

The Billionaire's Prodigal Wife by Tatiene Richard

Chapter 43

Chapter 43

By Friday Mackenna was exhausted. She was not sleeping and all of it had to do with the fact Alessandro had not returned her call and Nuncio had no updates for her. Whatever was happening in Italy, in the House of Giordano, was not hitting the news.

She sat in her office with her head buried in her hands when a knock on her door made her look up in surprise. "What's up?"

Savannah's expression was serious, "Nuncio called me. There was a statement from Alessandro's company this morning. It was their official statement with him and Dulce delivering the message."

"What did they say?" "Well," Savannah took a seat, "you're probably not going to like it." "Just spill it please." She felt her heart aching. Her friend opened her phone, found the article, and read it aloud.

"The House of Giordano would like to address the events which have recently transpired and subsequently reported to the press. Salvatore Giordano was arrested this morning on multiple counts of blackmail, coercion, attempted murder, and murder. House of Giordano is cooperating with the authorities and providing all information requested of them at this time. We will not be responding to any requests from the press at this time. We request respect for privacy regarding the matters at hand until the authorities have completed all inquiries into the matters at hand."

Mackenna felt her sick to her stomach. "His grandfather?"

Savannah gave a slow nod, "Yes, his grandfather." She stared at Mackenna. "The photo all over the world is Alessandro and Dulce standing on the front steps of their offices holding hands as a united front."

"I see," she took a slow breath and exhaled. "Are you okay?"

"I don't know." She answered truthfully. "I knew he never liked me. I mean the feeling was mutual. He's a cold-hearted cad who slapped his wife and cheated on her with a multitude of women, but I never thought he hated me so much he'd blackmail someone to kill my baby." She swallowed the bitter knot in her throat and then held out her hand. "Can I see the photo please?"

"Do you really want to, Mac?" Savannah gingerly held her phone out to her.

"Yes," she used her fingers to enlarge the photo. "He looks tired." She sighed, "and he's definitely holding her hand."

"He is," Savannah whispered as she accepted her phone back. "Well, that's that." She placed her palms on her desk and stood up. "At least I know." "What are you going to do?"

"There's nothing for me to do," she stated bitterly, waving at the phone in her friend's hand. "He never called me, he never reached out and he publicly made his choice. It's done. It's over."

"I'm so sorry Mac," Savannah whispered. "I thought for sure he would choose you over the evil bitch."

She shrugged, "I said it before and I'll say it again, she is everything I'm not. He only wanted me because I rejected him and left. I was nothing more than a conquest. I have no way to compare to her."

"You don't still believe they were lovers?" Savannah shook her head. "I mean, he denied it so many times and then there's the whole thing of her kissing me."

"No, I believe him. They aren't lovers but I'm guessing it does the company good for them to portray they are. What's the adage? There's no such thing as bad publicity?"

Savannah stood up and hugged her friend tightly. "I'll got to get back down to the trauma unit but if

"I'll be okay," she said feeling strangely calm. "I knew it was coming so I just need to move forward with my life, right?"

She watched as Savannah left her office and then stood up to follow her out of the office. "Tabitha, I'm just going to run for a coffee. If anyone is looking for me, I'll be back in fifteen."

"Sure," her assistant barely glanced up and Mackenna would have bet an entire week of paycheck she was reading the tabloid about her boss.

As she entered the cafeteria, she ignored the whispers and stares and moved to grab a coffee. She felt a touch on her shoulder, and she looked behind her to see Padma standing there. "Hey Padma. How are you?" She gave her a hug.

Padma hugged her tight. "I'm all right, great actually. I'm taking Derrick to meet my parents tonight."

"Oh, how exciting."

“My mother originally hated him because he’s not Indian but then I when said he was the head of orthopedics, it all changed,” she laughed with a glint in her eyes. “I probably should have led with his career instead of his ethnicity.”

Mackenna giggled at her new friend. “Derrick’s a great guy. There’s no way they won’t love him to bits. I’m so happy for you Padma.”

“Thanks Mac, I appreciate hearing it from you.” She shifted on her feet. “Everyone told me he had eyes only for you.”

Mackenna grinned as she paid for her coffee. “Ha, pretty sure his eyes haven’t left your ass since you shook it at him at the club.”

“What about you? Any word from Alessandro?”

“He and Dulce gave a joint statement this morning on the front steps of Giordano House.” She swallowed the bitter pill and forced a fake smile to her face. “At least now I know.”

“I’m so sorry Mac,” Padma squeezed her bicep.

“Not sure why everyone keeps saying it. It’s a good thing, right? I can finally move forward with my life, just as I had intended. It’s cost me a lot but, in the end, I know I’m strong. I got through the last three months; I can get through anything.” She gave her friend a grimace, “though I feel my counselling session on Monday morning is going to be very much needed.”

Padma laughed at her words and gave her another squeeze. “If you need anything, anything at all, you just need to ask.”

“I know. Thank you, Padma.”

She took her coffee and made her way back to her office happy for her friend but sad on the opportunity she had missed. She could have been the one moving forward with someone as great as Derrick Portman. Instead, she was stuck in a hellish purgatory until she decided on her next steps.

She finished her day forcing herself to stay focused on the work in front of her, grateful of the complexity a couple of new files had brought. It kept her from dwelling on the things she had no control over. As she was leaving the hospital, she decided to stop by the trauma unit.

