

# **KEY TO HAPPINESS:(My mute devil)**

## **#Chapter 81 - Read KEY TO HAPPINESS:(My mute devil) Chapter 81**

*Chapter 81: 81*

"Giovane padrone Liam is back!"

The butler's voice echoed through the marble halls, half a shout, half an announcement. He had barely caught sight of the sleek black car pulling up at the entrance before hurrying outside, eager to assist the young master with his bags.

But Liam brushed past him, his focus far from the family's formalities or their elaborate traditions of welcome.

"Where's my sister?" he asked sharply, handing the man his jacket without waiting for a reply.

"On the third floor, sir," the butler replied quickly, bowing.

Liam started toward the grand staircase but stopped midway, glancing toward the elevator instead. Impatience won. He crossed the foyer and pressed the button, his pulse quickening.

He had imagined this day countless times, the day he would finally see his twin again. Ever since the media had reported Carmela's death, his world had shattered, leaving him hollow. When he later discovered it was all part of his father's orchestrated deceit, he'd felt relief, anger, and dread all at once.

Now, standing before the elevator doors, he realized just how much that mixture still churned inside him.

The elevator chimed softly, and moments later he stood outside her room. His hand hesitated on the doorknob. What was he supposed to say? Hi, I'm your brother, the one you never got to grow up with because our father decided fate should play puppeteer with our lives?

He exhaled slowly and pushed the door open.

The rhythmic beeping of machines filled the air steady, cold, and mercilessly clinical. His eyes swept across the room, and for a heartbeat he felt his spirit leave his body and then slam right back into his chest.

The room looked nothing like what he had envisioned, no warmth, no comfort. It was a miniature hospital, sterile and suffocating, wires crawling across the bed like silver veins.

And there she was, laying motionless, her skin pale against the white sheets. Tubes and monitors surrounded her, their mechanical sounds the only proof that she was still tethered to life.

Liam's breath hitched. His chest felt tight, and before he knew it, his vision blurred with tears.

"Liam."

He turned sharply. Sai stood in the doorway, her expression soft with understanding. She didn't speak at first; she just stepped forward and wrapped her arms around him.

"She'll be fine," she whispered, gently patting his back as if to keep him from falling apart.

"How did she end up like this?" he asked, pulling away, his voice thick. He wiped his tears with the back of his hand. "I saw her, Sai.. even if it was just from afar, I saw her months ago. She looked fine. Perfectly fine. So why is she like this now?"

Sai placed a finger to her lips and guided him farther into the room. "Shh... keep your voice down," she said softly, glancing toward the sleeping figure.

"Elisa is..." she began, her voice faltering slightly as she looked back at Carmela, "...in between two worlds one where she's fighting to live, and another where she's already given up."

"Elisa?" Liam echoed, the name strange on his tongue.

Sai nodded slowly. "Uncle forbids us from calling her by her old name. He insists that Carmela is dead and.. "

But Liam raised a hand sharply, cutting her off, his expression hardening. "I care less about what my father thinks or believes," he said coldly. "Either way, where's Nix?"

His eyes swept across the room, scanning every corner as though the man might step out of the shadows. When he turned back, he caught the hesitant, disappointed look on Sai's face.

"Wait," he said, narrowing his eyes. "Don't tell me he's so busy that he's forgotten his wife is lying here half-dead. I've heard rumors about his dealings with some dangerous people but I didn't pay attention. So what's his excuse? Where is he?"

Sai hesitated before answering. Her voice was almost a whisper.

"He's not aware she's alive."

Liam froze.

For a heartbeat, the room felt utterly still, the rhythmic beeping of the monitors fading into the background hum of disbelief. His mind raced through every possible explanation, each one more absurd than the last. Then, realization struck like a blade to the chest. His father's lies. The false death. The silence.

All of it suddenly made sense.

"He's trying to separate them, isn't he?" Liam said, his voice rising. A sharp, bitter laugh escaped his throat. He ran a hand through his hair, pacing the floor. "Of course he is. He can't control who she loves, so he'd rather rewrite her entire life instead!"

Sai reached for him gently. "Liam," she said softly, "getting angry won't solve this. Even if Nix finds out she's alive, there's no guarantee anyone will be happy."

Her fingers trembled slightly, a sign of her own rising anxiety. She could already imagine the chaos if the truth reached Nix too soon. Her heartbeat quickened, her words tumbling faster now.

"The person in charge of her treatment is my fiancé," she continued, her tone hushed but urgent. "If anything happens to her, the alliance between our families will collapse. And right now, she isn't responding to treatment at all. He suggested bringing Nix, but that's where the real problem begins."

Liam frowned, tension drawing lines across his face. "What problem?"

Sai inhaled shakily before answering. "Carmela.. or Elisa is responsible for the death of Nix's parents. According to Uncle, Nix still doesn't know. Imagine if he learns the truth too soon. He might reject her completely... and if that happens, she'll be broken. And Zamiel, my fiancé, he'll take it personally and it will ruin everything."

Liam exhaled heavily, rubbing his temples as frustration overtook him. He turned away from the bed, his voice low but edged with helpless anger. "So what's the plan, Sai? Do we just sit here and play along while Father puppeteers all our lives?"

Before Sai could respond, the soft sound of someone clearing their throat sliced through the tension.

They both turned toward the doorway.

Zamiel leaned casually against the frame, his phone in one hand, his expression unreadable but tinged with exhaustion.

"Excuse me," he said dryly, pushing himself off the wall and strolling into the room. "But I'm pretty sure my patient is tired of listening to every single one of your schemes."

He pocketed his phone and sighed, casting an almost protective glance toward Carmela's still figure. "If you two are done plotting destinies and rewriting tragedies," he added, "I'd like to focus on keeping her alive long enough for any of that to matter."

"And you are?" Liam raised an eyebrow, his tone sharp and unreadable.

"He's my fiancé, Zamiel," Sai said softly, forcing a smile, though the tension in the room could be sliced clean with a knife. Zamiel, however, didn't even spare Liam a glance. His eyes were already fixed on the sleeping figure on the bed, his expression unreadable a mix of irritation and reluctant concern.

"I wouldn't say I'm pleased to meet any Sorrento family member," Zamiel finally said, voice low and dismissive, "but I do hope you're sane and different, just like my fiancée. I'm not sure what you're planning, but I've already thought of something, I just need to... experiment."

Liam's eyes darkened, the flower of suspicion blooming in the pit of his gut. His voice dropped, carrying a hint of protective rage. "Don't you dare turn my sister into one of your lab rats."

Zamiel only raised a hand, hushing him like a child, and pulled out his phone. Without explanation, he dialed a number and placed it on speaker. The room fell into uneasy silence. The soft, rhythmic beep of Carmela's monitor was the only sound that filled the air as everyone waited.

The call connected to the fourth ring. A familiar voice drifted through the speaker calm, dark, and dripping with irony.

"I now have to question how much you care about me, Mr. Dean. Not even a call or text message in the past three months," Zamiel said dryly, his voice carrying both mockery and fatigue. He knew how childish he sounded, demanding attention from a man who had buried his wife but he didn't care.

"When are you getting married?"

The question came from the other end. Nix's voice was smooth and cold, yet laced with something unspoken. The unexpectedness of it froze both Sai and Liam. Zamiel blinked, momentarily thrown off guard.

"Why do you suddenly feel interested in my affairs?" he asked, his brow furrowed.

"Aren't you tired of being engaged for so long without marriage, Doctor Zamiel?" Nix's tone sharpened into something almost playful, but it was the kind of play that hid a blade. "Or could it be that you have a reproductive disorder and that's why.."

"What in God's name would make you think like that?" Zamiel barked, fury erupting through his restraint.

A low, dangerous chuckle came through the speaker, and even Sai felt a chill crawl up her spine.

"I care less about your relationship status," Nix continued, his tone now dipped in venom, "I just want to meet my father-in-law. A little bird told me "your wife and mine are cousins."

Zamiel's mind spun hearing what he said. The words echoed like a ticking bomb. He could almost hear the blood rushing in his ears. Nix never involved himself in other people's affairs unless... unless he had a reason. A terrible one.

"You're suspicious of him?" Zamiel asked

"Suspicious?" Nix's chuckle was slow and deliberate. "Is there a reason I should be? Actually, I just wanted to say hi and greet my sister-in-law. Since I never got a proper chance to meet her."

The silence that followed was suffocating. Sai felt her pulse quicken. Liam's fists clenched. And Zamiel... he hesitated. The wrong word could expose everything.

Finally, Zamiel said flatly, "Nix... Carmela is dead."

The world seemed to stop breathing. The steady beep of the machines now sounded louder. No one moved. On the other end of the line, Nix said nothing for a long, unbearable moment. Then came a quiet exhale one so soft it made Sai's skin crawl.

When he finally spoke, his voice was lower, heavier. "You should never have said that, Doctor." The threat was quite almost tender but it carried the weight of death itself.

The line went dead.

Sai's knees trembled. Liam turned to Zamiel, his jaw locked. "What was that for?" he demanded, voice rising.

Zamiel slipped his phone back into his pocket, looking toward the motionless figure on the bed. His eyes had grown darker. "Because," he said coldly, "sometimes the only way to wake a man up... is to burn the truth he's avoiding."

"He's suspicious of someone... but who, and for what reason?" Zamiel's question drifted into the thick air, hanging between them like smoke that refused to clear. His voice was calm, but his eyes betrayed the turmoil behind it the realization that Nix's curiosity wasn't random; it was the beginning of something far darker.

Sai opened her mouth to respond, but the words caught in her throat when she noticed the faintest movement from the bed. Her breath hitched. "She.. she moved her hand!" she exclaimed, her voice trembling with sudden joy as she jumped to her feet.

But neither man reacted.

Liam was staring blankly at the floor, mind clouded by panic and guilt. Zamiel stood frozen beside him, thoughts racing faster than he could breathe. What if Nix finds out? The question clawed at both of them. The image of Nix's cold voice replayed in their heads, the threat beneath the calm and deadly promise wrapped in politeness.

"What if he discovers it?" The thought whispered through their minds, feeding the fear neither dared to speak aloud.

*Chapter 82: 82*

"Sis, what do you think?" Liam asked, squatting in front of her.

Elisa's eyes swept over the open field, her lips curving into a faint smile. Seeing so many people gathered at once felt strange and beautiful, a sharp contrast to the silence she'd lived in for so long.

She opened her mouth to respond but winced, clutching her side before letting out a soft chuckle.

"The baby seems happy about being here. But won't Father be upset?"

At the mention of their father, Liam rolled his eyes.

"And when do I ever listen to him? You said you wanted to go somewhere lively and paint and I delivered." He pouted, folding his arms dramatically. "But it seems you're not settled yet."

Elisa laughed quietly, shaking her head at his antics.

"Alright. But I'll need a model."

"I'll be your.." His words broke off when his gaze landed on someone in the crowd. His eyes widened.

"Sis, I'll be right back!"

"Where are you going?" she called after him as he straightened his shirt and took off.

"To win your sister-in-law back!"

Elisa sighed, watching him disappear into the sea of faces. All she could do was hope he wouldn't get them into more trouble. Ever since she woke up months ago, Liam had been her constant companion the only one who stayed by her side, talking to her even when she could barely respond.

She didn't fully understand why he and their father were at odds, but she knew one thing: she couldn't bear to lose either of them. Not now. Not with a child on the way.

Turning back to her supplies, Elisa reached for her paintbrush but accidentally knocked everything to the ground. Tubes of paint rolled away, brushes clattered, and she groaned in frustration, struggling to reach them from her wheelchair.

Then, a voice broke through her muttering.

"Let me help you."

She looked up, squinting against the sunlight. A tall figure crouched before her, gathering the brushes one by one. The glare hid his face, forcing her to lift a hand and shield her eyes.

