

Last Star 134

Star XXXIX ~ By the Seaside ~ Part VII

Avi's eyes slowly opened as her alarm clock rang. Her arm lazily reached to turn it off, and she was ready to go back to sleep. Although Luna also heard the alarm clock, she just snuggled to Avi's back and pushed herself closer, her face now buried in her girlfriend's hair. She wanted to lie like this, even if only for a moment longer.

[Scuba-diving!] - Eva interrupted them.

“Eva, let us sleep a little longer.” - Avi muttered.

[Pleeese. I want to see fish!!] - Eva continued whining.

“Five minutes, okay?” - Avi said, and Eva patiently waited.

[Five minutes have passed!] - Eva announced when she had finished counting seconds.

Avi, with blurry vision, looked at the clock. - “Eva. Can we reschedule it?”

[No! No, no, no! You had promised!] - Eva complained.

"I'm sorry, Luna." - Avi said and scrambled free from Luna's arms, then sat on the edge of the bed. Beyond the window, the sun was just rising, giving the room a dim, orange afterglow.

Luna got up, too, and sat next to Avi, then kissed her cheek tenderly. - "New day, new adventurers."

[Yes! Adventures!] - Eva exclaimed. - [Underwater adventures!]

"Eva can't wait." - Avi let Luna know. - "She's more enthusiastic than even me."

"Well, then let's not test her patience." - Luna giggled. - "I'll order the breakfast before your parents wake up."

Avi nodded and yawned, then outstretched her arms, and looked at a cabinet, on top of which there was an interactive display with photos of yesterday's party and beach visits. She smiled, reminiscing about time spent with her parents, surfing, and the campfire.

"It'll be a good day." - She optimistically said to herself and got up to prepare the equipment.

It was still quite early, so the eye of five tears was relatively empty. Avi put on her swimfins and downloaded the interactive map, given to her by Luna, to her wrist device. When she equipped the mouthpiece and diving goggles, she made sure they were working correctly and joined Luna at the boat rental.

“Will mom and dad be fine on their own?” - Avi asked.

“Of course. They both have force fields, and I'm connected to their equipment. If anything happens, and I assure you it won't, I can react in the blink of an eye.” - Luna informed.

“Okay.” - Avi uttered, peeking at Luna. - “It kind of looks weird that you dive without anything but swimfins.”

Luna waved it off. - “Unnecessary weight.”

“Okay...” - Avi muttered again and entered the boat. Luna blinked to the seat, then activated the motor.

The water was almost fully transparent, so it was possible to see part of the coral reef from above. Fish shoals were hiding between the sea anemones, and in the depths, one could notice tall weeds with yellow-red leaves and many eels lurking below.

Luna stopped the boat right there. - “It's a good spot.”

Avi moved closer to the boat's edge and looked below. This location was like a hollowed crater full of small caverns and crevices. She was most scared by its center, which was like a vertical pit without a visible bottom.

“Uhm... will we start with shallows?” - Avi asked.

“Yes, then we head to the eye itself.” - Luna replied. - “I'm sure we'll find bigger animals there. You don't need to worry, I'll lead you safely.”

Avi nodded and jumped into the water, and Luna followed.

The shallows were the most colorful and peaceful territory, rich in many gleaming fish species, crabs, and sea snails. Avi was stopping at each, even the smallest animal, and recording their life with her goggles. She missed neither the seven-armed starfish nor the spiral worms that were hiding in the perforated ocean floor. Luna wasn't hurrying her and scanned more interesting species herself, and categorized the data patiently.

Out of all the encountered things, what Avi most liked was a five-meter-tall anemone in the shape of a barrel-like tree with thousands of yellow feelers. Its sides were overgrown by barnacles, which formed an armor around the plant-like creature and effectively protected it against predators. Many yellow, red, and pink corals also grew around it, together with algae and tube-like sponges.

