

Chapter 62

The Wedding, Part 2

The Ceremony

Michael stood in front of the mirror that had been set up in the Padre's office in the local chapel. He was desperately trying to tie the bow tie for his tuxedo, was losing the battle mightily and quietly calling down curses on the tie every time he failed. Nearby, the Groom's Witness, Reginald Reynard, III, was losing his battle to hold in his laughter. With each passing second and each failed attempt at tying the tie, Reginald's laughter became more and more noticeable. Finally, Michael couldn't take it any more.

"What is só funny?"

"Watching you wrestle with that bow tie." Reginald replied as he started to laugh out loud.

"I suppose you could do better."

"Yes, infinitely better."

Under his breath, Michael replied, "Of course, you can." Out loud, he said, "You've probably been tying them your whole life."

"No, not my whole life, but I have been since I was six."

"Well, why haven't you offered to help?"

Reginald stood, walked over to Michael, took the ends of the tie, and started tying it for him as he said, "Because, Michael, in the short time I've known you, there's one thing I've learned. You are an independent cuss and you want to do everything for yourself and only when you can't do something, do you ask for assistance."

Michael stood patiently as Reginald worked on the tie. When Reginald finished, Michael said, "Truer words were never spoken, Reginald. My parents, my real parents, taught me to be self-reliant and I abhor depending on someone else."

Reginald patted the tie to flatten it and said, "Considering I've never tied a tie for someone else, I think I did a good job."

"You know, I can tie shoelaces with no trouble. I've been doing that since I was four or five years old, but a bow tie beats my butt every time. How long did you say you've been tying them?"

"I wore my first tuxedo when I was six. Mr. Wiley dressed me and showed me how to tie a bow tie. I untied the tie and tried to tie it myself. I could see Mr. Wiley was a little upset when I untied the tie but he also understood that I wanted to do it myself. I failed só he retied it for me and said that after the party, he would teach me how to tie the bow tie. I spent the next two weeks practicing until I finally got it right. By doing it myself with someone to tell me where I made mistakes helped me to learn faster."

"I agree wholeheartedly. Whenever I would teach someone how to do something, I would show them how to do it and then I'd let them do it with me there to offer advice. They seem to learn things faster that way."

The door to the office opened and Drs. Leo and Tigresa walked in. Tigresa walked over to Michael and he could see her eyes were glistening with tears. She wrapped her arms around him in a hug and started sobbing softly.

"Now, Mom," he said, "You're going to ruin my tuxedo if you get your tears on it."

Tigresa pulled back and looked Michael in the eyes as she said, "Hush you. By calling me 'Mom', you gave me the right to cry today." Then, she gave him another hug.

Leo walked over and said, "Michael, how are you feeling? Nervous?"

"A little. Who would have thought less than two years ago that I would be getting married and not only getting married but marrying a beautiful Humanimal woman?"

Leo reached up to adjust Michael's tie and, in a surprised voice, said, "Did you tie this tie?"

"No, sir. Reginald tied it for me. It was whipping me and Reginald stepped in to save me from saying extremely bad words. Of course, he laughed the whole time."

"Of course, I was laughing. It was nice to find out that you aren't perfect."

"Perfect isn't a descriptive I'd use to describe me. More knowledgable might work but not perfect."

Leo said, "Be that as it may, I knew you hadn't tied this tie because it was too well-tied." Then, he laughed. It was a laugh that sounded like a cross between a human laugh and a lion's coughing roar.

"Very funny, Dr. Leo. When you and Dr. Tigresa bought this tuxedo, I told y'all that I couldn't tie a bow tie."

Leo laughed again. Tigresa said, "Leo, stop laughing at Michael. After all, who ties your bow tie? Hmm?"

Leo kissed Tigresa's cheek and winked at Michael as he said, "You do, Love."

Reginald watched the goings on with mild surprise. He said to Michael, "Is this normal?"

"Nah. They're being restrained because of you."

Before Reginald could respond, someone knocked on the door and said, "Michael, Reginald, it's time for you to make your appearance."

Michael said, "We're on our way."

Turning to Reginald, he said, “Come on, Reginald. Our presence is required for the ceremony to continue.”

As Leo and Tigresa left the office, Tigresa said, “I’m going to check up on Amanda and Victoria, Leo.”

Leo gave her a quick kiss and said, “All right, Dear. I’ll see you shortly.”

