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# Animal Café

## Chapter 25 - Unobtainable pets

I loved Trixie a whole bunch, but she was a demanding one. When she didn't use her broken arm as an excuse to be lazy and make us do everything for her, she wanted to spend all her extra spare time with whoever pet girls were off work on any given day for some sexy time. At least I didn't have to wear her rabbit costume again because there was always someone else more willing than I was. The pet girls were always thrilled when they got to wear costumes they didn't get to put on often.

There was also the sexy nurse uniform that Trixie had purchased from the costume shop downtown. That one was another story. Accalia seemed to be its full-time owner now. Since that day when Trixie heard that her friend wanted to become a nurse, she insisted that she should wear it at all times when at the pethouse. I couldn't complain because Accalia was a pretty Asian girl, and that beautiful sexy outfit suited her perfect little body too well. Plus, when she played doctor with Trixie to make her feel better, it made me feel fuzzy inside. Why were Asian nurses so sexy? But Accalia returned to work recently, so that left a void.

Trixie was a demanding patient, and today I decided to go to the café on my own to take a small break. I was getting anxious with all those people around, so it would be nice just to get to relax there for a while without having someone ask for a fresh pair of panties because they were too heavy to carry with one arm only.

That said, a different type of anxiety developed inside me the closer I was getting from my beloved café.

I would get to see Lucy.

None of us knew if Shane had talked to her following Trixie's recent scolding. After Shane realized that he and Lucy were hurting the pet girls unintentionally, we were confident that he would take action, but when and how would be up to him. It didn't seem like something he should rush, so we would have to be very patient.

The thing that terrified me the most was not knowing if Lucy had heard about everything illegal we had done on that day; sneaking out of the pethouse in costume, having sex in a costume shop, ninjaging our way back in the insurance building, deceiving the security guards in the process, and finally getting caught by Shane. Oh, and there was the part when we sneaked back out of the pethouse with the white rabbit, this time to roam around the office floors, which undoubtedly was a high crime too.

This was why I stood in front of the Cakes & Pets, wondering if I should even walk in. I tried, but my legs refused to move.

Since I was not very good at being discreet and that a glass door didn't really prevent anybody inside the shop from noticing me, it was inevitable that the door would eventually open, like it just did.

"Clara? Are you okay? Why are you standing outside like this? You always do that. Come help me. I'm swamped. We just received our cake delivery. Can you unpack them and put them in the fridge? Oh, and can you update our inventory sheet as I showed you?"

"..."

"Are you okay? Why are you making a face as if you are about to cry?"

"... No... no... I'm fine... I'll help..."

"Alright. Come on. Then you can help me feed the pets. You like that, right?"

"Yes. They are my friends."

"Haha. I know that... Alright, hurry. Some of the cakes have ice cream in them. Those have to go in the freezer."

"Yes... "

Lucy didn't say a single word about Shane, and her voice didn't express any anger, which was a relief. On the contrary, she seemed in a pretty good mood, one of those happy days at the café. I could easily tell that running this unique business was something she loved doing, even if the pets were capable of driving her nuts. Lucy was a people person, and dealing with both the clients and her pets brought her joy day after day.

So, it was a good thing. I would not be confronted about anything uncomfortable today, which was great because I was not only here to escape Trixie. I was also here for something I attempted to do for a while, something that I was not yet ready to share with anybody because I felt the need to figure this out by myself first.

"Clara! Don't stand there while being stuck inside your head. Get in the café! I'm not going to hold that door open forever."

"Oh... sorry. I spaced out."

"What's new! Come on. The pets are hungry!"

I hurried into the café and headed straight to the kitchen to take care of my first task. A big cardboard box that was smelling a bit too good was waiting for me on the floor. Every time Lucy asked me to take care of the cake shipment, I gained five pounds just by smelling it. I opened the flaps and began sorting through the different cakes.

