

THE LAST STAR

Star I ~ Last of Her Kind ~ Part III

What used to be a little and lone place, gave birth to a new friendship. It was a passion for science mixed with the desire to commemorate lost ones. In sweat, stained in oil and lubricants, Avi moved from under the quad and climbed to the steering wheel. With great anticipation, she glanced at Luna, who answered in a flash of affirmative light. Avi turned the key and was all smiles after hearing the growling of the engine.

“It works! It really works!” - Avi turned and shouted to Luna.

“I hope that you can drive. If I were you, I would start slow and cautious.”

Not being very confident, Avi pressed the gas pedal and steered straight out of the garage. - “Where do you want to go?” - She asked Luna.

“Wherever you want. I only hoped to see what's left of my spaceship, but it can wait.”

“Oh... I understand. Sorry about your crash.”

“We shouldn't worry about it. Your planet is prettier than the moon, I will gladly check your favorite places out.”

“In that case, I already know where to go!”

Avi accelerated to a moderate speed, passing greenhouses with her berries. After fifteen minutes, both girls were driving a sandy path that crossed an orchard until they arrived at a small cliff. They stopped there and walked a route parallel to it until they arrived in its shadow, where a tiny waterfall was crashing against a pile of rocks inside a pond. Avi's spot was surrounded by a variety of plants, such as a set of lush shrubs, which concealed half of the area. On the other side, there was a bench from a birchwood, where Avi could sit and listen to the sound of water and at the same time, admire floating lilies.

“My little, peaceful oasis. I often used to read here.” - Avi said.

“Impressive spot. So much... freshness.”

"I'm glad you like it." - Avi giggled. - "Luna, how was the moon? Is it very different from our planet?"

"Very." - Luna answered. - "It's empty and sterile. I knew only the whiteness of laboratory walls, and outside of it, grey dust and large craters."

"Sounds... unearthly."

"I felt the same at the beginning, but with each passing day, I felt more and more... confined. I had to escape, to learn what else is out there."

"I understand your feelings."

"Do you, too, want to escape?"

"I wanted, once." - Avi smiled with sadness. - "Until I met you. I haven't had anyone to talk to for a long time."

“Me too. That's why I don't regret my decisions.”

Both of them enjoyed the tranquil view for a silent moment. When Avi took out a box of plums to have a snack, Luna still studied the place.

“Avi.” - Luna uttered after a while.

“Yes?”

“Your place and everything that you show me, it's beautiful, so why do I feel pain?”

There was a concern in Avi's eyes. - “Maybe you're missing home?”

“No, I hate my home.”

Avi understood. - “Sometimes, positive experiences remind us of things we lost... or never had.”

“This feeling, like someone is driving spikes into my shell, will it ever pass?”

“I don't know.” - Avi replied, even if she didn't want to be pessimistic. - “What you are talking about is quite sad. Do you want to let it out?”

“No... I just want to forget.”

“I understand.” - Avi lowered her head. - “Do you want to leave?”

“Despite everything... no. Let's stay here a little longer.”

Avi and Luna reached what was left of the burnt forest. When they walked ash-covered trails, Avi felt sadder. The forest was a memory of her parents, of their joint trips, of collecting wild berries and mushrooms, playing hide-and-seek, climbing trees... all that was lost, and it would take years for nature to reclaim.

Despite this, Avi turned to look at Luna. A loss of one thing could be a new beginning. The memory of the night when Avi walked through the fires was still fresh. Despite fear, Avi saved some kind of life, even if she didn't understand what that life was yet.

Overtaken logs blocked the path, but that was no longer an issue with the Scout. It flew high above the charred woods and found a new road with its keen eyes. Luna's spaceship was nearby.

The steel goliath rested in the middle of the wasteland, covered with trunks of dead trees. Although blackened, the surface of the ship wasn't damaged, with the exception of a slightly dented front that absorbed most of the impact.

Without a word, Luna came closer to the buried machine, and the metal opened, just like it did when Avi came to the rescue.

Luna's light illuminated the path to the bridge, and when she arrived there, she moved over the navigational platform, the one where she was stuck earlier.

Avi was a little surprised by the condition of the interior. - "Everything looks... untouched by fire."

“Yes, computers aren't damaged. The smoke caused more harm.” - Luna answered while attempting to restart the ship.

“What do you mean?”

“My technology is based on light. Any pollution can put the ship in hibernation... It's a bit similar to your solar panels.”

“...so ...it only requires cleaning?”

“As a matter of fact, yes, but in the current state – I can't do that... and there's also the frontal dent, I don't know what components were damaged.”

“But is there a chance it could fly?”

