

## Last Star 140

Star XXXIX ~ By the Seaside ~ Part XIII

The evening continued. Paff and Heria got to know Avi's parents better and were curious about life on Earth, so they discussed it for a long while. Uiloa was busy boasting about her sushi knowledge and easily listed their names and ingredients, while Luna occasionally interjected to mention the details she found on the internet. Rock was sitting on the corner, ordering the next beer, while Ferr and Galea were outdoors to catch some fresh air.

When they returned, most of the sushi boards were emptied, and Rui collected them and the glasses. Ferr sat in front of the cook, looking around to figure out the mood, then asked. - "Rui. Can you play 'Wandering of the Carefree Ronin?'"

Two tentacles moved under the counter and took out an instrument that looked like a banjo. Another tentacle replaced a musical cylinder in the radio, and the last tentacle grabbed a microphone and gave it to Ferr. Soon, an upbeat and happy melody drew the guests' attention, and the boy stood next to the smart board, humming a melody right as the lyrics appeared on its screen.

"The dreams left behind. I'll find them anew on the path ahead..." - Ferr sang. - "...I'll paint a story of a hero without a sword, in the land where the sun never sets..."

He continued to sing about a samurai who traveled from town to town, meeting commonfolk and helping them with their everyday work. About the brothers that the samurai lost in the war, and about finding their spirit in the people he once protected. About the cycle of life, births, and goodbyes. About the beauty of nature, and about the beauty of human ingenuity. He finished the song by asking a bard to take his writing quill and continue this never-ending song, passing the torch to the next generation.

When the melody was quiet, everyone responded with loud and enthusiastic applause. Except for Rock, who praised Ferr with a rather slow clapping and without a word. With a confident half-smile, Ferr left the scene and leaned against the counter, asking. - “Who's next?”

Avi's hand immediately shot up.

“What song do you want me to play?” - Rui asked.

Avi realized that she didn't know any of the local hits. - “Uhm... I don't know the songs from here. Can you upload one of mine?”

Rui nodded and turned the radio off, then connected a cable with an adapter to the smart board. - “You can hook up the cable using this.” - He explained.

“It's a bit more complicated, because we don't have our songs uploaded there...” - Luna interjected. - “...but I can assist.” - She asked Avi to give her the device, and once she gently touched it, she added. - “Everything is ready.”

Rui helped Avi navigate the song library, and she picked 'Past the Stargazing Season'. She stood next to the smart board, saying. - “I would like to dedicate this song to everyone, but I also wanted to add a special dedication to my parents.” - Then, just like Ferr, she sang from her memory. - “Goodbye, goodbye...”

Hearing Avi sing one of her favorite songs for the first time since their revival, tears welled up in Charlotte's eyes. She recalled how much Avi loved this melody, and also the moment before she died. The very same song was with Avi in the last moments they spent together. She remembered her

daughter's suffering and sadness, and how she wanted to remember their most cherished moments with this song. She didn't even notice when Nicolas hugged her, and when tears eventually began to run down her cheeks.

"It's a beautiful melody, coming straight from the heart and overflowing with love." - Paff commented as he handed Charlotte a handkerchief.

"She was so young when we had to leave her, utterly alone." - Charlotte spoke in a stammering voice.

Paff didn't know their entire story, but he smiled to comfort her and spoke. - "...but it's clear she survived because of everything you gave her, and she grew to be an incredible person."

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"...I want to stay by your side." - Avi finished and closed her eyes for a moment, to let out the emotions she had been holding inside.

Charlotte stood up, spreading her arms, and Avi leapt into her embrace. She hugged her, then her dad, then both. Again, there was loud applause, which didn't stop until Avi let go of her parents.

"I doubt anything today will top that performance." - Paff spoke to Heria.

"Mom. Do you want to sing, too?" - Avi asked.

"You know I'm bad at it..." - Charlotte said. - "...and I don't know what to sing, either."

"Please... just one melody that you like." - Avi insisted.

"Ask Dad. His voice is better." - Charlotte replied.

