

Chapter 56

Reginald's Grandmother

As they left Juanita's Cantina, Reginald caught Michael's arm and said, "What did you mean when you said that I would do the right thing in a very short amount of time?"

"Just follow me and you'll see."

They crossed the street and walked down the block until they reached the corner where Reginald had been standing when Michael found him earlier. Instead of stopping at the corner, Michael rounded it and headed straight for the house that Reginald had been looking at.

"Michael, where are we going?" Reginald said as he started slowing down.

Michael stopped and waited for Reginald to catch up. "Reg," he said, "would you like me to stop calling you Reg?"

"You know I would, Michael, but, what does going to that house have to do with you calling me Reg?"

"What did I tell you earlier about why I started calling you Reg again?"

"You said it was because I was being stupid."

"Exactly. If you want to convince me you aren't stupid, you'll come with me and do exactly what I tell you to do."

Reginald growled but, when Michael started walking again, he was right behind him.

About two-and-a-half minutes after leaving Juanita's Cantina, Michael and Reginald were standing outside of the house where Michael had seen Rosa earlier. "Now, Reg," he said, "I want you to stand right there." He indicated an area just past a corner where the recessed front door was located. "Stay out of sight until I call you over here. If you can see this door, you aren't out of sight. Got it?" Reginald nodded his head. "Good. Now get over there."

After Reginald hid himself, Michael reached up and knocked on the door. After a few seconds, an attractive Arctic fox with rabbit ears, rabbit muzzle and in her middle 20s opened the door. "Michael," she said, "Rosa said she saw you earlier. Are you finished with your errand?"

“Yes, ma’am. Could I speak with Rosa for a few seconds?”

“Of course, you can. Come inside while I go get her.”

“That’s all right, Erica. I’ll wait here.”

“Michael, what kind of chicanery are you planning?”

“Absolutely none, Erica.”

Looking at him suspiciously, Erica said, “Very well. I’ll be right back.”

A few seconds later, Miss Hoppenmeyer returned leading Rosa. “Here she is, Michael. Why are you so secretive about talking to her? Did you stop seeing Amanda so you could start seeing Rosa?”

“No, Erica, but I’d rather speak with Rosa in private. It’s a personal matter.”

“Very well.”

Rosa looked at Michael suspiciously. “Why the secrecy, Miguel?”

Michael turned toward where Reginald had hidden himself and crooked his finger. Rosa had followed Michael’s gaze and when she saw Reginald, a snarl formed on her muzzle and she literally growled, “What is he doing here, Michael?”

“He has something he wants to tell you, Rosa.”

“Well, he has nothing to say that I wish to hear.”

“I think he does, Rosa. Your sister-in-law forgave your brother for committing adultery. Don’t you think you could at least listen to what he has to say?”

Still scowling at Reginald, Rosa said, “Speak and then go away. Our son does not need to be around a father that who does not want to claim him.”

Reginald opened his mouth but Michael interrupted. “Rosa, I’m sure that Mrs. Hoppenmeyer would rather not draw unnecessary attention to her home so, could we step inside while Reg tells you what he needs to say?”

Rosa thought for several seconds before, in a non-committal voice, said, “Oh, all right. Come inside.”

They entered the house and Erica stepped into the living room carrying a mixed race kit. Michael judged it to part-Arctic hare, part-Arctic fox, and part-Arctic wolf. She was about to speak when she saw Reginald. “What are you doing in my home?”

Reginald asked, “Do I know you?”

In a somewhat sneering manner, she said, “You’ve never seen me before but, you’re Reginald Reynard, aren’t you?”

“The third, yes.”

“Reginald Reynard, III? Was your grandfather Reginald Reynard?”

“Senior, yes.”

Mrs. Hoppenmeyer turned around and left the room leaving three very confused individuals. As soon as she left the room, she called out, “Grandmother! You were right! He’s here!”

Reginald looked at Rosa and asked, “What’s that all about?”

In a less than friendly tone of voice, Rosa answered, “I have no idea.”

Reginald said, “Rosa, please let me explain.”

At that moment, an older Arctic fox vixen entered the living room. She stopped just inside the doorway and stared at Reginald for several seconds before speaking. “Is it true? Are you Reginald Reynard, III?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“How is your grandfather?”

“He died two weeks ago.”

Without the slightest hint of surprise in her voice, the vixen said, “How did he die?”

“He had a massive stroke while berating national police officers for violating contract laws.”

