

Chapter 48

Helping with Amanda's Rent

The next morning, Michael was awakened by the head nurse who said, "Mr. Thomson, it's 0030. You might want to gather everything and leave. Knowing how her," she indicated Amanda with a nod, "mother feels about you, I don't believe you want to be here when her parents arrive."

Michael laughed softly and said, "No. No, I don't. Is there anywhere that I can put these books so I can find them when I return tonight?"

Walking over to a chifforobe, she opened it and said, "You can put them in here. There's no reason I can think of for Mrs. Fuchs to open this wardrobe."

"Thank you." Michael put all of the books he had into the chifforobe except for the ones the absolutely refused to read to Amanda. After depositing the books, he gathered the items he was taking with him and, after glancing quickly at a clock on the wall, decided to take the stairway to ensure that he didn't accidentally run into Ophelia. As he snuck down the stairs, he couldn't help smiling as he compared his situation with how some of his friends when he was growing up used to tell him about sneaking out of a girl's bedroom to prevent being caught by the parents of the girl.

Last evening, Michael had parked his car in the back of the hospital so he could make his escape with little chance of Ophelia seeing him and, as a result, raising a ruckus about him being at the hospital. He reached his car undetected by Ophelia and drove home. After arriving home, he fed the kittens and cleaned their litter box. After washing his hands, he decided to prepare some breakfast. After eating, he went to his bedroom, got ready for bed, and fell asleep with a kitten on each side of him.

A few hours later, Michael woke up and found himself alone in his bed. He got up, got dressed, walked into his living room, and found Buddy and Me-You curled up together in Michael's favorite chair. They looked so peaceful he didn't have the heart to make them get out of the chair. Besides, he had some things to do before he returned to the hospital that night. Amanda's racy novels were still in his car to be returned to Amanda's apartment and he wanted to talk to the apartment manager before heading over to the Panthera home to eat dinner with them. Since he didn't like showing up unexpectedly and unannounced, he dialed the ten numbers of their telephone and, surprisingly, spoke with Leo.

"Dr. Leo? You never answer the telephone. Where's Dr. Tigresa?"

"She's attempting to corral Anne."

Laughing, Michael asked, "What in the world?"

“Tigresa wants to give her a bath.”

“A bath? Don’t y’all normally give her one after supper?”

“Yes, but Anne decided she didn’t want oatmeal for breakfast this morning so now she’s wearing it.”

Laughing even harder, Michael said, “I can’t say as I blame her. I never could stand that mess myself. So, what did she do, dump it on her head?”

“I wish. She got angry, slapped the rim of the bowl and sent it flying. The bowl hit her shoulder, went spinning through the air and oatmeal went all over the dining room, especially onto Anne.

“So, why are you calling?”

“Oh, I almost forgot. I was hoping to eat supper with y’all before I go to the hospital tonight.”

“Michael, you know you’re always invited to eat with us.”

“I just don’t want to intrude.”

“It isn’t an intrusion, Michael. Hold on a second.” Leo called out, “Tigresa, Michael wants to eat supper with us this evening.”

Michael could hear Tigresa say, “You tell that scoundrel that he doesn’t need an invitation nor permission to join us for any meal including breakfast.

“Anne, I’m going to spank you if you don’t come back here.”

Michael said, “Dr. Leo, tell Anne that I’m going to be there fore supper but only if she lets her mama give her a bath.”

Michael could hear Leo telling Anne what he had said. Almost immediately, the screaming stopped. Then, Michael heard Tigresa say, “Leo, tell Michael that I’m going to let him take care of Anne for a month then he’ll see how easy it is to raise her.” Leo and Michael both laughed uproariously.

Leo said, “When will you be here, Michael?”

“I’ve got to stop by Amanda’s apartment and drop off a few things that I thought I’d need to help Amanda last night and I need to talk the her apartment manager. After I finish doing those things, I’ll go right over. So, I should be there around 0700. But, don’t tell Anne or she’ll really get upset if I’m not there by then.”

Leo laughed and said, “You’re probably right. I’ll let Anne know that you’ll be here later today.”

