

Last Star 63

Star XXV ~ Fantasy ~ Part I

Luna's spaceship headed towards the twenty-fifth system. Gazing at the stars, Avi was reminiscing about the humble beginning of their journey and didn't even notice when they stopped, at least until Charlotte entered the bridge.

"I think it's a white dwarf." - Charlotte noticed.

Avi snapped out of her dreamy trance. - "It is. Let's check how many planets are here." - She activated the holographic map, revealing two small celestial bodies without moons.

"Not a lot to see." - Charlotte commented.

"Nothing strange, pure probability." - Luna mentioned as she entered. - "We need to get used to it."

Avi touched the nearest sphere. - "I'll check if anything is interesting on their surface." - The shape glowed pink, and about a dozen pulsing points appeared. - "Luna... that's something new. What does it mean?"

"Dense sources of psyche." - Luna said. - "Non-standard life or its imitation."

"Non-standard?" - Charlotte inquired.

Luna simply shrugged. - "Maybe it's ghosts again."

"Very NOT funny." - Avi rebuked.

"Calm down, calm down." - Luna said as she moved her face closer to the readings. - "The planet shouldn't be habitable. We'll need our spacesuits."

"Okay. I'll land next to the brightest point." - Avi added and activated the controls.

The spaceship entered the atmosphere and pierced pink clouds, making the lush vegetation made of translucent fibers visible. Everything shimmered in the starlight like a prism. There were lush forests of tall, glass willows with rectangular leaves, and the soil was overgrown by soft moss, which sank in like a pillow under the weight of the landing spaceship.

The first thing Avi could see after leaving their ship was sharp spikes scattered around the meadow full of cup-shaped flowers filled with golden nectar. Many flies gathered around the latter, their ruby-like fur glistening in the sunlight like a brocade.

"It's a nice place for a picnic." - Charlotte commented.

Avi liked the idea. - "Yes, it is! I'll return to the ship and synthesize snacks. Please wait for me."

When Avi disappeared, Luna focused on scanning the surroundings. She changed filters in her vision, making sure to look for traces of psyche. She suddenly noticed a pillar made of pulsing light, reaching the clouds themselves.

“Unbelievable.” - Luna whispered.

“Did you find something?” - Charlotte asked.

“The existence of such an intense source of psyche goes beyond all theories known to me.” - Luna stated. - “If I could only study it.... it would be a breakthrough in my research.”

Charlotte smiled. - “If it's important to you, then we'll keep you company.”

Luna was still gazing in awe, almost ignoring Charlotte. - “We have to examine it, there's no other option.”

When Luna was standing there, fascinated, Virka and Nicolas had already joined them.

“I heard there will be no surprises this time.” - Nicolas said.

Charlotte giggled. - “Unfortunately, our plans have changed a little.”

“Eh.” - Nicolas sighed, resigned. - “I was hoping for a peaceful stroll and a breakfast in a quiet setting... what's going on this time?”

“Luna wants to continue her research here.” - Charlotte explained.

“I'm not in a hurry. It's not going anywhere.” - Luna replied. - “We can eat something before it.”

“Research?” - Nicolas asked. - “Given what happened recently, it doesn't bring back pleasant memories... but I don't see anything other than plants and insects here. What are you planning to study?”

“The nature of psyche. I know that there is something more to this place than what we can see with our eyes.” - Luna replied.

“The nature of psyche?” - Nicolas was silent for a moment. - “Wouldn't it require the planet to be home to sentient life forms?”

“No, not really.” - Luna denied. - “What you have in mind is a fraction of possibilities. The aspect of psyche is a type of force. It doesn't require a vessel to interact with the environment – but that's also only a hypothesis. In all cases known to me, psyche only resides in the living creatures or life-like constructs.”

“Psyche as a type of force.” - Nicolas spoke. - “I can't imagine it, but if it's so, then I won't bother you. Do your thing.”

Luna put the filter on once again, silently studying the pillar of pure psyche. Soon, Avi returned with a hermetically sealed basket of food, and everyone headed out.

As they passed the glass trees, Avi stared at their golden veins with a childlike curiosity. She kept halting whenever she discovered a new species of beetles or flowers, making photos and notes in her journal.

Virka, despite being silent, observed her every move. Avi's optimism and carefreeness were incomprehensible to her. She wished that kind of happiness for her, but at the same time, it reminded her of what she had lost.

