

THE LAST STAR

Star I ~ First girl on the moon ~ Part I

For the rest of the week, Avi emptied the spaceship and transported all she could think of there, until it started to resemble her own home. She was only missing the bed and fridge, but Luna ensured that she would be able to manufacture them on the moon.

In the last day, after saying goodbye to the parents, Avi couldn't hold her excitement and decided to spend the final night on the spaceship.

Again, she had the same nightmare. She was carried by the raging waves of tar ocean. Her legs sank deeper, as if something pulled them. Her struggle only worsened it. She wanted to shout, but she had no voice. Soon, her arms, neck, and mouth were engulfed. Only her eyes searched for something far, trying to find what was never there.

“Avi? Avi!” - A familiar voice woke her up. She was drenched in sweat. Her eyes moved, and she shifted to a sitting position, but her heart was still racing when she saw her spherical friend.

“Luna?” - Avi spoke, still shaking.

“The ship is ready for the flight.”

Avi looked at her watch, it was two at night. Knowing that she wouldn't be able to sleep after her experience, she put on the slipper and walked to the bridge.

When Luna flew over to her navigation platform, Avi was surrounded by blue lights. At the level of her waist, there was a map of the night sky. It shifted and zoomed in, showing her sun, the nearby planets, and the moon at the center, which was circled by a red light.

“Ready?”

Avi shut her mouth and nodded.

In a cloud of dust, the ship started to dig its way out of the soil, then began to levitate half a meter above the ground, then soared high above the forest. Avi glued her face, nose, and hands to the window, and with wide eyes watched the trees grow smaller until they were in the clouds.

“Preparing to jump.” - Luna informed, and the image around the spaceship distorted, as if the entire world was reduced to a point that disappeared behind a ship, then became large once more, but instead of Earth, there was a moon now.

“We arrived and only need to land.” - Luna announced.

Avi danced with delight that she hadn't felt since her childhood. She was surrounded by stars, and her small planet was illuminated by the morning glow.

“A moment, please! I'll bring the camera!” - Avi ran out of the bridge, only to return a minute later and start recording. - “Space journal, entry one. Road to the moon.”

“Your device doesn't look handy, isn't it better to return with an alternative replacement?” - Luna interrupted.

“You only get one first time! We have to capture this moment, right here, right now!” - Avi protested and focused the lens on Earth.

“I admire your enthusiasm.”

Avi temporarily lowered the camera. - “Luna, maybe you will describe what it was like when you headed for the stars the first time?”

“I felt nothing. I know every start from my long studies. Although I have to admit, close scans of the planetary ecosystem made a lasting and positive impression on me.”

“You prefer to set your feet on the surface, rather than be here, and the sky's edge?” - Avi noted.

“Indeed. Variety is the mind's paradise.”

Avi smiled gently. - “Where would you want to fly next?”

“I don't know the detailed parameters of any system. I'll leave the choice to you.”

“Fifty-two stars...” - Avi hummed and moved the camera from the left side of the window to the right. - “...answers hidden in the void. We'll visit each one of them.”

“Ambitious.”

“From now on, no barrier will stop us!” - Avi summed up and turned the camera off.

“Are we landing?” - Luna guessed.

Avi nodded. - “I can't wait!”

The silver saucer gradually approached the moon's grey surface. Luna was extremely cautious and suspended her ship about ten meters in the air, next to a large crater, then extended the landing gear – that is, three steel legs – and slowly decreased the altitude.

When the ship landed, it trembled a bit, which tossed Avi onto the frontal steering panel, but luckily, there were no injuries.

“Sorry, I'll pay more attention to your shell next time.” - Luna apologized.

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“That's okay.” - Avi rubbed her arm, ignoring the pain, and looked outside. They were surrounded by an endless, grey space, and fine dust lingered in the vacuum. - “Being here, it's so uncanny...”

“My forcefield should be capable of temporarily negating the adverse effects of staying outside, but our priority should be reaching the base.”

Avi silently agreed, and they moved to the garage room, where Luna surrounded her with a purple shield. The steel liquified and the quad moved outside the external protective barrier.

Avi instantly felt lighter. - "...so that's how low gravity feels like."

"Do you like it?"

"I feel like a feather, like I could fly."

"You can climb down and jump a bit. We've time."

Avi did as Luna suggested, her feet landed softly, lifting the dust around her. After bouncing off the ground, Avi was floating over three meters in the air, or rather a lack of thereof, with a bright and honest smile on her face.

"I'm flying!" - Avi laughed and jumped a bit farther. - "I'm flying!"

"Even if I can't understand the joy related to the alteration of environmental effects, your happiness is my happiness."

"It's simply amazing here, Luna!" - Avi shouted, laughing loudly. She gained momentum, jumping higher and higher until she leaped as far as she could to make a somersault. When she landed, breathless, she puffed out her chest and looked at the sky, admiring her blue planet. - "First girl on the moon."