When he held out the brushes, she reached to take them but his fingers didn't immediately let go. The faint warmth of his skin lingered against hers. As he finally looked up, she caught her breath.

He was breathtaking. Dark hair framed a sharp, elegant face; his blue eyes gleamed like frozen glass. His features were calm yet unsettlingly intense like a deity who'd wandered by mistake into the realm of mortals.

"Car.." he started, his voice faltering.

"Hello," she recovered with a soft smile. "I'm Elisa. Would you... be my model?" She had no idea that her words struck something deep in him cracking open the fragile shell around a long-buried ache.

"Tomline," he said finally, standing to his full height. "But you can call me Tom." His gaze flicked to her rounded stomach before returning to her face, his smile gentling. "You're an artist?"

"Not really. Just trying something new. My sister was the real artist."

"Was?" he asked quietly.

"She's... traveled far away from us." The corner of her mouth trembled, but she held her smile. "Will you still be my model?"

"Of course," he said, pulling a nearby chair close. "May I sit?"

She nodded, and he studied her quietly as she dipped her brush in paint. Watching her move careful, graceful, although left-handed he couldn't help comparing her to his lost Carmela.

"You're left-handed?" he asked. She nodded again, too focused to answer. Minutes passed in silence until she suddenly beamed.

"I'm done! Want to see?"

Before he could reply, she turned the canvas toward him. Tomline blinked then burst into laughter.

On it were two hands drawn with a single unsteady stroke... and a round circle for a face with two uneven dots for eyes.

"What's this, Elisa?" Tomline chuckled, running a hand through his hair as he stared at the drawing.

Elisa only smiled proudly.

"You're slim, Tommy. This is the only way I can portray your image imagine me adding a few more strokes to you; it'll ruin the whole thing."

His laughter faded, replaced by something softer, warmer. "Wait... what did you just call me?"

For a moment, something unexplainable stirred in his chest the way she said Tommy sounded too familiar, too intimate, almost like an echo from a life he couldn't remember but somehow missed. It wasn't just the nickname it was the way her voice wrapped around it, sweet and teasing, the kind of tone Carmela used to have when she was amused. His heart gave an involuntary lurch.

Elisa blinked in confusion.

"Tommy? I'm sorry if you don't like it. It's just calling you Tom reminds me of Tom and Jerry. And if you have to be Tom, who would be your Jerry? Your life's going to be boring." She sighed dramatically, crossing her arms.

Tomline couldn't help it he laughed, his eyes softening. The sound of her voice saying Tommy lingered in his mind, like a whisper he didn't want to lose.

"It's okay," he said quietly, still smiling. "Either way, are you here alone? Isn't the father of your baby or anyone with you?"

"I'm here with my brother," she replied simply. "What about you?"

"It's my uncle's birthday," he said, a little too casually.

Elisa's face lit up immediately. "Wait, you guys are having a birthday party?" Her big brown eyes gleamed with mischief, and Tomline found himself nodding even though the truth was the opposite.

"So there's going to be a huge party with a huge cake, right?" she pressed, leaning forward eagerly.

He hesitated but nodded again.

Then, to his surprise, her smile faded.

"Actually, I'm being maltreated at home," she said in a theatrically sad tone, placing the back of her hand against her forehead like an actress on stage. Tomline's brows furrowed, then he nearly laughed when she continued.

"As you can see, I'm a pregnant woman, but no one listens to me. I keep telling them over and over again that I want cake, chocolate, maybe a ice cream! But they lock me in a room because my dad isn't around and my husband is far away."

She covered her face, fake-sobbing dramatically. "So, kind sir, would you take this lonely pregnant lady to your party and give her some cake?"

Tomline tried to hold back his laughter, he truly did but the sight of her pretending to cry while peeking at him through her fingers was too much. His laughter finally broke free, deep and genuine, the kind that echoed in his chest and startled Elisa into silence.

For a moment, she just stared at him, wide-eyed, a little stunned. She hadn't expected his laughter to sound that alive.

"Mrs. Elisa," he said finally, catching his breath and straightening up, "you just want cake, right?"

She nodded immediately, her expression brightening like a child promised a treat. "Yes! Chocolate, to be precise."

"Alright," he said, standing to his feet. "I'll get it for you."

"But what about the party?" she asked, tilting her head.

He paused mid-step and turned to her, offering a small, knowing smile.

"You're a pregnant lady. Being in a crowded place wouldn't be good for you," he lied gently before walking away.

The truth was, there was no party no cake waiting in some grand hall. But he could easily buy one from the nearby hotel. Bringing her with him, however, that was risky.

Because he didn't know when he might run into Nix and with Elisa's uncanny resemblance to Carmela, he didn't dare to stir the storm that was barely sleeping beneath the surface.

Meanwhile, Nix stood afar, watching the scene unfold. It was his birthday though it didn't feel like one. The laughter, the music, the colorful chaos of children running through the park all of it only deepened the ache inside him. He had everything and nothing at once.

He'd rented out the entire park that day, opening it to families for free parents, children, couples hoping their joy would fill the silence that haunted him. But even in the crowd, he was alone. Maybe it was because this was the second birthday he was celebrating without her beside him.

He took a slow drag from the cigarette between his fingers, the smoke curling lazily into the air as he scanned the playground. That was when his gaze caught Tomline, laughing freely, and unrestrained for the first time in months.

Curiosity flickered in Nix's eyes. What could possibly make Tomline laugh like that again?

His answer came when his gaze dropped lower to the woman in the wheelchair. There was something oddly serene about her, a soft light that didn't seem to belong in the noisy chaos of the park. The sight drew a faint chuckle from him.

"Another love story is about to bloom," he murmured to himself, half amused, half weary.

He exhaled smoke, flicking ash to the ground. For a brief second, the laughter of others faded replaced by the low hum of his thoughts.

Maybe I've been too busy fighting ghosts to notice my siblings finding life again.

He turned slightly, his sharp eyes scanning the perimeter. That was when he noticed them the lurkers. Men pretending to be part of the crowd, eyes shifting too often, hands buried too deep in their pockets.

Nix's expression hardened. He had told himself they wouldn't follow him all the way to Italy not after the bombshell he dropped on the Dynasty. But he should have known better. Shadows had a way of following him, no matter how far he went.

Then something subtle, but wrong.

A man near the vendor's cart poured a small amount of powder into a paper cup of ice cream before handing it to a young boy. Nix's eyes narrowed instantly. His instincts screamed. He watched the man kneel, whisper something into the child's ear, then point directly toward the woman Tomline had just left.

"I'm not the one they're after," Nix muttered under his breath, dropping the cigarette and crushing it beneath his shoe. His jaw clenched as he moved, swift and deliberate, through the crowd.

He reached her just as she lifted the spoon toward her mouth the ice cream half melted, her expression bright and unsuspecting. In one motion, Nix snatched the cup from her hands and tossed it aside.

"What was that for?" she half-screamed, startled.

He didn't answer immediately his pulse was still pounding from the sudden surge of adrenaline. She glared at him, one hand pressed to her chest.

"Are you one of the spies my dad sent to watch me?" she snapped. "It's just ice cream, not poison. I'm not.."

"You were about.."

Nix's words died in his throat.

The rest of the world fell away the chatter, the children's laughter, the sound of music in the distance. All gone.

For the first time in years, he couldn't breathe.

Her face...

The slope of her nose. The curve of her lips. The softness of her eyes the same eyes that used to look at him in candlelight, whispering promises he never thought he'd lose.

He took a single step back, as though the sight of her had struck him physically. His hand trembled slightly, his heartbeat thundering in his ears.

"Carmela..."

The name fell from his lips in a broken whisper half disbelief, half prayer.

But she only looked up at him, confused, unaware of the storm she'd just awakened.

*Chapter 83: 83*

"Carmela."

Nix stood dumbstruck, his eyes locked on the woman in the wheelchair. His heart pounded violently against his ribs, as though trying to break free.

"I'm a pregnant woman, for goodness' sake! Don't you have any women at home?" she snapped, bursting into tears completely unaware that the man before her was frozen to the ground. "What kind of bodyguard are you? Give me your identity number, I'll have Liam fire you immediately!"

Tom, who was returning with the cake he'd promised, couldn't help but notice the growing crowd of onlookers. Their attention was fixed in one direction. He followed their gaze and froze seeing Nix rooted there like a statue, while Elisa sobbed uncontrollably. His heart skipped a beat; it felt like his worst fears had just come true. Without wasting a second, he hurried over.

"Elisa, what's going on? Nix?" His eyes darted between the weeping woman and the motionless man.

"He... he snatched my ice cream cup and threw it in the trash!" Elisa cried, her voice trembling. "I told you I'm being mistreated at home! He's probably one of the people my dad sent to spy on me!"

Nix exhaled softly, regaining some composure as he noticed the small crowd forming around them. His gaze swept over the woman again her rounded belly finally making sense of her outburst.

"Elisa, please calm down," Tom said gently, crouching to her level. "I'm sure he had his reasons. Look, I brought the cake you asked for." He opened the box slightly to show her, but she waved it off with frustration.

"I don't want the cake! I just want my ice cream and.. "

"Uncle, just apologize to her, please," Tom interrupted, clearly panicking as he tried to defuse the tension. "She's pregnant, and pregnant ladies get very emotional and sensitive. I heard she's been craving ice cream but couldn't get any, so imagine how upset she must feel that you took it away.."

Before he could finish, Elisa suddenly let out a piercing scream, her voice echoing through the street. Everyone turned toward her.

"Elisa, are you.." Tom's words faltered as his eyes widened. Blood was soaking through her dress, spreading slowly and staining the fabric.

"The baby... it's coming," Elisa gasped, clenching her fists in pain.

Nix and Tom exchanged a startled glance, panic flashing in both their eyes.

"What do we do?" Tom whispered, his voice trembling. Nix was still unsettled her face, her voice almost everything except her name it all mirrored that of his beloved.

"Aren't you her friend? Call her family," Nix said sharply, narrowing his eyes.

"I.. I don't know her family! I met her here And she just mentioned she came here with her brother.. "Elisa screamed again, louder this time, cutting him off.

"My car's nearby," Nix said quickly, his tone firm now. "Let's get her to the hospital."

He started toward the car, but Tom grabbed his arm, stopping him

"Give me the car key I'll drive, while you stay and comfort her in the back seat," Tom said, stretching out his hand expectantly.

Nix gave him a questioning look, one brow arching so high it nearly disappeared beneath his messy red hair. His tall frame leaned lazily t the side his arms crossed like a man who had already lost his patience for the day. A faint breeze ruffled his shirt collar as his cold grey eyes flicked between Tom's eager hand and the pregnant woman moaning dramatically in the wheelchair.

"Weren't you grinning from ear to ear just a few minutes ago?" he asked dryly, his tone caught somewhere between disbelief and amusement. "So why are you suddenly handing me the responsibility? What happened did your backbone take a lunch break?"

Tom blinked, thrown off for a moment, while Nix tilted his head slightly, that faint, mocking smirk tugging at the corner of his lips the kind that said I'm enjoying this way too much.

"Do you honestly think I can carry a pregnant woman?" Tom shot back, eyes widening dramatically. "Look at your build and look at mine! Do you want us both to collapse halfway, and then she'll blame me for injuring her baby?"

Nix blinked at him, unimpressed. "Tom, she's not a piano. You're just lazy."

"I'm realistic!" Tom countered, placing a hand on his chest. "And I happen to value my spine."

Nix sighed, long and weary, like a man rethinking every life choice that led him to this moment. With a flick of his wrist, he tossed Tom the car key and muttered, "Fine. Don't drop the car."

Tom caught it with a grin. "Don't drop her."

Ignoring him, Nix strode toward Elisa. He crouched beside her, his voice low and gruff as he muttered something that sounded suspiciously like a prayer for patience. Sliding one arm under her knees and the other around her back, he lifted her effortlessly well, almost effortlessly.

