

Chapter 09 – Brand New Mess

Helena Piper started the next day. She was assigned to shadow the rest of the team while Mattias' explanation on why he torpedoed the 'superior' candidate was brought up before Ed and a couple people from Human Resources. Apparently Benjamin accused them of discrimination because his status as an Incubus was not a reason to choose another person. It took a couple of hours, but Matt finally explained that had nothing to do with it, it was his choice to attempt to use those powers to gain an unnatural benefit. He also argued that it was inappropriate for the workplace, even if it had not been used for personal gain, as it violated the company's sexual conduct guidelines. Incubi were charming, but they charmed in a very specific way.

Human Resources basically raked him over the coals for the first half-hour of the meeting, but Ed was quiet. She realized after he explained the feeling of the handshake, the cold drawing her forward to an odd warmth and then her mind quickly being made up about how he was a better choice; it all just fit too well. HR was not as familiar with what had happened, but once Mattias explained that both he and his Fomorian team member were able to detect his leaning into his charms rather easier. Really, more Lindsay than himself. It was just that sexual charms, like all those used by the Cubi, just were not effective on Vampires. He didn't have blood for that kind of thing anymore, so it wasn't something he could remotely care about. So, it just didn't work. His familiarization with charms from being married to a witch gave him the rest of the clues needed to put it together fast.

When Ed first spoke up, it was to keep Lindsay from having to talk to HR. She explained that she saw what Mattias was saying, and she thought he was right. Then, the conversation was over. He was no longer being interrogated but instead was near buried under a layer of paperwork. He had to fill out incident reports, get everything in order, and then double-check everything. Then they scanned and copied and signed more things. Then HR gave him a speech about how he needed to not act so quickly and check with his manager before moving on things like this. Of course, he didn't listen. He didn't care. He didn't want a person like that on his team, and frankly, if they did, he was happy to leave over it.

They agreed that Helena was a good choice though. As an option, she was a reliable worker, and she knew the company and its values well. That would save them a lot of time. Her previous managers spoke well of her ability to adapt and her passion for taking on something new. It was annoying to deal with. But HR had more important things to do and soon enough they headed off and he was allowed to head back to his team and help out like he had planned on.

But something stopped him as he reached the door. Ed had still been quiet throughout the meeting, and after. She hadn't said much. It wasn't like her. That usual confidence seemed to have disappeared. He took a breath, and that turned into a sigh. He didn't know why, but he felt he had to ask.

"Everything okay, boss?" His hand rested on the door, waiting for an answer. He didn't know if she would give one, or if she would just give him a quick and quiet response to get him out of her hair. He had to ask though.

"I'm okay, Mr. Holland," She gave a quiet response, which was all he had expected. But she continued, "I don't like being tricked, though,"

He paused. His hand was on the handle of the door and he would have been able to just leave with a quick statement. He took a breath and shook his head. "Yeah, it sucks. But don't let it weigh on you. He cheated, and you can't be expected to plan for that, you know."

She didn't say anything for a second, "I'm not used to dealing with non-humans."

"We're not terribly common. And not to put too fine a point on it, but humans have made it a point to ignore us their entire history," He shrugged, "Write off the stories from the dark and hope that things keep moving forward. Not that I blame anyone. I used to be human. I didn't think much about non-humans either until, well," He tapped two fingertips against his neck and glanced back over to her. "Seriously, if he had realized I was a vampire, he probably would have gotten away with it. One of the few times I've had a silver lining with that particular symptom, to be honest."

She didn't say anything again for a moment. He couldn't look back at her. He didn't want to see her vulnerability for some reason. He had no desire to have any sort of control over her and crossing this bridge might give him just a bit. He didn't like to change. Having her at arm's length was a good way to keep change away from his near future as well. He couldn't leave her spiraling into the thoughts that a brush with non-humans like this could cause. It looked like he would have to break that change.

"It's not my first time," She admitted. It was a string of words that felt a little heftier than he wanted. It made him turn around towards her.

He saw a woman sitting at her desk. Her usual sharpness was gone. The way she slouched and leaned against her desk was much less powerful than her usual demeanor. "What does that matter?"

"I should have known better..." Her eyes kept glued to the floor below, or perhaps the top of her desk. He wasn't that sure from this angle if he was honest.

"I hate to tell you, but it doesn't work that way, you know?"

She glanced up at him but didn't say anything.

"I've been doing this for a while. I've lived in this world for years. It doesn't get any easier. There are still missteps all the time," Mattias said with a hand motion in the direction of his team. "I had no idea how to handle a Fomorian until I met Lindsay." He shrugged, "I'm used to Witches, but Mountain Witches from European ancestry are vastly different than those from Asian ones, like Wu." He shrugged a bit, "And I could really go on."

"I know," She said quietly. "I guess I'm just rusty. It's been a while since I was able to deal with non-humans day-to-day." She took a deep breath. "Sorry, I'm just feeling stupid. I appreciate you taking a minute to talk to me though."

