

Last Star 51

Star XXI ~ Resuscitated Hope

The spaceship arrived at the twenty-first star system shortly before the time appointed by the Astronauts. An ominous light of the orange sun illuminated an asteroid belt slowly drifting in its orbit. Avi was already waiting, checking the radar every few seconds. Her heart was pounding with uncertainty.

“Time is up.” - Avi muttered. - “Where are they?” - She whispered with impatience.

Suddenly, the holographic map of star systems lit up with thousands of lights, and beyond the windshield, Avi could observe a large fleet of massive spaceships, all with heavy armor and various weapons.

The lamp next to her intercom turned on, signaling that the messenger of the Astronauts wants to speak.

“Avi, here.” - Avi relayed after activating the device.

“Are you ready for the exchange?” - A familiar voice asked.

“We should talk first.” - Avi declared. - “We want to make sure you won't use it for evil.”

"I understand, you're still hesitant. Come and allow me to clear up your doubts." - The voice replied -
"I'm sending you the coordinates of our flagship."

"Someone must watch our ship and Virka." - Luna interjected. - "Do you want to go just by yourself?"

"Will you let me?" - Avi asked.

"I'll be ready to assist you, but my reaction time will be delayed due to the far distance. Take the multitask cell, but be discreet about it."

"I'll do as you say. Thanks for trusting me."

"Just... come back to us soon."

"I will."

Luna's van flew inside the flagship's side airlock, and after making an exit, Avi had to climb the stairs. It seemed there was not a single soul on the spaceship, and Avi thought for a moment that she would be lost, at least until she found a blueprint that pointed exactly where to go.

As she passed the long hallways, Avi clutched Aurora tightly to her chest. Due to the lack of Luna's company, she felt uneasy, but her heart told her it was something she needed to do alone.

Finally, Avi stopped before a sterile, white door, where red lights of a scanner examined her equipment, then let her inside. She was greeted by a large, round table, where the familiar icosahedron being was sitting. On each of his sides, there were two robots with woman-like bodies, both in dresses made of steel plates, with featureless faces and holding obsidian halberds.

Avi sat on the other end of the table, gently caressing Aurora to calm her down.

"Should we start our negotiations, or would you like a drink before? We have an excellent infusion based on honey and mint."

Avi waved her head. - "Thank you, but it won't take that long."

"In that case, please speak your mind and ask anything you like." - Icosahedron suggested.

"Well, to start off, I've an important message from my friend." - Avi explained. - "One of the eighty-six immortals is dead."

Icosahedron's right hand slightly trembled. - "That's... a preposterous assertion."

"We have proof, it's in the nearest star system. You can see for yourself." - Avi calmly added.

"I don't sense any deceit in your voice." - The negotiator spoke. - "We'll do as you say, a recon probe will travel there shortly."

"Can you clear things up for me? Who exactly are the immortals?" - Avi asked.

"An important leverage in the battle for the fate of all existence. If even they can die... she will come. She'll come for everyone, and every star will eventually die."

"She?"

"You don't know?"

"No, I have no idea who you are talking about."

"The Infinity Witch."

"Does she have anything to do with Necrosis? I thought that's what our fight was about."

"The necrosis... is a secondary problem, but still a problem. For countless cycles, Astronauts fought on a dozen fronts. Even the victory against Necrosis wouldn't solve our biggest issue."

"It's all starting to get too complicated."

"That's why you need to trust us. There are forces beyond your comprehension at play."

"If you want my trust, you will answer a few more questions."

"I eagerly await them."

Avi was preparing the accusations in her mind. - "What happened to the population of this planet?" - She pushed a few buttons on her wrist, showing the seventh star system.

Icosahedron flinched. - "I have no information about it."

"Astronauts abducted them against their will. It was in the logs."

"Once again, the knowledge of that event is unavailable to me." - The icosahedron spoke. - "My branch doesn't interfere in the affairs of other divisions."

“...and what about what you did to miners of crimson dust? You left their civilization to die. You don't know anything about it, too, about how you also genocided sentient creatures to create a soul-killing weapon?”

“I...” - Icosahedron stammered for a moment. - “...I understand what this is about. You have the right to blame us, but without our actions, we would have lost the arms race a long time ago.”

