

## Last Star 146

Star XLI ~ Slowly Euthanasia ~ Part II

Luna was opposing Avi's idea, but didn't know how to tell her. She felt they weren't going to change anything and were wasting valuable time on top of that. She followed Avi and her parents along the busy streets, passing more infected people and examining their symptoms, which were crystal outgrowths, bloody cough, gradual loss of sight, and discolorations that weakened affected parts of the body.

Depending on the person, the Necrosis could progress in many different ways, so Luna wasn't sure whether it was always the same disease. It reminded her of the records of the labyrinth plague, and she wondered if she was missing something.

Gorn stopped in front of a two-story-high industrial container and leaned over to the ragged doormat, where the key to his house was hidden. After removing the lock, heavy chains that blocked the frontal sheet metal dropped with a loud clank, and Gorn could move it aside.

Without a word, the giant gestured for everyone to enter.

Avi began to study the lower container right away. Although the room was tiny when one took the size of Gorn into account, it still had tables for two people, machines for ore enrichment and melting, and a regulated oven, which was installed between kitchen tops. Above them, there was a shelf with a few jars full of various mineral powders.

However, what mostly caught Avi's attention were the photos on the wall. Gorn was wrapping his arm around a woman smaller than him, with a body resembling an expertly polished diamond. In front of them, there was a pet sitting on its rear legs that looked like a large mole made of black opal.

Gorn ignored Avi, who was curious about everything. He pushed aside cauldrons and drills that were occupying the countertops, then spoke. - "I don't have more chairs. You can sit here."

His guest accepted his offer, letting Gorn and Avi sit at the table.

"Sadly, I don't have any food for biological lifeforms." - Gorn said. - "I can only offer filtered water."

"Thank you, but due to sanitary reasons, I would like to suggest that my companions keep their helmets on." - Luna stated.

"Ah. True." - Gorn uttered.

"It's a humble, but cozy home." - Avi commented, still smiling as she looked at the photos.

Gorn sighed, clearly depressed. - "We used to invite guests to our garden plot, but it doesn't matter anymore."

"Oh. You've a garden?" - Avi asked.

"I do." - Gorn replied.

"It must be a lovely place." - Avi mentioned.

"Not anymore." - Gorn said. - "Days of its beauty are long gone."

"It can't be that bad. How about you show it to us later?" - Avi suggested. - "Well, because, you know, I also had a garden back on my home planet, Earth. I'm missing it a bit."

"Okay." - Gorn uttered. - "I will show it to you."

Luna felt it would be difficult to talk with Gorn, as was evident by the current silence. Despite this, Avi's optimism didn't fade. For some reason, Avi also didn't bother Gorn with more questions and was quiet, as if to give the golem time.

Finally, Gorn spoke. - "Why are you here?"

"For two reasons." - Avi explained. - "The first is my and Luna's dream to visit all the stars."

"What's the second reason?" - Gorn asked.

"We want to help others." - Avi added.

Gorn was silent for a moment. - "It's a noble goal."

Avi began to speak, even if it seemed risky to her. - "You know, I believe that everyone can be helped, and that everyone can eventually also help us."

"I understand." - Gorn said. - "If you need anything, speak. I'll answer."

"We had just come here, so we don't know the city." - Avi mentioned. - "Can you show it to us?"

"There's nothing to see here." - Gorn stated.

"...but there must be some places that you once enjoyed visiting!" - Avi protested.

Gorn sighed. - "There were. Rink. Wall. Market."

Avi was quick to show her enthusiasm. - "So!? Will you be our guide!?"

"Fine." - Gorn uttered, clearly exhausted.

Luna could figure out that Gorn wasn't an assertive person, which gave Avi an advantage. Again, there was a moment of silence, because Avi let the golem continue the conversation only when he wanted.

Gorn slowly stood up and climbed to the upper industrial container, where his bed and personal items were. He opened a chest made of hollowed stone and began to rummage inside it, taking out a small linen sack and a larger, leather bag which he tossed over his arm.

