

Chapter 20 Rule 20- When you're trying to sneak around, just remember, your parents have been playing this game a lot longer than you have.

I resist the desire to groan, not particularly wanting to delay my meal, but it's my dad calling so I suck it up and answer.

"Hey dad." I greet him cheerfully.

"Hey Kat..." He trails off.

"Did you need something? You don't usually call me in the middle of the day." I comment, trying to prompt him into saying something. I'm fairly sure he's just calling because Ashton is here and he's concerned but I don't intend to make it easy for him.

"Ah, no real reason. I just wanted to check how you went at work. Your boss didn't give you any trouble about your sudden leave? It wouldn't be right for you to risk stable employment for a temporary contracted job. I roll my eyes. Ashton is watching me with a calculated expression, clearly listening into the conversation and I shoot him a smile to show I'm not really upset or anything.

"There was no trouble at all. They were very helpful just like I knew they would be. But even if they weren't I would still help Ashton. I mean, this is a really interesting job and as much as I appreciate my normal job, it's not exactly my dream or anything. There are hundreds of other retail jobs that I could take if I had to give mine up. It wouldn't be the end of the world or anything." I remind him. Dad scoffs.

"That isn't a very fair way to look at it. You know that getting fired could ruin your reputation, they could give you a bad reference." He argues.

"Dad it's a retail job that is barely above minimum wage, management don't care enough about my existence to worry about trying to ruin my reputation. Besides, it's all a moot point because there were no problems with me taking leave." I remind him. He sighs reluctantly.

"Fine. So what are your plans for the rest of the day?" He asks.

"We plan to start investigating for signs of the criminals and we were both invited to a coworker's birthday celebrations later this evening. So unless we have made progress and are able to locate the criminals we will be attending that too. If you get home and we aren't here don't worry and don't wait up, okay?" I tell him firmly, leaving no place for argument. The silence on the other end of the line is telling. He WANTS to object, say I need to stay home or some other nonsense, but he can't think of a good reason. Eventually he lets out a long, deep sigh.

"Okay sweetheart. Be safe and call me if you need anything." He grumbles.

"Thanks dad. Actually there is something you can help with. I was going to call you as soon as I finish my lunch. Ashton and I were talking about ways to track down the criminals and since it's not likely they know the human realm super well it's possible they would cause some kind of commotion. Have there been any weird or suspicious reports over the last day or so? Any cases that don't make sense?" I ask.

"Not that I'm aware of, but I can look into it further." He promises.

"Thanks dad. Call me if you find any or if anything comes up, I'll keep my phone on me. Did you remember to take your keys with you today? I can leave a spare in the letterbox if you forgot again." I ask him with a teasing tone.

"No, I did not forget my keys!" He protests, but I can hear him patting down his pockets until the slight clinking sound of his keys reassures me that he actually did remember them today.

"Good, I'm glad. I'll see you later, probably in the morning or something, unless you leave for work really early. It depends what time I'm up." I add thoughtfully.

"I am working early tomorrow," he admits.

"Right, so I'll probably see you tomorrow evening then depending on how Ashton's search goes. Now, I want to finish eating so I'll talk to you later, alright? Love you dad!" I finish out the conversation, leaving him little chance to drag it out. He doesn't usually spend so long on the phone, but I think he's reluctant to leave me alone today.

"Bye, love you Kat," he grumbles before hanging up with a click.

I drop my phone face down on the table and go to take another bite of my food.

"Your father cares for you a lot." He comments and I shrug.

"I know. He might be grumpy, and I'm sorry that he's not been particularly nice to you, but I'm fairly sure that most of his attitude is out of concern for me. He shelters me to almost a ridiculous degree since mum died. He

hasn't even complained that I graduated highschool over four years ago and I haven't done anything other than work a dead end retail job. I never managed to choose something to study at university and I never managed to make any big career goals. I know there is still time for those things but I feel bad that I haven't even made an attempt to accomplish anything or strike out on my own." I sigh.

"He likes having you close, you take care of him and manage your father's home. That's not nothing. You make money to support yourself while you explore your options. There is nothing shameful in that." He reassures me and I give him a half smile.

"Thanks, what about you? Are you close with your parents?" I ask. The smile drops from Ashton's face.

"My father passed away. But up until his death we were quite close," he looks so sad and I feel awful for bringing it up.

"I'm sorry for your loss... What about your mother?" I ask, hoping for a less painful response. This time he does smile, although the expression doesn't quite reach his eyes.

"My mother is alive and well. She dotes on me even more than your father dotes on you. I am unsure if she could ever find fault in anything I do." He says fondly.

"That sounds nice, I'm glad you have her," I answer.

"As am I."

Ashton smiles sadly and turns back to his half eaten meal. I am about to do

the same, when my phone rings AGAIN. This time I do groan. I don't recognise the number.

"Hello, this is Kat speaking?" I ask, my tone a question.

"Good afternoon Miss Fall. This is Mayor Simmons." the mayor's familiar voice sounds through the phone and I repress a sigh. What does he want now?

"Good afternoon mayor. Did you need something?" I ask. Ashton isn't even pretending to give me privacy for my conversation like he did last night.

"Ah, nothing specific. I just wanted to call and check in on you and our guest. Make sure you didn't need anything and see if there has been any progress in your investigation." He says with false cheer.

"Oh, well everything is fine. We haven't made much progress yet, he has been getting used to his environment. We were just about to start investigating properly after lunch." I say pointedly, hoping he will go away.

"Ah, yes, yes. I understand. And about that other thing, do you have any other information you think I should know?" He asks unsubtly. Ashton perks up and I wink at him.

"Right, you wanted to know about the fae. Well... I can tell you that the fae think cars are kind of unsafe and that Ashton personally prefers horses. Also he thinks the fridge is really... cool." I chuckle at my own pun and Ashton flashes me a grin, no sign of his earlier sadness. Maybe this phone call wasn't so bad after all, it managed to cheer him up at least.

"Well... yes. That is... very interesting I suppose. Uh... keep it up, and let me know if there is anything you need. I'll be in touch." mayor Simmons hangs up without another word and I burst out laughing.

"That was so much fun!" I giggle and Ashton joins in. Soon both of us are snorting with laughter, the heavy atmosphere from our personal conversation a thing of the past.



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