Nicolas noticed that Virka didn't enjoy their stroll, so he slowed down to walk with her.

“Tired?” - Nicolas asked.

“A bit.” - Virka said from behind her dark visor. It was difficult to read her expression.

“Luna?” - Nicolas shouted. - “When are we stopping for a break?”

“Avi wants to find a perfect spot.” - Luna replied.

Nicolas sighed. - “Well, it seems it will take a while.” - He uttered to Virka.

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“It's fine.” - Virka said. - “Avi likes it and I don't want to ruin her fun.”

“Hah, I don't think you should spoil her even more.” - Nicolas joked. - “She has no sense of moderation.”

Avi didn't pay attention to the conversations behind her and instead climbed a tall crystal that appeared in front of her. She stood on its very top, above the treetops, and gazed at the surroundings. She quickly noticed a lake of golden nectar, where bipedal, one-meter tall creatures quenched their thirst with the long trunks attached to their head-torsos.

“Animals!” - Avi shouted to her companions, excited, and pointed in the direction.

“Be careful or you might scare them off.” - Virka warned.

Avi slid down the crystal with a smile. - "It's not too far! Luna, can you camouflage us? I want to see them from up close."

"Right... right..." - Luna said, clearly fatigued with Avi's antics. - "Just don't rush, okay?" - She snapped her fingers, summoning the invisibility field.

"Thank you, Luna!" - Avi exclaimed, then ran in the direction of the lake, leaving everyone behind.

Luna sighed. - "...and that's the last we saw her."

Already at the lake, Avi crouched behind the bushes and pushed the leaves away to better see the animals. Their fur waved on the wind, shimmering with all shades of pink, white, and yellow. What mostly attracted Avi's attention, though, was that some of the creatures had intricate braids of hair. Some were like hanging rings, others like flowers, and others like small ribbons.

Avi waited for her crew and whispered. - "Do you see? They might be someone's farm animals."

"A keen observation." - Luna commented. - "Maybe if we wait here for a bit longer or follow the herd, then we will find someone?"

Avi's eyes were sparkling. - "That's a brilliant idea!"

“Would that mean that the picnic will be even more delayed?” - Charlotte asked.

“Uhm...” - Avi's stomach grumbled. - “Eee... maybe their shepherd will want to have a snack with us?”

Luna giggled. - “Knowing you, I'm sure you will not allow them to refuse.”

“I'm worried you might scare them off by sneaking like this, though.” - Virka added.

“Hmm. Once we find someone, we'll turn the invisibility off and approach from a safe distance...” - Avi suggested. - “...but for now, let me adjust my camera. I want to make some good pictures.”

When Avi finished adjusting the settings, she filmed the animals for over fifteen minutes. She was about to zoom in when she noticed a pink shape between the trees. It was a twenty-centimeter-tall, four-winged creature surrounded by a mist of light. A trail of glistening dust followed it, like a tail of a comet or dozens of small stars.

“Oh...” - Avi kept recording. - “Someone joined us!”

Avi zoomed in even more and noticed that the creature's shape was a humanoid one. Although it had no ears, its nose was flat and the mouth was like a thin, almost invisible line.

“They look like a fairy.” - Avi commented. - “Do you think that the animals belong to them?”

“We'll see.” - Luna answered. - “Do you want to approach them?”

“One moment.” - Avi said. - “I'll just make one extra photo.”

The fairy flew to one of the creatures and sat on its back, then began to braid its hair as it drank water.

“Okay, I'm ready. I'll lead.” - Avi informed, and Luna deactivated the invisibility.

When the crew walked out of bushes and trees, the fairy noticed them from afar and flew a bit higher, then escaped behind the animal and hid behind its torso. Fairy's tiny hands clutched the mammal, and they peeked from behind it.

“Relax, you're safe.” - Avi tried to calm them down and slowly approached with her hands raised above her head. Other animals seemed unbothered by her presence and continued to drink water.

Avi walked to the closest mammal and began to gently comb its fur. - “See? We only want to make friends.”

The fairy's head gradually peeked higher above the fur. Then, they flew out of their hiding spot and approached Avi. The fairy circled Avi's helmet in absolute silence.

"I'm Avi." - Avi said. - "It's nice to meet you."

