

Last Star 138

Star XXXIX ~ By the Seaside ~ Part XI

Avi and Luna, in their raincoats, were ready to head out to Uiloa's hotel room, which was located at one of the skyscrapers at the farthest end of the beach. Holding each other's hands, both girls stepped into the rain and, after fifteen minutes, entered the building and then the elevator. The porter took care of their clothes and pointed them to Uiloa's apartments, then once Avi and Luna were at the door, they rang the bell and soon greeted their friend with cheerful smiles.

Uiloa, still wearing her mitts, kissed both girls on the cheek and invited them inside, where Heria and Gale were already waiting, then returned to the kitchen to take the trays out of the oven.

After greeting both other girls, Avi looked around the room. The exquisite furniture and decorations indicated that just like Virka, Galea was used to high standards of living. The entire interior design was based on cream-blue colors, creating a peaceful and comfortable atmosphere. Next to the walls, there were a few glass cases with wooden figurines and ornamented discs, and in the corner, there was a small library with various data-carrying artifacts.

"It's lovely here." - Avi commented as she sat in the armchair. - "Although I didn't know that there were hotel apartments with a kitchen."

"There are, but not everyone can afford them. These are the most expensive rooms." - Heria replied, lying on the sofa and hugging one of Uiloa's pillows. It seemed she wasn't interested in that topic.

Avi kept looking around and patting her knees gently. - "Maybe I should come to help Uiloa...?" - She suggested after a moment.

“There's no need.” - Galea said with a gentle smile. - “She asked us to wait patiently, so we should.”

“Okay.” - Avi uttered. Five minutes passed, then another, and another. Their tea party was supposed to start a long time ago, so Avi turned her head to the doorway, a bit worried.

Noticing it, Heria added. - “Her business meeting probably took longer than expected, so she started baking later than she wanted.”

“Mhm.” - Avi nodded with understanding. - “Is she often this busy?”

“Her schedule requires it, but if she postpones a few negotiations, she can find some time for her friends.” - Heria explained.

“I had no idea she was dedicated this much.” - Avi said. - “I kind of admire her.”

“We do, too.” - Heria admitted. It appeared she wanted to elaborate, but she resigned, because Uiloa was just entering the room with a tea set.

“I'm sorry you had to wait.” - Uiloa uttered. - “I'll bring the snacks soon, so please give me a moment.” - She then disappeared again, only to return with a tiered cookie stand, filled to the brim with freshly-baked, iced crescent rolls.

She sat down, exhaling in relief, and took off her mitts, which she haphazardly pushed into the side of her chair. Luna, without uttering a single word, lifted the teapot with her telekinesis and filled the cups.

“All these treats...” - Avi spoke. - “You've worked so hard! We're grateful for your hospitality.”

Uiloa reached for her cup and nonchalantly replied. - “Gratefulness is one thing, but I'm proud of the results, and I won't let you leave until you try everything.”

Avi smiled and joined the tea tasting. The drink was unusually strong, and its rich flavor wasn't similar to anything she had experienced before. The most accurate description of it would be 'invigorating'.

“Do you like it?” - Uiloa asked Luna and Avi.

“It's a perfect mix of leaves.” - Luna replied. - “It's way different than what is usually served here, in a good way, and the hotel service always serves good stuff.”

“It's an imported product.” - Uiloa explained. - “The leaves are repeatedly processed in laboratories in the Arctic and hermetically sealed inside temporal containers from Golden Needle.” - Avi couldn't tell what the name meant, so Uiloa added. - “It's three... well, now four outer systems away.”

“Golden Needle.” - Luna repeated as she sipped the tea. - “We've heard there are experts skilled in time manipulation there. If it's possible, I would like to analyze this container.”

“Sure. I don't mind. I have even a better idea, I'll gift you a sealed one, with leaves inside.” - Uiloa suggested with a smile.

“It's so kind of you.” - Avi thanked. - “We appreciate this.” - She finished drinking, and once Luna refilled her cup, she began hungrily eyeing the crescent rolls, which didn't go unnoticed.

“Eat, don't be shy.” - Uiloa encouraged.

“I don't know which one to choose first. They all look tempting with all these intricate decorations.” - Avi replied.

“The ones with black, starry icing are filled with sweet blueberry cream. The ones with coconut shavings have chocolate inside, and the ones without icing have a banana taste...” - Uiloa kept listing.

“Mmm...” - Avi uttered. - “They're all so gorgeous. It feels a shame to touch them.”

Luna didn't wait. Before Avi could make a choice, she reached for a roll and bit into a honey-almond mass. - “I can tell you put your heart into it.” - She added after a first bite.

Gailea grabbed a roll, too, and Heria followed right after. Only Avi was still waiting, unsure what to choose, but finally decided she would try one with a rose filling and a heart-sprinkled icing.

Initially, everyone enjoyed the dessert in silence, focused on trying out as many flavors as possible. Then, the conversation started with praises directed at Uiloa's baking skills, and later continued with the topic of Luna's and Avi's treasure hunt, then all the other girls described how they were spending their free time lately, then they talked about plans, and at this point, Avi admitted that it's likely their last day here.

