

## Last Star 90

Star XXXIII ~ Cage ~ Part VIII

After lunch, Avi decided to watch a movie that Kraken recommended, but it was so boring that she fell asleep merely twenty minutes after it had started. The movie, and her nap, took so long that once she was awake, Avi had no time to join other activities and had to return to her cell before dinner.

For the next two days, Avi worked hard until her balance was two thousand and twenty credits. She also received her first bonus for good behavior, which was one hundred credits.

On the third day, as usual, Avi was ready to unclog the toilet pipes. She was led to a train with her other coworkers, then transported to the destination, where she, the leader of her group, and other prisoners waited for another train that was getting late. When it finally arrived, it turned out to be empty, and the guard pulled the senior cleaner to the side to inform her about something. When their leader returned, she informed them that they would be missing a few people today, and that they would need to open up a bigger drainage, and that it would require a drill and new equipment.

Although Avi was curious about the large machine that soon stopped next to them, she expected the work to be more difficult than usual, and like the other coworkers, wasn't hiding her displeasure.

"We'll need a diving team." - The senior cleaner declared. - "Does anyone here have any experience?"

Nobody spoke or raised their hand.

"There will be a bonus." - The leader added.

“How much?” - A prisoner having gray hair with white highlights stepped out. She had scales on her neck, and there were skin membranes between her fingers.

“Three times the usual hourly pay.” - The senior cleaner informed.

The gray-haired convict approached to grab the equipment.

“Did you ever dive?” - The leader tried to confirm.

“Yes, but not in sewage.” - She heard in response.

“Good. You'll be responsible for other volunteers.” - The senior cleaner ordered. - “We'll need two more people.”

A few more people decided that the extra pay might be worth it, including Avi. The senior worker studied everyone in detail and asked Avi and another gelatinous being to step out. Skin of that jelly person was covered in vertical, yellow, glowing stripes, and her head had six eyes placed in two parallel, vertical lines.

“To the changing room, be quick.” - The senior cleaner ordered again, waiting outside herself.

The diving suit seemed to activate the same way in which the force field during the field hockey game activated. You had to stick a plaster to the skin, and a moment later, a swarm of nanomachines crawled out of it, tightly clinging to the body, from toes to neck. Only the head wasn't covered and required a helmet with a breathing apparatus. On top of that, the workers had to equip light oxygen-synthesizing bottles on their backs, and special boots and gloves, which allowed propulsion movement in the water. The last required device was a monocle with optic filters, which created a three-dimensional image of the surrounding terrain.

When Avi's team was ready, she and her two coworkers moved to the maintenance tunnel, right to the locomotive with five attached drills designed to crush harder rocks. They walked onto a platform on the side of the machine and grabbed the handles. The senior leader joined right after, ordered to hold on tight, and the train began to move...

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The senior cleaner stopped the locomotive right next to a steep, slanted tunnel submerged in brown-black liquid. The air here smelled like asphalt.

"U-42110." - The leader spoke to the gray-haired prisoner. - "The drill is set to automatic. For safety, don't come any closer to it. Your only purpose is to unclog the lateral outlets along the rails, using the solutions 461, 202, and 304 in sequence."

U-42110 nodded and waved to Avi and the gelatinous girl. She was the first to enter the sewage, and once she was underwater, she asked the other two coworkers to hurry. - "Faster, or we won't be able to catch up to the drill." - Then added. - "I take the left side, you A-674 take the right side. F-33016, you're pumping the solution to clogged drains."

At first, everything went smoothly. Avi took out an automatic screwdriver from her tool bag and removed the grating, while F-33016 applied the solution number 461. A thick, white liquid turned into foam, which softened the obstruction, which allowed Avi to crush the slime with the tip of her extendable rod.

A drain after a drain, the work continued. The girls were so quick and precise that they often had to wait for the drill to move first. At the moment, they needed it to remove the largest blockage, so they could continue their work.

“Good work so far.” - U-42110 let her friends know.