The fairy curiously poked Avi's helmet and then quickly withdrew their hand.

"You can't talk?" - Avi asked. - "That's not a problem." - She reached into the basket and unpacked a piece of chocolate cake. She tore off a small piece, then gave it to the fairy. At first, the creature was reluctant to inspect the food and retreated, but after a longer studying they came closer again and sniffed the gift, then quickly snatched it with both hands and flew away. Fairy's mouth opened wide, revealing rows of triangular teeth, which soon sank into the icing.

"Do you like it?" - Avi asked with a smile, but the fairy paid no attention to her and kept devouring cake. When the fairy was finished, they looked at Avi and then at her companions, who were observing from afar, and flew in the direction of the forest.

"Oh, are you running away already?" - Avi said, but the fairy turned to her, staring at them as if they were expecting something. - "Do you want us to follow you?" - Avi asked and made a step closer, causing the fairy to fly a bit farther away, where it waited again.

"Apparently, yes." - Virka deduced.

So, Avi followed, and the fairy didn't stop anymore. They passed more glass trees until they reached a small glade in the middle of a ring of crystal rocks, behind which one could hear the sound of a small

nectar stream. The sun gently shone from behind the treetops, illuminating the small patch of moss right in the center.

“Oh.” - Avi gasped in delight and turned to her companions. - “It’s a perfect spot!” - She exclaimed.

The fairy was hovering in the air, as if she were waiting for Avi. When the girl approached, she noticed more fairies hiding behind the rocks, peeking with their tiny heads, but as soon as they realized that their other companion was showing no hints of fear, they flew out of hiding one by one to touch Avi’s helmet or pull the fabric of her spacesuit.

However, once Luna joined, they were scared again and retreated into hiding.

“They seem intelligent, but it’s not a human-like intelligence. They’re more like animals.” - Luna remarked.

“Now, now. Don’t be scared.” - Avi encouraged as she divided the cake into smaller pieces. She extended her hand, but the fairies were still scared. That’s when the first one returned to casually sit on Avi’s wrist, reach for the cake, and begin eating again.

Avi giggled. - “See? Your little friend trusts me.”

The fairies, one after another, grew braver and flew over to take a treat.

"I think you made new friends." - Nicolas commented, approaching with Charlotte.

"They're so smart and cute." - Avi said as she sat on the rock and opened the basket.

Nicolas helped to unfold the blanket, and Luna summoned a forcefield around them, where they could safely remove the helmet and breathe or eat. When Avi prepared the plates, the fairies already circled them, curiously studying the spoons and other strange utensils, but what fascinated them most were women's hair.

As Avi was sitting on a rock, cutting casserole, the first fairy approached her and began to braid her hair.

"They've started treating you like one of their own. It's adorable." - Charlotte commented.

Avi, with a smile, allowed her hair to be altered. - "I feel like a princess."

Another fairy approached Avi to help the first one, then another.

"Nowonder, with the whole entourage." - Charlotte added, giggling. Then, another fairy joined, and two others approached Charlotte instead. - "Oh. They like me too, now."

Luna was also approached by one, but she continued her meal perfectly composed and paid no attention to it.

When the fairies finally showed some interest in Virka, she tried to shoo them with her hand. - "I won't let them destroy my hair."

"Oh, come on, Virka! Just do them the courtesy." - Avi persuaded.

"No, thanks." - Virka said, shooing next of fairies, but they wouldn't give up and dodged her hands, trying to force their way to her hair.

"They don't appear to be willing to let go." - Nicolas commented. He was the only person who was left in peace.

Virka finally gave in, and every woman was accompanied by three to seven little hair stylists. When it was time for the dessert, fairies were almost done. One of them flew to the edge of the meadow, gazing somewhere, and the fairies who were done braiding girls followed.

"Huh? Did something else catch their attention?" - Luna noticed.

Other, still busy fairies continued until their guests finished their cakes, but more of them were leaving.

"Let's pack up and follow them." - Avi suggested. - "Maybe we'll find their hives."

"I like that idea. Taking a walk after a meal is a good habit." - Charlotte stated.

Luna stood up and lifted the plates with her telekinesis, putting them one after another inside the basket. Once everyone was ready and in their helmet, she also took care of the blanket, then joined the group, which was already heading into the depths of the dense forest.