

Last Star 77

Star XXXI ~ The Angel's Message ~ Part II

After a significant amount of time had passed, Virka was still not returning, and she wasn't present at the bar either. Nicolas suggested that he'll go look for her, while Avi, Luna, and Charlotte go sightseeing.

"I'll find you, this space station isn't that big." - He assured, then left.

"So, shall we have a look around?" - Charlotte encouraged a moment later.

Avi vigorously nodded her head, then gave her hand to Luna, and the three girls began their small walk. As they passed the tables, Avi gazed at the tavern's guests. There was a variety of androids, levitating amoebas-like four-tentacled entities, crystal humanoids, citizens of Epsilon-V overgrown by plants, small anthropomorphic rabbits, four-armed massive beasts with thick skin and rhino-like skulls, creatures with tube-like mouth organs and dark green, algae-like hair that concealed their entire body, furry giants with three eyes and two massive horns, muscular and tailed beings covered by barbed black armor and with a face resembling a bare skull with red eyes, golden-winged machines in white hooded robes, and red humanoids with a cyclopic yellow eye and a head full of tentacles.

Every guest seemed to prefer a different type of meal. The ordered food consisted of synthetic raw meat, brown slurries, frozen fruits in chunks of ice, and even dancing flames encapsulated in an energy bubble.

Luna scanned each creature, although she was mostly focused on Avi, who often stopped to take a better look at the pilgrims.

“Don't you want to talk to them?” - Luna asked after she noticed that the guests were as interested in Avi as she was in them. Some of them even greeted the girl by taking their hats off and making a friendly nod. - “They must have never seen a person from Earth. They're surely as curious as you.”

“I guess I'm nervous... I don't know who to start with and how to start.” - Avi whispered to Luna. -
“There are so many... do you think I might offend someone by prioritizing somebody else?”

Luna sighed. - “You shouldn't be that worried.”

Avi didn't feel calmer after the remark. - “Well... I think we should finish our sightseeing first. I might join one of the tables during lunch.”

“It's up to you.” - Luna stated.

Soon, they crossed the gateway to an outer, glass corridor. Its inner side was overgrown by pink flora, and in front of the girls, there were a few benches where the guests were resting and listening to birds singing, reading books, enjoying music, or watching films.

“It's a quiet and serene place.” - Charlotte noticed.

As Avi's eyes searched for the source of the chirping melody, Charlotte put her hand on her daughter's shoulder and pointed. - “There.” - A red creature with two long tails was hiding among the leaves, peeking with its reptile head, which could gape its maw like a flower with four petals, revealing rows of sharp teeth.

"It's not scared?" - Avi noticed and wanted to come closer. When she was right under the tree, she observed with fascination until one of the guests approached her. It was one of the algae-haired people, and they held a blood-soaked bag.

"Hello." - The alien greeted Avi, speaking via translator device. - "Do you, perhaps, want to feed it?"

Avi accepted with a smile, but when she noticed what was in the bag, she felt disgust mixed with horror.

"Is anything wrong?" - The alien tilted its upper section of body and glanced inside the bag.

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Luna reacted immediately. Her scans already revealed what the food was. - "It's synthetic, Avi." - Then she spoke to the alien. - "I'm sorry, my friend avoids meat. She doesn't like it when animals are hurt."

"Oh." - The alien withdrew its tube-like limb, feeling guilty.

"...but if it's synthetic, then I'll gladly feed the bird." - Luna suggested.

Alien, still somehow embarrassed, offered the food to the girl. - "Here." - Luna took the bag, then tossed a piece of bloody meat to the avian beast. It caught a snack mid-air and swallowed, then, after noticing there was more of it, flew to Luna and sat on her shoulder.

Avi was still slightly shaken, but mentioned. - "It's so pretty."

"You can pet it. It's domesticated." - The algae alien suggested.

Avi gently touched the animal as it ate, and when she gathered more courage, she began to caress the feathers on its back, quickly forgetting about what had happened earlier.

"It's a pleasant feeling." - Avi whispered.

"It's the last of its kind." - The alien commented. - "They died when the megacorporations replaced the last of our swamps with holiday resorts for the bourgeoisie."

"Awful." - Avi replied.

"Wasn't there any way to artificially preserve their species?" - Luna asked. - "It doesn't seem impossible."

"There was..." - The alien said. - "...but they decided that they'll always be a biological risk due to transferred diseases, so they outlawed keeping them as pets and breeding."

"A cold decision..." - Luna commented. - "...but if that was the case, I can understand it."

"...and I can't. They could double their efforts, but instead chose an easy way out." - Avi stated.

The alien understood Luna's points of view. - "There were both risks and costs..." - but still, its sentiment was the same as Avi's. - "...but unfortunately, we lost a part of our identity. First, the stars' light was polluted by neon. Then, we sacrificed the swamps and bogs for the construction of megacities. And finally, our organs were replaced by implants, discarding even that which defines who we are."

Luna disagreed. - "It's a step forward, not backward."

"Luna, you don't understand." - Avi argued. - "It's about something more, our relation with nature, with who we are, and about our spiritual connection to the world."

"Ehh." - Luna sighed. She didn't want to discuss it. - "Fine. I don't understand. I see only the benefits of progress, and I was never interested in mysticism."

The alien spoke. - "When the end of everything slowly comes, we get to understand that in our blind chase, we lose part of ourselves. This holy site offers a sanctuary for reflection and spiritual teachers prepared to guide anyone back to the path of light. They'll gladly welcome any lost soul who forgot its purpose, or never knew it."

"Thank you for that information, but I'm not interested in searching for enlightenment." - Luna replied.

"I'll respect your choice, but do know that the majority of guests would be happy if you joined them in search for truth." - The alien mentioned.

Avi was listening with full attention, at least until Luna emptied the entire bag of snacks. When the bird noticed there was nothing more to eat, it flew off, back to the tree.

The alien looked around. The regulars were leaving one by one. - "It's time for me to leave to pray. Thank you for accompanying me."

"Likewise." - Luna replied.

"Good bye." - Avi added, waving to the alien as they left.

Charlotte also nodded as a sign of farewell. When they were alone, she suggested. - "Maybe we should join them, and send our prayers to the stars?"

"Not today, I'll pass." - Luna said. - "Besides that, it's a private event... or should be, at least until we are initiated. You can read about it in the brochure."

"...well, then should we keep walking?" - Avi asked.

"Most of the locations here have a religious purpose. We could visit the meditation hall, the theological library, the church, a baptismal font, and the place of their funeral rites." - Luna informed. - "For the uninitiated, clergy consultations are available eighteen hours out of twenty-eight."

"Wouldn't you like to open up to them about... You know." - Avi asked hesitantly.

"Avi, I haven't completely lost my mind." - Luna answered. - "They've nothing to offer but empty words."

"You didn't even give them a chance!" - Avi argued.

"And I don't plan to." - Luna stated. - "They won't change my situation, or my worldview, Avi."

Avi sulked. - "If you don't want to go, then I will. Maybe I'll learn something new about myself."

Luna rolled her eyes. - "Fine, I'll register us and come with you." - She preferred this over the risk that Avi would get manipulated.