

## Last Star 128

Star XXXIX ~ By the Seaside ~ Part I

After the safari, Avi and her companions spent most of their time sightseeing before dinner. They had spent the evening in the local hotel, and right after breakfast, their tourist visas were ready. Everyone returned to the spaceship, and Luna headed to the capital planet of the star system...

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When Luna flew closer to the ground, Avi's eyes were glistening like a million stars. Beyond the dense jungle, there was a curved patch of sand, and farther beyond it was a line of glass, seaside resorts, gleaming in the sunlight.

"A beach!" - Avi exclaimed with delight.

"I hoped you would like it." - Luna said. - "It's a classic Earthly vacation."

Avi flung herself at Luna, hugging her. - "It's the best gift you could make! I wasn't at sea for so long! My parents will definitely be overjoyed with it!" - She let her go for a moment. - "Oh... but I didn't take any swimwear... and we'll have to synthesize some sunoil... and..."

Luna giggled. - "Take it easy! I already took care of everything, and if we're still missing some items, then we can purchase them in local shops."

“Really...?” - Avi uttered in disbelief. - “Luna, you're the best!”

“I know that.” - Luna said, proud of herself. - “Simply pack your hygiene tools and some clothes, and I'll take care of formalities.”

Avi kissed Luna's cheek - “Thank you.” - then disappeared, heading to inform her parents and prepare.

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“I can't believe it.” - Nicolas uttered with a smile as he pulled two large travel suitcases behind him. - “A proper summer break. I honestly missed it.”

Charlotte was also in a good mood. - “Just like in the old days.”

Avi hopped next to them happily. - “Yes! Do you remember our surfing lessons?”

“You were so little, but so talented.” - Nicolas replied. - “We have to test our skills again. Let's hope the waves here are high enough.”

“It's an Earth-like planet, so the height of waves should be similar, too.” - Luna explained as she opened the spaceship's door. - “You won't be disappointed.”

Avi rushed outside as soon as the steel receded. The landing spot was concealed by wilderness from all sides. Deeper in the jungle, it was possible to hear tropical birds, and the palms were covered with pink fruits resembling one-meter large watermelons. Right in front of everyone, the hotel service was already waiting, together with a robot who would carry the luggage. The machine was shaped like a sphere with three grabbers, and the other person was a woman with a snake-like body, of a species which Avi encountered back on the moon. The snake-woman was wearing a long shawl around her waist, decorated with a leaf-like pattern. On top of her head, there was also a bonnet made of golden feathers, and she held four similar ones in her hand.

Right after Avi appeared in front of her, the reptile girl smiled friendly and patiently waited until all other guests arrived, then she exclaimed ceremoniously. - "Lasha!"

"Lasha!" - Luna repeated, greeting the woman on behalf of her companions.

"Lasha?" - Avi asked shyly.

"It means, I greet you, and I bless you." - The half-snake replied when her robot coworkers approached Nicolas to take everyone's luggage. - "Please, lower your heads, so I can properly invite you to our family."

Luna smiled. - "It's a local custom." - She did as instructed, and her head was soon decorated by a bonnet with white feathers as pure as snow. Charlotte received a headgear with peacock feathers, Nicolas a black one, and Avia a rainbow one.

"Our new sisters and brothers..." - The snake-woman finalized. - "...I believe that your visit here will not only bring you happiness, but also bring happiness to this place. Please remember that everyone here is

your friend, so you, too, should be friends with everyone. As you're given the light, so you must give light."

"We will do so." - Luna assured.

The snake-woman smiled brighter than earlier. - "The porter will lead you to your rooms. All of our services are available to you, so don't be afraid to use them. I would only like to remind you that the meals are served at regular hours, just as stated in the brochure. That's why I encourage you to stay punctual and to participate in our shared communion. Moreover, I would like to point out that from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m., everyone is required to stay in the hotel. I would also like to remind you that every guest is given a one-time optional pass to go sightseeing in these limited hours. That's all for today. I wish you a good vacation, rich in amazing experiences and new friends." - She bowed, then left.

