

The Kittenish's Meow

CAN JESSIE JAMES DECKER GET ANYMORE GIRL-CRUSHABLE? MARRIED TO THE NFL'S HOTTEST WIDE RECEIVER, ERIC DECKER, THIS BEAUTIFUL MOTHER OF TWO IS LIVING OUT HER CHILDHOOD DREAMS: WRITING SONGS, SINGING HER HEART OUT AND DESIGNING FOR HER BUDDING FASHION LINE, KITTENISH

WORDS BY VANESSA PASCALE



As soon as I step off the elevator onto the Gramercy Park Hotel terrace, I see Jessie James Decker and her Kittenish partner and founder of Kora Rae, Rachel Turzer, posing in front of the step and repeat. Tonight, New York Jets wide receiver Eric Decker is on the sidelines supporting his wife along with their pigtailed, flannel-donning 20-month-old daughter Vivianne, who is toddling around, and Jessie's younger sister, Sydney. With only a handful of people in the room, mainly family, I feel as though I'm intruding on this intimate moment.

I am here for the preview of Kittenish's spring collection, Jessie's nascent fashion line. Female models styled in Kittenish clothing: cutoff overalls, floral and lacey rompers, maxi dresses... line the perimeter. Guests mingle and eye the cute and colorful outfits as they imbibe mixed cocktails from the top shelf open bar and nibble on passed bite-sized chicken & waffles and mini cupcakes with the Kittenish logo frosted atop. I sip on the night's specialty cocktail "Kittenish" and take in the scene before I make my way over to Eric and Sydney for a few words on Jessie. (The country crooner is in a corner of the terrace doing interviews.) Before I leave, I am introduced to Jessie, who is dressed in a blue-hued floral Kittenish jumpsuit topped with a cream-colored blazer, and turquoise pumps, and has her trademark voluminous tresses tousled to perfection. The 27-year-old singer-songwriter-designer shakes my hand, tells me to enjoy myself and she'll see me tomorrow for lunch.

The following afternoon, Jessie and I meet up in midtown. She walks through the revolving door of The Capital Grille styled in all black, a v-neck shirt, leggings, suede boots and a light gray leather jacket from Intermix (a Christmas gift from Eric last year, she tells me later on) and hugs me hello.



KITTENISH COLLECTION

Black "Rose" Floppy Hat, "Don't You Wanna Hire Me?" Sweater in Ivory & Ross
Available at KoraRae.com/Kittenish

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

“Sydney’s the goody-good out of the two of us. Like, I’m really crazy, and say inappropriate things 90% of the time, but Sydney is never embarrassed, kinda how Eric is. She’s entertained by me, but she doesn’t judge. You have to be around people like that in your life, who accept you and like those things about you, ’cause it’s good energy. If you’re around people who don’t like things about you or judge you, it kills your light. I feel like we all have a little light that shines and makes us who we are. And I’ve had to cut people out. They kill that flame. I feel like I’m always getting preachy,” says Jessie with a smile.



After a pre-lunch-photo, we settle into our table and evaluate the lunch menu. We both decide on the Mediterranean Salad with Grilled Shrimp, and a cup of butternut squash soup for her. Over a basket of bread, we talk Kittenish.

Last night, Jessie launched Kittenish’s third collection, all of which is personally designed by her (during her recent pregnancy their design meetings convened at her dining room table). Since high school, while in math class, Jessie would write songs and sketch outfits she longed to perform in. “I wanted to be 100% hands-on... I love being that involved and that creative.” To get an idea of what the ladies are into, she started her first collection with a few pieces: t-shirts, rompers, cutoffs, dresses and items with *FRIENDS*-inspired names (her favorite *FRIENDS* character is Phoebe Buffay) like Ross (faux leather leggings) and Rachel Green (a plaid flannel shirt), the latter sold out immediately as did the tees with 87 and Kittenish on them. “I really listened to them (her consumers). I listened to what I would wear, what I felt confident in. I am really excited about it all,” says Jessie who has hung on to the name Kittenish ever since someone called her it in middle school. “To me, Kittenish is the definition of being really cute and sexy at the same time. Sex kitten and kittenish, I thought it was the perfect name and perfect word to describe a feeling, a certain style, just everything combined.”