Meanwhile, Amanda and Victoria were in another office on the other side of the chapel. Ophelia was with them when Tigresa arrived. Victoria was assisting Amanda into her wedding dress. Victoria was amazed as how small Amanda’s body was.

“Amanda,” Victoria said, “I knew you weren’t a big woman despite your height, but I didn’t realize you were só tiny.”

“Victoria, I weigh 120 pounds.”

“But, you’re 5’10” tall; you’re as tall as I am. Most women our height weigh around 150 pounds. Heck, I weigh around 145 lbs. You’re almost 30 pounds lighter than I am. If I had never seen you eat, I’d believe you were anorexic.”

Ophelia said, “Victoria, she is a red fox. Our race isn’t known for being heavy.”

Victoria, who had looked at Ophelia as she spoke, turned, looked Amanda up and down and said, “But . . .”

“She gets her height from our tiger ancestry. But, to be honest, I can’t believe she’s as small as she is.”

Amanda smiled and said, “Michael has said the same thing. He swears he could pick me up with one hand.”

Tigresa replied, “He probably could. Leo says he’s as strong as Richard and Richard’s at least 3” taller and about 20 pounds heavier than Michael.”

Victoria was steadily tying the laces on the back of Amanda’s dress as she spoke, “That isn’t what I’m talking about, Mom. Michael’s human.”

Tigresa said, “I’m glad to see you’ve noticed.”

Everyone laughed. When they finished, Victoria said, “Oh, haha. That isn’t what I’m talking about.” She looked at Amanda and continued, “Humans are big for their size . . .” She looked down and continued, saying, “down there.”

Smiling, Amanda said, innocently, “Their feet?”

Once again, everyone erupted in laughter, even Victoria. After she stopped laughing, Victoria said, “No, silly. A little higher up. You know, halfway between their head and their feet.” To add a little emphasis, Victoria placed a hand on each hip, palms facing each other while giving Amanda a knowing look.

Amanda, who was enjoying the little tête-à-tête, said, “Victoria, what are you talking about?”

“Amanda, I’m going to slap you! You know what I’m talking about!” Everyone, except Victoria, laughed uproariously.

“Oh! You mean that!” Amanda said as innocently as she could.

Sarcastically, Victoria said, “Of course, I mean that! What do you think I could have been talking about?!”

Amanda got a sly look on her face and said, “I guess you would know how big a human is . . . down there.”

“What are you talking about, Amanda?” Victoria asked as she glanced quickly at her mother.

“Oh, come on, Victoria. You’ve dated humans and you told me all about their ‘equipment’.” Amanda smiled.

Victoria laughed nervously as she said, “I’ve never claimed to be a virgin, Amanda. You know that. But, you are and I just wanted to prepare you for your wedding night and seeing a guy naked for the first time. Plus, I remember my first time. It was a bit painful and my first time was with a lion.”

“Oh, I already know how big Michael is down there.”

There was a stunned silence for several seconds before Ophelia said, “I thought you were still a virgin, Amanda.”

“I am,” Amanda said, somewhat dejectedly.

Ophelia said, “Then, how . . .”

“Not long after the day you and daddy visited me and saw me with my head in Michael’s lap, I gave him a key to my apartment in case I needed help. I gave him that key because he lived about five minutes away and you and daddy lived about thirty minutes away. I thought it would be a good idea for him to have a key and I knew that I could trust him to not take advantage of it, even though I was secretly hoping he would.” Even Ophelia laughed when she said this. “Because I gave him a key, Michael felt obligated to give me one to his apartment.

“One day, Michael and I were going on a date and I arrived at his apartment a little early. When Michael didn’t answer my knock, I used the key he gave me and let myself in. I heard his shower running and, since I’d never seen Michael wearing less than a swimsuit, my curiosity was piqued. Naturally, I snuck to the bathroom door, opened it as quietly as I could, and stuck my head inside. Michael had a clear shower curtain and I could see that he was washing his hair. His eyes were closed.

He had his head down and couldn't see me but I sure saw him, every inch of him. I saw everything." She got a wistful look as she remember the incident.

Smiling, Tigresa said, "Did he find out you saw him?"

"Oh, yes. I was so fascinated by what I saw that I didn't realize he had finished rinsing his hair and was opening his eyes." Amanda paused and smiled as she added, "I didn't know a guy could scream like that."

