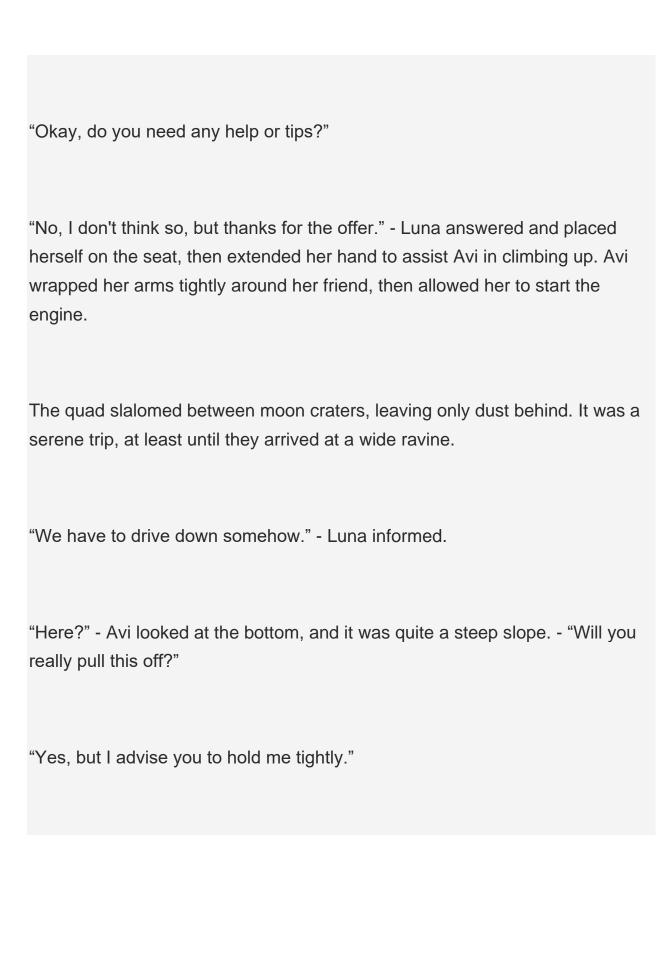
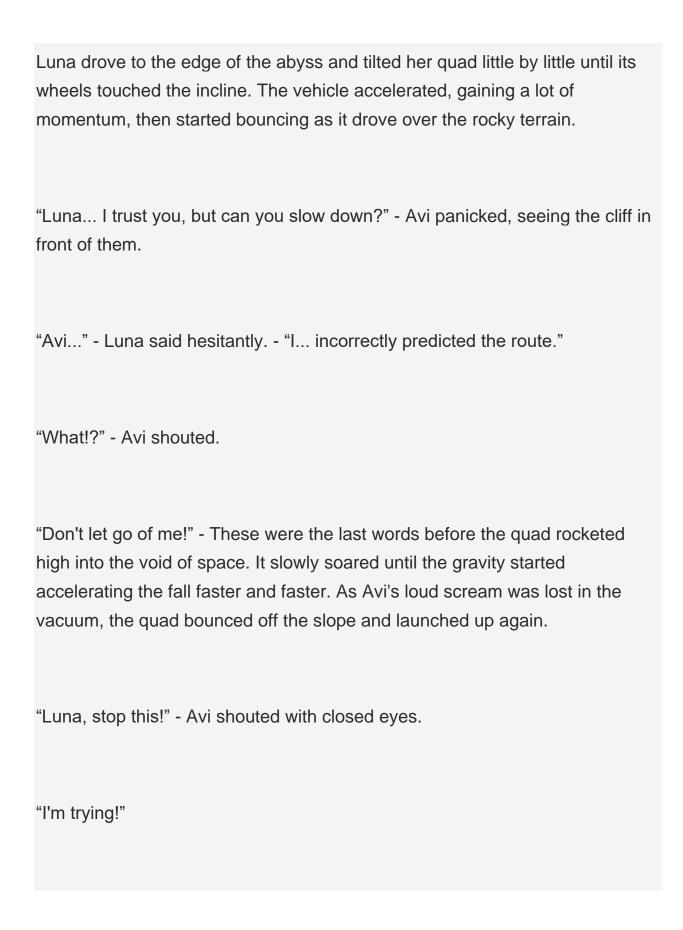
## THE LAST STAR

