t give that bastard the satisfaction. If we’re going to die, we die with dignity”

Don’t

Noelle sniffled hard, trying to force the tears back down. Right. Don’t let Brandon see you fall apart.

She lifted her gaze, staring straight at Brandon with defiance. “Do it then. Kill me”

Brandon stared at her, eyes unreadable—but strangely **soft**. “You really are obsessed with this man. Is it an illness, Noelle”

“You’re the one who’s sick!” she snapped.

He didn’t get angry. **In** fact, he laughed.

This version of Noelle... was broken.

But that was fine. He already had her memories. Soon, he would recreate a cleaner, more obedient Noelle—one who belonged to him alone

Brandon raised his gun, aimed it at her heart, and said softly, “Goodnight, Noelle.”

When you wake up again, you’ll be mine. Entirely mine.

Hut before he could pull the trigger-

“Stop!” The shout came fast and loud.

Brandon turned his **head**.

Bennett came running toward them, out of breath, with Stanley trailing behind, furious. “Are you insane? Why **did you** run out here?!”

Stanley stopped short at the chaotic scene—Damon on the ground, bleeding. Nicolas hunched over him. Noelle bruised and battered. Brandon holding a gun to her chest.

His heart dropped.

Back **at** the villa, Stanley **had** blocked the rest of the Anderson family from running out. But after hearing the gunshot, Bennett had refused to wait. He said he had a way to end it

Stanley had believed him. Now he was regretting it

Brandon **looked** up, his smile darkening “Well, well. If it isn’t Bennett. Here to die with them?”

Bennett **glanced** at his injured sister, then turned to Brandon. He smiled—but it was cold. “So, you’re really going to kill Noelle?”

Brandon shrugged. “You can see it for yourself”

But Bennett’s smile widened “Let me guess—**you’ve already** finished copying Noelle’s **memories**, right? So now, with a clean clone body. **you** can just upload those memories **into a** new version of her. Then she’ll be reborn.”

Brandon’s smile twitched

2/3

Chapter 287

Bennett had hit the mark

“I have to **say**, Brandon replied, “you’re quicker than I thought.”

Bennett chuckled. “Well, I am the smartest one in the Anderson family. Ever since you pushed so hard for that memory extraction. I had a feeling. You already suspected this version of Noelle would rebel”

Brandon didn’t respond, but the rising tension in his eyes **made** his intent clear—he wanted **Bennett** dead

But Bennett didn’t flinch. He looked Brandon in the eye and said, “It’s a shame, really. The memory chip you received? It’s incomplete And more importantly, all the memories of you have been erased.”

Brandon’s face froze.

Bennett leaned forward slightly, voice calm but **cutting**. “So when you upload that memory into your perfect little clone, you won’t get this Noelle. You’ll **get a** stranger. A Noelle who doesn’t remember you. Doesn’t love **you**. Doesn’t know you.”

“You wanted her back?” Bennett smiled. “Well, guess what—she’s already gone.”

E

As soon as Bennett finished speaking, Brandon vanished in a blur—appearing right in front of him. In the blink of an eye, Brandon’s hand was wrapped around Bennett’s throat.

Gone was the composed, confident man from before. His expression was vicious, rage burning in his emerald eyes. “You really **think** you can pull tricks on me and live to talk about it?” he snarled.

Bennett choked under the pressure but still managed a defiant smirk. “Like doing everything you say would’ve kept me alive anyway. Brandon, your arrogance will be your downfall.”

Brandon laughed coldly, tightening his grip. “You could’ve **lived** a little longer, but since you had **to** open your mouth-

He was ready to crush Bennett’s windpipe when Noelle lunged forward, bloodied knife in hand. She pressed it firmly to Brandon’s neck. voice sharp and unwavering. “Brandon. Let him go.”

Brandon turned his head, her reflection caught in his eyes, momentarily dulled by a **mix** of emotions.

He hadn’t expected to be cornered like this. Killing Noelle was supposed to be simple now—he had her memories. He could recreate her a thousand times if needed. But thanks to Bennett’s interference, that certainty was gone.

If he made a wrong **move** now... he might lose Noelle forever.

“You really **think** that little knife matters?” Brandon **asked** quietly.

Blood was still dripping from Noelle’s wounded palm, the same hand she had stabbed earlier to break the lab’s control over her. “You’re bleeding. Brandon said, reaching g **out** to grab her hand. “You need **to** stop the bleeding-

But Noelle quickly pulled away. “Don’t touch **me**,” she warned. Let Bennett go. **Now**

For the first time, Brandon looked almost... defeated. His voice softened. “You really know how to use my weaknesses against me, huh? One little knife and you’ve got me cornered?”

