

# First Day

The IBG building looked less intimidating than it was. A simple glass and steel building, as bright at night as during the day much like any other corporate building in Toronto. People in business dress made their way in and out, each with a unique sense of purpose.

Eustace Heath stared at the building in trepidation. The building seemed to ooze with power. The air was thick with it in a way that he was sure even humans could feel, a sentiment backed up by the almost imperceptible increase in pace of humans that passed it. The IBG was the core of the vampire elite. Each house would pick only their best to work for the IBG group. His financial skills had earned him a slot and he was excited to join their ranks. He ran his fingers through his thick brown hair, gave himself a calming shake, and strode confidently into the building.

The lobby was a cavernous space; it's polarized glass windows allowing in a wealth of sunlight. Eustace approached the reception desk which also appeared to serve as a security station. It was shaped like a broken ring coated in a black marble whose veins swam with rich textured gold and a creamy crimson. One of the guards, an attractive young man with a jawline that could cut paper, rose to greet him. "Welcome to the IBG group. How can I help you?"

"I'm Eustace Heath," Eustace said. "I'm supposed to be joining finance today."

The man looked at a nearby screen for a moment. "You have your ID?"

Eustace handed the man his ID, which he examined for a moment before returning.

"Have a seat in the waiting area. Someone will be over shortly." The man pointed to a small seating area filled with comfortable and rather pricey looking chairs.

Eustace was waiting for about fifteen minutes before a man in a garish red suit grabbed his attention. His head was shaved clean, including his eyebrows. "Eustace!" the man called out with the exaggerated sincerity of a person greeting an old coworker whose name they knew and that was all. "Welcome to IBG Toronto. I trust your trip went smoothly? No trouble on the way?"

"Nothing of note," Eustace replied as he rose to his feet.

"Excellent, excellent." The man gave him a critical look. "You are rather handsome. That's such a blessing. We have a reputation to uphold as members of the third house."

"I'm an accountant. I don't think it should matter how I look," Eustace said.

"Would you say that to Lord Ethelred?" The man asked with an amused smirk.

"Not unless he wanted me to," Eustace frowned.

"Well, he doesn't," The man said. "He told me I looked good in red. I've been wearing it exclusively for 6 years. Anyway, my name is Lucas, I'm the onboarding liason. I'll show you around and get you settled in." Lucas turned and began walking.

"Does Lord Ethelred come here often?" Eustace asked, striding to catch up to Lucas' brisk pace.

"All the house lords do," Lucas said. "As a matter of fact, the rumor mill says there is a meeting of them later this week so everyone is on high alert."

Eustace groaned internally. "My timing couldn't have been better," He said.

"Don't worry. Money is sexy, but finance is dull. Chances are good he won't pay you much mind, but never zero." Lucas led Eustace to a spacious elevator bank. Eight elevators stood in a half circle around a single, larger one in the middle. The central elevator had a pair of guards standing to either side. Lucas led Eustace toward it, either unaware or unconcerned with the mild hint of annoyance both guards faces began to show.

"Butch! Cassidy!" Lucas said gaily. "How are my favorite second house children."

"Lucas," one of the guards, a broad and stocky man of average height said from between closed teeth.

"The guy is Butch and the gal is Cassidy. Technically, it's Cassandra, but it's not nearly as catchy." Lucas said with a wide grin.

Cassidy was a notably muscular woman and looked all the world as though she were trying to kill Lucas with her mind. "You've been warned about being a distraction Lucas."

"I'm too pretty not to be," Lucas said with a snap of his fingers. "Now if you two wouldn't mind opening the lift, I have a tour to give."

Butch sniffed the air. "New guy got some ID?"

"Come now," Lucas said he patted Eustace's shoulder and gently brushed his arm to stop him from pulling his ID out. "He's already with me. He doesn't need that."

"Fuck off, Lucas." Cassidy growled.

"Now that's downright unprofessional, Cass." He was needling them on purpose and Cassidy was clearly taking the bait.

"Look, Lucas," Butch said, his tone level. "We don't have the patience or love for your house needed to play your games. We both know you only pull this shit because you're in the lobby." He locked eyes with Eustace. "Second house runs general security. Don't let Lucas get you on our bad side because he's bored. Now show me your fucking ID, or you can both pound sand in your piss holes."

Lucas chuckled as Eustace pulled out his ID and offered

it to Butch who snatched it irritably. After a moments examination he offered it back. As Eustace took it, he noticed Butch's expression shift into confusion. Eustace followed his gaze to a Trio of Children of Contrition. Two were in black suits and the last in their more common hooded dress. Male children weren't unheard of, but they were certainly anomalous. Seeing two at once and for them to be in an IBG building was so singular as to be alarming. Two seemed to be leading the third, but they walked as though they were invincible. Normally they were, but here in an IBG building the most certainly were not.