"Careful!" Elisa yelped, gripping his collar so tightly he nearly lost balance. "Do I look like a sack of rice to you?"

"Well," Nix grunted, adjusting his grip as she wobbled in his arms, "you're heavier than one."

Her mouth fell open in shock. "Excuse me?!"

"Relax, madam," he said, a smirk curling at his lips as he started toward the car. "I'm just trying to make you laugh before you give birth right here on the street. You know, keep the mood light."

The small crowd burst into laughter at his deadpan tone. Elisa, however, glared up at him with a look that could curdle milk.

"You think you're funny, don't you?" she hissed.

"Not really," he replied, adjusting her again as Tom hurried ahead to open the car door. "But I do think I deserve a medal after this."

Tom fumbled with the car keys like a man defusing a bomb. "Okay, okay, seatbelt, ignition... where's the hospital again?"

"It's called Google Maps, genius," Nix muttered, sliding into the back seat with Elisa still in his arms. He tried to adjust her gently, but she groaned in discomfort.

"Ow! Watch it!" she snapped. "You're crushing my ribs!"

"I'm trying not to drop you," he said flatly. "Maybe next time, give me a warning before your baby decides to make a public appearance."

Elisa gasped, clutching his shirt. "How dare you! I'm in pain and you're making jokes? What kind of man are you?"

"The tired kind," Nix replied dryly, leaning back with an exaggerated sigh. "I haven't even had breakfast yet."

Tom threw a nervous glance in the rearview mirror. "Guys, please! Let's not start World War III in the car. I just got this seat cover cleaned."

Elisa glared at his reflection. "Drive, Tommy! Before I have this baby in this precious seat cover!"

"Yes, ma'am!" Tom squeaked, hitting the accelerator a little too hard. The car jerked forward, sending Nix and Elisa slightly off balance.

"Careful!" Nix barked. "You trying to send us into early labor too?"

"Sorry! Sorry!" Tom said, gripping the wheel as if it were his last lifeline. "I've never driven a pregnant woman before!"

"You're doing fine," Nix said sarcastically, holding onto the seat as Elisa groaned beside him. "Just don't kill us before we get there."

"Can you both stop talking!" Elisa snapped, breathing heavily. "You're stressing the baby!"

Nix shot Tom a look through the mirror. "You hear that? We're stressing the baby. Add that to the list of today's achievements."

Tom groaned. "I swear, after this, I'm quitting friendship."

Nix smirked. "You've been saying that since 2019."

Elisa suddenly clutched his arm, her nails digging into his sleeve. "It hurts.. it really hurts!" she cried out.

Nix's expression softened for the first time. He instinctively brushed her hair from her face and said in a calmer tone, "Hey, breathe. We're almost there. Just hold on."

Tom, stealing a glance in the mirror, caught the rare look of concern on Nix's face and raised a brow. "You okay back there, tough guy?"

"Just drive, Tom," Nix muttered, his voice quieter now.

Elisa groaned again, and Tom's foot hit the gas pedal harder. "Don't worry! We'll make it!" he shouted.

"You better," Nix warned. "Because if she gives birth in my car, you're the one cleaning it and I mean every inch of it."

Elisa let out a weak laugh between breaths, while Tom's horrified, "That's not funny!" echoed through the car.

Meanwhile, Liam was forcing his way through the gathering crowd, muttering quick apologies as he brushed past people. "Excuse me, sorry coming through!" His sharp eyes stayed locked on the figure moving swiftly ahead of him.

"Babe!" he called out, but there was no response.

He quickened his pace. "Babe, wait!"

The woman stopped abruptly, spinning around with an exasperated glare. "Stop calling me Babe! I'm not your girlfriend and I have a name." Her voice was sharp enough to slice through the murmurs around them.

"But you said you liked me," Liam replied defensively.

"I said I like the way you shoot, not you!" she snapped.

"We went on dates not once, but twice."

She folded her arms. "You offered to take me out the first time because I helped you. The second time was pure coincidence we just happened to end up at the same restaurant, and you insisted on paying. Don't twist things, Liam." Her eyes narrowed. "I've only met you a few times, and already your father's sending me threats."

"Babe, listen.. "

"Luna Dean," she corrected sharply. "And don't you dare call me 'Babe' again. Tell your father he's lucky I didn't mention his little stunt to my brother, or heaven knows what would've happened."

"I know what he did was wrong," Liam said quickly, voice trembling slightly as he ran a hand through his hair. "But please don't talk like that. I'm just.. " He paused, searching for words, his throat tightening. The defiance in his eyes faltered for a second, replaced by something soft and desperate. "I'm just trying to make you understand how I feel."

Luna sighed deeply, rubbing her temple. "Listen, Liam, I'm older than you, and it's perfectly normal for your father to be worried about you getting involved with someone my age. But the issue here isn't your father it's me. I'm not interested in you."

"But I am," he said, his voice low and unwavering. His eyes held hers with such intensity that Luna felt her patience thinning. She exhaled sharply, tilting her head toward the sky as if praying for strength.

"Why won't you just listen to me?" she muttered.

"Because I listen to no one," Liam shot back, a mischievous grin tugging at his lips. "And for the record, I didn't kiss you that day because I was drunk and I'm not going to apologize for it, either."

"Liam.. "

He stepped back, his expression softening slightly. "I won't bother you anymore... at least not for now. I only came here with my sister, but don't think I'll let you slip away so easily. I don't care if it's your brother, my father, or the age gap I've given you my heart, and I'm not taking it back."

With a confident smirk, he threw her a playful flying kiss before turning away.

Luna stood frozen, speechless, watching him disappear into the crowd. "Unbelievable," she muttered under her breath, fighting the urge to smile.

#### *Chapter 84: 84*

The hospital doors burst open as Nix stormed in with Elisa cradled carefully in his arms, her soft groans of pain slicing through the sterile air. Tom trailed close behind, his face pale but his voice loud and commanding. "Hey! We need help here.. now!" he barked, his tone sharp enough to draw every pair of eyes in the reception toward them. "She's in labor! Somebody get a doctor!"

Almost instantly, a nurse leapt from behind the counter, signaling for a stretcher as two orderlies rushed forward. Nix's grip tightened briefly before he reluctantly let them take Elisa from his arms, his eyes following her as they wheeled her down the corridor. The world seemed to narrow for a moment, the smell of antiseptic, the echo of hurried footsteps, and the distant wail of a monitor brought back a nostalgic feeling.

Then, as the adrenaline began to settle, Nix turned to find Tom staring at him expectantly. He gave him a questioning look, with one brow raised. "Weren't you grinning from ear to ear just a few minutes ago? So why are you suddenly handing me the responsibility?"

Tom just shrugged, scratching the back of his head with an exaggerated sheepishness. "Because you look more... responsible?"

Before Nix could reply, a nurse with a clipboard called out from behind the counter, with eyes bright. "Sir! Are you the husband?"

"The what?" Nix blinked.

"Oh, wonderful!" She beamed, scribbling something down while another nurse joined her, whispering and giggling.

Nix frowned. "No, no, I'm not her.."

But it was useless. They were already calling him 'the husband' like it was a royal title. "Please, sir, fill this out for your wife's admission she's progressing quickly!"

Tom's grin was wicked. "Well, congratulations, Daddy Nix."

"Tom.. " Nix hissed through his teeth, but he was already halfway to the reception desk, taking the forms.

"Relax," Tom said, waving him off. "I'll fill it out. You just stand there and look like a proud father."

Nix rubbed his forehead. "I'm surrounded by idiots." he scoffed

Moments later, as Nix was trying to retreat to the waiting area, a nurse marched up to him with a kind but no-nonsense expression. "Sir, where are the baby things?"

He blinked. "Baby what?"

"The baby items! Diapers, blankets, bottles, clothes, everything the newborn needs. You didn't bring them?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about," he replied flatly.

She sighed like a disappointed teacher and handed him a list. "You better hurry before the delivery's done. The store across the street has everything. Go quickly."

Tom reappeared with a smirk just as Nix stared down at the paper. "Don't tell me you've been sent on an errand."

"Apparently," Nix muttered. "She wants me to get baby things."

Tom chuckled. "Well, the baby is going to be born on the same day as you were so you owe him this much" Tom teased a bit relief to see Nix out of his shell after a long time and acting as if he had never sunk in his well of darkness

"We're not.."

"Save it for later, Romeo," Tom said, patting his shoulder. "Let's go before the nurse starts threatening us."

In no time they arrived at the little baby store that was painted soft yellow and smelled faintly of powder and plastic. Rows of pastel onesies, tiny shoes, and teddy bears lined the aisles.

Nix paused at the entrance, suddenly quiet. His eyes softened as he took in the sight all the little things that symbolized a life beginning, innocence untouched.

For a brief, piercing moment, his chest ached as the thought of ..

If Carmela were alive... Would he have stood like this? Clueless in front of shelves of baby clothes, trying to imagine whether their child would have her eyes or his temper?

He swallowed hard. The thought cut through him, silent and heavy.

"What if the baby's a girl... or maybe a boy?" he murmured absently to himself, then waved down a clerk. "Just give me... everything unisex. As much as you've got."

The attendant blinked. "Everything?"

"Everything," he repeated.

Tom's jaw dropped. "Are you building a baby boutique or something?"

Nix didn't answer, still staring at a row of soft blankets with little stars embroidered on them.

Tom crossed his arms. "You do realize the baby won't stay tiny forever, right? And the mother's going to need a few things too. You've only picked two adult items.. if she wakes up and sees this, she'll think you were trying to clothe a small army."

Nix exhaled slowly, forcing a small smile. "Then help me pick. Before I accidentally buy the whole store."

They spent a few minutes fumbling through racks, Tom cracking jokes about Nix's terrible color coordination and Nix replying with sarcastic remarks that barely hid his distracted expression.

When they finally paid and left, Nix carried the bags like they were made of glass.

The moment they stepped back inside the hospital, the sound of hurried footsteps and muffled cries filled the hallway. Nix's heart started pounding faster than he expected.

He didn't even know her properly. Didn't know her story. But something about hearing those cries, that struggle for new life stirred something raw inside him.

Minutes later, a nurse appeared at the door, smiling wide. "Congratulations, sir! It's a healthy baby girl!"

For a heartbeat, Nix froze.

Then, despite himself, he smiled. A small, genuine curve of the lips he hadn't felt in a long time.

"Try to reach out to her family and inform them," he said quietly to Tom, handing over the car keys. "Her bag's in the back seat."

Tom nodded and left, while another nurse approached Nix with a bundle of soft blankets. "Here," she said gently. "You can follow them to the room." she smiled as the stretcher Elisa laid in came in sight. She looked pale but breathing steadily, her hair damp with sweat. A nurse followed, holding the baby wrapped in a soft yellow cloth.

But Nix only followed beside them silently. The moment they arrived the room he placed the bags he was holding aside and stood like an odd item watching how the nurse placed the baby in her cradle

"Sir!" She called and approached him and he turned his attention towards her "Her delivery was smooth but then she'll.." the nurse's words faded into the background as Nix's gaze was fixed on the tiny baby lying under the warm hospital light.

For a man who had lost so much, the sight was both unbearable and beautiful. He couldn't describe his true emotions at the moment but then he knew if he had the chance he'd protect the little one with all he had

"I guess I'm not destined to be a father" he murmured confusing the nurse that was speaking to him

"Sir are you listening?" She asked bringing his attention back to her and he nodded

"So make sure she takes those medications, and sanitize yourself properly before going to the baby. I'll take my leave now" she said and left the room leaving just Elisa, the baby and him.

The baby's soft whimpering broke through the hum of the hospital monitors and Nix turned his head, watching as the tiny bundle in the cradle squirmed, her cries small but piercing, the kind that made even the toughest man's chest ache.