"Let's go." - The giant announced and walked to the exit.

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"This is the wall." - Gorn stated the obvious once they arrived at the structure that separated the slum from the inner city.

The wall was about twelve meters high and made of massive blocks of brown stone. It had neither windows nor there was any cracks in it. Avi wondered why it was so important to the quartz giant, but she let him gaze at it first.

"Let's head to the market now." - Gorn said, apparently, he gave up on sharing this secret.

"Okay..." - Avi uttered. - "...but let's take a walk alongside the wall. I would like to admire it for a bit longer."

“Fine.” - Gorn uttered.

They walked in absolute silence, heading in the direction of the main gate. Initially, there was no indication that there was anything special about the wall. Only occasionally, there were single crystals growing below it. When they finally reached its inner regions, Avi noticed a few spray cans lying on the ground, and a few colorful tags on the wall itself.

“What are those markings?” - Avi asked Gorn.

“The last breath of those who are gone.” - Gorn stated.

He stopped for a moment under an art piece decorated with diamond roses. Other tags were already partially covering it, but the painting above them was still visible. It was an underground cave full of crystal ruby clusters. Many thin columns protruded from the water, and behind them, beyond a wall of transparent quartz, a light of large pink crystal dimly illuminated the rocky shore, where Gorn and his soulmate were sitting.

“It was made with heartfelt care.” - Avi commented.

Gorn gently touched the flowery tag with his fingers. - “It'll fade, like everything does.”

“Nothing lasts forever.” - Luna added.

“...but while it's still here, it'll remind us about all the wonders in the world...” - Avi said. - “...and before it's already gone, we can still create something new and beautiful.”

Gorn drew his fingers away. - “Not with these hands.” - He uttered, then continued to walk.

Avi caught up to him, then asked. - “How about you show us that place from the painting?”

“I can't.” - Gorn said, and when Avi asked why, he pointed at the wall's gate. - “It's there, and my place is here.”

Avi looked at the massive bolts that protected the city, and although she wanted for Gorn to visit the lake once more, her heart felt it was currently impossible. She didn't speak about her doubts and let the man point the way to the market.

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Gorn strolled through the market with apathy, as if he wasn't planning to show it to Avi at all. She, however, stopped at every possible occasion, asking about the items displayed at the stalls.

“...and this?” - Avi asked, pointing at the jars with rocks.

“Necrosis-slowng pills.” - Gorn uttered.

“Ah.” - Avi replied. - “Do they help?”

“Not a lot.” - Gorn denied.

“...but they're better than nothing, right?” - Avi commented. - “It's still a few moments of hope more.”

Gorn ignored her remark and moved to the next stall.

“...and this?” - Avi asked again.

“Catalyst.” - Gorn explained.

“What is it for?” - Avi inquired.

“It accelerates crystals' growth.” - Gorn informed.

“...and what's next to it?” - Avi didn't stop her interrogation.



"Core seeds." - Gorn spoke.

"...and?" - Avi asked.

"It's what you cultivate crystals from." - Gorn revealed.

Avi clapped her hands and exclaimed enthusiastically. - "It's ideal for the garden!" - She turned to Luna. -  
"Can we buy a few?"

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"It depends." - Luna replied. - "They don't accept credits. We'll have to find a currency exchange station."

"Don't bother." - Gorn uttered. - "I'll buy it."

"Uhm, are you sure?" - Avi asked. - "We don't want to strain your wallet. You might need money to survive here."

"I don't need money anymore." - Gorn stated as he moved the seeds and catalyst to his bag.

It didn't make Avi any happier. - "...it still would be nice to know where to exchange credits."

Gorn pointed at a booth concealed by a ragged canopy, where the only merchant with electronics was.

"Luna." - Avi asked.

"I can tell what's on your mind." - Luna said and left for a moment.

"Do you need anything else from the market?" - Gorn asked.

Avi looked at the wares. - "I would like a souvenir."

Gorn pointed at another shop between piles of sheet metal.

"Can you help me choose something?" - Avi asked. - "Please."