The Italy-born “army brat” lived in 14 different places growing up, but considers Georgia home as it’s

KITTENISH COLLECTION

“Don’t You Wanna Hire Me?” Sweater in Olive

Available at KoraRae.com/Kittenish

where she attended middle school, graduated high school, and presently where her family lives. A southern girl at heart, Jessie always wanted to be a country artist, but the Nashville labels wouldn't sign her and still won't, she tells me. "I got three record deal offers from pop labels. L.A. Reid signed me and believed in me. But they were pop labels, so what are they going to do? They're going to make me a pop artist, so that was a struggle big time," she says between bites. "L.A. Reid has always been a believer and I really feel he helped me grow as an artist." Influenced by artists like Shania Twain and Britney Spears, her very first inspiration was our cover girl, LeAnn Rimes. "First tape I ever had those days. I really loved her," she says with a smile. As the waiter clears away our finished entrées, he asks if we want dessert. We're both in the mood for the Warm Double Chocolate Cake with ice cream, which she suggests we split as the menu shows us it's a whole day's worth of calories at 1,280.

Jessie's Christmas album, *This Christmas*, which hit #1 on iTunes's Top Christmas Albums the day it debuted December 4th, features seven songs including originals, covers, last year's single "Baby! It's Christmas," new hit single "This Christmas," and a duet with her husband on "Baby, It's Cold Outside." "I love Christmas music. I love Christmas time—it's my favorite, so it was only natural to make an EP. It was time to do an actual record." Jessie has eased her way back to the stage since giving birth on September 1st to her second child, Eric Jr. On December 12th, Jessie is set to perform at the Opry at the Ryman in Nashville for a second time, and will embark on her Lights Down Low Tour—her first headlining tour—in 2016. She recently sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the Jets vs. Lions game and performed at The Cutting Room, where she planted



KITTENISH COLLECTION

"Not a Rug Pashmina" Ruana

Available at KoraRae.com/Kittenish

PEOPLE WOULD BE SURPRISED TO FIND OUT . . .

"I over think a lot of things and overanalyze for no reason. Like before shows, I get very, very, very nervous, lots of anxiety. I always think about things that can go wrong, but I also prepare myself, if this goes wrong, this is what I have to do. I care so much about what I do. By the second or third song, I'm golden. But I feel like I'm going to puke before I go on stage half the time. Eric, he gets so nervous before football games, but by the time you're in the second quarter, you're right at home."



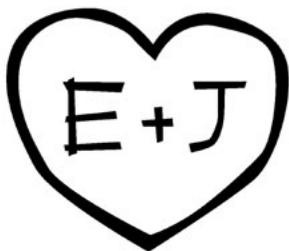
a kiss on co-owner of the music venue, Chris Noth —also known as *Sex in the City's* Mr. Big. A huge *Sex in the City* fan, the smooch was a dream come true. "I felt like Carrie Bradshaw for a moment. Eric gave me permission, so I was allowed. Now, next time he sees Reese Witherspoon, he can give her a kiss. He loves her," she laughs. Her celebrity crush is Ryan Gosling. "He's like good boy, but bad boy at the same time. I love that. But I still think Eric is hotter than Ryan... Eric is exactly what I want, in every way possible, everything about him. He's so gorgeous and his personality is perfect. I'm sitting here gushing about my husband," she giggles.

