

Last Star 69

Star XXVII ~ Mother

After three days of rest, Luna's spaceship arrived at the next system, which consisted of a red supergiant sun and three gas giants. Avi scanned the surface of planets in search of structures that indicate the presence of sapient life, and once she detected some on the largest, second planet, she headed there.

As the spaceship soared above the emerald-grey shell of a gas giant, Avi was gazing beyond the window, looking for the signs of life. - "Mother's Spire." - She whispered, her eyes focused on finding any shape that could penetrate the dense clouds. When she finally noticed the pointy tip of a lone obsidian tower that was almost reaching the stars, she knew it was their destination.

After finding a landing platform concealed by gas clouds, Avi called her crew and equipped her spacesuit. The closer she was, the faster her heart was beating.

It was quite windy outside the ship's force field, but not windy enough to limit safety and mobility. Slowly and cautiously, Avi headed to the spiral staircase and grabbed the railing. Its metallic surface was unusually smooth, but not so much that a hand would slip off.

Avi raised her head and took a deep breath. The way up wasn't the shortest one.

"I can always use levitation." - Luna suggested.

"No. Let's do it the correct way." - Avi replied.

Step after step, the team was climbing higher. By the time Avi was a third of the way there, she was panting heavily, but the beauty of crimson sunlight, which penetrated the clouds, inspired her to keep on moving.

“A small break.” - Avi requested only once they were two-thirds of the way there, then sat on the stair steps.

Luna looked at her barely breathing companions. - “Well, it won't hurt.” - then sat next to her friend.

Avi was gazing at the sun on the horizon. The red supergiant was just rising, but at first glance, it didn't move even an inch since they've started the climb. It seemed like the morning here would last forever.

“It's so quiet and peaceful here.” - Charlotte uttered.

“Yeah. I could gaze at this shifting cloud ocean for hours.” - Nicolas added.

Avi smiled. - “True, the sight is out of this world.”

“I was missing experiences like this one.” - Nicolas said. - “It reminds me of all the evenings, when we lay among the flowers, gazing at stars together.”

"I didn't forget." - Avi uttered with nostalgia.

Virka averted her eyes, hiding her sadness. She didn't want to participate in their conversation.

"I remember how I carried you on my shoulders and you tried to reach every single one of them..." - Nicolas added. - "I remember how you dressed like an astronaut and pretended to visit faraway worlds."

Charlotte nodded. - "In the winter, when we took you to skate, we always stopped to build a snowman, and you demanded it to be a different alien each time."

"You were hopping across the snowfields, pretending it's moon dust..." - Nicolas continued. - "...and when we were coming back from sledding in the evening, you would lie on the sled and pretend you were drifting through outer space."

"Life was simpler back then." - Avi said. - "I'm missing it a bit."

"Each of these small dreams... we wanted to give you so much, but in the end, there was nothing we could change." - Charlotte continued. - "Your dreams coming true now is a miracle."

"These dreams are nothing compared to what you gave me." - Avi stated. - "You made me understand what true joy and love are. I'll always be grateful for that."

“Me too. For giving Avi's light to the world.” - Luna added, taking Avi's hand. - “For giving me the chance to meet her, and share every morning and evening. Now, I know that even if all the stars go dark, her smile will always illuminate the night.”

Avi smiled sincerely. - “I also feel this way. When I hear your voice, warmth fills my heart, and just like this dawn's sunlight, it gently washes over my entire body.”

Avi and Luna shared a glance, and their eyes were glistening with happiness. Avi's parents didn't want to interrupt it and just smiled at each other, silently accepting their intimate moment.

It was only a few hundred steps until reaching the spire's top, which was concealed beneath a thin, white silk. The fabric fluttered in the wind, and in scarlet dawn, glowed in every shade of magenta.

Avi curiously looked up to the source of the enigmatic robe and noticed its owner. It was a gray, granite statue of a woman with long, wavy hair masterfully carved in stone. She was sitting motionless, in a lotus position, like she was sleeping for a thousand years, and her face was covered by a blank mask.

This book's true home is on another platform. Check it out there for the real experience.

“She appears as a majestic and graceful person.” - Charlotte whispered to Avi.

"We appear so small next to her. I hope she'll want to talk to us." - Avi replied.

"We must remember that she probably had no visitors for ages. I think she'll at least be somehow intrigued." - Luna uttered with conviction.

Once they were at the top, Avi directed her gaze at the Mother, but she wasn't showing any signs of life, even when she had five guests in front of her.

"Are we supposed to switch her on somehow?" - Avi whispered to Luna.

"I doubt it." - Luna said as she scanned the statue. - "My readings only indicate that she is thousands of cycles old. It would be unusual if she were still functional."

"...but that astronaut said that she could help us. She has to be functional." - Avi replied, then tapped against the granite head with her knuckles. - "Halo? Is anyone there?"

The Mother's neck turned ninety degrees immediately, causing her mask to face Avi directly, which scared the girl a little.