"Well, don't feel stupid. You did fine, given the situation," He shrugged a bit. "You're doing fine with all of it," He sighed, "And thanks for sticking your neck out to get us a person. I wish it hadn't turned out as weird as it did." Why he continued, he would never know. But he added, "And if you need anyone to talk about non-human stuff, I'm available. I have a whole lot of time and not a lot of goings-on to fill it."

“Thank you, Mr. Holland.”

“Hm.” Mattias smirked, “I thought that exchange might get a Mattias, instead of a Holland,” He gave an exaggerated sigh with a slumping shrug before finally pulling open the door. “Until next time, boss.”

“Try not to make it an HR reason for the next meeting,” She called after him as the door shut itself.

There was a little brush of air as he was back out in the cubicle farm. From her nice airconditioned and private office, there was a different taste of air. It was less stale. It didn't make the top of his mouth itch as badly as this foul air did. It just reminded him that it was implicit that he would get an office as management. What a shame.

But in a weird way, he was oddly happy with the day. It was a near-miss with HR, and nothing bad happened. And he felt like he had gotten to see a side of Ed he didn't know existed, with a bit of vulnerability. She was a good boss. He didn't trust her still, but she did feel more human. There was a bit of irony to that statement for him, he knew. He had been human once and at heart he still was. Just a human with a condition that made him dead and only animated by drinking blood and other such weirdness.

He adjusted his jacket. There was a moment where he dusted his shoulders off. His hair didn't grow anymore, so it was specifically frustrating that he had a sort of dandruff. It was odd that certain little things bothered him like that. Of course, he had dead skin flakes. The fact that all his skin was technically susceptible and the only way to stave that was with fresh blood should have made it bother him less. It just showed up so obviously. He hated it.

The distraction of that train of thought came crashing to a halt as he realized that Hal was standing nervously at Mattias' team's cubicle area. That was not a good sign, and as he approached he heard quiet. There was nothing but one team member talking. One whose voice he didn't know well yet, but at that moment recognized immediately.

“I understand... I would be upset too,” He heard her say, her voice shaking as he walked closer. “No... no sir.” She was responding to someone on the other side of a call. “I'm not trying to... no, sir.” She was struggling to keep afloat it sounded like.

Mattias put a hand on Hal's shoulder, and whispered, “What's going on?”

Hal gave a quick shrug, “Maddox came and got me. The first call the girl was soloing, some guy seems to have thought she gave him two different answers, and just went off on her.”

Mattias rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Right, guess its time to work, eh?” He said slipping past and twisting over to his desk. He took a breath and turned the screen back on.

“I'm sorry, let me... let me see if I can,” Helena tried to get a word in edgewise.

Meanwhile, the manager pulled up his console, slipped on his headset and breathed softly. He clicked a couple buttons and prepared to dive in. She was using another employee's account, so it took a minute to find the live call. But once he had, he waved over Maddox, who was closest. “One of you take her on a break after this, right?”

Maddox just gave a thumbs up and slipped over to stand between Ashley and Lindsay, who were sitting around Helena as she talked.

Mattias clicked the button. And then there was sound in his headset.

“Look, I don’t know what kind of game you think you’re playing, but I best damn hear a manager in the next five seconds. I have your name written down and will sue you personally to hell and back for personal defamation and false advertising.” He heard a voice barking into the phone. He had planned on defusing the situation – but he had a simple rule he always followed.

“Hello, this is Mattias Holland, Manager of the Guest Enrichment Center. Helena had chimed in to get me to join the call a few moments ago. I’d be happy to help,” He said, sickly sweet and unphased by the anger in the voice on the other end. “I’m afraid I may be unable to do so now, however.”

“What? Who the hell is this? Say your name and position again?”

“My name is Mattias Holland. I am the Manager of the Guest Enrichment Center for Yorokobi Entertainment. You were speaking with our newest member in...”

“Oh, good, finally. I want to,”

“I’m sorry ma’am, I can’t help you. I’ve cut off Miss Piper’s line as well. Given you have chosen to threaten a team member with a lawsuit, I am legally and ethically obligated to inform you of the following.”

“What? What do you mean you cannot,”

“Ma’am, please listen closely. Your call has been recorded and your complaint logged. We will be looking into the situation. However, given your threat, my team can no longer help you. Your call will be sent to our legal department, and they will be in touch with you or your representation as soon as possible. Can I have the name of your legal counsel?”

“What? I don’t... I mean,”

“Am I to understand you do not have legal counsel? If so, is the phone number you called from your personal number?” He asked coldly, nodding his head back towards the hall to try to get Maddox or someone to help Helena out and get her walking it off.

“I. Yes, but I want to talk.”

“I’m sorry, ma’am. If you would like I can transfer you directly to our legal department, but no further conversations can be held with our employees directly. Would you like me to transfer you?”

“No. I just want,”

“I’m sorry, I can’t,”

“I was kidding. It wasn’t a real...” Mattias didn’t say anything, he just let the person ramble for a second before the realized their misstep, “I didn’t want anything from a stupid foreign company anyway,” There was a loud snap, the sound of a phone being slammed, and it was over. He glanced after

his newest member, who was being walked out towards the break room. A great first day on the job for her. He wondered if it would make her rescind her acceptance.

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