

Chapter 57

Reginald Officially Proposes

“Rosa,” Reginald said, “you remember your father and brother threatened to kill me if they ever saw me again. Right?”

“Yes. If you do as I asked, you will prove your love for me and you will prove you are a man.”

Reginald couldn't sweat but, he was panting hard. He turned his head to look at Michael and Michael could see pure unadulterated fear in his eyes. Michael said, “Reginald, how about Amanda and I accompany you to Rosa's home. Her family thinks very highly of us. I'm sure they won't kill you while we're there.” Michael was smiling as he said the last.

Reginald, however, was less than amused. “Very funny, Michael.”

“Do you want her family to forgive and accept you?”

“Yes.”

“Then, we'll do it my way.”

“Be sure you put, ‘He trusted a human’ on my tombstone.” Michael, Rosa, and Olivia laughed heartily.

Olivia said, “Rosa's family knows that I'm Rosa's employer, Reginald. How about I go with all of you and explain to her family.”

“Thank you, Grandmother. I would appreciate that.”

That evening, Michael arrived at Amanda's apartment and was greeted with a bear hug, literally. Michael said, “Bertha, what are you doing here?”

“I am taking you and Amanda out to dinner to celebrate your success in getting her out of that Arranged Marriage Contract. Now, she won't have to see that rich Arctic fox again.”

“Well . . .”

Bertha got a mother's knowing look on her face as she said, “Well what?”

Amanda walked into the living room just at that moment. “Well what, what?” She asked.

“We’ve been invited to the Lobo-Rojo home for dinner on Sunday.”

“Fantastic!” Amanda said, excitedly.

“But, there’s a small catch.”

Bertha leaned over and got right in Michael’s face as she said, “And?”

Michael instinctively took a step back as he said, “We’re escorting Reginald so he can ask Rosa to marry him.” He quickly covered his head with his arms.

Bertha gently but firmly took Michael’s arms and uncovered his head. She turned him so he could see her face as she asked, “Why are you escorting him?”

“Because, Raul and his father threatened to kill Reginald after the judge declared that Reginald wasn’t the father of Rosa’s son even though DNA evidence said that there was a 99.9% chance that Reginald was the father.”

“Do you blame them, Michael?”

“No. But, they don’t know the whole story.”

“The whole story?”

“Reginald’s grandfather wouldn’t allow him to testify because he knew that Reginald would admit to being the father of Raul’s nephew.”

“Reginald told you this?”

“Yes, he did, Bertha.”

“He must be telling the truth because I can’t imagine a man lying about that.”

“It does happen but, in a society where out-of-wedlock children aren’t ostracized, it isn’t necessary unless the man wants to take care of the mother for some reason.”

Amanda asked, “When are we supposed to be an escort service?” Bertha looked at Amanda in shock. Michael stifled a laugh, barely. Amanda looked at them with a combination of fear and anger. “What did I say?” She asked.

Bertha looked at Michael and said, “You better tell her. I couldn’t finish without laughing.”

“Gee, thanks, Bertha.” Michael looked at Amanda and said, “Sweetheart, ‘escort service’ is a euphemism for someone who works as a prostitute.”

The embarrassment that Amanda was feeling was palpable. Michael took her in his arms, looked at Bertha and said, “This, Bertha, is one of the reasons I love this vixen.”

Bertha grinned broadly enough that her impressive canines were visible. She said, “I remember when I was that innocent. It’s one of the reasons Papa had to arrange a marriage for me.” A look of sadness replaced Bertha’s grin as she thought about her marriage. “It’s too bad my hus . . . I mean ex-husband didn’t see my innocence the way you see Amanda’s.”

Amanda finally pulled her head away from Michael’s chest and said, “When are we supposed to accompany Reginald to Rosa’s home?”

“Sunday.”

“So, we are going to be there to make sure that Reginald lives long enough to ask Rosa to marry him in front of her family?”

“That’s right.”

“Are we going to his home?”

“Well, it would be easier for all parties concerned if we all showed up together. I’m trying to decide if we should arrive in my car.”