“Small.”

Avi was excited. - “If we can fix it, I'll help!”

“It will take a few days, and we don't know if it'll succeed.”

“Better than nothing! We can start even today!”

“If that's what you wish for, we should start with the diagnostics. Do you see the right panel, right under the frontal lamp? Remove the latches, and it will come off.”

Avi did as requested. Inside a small compartment was a bundle of glass tubes, each filled with white, fluorescent liquid, each connected to a spherical instrument with a label 'DIAG-02'.

You might be reading a pirated copy. Look for the official release to support the author.

“What should I do? Clean the circuits?”

“Did you bring the required tools?”

Avi waved her head. - “No.”

“Check if any of the diodes are pink.”

“Only one, others are blue.”

“The number under the diode?”

“Zero... zero.. fourteen.”

“Okay, you can stand up. Touch the wall to my left.”

Avi's fingertips pressed against a steel plate, and it turned into liquid, then retracted to the sides, revealing a chamber with levitating glass spheres filled with the familiar white substance. One of the spheres had a small crack and leakage.

“Remove the sphere.” - Luna requested.

Avi did as instructed, and the spaceship was instantly lit by faint, turquoise lights. For a longer moment, Luna was silent. A few minutes passed, then a couple more.

“Luna?” - Avi asked with concern, but there was no answer.

Soon, it was already an hour. Avi idly sat on the floor, holding the sphere and waiting for an answer. For a brief moment, the row of lights under the ceiling turned blue.

“Luna? Are you there?” - Avi spoke quietly.

“Starting engine diagnostics. Main power supply disconnected. Testing the short-jump module. Error. The acceleration matrix efficiency is twenty-eight percent. Error. The vertical stabilizer malfunctioned, and the support core safeguards need to be replaced. Proximity sensors – normal. Detected a hull breach. Short-jump module deactivated.”

Next, a ring of thirteen glowing spheres appeared around Luna. Every light split into four smaller parts and formed a holographic map of the night sky, with the central, Earth's sun being highlighted in orange.

“Navigation systems, operational.”

The map disappeared, and Avi overheard a familiar, static buzz. She also noticed that for a brief moment, the ship's forcefield reformed, then vanished.

“Shields unstable.” - Luna paused. - “Ship's battery: Two percent.”

Luna's light got dimmer, and her body appeared to turn off, then light up again.

“I'm sorry, it took longer than I expected. I had to bypass a few faulty components.” - Luna informed.

“It sounded like the engine requires most repairs and the battery is quite low.”
- Avi uttered.

“Indeed, but I've a good message. The ship will be able to fly, but only to the moon. There, we can make full repairs. We only need to fix the front. The second matter is – we still have to charge the spaceship. We could use your

solar panels, it'll take four days if we use all of them, six if your outpost is supposed to still function."

Avi's eyes sparkled. - "Really!? You will show me your home!?"

"If that's what you desire."

Avi hopped happily. - "I can't believe it, I'll finally fly!"

On the next morning, Avi woke up radiating with enthusiasm. Luna, after studying the encyclopedia, watched nature documentaries for the entire night. When Avi entered the room, she was busy with the ocean life.

"Do you like it?" - Avi asked, peeking at the TV, where a colossal whale was consuming krill.

“Yes, but I don't understand one thing.” - Luan replied. - “Life is so diverse, yet I don't see any creatures or beings similar to me. They are like you, they breathe, eat, and sleep.”

Avi had no answer.

“Avi, who, or what am I?” - Luna asked, her voice deeply concerned.

“I don't know. How about asking your creators?”

“Do you think that they knew about... everything?”

“I suppose not. Otherwise, they would show you.”

“I... don't know. They were different than you, demanding.”

“Demanding?”

“On the moon, there were many responsibilities... until they disappeared. I guarded their machines, calculated data, and relayed reports. Usually, without any pause.”

“It sounds like slavery.”

“I liked it. In this cycle of continuous self-improvement, I could forget the entire world. My creators always repeated how important my work is, but that passed with the day they abandoned me. I lost purpose. In this lonesome silence, I began to hate that place.”

“Didn't you think about finding your own purpose?”

“Every day and I found it. Walking by your side is my purpose.”

Avi didn't understand Luna's mentality, she had an impression that it was either unhealthy or Luna's alien mind must be unlike hers. - “Luna... but what about the other things? There must be something you like doing.”

“Serving you will always be my main directive.”

“I understand, but I would be overjoyed if you were happy spending time on activities that you consider pleasant.”

“I never thought about it this way. I like... music and I want to discover new places.”

Avi giggled. - “Then, we have a lot in common.”

