

Last Star 130

Star XXXIX ~ By the Seaside ~ Part III

“Stupid lazybones...” - Avi grumbled. - “...to think they are always the ones complaining that I'm not active enough.” - She sat next to the cave's wall and gazed at other tourists. She wasn't sure herself what she should be doing.

It didn't take long because she was approached by a tall and well-built guy with limbs covered by thick armor. His face resembled half a toad, half a lizard, and his cheekbones were well-defined. With his hand, he pushed his orange dreadlocks back and smiled widely, revealing his triangular, shark-like teeth.

“Lasha!” - The man called. - “Can I sit next to you?”

Avi was slightly shocked by the stranger's demeanor, but she didn't refuse. - “Lasha. I have nothing against it.”

“I'm Chadack, but friends call me Chad.” - The man introduced himself.

“Avi. It's nice to meet you.” - Avi said, extending her arm.

Chadack grabbed it and shook it firmly, then asked. - “Avi, why so gloomy, if I may ask?”

“Nothing big. We've just arrived here, but my girlfriend prefers to sunbathe rather than spend time with me.” - Avi revealed.

Chadack laughed. - "I won't say that I want to replace her, but maybe I can offer you a temporary company?"

Avi wasn't sure. - "What do you mean?"

Chadack pointed at the kids playing with Avi's ball. - "The one in the yellow hat is my brother. I just thought it would be proper to repay your kind gesture." \

Avi waved it off. - "Think nothing of it."

"You can think nothing of my suggestion, too." - Chadack said with a confident half-smile. - "Do you see that shed?" - He pointed at an open-air bar. - "I will pay for a few of your drinks, we can play darts with my friends, and share some of our stories."

Avi replied with a similar, confident half-smile. - "Well, I can agree to that."

Chadack got up and let Avi grab his hand, so she could get up, too. They headed to the bar under a straw roof, where Chadack's friends were already waiting. They were rather loud, and when they noticed Avi, one of them whistled, adding from afar. - "Well, Chad, who did you hook up with this time!?"

"It's Ferr. Pay no attention to him, he likes to fool around." - Chad said to Avi, then replied to his friend. - "It's Avi. She's a newcomer, so I hope you'll show your better side, Ferr."

“Hey! Full chill.” - Ferr said. - “I always try to show my better side in front of beautiful ladies.”

Ferr's female companion laughed, non-verbally indicating that it's always the opposite.

“It's Galea.” - Chadack introduced the girl to Avi, then introduced the rest of his companions. - “This is Rock, Uiloa, Paff, and Heria.”

Avi shook everyone's hand, one by one, saying short 'Lasha' and bowing slightly.

“Manners are manners, but let's get to the point. If you haven't tried the fireball yet, that's how we need to start.” - Ferr suggested, signaling to the barman to prepare a drink.

“Eee... thank you?” - Avi uttered hesitantly, then whispered to Chadack's ear. - “He's not fooling around, is he?”

Chadack laughed. - “No, no. It's a tradition of our small company. Every initiate has to go through this.”

The robot behind the counter agilely sliced a coconut-like fruit in half and poured its juices into a shaker, adding some darker alcohol, then a syrup freshly squeezed out of round, yellow leaves. With its free arm, they opened a fridge, scooped out a ball from a half-frozen melon, then put it inside a small glass and filled it with the mixed drink. Finally, they added a metal straw and ignited the drink's surface with a lighter.

"It might sound counterintuitive, but please don't try to blow at it and use the straw." - The barman warned. - "One fire is enough for me."

"Fire?" - Avi asked.

Ferr nervously scratched his neck. - "Ee... let's leave that story for later. Go ahead and drink."

Avi took a sip. The drink had a quite sweet, apple taste with a hint of lemon and maple syrup. Initially, it was somewhat strong, but when the flames reached the melon flesh, they melted it slightly and extinguished, producing a cinnamon aroma. The drink cooled significantly, and its flavor was enhanced, making it easier to drink.

"Fireball, sunk!" - Chadack announced, brotherly putting his arm around Avi's neck, while everyone else cheered.

Avi's face was slightly flushed due to the drink, but she smiled awkwardly. - "Uhm, so will you tell me something about yourself now? How did you meet each other? Where are you from? Stuff like that."

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Uiloa leaned against the counter, tracing it with her finger. - "Three-zero." - She called the barman by their name. - "The usual for me, and for Avi..." - She gazed straight into Avi's eyes. - "Khazanite's kiss."

Avi flinched slightly upon hearing it. - "Excuse me?"

Uiloa looked at her flirtatiously. - "A sweet drink for a sweet girl... You won't refuse one if I pay?"

"No, no..." - Avi uttered quietly, but her gaze was stuck on the counter, worried.

Uiloa noticed it and immediately corrected herself. - "Did I say anything wrong?"

Chadack, unaware of why Avi was downcast, distracted them by joking. - "Don't try to hit on her, Uiloa. Avi already has a girlfriend, and I'm sure she doesn't need another one."

Uiloa didn't pay attention to it. - "Anyone who picked such an adorable apple certainly deserves a drink from me... maybe you'll invite her here next time?"

"Oh." - Avi appeared to come back to her senses. - "Luna will definitely like to know you. I'll tell her once I go back to her."