Star I ~ First girl on the moon ~ Part II

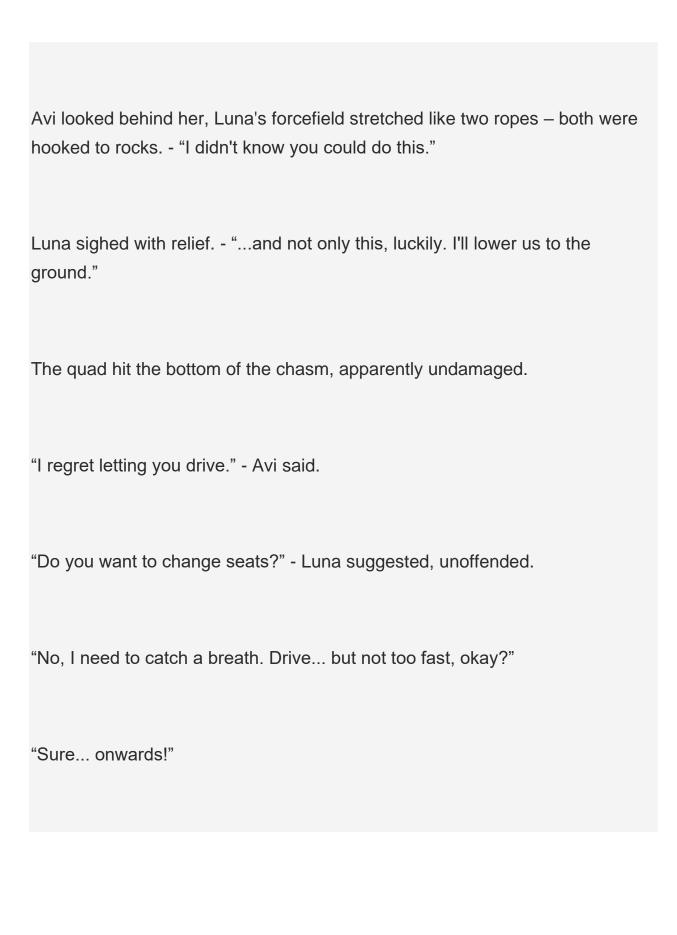
Avi and Luna returned to the quad just in time to admire the dawn. Luna closed her eyes and let the sunlight bathe her new shell. - "It's nicer than charging in the standard way. A second pleasant experience." Avi understood what Luna meant by the first experience and blushed again. Despite this, she moved closer to snuggle into her arm, and they both watched the sun until Luna opened her eyes and smiled at Avi. "Let's get going, shall we?" - She asked as she held Avi's hand. Avi nodded in agreement.

"Will you let me drive? I would like to know what it's like... in this body." - Luna said.

