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Vorzsák Milán

ENDLESS EARTH

Evolution is a gift. Do not waste it.

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I. ELF

“She’s an elf!”

The two men were walking down a corridor, a simple, ordinary one, in a complex, extraordinary facility. The younger one, who women might have found handsome in a softer, scientist type of way, with his wavy brown hair and hazel eyes, was trying to explain the unexplainable.

“An elf...” his companion, an older, portly man with graying hair looked baffled. “Brian, when you told me you would bring her, I was still thinking of you as the ultimate professional it now seems that you only used to be.”

“Alan, I still am. And I am telling you: she is an elf.”

“You mean like Santa’s, or...?” the older man was now chuckling.

“No, I mean like pointy ears, slight, perfect build, blue hair and almond-shaped eyes, drop-dead gorgeous, protagonist of ageless fairy tales, I’m telling you she’s not human!”

“So, you brought your crush... to work!”

“Ok, just wait until we get there.”

“Fine, I give up. What is her name?”

“Endless Earth,” the voice was rich, melodious, filled with the fresh fragrance of nature after a summer rain.

Both men turned, and Alan’s jaw dropped. Brian’s breath only caught. In front of them stood a woman no more than five feet tall, slender, but seriously fit. Her hair was the azure blue of the summer sky, her eyes of deep forest green bore into one like a sweet memory. She wore a simple, sleeveless top and knee-length pants of some cozy fabric, and light sandals cupped her small feet. Oh, and she did have pointy ears.

“Did I not tell you to wait in the room?” the younger scientist threw up his hands in exasperation. “This is a top-secret facility, full of..”

“You’re cute when you frown like that, really,” the breeze of the woods seemed to whisper to him. “But there is no place that is not Earth’s. Would you not find it funny if someone tried to forbid you not to enter your own kitchen, or sleep in your bed?”

“Let me handle this,” the older man sighed. “Young lady, if you do not follow protocol, you might end up in serious trouble. National security does not fool around. Meaning, the theoretical construct that most people have in their minds when they think of the word ‘jail’ might all of a sudden acquire solid, iron bars...” he added the last bit with a lowered voice, in mock-confidentiality.

“My child, do not worry about your mother so,” Alan thought he could actually smell wild roses in a sound. “I will not step onto your little sand-castle of rules. Earth promises. Actually, I’m here to help.”

Alan looked at Brian at a complete loss.

"I thought you were handling it," Brian shrugged innocently.

#

"Where did you get her, anyway?" Alan whispered furiously.

"She just appeared out of the blue at the Nevada compound I had been working in for the last few months. She chased me down in the dark, actually, and called me by my name. Then, she said she was thirsty."

"So, she... walked, like, sixty miles through the desert, to a facility so secret that your mother does not know about its existence, and she's been with Defense Research for thirty years. And asked for Brian to come out."

"I had already been out. Look, I know, and it gets weirder. It is why I brought her here, to Washington. To you, the boss. Because she is not human. We checked her DNA."

"Really? I cannot believe you would fall for that. How does she speak human so well, then?"

"She learned. Don't look at me like that. I am not that gullible. I tested her. She learned German in under one day."

"How do you know she had not already known?"

"She did not know I was testing her when I told her 'Du bist eine dumme, kranke Frau.' And she had no reaction whatsoever."

"And?"

Bran lifted his brown curls and showed a severely mangled left ear. "Then I gave her a German language chip to study, and by the evening she was reading Goethe in original, and then she

suddenly asked me... rather crossly, so to speak, why I had called her a dumb and sick woman in the morning. Uncanny memory, too.”

“Hey, nice garden you have here,” the strange creature suddenly spoke, and her blue hair floated through the air and seemed to envelop the old Chairman of Defense Research. The attack on his senses wasn’t sexual. There was something ancient and pure there instead, a feeling of primordial rightness that enveloped him every time the strange woman addressed him. It was like walking under the strong, sheltering branches of an ancient oak, or diving into the torrent of a waterfall, or both at the same time, somehow.

“I am glad you find it to your liking, Miss... Earth... ahem.”