A touch of sadness crossed the vixen’s face as she said, “I told him 45 years ago that his temper would be the death of him. I’m surprised it took this long.”

Reginald asked her, “Who are you and how do you know so much about Grandfather?”

“He never told you about me?” She huffed a laugh. “That doesn’t surprise me. I’m your grandmother, Olivia.”

Reginald looked at her in shock. “My—my grandmother? Grandfather said you died

shortly after giving birth to my father.”

She smiled. “That sounds like something he would tell you. He wanted to forget I ever existed, especially after I re-married.”

“Who was that young lady that called you?”

“She’s my granddaughter, Erica. I guess you’d call her your half-cousin.”

“Your granddaughter?”

“Yes. She’s the result of my second marriage.”

“She’s not Arctic fox; she’s not even full-blood fox.”

“Yes, I married an Arctic hare. My son, Marcus, married an Arctic wolf and they had Erica.”

“How did Grandfather wind up with custody of dad?”

A look of extreme sadness crossed Olivia’s face. “I married your grandfather when I was 18. Eight months later, I gave birth to your father. When he was shown to your grandfather, all he did was look at him and turn away. He was too busy running Reynard Manufacturing to care about his own son. He rarely touched me in bed. In fact, it was a rare night when he even slept with me.”

Michael said, “Was he cheating on you?”

“No. He was too busy working. He didn’t have time to sleep with me. He rarely slept more than 3 or 4 hours a night.

“Anyway, after a couple of years, he filed for divorce. He tried to get custody of your father but, at that time, he wasn’t strong enough to convince the judge to grant him custody.

“About a year after the divorce, when I was 21, I met Brian Hoppenmeyer. He was the exact opposite of Reginald. He was kind, loving, caring, everything that Reginald wasn’t. About six months after we met, he asked me to go out with him and I jumped at the chance. We started dating and the more we dated, the more I fell in love with him.

“Finally, after about 3 months of dating, we started sleeping together. We slept together every time we went out and we went out 3 or 4 nights a week. Two months after Brian and I started sleeping together, I started experiencing morning sickness. I thought my birth control was working but, it must have failed because, I went to the doctor and he confirmed that I was two months pregnant. When Brian found out, he was ecstatic. He got on his knee and proposed to me. I knew he was sincere and I gladly accepted. Somehow, Reginald heard about my pregnancy.

“Reginald visited my apartment and said, ‘Is it true?’

“‘Is what true?’ I asked.

“‘You’re pregnant. Is it true?’”

I took a deep breath and said, “‘Yes. I’m pregnant.’

“‘Is it also true that you’ve been sleeping with a hare?’

“‘Yes. His name is Brian Hoppenmeyer.’

“‘You slut! How dare you sleep around while my son is living with you!? You not only slept with someone without being married to him, you slept with someone that isn’t a even an Arctic fox! Only a slut would do something like that! I’ll have my son back by the end of next week! Just you wait!’ Then, he laughed, turned around, and left my apartment.

“Sure enough, the next day, I got a summons to the divorce court. The summons said that I had to appear in the courtroom the following Monday. When I arrived, accompanied by my lawyer, I sat in my assigned chair and waited. A few minutes later, Reginald arrived with his lawyer, Mr. Zorrillo. Reginald had a smug look on his face as he and Mr. Zorrillo took their seats. Brian was seated in the spectator seats directly behind me. Every now and then, Reginald would look at Brian and glare daggers at him.

“Finally, the judge arrived and we all stood as required. The judge sat down and we were allowed to sit. The bailiff announced the case and the lawyers started their cases. My lawyer called me to the witness stand and asked his questions. Finally, Mr. Zorrillo stepped up and started questioning me. The first question he asked was, ‘Mrs. Reynard, is it true that you are married to Mr. Reynard?’

“‘No, it isn’t true.’

“‘What do you mean?’

“‘I mean that over a year ago he divorced me.’

“‘I don’t think so, Mrs. Reynard. I did some research and the divorce was never finalized. So, you’ve been sleeping with another man while still married to my client.’

“‘No! I’ve got a copy of the decree at home. I didn’t start dating anyone . . .’

“‘Brian Hoppenmeyer?’

“‘Yes, Brian Hoppenmeyer. I didn’t start dating Brian until the divorce had been finalized for six months. It was three months after that before we started sleeping together.’

“‘I beg to differ, Mrs. Reynard.’

“‘About what, Mr. Zorrillo?’