"No." - Gorn refused, which wasn't like him. - "I'll wait."

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Luna joined Avi as she rummaged through various knick-knacks.

“Do you really think you'll find anything valuable in this trash?” - Luna asked.

“It's not trash!” - Avi protested. - “These items once belonged to citizens, and each was important to someone, and had its own, unique story.”

Luna scanned the nearby pile. - “I only see defective objects here.”

Avi pulled out a plushy mole without an eye. - “Everything can be fixed.” - She carefully put it on the counter, where she had already put a few other items.

“Are you sure you want to take it all to our spaceship?” - Luna asked.

“No. I'll take one or two items.” - Avi stated. - “It'll suffice.”

“Will it take long?” - Luna complained as she moved a wooden stool to her, then sat down.

“Give me ten minutes.” - Avi requested.

Bored, Luna moved the teddy mole to her and summoned a needle made of light to patch it. - "Eh... are you at least looking for anything specific?"

"Maybe. I don't know." - Avi said, struggling to free an iron locomotive you from the heap of junk.

"Be careful." - Luna warned dispassionately.

Avi disregarded it. - "I have it... uff... under control." - She pulled with all her strength until there was a loud crack, and she stumbled and fell, while all the trash tumbled down onto her.

"I've told you." - Luna uttered, still bored. With telekinesis, she pulled a rusty figurine of a rhino-like creature to her, then lifted her finger and began to clean it with light.

"You could have prevented this!" - Avi complained as she dug herself out from under the junk.

"I could have, and I have tried." - Luna said with no remorse.

When Avi got up, she was all angry and wanted to shout at Luna, but calmed down quickly upon noticing an armless, crystal, skater girl attached to a similar, transparent box with a complicated mechanism inside.

She lifted it and cautiously put it on the counter. - “Luna, can you fix it?”

Luna lazily lifted her hand, and a few dozen broken pieces and gears flew out of the pile, which she promptly attached to the figurine. - “Here.”

Avi wound up the mechanism, and it began to play a melody while the ice skater twirled.

“I’ll take this one!” - Avi called the merchant.

When the shopkeeper appeared from behind the curtain and noticed the mess, he was in shambles. - “What have you done...?” - He clicked his tongue. - “I need to assess the damages.”

“Uhm. It might take a while...” - Avi muttered.

Luna, still bored, snapped her fingers, causing all of the items to levitate in a few parallel rows, each encompassed by a white glow. She fixed each item at the same time, then sorted them into neat piles.

The merchant stared in disbelief, speechless.

“So, how much is it going to cost us?” - Luna asked.

All she heard was quiet. - “Nothing.”

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Gorn waited outside, sitting on a stone bench. Avi happily ran to him, showing the figurine. Strangely, the golem's eyes were locked on the item. It was a gaze full of pain, but also a nostalgic one.

“May I?” - Gorn asked, and once Avi gave him the music box and the melody played, he was lost in thought, and only spoke once it stopped. - “Keep it.”

“A strange choice of words.” - Luna noticed it.

Gorn wouldn't explain himself. - “Let's go.”

When they walked to the ice rink, Gorn was still silent, and Avi felt it wasn't a good moment to start the conversation. She was turning the music box in her hand and noticed a name tag underneath it. It said 'Liliana', and it was the same name she saw under the wall graffiti. On top of that, the figurine did resemble the woman in the photo. The facts spoke for themselves. It was part of Gorn's story, and he decided to just give it to someone else. Feeling sadder, Avi put the music box in her bag, hoping that Gorn would change his mind later.

Finally, they've arrived at the rink, which was a wide and mostly flat crater made of polished crystal. Again, Gorn sat on the bench, gazing at the healthier couples, who somehow still enjoyed skating, even in such a dire situation.

Avi sat next to Gorn, took out the music box, and gave it to him. - "It's the same name tag as on the graffiti."

"You have noticed." - Gorn uttered.

"You should keep it, not us." - Avi added.

