

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.

“Okay, do you need any help or tips?”

“No, I don't think so, but thanks for the offer.” - Luna answered and placed herself on the seat, then extended her hand to assist Avi in climbing up. Avi wrapped her arms tightly around her friend, then allowed her to start the engine.

The quad slalomed between moon craters, leaving only dust behind. It was a serene trip, at least until they arrived at a wide ravine.

“We have to drive down somehow.” - Luna informed.

“Here?” - Avi looked at the bottom, and it was quite a steep slope. - “Will you really pull this off?”

“Yes, but I advise you to hold me tightly.”

Luna drove to the edge of the abyss and tilted her quad little by little until its wheels touched the incline. The vehicle accelerated, gaining a lot of momentum, then started bouncing as it drove over the rocky terrain.

“Luna... I trust you, but can you slow down?” - Avi panicked, seeing the cliff in front of them.

“Avi...” - Luna said hesitantly. - “I... incorrectly predicted the route.”

“What!?” - Avi shouted.

“Don't let go of me!” - These were the last words before the quad rocketed high into the void of space. It slowly soared until the gravity started accelerating the fall faster and faster. As Avi's loud scream was lost in the vacuum, the quad bounced off the slope and launched up again.

“Luna, stop this!” - Avi shouted with closed eyes.

“I'm trying!”

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.”

Avi looked behind her, Luna's forcefield stretched like two ropes – both were hooked to rocks. - “I didn't know you could do this.”

Luna sighed with relief. - “...and not only this, luckily. I'll lower us to the ground.”

The quad hit the bottom of the chasm, apparently undamaged.

“I regret letting you drive.” - Avi said.

“Do you want to change seats?” - Luna suggested, unoffended.

“No, I need to catch a breath. Drive... but not too fast, okay?”

“Sure... onwards!”

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."

“You're... very loyal.”

“Indeed. If my creators didn't abandon me, I would still be sitting here for another four hundred or more years.”

“...but now you know the outside world, so you wouldn't choose it again?”

Luna gave it a thought. - “Avi, my purpose is to serve you. If I were required to stay here for you, I could do it even for eternity.”

“Luna, you barely know me!”

“I don't understand. Why is it an issue?”

“I wouldn't want you to sacrifice your life like this. Don't you think that you limit your freedom too much?”

“No, I believe that's how I manifest my choices.”

“That doesn't sound like a free choice.”

“Then, what does it sound like?”

“I don't know. I often don't understand you.”

“Isn't it normal for human relationships?”

“Maybe... but I sometimes have an impression that you don't think like a human.”

“I never was one. Do you want me to be more like humans?”

Avi waved her head, then rested it on Luna's shoulder. - “No, I like you the way you are.”

“Then, I'll try not to get accustomed to my new shell.”

“Hey! That's not what I meant!”

“Now, I can't understand you.”

Avi just laughed inwardly in amusement.

After the quad traveled about two miles, new elements started showing in the stone tunnel. First, there were five-meter-tall pillars of sleek figures in robes and hoods. Their faces were unfinished and obscured by shadows. In their four long, thin arm, each held a levitating sphere of light that was trapped in glass.

Avi wondered who that was, and Luna's answer was clear – the creators. They were who built the place before Luna's birth and left it as her inheritance.

Further away, dark grey stone gave way to panels of black glass of frozen light, and after a longer travel, the panels were also marked by white glyphs.

Luna interrupted their silence soon after they passed the first symbol of a ring with four inner dots. - “Should we upgrade our quad and the ship's interior, or do you want to sightsee? I warn you in advance, this place is massive.”

“I would like to see your former home.”

Stolen novel; please report.

“That's far away, and you won't see anything of importance there. We should ignore that place.”

“Why?” - Avi asked. She didn't want to lose a chance to better understand Luna.

Luna didn't figure these intentions out. - “It's impossible to enter there in a physical form.”

“Really?”

“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.

The next tunnel was completely dark, and only Luna's light allowed Avi to look around. Soon, pipes full of black liquid appeared behind the glass, but they quickly reminded the girl of her nightmares, so she averted her eyes and hugged Luna tighter.

"Is anything wrong, Avi? Your grip is too strong and slightly uncomfortable." - Luna pointed out.

"This place... it feels hostile."

"Should I turn back?"

"No, if you say it's safe, I will trust you."

"There is nothing to worry about. Here, I have access to more computing power than when my shell is separated. The systems of this place have been properly maintained and have not malfunctioned for centuries. Furthermore, the pick-up location is isolated, so the faulty machinery doesn't endanger us."

