

Haven

“She's crashing!”

The lights were far too bright, and yet the darkness was closing in. She could hear people screaming around her, the words muffled and disjointed. All she knew was agony, the burning in her stomach and the heavy pressure that felt like it was crushing her. The strange pressure in her lungs made it harder and harder to draw breath as she began to wheeze on the table. It felt like liquid fire in her veins.

“Stop pushing, Dr. Hutchins! You need to wait!”

Hutchins? Was she this Doctor Hutchins? She must be, because she could hear them through the cotton urging her to wait. Not to push. Though she felt the pressure in her abdomen increase and she screamed. It – whatever **it** was – was going to rip it's way out of her if she didn't push.

“G-get... get. It. O-out!”

Her voice was raw from screaming by that point, but lucidity was coming back as she blinked rapidly. The sweat was slick and cold on her face and she heard the calls of relief as she seemed to come around. She tried to tell them something was wrong, but the moment she did her eyes rolled back into her head and darkness closed in.

“Get her into surgery! Prep for a cesarian! We may need it!”

Elizabeth Hutchins frowned at the board in front of her. Seven people, those that could make or break her future were just looking over her thesis. The only woman on the board looked about sixty, settled at the far end. The rest were men of varying ages; not a one younger than mid-fifties. The Director of the testing Board frowned at her over the clipboard in his hand, looking from the figures and the results of her own personal tests before fixing her with a watery blue gaze.

“Dr. Hutchins... how far have you gotten into your testing?”

Elizabeth erased her frown with hardly a thought, replacing it with a congenial smile. “Not very far at all, Director. Everything I’ve outlined in my thesis is currently just supposition. A few minor tests on the parasite has proven that I am capable of altering it's DNA. I can write whole new lines of code into it for the parasite to follow.”

“What exactly are you asking us for, Doctor?”

The second voice had interrupted her before she could continue on her line of thought and she was momentarily lost. It took only a moment for the attractive blond woman to smile again, and pick up her thoughts to answer the old man who had questioned her. Sharp brown eyes gave them her undivided attention as she sought to soothe their unease.

“A small sum, just a grant so that I can move my testing from the parasite itself into other animals. Insects to begin with since that is what it most often infects. Of course after that, I'm hoping to move the testing up within a year to rats – with the ultimate goal of further testing in five years to reach out to human volunteers--”

“Absolutely not!” The shriek from the woman at the end of the table startled Elizabeth enough that she flinched.

“Your thesis suggests forcing evolution. That human kind has stagnated and now you want to introduce foreign material to our bodies to spur a new evolutionary line? Are you mad, Dr. Hutchins? It is pure foolishness to take such a divine place!”

It was with a detached sense of amusement that Eliza observed the woman's cheeks turning a deep pink, and the flush of anger working over her face. A few of the other board members looked equally uneasy at her suggestion. A deep breath, and then a soft sigh escaped Elizabeth before she spoke again.

“I assure you, Mrs. Davis, I am not seeking to play a divine. Though I do not see the place of God in science, I can understand your unease at my proposed thesis. However, I am not suggesting this because I think the evolution of humanity must be pushed forward – it is a line of testing I am

suggesting so that we can work on eradicating the diseases that still plague our entire species.

There are no other animals in the world that suffer from so many illnesses that humans suffer from. The range of diseases that affect only humans is astronomically higher than any other species on our planet. If we can alter the structure of DNA in a parasite, and use it to subtly alter the DNA of other creatures, imagine the diseases we could wipe out.”

Her passion was rising, and she felt her cheeks flush as she spread her arms wide and spoke to the board in front of her with all the charisma she possessed.

“It is immoral,” the voice shocked her out of her tirade. The Director looking over the clipboard at her once more and frowning deeply. “Dr.Hutchins, what you are suggesting goes against most medical practices today. Yes, we do want to increase the life of the patient. Yes, we seek to help them and to prevent illnesses from occurring. But the means you are suggesting, the idea of altering the entire genetic structure of a human being...”

He trailed off, and shook his head just slightly. Several of the other board members looked likewise concerned. It was the vindicated look on the woman – Davis' – face that had Elizabeth frowning darkly at the whole group of them. Her cheeks flushing pink as she bit her tongue. It took her nearly thirty seconds before she could gather her frayed control to speak without sounding sharp.

“There is very little else that has worked, Director. I know what I am suggesting is not the norm, but sometimes one must look outside the box to find the answers. This can work, sir, I know it can.”