The barman began serving first drinks. Chadack took his glass and took a swig, then added. - "I think we went off topic. Uiloa, if you're so talkative, maybe you'll be the first person to vent about what brought you here."

Uiloa casually brushed her hair aside and said with boredom. - “Again...?”

Paff spoke in a natural, deep voice. - “If you're going to complain like the last time, then maybe it's better if I start...”

One by one, Avi's new companions revealed where they are from and what they're doing for a living. Paff was an army-contracted plumber and was simply having a vacation. Two years ago, he met Heria here, and they were already engaged. Heria was Galea's close friend, and they both worked for the police's intelligence forces, but they weren't allowed to reveal too much about their work due to its confidentiality. The main difference in their job was that Galea was on an internship. Ferr and Chadack were the youngest people in their group, and they both were studying at a prestigious university. Respectively, it was xenomedicine and force field engineering. Their vacation was a reward for their extraordinary grades. Rock was Uiloa's servant and bodyguard, and Uiloa was the first potential inheritor of some large automotive industry. Her visit here was a long one and partially forced. During it, her relationship with Rock became more casual, although the man still tried to stay professional when it came to his tasks.

Finally, Avi revealed that she's from Earth and that she travels with Luna across the universe, ignoring the details. Although it was all enough to pique the group's interest, and most specifically, Uiloa's.

“You're pulling our leg!” - Uiloa said in disbelief. - “How were you supposed to get here all the way from the inner systems? It's light-years away!”

“Uh... our spaceship is quite fast, but it still took months.” - Avi uttered hesitantly.

“Alright, alright. You got us a bit with that joke.” - Chadack said to Avi. - “Seriously though, where are you from?”

"I'm serious!" - Avo protested, but soon lowered her eyes, feeling guilty. She sipped her drink, adding. - "I just... didn't tell you the entire story. It wasn't an easy journey. I've experienced all life has to offer, including the happy and sad moments, and even death. I'm not sure if I want to talk about it."

Ferr shifted back a little in his chair. He looked at Chadack, as if he was asking where he found that girl, then asked. - "It's hard to believe your story without any proof."

Avi revealed a barcode on her wrist. - "I don't know. Maybe you'll recognize it, maybe not."

Everyone leaned closer to look. Nobody knew what the symbols meant, nobody but Heria, but even she didn't have full knowledge.

"It's from the Prison of Aeons." - Heria uttered. - "You were held there? You're so young..."

"There had been a mistake..." - Avi said, withdrawing her hand. - "...and I don't have good memories of that place, so please don't ask about it." - She raised her hand to ask zero-three for another drink.

"Wait, so it's all true?" - Uiloa whispered.

"We can't fully verify it..." - Heria said. - "...but the story began to seem way more plausible."

Avi sighed as she stared at her reflection in the bottom of the empty glass. - "I wanted to have fun, but it seems I'll drink my sadness away instead."

Ferr slid gracefully off the stool. - "Not on my watch." - He clapped his hands to three-zero, whose cybernetic eye seemed annoyed by his antics.

Despite this, the robot reached under the counter and took out an old, yet still modern radio, and soon a swing-style music began to play. Ferr bowed deeply in front of Avi, then extended his arms and showed his empty palms. Thought still a bit down, Avi gave him her attention and stared at the man who closed his fists, then moved his fingers, opening his hand again, and revealing a single dart.

"Ta-da!" - Ferr announced, finishing his magic trick.

Avi was actually impressed. - "How did you do that!?"

"A good magician doesn't reveal their tricks!" - Ferr said, proud as a peacock. - "So, shall we play?"

Avi jumped off her stool and enthusiastically nodded.

"I must warn you, I'm really good at it." - Ferr boasted. - "That's why I suggest you join my team."

“Oh, oh, Ferr. Don't be so overconfident.” - Chadack said, then spoke to Avi. - “Ferr might be good, but he can't hold their liquor, and our little game's rules are modified. Every score above twenty points means you need to drink, and every part of the dartboard is a different drink. Every three rounds means everyone drinks...”

Chadack shortly explained the other, more basic rules. There would be four-player teams today, and he and Ferr usually were team captains. Chad suggested Avi play it safe and join him instead.

Ferr was quick to protest. - “Hey, hey! Chad is a bore! He always plays his 'optimal strategy'. I tell you, there is more fun in chaos and risk! If you want to enjoy yourself, then let me show you how to play.”

“Optimal strategy?” - Avi inquired.

“Everyone has their breaking point.” - Paff added. - “You need to balance between the score and sobriety. That's why it's important not to rush and leave the areas with points multiplier for later.”

“No offence, Chad, but it's not my style...” - Avi said before sitting next to Ferr. - “...and I do think that rivalry will be more interesting than cooperation, so consider it a friendly gesture on my part.”

Galea winked at Ferr. - “I think so, too, so you'll do fine without me this time.”

Uiloa wrapped her arm around Avi's. - “You don't have to persuade me. I'm already eyeing the main prize.”

Rock was silent, but half-smiled as he stood next to Chadack.

“We should balance the teams.” - Paff said and joined Ferr, leaving Heria with Chadack.

“It's still an early afternoon, so let's play just one tournament. Five hundred points is the target.” - Chadack announced. - “Is it fine with you, Ferr?”

“That only makes it easier.” - Ferr uttered confidently and grabbed the first dart...