“I think so, Michael. If the Lobo-Rojo family see a limousine show up, they’ll probably be on the defensive from the start and won’t give Reginald a chance to talk.”

“I agree. We’ll explain that to him Sunday morning.”

Early Sunday morning, Michael was climbing the stairs to Amanda’s apartment. He passed the Protelo apartment without incident which caused Michael’s curiosity to grow. However, he continued up to Amanda’s apartment where he knocked his special knock and was rewarded by having Amanda’s voice telling him to come in.

Unlike most of the times when he visited, Amanda was fully dressed and sitting in her favorite chair and reading a book Michael recognized as one of the books he had read to her while she was in her coma. He closed the door and stood there enjoying how beautiful she looked. He knew what she would say if he complimented her so he kept quiet.

Michael watched Amanda as she read. Something seemed strange about how she was reading. Finally, it hit him and he smiled. He walked over to her and said, "May I?" She relinquished her grip on the book as he took it. Michael turned the book over. "Here. It's a lot easier to read if it's right-side up." He said, smiling.

Amanda stood up, hugged him and then, punched Michael's side as she said, "I should have figured you'd notice." Then, she kissed him.

Michael said, "I couldn't believe it when I walked in here and saw you ready. Are you that excited to see Reginald again?" He smiled mischievously.

Amanda glared at him as she said, "You know. I haven't bitten you in a while. I'm not afraid to do it again."

Michael laughed and said, "Oh? You mean you'd rather see Rosa and her family?"

Amanda stood up and slowly walked toward Michael. The upper lips on her muzzle formed into a snarl and her canines were exposed as she said, "You know, a tiger has an impressive bite force. I believe only hyenas have a stronger one. Shall we test this theory?"

As Amanda approached him, Michael was slowly backing toward the door of her apartment. He said, "How about we don't and say we did?"

Michael's back bumped to door as Amanda reached him. Suddenly, she launched her self at him and pressed her muzzle against his neck as she kissed him. After kissing his neck, she nuzzled him giving him small kisses. Michael was enjoying this until he remembered what they were supposed to be doing.

"Amanda," he said as a soft moan escaped his lips, "you need to get off me so we can get Reginald and take him to get engaged."

That snapped her back to reality. "Oh! That's right!" She moved Michael away from the door and said, "Come on, slow poke. Time's a-wasting!"

Michael laughed as he followed her out.

As they passed Angelique and Oskar's apartment, Michael said, "I haven't seen Angelique and Oskar in a few days. Have you?"

"They went to visit Oskar's family in south Afurica. Angelique said that she expects Oskar's family to start pestering them again about having pups."

Michael was quiet until they got into his car and he cranked it before he said, “I wonder if they can.” Amanda looked at him questioningly. “I mean. You know how sexually active they are. If she could get pregnant, don’t you think she would have by now?”

Amanda said, “Michael, Angelique is taking contraceptives.”

“Wait! Contraceptives? I thought Dr. Leo told me those weren’t safe for Humanimals.”

Amanda looked at him with an accusatory look. “Why were you asking Dr. Leo about contraceptives? Is there something you want to tell me?”

“Amanda! Come on! When we went to Jaguarville you were going to start your heat cycle that weekend. Remember?”

“Yes. What does that have to do with contraceptives? I thought you were asking about something to ease the effects of being in heat.”

“Well, I did. I thought he was referring to contraceptives.”

Amanda laughed and said, “No, Michael. Humanimals have had contraceptives for over 2000 years.”

“Oh!”

Several minutes later, they arrived at the Reynard Estate. Michael pulled up to the door and was greeted by Mr. Wiley. He said, “Welcome back, Master Thomson. It’s a pleasure to see you again.” Then, he whispered conspiratorially, “Are you here to ‘convince’ the young Master to accompany you somewhere?”

Amanda looked at Michael questioningly as he said, “Not today, Mr. Wiley. Actually, he asked me to take him somewhere.”

“Ah, good. By the way, if you and the young miss would please enter the mansion, Mr. Orso will escort you to see, Master Reginald.”

“All right.”