“If it's so, I'm glad that our goals align.”

Avi hopped onto the sofa to sit beside Luna and watched water giants while munching on a carrot. Where the séance was over, a new series started, about jungle life. Luna was silent, so Avi decided not to bother her and spend her entire day the same way. At least until the first part of the series was over.

In that short break, Luna spoke. - “Avi.”

“Yes?”

“Where did all the animals go? I would like to see some.”

“Unfortunately, they are all extinct.”

“That's highly improbable considering the amount of biomass and your reproductive cycle. Do you have a film that explains it?”

“No, but supposedly, all living organisms became sterile over the course of a few years, then died out. That's what my parents told me.”

“That doesn't explain your existence and what happened to other people.”

“I was told that we were the exception, but I live in hope that there is still someone out there. Maybe I'll be able to find them with you.”

“I wouldn't count on it. I tracked unique signatures of intelligence, similar to my own.”

“What do you mean?”

“Before landing, I didn't detect any other sentient beings on the planet.”

Avi's face became pale. - “No... that can't be true. You have to be wrong!”

“I don't think I am. You're the last of your kind.”

Avi covered her face and began crying. - “I... don't believe! That can't be the end!”

Luna didn't know how to comfort Avi, so she remained silent, at least until her friend calmed down.

“Our every achievement was for naught. Our trials, stories, dreams... they'll fade away with me.”

“Don't lose hope.” - Luna said. - “My creators are still there, in the darkness. If you want, you can be an ark that will carry humanity's last light to the stars.”

Avi lifted her head. - “Does it... even matter now?”

“You spoke of purpose, of your dream of flying. Why would you want to give up now? Let me be your wings.”

“I have to think about it... But thank you, Luna, I mean it.”

It was a cold evening, and Avi walked to the balcony to breathe the chill air and cleanse her mind. Luna was absolutely right, she shouldn't be stuck in the past. She felt that she owed her parents and everyone who contributed to everything that led to this very moment. For the comfort of her home, for all the discoveries and efforts, for sacrifices, and the war against extinction. Even if it was in vain, someone should hear about their fight.

Luna's creators.

Who were they? On one of the fifty-two stars, there had to be an answer.

Avi leaned against the balustrade and looked at the sky, smiling.

“Space adventure. Nobody would want to miss such an opportunity.”

Avi's smile vanished, replaced by nostalgia. She turned and looked at her home. Avi didn't want to leave it, she didn't want to forget her parents.

“I'll return.” - Avi whispered quietly and closed her eyes.

The next day passed as quickly as it began. Avi and Luna drove across the ashen meadows to the burnt forest, and there, they began the preparations.

Luna showed Avi her spaceship, starting with a toroidal engine room, a storeroom for spare parts, and hydraulic modules. Even if the spaceship was quite spacious, Avi felt a bit claustrophobic and didn't hide it.

“Luna...” - Avi's voice lacked confidence.

“Yes?” - Luna didn't stop and kept leading Avi through the narrow corridors.

“Everything here is so fascinating, but... is there a bigger, spare room... and, you see, there aren't many rooms adapted to human needs.”

Luna analyzed Avi's word. - “Ah, understood.” - She turned right and allowed the wall to liquidify.

Avi kept following until there were seven doors, all with a small, rectangular window that allowed looking inside.

“What do you keep there?” - Avi asked, curiously looking inside the closest room. There were a lot of cylindrical containers, and they occupied all the space, which was about nine square meters.

“Backup.”

“Backup? Of what?”

“Data.”

“Is it... important?”

Luna flickered, like she used to when thinking. - “Mm, a bit, but nothing will happen if we move it to your house.”

Avi checked the room once more. - “There is a lot. What exactly is saved there?”

“Geological data... pictures of the universe... results of simulations... mathematical models...”

“We should be able to move them to the living room and the garage, once it's emptied.”

“Suit yourself. These rooms are yours. If you want, I will reconfigure the ship's nano-network so you can install the bathroom, kitchen, and electrical devices. The required components can be manufactured on the moon.”

“It's possible...?”

“Naturally, there is an entire mining and factory complex at my disposal. Considering the complexity of your tech, the synthesis of required materials won't be an issue.”

Avi blushed happily and ran to the largest door. - “...and what is there?”

“The garage for specialized drill units.”

“It's empty!”

“Indeed. I suggest using it as an entertainment center and the room for your quad.”

“You want to take it with us?”

“It'll be useful during the tour of the facility. At least, until I manufacture an alternative vehicle.”

Avi grinned, her doubts were gone. Luna's vision of the journey was like a dream to her.