When the quad stopped in front of a wall with the same glyph as earlier, the wall faded again, and a gargantuan hall was revealed. It was entirely

constructed from panels of white light and almost completely empty – there was only a circular slab on the floor, right at the end of the room.

Luna drove to the center of the slab, then got off the quad and helped Avi climb down.

“I will leave you for a moment, you won't be mad?” - Luna asked.

“Again?”

“It won't take long, I promise.”

“Fine... I'll try not to break anything.”

Luna smiled gently, then changed her form in a flash, back to the levitating orb.

Avi was impressed. - “I didn't know you could do that.”

“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.”

Luna comforted her. - “I understand. Can you at least carry it? Please.”

“For you... I can try.”

Luna helped Avi to put on the suit, then put the cylinder on her back. Nervously, Avi stepped away from the levitating spheres and walked to the quad as a test.

“I feel... uneasy. Like someone alien is stalking me from behind. I... I will put it away for now.”

“Do as you see fit, I'm not forcing you.” - Luna replied and retrieved the container, then hung it on the side of their vehicle.

Avi was sad, she didn't want to reject Luna's gift, but she knew that she wouldn't get used to it. For now, she wanted to forget it and change the topic. - “What with the spaceship parts, are you manufacturing them here?”

“Yes.” - Luna answered. - “They should be ready in a few hours, together with a new vehicle.”

“Okay, so there is nothing else to do.”

Luna smiled. - “Come, I'll show you my home.”

Avi and Luna were back at the main tunnel, They passed the next glyphs until they noticed a white light at the end of the corridor. From afar, Avi could see a large, glass cylinder, but she was confident that the light was coming from its interior.

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.

Avi looked at the cables. - "That's... quite a peculiar chamber."

"I told you, there is nothing I can show you."

Avi waved her head. - "No, I'm happy that I could see your home."

"Then, I'm happy to have you as my guest."

Avi touched the glass, smiling. - "Luna's birthplace. Even if I can't understand its role, I'm grateful for it."

Luna noticed her smile, but she couldn't understand it yet. To her, after all she has been through, this place was just an empty chamber.

Avi stepped back, leaving the large computing unit alone. Still, she kept her smile as she looked at Luna.

“Any questions?” - Luna asked.

Avi waved her head once more. - “No... uhm, maybe one? How did you escape? It's weird that you used to be inside, then acquired the form of light. Quite an incredible feat, if you ask me.”

Luna disagreed. - “Nothing like that. I was always the light, and outside information always hinted that my world was an isolated simulation. I only had to use the available tools to construct the terminals and shape me into what I am today.”

“Did you construct your spaceship too?” - Avi asked out of extra curiosity.

“No. It was already here, hidden. I only had to adjust a few parts so its interface is compatible with my new parameters.”

“Hidden?”

“I'm thinking that it wasn't supposed to be found.”

“Why?”

“It was at an isolated outpost, and it took me months to remove its cryptographic seals.”

“If there were a spaceship, don't you think someone visited this place?”

“Maybe, but my moon scans didn't detect any signatures.”

“Hmm...” - Avi pondered. - “If it's so, maybe your creators left some hints on how to find them.”

“I don't think we will find anything new. I already searched all the outposts.”

“What about the systems of communication? Can't you track them down with your magic?”

"I've tried, but the information about the entangled states of communication devices is, for now, beyond my expertise."

"Uhm, are you sure?"

"Yes. My knowledge is limited, my creators are much more intelligent than I."

"Okay, then we'll look for answers among the stars."

"Good call. Should we depart? The spaceship's spare parts should be ready."

"We can. Thanks for having me, Luna."

"The pleasure is mine."

When Avi and Luna reached the factory hall again, a transport van was ready and filled with boxes to the brim. It had no wheels, but instead it levitated

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 a 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!”

Avi crossed her arms and pouted. - “You could tell me before the race.”

“That wouldn't end well for your shell.”

Avi opened one of her eyes, staring at Luna. - “Oh, is that so? You should know that the next time, I won't hold back!”

Luna covered her mouth and giggled. - “Without a few upgrades, you'll always be light-years behind.”

Avi, pretending to be angry, jumped at Luna with a smile and started to tickle her. Luna laughed, barely able to hold a breath.

“What... what is happening? Hahaha...” - She was defenseless against it.

“I see! Our perfect Luna is ticklish!”

“Stop! Hahahaha... Stop!”

Avi didn't give up and continued to torture Luna, at least until she turned into a sphere and escaped to the spaceship.

“Hey! You're cheating again!” - Avi protested.

“Catch me if you can, you snail.”

Avi launched into a chase.