

Last Star 110

Star XXXVII ~ Unravelling ~ Part II

After leaving, the farmer who showed the girls around and Kerq waited outside. They were casually chatting like two buddies who had known each other for ages. They didn't even pay attention to the visitors, at least until Luna approached them, asking about what the town had to offer.

Kerq scratched his head, but he couldn't figure out anything special. - "Not a lot happens here, unless we have to shoo some fork-horns away. Sometimes, we play the Seven Miracles. I can teach you if you want..."

Avi was excited to learn and tried to persuade Luna to try. Luna rolled her eyes, but still agreed. It was a simple game of cards and dice, which Luna quickly figured out, causing her to win the majority of the rounds, ignoring a few where her cards and dice results were unusually weak. She stopped only when Avi started to complain that she was cheating, and instead suggested that she would look around the village, while they could keep playing.

"Excuse me..." - Luna's stroll was interrupted by a small boy. He pointed at a ball that was stuck between a chimney and the roof of a nearby house.

Without question or saying anything, Luna telekinetically pulled the toy right into his hands. The boy smiled and thanked her, then sprinted back to a nearby backyard, and Luna could continue her walk.

However, Luna's abilities weren't unnoticed. Two construction workers called her.

"Hey, kind soul, can you help us, too?" - The first one spoke.

“How?” - Luna asked.

The worker pointed at a carriage with straw bales and wooden planks. - “Can you pass them to us until we are finished?”

“I have a better idea, but I need some space. Please, come down for a moment.” - Luna requested.

The workers did as instructed, and Luna lifted all materials from the carriage, then finished the construction of the roof in under a minute.

“It looks solid.” - The second worker commented.

“It'll withstand even a hurricane.” - Luna assured.

The workers looked at each other knowingly, and the first one asked. - “We don't want to take advantage of your kindness... but could you help us to dig a well, too?”

“I have nothing better to do, show the spot.” - Luna said.

Luna was confident that it would be over after this favor, but she was quickly offered paid work. The workers needed help with the construction of two houses for newlywed villagers. She agreed to work for free, thinking it was another task related to finishing a house, but it turned out she was sent to a sawmill far away to retrieve some planks and to gather clay from a muddy morass in the wilderness.

Although Luna could just flash and travel there instantly, she decided a short stroll would lift her mood. She gazed at the flying mantas as she walked, and once she was near the sawmill, she gathered some nepenthe seeds for her botanic garden. She also found some three-armed stars with cylindrical head-maw-torsos in the muddy area, which she scanned to show to Avi later.

When Luna returned with the materials, both workers were lazing off beneath a tree, and one was even sleeping. When Luna approached, the first worker pointed at an empty table without even lifting his hat to see her face.

“Eh?” - Luna exhaled, barely able to understand what it was about.

The worker finally raised his head. - “Do you need me to explain the blueprints?”

“What blueprints?” - Luna asked.

Only now, the worker realized that his documents had disappeared, likely carried away by the wind.

“Eee...” - He uttered, clearly lost, and nudged his friend to wake him up. - “Dasq! Our papers are gone! Go fetch the architect!”

Dasq yawned. - "The architect is away. He'll return in the next season, let's just forget about it."

Luna stomped her feet. - "Let me guess. The wedding ceremonies are supposed to wait, too?"

"Happens..." - Dasq said without any care in the world. - "...unless you know how to draft a house."

Luna was furious, but it was a silent fury. She snapped her fingers, and all the clay and planks formed a violent vortex above the workers, causing them to cling to the tree trunk in fear. Luna sawed the wood, then sent it to the necessary locations together with clay, combining everything into walls.

When she was also done with a roof, she crossed her arms and asked coldly. - "Anything else?"

"Uhm, furniture?" - Dasq barely uttered it, but his friend immediately warned him with a nudge not to try their luck. - "Oh, no, no! Thank you!!"

Luna returned to the village with the intent not to help anyone anymore, but to her irritation, she found Avi and Charlotte collecting eggs in one of the enclosures.

"What are you both doing?" - Luna asked.

“Oh, a nice elderly woman asked us to bring some water from the well...” - Charlotte explained. - “...we chatted a bit, and it turned out she needs help with her animals.”

“We were even feeding oxen!” - Avi added enthusiastically.