My role was to make sure we didn't have too much of one cake or another and place them in the fridge so we would finish the old ones before digging in the fresh ones. It was not very difficult, but it made me feel a lot more valuable than my previous job did. Packaging useless items for random people I would never meet had not been fun. At least, here at the café, I could see the clients enjoying what we were serving.

I did what Lucy had asked me to do and updated the inventory sheet for the next few minutes. As I completed my duty, Lucy showed up.

"Ah, you are already done?"

"Yes. It wasn't... hard."

"I know, but still... You are helping me a lot. I appreciate that."

"Lucy?"

"Yes?"

"I think I decided..."

"Decided what? Oh? You want to marry Trixie?"

"..."

"I'm kidding, Clara. You are so easily startled."

"S... sorry."

"Aaah! Don't be sorry. So, tell me... What did you decide?"

"School..."

"Oh... You finally decided on a career path?"

"Yes, I have a meeting... with Tim. Tomorrow."

"Super! And? What did you pick?"

"Finance."

I shouldn't have said that while Lucy was drinking a glass of water because she sprayed it all over the floor. At least I knew what she was thinking now; she didn't like my choice. As she was wiping her chin using the back of her hand, her gaze intimidated me.

"Finance!?"

"I'm... I'm sorry."

"Well... It's your decision... I'm just surprised... I didn't picture you playing with numbers all day long. Why did you pick that?"

"... Tim... He said that... I could help my friends... with money. And that made me think."

"Help your friends? That's not what finance people do. Usually, they try to get as much money from their friends for their own benefit. Trust me on that."

"Oh... I would never do that."

"Haha. I know that, Clara. That's why I'm puzzled by your choice."

I knew Lucy didn't mean bad, but her reaction kind of made me feel awkward. Was I a fool to think that if I were good with money, I could help my friends? I was aware that many people weren't thinking like that, like my previous landlord who had heartlessly raised my rent or my multi-billion company who had refused to give me a small raise. I wasn't like them, but still, I lowered my head, shameful.

"Heeey! Clara. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. If you want to study finance, that is your choice. And I'm sure you can help your friends with that knowledge. Believe me, Trixie could definitely use your help. Oh, and you know what, maybe one day you'll be able to run the café by yourself, that way I can go on vacation."

"..."

Now she was just trying to cheer me up. I knew she would never take any extended vacation. She liked it too much here. I lowered my head and went to the fridge to grab the food bottles for the pets.

The truth was... I wasn't confident in any aspect of my life, and I couldn't help but think that my choice could be a mistake. It took me a long time to make that career choice and convince myself that it was a good idea, and a bit of teasing, as Lucy did, was enough to crack my weak foundation. Now, I didn't know what to do anymore and was back to square one. Since my appointment with Tim was tomorrow, I didn't have much time left to make up my mind.

I filled up the tray with the various food and water bottles and headed to the lounge with Lucy. At least I would get to do something that will take my mind off this topic.

"Alright, Clara. Let's feed those little stomachs."

"Yes. I will go get Oreo."

"Ah, no. Not her. I need to talk to her this morning. Why don't you feed the new one instead to get acquainted."

"The new... one?"

"Yes, look... On the pillow pile with Meeka. I tell you, those two never leave each other. They are so annoying."

When I decided to come here this morning, I had hoped to spend some time with Oreo because I just couldn't stop thinking about how I had felt around her. I didn't know what it was exactly, but I just wanted to spend some more time with her. So it was a bit disappointing when Lucy said I couldn't feed her.

But that disappointment didn't last too long because I saw who was Meeka's new friend. It was the cheetah pet, and I had no clue about who was wearing it. If I understood Lucy correctly, it was a new girl that I had never met before, which made me tremble.

"Come on, Clara. She won't bite. Her name is Savannah. She is a weird one, but she is dedicated and does a great job."

"... O... okay."

I hesitantly walked to the corner of the room. Right in front of me was a scene that made me feel funny in my lower belly.