"It's only an item. It won't replace a living person." - Gorn said as he turned the figurine.

"...I understand..." - Avi could empathise. - "...but it's still better than nothing."

"It stopped being mine when I had sold it." - Gorn said.

"Can I ask, why did you do it?" - Avi asked.

"Liliana was still alive back then...." - Gorn answered. - "We couldn't afford the medicine, but we still fought."

"I think I understand why you liked this place now." - Avi added.

"She liked it." - Gorn clarified.

Avi lowered her eyes. - "Being alone must have been difficult for you."

Gorn wouldn't answer.

"...I can tell what you had felt. I used to be alone, too." - Avi continued. - "I've also lost my hope, but I kept on living, and then a miracle happened."

"A miracle?" - Gorn asked.

"It was Luna who had saved me... and then, I also got my parents back." - Avi said. - "I don't want to tell you what's possible and what's not... but your life has value. You can give so much to others and yourself."

Gorn sighed. - "Perhaps, but is it worth the risk?"

"I know that you don't want Necrosis to spread..." - Avi argued. - "...but Necrosis isn't the only disease that affects our souls, and these other diseases can be healed, if you give yourself a chance."



Gorn was silent for a long moment. He then gazed at the rink last time and got up. - "The garden is next." - He said, ignoring Avi's last comment.

Avi was overcome by deep sadness, but she got up to follow the giant. She had one more chance, and if it didn't work, she was going to find a way to create more of them.

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At the slum's outskirts, there was an area full of scattered shacks. Most of them were abandoned and in bad condition, and the neighbouring gardens were overgrown by white crystal clusters, similar to those that affected diseased citizens.

Gorn stepped between the outgrowths, leading Avi and her companions across his piece of land. Only thanks to Luna's spacesuits, they avoided being wounded by sharp spikes that protruded from the ground.

Gorn finally located the remains of the lounge chair and sat on the edge, as depressed as before.

"It's all that's left." - Gorn uttered.

"Okay! Let's do it!" - Avi exclaimed and, wasting no time, headed to the toolshed. She returned with a pickaxe and asked Gorn. - "The white ones. Are they all weed?"

Gorn looked at her. - "It's pointless. Give it up."

Without a comment, Avi approached the biggest outgrowth and attacked it. - "What are you standing around for!? I could use some help!"

Luna sighed. - "He's right. Let it go. I can do it myself way faster."

"No!" - Avi protested as she turned to Luna. - "It's not about it! Do you remember the garden back on Earth? We had fun there."

"Avi. It's different." - Nicolas replied. - "It'll take ages."

"If you keep standing like that, then it surely will!" - Avi said before breaking off the first crystal.

"Eh. You can't reason with her." - Luna said as she grabbed a nearby hammer. - "Once she tires, perhaps maybe she'll come to her senses."

"She knows what she's doing." - Charlotte uttered discreetly to Nicolas. - "We should help her."

Nicolas agreed and found a chainsaw, while Charlotte grabbed a smaller hammer and a chisel. Hours passed, and the work didn't seem to progress, but Avi still kept zealously hitting the crystals. She managed to remove the entire growth from the door of the cottage and kept digging, while Gorn was just sitting and staring.

It continued until Avi began to lose her strength. - “Gorn. Mind to help?” - She asked.

Gorn, however, was silent, so she got to work and went on, even after the crystals that illuminated the cave grew dimmer. Although Nicolas and Charlotte needed a break, Avi herself wouldn't stop.

Luna also wouldn't use her abilities, which made her physical body affected by fatigue. She didn't understand how Avi had energy for all this.

A strike after strike, the pickaxe broke more crystals, and their chunks fell onto the ground. At last, Avi's arms gave in, and she dropped the tool. She felt her hands shake from the continuous effort, but she still bent down to pick up the pickaxe.

That's when Gorn approached and snatched it from her. - “Enough.”

Avi looked at him, silently asking for another chance, but Gorn said nothing. Instead, he began to hit the crystal growths. It wasn't your usual strikes. They were filled with anger and frustration.