“And? Do you plan to waste all day like this?” - Luna added. - “There will always be someone who will want to exploit you. They have their own arms and legs, they'll do just fine!”

“Luna, don't be so unfriendly!” - Avi replied.

Completely irritated, Luna snapped her fingers, making all the eggs fly to the baskets. - “Done.”

“Hey! You're ruining the fun!” - Avi shouted.

“Whatever, whatever.” - Luna uttered. - “There's only one hour until the evening. Do you at least know where the shrine is?”

“At the highest point of the plateau, next to the eastern cliff.” - Charlotte explained. - “We have to walk the southern path and turn to a meadow of silver shield-milkweed. Do you want to go now?”

“It won't hurt if we arrive a bit earlier.” - Luna replied.

“Why are you so impatient?” - Avi added as she carried the basket to the house's door. - “It's not that far, we can still see the village.”

Luna raised her arms, surrendering. - “Fine! Fine! As long as you don't take any requests from strangers!”

Charlotte put the eggs in her hands into the basket, then, together with Luna, followed Avi wherever she wanted to go. Luna wasn't too surprised after noticing it was a bakery. However, a lot of time has passed, so she didn't tease Avi for her gluttony this time – it was natural that she could be hungry by now.

After purchasing some sweet rolls with pollen-based frosting and slices of plum-like fruits, they slowly walked to the hill concealed beneath a layer of gleaming, silver, concave discs. Inside them, there was some brown milk with a strong, nutty smell, which lured buzzing balls of flying, red fluff.

Avi curiously approached the flies, but she quickly learned it was a mistake. Smelling the frosting, the insects swarmed Avi from all directions. It was futile to run away, and they would chase her across the entire meadow until she ran to Luna, begging her to protect her.

“Why am I not surprised?” - Luna commented as she summoned an invisible forcefield.

“Hey!” - Avi protested. - “It's not my fault!”

Luna gave it a rest and her face turned towards the setting sun. In the distance, she noticed more villagers who headed towards the shrine. They weren't the citizens of the previous town, and each of them carried various gifts, such as baskets of fruits, wooden figurines, bead necklaces, and homemade goods.

When the girls joined them, it turned out they were already at the shrine. A rather large crowd gathered there, concealing everything except a thick and old white root.

"Eltri." - Luna assumed.

The sun faded beyond the horizon, and the tip of a root glowed with a blue, gentle light. Every villager knelt, revealing the monk who stood before everyone. His creamy-blue robe had a symbol of a single feather, and he raised his arms to the sky, calling.

A case of literary theft: this tale is not rightfully on Amazon; if you see it, report the violation.

"You, who keeps the light burning, take our gifts and cleanse our souls. You, who keeps the light burning, remove our filth and wickedness, and grant us goodwill and kindness. You, who keeps the light burning, replace our fear and suffering with bravery and wisdom..."

He prayed for a while, then continued.

"I, your servant, and all the people gathered here in the third prayer season – we submit our petitions... to heal the beehives, by Feaq, born in the fourth spring. Please, step out."

Feaq approached and put three jars with fluorescent, green resin on a blanket. His index finger moved to the left part of his chest, then to his belly, then to the right part of his chest, forming a letter V. When he was done, a drop of sap fell from the tip of the root and landed on his gifts, causing them to burst in blue flames, which quickly turned them to ash.

“What...?” - Luna whispered as she analyzed her scans. - “No traces of any interaction with fundamental aspects?”

“Luna, quiet!” - Avi scolded.

“Quqa and Haqe, united under the light of Green Pearl, would like to request a gift of new life. Please, step out.” - The monk asked, and a pair of newlywed villagers put two candles next to the root, which were also evaporated.

The rites continued until the last of the villagers presented an offering. However, the monk wasn't done. He looked at Charlotte, Avi, and Luna, inviting them to come closer.

“Please... you, too, voice your pleas.” - The monk requested.

“Eee... but we have nothing to offer.” - Avi said.

“A quiet prayer is enough. The one who keeps the light burning will understand.” - Monk assured.

“Avi. I don't know what this thing is. We should not risk.” - Luna warned.

“I'll go.” - Charlotte suggested. - “I don't think they've ill intentions.” - She knelt before the root, silently thanking the world for reuniting her with her daughter.

“What do you request?” - Monk asked.

“For stars to protect my family.” - Charlotte said.

“...and your name is?” - Monk said.

