

Last Star 65

Star XXV ~ Fantasy ~ Part III

“Is Avi still angry?” - Luna asked Virka, who discreetly peeked at their friend, whose body language indicated that she won't forgive them easily.

“Yes, she is. Fortunately, she is also still following us.” - Virka informed.

Vashi led the group out of the forest to a beach that surrounded a perfectly circular lake of nectar. As Luna walked on the sands glimmering with rainbow light, she noticed crab-like creatures underneath. Most of them were sleeping, but they were still aware of the intruders' presence, and upon closer approach, they dug themselves out of the ground to escape to a safer distance.

Vashi submerged her feet in the water and looked behind her, at the group, then pointed at the center of the lake, where, amidst a pile of bones, a huge humanoid skull was resting.

“There.” - Vashi said.

Luna scanned the skeleton. All of the psyche readings were off the charts.

“Go.” - Visha asked and continued to wade in the nectar until it reached her knees.

Luna quickly joined, and soon the liquid reached both of their waists, so they had to swim until they reached a small island around the skeleton. Meanwhile, everyone else waited for them at the beach.

Vashi touched the skull with her open palm and focused, staying fully silent. When she finally withdrew her hand, she requested. - “Primordial one. The Avatar of Lake Lady. They insist. Talk.”

“It's... alive?” - Luna was in disbelief.

Vashi shook her head. - “No. Dead.”

“Then, what is it?” - Luna asked, her hand reaching to the skull.

“Echo of their last breath.” - Vashi said. - “A memory of false gods.”

When Luna's fingertips finally touched the bones of the dead giant, they immediately became numb. She felt being held, then pulled somewhere.

“Reject fear.” - Vashi instructed for one last time, and Luna lost entire control of her body.

Luna's vision was blurry. Although her feet waded in the same lake, she could now normally breathe. Rays of sunlight shone through the clouds and reflected on the nectar's surface.

Luna turned, but Vashi wasn't here. Neither was Avi nor any of her companions. Luna quickly realized she was either in a pocket dimension or it was some kind of memory that was sent directly to her mind.

Luna took a step back, but immediately stopped once she noticed bubbles in the water. A pair of long, pointed ears emerged from the lake, and they turned out to be a part of a mask. Soon, an androgynous figure stood before Luna, their waist covered by a cyan toga, and their hand holding a two-tipped spear.

"O', daughter of traitors, one free from their shackles." - The stranger spoke to Luna. - "It's farewell. My lady, patron of arcane arts, the seventh labyrinth architect, she who merges the souls in eternity, she whose breath heals, the princess of chill spring, shelter of exiles, baptism for reincarnated, the second last of false gods – she is gone, forever sleeping in aether."

Luna crossed her arms. - "I'm sorry for your loss, but I was called here for some reason, not to listen to a eulogy."

"The Lake Lady gave me eyes to see what's invisible. I know that you come from afar and that you traveled for long... but she, who pierced my savior's heart with a black dagger, she also sees."

"Are you speaking of Infinity Witch?" - Luna asked.

"Annari gave you a keen mind, but they're blind to the nature and destiny of the soul. You're heading to a place where neither advanced technology nor a brave heart can help you."

“...and where precisely do you think we are heading?”

“To the outer systems, directly into her trap.” - The avatar uttered.

“Are you asking us to turn back?” - Luna wondered.

“No, I ask you the opposite. I'll grant you a blessing that will conceal your minds from her sight. Your psyche will be strengthened, making her magic and tricks less effective. In return, I ask only one thing.”

Luna raised her eyebrow.

“Tell Vashi that she is free...” - The avatar said. - “...and tell her that I'm sorry that she had to wait for so long.”

“I can do that.” - Luna assured.

“You're the last who will hear about the Lake Lady.” - The avatar added. - “May the legends about those who used to rule the universe be forgotten. In the age of the end, I pray for the age of humans to come, and I pray that you'll be able to succeed, where even the gods failed. I leave, giving you their last heritage, the symbol of their penance – the penance for all the injustice they had caused. I place it upon you. May you be doers of good, so that by your hands, they are granted redemption.”

When the Avatar's hand drew a square shape in the air, Luna felt something deep inside her change. The readings indicated that the tangles of light in her body loosened, forming new, elegant knots. As she observed this process, she understood what was missing in her research of the psyche and felt that, to some degree, she could control these processes in other beings.

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“May your mind always follow the truth.” - The avatar uttered and drew an inverted triangle.

Luna felt more of the knots transforming in her body. Her heart was beating faster as, for some reason, she recalled the moments shared with Avi, then the moments when she encountered different aliens and creatures, Virka, Avi's parents, and Vashi. In a single moment, she felt immense warmth in her chest and could better understand the nuances in emotions and behavior of people she had met.

“May your heart always be filled with love.” - The avatar uttered, drawing a circle.

The last of the tangles loosened and formed straight lines, and that's when Luna realized it was the last of the blessings. Her soul became invisible and inviolable, but she felt something more – her eyes opened, and her vision was no longer blurry. She saw every lock that Anaari had put on her, but she also learned that each of them requires a key, and she, herself, was one. She didn't understand how to decipher Anaari's mysteries yet, but she felt that the answers would come once she was ready.

“May your soul always walk in faith.” - Were Avatar's last words, and then, the memory ended, and she was back with Vashi.

“Dead. Forever.” - Vashi whispered. - “Dead.”

Seeing Vashi, Luna could recognize her immense sadness and loneliness, the latter one resurfaced after being long-forgotten.

“Vashi.. I'm sorry for your loss.” - Luna uttered quietly.

