

A New Tradition

by Bryna

Jackson was standing at the window of the Valley Inn looking out as the sun began to set over Pine Valley. Behind him he could hear the clanging of dishes and the wait staff cleaning up the remains of the 'family' Thanksgiving dinner. It hadn't gone at all as he had hoped, but then again, he wasn't surprised.

"A penny for your thoughts, handsome," Erica said as she wrapped her arms around him from behind.

"Oh, I was just thinking about another Thanksgiving gone wrong," Jack said with a sigh, as he continued to gaze out of the window.

"I thought it went rather well." Erica said, moving in between Jackson and the window, causing Jack to look at her with a bemused expression.

"Who did you have Thanksgiving with?" Jack asked with sarcasm.

"Oh, come on, Jack. It wasn't that bad. Only a few things were broken and no one left with life threatening injuries. I would say things went smashingly. No pun intended" Erica said with a giggle as she remembered Greenlee throwing the water pitcher at Kendall and Kendall throwing the cranberry sauce on Jonathan.

"Do you know you have the most beautiful laugh?" Jackson said with his full attention on the love of his life.

"Well, I hope my laugh isn't the only thing about me that you find attractive." Erica purred back with a twinkle in her eye.

"I tell you what, why don't you come back to the loft with me for a...um...after Thanksgiving celebration and I will show you exactly how attractive I find you." Jackson said huskily as he took Erica's face in his hands and kissed her. Jack had only intended to give her a quick but heated kiss, but when he felt her mouth open under his, he had a hard time controlling his passion as the kiss very quickly intensified.

"Um...WOW...that... is...uh...certainly a tempting offer, counselor, but I have to decline." Erica whispered as she tried to control her breathing.

"Well if that doesn't convince you, let me tempt you a little more." Jack

barely managed to complete his sentence as he leaned in to resume the kiss that took both his and Erica's breath away.

Erica quickly pulled away as she felt the kiss intensify. "Jackson, if you keep kissing me like that, I am never going to get out of here."

"What, you have plans?" Jackson asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Actually, I do." Erica stated firmly. She could tell by the look on Jackson's face and by his body language that he wasn't happy about not getting his way and she could see the glint of curiosity in his eyes as to why she had plans on Thanksgiving that didn't include him.

"Relax, Jackson. My plans are with you, you just don't know it yet." Erica said with a clear tone of mischief in her voice.

"They do?" Jackson questioned back.

"Yes, Mr. Montgomery, they do." Erica stated. "Now, come with me and no more questions."

Jack knew that Erica was up to something, but he couldn't figure out what. He pretended to be irritated at her, but truth be told, he was just happy to have an opportunity alone with her. It seemed like every time they found themselves alone together, some one would interrupt at a not so opportune time. Jack loved their family, but lately he had become very frustrated, and in more ways than one.

Erica didn't say a word. She knew Jack's mind was racing trying to figure out what she had in store, but she smiled to herself secretly, knowing that he had no clue. Jack's mind was racing, but not on Erica's secretive plans. He couldn't keep his eyes off her. Jack wondered how it was possible that Erica could take his breath away with a smile, even after 16 years. Oh, how he loved her and he was becoming increasingly aware of just how much he needed to show her.

The car stopped and Erica glanced over at Jack. She was so excited and nervous about her surprise for him, that she hadn't noticed that Jackson had removed his seatbelt and was practically sitting on top of her. When she turned and their eyes met, she became very aware of how much she enjoyed being this close to him. So much, in fact, that she almost forgot the goal for the evening.

"Jack, we are here." Erica managed to whisper; all the while her gaze was

focused on Jack's lips.

"Mmm, so we are." Jack said, closing the distance between them as he captured her lips in a breath taking kiss. Erica's hands made their way to Jack's face and to the back of his neck. Jack's hand began to explore Erica's face, her hair, and her neck. His hands quickly moved to Erica's back and then to the thin straps of her dress. Jack couldn't help himself. He wanted her so much and she felt so good in his arms. He slowly removed the strap of her dress from her shoulder and began to run his other hand up the soft skin of her leg pushing the hem of her dress up her thigh.

"No...no...no...Jackson Montgomery. You will not distract me" Erica said breathlessly as she remembered where they were.

"Erica, I want you so much right now that I can't stand it anymore. Do you realize how long it has been?" Jack groaned as his hands continued their journey.

"Oh yes, Jackson, I know exactly how long it has been. Trust me; I want you just as much as you want me. But not like this, not here. I promise you, Jack, you will thank me." Erica said.

"I doubt that. Come on Erica, do you want me to beg, because right now..." Jack began.

"Jackson, I am not doing this to be cute, there is something I need to show you. I will never get to show it to you if you don't hold that thought and be cooperative." Erica interrupted.

"Okay, but I don't like it," Jack said with a distinct pout to his voice. "Let's go see whatever it is that we must see, so we can get back to what I hope will be the evening's activities."

As Jack and Erica stepped out of the car, Jack was totally confused. "Erica, why are we at someone's house? So help me, if we have to spend the evening making small talk with some business associate instead of making...well, you know, then I am going to be really..."

