

Last Star 170

Star XLVII ~ The Flowers There... Are Always in Full Bloom ~ Part II

The spaceship emerged from beneath the creamy-pink clouds, right above a lily over several dozen meters wide, floating at the center of a lake. Around it, many smaller white platforms were the foundations of multi-story wood towers, tent-like constructions, and smaller flowers connected to thorny roots which partially protruded from the water, and were hollowed, and had some of their segments replaced by windows, making it easy to notice crowds of people inside or passing metro trains.

Once Luna landed, she and Avi entered one of these hollowed roots. Their train moved along the inclined tunnel towards its underwater section, revealing the illuminated lake bed, where a second city made of glass bubbles was. Thousands of car-submarines traveled between schools of fish that shimmered with all colors of the rainbow, passing weeds and algae that were almost reaching the lake's surface.

It was easy to notice that different districts of the city were distinct. Some were placed on top of patches of golden sand, where giant crabs wandered. Others were squeezed between gray stone riddled with holes, where eels had their nests. In the center, the ruins of a city overgrown by red moss were a tourist attraction, and to the west, the flora was so dense that it resembled a forest. To the east, in the trench-like abyss, there were geothermal crystals with power plants surrounding them, and far in the south, the murkier water seemed to create a mist-like phenomenon, where stilt-legged creatures with crawfish torsos lived.

"It's so beautiful in here!" - Avi uttered, glued to the window.

"So, do you want to stop there?" - Luna asked, causing Avi to just turn around and nod her head energetically. Seeing this, Luna added. - "I will get us visas by noon. Until then, we have to stay on the surface, but the upper city is also nice."

“Oh, right.” - Avi recalled. - “We aren't here just to explore, are we?”

“I'm glad you remember...” - Luna replied. - “...but you will decide where we go first. Our responsibilities can wait.”

“Hmm...” - Avi pondered. - “Let's eat something, then we'll figure out where to go.”

“You're my favorite hungry little thing.” - Luna giggled.

“Next station: Yvrett's Lily.” - The speakers announced.

“Well, it's our stop soon.” - Luna informed once the train was above water again.

Avi looked beyond the window. In the shadows of pink petals, there was a waterfront terrace with a little sidewalk for pedestrians, and right behind it rows of boutiques and restaurants. There was also a paddle-boat rental nearby, and some citizens were using these to travel to smaller platforms with gazebos and benches that allowed to comfortably relax, far from crowds and noise. Some levitating drones sporadically traveled between these isolated places, delivering breakfast or providing other services, such as taking care of children or giving a massage.

“They sure made themselves quite comfortable here.” - Luna commented. - “Do you want to try it?”

“Mmm...” - Avi was undecided. - “Maybe later, after we're tired of walking?”

“Ah, so it seems you want to explore.” - Luna deduced.

“We'll just check out the promenade.” - Avi suggested. - “To clear our minds.”

“I'm okay with that.” - Luna said just as their train stopped and entered a glass tunnel that led to the waterside station. She pressed the button to open the door, then let Avi head outside first and joined her in a flash of light.

“Mmm...” - Avi inhaled. - “A nice, fresh, and gentle smell!”

“Apparently, the air here can improve immune system function.” - Luna added. - “People living in the capital usually are healthier and live longer than in other outposts.”

Avi took Luna's hand and, with her other arm, pointed ahead. - “Look! There's even a flower shop! We can buy something for your garden!”

Luna laughed. - “Am I supposed to carry all that stuff around?”

“Let's just take a peek, then!” - Avi pleaded as she pulled Luna. - “We can always return here later.”

“Or I can purchase only the seeds.” - Luna suggested. - “We won't have to head back.”

Once they were in the shop, Avi studied the spiral stalks with flowers that resembled hanging ribbons. Luna, instead, scanned the offer, looking for unique specimens that would take effort to grow, because she liked the challenge.

An older alien woman gazed at them, uttering no word as she kept smiling warmly. Only after Luna approached the counter, because she was disappointed that her search proved to be fruitless, did the shopkeeper greet her and ask. - “It's easy to notice you were only interested in the Nocturnal Orchids. Not many choose to purchase them, mainly due to their common appearance and problems with keeping them alive.”

Luna smiled out of courtesy. - “It's mainly due to the latter that I want to buy a few bulbs.”

“Hmm, it would be a shame if these flowers were to wilt. I have some supplements that can save them if it comes to the worst.” - The merchant suggested.

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“I'll take them. Better safe than sorry.” - Luna replied. - “Although I'm sure I won't need them.”

“You're confident. Can I ask you about your experience with rare flowers?” - The alien woman asked.

"It's merely some months, but I'm skilled." - Luna revealed. - "I catalog the flora on every planet we visit, and I already cultivated more difficult specimens in my spaceship's garden."

"Hmm." - The shopkeeper was curious. - "I would love to hear more about it."

Luna summoned the holograms of her plants with the data she had gathered and her personal notes related to cultivation. - "As an example, these Late-Spring Fans are mainly parasitical plants, and I couldn't grow them until I've found Bleeding Blackberry, which overproduces sap, swells, and quickly bursts in standard conditions." - Luna showed a recording of her garden. - "However, once I've applied an adequate number of first flowers to the latter, both specimens could live in symbiosis. Another example would be..."