She was in a pensive mood for a while, then returned to her vehicle, pleased.

"Where are we driving?" - Avi asked while she re-equipped her helmet.

"To the nearest crater."

Avi stopped right where Luna asked, but there was no entrance. - "Here?"

"Yes, it's to the right. We can walk."

Four steps later, there was a gap in the crater's surface. Luna approached it, and the earth started to shake under their feet. Lunar dust cleared before the round steel gate. It opened, revealing a long, steep tunnel down, which on Luna's command formed a staircase.

“I'm usually using a less physical transport. It's not a standard entrance.” - Luna explained

“It's so dark in there.” - Avi noticed.

“As I said, it's not a standard entrance.”

Avi followed Luna's light into the mysterious abyss. She was confident it had taken at least ten minutes before they both reached a wall with a round terminal and strange rings of light.

Luna flew closer and pressed her orbular body into the central slot. The rings turned like wheels, and the entire complex was shaking again. Avi could barely keep her balance.

“What are you doing?” - Avi asked with her hands on the wall, but Luna remained silent.

Five minutes later, the loud noise stopped. Luna's light returned.

“Ready.” - She said.

“What is 'ready'?”

“I changed the architecture.” - Luna answered as the wall with a terminal retracted to reveal a small room with four empty white walls. There was a single bench, plus four cylinders in the corner, with a bubbling liquid of azure color. - “You can breathe here freely.”

“...but there is nothing here.”

“It's a temporary stop, before we return to our vehicle. From here, I can travel to my regeneration chamber, which should ease the next steps of our journey.”

“I understand, should I wait for you?”

“If it doesn't bother you.”

Avi waved her head. - “It doesn't. I'm a bit tired, so I think that I'll take a nap.”

“Sweet dreams and goodbye.”

“Goodbye.” - After those words, Luna touched the terminal, her light flashed, and she was gone.

Drowning in the vast blackness, I've realized that millions of tiny teeth are slowly tearing my body apart, on the outside and the inside. I'm bleeding out slowly, but all I feel is piercing cold. I didn't have the strength to fight, my fingers barely touched the last echo of freedom.

“Avi, wake up.” - An unfamiliar, caring voice woke Avi up from her nightmare. Her head rested on the lap of the stranger, while her hair was softly combed by a warm hand.

Avi's eyes opened, seeing a human face, similar to hers, but made from a solid white light and with long, straightened hair.

“Luna?” - Avi whispered as she moved to sit.

Luna answered with a kind-hearted smile.

“You look almost like me!” - Avi said in shock.

“I copied your form by analyzing the functionality of your shell. Now, I should be capable of experiencing the same external stimuli.”

“That's... mind-blowing.”

Luna extended her hand to Avi, offering to lead her out. - “Should we continue our journey?”

Avi wiped her sleepy eyes and accepted. - “We can.”

When climbing the staircase, Avi admired Luna's slim, luminous silhouette, concealed under a white dress with transparent sleeves and hem. There was grace in both her movements and in her hair that waved on its own.

Slightly embarrassed, Avi couldn't find the proper words. - "How... how do you feel in your new form?"

"I feel the heavy chains of the moon's gravity. It's uncomfortable."

"I understand, but there are advantages to your body, I promise."

"I didn't notice a lot of them. For now, this shell is like a cage."

"Your voice... is pleasant."

"In that case, I'm glad you like it. I tried to adjust the parameters according to the data gathered during listening to music."

“...and you can finally be touched.”

“Is it important?”

“Touch is how humans express their bonds. What you did when I slept... was nice.”

“You looked like you had a nightmare. I mimicked the behavior of primates, it's how they calm their offspring.”

Avi lowered her head and averted her eyes. - “I don't sleep well.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Avi squeezed Luna's hand tighter. - “After my parents' death... each night, I feel like drowning in an endless, black ocean.”

“You endure this repeatedly?”

"It's not like I have a choice."

"I don't know what it feels like, but it proves that you are strong."

"Do you think so?" - Avi stared at Luna. - "I can't even do half of what you can do!"

"Why are you doubting yourself? You saved my life. Your strength is something more than the current capabilities of your shell."

"I... I don't know. That night... I don't understand one thing. You saved me from the fire, couldn't you escape on your own?"

"I could."

"You could?"

"I could, but I didn't. I didn't want to risk it, and I was scared, paralyzed, and without the knowledge of what awaited outside. On top of that, the smoke blocked the stars' light... and after a crash, I lost most of my power to prevent

damage. When I saw you, you gave me more than hope. I already knew that there was an exit.” - Luna stopped and looked Avi straight in the eyes. - “You saved me. That's my truth. Please, don't question it.”

“I'm sorry.” - Avi averted her gaze once more, but Luna pulled her arm and hugged her.

“To me, you're the most precious thing in the world. Don't forget.”

Avi blushed and tears welled up in the corners of her eyes. She closed them and hugged Luna back.