



Project Earthguard

“What inspired you to choose this particular field of wildlife rescue and conservation?” the recruiter of Earthguard asked Ira.

He leaned forward, watching her every move with keen interest.

She didn’t have to think much about this one. She knew the answer just as much as she knew her name.

“I really love animals, and my mother used to take me to her wildlife reserve.” She gave a small smile, recollecting memories of her precious childhood. “Those were the best times of my life, and I really want to feel that happiness again. I also believe that animals deserve a safe environment just as much as we humans do.” She finished her statement with a smile and was glad to see her interviewer return it.

“You are doing great, Miss Manhora. Just one more question.” He looked at her intently as he asked the question that could possibly decide her fate.

“If an animal had to be killed, which gun would you use to kill it?”

Ira’s jaw clenched at the question. It was a strange question and, besides, she hated killing animals. She thought of Mikka, the tiger that her mother had practically raised. It was like family to them until her mother’s company decided that the tiger was too violent to let live and the best thing to do was ‘put it to sleep’, which basically meant kill it.

She hated the company for that, especially since Mikka wasn’t violent. She was quite the opposite. It was another one of the reasons she wanted to join Earthguard. However, she couldn’t say that to the person in front of her. She knew that the company asked weird questions, so she just smiled and replied softly, “An ARX-7, sir.”

The interviewer looked pleased with the answer.

“Very well, Miss Manhora. We look forward to seeing you on Monday.”

And just like that, Ira landed a job in the most active wildlife protection company in the country. She patted herself on the back as she walked out.

She had no idea that five hours later, her life would change completely.

BREAKING NEWS: ANIMAL FOUND DEAD IN EARTHGUARD. POST-MORTEM REPORT SUGGESTS FOUL PLAY.

Ira was comfortably sprawled on the couch, completely absorbed in the TV with a bowl of chips beside her when she saw the news flash on her phone. She instantly switched the channel to News 24. A tiger was found dead in the very forest of the company she was supposed to work in.

Just as she considered calling someone, her phone rang. The screen read **MR HARSHAL, MANAGER, EARTHGUARD**. She answered it almost immediately.



“Miss Manhora, come to the office right now.”

That was all he said.

COME NOW.

It took her 30 minutes to get there, and as she entered the room, she recognised her friend immediately.

Detective Aiyer sat opposite her with a man dressed in a formal coat. Agni Aiyer looked up and gave her a brief smile as she sat down.

“Miss Manhora,” the other man addressed her. “Mr Aiyer came here a few days ago to investigate a complaint given by an anonymous caller who claimed that there was an animal missing in Sector 8, and just a few hours back, we found a dead tiger near the edge of the reservoir and a gun near it. And guess what?”

He paused to catch his breath.

“The evidence led to you.”

She frowned.

“How so?”

“Well, first of all, the animal was killed by an ARX-7.”

She gasped. “That’s horrible! An ARX-7 is a powerful weapon and it—”

“Was the exact weapon you said that you would use to kill an animal with.” His gaze bore into her, and as she listened, realisation and another dark feeling that she couldn’t place crept inside her at once.

“Sir, I would never do that!” she cried. “I can’t kill an animal. That is just too cruel for me.”

“The gun had your fingerprints on it.”

“That is not possible!”

“It is, if you had used it to kill the animal.”

“But sir, I didn’t do it.”

“You may explain that in court.”

Agni stood up just then.

“Sir, I shall investigate her and inform you in case she is guilty.”

The man agreed, and the second he walked out, she went near Agni.



“Agni, you know I didn’t do it, no?” Tears sprang to her eyes.

“Of course I do, and I have something to use against the company.”

He opened his bag and showed her the contents. There were files about reports and analyses accusing the company of destroying nature and killing animals. There were stacks of missing reports and statements of many employees and even visitors. It stated that the company was ruining the ecosystem by illegally selling trees in large numbers and killing the animals that they couldn’t afford to raise.

Throughout the documents, one name kept repeating.

NITHA

“I just went through the company data and saw complaints filed about the company by someone called Nitha who claimed that the company killed the animals that were too expensive for the company to keep. The company threatened to kill his family if he spoke up, so he didn’t. I visited his house, and he gave me a document on the evidence he collected to support his statement.”

She looked at the blue-coloured document which could prove the company guilty and her innocent.

“I will submit this in court.”

She smiled gratefully at him, feeling hopeful at his assurances.

TWO WEEKS LATER

Ira and Agni submitted the documents and statements to the court.

“Your Honour, these files prove that Earthguard was involved in many illegal activities before,” her lawyer said. “The tiger might just be 1 in 100 of the poor animals that were killed by them.

“Moreover, the evidence that the police processed to determine that Ira killed a tiger was merely an answer that she made in an interview and also her fingerprints. While the evidence to prove against it is large, my client had an alibi during the time of death, which, as per the post-mortem, was around 8 p.m. on Tuesday. My client was not even in the city at the time. The police, of course, did not care to investigate this before accusing her of something she would not even dream of doing.”

Her lawyer smiled at her as he sat down, and she knew by the look on the opposing lawyer’s face that they had won the case.

“As the evidence that holds Miss Manhora guilty is insufficient, the court declares her innocent of wildlife destruction. Moreover, the court also orders a thorough investigation of Earthguard due to suspicion of illegal wildlife destruction. The company may remain closed till the investigation is completed.”

That was the judge’s final verdict.

Over the week, the company was thrashed, as the investigation brought to light all that had been hidden by the company before.



The company was destroyed completely as many more people gained the courage to speak up about the same. Earthguard was trashed on social media, and people started boycotting it. The company head and many others were arrested for illegal wildlife destruction. The company had to undergo many more investigations, which led to many more arrests. By the end of the year, the company that Ira was supposed to work in was utterly destroyed, and she did not feel the least bit of remorse.

"I just can't believe that we pulled that off," she exclaimed as she took a bite of a sandwich. She and Agni were at a local snack bar to celebrate.

"I know, right? It was crazy, stupid and completely worth it." He laughed.

She smiled as she thought of the look on Mr Patel's face as he was sentenced to life imprisonment. He deserved it after what he did to Mikka.

He killed her just because she was too expensive for the company to look after. They provoked her, and that was why she hurt the worker. What was worse? He made Ira's mother shoot her, shoot the very animal that she loved like her child.

It broke her, and she killed herself a few weeks later. Ira had to live with the grief of losing them both while he made billions. She did live with it, doing nothing to avenge their deaths.

She worked in a small veterinary clinic until she heard that the company was destroying nature and ruining the ecosystem. It led to many animals losing their lives while the company just hid the complaints and data and destroyed the lives of those who spoke up.

So, she planned this, made herself look like a suspect while also playing the victim. The tiger was rather old when Agni killed it, and they were doing it a favour. The tiger should consider it an honour to die for such a good cause, to avenge the death of many of its relatives.

Ira knew that the tiger was dying already, just like she knew that the company asked weird questions. So she made it look like her answer was used against her and also made the complaint that summoned Agni, who helped her leave clear evidence everywhere to solidify her victim card.

He used Nitha's document to prove the company guilty.

Exactly as planned.

"Mission 1 accomplished," Ira smiled.

"Just one?"

"There are more forests to be saved."

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School Student

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