Avi wouldn't give up, though, so Charlotte, even if she didn't want to do it, agreed. She walked onto the scene, singing slowly. - "A new day has come... a new day has come. I was waiting for so long, for a miracle to come..."

Although Charlotte was adamant about her lack of ability to perform well, she was still doing her best, and it was clear that she knew the song well, too. That's why it wasn't unpleasant at all to listen to her.

Afterward, it was Nicolas's turn. - "I have been a fool, and you've been childish..." - then Luna's, Heria's and Paff's, Galea's and Uiloa's, and finally Rock's, but the man refused with a gesture and kept refusing even when Avi continued to harass him without a pause.

Uiloa sighed. - "Leave him. I doubt he can sing anything good without proper practice."

Avi wasn't buying it. - "It's not about it. It's about having fun together!"

“He doesn't know how to have fun either.” - Uiloa added. - “He came here to eat, don't expect anything else.”

“You don't care, not even the slightest bit?” - Avi asked. - “You're friends after all.”

“No, I don't care.” - Uiloa replied, but it was clear she wasn't honest with herself.

Rock, still silent, finished his beer and wiped his lips, then stood up and walked to the scene.

When he grabbed the microphone, Uiloa uttered - “Are you serious?” - and Avi began to cheer for the man.

Rui played the song chosen by Rock, and the man's voice became deeper than usual. Accompanied by liturgical music, he began chanting words in a foreign language. Uiloa was speechless, because she could've never guessed her caretaker had this type of talent. On top of that, she didn't know he was interested in ancient songs. Even after Rock was done and received his well-deserved applause, Uiloa was frozen still and silent.

“Rock?” - She whispered only after the man passed next to her, but she was ignored. Rock sat back in the corner of the bar and ordered another beer. Uiloa lost her composure. - “Why were you hiding it for all this time!?”

Rock didn't say anything and patiently waited for his beer.

"We have known each other for years!! I deserve an explanation, don't I!?" - Uiloa said rather loudly.

"Oh, oh, Uiloa." - Ferr tried to calm her down. - "Let man have his secrets."

"No. Not this time!" - Uiloa demanded.

Rock took a deep breath in, then out. - "I was nervous."

"What...?" - Uiloa uttered, but seeing Rock completely serious, she began giggling. - "You? Nervous?" - She soon was laughing so hard she couldn't breathe. - "I... I didn't expect this, not from you. Don't tell me that for all this time... you... I'm shocked." - She sat next to Rock, wiping her eyes. - "...what's next? Will you tell me that your constant seriousness is just a mask and that you're just shy?"

Rock's silence spoke more than words. He was embarrassed, and only Uiloa could see it. For everyone else, he was still his stoic self.

"Oh, I get it. I get it." - Uiloa said. - "I get everything now." - She finally gave the man some peace and ordered a drink, saying. - "There'll be another chance to talk about it."

Ferr smiled when he noticed how Uiloa and Rock were understanding each other without words, then asked the rest of the group. - "So, who's next?"

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Karaoke lasted late, at least until the guests got worn out. It was midnight now, and the conversations continued while Rui served more and more drinks. Luna was sitting in the back of the bar, next to the scene, still humming melodies to the peaceful, atmospheric music.

The first guests who had to leave were Rock and Uiloo, mainly due to tomorrow's business meeting. Uiloo kissed Luna and Avi on the cheeks and disappeared in the rain. Shortly after it, Paff and Heria decided to go back to the hotel, too.

When Avi asked Ferr and Galea if they would stay, they declared that they could stay until morning. However, once Avi realized the party pretty much ended, she decided it was the best moment to depart. When Ferr heard it, he decided that he and Galea would still stay here for a while longer. They said goodbye, and Avi, her parents, and Luna left.

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Avi was slightly tipsy, so after returning to the spaceship and saying 'goodnight' to Luna, she quickly fell asleep in her room, just like her parents did in theirs. Once Luna was alone, she started the engines and made a short jump to orbit. Remembering the promise made to Avi, she contacted the AI which ruled the planet and offered technological support...