“Let me make it easier for you,” she smiled at him like a summer sunset. “They call me ‘Endless one’... or so they did when they called me anything. Brian calls me ‘Earth’, a name that I used to be called, but which is really also inaccurate, since everyone in my order is... or was... Earth. Earth Sky, Night Earth... and in all actuality, these are really titles, not proper names. ‘Endless’ is the title of what you would call a high priestess these days, I guess, though Earth is not a religion but a family.”

“I see,” Alan said, while clearly, he did not. “So, you are a leader among your people, if I understand correctly. And when did you become... endless? With a capital letter...”

“About two hundred thousand years ago. And to answer your next question of how I got here, well, Earth was fleeing for dear life, from the circumstances that had brought the last Ice Age. I understand it has been over for about seventeen thousand years

now. Lucky you. Or not so much, really, since this is the end, and all.”

“Wait, too much information again, I’m afraid. I feel I am getting too old for this, but it seems that I am still insolently young, compared to some of us in the room. So, you are hundreds of thousands of years old, and you were trying to save your own life. Or was the Earth attempting to save all life?”

“Both, actually.”

“Of course. And you came to our humble year of 2456. Somehow. And this is the end of what?”

“She claims that she wanted to skip the Ice Age and then start to re-animate the Earth”, Brian cut in, to give his old mentor the gist of what he knew would be mostly unintelligible and lengthy explanations on Earth’s part. “And she actually arrived to the end of times. For Earth. I mean *the* Earth.

“You mean time travel and Armageddon, all in one bunch? Is that what she is selling? She is a science fiction doomsday prophet? So, what is it that that you think will do us in, Miss Earth? Some classic cliché, like more global warming, nuclear war, or a meteor-strike, perhaps? Is that why you brought her, Brian? She got to you with some bleak prophecy? I thought I had taught you better than this.”

“There is nothing wrong with Earth, or *the* Earth, for that matter, Mr. Alan,” the voice of the elf sang like a madrigal. “I am as confused as you are. This world is nothing like the one Earth used to know, but I recognize a good system when I see one. The new race that Earth created has outdone itself. You have developed and multiplied wondrously, but then again, Earth designed you for just that purpose, did I not? Don’t answer that,

you cannot. And yes, I can talk about myself in first person if I have to clarify certain blurrier aspects of my various purposes to my children. Earth's children. I designed you, Alan, my child, and as a good mother, I am worried about my capable family: you, Brian, and everyone in the world. And I swear to you: I will not let anything happen to my progenies. Not if Earth can help it. For Earth... is Endless!"

#

"This is a revolutionary design. Very different from all previous patterns."

"I know," she said with confidence. "And I do believe it necessary for the development we have in mind."

"All right, explain."

"I think the most obvious change that my new design proposes is doing away with the muzzle. I consider it to be a must for our new purposes, and the old one has become obsolete anyway, since we are designing a creature that will not rip its prey to bits using only the strength of its teeth, augmented by neck movement. So, we may soften the design of the jawline and make it more elegant, more flexible..."

"Ready for it to develop a sophisticated language, I agree..."

"Exactly. Now, of course, the lack of a prominent muzzle will make the face more vulnerable to potential frontal hits. We have to take into consideration especially the eyes as essential targets to be protected. My design suggests a brow ridge thrust forward just enough for its bone to be able to block a wider object from reaching the eye, while the cheekbone under it will act as its

counterpart, giving the eyeball just enough depth to go undamaged in most accidents or attacks, apart from a deliberate, piercing hit.”

“I see the advantages. Now, what about that most curious part of the face? I see the nose protruding more than it needs to. Why not make it shorter and less susceptible to harm?”

“Ah, but we do want it to be in harm’s way, so to speak!” she exclaimed triumphantly. “Its delicate cartilage will cause pain when damaged, so any individual from this new species will instinctively protect it!”

“Thus, indirectly defending the more important hardware behind it, namely the eyes and the skull itself. I like it!”

She was glowing with pride. It was the first time that her suggestions were taken into consideration to such a degree.