A cheetah girl and a raccoon girl, all made of shiny latex, so form-fitting that there were barely any wrinkles. Their cushy paws rubbed each other's bodies, making the latex crackle slightly. Of course, they were not doing anything inappropriate, but it was still attractive to see them tenderly cuddling each other like this. If I had not been working, I would have loved to lay down between the two of them, naked, and let the good feeling of slick latex run over me.

After all that time at the café, I had not yet decided what I liked the most—being cuddled by rubber animals or being the rubber pet who cuddled the others. My heart leaned toward the former, though. I loved taking care of the pets more than being the pet taken care of. But, again, next week might be different. I guess it all depended on the situations I encountered.

"Sa... Savannah? Do you... want to eat?"

I always hated interrupting them because I knew how good it felt to cuddle like this, but at the same time, I knew they would let themselves starve if we didn't stop them.

Savannah turned to me, probably wondering who I was since she had never seen me before.

"Hi. I'm Clara and... EEK!"

Unexpectedly, as a real cheetah would do, she pounced on me like I was a baby gazelle. I didn't fall to the ground, but I made a couple of steps back, trying to regain my balance. The cheetah had wrapped her arms around me tightly as if she was thrilled to see me. Because the pets were as tall as me, there wasn't much I could do but accept the sudden affection. Why was she so forward toward a stranger?

"Hi... I'm... Clara. Have... have we met before?"

Savannah nodded.

"O...okay... Who are you?"

That was a rather idiotic question. How could she tell me? Now I wasn't sure what to think anymore. When Lucy mentioned the new one, was she referring to a new costume or a new girl? If Savannah jumped in my arms like this, was it because she was one of the girls I knew who was wearing a different costume? There were so many pets to keep track of. Thinking hurt, so I just decided to proceed as usual.

"Come... I'll feed you. Do... do you know how it works?"

Savannah nodded again.

"Good. Meeka, you come too. I'll feed you next."

Meeka sprang to her legs and danced a bit. That raccoon girl always loved to get fed, even if we all thought her vegetarian food was questionable. Together, we headed to the nearest booth and got ready for some bottle action.

It was interesting to see Savannah clumsily trying to climb on the couch and lie down so she could rest her head on my lap. She knew what she had to do but was just not used to it, which was kind of confirming that she was not one of the girls I already knew.

"Savannah... You have to stay still. Or else it's going to take forever."

As I attempted to feed her, she kept turning her head to look at Meeka, which was not making things easier. Every time she did that, the bottle unplugged from her chin hole, and I sprayed food all over her neck. I was about to run out of napkins.

From the corner of my eye, I could see Lucy feeding Oreo while talking to her. I was a bit sad that I didn't get to feed her, but on top of that, I wondered what they could be talking about. Lucy spent a lot of time with her pets and, curiously, never ran out of things to say. It was as if the pets were evolving as persons even though they were prisoners of strict rubber suits, and Lucy was the one guiding them through this experience. Perhaps I should try to be a bit more like that too because I generally kept quiet when I was around my pet friends. My few words were mostly practical questions more than conversations.

I remembered when I first visited the café, the pets had tried to make me talk so I could practice my speech and get better at it, but they didn't really do it anymore. Obviously, when I had accepted my real problem, the bad conflict with my parents, my oral skills got a thousand percent better, so maybe it was the reason why they didn't push me as much as before. Still, I didn't feel very good at it, and I would love it if the pets were to coach me so more socially. They were so amazing at dealing with people, and I wanted to learn to be more like them. And since Oreo was a bit like me on that aspect, perhaps we could learn together.

After a long struggle, Savannah finally finished her food bottle, but now I had another problem. She wasn't moving anymore.

"Meeka? I think Savannah fell asleep. I... I don't want to wake her up. Can you wait a bit longer before eating?"