"That is the elevator to the upper floors?" One of the Children in a suit said. The voice was clearly female, making the situation feel less strange almost immediately.

"It is," Cassidy said carefully.

"Good. I am Lumina." She gestured to the woman in the dress. "My sister Zelma." She gestured to the man behind her while also bowing her head. "And our lord and head of house Evandrus. You will call the elevator so that our lord might call a meeting with his siblings to signal his return."

Eustace hadn't woken up today expecting to meet a house head, let alone the rumored dead bogeyman that headed the Children of Contrition. In truth, he was unimpressed. The house heads were terrifying concepts. Each was a child of the First Father. Each had enough power to strike even an elder down without difficulty. The man standing before him seemed so normal. He was tall, but not strikingly so. Muscular, but not to an unusual degree. He couldn't feel anything special about this man who even the other house heads dared not to cross.

"Lord Evandrus is dead," Butch said. "No one's seen him in a hundred years. Why should I just accept this guy as him?"

"Are you questioning the word of a Child of Contrition?" Lumina's tone became dangerous.

"I'm not scared of you," Butch said, his tone hard. "This isn't some back alley dirt hole. It's a corporate HQ. What are you gonna do? Pop my curse? You certainly aren't gonna drag any wolves in here to do your dirty work. So, cut the bullshit."

Even with her face hidden by a mask, it was clear Lumina was seething. Butch was right. Children of Contrition were dangerous everywhere except in places with large numbers of vampires or if an elder was present. Eustace had heard of them being killed because they overestimated their own skill or couldn't mentally overpower a particular target. The other child, Zelma suddenly placed a gentle hand on Lumina's arm as to calm her agitated sister.

"I'm sorry. Your name?" Zelma said, her voice like honey.

"Butch,"

"Thank you, Butch. Tell me, if we accept your statement

of our lack of power here as fact, what would you require to allow us passage?"

"An ID issued by IBG security," Butch replied. "Or to be vouched for by an elder or house head."

Zelma gave an exaggerated sigh before turning to the man they claimed to be Evandrus. "I'm sorry, My Lord."

It happened to fast for Eustace to see. Evandrus was suddenly holding Butch by his mouth. The stocky vampire was striking Evandrus' arm, face, and body in a futile attempt to free himself. "Worry not, Zelma," Evandrus said, his voice cool. "He is simply doing his job. I can respect that."

Passers by stopped to watch as Butch was forced to his knees. Without realizing it, Eustace and the others had all backed away, their eyes locked on a lesson in progress. The house heads were known for physical shows of force and in this, it appeared, Evandrus would show his credentials.

Evandrus began to slowly squeeze Butch's face. The bones of his jaw and lower skull crunching like the shell of a hard boiled egg. Butch's muffled scream only able to escape through his nose. Evandrus then, with his other hand casually tore out Butch's top four front teeth, crushing them one by one between his thumb and forefinger. "Is this satisfactory identification, Butch?" Evandrus asked, his voice a tundra.

Butch squeezed his eyes shut and nodded in Evandrus' grip.

Evandrus released his victim and wiped his hand on the man's shirt.

"Now," Lumina said. "Please call the elevator."

"Of course, Ma'am," Cassidy said as she pressed the call button behind her.

After a moment, the soft ding of the elevator signaled its arrival shortly before its wide doors slide open.

"Sister, I think our man Butch here is a excellent guard, is he not?" Zelma said.

"He is. As a matter of fact, I think he should serve as an example for everyone else." Lumina turned to Butch. "I'm sure Lord Evandrus will be pleased to see you standing here as a testament to your dedication to the duties given you as a member of the second house. See to it that you are here when we leave."

"I could not imagine the disappointment we will feel if you aren't in this exact spot when next we pass." Zelma's tone was gleeful.

Evandrus made a soft sound of affirmation as he stepped into the elevator with his two aides close behind.

Zelma clapped her hands sharply and turned to lean out of the elevator, facing Lucas and Eustace. "Did we steal this from you? I'm sorry. You were clearly waiting." She gestured

to the inside of the elevator. "Join us?"

"Oh, no. We wouldn't want to crowd," Lucas said, taking a small step back.

"A shame," Zelma said sadly. She leaned back into the elevator and waved politely as the doors closed.

As soon as the door closed, Lucas's phone was in his hand. "I just saw Evandrus. No, the fucking other one! Of course, I mean the seventh lord." He held his hand up to Eustace as a sign to wait and walked off to make a call leaving the new accountant to ponder exactly how much more dull his job could be.