“Perhaps it can work, but just because we can do something does not mean we should. I am sorry, Dr.Hutchins. Your thesis must be denied, and funding to your department will be cut. The board will convene to debate if we should continue to keep you in our employ. In the meantime, please return to your office – we will let you know in a few hours if we would like to continue employing you.”

Shame, horror and utter all consuming fury washed through her as she observed these old men that controlled the whole of her work. The mere idea that they would let her go over this was

preposterous and she turned without a polite word and stormed from the room. The sound of the door slamming behind her brought a sense of complete euphoria.

'Those ridiculous old wankers! Where do they get off telling me that they're going to cut my funding?! I have the answers to our problems right here!' Sharp steps led to the constant click clack of her heels down the tiled floor. There was no resistance as she shoved her office door open and slammed the second door in as many minutes with a shiver of relish.

A few steps led her to the chair and she sank into the cushioning softness with a despondant sigh. The fury left her in a rush and her shoulders sagged with exhaustion. It took her only a few moments to bring her hand up and rub at her temple. The full ramifications of what they had said finally hitting her as she reclined back and turned her gaze up to the ceiling of her office.

“Everything... all my work, down the drain...” She could feel the shimmer of tears in her eyes, but stubbornly she refused to allow them to fall. Straightening up she considered her options while pulling up everything she had on file. It was time to save, double save and back up every single piece of research she had.

'I will not lose all of this just because they don't understand that this will be the future!' She began to type furiously. The next few hours passed in a flurry of noise and activity for her. The printer in her office worked overtime as she filled hard drive after thumb drive with information. Notes and comments on the tests she had already performed and those she planned for the future. The correspondances she had sent out to request information from other scientists were copied and printed.

A knock at her door nearly three hours later startled her out of her labeling as she looked to the door with a harried huff. “Yes, what is it?”

“Dr.Hutchins, the Board is asking for you.”

“I'll be there in a moment, Susan,” she listened to the muffled steps of her secretary as the woman headed back to her desk. A scowl curling over her features as she noted the woman hadn't even bothered to open the door.

The squeaking of her chair was the only companion to her clicking steps as she stood retracing her earlier path from her office to the Boardroom. There was an instant where she considered being polite and knocking before she decided if they were going to fire her it would be on her own terms. Rudely she shoved the door open and walked into the room. A sense of satisfaction filling her at the disturbed looks on their faces and their shock at her boldness.

“You wanted to see me?” She kept her voice cordial, barely.

“Yes,” the Director spoke. “Yes, Dr. Hutchins we did. At this time, we feel that it would be best for our company and you if we were to terminate your employment here.”

The words fell like stones in her heart. Though she had been prepared for it, was certain she could handle it, the proclamation was still enough to make her feel nearly sick. Elizabeth allowed her eyes to trail over all the Board Members in the room and finally she sighed, shaking her head.

“Is that so, well then, I will gather my research and be out of your hair by day's end.”

“You have until the end of the week, Dr.Hutchins,” that voice was a much kinder one. One of the men on the right side. An elderly gentleman who looked far too close to retirement for her comfort.

“Thank you, sir, but I do not require it.”

Before another word could be utter by herself or the Board she turned and left the room. The muttering that sprung up behind her was ignored easily enough as she headed back to her office and sank down into her chair with a thoughtful look on her face.

'So, unemployed. I've never been unemployed before... where will I go? Who would be interested in my research?' She bit her bottom lip as she worried over her future. There was enough in her savings for her to live for a while yet. Though she would have to be fruegal she could search for the perfect job to fit her studies. So lost in thoughts she didn't notice the presence of a man in her doorway until he knocked.

“Dr.Hutchins?” Elizabeth jumped and looked in shock at the man who spoke to her. It was not one of her colleagues so she felt only confusion.

“Y-yes? Who is asking?” She cursed herself for the minor tremble in her voice.

“I am, Doctor Andrei Vyachesklav, at your service,” he held out his hand to her with a roguish grin.

The flush that spread across her cheeks caught like wildfire. It took her a moment to speak as her eyes roved over the attractive man in front of her. He had to stand nearly six feet, and she could tell he spent time in the gym. Then his name caught up to her and she jerked her eyes to his blue ones. Fumbling to rise and take his hand she felt her voice catch before she forced the words out.