Then, with a swift motion, Brandon closed the distance between them, snatched the knife from her **grasp**, and grabbed her wrist before **she** could escape. A slight pull, and she was back in his arms.

Noelle’s face went pale. She tried to struggle, but Brandon shot her a cold glare. “Try anything, and I’ll kill everyone here. You know you can’t stop me.

He was right. She couldn’t.

So Noelle went still, glaring **at** him with all the fury and helplessness she **had**, Brandon, unfazed, **tore** a strip from his own shirt and gently began wrapping her injured hand. His movements were slow and careful, almost tender, as if he couldn’t bear to see her hurt. It was **surreal**—seconds ago, he’d nearly killed her. Now he was tending to her wounds like a doting lover.

Everyone held their breath, watching Brandon in silence, unsure what he’d do next. For now, all their lives hung in his hands.

After finishing the bandage, Brandon suddenly turned to Bennett and asked. “You weren’t lying, were you? That memory chip is really incomplete?”

Bennett snorted. If you think I’m bluffing, go ahead. Kill us all. But don’t come crying when the ‘new’ Noelle wakes up **and** doesn’t even know your **name**.”

Brandon didn't speak.

After a pause, he turned to Noelle with a smile that didn't **reach** his eyes. Tell me, Noelle. If I kill everyone here, would you fight me?"

"Yes," she **said without** hesitation." "And if I can't kill **you**, I'll kill myself."

Her voice **was** firm. Steady. Final.

Brandon let out a breath of **laughter**. "Fine, I admit it—I underestimated Bennett. **Guess** you're more useful than I thought."

He tossed a glance at Bennett, then sighed dramatically. "I'll let everyone live. But—there's a condition."

Noelle's eyes narrowed. "What condition?"

1/2

Chapter 288

Noelle free.

Brandon chuckled. "What, did you think I'd just walk away empty-handed after all this? That I'm some kind of saint?"

He wasn't. Noelle knew that better than anyone. From the very start, Brandon had always been dangerous—brilliant, powerful, and terrifying. She'd just been too naive to realize how far he'd go.

"It's an easy choice, Noelle," Brandon said with a smile. "Stay, and they all die. Come with me, and they live. What's it going to be?"

Noelle's lips parted. She **was** just about to answer when

"Noelle"

Nicolas's voice broke through

him. He was staring at her, eyes locked on hers. He didn't need to say it. She already knew what he meant.

He couldn't stop her from going. Not right now. Not without getting everyone else killed.

And even if he was selling to die for her, what about the others? The Andersons. The staff. The innocents.

So Nicolas forced a smile, pushing every ounce of heartbreak deep down, and said, "Don't worry. I'll come for you."

Noelle's eyes filled with tears, but she nodded and smiled back. "Till be waiting"

Brandon scoffed. "How touching" he muntered, and wrapped an arm around Noelle, forcing her to turn away.

Her gaze swej over everyone one last time–Damon lying unconscious, background... and finally, lack to Nicolas,

Take care of Damon, she whispered. "**And** Nicolas... Il be waiting for you."

on edge, Stanley trying to blend into the

With that, she let Brandon lead her into the night, disappearing into the darkness.

Once they were gone, Benisett finally let out the breath he'd been holding and rushed to Nicolas's side.

He checked Damon's injury–bad, but the knife had missed the heart. "We were lucky," he said. "Where's the ambulance? Call them

As Damon was taken away. Nicolas turned to Bennett. That memory chip... was it really incomplete?*

Bennett raised an eyebrow. "Of course. What, you think I'd risk all our lives on a bluff?"

Nicolas fell silem, both reassured and deeply **uneasy**. Brandon was far more dangerous than he'd anticipated.

he'd

Looking at Stanley, who'd **stayed** uncharacteristically quiet, Nicolas **asked**, "Can you **kick a** tree in half?"

Stanley blinked, "What?"

Nicolas pointed **toward** the massive tree Brandon had split with one kick. "He did that. One foot"

Stanley stared. The tree trunk was as thick as a grown man's torso. Its base was a mess of jagged splinters.

"Holy shit," he whispered. "Brandon's that kind of **psycho**?"

Nicolas nodded slowly.

Well

Only

θ

Nicolas let out a long breath. “So. I guess **you** can’t catch bullets with your bare hands after all”

Stanley’s face twitched. “**What** do you think **this** is, a sci-fi movie?”

