

Last Star 19

Star VII ~ The Dream of Flight ~ Part I

One and a half days have passed. Luna's spaceship was anchored in orbit around a white dwarf star.

Avi stood on the bridge, gazing with her sad eyes into the distant void. Luna, after leaving her control slot, had a similar expression.

"Report, ready." - Luna informed, the tone of her voice foretold bad news.

"Please, speak."

"One planet."

"...and the space station?"

"I didn't detect any working technology." - Luna said. - "The station is inactive or destroyed."

Avi leaned against the computers. - "Can you still locate it?"

"No..."

Hiding her head in her arms, Avi muttered. - “What are we supposed to do now?”

“I don't know... the planet seems interesting. It has an anomalous structure. Should we land?”

“I really don't know. Do we even have time?”

Luna was saddened, she wished for Avi's desire to explore and journey into the unknown to return, because she knew that's what brings her joy. But now, when there was a new priority, everything was gone. Luna opened her mouth, ready to speak, ready to find an excuse to land, but Avi was first.

Avi lifted her head. - “Okay... we'll just peek. Maybe we'll find some hints up close.”

“In that case, I'll do my best!” - Luna promised, her face brighter.

The spaceship flew through black-red clouds. Avi, leaning over the window, looked for interesting structures, but she couldn't notice anything other than islands floating in the air. Their shadowy shapes were overgrown by sharp glass, and below them, beneath grey fog, were abysses, leading down who knows how deep.

“Luna... there is no point, there is nothing here.” - Avi said, even if she missed the chance to explore otherworldly landscapes.

“Avi... I detect a very weak signal from the Isles on the other side of the planet.”

“You mean...!?”

“Somebody was here and left something.” - Luna informed. - “I'll land there, nearby. Then we'll drive.”

“I'll prepare our transporter and call Caleb!” - Avi said in a hurry, leaving Luna alone.

The spaceship turned and dove into the mist, then stopped, grinding into the glass shards. Luna entered the garage right when Avi was equipping her suit.

“Caleb, ready for the first adventure?” - Avi asked the former Scout, who was currently hibernating on top of the van.

“Ready. I'm not sure If I'll be useful, though. The mobility module is hard to understand.” - Caleb responded.

"I would start with learning how to glide. This planet has low gravity and a lot of empty space, so it's ideal for training." - Luna interjected. - "Avi could also learn a lot here."

"Okay!" - Avi agreed. - "We'll find a bit of time, but the mission is more important!"

"Ehh..." - Luna sighed.

"Uhm. Yes, Luna?" - Avi wondered what was on her friend's mind.

"I understand the importance of our mission, but your ability to control the cell and Caleb's synchronization with Scout's body shouldn't be neglected. It could have an impact on us in the future. The better we are prepared for every plausible scenario, the bigger our chances of success." - Luna explained.

"I... never thought about it." - Avi muttered out.

"You already know how dangerous our journey has been so far." - Luna added.

"I know." - Avi said, quite serious. - "I'll train hard to handle any task."

Luna smiled gently. - "In that case, I'll just put on my shoes and we can go. I'll lead."

Avi nodded with a confident smile, and Caleb jumped down onto her shoulder, also nodding.

After the garage opened, Luna slowly and carefully levitated their van forward, centimeters above the layer of sharp glass. She could only see a few meters in front of her in the mist, but she knew the terrain well.

She drove closer until she and her companions could hear an intensifying beeping. Then, from behind a mist, two meters above the ground, a red light appeared. Once Luna arrived at the spot, from behind the van's window, everyone could see a tall vertical mast with a long cable running along the cliff.

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"What is it?" - Avi asked.

"Antenna." - Luna answered.

"Why is it here?" - Avi asked again.

"I don't know, let's examine it." - Luna suggested.

Van's door opened, and Avi jumped down, crushing the glass under her boots. Luna held her hand and descended cautiously, her face directed at Scout.

"Caleb." - Luna called him.

"On alert." - He replied.

"Can you analyze the cables for me?" - Luna asked.

"Scanning..." - Caleb informed, and his pupils widened. - "It looks like an optical fiber encircled by measuring equipment. Whatever was studied here it's below, and the signals are transmitted to outer space."

"To outer space?" - Avi uttered. - "To the space station!? We did it!!! We really did it!!!" - She didn't hide her joy. - "Luna! You must be able to locate it!"

Luna calmed her friend down. - "Yes. It shouldn't be a problem... but if we are already here, the knowledge of what's below us might be useful. We might even find information about the astronaut from the soap planet."

"Okay." - Avi said. - "Let's go down there quickly, and then we'll follow the signal."

“You should be more cautious than in a rush.” - Luna advised and approached the antenna, then ran her fingers over its surface until she found a steel panel. She unscrewed it with telekinesis, then looked inside, put a hand in there, and moved a few switches. - “I know the coordinates... but that signal is weird... like pulsing veins and nothing else.”

“Well, so there is nothing left to do other than follow the cable.” - Avi said and held out her hand. - “We'll learn its purpose.”