“You're leaving already?” - Uiloa uttered, clearly sad. - “Why?”

Luna stared at the floor, unsure what to say. Avi wanted to make it easier for her and speak, but Luna put a hand on Avi's shoulder, then shook her head, indicating that she would like to do it on her own.

“I'm Anaari's daughter.” - Luna confessed.

Heria was speechless. - “You mean... those Anaari?”

“Yes.” - Luna continued. - “It's a long story... but they took my freedom away. Even here, I'm still feeling imprisoned.”

Uiloa put her cup back on the table. - “Imprisoned...”

“Each moment can be my last.” - Luna revealed. - “I want to live my last days fighting against it. That's the choice I've made.”

Uiloa raised her eyes and could tell there was conviction in Luna's words. Once again, she was conflicted about her own choices, but seeing how Luna opens her heart, how she struggles with something greater than her problems, Uiloa has realized her choices seemed meaningless.

"I understand." - Uiloa finally spoke. - "Maybe I'm not the right person to say it, because our situations are way different... but I also feel imprisoned, so I can relate."

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Luna smiled faintly and gently grabbed Uiloa's hand. - "...we'll get our wings back. All we have to do is try."

Uiloa averted her eyes. - "How are you so sure?"

Luna continued to smile. - "I'm not sure, but some things are worth believing in... even if the entire world tries to deny it."

"I admire you both." - Uiloa uttered. - "It might come out wrong... but I'm also jealous. Even in your situation, you still have hope and you're still in control of your own life."

"What awaits us at the horizon of our choices might be hard to notice, but we all have a compass called heart." - Luna continued. - "This light will always shine through the clouds to point you the way."

"I always..." - Uiloa whispered with lowered head. - "I always knew..." - She raised it after a moment to add. - "Luna, Avi. I'm sorry for making it about myself. I just never hesitated this much, but I can slowly feel my heart beating again."

"Hey! Your feelings are important, too." - Heria added to cheer Uiloa up.

Avi nodded.

"I'll make it up to you. I promise." - Uiloa added.

Luna shook her head. - "I had a lot of time to find my way, while you were still searching. You are the one who needs our support."

"Luna..." - Uiloa spoke shyly. - "...you're an angel."

"We might not be together forever, but our souls will always pray for you, Uiloa." - Galea added. - "And for you two, too." - She said to Luna and Avi.

"Yes... and it's a shame this is the last day." - Uiloa uttered. - "I would like to get to know you better."

Avi extended her hand to Uiloa, making a vow with just her pinky. - "Let's make a promise that we'll meet again after we all fulfill our dreams."

Uiloa hesitantly looked at Avi and wrapped her pinky around Avi's. - "Will you come back?"

Avi gently shook their fingers. - "Yes, so remember us."

Uiloa smiled more confidently. - "I will."

"We must organize a memorable last party." - Galea added. - "Have you planned anything yet?"

"I know that we're doing it at the last possible moment, but we would like to invite everyone to a sushi restaurant in the evening." - Avi replied. - "Will you come and tell the boys to come, too?"

"Ferr will find time. Chadack will find it, too." - Galea said as she looked at Heria.

"We'll come." - Heria assured.

"Eh, I wish it would stop raining until then..." - Avi sighed. - "...but that's not something we can change."

"You don't like rain?" - Galea asked.

Luna giggled. - "She does like it... but apparently only when it doesn't ruin her plans."

"It's easy to sleep when it's raining and I like its patter against the windows or an umbrella..." - Avi elaborated. - "...or when I stand in it and it washes over me. I feel all my anxiety has gone away."

Luna laughed. - "Those are deep thoughts, but you didn't mention how much you love jumping in puddles and watching them splash."

"I do like it." - Avi didn't deny. - "Those simple everyday pleasures are what make us feel alive."

"When I was a child, I liked to do it, too." - Heria added. - "It's strange how we outgrow some things and replace them with other passions."

"But those things don't have to be forgotten! They can still make you happy!" - Avi protested.

Heria sighed. - "Maybe I could even want that... but it's not like it. It just stopped giving me joy one day. I don't know why myself."

"I can't believe it." - Avi uttered and looked at the other girls. - "Don't tell me you, too, are like this."

Uiloo appeared gloomy. - "I never had a chance to play like this. I had a strict upbringing."

“...but nobody is stopping you now!” - Avi protested.

Uiloa shook her head. - “I don't think I could be happy with just this activity.” - She then buried her face in the cup.

Avi turned to Luna, who said. - “Don't look at me. You know that I'm a rational person. I prefer to look at you being happy, rather than participate in it.”

“Galea. You, too?” - Avi uttered, losing hope.