Nicolas, visibly frustrated, snapped, “Alright, alright. I get it. You’re useless. You can stop talking now?”

Stanley muttered to himself, ‘If Brandon doesn’t kill this guy, I just might’

Then Bennett suddenly added, “Technically, Noelle should be able to.

That caught Nicolas’s attention. He turned to Bennen. You mean she can catch bullets too?”

Bennett nodded. “I ran some tests before. Her reflexes and strength are well beyond human limits. Under normal conditions, yeah—she **could** do it.”

Stanley nearly choked. “We’re all supposed to be transformers: So why is the gap between us so damn big?”

But to Nicolas, this was a glimmer of hope.

Brandon’s overwhelming power tonight had left Nicolas feeling helpless. He was used to planning and manipulation—but only against humans. Brandon was a different breed entirely.

But if Noelle had the strength to rival him, maybe—just maybe they still had a chance.

Nicolas turned back to Bennett. “How’s your family?”

Bennett sighed. “After the guests were gone, Stanley locked **us** all in the villa. He didn’t let anyone out Mom and Dad were freaking out.”

Stanley defended himself instantly. “What else was I supposed to do? If I hadn’t stopped you all, the whole Anderson family would’ve rushed into the chaos. I **basically** saved your lives.”

Bennett gave him a half-hearted smile. “Yeah, thanks, I guess.

Not much gratitude in that tone.

Ignoring their exchange, Nicolas refocused. “So what now? Noelle’s gone. Damon’s badly injured. How are you going to explain all this to your family!”

Bennett shrugged. “What’s there to explain? 111 just tell them the truth.

“You **sure** about that?” Nicolas frowned. He was worried. What if the Andersons couldn’t handle the truth? Would they reject Noelle again?

But Bennett seemed to know exactly what Nicolas was thinking. He scoffed. “Noelle became a ‘transformer’ because of our failure. She’s suffered for years because of it. You think we’d be heartless enough to blame her? Especially now, after she risked everything for us? If anything, we

should be tearing Brandon apart to get her back. So don't worry about us turning our backs on her."

Nicolas let out a quiet laugh. "Good. At **least** now you're finally acting like **people** worthy of Noelle's sacrifice.

Bennett didn't respond. Today **was** supposed to be Noelle's 19th birthday—and it had turned **into a nightmare**. Who knew what chaos tomorrow might bring?

He turned to Nicolas. "So, what's the plan for getting her back?"

Nicolas's eyes narrowed as he scanned the aftermath of the **night's** chaos. "If Brandon dared to strike today, then the lab has to **pay**. First, I'll stir up public outrage—force the higher-**ups** to accelerate their investigation. Once the pressure builds, we'll expose the lab completely. Shut it down. Burn it to the ground. Let's see where he runs then."

Bennett nodded. "Makes sense. **But** you better move fast. Who knows what kind of tech that lab still has! No telling what H do to her.

I'm not going **to** waste time explaining anything to Vincent and the others then?

"Good. I'll handle things here

Brandon might

And so, Nicolas and Bennett split up—Bennett staying behind to calm the still-panicked Anderson family, while **Nicolas** launched into action to plan Noelle's rescue.

Chapter 289

By morning, Vincent, Kimberly, and the rest of the Andersons had finally come to terms with the truth: Noelle was a product of **a** secret laboratory—she was a transformer.

Kimberly's eyes were swollen from crying. She wiped her tears with trembling hands, sobbing. "How did it come to this? My poor Noelle... She suffered so much, and we never knew.....

"Enough. Don't blame yourself, Vincent said, steadying her.

Kimberly had cried so hard, the skin around her eyes was raw and red. But Eli couldn't sit still. He stormed up to Bennett and grabbed him by the collar. "So you just let Brandon take her? You let our sister walk into the lion's den?! Some brother you are!"

Bennett gave him a look and said calmly, "What **would** you have done? Go check the tree near the pavilion. It's as thick as a grown man's waist. Brandon kicked it clean in half. If you can do the same, I'll admit I was wrong."

Eli had already been to the scene. There was blood. Clear **signs** of a struggle. And yes, a massive tree—snapped in half like a twig.

He couldn't even cut through it with a chainsaw, let alone kick it down.

What kind of monster is that guy?" Eli muttered, horrified.

Bennett replied grimly. "That's what you get when science is taken too far. Those labs did everything imaginable to create these monsters—drugs, surgeries, genetic splicing. The human rights group reported how many kids died just from failed experiments. Noelle only survived because she was lucky. But living meant more pain"

Vincent's face darkened. "No wonder she's so skilled... She paid for it in blood"

He used to be **proud** of how extraordinary his daughter was. Now he wished she'd never had to be.