Their unbridled affection for one another is among a list of reasons they've been crowned our generation's King and Queen of #RelationshipGoals. Everyone is crushing on this gorgeous couple; even *Elite Daily* ran a series of their Instagram photos depicting the Deckers picture-perfect-life together with the hashtag: couple goals. "That's so sweet when people say that, and it makes me feel good 'cause it is genuine. Anyone who is around us, they know that's just how we are. I really want to set an example for girls to not settle and not be in relationships just because it's easier or they just don't think they're going to find anything better.... We're all capable of meeting our split apart, our soul mate... I just feel like people get impatient... I dated horrible guys, psychologically, really horrible for your self-esteem and I went through that. But I came out on the other side... That's why I preach about it all the time, 'cause I got it. I know it exists," says Jessie, who knew Eric was the one when she saw how well he fit in with her family. This is, surprisingly, how Eric knew she was the one, too. "I just met her family and got to see her dynamics, where she came from. She's like a mini-version of her mom, so when

KITTENISH COLLECTION

Grey Beanie & Ross

Available at KoraRae.com/Kittenish



ERIC + JESSIE DECKER FOUNDATION

EJDeckerFoundation.com

SWEET CHARITY

Deckers Dogs, an initiative of the Eric and Jessie Decker Foundation, is a cause this couple is very passionate about. “We’re very, very, very, proud of it. We rescue dogs from shelters that are about to be killed and we train them, then we send them home to veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. We’re on our seventh dog and it costs \$25,000 a piece. It’s a lot of money, but at least you know exactly what your money is going towards. We get to save animals, and then we get to save a life of a veteran. These dogs are trained to emotionally sense if these guys are scared, or they feel like someone’s going to attack them or their heart is racing. These dogs know what to do --they’ll press their bodies up against them or they’ll hop up and put their paws on their shoulders and look them right in the eyes,” says Jessie.

I met them I felt like it was so easy to just be around them —that was the moment I fell in love with her and knew she was the one,” says Eric. Their answers are so in sync you’d think they’re rehearsed, but Jessie is actually surprised when I tell her I asked Eric a few questions the night before.

In 2013, E! introduced us to Eric and Jessie’s life together in Denver with their reality show *Eric & Jessie: Game on*. It was then that most of us became enthralled by their love, lifestyle and gorgeous looks —*this* is what romantic comedies are made of. The two were set up by a friend over the phone. After a month of video chatting, Eric flew to Nashville to meet her. “After the weekend, like an 8th grader, he asked me to be his girlfriend. He’s like, ‘Let’s be girlfriend and boyfriend,’ and after three months, he asked me to move in with him, and that was it,” she says wistfully. In June of 2013, Eric and Jessie tied the knot. Fourteen days after their wedding, Vivianne was conceived. And then seven and a half months after she was born, they conceived Eric II. I rub my hand against Jessie’s arm. I am hoping your fairytale-juju rubs off on me. She laughs, and asks me about my love life, and the girl talk commences.

“Everything’s an adventure... I love being surrounded by so many Italians,” she says of living in New Jersey, and adds that they will eventually settle down in Nashville. The Deckers relocated from Denver to the east coast after Eric signed a five year \$36.25 million contract, with \$15 million in guarantees, (those alleged numbers were posted on NFL.com by an NFL media insider) to play for the New York Jets in 2014. Life has become an even greater adventure now that this successful duo has two kids. “I am obsessed with them.... I cancel 80% of things now because of my children... There are times where we’re all sitting watching TV together. Everyone’s relaxed, happy and we’ll look at each other and just smile. *This is us. I can’t believe we did this together out of love,*” she says with a big smile. The kids often tag along to football games and events. I comment on how at ease Vivianne was at last night’s launch. “I just want her to be a part

of everything. She came to the shows. Little Man’s in the back. I think it’s good for her to get out, it makes her mature, builds her little personality, so she’s not afraid, so she’s fierce,” says Jessie. “She looks just like Eric, but that girl is all me on the inside.”

With a new baby and a toddler in the mix, Jessie and Eric are cognizant of carving out time to be alone with one another. “It’s hard! I’m not going to say it’s not... There’s definitely times we’re exhausted and maybe didn’t get to talk all day. As soon as we hit the mattress, we’re out. I’ll wake up in the morning and he’s asleep and I’ll just curl right up to him and hug him, and whisper, ‘I love you’ and he always says it back, even in his sleep. I’ve recorded him doing this,” she laughs. To stay connected, they write each other notes, and surprise each other with little mementos, like when Jessie pulled a hair extension from her head and hid it in Eric’s bag while he was away. “He found it on the plane and took a picture and was like, ‘Thanks.’ So he thinks about me.” She smiles.