Meeka nodded and came to sit carefully next to me. She wrapped her arm around mine and leaned her head on my shoulder. It wasn't the first time something like this happened to me, and the truth was that I liked it. Observing inanimate latex pets was interesting.

It was a good opportunity to explore this beautiful cheetah costume. Elizabeth, the creator of the pets, was a skilled artist. I could have been jealous of her talent, but this was a case where I was convinced that the vast majority of people would feel the same as me about her. Being able to craft something this amazing was not something they taught at school; it couldn't be learned. She HAD to be born with this ability, and no matter how hard most other artists would try, they would never reach her level. It was humbling and such a privilege to be so close to such a masterpiece.

And the little human inside the costume was giving it life and warmth. That girl I knew nothing about was perhaps not as skinny as most of the other pets, maybe she liked eating a bit too much, but she was still far from being overweight. Maybe after a few weeks being a pet, she would shed a few pounds. Lucy would probably make her eat healthier food, and incessantly cuddling the clients was certainly going to do some good to her waistline.

That said, she was very comfortable to have on my lap. Running my hand on her rubber belly felt amazing. The glossy latex was so pleasant to caress, so kinky. Not as shy as I once was around the pets, I allowed myself to slide my hand on her warm chest discreetly. Her boobs were pretty much as big as Trixie's, and they were so warm too. I wondered what she looked like out of costume or if she would move in the pethouse with us. Would she be into girls as well? Perhaps I should be mindful of what I did with my hands.



And I shouldn't expect all the pets to be very sexual. I was willing to bet that Savannah was a shy girl who probably didn't associate the rubber animal costumes with something kinky. Maybe she would be the most innocent one of the bunch and just decided to work here because she wanted new friends and loved animals.

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The clients started to arrive, so after her short nap, Savannah began working; a client had selected her right after Vix. With her gone, it allowed me to feed Meeka, who also went to play with the new clients as soon as she finished her meal. Now that I had nobody else to take care of, it was a perfect opportunity to do what I had hoped for when coming here this morning, spend some quality time with Oreo.

The black and white cat was standing in the corner, somewhat conversing with Asha. After all this time around petgirls, I still couldn't understand most of what they were saying in their paws language. Since they didn't look overly busy, I went to see them. Perhaps I could steal the black and white cat for a moment.

I crossed the lounge and arrived next to my two rubber friends. At first, the temptation to wrap my arms around Oreo was strong, but spontaneity wasn't my forte, so I refrained from doing so. As I tried to figure out if I should have done it or not, a familiar voice called me over, disrupting my plan; it was Lucy.

"Ah! Clara! Can you come here for a minute? I need your help with something?"

Oreo turned around and stared at me for a moment, discovering that I was creepily standing next to her. Unfortunately, my hug would have to wait. I headed toward Lucy instead.

"Yes, Lucy?"

"I totally forgot to buy a bunch of stuff when I went shopping yesterday. Could you go to the grocery store real quick and buy me what is on this list?"

"Aww... now? But, I wanted to spend time... with the pets."

"Well, it's that, or they won't have enough food for their lunch. You don't want your friends to starve, do you?"

"No. I'll go."

It wasn't my day. First, Lucy didn't let me feed Oreo, and just as I was about to interact with her, I had to go shopping. At least the grocery store wasn't too far, and I would be back shortly.

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With some sweat covering my forehead, I entered the kitchen with a few grocery bags full of delicious ingredients. Feeding five or six pets three times a day was hard work. Lucy spent quite a bit of time preparing the food bottles, which is why I was always happy to help. She always wanted the pets to eat well and therefore had no issues sacrificing her precious time to make sure they could have something tasty that they liked. As she told me once, if the pets had a happy stomach, they would do a better job at keeping the clients entertained and bring more money in. That said, I suspected that her daily profits weren't her real motivation.

But now that I had completed my task, I wanted to refocus on my primary objective for the day.