For a long second, he simply stood there frozen, and unsure. He'd faced assassins, men with knives and cold hearts, but this? This fragile, red-faced creature wailing with all her might? It felt like standing before something holy.

He hesitated, then finally went to the bathroom in the room to wash and sanitize his hands before coming to her. He leaned forward, his large hands trembling just slightly as he lifted her from the cradle. She was so light, so impossibly delicate that he feared even his breath might crush her.

"Hey, hey..." he whispered awkwardly, his voice softer than he expected. "You're... smaller than my hand."

The baby's cries quieted, just a little.

And as he held her against his chest, a strange, unfamiliar warmth crept up inside him a feeling of peace, of belonging. The sterile smell of disinfectant faded; all he could feel was the soft weight of her tiny body and the steady rhythm of her heartbeat against his palm.

He smiled faintly, a rare, unguarded one that reached his eyes. The kind of smile he only had on around Carmela

Then something caught his attention.

Her eyes now half-open glimmered faintly under the hospital light. A dark, stormy gray.

The same color as his. Nix blinked "Well... that's new." He let out a small, breathy laugh, brushing a thumb over her tiny fist. "What are the odds, huh?"

The baby's breathing steadied, her little mouth curling as if in contentment. He chuckled softly under his breath, shaking his head. "Guess you're tougher than you look, kid."

And that's how Elisa found him when she woke up sitting beside her bed, her baby sleeping quietly in his arms, his expression a mixture of wonder and confusion.

For a moment, she just watched him, her head slightly tilted.

There was something oddly tender about the sight the man's usual composed aura softened, his gaze gentle as he rocked the baby.

A soft smile tugged at the corner of her lips.

Her movement stirred the sheets, and Nix turned instantly.

"Oh," he said quickly, standing up so fast he nearly jostled the baby. "You're awake."

Elisa blinked drowsily, her voice weak but warm. "You... carried her?"

He nodded, his tone apologetic. "I'm sorry. She was crying uncontrollably, and you were asleep. I didn't know what else to do."

Her smile widened a little. "It's fine. You seem to be doing just fine."

"I'm not so sure about that," he muttered, glancing at the baby like she was a ticking bomb.

Elisa chuckled softly, adjusting herself on the bed. "Thank you. Really."

He nodded once, clearing his throat awkwardly as he handed her the baby. "She's calmer now."

As Elisa cradled the infant, Nix sat back down, unsure what to do with his hands. A quiet lingered for a moment before he asked, "So... where's the father?"

Her eyes flickered down. "He's abroad," she said simply. "Work."

"Ah." He nodded slowly, then smirked faintly. "Well, your baby and I have the same eye color. If someone walked in right now, they might think she's mine."

That made her laugh a genuine, light sound that filled the room. "You're ridiculous."

"Just observant," he teased with a small smile and she shook her head, smiling at him. And that was all the confirmation he needed.

"They may look alike but their personalities are different" he murmured to his self as if reassuring himself that the person before him wasn't his wife

But before either could say more, the door burst open.

"Sis!"

Liam's voice cut through the air as he rushed inside, worry painted across his face. He ran straight to the bed, completely ignoring the man seated beside it.

"I'm so sorry," he gasped, clutching her hand. "I got so scared when I got there and couldn't find you... I just got a call and rushed over here as.."

His voice faltered mid-sentence. His gaze dropped to her stomach no longer rounded, just a faint trace beneath the sheets.

"Elisa," he breathed, "where's the baby? Your stomach, it's..."

"If you'd taken a second to look around," she interrupted with a tired laugh, "you'd see your little nephew." She nodded toward Nix.

Liam turned and froze and the air seemed to still.

Nix Dean sat quietly beside the bed, his sharp, brooding features softened by the sight of the baby in his arms again. The shadows under his eyes gave him that same dangerous aura Liam remembered the one that made men hesitate before speaking. But somehow, holding the tiny newborn, that darkness looked... almost gentle.

Nix looked up, meeting Liam's wide eyes with a calm, unreadable expression.

"Nix Dean," Liam muttered under his breath, a chill running down his spine.

Elisa blinked between them. "You two... know each other?"

Nix tilted his head, saying nothing.

Liam swallowed. "He's the.. "

"He's the bodyguard that saved me," Elisa cut in, smiling faintly, though confusion flickered in her brother's eyes.

"Bodyguard?" Liam repeated slowly, his gaze shifting between the two, suspicion stirring.

Nix just gave a small, dry smile the kind that held more secrets than explanations. And something about this next intercession in the love story of his sister and her husband gave him chills

"Another bloody war is about to start isn't it?"

*Chapter 85: 85*

Zamiel had arrived at the Sorrento estate just a few hours ago to check on Elisa. Her due date was close, and though her physical recovery seemed stable, her case still baffled him. Months ago, she'd woken from a six-week vegetative state with just opened eyes, breathing steady, but her memory was blank. She had no recollection of the dynasty, of her ties to Zamiel, and most importantly, of Nix Dean.

Liam had promised to keep her calm, to ensure she didn't wander or exert herself. But when Zamiel called and Liam couldn't find her, panic seized him like a sudden storm. All the "what ifs" he tried to ignore roared to life: What if she collapsed? What if her memory snapped back in the worst way? What if Nix found her first?

His phone rang before the dread could consume him completely, someone called reporting that Elisa had been rushed to the hospital. Relief washed through him, followed by urgency. Without wasting a second, Zamiel grabbed his coat and barked at Sai, "We're leaving now."

The hospital wasn't far, barely a few miles but every red light felt like a curse. By the time they arrived, Zamiel's pulse was racing. He expected to find her asleep or under medical care, but what he didn't expect... was that sight.

Through the half-open door of the ward, Nix Dean sat in a chair, one arm protectively wrapped around a newborn, his usually guarded expression softened into something

hauntingly tender. The baby's tiny hand was curled around his finger, and for a fleeting second, the hardened man looked almost... human.

Zamiel froze. He held up a hand to stop Sai, who was about to step forward. "Wait," he whispered, eyes narrowing. "Let me see what kind of mood he's in first."

Because with Nix, there were only two possibilities: either he left with his head still on his shoulders... or detached

Tom, standing near the doorway, shifted nervously spotting Zamiel

"Another bloody war is about to start, isn't it?" Liam muttered making Zamiel hold back his breath

Nix's cold gaze snapped toward him like a drawn blade. "Which war?"

Liam froze, gulping But before he could say a word

"Zamiel, what are you doing here?" Tom blurted, snapping Zamiel's focus away from Nix.

Zamiel straightened his coat, forcing his voice steady as he stepped inside. "Medical duty," he said smoothly, though his pulse was anything but calm. He gave Sai a small nod, motioning her to follow.

"Sai!" Elisa's voice broke through the tension. She smiled weakly, waving her over from the bed.

Sai rushed to her side, but even as she did, the air in the room shifted thickening with something unspoken. Nix's demeanor, once soft with the child in his arms, darkened the moment Sai entered. His eyes flicked up cold, unreadable, and calculating. Everyone noticed it except Elisa, who remained blissfully unaware, her attention fixed on Sia and her baby.

Zamiel cleared his throat and forced a smile, trying to cut through the silent pressure Nix was radiating. "Nix," he began, his tone light but edged with caution, "what are you doing in Italy?"

Nix didn't even look at him. He adjusted the baby's blanket instead, his expression unreadable.

"When did I start reporting my whereabouts to you?" he said flatly. Then, raising one eyebrow, he added, "And I can ask you the same thing, Doctor what are you doing here?"

The room held its breath hearing his question

Zamiel, forcing calm, walked over to Elisa's bedside. "Do you feel any discomfort?" Zamiel asked softly, checking the monitor beside Elisa's bed.

"No, just pain," she whispered, trying to adjust her position.

He nodded, scribbling a few notes on his clipboard before letting his eyes drift toward Nix. His tone grew sharper, deliberate. "She's my patient," he said, watching Nix's unreadable face for a flicker of emotion. None came. "She's Camillo Sorrento's second daughter... your late wife's sister. In other words, your sister-in-law."

The words hung thickly in the air. Nix's gaze darkened sharp, and restrained but his body remained still, every movement calculated.

Zamiel smirked, hiding his own unease. "I was honestly nervous about introducing you two, given her striking resemblance to..." He trailed off, knowing the name was a wound better left untouched. "But it seems you're okay."

A moment of silence passed before he added lightly, "Though, you shouldn't hold a newborn for too long. She's still prone to infections... and besides, someone might mistake you for the father."

At that, Nix's jaw tightened. His fingers clenched around the baby's soft blanket not enough to harm, but enough to betray the anger boiling beneath his calm surface. The faint sound of his knuckles cracking filled the air. His chest rose and fell with slow, controlled breaths, his eyes like cold steel locking on Zamiel's smirk.

Elisa, oblivious to the tension, turned to Zamiel. "Doctor Zamiel, do you know him?"

"Yes," Zamiel replied, too smoothly. "He's your brother-in-law." He smiled faintly.

"My brother-in-law?" Elisa blinked, surprised. "Isn't he a body.."

"Sis, he's not a bodyguard," Liam cut in quickly, glancing between Nix and Zamiel with visible discomfort. "He's... a big businessman."

Her lips formed a small O of surprise. "Oh. Then thank you for saving me either way. I.."

Before she could finish, Nix's voice sliced through the air like ice. "No one ever mentioned that Camillo had a son. Or that his daughter, the one who had bone marrow cancer was pregnant. And without a husband, at that."

Zamiel froze. The smirk drained from his face, replaced by a flicker of guilt. Around them, the room fell into a heavy, unnatural silence. Even the faint cooing of the baby seemed to hush. Everyone could feel the weight in Nix's tone, not curiosity, but accusation.

Sai shifted nervously where she stood and Lam's throat bobbed as he swallowed. Tom, by the wall, looked ready to step in if things turned ugly.

Then Nix's cold gaze slid toward Sai. His voice dropped to a dangerous whisper. "You might want to start praying for your fiancé, Sai. Otherwise, you'll be a widow before you even make it to the altar."

The room went deathly still. The threat wasn't loud, but it didn't have to be. His words carried the kind of quiet promise that made the air freeze.

"Okay, okay," Tom interjected quickly, raising his hands as if to physically push the tension back. "This room is for the mother and the child not for bloodshed or war."

"Yes, yes," Liam agreed, stepping forward hastily. "Sai, stay here and take care of Elisa and the baby. Everyone else, let's go." He grabbed Zamiel's arm and started ushering him toward the door.

Zamiel didn't resist, but his eyes stayed locked on Nix, silently measuring his next move.

Nix, however, didn't budge. He stayed seated, cradling the baby close to his chest. His arms were rigid, protective and almost possessive. His gaze softened only slightly as he looked down at the child, brushing a thumb over her tiny hand that had curled around his finger.

There was something fragile about that moment as if the world, for just a heartbeat, had reduced itself to him and the child. The warmth of her tiny body against his chest, the rise and fall of her breath... it stirred something foreign in him. A flicker of tenderness that he tried, and failed, to suppress.

"Mr. Dean..." Elisa's voice was gentle, almost pleading.

But he didn't respond. His expression was distant conflicted. It wasn't anger anymore; it was something deeper, more dangerous. A mix of longing, confusion, and pain.

Liam hesitated at the door, watching as Nix's fingers slowly loosened their hold, the baby letting out a soft whimper as if sensing his hesitation.

"Nix, can I have the baby?" Sai said, calling his attention.

But he only returned his gaze to the little one, whose tiny hand had curled back around his fingers.

"You can come and visit her whenever you want," Sai added softly, hoping he would let go though she knew deep down it was impossible for him to come and visit. Her uncle would never allow Nix near his house, not even ten feet close to Elisa or her baby.

Still, her words seemed to have a small effect. Nix gently placed the little one back into the baby cot beside Elisa instead of handing her over to Sai.