“Thanks, Dr. Leo. I’ll all of you later.”

Michael hung up his telephone and found the kittens. After petting them and telling them he'd be back later, he left. He drove to Amanda's apartment building, took her books back to her apartment, and put them back where he had originally found them. After returning the books, Michael left Amanda's apartment after locking her door. When he reached the second floor landing, he was, once again, accosted by a totally nude Angelique.

In a sultry voice, she said, "Michael, leaving without your fiancée?"

"She isn't here, Angelique."

With a confused look on her face, Angelique said, "But, I heard her door open and close."

"Yeah. That was me. I was returning some books I had borrowed from her yesterday while you were working."

"Wait a minute, Amanda always locks her door when she leaves. How did you get in?"

"She gave me a key shortly after we met."

With a lustfully sly look on her face the otter said, "Where did she stay last night? Did she finally break down your defenses?"

A sad look crossed Michael's face as he said, "No, she's in the hospital. She's in a coma due to injuries sustained in an automobile accident Friday night."

The playful look on Angelique's face was quickly replaced with one of shocked horror. Her mouth moved for several seconds before she could say anything. "Oh, my God! What happened!? Is she going to be all right!?"

"What happened is it turns out that Amanda was the guest of honor at the Engagement Party we attended. It seems that when she was 14, her mother arranged a marriage with an Arctic fox by the name of Reginald Reynard, III. Amanda didn't know anything about it until Reginald announced it Friday night. I got upset and left. I had thought that Amanda had used me as a plaything as she waited to be officially announced as Reginald's fiancée. However, after I got a few blocks away, I realized that Amanda would never do anything like that. I turned around and returned to, hopefully, apologize and take her home but, she had left already. It was while she was riding home that a drunk driver ran a stop light and T-boned the limousine she was riding in and caused a lot of serious injuries to Amanda.

"About two hours after I got home, I received a telephone call from Piedmont Regional Hospital telling me I needed to hurry down there and talk to one of the doctors. He told me that Amanda had severe injuries including a broken tibia, fibula, femur, radius, ulna, and humerus. All of her ribs on her right side were broken, her clavicle had a compound fracture, two of her ribs had punctured her right lung, and one of her ribs had punctured her diaphragm and lacerated her stomach and liver. She was in emergency surgery for over 12 hours. The doctor put her into an induced coma

to keep her pain from breathing to a minimum. The doctor I spoke to said she has a better than 75% chance to make a full recovery and every day that per percentage increases by a minimum of 1%.

“Now, you know almost everything I know. I spent last night in Amanda’s hospital room reading to her to keep her brain stimulated.”

“What about this guy who says she’s his fiancée?”

“He had minor injuries because he was on the side of the limousine that wasn’t struck by the drunk driver. He had his injuries tended to and he left while Amanda was still in surgery. According to the head nurse, he never even asked how Amanda was doing. That just makes me mad enough to chew nails. I mean, if she’s his fiancée, he should be there waiting for her to recover.”

“You’re right, Michael.”

“I need to go speak with the apartment manager. I’ll see y’all later.”

Angelique hugged Michael and said, “So long, Michael. We’ll pray for Amanda’s recovery.”

Oskar shook Michael’s hand and patted his back as he said, “Amanda did good falling for you. I’m sure she’s happy that you’re there for her.”

Michael said, “Thank you, Angelique and Oskar. I’ll keep you informed about Amanda’s progress.”

Michael left the apartment building and drove over to the manager’s office. He entered the building and was greeted rather quickly and warmly by a civet. “Hello, I’m Andrew Moschogali, the apartment manager. Are you looking for an apartment?”

Michael couldn’t help but smile at Mr. Moschogali’s enthusiasm. However, he said, “No, sir. I’m here about Amanda Fuchs. Could we talk?”

Giving Michael a somewhat suspicious look, Mr. Moschogali said, “How do you know Miss Fuchs? Oh, wait a minute. You’re that human I was warned about a few months ago, aren’t you? Sorry, I’ve got nothing to say to you.”

“Very well. Then, let me do all the talking.

