

The Earth Mother and the Aliens

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In a small interrogation room on Elizabeth of York, the sole moon of Henry VII, the Earth Mother faced a pair of aliens.

"Name?"

"The only name I answer to is the Earth Mother."

"That is not the name on your passport."

"I am not responsible for that," she answered calmly.

"What is your purpose for coming here?"

"There's a war. I'm not a warrior. I heard you had a hospital here. I want to help."

"But the hospital is run by and for members of our race. Why do you not work at a human hospital?"

"There aren't any in this system. You have either destroyed our Navy, or at least chased them to a system we control where they can get all the help they need."

"Then why should we need any help at all?" asked one of the aliens.

"Because a small group of Men has taken up the battle, and you will find that, in their way, they are more formidable than the Navy." She stared at the two aliens. "If you don't need medical help yet, you soon will."

"Why should we believe you?" asked the second alien.

"I am unarmed. I am in what we call late middle age, and I am seventy pounds overweight. I have high blood pressure and diabetes. Surely even you must realize that I pose no threat to you -- and I do possess medical knowledge that may be unknown to you."

"Are you a doctor among your own people?"

"No."

"A nurse, then?"

"No. But in my prior profession, I was frequently called upon to heal the wounded."

"Why didn't you send them to a medic?"

"Our social structure would probably make no sense to you. Just believe me that there were valid reasons why they did not want anyone to know that they had patronized my business."

The aliens exchanged knowing smiles. "Perhaps you are not as incomprehensible as you believe," said the first one. "All right, Earth Mother. You may work in our hospital as a nurse."

"But know that you will be under electronic surveillance at all times," added the second.

"That will be perfectly acceptable," said the Earth Mother, getting to her feet. "Which way do I go?"

One of the aliens got up. "I will show you."

He showed her into a small dressing room, waited while she donned the uncomfortable and ill-fitting blue-gray robes of an alien nurse, and then escorted her to a ward, where she was introduced to her superior.

Her first job was emptying and cleaning alien bedpans. As she collected them, she carefully studied the anatomy of the wounded alien soldiers. Later, in the nurses' dormitory, she joined a few of her workmates in the group shower, and spent as much time scrutinizing them as they did her.

Yes, she decided, _it should work just fine. A few days, a little gossip, maybe a little surreptitious observation, and I should know everything I need to know. We're not all that different, your race and mine, and there's no reason why I shouldn't bring my non-medical expertise to the situation at hand. I mean, hell, we've already got a few empty wards filled with brand-new beds. Now all I have to do is figure how much to charge to fill them._

She looked out at the ward. An alien soldier, his foot blown off, his torso swathed bandages, still managed to pinch a nurse as she walked by.

The Earth Mother smiled. _This is going to be easier than I thought._