

THE LAST STAR

Star I ~ Last of Her Kind ~ Part I

Every day, it's the same dream. I sink deep into a vast ocean of black tar. My right hand reaches for the sky, attempting to grasp something fleeting and ephemeral. But, in reality, I know that nothing there was ever waiting for me.

Day after day, I hide in my four walls, knowing well that out there, there was never anyone waiting for me. Promises of my younger self disappeared right when the sun set, and I could only follow their elusive shadows.

What waits for the lone me? In this dead silence, I even forgot how to shed tears.

Avi scrambled out of her untidy bed, it was already past noon. Her face showed the same, dispassionate expression. On her way to the bathroom, she even forgot to put her slippers on, causing the cold touch of tiles to remind her about the pain that she experienced every day.

The abyss of her dark-green eyes stared back at her from the mirror. Avi tried not to think about the day that awaited her.

About the next twenty-four hours, without any meaning or purpose. About the dreadful wait for the end of this perpetual cycle of evenings and mornings.

Avi fixed her hair into two spherical buns, then began her morning ritual. First, she cleaned her face with cold water, then took a long and warm shower and changed into a clean, pink pajamas with a big sunflower – one of the few things that still reminded her about a carefree past. The past, that has passed irrevocably, like a soundless melody that still played in the nooks and crannies of her scattered mind.

She passed the kitchen and although she was lacking the appetite, Avi knew that she must eat even if the fridge was as empty as usually, with only a few leftover veggies and a couple of pears, and the single, last apple.

Packing what she could, one last time, Avi peeked at her old drawings and photos attached to the steel door via rainbow magnets. It caused her only more pain, by reminding her of something that was lost forever. She turned her eyes away and gritted her teeth, then shut the refrigerator with full force and hastily ran outside.

Her bare feet dashed through the tall, dewy grass, paying no heed to the soggy soil. Avi ran until she was out of breath and stopped only upon reaching the middle of a lavender meadow, opposite the small hill with two tombstones.

“Mom, Dad.” - Avi knelt in front of the graves. - “I still remember.”

She lay down, resting her head between two stone slates and stared at the clouds in silence.

Do you remember... we always flew kites at this time of the year. I always asked what it feels like to glide between clouds, just like the birds. You told me of true freedom, but I didn't understand what you meant back then. Now, I understand that this freedom was never meant for me.

I feel these monstrous chains, they are constraining the movement of each of my limbs, forcing me flat to the ground. Even if I had wings, I wouldn't be able to fly away. I'm stuck, with my face in the mud. The sky is out of my sight's reach, and I can barely breathe.

I... don't remember what I have promised you, but I can't keep that promise. Not when this rusty iron cuts into my ankles and wrists. Not when I choke on this disgusting slime.

Not when you're gone.

Hours passed, but Avi was still stuck in one place, until the late evening. The warmth of the setting sun passed, replaced by a cold, night wind. The only thing that Avi could do was to dress in her outerwear, sewn by her mother on the eve of her death.

Despite this, Avi was freezing, but before her return, she still had a single desire.

To see stars.

She remembered the days when her parents taught her. When, for the first time, she learned the names and the number of those stars. There were exactly fifty-one, her planet's sun excluded.

Avi pointed her finger at the sky and started counting, It was one of a few activities that still calmed her soul.

“One... two... three...” - She repeated aloud, but before she reached four, she had to cover her eyes with her forearm. Two streaks of tears rushed down her cheeks. - “Mom... dad... I'm missing you.”

Avi moved her arm away and continued. - “Four... five... If only I could see you, even if only for a second. If there were anyone here with me, then perhaps, I could survive somehow.”

“Why does everything hurt so bad? Every breath, every move. Without you, even what was once pleasant, now is nothing but torment.”

“Please... make it end.”

“Please...”

Avi reached for the sky, evoking the scene from her nightmare. Despite everything, there was hope in it. The hope to grasp something out of reach, to summon someone or something that might save her life.