“First of all, Amanda was in a bad accident last Friday night.” Mr. Moschogali’s face got a shocked look. “She’s currently in the hospital in an induced coma due to the severity of her injuries.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because she’s going to be in her coma for at least two months. I’m guessing she won’t be able to pay her rent for three months. Sir, Amanda loves her apartment and I’m sure she doesn’t want

to lose it. So, I'm here to tell you that I'm going to pay her rent until she can start paying it again herself."

"I'm sorry, sir, but you're not allowed to do that."

"What!? Why not?"

"It's in her lease agreement. Here, let me show you." He sat at his desk and pulled out a drawer full of lease agreements. He dug through them until he pulled out one of them with Amanda's name on it. "Here, read this paragraph." He pointed at the very last paragraph in the agreement.

Michael read the indicated paragraph. "The lessee is the only person responsible for and allowed to make the month rental payment. Failure to make the monthly payment on time shall result in forfeiture of the rental agreement and the lessee shall be subject to eviction proceedings."

Looking at Michael with anything but sympathetic eyes, Mr. Moschogali said, "So, you see, my hands are tied."

"I see. I see quite clearly. May I see another rental agreement?"

"I'm afraid not. Rental agreements are considered private legal matters and only the lessor or a lawyer, under court order, may look at them."

"And yet, you violated that privacy by showing me Amanda's rental agreement." Michael stared at Mr. Moschogali for several seconds before speaking. "You do know that such a paragraph in a lease agreement is a violation of the law, don't you?" Mr. Moschogali looked at Michael somewhat fearfully. "First of all, a renter is allowed to become at least three months in arrears before eviction proceedings can begin. Second of all, there is no law that allows a lessor to put such a requirement in a lease agreement."

"But, there is no law that specifically prevents it, either."

"True. All right. I'll try a different tack, then. You agree to let me make Amanda's rent payment every month and I'll pay three months rent for each month she's unable to pay her rent due to her hospitalization."

A look of greed crossed Mr. Moschogali's face as he thought of what he could do with that extra money but, a look of fear crossed his face just as quickly. "All right. But, I don't know what I'll tell her mother."

"What do you mean?"

"When Miss Fuchs decided to rent an apartment here, her mother wasn't happy in the least. In fact, Mrs. Fuchs found fault with everything about the apartment from the color of the walls to the location to the rental amount and we've got some of the lowest rent in all of Catlanna. When Miss Fuchs wouldn't be swayed, Mrs. Fuchs decided to talk to me and requested that condition be included in the rental agreement. I didn't see a problem so I included it. So, I don't know what to say if Mrs. Fuchs finds out that her rent is still being paid while she's in the hospital."

“Well, sir, if you’re a decent actor, just tell her that Amanda has never paid her rent in person. When Mrs. Fuchs demands to know why, tell her that Amanda set up an account at a bank which sends you the rent every month. So, technically, she isn’t in violation of the rental agreement.”

“That might work. Miss Fuchs is a good tenant. Okay, I’ll try that.”

“Thank you, sir. Here’s this month’s rent payment times three as I agreed.” Michael wrote out a check for the specified amount. “I’ll be back next month.” Michael handed Mr. Moschogali the check, stood, and shook his hand.

After leaving the apartment manager’s office, Michael drove to the Panthera home. He arrived shortly after 0700 and, upon entering the home, was greeted enthusiastically by Anne who demanded that he pick her up. When he did, she asked about Amanda. He explained to her that Amanda was still in the hospital and would be for a long time. Anne frowned and teared up but, she never cried. She seemed to understand that it wasn’t Amanda’s fault that she couldn’t visit.

Michael carried Anne to the living room where he was surprised to see Raul and Consuelo Lobo-Rojo sitting there. Felipe was sitting in the floor playing with some of Anne's toys. When he saw Michael, he pushed himself up and toddled over to him.

“Mah-ca!” He said, excitedly.

“Well, hello there, Felipe.” Michael knelt down and allowed Felipe to hug his neck.

Anne said, “You know my fwen?”

“Yes, I do, Anne. I know his father, too.”

“Weally?”

“Yep. Do you want to play with Felipe?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Okay. Play nice.”