She waved at Savannah, “I’m heading home. Are you pulling a double tonight or are you off at seven?” “So far, I’m off at seven.” She was washing her hands at the sink. “I’ll send Nuncio back for you,” she offered and then stopped. “You guys should go out on a real date.” “No,” Savannah shook her head. “We are not leaving you alone

tonight.” oraer in some takeout and watch a movie on our new television.” Sne forced the smile. Please, i neea things to be back to normal and you going on a date on a Friday night is normal. I’ll be safe in the apartment so there’s no need for Nuncio to babysit me tonight.”

“I don’t know Mac,” Savannah bit her lip, obviously conflicted.

“I’ll send him back with a duffel bag and you can get changed here and go,” she gave a grin. “You should wear the new blue dress you bought.

“Are you sure?” Savannah was absolutely torn.

“Yes!” She clapped her hands together. “I’ll even call and make a reservation for you at the steakhouse you like so much.” She waited until Savannah dried her hands and then took them. “You guys have been amazing for me, and you deserve a night away from my moping and I need a night away from you two making out when you think I’m not looking.”

Savanna laughed. “We do not.”

“You definitely do. I’ll see you in the morning. Have fun.”

She walked back to the hospital lobby, as she walked, she called the restaurant and made a reservation for eight for Savannah and Nuncio. She then found Nuncio waiting by the security office. “I’m all set.”

He grabbed her and gave her a big hug. “Are you okay?” he held her gaze with a concerned look.

She patted his chest, “yes, I’m fine. I was just making a dinner reservation.”

“You want to go out?” he was surprised.

She laughed outright, “no, not for me. You and Savannah are going out for dinner to act like an actual couple instead of my babysitters.” When he opened his mouth to protest, she shook her head. “No Nuncio, you’re going. You’ve been on call with me for twenty-four hours a day for weeks. You both need a break. I’m not going to succumb to a broken heart while you’re out. I’m going to cuddle with Romeo and watch a movie. You’re going out.”

“There’s no arguing with you is there,” he questioned her quietly.

“No, and if you bring her back home before one in the morning I promise you, she will dump your ass and I’ll encourage her. Do something fun. Dinner is at eight, so you’d better hurry and get me home so you can come get her at seven and give her time to get changed.”

He gave her a kiss to the cheek. "I've never had a sister Mac, but I'm sure if I did, you would be exactly what I'd want."

"Thanks Nuncio," she blushed at his words. "Let's go home."

When she got home, she moved and pulled Romeo's food from the fridge and dumped a glob into the dish. "Sorry buddy, I know you hate this stuff," he wound through her ankles, and she laughed. Since the day she'd had the panic attack on the balcony he'd been her shadow when she was home. He followed her everywhere, purred when she touched him and slept on the foot of her bed. She leaned down and stroked him as he started in on his food and whispered, "I'll slip you a piece of chicken when my takeout order comes."

Nuncio was coming out of Savannah's bedroom when her food order arrived and Mackenna let out a low whistle. "Looking fine my friend," she winked at him and pointed to the bag on the kitchen island, as she opened the door to take her food order. "Take the bag to her. Also," she tipped the driver the security officer at the front doors had let up at her command and then closed the door, "if you want to score brownie points with Savannah there's a cabaret club she really likes. You'll have fun there."

"It's a club where you watch the dancers on stage," she grinned as she took her phone and sent him the link via messaging. "It's risqué and bawdy but it's funny and I know there was a kid she admitted to ICU today, so she needs a good laugh. They'll hold tickets for you if you call them."

He clicked the link, and his eyes grew round. "This is um," he swallowed at looked back to Mackenna. "You've been there with her?"

"Yeah, it's a lot of fun and I promise, you will laugh but if you don't enjoy the view, you are dead inside," she gave him a smirk, "there's lots to see of both sexes and you will enjoy it. Just keep it down when you get home. I don't want to know how much you enjoyed it if you get my drift."

He slapped her bottom as he walked past her and shook his head. "Okay, I'm leaving. I've left Ari, the new guy, downstairs at the front door. If the doorman doesn't know who is trying to come into the building, then he will ask for credentials or confirmation of where they are going. You'll be safe here but just in case someone gets past him, do not open the door for anyone. Nobody. Understood?"

"Yes, I'll be fine. Go." She pointed to the door. "My Chinese food is getting cold, and you'll be late to Savannah if you don't go now."

"Are you sure about this Mac?" He paused at the door.

"Yes," she waved him off. "Go."

When he left, she walked and locked the deadbolt of her steel door and then grabbed her food and headed to the living room. She and Savannah had picked out a beautiful white leather sofa facing the huge television hanging on the wall Nuncio had insisted they needed. She popped her food on the glass coffee table they'd picked out and started digging through the bag with one hand while she turned the television on with the other.

She sat cross-legged on the sofa and found the movie streaming service Nuncio had set up on the television and started going through the movie titles. No romantic comedies, no romantic movies at all, she grimaced as she plucked a piece of beef from her beef and broccoli dish and fed it to Romeo, grimacing when a droplet of gravy landed on the new white area rug. Romeo jumped down and cleaned the rug and she grinned.

She found a horror movie she'd watched as a kid and hit play. With luck, the numb feeling she had been holding onto all day would guide her through the movie and she wouldn't shed one more tear over Alessandro Giordano.

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Chapter 44

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The next morning Mackenna stretched in her bed and groaned as she rolled over and looked at the time on her phone. It was nearly ten in the morning. After watching the horror movie, she had watched another one even more disturbing than the first and every noise in the new apartment had her jumping. Finally, around two in the morning, she had taken a sleeping tablet which had knocked her out.

Nuncio and Savannah had not come home by the time she'd gone to bed, and she was glad. They had needed the night out to behave as a couple and she had proved to herself she could function without turning into a panic-driven mess of tears. She was proud of herself for getting through the night and she smiled to herself.

