

Last Star 131

Star XXXIX ~ By the Seaside ~ Part IV

Avi leaned against the bar's counter, smiling and waiting for her turn. Ferr's first throw hit the dartboard right in the center, which earned him the 'Black Hole' drink.

"Nice aim." - Avi praised him.

Ferr opened a small packet with white, shimmering powder and added it to his fairly dense cocktail. - "I have been playing since childhood. My parents even took me to junior tournaments. I never won first place, but I remember those times fondly."

Avi smiled with a hint of sadness. - "It must be nice to have those kinds of memories."

"Yeah... but the world moves on, and some things we have to let go of." - Ferr confessed. - "Especially, if there are way better people at them than you."

"I don't know if I would be able to give up on things like this." - Avi said. - "It might be strange, because I'm not good at many things, but my dreams are important to me."

Ferr slowly stirred his drink. - "I assume you have some hobby in mind."

"I'm writing a bit, drawing a bit... stuff like that." - Avi revealed.

"You'll probably meet many people better than you, but don't compare yourself to them." - Ferr continued. - "Learn from them and try to reach your goal at your own pace."

"I'll try." - Avi said. - "Although I don't think I will ever join any competition."

"It's always worth trying." - Ferr uttered. - "You are not losing anything, and there is always a chance to win. You can also learn a lot from that experience."

"I don't think I'm fit for this." - Avi replied. - "I don't like losing."

"The most important thing is to improve and chase your dreams. Recognition and victories may eventually come." - Ferr added, then drank his 'Black Hole' in a single swig. - "Ahh, I love that strong flavor."

Avi giggled. - "I hope you can make it to the end."

"It's merely a warm-up. Besides, I've to give the rest of you a bit of an advantage." - Ferr said, smiling confidently and looking at the dartboard. Chadack scored twenty points, Paff thirteen, Galea ten, and it was Uiloa's turn.

A loud buzz came from the dartboard, announcing thirty-four points. Uiloa smiled triumphantly and returned to her stool, dancing. She sat next to Avi again, telling Ferr. - "Don't be offended, but it's my turn to get to know our sweet apple better."

"A good score." - Ferr said with content. - "You deserve it."

Avi giggled. - "Sweet apple? Is it how you call every newcomer?"

"There were a few strawberries, some little lemons, plums, and cherries, but you're the first sweet apple." - Uiloa revealed.

"Why a sweet apple of all things?" - Avi asked, intrigued.

"It's a forbidden fruit, and supposedly that's the most tempting of all." - Uiloa replied flirtatiously.

"Forbidden?" - Avi asked.

"Oh. You don't know that story, do you?" - Uiloa said. - "It's from the oldest myths related to the age of the labyrinth. Apparently, in its deepest levels, there were towers so tall that one could think they were infinite. On top of them, there were trees which gave youth and prolonged life... but even those kinds of treasures had their price. Those who picked the fruit and weren't destined to do it would become enemies of false gods, and their anger would be great."

"Interesting story, although it's a short one." - Avi commented. - "I'm up to listen to more myths."

Uiloa turned on her stool and received her drink: Thief's comet. In a tall glass, on the surface of green liquid, there was a thin layer of ice, and above it a small fog.

"In that case, I can recommend three translations: 'Strength and power', 'The Dragon Knight's Trap', and 'The Castle of Yellow Bricks'." - Uiloa replied. - "You can find them in the hotel library, in the historical section."

"I will read them in my free time." - Avi assured, then asked. - "Is it just a temporary hobby, or am I sensing the spark of something more?"

Uiloa took a sip of 'Comet' and explained. - "As I already told you, I'm a heiress of a large fortune. That's why all of my future interests were controlled since my early childhood. Only when I became a legal adult was I able to 'force' my family to loosen the restraints that were put on me. Even if I try to have any dream just for myself, it's already too late."

Avi was shocked. - "Why are you saying this!? You are still young and there's an entire life ahead of you!"

Uiloa clenched her glass with both hands. - "I would like to be a data recovery archeologist, but it takes years to study, get the necessary certificates, and experience required to travel to dark regions of space. I already wasted those years, doing what my family required of me."

Avi pondered. - "I don't know your situation, but are you sure you want to give up?"

"I already gave up. I've tried persuading my family to let me study, but they've put so much effort into my education that it's not profitable for them to resign..." - Uiloa said. - "...and I can't make it just on my own."

Avi was speaking louder. She was already convinced about what needed to be done. - "Will you be happy with the life you didn't choose?"

Stolen novel; please report.

Uiloa bit her lip. - "No, I don't think so."

"Then aim for the stars!" - Avi encouraged as she slammed the counter and stared into Uiloa's eyes with determination. - "Nobody has the right to take your dreams away from you."

"Avi." - Uiloa said, already sad. - "Life isn't that simple. Some people are born without the means to survive, let alone to pursue dreams. My role is important. It doesn't matter whether I like it or not."

Avi protested right away. - "But you're one of the lucky few who have the means to pursue their dreams! You're heiress of fortune, and you had a good education! Can't you just use the money you inherit to sponsor your dream?"

"It doesn't work like this." - Uiloa said. - "It's a family business. If they sense I try to step out of line, they'll devour me and leave me with nothing."

Avi rubbed her head. - "...but what if you could somehow make these two things compatible? Can't you just invest in data recovery?"

"I already thought about it, but it would be a bad idea to diversify my assets. There are too many archeological giants on the market." - Uiloa explained.

Avi was mad about the whole situation, but she had a fighting spirit. - "Uiloa. You'll find a way. Be determined and find a way to win."

"That could end pretty badly." - Uiloa replied quietly and finished her drink.

