

KEY TO HAPPINESS:(My mute devil)

#Chapter 91 - Read KEY TO HAPPINESS:(My mute devil) Chapter 91

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"Madam, how about you let me hold her, you.." Francesca began gently, but Elisa interrupted with a sudden sneeze that startled both her and the baby.

Francesca blinked. "Madam..."

Elisa waved her hand dismissively, sniffing lightly but managing a soft chuckle. "Don't worry, she won't catch a cold from me. I'm not sick just stressed, remember?" She adjusted the baby's tiny blanket and smiled wearily. "Once we're on the cruise, I'll rest before the New Year's party begins."

Francesca frowned, wringing her fingers nervously. "You should have called me when she cried at night. Why did you stay up for three consecutive days? What if Mr. Sorrento.."

"Francesca, relax." Elisa's tone was calm but carried quiet authority. She turned her gaze toward the young maid, eyes softening when she saw the genuine worry in her face. "Why are you so scared of my father? He's not going to do anything to you or your mother."

Francesca looked down at her feet, still uneasy.

Elisa continued, her voice lower now, more personal. "I decided to take responsibility for you the moment I told the head maid to take your name off the list of household staff. It doesn't matter whether you're beside me, resting, or studying you're under my protection. So don't panic, okay?"

She offered her a reassuring smile before glancing at Francesca whose wide eyes were filled with curiosity and faint fear. Elisa's expression softened even more. "Your mum's job is secured, and with time, I'll find something better for her."

The girl's face brightened a little, and Elisa couldn't help but reach out to tuck a stray curl behind her ear.

Inside, though, a familiar ache stirred a vow she had made long ago. She had sworn never to let any woman or girl suffer the kind of silent torment she had endured when growing up. Whatever form that "hell" took, Elisa had made it her mission to drag anyone she found trapped in it back into the light.

It had started a few nights ago quietly, almost by accident.

Elisa had wandered into the kitchen for a glass of water when she noticed Francesca crouched behind one of the long marble counters, the faint light of a dying bulb glinting off her trembling hands. The young maid's uniform was wrinkled, and her eyes were red-rimmed from exhaustion. She was struggling to smooth out a crumpled piece of paper a note Elisa herself had secretly slipped beneath the bread tray earlier that day.

Curious, Elisa lingered by the doorway, hidden in shadow.

Francesca squinted hard, her lips moving silently as she tried to read the hurriedly scribbled words, her fingers tracing each letter as though they were made of gold. She looked so small barely sixteen, Elisa guessed and yet there was something fierce about the way she tried to make sense of every line, refusing to give up despite the tears in her eyes.

That determination struck Elisa right in the chest.

It wasn't just pity but it was recognition.

She saw herself in that fragile figure: the same hunger to survive, the same spark of defiance against circumstances too cruel for someone so young.

The next morning, Elisa had quietly asked one of the older staff about the girl. She learned that Francesca and her mother had both been working as maids in the Sorrento estate for years living in the cramped servant quarters behind the east garden. The girl had taken up extra shifts at night just so she could afford her school materials, sometimes collapsing in exhaustion before dawn.

Elisa hadn't said a word to anyone else after that. She simply made a decision one that felt more instinctive than planned. From that day, Francesca would be her responsibility. She would shield her from the fear and humiliation that had once eaten away at her own youth.

"Also, you have exams coming up," she reminded, tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear. "You need as much time to yourself as possible. Don't worry about Nyxella and me. I'm her mother, and I can take proper care of her, okay?"

Francesca hesitated, biting her lower lip before nodding slowly. "Yes, madam." Her voice was soft, barely above a whisper, but Elisa could see the relief in her eyes.

A tiny smile tugged at Elisa's lips, though her exhaustion was evident in the faint shadows beneath her eyes.

"But shouldn't we go on the cruise?" Francesca asked after a moment, fidgeting with the corner of her shirt.

Elisa glanced toward the door. "Yes, we should, but Amina asked that I wait for her." She shifted the baby in her arms and then raised an eyebrow. "Also, were you able to get your hands on what I asked for?"

Francesca straightened, her fingers nervously clasped together. "I saw it," she began hesitantly, her gaze flicking to the floor. "But I couldn't take a picture Sir Sorrento was in the room."

Elisa's calm expression barely wavered, though her heart gave a sharp thud at the mention of his name.

"He was talking about your future husband coming to the party," Francesca continued uncertainly, "and something about making sure the both of you met."

For a heartbeat, silence filled the room.

