

Chapter 47

First Night at the Hospital

At 1335, Michael arrived at the hospital and, after initially being denied access because visiting hours were over, he explained that he was on Amanda's Emergency Contact list. After showing the Manul cat his identification, he was directed to the admissions desk where he was greeted by an Amazon giant river otter wearing a name tag with Teresinha Lontra de Rio written on it. After once again explaining that he was Amanda's Emergency Contact, Teresinha told him where to find her.

"Amanda Fuchs is in North 1216 East." The perplexed look on Michael's face told Teresinha that further explanation was necessary. "I'm sorry, sir. She's on the 12th floor of the north tower on the eastern corridor in room 16."

A look of relief greeted him as Michael said, "North tower? How do I get there from here?"

Showing him a map, Teresinha said, "As you can see, we're in the dead center of the four towers. Directly behind me is the South Tower. So, all you have to do is turn around and walk down that corridor until you reach the elevators." She smiled as she added, "I'm sure you know how to operate an elevator so I won't explain that to you."

"Thank you, ma'am. I appreciate your being so understanding to a simple human."

"You're quite welcome, sir."

Michael turned around and started toward the elevators. As he walked away, he heard Teresinha say, "Such a handsome and friendly human. I wonder if he . . ." She gasped and whispered, "My father would disown me if I followed through with that thought."

Michael smiled as he walked down the corridor.

After reaching the east corridor of the north tower, Michael approached the nurse's station. He stood there for about 15 seconds before the head nurse, a rather stern looking quole, approached him.

"I'm going to assume you've already been told that visiting hours are over. So, you've got a good reason for being here. How may I help you?"

"Yes, ma'am. My name is Michael Thomson and . . ."

"Michael Thomson? Dr. Macaca told us to expect you. He also wants to talk to you before you visit Miss Fuchs. If you'll have a seat, Dr. Macaca will be here shortly."

"Thank you."

Michael sat down grateful to be relieved of some of the weight of the reading material he had brought with him. As he waited, he thumbed through the pile to make sure he brought everything that he knew Amanda liked to read. He had decided that carrying on a one-sided conversation would be difficult at best so, he had decided to read to her for a couple of hours and listen for any sound she might make to indicate she was interested in what he was reading to her.

As Michael was looking through the reading material, he sensed a presence. Looking up, he saw Dr. Macaca standing there looking at him with a smile on his face.

“Yes sir?” Michael said, returning the smile.

“That’s quite a reading list.”

Continuing to smile, Michael replied, “Amanda likes a lot of different things to read. I figure that she’ll like something in this pile.”

“And how will you know if she likes what you’re reading to her?”

“I’m sure she’ll show me somehow, a smile, a sound, something.”

“Interesting. Well, come along. I have an experiment I’d like to perform and you’re a necessary part of it.”

“Really? What kind of experiment?”

“I’ll tell you when we get to Miss Fuchs’ room.”

Dr. Macaca led Michael down the corridor to Room 16. Unlike hospitals during the time that Michael was growing up, all rooms in the hospital were private rooms. This was partially because Humanimals rarely needed to be hospitalized and partially because they had learned that most people heal better and quicker when they didn’t risk cross-contamination from someone else’s illness.

Upon arriving at Amanda’s room, Dr. Macaca stopped Michael and said, “Now, what I want to do is monitor her vital signs as you talk to her. Don’t say anything for several seconds until I can verify that her signs are what we expect to see. When I touch your arm, start talking to her. Say anything you want or feel a need to say.”

“Yes, sir.”

They entered Amanda’s room and, when Michael saw her lying there in a full body cast from her neck to her right pelvis and a leg case from her right pelvis to her right foot, Michael’s eyes filled with tears. It was all he could do to not rush up to her and grab her in a hug. But, he did walk over to the side of her bed and just stared at her as the tears in his eyes dropped onto the covers of her bed. After a few seconds, Dr. Macaca touched Michael’s arm and nodded.