“Charlotte.” - Avi's mom informed.

The monk raised his arms and whispered a few psalm verses. A small flame appeared above Charlotte's head, only to fade a moment later. When Charlotte returned, Luna was slightly worried.

“Do you feel anything strange?” - She asked.

Charlotte shook her head. - “It's safe.”

With a smile, the monk encouraged Luna and Avi to join.

“I’ll go, too.” - Avi declared, letting the monk ask her what her request was. - “I would like my friend to find her path to the light, so she can find a place where she’ll be welcome regardless of her past and where her soul can be healed.”

After asking Avi her name and uttering three different verses of the psalm, a small flame appeared above Avi.

There was only Luna left, but she didn't want to join.

“I refuse.” - Luna said. - “I don't believe in your rites and superstitions.”

Many villagers turned their faces to Luna, some staring at her in shock, some with sadness, others with compassion. Luna didn't let the pressure get to her and didn't budge.

The monk could understand her and didn't insist. One last time, he raised his arms to the sky, uttered a final prayer, then let the crowd leave. Still, some people remained to talk with the monk, which made Luna impatient, because she, too, had questions. Regardless, she waited until everyone was done, and when the first stars appeared on the night sky, she and her companions could face the priest alone.

“What can a humble servant help you with, o' pilgrims from the stars?” - The monk asked.

“Your chief. I asked him about Eltri's location, but he told us to wait until evening.” - Luna informed. - “I was sure that we'll learn something here and I must say, I'm slightly disappointed.”

“Why do you look for the soul tree?” - The monk inquired.

“This knowledge will be helpful to us. Also, we are worried about it.” - Luna revealed.

“Why?” - The monk continued.

“There are people who want this tree to die.” - Luna stated. - “You should know that you will suffer because of it.”

The monk spoke in a calm voice. - “The tree is already dying. It can feel that its next days are its last.”

“Can't we stop it somehow?” - Avi added, worried. - “It's your life at stake.”

The monk shook his head. - “Not ours. This life belongs to the one who keeps the light burning.”

Luna rolled her eyes. - “I already heard stuff like this before...”

"I know that you mean well..." - The monk said. - "...but the river of life isn't supposed to be stopped, or turned back. We are all heading to the final light, where our place is."

Avi still had doubts. - "What do you mean by final light?"

"It's a place where our souls come from." - The monk explained. - "Our home of eternal happiness and peace."

"At least their beliefs are not as extreme as the ones we've encountered earlier..." - Luna muttered. - "...but it's still unscientific nonsense."

"Luna!" - Avi scolded. - "Be more tolerant!"

"I have a better idea. You talk to him, while I make my leave and wait nearby." - Luna said. - "Just don't forget to ask where to look for Eltri." - She sat on a nearby stone and didn't say anything anymore.

"I'm sorry for her." - Avi said to the monk.

"It's okay." - The monk assured. - "Faith requires one to free oneself from shackles of reason, and to descend into the unknown. Not everyone wants to take that step..." - He paused for a moment, then added. - "...but maybe by getting to know Eltri, your friend will be closer to what she so desperately tries to touch."

“Do you know where it is?” - Charlotte interjected.

“No, but the order of restoration knows.” - The monk said. - “You'll find it in the far north, in the hostile tundra of the highest mountain range.”

“Thank you for the information, on behalf of us and our friend.” - Charlotte replied.

The monk nodded. - “Do you need anything else?”

Avi was thinking. - “Can you explain what the flame that appeared above us is?”

“Ah.” - The monk folded his hands, concealing them in his sleeves. - “It's a soul fire, a pure spiritual energy.”

“Spiritual energy? Whose? Ours?” - Charlotte asked.

“No, no.” - The monk denied. - “It's soul of Eltri.”

Avi connected the dots. - “It's the soul of the first astronaut!”

The monk shook his head. - "I can understand the source of your flawed knowledge. Indeed, the Eltri fragments come from him, but what sprouts out of them has its own heart."

"Are you trying to tell us that this tree has a soul?" - Charlotte was taken aback. - "What does it mean? Does it think and feel, like us?"

"No, no." - The monk denied again. - "It would have to grow and develop for it to happen, and it would take many cycles. Currently, it's only a chaotic mass of consciousness, capable of only dreaming."

