

Chapter 49

Michael Tells About Amanda

The next morning, Michael woke up, put the book away, and, after admonishing Amanda to not argue with Ophelia and hearing a snort from her, kissed her good-bye. He promised that he'd return that night to read to her again. He decided that, even though visiting hours wouldn't start for another half hour, he'd continue using the stairs to leave so he wouldn't get into a bad habit and accidentally run into Ophelia and have to listen to her tirade about his visiting Amanda and what he planned on doing to her for the umpteenth time. He walked down the twelve flights of stairs and reached the lobby of the hospital. After verifying that Ophelia wasn't in the lobby, he walked quickly across it and exited through the door that led to the rear of the hospital. He got into his car and drove home.

After arriving at his apartment, Michael unlocked the door and walked inside. The kittens raced up to him and mewed constantly until he fed and watered them. As the kittens ate their breakfast, he took a shower. He paused during the shower occasionally as he thought about how Amanda had nearly died because of the accident and he realized how much she meant to him. He said to himself, "Amanda, I can't say this enough. You mean more than life to me and, if you had died as a result of that accident, I doubt very seriously I would have survived a day without you." Michael smiled as he realized that he had paraphrased a line from his most favorite love song.

Michael finished his shower, got dressed and prepared a quick, nourishing and filling breakfast. As usual, as he ate, he had two kittens investigating his meal and trying to help themselves to it. Knowing that they wouldn't like what he was eating, he took a small amount and gave each kitten a taste. As he expected, both of them sniffed at the offering and, without taking a bite, jumped to the floor and wandered off. Laughing, Michael called after them, "If you didn't want it, why did you ask for a taste?"

After eating, Michael put his dishes in the sink, brushed his teeth, said good-bye to Buddy and Me-You, and left for work. As he drove, he debated going directly to Mr Blaid's office and delivering the news about Amanda's accident. He knew that Mr. Blaid would need to get a replacement so, he decided to go straight to Mr. Blaid's office and tell him.

Michael arrived at SoGa Industries and parked in his personal parking place. He sat in his car for a few moments as he practiced what need to be said before he got out of the car and entered the building.

"Good morning, Mr. Thomson," Mrs. Lagomorph said when she saw him.

“Good morning, Mrs. Lagomorph,” he replied as he cheerfully as he could.

“Oh! Mr. Thomson!” Mrs. Lagomorph said. “Miss Fuchs hasn’t arrived yet. Is she feeling all right?” Michael realized now just how well-known his relationship with Amanda was.

Michael choked back a tear as he said, “No, Mrs. Lagomorph. She isn’t feeling well.”

“Please tell her I hope she gets to feeling better soon.”

“I will, Mrs. Lagomorph, and thank you.”

Michael reached the end of the foyer and turned left. He walked to the elevators and entered his personal ID code. When the doors opened, he pressed 12. The doors closed and the elevator started up. As the elevator neared the 12th floor, Michael’s countenance grew more and more sad. Finally, after about a minute, the elevator stopped and the doors opened. He stepped out and every head on the floor turned and looked at him. He smiled, waved at them and started walking toward Mr. Blaid’s office. As he walked, he saw Bertha pick up her telephone and dial four numbers. Even though he couldn’t hear what she said, Michael could hear her whispering and knew she was talking to Mr. Blaid.

Before Michael could walk all the way across the lobby, the door to Mr. Blaid’s office opened and he walked out. “Michael,” he said, “have you seen Amanda? She never late and it’s over an hour after she was supposed to be here.”

“Yes, sir. I saw her at 0030. That’s why I’m here.”

“0030? Michael, you know her situation. Do you think you should be with her that early in the morning?” Mr. Blaid had a wolfish grin as he spoke.

Michael smiled slightly as he said, “That’s true normally, Mr. Blaid; however, circumstances being what they are now, it’s probably acceptable.”

The grin disappeared from Mr. Blaid’s face and he looked at Michael as he said, “Does this have anything to do with what happened Friday night?”

“Well, sir, in a way it does and in a way it doesn’t.”

“That sounds somewhat ominous. Would you care to clarify?”