Avi was scanning the mass in front of them, observing how the tiny and large blocks of hardened slime gradually crumbled away. The main drill got stuck and stopped at some point. Even at full power, it was rotating barely a few centimeters.

The senior cleaner informed everyone. - “Step back, I'll reset it.” - Then remotely put the engine in full reverse. At first, the drill didn't even flinch, but after some time, the sludge around it loosened, as if something was sucking it into the crevices between the tip of the machine and the obstruction.

U-42110, who was the closest to the drill, shouted without any prior warning. - “GRIP SOMETHING OTHER THAN THE DRILL AND DON'T LET GO, RIGHT NOW!”

Avi noticed that U-42110 was swimming in the direction of the closest drain, desperately trying to reach it with her arms.

If you discover this narrative on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report the violation.

F-33016, disoriented, grabbed the edge of the pipe, but quickly realized that it wouldn't help. - "EVERYTHING IS TOO SLIPPERY!" - She called.

As Avi's fingers touched the same surface, she realized that the gelatinous girl was right. Instead, she extended her cleaning rod to insert it into the opposite drain, then wedged it in both holes. - "GRAB MY ROD!" - She called her colleagues, and the jelly girl immediately joined her, wrapping her entire body around the metal stick.

The only problem was that U-42110 was too far, so Avi extended her arm to her. - "USE YOUR CLEANING ROD!"

U-42110, panicking, adjusted the tip of her device to form a hook, then launched it towards Avi, who helped to attach it to her rod. The first cracks began to appear on the obstruction, which soon began to collapse due to the difference in pressure. U-42110 immediately pressed the button that shortened her rod, pulling herself to Avi, who grabbed her. In that very moment, the clog gave way, and both the solid sewage and the drilling machine were sucked deeper into the tunnel. The three prisoners felt a sudden pull followed by a rush of water, but none was letting go.

U-42110 began to loudly curse to her communication device, adding. - "ARE YOU EVEN HEARING WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE!?"

"Are you all alive?" - The senior cleaner asked.

"CALL SOMEONE AND STOP IT ALREADY, SOMEHOW!" - U-42110 ordered.

"Speak clearly. What do you want me to stop?" - Their leader asked.

"THE PRESSURE IN THE OTHER MAINTENANCE TUNNEL IS TOO HIGH." - U-42110 yelled. - "INFORM SOMEONE!"

"A moment, please." - She heard in response.

"A MOMENT!? DO IT RIGHT NOW!" - U-42110 demanded.

A minute had passed before the pressure fault was fixed and everything was normal again. There was no sign of a drill, and the girls could return safely. Once outside, U-42110 kept cursing at her higher-ups.

"ARE YOU TRYING TO KILL US!?" - U-42110 shouted. - "WHAT ABOUT THE PROCEDURES, YOU MINDLESS MORONS!"

"I would like to remind, that in block zero-six, each of you is alive only due to the goodwill and mercy of the jury." - The senior cleaner spoke. - "Don't forget about your crimes, U-42110. It's the first, and the last reprimand."

U-42110 angrily threw her rod at the floor and disconnected.

"I can't believe it, I simply can't." - U-42110 repeated. - "We're working for them, and they're treating us like disposable garbage."

Avi hesitantly approached U-42110. - "...but we're alive, right? That's most important."

U-42110 looked at her. - "Yeah, we do live, and we all should thank you for your quick thinking."

"Uhm, sure." - Avi quietly replied.

"How do they call you?" - U-42110 asked.

"Here? Anna." - Avi revealed.

"My nickname is Glass tooth." - U-42110 informed. - "Here, take it." - She gave Avi one first-tier reputation star. - "You deserve it."

"It's too much, really!" - Avi stated.

"Know your worth. If not you, we all would be dead..." - Glass Tooth replied. - "...and well, I can't take those credits back anyway."

“Well... thank you, then.” - Avi uttered.

F-33016 approached Avi, too. - “I don't have too much, but people on my block will hear about your courage for sure.”