Avi didn't understand one thing. - "How do you know everything this? Your civilization, no offense, is quite primitive."

The monk uttered as slowly as he could, still calm. - "United with Eltri, we have deep knowledge of our own and other souls, and we know their capabilities." - He opened his palm to show an example. Above it, a crystal shape began to form, soon resembling a beetle. After about two minutes of focusing his spiritual energy, the insect opened its eyes and flew up. - "First and foremost, those born from light can give light..."

Seeing this, Luna instantly got up. - "How!? With no technology!?! Without manipulating fundamental aspects!?"

"A sufficiently developed soul can tap directly into the source itself. It's what gives birth to life. All other methods are only layers of interpretations, concealing what should be pristine." - The monk said.

"It's some sort of a trick!" - Luna shouted.

"Luna... I don't think they would have the technology that would allow them to deceive you." - Avi pointed out. - "Even if they did, why would they?"

"You reject the truth, which you don't see." - The monk added. - "Accept the truth, which you do."

"I'll go crazy." - Luna replied. - "Show it again. I have to make another scan."

The monk sighed. - "Let me continue instead and scan me all you want. The second, smaller, but still important aspect of the soul is cognition. By knowing the light, we recognize the light." - He then turned to Charlotte. - "That's how I know you both are of the same blood." - Then to Avi. - "That's how I know you have a twin soul." - Then to Luna. - "That's how I tell you two are sharing an important bond."

Luna was sceptical. - "I might not know how you learned about Avi's soul, but a keen observer could deduce everything else."

The priest paid no attention to her comments. - "With cognition comes the third aspect – conversation." - The priest closed his eyes, and every one of the three present girls heard a voice inside their heads. - [United by the light, we can share way more than even our inner shells allow.] - Then he formed an image of the forest in the middle of the storm. Everyone could feel the strong wind pushing their bodies, the smell of fresh rain, and the droplets on their wet skin. They could also recognize their fatigue and determination to press on. Though the core detail was that it wasn't the monk's own experience, but rather something that was passed to him.

The images disappeared as soon as they appeared.

“The third aspect, change.” - The monk called the beetle back to him, then made its crystal body change its colors. - “The light brings growth.” - A moment later, the beetle grew older and at last, turned to ashes. - “The fifth aspect, release and last one, transfer.” - From the ashes, a flower now grew, which the monk planted under the Eltri's root. - “That's the cycle of life.”

“No data.” - Luna uttered, resigned.

Avi was full of awe. - “Can it be learned?”

The monk smiled. - “It depends. It took me two hundred and forty seasons to perfect my abilities, but without Eltri's patronage, I could lose them in a day.”

Luna was quick to conclude. - “If Eltri is dying, it must affect you, too.”

“Indeed.” - The monk said. - “The weaker the patron, the harder it is to perform miracles, but there are alternative ways, like the united effort of many souls, or what you already know – manipulation of aspects by use of technology.”

Avi shouted excitedly. - “I want to learn this!”

“Your enthusiasm pleases me greatly.” - The monk uttered. - “Considering you have a twin soul inside you, I suggest you try to talk to your other half. It's the easiest exercise and doesn't require a patron. The order of restoration will be glad to show you the ropes.”

The idea that Avi could study the souls seemed absurd to Luna, but she didn't reject it outright, even if she felt a strong aversion towards it. - “...uh, and then she would have to form a connection with that patron somehow?”

“Everyone experiences meeting Eltri differently.” - The monk said. - “Not many were chosen by it, but she can always try. However, I don't know if it'll help you, because none of us was ever able to influence the world beyond this star system.”

“...so if we want to travel, learning is out.” - Luna assumed.

“Learning leads to understanding.” - The monk added. - “Although I must admit that without years of practice, the chance for her skills to develop is small.”

“I still want to try!” - Avi exclaimed to Luna. - “Maybe this time I'll be better than you at something!”

“You certainly will, because I don't want to participate in this at all.” - Luna replied.

The conversation with the monk continued for a short time because Avi was still curious about how the learning process would look, and she also wanted some advice. She mainly learned that the initial exercises would be about meditation and require rigour, because shortcuts could negatively affect one's health. Avi's question stopped only after two moons could already be seen on the night sky, and the

monk also grew impatient, even if he wasn't showing it. He mentioned that it's time to sleep and said goodbye, so Luna and her friends returned to the spaceship.