

Chapter 05 – Helsing’s Legacy

“Mr. Holland. I understand that on the night shift there was a certain lack of decorum required,” Ed’s voice cut as he entered her office. The door had barely opened before she laid into him. Her dress was only half as sharp as her tone, and that was saying something. He had expected some pushback, of course, but he thought that she would at least have the decency to give him another few minutes. Or maybe let the door shut behind him before she did so. But no, that wasn’t going to be their relationship, it seemed. “Here, we’ll require you be a bit more put together. I expect you to conform to the company dress code in the future – just consider this a warning.”

“Noted,” He said glancing down at his attire. He raised his arms slightly to get a good look at himself. Aside from wrinkles, he thought he was within code. “What am I missing, exactly?”

“Management is required to wear business attire. For men, a pair of black or brown slacks, a tucked-in white or gray collared, button-up shirt, matching coat, shoes, and belt,” She listed – each item of clothing counted down as her fingers pointedly rising as each was enumerated.

“Oh, right, I’m management,” Mattias gave a quick nod, raising a hand and a finger of his own, “And if I don’t have those things?”

“Get them,” She said. There was no feeling in the words. It was so matter-of-factly put out that it could have been the words printed to page. She did soften after a moment, though, with a soft sigh. “I’ll have HR email you the expensing paperwork.”

“Neat,” He said with a bit of a smile, as he let his handset on his drink and twist open the small red bottle. “Was this meeting specifically about dressing me down, or did you...” He took a sip. “...have something else.”

She didn’t seem to enjoy his nonchalant discrediting of her reprimanding. Her face was a bit distorted, somewhere between annoyance and exhaustion if he was reading her correctly. Of course, she wasn’t as readable as most people he had met, but he couldn’t put a finger on why. Her natural demeanor never seemed to change that much, and even when she was frustrated, like now, she would quickly return to her normal cold sort of self.

“Something else,” She added, as her voice faded back to the regular cold that he had known from her in the past. “I have a couple of new members for your team coming. One is a new hire. He’ll be along in a few days. Another will be a transfer from our data center support team. Both are moving to town for the jobs.”

Mattias let out a little, single chuckle.

“What?” She knew it was a bit rude.

“Nothing, just a surprise.” He responded with a shrug. Really, he was just hoping they realized what they were getting into – and didn’t personally know how they would possibly decide moving here for this kind of job was worth the cost of moving and resettling your life. He didn’t know their lives,

though, so maybe they had a good reason. He shouldn't judge. He would. He just knew that he shouldn't do that.

"Good. Next week will likely be when they start," Ed added, finally sitting down in the large executive chair behind the actual red oak desk – likely the only real wood on the entire floor. "Now, due to a recent change, you won't be getting an office."

"Wait, what? What change?" He protested, having expected a private office to do his work as a manager. It was likely the only thing he was really looking forward to with the change, and even then he realized it was more of a silver lining.

"Managers and team leaders will now be working with their team on the floor. We're converting the offices," She replied.

"Except this one," He spoke with a small shake of his head.

"Right. Directors will still have private offices,"

Mattias didn't say anything. He couldn't think of anything.

"It wasn't my decision," Ed added quickly, "Will that be a problem?"

There were a thousand things that went through his head that moment. A thousand smart remarks and childish quips, along with a handful of reasonable complaints. Of course, when push came to shove none of those came out of his mouth. Only a single word slipped out, "No." He heard himself say. It was almost as if the word had a mind of its own as if it wanted to escape and didn't mind that there were plenty more arguments that could have been made. He never would have admitted that there were other reasons that he just said no, not even to himself – but he wouldn't have long to dwell on it anyway.

"Good. Your team is assigned to a cubicle square, but luckily you are right next to the windows," She added, "And the break room. So, you'll have ample chances to meet the rest of the team here on the day shift."

He just blinked.

"You don't look happy with that,"

"You do realize I'm a vampire, right?"

"Yes."

He swallowed and adjusted, "Okay. So," He motioned towards the office, "See how it's shady in here?"

"Yes," She nodded, and on the third or fourth nod realized what he was getting at. Her head lulled back and she let out a long, "Oh. I understand. Sunlight is uncomfortable for you,"

"Well, that's one part,"

"Can you last a week?"

“What?” He responded as he watched her pull a pad of paper from one of the drawers.

She set it down on the desk and grabbed a pen, clicking it a couple of times, “Can you last a week?”

“I mean, yes. But it’s...”

“Good. We’ll get shades installed...”

“...exactly comfortable.”

“Will that work? Shades?”

“It’ll help,” He couldn’t help but say the words with a bit of quiet amazement at the way she worked. It was as if he was only tangentially here. That the words he had started to say cued her into something, but now she knew precisely what she was going to do and how she was going to handle it – without any further notes from him.

“Good,” She had written down something in sharp letters, circled in a way that almost made a triangle more than it made a circle. He could read it fine but tried to look away when her eyes twisted back to him. “Anything else?”

“I just want to raise one more little thing to your attention,” He spoke softly, raising his hand and giving a little pinching motion at the term little.