Michael started to park his car but, Mr. Wiley said, “Don’t worry about that, Mr. Thomson. I’ll park it for you.”

Michael and Amanda got out of the car and entered the mansion. Mr. Orso saw Michael and smiled warmly at him. “Follow me, please,” he said.

Mr. Orso led Michael and Amanda through the mansion until they reached an office. Mr. Orso knocked on the door and said, "Sir, they're here."

"Good. Send them in."

Mr. Orso opened the door and allowed them to enter. They entered the office as a middle-aged Arctic fox tod was standing up. The fox stuck out his hand as Michael and Amanda approached.

In a cheerful voice, the fox said, "You must me Michael Thomson, like the gazelle." Then, he laughed.

Surprised at the joviality of the fox, Michael smiled and shook his hand. "I'm going to assume you are Reginald Reynard, Junior." He said.

"That I am, sir, that I am." Junior turned to Amanda and said, "Hello Amanda. I hope you are doing well."

"Thank you, sir. I am." She replied, but she gave him a pleading look that said, "Please don't say any more."

Junior gave her a quick nod and returned his attention to Michael. "Reginald has told me that you two are going to try to help him today. Do you think you can avert a tragedy?"

Michael said, "I'll certainly do my best but the Lobo-Rajo family more or less adopted Amanda and me after I helped Raul get a job at SoGa Industries and saved his marriage as a result."

"I know the wolf community quite well. Despite my father's animosity toward anyone who isn't a fox, I managed to make friends with several different races. Wolves are very family-oriented. By helping one of their family members, you were asking them for permission to join their pack, their family. As a result, you are members of their family."

"Really? That's interesting." Michael turned to Amanda and, smiling, said, "How do you like that, Amanda. We're wolves now."

Amanda smiled and shook her head. As Amanda was shaking her head, someone knocked on the office door. Michael and Amanda turned their heads, saw the door opening, and an older Arctic fox vixen entering. They immediately recognized her.

"Mrs. Hoppenmeyer!" They said.

She smiled at them and said, "Hello Michael and Amanda. How are you doing today?"

Michael said, "We're doing fine. Strange coincidence that you're here today, Mrs.

Hoppenmeyer. Oh, by the way, I don't believe in coincidences."

Putting on an air of innocence, Olivia said, "Whatever do you mean?"

"I mean everything happens for a reason. You're here on the day that Amanda and I are supposed to escort your grandson to Rosa's home to prevent his life being shorter than he had hoped. Does Reginald know you're going to be joining us?"

"Yes. After the two of you left the other day, he returned and we talked for a couple of hours. He met my other kits and grand-kits. He also spoke with Rosa for a short time before he asked me to join you. Rosa said she wanted me to join you because her family have been asking when I would visit them again. I also wanted to see my son again after 45 years."

Amanda said, "Michael, do you know her?"

"Oh! I'm sorry, Amanda. Let me introduce you. Amanda, this is Reginald's grandmother, Olivia Hoppenmeyer. Olivia, this is my fiancée, Amanda Fuchs."

Amanda was shocked. "Reginald's grandmother!?"

Junior said, "Yes. My father had always told me that she had died as a result of complications from giving birth to me. So, imagine my surprise when Reginald walked in with a lady who claimed to be my mother."

Olivia looked at Amanda and asked, "Amanda Fuchs? Are you related to Jacob Fuchs?"

Amanda looked at her in shock but said, "Yes, he's my father." But, she gave Olivia a quick shake of her head and indicated Michael. Olivia gave a quick nod in understanding.

Just then, the doors to the office opened again and Reginald walked in saying, "Dad, I can't find Grandmother and Michael and Amanda are going to be here any minute." He looked up and said, "Oh!"

Olivia said, "I see you found me." Then, she laughed.

"Ha, ha. Very funny."

Michael smiled and said, "Well, Mr. Reynard, if you'll forgive us, we really need to be on our way. If everything goes according to plan, you'll have a future daughter-in-law by tonight."

Nervously, Reginald added, "Or a funeral to plan."

