

Last Star 104

Star XXXIV ~ Requiem ~ Part VI

Once again, Luna helped her friends to cross the walls of brain tissue. The concert was still ongoing, so they had to wait under the stage, but there was still some time until Sari's final performance. When there was a break, Sari joined everyone and gave them passes to VIP boxes, then asked Luna to tune the equipment again.

After that, Avi and her companions walked up the arching stairs, passing some robots who transferred unidentified devices and brains in jars, until they reached their VIP box. There were no seats, so the group had to stand, but it didn't bother anyone. Avi leaned against the balustrade and, with dreamy eyes, looked at Sari, who was now calm and collected, and approaching the microphone. She soon began to sing a soothing, but sad melody.

"My hand reaching for the sky, calling your name. Yet, there was no answer. Our words, meaningless. Will everything fall apart once I stop believing?"

"I recall you, leading us to the stars unknown. The dreams became reality, and restored the colors to my life. I recall, my smile, when the smallest miracles happened..."

"Last desert flower, weak and dry. It reminds me of you. To protect it, I'll sacrifice myself. I merely pray for you to remember me..."

"Last desert flower, I water it with my tears. How much of my pain will it take until you're healed? I merely pray for you to remember me..."

"My hands reaching for the sky, calling your name. Alone, in this barrenlands, I still wait. Each grains of sand, I had already counted."

"Please... listen, wherever you are, and give me hope, before my heart cries with despair. Console me, before I forget how much I love you."

"Last desert flower, its blackened petals slowly falling. I have nothing left, but the scars that will never heal."

"Last desert flower, crumbling in my trembling hands. Nothing remains. Nothing, but death's embrace."

"My hands reaching for rthe sky, calling your name. Give me wings, so I can fly away. Don't punish me for merely existing. Don't punish me for missing you."

"I want to keep running, together. Across the endless meadows, show me the path. I want to dance together again, please let me take your hand."

"Last desert flower... It's no longer here, while I remain. The dusk never came, the dawn never came."

"Last desert flower... I'll cry no more. My cold heart, beats without purpose, to be forgotten, forever."

Sari finished her song and looked in Avi's direction, noticing emotional tears welling up in her eyes. Knowing that her song could touch at least one heart, Sari smiled inwardly and walked off the stage.

A brain in spherical jar flied onto the scenes, suspended in a fluorescent fluid filled with fine particles of silver glitter. They thanked Sari for her performance, then announced the next artist. During that short pause, Sari could join Avi and her friends.

"You were amazing!" - Avi exclaimed while Sari was still climbing the stairs.

Sari simply smiled gently.

"You had to pour your heart and soul into it." - Virka noticed. - "Your skill could match Khazan divas, and trust me – they were one of the best vocalists in the galaxy."

"I appreciate the compliment..." - Sari replied. - "...but it's all thanks to my ancestors. My techniques were developed according to their teachings and ancient records, and I only try to carry their songs to the skies."

"Don't be so humble." - Virka's tails twisted with appreciation. - "You not only have a talent, but you also have put enormous effort into practice, which I assume took your entire life. It's not hard to notice."

Sari didn't deny. - "I'm not the only person who is here to give their all. I heard they've found somebody very special for their last performance."

Luna gazed at the scene, noticing a small girl underneath a black cloak. Despite Luna's doubled efforts, her scans returned an error.

"Who is it?" - Luna asked. - "Her masking technology is not natural."

"I don't know." - Sari revealed. - "I didn't have any chance to talk to her."

The mysterious singer approached the microphone and began to hum slowly. Her voice was flawless, and every transition was so fluid that one could think that the artist did not need to breathe. Virka immediately understood that it wasn't just someone skilled, but someone who practiced for thousands of years, someone with unnatural vocal physique, and someone who wasn't using any implants or enhancing devices.

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"The darkness is no stranger to me... oh-oh-oh. Take me there, to drown in the abyss of sorrow."

Avi felt uneasy. Despite never hearing a voice so beautiful, it sounded suspiciously familiar to her.

"May your blade wound my side, oh-oh, I'm not bleeding, no more. Give me pain, so I can feel again."

Although the song was technically perfect, Luna didn't like it. The melody was eerily ominous.

"I don't like it, let's leave." - Luna suggested.

Sari looked at Luna. It was obvious she wanted to know why. A performance like this would happen only once in a lifetime.

"Shackled by life, oh-oh, oh-oh. I sing for deaf. Tell me, fool – If I lose my mind, will my sins be justified?"

Virka observed Luna for a long time, and could also tell that something was wrong. Not only because of the song, but also due to the lower VIP boxes. When she examined them carefully, her subconscious suspicions were confirmed and she noticed that one after another, the brains fell almost lifelessly to the bottom of their jars.

"Luna. There's something wrong with the guests." - Virka alerted.

Luna scanned one of the jars as thoroughly as she could. - "They're alive, but their intelligence signatures completely stopped."