"You won't wind up homeless with your knowledge..." - Avi argued. - "...and while you still live, there is always a chance to restart. If you are supposed to be unhappy as a heiress, then it won't matter whether you have your fortune or not. I believe in taking every chance life gives you, so hold on to this dream and don't let it slip away."

Uiloa spun the empty glass, gazing at her reflection in it. - "I... I'll think about it."

"Don't think, but want it and fight!" - Avi added.

Uiloa smiled, still with sadness. She didn't want to argue with Avi. - "You know, you give me hope. Maybe you're special after all. I would like to know more about your dreams."

“At the moment, I have mainly one.” - Avi declared, then loudly announced. - “Fifty-two stars!”

“Sorry, I don't understand.” - Uiloa replied.

“Luna and I will see every star in the universe!” - Avi added. - “We've seen almost forty and we're close to the finish line!”

Uiloa's eyes opened wider. - “You're not planning to fly to the last one, do you? It's impossible!”

“Nothing is impossible.” - Avi declared again. - “If we have to stop this everlasting war to do it, then we will!”

“You're crazy...” - Uiloa uttered.

“If it's crazy to dream, then I'm not ashamed of it.” - Avi continued. - “I plan to fight for what I believe in until the very end, and I believe that even if it takes eternity, there can be a happy ending for everyone.”

Uiloa was speechless. She couldn't grasp even a fraction of Avi's feelings, but she knew the girl was honest. Still, she couldn't answer and froze in her seat.

Avi raised her hand to the sky. - “Reach for the stars, that's what I want.”

When Avi's hand was stuck like this, Ferr approached her and put a dart in Avi's palm.

“Did I interrupt anything?” - He asked. - “Because it's your turn, Avi.”

“Ohh, already?” - Avi said and hopped off the stool, then approached the dartboard.

Uiloa ordered one more drink. It wasn't unnoticed by Ferr, who asked what had happened.

“Nothing.” - Uiloa said. - “I... I simply understood how much others put on the line to make their and others' dreams come true, while I'm still here, worrying about absolutely nothing.”

Ferr put his hand on her shoulder. - “...we've tried to explain it to you so many times. I'm glad you've finally understood.”

“Still, I'm scared.” - Uiloa added.

“You're not the only one...” - Ferr replied. - “...but we'll support you.”

He sat next to the woman, and they continued talking. Uiloa, still full of doubts, saw a chance for things to change, a dim light among the darkness, which she wanted to follow.

Avi, with her tongue out, was focusing and trying to aim. Ferr, who was responsible for over half of their total points, was already tipsy, and it was mainly Avi's fault. She didn't hit the dartboard even once, which put them at a large disadvantage.

"Go, Avi!" - Ferr spoke in a groggy voice. - "Go!!!"

"Aim for the stars!" - Uiloa added.

Chadack and Paff were sitting next to each other, drinking slowly and finalizing their bet.

"She can do it. I believe in her." - Chadack uttered.

"Huh? Do you want to lose that badly?" - Paff replied.

Chadack laughed. - "We both know that after her fourth miss, we are all only cheering for her to finally score."

Paff smiled back at him. - "...and cheer for Ferr, to stand on his feet until the end."

Avi drew back, instinctively closed her eyes, and threw with all the power she could muster, but the dart hit the neon on the wall instead of the dartboard. The sign flickered twice, then its light faded forever.

Three-zero facepalmed his spherical head-torso, speechless.

“Ee... I'm sorry?” - Avi uttered innocently.

Rock, with stoic calm, approached the dartboard and scored enough points to finish the tournament.

“Well, that was a good show...” - Paff commented. - “...but I think I need to take my leave. Chad will pay my tab.”

Heria joined him, and they said goodbye to the group.

Avi approached her team. - “I'm sorry, Ferr. I may have put a bit of a dent in your wallet.”

“You did (burp) your best.” - Ferr muttered, giving Avi two thumbs up. He wanted to get up, but he staggered and had to grab the counter until Chad approached to help him stand.

“You've fought bravely, but this time, you'll return on the shield.” - Chadack commented, then turned to Avi. - “I had fun, but I'll have to help Galea get Ferr to the hotel. How about we have another round one day?”

“I don't know for how long I'll stay here, but I hope we meet again, too.” - Avi said.

Chadack pulled a hotel tablet out of his pocket with his free hand. - “Here. Add me to your contacts, and maybe we'll meet up someday.”

Avi touched the screen with her finger, just as the instructions asked, and her name was in the friend system.

“Hey. Add me, too!” - Uiloa asked. When she took her tablet back, she hugged Avi and kissed her cheek as a sign of farewell. - “Goodbye!”

“Bye, bye!” - Avi replied and waved to her when she was leaving with Rock.

“See you!” - Chadack added, and Ferr weakly gave another thumbs up, while Galea simply waved for a moment.

When they left, Luna appeared right next to Avi in a flash, startling her a bit.

“Did you have fun?” - Luna asked as she ordered a glass of juice from the menu installed in the counter.

"Don't tell me you were observing us for the entire time." - Avi said.

"My scans are always active, but I can keep them down if you don't like it." - Luna replied.

"No, no. It's fine." - Avi uttered. - "And yes, it was quite fun and I got to make many new friends."

"Well, you have also managed to demolish the bar." - Luna laughed.

Avi crossed her arms. - "Oh, out of all things, that's what you care most about!?"

Luna was still in a good mood. - "I'm saying this because I can fix it in a second."

"There's no need." - Three-zero answered as he served the juice to Luna. - "I'll keep it as a memento."

"That's kind of you." - Luna replied.

"It'll be a good reminder to routinely check my visual sensors." - The barman added.

Luna laughed. - “Well, that was less kind.”

Avi was red from anger and embarrassment, but she said nothing. She knew it would only make them tease her more. She waited until Luna finished her drink, then thanked three-zero for the eventful afternoon and returned to the beach.