

Last Star 171

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

Avi and Luna approached a temple built on one of the smaller lilies. Columns of religious followers in hooded robes slowly moved forward to the sacred place, folding their hands in prayer. Some were carrying flowers, others incense, and others bars of white steel.

“Are you sure it's the right place?” - Avi asked. - “It's quite a busy square.”

“They're celebrating the 'Blooming'.” - Luna explained. - “The day when pilgrims gifted them the seeds that created this city.”

“Oh...” - Avi uttered. - “...but doesn't that mean that their priest are too occupied to help us?”

“Easy, Avi. Our meeting is already scheduled.” - Luna replied. - “Their ceremony will take only half an hour. Right after, when their adepts will start cleaning the place, one of their enlightened clerics will come and evaluate your spiritual abilities.”

“Alright. What about the celebration? Should we join?” - Avi asked.

“Would you like to?” - Luna replied.

“I think so...?” - Avi hesitated.

Luna considered it a 'yes'. She summoned two hooded cloaks, so they could mingle with the crowd. -
“We already have the outfits, but it would be good to have a gift, too.”

[How about we create one with a miracle?] - Eva suggested.

Avi extended her hands and shaped them like a cup, then focused, imagining blooming Earth roses. Above her fingers, light-blue energy began to gather and swirl, forming buds that slowly opened, revealing hundreds of pale-blue petals.'

“I think it worked.” - Avi said as she opened her eyes. She quickly noticed that Luna was worried, then realized everyone nearby was looking at her, and some people were kneeling.

“The pilgrims! They've returned!” - One person shouted from the crowd, which already started surrounding the girls. A mother with a blind child stepped ahead and knelt before them.

“Please! Have mercy and help my little angel!” - She begged. - “It's my only son, and everyone says he won't survive the winter... but you, pilgrims, you can just touch him and he will be healed!”

Luna listened to it, pitying those people. She felt she had to free them from their delusions.

“Luna. Can you help them?” - Avi asked, unsure if it was possible at all.

Luna just sighed. - "Do I have a choice?" - She analyzed the child with a beam of light, but couldn't figure out which disease he was affected by. - "Strange. The weave of fundamental aspects is damaged, but when I try to interact with it and make repairs, it returns to its broken form. I can cure the symptoms and restore his eyesight, but he'll soon fall sick again."

[Avi, do you see it? His soul is similar to ours.] - Eva pointed out, noticing dark threads, or perhaps roots, intertwined with the boy's souls.

"Yes. I can see it." - Avi confirmed.

[If it affects their soul the same way my soul affects yours, maybe it's the cause of sickness?] - Eva guessed. - [We could try to remove it.]

"Luna... Eva has an idea, but I'm worried I could hurt him." - Avi informed. - "Can you observe if we're not making any big mistakes?"

Luna crossed her arms and spoke to the alien woman. - "Did you hear? It requires a risk."

"O' pilgrims! If my faith is not enough and I lose him, then punish me, too, because I can't live without him." - The woman declared.

"We're NOT pilgrims!" - Luna shouted, making sure that everyone would hear. - "It's a medical procedure and my friend has never attempted it before!"

The woman raised her eyes, unsure how to react to these words. - "...but I saw it... the flowers of Evermoher. I... I don't know what your role is, but I trust she had sent you."

Luna sighed. - "You can't reason with some people..." - Then spoke to Avi. - "Do your thing."

"Okay." - Avi uttered quietly and put her hand to the boy's chest, letting Eva focus and remove the nether-born roots. There was but one issue. She couldn't just erase it from existence. It had to be transferred into Eva's soul.

[I can neutralize it. Don't worry.] - Eva assured.

Avi trusted her and let her finish the soul surgery. Once they were done, Luna encompassed the boy with her light and healed him, causing him to see again. The first thing he could notice was Avi's comforting smile, then the rather cold and unbothered Luna.

"Go to your mom. She's right behind you." - Avi requested politely.

The boy, still in shock, ran to his mother and hugged her. He quickly noticed her sincere tears of happiness and began to cry with relief, too.

"Pilgrims." - Another voice of disbelief could be heard from the crowd, and many other voices soon joined it, causing a small commotion. Avi and Luna were now totally surrounded by people who forgot about the ceremony and instead pushed new patients to the girls.

Seeing this, Luna summoned a force field around herself and Avi, worried that they would be hit or crushed.

"That was predictable." - Luna commented.

"Uhm, can't we just help them?" - Avi asked.

"I'm already doing it. I'm scanning everyone and trying to determine if there are anomalies in their weave. I can heal most of them, but there are four who will need your intervention." - Luna informed.

Avi nodded to confirm she follows.

"Everybody here, except four people touched by my light, is healed! Leave and make some space so we can approach them!" - Luna ordered, but the crowd didn't listen. Instead, they allowed the diseased to be brought to the girls, and Avi promptly healed them, the same way she did earlier.

It wasn't over, though. People were still approaching and moaning about their sick relatives. Luna couldn't control it, but a few monks miraculously made it through the crowd and were willing to help.