“Considering all that, how am I supposed to believe that you will fix everything!?”

“Some beings are better off dead. You must trust me on this.”

“I will never agree to that! Where do you draw the line between who should live and who shouldn't!? Between who deserves a second chance, and whose heart is supposed never to beat again?”

“We have a method.”

“Some cold calculations!?”

“No. Everyone will face a fair judgment. Those who choose to continue to walk the path of evil will be left with no mercy.”

“I can't agree to that! It's still a murder!” - Avi protested.

"For those who brought a fate worse than death upon many of us, it's an adequate punishment." - The icosahedron replied. - "Our brothers and sisters were trapped in a perpetual cycle of cruel torture, consumed by eternal fire, to fuel the witch's power. Many of our people were taken, many had their memories altered to the point where they can't tell the difference between lies and reality. Those who want nothing but the death and suffering of all existence don't deserve a second chance. There are beings that were born evil and destructive, you can't change the nature of a bear or a snake. Just like these animals need to hunt their prey to live, our enemies have harvested the lives of many. Do you still believe that you are capable of changing that?"

Avi clenched her fist. - "I don't know yet. I didn't try."

"But we did. It's a war, and you can't win a war without sacrifices, Avi."

Avi hesitated. - "The Yggdrasil's cargo, what do you need it for?"

"To save more lives, nothing more. It won't happen if it ends up in the wrong hands. With us, it'll be safe."

"Okay... I understand. I can't change your mind, but maybe it'll help someone." - Avi uttered, then lifted Aurora. - "Just promise you won't hurt her."

"This... is the cargo? You had it with you all this time?" - The icosahedron was in disbelief.

"Yes. Now, fulfill your part of the deal." - Avi answered.

"A moment." - The icosahedron snapped his fingers to one of his servants. - "I have to analyze it to confirm the authenticity of the cargo. In the meantime, if you still have any doubts, do ask."

Avi pondered a bit, wondering if she forgot anything. - "One more thing... do you know someone named Daichi?"

"Daichi?" - The icosahedron replied. - "Yes, I noticed the similarities. I didn't think you knew each other, though."

"We don't..." - Avi said. - "...but he's the last living man from Earth. I would like to find him."

"We can't help you with that. He's guilty of many transgressions against our faction. He needs to be captured and sentenced."

"What did he do?"

"We can't tell you." - The icosahedron added as his servant returned with a report, which was passed to him.

Avi saddened. - "I only wanted to talk to him. To tell him that he's not alone among the stars."

"We'll tell him ourselves, once we find him, but there is nothing more you can do. He's an outlaw."

"I understand." - Avi averted her gaze.

"Hmm..." - The icosahedron continued studying the report. - "It does seem like it's our Yggdrasil cargo. We'll activate the Eden project as we promised. Are you ready?"

A glow returned to Avi's eyes, and her heart beat faster. She felt an unusual pain and anxiety, and got up, unable to utter even a word, as if something was stuck in her throat.

The icosahedron understood what it meant and didn't request anything else. With his arms behind his back, he walked to the round door at the end of the hall, and his servants followed. Avi almost sprinted ahead and soon found herself in front of two hibernation pods, where there were two artificial bodies devoid of life. They looked exactly the same as her parents.

A case of literary theft: this tale is not rightfully on Amazon; if you see it, report the violation.

Avi covered her mouth, she was on the verge of tears. She never thought she would see them again.

When the icosahedron touched the authorizing device with his hand, the frost beneath the glass lids receded, the pods opened, and both bodies began to breathe.

Avi ran between the capsules, and both her arms embraced her parents.

“Mom, Dad. I'm with you.” - She spoke in a voice full of emotion.

Avi's dad backed away a little, slightly disoriented. - “Avi?” - He then looked the the side, at his wife. - “Charlotte?”

Charlotte also backed away a little to sit and gazed at Avi's crying face.

“Avi? Nicolas?” - Charlotte touched her cheek, she couldn't comprehend what was going on.

“I'll never leave you, never ever!” - Avi muttered.

Nicolas was finally aware of what was happening. Both parents turned to Avi, hugging her. - “It's okay now.”