Before anyone could reply, someone knocked on the door and said, "Amanda, the 'Wedding March' is about to begin." Everyone wished her well and headed to their respective seats.

After leaving the office, Michael and Reginald followed Padre Orso into the sanctuary through a doorway beside the altar. Michael glanced at the crowd seated in the pews and recognized a few of the people seated near the front and acknowledged them with a small nod. However, he couldn't see many of the people in the back. He was hoping to see the people he and Amanda had decided to invite to the ceremony. He thought a couple of them would cause a bit of a stink but he also knew Humanimals accepted things humans never would when he was growing up.

As Michael looked around, he suddenly felt Reginald grab his arm and whisper, "Michael, three rows from the back next to the wall on the right side, is that who I think It is?"

Michael looked toward the indicated seat just as the occupant, a tiger-striped white skunk, looked toward him. He saw her smile warmly. To her left was a rather buxom red-haired red fox vixen who waved vigorously toward him when she saw him looking in their direction. He also saw a striped skunk grab the vixen's arm and give her a stern look.

Michael smiled back and said to Reginald, "If you're thinking that's the world famous Zig Zag, you'd be right. Next to her is the equally famous Sheila Vixen and next to Sheila is Zig Zag's computer tech, Sabrina. Why do you ask?"

"Come on, Michael. Zig Zag and Sheila Vixen? How did you convince them to come to your wedding?"

"I didn't. Amanda and I met them when we went to Jaguarville not long after I started working at SoGa Industries."

"Wait a minute. You took Amanda all the way to Jaguarville? I'm surprised Mrs. Fuchs didn't go ballistic."

"First of all, I didn't take Amanda to Jaguarville. We were there on SoGa's dime and it was a business trip. They sent me there to find a new computer system for the company and Amanda was there to make sure I didn't spend too much money on the system.

"Second of all, when Mrs. Fuchs found out that Amanda was in Jaguarville and with me, she did go ballistic.

“Anyway, it seems there was a porn convention in Jaguarville the weekend before Amanda and I returned to Catlanna. While Amanda and I were walking through the Convention Center, we heard someone calling Amanda’s name and loudly. Amanda froze and slowly turned in the direction the voice came from. Just as she got fully turned around, a rather buxom red fox vixen with hair only slightly lighter than her fur color grabbed Amanda in a bear hug. After a few seconds, I heard another voice calling out, ‘SHEEEEEILA! What did I tell you about running off from everyone else!?’ I looked and saw a buxom tiger-striped white skunk wearing a tight top and an equally tight miniskirt walking very quickly toward us. She was none too happy until Sheila introduced her to Amanda.”

“How did you know her then? You don’t impress me as being a porn connoisseur.”

“It’s a long story, Reginald. It’s as long as I was in stasis. I used to read what were known as web comics. One of those comics had her in it.”

Reginald looked at Michael incredulously. Michael said, “Don’t ask. I don’t know for sure how it happened although I have suspicions. Anyway, it turns out that Sheila is Amanda’s cousin on her mother’s side and Zig Zag may be Amanda’s cousin on her father’s side.”

A cough behind them caught their attention. They turned and saw Padre Orso looking at them. They smiled sheepishly as he said, “The Prelude to the Wedding March is about to begin.”

As Padre Orso finished speaking, he nodded and the Wedding March Prelude began. Michael and Reginald turned toward the double doors at the other end of the sanctuary just as they opened to reveal a three-year-old lion-tiger cub wearing a light pink floor length dress with her orange hair professionally done and holding a basket full of rose petals. Anne was as pretty as any three-year-old could be in such a circumstance. As soon as the doors opened, she reached into the basket and retrieved five petals which she dropped at the threshold of the double doors. After dropping these petals, she started walking down the aisle. Anyone who paid close attention to her could see her mouth moving as she counted. Every three steps, she stopped, reached into the basket, removed five petals, and dropped them. Then, she would repeat the procedure.

As soon as Anne entered the sanctuary, the doors closed. When she was about halfway down the aisle. Padre Orso nodded a second time and the double doors opened again revealing a four-year-old Arctic fox-Mexican red wolf pup in a small baby blue tuxedo. Hernando was holding a light blue satin pillow with two wedding bracelets on it. After the doors were fully opened, he started walking slowly toward the altar while making certain that he didn’t jostle the pillow any more than absolutely necessary. As soon as Hernando passed the threshold of the double doors, they closed once again.