"Lost in the puppet dance, oh, we're replaying the same pictures... does the actor care that the movie has to end?"

Nicolas decided not to wait. - "Avi. We're leaving." - He ordered.

"...but..." - Avi stared at the performers on the stage all this time, enthralled. However, once she turned her eyes away and noticed her worried companions, she didn't protest. - "Okay."

"Sari. Are you coming, too?" - Virka asked.

Sari nodded. - "Yes."

Luna hurried to get everyone out of the concert hall, while the melody didn't stop. All the sound systems in the brain were broadcasting the song. The brain tissue seemed to gradually slow down its pulse, while the guards were asleep, lying on the floor.

Once Luna was outside, the situation was no different. All means of public transport were stopped, and most of the skyships were automatically forced to make an emergency landing wherever they could.

Avi was even more worried than before. - "Luna... can we just leave everyone?"

"We have to." - Luna said.

"...but how would you know that?" - Avi asked.

"I simply know. Whoever they are, we're not ready to challenge them." - Luna explained. - "Not yet."

"...but that person. What do they want to do with these people?" - Avi replied.

Luna stared at Avi, her face serious like rarely before. Still, she did not answer.

Avi frowned on the spot. - "We can't leave them. We have to do something."

"AVI!" - Luna exclaimed. - "We'll discuss it on the spaceship. Once we're safe."

"We don't even know how much time we have. We shouldn't stop." - Nicolas added.

"About that." - Sari uttered. - "The song. I feel that something bad is going to happen once it's over."

Virka frowned. - "I was expecting this. We need to seize a skyship. It'll give us an advantage."

Avi gave in and decided to listen. Right after their skyship has started and flew above the synapses-made dome, they could notice blackening sun.

"Is their star... dying?" - Sari uttered.

"Yes, that's what also happened in the Prison of Aeons." - Luna reminded.

Sari folded her hands in prayer. - "The source of life, protect us. The source of life, lead us home safely..."

Luna was irritated by it, but didn't let anyone notice. She was too focused on leaving the city as soon as possible. She boosted the engine power beyond the maximum limit, making them overheat and produce a black smoke with a smell of burnt flesh. When the ship flew out of the cultural district, its rear exploded, but Luna ignored it.

"Luna!?" - Avi shouted. - "Do you have this under control!?"

"It's a side effect. Everything is fine." - Luna informed right before the second explosion, which caused her to lose control of the engines. The ship started to dive down at full speed, heading towards the city walls.

"We'll crash!" - Sari warned, her eyes wide open.

“YES.” - Luna confirmed. - “That was the plan. Everyone, hold me tight.” - She said as she summoned a barrier of light around them.

The tail of black smoke split the sky above the city in two, and slowly approached the city's forcefield. Luna aimed with her index finger, focusing the light on its tip, then shot. A bullet of light struck the forcefield, creating a shattered pattern.

“Curse it!” - She uttered as she focused again. After another shot, there was a dent in the forcefield, but it didn't seem like it would disappear.

“Luna!? What are you doing!?” - Avi panicked. - “It's not working!!”

“I have everything under control!” - Luna tried to calm her down.

“What will happen if we crash into it!?” - Nicolas asked.

“We won't!” - Luna replied nervously, adding with irritation. - “Let me focus!”

When the ship was fifteen meters away from the barrier, Avi closed her eyes and shouted in panic, while Luna stayed as calm as she could and waited until the last moment. The skyship's bow entered the forcefield, disintegrating in a cloud of smoke, causing Luna to lose the sight of her target. Still, her hand was aimed in the same direction as earlier. She shot again right before her index finger could touch the barrier, and it shattered like glass, causing shards of its energy to melt into Luna's shield, evaporating it in a few spots.

The back of the ship flew through the newmade hole, while its balloon was incinerated completely. Luna slightly lifted the wreckage, causing it to land outside the docks in a sliding manner, on one of the airstrips, then later stop right in front of Luna's ship.

Luna quickly disabled her shield and remotely activated the ship's engines.

"Sari. Will you be fine?" - She asked before they would split.

"Yes, my spaceship is close!" - Sari informed as she hurried towards it. - "May the starlight guide you!"

"May it guide you, too!" - Luna responded quickly before joining Avi and her parents, and Virka.

Soon, Sari disappeared, but they could see her small personal spaceship after they started their own ship. It headed up to the stars and just flashed into hyperspace. Luna followed, making a short jump to the planet's orbit. She could notice dozen thousands of small dots on her radar, all with unknown signatures, but she didn't bother checking what they were and left the system.

Intermission ~ Rapid Fire

Luna focused, still trying to make sure that nobody was following them, but there were no suspicious signals. Once the spaceship was far enough and heading towards the next star system, she joined her friend in the recreational room.

She sat down on the sofa and rested her elbows on the table. With her hands intertwined in front of her face, she pondered, trying to understand what exactly had happened.