"Please, follow me." - The porter spoke in a synthetic voice, then led Avi and her companions along the sandy path between the palms to the glass hotels.

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Avi was sitting on the bed and beginning to unpack. Everything she needed was in her suitcases – the outfits for various occasions, the sunbeds, a compact surfing board, an inflatable ball, and even badminton rackets.

However, she was most surprised by a small mouth device. - "What is it?"

"Diving equipment. It's a bit more advanced than the one you're used to. You'll also find swimfins in one of the compartments." - Luna explained.

Avi smiled instantly. - "So much to do!"

"...and on top of that, we need to include everything prepared here for the guests." - Charlotte pointed out.

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Avi's eyes were sparkling. - "Yeah! There were so many motorboats and sailboats, and festival booths!"

"...also, there was a spa and an arcade. Moreover, we can access the entirety of their multimedia library, go to the cinema..." - Luna started listing.

Avi began to stomp her feet excitedly. - "I don't want to keep waiting! I'm going to change my outfit!"

"Would that mean we're starting with the beach?" - Luna asked.

"Yes!" - Avi exclaimed. - "Sun, sand, and waves!!"

"There are many available spots. Do you prefer a large beach by a seashore, or do you prefer a quieter place?" - Luna asked.

“What do you mean by the latter?” - Charlotte replied.

“The eye of five tears. It's a small bay hidden inside a cave with a large hole at the top.” - Luna explained. - “There's plenty of sand there, and you can bathe under the waterfalls. Pros: not many people, beautiful scenery, underwater coral reefs, it's relatively quiet, and you can join a jungle boat trip. Cons: it's far, so it takes time to get there, there's not a lot of space for activities, and most of the beach is concealed by shadows, so sunbathing might be impossible.” - She opened her palm, summoning a few images above it.

“Such a charming place.” - Charlotte commented. - “Good for rest and reading.”

Avi looked, too. - “It's nice... but we will miss all the fun!”

“I'm only presenting the options.” - Luna said. - “The choice is yours.”

Avi looked at Nicolas, begging with her eyes for him to pick the seashore.

“I'm not sure.” - Nicolas uttered. - “We should plan our day accordingly. What kind of events are happening here?”

“In the evening, they have a welcome party for newcomers at the main beach. I'm not sure if we want to miss it.” - Luna answered. - “If we want to see both beaches, then we should start with the eye of five tears, and we can always visit the other beach on a different day.”

Avi was deep in thought. - "You said that there are coral reefs at the bay. Does that mean we're allowed to go diving there?"

"Of course." - Luna confirmed. - "It's one of the best spots."

"Mmm...!!!" - Avi was undecided. - "Fine! I want to make the most of this day, so let's leave nothing for tomorrow! The eye of five tears, it is!"

"It's decided, then." - Luna added. - "We'll get there via a scenic cable car. I'll reserve tickets."

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Avi, with binoculars hanging below her neck, kept an eye out for different types of parrots during the whole journey to the eye of five tears. The monkeys with mantis-like arms jumped between the trees, and many of them were busy attacking the large fruits, sending them crashing to the ground, where they shattered into a dozen pieces, revealing yellow flesh that could feed the mammals. In the shadow of palm crowns, there were also hanging creatures with three tentacles, similar to squids. They bit into the bark with their teeth, which replaced the suction cups, and sucked the sap out with many mouths on their arms. The closer the car was to the eye of five tears, the less fauna there was, but Avi could still see many large insects, such as green moths camouflaging between leaves, or black centipedes covered in red rings.

When the car stopped next to a small stream, it was easy to notice a large hole in the ground, its edges overgrown by various plants. The beach at the eye of five tears waited a bit lower, hidden at the end of a natural, narrow, dark tunnel, which was rebuilt to serve as a staircase. It was merely a few dozen steps

down, and when the first rays of sunlight entered the cave, Avi rushed out to see with her own eyes what wonders this unusual place was hiding.