"Lucy... Can I go see the pets now?"

"What? Of course, you can. You are not a child. You don't need my permission."

"..."

"Go have fun. I'm good here. Hehe."

Feeling guilty for leaving Lucy with all the cooking, I still headed back to the lounge and walked in.

A few clients chilled with the pets, which worried me because I wanted to spend time with Oreo. I knew my cat friend was popular recently, so the probability that she had been selected by someone already was quite high.

On the first couch was Vix, warmly nestled between two women who seemed to have a lot of fun playing with her rubber ears. To my right, were Meeka and Savannah entertaining a couple, no surprise there since they acted like best friends already. And finally, Accalia spent time with a group of three girls intrigued by her cute mask. I just had to find Asha and Oreo now.

I walked deeper into the lounge, and on the pillow pile in the far corner was Oreo, lying flat on her belly, not paying attention to any clients or friends. Because of her position, I had a deep desire to go squeeze her shiny black rubber butt. She was so adorable.

However, when I approached her, I noticed something bad that sadly explained why she looked unusually detached from the action. She had a red collar around her neck, meaning that she either got punished or that she was deemed too tired to work at the moment. No matter what the reason was, nobody was allowed to interact with her until further notice.

Since Lucy wasn't around, I decided to bend the rules a little bit. I crouched behind Oreo and placed my hand on her rubbery butt; I just had to. It was so warm and soft, and the texture of the latex just made me want to lick it.

She turned around to see who was massaging her rear.

"Hi, Oreo."

Slowly, and cautiously looking left and right because she knew I was breaking the rules, she waved a paw at me.

"I wanted to talk to you, Oreo... but I didn't have much luck so far today... Eeep!"

As I tried to engage in a conversation with Oreo, two snow-white paws wrapped around my waist and pulled me away. It was Asha who didn't seem to appreciate what I was doing or, at the very least, tried to prevent me from making a big mistake. She probably knew what her friend had done to deserve a red collar.

"Ashaaa! I wanted to talk to Oreo! Let me go!"

The rubbery snow leopard leaped in front of me and pushed me in the chest, forcing me to retreat to the nearest empty couch. Asha then climbed on top of me and sat on my lap as a safety measure so I wouldn't go see Oreo again; Asha was way more athletic than I was, so I didn't stand a chance. And then, she poked me on the forehead with her cushy paw.

"I knooow! But I didn't get to say hi to her this morning."

Asha straddled me and touched my nose with hers as if to say that I could cuddle her instead of risking it with an inaccessible pet. Considering the circumstances, she wasn't wrong. Not only cuddling with Oreo right now could end badly for me, but that could have put my cat friend in hot water as well.

I wrapped my arms around Asha's waist and pressed my face in her smooth latex chest. Yes, it wasn't a bad alternative option.

As I was hearing her little heart beating fast, I wondered how I could explain to her what was going on in my mind? For the past few days, I had a lot of fun at the pethouse with Trixie, Misti, and Accalia; lots of stressful activities, lots of sex, and no real regrets. I liked doing things with them all. Even having Asha in my arms right now felt incredible, she was a beautiful snow

leopard, and I adored her. But, how could I tell her what has been bugging me for such a long time?

... since that day when I met Oreo out of costume.

Oreo, the cat, wasn't even my favorite costume of the bunch. It was a super cute catgirl like Misti, but if I had to choose, I would probably pick Vix, Asha, or Trixie as my favorites, maybe because I had my first intimate interactions with them. But since the day I found Oreo all tied up in latex on the big bed at the pethouse, the first time I saw her incredible eyes... That feeling I got in my belly, and the way we ended up kissing languorously so quickly after we met... How could I explain this to Asha when even I couldn't understand what was happening?

And right when I was about to get to know her better, Trixie had fractured her arm, and Oreo had been working since then, leaving me in a confused state. But, even though it was a while ago, I still had the same feeling lingering in my chest. I didn't exactly know what it was, but it was just enough for me to decide to explore this strange sensation. Today didn't seem like a good day for that, though.