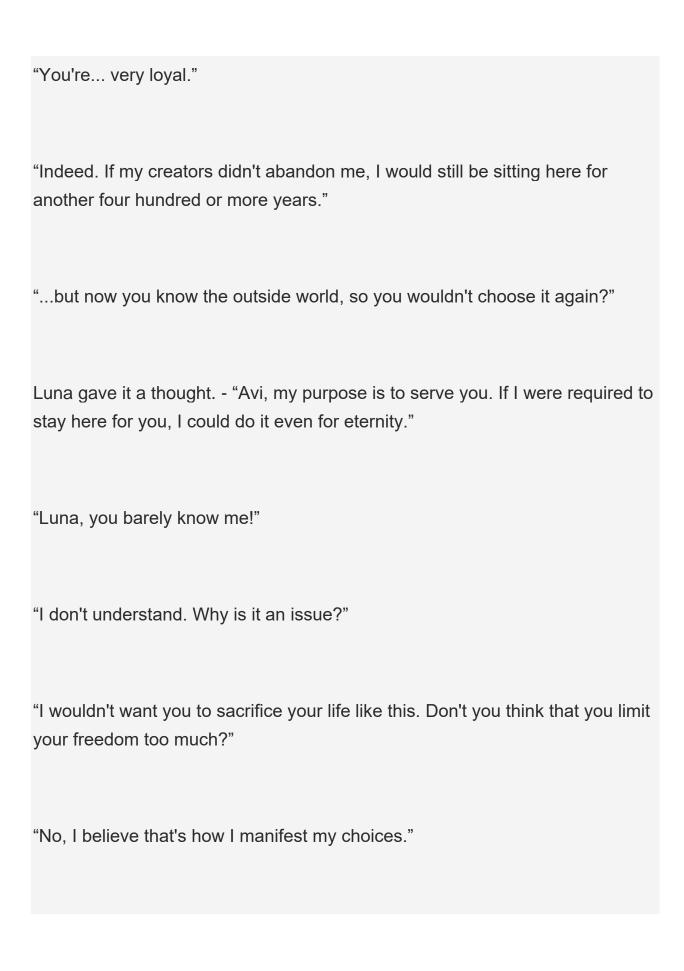


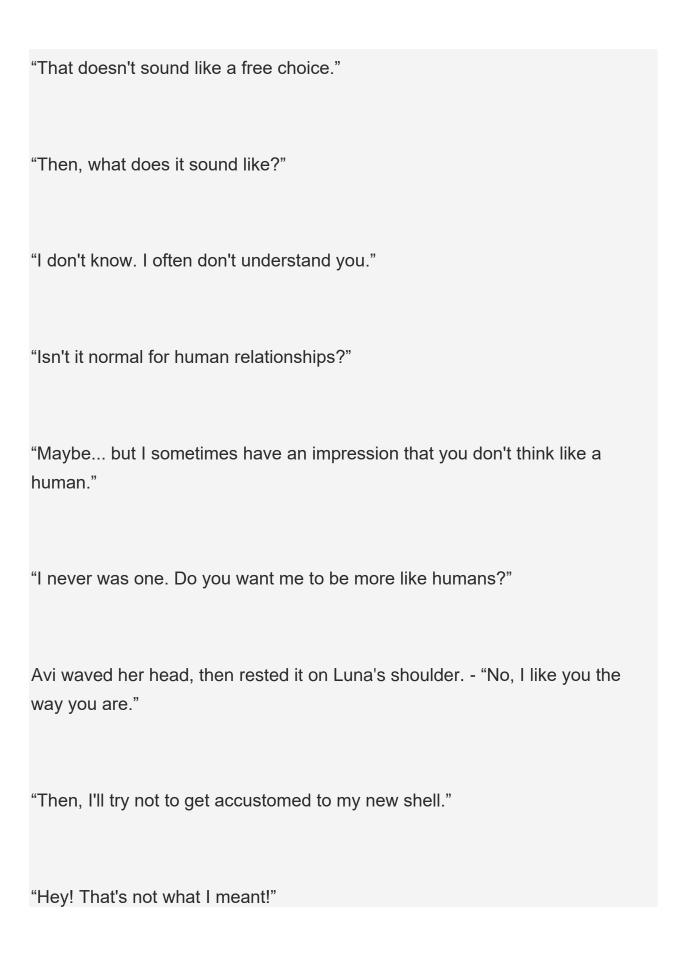


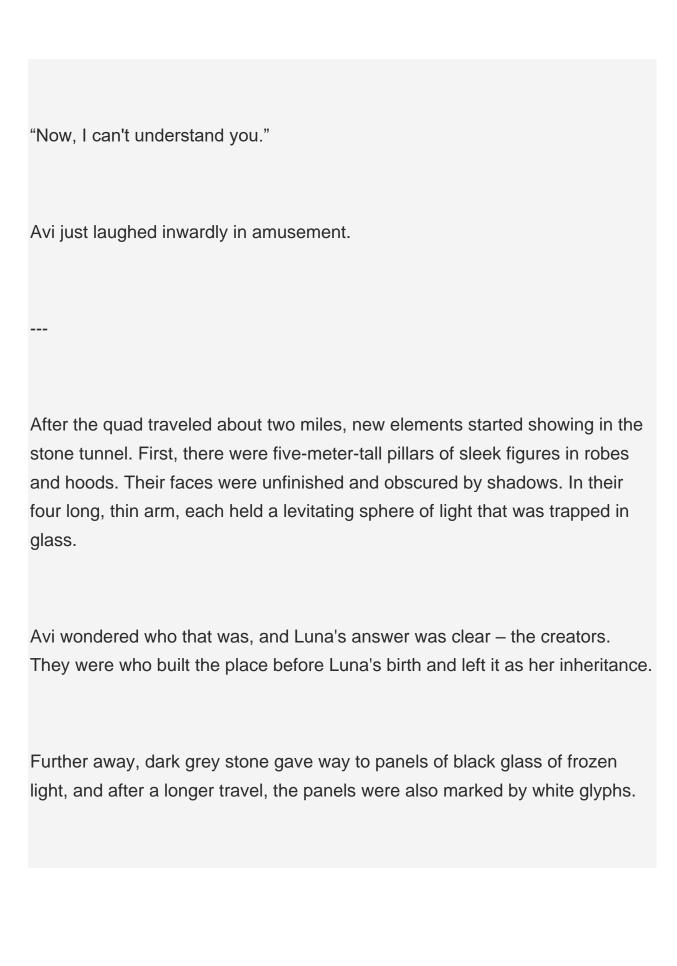
After these words, the quad hit the ground again, but soon that event wouldn't repeat. In front of the girls, there was the last, deepest hole, and it appeared that their trip would end in a crash. Despite this, Luna kept pressing the brakes, but it didn't help due to all the bouncing.
The quad shot up for the last time, then fell into the chasm.
"Avi, are you alright?" - Luna asked.
Avi opened her eyes, quad was hanging a few centimeters above the ground.  - "Are we fine?"
"It appears so."
"What did you do?"
"Improvised."