"She's still prone to infection," he murmured, his tone unexpectedly tender. "So you shouldn't carry her yet."

A faint smile touched his face as he stared at the baby, a look Sai had never seen on him before. It made her chuckle quietly as she watched him leave the room.

But the moment Nix stepped outside, his expression changed like a snake shedding its skin. The warmth vanished, replaced by the cold, sharp demeanor that defined him. His jaw tightened, eyes darkening with a quiet rage that seemed to hum beneath his skin.

He stepped into the corridor to find Liam whispering something to Zamiel. Nix couldn't care less about whatever they were discussing until he noticed Camillo storming toward them.

The next moment caught Nix off guard.

Camillo's hand came down hard across Liam's face a sharp, echoing slap that drew gasps from nearby nurses.

"I warned you about taking her out of the house, didn't I?" Camillo barked.

Nix, who was never fond of Camillo, leaned casually against the wall, arms folded, choosing to watch the scene unfold like a spectator at a play.

"You just want to do as you please," Camillo continued, voice booming. "Forgetting that I.. "

"You are just a father," Liam cut him off, voice rising, "not the lord over our lives!"

"Liam!"

"Don't scream my name!" Liam snapped back, his anger startling everyone in the corridor. Nix's lips curled into a small, knowing smile.

"I try my best to give you the respect you deserve as a father," Liam continued, stepping closer, "but you've decided to become the enemy of your own children's prosperity, haven't you? This should be the last time you lay your hands on me or place any restrictions on her. Unless..." His tone dropped, cold and deliberate. "...unless you want that little gem you're hiding from the world to be seen by everyone."

He scoffed and began walking away.

Camillo's face blanched, his fury momentarily replaced by shock. But before he could recover, Nix's voice low and venomous froze him in place.

"What little gem are you hiding from the world, Mr. Sorrento?"

Camillo turned sharply, meeting Nix's gaze. Their eyes locked one full of defensive pride, the other laced with quiet, dangerous amusement. Camillo's authority wavered under the weight of Nix's calm intimidation.

"It's none of your business," Camillo spat. "Stay out of my family issues."

Nix gave a faint, mocking smirk. "I have no business with your family affairs, father-in-law, but make sure that little gem of yours doesn't cross paths with me."

He took a step closer, his voice dropping into a threat so quiet it made the air feel heavier.

"Because if it does... I won't just ruin your peace, I'll burn down your world, piece by piece."

Without another glance, he turned and walked away, his footsteps slow and deliberate, each one echoing like a silent warning that lingered long after he was gone.

#### *Chapter 86: 86*

The sound of glass shattering made Luna snap upright. She yanked off her headphones and peered toward the window, heart stuttering. For a moment all she saw was the city streetlamps haloed by the night, the faint hum of traffic but nothing obvious explained the noise. She paused, listened; the only sound was the wind skimming across the balcony. Convinced it was nothing, she eased back into her chair and returned to her laptop, the glow of the screen small and intimate against the dark room.

Then a faint, breathy hiss at the edge of her hearing stopped her again. This time she turned instinctively toward the balcony. Behind the gauzy curtain a shadow moved too deliberate to be just a trick of the light. Her pulse thudded in her ears.

She slid the drawer beside her desk open with a silent motion, fingers brushing the hard, familiar shape she'd kept there for late nights and unwelcome surprises. She lifted the pistol out, the metal cool and weighty in her hand. Every movement afterwards was careful, and deliberate. She parted the curtain an inch and stepped onto the balcony, and with every breath shallow senses sharpened.

The figure was close enough that she could make out the outline of a jacket and the angle of a shoulder. Luna pressed the gun to the back of his head, the heel of the barrel flat against skin and the instant he felt the cold, he snapped his hands upward in surrender.

"Who are you?" she demanded, voice low and steady despite the tremor in her fingers.

He turned slowly. For a beat the world narrowed to his familiar and impossible face. Her jaw dropped.

"Hey, babe." Liam's smile was small and nervous, as if he'd been caught in the middle of something he hadn't planned for.

The pistol slid from her hand and clattered to her side

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, fighting for control. "How did you even get in, for goodness' sake?"

Liam ignored the questions. He ducked past her and, as if this were the most natural thing in the world, made himself comfortable on her bed, leaving the curtain fluttering and the Luna still standing at her spot

"You should be welcoming me instead of asking such questions," Liam said, flashing that boyish grin of his as he brushed imaginary dust off his jacket. "Do you know how many feet I had to climb just to get a glimpse of you? Honestly, Luna, if I fall off one of those balconies, at least let my ghost in without an interrogation." His eyes flicked to the pistol beside her "And why on earth do you even have a gun?"

"Because my brother gave me one," she replied flatly, folding her arms.

"Ohhh," he drawled with a teasing smirk, stepping closer, "my brother-in-law is quite the responsible man then, training his gorgeous little sister in self-defense? Tell me, does he offer private lessons too? I promise I learn fast." Luna's expression didn't even twitch. She grabbed his arm, dragged him away from the bed, and practically shoved him toward the balcony door. "Go back to wherever you just came from," she said coolly, not blinking once.

"But I just.. "

"You didn't ask for my permission before sneaking in," she cut in sharply. "So I don't need yours to send you back out."

There was no malice in her tone, but the firmness was enough to slice through his charm. She wasn't being cold, just careful. She knew that if Nix or anyone else found Liam in her apartment at this hour, the problem wouldn't just be why he was there... it would be how he got in. She had no intention of receiving another one of Camillo's "warning packages," nor did she want Nix turning back into Nathan, the ruthless version of himself just to keep her safe. After Carmela's tragedy, Luna had promised herself a quiet, simple life. But standing here with Liam grinning like trouble personified was anything but simple.

"I can't go back home," he said suddenly, slipping from her grip and flopping down onto her bed again, arms folded behind his head like he owned the place.

Her eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"Because," he said, flashing a smug little smile, "I've decided to be with you. I'm ready to be the house husband you clearly need."

Luna blinked. "What?"

A lazy smirk tugged at the corner of his lips. "I remember overhearing you say you wanted to live a simple life. You know, dating someone uncomplicated someone like your brother, but a more simplified version of him. So," he spread his arms dramatically, "I've decided to be that man."

She let out a breathless scoff, rolling her eyes so hard it could've powered the lights. "Do you even know who my brother is?" she asked, one brow arched in disbelief.

Liam shook his head with faux innocence. "Nope. But I wouldn't mind studying him... just to become him. Think of it as... immersive research for love."

Luna pinched the bridge of her nose. "God help me."

Liam grinned wider. "He might, but not before I do."

"You're mad, now get.. "

The sharp creak of the door cut her short.

Luna froze, her pulse skipping a beat as her gaze darted toward the entrance. There, leaning lazily against the doorframe, was Nix. His tall frame filled the doorway effortlessly, his expression a picture of cold boredom. The faint light from the hallway spilled across his features, highlighting the unreadable stillness in his eyes which were dark, sharp, and calculating.

For a split second, silence hung heavy in the air. Even the night breeze that filtered in through the balcony curtains seemed to pause.

Liam's breath hitched. He looked like a criminal caught red-handed stiff, wide-eyed, and utterly guilty. Luna's fingers twitched by her side, her mind scrambling for words that refused to come.

"Brother," she finally managed, her tone awkwardly thin.

"Brother-in-law," Liam added almost immediately, voice trembling slightly, his lips twitching into a nervous grin that only made things worse.

Nix's expression didn't change. His gaze swept slowly from Luna to Liam and back again calm, cold, and utterly unreadable. The tension in the room thickened, pressing down on their lungs.

Liam cleared his throat and stood from the bed, trying to look casual but failing miserably. "I... I'll take my leave now," he muttered, his hand rubbing the back of his neck. He turned toward the balcony, forcing out a shaky laugh as he prepared to climb down again, one leg already over the rail.

That's when Nix's voice sliced through the silence low, lazy, but dangerously sharp.

"Do you know I can have my guards shoot you right now and claim you were a thief?"

Liam froze mid-movement. His face drained of color as he quickly stepped back inside, holding his hands up in surrender. "Brother-in-law, actually... there's no need for violence. I was just.. uh.. testing the security system. You know, for her safety."

Nix ignored the excuse entirely, straightening to his full height. His presence filled the room like a quiet storm. "Join us for dinner," he said flatly.

"What?" Luna's voice shot out in disbelief, her eyes wide with irritation and confusion. But Nix didn't even glance at her. He opened the door wider instead, his tone still calm but final.

"The butler will show you to the dining room," he said, his gaze fixed on Liam. "He's waiting outside."

Liam hesitated for a heartbeat, then flashed Luna an apologetic smile half-guilty, half-relieved. "Dinner sounds great," he said quickly, scurrying out before she could react. The door clicked softly behind him, leaving the room heavy with silence once again.

The moment the latch settled, Luna spun toward Nix, her irritation bubbling to the surface.

"What was that for!" she snapped, glaring at him.

Nix's eyes narrowed, his calm façade cracking just enough to reveal a flicker of anger beneath. He took a slow step toward her.

"You received a threat," he said, voice low but sharp, "not once but twice. And you didn't tell me?" His gaze locked with hers, intense enough to make her chest tighten. "Have you already considered me dead, Luna?"

The words hit harder than she expected.

"Nix, don't say that," she said softly, her voice trembling around the edges. "It's just... I didn't want to bother you."

He exhaled sharply through his nose a sound that carried frustration more than anger. "You are my responsibility, Luna," he said, his tone rising, his jaw tightening as he stepped closer. "You all are my responsibility and everything that happens to any of you bothers me."

She sighed, lowering her gaze. For a fleeting moment, she had forgotten how fiercely protective he could be. The way his anger wasn't born from control, but from fear, the fear of losing someone else he cared about.

"I know, okay. But why did you let him stay for dinner?" Luna rolled her eyes.

"Because he can't go home now." Nix's voice was flat.

"And how do you know this?"

"Because I was with him a few hours ago. I met his family including his sister, who's Carmela's identical twin sister."

Luna's breath hitched. The implication landed like a lead weight in her chest. Without a word, she crossed the room and wrapped her arms around him. She pressed her face to his chest, feeling the steady thud of his heartbeat beneath her cheek, a small, stubborn rhythm that said he was still there. Nix's shoulders were tense at first, as if bracing against some invisible memory, then slowly, infinitesimally, he loosened. The brief contact seemed to soften something behind his eyes; for a moment he looked smaller, human in a way he rarely allowed himself to be seen.

"How do you feel?" she asked, looking up at him.

He gave a small, crooked smile the kind that didn't reach his eyes but fit the moment anyway. "I'm fine. Now let's not keep your lover waiting." His said in a teasing tone to have Luna smirked and stepped back. "You know it's not going to work out between us, right?" she said as she moved toward the door.

Nix tilted his head, studying her. "With the zeal and fire I saw in his eyes? I doubt you'll be able to escape."

#### *Chapter 87: 87*

When Nix descended the stairs, Liam felt it before he saw him. The room's air seemed to tighten, and every hair on his arms prickled. Nix still wore that deadpan expression, the one that made men reconsider their life choices. Before Liam could find his voice, two other men crossed from the far side of the dining room and took seats opposite Nix and Luna, their movements casual but deliberate.

"Seems we have a guest," Xavier said with a nearly invisible smirk, his eyes narrowing as they found Liam.

"You're Elisa's brother, aren't you? What are you doing here?" Tom asked bluntly, but Liam only managed a thin, nervous smile instead of an answer.

"Nobody forgets their manners," Nix said, his voice crisp and authoritative. The dining room fell completely silent; even the clatter of silverware paused as the maids, sensing the charge in the air, moved quietly to serve.

"So, Liam," Nix continued, leaning back in his chair as he toyed with his napkin, "I heard you want to be a house husband. Let me save you some time and tell you to scrap that plan." His tone was casual but sharp. "I will never let my sister marry a man with no financial security."