Amidst the flora and fauna, a family of hermit crabs was hiding in their shells. It took a moment until they were approached by their unaware prey, that is, wandering shrimps, which, like an ant colony,

were traveling along the sand paths in search of food and building materials for their cone-shaped kingdoms.

Apart from it, in the shadow of an underwater tree, between the feelers of other anemones, there were orange fish with black rings, their blue cousins with big, yellow dorsal fins, the green tang fish, and swarms of their two-centimeter large, red brothers. The last type of fish was a common food for the largest fish present here, that is, water pigs, whose swollen pink bodies kept a gas inside and used it to repel predators via nozzles around their caudal fins.

When Avi stopped recording, Luna invited her with a hand gesture. She moved sand aside, revealing a half-meter large shellfish beneath it. It immediately attacked with its five scorpion-like tails, so she left it alone as soon as Avi finished taking photos.

Luna pointed to keep on swimming and entered a small, vertical hole. Her arm was soon reaching out of it, hurrying Avi to come. When Avi entered, she could see a nest full of black eggs with something green glowing inside them. They were guarded by a creamy-brown shark with tiger stripes, which also glowed green. The animal was ready to attack as soon as it noticed intruders, but Luna just grabbed it by the nose and rotated, sending it back home.

She then pointed at another tunnel leading to a more spacious chamber, where they found creatures similar to two-meter large, plump sea cucumbers. One of them opened its mouth, which was like a dozen tubes, and began to excrete slime onto the cave's walls. It dissolved coral and thus expanded their feeding grounds. The creatures seemed to ignore the uninvited guests, so Luna could easily lead Avi out to the edge of the 'eye', whose steep floor was as overgrown as reefs in the shallows.

Luna merely touched the corals, and it already alerted the umbrella-shaped animals that were hiding beneath. A large group of these creatures swam up, their heads covered in the local flora, and they agilely steered clear of both girls with their tentacles until they disappeared on the other side of the pit, where they hid between the weeds and algae again.

Luna let Avi observe the smaller creatures that were here for a moment longer. There were transparent slugs with horizontal lines decorating their bodies, and with extendible deer-like horns. There were white larvae with sharp teeth and a torso covered in sting cells, and there were also underwater hedgehogs. Next, Luna took Avi deeper, to a cliff with the yellow-red-leaved weeds that they had seen before. Between these, they could meet blue and azure eels, and their white cousins with fluttering fins covered in many small purple lights.

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The last animal had a natural enemy, which was a species of shellfish that loved to climb up the weed. They resembled squids, but their torso was covered by hard armor, and their tentacles were capable of launching attacks similar to a chameleon's tongue. The second type of predators were mammals similar to dolphins, but with twin tails, two vestigial caudal fins, and two larger pectoral fins, which were right behind their duck-like beaks.

Luna dove deeper, illuminating the seabed concealed by weeds with her light, then stopped at the edge of the pit, pointing down at three-meter-tall tripods with funnel-like mouths below mushroom-like caps. These creatures were continuously sucking the water and soil in, then letting the filtered sand out with the gills at the top of their heads. One of the creatures broke away from the group, and then the ground next to it moved, revealing a large toad-like maw of a four-winged, manta-like creature. It swallowed the tripod whole, then vanished in a cloud of brown dust.

After showing it to Avi, Luna returned to the weeds, then headed to the boat. She resurfaced with Avi, waiting until she catches a breath and can talk again.

"How was it?" - She finally asked, curious.

[It was wonderful! I want more!] - Eva exclaimed.

“Eva liked it. I liked it too...” - Avi answered. - “...but I have to recover strength before we dive again.” - She climbed into the boat with Luna and opened their basket with breakfast. - “Do you think that my parents will finish soon, too?”

“I can track them on my radar.” - Luna said. - “They're almost done.”

Avi bit into the protein bar and drank some water, swallowed, and added. - “Those reefs are beautiful, but I wonder where you sent them. It's hard to believe that there would be another spot as interesting as ours.”