Kimberly began crying again. "My Noelle... What do we do? Vincent, what if Brandon hurts her!"

Vincent had no answer.

He turned to Bennett. "What do you think?"

Bennett exhaled. "For now, I don't think he'll hurt her. Brandon is obsessed—dangerously so. But he won't lay a hand on her. Not yet."

"That doesn't mean we let her stay with him! Kimberly cried. She had felt something off about Brandon from the start. There was something cold, dangerous in his aura. And the way he looked at Noelle—it had never sat right with her.

"Kimberly, calm down, Vincent tried to soothe her. "Shouting won't help. Nicolas is already planning the rescue. Let's think about how to support him, not **break** down now."

Charlie finally spoke up, "Mom, at least we know Noelle's not in immediate danger. That's something. We'll **deal** with everything else once she's back."

Kimberly nodded slowly, regaining some composure—but tears still streamed down her face. "I just... I **can't** stop thinking about the reports. All those children who died in the experiments. And Noelle... She almost became one of them. She's always smiling, never blames us... But we—when she first came home, we treated her like a stranger...

Vincent fell silent. If Kimberly felt unworthy, what did that make him?

She had at least welcomed Noelle with a smile.

He, on the other hand, **had** coldly used her as a pawn in a political marriage—all while fearing his real daughter might be harmed.

It didn't matter that Nicolas turned out to be **a** good match. At the time, he didn't care. He had thrown Noelle away.

Now, she **was** gone—taken by a monster. And they were helpless

Vincent bent over, burying his face in his hands, wracked with **guilt** and fear.

Bennett watched them both, helpless to lift the weight **that** had settled over the room.

Then he noticed something. He turned to Eli. “Where’s Adriel?”

El blinked. “He’s upstairs with Elsie. She’s been acting strange since last night.”

Chapter 290

“Okay,” Eli was about to head upstairs when Bennett stopped him.

“Wait a second,” Bennett said.

“What’s wrong?” Eli looked confused.

Bennett hesitated, then told the rest of the family a startling truth. “Elsie... **she’s** also **from** the lab.”

“What?” The entire Anderson family gasped.

Kimberly’s eyes widened. “Elsie... she’s a transformer too?”

Bennett nodded. “Yeah. According to Stanley, she’s from the Serpaton–Mocrta Alliance Laboratory. Same as Noelle–she’s **an** 55-**class** transformer.

Kimberly covered her mouth in shock. After everything she’d learned the night before, she now understood what 55-class meant immense strength and talent–but even more suffering.

She’s been terrified of Brandon since the moment he showed up.” Bennett added. “She’s clearly still shaken. Let Adriel stay with her a liule longer.”

Kimberly sighed. “Alright...”

She was already emotionally drained after learning the truth about Noelle. Now that her son’s girlfriend turned out to be one of those poor children from a lab too, she barely had the strength to react.

“They’re all such unfortunate kids... she murmured. “Those monsters at the lab... how could they do such cruel things to children?”

“I just hope this is the **moment** we finally bring those labs down, Bennett said.

Kimberly nodded and turned to the staff. “Go prepare some soup, something calming. Take it up to Elsie.”

Yes, ma’am.”

But before the soup could be delivered, Adriel came downstairs.

Seeing everyone gathered, he went straight to the point. "I've already contacted some international allies. They'll help amplify the story. If we **can** get the public involved, it'll increase pressure on the lab. Maybe we can force Brandon to release Noelle."

Kimberly's expression softened, comforted by his decisiveness. Then she asked, "How's Elsie? I heard she's a transformer too... Did you know?"

Adriel's gaze darkened slightly.

After learning about Noelle's past and hearing the word "transformer" from Bennett, he had suspected the truth. He'd always known there was something different about Elsie—especially after that night at the warehouse explosion.

But it didn't matter. A transformer or not, she was still Elsie. The girl he loved.

"So long as you're aware, Kimberly said quietly. "I just wanted you to know not to change your mind, just so you won't be caught off **guard**."

Adriel nodded. "Her mental state isn't good. She doesn't want to see anyone. I'll bring it to her myself"

"Alright," Kimberly said.

Adriel turned to his brothers. "We can't just stand around. Reach out to everyone you know—**contacts**, media, whatever. The lab has big bucks, so if we want to take them down, we have to cause a huge uproar."