Michael put his arm around Reginald's shoulder and cheerfully said, "Well, either way, all of your troubles will be over."

Reginald glared at Michael and said, “You really should consider being a comedian. You know that?”

Everyone laughed and Michael said, “Come on.”

After driving for about 45 minutes, Michael pulled up outside the Lobo-Rojo home. From the moment they left the Reynard estate until now, Reginald got progressively more nervous and fearful. He never once asked Michael to turn around but everyone could hear it in how he spoke. Olivia was continually telling him that everything would be all right as she gently caressed his arm and shoulder.

Everyone got out of the car and Olivia had Reginald walk behind her which he dutifully, and gratefully, did. They walked up the walkway to the front porch of the house. When they arrived, Michael knocked on the door.

The door opened and Alejandro stepped out. When he saw Michael and Amanda, he grabbed both of them in a hug and said, “Miguel! Amanda! Rosa said you were coming over for dinner with us today! Come in! Come in!”

Then, he saw Olivia and hugged her saying, “Olivia! You are here, too!? Welcome! I am so . . . “

He noticed Reginald and continued with, “What are you doing here, pendejo? Do you not remember what Raul and I said to you three years ago?” He took a menacing step toward Reginald.

Rosa ran out of the door, “No, papá, no. Lo invité aquí hoy.” (“No, daddy, no. I invited him here today.”)

Alejandro replied, “¿Tú!? ¿Lo invitaste? Después de lo que te hizo a ti ya Hernando, invitarías a esto. . . este puto en nuestra casa!?” (“You!? You invited him? After what he did to you and Hernando, you would invite this . . . this puto into our home!?”)

Reginald whispered to Michael, “Do you know what is being said?”

“A little.”

“What?”

“You really don’t want to know.”

Alejandro said, “Very well.” Glaring at Reginald, he said, “You may enter my home but,

understand you are not welcome here.”

Nervously, Reginald said, “Thank you, sir. I hope by the time I leave I will change your mind about me.”

Rosa walked up to Reginald and whispered to him, “If you are sincere in what you said at Olivia’s day care, wait until after we eat. Papa and Raul tend to be more complacent then and will be more likely to accept your offer.”

“All right, Rosa. Grandmother is here because your family knows her. She’s hoping that they will be more willing to believe my offer of marriage if she’s here.”

The group entered the house and, when Reginald was recognized, the chorus of snarls and growls would have put a pack of feeding feral wolves to shame. At first, Reginald was nervous, terrified even, but, Rosa held his hand and whispered encouraging words to him. While this helped Reginald a little, he was still worried about the threats made against him three years earlier.

Michael sensing that it was necessary, decided to try a little humor to try to defuse the situation. “Whoa,” he said, “did I do something to upset you the last time Amanda and I visited?”

Raul said, “It is not you, Miguel. It is this pendejo.”

Rosa said, “Raul! You should not use such language in front of Mama.”

Araceli said, “It is all right, Rosa. I am thinking the same thing.”

“Mama, wait. Please!”

Rosa was near tears when Olivia said, “Everyone please. Let me speak.”

Alejandro said, “Go ahead, Olivia.”

“Thank you, Alejandro. Everyone please listen to what I am about to say. You know me. I have employed Rosa for almost three years in my day care center. But, there is something about me you don’t know. You don’t know it because I never thought to bring it up. I guess now is as good a time as any. Reginald Reynard, III, is my grandson.”

Everyone stared at her as she continued, “Yes, it’s true. Forty-five years ago, I was married to his grandfather and gave birth to his father. You weren’t there when Reginald and Michael visited my day care earlier this week. I won’t tell you what Reginald said; he should

say that himself. All I ask is that you let him speak. Will you allow him to do that?"

Araceli said, "We would not be Mexican red wolves if we denied him his opportunity to speak. Besides, we can always kill him after he speaks, right?"

Alejandro walked away as he said to Michael, "Miguel, come see the cabinet I'm building for Dr. Leo."

Curious, Michael excused himself and followed Alejandro. They went to the workshop where Alejandro turned toward Michael with a big smile on his muzzle. His curiosity piqued, Michael asked, "What's going on?"