#

As much as they could, they stayed in the Compound garden. Earth seemed to be addicted to the closeness of soil and plants, birds tweeting and insects buzzing, and Brian simply liked to see her happy. It was a mellow evening, and the stars were twinkling above them, with only a hint of faint light to cast shadows upon the curious eyes of the humans.

“So, you’re not just saying that humans were designed on the drawing board, so to speak, but that you yourself had a hand in their creation.”

There was no incredulousness in his voice. He simply assessed what he had heard. His analytical brain was what had got him the

job he loved so, the one that dealt with things outside of normal explanations.

“And that is where we have her, my young friend,” Alan smiled, satisfied that he could still best his former student and protégé. “For what you are saying, my enchantress, is that you designed humans to go without the animal-like, protruding jaw. But then, why is it not present in your kind? According to what you said, elves were an earlier species than humans.”

“There is nothing illogical in my memories,” Earth mused, while following with her eyes a late ladybug’s road down her finger. All life just seemed to draw to her instinctively. “When it comes to designing a new species, it is not just about making improvements and programming new abilities into old hardware. More often, it is taking things out: everything that did not work in the earlier model, though installed with the best of intentions. One of the features we decided that the next race should go without is collective memory. You see, at first, we thought it would prove invaluable if the new generations could draw on the memories of the old ones and thus improve themselves, building on the knowledge of their predecessors.”

“That would save a lot of time indeed,” smiled Brian.

“Wouldn’t it? But what happens to all the unnecessary load? The burdensome memories? Loss felt by others before you, feuds that cannot be laid to rest over generations, because they cannot be forgotten? Mental diseases lingering?”

“What are you getting at?”

“What I was telling you earlier was from memories of making the race before that of men.”

"Mine. We still possess collective memory in our species. And oh, believe me, it is hard to sometimes sort out Earth's own ones from the medley. And I'm not talking merely about my own species. Earth can remember DNA design back to the beginning. My race also possessed collective memory, true, but most of them could only remember general aspects of life, no real details, their brains would have been needlessly overburdened otherwise. But an Endless one was always endowed with the ability to remember it all if necessary. Even before our species was developed, there was an Endless part in Father Earth's consciousness that was somehow separate from His own. And He created in every one of His Endless ones the ability to tap into that great reservoir of memories whenever there was reason to. For an Endless one, it was an infinitely advantageous feature, obviously, because they could draw on the past wisdom of countless millennia to help them solve a present crisis, for instance. But for a race as a whole, even a simple, sketchy version of collective memory became burdensome after the first scores of generations, due to the reasons I mentioned earlier. It was Earth who finally voted it down. You can say I am the reason you guys are free of collective memory," she smiled.

"Gee, thanks," Alan put in drily.

"You are very welcome," she nodded earnestly.

Brian had an idea.

"Does your species have any more features that you removed from the human design?"

Earth sat down right in front of Brian. It was one thing to engage in idle conversation, quite another to have an elemental

force look you in the eye. At least the young scientist felt like he was gazing into a silent, beautiful tornado. It was a humbling experience, and despite himself, he had to blink and look away.

“No. Look into my eyes,” she seemed to sing to him like a siren.

Brian did not know if he really heard her voice or it was just inside his head. He did know that he very much wanted to oblige, in a dangerous and fascinating way that one is tempted to jump off a high cliff or touch the dancing flames of a campfire. He dived into those eyes and felt himself dissolve into their infinite forest green. He finally came up for air after an endless moment, pushing his head above the rainforest canopy that had enveloped him so lovingly.

“What do you see?” she asked.

“Um... what?” he felt like kid caught at the forbidden cookie jar, for staring at her like that.

“My eyes... do they glow?”

“Oh, that! Oh... yes. Yes, they do. Like a cat’s, they catch the faint light of the lamp and reflect it back into the dark.”

“Exactly,” Earth purred like a satisfied kitten.

“Well, if you are so satisfied with it, why did you delete this feature from the new species?” Alan cut in, unmistakably pointing at himself.

“Do you not have night vision goggles? Do you not have telescopes?”

“Yes, we do. And what does a telescope have to do with this, anyway?”