Elisa blinked slowly as if trying to process what she'd just heard. Then her lips parted slightly, the faintest tremor of disbelief slipping through her composed mask.

"Husband?" she repeated, her tone low and incredulous, though her eyes had grown distant, dark.

Francesca flinched, realizing she might have said too much. The young maid's face filled with uncertainty; she couldn't tell if she'd just delivered harmless gossip or a spark that would ignite something far bigger than she understood.

Elisa's grip on Nyxella tightened just slightly, enough to still the baby's tiny movements. The child blinked up at her, innocent and unaware, while her mother's mind began to race connecting threads, sensing schemes, and feeling the first tremors of another storm brewing within the Sorrento family.

"Yes," Francesca nodded eagerly, her young voice steady despite the weight of what she'd just said. "He called him Armani Riccardo."

Elisa's head tilted slightly, her brows knitting. "I think you're mistaking him for someone else," she said quietly, almost too calmly, as though trying to reason it away.

But Francesca shook her head. "No, I'm not." She swallowed before continuing, oblivious to the way Elisa's expression began to darken, her gaze sharpening into quiet disbelief. "I also overheard him saying that his sister is the soon-to-be fiancée of Nix Dean."

For a fleeting moment, the soft hum of the sea outside seemed to fade into silence.

Elisa's hands froze mid-motion, and something in her eyes flickered a sudden drop in warmth replaced by a still, icy calm. Her face didn't betray the turmoil underneath, but

her heart had begun to pound so loudly that she barely heard Francesca's voice continuing in the background.

"Let's leave this issue for now," Elisa finally murmured, her tone clipped and forcedly neutral. "Help me hold Nyxella I need to ease myself."

Francesca nodded quickly, unaware of the storm building in her mistress's chest. Elisa handed the baby to her with careful precision, pressing a soft kiss on her daughter's tiny forehead before turning toward the passage that led to the sea port restrooms. Her steps were brisk, her mind racing Armani Riccardo? Nix Dean's fiancée? The name repeated in her head like an unwanted echo.

Meanwhile, Francesca adjusted the baby in her arms awkwardly, trying to balance her weight along with the luggage beside her. Nyxella cooed softly, grabbing at the girl's necklace with curious little fingers. "Oh no, don't pull that.." Francesca giggled, prying the baby's hand away gently.

Then she realized one of the suitcases had come unzipped. Sighing, she bent over to fix it. "Just a second, little one," she murmured as she knelt, pulling out a few scattered baby items that had slipped out tiny socks, a bottle, a pink pacifier.

She placed Nyxella carefully on a folded shawl beside her feet.

But just as she zipped the bag shut, the wind from the dock picked up, scattering a few sheets of paper and a travel ticket that had slipped from her pocket. "Oh no wait!" she gasped, darting a few steps forward to grab them before they blew farther down the walkway.

It took less than a minute.

Just sixty seconds.

When she turned back, the shawl was empty.

"...Nyxella?" she whispered, blinking rapidly, her heart skipping. She looked around the busy dock was filled with chatter, the rhythmic clang of metal, seagulls circling above. But there was no sign of the baby.

"Nyxella!" Francesca called louder this time, panic lacing her voice. She scanned the area between benches, around the columns, near the loading bay but the baby was nowhere in sight. Her breath came faster as she began to run in small frantic circles, clutching her head. "Oh God, no... no, no, no Nyxella!"

A few passersby glanced her way, confused, but no one stopped to help.

Moments later, Elisa emerged from the restroom, adjusting her sleeve with quiet composure until her gaze landed on the empty spot where she'd left her daughter. The stroller and luggage were still there. But Francesca and Nyxella were not.

Her stomach dropped instantly.

"Francesca?" she called, voice tightening. When no one answered, her steps quickened into a run. She turned down one passage, then another her breath growing shallow, her pulse thundering in her ears until she finally spotted Francesca near the corner of the loading area, trembling, her face pale and eyes wide with tears.

"Where is Nyxella?" Elisa's voice came out low, barely above a whisper, but there was a tremor underneath one that made Francesca flinch.

Francesca's lips parted, her breath hitching as she tried to form words, but her throat locked up. Elisa's heartbeat pounded harder, every breath jagged, the first wave of panic settling deep in her chest like a cold weight.

Her eyes darted around the port in silent desperation, searching for a glimpse of her baby's shawl, a tiny hand, anything but all she could see were strangers moving past, oblivious to her world crumbling in slow motion.