“I...” - Galea gazed somewhere afar, with longing. - “...I used to be like you, and I used to love rain. I was even growing up in a small town where it was always stormy. I would twirl and dance in the rain, and I often didn't take an umbrella with me. I always loved to return home wet and dry myself next to the fireplace, drinking hot chocolate and reading comic books, while the storm still raged outside.” - Galea's smiling face now had a hint of pain. - “It changed when my parents sent me to the school. My peers didn't accept it and quickly noticed I was always coming to the lessons wet. They've called me a 'river hag' and avoided me. When I've figured out why... it was already too late. I was bullied until we moved... but this experience made me a quiet and withdrawn person.”

“...and you stopped to enjoy the rain?” - Luna asked.

“No...” - Galea denied. - “...although I've tried to control myself, my heart was always missing it. At my lowest points, I always came back to scream in the storm or hide my tears. When I was a bit older, a therapist had helped me. It took years before I could stay in the rain for the first time and experience catharsis. I was standing alone at the beach, tears ran down my cheeks, but I felt happy.”

"Although you found yourself once again, it's quite a sad story." - Luna commented.

"That's when I met Ferr for the first time. He stood next to me, asking: Are you waiting for a lightning to hit you?" - Galea said, then finished. - "It's a flat area, the chance of that happening is quite high. Right next, there was a thunder and I was scared as never before."

"You're skipping the part where he abandoned you to flee from there as fast as he could." - Uiloa reminded.

"Run for the hills!!" - Heria quoted Ferr. - "He always tries to justify himself by saying that he had warned you."

Galea pouted and tried to defend him. - "He did! What was he supposed to do? Stand there like an idiot and wait until something strikes him?"

"He could've at least waited until he's sure you're running, too." - Heria said.

"He was brave and cared for a stranger, and you're belittling his efforts." - Galea protested. - "He said all that was needed, so he was no longer responsible for me."

"That's indeed... an unusual way to begin a friendship..." - Luna commented. - "...that ended in a rather complicated moral dilemma related to survival."

Galea continued. - "Luna! I'm sure you will understand! If he had waited, he would only increase the risk of being hurt, too."

"I don't think he's guilty for escaping." - Luna said.

Avi didn't agree, though. - "He acted instinctively, so I feel it's forgivable... but if he stayed, he would be a paragon of virtue. To risk your life for a stranger is selfless."

"...and sometimes, it's just stupid..." - Galea protested. - "...or a suicide."

"I can agree with that, too." - Luna added. - "Especially in situations where the chance of survival for both parties involved is way smaller than if they were separated."

Avi had her doubts. - "I disagree. We should always strive to stay together, especially in times of trial. If I had to choose, I would always want to have a strong will and be brave enough to do that."

"...but what if, hypothetically, you and Luna were in a situation where only one of you could survive. What would you do?" - Galea asked.

"I would stay with Luna until the very end, looking for a solution." - Avi said, determined. - "Even if we were both to die, I wouldn't give up on hope."

"I..." - Luna looked hesitantly at Avi. - "...I would analyze the situation, and if there were no alternatives, I would do everything I could to save Avi."

"Luna!" - Avi protested. - "Why are you still like this!?"

"One life is more than zero." - Luna explained. - "There's no virtue in senseless, preventable death."

"What about the bond we share!?" - Avi said, offended. - "There are no obstacles for true love."

"These are just words, Avi." - Luna spoke calmly. - "The world won't bend for us. We're not special, and life can sometimes be tragic."

"No. Love is a power greater than anything." - Avi replied. - "All you have to do is to believe in it."

Luna sighed. - "I really don't want to argue with you."

Uilooa felt that the mood was getting heavier. Her previous choices were once again called into question. She was doubting if she could fight fate itself, yet she spoke with courage. - "I agree with Avi."

"Thank you, Uilooa." - Avi said, crossing her arms.

Uiloa continued. - "...but I also understand Luna. The love you speak of is an absolute necessity, and I feel it can change the world. That it can guarantee the final light to most of us... but the hardships we have to face aren't without reason. We can't just negate our role in the universe with wishful thinking and blind faith. When the time to choose will come, our hearts will show us the only right path, and sometimes it requires us to suffer for something greater than ourselves."

"I couldn't have put it better myself." - Luna summed up.

Avi wanted to protest, but when she thought twice, she knew she agreed with Uiloa. She averted her face, processing her unfounded anger and stubbornness, then grumbled. - "You might be right. Might be."

"You've changed her mind?" - Luna uttered in disbelief.

Avi immediately turned to her. - "Hey! Don't act like it's anything unusual with me!"

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry." - Luna said before grabbing a crescent roll. Avi's intense stare followed her every move. Noticing it, Luna asked. - "Are you still angry?"

"No..." - Avi grumbled. - "...but you took the last crescent roll that I didn't taste yet."

Luna put it back onto the plate. - "I'll take a different one. Enjoy."

“You don't have to.” - Avi said before breaking the roll and giving Luna the bigger half. - “There's enough for us both.”

Heria concealed her smile. She felt that this compromise was for Avi merely a continuation of her story's prologue. With content, she refilled her cup and looked at the clock. The time of departure was quickly approaching...