Staring at the permanent darkness, Avi slowly accepted her fate – to sink into her ocean of sadness and resignation.

“I understand. There is nobody in this changeless void who could hear my silent scream. Is it possible that the only option is to give up, humming my blue melody, until the day I disappear?”

“I really would want to be wrong, but I've tried everything already.”

Avi moved her arm to cover her face again, but before she could do so, she noticed a barely visible, twinkling, silver light that slowly approached her planet. It was kindred to a falling star.

That image was enough to evoke a memory of her parents, sitting on a hill, snuggling together and holding her close, while she spoke her wish.

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“If I could float up in the atmosphere, disappear... and dream, forever.”

The light became brighter, then disappeared behind the clouds for a moment, pierced through them, and exposed its fiery, crimson tail, which illuminated the entire sky until the comet disappeared again behind the horizon, where it exploded in an orange-pink flash and thundering rumble. A rumble so loud that Avi jumped in fear.

Nourished by the tongues of flames, the second dusk appeared afar, over the burning forest.

Avi felt overwhelming anxiety, knowing that fire could reach her place.

Was this how it was supposed to end?

Avi noticed her shudders, that wasn't what her body and mind instinctively had wanted.

Taking one step back, Avi grabbed her leather bag. She didn't notice that her food spilled out and was ready to run back to her home, but at the moment she was going to turn away, a beacon of blue light shot up in the sky right where the explosion was, blinking irregularly.

Three short signals, three long signals, three short signals.

Avi's mouth opened slightly, she knew what it indicated from the games that she used to play with her parents. With a lump in her throat, Avi realized that she had waited for something to happen for so long, but she didn't expect it to be a test of her determination.

One deep breath, her body was still trembling. Step after step, she descended from the hill, staring at the fading, pale blue, until it disappeared completely.

Instinctively, she began to run.

Avi was surrounded by the sound of crackling flames from every direction. Overturned logs blocked her path forward, and the girl knew that if she entered there, she might not be coming back. Full of fear, she glanced in the direction of the blue signal that barely reached over the burned treetops.

“What am I doing?” - Her doubts grew. She felt the scorch coming from the middle of the forest, but every time she wanted to turn back, the sight of the beacon wouldn't let her.

Somebody needed help, and she knew it, even if the risk was too high. The air became heavier and hotter with every passing second, and she was slowly running out of oxygen.

Soon, the dim light disappeared behind a wall of black smoke, but Avi stayed on track and slowly walked onward until she heard a static buzz between the cracking wood.

Behind a wall of sparkling red, driven into the ground, was a silver disc a few times as large as Avi's house. Its dozens of blue lamps pointed to the sky, focusing their fading light in one direction.

The steel disc was surrounded by a half-sphere of pulsating, purple plasma that kept the fire a half-meter away. It was barely noticeable, but the shield

was shrinking continuously, and the flames were getting closer and closer to the spaceship.

Avi navigated between the overturned logs, then approached the wall of fire that was soon to climb higher and trap its victim in an incandescent dome. She wasn't sure what action to take, the entire place looked like a lethal trap, but the dim blue light still gave her hope.

She only had to run and jump through to get inside, but she hesitated.

The signal died, and Avi knew deep in her soul what she wants and must do.

Avi covered her eyes and jumped over a pile of burnt wood. The flames singed her shawl and pajamas, but died out once she crossed the purple shield. After one light tap on the silver surface, it moved away like a shapeshifting liquid and created an oval entrance.

Although the ship's corridors were like a steel labyrinth, the only viable path was illuminated by long lamps in the corners of the ceiling, which was the source of a static buzz.

At the path's end, there was a hemispherical chamber with a platform. A tiny, fading orb of light levitated over it.

Avi quickly understood that there was likely no one inside.

“Is anyone here!?” - She shouted in desperation, then checked the situation outside through the ship's tinted window. If she was supposed to leave, she had to act fast.