“Uh-kay, Mah’l.” Michael put Anne down and she walked over to Felipe.

“Hello Raul, Consuelo. How are y’all doing?”

“We are fine, Michael, but, I understand that you are not doing very well.”

“How did you find out?” Michael said as he glared at Leo.

Leo said, “It wasn’t me! I swear!”

“It doesn’t matter. I was going to tell him on Monday anyway.”

“Are you staying for dinner?”

“We have been invited.”

“Good. I haven’t seen your lovely wife and cute son since Amanda and I had dinner with your family.”

Michael sat down and Raul said, “I am sorry to hear that Amanda was injured in an automobile accident. Will she recover?”

“The doctors are optimistic. I guess you’ve been told about the extent of her injuries.”

Consuelo said, “Yes, we were. How is she putting up with the pain of breathing?”

“She’s in an induced coma. She may still feel pain but it won’t interfere with her breathing.”

“That is good. It is also good that her pelvis wasn’t broken. That could have caused her problems when you and she decided to have pups in the future.”

Michael got quiet for several seconds before he said, “Well, I don’t have to worry about that.”

Raul said, “Why not?”

Michael didn’t answer but, Tigresa did. “It would seem that Amanda is in an arranged marriage contract.”

Consuelo said, “Oh, Miguel. Did she not tell you?”

Michael said, “She didn’t know until Friday night. I guess her mother thought it was a need to know situation and she didn’t think Amanda needed to know. Amanda’s father didn’t know about the arranged marriage either.”

Felipe got up from playing and toddled to Consuelo. “Mama,” he said, “I sleepy.”

Anne toddled to Tigresa and said, “Me, too, Mama.”

Consuelo said, “Oh, I did not think about his nap time.” She looked at Raul and continued, “What are we going to do?”

Michael said, “Dr. Tigresa, do you have a few blankets?”

“”Yes, why?”

“Get them and I’ll show what we used to do when I was growing up.”

Tigresa left and a couple of minutes later, returned with about five blankets large enough to

cover a king-size bed. Michael took them, folded them in half and laid them in the middle of the living room floor. By the time Michael had done this, Felipe had fallen asleep in his mother's lap and Anne looked like she wasn't too far behind him. Michael took Felipe and laid him on the pallet and beckoned Anne to join him. Soon, everyone was looking at the two sleeping toddlers. Shortly after she fell asleep, Anne rolled onto her side and placed a thumb in her mouth and an arm around Felipe which shocked Michael.

"Dr. Tigresa," he said, "I've never seen Anne do that before. Have you?"

"Only to her favorite stuffed animal doll."

"Well, now that the cubs are taking a nap, I think I'll start dinner."

Consuelo stood as Tigresa did and, despite Tigresa's protestations, insisted that she was going to help. Because of Consuelo's insistence on helping, Victoria got up and followed them. When she saw Michael smiling at her, she glared at him and stuck her tongue out causing Michael to laugh.

Leo, who had witnessed the situation said, "I'm glad to see you still have a sense of humor, Michael."

"If I didn't laugh, Dr. Leo, I'd cry. Besides, crying or being upset won't help Amanda and it'll cause me to be more depressed than I already am."

Raul said, "You are right, Michael. Even though it is not the same thing, when my Consuelo left me and threatened me with divorce, I, too, became depressed. That is why I started drinking. I had nothing to make me happy. The two rays of sunshine in my life were gone. Even my family could not make me smile." He thought for a few seconds before continuing with, "I wonder what would have happened to me had you not met me that night."

"I don't know, Raul, and I'd rather not think about it. As I told you, that waitress' brother is a member of Special Forces and they are taught how to maim and kill without leaving any evidence."

"Yes, I thought about joining the Special Forces when I was in the Army. But, when they told me that I could be away from home for up to a year at a time, I decided seeing my Consuelo every day was more important to me."

Richard said, "Raul, you're too nice of a guy to be Special Forces."

Leo, Michael and Raul all laughed causing Richard to look at them like they were insane. Leo said, "Richard, the brother of the waitress Michael is talking about is one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet. He makes Michael seem like a raging maniac; however, if you mess with his family, friends or country, a raging maniac is calm compared to him."