“Don't worry about it. We'll switch locations and you'll find everything out.” - Luna replied.

“Ah, how mysterious...” - Avi giggled. - “Lately, you like to surprise us.”

Luna smiled proudly. - “Don't say that I'm not good at it.”

“You're good, you are.” - Avi assured. - “I can't wait to see the next place.”

As they rested, Avi took out her hotel tablet and checked the messages.

“Hi, Avi!” - Uiloa's message appeared. - “How was yesterday evening?”

“A friend from the bar?” - Luna asked.

Avi nodded and sent a reply. - “Luna and I were at the welcome festival. The show was amazing!” - She uploaded two images, one of her and Luna in masks, another displaying the main ceremony.

Uiloa replied almost instantly. - “I'm jealous, my sweet apples. The first time, it was only Rock with me, and I've already told you how uptight he could be back then. But that's not important. What are your plans for today?”

Avi sent her a photo of a coral reef. - “We've been diving since morning.”

“What? Who gets up so early!?” - Uiloa wrote back, following it with more text. - “Is it the eye of five tears? I have a place I like to visit there, and I would love to show it to you if you wait!”

Avi looked at Luna, who replied. - “I have nothing against it.”

“When will you come?” - Avi asked.

“Give me about an hour!” - Uiloa informed. - “Can you wait that long?”

“Sure!” - Avi confirmed.

“I love you! Sending virtual kisses.” - Uiloa finished, so Avi put her tablet away.

Charlotte and Nicolas joined Luna and Avi back on the beach. They've also needed a break before continuing to dive. They shared some of their experiences while making sure to keep the next location chosen by Luna secret.

When Uiloa arrived at the eye of five tears, she was accompanied by Rock. After saying hello to each other, Uiloa joined Avi and Luna. Although Rock was invited, too, he refused and said he'll wait at the bar. Nicolas and Charlotte initially wanted to keep him company, but he insisted that they could have fun without him, so they didn't pressure him any longer.

When everyone went their own way, Luna headed their boat to the place that Uiloa wanted to show and soon realized that it was the same spot that she wanted to explore.

“Nice. I actually wanted to dive here, too.” - Luna said. - “We don't have to reschedule anything for later.”

“Okay, but you won't mind if I am our guide?” - Uiloa asked. - “I know this place inside out.”

Luna didn't protest. - "That's even better. I'm sure we'll get to see more this way." - She waited until Uiloa equipped the mouthpiece and swimfins, then they jumped into the water...

On the ocean floor, between coral reefs, there was a sunken aircraft carrier. It was exactly the place that both Luna and Uiloa wanted to show Avi. On the main deck, there were a few naval guns with empty rocket cannons. Uiloa lifted her flashlight and directed the light into the hole, calling Avi to her. A white barracuda was hiding there, its pale eyes anxiously followed the girls' every move, and soon it retreated deeper into the steel tube, so Uiloa left it alone and continued their adventure. She led the girls to sunken and damaged fighter jets, then pointed at the cockpits, where shoals of smaller fish were hiding, and next pointed underneath the planes, to show the trilobites that lived there.

Next, Uiloa headed to the side of the ship, where one of the numerous holes left by the enemy's devastating barrage was located. The carrier was pierced all the way through in one spot, which helped to navigate its insides. Uiloa found the main hangar, which was now a home to five-eyed creatures with twelve tentacles. Although they were intelligent enough to understand that the presence of divers wasn't threatening, they camouflaged quickly in the corners and crevices, altering their skin color.

On the other decks, next to missile holes, other creatures also found home. The cabins were shelter to a family of black sharks covered in white spots, with triangular heads that were slightly wider than their necks. The central deck below the hangar was full of water pigs, and the missile storeroom had some fish in them, many in the shape of a rounded kite, with only three large fins, white scales, and four yellow eyes.