Liam's hand trembled as he reached for his cutlery; the knife slipped slightly in his palm. A fine sheen of sweat gathered at his palms and the back of his neck, making the silverware slick. He swallowed hard, eyes sweeping the table and landing on Luna, the only woman at the table then back to the men. The faces around him weren't friendly, their gazes were sharp, the kind that measured and judged. He tried to read the room and realized, with a sinking feeling, it was because he'd dared show interest in their sister.

"You can say the Dean family is short on women," Nix said, keeping his gaze locked on Liam, "but the women we have we protect and respect them." His voice was low, but it carried like a verdict. "For example, if you make her cry, I won't be the only one to deal with you." He lifted his chin, enumerating with surgical calm. "First would be her twin brother. He looks casual and stupid, but he's precise with his fists. After that, you'll have Tom. He's got the sort of unpredictability that makes people keep their distance."

Tom's jaw tightened. "Brother!" he snapped, glaring at Nix, but Nix didn't flinch; he merely gave a small, almost indifferent shrug and returned his attention to his plate as if the warning had been nothing more than table talk.

The room stayed tense and quiet, the maids moving like shadows to replenish glasses and lay out dishes. Liam sat very still, the cocktail of embarrassment and fear rising in his chest. Every polite smile he tried to muster felt thin, and the cutlery in his sweaty hand felt suddenly heavier than it had any right to be.

"You may not have met my wife, your sister" Nix began evenly, resting his elbows on the table, "but you must have heard about her. And if you've truly heard the stories, then you know how crazy she was." He pointed casually toward Tom with his fork. "And him... he was her best friend not just any best friend, but the kind that supported every reckless decision she made, even the one that almost involved killing me."

"Nix, I thought we talked about this" Tom muttered, rubbing his temple, but Nix waved him off like a fly, as though the comment was nothing but background noise.

"You're a bit special," Nix continued, turning his attention back to Liam, "because you're the brother of my wife. So I'll go easy on you."

Xavier let out a short, sarcastic laugh, breaking the silence like the crack of glass. "More like jumping from the frying pan into the fire," he said, smirking as he placed a spoonful of soup into his mouth.

Nix ignored him completely. His eyes stayed fixed on Liam, cold and analytical. "You're still young, so I won't expect much from you. Just answer one simple question." The clinking of cutlery died. The air thickened. "Except for your father's wealth," Nix said slowly, "what is your net worth?"

The room fell so silent that even the ticking clock on the far wall sounded intrusive. Liam froze mid-breath, darting his gaze between the faces around him. Under the table, Luna nudged him lightly with her foot, hiding a small, knowing smile.

"Uh... actually, I don't know," Liam finally admitted, scratching his neck. Tom burst into laughter, the sound deep and mocking.

"Do you even have a degree?" Nix asked, raising an eyebrow.

"About that.. I'll be graduating next year," Liam stammered, forcing a nervous smile. Nix's eyes narrowed slightly, and unreadable.

"And you think that's enough to give her a secured future?" he asked, voice steady but sharp. Then, with a small sigh, he leaned back in his chair. "Look, I won't be quick to judge. I'm sure you have potential. So I'll give you two years to prove yourself worthy of my sister."

The words came without warmth. His face a mask that showed no flicker of emotion, no trace of empathy, just a cold, polished exterior that spoke of a man who'd seen too much to care anymore.

"Nix, I don't remember saying I was interested in him," Luna said, her tone dry.

"Are you ever interested in anyone?" Xavier interjected before Nix could respond. "At least he's willing to stick with you despite your deranged mental health." His smirk widened when Luna shot him a glare sharp enough to cut glass.

"Sorry to say," Liam blurted without thinking, "but is every member of the Dean family mentally challenged or something?" The words were out before he could catch them. Every head at the table turned toward him. The air grew heavier. Liam's voice faltered, turning softer, almost pleading. "I.. I mean, you just... keep mentioning being unstable..."

"If the interview session is over," Xavier drawled, breaking the silence, "can we eat peacefully now?"

No one replied. One by one, everyone returned to their plates. The clinking of forks and knives resumed, slow and cautious. Liam tried to do the same, but every bite felt like swallowing nails. He could feel eyes on him, though whenever he looked up, no one was actually staring. The tension sat thick in his throat until the last dish was cleared.

Eventually, they all began to leave the dining room Tom first and Xavier, chatting slowly as they disappeared down the hallway. Luna followed with a weary glance back at Liam. Within minutes, the room was empty, except for the two men, Nix sitting calmly with his phone, and Liam, unsure whether to stand, leave, or breathe.

The silence stretched until Nix spoke without looking up.

"Have you heard from your sister and her baby?"

Liam nodded quickly. "They're fine." He forced a small smile, but guilt pressed hard on his chest, guilt for tearing apart a family, for separating a man from his wife and child. He looked down, ashamed.

"You.. " Liam started, finally glancing up.

"Don't worry," Nix cut in, sensing what was coming. "I won't mistake her for Carmela. I buried her with my own hands. This is reality, not a movie."

Nix smiled faintly, but it didn't reach his eyes. "Good?" he said, his voice quieter now, almost distant, before returning his gaze to the phone in his hand.

Liam hesitated. "You're not going to ask me any questions?"

That earned the faintest smirk from Nix. "You're a smart young man," he said, sliding his phone onto the table and folding his arms. "So let's not beat around the bush. I'm not going to ask how Camillo happens to have you when no rumors ever mentioned your existence. I'm more interested in something else."

He leaned forward slightly, eyes darkening. "I've been searching for something. And your father seems to have it."

Liam's throat went dry. He could feel sweat bead under his hairline despite the chill in the air. "Wh-what could that be?" he asked cautiously.

"One of Carmela's paintings," Nix said evenly.

Liam let out a long, shaky sigh of relief until Nix continued.

"I lost it in a tragic situation," he said quietly, his voice dropping to a dangerous calm, "and when I went back for it, I was told your father has it in his possession."

"I doubt it's true. I've never seen any paintings in the house," Liam protested, forcing a smile that didn't reach his eyes. Nix chuckled once again, low and humorless.

"You see, this is what I hate about your father," Nix said, the words spitting out like a wound. He set his jaw and his hand curled around the stem of his glass so tightly the knuckles whitened. "He skulks in the shadows, pretends everything's fine, and never stands up for what matters. Carmela deserved someone who would have fought for her in the open not a man who buries truth and hides behind polite smiles."

He tapped the table with slow, deliberate patience. "Either way... I want the painting back." The sentence was simple, but the hatred behind it made the air between them colder. It wasn't just about a canvas. It was about a promise, about a life that had been erased and the one thing tied to that life that Camillo had kept.

Liam blinked, scrambling mentally through possibilities of where the painting might be hidden a locked room, a private office, maybe a storage crate in the estate. He tried to sound helpful. "I'll help you get it," he offered cautiously. "But the only time I can think of is when my father's guards are a little... lax is New Year's Eve."

Nix's face shifted a slow refocus, the slightest tightening at the corners of his eyes. For a heartbeat his aura changed; the bored, measured gentleman folded away and something more dubious and dangerous slid into place. The room seemed to avert its breath.

"That's eleven months from now," Nix said, impatient. "I can't wait that long." His voice was flat, but the impatience hummed like a live wire beneath it.

"That's the only time his guard's down," Liam insisted, watching Nix for any sign of compromise.

A silence stretched. Then, before he could think, driven by fear, by adrenaline, by the desire to end whatever suffering lingered in this family Liam blurted, "Can we also kill him then?"

The words dropped like a bomb. For the first time in the night, Liam's bravado cracked; he immediately paled at his own suggestion as the weight of what he'd said landed.

Nix's eyes locked on him. For a moment there was nothing but a quiet, terrible assessment, the kind of look that measured the soul. Then he leaned back, an almost amused tilt at the corner of his mouth.

"Of course we can" he responded softly and dangerously controlled, as if testing the waters.

## *Chapter 88: 88*

The entire Sorrento household was alive with celebration. Though the festive season had passed weeks ago, anyone who walked through their iron gates would swear they would believe they missed one of the celebration days that the Sorrento's didn't.

Laughter rippled through the marble halls. The maids moved like dancers in rhythm polishing, dusting, and polishing again as though every gleam on the silver trays and chandelier crystals reflected their joy. The reason for their cheer was no secret: the young madam, Elisa, had just given birth, and along with the news came a generous increase in salary and double bonuses.

"Careful with that vase, it's from Florence!" one of the senior maids scolded gently, though even her stern tone couldn't hide the grin on her face. "Oh, bless the heavens for this child," another maid murmured, kissing her fingers and pointing them toward the ceiling.

Moments later, the heavy oak doors of the Sorrento mansion opened to welcome Elisa and Sai. A pair of guards immediately bowed their heads as Sai entered first, her posture protective and alert. Behind her, Elisa followed pale from delivery, yet glowing in that mysterious, tired beauty that only new mothers carried.

A maid hurried toward them, almost tripping in her excitement.

"Madam Elisa! Oh, madam, welcome home!" she beamed, reaching to take the luggage from Sai's hands. "You look so radiant, ma'am! And this little one.. oh, she's just as pretty as her mother!"

Sai gave the maid a wry smile and handed her the lighter bags. "Thank you, Mina. The rest I'll take upstairs."

Together, Sai helped Elisa to her room, speaking in hushed tones as if afraid to disturb the peace of the sleeping baby cradled in Elisa's arms. Once inside, the scent of soft roses and warm linen filled the space. Sai carefully took the infant from Elisa and laid her gently in a white cradle draped with a soft, silver blanket.

The little one stirred and then smiled a small, fleeting curl of her lips that made both women's hearts melt.

"Elisa," Sai whispered, admiring the baby, "what's her name?"

A tender smile spread across Elisa's face. She brushed a stray strand of hair from her face and gazed at her daughter with quiet awe.

"Nyxellaa."

Sai blinked. "Nyxellaa...? That's unique," she said softly, tilting her head. "A beautiful name, but why that name?"

Before Elisa could answer, a voice cut through the calm, low and commanding

"Why that name indeed?"

Both women turned toward the door. Camillo Sorrento stood there, his expression stiff an old, unreadable mask over storming eyes. His suit was crisp as ever, but his presence darkened the cheerful room like a shadow spilling over light.

Elisa's posture straightened immediately. "Sai," she said calmly, never breaking eye contact with her father, "can you please excuse us?"

Sai hesitated, her gaze darting between the two, but Elisa's small smile was enough. She nodded, bowed slightly, and slipped out, closing the door softly behind her.

Camillo took a step forward, shutting the door completely this time. The quiet click echoed like a verdict.

"I asked why that name of all names?" His tone was calm, but there was steel underneath.

Elisa turned back to the cradle, fingers brushing her baby's soft cheek. "Because," she said with a faint smile, "she's just as unique as her father."

Her words struck like glass against stone. Camillo's jaw tightened. "Didn't you promise to forget him?" he said, the calm in his voice cracking.

"Of course I did," Elisa replied almost mockingly. "Everyone believes I have. Zamiel, the entire family, even Nix himself doesn't suspect me of being his wife." She finally turned to face him fully, her eyes glinting with a dangerous calm. "But promises, Father... are meant to be broken, aren't they?"

Camillo's face was drained of color.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying," Elisa continued, stepping closer, "just as you broke your promise to protect my mother and me, I can break mine too. And when I do, I'll send my little one back to her father's side."

His nostrils flared. "She's my granddaughter!"

Elisa's voice sharpened. "She's a Dean before she ever became your granddaughter!" She raised her voice, the weight of years of suppressed anger now spilling free. "Are

you trying to build another family just so you can destroy it again? Haven't you ruined enough already?" Her eyes glistened with tears, though her voice didn't waver. "I'm hanging by a thread, Father. And if it breaks.. " she gave a brittle laugh, ".. I'll send her back to her father and go jump off a cliff myself!"