With tears in his voice, Michael said, “Hey, Princess. I’m so, so sorry that I left you last night. My only excuse is that, when I figured out that you were the one he was going to announce as his fiancée, I felt that you had betrayed me. I should have known better. When I had gotten a couple of

miles away, I stopped and started thinking. As I thought, I realized that, if you had wanted to be with him, you would have been happy when he asked to dance with you but, you were hesitant about it. Nevertheless, my pride had been hurt and so I left. If I had stayed, you would have never been in that accident and you wouldn't be here. I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive myself for that but, I'm hoping that you'll forgive me."

Dr. Macaca touched Michael's arm again causing Michael to look at him. Dr. Macaca motioned for Michael to follow him. Michael leaned over, kissed Amanda on her cheek, and said, "I'll be right back, Princess. I need to talk to a doctor. Don't go anywhere."

As he started to rise, Michael saw a tear forming in Amanda's eye. He wondered if she was crying because he was leaving, because he had blamed himself for her current situation, or because she was happy he was there. Whatever the reason, the tear hurt him since he didn't know what it meant.

Michael found Dr. Macaca and Dr. Macaca was smiling. "Mr. Thomson," he said, "as you spoke to Miss Fuchs, her vital signs got stronger. She's happy that you're here."

"Or she's angry that I left her alone at the party and she doesn't want me here."

"Mr. Thomson, you know better than that. Her so-called fiancé left before he even knew what had become of her. She could have died from her injuries but, his concern was with returning to his home. He didn't even concern himself with the well-being of his chauffeur.

"So, go back in there and do what I would do if I wasn't married and I was in love with such a beautiful young woman. Take her left hand in yours, caress her face, and tell her how much you love her and how you're going to be there by her side every night until she heals."

"Thank you, Dr. Macaca. I'm going to do just that."

Michael shook Dr. Macaca's hand and returned to Amanda's room and did everything that Dr. Macaca told him to do. As he sat there talking to Amanda, he could hear her heart rate slowly grow stronger and her breathing became stronger and more regular. The tears that he had noticed earlier stopped falling, he could have sworn he heard a soft moan of happiness, and a smile forming on the corner of her lips.

After a few minutes of this, Michael gently disengaged his hand from Amanda's causing a sound of disappointment to be heard. However, Michael said, "Sweetheart, I'm not going anywhere until tomorrow morning. I'm just going to get something to read to you. I used the key you gave me, went to your apartment, and picked up a few of your books. I'm going to read them to you to help keep your brain stimulated so it doesn't atrophy during your coma." Michael stole a quick glance at Amanda, smiled, and said, "Not that kind of stimulate. Get your mind out of the gutter." Then, he laughed softly.

After Michael laughed, he heard a soft snort come from Amanda. He turned quickly to look at her. Was she actually able to laugh while she was in a coma? There were those, when he was growing up, who believed that it was possible even though no one had actually recorded it. Michael, had always been a bit ambivalent about the possibility but, he did know that it had been proven that someone in a coma could hear. That was why he intended to read to Amanda every night as long as she was in her coma.

He smiled as he thought about the possibility of Amanda laughing while in a coma. He picked up a book and read the title out loud. "My Human Lover", he said. A small frown crossed his face as he considered what that title implied. He opened the book and read the first couple of sentences.

"Sophia was an attractive otter. She had always gotten the attention of every Humanimal, male and female. She enjoyed this attention and dressed as was necessary to continue to receive as much attention as possible. However, she soon developed a reputation as a woman who would entertain anybody for any reason, even though she had never been intimate with anyone."

"Wait a minute," Michael said, He turned a few pages and read another paragraph to himself. As he read, he felt his face becoming warm. He flipped a few more pages, once again reading to himself. He felt his face getting even warmer as he felt a familiar physical reaction happening. Finally, after reading several passages and finding the descriptions becoming more and more intimately descriptive, he closed the book and said, "I don't care how much you beg, I ain't gonna read the Humanimal version of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' to you. You really had me fooled. Never in a million years would I have ever imagined that my sweet, innocent, virginal little Amanda Fuchs read smut." Michael heard a soft snort coming from Amanda's hospital bed. "And don't even try to convince me you read this to help you when you're in heat. I found this book on the nightstand beside your bed so, you were reading this book very recently."