The first thing that Avi could notice was the fresh fragrance of flora and wet stone, and right afterwards, the sight of white sand next to five waterfalls, two of which partially concealed the bay. There were already a few guests sunbathing, some occupied by reading, watching videos, or wearing headphones and listening to music, while others were sleeping in the shadows. A few tourists elsewhere took some breakfast snacks with them and organized a picnic, and conversed merrily.

Avi, like an eagle, was searching for a good spot. She quickly noticed two palms next to a small pond, then hurried there before any of the guests could get there first.

"Here!" - She called Luna and her parents, urging them to move faster.

Nicolas helped to set up their sunbeds, the table, an umbrella, and a blanket.

"You've found a good spot." - Nicolas praised Avi.

"I always do!" - Avi exclaimed proudly and jumped on her sunbed, then encouraged Luna to rest next to her. Charlotte and Nicolas also lay down, and holding each other's hands, were absorbing the beauty and tranquility of the bay. It was still an early morning at they had a lot of time until lunch. When Charlotte was done enjoying the view, she took out a hotel tablet and began reading, while Nicolas decided to stretch his legs and take a walk along the beach.



Luna peeked at Avi, whose eyes were concealed by dark sunglasses. She smiled kindly and asked. - "So? Do you like it?" - She didn't receive any answer, though, and instead heard a short snort, which soon turned into snoring.

Charlotte giggled. - "It seems she has already decided what she would like to do."

"My cute sleepyhead." - Luna added and blinked away, to not bother Avi, and to join Nicolas.

Nicolas leaned over the sand, sifting through it now and then, evidently happy with his quest.

"Let me guess... you're looking for souvenirs in the form of sea creatures' shells." - Luna commented.

Nicolas nodded. - "Yes, I would like a big and pretty one, so we can take it to the spaceship. Do you want to help?"

"I could scan the entire beach and select a few, but I guess it would make this activity lose its charm." - Luna replied.

"I can tell you enjoy doing things the efficient way. Really, I wouldn't mind, and I'll gladly see what you've managed to find." - Nicolas assured.

Luna smiled and in a flash, returned with four big shells, each of a different shape and color, without any cracks or blemishes. - "Do choose!"

“They are all pretty.” - Nicolas said, then put one of the shells to his ear.

“What are you doing?” - Luna asked, captivated by that bizarre behavior.

“I'm listening to the sound of ocean.” - Nicolas answered.

“To be precise, it's an ambient noise echoing inside the shell and amplified by it.” - Luna explained.

Nicolas laughed. - “I know, I know... but sometimes, you must overinterpret the reality to make it more magical.” - He began walking, encouraging Luna to follow. - “I used to tell Avi that these sounds were whispers of sea people, in a language forgotten by time. She believed I could translate them, because each time she brought me a new shell, I would tell her a different tale from the deep.”

“That must've required a lot of creativity.” - Luna noticed.

Nicolas laughed again. - “Yes. Sometimes, she could bother me for hours. Still, I had a good method. Only the most beautiful and the largest shells contained long stories, while the smaller ones were merely proverbs and fun facts. It helped me to figure out what story to tell next, and helped her to make more effort in her search.”

Luna pondered for a moment. - “Well, so what about my shells? Are they worthy of any tale?”

Nicolas smiled. - "I'm glad that Avi didn't have a talent like yours, I wouldn't be able to shoo her away." - He thought for a moment, then added. - "I know one story, about little sirens singing songs to a little girl, who was building a ship."

Luna giggled. - "I can already guess what that ship was."

"She called it 'Gale' and wanted to sail around the world in it." - Nicolas explained.

"And? Did you let her?" - Luna asked.

"She was determined, but she had to give up when I told her a story about a sea serpent that guarded the Middlesea... to appease it, one had to find six treasures of the Riddlemaster, hidden by pirates on our small island."

"A cunning ruse..." - Luna admired the idea. - "...and what was next, did she find them?"

Nicolas continued with a smile. - "The first treasure was called 'Storm Scepter' and it protected from bad weather..."