"Elisa, stop it! Stop talking about dying" Camillo barked, his composure snapping. His hands curled into fists at his sides, the veins in his temples bulging. He looked as if every muscle in his body was straining to hold back something violent.

But Elisa only chuckled, the sound soft and broken. "Oh, now you care?" her voice cracked low, and bitter, but trembling under the weight of everything she had buried for years. "Do you even know how many thousand times I died under the care of the man you let me call father? How many times my heart stopped beating while reading those medical reports you fabricated?" Her chest rose and fell sharply. Tears burned at the corners of her eyes, but she refused to let them fall. "You could have told me the truth, Father. You could have just said it that you were my father, that my relationship with Nix could never work because of what I'd done. And yes," she gave a small, broken laugh, "I would have fought you, I would have shouted, maybe even hated you for a while. But I would have come with you eventually."

Her voice wavered, rising with every word. "Instead, you ruined my entire life just to protect one secret. One. And now, I can't even do what I love the most without fear of being caught in the web of lies my darling father has spun."

She raised her right hand trembling, which was now scarred from old injury, her fingers slightly curled as if remembering something they once held. "I wanted to paint," she whispered. "God knows how much I wanted to. But I can't. You know why? Because I damaged my right hand and now I have to use the left just to avoid suspicion that Carmela is still alive."

Her voice softened, the anger dissolving into grief. "When I saw him again, I wanted to hug him. To tell him I was here. He looked... lost. Like he was drowning in sorrow." She gave a bitter chuckle. "I wanted to pull him out of that dark well, even though I was the one who pushed him in. But I couldn't. I had to keep pretending to be Elisa."

She turned toward the cradle and smiled weakly. "But this little one," she said, brushing her baby's cheek, "this little one decided to do what her mother couldn't she limped right into her father's arms."

Her smile twisted into something sharper. "He's already emotionally attached to her. Even without knowing who she really is. Now, imagine what happens when he finds out."

Camillo's voice was quiet but dangerous. "Are you threatening me?"

Elisa tilted her head slightly, a dry smile tugging at her lips. "You take my words so lightly... as a threat?" Her smile vanished, leaving only a chilling calm. "You already destroyed the life of one of your children. I dare you to do the same to the other. Stop Liam from getting what he wants, and watch me unleash hell on the entire Sorrento family."

Camillo flinched at her words just a small twitch of his eyes, but she caught it.

"Do you hate me that much?" he asked, his voice cracking for the first time.

"Hate?" Elisa's lips curled bitterly. "That's an understatement for what I feel. If I could go back in time, to the day you gave me that ice cream, the day I smiled and thought you were just a kind stranger I'd refuse it. I'd refuse you."

Her tone hardened. "And you're wrong about one thing, Father. Your decisions are never the best. Now, if you don't mind..." she turned away, her voice tired, "I need to rest."

For a moment, the only sound was the soft cooing of the baby in the cradle. Camillo stood there, frozen between guilt and fury. His hands clenched and unclenched at his sides, veins standing out against his skin. Then, without another word, he turned sharply and left the room the quiet click of the door closing feeling like a final goodbye.

Elisa lay down on her bed, staring blankly at the ceiling. Her breath trembled, and at last, the tears she'd fought so hard to contain slipped silently down her cheeks.

When she was sure Camillo was gone, she sat up slowly and reached for her baby. "Nyxellaa..." she whispered, pressing a kiss to her forehead. "Mummy's sorry for being selfish. It's the least I can do after all since you've clearly chosen your dad as your favorite."

Her eyes glistened, and she smiled through her tears. "You decided to be born on the same day as him, and even took his eye color. Isn't that favoritism?" she laughed softly, shaking her head. "But don't worry, my love. I'll take care of you like he would have maybe not a hundred percent, but I'll give you eighty. And I promise, you won't grow up knowing the kind of life I had..."

She blinked, her voice cracking just slightly. "...and maybe that'll be enough."

Suddenly, the door burst open.

"Sister!"

Liam's voice startled her so hard that she almost dropped the baby. She turned quickly, wiping her tears with the back of her hand and forcing a small smile.

"You were crying, weren't you?" he asked, stepping closer, eyes scanning her face like a detective trying to read a confession she hadn't written.

"Nope."

"Hmm you're lying. Did father.." Liam started, but Elisa cut him off.

"Why didn't you come back yesterday?" she asked quickly, shifting the topic. Liam let out a long, theatrical sigh.

"Sis, you know the story of Daniel in the lion's den," he said, putting on a melodramatic voice. "I was in the lion's den yesterday, but by the mercy of the Lord I survived."

Elisa snorted then laughed despite herself. "And now you need my help?"

"Always." He leaned forward, earnest. "Lend me your brain. If you were our father and you wanted to hide something, where would you hide it?"

Elisa paused, the question sending her mind skittering through memory lanes and the map of the Sorrento estate. She pictured Camillo moving through his rooms measured steps along marble floors, hands that never touched anything without thinking of the impression it would leave. She imagined the way he loved secrecy, how he preferred rules written in shadow rather than in the open.

If he wanted something hidden, it wouldn't be crammed in an obvious vault, she thought. He didn't keep things where people would dig in the dark; he kept them where people would see them and never suspect. A painting folded into plain view under his own pride displayed behind another frame, tucked in a study full of men's trophies, or masked as an innocuous piece in a guest room. He would disguise the true value in plain sight, trusting the opacity of reputation to shield his secret.

"Given his personality," she said slowly, eyes distant as she pieced together the logic, "if I were him I wouldn't hide what I'm afraid to lose in the shadows. That would make it too easy to find. I'd keep it in plain sight disguised in a public setting where everyone sees it and never understands what they're looking at."

Liam's face lit up; he started clapping as if she'd delivered a speech. "You collected all the brains and left me with none!"

Elisa smiled faintly. "Okay, but what exactly are you searching for?"

"A painting," he said. "And with what you just said, there's no way he keeps it here. So where could it be?"

Before she could answer, Sai returned to the room carrying a tray. She set it on the bedside table and dropped a small tag beside Elisa's pillow. "His private yacht," she

said without preamble. "If Uncle were to hide something like a painting, he'd hide it there. No one would suspect."

"You mean the one he only opens for New Year's Eve?" Liam raised an eyebrow. Sai nodded.

*Chapter 89: 89*

"You guys want to steal from Uncle!"

The words hit the room like a thunderclap.

Sai yelped, nearly knocking over the food tray she'd just set down. Elisa's head snapped toward the door so fast her hair brushed her cheek, while Liam jumped to his feet, clutching his chest as if his heart had just leapt into his throat. Even little Nyxella stirred in her cradle, her tiny fists twitching at the sudden noise.

"Amina!" Sai barked, her voice half a whisper and half a growl. "Are you trying to kill us?"

But Amina only rolled her eyes in a dramatic, unbothered fashion and strutted into the room with a practiced sway like someone who'd spent too many years walking in front of cameras. Her glossy curls bounced against her shoulders, and a teasing smile tugged at her lips as her gaze softened upon spotting the cradle.

"Oh, little girl," she cooed, bending slightly toward Nyxella. "How are you doing, sweetheart? Isn't she just the cutest thing?" Her tone dropped into a sugary softness that felt slightly out of place considering she had just accused them of plotting theft.

Elisa frowned, still recovering from the shock. "Amina, what are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be in the States?"

Instead of answering Sai's question, Amina waved a manicured hand in dismissal and turned her radiant smile toward Elisa. "What's her name?"

"Nyxella," Elisa replied quietly, brushing a soft hand over her daughter's blanket.

"Such a lovely name," Amina said with a wistful smile.

"Amina," Liam interjected, narrowing his eyes, "can you at least answer us? Weren't you supposed to be shooting your newest movie?"

For a brief moment, Amina's face froze her smile faltering at the corners. She exhaled sharply through her nose and crossed her arms, her nails tapping rhythmically against her arm in irritation. "Forget about the movie," she muttered, tossing her head back. "I've been heartbroken, alright? I'm here to mend my broken heart."

The three siblings exchanged uneasy glances. Sai tilted her head, curiosity flickering behind her eyes; Liam rubbed the back of his neck, fighting the urge to laugh and Elisa just raised an eyebrow, torn between amusement and disbelief.

"Who cares to break your heart," Elisa finally said with a half-smile, "after knowing you're the daughter of the Sorrento family?"

Amina scoffed, her expression souring into something sharp and defensive. "Oh please, you say that like being a Sorrento protects me from idiots," she said, plopping herself down on the couch as though she owned the place.

"It's obviously that David guy..." Liam said, narrowing his eyes at Amina. "I warned you that he's not the one, but our dearest first lady told me to mind my business." He scoffed, leaning back with his arms folded like a man who had seen the future and wasn't surprised it turned out badly.

Amina's glare could have burned a hole through steel. Her nostrils flared, lips pressed into a tight line, and the sharp click of her heels echoed as she took a threatening step closer to him. "Say one more word, Liam," she hissed, "and I'll mind your business permanently."

Liam raised his hands in mock surrender, a teasing smirk playing on his lips. "See? Even heartbroken, you're still violent. Classic Sorrento trait."

Before the verbal war could escalate, Sai intervened with the calm authority of someone used to babysitting two overgrown children. "Would you two stop it already? Amina, tell us what happened or keep quiet. We don't have all day."

Amina sighed dramatically, brushing a stray lock of hair behind her ear before sitting on the edge of Elisa's bed. "He said..." She paused, bitterness thick in her voice. "He said he wants to become a father."

Liam's eyes went wide. "He's supposed to be arrested for that statement. Even the law should sue him for attempted stupidity," he scoffed, shaking his head. "A man like that doesn't deserve the air he breathes."

Sai shot him a look but Amina chuckled bitterly. "I guess you're right. We both ran some fertility tests turns out, the issue was with him. But I didn't complain, I stayed loyal." Her voice cracked slightly, and she clenched her fists. "But then, when he broke up with me, he said his new girlfriend was pregnant... and that I was the one with the issue."

Liam's jaw tightened, his expression softening just a bit beneath his sarcasm. "That guy surely has guts saying that to you. Maybe you should tell Uncle. He'll handle him in his own special way."

"Please," Amina scoffed, rolling her eyes. "I've already become an outcast in the movie industry because of my father. The last thing I need is him 'handling' someone on my behalf." She folded her arms, her tone growing colder. "Sometimes I wish I had your father instead of mine... but seeing how deranged both brothers are, I think I would've done better without being born a Sorrento at all."

Liam threw his head back in laughter. "You finally realized it! If only Aunt Rena had been the only Sorrento in existence, we'd have had peaceful lives, stable childhoods, maybe even a family therapy session or two."

"Can you keep quiet for once?" Sai groaned, rubbing her temple. "That's not the issue at hand."

"What then?" Liam asked, feigning innocence.

Amina hesitated for a moment, then exhaled sharply. "The issue is that old Aron has decided to get this same girl, David's pregnant girlfriend married to Nix Dean."

The room went dead silent. Even Nyxella's soft cooing seemed to fade.

Sai blinked, her lips parting in disbelief. "You've got to be kidding me..."

"Excuse me, which of the Nix Dean are you talking about?" Liam's tone was sharp, laced with disbelief. He leaned back, eyes narrowing like he was expecting her to suddenly say she meant another man entirely.

Amina rolled her eyes so hard it was a miracle they didn't fall out. "How many Nix have a Dean attached to their name as a surname?" she shot back, crossing her arms and raising a brow as if the question itself was beneath her.

The room instantly fell silent the kind of silence that hummed with danger. It was thick, brittle, and almost painful to breathe through. Sai's playful smirk slowly faded, and even Liam's sarcastic edge dulled as their gazes drifted toward Elisa.

