Last Star 28

Star IX ~ Home ~ Part II

Avi and Luna enjoyed their Aragawa alcohol in peace, and Avi was in quite a good mood. She rested her head on Luna's shoulder and swirled the crystal glass.

"It's nice here, these fleeting moments are so very worth remembering." - Avi whispered, moving her nose closer to Luna's hair.

Luna brought the glass to her lips and sipped the liquor. She looked at Avi, who, with a blissful smile, rubbed against her neck, and the corners of her lips lifted slightly, then she kissed Avi on her forehead.

"Feeling comfy?" - Luna asked quietly.

"I like your smell so much, when I'm next to you and close my eyes... It's like pure, dancing slowflakes."

"...and I like the touch and warmth of your hair." - Luna said, combing through Avi's loose hair. - "...I feel as if I'm walking through fields of wheat, wrapped in the warm light of the rising summer sun."

"Can we stay like this a bit longer?" - Avi asked.

"If you only wish."

"Mmm... I'll take an hour-long nap... and then... then..." - Before Avi could finish, she was already snoozing.

When Avi woke up, Luna was still watching her. She welcomed Avi with a smile, and the girl shifted to sit straight, stretched her hands, and wiped her eyes.

"Was I sleeping for long?" - Avi asked.

"About two hours, but we didn't miss a thing." - Luna said. - "We don't have to hurry."

Avi was thinking for a second. - "I... don't know."

"Is something troubling you?"

"God's Sickle... and the whole situation with Aurora. When we rest like this, I feel a bit guilty."

"Your well-being is also important. Good morale has a positive influence on our effectiveness."

"...maybe ...but I think we've gotten a little carried away." - Avi replied. - "We shouldn't stop searching."

"I understand."

Avi gazed at Luna, but couldn't read anything from her enigmatic expression. She wondered what their next steps should be. - "Maybe we'll ask our squid to help?"

"It seems like a good idea."

"Excuse me, dear assistant, are you still here?" - Avi called.

"I'm coming right now!" - The mascot rematerialized, spinning around its own axis. - "How can I help you?"

"We need something that would allow us to use data interfaces designed for the native population." - Avi explained.

"Ohh... that might be a hard task." - The assistant spoke. - "You'll need an appropriate pass that indicates extraordinary citizenship."

"Uhm... is it possible to acquire it?" - Avi asked.

"Hmm... the easiest way is to serve a few dozen years on the commerce fleet, but even that is rare. Not everyone is allowed direct access to the transporters." - The squid replied.

"Ohh..." - Avi sighed, resigned.

"Avi, leave it to me." - Luna continued, still confident. - "Can we arrange a visit to the office of someone who previously possessed such a pass?"

The squid twinkled, thinking for a longer moment. - "The butterfly matron, Ronra Naad. She's not present here, but I can send her a message via quantum device."

"Wait..." - Avi's eyes sparkled. - "...are you saying, she's... alive?"

"Of course. She's in her outpost in the nearest system, Genesis Star."

"Did you hear Luna!?" - Avi shouted. - "There is someone out there!"

"That's... good news." - Luna said, then turned to the virtual assistant. - "Please, inform the matron that we would like to discuss an urgent matter with her."

"As you wish!" - The mascot summoned a flat, holographic panel in front of her tentacles, then inputted instructions. - "Done! Oho... we have a direct call. The matron wants to speak!"

"Connect!" - Avi yelled, almost jumping out of the sofa.

"Cough... cough... Greetings in the name of... Mourning Penitent's Hive." - The matron breathed irregularly and coughed a lot, it sounded like she was speaking through an oxygen mask.

Avi was in disbelief. She sat in silence for a moment, stunned.

"Cough... is anyone... there?" - The matron asked.

Avi came to her senses quickly. - "It's a pleasure to speak with a Butterfly Matron herself! I'm Avi, from Earth, accompanied by Luna, from its moon."

"Earth? I don't know that system." - The matron replied. - "Do you belong to the generation from the forbidden system, or to abyss travelers?"

"I... don't know." - Avi muttered. - "Luna?"

"I'll send the coordinates of our origin to the virtual assistant. Please judge yourself." - Luna mentioned.

"Ahh... children of Necrosis...? What's the miracle behind that...?" - The matron was clearly astonished.

"Sorry... I'm lost." - Avi mumbled out.

"You shouldn't be alive." - The matron replied. - "Universal Necrosis flooded those regions."