Michael put the book down and picked up a different one. "Hmm. 'Marooned on Tashoo'. That sounds like science-fiction." He opened the book and started reading.

"The next morning, I got out of bed and retrieved one of the suits of clothing that Ara had purchased for me, got dressed and a few athaloo later, I was sitting at the table eating our humble nakvyv (breakfast). I say humble because, for a long time almost all of our meals consisted solely of vegetables from the communal garden. It amazed me how much an obviously carnivorous animal ate vegetables. However, I must also point out that most of the vegetables have a meaty flavor to them. I would guess that they are also very high in protein."

Not long after I started grasping the language, I mentioned the lack of actual meat to Ara and Rora, Ara said, "It is because Rora guards the garden nine days and has only one day off. That does not give him a lot of time to hunt for us and, when he does get a chance to hunt, he does not have much success. Plus, his pay for being a guard is only fifty Kandoo (approximately \$1.50) a day and he is not paid for his day off. He receives his pay on the day before his day off. It is not easy to purchase much on four Shurtan, fifty Kandoo (approximately \$13.50). So, we have to depend on the hunting parties to provide us with our meat ration and they have not been very successful lately."

I looked at Rora and asked, "Rora, do you know what methods the hunting parties use to obtain the meat?"

"No, since I am always on guard duty, I do not go out with the hunting parties. But, my friend, Zo-Kyna is a member of our Ka'nany (neighborhood's) hunting party. I will ask him to stop by and see if he can answer your questions."

"Thank you, Rora. Perhaps he will have information that we can use in the future."

Rora laughed. “I doubt I will be able to use any information that Kyna might possibly give you.” He said, as he finished his meal. He stood up, “kissed” Ara and left for his job guarding the garden workers from marauding wild animals and the aforementioned raiding parties from nearby villages that occasionally attack Talo-Vy for anything that they want and need, including food, females and slaves.

Shortly after Rora left, I asked, “Ara, would it be all right with you if I return to my room. I feel an urge to do something.”

Ara looked at me somewhat mischievously and said, “Mvilu, if you feel an urge, I believe there are nohachy (female) slaves that would be willing to accept your advances. After all, you are a very attractive Uany chohachy (male).”

At first, I was at a loss as to what she meant. However, as soon as I realized to what she was referring, I blushed and said, “Not that kind of urge, Ara. As you know, I remember a few things from my youth and one of them was an exercise routine that I did every morning. Since I did not do my exercises this morning, I would like to go to my room and do those exercises now, if you do not mind.”

“Of course not, Mvilu. With your physique, I do not doubt that you did a lot of exercising before you became a part of our household.”

“Now, this sounds rather tame. Maybe I’ll read this one to you, although it seems rather strange that the hero is a human and it seems to be taking place during the human era after I was put into stasis but before the creation of the Humanimals.”

Michael looked through the collection of books that he had brought from Amanda’s apartment. A couple of them, “Beyond Appearances” and “The Chananan Princess”, caught his eye and he decided that he was going to read them to Amanda. He didn’t know if she had already read them or not but he definitely hadn’t so he was going to read them as much for his enjoyment as for keeping Amanda’s brain from stagnating.

Michael brought “Marooned on Tashoo” with him and he sat in a chair beside Amanda’s bed. He reached over and gently caressed her left hand smoothing the fur as he did so.

“Now, I don’t know if you’ve ever read this book but, I never have so, I’ll read it to you and myself at the same time. It looks like it’s an interesting book.”

Michael opened the book to the first page and started reading to Amanda.

“Marooned on Tashoo

The Mory-Talo-Vy

Introduction

Allow me to introduce myself; my name is William Henry Watson. My friends call me Bill and I hope that by the time you finish reading my story, you will think of me as a friend as well.