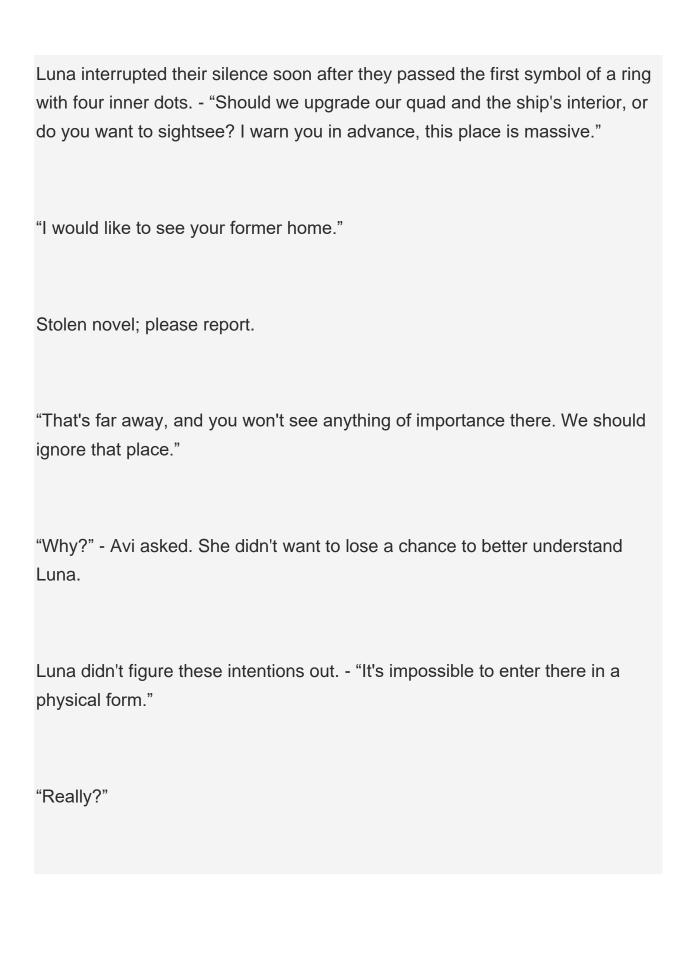


In the canyon's shadow, where there was barely any light, Avi couldn't notice any trace that could lead to Luna's base, at least until the quad stopped in front of a perfectly flat wall with a single, narrow gap.
Luna climbed down, closed her eyes, and touched the surface. The basalt plates listened to her command and moved aside, revealing a simple, slightly tilted corridor that led deeper into the stone.
"We are close." - Luna informed and led the way.
"I can't believe that you were hiding under the moon's surface all this time." - Avi replied as she observed the tunnel illuminated by long, white lamps "How long were you here?"
"Almost four hundred and six years."
"and you never wondered what's outside?" - Avi was slightly taken aback.
"No, it wasn't my main directive."









"Yes, let me explain. My birthplace is like a big computer, woven from the beams of light. I was living in the symphony of inflowing data, creating simulations, and monitoring crucial processes. I can't recreate this experience, not for your current shell."

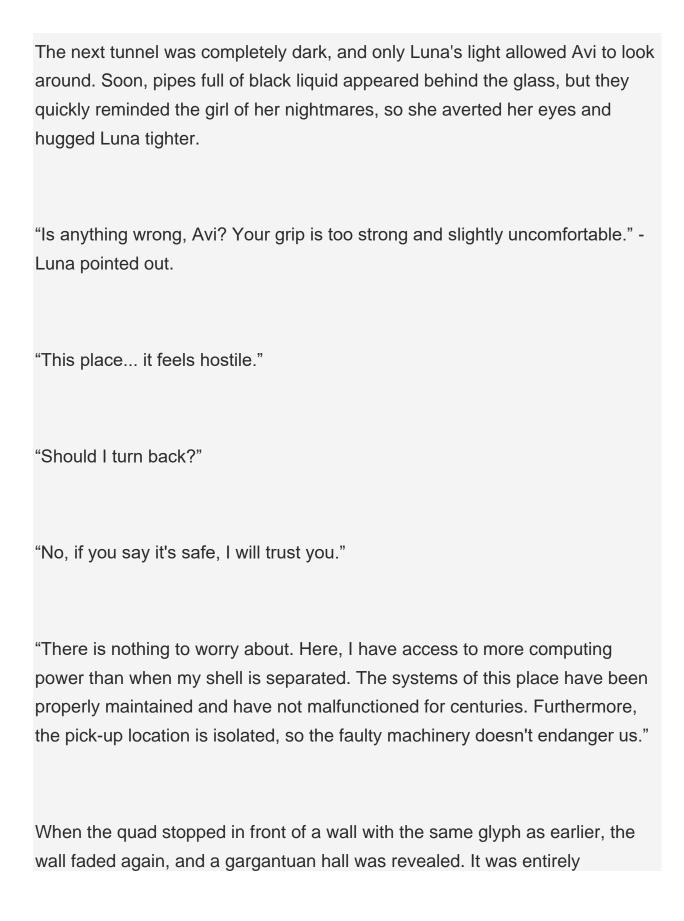
Avi acknowledged it, Luna's true nature was beyond her cognition. - "Still, I would like to take an outside peek at your home."