“Wait, the Vyachesklav? The famous biochemist?!” Her voice was pitched higher than she intended and she enthusiastically shook his hand. “A p-pleasure, Dr. Vyachesklav. I-I’m Elizabeth Hutchins,” his laugh made her cheeks darken further.

“Yes, Dr. Hutchins, I know.” The slight patronizing tone to his voice was lost to the thoroughly gobsmacked young woman. “I am here because my uncle informed me of the decision of your Board of directors an hour ago.”

Elizabeth frowned, confused about how her lost job could have resulted in someone coming to speak to her so quickly. “Yes, I only just heard they were releasing me of my obligations to the company a few minutes ago. How did you hear so quickly? Before I did?”

The sharpness in her words only made Andrei grin, “My uncle is on the Board. He sent me a message to let me know. He is of the mind that you do not fit in with your research at this company, but that perhaps you would be interested in coming to work for mine? The biochemical tests we currently conducting are not too far out of the parameters of your thesis...”

“Yes!” Her voice was much higher than she intended. A shy cough and a blush, before she controlled her reaction with a small nod, “I- I mean yes. I would be happy to come and work on your team.”

“Excellent, would you like a hand with your boxes? We can walk and talk.”

A grin was already crossing her lips as she offered one of the boxes she had filled with her work

earlier towards the attractive man. “That would be wonderful, thank you. The proposed plan is called **Aeger...**”

“Push Dr.Hutchins! Push!”

A scream tore from her throat as she arched her back off the table. The agony that rolled through her spine was enough to bring her to consciousness with violence. Words registered only faintly as the nurse continued to encourage her to push. With a rather impressive snarl she reached out and grabbed the womans gown.

“You push, you freckle-faced bint!” Her words, and her hand, were brushed off with little concern given to them.

There was another contraction and a rush of agony as she screamed. The grip of her hands on the sheets was enough to tear the fabric as her knuckles whitened.

“That's it! I can see the head! One more push!”

Elizabeth screamed as she did just that, the feeling of her vocal chords tearing wasn't nearly as important as the unending pressure and pain. Then all of a sudden it was over, the slickness of her skin told her that she had been in labor for hours. The silence after her own scream concerned her, and she struggled to lift her exhausted upper body.

“My baby..!”

A moment after she spoke, and there was a wailing cry. The cry lasted only a flash before silence descended once again. Terror was bubbling up her throat as she desperately tried to look at the wrapped pink bundle in the arms of one of the nurses. The terror left as quickly as it came however when she saw a small hand with five perfect fingers reach towards the nurse with a gurgling sound.

The gurgle was replaced by a whimper as one of those tiny fingers was pricked with a test strip and set aside. The whimper filled Elizabeth's heart with concern and worry for her child.

“My baby! Give her to me!”

The nurse turned with a worried look, though she tried to smile as she approached Elizabeth. One of the other nurses was moving the bed so she could sit up while another two were arguing quickly with the doctor in the corner. All of this was ignored as the nurse handed the small bundle over to Elizabeth.

Eager hands held the baby to her chest and she looked down into a soft, cherubic face. Pale, flawless skin covered her baby and she felt wonder spin through her chest. The smile that spread across her lips only grew as she counted ten tiny fingers. Moving down she spied her daughters feet and her smile only grew as she counted ten tiny toes. The strange jointing of her ankles was ignored – it was likely just a newborn thing.

Her blue eyes traveled back to her face, and she met the gaze of her child for the first time. Eliza felt her breath catch in her throat as she stared down at her child. Eyes the color of blood stared up at her – but that was not the most shocking feature of her child. No, the real shock was the complete lack of pupil in her eyes.

“Dr.Hutchins... she... w-we are fairly certain your daughter has been born blind.”

The baby turned her head in the direction of the voice, making a pleased gurgling as she reached blindly towards the sound. But Elizabeth felt her breath escape in a hiccup. Tears began to fall and splashed onto the startled baby's skin.

“She's beautiful... my little Haven... Haven.”

There was a moment where he cleared his throat while watching mother and daughter, before he got her attention again.

“Dr.Hutchins there is something else...”

“What?” Her voice was distracted, as she couldn't stop looking at her beautiful baby girl.

“The strip test confirms that the child-”

“Haven.”

“-Yes, *Haven*, is completely infected with the Aeger parasite.”

Elizabeth felt her smile grow as she tickled her fingers tiredly along the softness of her daughters belly.

“Wonderful.”