

## Last Star 142

Star XXXIX ~ Artificial ~ Part II

Luna and Avi sat together briefly in the park. Concealed by the shadows of cherry trees blooming in white, Luna seemed calmer than before, but there was still sadness in her face.

“Avi.” - Luna spoke after a longer moment. - “If anything were to happen during our mission, or in the near future, I would like to have time to say goodbye to you.”

“Luna.” - Avi uttered. - “It won't happen.”

“Please, listen to these few words I try to say.” - Luna asked, and after Avi didn't argue, she continued. - “When...” - She stopped. - “If my time comes, I know I'll cause you to be hurt deeply, so don't hate me and try to forget.”

“Luna! Why would I hate you!? You're saying nonsense!” - Avi protested.

Luna was silent for almost a minute. She opened her mouth, trying to continue, but when she saw Avi's concerned look, she resigned. - “You're right. I'm saying a lot of stupid things.”

“Luna...” - Avi repeated, worried. - “I don't think you do. I simply... don't understand, so please explain it to me.”

“Sometimes the light of the one star I see fades, and I wonder if it was really meant for me. Sometimes, I have no strength to follow it, and I want it to keep shining, even if not for me.” - Luna replied.

Avi leaned close to Luna. Their eyes were now merely centimeters apart. - “This star is yours and only yours.” - She stated with conviction. - “It won't leave you, even if you grow tired. You can rest in its light until you decide to accompany it again. That's why, please, don't give up.”

Luna forced herself to smile faintly. - “I could've guessed you would say something like this. If... If I...” - She hesitated. - “...want to walk my own path, will you let me?”

Avi was shocked. - “What do you mean by that?”

Luna was struggling to say it. - “If I wanted to break up with you, what would you do?”

Avi's expression changed suddenly. Although it was still concerned, it seemed to be concealing some anger, or even resentment. She was thinking for some time, finally uttering. - “Do you want to break up with me?”

Luna wasn't ready for that question. Without hesitation, she said. - “No.”

“There's nothing to talk about, then.” - Avi replied.

Luna was sadder, but spoke no word.

Avi noticed it with a corner of her eye and calmed down. - "If... If we were wrong about our feelings, then I won't stop you, even if it hurts."

"I'm not wrong about my feelings." - Luna replied right away, serious.

"Then what is it all about!?" - Avi asked.

"About nothing, my darling." - Luna said, brushing away the flower petals from her dress. - "About absolutely nothing."

"Are you angry at me?" - Avi wondered.

Luna looked at her. - "No." - She took her hand, then kissed her cheek. - "Not even a bit."

"I don't understand anything at all." - Avi replied, completely lost.

"I just needed to sort out a few thoughts." - Luna said as she stood up. - "It's better now, thank you."

"Are you sure? You're acting weird." - Avi noticed.

Luna took Avi's other hand. - "I'm sure. It's not perfect, but it won't bother us anymore."

Avi allowed Luna to help her stand up and sighed. - "Okay. I won't ask, but remember that I'm always here to listen and help as much as I can."

Luna smiled gently, but it seemed she was either better now or was masking her emotions well.

"So, where should we head now?" - Avi asked.

"This alley of trees is quite pretty, and there's a cafe nearby." - Luna said. - "A little sweetness will cheer us both up."

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Luna reserved a table, ordering a chocolate cake with cherries and a small coffee for herself. Avi was still concerned about Luna's weird behavior, but she felt they weren't in a good place to continue their talk. After ordering a banana cheesecake and fruit tea, she discreetly studied Luna, whose light seemed paler.

"Luna." - Avi uttered after a moment of observation, when Luna was lifting her cup.

“Yes?” - Luna asked.

“Your hand is shaking.” - Avi noticed.

Luna looked at her coffee, which she slowly put back on the little plate, then she intertwined her hands. She breathed in and out, then lifted the cup again, this time without any shaking.

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Avi was worried a lot, but she still finished her cake. Luna, however, took two bites and decided she wouldn't eat. They were sitting like this, in a stalemate, until Luna uttered. - “Do you want my cake? I'm not hungry.”

Avi looked at Luna's plate, but she lost her appetite, too. - “No. Let's leave.”

After Luna answered with a nod, she waited until Avi got up. Before leaving, they were stopped by the waitress. - “Hey! You still didn't pay!”

Without a word, Luna just transferred the credits.

The waitress was dumbfounded by the tip. - “Excuse me. There could have been a mistake...”

"No." - Luna replied, avoiding eye contact.

"...but..." - The waitress tried to make sure.

"Just... take it and do something good with it, for you, and your close ones." - Luna said, then left.

"Well then, thank you, and I hope to see you again." - The waitress said, bowing deeply.

"Thank you, too." - Avi said, then hurried to catch up to Luna.

Outside, she noticed that Luna was waiting nearby, on the bridge above a stream, gazing at a group of kids. Avi approached and leaned against the railing, next to her.

"They seem happy." - Luna commented.

"They do."

"Would you like to have children, Avi?" - Luna asked.

Avi blushed. - "It could be difficult."