Avi was standing too close to him, so Luna pulled her back. - “I think it's something he needs to process on his own.”

Exhausted, Avi fell onto the lounge chair and closed her eyes.

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"Gorn?" - There was a voice behind the weeds, which awoke Avi. There were two crystal people, one made of malachite, the other of calcite. - "Long time no see! You're working this late?"

"I have to finish something." - Gorn uttered.

"There's a lot of it." - Calcite being noticed. - "It'll take you until morning."

Gorn ignored it and continued to work.

"How stubborn you are." - The calcite golem uttered and nudged his companion to keep on moving.

It didn't take long before they both returned with pickaxes and began to clear the garden too. Gorn didn't seem bothered by their presence. He was indifferent and too focused on the task.

About fifteen minutes passed, when another person made of red crystal called them. - "How long do you intend to make all this noise!?"

"Until we are done." - The malachite golem replied, and the stranger waved at them, frustrated.

Another fifteen minutes passed, and he returned with eight other neighbours, all with tools.

"It cannot be that a neighbour disturbs another neighbour's evening..." - He told his group. - "...but it's not evening yet, so we'll get it done."

About an hour later, the garden was like new, and outside, there were baskets full of crystal shards.

"Uff... my back." - Malachite golem complained. - "You don't seem too tired, Gorn."

Gorn faced his benefactors. - "Thanks for the help, Fatee. Thanks for the help, everyone."

Fatee nodded at Gorn while his friend asked. - "How are you holding up?"

"It used to be better." - The quartz golem said.

"Well, fortune isn't smiling on us." - The calcite being replied. - "Lately, Shaer and Yta were disposed of."

"Shaer?" - Gorn asked. - "He seemed relatively healthy."

"It's not Necrosis that got them. It was something with their core." - The calcite golem explained. -  
"Apparently, a rare defect."

"May the stars guide his soul." - Gorn uttered.

"How about you, Gorn?" - Fatee asked. - "I've heard your Necrosis is progressing."

Gorn turned to look at Avi, but she was all asleep now. - "I have... a few more days."

"Huh!? And you're working!?" - Fatee's eyes opened wide. - "Wait a minute... so why did we even bother cleaning this!?"

Gorn had no answer, but Fatee wasn't bothered by it and instead began to laugh.

"You've gone completely crazy!" - Fatee shouted. - "But no harm done! Do you have the seeds?"

Gorn nodded and revealed the bags with yellow dust.

"If you make it to the harvest, we'll brew something up and drink to your health." - Fatee declared. - "If you don't, then we'll make sure something grows here and drink to your passage to the other side. Deal?"

"Deal." - Gorn agreed.

Fatee smiled. - "Until the very end, Gorn!"

"Until the very end." - Gorn replied.

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When Avi woke up, Gorn was gone. Luna was observing her all this time, monitoring her health.

"You overexerted yourself a little." - Luna commented. - "Sometimes you're really stupid."

"...but did it work?" - Avi asked.

"I don't know what you mean, but Gorn and his friends left to drink the gloom away." - Luna answered. -  
"He left a message for you, thought."

"Oh?" - Avi uttered. - "What is it?"

“You earned a new friend, and Gorn will keep the music box after all.” - Luna informed. - “He also couldn't repay us for the assistance in clearing his garden, so I suggested he give us a few seeds for our own.”

Avi smiled. - “It's enough, because we've already found something more valuable.”

“He knows we're not staying here for long.” - Luna added. - “He also said that once we're done with everything here, we can always visit him to say goodbye.”

“I will remember!” - Avi announced enthusiastically, then yawned. - “...but now, I think it's time to rest.”

“When you were sleeping, I reserved a place in a hostel.” - Luna informed. - “There might be a problem with the room's quality, but well, you'll understand once we're there.”

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Avi quickly learned that the slum hostels don't offer comfortable beds. It's not like they were needed, because citizens were made of hard crystal after all. Still, Luna solved the issue by summoning three mattresses made of light and then watched over everyone until sunrise.