“‘Your whole story. There are witnesses who say that, shortly after you moved out of your husband’s house, men were seen visiting you and leaving your apartment late at night. I’m prepared to call at least 12 witnesses who will attest to the fact that each one of them spent at least one night with you prior to the date you claim the divorce was finalized.’

Reginald and Rosa both gasped. Reginald said, “Did you say 12 men claimed to have had sexual relations with you while you were still married to Grandfather?”

“Yes, why?”

Rosa said, “When I brought a lawsuit to have Reginald declared the father of my Hernando, his grandfather’s lawyer brought 12 men who claimed to have slept with me even though I’d never engaged in sexual relations with anyone but Reginald.”

Michael said, “Well, at least he stuck with the same game plan.”

Olivia continued, “Anyway, I said, ‘You can bring all the witnesses you want and they can say whatever you tell them to say but, that won’t make their story one whit true. Before I met Brian and we started sleeping together, I had never had sexual relations with anyone but Reginald.’

“Mr. Zorrillo said he had no more questions and I was allowed to step down.

“I was the last witness my lawyer had so Mr. Zorrillo started calling his witnesses. One after another witness after witness, none of whom I had ever seen before in my life, stepped forward and claimed to have seen man after man enter my apartment early in the evening and, normally, not leave until the next morning. When my lawyer cross-examined these witnesses, they all stuck by their stories even when my lawyer presented testimony that said that they were lying. Even when asked to give specific dates, they stood by their stories.

“Then, Mr. Zorrillo started calling the men who claimed to have had sexual relations with me. They all told the same story. The story of how I met them at a bar and invited them home with me. They even described my naked body almost perfectly. I was at a loss as to how they could know this information until I remembered that they were witnesses for Reginald and Reginald had seen me naked numerous times during the two years we were married and sharing a bed. When I brought this to the attention of my lawyer, he asked the witnesses if they had had any dealings with Reginald or Reynard Manufacturing. They all denied it even when my lawyer produced evidence that every one of them not only had dealings with Reginald and/or Reynard Manufacturing but also owed them a large sum of money. He also implied that they had been offered the opportunity to erase this debt if they bore witness against me. Every one of them denied this accusation. They even went so far as to accuse my lawyer of creating this evidence

because he knew that I was guilty of what I was being accused of. Even Mr. Zorrillo demanded that the evidence be stricken from the case for that same reason. My lawyer and I were both shocked when the judge stated that he agreed with Mr. Zorrillo and he struck the evidence from the case.

“After the closing arguments, the judge stood and announced that he would consider the evidence and testimony and return with a decision as soon as he could. I was devastated. I was scared and on the verge of tears. For some odd reason, I believed that the judge was going to rule in favor of Reginald.

“About 5 minutes after leaving, the judge returned and made his announcement, ‘Since there is no evidence that the accusations against Mrs. Reynard are inaccurate and there is no documentation stating the the marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Reynard was ever declared final, it is my decision that Mrs. Reynard is guilty of adultery and not acting in the best interests of her son. Therefore, I am required by law to remove Reginald Francis Reynard, Junior from the household of Mrs. Reynard and grant custody of him to his biological father, Reginald Reynard, Senior. I am also denying her visitation rights because it is my belief that she would take the kid and leave the jurisdiction of this court thereby violating the decision of this court to grant custody of the kid to the biological father. I am also officially declaring the marriage between Reginald and Olivia Reynard to be dissolved as of this moment. You each will receive documentation within a week so stating. Case closed.’

“Needless to say, I was devastated. None of my witnesses testimony was even considered. In fact, their testimony was completely ignored, even the fact that the dates several of the men claimed to have engaged in sexual relations with me would have been impossible since I was out of town visiting family on those dates. Even the testimony of my boss who had sent me on business trips on those dates was ignored.

“That evening, Mr. Zorrillo arrived at my apartment with a dozen police officers to take my son from me. I wasn’t even allowed to tell him good-bye and that I loved him.” Olivia, who had taken a seat to tell this story, stopped talking for a few seconds as she worked to control her emotions and wipe her eyes. “Anyway, I wasn’t going to allow Reginald defeat me that easily. In order to prevent Reginald from having any more ammunition to use against me, I waited until I received the second divorce decree before I allowed my marriage to Brian to proceed. We were happily married for 40 years before he passed away five years ago.” Once again, Olivia wiped a tear from her eyes as she thought about how happy she had been with Brian.

Speaking to Olivia but looking at Reginald, Rosa said, “He is just like his grandfather. When I went to court to have him declared the father of my Hernando, he did the same thing.”