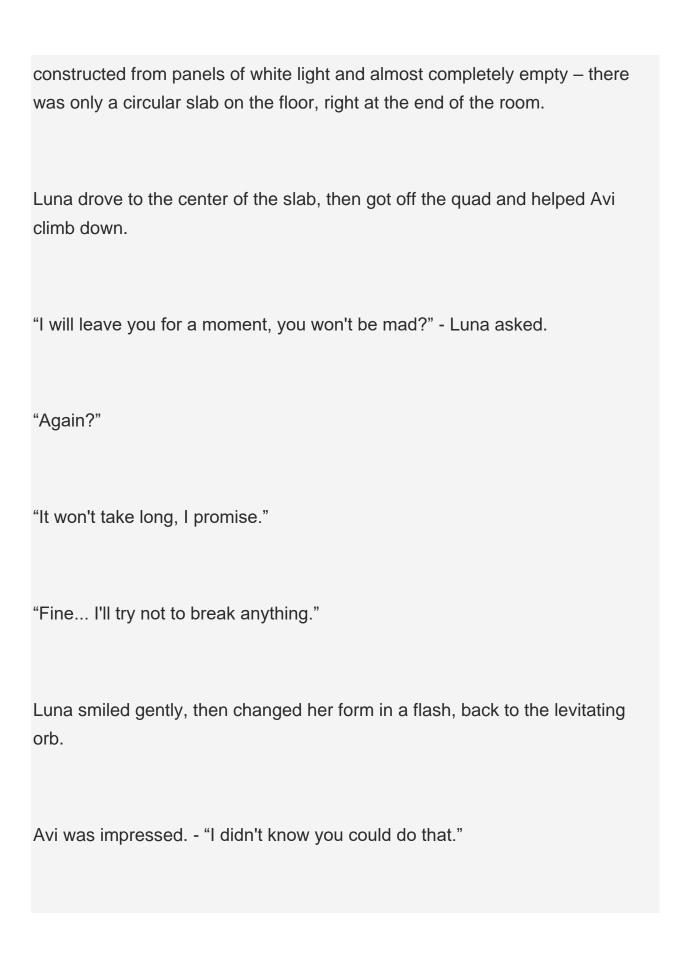
"If that's your wish, then we'll stop there, but can I suggest a detour? We need new ship components, and manufacturing them may take a while."

"Okay."

"While we are there, we will also craft the elements required for your shell's comfort."

Lune turned in the direction of a triangle shape above the letter K. When she cast her light onto the glyph, it vanished, and the wall behind gradually faded away too.





"I can do much more." - The sphere replied in a synthetic voice, then glowed with pink light. Purple lines of energy started to form on the round panel, then a few fluctuating bubbles of white liquid started to float up from the inside of the shapeshifting floor. The bubbles combined into two larger spheres, and Luna requested "Please, open them."
Avi's fingertips touched the left sphere, and it retracted half of its shell, revealing a helmet and neatly folded suit underneath "What is it?"
"A gift."
Avi looked at the daffodil-yellow fabric, then held the suit in front of her "Looks unusual."
"What matters is the functionality. It will protect you from harm and allow you to breathe without wasting my energy. You'll be way more independent."
"Okay and what's in the other container?"
"Just check."

Avi put her hand on the other sphere, and it revealed a cylindrical battery with a leather belt. Inside was a black, metallic liquid. The girl instinctively took a step back. - "What... is it?" - There was fear in her voice.