“I’m sure you think that I’m here to give you my notice because of what happened at the

party Friday night but, I'm not. It's what happened after I left."

"Wait a minute, Michael." Mr. Blaidd turned to Wanda and said, "Miss Anaguma, would you please call all of the vice-presidents and ask them to step out of their offices for a moment."

"Yes, sir." Wanda pressed a button on her intercom, dialed a series of numbers and then said, "Yes, Mr. Blaidd has requested your presence in the lobby, please."

About ten seconds later, all eight vice-presidents stepped into the lobby. It was the first time since he started working at SoGa Industries that Michael had seen even four vice-presidents at the same time. After all eight of the vice-presidents had entered the lobby, Mr. Blaidd said, "I'm sorry to pull all of you away from your early morning work but, Michael has some important information concerning my personal secretary. Michael?"

With a look of sadness on his face, Michael stepped forward and started speaking, "For those of you who don't know, a couple of months ago, Amanda Fuchs received an invitation to an Engagement Party to celebrate the engagement of a Mr. Reginald Reynard, III. It was held this past Friday night. When Amanda received the invitation, she told me that she had met Mr. Reynard only once in her life and that was four years earlier. Because of this she couldn't understand why she was invited to the party. In fact, she didn't want to go but," Michael paused as he fought his emotions, "I talked her into going."

"We arrived and were escorted to our seats and we were served as sumptuous a meal as I could imagine. The meal was enhanced by the fact that there was a string quartet playing beautiful music in the background. After we ate, I broke with Reynard tradition and asked Amanda to dance. As we danced, I noticed that several people had shocked looks on their faces but, soon, almost everyone had joined us. After a few minutes, Reginald approached Amanda and me and asked if he could dance with her. I thought it was a bit strange that the man of the hour wanted to dance with my fiancée but, I told him that it was up to her and, even though I could see that she didn't want to, she also didn't want to seem ungrateful.

"As I walked back to my chair, I got to thinking. I couldn't understand why Reginald wasn't dancing with his fiancée. Then, it hit me and I became angry. I thought that Amanda had used me. I thought that she had been dating me only because she was waiting to be officially announced at Reginald's fiancée."

Bertha interrupted saying, "Michael, you know better than that. There isn't a deceitful bone in Amanda's body."

"I know, Bertha, but, you have to understand what my life was like when I was growing up. Every one of my girlfriends dropped me like a hot coal when someone better came along and you have to admit that a multi-millionaire heir is a sight better than a simple manager of a major company.

"Anyway, I drove several blocks arguing with myself about whether I did the right thing or not. After a while, I convinced myself that I had jumped to an incorrect conclusion and I went

back to see if Amanda would forgive me and let me drive her home. When I got back to the mansion, I found out that Reginald had given Amanda a ride home almost immediately after I had left so, with a heavy heart, I started driving home. When I was about a mile or so from Amanda's apartment complex, I saw flashing red-and-blue lights and knew there had been an accident up ahead. I had to take a detour to get home.

"I got home and went to bed intending to call Amanda Saturday morning and apologize for leaving her alone at the party. Two hours or so after I went to bed, I got a telephone call from Piedmont Regional Hospital asking me to come down there. When I arrived, I spoke with a Dr. Macaca." Michael started having difficulty talking due to strong emotions. Finally, after several seconds, he composed himself enough to continue. "He . . . he said . . ." Once again, his emotions stopped him for several more seconds before he could continue. "Amanda was in a bad accident and was severely injured." Everyone gasped. "The Reynard limousine was struck by a drunk driver traveling at a high rate of speed attempting to elude police. The vehicle struck the limousine at the door Amanda was sitting next to causing her injuries. The drunk driver was killed in the accident. Amanda has a broken tibia, fibula, femur, radius, ulna, humerus, and clavicle. All of her ribs on her right side are broken, two of her ribs punctured her right lung, and one of her ribs punctured her diaphragm and lacerated her stomach and liver.

"Amanda was taken to Piedmont Regional Hospital where she endured twelve hours of emergency life-saving surgery. Currently, she's in an induced coma until she heals enough to breathe without pain. Likely, she won't be walking for at least three months." Amanda's closest friends drew a shocked breath.