She got up from the bed and after a quick shower she made a mental note of the things she needed to get done. She needed to do shopping and she needed to finish unpacking her room she thought as she kicked a box away from her walk-in closet.

The sound of Savannah's raised voice made her pause. She couldn't make out what she was saying but she grimaced at the tone. Perhaps the date night had not gone as well as she had expected it would. She decided to hide in her bedroom for a few minutes and bent and retrieved the box she had kicked moments earlier. Maybe she could empty the box before going to grab a coffee.

She went into her closet and started pulling the clothes from the box and made a face at each item she pulled out. The clothes were all from second-hand shops or sales racks and while they'd all served a purpose at one point, now, she could afford better clothing and she decided she was going to donate them all and go buy a new wardrobe.

"Retail therapy," she thought with a grin. "A new wardrobe to start my new life." She told Romeo who had suddenly appeared in the closet with her. "Maybe some new shoes too?" Romeo meowed loudly at her, and she grinned as it appeared he agreed with her.

The sound of footsteps in her room made her pause and she looked over her shoulder to see Savannah standing at her closet door, her face flushed with anger and her blue eyes icy and cold.

"I sent you out to have a good time, not fight," she said to Savannah. "What is going on?" "Nuncio and I are fine," she waved her hand and stepped into the closet. "Dulce is in the living room." "Are you kidding me?" she stared incredulously. "Is Alessandro with her?"

"No, she's on her own. She's insisting she talk to you." Savannah held her gaze. "If you want her gone, I'll personally throw her ass, possibly off the balcony to the hoards of press below."

"Will you stay with me?" Mackenna asked suddenly, "I may need a witness if I suddenly lose my temper and throw Romeo at her face. I don't want to be charged for destroying her face with cat claws." Romeo meowed as if agreeing to be her weapon of choice and she bent down and scooped him up.

"Since we moved in here, he's such a different cat," Savannah griped as they moved from the closet in the direction of Dulce.

"I'm starting to think he likes living high on the hog," Mackenna stroked his ears and was rewarded with a purr and a head butt to the chin. "Maybe he was used to living rich and we downgraded him."

"Probably," Savannah stroked the cat and got batted with a paw, "or he's simply become your personal defense." She paused her in the hall just before they reached the open concept of the living room,

dining room and kitchen area and put her hand on Mackenna's arm. "Mac, you just have to say the word and she's gone."

"I know," she walked into the area and saw Nuncio standing with his arms folded over his chest angrily glaring down at the woman lounging on the big white sofa. She chuckled and patted his back."

"You kiss your bodyguard?"

“He’d take a bullet for me,” she grinned naughtily hoping what she said would get back to Alessandro, “I’d give him *anything* he wants.”

“Oh, someone get me popcorn,” Savannah said as she flopped into the oversized matching chair with a wide smirk.

“I would like to talk to you alone,” Dulce said seriously, eyeing Savannah and Nuncio with disdain.

“They are welcome here, you aren’t, so b***h, say what you got to say and then get the hell out,” Mackenna almost laughed when Romeo punctuated her statement with a hiss.

“It is private,” Dulce tried again.

“Listen, I’m going to tell them everything you said as soon as you leave anyway, you may as well just save me the trouble.”

“Fine,” the woman rolled her eyes, the gorgeous copper shade belying her exasperation at Mackenna’s attitude. “Can you at least sit, it’s bad enough with him hovering over me?”

Mackenna studied the woman and noted her skin, normally polished in a gorgeous mahogany glow was dull and she had dark circles under her eyes and her lips were pursed and tight. She forced herself not

to care the woman appeared as if she was exhausted. “Why should I give a damn if you’re uncomfortable?”

Dulce pressed her fingertips into her eyes and sighed. “Do you not care I flew all this way just to talk to *you*?”

“Not really, no.” Mackenna saw Savannah’s lips twitching from the corner of her eye and her own moved. She felt powerful for the first time in her life, and it felt good. “Spill it Dulce so we can all get on with our day. I have better things to do than listen to you, for example my toilet needs to be cleaned.”

Savannah guffawed then and Nuncio turned his back, his shoulders shaking as he moved to look out the closed balcony doors.

“I never wanted to hurt you,” Dulce said suddenly, her voice whispered. “Salvatore was blackmailing me.”

“Uh-huh,” Mackenna shrugged, “I figured that.” Dulce’s head snapped up. “You knew?”

“Just since yesterday when you gave your statement. It makes sense. I couldn’t imagine why for the life of me you felt so threatened by me all this time and then when the

statement mentioned blackmail, I knew it wasn't just the i***t who murdered my grandparents and my baby."

At the last words, Dulce's eyes flicked to Mackenna's stomach, and she closed her eyes. "I'm so sorry about your family Mackenna. I knew he hated you, but I never thought he'd go to such lengths."

"You should have told Alessandro," Mackenna shrugged, "you could have told him years ago, he would have taken care of it, and we wouldn't be here."

"I have a daughter."

Mackenna didn't miss Savannah's gasp or Nuncio's slow turn back in the direction of Dulce, who was picking imaginary lint off her perfectly fitted skirt.

"No way," Savannah gritted through her teeth. "You're as gay as they come."

"When I was fifteen, I had a girlfriend." Dulce whispered, obviously struggling to recount the story, "Her father and brother found out and decided it was my fault and I needed to be punished." nanas arouna ner stomach as a reeing or nausea wavea over ner.