"Relax, Jack" Erica giggled "It will just be us for the evening."

Erica opened the door to the beautiful brick two-story home, similar in appearance to her house that Trey had burned down, but much larger. The house was unfurnished, but recently painted. There were new carpets and tile floors. It was obvious that the house was vacant, but by the looks of things,

recently purchased.

"Do you like it?" Erica asked, with a slight uneasiness in her voice.

"Yeah, it's great, but why are we here? This can't be your new office space for New Beginnings, so what is it?" Jack questioned.

As they walked into the family room, Jack noticed the roaring fire in the fireplace and the plush pallet on the floor surrounded by pillows and several lit candles. There was sparkling cider on ice and a picnic basket beside the pallet.

"Erica..." Jack questioned.

"Well, I came across this house and I just fell in love with it. Since I no longer work or own Enchantment anymore, it doesn't seem right to live in the penthouse. Plus, there are a lot of bad memories there. So....when I saw this, I just couldn't resist." Erica babbled.

"Wait a minute, you bought this house? When?" Jack was confused and a little stunned that Erica had made such a large purchase and such a big decision without mentioning it to him. Since her return, she and Jack had no secrets and they communicated on every topic.

"Well, I signed the papers while you were in FL. and I thought, if you want, you could help me celebrate. Do you like it, Jack?" Erica asked again with the same uneasiness as before.

"Yes, Erica, I told you I did. But, isn't this a little big for just you?" Jack was so stunned that it didn't even dawn on him that this wasn't just for Erica.

"Okay, Jack...why don't you come sit with me, in front of the fire." Erica took Jack's hand and led him to the pallet on the floor. "You see...well...yes, the house is very large for just one person, but there are several bedrooms, a pool out back, a great study, and game room. I have had everything decorated...I mean...one bedroom, it's purple...and ...the school district is the same as your loft...well...the reason I bought it is..." Erica's mind was racing, had she misjudged her and Jack's relationship? They were taking things slowly, and obviously by his shock, he didn't see this coming. It was too late to back out now, Erica thought, I should just say it.

"Jack, what I am trying to say is..." Erica's sentence was stopped as Jack pulled her into a kiss.

"Shh, sweetheart, you don't have to finish, I know..." Jack began as the reality had finally hit him and he realized what Erica was trying to say.

"Jack, please," Erica whispered, "I need to say this."

"Okay, Erica, I am all ears." Jack replied.

"The thing is... Well, Jack I was hoping, no, I was more than hoping that this house wouldn't just be for me. I was hoping it would be for us, for our family. There are enough rooms for Lily, Reggie, and us, as well as spare rooms for Bianca, Kendall, and even Greenlee, if she ever needs to stay with us. There is a beautiful law study for you and a game room and pool for the kids. Jack, when I bought this house, I bought it for our family, not for me. Look, I know that we agreed to take things slow and I know that I haven't even earned the right to ask you this yet, but..."

"Erica, sweetheart..." Jack began with a smile.

"Jack, please let me finish." Erica insisted. "I love you so much, Jackson. I just can't take being away from you anymore. I want to spend my mornings and nights with you, I want to spend all my mornings and nights with you. When I am with you, I never want to leave and when we are apart, I can't wait to be with you again. You are in my every thought, you are my every thought. Jackson please allow me the privilege of showing you each day just how much I love and adore you. Jackson, will you marry me?" Erica barely managed to get out the question because she was so full of love and emotion for Jack. She didn't even try to control the tears.

Jack wiped each tear from her face and with a smile stated, "Sweetheart, what do you think?"

"Jack, please let me hear you say the words."

"Yes, Erica. I will marry you!" Jack found himself unable to control the flood of emotion that had been building since Erica's return from rehab. "I love you so much Erica, that I can't see straight. It would be my honor to marry you."

Every thought that Erica had vanished, as she began to pull Jackson's face towards hers for a kiss. Erica and Jackson's passion and heat had never been an issue. Sometimes, just when they thought things couldn't get any more magical, fireworks would erupt that neither of them could imagine. This time was no different. As Jackson took control of the kiss, Erica was taken

off guard by the intensity of love she felt for him. He was her everything and in this moment and in the days since her return, she had finally let go of all the fear and insecurity that kept her from fully belonging to Jack. In this moment she felt whole. She had never felt that before. As Jackson's lips separated from hers, he heard her whisper through her tears, "It will work this time, Jack, I promise."

"I know, sweetheart, I know," Jack replied in a low breathless whisper.

"You have always given all of yourself to me, but I have never done that with you, not until now. I can finally give you all of my heart, because the dark places of it that belonged to my past are gone. I can honestly say that for the first time in my life, I feel free." Erica was beaming from ear to ear and at this moment she looked more alive and at peace than she ever had.

"I am so glad, Erica. That is all I have ever wanted for you." Jack replied with honesty and love.

"You gave that to me, Jack. For 16 years, you never gave up. You never let me go, even when we both belonged to someone else. You..."