I was born on 11 March 2410, in Valdosta, Georgia, United States of America. I am about 188 cm tall and weigh about 85 kg. I have reddish-brown hair, blue eyes and what has been described as a medium complexion. Even though I am not muscular by any stretch of the imagination, I do spend time in the weight room on a regular basis and, as a result, I've got a toned body. I don't want to sound conceited, but I have been told by several women that I am more than a little attractive.

I have three siblings, one younger brother, Daniel, and two younger sisters, Alexandria and Mary. You'd think, with three younger siblings, I'd be a bit of a bully; but, my parents wouldn't allow me to bully any of them. Their reaction was, "Put yourself in their shoes. Would you want someone to bully you?" I thought long and hard about this admonition and because of it, I've always hated bullies and I oppose them at every opportunity.

Another reason I didn't bully my younger siblings is because when I was growing up, I was a rather small child; skinny would be a better description. As a result of my size, or rather a lack of, I was the victim of the bullying that my parents prevented me from doing. This bullying did wonders for my self-esteem, or maybe I should say, lack of self-esteem. Because of this victimization, my father thought I should be able to defend myself from bullies and started training me in the martial arts from the age of seven, with training in karate, aikido, judo, and jujitsu. From there, I graduated at age nine into more advanced martial arts of sword fighting, including usage of the epee, katana, and the Scottish Claymore swords. I became extremely proficient in the usage of all of these martial arts. Plus, learning these martial arts also taught me to control my emotions and greatly improved my self-confidence and self-esteem. They taught me to not react to the bullying but to think things through and react from a well thought out and emotionless attitude. While I was learning the aforementioned martial arts, I also learned archery and shooting firearms. I practiced my martial arts and shooting daily and, years of practice, my abilities with the pistol and rifle were second to none and my skeet abilities were amazing. I couldn't be mistaken for a trick shooter but, I rarely missed my target. I once recorded 500 birds in a row. My father told me that the reason he paid for all of my training was because he wanted me to be a member of the United States Olympic teams. When I was fourteen years of age, I won a place on the Olympic team in the three sports in which I was most proficient, fencing, martial arts, and shooting, three of the lesser promoted sports but, that was fine with me because, believe it or not, I don't a lot of attention. In the Olympic Games I attended, I won the following medals in order, Gold, Bronze, and Silver. I don't know who was more proud of my accomplishments, me, or my father. I do know that the international community was more than a little surprised that an American could win Gold in fencing since it has always been considered a European dominated sport.

Do I sound like a superman? Believe me, I'm not; I'm merely an over-achiever. The reason for this is because I became addicted to something very early in life, praise. The more praise I received; the more I wanted. I received the most praise from my father. He was more than a little effusive in the dispersal of his praise. When I, or my siblings, would fail at something we were attempting and would feel like we had disappointed him, my father would say, "Did you give 100%?" When we would reply

in the affirmative, “Then, I’m not disappointed in you. As long as you give it your all, you’ve met my expectations.” Because I wanted to exceed his expectations, I became the over-achiever I am.

Michael continued reading the book for an hour or so. He had read five chapters of the book before he became too tired to continue reading. He looked at Amanda and said, “Sweetheart, I think I’m going to stop here for tonight. This is a rather long book.” He found the last page and said, “Whew! 365 pages and I’ve only read 49. It’ll take at least a week to finish this book so, if you don’t mind, I’m going to take a nap and I’ll read something else when I wake up.”

Michael reached out, took Amanda’s hand and squeezed it softly. Then, he leaned over and kissed her left cheek as gently as he could as he continued to hold her hand. When he pulled back from the kiss, he looked longingly at her as tears began forming once again while he thought about how she wouldn’t be lying in this hospital bed if he hadn’t allowed his pride to take over and tell him to leave her behind.