“You've grown a bit.” - Avi's mother noticed.

Although Avi's face was still a mess, she grinned brightly.

The icosahedron stepped outside to let them enjoy the moment.

Nicolas, although full of questions, left those for later. They kept hugging for a few minutes until Avi calmed down and freed them.

“We have got a lot to catch up on!” - Avi exclaimed as she wiped her eyes. - “You don't know how much has happened since you... since you...”

Charlotte looked at Nicolas, then gently laid her hand on Avi's shoulder. - “We understand. We've got time. You can share everything with us later.” - She scrambled out of the pod, then sat on its edge.

Nicolas also moved to sit more comfortably, then looked around the room. - “Is this... the afterlife, Avi?”

Avi waved her head. - “No, it's just an advanced technology.”

“Oh...” - Nicolas was in disbelief. - “...then where are we, precisely? On Earth?”

“No, in space.” - Avi explained.

“...and everyone is back alive?” - Nicolas asked.

Avi was slightly unsure what to say. - “No, not yet. When it comes to Earth, only you two were revived... but I'm sure the time when you see your loved ones will come. I really believe in that.”

“That's... hard to digest...” - Nicolas said. - “...but we're together again, and that's what is most important.”

“Yes!” - Avi exclaimed enthusiastically.

“Will you show us your home?” - Charlotte asked. - “It's a bit cold in here.”

“Oh, sorry, I didn't notice. Hang tight, I'll take good care of you soon. I know you must be starving.” - Avi replied. - “Still, we have to walk a little to our spaceship.”

“You have your own spaceship?” - Nicolas was quite shocked. - “..and you can fly it?”

“Uhm... It's not precisely mine, but I can control it. It would take a while to explain.” - Avi responded.

“You'll explain as we walk...” - Charlotte suggested. - “...but it makes me so happy to see how capable you've grown during our absence. I'm really proud of you.”

Avi blushed. - “Most of it is thanks to my friend, Luna. If not her, we wouldn't be here.”

"In that case, we should thank her for taking care of you." - Charlotte decided.

"Just... don't overdo it. She'll twist your words and use them to tease me." - Avi said.

Charlotte giggled. - "So she's that good of a friend?"

"Yeah, she's the best." - Avi sighed sarcastically. - "Unfortunately."

"I'm glad you found someone like her..." - Charlotte added.- "...and that you weren't on your own. You both have certainly been through a lot together."

"You know it! You won't believe it, but she's from the moon! We have already visited twenty star systems and saved each other's lives a lot!"

"...so there was life on the moon." - Nicolas interjected. - "You're right, I can't believe this..."

"It's a fact, though! There was a vast factory under its surface, and Luna lived there for four hundred years until she found me." - Avi explained, telling her parents most of her first adventures, which shed some light on their current situation. They kept listening until Avi led them to her van.

When they entered and Avi moved outside, Charlotte could see the asteroid belt illuminated by the orange sun and was left speechless.

"If I didn't see it with my own eyes, I would never believe you." - Nicolas stated. - "The city of robots... swamp monsters... all the consequences of not paying your bills at the golem's restaurant... and you're telling us that it all happened barely a few weeks after Luna crashed on Earth."

"It really happened!" - Avi confirmed.

"Hearing these stories makes me worried about your safety, Avi." - Nicolas added.

"...but I'm fine and I promise I won't risk like that anymore. We'll do some sightseeing together, you'll see how fun it is!" - Avi assured. - "Luna will make sure that not a single hair falls from your head."

The van soon stopped in the recreational room of their spaceship. Luna was already waiting there with Virka, who was wearing a long-sleeved sweater.

Luna slightly lifted her dress and bowed, greeting her guests. - "Welcome aboard. It's an honor to meet the parents of the one I cherish most deeply. I'm Luna, from the moon, and this is Virka, from Khazan."

Virka bowed too, her body in alignment with Luna's.

"Uhm... Luna, will you be their host, while I quickly prepare something to eat?" - Avi asked.

"It would be my utmost pleasure." - Luna declared officially.

Avi smiled and disappeared, leaving Luna with the guests. The girl pointed them to the sofa, where they could sit, and suggested. - "Please, do rest."

