Erica's Paradise

Lindsey Greene

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Taking a Tour

"Puppy Paradise, this is Jan, how may I help you today?" the bubbly receptionist for Doveport's most popular canine destination answered the phone.

"Hi, I saw your ad on TV; do you really do everything there?" A curious Erica asked. Erica Roberts had been looking for a place to take her black lab, Duke while she spent two weeks in the Caribbean with her best friend Tori and Puppy Paradise was her last hope. All of the other facilities were dingy and dank and kept the animals caged twenty hours a day – something she could never abide by.

"Absolutely," Jan replied. "We are unlike any other facility of our kind in the nation. I can tell you everything we do and have here, but if you're interested we do offer free tours."

"Do you keep the animals caged?"

"Never. We have a one acre kennel among other things and all dogs are free to roam freely. We do keep new animals separate from the others while we test for rabies, and to gently introduce them to the others, but they are never caged."

"When can I come in for a tour?" Erica asked.

"Anytime. We are open until ten."

"Thank you," Erica said. So far she was pleased, but hearing something over the phone and seeing it in person were two different things. Grabbing her purse from the stand, and her keys from the hook on the wall, she headed out the door.

Erica arrived at Puppy Paradise an hour later and was already happy with what she was seeing. The lawn was well-maintained, the building was large and also well-kempt, but most importantly – at least in her mind, were the dozen or more cars in the employee designated parking lot. That meant there were more than one or two people around to take care of dozens of animals.

Opening the front door and walking inside was like entering a luxurious spa. Soft, relaxing music was playing, and a woman with a pleasant demeanor sat at a receptionist's desk looking at her with a smile.

"Hi," Erica said approaching Jan "I called a little while ago and was told you give free tours."

"Of course. Let me just page Karen and she'll guide you around the facility."

"Thank you."

"Karen, could you please come to the front for a tour?" Jan said over an intercom. "Karen, to the front for a tour please."

A tall, curly-haired brunette in a skirt suit and white lab coat entered from a back room and walked over to where Erica stood waiting. "Hi, I'm Karen," she said offering Erica her hand.

"Hi. I'm Erica," Erica said taking the hand in her own. Again, she was surprised at the level of pleasantness and professionalism.

"Nice to meet you Erica. To start the tour, I am one of four licensed vets here at Puppy Paradise. We are an all-inclusive facility meaning we do everything from grooming and breeding, to obedience training and housing," she continued as she led Erica through the lobby and into the animal clinic. "What breed of dog do you have?"

"I have a three year old black lab named Duke," Erica replied. "I have to say, this place looks amazing! I've been to half a dozen others and they just throw your pet in a cage and forget it"

"And that's why I founded Puppy Paradise," Karen replied. "This is our clinic staffed by fully licenses vets. When you bring Duke in," she said as if the decision was already made "this will be his first stop. We'll check him for rabies and other diseases before introducing him to the other animals."

"Do you have a lot here?"

"Right now we have eighteen dogs, but we are capable of housing sixty-seven. In another month when vacation season really hits, we'll have no fewer than fifty on any given day. "Does Duke have any special dietary needs?" she asked, leading Erica out of the clinic and down a short hall. Opening the door, she motioned for Erica to step into the large, open room.

"What is this place?" Erica asked. The fifteen by eighteen foot room had several dog toys lying on the floor and one wall was one big screen looking out onto a field.

"This is the integration room," Karen explained. "This will be Duke's next stop after the clinic. Here, he'll be able to play while the screen allows for him to get used to the other animals, and for the others to get used to him. We learned long ago that not all dogs will play well together upon first meeting, but after a few hours sniffing each other out in safety, they all tend to get along eventually."

"I see. That's a pretty good idea," Erica said sounding more impressed by the minute.

"The field beyond the screen is one of six where the dogs are free to roam at their leisure. If you'll follow me we can go out so you can see the rest of the facility."

"Of course," Erica said following Karen out of the room and down another short hall to a door leading out of the building. To the left and right were tall chain link fences with eight large doggy doors running along at ground level. She saw several dogs lounging lazily to either side while a boxer and a yellow lab played tug of war with a length of rope.

"If you'll look to the left and right in each kennel you'll see the automatic food and water dispensers," Karen said pointing them out. They were much larger than the one's Erica had at home, but served the same purpose. "There are enough to feed and water twenty dogs in each kennel at a time and the water is continuously fed and temperature controlled to prevent algae build-up."

"Is there anything you haven't thought of?" Erica asked. "This place is almost too good to be true!"

"I love animals," Karen replied. "I've spent my entire life around them and can't stand people whom mistreat them. I thought of everything I'd want if I were a dog spending time away from home, and Puppy Paradise is the results."

"So, you own this place?"

"I do. And I work here six days a week. Now, don't let the name fool you. Although I centered my business on taking care of canines, we are also equipped to take care of felines as well. And next summer we will be licensed to stable horses. Currently we have five acres of land, but by this time next year we hope to increase that number to fifty so the horses have plenty of room to run free as well."

"Wow!"

"Yeah, it's a huge endeavor, but one I think well worth it," Karen said. "To your right is the breeding kennels where we breed our own line of AKC certified purebred dogs, as well as those of customers should they be interested in that sort of thing," she added pointing to a red-

brick building further on. "And to the left you'll see the dog houses. Since we are in a cold weather area we've build custom, state of the art dog houses for those cold winter months. Each is elevated off of the ground as you can see, and is fully insulated and heated. The rubber doggy door keeps the warmth in and the cold out."

"Amazing!" Erica exclaimed. "Simply amazing! So, how much does all of this cost?"

"We charge \$50 per day, or \$300 per week," Karen answered. "We also offer further discounts for longer-term stays."

"That's not bad at all," Erica said, surprised at how cheap it really was considering everything included. And she hadn't even seen the entire facility yet.

"Now, that is the price for housing. If you're looking for breeding, or obedience training, that is extra, however, the obedience training price also includes housing," Karen explained.

"I just need housing for two weeks," Erica replied.

"Two weeks will run you \$575 plus tax," Karen said. "So, would you like to continue the tour, or have you seen enough?"

"I think I've seen enough. This is far better than anything I've ever seen. I'm leaving for vacation in two days, is it possible to get Duke in then?"

"Absolutely. Bring him on by whenever you're ready."

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The next day, Erica arrived at Puppy Paradise with Duke in tow. She paid to house him for two weeks and handed him off to Karen who doted on him for several minutes before taking him to the clinic for his initial check-up. Leaving him in their capable hands, she went home and did her customary last-minute packing, content in the knowledge that her beloved pet was going to be well taken care of.