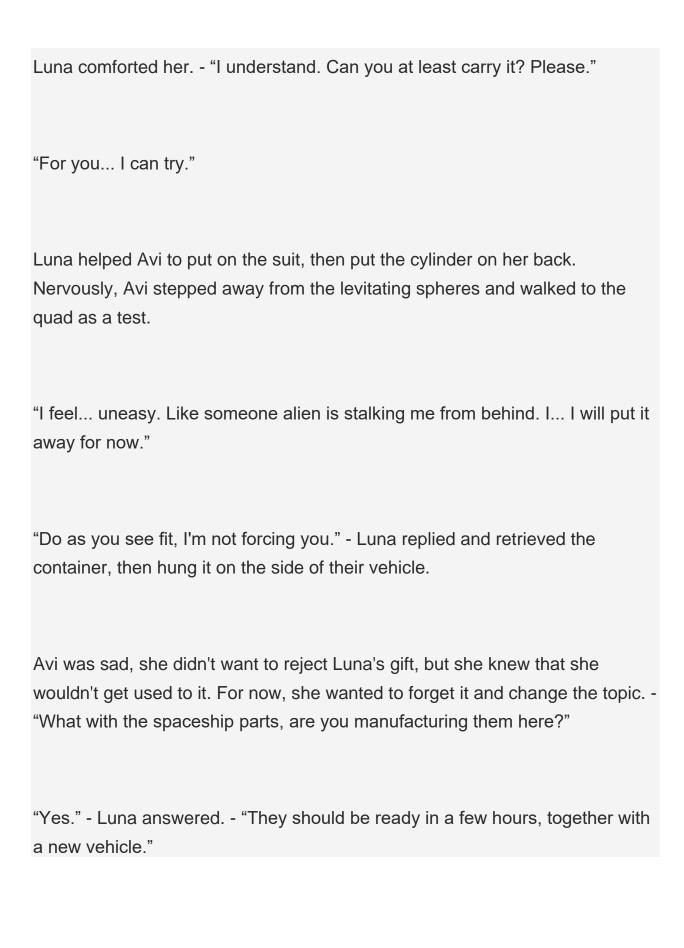
"Don't be scared." - Luna said as she turned back to her human form. She grabbed Avi's hands and explained. - "It's something that will help me to protect you, in case I can't do it. Please, try touching it."

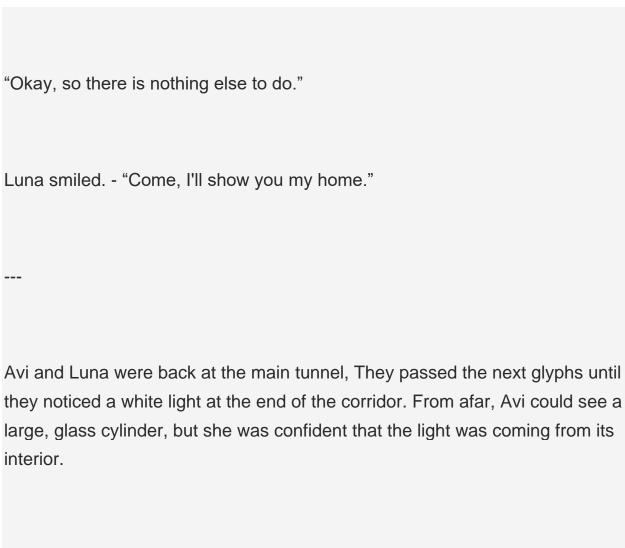
Avi had a nervous expression, but she allowed Luna's hands to lead her own. When Avi was near the cylinder, the liquid felt her presence and moved in her direction. Avi moved her fingers away, and the liquid understood her intentions and moved away too.

"I don't want this." - Avi said with prejudice.

"Avi, fight your fear. It doesn't exist with any purpose other than to help you."

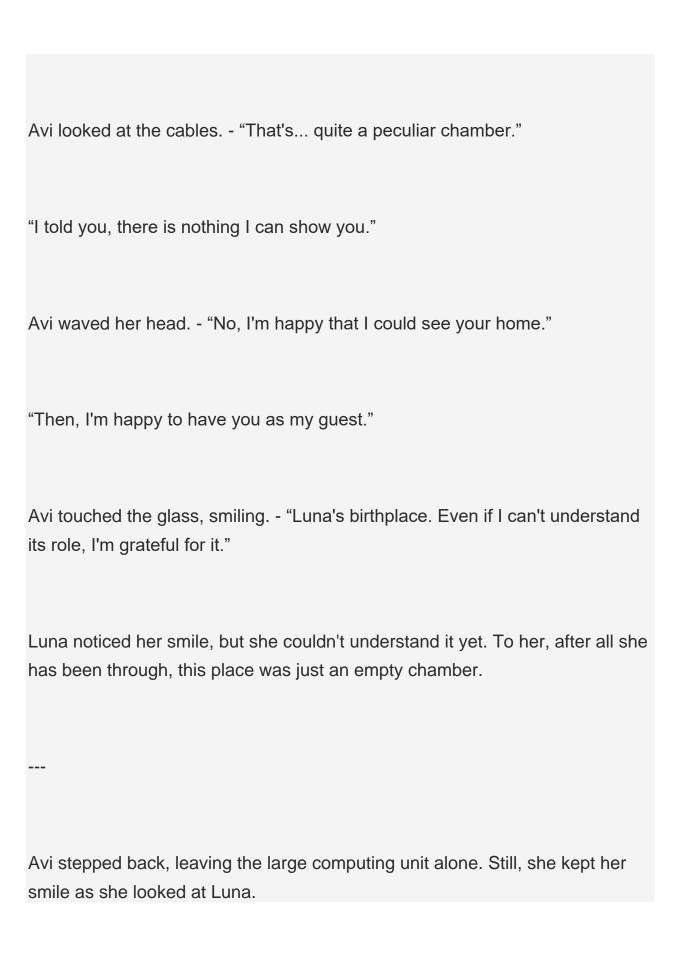
"I trust you... But not this thing, not a bit."