After a few seconds of fighting back the tears, he sat in the chair, sniffled a few times, and wiped his nose with the sleeve of his shirt. He gave a silent prayer once again asking his God to take care of and protect Amanda during her recovery. After praying, he suddenly felt tired and he leaned back in the chair he was sitting in, put his feet on a small stool, closed his eyes, and fell asleep. As he slept, he thought he heard a voice, an unearthly voice that he couldn’t describe other than to say it put him at ease.

The voice said, “My son, twice in the last day you have prayed asking for my intervention to help this woman lying in this hospital bed. When you first met her, you were concerned that I would not approve of you having a relationship with her. Michael, I was the one who brought you two together. If I had not approved, you would have arrived at SoGa Industries 15 seconds later and, as a result, you would have never run into each other.

“Always remember that nothing happens on Earth without my knowledge and approval, even evil things. I inspired humans to create the Humanimals over 19,000 years ago. I also inspired them to splice the DNA of animals and humans to allow humans and Humanimals to mate and produce children with each other. If I opposed such unions, I never would have allowed the creation of Humanimals even if the human species would have gone extinct as a result.

“I hope that this explanation tells you that I will protect Amanda. However, you must endure more tests to show me how much she means to you. She will awaken in three months and you will endure a test shortly thereafter. Pass this test and your life will improve vastly.”

The voice faded away and Michael woke up. Unlike when he awoke earlier from listening to the voices trying to convince him to make the decision they wanted him to make, this voice made him understand that the decision was entirely his and the voice would accept his decision and would assist him if he asked for it.

Michael turned his head and looked longingly at Amanda. After a few seconds, he stood, leaned over, and kissed the top of her head. Then, he whispered in her ear, saying, “I love you,

Princess. I will always be there for you and no one will stand in my way not even your mother. So, you rest easy and heal knowing that I'm here to protect you."

As Michael finished saying this, he heard a familiar voice say, "Well said, Michael. I believe you'll do everything in your power to keep that promise."

Michael turned and saw Jacob standing in the doorway of the room. He walked quickly over and shook Jacob's hand. Then, he said, "That was a nice trick you pulled on me, Mr. Fuchs. I was beginning to believe it was real."

Confused, Jacob said, "What trick?"

"You know. What you said to me while I was asleep."

"Michael, I just got here. I heard you talking to Amanda and promising to protect her from anything, including her mother."

Michael was shocked and in a surprised voice, said, "You're serious?" Jacob raised an eyebrow and cocked his head slightly. "You are serious!"

"What did you hear?"

"I heard a voice saying . . ." Michael thought for a moment before saying, "Never mind. Are you alone?"

"Yes, I had Ophelia take some melatonin and lay down. I waited a little while, to make sure she was asleep and then I came here. I knew you would be here and I wanted to see how this situation was affecting you."

Slightly suspicious, Michael asked, "How did you get in here? The last I heard I was the only person on Amanda's Emergency Contact list."

Laughing, Jacob said, "It helps when you're golfing buddies with the hospital director and he isn't a very good golfer. He owes me quite a few Yenars and I said that I'd cancel the debt if he would leave word that I'm allowed to visit Amanda tonight."

Michael shook his head and said, "I guess the saying, "Sly as a fox", applies to you."

Jacob smiled mischievously before saying, "How is she?"

"Considering that 12 hours ago she was in surgery and she's currently in an induced coma, she's doing quite well. I even got her to laugh a couple of times."

"Michael, she's in a coma. She can't hear us."

"Mr. Fuchs, don't ever believe a person in a coma can't hear you. A person in a coma can't talk, can't walk, and can't eat but, a person in a coma can hear. Watch."

Michael walked over to Amanda, leaned over until his mouth was a couple of inches from her ear, and said, loud enough for Jacob to hear, “Sweetie, I’ve got to go. I’ll see you tomorrow.” When Michael finished speaking, a distinct whine could be heard coming from Amanda’s throat, shocking Jacob. Michael gave him a knowing look.

“See.” Returning to speak in Amanda’s ear, Michael said, “I’m sorry for doing that to you Sweetheart but, I had to show your father that you can hear us.”