"Quite a lovely place, it's almost like our own living room." - Charlotte noticed.

"Avi was in charge of interior design. I only helped." - Luna commented.

"Avi praised you a lot. You gave her a chance for a second life." - Nicolas added. - "We're so grateful."

"Thank you for your nice words, but Avi put a lot of effort into getting here, too. I don't want to take that away from her." - Luna responded.

"So beautiful and humble." - Charlotte said, then turned to Virka. - "Avi also mentioned you, praising your intuition and kind heart."

"I'm relatively new here, but I'm still glad that Avi finds time to think about me." - Virka replied.

Nicolas sat on the sofa, and Charlotte joined him, while Luna and Virka seated themselves on the floor, on the pillows.

“How do you feel right now?” - Luna asked. - “It must be quite a shock to be reborn and witness all this.”

“Indeed, it is.” - Nicolas said.

“It's a breathtaking sight out there.” - Charlotte added.

“You would have to see Virka's home system.” - Luna mentioned. - “A belt of white and black asteroids, illuminated by a purple sun surrounded by glass.”

“Can stars really have that kind of color?” - Charlotte asked, surprised.

“It's an artificial creation.” - Virka explained. - “It does not compare to the innate beauty of space.”

“The art has its own charm, too...” - Nicole interjected. - “...although, I'm sure Charlotte would enjoy the raw blueprints and mathematics behind that object the most.” - He said as he playfully nudged his wife with an elbow, while winking at her.

Luna appeared more lively than before and turned to Charlotte. - “Really!?”

“Oh, Nicolas is exaggerating a bit...” - Charlotte replied with a smile. - “...but yes, I do love to look at the numbers sometimes.”

“That's the complete opposite of Avi.” - Luna laughed. - “Whenever I try to explain any details of our spaceship's functionality, she gets an instant headache. Even a simple trigonometry is beyond her.”

“Oh, oh. It appears she wasn't doing her homework when we were gone. Haha.” - Nicolas also laughed.

“Yeah, she's a hardcore couch potato. If there were no planets to explore, she would just be sitting here, watching series and playing games.” - Luna noted.

“Well... what am I hearing?” - Nicolas replied. - “You're doing a little too well here, but maybe with us, it can be fixed a little.”

“That's what I'm counting on.” - Luna gave a sinister smile.

That's when Avi returned, carrying pasta with a creamy spinach-based sauce. - “Virka, can you help? I left lemonade and three more plates in the kitchen.”

Virka nodded.

“...so, what are you talking about?” - Avi asked, putting the meal on the table. - “Are you badmouthing me, by any chance?”

Nicolas fixed his shirt, perfidiously pretending that everything is normal. - “Why would we do that to our dearest daughter?”

“You should know that we only want the best for you, Avi.” - Charlotte added.

“Sure, sure.” - Avi raised her eyebrow. - “I know you well, I can already sense your scheming ”

“My ladybug, trust us.” - Charlotte said. - “Everything will be like it used to be, I swear.”

“Eee... like it used to be? Haha... right.” - Avi laughed nervously. - “You know, I'm quite grown up. We have... uhm... a bit more easygoing lifestyle here. You'll... uhm... adjust.”

“I see, it's about an inch or two more easygoing at the hips.” - Charlotte added.

“It's normal! I'm still growing!” - Avi seemed mad.

“You grow, you grow, but mostly fat.” - Charlotte nagged.

Virka just entered the room and overheard it.

“Virka, that's not true! Tell them!” - Avi protested.

“On my planet, a parent's word is sacred.” - There was a well-hidden pain in Virka's words. -
“Sometimes, unpleasant things happen, for the greater benefit.”

“Virka...” - Avi took her hand. - “Uhm... we'll bring the other plates and be back soon.” - She said, then they both disappeared into the kitchen, where Avi whispered to Virka. - “They will take my fruit parfait away.”

“Considering your lifestyle, you should cut back on sweets.” - Virka answered.

“Virka! That's not what it's all about!” - Avi kept whispering, almost as if she was paranoid. - “Luna is planning to stage a takeover. We can't let her, it's OUR home. OUR safe haven. They will first take my parfait, then limit my gaming time... and then... and then... want me to do math homework.”