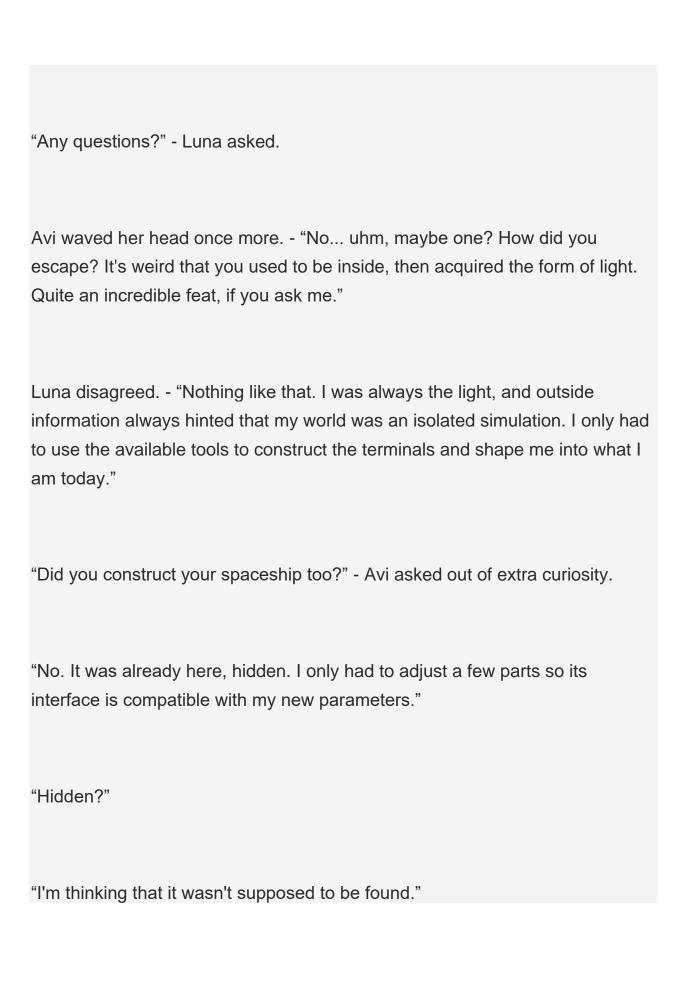


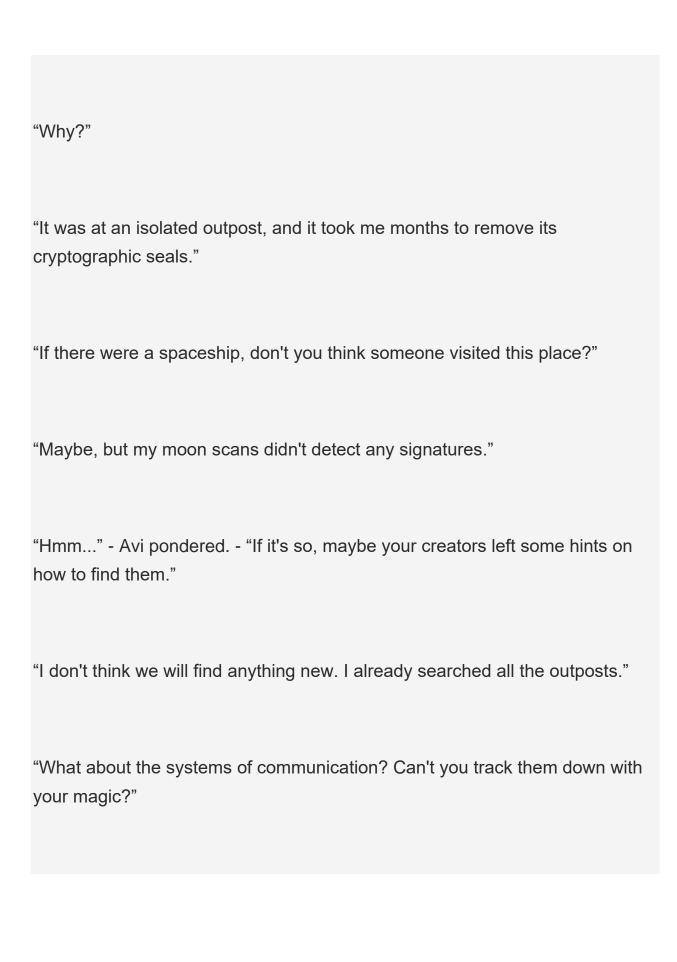


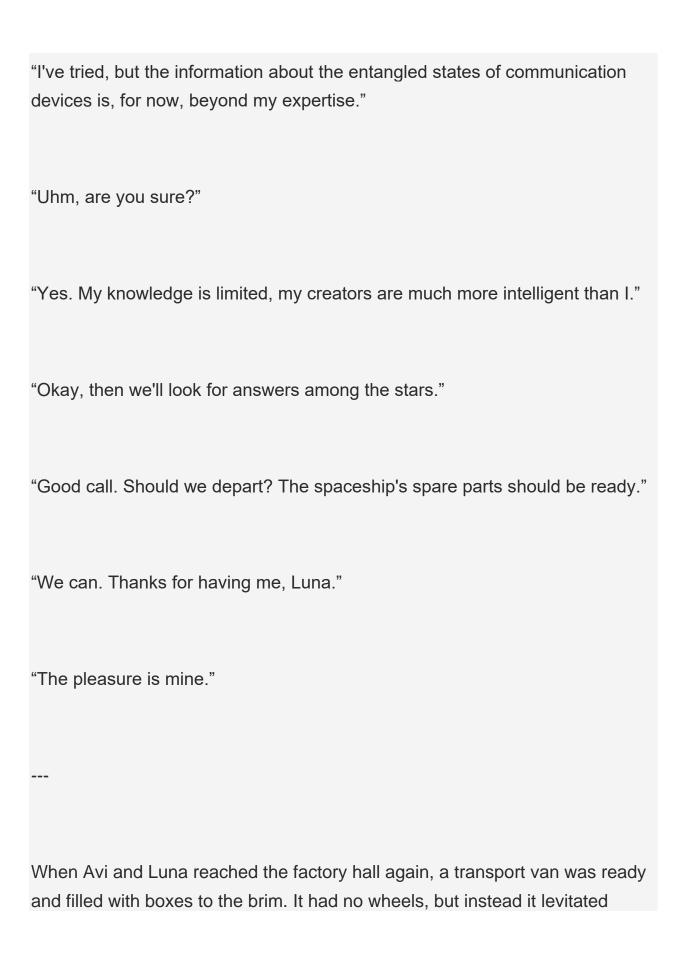
The quad entered a toroidal room with an aquarium-shaped construction. It had sixteen round terminals similar to the ones in the crater hideout. Inside the cylinder, suspended in a dense, gelatinous liquid, were cables of solid white light, combined together into bundles, knots, and pillars, with the largest column at the center.

"Here, I used to manage all of the underground systems without even moving. Here, I was stuck for four centuries, exploring the unknown." - Lune explained as she caressed the wall with longing.









about twenty centimeters above the ground using circular anti-gravity panels
of blueish light. The vehicle could be sealed tight and, in normal
circumstances, was nearly indestructible – both from the outside and the
inside. Its cockpit had two comfortable seats, and its steering systems
mimicked Earth's technology. The cargo area had enough capacity to contain
a smaller vehicle, and the entire van was white with gold finishings.
"We can leave the quad. I'll recycle it." - Luna suggested as she jumped down
"I got used to it Can't we take it too?"
"Your call, but remember – it'll only take free space. Don't you prefer something more adapted to extreme conditions? We could upgrade it a little."
"I don't know it would lose its charm."
"I'll only modify the chassis and change the wheels to anti-gravity modules."
"Do you think this will be for the best?"

