

Short Story

HOW TO

A

Entice
Friend

ALICE WINTERS

How to Entice a Fiend-Short Story

*Should be read after VRC 6

Alice Winters

Proofed by: Courtney Bassett (in the parking lot of a store on her phone because I gave her absolutely no heads up)

Mads

“Why the hell does she need so much stuff?” Ender asks as he looks at the list of supplies the school wants Rylee to have. Since we are staying here for a bit, Ender decided to enroll her in the local elementary school, which Rylee seems quite excited about.

While Ender is waving the supplies list around like it’s something disgusting that has adhered itself to his hand, Rylee is dancing with Señor Fluffybottom who is just along for the ride, no shits given. I’ve started to question if that cat is even real at this point. It just goes along with the ride... any ride. Rylee’s like “Let’s take him to the park” and to the park he goes, enjoying it all the way.

“This is ridiculous,” Ender grumbles.

“Are you nervous about her going to school?” I ask.

“Absolutely not.”

“She did so well on the placement test they gave her that I’m not worried that she’ll struggle at all. I know you were worried about her being behind the others because she didn’t have much schooling until you took over for her. But she placed beyond children her age because of you.”

Ender just grunts.

That’s what I get for complimenting his skills on the matter.

A grunt.

“Ender, come on. Don’t be stubborn.”

“I’ve never been stubborn a day in my life. Let’s get this over with.”

Rylee kisses Fluffybottom and assures him that she will return before placing him in his cat bed in the window. This is where the cat will still be when we return because he has learned that he doesn’t have to use any of his legs if he simply waits for Rylee to carry him off on his next adventure.

The drive to the store is filled with Rylee telling us all about the stuff she wants to do at school and how she’s going to make so many friends.

“Can I have a sleepover with all of my friends?” she asks.

I grin at the idea of parents bringing their little children over and meeting Ender. Oh, the delight! They would be horrified until they see how he treats Rylee like she's the most precious thing to exist.

The moment we're outside of the car, Rylee spins around to face us. "I want to hold hands," Rylee declares as she grabs Ender's hand and mine before swinging them back and forth with much vigor.

Ender leans toward her. "You know this makes it easy for us to toss you in the trash can, right?"

"No! Don't be evil like Marcus!"

"Claude wants to take you clothes shopping for school," I say.

The way her mouth falls open makes me laugh far too hard. "I would be bullied for life! I would never make friends again!"

"Claude made friends with us even with the way he's dressed! It's what's inside that matters, not out," I say.

"Yeah, but he's like hundreds and hundreds of years old. I don't want to have to wait hundreds and hundreds of years to make friends! I want them now! I'm going to have a sleepover, and Ender will read us scary stories, and then Ender will take us to that trampoline park Finn mentioned! And he'll jump with me and make me bounce super high."

"None of this is happening," Ender says.

Rylee is not deterred. "Why? Ooh! We should have the party at Orin's where there will be a pool and Ender will swim with us! I'm so excited."

"If you're making friends, why do all of your activities involve torturing me?" Ender asks. "Torture Mads. Look at his face. That's a face just begging to be tortured."

Rylee laughs as I hook her with my free arm and drag her in to kiss the side of her face before whispering loud enough that Ender can hear. "I'll help you torture him!"

"Yesssss."

"You two are not allowed to scheme together," he says. "Let's buy you these supplies and be on our way."

"First up are markers!" she says.

"Alright," Ender says as I see him head over to the aisle and start scrutinizing each package like this might be the hardest decision of his life. Rylee is over there marveling over some cheap sparkle markers that probably come out of the package dried up.

“Here,” he says as he hands me the most expensive, artist-level markers he can find like he’s sending his little Van Gogh off to art school when she drew a picture just yesterday of me and Ender and I’d mistakenly gone “What cute little aliens!”

“Ender... do you think the child needs hundred-dollar markers?”

“She has to be better than the rest,” he decides.

“How about we get the brand the teacher suggests? Oh look. They’re four dollars,” I say as I put them in the cart.

“These ones sparkle!” Rylee says, oblivious to anything else.

“Just like Ender does,” I say with a smile.

Rylee laughs so hard about my comment that Ender hangs the sparkle markers back up. “You’re getting nothing now.”

Rylee gasps. “NO!”

“Then I’m going to make Marcus babysit you.”

“He would eat me whole!”