Dulce continued. "I got pregnant because of their punishment. My family is deeply religious so being gay was bad enough but having an abortion was out of the question. My mother's sister and her husband had been trying for years to have a child and couldn't. We did a sealed adoption. I get to see my daughter; she thinks I'm her cousin and she's very well loved."

She took a breath, "the first week I was in Milan, Salvatore cornered me. He found out about Yara and showed me a photo on his phone of a man at her daycare with a gun pointed at my girl." She wiped a tear rolling down her cheek, "he told me I would do what he said, or she was dead, and he would kill my aunt and uncle as well. He also told me I was never allowed to date a woman again because it would look poorly on the company and if I did, she was dead." She looked to Savannah, "it's why I freaked out. I was so scared he would kill her."...

Nuncio's curse filled the room. "For nearly six years, he forced me to do so many things, including being his lover," "The man in the video was Salvatore," Mackenna's voice was hoarse.

Dulce grimaced, "I had hoped when it got released Alessandro would recognize him and he did, eventually." She offered a smile to Mackenna, "I knew you would know it wasn't him right away. He said you didn't even hesitate and knew it wasn't him."

"The build was wrong, the voice was wrong, and the tattoo was missing," Mackenna shrugged as if it was not a strong feat to sort out.

"They are the same height, walk very similarly and their voice carries the same inflection," Dulce countered. "I released it hoping it would get discredited and Salvatore was pissed off I had the video. I told him I was desperate because you weren't going away. I told him nobody would be able to tell the difference. He bought it completely and even said he wanted the full video for his collection."

"He's an i***t, I hate him so much." Mackenna clenched her fists.

"I hate him too. Alessandro came with me to the police station on Saturday and helped me file a report. He'll be charged with rape, blackmail and coercion." Dulce's breath was shaky. "Your husband is a good man Mackenna. He never left my side until yesterday when we did the press conference. I haven't seen him since."

Mackenna regarded the woman critically, "is this why you're here? You thought he would be here?"

"No," she shook her head, "he said you gave him a week and he missed his deadline. His family murdered your only remaining family and your baby. I asked him yesterday if he was coming back to you

and he said he couldn't put you through another day of the torture the Giordano House had inflicted. Mackenna, he's devastated and hurting but he said the only way to protect you is to stay away."

Mackenna exhaled slowly as she stared at the floor, feeling dizzy and her chest tightening. This was not the time for a panic attack and yet she felt unable to stop it from starting. He was staying away because he felt guilty. He wasn't coming back.

"Mac," Nuncio moved to her as Romeo jumped up beside her on the sofa and began nudging her arm with his head.

"What's wrong with her?" Dulce whispered, a frightened tone to her voice.

"Panic attacks," Savannah said as she moved to kneel in front of Mackenna as Nuncio stood beside the sofa and rubbed her hand between his. "Since the car accident. She had a pretty bad one last weekend when the prosecutor called her." nine, she whispereu siowiy, trying to remember wnat came next. Sne pausea ana neara Savannah coax her to say "eight," she felt Romeo nudge himself onto her lap and she dug her fingers into his fur, "seven," Nuncio's hands moved to her shoulder and rubbed her shoulder briskly. When she finally got to one, she felt her breath even out and she exhaled slowly again one more time.

"Is she okay?" Dulce asked quietly.

"I'm fine," Mackenna's voice croaked as she flicked a glance to the woman. "Having a panic attack doesn't make me weak, it just means my brain is healing," she glared at the woman as if daring her to deny what she said. "Why did you come here today, Dulce?"

"I came to say I'm so sorry for all I've done. I know you can never forgive me, and I understand why. I would not be able to forgive me if I were in your shoes. I also came to say, I will stay away from Alessandro. He has been my best friend and has been the brother I never had growing up. I've always been so distrustful of men, but he's always been a gentleman and a true friend and so," she sobbed as she spoke, "I will walk away from him because he deserves his happiness, and he loves you. I beg of you go to him and make it work. I will never interfere. I will continue my contract with the company for as long as they will have me, but I will limit all interaction with him. He's my friend and I love him enough to know he needs you so much more than he needs me."

"Well s**t," Savannah sat back on her heels and looked at the woman in awe. "Who would have thought you had a heart inside all your superficial exterior."

Mackenna interrupted. "I can't." Dulce gasped. "Why?"

"I called him, and he never called me back. I left him a message on his voice mail, told him I loved him and asked him to call me back and he didn't."

"But he missed your one-week deadline," she protested.

"I called him after the deadline," she saw Dulce's eyes open widely. "I didn't care about you, I just needed to know he was okay, and he never called me back. He never called me to tell me about his grandfather, he never warned me I'd be getting a call from the prosecutor, and then not once has he called me to ask if I'm all right," she shook her head sadly. "No, Dulce, I appreciate your gesture, but the writing is

on the wall. If he cared for me even a fraction, he would have returned my call. He did not."

She set Romeo on the floor as she continued to regard the woman, "I forgive you, Dulce. I would have done anything to protect my child and so I understand. It will take me a long time to forget but I will work on it. If he needs you, you should go to him." Mackenna felt the tears streaming down her cheeks, unable to stop them.

The room was silent as Mackenna stood up with the intention of heading back to her bedroom, the need to be alone and process everything suddenly overwhelming. "I need to go lay down," she whispered to Savannah.

As she tried to navigate around her friend still sitting on the floor and the cat at her feet, her toe caught the edge of the new area rug and she tripped. She felt Nuncio grab for her, but she was already falling, arms outstretched into the new glass coffee table. She heard shattering glass as Dulce screamed and then there was nothing but blackness.