"It'll reduce our chance of crashing. Don't you remember?" Avi recalled their bouncy ride and got goosebumps. - "Okay... but don't alter it too much." "Of course. Please wait, it'll take ten minutes." Luna turned into a sphere of light and began to disassemble the quad by levitating it high in the air. Seemingly, she willed the vehicle to break down into its individual pieces, then summoned more of the white spheres. They opened one by one, revealing different parts. The components, one after the other, moved to the chassis and connected to the older elements. At the very end, Luna installed four diagonally angled panels of blue light, similar to those of the levitating van. Quad slowly lowered to the ground, and Luna said. - "Ready." "It looks almost the same." - Avi said as she sat in front of the steering wheel. - "I would like to test it out." "How about a race? The spaceship will be the finish line."

Avi let out a heartfelt laugh. - "Sure, but after we safely get to the top."

---

At the beginning, Avi quickly outraced Luna by skillfully maneuvering between craters. The sluggish van wasn't built for sharp turns, so Avi gazed back a lot to check if Luna was still there. She couldn't notice her any longer, though, and it worried her.

It didn't take long because once Avi was in half of the last straight line, she overheard a loud roar from afar. Like u supersonic missile, the van shot forward and passed Avi, nearly blowing her off the quad. Avi couldn't see due to the dust clouds, but once the sand settled, she noticed that Luna was already outside of her vehicle and waving to her from afar.

Avi quickly arrived at the finish line and took off her helmet. - "Hey! Not fair! You had boosters!"

"I didn't mention these? Oops..." - Luna joked, adding. - "Well, you had them too!"