Luna continued her lecture, and the shopkeeper paid a lot of attention to everything she had said, occasionally praising Luna's ingenuity and commenting with her own, useful insights. Soon, both girls talked purely in theoretical fashion, which resulted in a mutual exchange of many useful cultivation techniques and in developing a few new ones.

At the end, after the florist understood how serious Luna was about her hobby, she casually added. - "Eh. I would love to have some of those plants to expand our offer."

Luna blinked her eyes twice. - "That's not a problem." - She flashed to the spaceship and returned in under a second, with labeled seeds and bulbs. - "I have too many of them. They're useful for experiments, but they mainly go to waste."

The merchant looked at Luna's basket, speechless. - "I... I don't know what to say."

“Hey. It's a gift from one enthusiast to another.” - Luna winked.

“I'm not sure if I can grow them just by myself.” - The alien woman replied, overwhelmed.

“There are enough samples to make some mistakes...” - Luna pointed out. - “...but I'll also leave you my notes, just in case.”

The shopkeeper accepted the gift and temporarily put it under the counter. She looked at Luna, unsure, but she still felt it wouldn't be kind to leave her with nothing in return. - “Please, wait a moment. I also have something for you.” - She walked to the backroom and soon reappeared with a bag of miniature seeds that resembled ruby dust. - “Those flowers are called Soul-stealers. They grow and bloom when fed with spiritual energy, and enhance the host's ability to perform miracles.”

“It sounds like something beyond my expertise...” - Luna admitted. - “...but I'm sure my friend can take care of them.”

The florist shook her head. - “You don't need a soul expert for it. If you just hold a seed in your hands and meditate for a few days, it'll sprout. Afterwards, the plant has to be transplanted to the skin. Side effects of cultivation are negligible, and perhaps, you'll later be able to see the world differently.”

“Hmm, now that you describe it, it does sound interesting.” - Luna said and accepted the bag. - “Thank you.”

Avi looked at them, curious. She approached and leaned over Luna's shoulder, asking. - "What do you have there?"

Luna smiled mysteriously, uttering. - "You'll see." - Then added. - "Did you already choose some flowers you like?"

"Yes! Basilisk's Eye!" - Avi declared.

Soon after, their visit was completed, and they waved goodbye to the shopkeeper.

Avi gazed beyond the cafe's window as she stirred her cacao drink with a small spoon. In the crowds of pink aliens, she could notice many smiling citizens. Children played and laughed, some teenagers tried to impress some girls, a few parents rested on the benches, and then there were the elders who peacefully fed fish. This city and its serenity seemed special to Avi, like it was proof that a better world can be created. Despite being aware of everything she had lost so far, it was giving her the strength to press on.

"They're so happy." - Avi finally commented.

"Carefree, I would say." - Luna corrected.

"Is it wrong?" - Avi asked.

“Never mind, I don't want to ruin the mood.” - Luna replied.

“Luna. It could be important.” - Avi emphasized.

Luna sighed. - “No, it isn't. They chose to live like this. I shouldn't be imposing my value system on them.”

“You still didn't tell me what's on your mind.” - Avi pointed out.

“They're not ready for war, not even a bit.” - Luna said dispassionately. - “Their barely armed recon fleet is all they have.”

Avi looked beyond the window again, saddened. - “Do you think it would be better if they participated in this bloodshed?”

“I don't know what's right and what's wrong. I simply state that they're under a threat of a total and ruthless purge of their population.” - Luna revealed.

“There's good in everyone.” - Avi uttered quietly. - “Maybe they can avoid such a fate and find a diplomatic solution.”

“Not if what we've heard about the witch is true.” - Luna reminded.

“Then, it's all the more reason to put an end to it.”

“Just us, alone?” - Luna asked. - “You're putting a lot of hope in us.”

“I trust in us. I trust that we can succeed.” - Avi declared, but could tell Luna was consternated. - “I know that you care, and I know you're doing your best to help them. If you think we should change our plan, or have another one, please tell me.”

“I don't have another plan.” - Luna admitted. - “Daichi might have one, but not me.”

“Do you want us to rely on him?” - Avi asked, slightly surprised.

“No. I don't think you would like it.” - Luna said. - “I also know you don't want a total war, and I don't think one would be winnable according to rumors and data. We will simply do it our way.”

[I promise to stay with you until the very end.] - Eva added.

“Thank you, Eva. It's good to have you as an ally.” - Avi uttered, then intertwined her fingers with Luna's, comforting her. - “Good always wins.”

“Eh.” - Luna sighed, she had less faith. - “I know, I know...”

The girls finished their breakfast and strolled along the promenade, at least until Luna obtained the visas that allowed them to visit the main flower and underwater city. When she asked Avi where she wanted to go, apparently, the girl changed her mind.

“Let's first learn the lessons we came here for.” - Avi said.

“I'm shocked. You prioritize the duty?” - Luna replied. - “That's unlike you.”

“It's just... after our talk, I think I need to put more effort.” - Avi declared. - “I know it's slightly too late for that, and I'm doing it in the last possible moments, but... Luna, once we return to our spaceship, can you train Eva and me on how to use multitask cell?”

“It's never too late.” - Luna encouraged. - “I'm glad you didn't give up completely.”

Avi smiled, confirming silently that she would give her all.