Avi nodded with acknowledgement.

“I'm glad we're done with the work.” - Glass Tooth commented, exhaling. - “I'm not agreeing to any diving anymore.”

After cleaning their diving suits in a separate room, the girls moved to the showers and said goodbye to each other, knowing well that they likely won't meet again.

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It was time for another lunch. Kraken, with a wide grin, was waving to Avi to invite her to join.

“Well, well... we were eagerly waiting for you” - Kraken spoke when Avi sat down. - “I heard you gained some reputation... and I'm not speaking about these meaningless stars.”

Avi didn't want to boast too much. - “Yeah... there was an accident during our work, and well, it turned out like this.”



Ace grabbed a thin strip of synthetic meat with her chopsticks and dipped it into a honey-based sauce. -  
“They owe you a debt that is hardest to repay.” - She added pragmatically. - “You should remember about it if you ever need help yourself.”

“Come on!” - Avi spoke. - “It was about saving lives. I'm not going to treat it as some sort of currency. You simply do things like that.”

“Do you think that you would be treated the same if you were the one being saved?” - Ace asked.

Avi quietly admitted. - “I... I don't know.”

“It's a matter of honor.” - Ace added. - “If you didn't want to pay this debt whenever it's possible, you would be at the very bottom of the prison hierarchy. I'm only trying to give you good advice, use your leverage.”

“I will not blackmail anyone!” - Avi protested.

“...but you still plan to escape, don't you?” - Goose asked.

“I can figure out what you're trying to say....” - Avi crossed her arms. - “...but I can still do it without forcing anyone to help me.”

"You don't have to force anyone to do anything." - Ace said. - "Knowing Glass tooth and the friends of the six-eyed one, they'll help you once there is a chance."

Avi sighed, exhausted. - "I really don't know what to think about it."

"There is nothing to think about." - Goose added. - "It's part of the culture here."

Avi submerged her spoon in gruel, then consumed it without commenting. She finished her meal in silence, and so did the others. When there were still a few minutes until the lunch break was over, she asked. - "Do accidents like this happen a lot?"

Ace looked at Kraken, as if she were trying to guess what Kraken was going to say. - "No, almost never."

Avi was deeply thinking, and Kraken analyzed the girl thoroughly. - "Ace is right... Although in lower levels, that would be a different story."

Avi intertwined her fingers. - "...but in lower levels, those are not accidents, right?"

Kraken had a roguish smile. - "Oh, of course, dear."

"I... understand." - Avi quietly added.

Kraken was pleased and knew that Avi suspected foul play. - "When you earn some reputation for the right people, I might be able to investigate it for you."

"Thank you for the offer, but it can't wait." - Avi said. - "I'll try to deal with it on my own, as much as I can... and also..." - Avi wasn't sure if she should finish.

"Speak." - Kraken encouraged. - "I insist."

"Don't put yourself at risk, Kraken." - Avi added.

Kraken laughed. - "You care about me that much?" - She mentioned derisively.

"I don't know... I just feel... we shouldn't stir up a hornet's nest." - Avi said with worry. - "More harm than good would come of this."

Ace listened cautiously and silently.

"What are you planning, then?" - Kraken asked, fully curious.

"I plan to be quiet and not give anyone a reason to hurry." - Avi said. - "I want to gain at least a little time."

"Wise." - Ace commented. - "Even if you reported it, on this level, they would just think you're paranoid."

"I think so, too." - Goose added. - "Also, it's quite safe here. I do think it could be just an accident. If it wasn't, I don't think they would strike again soon. It all requires good logistics and a lot of connections."

"I hope you're right..." - Avi replied. - "...all this makes me want to hurry up with my plans, but I still don't know how."

Kraken leaned on the table with her arms, settling more comfortably. - "Perhaps the help will come to you if you give it some time." - One could say that she could know something, but didn't want to reveal it.

"Perhaps." - Avi whispered to herself.