Being surrounded by family is extremely important to Jessie. “I’m always having them fly in to help me with things. My mom was with me a month after the baby was here, and my sister. They took turns being with me — just trying to adjust to having two kids.” She mentions that Sydney is babysitting the kids right now. “She always wants us all together. Even my mom’s like, ‘Are you sure you don’t want Christmas with just the four of you?’ ‘No! I want family!’ She always wants family around for everything,” says Sydney about Jessie, “her biggest protector and best friend.” Hearing all this, it’s no surprise that Jessie’s favorite Christmas movie is *The Family Man*. “We watch it every year. I love the message: You can have all the fancy stuff and all the riches, and it doesn’t mean you’re going to be happy. It’s all about family and being appreciative of what you’ve got.” Are there plans for more kids? “We’re taking a big old break and now we’re using protection so that does not happen for awhile.” She laughs. Vivianne and Eric Jr. were surprises. “We might have a third, but if we do, it will be in a few years. We’re pretty fulfilled.” **ML**

HE SAID, SHE SAID

I asked Jessie and Eric the same questions, separately, and here's how they answered

SECRET TO A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

JESSIE: "Flirt with each other! Keep it alive, have sex with your husband, greet him at the door with a big kiss. Do little things. We write each other little notes. You just have to keep flirting, that is the biggest thing that never needs to stop. It's so important."

ERIC: "Well, for us it's a lot of things we've got to balance. We have kids now, we're both career-driven, we both need some alone time with one another as well, so just trying to find that balance and communication, I think, is the biggest thing. Kids will keep you up at night. You're tired. You're grumpy. Make sure you always keep that playing, why you're together. That's the relationship we built. You gotta have a little alone time to keep the flame alive and that's why we make sure we do date nights, go into the city, get a hotel room, just to have one another away from the kids. Something very important to us."

BEST THING ABOUT ERIC / JESSIE

JESSIE: "His patience and understanding. He is the most nonjudgmental person. I can say the craziest, most weirdest, out-there stuff, and he never rolls his eyes or thinks it's weird. He just gets me. He understands me. He's very patient too, 'cause I'm a lot to handle sometimes, and he just does not feel like it is. He just thinks it's great! What did he answer?"

ERIC: "For me it was just kinda the 'it' factor, the whole package. Obviously very attracted physically right away to her, but she made me laugh. I opened up right away, just felt really comfortable around her. I think that was it. I just knew she was the one because I was me. She brought the best out of me, and it was something that a lot of people haven't done, I guess, before that."

JESSIE: "Aww -that is very true." She laughs. "He was very shy when I met him and very introverted. He knows this too, I was almost worried about if I could keep dating him because he was so introverted... But after we spent some time together, he did feel comfortable. He was very open, very honest and he felt he could tell me anything. That's so sweet he said that."

ULTIMATE DATE NIGHT

JESSIE: "We like going to dinner together -get a bottle of wine, we kick each other under the table, tease each other, just laugh. We talk about anything and everything. Sometimes we'll take a bubble bath. Sometimes we'll both get word search books, and we'll go, 'Go to page 23' and see who can find the words the quickest. We're always competing with each other. Or we'll play card games in bed -games he plays with his football player people. I beat him at all of them. We're such dorks: We play word search and play cards. We're like, ridiculous. It doesn't sound sexy at all," she laughs.

ERIC: "Realistically it would be dinner, then going home to an empty house and lying around with each other. But I would say, we love to get a nice Italian or steak dinner, and then go grab a cappuccino at a little café afterwards and just have a little conversation. Get some dessert in a setting where we can hang out, relax, and just catch up, to be honest, 'cause there's so much going on in life. You gotta have that alone time."

JESSIE: "He's so sweet. That was pre-babies. Now that we have babies, we can't do that as much. I love hearing his answers! You little sneaky you."



Photo by Johnny Ferrari