“Whole? I bet he’d leave your eyeballs,” I tease. “I mean, no one wants to chew up eyeballs.”

“Ew! Ender! Mads is being sketchy!”

“Mads, don’t be sketchy,” Ender says.

“I was born sketchy,” I say.

“I want to do sciencey stuff like Mads one day,” she decides.

I grab her and hug her to me. “Ender... Ender, she wants to be like her papa.”

Ender looks unnecessarily concerned by that. “Rylee, you really want to be that strange? You know he got that strange after frolicking around with chemicals for too long. Do you want to cackle when you see a powder on a shelf?”

“One time. *One* time I cackled and you’ll never let me live it down. Let’s stay focused. We need pencils. And a lot of them.”

Ender stares at the sheet like he’s suddenly forgotten how numbers work. “Hell, do they eat them? Why do they need so many?”

“You said a bad word,” Rylee says. “Maybe *you* need to be babysat by Marcus!”

“I will be saying a lot of bad words if that happens,” Ender says as he checks the paper again. “Do you think the teacher just hit one too many numbers? Do we really need this many pencils?”

“We’ll do as they ask.”

“I guess if it really is for her to eat, it’d be cheaper than feeding her. That child eats more than she should be able to!”

Rylee, who is back to staring at the sparkle markers, gasps. “I do not!” But I know she won’t ask for them. She rarely asks for things unless it’s for Fluffybottom.

“Should we have a talk about not eating your classmates?” I ask.

“I forgot about that,” Ender says as he grabs the sparkle markers the moment she turns her back and tosses them into the cart. She’ll be delighted when she sees them later.

“I will not eat my classmates! I don’t think that’s how you make friends and my whole goal is to make friends.”

“No, your goal is to learn,” Ender says.

“Learning’s for losers,” I say.

Rylee giggles. “It is!”

“Says the professor,” Ender says before turning back to her. “We don’t want to tell them that you’re a vampire either, got it? We’ll keep that secret for now.”

“I know! I know! Don’t get into strange vehicles no matter how cute the kitty is and don’t tell anyone what I am. I heard it the first bazillionth time you told me.”

“Weirdly, I feel like I need to repeat things with you a ‘bazillionth’ times,” Ender says. “Are we done?”

I wave the list before him. “We are not. We only got two things. Now we need paper.”

“Let me guess, thirty packs of it or something.”

“Close,” I tease as I grab two packs and move on to a pencil box. I task Rylee with picking out what color she wants, and by the time she and Ender are done with that extremely long task, I’ve collected most of the other things that don’t require Rylee’s input. Rylee doesn’t care. She’s got a sparkle box and has locked eyes with a backpack that has a huge cat’s face on it.

“I have to have it,” she whispers.

“It’s the gaudiest thing I’ve ever seen,” Ender whispers so Rylee doesn’t hear.

“I believe most things children love are,” I say.

“I’m so excited. Ender, look! Isn’t it the best? I love it so much! It looks like Señor Fluffybottom! Can I have it?”

“Sure.”

Her eyes get extremely wide. “Really? Thank you so much!” And she rushes over and grabs him in a hug. “I love it so much. I’m so excited. I can’t wait. It’s so amazing.”

“You remember that,” I say.

“What’s that mean?” Ender asks.

“You’ll see.”

It’s four in the morning when Rylee crawls into our bed. She sets Fluffybottom on Ender’s face then lies on top of the covers where she pivots her body in at least thirty-eight different positions in the span of thirty-three minutes.

Then she leans over Ender and stares at him as he tries his best to pretend to be asleep. Then she sighs loudly and flops back down before deciding she wants to stare at me. Clearly, I’m not as good at feigning sleep as Ender because she locks eyes with me and crawls over to stare at me.

“Mads... hey, Mads... Mads, are you awake?”

“Rylee, go to sleep,” Ender growls as he hands her the cat and forces her to lie down next to him.

“I can’t sleep. I’m too excited.”

“It’s because you are rolling and flipping and flopping and breathing so heavily. You don’t need to breathe! Just... sleep.”

“But I can’t. I’m too excited. I just can’t sleep.”

“What if I read you the shortest book ever?” I ask as I grab my phone.

“Yes! That!”

So I pull out my phone and quietly read to her. She’s out before I even reach the last page and in relief, I put the phone down and close my eyes.