At the very depths, there was an engine room, or rather what was left of it, because most of the technology had been recovered. The chamber was half-filled with sand and full of fluorescent coral. Turquoise pillars and pleated, yellow spheres were blocking narrow pathways between the pistons, making further exploration seemingly impossible. Despite this, Uiloa knew how to navigate the tunnels, and the girls reached a half-spherical structure made of net-like biomass. Below it, there lived common species of fish, but there were also shoals of goldfish with glowing, red bellies, white bioluminescent krill, and long sea serpents with torsos covered in glowing dots.

When Avi was done filming and taking photos, Uiloa led the girls out of the aircraft carrier and back to the boat.

“Uff...” - Avi exhaled, exhausted. - “If you say that we haven't seen everything yet, then I'm not going to believe you.”

“There are some interesting diving spots, such as Columns of Titans and Traitor's Lullaby.” - Uiloa explained. - “But it would take one and a half days to travel there.”

“I don't know if we'll stay here for long enough to learn about them.” - Avi uttered. - “There always is another place worth exploring.”

Uiloa was a bit sad. - “Then you must make the best use of the time you have.”

“That's our plan!” - Avi exclaimed, then spoke directly to Uiloa. - “Your friends said you were here the longest. Do you have any suggestions?”

“Uhm... to be honest, I spend most of my free time in a hotel, or in the bar with friends. This place is great to visit, but it gets boring once you get to live here daily. Although...” - Uiloa thought for a moment. - “There will be a meteor shower tonight, and tomorrow they're serving sushi for the new guests and their friends. Did you sign up?”

Avi looked at Luna.

“Yes. It's supposed to rain that day, so we need to think about indoor activities.” - Luna revealed.

“There is a spa and hobby clubs. I like the tabletop roleplaying games and baking.” - Uiloa suggested.

“You're baking!?” - Avi shouted with enthusiasm, almost leaping to Uiloa. - “You have to treat us sometimes!”

Luna giggled. - “Sorry, she's like this when it comes to food.”

Avi being so close made Uiloa blush. She moved back a little, then said. - “I can send you a few crescent rolls for breakfast.”

“...or we can organize a tea party!” - Avi suggested. - “We'll gossip a little, then you'll show us some photos from your trips, and we'll show you ours! Does it sound good!?”

“I-I think I can find some time. Do you want me to invite others?” - Uiloa asked.

“That depends on you!” - Avi replied. - “If you prefer a bit more private setting, then we're fine with that!”

Uiloa nodded. - "Maybe I'll talk to the girls and we'll figure something out. I'll let you know this evening or in the morning tomorrow."

"Thank you!" - Avi smiled and hugged Uiloa.

Although Uiloa was surprised, she hugged Avi back, adding. - "Hey, think nothing of it..."

Avi freed Uiloa. - "I'll be looking forward to it eagerly!"

Uiloa brushed her wet hair back, then asked shyly. - "What are you planning for later today?"

"There is a treasure hunt, but it's after lunch." - Luna recalled. - "You can eat with us if you want and join later."

Uiloa turned sad again. - "I have a business meeting, I can't."

"Uiloa is a big shot. She's a heiress of the automotive industry." - Avi explained.

"Ah, that makes sense. In that case, I look forward to our next meeting." - Luna added.

“Me too...” - Uiloa added quietly, then came up with an idea. - “...but if you want, you can invite Chad and his younger brother instead! They'll surely enjoy the event!”

“Ooo...” - Avi uttered. - “...I'll message him right away.”

Instead of sending a message back, Chadack decided to make a video call. Avi could notice his younger brother and his friends behind him, making a sand castle. After Chad greeted Avi and Uiloa, then introduced himself to Luna, he called his younger brother to ask if he was interested, and he instantly agreed. Chadack was in a good mood, so he shortly asked about the girls' diving adventure, then mentioned a moat he had dug for his brother. Finally, they decided where they would meet and said goodbye. Three girls returned to the beach and said another goodbye to Uiloa and Rock...