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Chapter 45

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Mackenna woke to the familiar sounds of beeping and monitors, and she groaned. As she tried to lift her hand to her head, she felt weighted down and moaned with frustration.

"My love, if you had wanted me to come home, all you had to do was ask. There was no need to plunge yourself headfirst into a table," Alessandro's soft words were whispered near her ear.

She couldn't help it and she started to cry at his gentle teasing. Why was he here? Her eyelids flickered as she tried to focus but everything was fuzzy.

"Hey Mac," Savannah's voice was professional, "you're going to be pretty groggy. You did a number on your arm, and you lost a lot of blood. You have nearly fifty stitches in your arm and a solid concussion. You hit the metal frame of the table pretty hard."

"Oh, the area rug," she whispered a small smile on her lips, "had to hide the gravy stain."

Savannah burst into laughter at her friend's words. "Yeah, I think you're going to be fine. I'll talk to the plastic surgeon who stitched you up to see if we can take you home as soon the anesthetic wears off."

"Should she leave the hospital?" Alessandro's voice interrupted. "You said she lost a lot of blood."

"She did but her roommate is a trauma doctor," Savannah mocked him, "and we don't like to admit anyone unless its absolutely necessary. Generally, people heal much better at home than in hospital."

Mackenna eyed Savannah across the room. "How long have I been out?"

"Couple of hours," Savannah shrugged carelessly, "Doctor Wright from plastics had the anesthetists give you something to keep you out until he stitched up your arm. You had a huge piece of glass embedded in your wrist and it hit your artery so we couldn't move it until we were ready, so he had the neurosurgeon Doctor Shea right beside him." She pointed at her. "I know you hated the rug but spilling your blood all over it was a bit much. Also, you had the entire hospital outside your operating room."

She tried to lift her hands but they both felt heavy. She glanced down and saw her left arm was wrapped from the fingers to the shoulder and her right arm sported an IV. "I'm such a pain in the ass." She

looked to Alessandro very aware she'd been avoiding meeting his face. "How did you get here so fast?"

He chuckled, "my love, I was just getting to the apartment complex when the ambulance arrived."

"Why didn't you call?" She tried not to sound whiny, but she had no control over her tone, or at least it was the excuse she provided herself.

"I didn't think you would want me to after what my grandfather did." He answered truthfully. "I should have called but I was terrified of your response and," he saw her eyes flitting from closed to open as if struggling to stay awake. "We can talk more about it after, okay? When you're not so groggy."

She stared at him still surprised he was there and not a hallucination, "How did you get the bruise on your face?"

"Dulce landed a right hook," Savannah grinned at Mackenna's gasp. "Since you said you forgive her, I'm pretty sure she'd fight a lion to the death for you."

"But why did she hit you?" "Because I didn't call you back," he smiled softly. "I didn't get your message right away." "You didn't?"

"No," he rubbed his jaw, "I had no idea you called. Since the video release I've easily had a hundred or two hundred calls and voice mails a day, so my phone was set to go straight to message. I making my way through them. I heard it at three o'clock this morning."

"And so, you came," she whispered suddenly bashful, unable to hold his gaze "I did," he reached out and stroked her cheek gently. "I wanted to hear it in person instead of in a

"And there's my cue," Savannah tossed out. "Mac, I'm going to go talk to Doctor Wright about your post-op care and then see about getting you released."

She rested her head on the pillow and closed her eyes. Alessandro was here and he'd only heard her message today and he'd come straight to her after hearing it. She felt his lips press against her forehead and she felt a tear escape the corner of her eye. "I feel like all I do is cry lately. I was so proud of myself not crying most of the week but here I am, crying again."

"I'm sorry Mackenna. It breaks my heart to know how much pain and suffering my family has caused you."

“Why?” She opened her eyes suddenly and looked at him. “What did I do to make him hate me so much he would plot to kill our child?”

Alessandro sighed deeply and took a seat on the edge of her bed, holding her fingers lightly between his. “I wish I could simply say he was a sick man but there is so much more to it. Dulce told me she told you everything.”

“Yes, and while I still think she should have come to you right away with what was happening because I know you would have taken care of everything, I also understand she was scared,” she shook her head. “I cannot imagine knowing someone was pointing a gun at my child, threatening their life for five years. No wonder she went crazy when the nurse saw her kiss, Savannah.”

“I agree with you. She should have come to me. Had she come to me years ago, we would not be where we are now. I admit I am not as forgiving as you are in the moment. I also was not happy to see her standing with you at the ambulance. I could have throttled her, but she landed the first punch. The press will have a field day.”

“She came to me to apologize but,” she gave him a crooked smile, “also to tell me she will stay away from you and begged me to go to you.”

“Hm,” he pondered it for a minute, “no, I’m still pissed off. I need time to process. Mackenna, I knew of Dulce’s child. There have been so many secrets we have shared because we were both going through heartaches of our own and not once in all the times, we chatted did she ever insinuate someone was forcing her to do anything against her will. She should have told me.”

Mackenna nodded understanding his thought process.

“As for you,” he rubbed his temple, “my grandfather felt you were a distraction. He had been after me for years to be with someone in the industry who would help me build the company bigger and better than ever. When I met you, even though my work got better he thought you were a poor distraction. He felt married beneath my station,” he grimaced, “he said those exact words to me last weekend when I

confronted him. He said he didn’t want our bloodline tainted with common blood.”

Mackenna felt sick and knew it had nothing to do with her head injury. “He hated me because I wasn’t wealthy, a model or even pretty.”