Michelle said, "Is she in intensive care?"

"No. She's in a room. In fact, I spent the last two nights in the room reading to her."

Wanda laughed nervously and said, "Michael, if she's in a coma, she can't hear you."

"Dr. Macaca thought so, too, until he performed an experiment." Every looked at Michael with curiosity and he added, "He watched her monitors while I talked to her. As I spoke to her, her breathing, heart rate, and brain function improved slightly. I made one of my silly little jokes and we both heard a soft snort afterward. It seemed she was laughing at my joke."

Bertha said, "I had heard that some doctors were beginning to believe that people in a coma were more aware of their surroundings than we think they are."

Michael replied, "Well, I'm sure that Amanda is."

Mr. Blaidd looked at all of the vice-presidents and said, "Michael, if you want some time off to help take care of Amanda, I'm sure we could give you the time you need." All of the vice-presidents nodded in agreement.

"Thank you, Mr. Blaidd, but, I'd be staying at home all day since Mrs. Fuchs is spending all day in Amanda's room and it isn't a secret how she feels about me."

“You could catch up on the sleep you lose staying with Amanda at night.”

Michael laughed and said, “I don’t read to Amanda all night long. After couple of hours, I kiss her good night and lay down on the sofa in her room. The head nurse even brings me a cover. So, I get enough sleep to allow me to work the next day. Thank you, though.”

Michelle said, “I’m going to see her. What room is she in?” Everyone nodded in agreement.

“She’s in Piedmont Regional Hospital, Room North 1216 East.”

Wanda said, “I’m going to go see her after work. I’ll bring Robert.” She thought for a couple of seconds before turning to Michael and saying, “Michael, what does she look like?”

Once again, emotions grabbed hold of Michael before he could say, “She’s in a full-body cast from her neck to her pelvis. Her right leg is in a cast from her pelvis to her foot. Her jaw is wired shut and swollen. I have no doubt she’s got a catheter to empty her bladder. Naturally, her eyes are swollen shut and she’s got wires hooking her to several monitors. She’s got a breathing and feeding tube in her mouth and her muzzle is taped shut to keep those tubes in place. All in all, she’s a sorry looking sight but, she’s alive and that’s most important to me.”

Wanda said, “I’m still going to go see her after work.” Everyone nodded their head in agreement.

The day was slow. Michael did his normal rounds of all the departments to verify there were no pressing issues that he hadn’t been informed of. He had his daily 0300 meeting with his staff. During this meeting, Michael, once again, told the story of Amanda being in the hospital and why. Albert swore that he would make certain Michelle made it to the hospital to see Amanda. Everyone in Michael’s department knew of his relationship with Amanda and everyone swore they were going to visit her. At the 0430 meeting, Michael gave his weekly report and, once again, assured Mr. Blaid and Mr. Schimpanse that he didn’t need extra time off this time adding that work was cathartic and would keep his mind off Amanda’s troubles.

Finally, at 1100, Michael finished the last of his daily paperwork, a requisition for 20 cases of printer paper. After signing his approval, he placed the requisition in his out box, closed and locked his desk, retrieved his lunch box, walked out of his office, and closed and locked the door.

At the same time that Michael was closing up shop, every one on the 12th floor was doing the same thing. Bertha, Wanda, and Michelle were talking with each other as they headed toward the elevator. Wanda said, “We are going to go see Amanda, aren’t we?”

Bertha said, “Are you kidding? Of course, we are. Jonathan is going even if I have to hogtie him.”

Wanda laughed and said, “Jonathan doesn’t seem to be the kind of guy who’s into being bondage.” Bertha gave her a dirty look causing Wanda to laugh even harder.

Michelle, who had been laughing, too, said, “You know Albert is going to want to go. He used to flirt with Amanda all the time.” She paused for a moment before adding, “Believe it or not, that made me so jealous and I don’t know why.”