"Luna..." - Avi uttered quietly. - "...what should we do now?"

"Nothing." - Luna said, resigned.

"Nothing? Why?" - Avi replied.

"We can't help them. Not yet." - Luna spoke, her hands slightly shaking.

"Can you at least explain..." - Nicolas began asking.

"No." - Luna interrupted. - "I don't know anything. If it were a technology, I would know, but this person rules the fundamental aspects of the universe, as if they were an extension of their senses. It's unnatural."

Nicolas sighed. - "Considering you could say at least that, you still know something."

"I only know what I've already told you." - Luna muttered. - "I'm scared to think about what else that person may be capable of."

Avi lowered her head. - "If it's her... Infinity Witch. She will surely hurt them."

Virka sat down next to Luna. - "That's more of a reason not to come close."

"I would like to talk to her. To understand." - Avi uttered.

"There's not much to be understood." - Virka warned. - "If what Akel was saying is true, then she fights a battle harder than ours, and seems to be winning. You can't persuade someone who most likely heard your words countless times."

"I don't know that, because I didn't try. There is always a chance." - Avi argued. - "Our attempt might still be the first."

Luna rested her back against the armrest, denying. - "Avi... think about it. She currently lives in many timelines, some of which also originate from this one. According to Akel, their relative time can also be accelerated. It's almost the same as precognition."

"...but those timelines can still differ!" - Avi protested.

"Even if it was true, you still should understand who we are fighting against." - Luna said. - "All those paintings, all those prophecies... to her, our future already had happened. It's as if she's manipulating fate itself, as if she wants to let us know what's soon going to happen."

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"It's hard to think about it." - Nicolas commented as he sipped his coffee. - "We really would need a miracle."

Avi crossed her arms. - "Maybe, but still, we can be that miracle."

"You don't know when to give up." - Virka added with a half-smile.

"No, I don't." - Avi confirmed.

"That's why you have us." - Luna also commented. - "Someone needs to keep you from always pushing your hands into the thorns."

Avi had a sour expression. - "I know what I'm doing!"

"If you..." - Luna wasn't able to finish, because the ship's alarm blared. She instantly flashed to a bridge, leaving everyone else.

"What's happening!?" - Avi shouted to her.

The ship's sound system soon transmitted Luna's warning to them. - "They've locked onto us! Four unmanned, armed reconnaissance units. Unknown signatures."

"Can you lose them!?" - Avi asked.

"Not fast enough." - Luna informed. - "I have to shoot them down before they mark us. Otherwise, they'll be able to send their entire fleet here. Grab onto something!"

Luna decelerated to match the speed of enemy ships, and soon four grey shapes blinked beyond the windows for a short moment. There was a moment of silence, after which green lasers flashed next to Luna's spaceship. One of them struck the shields, creating a hole, then disappeared somewhere at the back of the engines. The ship tilted slightly, and it appeared that the artificial gravity was destabilized. The cabinet with vinyls almost fell, but Nicolas was able to keep it in place.

"Luna!?" - Avi shouted again. - "They've hit us!"

"I know, but I got one!" - Luna shouted back. - "Stay where you are, no matter what happens!"

Luna's ship accelerated, and there was a loud bang, which reverberated across the interior and shook it violently. For a fraction of a second, metal scraps could be seen passing beyond the window.

"Got the second one." - Luna informed. - "...and the third one. Their last scout is an advanced prototype unit. If I'm supposed to match its evading maneuvers, then it's too dangerous to keep artificial gravity on. I'm disabling it."

The table and the dishes began to levitate. Virka grabbed sofa tightly as it started to gradually rise higher. Similarly, the van began to move towards the back of the room and hit the steel wall with a loud thud. Charlotte hugged Nicolas, desperately trying to stay where she was, and extended her hand to Avi, so she could also grab them. However, there was a sudden sharp turn, and everything was pulled towards the van. Then, there was another turn, which restabilized everyone's positions, only to immediately push all the unsecured items and people into Avi's prized belongings. The sofa caused the biggest damage, utterly demolishing Avi's entire collection of game cartridges and CDs.

"Ouch!" - Avi exclaimed as she tried to get up. - "Hey! Luna! Be careful, it's worse than an earthquake!"

"I'm sorry. I got the last one, though. It should be okay now." - Luna informed, then flashed back to the recreational room and inspected the damage. Bruised Avi was massaging her arm, while Nicolas freed Charlotte from his protective embrace.

"Virka, are you alright?" - Luna asked, seeing that Virka's fingers were still digging into the sofa.

"I think I've broken a fingernail." - Virka replied, irritated.

"I'll synthesize a replacement." - Luna suggested.

Virka waved it off. - "There's no need. I think it will be better to clip them."

Next, Luna's sight turned to Avi, who was kneeling in front of broken furniture, wailing. - "Luuuuna..."

“Eh.” - Luna grabbed her face and shook her head. - “I'll need to remember to install gravitational anchors in the future.”