"Ah!" - Avi stammered. - "T-that was r-rude of me! I'm sorry!" - She corrected herself.

The Mother remained absolutely silent and didn't even flinch. It appeared as if she was expecting something.

“Uhm...” - Avi, slightly intimidated, spoke. - “I'm Avi, this is Luna, Virka, Charlotte, and Nicolas. It's nice to meet you.”

A voice reverberated from behind the mask, so resonant that it caused the statue's dress to smooth. - “You... my children... brothers and sisters of my dear son. My heart is filled with joy to know that the stars didn't fate him to walk alone. Please, you, kind to my soul, may you and your friends rest after the hardships of your journey. Sit and sign your stories, these worth remembering, of times when you wandered happily in the warmth of the sun, and these of times when the cold rain concealed your tears of sadness.”

Avi straightened up. - “Thank you for your hospitality. We indeed saw a lot... I don't even know where to begin.”

“Time. Although it's so fleeting, there should be enough of it until the sun sets, and even if it were to run out, I pray that the next morning blesses you.” - The Mother replied. - “Please, start from the beginning. I know your names and I know your homes – Earth children, daughter of Anaari and the Khazan's highest lady.”

Upon hearing the last title, Virka almost froze, and her heart skipped a beat. She was afraid.

“Share the tale of the thread of fate that has united you.” - The Mother encouraged.

Avi shortly explained how she met Luna, how they had found Virka, then mentioned how the astronauts revived her parents, and finished. - “... astronauts were the ones to give me hope in these challenging times.”

The mask, which was previously turned to Avi, moved to gaze at the sky. - "Astronauts... their calling stole many hearts of my children. They rarely visit me, and we rarely talk. Who will guide them through the darkness, who will give them good advice, in times when the path is so uncertain? All I have left are the fleeting memories of their warm smiles, like far lights fading behind my lonely veil... Although I so much want to follow them, they are scattered across the universe."

Virka felt compassion for the Mother. She understood her. - "That's why you've stayed there. You're a haven for those who would want to return. A lighthouse that would always guide them on their path."

"...but what waits for them beyond the horizon? An empty sky, lost hopes. So close, yet so far away, from the place they once called home. Echo of longing, drowned out as they chase the illusion of freedom. Neverending journey, abandoned dreams, a desire to open the eyes again, to feel again – sunlit meadows, gentle rain, rustling leaves, falling snow." - The Mother continued.

Avi didn't understand what the Mother tried to say. - "...but aren't these wishes human? Isn't it everyone's wish to be able to wake up and experience the next morning?"

The Mother replied. - "The wishes, like night whispers, don't let them dream. Like gears grinding, they squeeze oil from will-less puppets, fueling the eternal, hungry mill, and leaving only fine dust. The pendulum keeps swinging, burning a second after a second, until their lights go out. Why do they choose premature wilt, when they can bloom so beautifully? They forgot how carefree they were when they chased each other among the alleys. They forgot the bonds they had, and they rejected the gate of life by depriving themselves of the most crucial emotions."

Luna analyzed the Mother's words. She disagreed. - "You don't think too highly of astronauts. For them, the end justifies the means. These days, you have to forget about childhood and roll up your sleeves to work. This storm won't pass anytime soon."

Avi glanced at Luna's cold expression and touched her hand. - "Do you remember? Even in this storm, flowers can still bloom. Even in this storm, we can hear the singing of the last birds. It leads us through the waves, toward calmer waters, where we can spread out sails wide."

Luna's eyes met with Avi's, and her expression softened. - "You're right... We don't have to sacrifice everything."

The Mother scanned Avi thoroughly. - "You speak with an open heart. I only hope your words can reach my children."

"I'll carry your wish to the stars. You've my word." - Avi promised.

The Mother thanked her in a gentle voice. - "You bring joy to my soul... but I still have to ask, will you grant me another wish?"

Luna looked at Avi, expecting her to play it safe, but Avi's eyes were shining with determination.

"I promise." - Avi stated.

Mother's voice, still gentle, was sadder. - "Your brother, Daichi. He's lost. Make him come home."

“Actually...” - Avi started explaining. - “...we know about it and we want to help each other out. We came here precisely because we know you can lead us to him.”

“Yes.” - The mother replied, then pondered. Her head turned, pointing at the thirty-third star. - “There. Prison of Aeons. They wait, lurking like a pair of foxes, but abandoned by fate... when he hears the word that a daughter of Earth arrived, he'll approach you, waiting for words that will make them drop their mask. Ask – Why did he flee to the sky? - and he will answer – Walking among the dead, I won't find forgiveness. - Then, tell him. - Even if you can't forgive yourself, I will forgive you. - and that's when he'll know that I had sent you.”

“I'll do as you asked.” - Avi assured.

The statue straightened, gazing in front of her. - “Continue your journey to the unknown worlds, and may the starlight always guide you.”

“Thank you for everything.” - Avi spoke in the name of the group.

The statue didn't utter anything and remained motionless, just as she was found.