"Asha... Am I crazy?"

The small snow leopard pushed on my shoulders as if she were surprised by my odd question. She cocked her head to the side, and then she nodded energetically.

"Awww! Don't make fun of me!"

She then tapped on my mouth and back on her chest.

"You want to know why I'm asking, uh?"

Asha helped me a lot during my meltdown and again when I moved to the pethouse. Without saying she was like a sister to me, it was a person I trusted quite a bit. She wasn't hyperactive, like Trixie, which made it easier to interact with her, and she didn't seem to have a heavy past like some other pets. We had some intimate time together, and it has always been pleasant and comfortable. Perhaps I could ask for her advice once more. Since she was a pet today and couldn't talk, it would probably be less embarrassing for me to discuss this.

"You... You know Oreo, right?"

Asha scratched her head and nodded. Of course, she knew Oreo. She lived with her. It was my first idiotic question that betrayed my discomfort.

"Well... You know... When I met her for the first time... She was all tied up and... well, that has nothing to do with it... but... you know..."

Asha scratched her head some more, trying to make sense of what I was trying to say.

"Aaaah! I thought she was... cute."

Asha nodded, then shrugged.

"No, I mean, you are all cute..."

Asha nodded and pointed at herself.

"Yes, you are the cutest, of course. But... I don't know... It was different with her... Do you understand? Like... different..."

Asha paused for a moment, then very slowly she extended her arm toward Oreo, who was still lying down on her belly in the pillow pile, depressed, and then pointed at my chest. Then she finished by drawing a big heart in the air with her paws. I was not very good at understanding sign language, but I understood what she had meant right away... and my face turned beet red.

"I... I... I..."

Not needing my words, Asha leaned forward and hugged me tightly. What have I done? Did I just admit to her that I had a crush on Oreo? Have I been in denial since the first day I met her? And even if, deep down, I knew what this feeling was, did my brain have tried to avoid the topic? Did I really need Asha to draw it for me before I grasped what was happening here?

I wanted to die.

If Asha were to repeat this to everybody, what would happen then? Or did they already know? A couple of pets teased me in the past, saying that Oreo was my special person. Even if I dodged those comments, thinking they were not serious, perhaps they had seen something that I hadn't?

But even worse, what would happen if Oreo learned about this? Would she still want to be my friend? Or would she freak out and ignore me? I knew she was a very sensitive girl with some social issues, so this could be too much for her to handle.

I wanted to die.

As I crushed Asha in my arms, Lucy entered the room and headed directly to the black and white cat. She flipped her to her back like a crepe, and that was when I learned the true reason for the red collar.

"How many times did I tell you not to climb on the table? Don't you remember what happened to Trixie? She broke her arm after standing up on the couch. You have to listen, Oreo."

Oreo shrugged.

"Don't give me attitude. You walked on the client's cake! She almost cried, thinking I would charge her for her new slice."

Oreo lowered her head. Yes, it was not the first time Oreo pulled this kind of stunt, but she didn't seem to learn from her mistakes. That catgirl had more in common with a little alpinist than a café pet sometimes.

I knew Lucy wouldn't stay mad for long as Oreo was one of her favorite pets to take care of, but the real good news was that Oreo was no longer off-limits for me as her collar was removed. Since all my courage had vanished after my little conversation with Asha, at least I knew I could go see her when I would be ready to talk again.

Asha, who had observed the same scene as I did, knew what I was thinking, mainly because I was still staring at Oreo, who was pushing back the pillows she used into the pile, butt out and tail dancing in between her slim legs. What would happen now? Would Asha go tell everything to Oreo, or worse, force me to do something about it?

After tidying up her corner, Oreo headed toward us, probably remembering that I had squeezed her butt and wanted to talk to her earlier. Now what? What should I tell her? I didn't even know what I wanted to discuss the first time.