"...but here we are, and we look for answers. We also have an important delivery for God's Sickle. Apparently, it can save many lives." - Avi revealed.

"God's Sickle? That's an enclave of betrayers and murderers. You should... show it to me. I'll judge what needs to be done next." - The matron spoke in an exhausted voice. - "Do... you need... anything else?"

"Yes, an adapter." - Luna added. - "It can be useful while we are here."

Stolen from its rightful author, this tale is not meant to be on Amazon; report any sightings.

"An adapter?" - The matron said. - "What do you need it for?"

"We wanted to explore Pioneer. We were looking for information on where to travel next... and we also found something strange." - Avi answered.

"What exactly?" - The matron asked.

"A white tree in a pocket dimension, there was a crystal fragment inside." - Luna explained.

"White tree? Fragment? I don't know what you are talking about... but... cough... cough... the Buscarriati House had fallen. If it had secrets, they're worth uncovering... if you're able to do so. I will... cough, cough... share the adapter with you. My pass will be sent to the virtual assistant. Allow it to guide you."

"Thank you!" - Avi replied.

"No, I'm the one grateful. In the name of hive, and my own... it had been a long time since I talked to anyone... but now, I wish to rest. Come to Genesis Star as soon as possible, I want to see you with my own eyes."

"We'll come!" - Avi assured.

"In that case, see you soon." - The matron added.

"Goodbye!" - Avi finished, then the matron disconnected.

"Luna! We finally know what we are supposed to do!" - Avi spoke.

"Maybe." - Luna was sceptical. - "The problem is, we didn't learn a lot, and we revealed a lot."

"I don't understand." - Avi said.

"I would be more cautious next time, we don't need to lay all our cards on the table." - Luna explained.

"You should have more faith that everything will be fine!" - Avi argued.

"No, Avi. You wouldn't trust God's Sickle, so why would she be different?" - Luna asked.

"...because they know about them? Maybe they're victims too." - Avi said. - "That means, they should understand how much damage evil can do."

"I wouldn't be so sure. Selfishness and greed reside in every one of us." - Luna said.

"I don't want to think that way." - Avi argued. - "...but I trust you. Maybe you're right, I will try to be more careful next time."

"Thank you." - Luna replied, then turned to the virtual assistant. - "Will you lead us to Ronra's office?"

"For our generous clients, everything." - The squid said ceremoniously, bowing. - "Would you like me to give you a tour of the city while we're at it? There are a few interesting places close by."

"Avi?" - Luna asked.

"We'll just take a peek, there is no need to spend the entire day." - Avi summed up.

After traveling all the way down via elevator, the assistant called a taxi. Luna and Avi were soon driving the empty streets, watching as glowing signs, colorful banners, and neon lights reflected in the glass surfaces of skyscrapers.

"Please look to your right, we'll soon pass a Geafird's memorial, he was called a sage of fiery heart." - The squid declared, and a few hundred meters later, on a large square between buildings, there appeared an aquamarine statue of an eight-armed slug. In their hands was a papyrus scroll, and inside its chest was a large ruby that glowed with red light. - "Geafird was executed for the declaration and spreading of the fourteen commercial laws, in the times when human trafficking and drug trade were common. He and his companions died as martyrs, years before the incursion of the House of Unity, but they were precursors of the coming changes, because many later followed in their steps."

"They died for the idea." - Avi said, gazing at the tentacle-bearded face of the sage. - "For the hope of a better tomorrow. Like heroes that my parents told me stories about."

"I never understood this pathos in human literature. The change can often be achieved slowly, without risking one's life." - Luna commented. - "Without spilling one's own blood."

Avi waved her head. - "Maybe you're right, but how much of human suffering would continue without their sacrifice? Some problems need to be solved here and now, even if you must pay the highest price. That way, one life can be worth millions."

"That sounds like a cold calculation." - Luna replied. - "And it low-key disregards the sacrifice and effort of other remarkable individuals."

"I agree with you, maybe I said it too hastily, but I still don't think that their death was pointless. Some battles must be fought." - Avi said.

"Dialogue seems to be a better solution." - Luna argued.

"Dialogue is not always possible." - Avi averted her pained gaze. - "I... learned that very well."

The squid flew between Luna and Avi. - "Geafird tried dialogue, and because of that dialogue, he died. Only then, after him, the armed rebellion against the oppressors brought order and stability."

"Eh... if only some people wanted to listen." - Luna sighed. - "Why is it so hard to make simple changes?"