"I... I placed her on the ground to.." Francesca's voice trembled as her hands shook violently, her eyes glassy with tears that refused to fall. ".. to fix the bags, I swear I didn't take my eyes off her for long. When I turned back, she was nowhere to be found."

Her words came out in broken pieces, each syllable heavy with dread.

Elisa stood frozen for a moment, staring at the girl in front of her, unable to decide whether to scream or pull her into a hug. Her entire body went cold, her fingers twitching at her sides. Every instinct in her wanted to lash out how could she let this happen? but another voice inside her reminded her that anger wouldn't bring her child back.

Her chest rose and fell unevenly. There was no time to think. No time to feel.

All she knew, all she could afford to know was that she had to find her daughter.

Without another word, she turned sharply, eyes scanning the sea of strangers moving around the bustling seaport. The air reeked of salt, diesel, and panic. Her panic.

Vendors were shouting prices, children were laughing somewhere in the distance, luggage wheels rolled over the wooden boards, and tourists moved about with no clue that someone's entire world had just vanished in their midst. Elisa's gaze darted left and right faces blurred, colors blended, nothing stayed still long enough for her to focus.

Every child she saw made her heart leap only to crash seconds later when she realized it wasn't Nyxella.

"Excuse me! Have you seen a baby girl light skin, on black clothes with grey eyes please!" she called out to a dock worker, but he only shook his head apologetically before hurrying off. Her voice cracked as she shouted again, "Nyxella!" but her cry was drowned by the blaring horns of departing ships.

Her breathing grew shallow, panic clawing its way up her throat. She spun around helplessly, hair whipping against her face from the cold sea breeze, her eyes burning with unshed tears. People brushed past her shoulders without stopping each movement a cruel reminder of how small her chances were in this crowd.

Her trembling hands fumbled for her phone. She could barely see the screen through the blur in her eyes, but she managed to tap Liam's contact. It rang once twice then clicked.

"Sis?" his voice came through, calm and unsuspecting.

Elisa's throat tightened. The moment she heard his voice, the dam inside her nearly broke. Her lips parted, but for a second, no sound came out. All that left her was a shaky breath, and when she finally spoke, it was barely a whisper, heavy with desperation.

"Liam... she's gone."

The noise of the port seemed to vanish entirely as the weight of those words sank into the air between them.

"Liam, my baby..." Elisa's voice trembled through the line, breaking under the weight of panic. "I can't find my baby, she's missing!" she cried, words tumbling out between gasps. She wiped the tears that streamed down her cheeks with shaky hands, but they kept coming, endless and hot. Her eyes darted wildly around the bustling sea port, seeing nothing but moving faces and noise.

Liam's tone immediately shifted from casual to alert. "Elisa, breath, breathe for me, okay?" he said, voice firm but gentle. "Where are you right now?"

"At the port... near the east boarding lane," she sniffed, trying to hold herself together. "I looked away for a moment, Liam, just a moment and she was gone!"

"Stay there. Don't move. I'm coming right now," he said quickly, his voice edged with concern but steady enough to anchor her. "We'll find her, I promise."

The line went dead, and Elisa was left clutching the phone to her chest as though it were the only thing keeping her from falling apart. She started pacing again, calling out

her daughter's name, her voice cracking with each attempt. The crowd pressed around her sailors shouting directions, families waving tickets, luggage wheels rattling against the pavement. Every child's cry made her flinch. Every flash of red clothing made her heart leap and break again when it wasn't Nyxella.

Then, through the chaos, a familiar voice called her name. "Elisa!"

She turned sharply and there he was. Liam pushed his way through the throng, his breathing heavy from the rush. Without hesitation, he gripped her shoulders firmly, forcing her to meet his eyes. "Hey, listen to me," he said, his voice calm but carrying a quiet urgency. "We're going to find her, alright? I've already called the port authorities, security's locking down the exits and my team's on their way. She can't be far."

Elisa's lips quivered, and her body shook as guilt flooded through her. "I should never have left her with Francesca," she whispered, her tone raw with self-blame. "I'm her mother, Liam.. I was supposed to protect her. I looked away for just one second.. one second!"

"Stop," Liam said, his voice firm but kind, pulling her into a brief, grounding embrace. "This isn't your fault, do you hear me? We'll find her. You just have to keep your head clear, okay? That little girl needs you strong right now."

But as the words left his lips, Elisa's eyes wandered helplessly through the crowd again, searching for a glimpse of her daughter's bright eyes, with her heart pounding with fear that maybe, this time, her strength wouldn't be enough.