Vashi sighed. - “Sacrifice. Sared. They live in you.”

Luna hesitated. She wasn't sure how to tell Vashi what the avatar requested. - “They... wanted to apologize for making you wait for so long.”

Two trickles of tears flowed from beneath Vashi's mask. - “Haar di shi anuur.”

“...and they said that you're free now.” - Luna added.

Vashi lowered her head, then burst into even heavier tears.

Luna let Vashi stay with the skeleton, alone. She returned to her companions, explaining what had happened.

"This is where the avatar of the second last false god had passed away. It was her only friend." - Luna uttered. - "They left a gift to protect us. For some reason, they had immense faith in us."

Nicolas looked at Vashi, who was kneeling in front of the skull, caressing it with her hand. - "Does she have a home to return to?" - He asked.

Virka lowered her eyes. She was deeply sad. - "Her heart must have shattered when she learned she'll be alone again."

"I think we shouldn't leave her like this." - Luna added. - "The loneliness won't heal the pain of loss."

Avi didn't want to hear about this. - "You aren't suggesting that she travel with us, are you?"

"If I am, will you refuse?" - Luna asked.

"I don't want to share our spaceship with a person who doesn't respect life." - Avi protested.

“Don't be a hypocrite. You killed all of the parasite eggs inside you, just to survive.” - Luna rebuked. - “I thought that you would finally understand. Some boundaries can be crossed when you have to choose between the survival of sapient and non-sapient life.”

Avi flinched and clenched her fists. - “That's different... they forced me. YOU forced me.”

“No, it's not different at all, Avi.” - Virka argued.

“You didn't allow me to think even a little about what I was going to do!” - Avi continued in anger. - “...and you, Luna, you egged me on!”

“Is that what you really think?” - Luna asked. - “That I would do that to a person I care about?”

Avi hesitated. She didn't know how to respond.

“You should apologize, Luna, Avi...” - Charlotte added. - “...and Vashi, too.”

Avi bit her lip. She knew she wouldn't be able to say 'sorry'. - “I admit, I made a mistake. I made that decision, not somebody else. I wanted to save myself at the cost of other lives, and it's unforgivable. There had to be a better solution, and I didn't look for it.”

Virka approached Avi face-to-face. - “This again! Please, wise up finally! There was no better solution. You're living, isolated in your ideal world, instead of accepting that death is a natural part of existence.”

"If I compromise, the next thing you'll tell me will be that killing people can also be justified!" - Avi argued. - "You'll push the boundaries, completely blurring the lines between the good and evil, when the answer was always simple."

"You're the one trying to make everything simple, Avi!" - Virka countered. - "And there is nothing simple about life. The earth you walk on, the air you breathe, the water you drink. It's all teeming with life, which you irrevocably take away without even knowing. If you think there is some sort of boundary, then where will you place it!?"

"Where I still have the freedom to choose." - Avi stated.

Virka wanted to continue, but Luna put her hand on Virka's arm and shook her head. - "I know what you want to say, but I already spoke about it with Avi. She won't change her mind."

"I'm sorry... It's our fault. We should've raised her better." - Nicolas apologized.

Virka sighed, her heart aching. - "Then, do you still want to leave Vashi alone?" - She asked Avi. - "You should know best what she's feeling."

Avi involuntarily peeked at Vashi. - "I..."

"There is no love without forgiveness." - Luna added.

Avi's anger disappeared once she understood what Luna had meant, and she felt sorry for Vashi. - "If she wants to change... she can come with us, as long as she wants."

"As long as she wants..." - Luna repeated, trying to guess what the masked stranger was truly hiding in their heart.

"Vashi stays." - Vashi informed after hearing Luna's suggestion.

"Are you sure?" - Luna asked. - "There, among the stars, are a lot of people who will be glad to meet you. You won't be a burden to anyone."

"Vashi knows." - Vashi said. - "Vashi's home. Here."

Virka felt that Vashi wasn't fully honest, so she wanted to make sure. - "Vashi, think twice. When we leave, nobody will come here for many years."

"Nature. Balance. Vashi guards." - Vashi replied. - "Sacrifice. Sacred."

Virka understood. She was once in a similar situation. - “This world will give nothing back for your sacrifice. It'll only take. Are you sure you want to stay?”

“Loneliness. Old friend.” - Vashi said. - “You. New. Balance – you, restore. Then, return. Vashi will wait.”

Luna felt sad, but accepted her decision. - “We will return. I promise.”

“...so, this is a goodbye...” - Virka added. - “...and we didn't even get to know each other well.”

“Heart. Haar shi nash. Everyone.” - Vashi said, pointing at her chest. - “One.” - She extended her hand to Luna, asking her to say goodbye.

“May the stars' light always protect you.” - Luna uttered as she shook Vashi's hand.

“Memory of stars, memory of you.” - Vashi replied.

Virka was next. She forced herself to smile, although it was clear she was sad.

Vashi spoke. - “Goodbye – promise of tomorrow.” - She then extended her hand to Charlotte and Nicolas. After that, once she was next to Avi, she stopped, observing her for quite a long time.

“The bravest.” - Vashi said, extending her hand.

Everyone waited, silently looking at Avi. Their stares told volumes, so reluctantly, Avi accepted Vashi's handshake.

“Don't hurt any other animals, okay?” - Avi requested.

Vashi freed Avi's hand and lifted her mask slightly to reveal a bright smile, then added very quietly. -
“The most stupid.”

“Hey! What's that supposed to mean!?” - Avi protested.

Virka put the mask back on her face, laughing heartily. She took her bags and looked at the strangers one last time, waved her hand, then left and disappeared in the fog.