The elevator door opened, they entered and Wanda said, “I know why.” Michelle gave her a curious look. “Albert is quite attractive and, despite his actions, he’s quite nice. Despite your bad experience when you were 14, I believe you’ve been attracted to him all along.” Bertha nodded in agreement.

When they reached the entrance to the foyer, they were met by their fiancés. Robert said, “Wanda, I’m going to go see Amanda tonight. I’m guessing that’s your plan as well.”

Wanda kissed Robert and, looking at Bertha and Michelle, said, “Now, you know why I love this guy. He knows what I want without me even telling him. Sometimes, he knows what I want before I know.”

“I’ll take that as a yes.” Robert said as he smiled at her.

Jonathan and Albert hugged and kissed their respective fiancées and the six of them headed toward the front door while talking about visiting Amanda. They all agreed to go straight to the hospital and meet there.

After arriving at the hospital and receiving permission to visit Amanda, all six entered the proper elevator and rode to the 12th floor where Wanda approached the nurse’s station and asked for directions to Amanda’s room. She returned to the group and they walked down the corridor to Amanda’s room. When they entered, they were confronted by a curiously upset vixen.

In a very sarcastic voice, Ophelia said, “Who are you and why have you entered my daughter’s hospital room?”

Wanda was the only one who wasn't cowed by Ophelia's attitude. She said, "I'm Wanda Anaguma and we work with Amanda at SoGa Industries."

Ophelia said, "You mean you used to work with my daughter. By the time she gets out of the hospital, Edward will have replaced her. She won't be able to pay her rent so she'll lose her apartment."

Bertha look at everyone and said, "Well, we'll pay her rent for her."

Ophelia got a smug look on her face and said, ""Her rental agreement says that no one but Amanda can pay her rent."

Michelle said, "Why would she sign that type of an agreement?"

Ophelia just shrugged her shoulders. "Now, if you don't mind, please leave. I don't want my daughter being upset by your presence."

Wanda started fuming. She said, "Likely as not, it's your presence which is upsetting her."

She started to take a step toward Ophelia when Robert eased between them. Robert said, "Come on, Wanda. Maybe we can see her later."

Ophelia responded with, "Well, I'm having all of you banned from her room so you won't be allowed to bother her any more."

Wanda turned around and, with tears in her eyes and voice, said loud enough for Ophelia to hear, "Michael's right, Robert. He keeps telling us that she doesn't care one whit about her daughter's well-being. This proves it to me."

The group took a couple of steps before Wanda said, "Robert, was I really that bad before your parents talked to me?"

Robert looked over his shoulder at Ophelia as he said, "You were bad, Sweetheart, but, at least, you listened to reason."

Ophelia's response was a simple but obvious, "Humph!"

The group reached the elevator and Albert pressed the down button. When the doors opened, they nearly ran into Jacob as he was walking out. Jacob looked at them for a second before he said, "Hello Wanda, Bertha, Michelle. Did you visit with Amanda?"

Jonathan said, “We were going to until your wife kicked us out of her room and threatened to ban us from ever visiting her.”

“Really? Come with me.”

Jacob led them back to the room. They led Jacob in and heard Ophelia say, “I thought I told you to leave. I don’t want you to upset Amanda with your presence.”

Just as Ophelia finished speaking, Jacob pushed through the crowd. “Ophelia,” he said, “what are you doing?”

“I’m trying to keep them from stressing Amanda. You know she needs to avoid stress right now.”

“I know, Ophelia. But, these ladies and gentlemen are her friends and co-workers. She used to see them almost everyday. If they were stressful for her to be around, she would have been stressed by them then. She never complained about these six people.”

Bertha made her way to the side of Amanda’s bed. She was looking at her with sadness when the look on her face changed from concern to curiosity. She bent closer and looked at the left side of Amanda’s face. As she looked, the look of curiosity changed to one of abject fear.

While Bertha was peering closely at Amanda’s face, Ophelia noticed and said, “Get away from my daughter!”

Bertha said, “Ma’am, how long has Amanda had this knot on her jaw?”

Ophelia said, “I don’t know.”

Jacob asked, “Why?”

“All of her injuries are on the right side of her body. This knot is on the left side of her jaw and I know it wasn’t there when she was at work Friday.”