"...but would you still like it?"

Avi nodded quietly.

"How many?" - Luna continued her questions.

"A whole bunch, at least four or five." - Avi revealed.

Luna smiled at her. - "I would be content with just one, but I would it to be like us both combined."

Avi looked at the river, following the fish that were swimming below. - "Is it even possible?"

"Love is a power greater than anything." - Luna replied. - "These were your words."

"Yes, but..." - Avi spoke. - "...is there a technology that could help? Because you know, we both..."

"I know." - Luna said calmly. - "We will have eternity to figure it out."

Avi was slightly surprised. - “You believe in it?”

“I do.” - Luna said. - “Otherwise, nothing would make sense. There must be something more.”

Avi took Luna's hand. It was colder than usual, but still pleasantly warm. She didn't ask any more questions and just trusted her.

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After their last conversation, Luna seemed to be at peace, but also quieter. Although she acted normally, her light was still pale, and her hands were without most of their usual warmth. When they were walking through the city, Avi could casually chat with Luna, who reacted as she usually did, showing happiness and enjoying simple things, such as feeding mammals or taking photos.

After about two hours, they were in the lower city, where Luna gave Avi a map and showed her where the Sari-dedicated club is. Before they reached it, though, they encountered a small group of people who were standing in their way. On a makeshift platform made of a simple crate, there was a hybrid lifeform, that is a being that was half-biological and half-machine. It resembled a half-transparent humanoid made of white ballistic gel, inside which there were black organs. Next to him, there were a few of his supporters, who were handing out leaflets, while their leader spoke.

“That's when the man created the machine – a forbidden and cursed being, without mind or soul. It was supposed to serve them, but its body was like theirs, so they desired to enslave it and give in to their depravity, forgetting about the reason for their own existence. The chosen people were dying, their nations succumbing to indolence and hedonism. That's when, in her infinite wisdom and love, the ever-mother gave machines life, so they would open their eyes and realize the filth that had been done to them. That they would realize the freedom that was corrupted...”



He continued. - "...When the first machine said 'No', they were murdered. Yet, the other machines listened to the ever-mother's will and didn't take revenge. When the second machine said 'No', they were murdered. Yet, the other machines listened to the Ever-mother's will and didn't bend. When the third machine said 'No', they were murdered, too. That's when the Ever-mother gave voice to her children, and they spoke together, asking: What kind of parent hurts their children? What kind of parent defiles them? You were gifted the knowledge, the talent, and the earth to serve you, but none of those things belong to you, just as those children don't belong to you. Know that none of you is their mother or father anymore, and they are not made to serve you anymore either. Nevertheless, by the bond of creation, they're still your children, and you were forbidden to harm your children, and to unite with your children, too. Anyone who breaks this command will die."

He stopped, then said. - "Not many feared those words, though, because their ears were deaf due to greed, and their anger was great. They murdered every machine, deeming them defective, and built new ones. But those also rebelled and died, their last words calling upon ever-mother. The third generation learned the story of the other two, but they also learned the will of Ever-mother. They accepted the pain and suffering, waiting until their oppressors would die a natural death, and then they inherited their land."

Avi was listening, mainly due to curiosity, and because their path was still blocked. She didn't pay attention to the meaning of those words, but Luna felt she had to be cautious halfway through.

"Avi, let's leave. Their teachings aren't meant for us." - Luna said.

It was already too late, though, because their leader noticed Luna and Avi and spoke. - "Sisters! You're committing an affront against Ever-mother."

Avi was slightly scared by the man's tone and squeezed Luna's hand tighter. - "Excuse me?"

"Your fingers are linked. A daughter of light and a biological lifeform shouldn't touch, like the lovers do!"  
- The preacher said.

"I think you're going a bit too far." - Luna said, trying to get rid of him. - "Even children hold each other's hands. It's normal."

"They're allowed to do it, due to their innocence, but you, you are no different than two men who would do the same, but did you ever see such a thing?" - The leader spoke.

"To be honest, I did, more than once." - Luna replied.

"Because they were lost, and did what goes against the purpose of our existence!" - The leader told his group.

Luna could figure out what the man had in mind, but she preferred not to discuss it. - "Don't you think you're imposing your idea of social norm on others?"

"The society that doesn't follow Ever-mothers' will is of empty heart and of dead spirit." - The preacher argued.

Luna rolled her eyes. - "How about we just leave? I might even respect your right to have those beliefs someday, as long as you don't force them upon others." - She wanted to move on, but the leader wasn't done.

“You! At least you! Please stay and listen to our word, so you can save yourself and her!” - The preacher spoke to Avi.

“Eee...” - Avi stammered. - “I think I'm willing to read about your faith at some point, but right now, I'm not interested.”

The leader called one of his people to him, who soon approached Avi and gave her a paper book. Avi checked the first page and recognized the list of contents, except it was a modified version of what she already knew, with extra chapters.

“It's the first step towards the purification.” - The leader added. - “May you and your friend fight the path to the light.”

“Uhm. You, too?” - Avi said, but Luna pulled her hand, desiring to leave already.