

Chapter 17 Rule 17- The internet is like a spooky forest. You should enter it warily and with a strong sense of caution.

I started off working a register, but since Ashton keeps coming up to ask me questions every few minutes Marcus suggests that I swap with someone and work on stocking a few shelves and cleaning instead so I can walk around a bit more. I'm fairly sure he knows that I'm really not getting an awful lot done at this point but I doubt he cares. It's a fairly quiet morning so far. I probably could have just not turned up at all but I did promise to come in and I would have felt guilty if I didn't, especially on Marcus' birthday. Besides, Lucy got to meet Ashton and I'm pretty sure it's made her year. Ashton gets a lot of funny looks from people. Some I think probably do suspect that he's fae. But most of them I reckon are just staring because he's hot and also because he's been hanging out in the toy section for an hour and has pressed every single 'try me' button at least a dozen times. He asks me to explain the batteries and electricity stuff and I give a vague explanation and mentally promise to set him up with my laptop and an internet browser sometime and just teach him how to surf the web. He can go down a rabbit hole of weird obscure research topics. I'll just give the general disclaimer to not believe everything that you read online. I'm nearing the second hour of my shift when the store starts to get busy. Or at least the corner of the store we're in gets busy. Except no one seems to actually be shopping, they're all just staring at Ashton, or rather pretending that they're not staring. I suspect that word has gotten out that there is a fae randomly hanging out in this store. It's not really a problem as long as people stay quiet and don't get in the way though. No one has

even tried talking to him yet.

I spoke too soon. One girl, a teenager I think, decides to be brave and approach Ashton.

"Hi, uh, excuse me." She says nervously. Seeing how uncomfortable she is, Ashton smiles at her kindly.

"Yes?" He prompts her.

"I was wondering... are you a fae?" Her words are blunt but she sounds so uncomfortable that it takes the edge off of them.

"Yes I am." He answers. I'm not watching the girl for her reaction, I'm watching the group of people who are still hanging back and clearly eavesdropping. Ashton admitting he is fae seems to be enough for the dam to break because all of a sudden they are all rushing forward. Some are asking for photos, others shoving their way through insisting they need to talk to him. I consider intervening but Ashton seems to be dealing with them admirably well. He declines having his photo taken but patiently listens to everything they have to say, answering some questions and dodging others while smoothly changing the topic. It reminds me of how he was last night talking to my dad and the mayor. He's in control of the situation and confident enough that people listen and do as he says. He was a little freaked out with Lucy, but seeing him deal with this crowd I suspect that his concern was just because she's my friend and he wasn't sure how much to say. After about ten minutes the crowd starts to grow and despite his expert skills in managing them, people start to get rowdy. Some guy elbows his way through past a group of teenage girls, knocking

one of them over. Ashton immediately helps her up but the single rough action is enough that her friends get angry and start yelling which causes him to yell back and suddenly everyone is taking sides, yelling and pushing while simultaneously trying to get Ashton's attention with a level of enthusiasm that I've only ever seen in Lucy's puppy when you mention the word 'walk.' Since Ashton has lost control of the situation, I conclude I should probably intervene before the store ends up trashed. Already someone has knocked over a display of dinosaur toys and at least three of the boxes have ended up on the floor.

Steeling myself, I step forward and channel my 'in charge, don't mess with me' vibes which I usually save for when I have to deal with Karens or particularly persistent dude bros who think it's cool to constantly harass and hit on staff because we can't just leave and are paid to be nice to them. Or at very least to be polite. I'm definitely starting to regret coming into work today. I didn't realise that having Ashton here would make MORE work for everyone. I didn't think he would end up being mobbed by obsessed fans. I clear my throat loudly.

"Hey, you all need to calm down and remember you're in a public place. You're all making total fools of yourselves. Is this really the impression you want to make?" I do my best to sound 'not angry but disappointed' in that way which is oddly more painful than someone actually being straight up angry with you. In an ideal world, everyone would feel bad, apologise and leave. In reality my words don't change a lot but a few people stop and guiltily glance at Ashton which is better than nothing. The few people calming down leaves me enough space to slip through the group and get to Ashton.

"Hey, I think it might be best if we get you out of here. Follow me." I grab Ashton's hand and he squeezes it in response. I am fairly sure that the crowd is going to follow us, but I'm hoping they're distracted enough by each other that if we walk away quickly and confidently, we can make it to somewhere secluded before they gang up on him again. A few people notice us leaving, but they're good enough not to make a big deal out of it.

I end up taking Ashton back to the offices and staff area and hope that the 'staff only' sign will be enough of a deterrent to stop anyone from stalking him in here.

"That was..." Ashton is searching for the words so I finish the sentence for him.

"Insane? People seriously need to relax. I'm not sure what they thought they were going to accomplish." I pause and sigh before continuing.

"It's probably not as interesting in here, but it might be better if you just hang out back here until I finish work, it 'll only be a few hours." I tell him apologetically. He nods his understanding.

"Yes, I did not intend to cause trouble but it seems that my presence here is more significant than I expected." He answers easily but I can hear the disappointment in his voice. He was enjoying exploring.

"We will figure out a way that you can move around without being so easily identified. In the meantime, there's a little breakroom with a couch you can relax on." I tell him. I lead him to the break room where he makes himself comfortable. In a stroke of inspiration, I pull out my phone. I open the internet browser and drop into the seat beside him.

"Here, you can use my phone while I'm working. It does other stuff other than calling people. It can access the internet which is basically like a giant library of information. I'll show you quickly how to use it but just remember that anyone can add to it so it's full of fiction as well as accurate information and some sources are more reputable than others. You should probably also remember rule thirty four." I wait for him to ask.

"What is rule thirty four and why is it more important than the other thirty three that must come before it?" he questions and I grin.

"Rule thirty four is 'if it exists, there is pornography of it.' So you should be careful what you search online and if you come across anything unsavoury just exit the site, okay?" Ashton seems concerned but his curiosity to play with my phone wins out and he agrees. I show him how to enter my password and open the internet app. Then I quickly demonstrate how the touch screen works, how to use the search function and how to follow links and to go backwards.

"There are plenty of other functions and you're welcome to experiment with them but I don't have time right now to explain them. Hopefully this will be enough to keep you occupied for a while." I apologise again and, still feeling a little guilty, I head back to finish stocking the shelf I was working on.

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Error Collection



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