Luna clasped her hand firmly around Avi's fingers. - “Surely.”

They followed the cable to a cliff from which it dangled, disappearing into the fog.

“We can descend in our van... well, unless you want to try gliding.” - Luna suggested with a sly grin.

“Glide... there!? Are you crazy!!?” - Avi shouted.

“Just kidding...” - Luna laughed, then pointed at the nearby island below them. - “...but you can still fly there.”

“But it's separated by a chasm! What if we fall?!” - Avi still couldn't accept Luna's idea.

"You've the cell." - Luna said. - "How about... building a safety net?"

Avi looked at the abyss once more. - "I can try... but... are you sure it's a good idea? We can always find a better planet."

Luna waved her head. - "This one is ideal. We might not get a second chance anytime soon."

"Okay... okay... I will try, but only this one time." - Avi replied.

"One time is enough, I'm sure you'll pick it up quickly." - Luna said.

Avi followed Luna's idea of building a net to catch them, but she still looked at the distance that separated both planets with uncertainty. - "Caleb... maybe, you first?"

Caleb analyzed the strength and direction of the wind, then responded. - "Caleb... needs instructions."

"Avi, can you lend me your wrist guard?" - Luna asked. - "I'll send him a flight simulation."

"Here..." - Avi said, removing the brace.

After equipping it, Luna relayed the appropriate data to Caleb, who silently spread his wings and leaped off Avi's shoulder. His bird body glided down, its flight supported by jets installed underneath its steel feathers. He landed without seemingly without any issues and then waved to Avi from the opposite island.

"See? It's not that difficult." - Luna encouraged.

"I'm not sure." - Avi replied. - "I think you were cheating."

"You can make way larger wings than Caleb has. He needed some assistance." - Luna said.

"...and he had the simulation." - Avi added. - "I don't know what I should do."

Luna stepped up to Avi, then grabbed her under arms and brought her cheek just an inch away from Avi's ear. - "Lift the cell, as if you were raising your arms wide."

Avi blushed, but she followed the instructions. From her back, a pair of impressive wings spread.

"Higher and wider." - Luna delicately lifted Avi's arms.

"Like this?" - Avi asked.

"Mmm... yes, it's good for the start." - Luna backed away, giving Avi space and lay her hands on Avi's back and under belly. - "Now, we'll approach the cliff and softly lean forward."

Luna tilted Avi, holding her over the abyss. - "Do you feel the wind under your wings? I want you to remember this feeling. When you take your run, position your wings to feel the breeze, push off, and keep straight until the very end." - Luna brought Avi back up. - "If you start losing altitude, make thin membranes between your body and limbs."

"I think... I get it." - Avi said, taking a few steps back.

"Ready?" - Luna asked, smiling gently.

"No, I don't think that I'll ever be ready." - Avi said. - "Please, assist me."

"If anything goes wrong, I'll be nearby and prepared." - Luna added.

"Okay." - Avi took a deep breath and then exhaled. She leaned forward to catch the wind and started to run. After a moment, she felt herself lift on her own, without jumping off the cliff yet. As she ran, it turned into longer and longer leaps, and five meters before the cliff's end, Avi ascended and soared. She flew so high that she was at risk of passing the isle and the safety net.

Avi started shouting. - "Luna! How do I land!!!"

Seeing that the situation became dangerous, Luna quickly sent instructions to Avi's helmet. - "Tilt left, or you'll miss the island!"

Avi listened and began spiraling her way down to the ground. Her speed was still too high.

"When you are close to landing, straighten your flight and raise the front of your wings to increase lift and decelerate." - Luna continued.

"I don't know if I can. I'm dizzy." - Avi complained.

"You'll be fine!" - Luna shouted.

Seeing that the glass grass is only a dozen meters below her, Avi followed the instructions. When she changed the position of her wings, she quickly felt that her speed decreased, then her legs bounded off the ground twice. She fell on all fours, feeling the shards crush under her weight.

For Luna, it was a success. Overjoyed, she called Avi. - "How was it!?"

"I imagined my first flight differently." - Avi said. - "I think I prefer to walk, at least for now. Can you fly down to us?"

Luna entered the van and set levitation modules to maximum power, then allowed Avi and Caleb to re-enter it.

"Once we finish our mission here, we can train a bit more, for better practice." - Luna said, still smiling.

Avi was glued to her chair, she felt nauseous. - "Luna... I don't think it's a good idea. Can we leave it for later?"

"I thought you liked flying." - Luna said.

"I liked, when it was a dream, not a reality." - Avi answered pragmatically.

"Ohh..." - Luna's smile faded. - "How about you, Caleb, would you like to do it again?"

"Not necessary. Caleb understands the idea." - Caleb replied.

"Okay, in such a case, I'll lead us down, but do know, it might be a long trip." - Luna informed.

"If it's so, then I'll catch a nap." - Avi said and adjusted her chair using the button below the armrest. -
"Please give me a nudge when you see something interesting."