Charlie nodded. "I've got friends in the entertainment industry. We'll mobilize the fanbases and PR teams—**get** the story everywhere"

-geithe

"I have a friend whose uncle **works** in media regulation. Eli added. Tll push to make this a major news story"

Adriel gave a small nod. "Noelle needs us now. Even if our power is limited, we're her brothers. We have to do everything we can.

—

Chapter 290.

With a **clear** direction now, the brothers all scattered to act.

Adriel looked to Bennett. "You know the lab better than anyone. Help Nicolas with whatever he needs

"On it"

Once Bennett left, Adriel turned **back** to his parents

“Dad, Mom,” he said solemnly. “We’ll bring Noelle back. You’ve been through enough already—let us handle this.”

Kimberly’s eyes welled with tears again. “Adriel... please bring your sister home.”

I promise,” he said with unwavering conviction.

Before leaving, Adriel glanced upstairs. “I may not be able to come home every day for a while. I don’t feel safe leaving Elsie elsewhere. If I’m not here, can you look after her for me?”

“Of course, Kimberly said gently. “You don’t have to worry about anything here”

Thanks, Mom.”

Silly boy. **What’s** with the ‘thank you between mother and **son**?’”

Meanwhile, Noelle was back in the lab—and every inch of her body rejected it

She hated this place. It **was** soaked in memories she’d rather forget. But she had no **choice**.

To prevent her escape, Brandon had fitted a metal collar around her neck- an explosive device made from the lab’s newest biomimetic alloy. If **she** moved too **far** from **him**, it would detonate.

Since arriving, she’d been locked in a room. **Brandon** hadn’t shown his face, **and** she **had** no idea what he was up to. The room had everything—food, water, even a TV—but the **only** media available were pre-recorded tapes, nothing online.

One day, the door opened, and a **lab** tech **in a** white coat walked in to drop off food. Noelle immediately asked, “Where’s Brandon?”

“That’s **none** of your **business**,” the man replied coldly, turning to leave

Fuming. Noelle stepped toward the door—but the collar around her neck began beeping

If the alarm sounded more **than** three times, the collar would explode.

Gritting her teeth, she stepped back. She had to **stay** alive—Nicolas was coming for her. She just had to wait

In another part of the lab, inside a glass chamber, a girl identical to Noelle began to stir

Brandon stood at the control panel, fingers flying over **the** keys. He was uploading memories from a chip—specifically the one Bennett claimed **had** all of Noelle’s memories, minus any involving Brandon

Brandon didn’t fully trust him. So he **had** to see for himself.

Once the **upload** completed, Brandon hit the final button.

The girl in the chamber slowly opened her **eyes**.

Realizing she **was** underwater and unable to breathe, she panicked, ripping off the respirator and thrashing against the **glass**. She started to drown.

Brandon quickly drained the fluid. When the chamber opened, she **collapsed**—but before she could hit the floor, Brandon caught her.

As she regained **balance**, **she** looked up at the man holding her. Her big, innocent eyes were full of confusion.

“Um... who are you? Why am I here?” **she** asked.

The moment she said Who are your, Brandon’s heart **sank**

He stared at her. “You don’t know me!”

“No.” She shook her head

2.37 PM C

Chapter 290

Then, **realizing** she was **naked**, she immediately backed away and wrapped her arms around herself, blushing furiously. “Why am I not wearing anything? Don’t look! Nicolas said I can’t let other men see me like this. Don’t look!”

“Nicolas?” Brandon’s eyes darkened.

He stepped closer. “**You** know Nicolas?”

“Of course I do!” she said brightly. “He’s my fiancé—the person I love most.”

“And **me**?” Brandon asked carefully.

She blinked. “You? Who are you supposed to be!”

Brandon clenched his **jaw**. “I’m Brandon. We grew up together in the lab. We spent years side by side.”

She looked at him, puzzled, then shook her head. “I really **don’t** remember that. Are you sure? I **have** no memory of you at all.”

Try harder, Brandon said, voice turning cold. “You have to remember me. I’ve endured everything **just** for you. How could you forget?”

Her instincts screamed danger. I said I don't remember. You're weird. Where's Nicolas? I want to see Nicolas

She turned to leave—but Brandon grabbed her arm and yanked her **back**.

“Think carefully,” he said, eyes cold as steel “Are you sure you don't remember **me?**”

“I don't!” she snapped. “Let me go, or I'll fight you!”

Before she could strike, Brandon raised a hand—and in one clean motion, slit her throat.

Blood gushed. She fell to the ground, lifeless.

Brandon looked down at her body, face devoid of emotion—as if he'd just tossed **away** a defective piece of trash.

E