

Last Star 205

The Last Star ~ Sixth magnitude star

Eva cleared away the snow, revealing a transport platform and its control panel. When she bypassed the primitive security, the heavy steel shook violently, then began creaking loudly and moving down a glacier shaft.

When the darkness of the ocean enveloped the trio of girls, Luna's pale light, like the last dying star, was the only thing that illuminated their path. Hours passed without any food or water, making the astronauts gradually lose strength, but the elevator eventually stopped. What was at the bottom seemed to be just an endless darkness, a trap for those who wandered too far.

Still, there was a barely noticeable light in the distance, similar to Luna's.

“Daichi?” - Avi asked as she got up. Her friends were still sleeping, so she decided to look for him alone.

The light approached, so Avi hurried towards it, but once she was close, it faded and reappeared elsewhere.

“Daichi!?” - Avi shouted again.

Her call was answered by an amused giggle.

"It's not Daichi..." - Avi uttered, anxious. She turned back, searching for Luna, but more lights materialized around her, concealing her friend.

"Where are you flying, little cuckoo?" - A familiar voice asked.

Cold wind blew, giving Avi goosebumps. She took a step back.

"Are you afraid of your mom? That makes me sad..." - The voice spoke. - "...but know that my love forgives everything and never, NEVER forgets."

"Who are you!?" - Avi shouted.

"A bad liar." - The voice whispered to her ear.

Avi's heart skipped a beat. She turned around, but didn't notice anyone. An echo of an amused giggle could be heard from all directions, but soon faded as if the eerie presence retreated. The only thing that remained was a single light in the distance.

"Luna!" - Avi rushed towards it, but she felt someone holding her wrist.

"Wait!" - Again, a familiar voice spoke, but this time, it was a voice of someone else.

“Una?” - Avi uttered, surprised.

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“It's too dangerous. Follow me.” - Una asked.

“I can't. Luna waits for me!” - Avi pulled her hand out.

Una grabbed her again, with both hands. - “It's not Luna! It's a trick!”

“Una.” - Avi spoke calmly. - “I can feel you shaking, and I know your voice now. You're desperate.”

“I want to help you!” - Una denied. - “Why won't you trust me!?”

“It's not a matter of trust.” - Avi said, pointing at the light. - “I know how Luna looks! I know it's HER!!”

“Please... I want to help you.” - Una begged.

“Let me go, then.” - Avi asked.

Una withdrew her hands, but as soon as Avi made a step forward, she leaped to grab her belt. - "I can't... I can't go back there! Avi, you have to help me! You have to... mhm... mhm!!!"

Avi turned to her, recognizing black arms that covered Una's mouth. More hands emerged from the darkness, wrapping themselves around Una and tightening their grip, then pulling her back into the void. Although Avi wanted to help, she was too paralyzed by fear. She couldn't move until more of the arms appeared and began approaching her.

Avi's heart, which previously felt like it had almost stopped, was now racing. She began to run without looking behind her, not even noticing the arms that flooded the area like a black ocean. She ran until she couldn't breathe, but Luna's light slowly faded until it became a tiny mote of hope...

Avi woke up screaming and clutching her pounding heart. Eva's multitask cell surrounded her, ready to assist.

Luna exhaled with relief. - "I'm so glad it worked."

Avi calmed down. - "Sorry for waking you up... I had a nightmare."

"Nightmare?" - Luna uttered. - "Avi. Your heart had stopped. If not Eva, we would've lost you."

“That would explain why I feel so exhausted.” - Avi commented.

“You don't seem concerned.” - Luna noticed.

“I got used to it.” - Avi said, forcing a half-smile. - “Are we there?”

“We are.” - Eva quietly informed.

“We should rest first, and I'm serious. It can wait.” - Luna said.

“Luna. If we keep waiting, we'll be out of strength soon.” - Avi argued. - “You should be aware of that.”

“At least five minutes. Let your body calm down.” - Luna asked.

“A minute.” - Avi negotiated.

“Three, don't try to haggle it down.” - Luna demanded.

Avi smiled maliciously. - "Tw..."

"Avi." - Eva scolded. - "I know you're trying to cheer us up, but it's not funny at all."

Avi looked at Luna. It was hard to read her feelings when she was a sphere, but the weak flickering of her light told Avi enough. - "I'm sorry. Three minutes."

Luna's light reflected off the fluctuating surface of the portal. The moment when three girls decided together to cross became etched into her memory. Mostly, it was Avi's optimistic smile, which still tried to lift the mood. However, Luna didn't feel that. Instead, she felt growing pressure, a heavy weight she carried inside, the Echo of Apocalypse.

This time, there were no interdimensional tunnels, nor a sorting chamber, nor any other hellish structure. In front of them, a wrinkly old woman sat on a crumbling wooden throne, with a witch hat on top of her long white hair.

She uttered no word and just lifted her finger, pointing at Luna, who disappeared into nothing.