“You are beautiful, the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. Even laying there with a goose egg on your forehead, you hold more appeal to me than any woman I’ve ever met. He’s ugly. He’s so ugly inside and out he’s a stain on the Giordano name. My parents are horrified. My mother is desperate to come to Phoenix and apologize in person and my father is so ashamed of Salvatore he doesn’t even know where to start to make reparations to you.” He squeezed her fingers tightly. “Mackenna, my family has

always adored you, with the exception of him and please know, had we known of how sick he was, we would have protected you so much better.”

She grimaced, “he’s in jail now though, right?” He snigunng ine charges ana saying its a set-up.”

“I may be sick,” she closed her eyes and leaned back against the pillow. “Poor Dulce, her rapist goes free?”

“Mackenna, as much as I would love to see him rot the rest of his days in prison, he is a sneaky conniving and nasty individual. I have already given extra protection to Dulce and her family until the matter with him is settled.”

“How do you settle a matter with him?” Mackenna’s brow scrunched up at the thought.

“Do not ask questions you do not want to know the answers to,” Alessandro spoke quietly, his voice deadly and eerily calm.

Her eyes flew open and met his noting the warm golden color of his eyes were cold and bitter as he contemplated his grandfather. “Alessandro, he’s your grandfather, you wouldn’t,” she let her words trail

away.

“He took what was mine, what was ours,” he put his free hand on her tummy possessively, “and he will pay for it.”

Mackenna didn’t know what to say, never seeing this side of her husband before. She knew he could be a ruthless businessman, but he was insinuating something so much more sinister than she was accustomed.

“Enough talk of this unpleasantness,” he brushed her hair off her forehead. “I want to talk about the message I heard at three in the morning while sitting in my office in Giordano House. Would you care to elaborate?”

She blushed as his eyes warmed up considerably and bore into hers. “I only wanted to know you were okay.” She lowered her gaze to the hand holding her fingers tightly. “I was horrible to Savannah and Nuncio. I yelled at her and flipped her off.”

Alessandro’s head pulled back in surprise. “What did she do to deserve this?”

“I had a rough time after learning of your grandfather and I was cranky,” she struggled for the right words, “and they cut me more slack than I deserved. Monday morning, I spent time with two vastly different families wading through complicated health matters and billing matters. I get teased at work frequently for doing too much but it kills me to know someone is so worried about paying a bill they can’t be focused on their sick

family. Anyway, Savannah told me I had more compassion for strangers than I did my own husband.”

“Ah,” he owed Savannah a hug of gratitude.

“She pointed out it wasn’t just my family and my baby impacted by Salvatore’s actions but also yours and I was being selfish. I moped the rest of the day and then when I got home, I knew I was being an ass. I had to apologize to everyone, but you were the first call I made.” She looked back to him then. “I’m so sorry Alessandro. I’ve been so wrapped up in my own hurt and my own pain I didn’t care about anyone else and I’m sorry.”

“You have been through so much Mackenna. Once I learned of Dulce’s treatment of you, I knew and understood why you left me. When we found you were pregnant, I said a thousand prayers of gratitude because it gave me a second chance, I knew I didn’t deserve. Salvatore ripped it away from us. I know! am bossy and demanding and given everything the Giordano family has put you through, I have no right to demand your love.”

“Yet, here we are with me still loving you as much as I did the day we married.” She finally admitted to

him her love and was rewarded with a wide smile and tears in his eyes. “I do love you Alessandro. I’ve never stopped. I should have known the day I filed the papers and had a meltdown in my grandfather’s arms how I felt but I was so angry and so bitter,”

“And very rightly so,” he traced the path of her tears with his thumb. “You have every reason to hate me and to never want anything to do with the Giordano name but to hear you say you still love me makes me the happiest man in the world.”

He leaned forward and kissed her lips very gently before standing upright. “Well, now all we have left to do is to get you discharged from here and take you home.”

Mackenna nodded at his words, Home. Milan. He of course would want her to return to Milan, where his company was. She would have to give up her life here in Phoenix and return to his estate. She closed her eyes as she felt sadness about leaving her friends behind, but she would follow him anywhere and deep down she knew it.

“Are you okay?” Alessandro asked watching her closely.

“I’m suddenly exhausted and I have a bad headache coming on,” she wasn’t lying she noted as the throbbing in her brain increased.

Aknock on the door interrupted them as a nurse stepped in. “Did I hear you say you have a headache?”

“Yes, it’s nothing,” she shook her head not wanting the nurse to make her stay any longer than she needed to.

The nurse, Beth, if Mackenna remembered her rightly, shook a needle in her hand. “It’s expected. Doctor Wright asked us to give you this into your IV before your discharge.” She shook her other hand with

, “This is your discharge instructions,” she passed them to Alessandro, “hubby can read them over and make sure you follow them to the letter. No driving, no operating heavy machinery, no flying and heavy exertion like cardio for at least ten days. You’ll see Doctor Wright in ten days, and he’ll check your sutures. Also, no getting your arm wet. I’d suggest baths keeping your arm out or finding a way to shower with a handheld unit, so the bandages stay dry.” It meant she had at least ten days before he whisked her back to

Milan.

“Not a problem,” Alessandro assured the woman.

“Doctor Kirkland also said she’d kick your ass if she caught you doing anything with your arm, so I know she’ll keep an eye on you.”

As the woman put the medication into her IV Mackenna instantly started to feel woozy. “Wow, it’s a bit much.”