"Oh, wow," was Richard's response.

Raul said, "Richard, the Special Forces cannot allow someone who will fly off the handle at the drop of a hat to join. They need to be subtle in their activities otherwise, they would attract too much attention to their activities and good people would die unnecessarily."

“Oh.” Richard was duly impressed.

At about this time, the cubs woke up and Felipe went to his father and Anne went to Michael. Sleepily, each of them climbed into the lap of the person they sought and snuggled with that person. Anne popped her thumb back into her mouth and stared at Felipe as he did the same to her.

After a few seconds, Felipe looked at his father and said, “Daddy, where mama?”

“She is helping Dr. Tigresa cook dinner.”

“Weally? Wat we eaten?”

“I don’t know, son but, you’re going to eat, right?”

Anne looked at Leo and said, “Daddy, ca’ mah fwen ea’ wif us?”

“Of course, Sweetheart. Don’t you remember? Mama asked them to eat dinner with us.”

“Oh, yeah.” She smiled at Felipe and he smiled back.

Michael laughed and said, “I think Anne has a boyfriend.”

Richard said, “She’s been flirting with him ever since he arrived. In fact, she brought her toys out for him to play with them. I’ve never seen her do that before.”

Michael said, “Well, when I was growing up, the surest sign that a child liked another child was if the first child willingly shared his or her toys with the other child without being told to.”

A few minutes later, Victoria came out of the kitchen and said, “Dinner is ready. Mom said that everyone needs to get their butt to the table.”

From the kitchen, everyone heard Tigresa say, “I did not say it that way, Victoria.” Victoria winked and everyone laughed.

When they reached the table, Michael noticed that Tigresa had, to him, prepared a meal large enough to feed a small army. He took his seat and, despite his protestations, Tigresa prepared his plate for him.

“Dr. Tigresa,” he said, “I’m a grown adult man. I can prepare my own plate.”

“Michael,” she responded, “every time you have eaten with us, you haven’t eaten enough keep a hummingbird alive. So, either eat more or I’m going to start preparing your plate like I do for Mary and Anne.” She gave Michael a very stern look.

Michael could hear snickers around the table so, he decided to give them something to really

laugh about. "Yes, mommy." He replied.

The table erupted in uproarious laughter. Tigresa glared at him for a few seconds until the laughter died and she said, "And don't you forget it."

After dinner, Anne and Felipe were put on the pallet they had been sleeping on earlier and they started playing with her toys. Unlike most human children, Humanimal children are less possessive of their toys and freely share them with other children. No one that Michael asked about this knew why. The only thing that anyone could come up with was how Humanimals had been treated so many thousands of years ago.

Because of their fascination with each other, Felipe was willing to pretend anything that crossed Anne's mind. Felipe didn't even balk at them playing house or when Anne decided to give her "husband" a welcome home kiss. In fact, he seemed to enjoy it.

Michael looked at Raul and asked, "Are all Mexicat red wolf pups like that?"

Raul said, "Like what?"

"He didn't turn away when Anne wanted to kiss him."

Raul laughed and said, "I do not know. I do know that my madre used to make fun of me because from the moment I laid eyes on my Consuelo, all I wanted to do was kiss her and we met when we were about the ages of Felipe and Anne."

Michael smiled mischievously and said, "Are you saying that Anne is your future daughter-in-law?"

Consuelo said, "Maybe, maybe not. All I will say is that in the short time I have known this family, I believe Felipe could do worse for in-laws."

After visiting with everyone until he knew visiting hours at the hospital were over, Michael said his good-byes and headed to the hospital. He arrived at Amanda's room, opened the chifforobe, found the book he was reading to her the night before, and walked over to her bed. He looked at her for several seconds before he leaned over and kissed her cheek. He was rewarded by hearing a soft moan causing him to smile lovingly at her before he sat in the chair beside her bed.

After sitting, Michael opened the book and said, "Well, let's get back to William Watson's adventures on Tashoo. As you may recall, . . ."