“Yes?”

“I’m not sure how well this set up will work for a team off nightshift. It’ll take them a while to...”

“Already ahead of you,” She said with a nod. “I understand they’ll take some getting used to this kind of work environment and we want to make it as easy as possible. So, your team will have an easy week, and on Friday we’ll have a large meet and greet with catered food.”

“I think that’s,” Mattias waved his hands down quickly, “the worst idea,”

“Really?” She spoke as the door opened behind him, she leaned to one side, “This is my next meeting. Mr. Kelly. Mr. Kelly, Mr. Holland – he’s just transferred from Night Shift, and he and his team will be,”

“Oh, the new Damage Control team,” The old man said reaching out a hand. “I’ve heard good things.

“A pleasure,” Mattias reached his hand out towards Kelly.

“Right, Mr. Holland and I were just talking about his vampirism,” Ed spoke. She never noticed the next part, or if she did she made no signal that she had. Kelly stopped his hand and pulled it away at the word vampirism.

“Oh. Well, good to have you aboard. I can come back,” Kelly spoke. It left Mattias with his hand in the air.

“No, Mr. Holland and I can continue another time.” She said, waving towards the door. “If you would, Mr. Holland. There is a placard for your team on your cubicles, just hang a left and just past the break room.”

“Right. Another time,” Mattias said, shoving his hand into his pocket. “Kelly.” He nodded to the man and stepped out into the hall again. He didn’t wait or hesitate. He just left.

So far at this job he had been incredibly lucky.

He knew that. He always knew that. He was treated very well for the most part. His team was understanding of his condition as a non-human, and what that entailed. He didn’t have to deal with the old-world mistrust and fear for the most part. His team knew that he wasn’t going to attack them or spread his curse, or any of that nonsense. He was just trying to do his best with the cards that were offered him. But there was still a hatred between humans and many non-humans. The people like him, the so-called ‘dark’ non-humans may have had it the worst.

Vampires, in eras before the industrial revolution, had preyed on humans. So it was understandable that it took them time to get over that. But that was two eras ago. The Industrial Age, the Atomic Age, and now into the Information Age – and still that old fear held on. Fear that kept people from giving him a chance or shaking his hand.

The good note was that the sunlight wasn’t making him nauseated any longer. It was the stress of the realization that he was going to be at least partially ostracized by the people that worked here that was causing it now. Stress was a much different sort of unwell feeling, one that at least he could turn to anger if it got too bad. His particular non-human traits were not even as noticeable as many others, and he began to worry about what might happen to any other non-humans that worked here. Lindsay was obviously not human. He shook his head and tried to chase off the thoughts after realizing he had been standing in front of the office for a few seconds. He started his walk down the aisles of cubicles and towards his new home away from home. His new prison in the sun.

The walk down to this new office area, this new place they would be, was longer. For the first time in a long time, he felt the stares of the people around him. Eyes boring into his being and examining him, trying to size him up and figure him out without so much as a word. He had grown accustomed to his comfortable life, with his comfortable team, and now, suddenly he was back here. He was back in a pit of emotions he felt he had grown past. Or, maybe survived in the past would have been a better term.

As he found his way to the cubicles, he nearly bumped into someone coming out of the break room. They didn’t say anything, except a simple, “Watch it,” As they passed by. He tried not to think anything of it.

That was a hard thing to do in his situation. He was hyper-aware of his situation, thanks to his condition. He concentrated on his objective. Get to his desk. Find a way to make it through the day. That was the simplest thing he could do. He was probably making more of this than there was to it. He was overthinking. No one noticed. He just looked like a pale fellow, someone who needed to go outside for a while if possible. Of course, that was true, but also something he just could not do currently - or really, ever again.

When he came around the corner of his team's cubicle block there was a moment when his breath just left him. It was stark. The cubicle was an open plan, with six sterile and empty desks - with fresh new computers that smelled as if the entire area had only recently been unwrapped from whatever plastic it had originally been wrapped in and heated by the warmth of the rising sun. Of course, this was also mixed the thousand various smells wafting over from the nearby break room which was near headache-inducing, but coffee was winning out. So, to him, the smell was coffee and plastic.

His team was not here yet, except for Lindsay who stood awkwardly at one side of their new open floor office. They were still likely rolling in and finding a spot, misjudging the time they needed to a lot, or simply not being able to wake up as needed. Lindsay shuffled to one side as he entered, a bit further - nearly brushing up against a desk before a worried look crossed her face and she moved to the middle place between two of the desks. She gave him a little half-wave, her arm twisting at her elbow to raise a hand for a split second before it snapped right back down to her side.

He gave her a nod. She was his unabashed favorite. Sure, they were both non-human and they had that in common, but that wasn't what made him like her. His joke was that she was quiet and didn't bother him. That wasn't it either. She was honest in the exact opposite sense he was. She wore her nerves on her sleeve and you could tell when she was nervous. He just bottled it up, hiding from all the Helsing in the world that hated him for being him. He was detached. It would have been better to be like her. To be honest.