“You’ll enjoy it in a minute,” Beth winked back before speaking to Alessandro. “He gave her a pretty potent dose just to keep her comfortable on the drive back home. She’ll be higher than a kite for at least two hours. There’s a prescription in the stack of papers for a painkiller. She should take one every twelve hours for two days and then she can take over the counter painkillers.”

She was so fuzzy in her thoughts as she heard the words the nurse was saying but all she could think of was him going back to Milan without her. “Alessandro,” Mackenna reached for his hand. “You’ll stay with me, right?”

“An army couldn’t keep me away,” he promised.

Mackenna wasn’t sure how it was Nuncio and the rest of the security team managed to get her home yet as she opened her eyes, she was indeed in her new apartment, in her new bed tucked in with Romeo purring at her feet. Whatever was in the concoction the nurse had put in her IV had knocked her out cold and felt as if she was nursing the worst hangover in her life.

“Never thought I’d see the day you’d share your bed with another fella,” a teasing voice called from the corner of her room. Romeo hissed in his direction.

Mackenna squinted against the dim lamplight to where Alessandro sat in a wingback chair Savannah had insisted, she needed for her bedroom. They had spent too much money furnishing this place but as she watched him sitting there, she was glad the chair was available to him. The way she was feeling, had he not been there when she woke, she likely would have had a meltdown.

"How long have been asleep?" she mumbled. Her mouth felt as if she'd been eating cotton, dry and parched.

As if reading her thoughts, Alessandro stood up, setting his sketch book on the chair and grabbed a glass of water sitting on her nightstand. Holding it against her lips he encouraged her to drink. "You've been asleep about three hours. It's coming on six now. Are you getting hungry?"

She made a face at the thought of food, and he chuckled, the sound reverberating in her chest. How she'd missed the sound of his laugh. After the fun they'd had the night, they'd gone dancing it was something she realized she needed. "I feel as if I were hit by a bus."

"I bet," he stroked her cheek softly. "I'm sorry Mackenna." "For what? You didn't push me into the table. You weren't even here." She was confused.

"For not coming home sooner, for not calling you last weekend. For so many things." His eyes were serious as he took her non-injured hand into his and squeezing her fingers gently. "We have so much we need to talk about."

"We do," she agreed.

"I know you have so many more questions about the things we talked about earlier today, but I think it best if you got rest and we tackled the important things tomorrow when you've had time to recuperate just a bit more. The last thing I want is for you to be upset any more, especially after the day you've had. Your body needs to rest."

Her eyes flicked to his, suddenly aware she didn't want to wait any longer to tell him how she felt or what she wanted but his gaze was serious. "Alessandro, I don't want you to leave." Her voice was husky and tear-filled.

"I said I didn't want to upset you, I didn't say I was leaving," he cupped her cheek, wiping a solitary tear away gently. "I'm not going anywhere, *cara mia*. You would have to hire your own security team to drag me away." He winked as her lips rounded in a surprised oh. He bent and placed a kiss on her forehead. "The lump is still pretty nasty looking."

"Ugh," she groaned, "I can't even imagine. It explains the fierce headache."

“Savannah left instructions you needed to eat something. I know you’re not keen but is there anything I can get you?” He tried again.

Before she could answer a knock on the door interrupted and Nuncio stepped in. “Hey Mac, Savannah just texted me to check in on you. She wants an update. I will tell her you are awake.” He grinned broadly. “Also,” he pointed a finger at her, “you’re clumsy and don’t even do such a thing again. My heart nearly stopped.”

The Billionaire’s Prodigal Wife by Tatiene Richard

Chapter 46

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awake, He leaned against the door irame ana sent a text message, nis uingers lying rapialy. A ding toia her she had already answered. “She says you need to eat something.”

She wrinkled her nose in disgust. “I’m really not hungry. I don’t want to be sick.”

“You lost blood Mac and a lot of it. Carlos and I disposed of your area rug and I’m quite sure the tenants in this building thought we were disposing of a body.”

“I hated that area rug.” She grinned at Alessandro. “Who wants a pure white area rug in a home owned by people who work in a hospital?”

“You’re changing the topic,” Nuncio called her out. “Food Mac.”

“Why must you insist on calling her Mac?” Alessandro groaned. “Her name is Mackenna.” He drew the syllables out as if trying to explain the sounds her name made.

“The only person who calls her Mackenna is you,” he shrugged. “Even Dulce called her Mac when she called me earlier. Its just catchy.”

“Is she okay?” Mackenna interrupted. “I don’t like the idea she is alone in a hotel.” “She has a guard,” Alessandro rolled his eyes.

“She’s been blackmailed, tortured and victimized by a masochistic son of a b***h who is now free.” Mackenna glared at him. “Her best friend is angry at her and she’s in a foreign country without any of her support system with her. She should not be alone. She must be so scared,” she whispered suddenly sad for the woman.

“I know you hit your head hard Mackenna, but she tortured you for five and a half years,” Alessandro shook his head. “I am not so quick to forgive as you.”

“Alessandro, please, call her and make sure she is okay. She didn’t need to come to me and apologize and she did. She promised to only have a working relationship with you if you would even have it. She must feel so alone in a strange city.”

“Because of her presence here, you fell, the press got wind of it and the news is suggesting you attempted suicide because of her.”

“All the more reason to bring her here among friends.” Mackenna wasn’t backing down, “You are a stubborn woman,” Alessandro griped. “I learned from the best,” she stared pointedly at him.

“Fine,” he threw his hands up in surrender, “We will make this deal. I will go get food and you will eat it and in return I will check on Dulce.”

“Deal.” Her smile held no shame.

He kissed her forehead again and walked out of the room shaking his head. Nuncio grinned at her from the doorway.