Still smiling, Alejandro said, "We knew Reginald was coming here today."

Shocked, Michael said, "Do what?"

Now, laughing uproariously, Alejandro said, "Yes, Rosa told us the day she told him what he had to do for her to forgive him."

"But, but, why?" Michael pointed back toward the house.

"We still believe that Reginald needed to be reminded of what Rosa went through at the court hearing."

"So, that was a lesson you hope he'll learn and never forget?"

"More or less. Michael, I am pushing 60 years of age. I have seen people claim to change and don't. I have seen people act like they couldn't care less and be the first to jump to take care of someone else. I want to make certain that Reginald truly means it when he asks my Rosa to marry him."

Michael looked back toward the house with a nervous look but said, "Sir, I believe he does. On the day he talked to Rosa, I caught him staring at her and Hernando. He had a sad look on his face and he was mumbling something. I'm not certain what he was saying but it sounded like he was wishing he could change what had happened."

Now, Alejandro was looking nervously at the house. "Perhaps he truly means it. We will see after we have dinner. Yes?"

Michael smiled and said, "Si."

Now, they could hear yelling in the house. Alejandro frowned and said, "I believe we are needed inside. Come."

They returned to find Reginald cowering with Rosa's next older brother, Joaquin, standing over him in a menacing posture. Rosa was standing between them yelling at Joaquin in Spanish. Reginald was lying on the floor whimpering like a whipped pup. Olivia was cradling Reginald in her arms to try to protect him from Joaquin. Michael rushed to stand between Joaquin and Reginald. Upon Michael's arrival, Rosa turned to help Olivia hold and protect Reginald. When Rosa turned, Raul, who had just entered the living room and Alejandro stood on either side of Michael.

With anger bordering on hatred, Joaquin said, "Papa, Raul, Miguel, why are you protecting this puto. He deserves to die for the affront he did to Rosa."

Alejandro said, "Joaquin, you were not here when Rosa told us he was coming here today. He came here to prove to Rosa and us that what happened three years ago was not what he wanted. It was his grandfather's doing to make Rosa look like something she is not."

Reginald dabbed his nose with the back of his wrist and noted the blood on his white fur. Rosa held a handkerchief out and pressed it against Reginald's bloody nose. Olivia continued to hold Reginald in the loving embrace that only a grandmother can give as she glared at Joaquin.

Joaquin said, "What are you talking about? This pendejo denied he was Hernando's father."

Reginald said, "That isn't true. I never denied being Hernando's father."

"Then, why did you not admit it in court."

"Because my grandfather wouldn't allow me to speak. He wouldn't allow his lawyer to call me to the stand because he knew I would admit it. In fact, every time I tried to speak the judge ordered me to silence under penalty of contempt of court. I learned later that my grandfather had made a sizable contribution to the judge's re-election campaign, otherwise, he would have ruled correctly. That being that I am Hernando's father. This is why I'm here today. I was going to wait until after we ate to do this but, since my hand has been forced, I'll do it now."

Reginald got up on one knee, reached into his pants pocket, withdrew a rectangular box, and said, "Rosa Lobo-Rojo, ever since the first time I laid eyes on you, I've been enamored by your beauty. I never wanted to pressure you into doing anything that you didn't want to do. As we became closer and closer, I realized that soon we would become intimate and that made me more nervous than anything I had ever done before. Why you may ask? Because to me you were an angel and I wasn't worthy of your love. Yet, one day in your shy manner, you told me that you knew you weren't good enough for someone like me but you were in love with me. That day for the first time in my life, I made love with a woman and it was the most wonderful feeling I had ever experienced. I vowed in that moment that one day I was going to ask you to marry me. Today, Rosa Lobo-Rojo, is that day. Rosa, will you do me the great honor of

agreeing to be my wife?”

Then, Reginald opened the box and inside was a golden engagement bracelet. He removed the bracelet and presented it to Rosa. Michael saw exquisite scrimshaw engraving on the top and two hearts interlocked. One heart was made of alternating emeralds and rubies; the other heart was made of blue sapphires.