“I thought you were missing your parents.” - Virka pointed out.

“I missed them! But that thing, it's different! We have to keep our independence. I can't count on Luna in that aspect, she's already on the enemy's side, but you – YOU can help me.” - Avi tried to persuade her.

"How?" - Virka asked.

Avi pondered a little. - "Pretend that you are with them... and when they try to plot anything, report to me. We'll sabotage their attempts."

"I'm not sure if disrespecting your elders is the best idea." - Virka mentioned.

"Oh, Virka! We've to stay together! There are no rules in this war!" - Avi explained.

"I have doubts, Avi."

"I beg you, please help me." - Avi made a puppy face.

"I don't like it at all."

"Pleeeeeeease." - Avi whined.

"Fine... I'll try, but don't overdo it." - Virka agreed. - "I don't want it to become anything more than an innocent game."

“You've my word!” - Avi exclaimed and took the glasses, then returned to the recreational room. There, Luna and Avi's parents were joking joyfully, but when the girl entered, they immediately kept their mouths shut, although without hiding their happy expressions.

“Now, now. That's enough of this fooling around.” - Avi declared. - “Let's eat while it's still hot.”

After spending the evening sharing memories and experiences together, Avi returned to her room all radiant. On her bed, she buried her face in her pillow and, full of energy, kicked her legs back and forth until she heard a knocking.

“Avi? - She heard Virka behind the door.

With a hop, Avi hurried and pulled the door open, letting her friend in.

“I knew it. They are already planning my downfall!” - Avi said, gazing at Virka with determination. - “Tell me everything, quickly.”

“They made their move. Starting tomorrow, access to the synthesizer will be limited.” - Virka explained.

“W-what!?” - Avi uttered, terrified. - “My parfait! Can't anything be done about it?”

"I have no clue..." - Virka said, her hand reaching under her coat. - "...but I saved the last one for you."

"My parfait!" - Avi grabbed the cold glass and put the spoon in her mouth. - "Oh my, this is so delicious!"

"It seems you're having fun." - Virka noticed.

"Not at all." - Avi said, while she chewed candied fruit. She gazed at Virka for a moment, then moved the parfait to her and passed her the spoon. - "May this parfait seal our pact as we share it together."

Virka looked at Avi and took the spoon, her other hand swept her hair aside. That's when the sleeve of her sweater moved away a little, revealing her bandages.

"Virka.. I wanted to ask, how you feel about everything that's happening?" - Avi said, seeing Virka's rather apathetic expression.

Virka chewed the fruits, silently pondering. When she was done, she wanted to be honest. - "It reminds me of my own home."

"Can I ask what happened to it?" - Avi said, concerned.

"It's gone, like we all will be gone one day." - Virka said dispassionately, while she scooped up another serving.

"I really want to give you another home." - Avi replied, saddened.

"Avi, stop." - Virka requested. - "It doesn't help."

"Then tell me, how to help you." - Avi continued regardless.

Virka moved to the corner of the room, where she sat, averting her gaze. - "You can't undo the past."

"You don't have to live in the past." - Avi muttered, worrying that she would say something wrong again.

Virka, however, was still impassive. - "Beholder. He was the first person who showed me the snow. He was the first who take me outside of Khazan. For a short moment, he freed me from... my job. He was different, he only wanted a company of someone who would understand the burdens he carries. Nothing more. Nothing lasts forever, though... even he couldn't save me. They possess an irreplaceable knowledge of someone as old as the world, yet they couldn't change anything. He was gone one day, and after him, there were only liars... until I met you."

"...but?"

“...but it's not the same anymore, it's not the same as the time when I still had hope. When I could cry pure tears and pray for a better tomorrow. Now, everything will come to an end.”

Avi didn't say a word, she was just sad.

“Avi... you know that you'll have to tell your parents the truth about this world. How long do you want to keep them ignorant?”

“I want them to be happy.” - Avi replied. - “Even if for a moment. When the time comes, I'll tell them everything.”

Virka was deep in dark thoughts. - “I want you to be happy too.”

“We will, together.” - Avi declared.

“May the stars' light listen to your prayers.” - Vrika whispered.