“I know what you’re doing.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she rolled her eyes, ignoring the pain just the simple movement caused.

“You think you can fix everything for everyone, don’t you Mac.” Nuncio walked into the room and sat with his back against the footboard of her bed, kicking his feet up beside her.

“Still don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You saw how upset Dulce was, earlier this morning about not being part of his life, and you know how much she is hurting. You figured you could send him over to her and they can patch it up.” Such a thing!

“Because you’re you, Mac.” Nuncio offered as an explanation. “Always so worried about everyone else you forget about your own feelings.”

“You been talking to my shrink?” she didn’t meet his gaze, knowing he was smirking with self-satisfaction in her direction. The brown-eyed man was too observant.

“No, I just know my friend.” He kicked her thigh with his foot. He tilted his head in the direction of where Alessandro had left. “He hasn’t left your side since the ambulance. The only reason he didn’t ride in the ambulance was because the paramedics preferred having a doctor in the back instead of him.”

“I don’t even remember the ambulance,” she tried to recall anything from the time she fell to when she woke up in the hospital.

“Well, I carried you down to the waiting ambulance,” Nuncio shrugged, and I won’t lie, I was terrified you were dying.”

“Pfft,” she tapped his foot with her hand, “I’m like a cat, nine lives baby.”

“You’ve used two so let’s just stop there, kay?” his brown eyes were serious as they held hers.” Savannah mentioned you could have another dose of painkillers with food. How’s your head?”

“Honestly, I have a bad headache but I’m feeling strangely numb,” she admitted quietly. “I spent the

bo until yesterday when he gave his statement. Even when Dulce said this morning she would give us space, I really felt he made his choice and wasn’t coming back. I didn’t like it. I hated it. I just was ready to accept it. Now he’s here again and talking of taking me home and Nuncio, I missed him so much.” She reached up and pushed her bangs off her face. “I’m just so scared of things going sideways again.”

“He loves you, Mac. You love him.”

“He’s also stubborn and pigheaded and a bully,” she pursed her lips, “and I’m so afraid of losing myself again.”

“Tell him,” Nuncio gave a simple shrug. “Mac, I know it’s been a long haul for you both, but I think at the end of the day, you two love each other and if this is what you want, if you want to be with him, then be with him. Find a way,” he held her gaze. “I think there’s something else though. C’mon, spill it. What’s on your mind Mac?”

She took a breath, “I don’t want to go back to Milan. My life is here. I love it here. I love my job, my friends, and my life here. I don’t want to leave Savannah behind. I have nobody but Alessandro in Milan. I’ll have to find a new job and,” she groaned at Nuncio’s gentle smile, “I’m putting the horse before the cart, aren’t i?”

“Yes,” he replied with no judgement in his voice, “but I understand why you’re feeling this way.”

“The thing is, I love Alessandro and I don’t want to lose another minute with him.” She gave a deep sigh as she felt emotional about everything. “What do I do?”

“You talk to your husband,” Nuncio instructed, “you tell him how you feel, and you actually communicate with him.”

“Orl just accept his job is so much more important than mine. He runs a multi-billion-dollar empire, and he needs to be in Europe.” She twisted her lips wryly.

“Talk. To. Him.” Nuncio repeated himself, enunciating every syllable. “I will,” she rolled her eyes at his tone. “You’re such a big brother.” “Remember this wherever we go,” he pointed his finger at her. “Where you go, I go Mac. You won’t

ever be all alone there.”

She offered him a tight smile noting the sadness in his eyes. If he left with her for Milan, Savannah was completely on her own. A thought popped in her head. “Hey, tell me about your date last night. How was dinner?”

“Dinner was great. The cabaret,” he tugged his collar and stretched his neck, “well, it was something else.”

“Fun right?”

He exhaled slowly. “Mac, I’m not sure fun was the right word. One, Savannah knew every single performer by name and not just their stage name. Two, I’m in damn good shape but some of those men made me feel weak and puny. Three, and I say this with all the love in the world, are you sure you’re not a tad gay?”

She threw her head back and laughed aloud. “Nope. Not even a smidge. I love a great body and a good laugh. The drag queens are my favorite part of the show and they’re incredible, not to mention hey are flipping hilarious.”

“I may be a tad gay,” he admitted with a self-deprecating grin. “I think I was attracted to every single one of them. I damn near threw Savannah in an alley on the way home.”

She giggled at his admission. “You’re not gay Nuncio, you’re just a red-blooded man and sexy is sexy.

“All know is, if they sold season tickets, I’d buy them. We had a really great time. Thank you for the suggestion, Mac. Our date was really fun.” He met her gaze naughtily. “Hopefully, we didn’t keep you up when we got home?”

“Ha!” she laughed at his comment. “I watched horror movies last night and freaked myself out so bad I had to take a sleeping tablet just to fall asleep. It’s why I slept in so long this morning. I heard nothing!”

“Good thing,” he teased her. She slapped his foot. “You’re awful.” He grinned unabashedly. “I know.”

They sat there talking for about an hour, Nuncio making her laugh until her sides hurt as he recalled the show, he and Savannah had taken in. The sound of the outer door opening making them both pause and look at each other.

“I suppose, I should go double check it’s Alessandro and not an intruder.” He swung his legs off the bed and headed in the direction of the door.

Mackenna settled back against the pillows and heard Alessandro’s voice and both men sharing a laugh. Nuncio was right, she would talk to Alessandro and let him know of her fears of returning to Milan. At the end of the day, communication, or the lack of it, was what had destroyed their relationship in the past. It was time to put it behind them and start fresh.