As she placed a knee on the couch to join Asha and me, the lounge door opened again, and two girls walked in. Asha and Oreo were on high alert, wondering who would have the task to entertain these two. Asha got off me and, accompanied by Oreo, went to see them. Following

some arm waving and hugs, they selected Oreo and headed toward an empty table with her. Asha, kicking some dust, just trotted back to me, rejected... At least they patted her on the head as a consolation prize before sending her off.

Not too sure if it was a good or bad thing, it appeared that I would have to wait some more before spending time with Oreo. But, at least Asha was here to keep me company. Her arched back over my lap was a clear invitation to rub her belly, which I gladly did. The soft part between her navel and sternum was always so warm and squishy.

But this fun activity didn't fix my issue. What now? Somehow, I felt like the crepe-leopard was trying to think of something as well because we remained silent for such a long time. Was it even okay to fall for a pet more than another? The café clients were doing it shamelessly, but it was different when it was simply for a short moment. In my case, there was a risk in favoring someone in particular within our group of friends. Or was it just in my head?

Misti and Trixie were incredibly close to each other, and I could tell that they behaved differently together than with the rest of us. But was it just because we all did it? I was not acting the same way around Vix as around Asha, after all. Or was it because Misti and Trixie were, in fact, closer and perhaps even lovers? Their tight relationship wasn't causing any conflicts, though, so could I have the same type of behavior around someone else without causing any trouble?

Then all of a sudden, Asha crunched up as if she had been struck by lightning and sat back on me, all excited.

"Aaaah! Asha! You scared me. What is it?"

For a moment, she performed a series of pointings and gestures. She kept pointing at Oreo and me and then placed her two paws on the side of her head as if she pretended to sleep.

"What is it? Are you tired?"

Asha slapped me on the forehead and tried again, frustrated by my inability to understand her quickly. Nonetheless, she persevered until I finally completed the math.

"Oh... You want me to sleep here tonight."

Asha nodded.

"... so... I can spend time... with Oreo?"

Asha nodded again while my face began to burn. Usually, sleeping at the café with the pets was always fun, but since there was an ulterior motive this time around, such a proposal was harder to accept.

"Awww... but what if she finds out I like her? What if she doesn't want to talk to me again after?"

I fell to my side on the couch, defeated by my own paranoid brain. I shouldn't have come here today. I wasn't ready for these kinds of emotions. Asha climbed on me and crushed me deeper into the soft seat. At least, buried like this into the seat, nobody would see me ridiculously suffering.

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Later in the afternoon, I went to see Lucy.

"Lucy?"

"Yes, Clara?"

"Could.... Could I sleep here tonight? With the pets."

"Sleep here? In the lounge?"

"Yes."

"Not really, no. I mean, you can sleep here, but I would prefer that you sleep upstairs in one of the capsules. The other day, I caught Asha, out of costume, sleeping with the pets in the lounge. She had sneaked in during the evening to be with them. I'm trying to teach them that it is not okay, so if I permit you to do what I don't want them to do, it would be counterproductive. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes. The capsule is fine... but... Can I take a pet with me?"

"Absolutely. But only one this time. Because of all those recent changes, Trixie, breaking her arm, and Savannah, who just started with us, I want everybody to rest as much as possible."

Well, that turned out even better than I had expected. Not only would I be able to sleep with Oreo tonight, but on top of that, I would have a legitimate excuse for not inviting the other pets who would want to join us.

"Yes, that's fine. I'll not pick more than one."



"Oh, and since you'll be here tomorrow morning, could you take care of feeding the pets their breakfast? I have something else I need to do in the morning. I should be back around 10 am. Deal?"

It was a lot of unexpected work, but it was a small price to pay for being able to spend the night with the elusive Oreo. I would do anything.

"Deal."

"Good. Aaaaah! More clients are coming. Why is this day so busy?"