Reginald said, “No! No, Rosa. It wasn’t me. That was Grandfather’s doing. Grandfather wouldn’t even let me take the witness stand, Rosa. I love you. I have loved you from the moment I laid eyes on you. I wanted to tell you but I knew that Grandfather would disown me and kick me out of the house.”

“If you truly loved me, you wouldn’t have cared. You would have demanded to tell your

story.”

“I did. Mr. Weaselton listened to Grandfather and wouldn’t call me. Since I wasn’t on your lawyer’s witness list, I was never called. I swear, Rosa. That’s the truth.”

“Why would your grandfather kick you out of the house if you admitted to being Hernando’s father?”

Olivia said, “For the same reason he took Reginald, Junior from me. He’s a racist. He believed that foxes in general and Arctic foxes in particular, were superior to any and all other races. He didn’t want his blood tainted with wolf blood.

“After he took Reginald from me, Brian and I got married and a few months later, I gave birth to our first son. We named him Aaron. Brian loved Aaron as much as I loved him.

“A couple of months after Brian and I got married, someone started vandalizing our home by painting very racist things on the walls of our house. We filed a police report and, after a couple of days, one of our neighbors contacted the police and told them that he had been approached by someone asking him if he would be interested in joining a group of people to paint the sides of the house of the fox and hare couple. He said that the only reason he didn’t say anything sooner was because he thought they were going to paint the outside of the house to improve the looks of the house not put racist things on it.”

Michael asked, “Did you believe him?”

“Yes. This neighbor was the first to welcome us to the neighborhood.

“Anyway, he told the police the name of the person who tried to recruit him. The police brought that person in for questioning. He told all he knew. Shortly afterward, Brian and I were informed the recruiter had given a name that turned out to be a pseudonym. The recruiter said that the person he dealt with never showed himself so he didn’t even know his race.”

Michael said, “As likely as not, the person the recruiter dealt with was a sacrificial lamb.”

Olivia said, “A what?”

“A sacrificial lamb. It’s what you call someone who’s job is to ‘fall on the sword’ to protect someone else. Mrs. Hoppenmeyer, you have a suspect as to whom it is that was behind those attacks, don’t you?”

“Yes. I do and I’m not going to say who it is.”

Michael smiled. Then, he turned to Reginald and said, “Reg, didn’t you have something to say to Rosa?”

Rosa and Olivia looked at Reginald in shock and Rosa said, “Reginald, why is Michael

calling you, Reg?”

Michael continued smiling as Reginald said, “Because he thinks I’m stupid.”

Michael said, “I never once called you stupid, Reg. I never even said I thought you were stupid. Tell her exactly what I said.”

“He said that I was acting stupid and as long as I acted stupid, he was going to call me Reg.”

Olivia said, “Stupid? Stupid in what way, Reginald?”

Michael looked at Reginald as he continued smiling. This caused Reginald to glare at him. As Reginald glared at him, Michael indicated Rosa with his head and mouthed, “Go on.”

Slowly, Reginald turned his head and looked at Rosa. He took a deep breath and said, “Rosa, I’m terribly sorry for what my grandfather put you through. Throwing you out of our home with nothing on but your fur was bad enough but, what he did at the trial was, in my opinion, infinitely worse. I know you think I was denying Hernando’s parentage but I swear to you that I wasn’t. Grandfather wouldn’t allow me to testify because he was afraid I would admit that I was Hernando’s father and he was right. I love you, Rosa and I want to do the right thing by you.”

Then, Reginald shocked everyone in the room, especially Michael. He reached into his pants pocket and pulled out an emerald green rectangular box. Holding it in his left hand with his right hand resting lightly on the top, Reginald said, “I want to prove to you that it wasn’t me that denied that I’m Hernando’s father.” He opened the box and laying inside the box were matching engagement bracelets. “Rosa,” he continued, “I’ve done a lot of improper things for the last three years and I’m not proud of any of them. But, the one good thing I have done is love you. If you can find it in your heart to forgive me for not doing a better job of showing my love for you and do me the great honor of allowing me to be the father to Hernando the I’ve wanted to be, I’ll always be there for the both of you and any future pups we may have. Rosa Lobo-Rojo, will you be my wife?”

Despite the tears in her eyes, There was a toughness in Rosa’s voice when she said, “If you truly mean what you just said, Reginald, you will repeat those words in front of my family. If you do that, I will know that are sincere and I will accept your offer of marriage.”