Anne reached the steps to the altar and climbed them. When she reached the top step, she looked into the basket and realized that she hadn’t used all of the flower petals and, as a child is wont to do, she made a decision and dumped the rest of the petals onto the floor where Amanda would eventually be standing causing a ripple of laughter to pass through the sanctuary and her mother to shake her head slowly and wearily.

About a minute after Anne arrived at the altar, Hernando arrived. He ascended the steps and reverently offered the pillow to Padre Orso who equally reverently accepted it. Padre Orso took Amanda’s bracelet and gave it to Reginald and gave Michael’s bracelet to Victoria. Then, with a smile and a small nod, dismissed Hernando and Anne who, holding hands, quickly descended the steps and

quickly walked to where their mothers were sitting and sat between them as they continued to hold hands.

As soon as Hernando and Anne were seated, Padre Orso looked toward the organist and gave her a short nod. The Prelude abruptly stopped and the strains of the Humanimal Wedding March started. Five seconds later, the double doors opened a third time revealing Amanda wearing a baby blue and light pink form fitting wedding dress standing next to Jacob who was wearing a black tuxedo. The wedding dress had a baby blue body and light pink sleeves. The skirt, which reached all the way to Amanda's ankles, was light pink. Even though the skirt was a little tight, it was loose enough to allow her to walk normally. Michael could see small sequins in rows on the front of the dress. The sequins on the body of the dress were light pink and the sequins on the skirt were baby blue. Amanda's hair, which she had been letting grow out after Michael's proposal, had been braided and wound around and stacked on top of her head. She was wearing a baby blue veil that covered her face to about an inch below her chin.

Amanda waited another five seconds before she and Jacob started walking slowly down the aisle toward the altar. As she approached, Michael thought how, even though Amanda had exposed herself to him on more than one occasion, he couldn't help thinking of how revealing Amanda's wedding dress was even though it covered her from her neck to her ankles and her arms to her wrists.

Amanda's steps, slow and deliberate, but fluid, slowly brought her closer to the altar. Her steps, to anyone inclined to think so, seemed intentional and planned. Jacob matched Amanda's steps perfectly. Just as Amanda reached the bottom of the altar's dais, the music stopped. Michael stole a quick glance at the organist and saw her smiling. Michael smiled back as he realized what few others likely had noticed. He decided that he was going to talk to the organist and ask about his suspicions during the reception.

Padre Orso looked at Amanda and Jacob as they stood at the bottom of the dais before he looked at the guests and said, "Beloved friends, family, and acquaintances of the couple before me, we are gathered here to witness the union of this man and this woman in holy matrimony. This is an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God in Paradise.

"Our Lord blesses and honors marriage with His presence. Even though the original marriage ceremony was given to humans, after we Humanimals were created, we saw the joy and happiness that humans enjoyed as a result of the institution of marriage. Even though we were slaves to the humans, we begged our human masters to allow us to implement marriage as a Humanimal custom which they agreed to allow. Because of this history, marriage is not to be entered into inadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

"The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for the mutual companionship, help, and support that each person ought to receive from the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Marriage was also ordained so that man and woman may find delight in one another. Therefore, all persons who marry shall take a spouse in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, for God has not called us to impurity but in holiness. God also established marriage for the procreation

of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord so that they may offer him their praise.

“For these reasons God has established the holy estate that Michael Edwin Thomson and Amanda Frances Fuchs wish to enter. They desire our prayers as they begin their marriage in the Lord’s name and with His blessing.”

Even though he knew the answer, Padre Orso looked out over the crowd as he asked, “Who gives this woman in marriage?”

Jacob said, “I do, Padre.”

Padre Orso looked at him and asked, “And you are?”

“Jacob Isadore Franklin Fuchs. I am Amanda’s father.”

When Michael heard Jacob’s full name, he fought a small laugh. Jacob cut his eyes toward Michael but said just smiled.

“Do you agree to the union between your daughter and her betrothed?”

“I do, Padre.”

“Bring your daughter to the matrimonial altar.”

Jacob assisted Amanda in climbing the steps to the altar. Padre Orso said, “Jacob Isadore Franklin Fuchs, your obligations to this woman are hereby ended.”