"You...?" - One of the enlightened clerics spoke from behind the adepts.

“O', blessed servant!' - The mother of the healed boy called. - “They're the pilgrims! They've saved my child!”

“We're not pilgrims!” - Luna shouted. - “How many times do I have to repeat this!? It's SCIENCE!”

The priest seemed concerned by her declaration, but he came closer to Luna. - “Can you help me get through? I'll try to calm them down.”

Luna let the cleric inside her force field, and that's when he asked. - “I know it's inappropriate for a mere, humble servant to make such a request, but can I promise them that you'll perform more miracles after the ceremony? ”

“Ye...” - Avi was about to agree.

Luna stopped her immediately. - “We can't help everyone. It's mathematically impossible, but we're willing to heal as many people as possible.”

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The cleric seemed to be more interested in Avi's answer, but Avi just lowered her eyes with guilt. She trusted Luna's decision.

“Of course, it's reasonable.” - The cleric said. - “Now, allow me to speak to the crowd.” - He did so, explaining that the pilgrims came to save them, but needed to rest. He encouraged everyone to be patient, emphasizing that the souls that were destined to meet Ever-mother have nothing to be anxious about, and that those who wait and endure their pain will be rewarded.

It took some time before most people were convinced, and the main reason for it was Luna's and Avi's passive waiting and not bothering with any requests, which implied that what the cleric said was true.

Finally, the priest could rest. He noticed the soul roses lying on the pavement and picked them up, then gave them to Avi.

“Is it yours?” - He asked.

Avi nodded shyly.

“You must really be pilgrims, then... and I can see from your robes that you want to pay tribute to your precursors. It's an honor to serve you.” - The priest put one of his knees on the ground, half-kneeling.

Luna rolled her eyes. - “Stand up, please.”

The cleric, however, was still kneeling in silence, so Avi added. - “You don't need to bow. It's exactly as you've said – we've wanted to join the ceremony before you share your teachings with us. We would like to sincerely apologize for causing chaos.”

“Ah, of course.” - The monk stood up. - “You have nothing to apologize for, though. Good deeds and the will to serve those less fortunate know neither time nor circumstances. Please, follow me. A site commemorating your ancestors is a few steps away from here.”

Luna wanted to argue by insisting they weren't pilgrims or their successors, but Avi put her hand on her shoulder and shook her head. - “We don't know their culture. It might be normal here.”

“I hope so.” - Luna uttered gruffly.

Both girls followed the priest and entered the crowd, who stepped aside and made a way, kneeling on both sides. Avi felt awkward seeing this, while Luna was clearly irritated. Soon, in front of them, a shrine appeared. Various gifts were piling up below six statues of astronauts, each with a different emblem - a dove, a heart, a skull, a comet, a question mark, and a hand with an index finger pointing up.

Avi gently put the wreath of soul roses next to them, knelt and prayed quietly before leaving...

Luna, Avi, and the enlightened cleric entered a small library and sat down. Only a single nun joined them as a servant, bringing them tea and a light meal consisting of bread and cottage cheese. Avi felt awkward due to the initial silence because nobody wanted to speak first. Nobody except Luna, who immediately tried to get to the point.

“We're here because my friend needs to learn how to protect her soul from curses, and how to regenerate her soul.” - Luna informed.

"Ah, young spirits. Of course, of course... I'll pass on the knowledge of your ancestors. How many days are you willing to spend on learning, before you depart?" - The priest asked.

Avi peeked at Luna, who said to her. - "Go ahead. It's your call."

"There isn't much time. We still need to find a replacement body for Eva." - Avi said. - "It needs to be max week."

The monk pondered. - "That's... limiting, but it'll be enough to teach you how to close your soul." - He got up and approached a nearby bookshelf, searching for a manual. Once he got it, he put it on the table and opened the first chapter. - "What we don't see and can't touch, can't hurt us." - He spoke. - "I assume you can see souls."

Avi nodded.

"Can you silence your gift?" - The monk asked.

"I think so." - Avi confirmed.

"Do it." - The monk requested, and once Avi's soul changed, he sent a soul message to her. - [Do you hear me?]

"Loud and clear." - Avi replied.

[Can you silence it, too?] - The priest asked.

"Uhm, I don't know. Eva?" - Avi asked.

[Easy peasy.] - Eva informed and cut the message short.

"Hm. Eva?" - The priest noticed.

"It's my friend. We're united. It's a spiritual entity with, uhm, nether soul." - Avi revealed.

The cleric closed the book and attacked Avi with a powerful surge of spiritual energy, which was supposed to mutilate Eva's soul. Avi felt something heavy, like a wave, hitting her chest. She fell with her chair onto the floor, panting and unable to catch a breath.

[That wasn't nice.] - Eva commented. - [Tell him not to try it again.]

"...and there were seven of them, the last one, without name or emblem, was born from darkness." - The cleric uttered. - "Because of her, the pilgrims died, but their word still lives in us. Tell me, are your abilities yours, or do they come from Eva?"