Elisa's expression was unreadable at first, but her fingers, resting on the blanket beside her, clenched. Her jaw tightened ever so slightly. Behind that forced stillness, anger began to bloom like smoke under glass silent, invisible, but lethal. Her smile was still there, but it carried the stillness of a storm before lightning strikes.

Amina, oblivious to the emotional bomb she'd just triggered, continued cheerfully, "Either way, when are you planning on stealing the painting?"

The air seemed to release a little, the tension briefly masked by the shift in topic. Sai cleared her throat, standing up as if movement alone might calm the atmosphere. "In eleven months' time," she announced, brushing imaginary dust off her shirt.

Liam whistled low. "Hmm, that's enough time to draft a proper plan," he said, leaning back on the couch again, feigning nonchalance.

Amina nodded thoughtfully, still completely unaware of the dagged looks being exchanged behind her. "Also, Nix's official engagement is in January, and the wedding date should be announced soon.."

"Amina!" Liam and Sai chorused, panic slicing through their voices.

Amina blinked, confused. "What?"

Their eyes darted toward Elisa in warning, but it was too late.

"Guys, why are you shouting? Let her speak," Elisa said, her tone soft but laced with frost. Her lips curled into a calm smile, a facade so flawless it was almost frightening.

Sai and Liam exchanged a look that screamed we're doomed.

"She doesn't remember anything," Amina murmured under her breath, barely loud enough for Sai and Liam to hear. They rolled their eyes in perfect synchronization, realizing Amina was far too late to whisper that.

Elisa leaned forward, resting her chin on her palm. "So, what's the plan?" she asked, raising an eyebrow with the same casual interest one might use when discussing the weather but her eyes glimmered like glass about to crack.

Sai opened her mouth, trying to salvage the conversation. "We have to.. "

"Having all the Sorrento siblings gather in one room gives me an anxious feeling..."

The voice came from the doorway.

They all turned at once.

Zamiel leaned casually against the frame, arms crossed, a small smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. His sharp eyes flicked from one face to another, taking in the tension that still clung to the air like smoke.

"What are you all plotting again?" he asked, stepping into the room with the confidence of someone who already knew the answer but wanted to watch them squirm anyway.

The room shifted once more. Liam coughed into his fist. Sai suddenly found the tray on the table fascinating. Amina plastered on an innocent smile.

And Elisa?

She simply exhaled through her nose, straightened her shoulders, and looked up at Zamiel her anger now tucked neatly behind a serene mask.

"Family bonding," she said sweetly. "Care to join?"

#### *Chapter 90: 90*

And slowly, as though time itself had grown wings, hours melted into days, and days slipped seamlessly into weeks. The weeks rolled over one another like gentle tides until they fused into months, months that seemed to vanish in the blink of an eye. The world outside Nix's estate had moved in a blur: leaves had fallen and bloomed again; the winds had changed their song from cold whispers to mild laughter; and now, at last, the calendar had arrived at the threshold everyone had been waiting for New Year's Eve.

The streets were alive with expectation. The city hummed like a living heartbeat distant fireworks testing the sky, laughter spilling from open bars, the air thick with the scent of roasted corn and sweet smoke. Time, it seemed, had been sprinting toward this night all along, dragging both joy and sorrow behind it, until the world stood on the edge of a new beginning.

But within that whirlwind of anticipation, one man seemed to wear a different kind of light. Nix Dean.

For the first time in what felt like forever, his lips were no longer weighed down by grief. A quiet smile, small at first, uncertain, but real had found its way onto his face. It wasn't the cruel smirk that used to intimidate men or the polite grin that masked exhaustion. This was something softer, almost foreign to him, like the warmth of dawn breaking after a long, merciless night.

His newly appointed driver kept stealing glances at the rear-view mirror, almost unable to believe what he was seeing. Since his employment, he had silently wondered if perhaps his boss had forgotten how to smile if the muscles that lifted the corners of his mouth had grown stiff from disuse. But today, as they cruised through the sun-drenched highway on their way to the airport, Nix's smile refused to fade. It lingered there, patient and genuine, the kind that carried both memory and hope.

The driver blinked, adjusting the mirror once more, half afraid it was just a trick of the light. But no, the faint upward curve was still there.

For the first time, Nix Dean, the man whose silence once chilled entire boardrooms, looked like a man who had remembered what it meant to breathe again.

It was finally the day he had been waiting for eleven long months that felt like eleven lifetimes. Each sunrise had come and gone carrying the same hollow ache, each night haunted by the same memory Carmela. The pain of her loss hadn't dulled with time; it had only reshaped itself into something else, a quiet, burning purpose.

After her demise, Nix found himself standing at the edge of a life that no longer made sense. But then, he remembered her art, those vivid, soulful paintings that carried pieces of her heart. Every brushstroke she had made, every canvas she had touched, felt like a fragment of her that had refused to die with her. And so, he turned his grief into a mission to recover every painting she had ever made, no matter where it had ended up, no matter who had it.

Each one became a clue, a whisper from the past, leading him deeper into the labyrinth that her life and death had become. But there was one painting that eluded him the last one, the piece Carmela had clutched in her hands on that fateful day

He remembered vividly the rotor of the helicopter chopping violently against the wind, Carmela climbing the ladder with trembling hands, her knuckles white as she held on to the painting. Then, the gunshots. The scream. The world slowing into fragments of horror as she lost her grip both on the ladder and on the painting before vanishing into the black mouth of the sea.

That image had carved itself into his soul.

For nearly a month, Nix had men scouring the waters. He paid divers, hired private vessels, even mapped the currents of that coast himself, convinced that if he couldn't save her, he could at least recover the piece of her that the painting represented. Yet, day after day, they returned empty-handed.

Then one night, a message came in from one of his informants a whisper wrapped in static over the phone:

"Sir, the painting... it resurfaced. But not where we expected. Camillo retrieved it."

Camillo.

The name sent an unpleasant chill down Nix's spine. The man had vanished the very night after Carmela's burial rites were performed like a ghost erasing his own footprints. For months, Nix had tried tracing him through bank trails, old contacts, coded messages but each attempt ended the same way: silence. It was as if the earth itself had swallowed him whole.

But who would have believed that all this time, Camillo had been in Italy?

Nix leaned back in his seat now, staring out the window of the car as the seaport drew closer. The winter light spilled gently across the horizon, painting the sky in soft golds and greys. His reflection on the glass looked different, calmer, older, but the fire in his eyes still burned.

Eleven months of chasing ghosts, of unearthing truths buried in betrayal and blood and it had all led to this day.

To Italy.

To the man who held the last trace of the woman he loved.

"Sir, we're here," the driver announced, his voice breaking through the fog of Nix's thoughts and pulling him back from the quiet world he'd been lost in.

Nix blinked, focusing on the scenery outside the car window. The crisp winter air hung thick with the smell of pine and distant smoke, and the faint hum of fireworks being tested in the distance reminded him that the new year was only hours away.

Retrieving the painting wasn't the only reason he felt this strange excitement burning in his chest. The real reason the one that brought warmth to his otherwise cold expression was the thought of seeing her again. The little one. The tiny spark of light that somehow managed to melt through the walls he'd built around his heart.

He wished he could see her every day.

But he knew better.

Too many eyes were watching, especially Camillo's. The man would undoubtedly misinterpret his every move, thinking Nix was after his second daughter simply because she bore the same hauntingly beautiful face as his late wife. And there was also the old Aron scheming, restless, stirring up the kind of trouble Nix had warned him to avoid.

"Sir, should I return later tonight?" the driver asked, stepping out to help with his luggage. His breath clouded in the cold air as he reached for the trunk.

Nix followed, his polished shoes crunching softly against the gravel. He took the handle of his suitcase, nodding slightly as if lost in thought before offering a faint smile.

"Don't worry, enjoy the New Year's celebration with your family. I have.."

Nix's words froze midway, caught off guard by the sudden, small weight clinging to his leg. For a brief second, he thought it was a dog, or perhaps some stranger's child running past, but when he glanced down his breath hitched.

There she was.

The little one tiny arms wrapped tightly around his leg, as though she had found something she'd been looking for all along. Her face was buried against the fabric of his trousers, the soft sound of a giggle muffled by his coat. Slowly, she tilted her head up to meet his gaze, and the world around Nix went completely still.

Those eyes, wide, silvery-grey, shimmering with that same quiet light he once saw in Carmela's. They were eyes that carried no darkness, no schemes just pure, unfiltered

innocence that could melt through the coldest of walls. Her tiny pupils reflected the winter sky, like bits of morning dew trapped in sunlight.

And then she smiled.

A wild, unrestrained grin that showed off four tiny teeth two at the top, two at the bottom perfectly spaced in that adorable, clumsy way toddlers often have. The corners of her mouth were stained faintly pink from candy, and one of her small curls bounced across her forehead as she tilted her head again.

Nix felt something inside him break something that had been rigid and unfeeling for months. His lips curved upward in response, an instinctive smile he hadn't worn in what felt like forever.

"Hey there..." his voice came out softer than he expected, almost foreign to his own ears.

She blinked, then stretched her hands up, her tiny fingers opening and closing in a gesture that clearly meant "carry me". Nix couldn't help but chuckle, bending slightly to lift her into his arms. She weighed almost nothing, her small frame fitting perfectly against his chest as though she belonged there.

Her little hand reached for his face, brushing against his cheek before patting it twice, as if confirming he was real. The warmth of her touch seeped into his skin, and for a brief, fragile moment, the cold air, the seaport crowd, even the pain of the last eleven months all of it vanished.

Nix smiled down at her again, eyes softening. The warmth in Nix's tone was something rare, something the man behind him had never heard from his usually cold, commanding boss.

The baby's face brightened even more at his words. Her giggle was light, bubbling up like a song as she clapped her tiny hands together in sheer delight. Nix couldn't help but let out a low chuckle, his stern expression melting away completely.

"Are you lost?" he asked with a teasing tilt of his head. "Or maybe... I look like someone you know?" His tone was playful, as if expecting her to actually respond.

"Sir..." the driver began cautiously, still unsure of what to do.

"Oh yes, you can leave. I've got this handled," Nix interrupted with a wave of his hand, not once taking his eyes off the child. He reached for his bag from the driver, shifting it to his shoulder while securing the little girl in his arm.

The driver hesitated for a second partly confused, partly amused before bowing slightly and heading toward the car, leaving the two of them alone near the busy terminal entrance.

Nix turned back to the child, who was now playing with the buttons on his coat, completely at ease in his arms. "Darling," he said with a small smile, "where are your parents, hmm?"

Her response was a soft babble, words that made no sense but carried so much life that he couldn't help but smile again.

He straightened, scanning the area carefully. The airport terminal was bustling travelers wheeling suitcases, security guards pacing, announcements echoing through the loudspeakers. His sharp eyes darted from one direction to another, searching for anyone who might be frantically looking for a missing child.

He turned toward the taxi lane first, then the glass doors leading into the main building, his gaze sweeping through the crowd. A woman in a red scarf caught his eye for a moment—she bent over to pick up a bag, then kept walking. Another couple exited holding hands, their laughter echoing faintly. No one seemed to be searching.

Frowning, he adjusted his hold on the child, who now rested her head on his shoulder, tiny fingers gripping the lapel of his coat. He turned toward the information desk, his instincts alert but conflicted. Something about the child's presence, her calmness, her unshaken trust felt too familiar, and too deliberate.

"Strange..." he murmured, eyes narrowing slightly as he scanned the open parking lot, the nearby café, even the reflection in the glass doors. The wind blew softly against his face, carrying a faint chill and the distant sound of laughter but no frantic parent, no cry, no searching eyes.

He glanced down at the girl again. Her breathing had steadied; her small hand was now curled against his chest. For a brief second, it almost felt like destiny had placed her there.

"Well," he whispered, brushing a loose curl from her forehead, "looks like it's just you and me for now, little one."