Jacob bowed his head and returned to where Ophelia was seated. As he approached, he noticed she was dabbing tears from her eyes.

After Jacob was seated, Padre Orso led Michael and Amanda to the altar. When they arrived, Padre Orso turned and said, “The couple standing before me have a desire to enter into Holy Matrimony. Is there anyone here who has just cause to believe these two should not be wed? If so, speak now or forever hold your peace.” Everyone held their breath because they knew how Ophelia felt about humans. However, even she held her peace.

When no one gave just cause, Padre Orso continued, saying, “Since there are no objections, we will continue with the ceremony.” He turned to Michael and said, “Michael Edwin Thomson, will you have this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony as God ordained it? Will you nourish and cherish her as Christ loved His body, the Church? Will you love, honor, and keep her in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, family, friends, kits, acquaintances, and strangers, remaining united to her and her alone, so long as you both shall live? If so, say, ‘I will.’”

Michael said, “I will.”

Padre Orso looked at Amanda and said, “Amanda Frances Fuchs, will you have this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony as God ordained it?

Will you nourish and cherish him as Christ loved His body, the Church? Will you love, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health and, forsaking all other, family, friends, kits, acquaintances, and strangers, remaining united to him and him alone, so long as you both shall live? If so, say, 'I will.'"

Amanda said, "I will."

"19,000 years ago, in the middle of a pandemic that continues to this day, we Humanimals were created to carry the legacy of the human species into the future. Unfortunately, as is the wont of a dominant species, the humans saw us as free labor. Pets, if you will, but pets with the ability to understand what was said to them and an ability to reply in an intelligent manner.

"That began a thousand years of slavery for Humanimals. Early in our enslavement, we were bred to mates that matched a need of the humans. Eventually, certain humans realized that, because of the human half of our DNA, we needed more than temporary sexual encounters to remain happy and productive. So, we were given mating rituals based on human marriage rituals and we were allowed to keep our mates as long as we desired. Those mating rituals were the basis fo our current marriage ceremonies."

Padre Orso turned to Michael and said, "Michael, please repeat after me.

"I, Michael Edwin Thomson, take you, Amanda Frances Fuchs, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy will; and I pledge to you my faithfulness." Michael repeated the vows.

Padre Orso turned to Amanda and said, "Amanda, please repeat after me.

"I, Amanda Frances Fuchs, take you, Michael Edwin Thomson, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy will; and I pledge to you my faithfulness." Amanda repeated the vows.

Padre Orso turned to an Reginald, retrieved Amanda's bracelet and handed it to Michael. Michael placed it on Amanda's left wrist. Padre Orso said, "Please repeat after me.

"Amanda Frances Fuchs . . ."

"Amanda Frances Fuchs . . ."

"With this bracelet . . ."

"With this bracelet . . ."

"I claim you as my mate . . ."

"I claim you as my mate . . ."

"From this day forward . . ."

“From this day forward . . .”

“So long as we both shall live.”

“So long as we both shall live.”

“Let this bracelet be a sign to all others . . .”

“Let this bracelet be a sign to all others . . .”

“That you are mine and unavailable . . .”

“That you are mine and unavailable . . .”

“To be anyone else’s mate.”

“To be anyone else’s mate.”

Padre Orso indicated the clasp and Michael closed it. Then, Padre Orso turned to the Victoria, retrieved Michael’s bracelet and handed it to Amanda. Amanda placed it on Michael’s left wrist and Padre Orso repeated the vows and Amanda closed the clasp on Michael’s bracelet.

Padre Orso turned toward the door that Michael and Reginald had entered the sanctuary through and gave a short nod. Then, he turned back toward Michael and Amanda and said, “When we Humanimals received the Ceremony of Holy Matrimony from our human masters, we noticed that there seemed to be something missing. In the ceremony, we speak of putting no one, not even ourselves, above our new spouse. \

“In the feral animal kingdom, in several species, especially foxes, the male takes care of the needs of the female especially in times of pregnancy and birth. These needs include providing her with the food necessary to maintain her strength during these times. Therefore, to prove how much our spouse means to us and to harken to those lessons our feral relatives have to teach us, we share a first meal with our spouse.”