Still in shock, Jacob said, “I saw it and I still have a hard time believing it.”

Jacob sat on one side of Amanda and Michael sat on the other as they spoke. Every now and then, Michael would stand up and adjust the sheets covering Amanda. Then, he would sit and continue the conversation. Every time Michael stood, Jacob watched him. He was amazed at how attentive Michael was to Amanda. He smiled as he thought about how Michael reminded him of how he always treated Ophelia when she was in the hospital after giving birth to one of their kits. He smiled at these thoughts, an action that didn’t go unnoticed by Michael.

“What are you smiling about, Mr. Fuchs?”

“You remind me of me whenever Ophelia is in the hospital. I’m so concerned for her welfare that I make a pest of myself trying to take care of her.”

“You must love her a lot, Mr. Fuchs.”

Tearing up slightly, Jacob said, “Yes. I do. As hard as it may be to believe, I love her more now than I did on the day she and I got married. Oh, don’t get me wrong, she can tick me off, especially where Amanda’s concerned but, she’s the love of my life. I’ve been in love with her since I met her when she was 6 and I was 10 and I wouldn’t trade her for all the gold in the world. You’ll know what I mean when you and Amanda have been married for 20 years.”

“Don’t you mean if? As I understand it, an arranged marriage contract means the couple is already married; the marriage ceremony is just a formality.”

“You’re about half right, Michael. Yes, in the eyes of the Humanimals, someone in an arranged marriage contract is technically married, to the other person but, if, for some reason, one of the parties decides to opt out of the marriage, then a divorce isn’t required, merely the buy-out amount.”

“Buy-out?”

“Yes, every arranged marriage contract has one. It can be as little as one Yenar or as much as the forfeiture of the dowry. Of course, there are other ways.”

“Such as?”

“Oh, infidelity of one of the parties, for example, but, quite often that’s difficult at best to prove and even then, the offended party has to want to end the contract, if you’re getting any ideas.”

Michael laughed and said, “Despite all of her attempts at seducing me, I would never do that to her. I made her a promise during the first heat she experienced after we met that, if it was up to me, she would be a virgin on her wedding night. That still holds true.”

“Well, it was an option, although, for some reason, I don’t believe that Reginald would release Amanda from the marriage contract for infidelity.”

“Why not, sir?”

“It’s just a feeling I have.

“Well, I need to get home. Ophelia hasn’t been sleeping very well lately and she likes for me to be home if she awakens in the middle of the night.”

“Really? Why?”

“She’s pregnant.”

“Really?”

Jacob laughed. “Why do you find that so hard to believe?”

“How old is she? 40?”

“38 actually. Why?”

“I guess I have a hard time accepting a middle-aged woman getting pregnant even though it happened quite regularly when I was growing up. Some women didn’t even have their first child until they were in their 40s.”

“Michael, hasn’t anyone told you that Humanimal women can get pregnant as long as they live? That’s why, even though it’s been over 200 years since my tiger grandmother gave birth to my direct ancestor, it’s only been five generations since she was alive. In fact, she was 66 when she got pregnant with that ancestor and Ophelia’s tiger ancestor was 58 when she gave birth to Ophelia’s direct ancestor and our ancestors weren’t the last kits those grandmothers birthed.”

“Wow!”

“Since she can give birth every three years, Ophelia could theoretically give birth to 10 more kits before she dies.”

Michael’s eyes got so big you could see all the way around his irises. “Are you serious? I didn’t know that.”

Jacob smile and said, “Now, you know what you have to look forward to after you and Amanda get married.”

A look of sadness crossed Michael’s face as he said, “Well, that ain’t gonna happen now, is it?”

“Don't give up hope, Michael. Things have a way of working out.

“I really need to go. I'll see you another time. Take care of my daughter.”

“I will, sir.”

Jacob shook Michael's hand, kissed Amanda's cheek, and left. Michael watched him leave, kissed Amanda's other cheek, sat in the chair next to Amanda's bed, closed his eyes, and fell asleep.