"I don't know." - Avi replied. - "Maybe, some people are afraid of changes, of losing their comfortable lifestyle and having to work on improvement. Maybe some don't even have a choice to change. I quietly hope that our generation won't have to make decisions like theirs."

"I'll do my best to bring your hopes true." - Luna said with conviction. - "I don't want anyone's sacrifice."

"You can't live without sacrifice." - Avi muttered.

"Then, leave the sacrifice to me." - Luna requested. - "I will protect you."

"Luna... I know you mean well..." - Avi responded. - "...I just pray, you won't have to do it. I don't want... your pain, I don't want to lose you."

"I won't give up as long as you're with me. I promise." - Luna laid her hand on Avi's wrist.

Avi lifted her eyes, slightly embarrassed by Luna's kind expression. - "I... trust you."

The car passed the square, and droplets of rain chased each other down its window. There were a few other important locations around the city, like the tallest office buildings, the headquarters of well-known corporations, sculpture exhibitions, and a road through the park. Ultimately, the car arrived at the city exit and entered the suburbs, where the jungle mixed with the infrastructure.

The self-driving car slowed down and stopped in front of the walls of a large residence. Luna and Avi got out, and Avi created a small umbrella with her cell. When the squid let the detector scan her virtual card, the gilded gate opened and let everyone inside.

In the inner courtyard, it was possible to notice garden robo-servants, who were busy cutting the trees in neat shapes of perfect spheres. Between brush leaves, many mechanical butterflies danced, their glass pink wings fluttering and pollinating the azure, cup-shaped flowers that grew in clusters along the edges of the cobblestone path. Between the grasses, there were croaking cybernetic frogs, and in the ponds, there were long snakes with feather-like scales. Everything was illuminated by red lanterns with golden ribbons that swayed in the rain, which enriched the ambience of the place with their dim light.

Before entering the main palace, Avi lifted her eyes to look at the higher floors. Three small roofs with upturned corners decorated a pagoda-stylized building, and from the balconies, white vines were hanging, a wax-like aroma was coming from their pure as snow flowers with five petals.

Avi opened the sliding doors and entered an empty hall constructed from dry, yellow bamboo. On the side walls, there were shelves of plants, and next to them, armor stands and glass cases with ancient weapons.

Luna approached one of the stands, studying a black skin-tight armor. Its dark leather had a golden shine to it, and behind were six dragonfly-like wings. Its helmet was marked by a double-crossed letter T.

"Avi." - Luna uttered. - "The symbol on this armor it's a glyph of my creators."

"Really?" - Avi came closer. - "What does it mean?"

"I hope that Ronra Naad will know the answer." - Luna replied. - "I feel we might be getting closer to something very important... and the armor itself, its durability can equal the power of your cell. That's what makes me confident about its origin."

"Do you think we should look around more?" - Avi asked.

"Who knows." - Luna scanned the room and approached a spear with three runes, its tip was an orange, incandescent piece of steel. - "Its signature shows it was manufactured in the Iron Crown... and this..." - Luna moved to a miniature needle in a small box cushioned in red. - "...I think it's from their home system. It's a very deadly and quick weapon."

"Do you think... there is a threat to us?" - Avi asked.

"I'll be fine, but if they turn out to be hostile, you alone could have trouble surviving. Everything depends on your level of cell mastery."

"The matron... seemed supportive of us." - Avi uttered.

"Key word. Seemed." - Luna said. - "In the near future, let's be cautious and never split."

"Mm. Okay. I understand." - Avi said, then both girls climbed the stairs to the office.

"Here it is!" - Luna shouted as she took the adapter out of the desk. It looked like a cybernetic collar. - "That should be enough to hack into Pioneer's inner network."

"Then, back to Pioneer?" - Avi asked.

"Not so fast, our spaceship is still being upgraded." - Luna reminded.

"Time is important too, though." - Avi mentioned.

"I'll figure out something." - Luna said. - "With this device, it'll be easier to do that. I just have to find a web-entry point."

The squid assistant materialized before the girls, suggesting. - "Or you can rely on me."

"What do you mean?" - Avi asked.

"For a small fee to cover insurance costs, our company will be happy to provide you with an alternative means of transport." - The squid informed.

"Well, then let's not wait any further. Where can we find it?" - Luna inquired.

"On the top of our building, there are a few private space survey units." - The virtual assistant explained.
- "Should I call the taxi?"

"Yes!" - Avi shouted.

"Done. I'll wait next to the car." - The squid said, then vanished.