Lucy turned heels and went back to the reception to welcome the new visitors. That was when I noticed Asha next to me with a paw up in the air.

"Asha?... Do you have a question?"

Asha rolled her head as if I had said something super stupid. She then motioned her paw in a way that made me understand what she wanted from me.

"Oooh. You want a high-five?"

Asha nodded, and I slapped my hand in hers. As usual, Asha took care of me and used her smart brain to find a solution to my problems and provide me with a comforting presence. All there was left to do now was to wait for the business day to pass and hope that Oreo would actually want to spend time with me tonight.

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It was a long wait. All afternoon, the café was very busy. I had no more petgirls to play with and ended up helping Lucy quite a bit even though I wasn't officially working. But since I was ready to do anything to repay the favor she had granted me, I didn't mind putting in the extra effort. The downside was that Oreo would surely be exhausted tonight because her clients were really happy and active. I've never seen her getting this many hugs and cuddles in one day. This much affection would have certainly killed me, so I admired her endurance.

At the end of the business day, after the last client finally left, Lucy took a minute to sit with me for a coffee and to decompress a bit before going home.

"Feeew! What a day! Good job, Clara!"

"I didn't help... much."

"You are too modest. You are always helping so much. You have to start believing it. So, listen, I wanted to apologize for what I've said this morning..."

"..."

"You know... When I said that I didn't picture you as a finance person. I kind of regretted what I said and changed my mind. I think you would be great at it."

"... Really?"

"Yes. When you do something, you take your time and do it well. You are never in a rush and avoid mistakes because of it. I think if you pay the same attention to details when you manage people's money, you'll make them very happy."

"... yes?"

"Absolutely. And I'm good with finance too, so I'm going to enjoy teaching you what I know as well. That's going to make me feel useful."

"You are... always useful, Lucy."

"Haha. I have my moments. So, do you still want to sleep here tonight?"

"Yes. If that is still okay."

"Of course it is. Oh, and if you have some free time, your furniture in the basement, could you start making a list of what you will keep or not? It can't stay down there forever, you know. Is it still going well at the pethouse? Do you like it?"

"Yes... It's going very well. I will decide what I'm going to keep. It's all old things anyway."

"Good. Alright, I'm going now. You take good care of my café and my pets, and don't forget to lock the door behind me."

"Yes."

Lucy gulped down the rest of her coffee, stood up, and stretched for a long moment. After working this hard, she definitely deserved to go home and relax. And me, I would finally have time to spend with Oreo. It was a good day, after all.

As usual, Lucy said goodbye to her pets, hugging them all and moralizing them one last time, and then she headed toward the lounge door.

But something wasn't right...

... Why did she hold Oreo's wrist and led her toward the exit?

"Lu... Lucy?"

"Yes, Clara?"

"... O... Oreo? Is she... leaving?"

"Oh, yes. Didn't I tell you? She has an appointment with the dentist tomorrow. She hates it, so I promised I would go with her. She is sleeping at my place tonight. As I said, I'll be back around 10 am."

"..."

"Is there a problem?"

"... N... no... Have... a good night."

"Alright then... Come, small cat. Let's take off your costume and go. Oh, how about we watch your favorite movie tonight? Would you like that?"

Oreo nodded as she happily walked out of the lounge, not even looking back at me, more interested in this privileged time she would get to spend with Lucy.

When the door closed, I stood up, looked at the remaining pets. Asha was holding her head, knowing very well what had just happened and how devastating it had been for me.

Our master plan had turned to ashes.

I walked straight to the pillow pile in the corner of the room and let myself fall flat on my belly. A moment later, I felt a bunch of supportive cushy paws rubbing and patting me on the back.

Tonight, I would probably sleep with Asha... And probably just sleep... because of all that extra work I would have to do before Lucy came back tomorrow...

I should have stayed at the pethouse today... I knew it.

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