The door opened and an acolyte entered carrying a plate and a goblet. He stood between Michael and Amanda and next to Padre Orso. Padre Orso said, “On this plate is a small meal to be shared by Michael and Amanda. Michael, you will note that there are two small portions of beef, bitter herbs, and cake. Each portion has a significance in the beginning of your life together. Michael, take the fork and use it to give Amanda a piece of the beef.”

Michael did as he was told to do. “Michael, the beef is indicative of the good times your marriage will experience. By giving Amanda the meat, you are showing her that you will ensure that she will always have the necessary sustenance that she will need to continue to provide a good home for the two of you and the future kits you will bring into the world. Now, give her some of the bitter herbs.”

Michel did so. As she chewed the bitter herbs, Amanda made a sour face. “Michael, the bitter herbs are a reminder that not every day will be perfect and happy for you. You will suffer times in

which you may fear that your marriage will crumble and fall apart. But, you must continue working to ensure it doesn't do so. Now, give her some of the cake."

Michael did so. "Michael, the cake represents the sweet times that will return when the bitter times eventually end. You must always work through the bitter times with the sweet times as your goal."

Padre Orso indicated that it was now Amanda's turn to feed Michael the symbolic meal. "Amanda, take the fork from Michael and use it to give Michael the remaining piece of beef."

Amanda did so. "Amanda, as I told Michael, the beef is indicative of the good times your marriage will experience. By giving Michael the meat, you are showing him that you will always be willing to prepare his meals so that he will have the necessary sustenance to go out to provide you with the necessities of life. Now, give him the bitter herbs."

Amanda did so. As he chewed the bitter herbs, Michael made an equally sour face. "Amanda, the bitter herbs are a reminder that not every day will be perfect and happy for you. You will suffer through times in which you may fear that your marriage will crumble and fall apart. But, you must continue working to ensure it doesn't do so. Now, give him the cake."

Amanda did so. "Amanda, the cake represents the sweet times that will return when the bitter times eventually end. You must always work through the bitter times with the sweet times as your goal."

After sharing the food, Padre Orso took the goblet from the acolyte. He turned to Michael and gave it to him. "Michael, give Amanda a sip of the wine in the goblet." He did so. "Michael, the wine in the goblet is holy wine that is shared between new spouses to seal the marriage vows. This wine is to be drunk only during the wedding ceremony and only for the purpose of sealing the marriage vows between newly married couples."

After Michael gave Amanda her sip, Padre Orso took the goblet from Michael and gave it to Amanda. "Amanda, give Michael a sip of the wine in the goblet." She did so. "Amanda, the wine in the goblet is holy wine that is shared between new spouses to seal the marriage vows. This wine is to be drunk only during the wedding ceremony and only for the purpose of sealing the marriage vows between newly married couples."

After each of them took their sip of wine, Padre Orso said, "This wine is the blood that you two now share. It is not to be taken lightly and should always be a reminder that you are no longer two people but one family."

After the meal ceremony, Padre Orso gave the plate and goblet back to the acolyte who turned and took them away. After the acolyte left, Padre Orso indicated that Michael and Amanda should kneel. He said, "Now that Michael and Amanda have committed themselves to each other in holy matrimony, have given themselves to each other by their solemn pledges, and have declared the same before God and these witnesses, I pronounce them to be husband and wife, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Padre Orso made the sign of the cross as he said this. "What God has joined together, let no one put asunder."

Padre Orso indicated that Michael and Amanda should stand and turn around. Placing a hand around each shoulder, he said, “Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you . . .”

He turned to Amanda who said, “Amanda Frances Fuchs Thomson.”

“And . . .”

He turned to Michael who said, “Michael Edwin Fuchs Panthera Thomson.”

Michael’s statement caused a small ripple of surprise in the audience because males rarely took the name of their wife’s family as part of their own.

Padre Orso then said, “Michael, Amanda, you may now kiss to seal the union of your two families.”

Michael and Amanda kissed as passionately as they had ever kissed. As they kissed, a voice could be heard yelling, “Woo-hoo! Way to go, Amanda!”

When they finished kissing, Amanda placed her forehead on Michael’s and whispered, “I’m going to kill her. She’s my cousin and I love her to death, but I’m going to kill her.”

Michael smiled and whispered, “She’s just happy for her favorite cousin, Amanda.”

Looking lovingly into Michael’s eyes, Amanda said, “I know.”

Michael took Amanda’s arm, helped her down the stairs, and led her down the aisle toward the double doors and the reception.