As he held the bracelet out to Rosa, Reginald said, “I remember you saying that you loved the blue sapphire so I used them to make your heart. Please accept this bracelet as a token of my love for you and as proof of your acceptance of my marriage proposal.”

Joaquin was dumbfounded. He said, “Are you serious? Is this all an act?”

Reginald didn’t react. He merely looked pleadingly at Rosa as she smiled at him. “Please say yes, Rosa, and make me the happiest fox on Earth.”

“What of your family?” She asked. “Will they not be upset with your choice of a mate?”

“Grandfather is dead; Grandmother definitely approves of you; Father and Mother are ecstatic that I have someone that I’m happy with. I don’t care what my siblings think and I care even less what Michael thinks.” He turned and grinned at Michael who overreacted to the perceived slight causing everyone, including Reginald, to laugh uproariously.

Rosa placed her wrist beneath the bracelet and allowed Reginald to buckle it in place. Then, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him with all the pent up passion of a woman who’s waited three years to hear those words come out of the mouth of the man she loves.

After the happy couple finished kissing, Reginald turned, glared at Michael, and said, “Did you know about that little trick they played on me? Tell me the truth or I swear Alphonse and Ryan will visit you with orders to bring back one of your shoes . . . with your foot still inside.”

Before Michael could reply, Araceli said, “Lunch is almost ready. We can talk more as we eat.”

Everyone walked to the dining room. Rosa sat next to Reginald and Amanda sat next to Michael. Hernando sat in Rosa’s lap as she fed him. Every now and then, Hernando would take a little bit of his food and offer it to Reginald who accepted it. Olivia smiled whenever he did this because her kits with Brian would do the same thing to him.

As they ate, Rosa said, “Reginald, Michael did not know of the trick we played on you. I told Mama and Papa that you were coming over and they suggested playing the trick on you. Joaquin was not home when we planned it so he did not know. Please forgive him and us.”

“All right, Rosa. I don’t believe you’d lie to me, especially after what I suffered just now

and the last three years.”

Reginald turned to Michael and said, “Do you mind if I visit you at your job tomorrow? I have something very important to discuss with you.”

“If it’s what I believe it is, why not ask Joaquin?”

Reginald cut his eyes toward Joaquin and said, “Michael, that wolf tried to kill me a few minutes ago, in case you’ve forgotten.”

“No, I haven’t forgotten. Do it here in front of his family.”

“Why?”

“Remember Reginald, he’s a wolf. Wolves are pack animals. The most important thing to a wolf is acceptance by his pack, his family. If you ask him now, in front of his pack, he’d cut his own throat by refusing and he’ll have to make sure you arrive at the wedding in one piece.”

Reginald thought about this for a few seconds. Finally, he came to a decision. He looked over at Joaquin and said, “Joaquin.”

“What do you want?” Joaquin replied, grumpily.

“I want you to be my Friend of the Groom.”

“Why do you not ask Miguel? You seem two seem to be close.”

“I did; he refused.”

“Then, why ask me? Do you not remember that I tried to kill you?”

“I remember; but, I know that as my Friend of the Groom you have to make sure I make it to the wedding. You will also be able to force me to follow through with the wedding and, as a result, make certain that I do what’s right by your sister.”

Everyone looked at Joaquin as Reginald glanced at Michael. Joaquin replied, “How do you know I will not try to kill you anyway?”

“I don’t but, because you love your sister and your nephew, you’d rather see her married to me than to see her an unwed mother.”

Joaquin thought for several seconds before saying, “Yes, you are right.”

“Plus, because of my status, I can provide for her wants and needs as well as the needs of my son and your parents.”

“That is also true. You would take care of my parents if you were to marry Rosa?”

“Joaquin, I may not be a wolf but, I understand how wolves think. The pack, the family, is the most important thing to them and with Rosa as my wife, your family becomes my family and foxes take care of their family.”

“Very well. You take care of my sister, your son, and my parents and I will not kill you.”

Breathing a silent sigh of relief, Reginald said, “I couldn’t ask for anything more.”