In answer, the orb of light brightened to get Avi's attention. The girl noticed and cautiously reached with her fingertips. Two bodies connected, and a single word appeared in Avi's mind. - “Help.”

Without hesitation, Avi removed the orb and squeezed it into her arms. The item was radiating with a would-be-pleasant warmth, if not the circumstances. Upon the orb's removal, all the spaceship systems failed, leaving Avi seemingly alone in the dark.

Scared, Avi hugged the sphere of light tighter and began to walk to the exit, but she quickly sensed the smoke that was filtering in through the vents.

“Don't be afraid.” - Avi heard a voice in her head. - “I will protect you, like you protected me.”

Avi coughed. - “I can't breathe.” - Her eyes were wet.

“Breathe? I don't understand.” - The voice answered.

“I need air!” - Avi complained and retreated deeper into the corridor.

“Why?”

“To live!”

“Ohh, that's a bit... unexpected.” - The voice was equally concerned and curious. - “Are there any rules that your 'breathing' abides by?”

“I need to inhale air every few seconds or so, but if necessary, I can last a little longer...” - Avi explained. - “...but even assuming I get my air, I still won't get through the flames!”

“I'll try to do something about it.” - The sphere said and produced a forcefield, identical to the one that used to surround the spaceship, except in size. - “You need to hurry, my energy won't last long.”

“Understood.”

Avi crossed the first doorstep. She could well observe that her shield is gradually fading, and although the smoke and fire couldn't infiltrate it, the temperature inside was still rising, as evidenced by thick drops of sweat on the girl's forehead.

She continued to run through the dark corridors until she was outside, where the fire raged in the worst way possible, like a fiery ocean in a hurricane. Hurriedly, she walked amidst the conflagration and cautiously looked at the havoc. All around her, branches and heavy logs fell with a loud thud onto the glowing ash, sending up clouds of grey dust.

Despite nature's relentless display of destructive power, Avi's heart raced faster, but not due to fear. She never imagined herself watching such an extraordinary and breathtaking scene.

However, Avi was anxious – what would happen to the meadow and her home? Would there still be a place to return to? - “Please, one more miracle.” - She whispered.

“May the stars' light listen to your prayers.” - The orb of light answered.

“Thanks... whatever it means.”

“It's a blessing of my people.” - The light added as it radiated between Avi's fingers.

The sky lit up, cut in half by a lightning, and a rain started to pour down.

“Did you... do it?” - Avi asked in disbelief.

“No.”

Avi gazed at the clouds as the cold drops of water washed her sooted cheeks, and before she realized, tears rolled down her face.

“Is everything okay?” - The sphere of light asked.

Avi wiped her eyes. - “I don't know. I just feel relieved. Like... someone is still watching over me.”

The sphere's light got slightly dimmer. - “It must be an amazing feeling.”

Avi's eyes lowered, as if to ask what her companion really meant.

“I'm... sorry.” - A faint, telepathic voice withdrew.

“Why?”

“You saved my life, and I didn't even thank you. You should know that your happiness is my happiness, and one day, I want to pay back this debt. Can I ask, what's the name of my savior?”

“Avi. I'm Avi.”

“It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I'm Luna. From now on, I want to walk by your side.”

“I... I don't want to force you to do that.”

“If my request is too much, please send me away.”

“That's not what I meant!” - Uncertain, Avi extended both her hands to look at the sphere directly. - “Your presence doesn't bother me. I just... don't want you to feel burdened by your promise. If you want, you can accompany me, at least until we don't figure out how to help you.”

“That's not necessary. Do allow me to be by your side.”

“Okay, okay! Understood! It can be so, at least until you decide otherwise.”

“Thank you.” - Luna's voice was filled with joy. She flew closer and rested above Avi's shoulder.

Avi needed a moment to reflect, she didn't know what to think about all of this. The fire was almost out, leaving only a warm, wet, and black residue. Once at the forest's exit, the girl noticed that a large area of lavender meadows was turned to ash, but despite this, she had a home to return to.