"Erica, we never really belonged to anyone else. We have always belonged only to one another. We just used other people to fill the void while we were apart." The seriousness in Jack's voice told Erica that he meant what he had just said. He had said in the past that he had never loved Laurel or anyone the way he loved her and in this moment, looking into his eyes and his soul, she knew it was true.

Erica replied with a grin, "It didn't work very well, did it? Using Laurel and Dimitri? You know I made myself believe that I loved him, but I never really did. I tried, but it was you I wanted. It has been you that I have always wanted, I just couldn't admit it."

"Why couldn't you, Erica?" Jack questioned.

"Because, Jack, to admit that would be admitting that I was wrong when I remarried Travis. It would be admitting that you were right every time you called me on a bad relationship." Erica replied with seriousness. "And... You know how much I hate to be wrong." Erica continued with a grin.

"Yes, I do know that. Mmmm... I have an idea." Jack tone was full of seduction.

"Really? And what would that be?" Erica questioned as she began untying

Jackson's tie.

"Why don't we begin to christen this new house of ours? I think this room looks like a wonderful place to start." Erica removed Jack's tie, jacket, and shirt. Using her moist lips, she began placing slow kisses on Jack's chest, neck, and face. Jackson began removing the straps of her dress. He began his own feast on Erica's bare shoulders and neck. As he laid her back on the pillows and placed the weight of his body on hers, she heard him say "You were right, Erica, I am going to thank you..."

"I would say you are off to an amazing start" Erica replied just before Jack captured her lips in a kiss and began to 'thank her' appropriately.

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The happy couple lay wrapped in each other's arms in front of the fire. Their hands intertwined and their eyes locked in a gaze of love.

"I should probably call and check on the kids, huh?" Jack asked with a laugh. "They might be wondering where we are."

"Not a chance, Jackson Montgomery. This is a kid free evening." Erica said with a smile, "Besides, they are staying with Bianca, so all is taken care of."

"You thought of everything, didn't you?" Jack questioned as he pulled Erica closer to him. She was clothed only in his dress shirt. She would never understand how amazingly sexy Jack found her in this particular ensemble. They had spent hours making up for lost time, but he couldn't keep his hands off of her.

"What do you say we move on to another room, gorgeous?" Jack's intentions were clear as he moved his hands to begin unbuttoning the shirt Erica was wearing.

"Sounds like a plan, but first, how about dessert?" Erica sat up, disappointing Jack, and began to open the picnic basket. "We never got a chance to eat dessert tonight, so I arranged to have your favorite dessert waiting for us."

Jackson laughed. "Trust me, sweetheart, I have already sampled my favorite dessert." Jack began to nuzzle Erica's neck playfully.

"Okay, so maybe dessert can wait. So, which room would you like to christen next?" Erica's tone was low and she had that look in her eyes that

Jackson knew so well.

"Well, you know the way around, why don't you pick."

"Okay, Hmm...We could start in our bedroom, but it doesn't have a bed yet." Erica began.

"Oh, I like the sound of that...our bedroom...but we should probably wait until we have a bed so we can christen it properly."

"I almost forgot, the former owners did leave one piece of furniture behind. Come here, let me show you," Erica grabbed Jack's hand and pulled him to his feet. There was a look of excitement on her face that surprised Jack.

"Okay, but when did you become so interested in used furniture?" Jack asked with confusion.

Jack's confusion quickly disappeared as he saw which piece of furniture had Erica so excited.

Jack began to laugh as everything began to make sense. "A pool table, they left a pool table?"

"Well, when I saw that this was the only piece of furniture in the house and would be the first piece of furniture that we owned jointly, I took it as a sign. That is why I knew that this was the house for us." Erica replied laughing. "I told you it had a great game room, didn't I?"

"And I suppose the former owners left the sleeping bag and pillows, too?" Jack replied with a grin.

"No, that was all my doing. I happen to know of a certain fantasy that you have which involves a pool table, a sleeping bag, and us."

Jack didn't reply. He picked Erica up and placed her on the table. "I say we fulfill the fantasy that I have had ever since the first moment we kissed." Jack didn't give Erica time to reply. Words were not needed as the two began their journey of passion and love all over again.

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The sun was rising over Pine Valley and the brightness of the morning woke a still sleeping Erica and Jack. Erica had given Jack a complete tour of the house, spending extra time in several rooms as they went about the task of christening their new home. Erica reached up and began planting tiny kisses

all over Jack's face.

"Good morning, beautiful." Jack said in a husky morning voice.

"Good morning, handsome. Just think, in a few weeks we can spend every morning like this." Erica's smile was almost as radiant as the morning sun.

"Mmm, I think I could definitely get used to this." Jack replied as he began showering Erica with his own kisses.

"I know we aren't married yet, but I have made the first decision for us as a married couple." Erica grinned.

"Really, and what would that be?" Jack inquired with amusement.

"I think we just started a new Thanksgiving tradition for ourselves."

"Mmm, mmm, mmm, lady, I do like the way you think. Come here..." Jack said in a low seductive voice as his hands began a journey of their own. "I can tell I am going to love being married to you."

The End