“Uh.” - Avi barely got up, still experiencing pain. - “I think we do it together.”

“Perform a miracle.” - The priest requested.

Avi, although still aching, did as he wished. She summoned a small beetle, which soon wandered around her hand.

“This power is not yours.” - The priest informed. - “Your soul merely interprets it, allows itself to be torn apart and reshaped. You can't create light from darkness, but light will always triumph over darkness. You're sick, and you sacrifice your own self to shape curses into miracles.”

“We already knew it to some degree.” - Luna said. - “That's why we're looking for a replacement body for Eva.”

“How lost I was to think that you were pilgrims. I hope Ever-mother forgives me.” - The monk uttered.

“Hey!” - Luna protested. - “I was telling you we weren't them from the start!”

“...and I should've listened.” - The cleric said. - “Still, you bring the gift of healing, despite being merely common people.”

"It's mostly science." - Luna emphasized. - "Once I give you our diagnostic algorithms and teach you the methodology of treatment, you will be able to do it, too. Well, as long as it's not the soul that is affected. Only Avi can cure curses."

"How?" - The monk asked.

"Uhm... Eva eats... eee... those black threads inside their souls." - Avi explained.

"...and accelerates your death." - The cleric informed. - "Please, don't do that again."

[I didn't know. I'm sorry.] - Eva uttered.

The monk pondered, depressed. - "Those threads, they are the curse of the nameless one. There are people among us who still worship her and spread her heresy. Your soul is indeed an open one, but only Eva can close it. Teaching her how to do it isn't a good idea."

Luna moved back in her chair, irritated. - "So much effort for nothing..."

"Luna, I can accept it." - Avi interrupted. - "We will have to figure things out ourselves."

The priest got up and opened his book. - "You weren't sent by pilgrims, but there's good in every person who follows the will of Ever-mother. As long as you're still willing to help us, we'll gladly accept your technology..." - He then spoke to Avi. - "...and we'll pray for you. Your path isn't an easy one."

"Uhm. Thank you?" - Avi replied.

"If there's anything else we can do for you, let us know." - Luna added.

The priest judged Luna's soul. - "There's a lot of potential in you, but you're not willing to open to it."

"What do you mean?" - Luna asked.

"Your soul can open in a way unlike any other..." - The monk explained. - "...and with that power, you can do much good."

"Actually, I'm kind of working on it." - Luna revealed. - "Although I must admit, I don't like playing with those nonsensical powers. I'll do it my own way, analyzing and studying the nature of souls, just like I research other fundamental aspects."

"Although you can't measure what's invisible and intangible..." - The priest replied. - "...perhaps the essence of your existence will speak in the language of knowledge and understanding. I have some advice for you – once you see the light, don't reject what lies beyond cognition."

"Nothing is beyond cognition." - Luna declared. - "Not for me."

"Greater than you died, blinded by their ambitions..." - The priest warned. - "...some even died without leaving this world. Speaking of this, that's what I wanted to discuss, because you were willing to help us."

Luna raised her brow. - "Speak."

"Some lost souls can't return..." - The monk spoke. - "There are liars among us, who paint a false image of Ever-mother. Their cult attracts the weak and those who have already given up, and just like Eva, they transfer the problems elsewhere. They offer penitents and sinners to death, and are not healing."

"Sounds like a difference of opinions to me." - Luna commented.

"It's not!" - The cleric protested. - "They're hiding in the caves and forests, abducting those who don't follow their faith, forcing them to either renunciate their religion, or to be slaves for their experiments or repositories for their curses."

"Well, that does sound much worse." - Luna admitted. - "I assume you want me to handle this?"

"You can't stop curses or miracles with technology..." - The priest spoke. - "...but I think you could still control or limit their influence."

Luna sighed. - "I've figured this out when we've tried to heal your people. What exactly do you want us to do?"

"We want to know where the leaders of their sect hide." - The cleric said. - "The inquisitors will handle the rest."

"Hm. If cultists can conceal their soul presence, then it might not be easy." - Luna noticed. - "Avi might be able to find them, but I assume your beliefs are against it, and well, it could hurt her, too."

"I see you have some experience." - The priest noticed. - "Indeed, it's as you say, but worry not, only trained cultists can be a problem. If you were to attack their supply lines, or stop them from attacking ours..."

"...it will be easier to draw out their leaders." - Luna deduced. - "That's when you'll strike."

The priest nodded.

"So, Avi. What do you think?" - Luna asked.

"I would prefer to talk to those people. I won't want anyone to get hurt." - Avi declared.

"I'll make sure everyone stays safe." - Luna assured.

Avi had doubts. - "What about curses? You don't know how to stop those! I don't want them to start killing each other!"

"The inquisition doesn't kill." - The priest corrected. - "They only seal."

"There is your answer." - Luna summed up.

Avi was still hesitant. She considered the negotiations and dialogue to be a better alternative, but she also knew the church had probably already tried it more than once.

"I won't start this operation without you." - Luna added.

"Okay..." - Avi agreed. - "...but please, be cautious."