But now I can’t sleep. I was kicked, flopped onto, and stared at for over half an hour. How the hell am I supposed to sleep now?

I open my eyes to see that Ender is wide awake as well. He gives me a look and sighs before burying his head in his pillow.

It makes me grin as I reach over Rylee and squeeze his shoulder. Then I draw a heart on his arm with my finger and grin at him when he emerges from his pillow long enough to give me a raised eyebrow.

He’s absolutely adorable.

I feel like I've just fallen asleep when the alarm goes off and Rylee sits up with a look of absolute horror on her face.

"I don't want to go," she declares.

I wish I could photograph the look on Ender's face. "Excuse me?"

"I... don't... want to go," she says, and then she starts sobbing as she buries her face in Fluffybottom's fur.

"I'm sorry. Is this the same girl who bounced around for days. Who has worn her backpack around the house since we got it. Who tried to go to sleep wearing it. And woke us up because she was so excited?" Ender asks.

"I told you," I say.

Ender just gapes at both of us. "Come on now."

"But I have to leave you and I have to leave Señor Fluffybottom and I have to leave Mads. I would even rather stay with Marcus!"

"Wow! That's quite the declaration," I say. "Evil Marcus?"

"YES!"

"Come on," Ender says as he drags her out of bed. "We're getting dressed."

"And I'm going to get your breakfast ready," I assure her. "We don't want to be late for your first fun day of school."

Ender nods. "Yeah, the bus will be here before you know it." Which is really the worst thing for him to say when she's already in meltdown mode.

"I don't want to get on a bus!" she cries.

"You were the one who told me you wanted to ride the bus the first day because it sounded so fun!" Ender says.

"NO! I will stay here, and I will just be perfect and you can keep teaching me. Yes. That."

And off he drags her as her wails fill the house.

By the time she comes out dressed and ready in the cutest clothes that do nothing to help her red face and puffy eyes, I slide some waffles in front of her. The tears mix with the syrup as Ender stares at me like I can fix this problem. Does he think I have children of my own that I've forgotten to mention up to this point?

"Honey, it's fine," I assure her. "You're going to have so much fun."

"Think of the friends," Ender says.

"The only friend I need is Fluffybottom!"

Through her sobs, she somehow manages to eat most of her breakfast.

“We’ll run you to school, alright? We’ll skip the bus,” I say. “Will that help?”

She nods, which I should have known would be a lie because the moment we roll into the school, she unbuckles her seat belt and latches onto Ender like an alien lifeforce planning on sucking the energy right out of him.

“I feel like the bus would have been better,” Ender says.

I grimace and hurry off to see if her teacher, who we met the other day, would be willing to come get her. She’s all smiles and happy as can be as she comes out. It’s clear the woman has dealt with her fair share of sobbing children as she hurries Rylee away while Rylee looks back like she’s being hauled off for life.

“Well... that was fun,” I say quite sarcastically.

“She needs to toughen up,” Ender decides as we drive for home. “It’ll be good for her to toughen up a bit.”

“Uh huh...” I say as we reach home, and I proceed to watch Ender pace his way around the house for most of the morning. Even Señor Fluffybottom seems to realize his services are needed as he meows at Ender until the man says something like “Why the fuck do I need to hold you? Don’t you have four legs?” and then proceeds to pace around the house while holding the cat.

“I’m going to go get some milk,” he suddenly says about eleven o’clock.

“Oh yes, we definitely need milk. You must make haste,” I say.

And off he goes as if I wasn’t being extremely sarcastic. He returns not long later with absolutely no milk.

“And how was Rylee?” I ask.

He stares at me for a moment, as if he could possibly be surprised I knew he wasn’t going out to get milk. “Perfectly fine.”

“Yeah? Did you stalk around the school like a thief in the night?”

“I stalked around the school with finesse, thank you very much.”

“What was she doing?”

“At recess playing with a group of kids.”

I stand up and walk over to him. “So now you’re the only one crying.”

“I’m not crying!” he declares as I laugh.

I wrap him up and kiss him. “You’re so cute.”

“No.”

“No?” I ask.

“Not... no.”

I kiss him again and he pulls me in for a deeper kiss. “You know what this means? House to ourselves.”

“What the hell have I been doing?” he whispers as he grabs my pants and whips them down before picking me up.

I can’t help but laugh as he carries me off for the bedroom.