Ophelia said, “She must have been struck by something in the accident.”

“No ma’am. I was in an abusive marriage for 15 years. I had to hide numerous places where my ex-husband would hit me. That knot is shaped like a fist and I should know as many times as my ex-husband would pound me with his fists. Believe me, somebody hit Amanda in the jaw before the accident.”

Ophelia said, “It must have been that human, Jacob. He was angry when he found out that Amanda was Reginald’s fiancée.”

“No, he wasn’t, Ophelia. He was sad. He thought that Amanda had deceived him about her feelings for him. Besides, I don’t think he’s capable of hitting a woman, even in self-

defense. But, I guess we won't know for sure who hit Amanda until she's revived from her coma."

"Well, I know, Jacob. I've been warning you about that human ever since we met him. I only wish Amanda could see him the way I do."

Wanda jumped in. "Mrs. Fuchs, I've about had it with your attitude toward Michael. I used to have the same attitude about humans. I never hid it from anyone, especially Michael. Do you know how Michael reacted? He treated me with kindness. But, that didn't change my attitude. However, Robert's parents pointed out to me that Michael shouldn't be judged by what humans used to do to our ancestors both feral and Humanimal. My ancestors were killed because they were considered a nuisance. Humans made hats out of the skins of my ancestors. Michael had never denied these things but, he said he was opposed to killing an animal for the so-called 'thrill of the hunt'."

"I don't care," was Ophelia's response. "Humans killed our ancestors."

Robert joined in at this point. "So, using your logic, I should hate everyone in this room because all of your ancestors killed my ancestors . . . and ate them. Is that what you're saying, Mrs. Fuchs?" That stopped Ophelia in her tracks for a moment. "But, I don't hate you or Wanda or anyone else in this room. I love Wanda and in a few weeks, I'll have the pleasure of sleeping next to her as her husband. As I understand it, caracals kill servals in the wild but, Albert and Michelle are happy together and are even expecting a kit in a few weeks. Don't you think you should let go of the past?"

"No! Humans abused all of our ancestors! They used dogs to hunt animals and cats to hunt and kill mice and rats. They kept foxes, rabbits, and minks for their fur. Humans are just abusive to animals."

"They also kept those animals for companionship, Mrs. Fuchs." Michelle interjected. "Michael told me himself that he had a pet tiger and a pet fox. He said that his tiger lived for 20 years and would play with the fox."

"That's right," Jonathan said, "he even said that Tiggy would quite often pick up Imp like a cub and carry her to their shared bed and would curl up with her like a mother tiger would do with her own cub."

"Imp!?" Ophelia said, in shock and anger.

"Yes, ma'am. He said when he first got Imp she would sneak up on Tiggy and jump on her to aggravate her. He said he would laugh at their antics as that 60 lb. Tigress would chase that 15 lb. Vixen through their house but would always be two steps behind Imp no matter how slow she ran. He really loved those two animals."

"It doesn't matter."

Michelle said, “It should. When I was 14, I was raped by a caracal just because my mother had married a cheetah when I was five, two years after my father had died. I hated all caracals because of it. When I met Albert, I was scared to death that he was going to rape me, too. One night, not long after Michael started working at SoGa, I needed a ride home from Bruno’s. The only person who lived in the general direction of my home was Albert. Michael took Albert aside and told him that if I said that he had said or done anything to offend me, Michael would beat him with an inch of his life. Albert was a gentleman all the way to my home. Because of Michael, I learned to trust Albert and I eventually fell in love with him. You need to let go of those past transgressions and judge Michael on his own merits.”

Ophelia just said, “Humph!”

Jonathan said, “Come on, everyone. We aren’t going to convince her to change her mind. She’s the epitome of a bigot. Her mind is made up; she isn’t interested in the facts.”

After everyone left, Ophelia grabbed Jacob in a hug and buried her face in his chest. Jacob could feel her softly sobbing. After several seconds of this, she looked up at him and said, “Is it true, Jacob? Am I a bigot?”

“Ophelia, you won’t give Michael a chance for no other reason than he’s a human. What do you think?”